
Following the Faith of Our Fathers.



A Paper
Read at the Convention of the Missouri Synod
in Fort Wayne, in June, 1923,

by

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Following the Faith of Our Fathers.

Venerable Fathers, dear brethren! Last year we celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of our Synod. The Bible enjoins upon Christians gratefully to remember their departed leaders and to follow and to copy their faith. Heb. 13, 7 we read: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." Note the limitation: "Which have spoken unto you the Word of God." Only he is a true Christian leader who himself follows Christ and abides by His Word.

But, alas! there have always been, and there still are, disloyal leaders, false teachers. Witness the founders of the numerous sects and cults! Deviating from the royal highway of Christian truth, they struck out on paths of their own, misleading their followers. The history of the Lutheran Church (America included) also records names of teachers and leaders who erred from the faith and deviated from the path. False leaders, however, must not be followed. Our plain duty is to beware of them. They are disloyal to the Captain. No one can follow them without forsaking Christ.

What of our fathers? Every Reformation Day we portray and hold up Luther as a leader whom to follow means to follow Christ. May we say the same of Walther, Wyneken, Sihler, and other sires of our Synod? Are they worthy of our following? In their memory, last year, services of thanksgiving were held at home and abroad. Everywhere, in all our Districts and congregations, pastors, teachers, and laymen were urged to walk in their steps. Were we justified in doing so?

It goes without saying that our fathers, too, were poor, sinful men and imperfect Christians. They themselves were first and foremost in confessing their faults. But whatever frailties and shortcomings their lives may reveal, the outstanding fact remains that they were true priests of God, close followers of Christ, leaders loyal to the Captain, and teachers faithful in proclaiming the Word of God. They walked the narrow path, they preached the pure and only-saving Gospel-truth, and they strove and labored to win souls for Christ.

Such being the case, the admonition stands: "Remember" your leaders! "Follow" your fathers! This "remembering" and "following," however, dare never degenerate into blind prejudice and uncritical partisanship. We are to prove all things and to hold fast that which is good. No, there must not be found among us a worshiper of heroes or an idolizer of human authorities.

The sole authority to which we submit our faith and life is the Word of God. This, being in itself the convincing power of the Spirit, is in need of no human support or testimony. By this Word we also test and try again and again the doctrines received from our fathers. We regard nothing as true or right simply because Luther said or did so. The same holds good with respect to the fathers of our Synod. Wherever we follow them, we do so only because we are convinced that their faith was none other than the one true faith once for all delivered to the saints.

Such is the manner in which we remember, and ought to remember, our fathers, — always making sure that in following them we are in reality but following Him who said: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me," and again: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

I.

Let Us Follow Our Fathers in Their Confessional Loyalty.

Long before our fathers embarked for the New World, the Lutheran Confessions had fallen into universal desuetude in Germany. And what were the conditions in America? True, as early as 1748, almost a century before the founding of our Synod, Muehlenberg had organized the Ministerium of Pennsylvania with a constitution recognizing all of our confessions. But, alas! in less than fifty years this synod had abandoned everything save the Lutheran name. In its new constitution of 1792 the symbols were not even mentioned. On the contrary, the Prussian Union of 1817 was held up as an excellent example to follow in America. And several years later (1819 and 1822) resolutions were adopted to bring about just such a union. With the exception of tiny Tennessee not one of the six Lutheran synods existing in 1820 was loyal to our symbols. As a result, the so-called General Synod was, in the same year, organized with a constitution containing no doctrinal basis whatever, not even an allusion to the Lutheran Confessions. Such were the conditions prevailing in and before 1820. And in the decades following they became still more deplorable.

When, in 1845, Wyneken urged the General Synod to return to the Lutheran moorings, his fervent appeal was treated as a great joke. With increasing malice, coarseness, and contempt Lutheran periodicals spoke of our Confessions as "Luther's old hat, coat, and boots," as "old rags," which the General Synod, "moving forward gloriously, had long ago forgotten." Luther and the Lutheran confessors were openly derided. November 23, 1849, Benjamin Kurtz wrote in the *Lutheran Observer*: "The Fathers — who are the 'Fathers'? They are the children; they lived in the infancy of the Church, in the

early dawn of the Gospel-day. . . . We are three hundred years older than Luther and his noble coadjutors and eighteen hundred years older than the primitives; theirs was the age of infancy and adolescence, and ours [is] that of full-grown adult manhood. They were the children; we are the fathers; the tables are turned." Indeed, as late as 1855 these decided enemies of Lutheranism made a bold attempt to scrap the Augsburg Confession and replace it by the so-called Definite Platform, a botch document shot through and through with Reformed sentiments.

Concerning the Lutherans whom he had met in America, Wyneken, in his renowned pamphlet published during his stay in Germany, declared: "They have entirely abandoned the faith of the fathers." Four years later (1845) he characterized the General Synod as "Reformed in doctrine, Methodistic in practise, and laboring for the ruin of the Church whose name she falsely bears." In 1858 Dr. Sihler felt justified in speaking of the leaders of the General Synod as "open counterfeiters, Calvinists, Methodists, Unionists, and traitors and destroyers of the Lutheran Church."

Such was the deplorable condition of American Lutheranism when our fathers began their work in this country. By her own children the banner of the Lutheran Church had been hauled down and trodden in the dust. What was left of the Lutheran pledge was, as late as 1850, denounced by Krauth, Sr., as a mere "solemn farce." True Lutheranism was down and out; nothing remained but the empty name. As a result large parts of the Lutheran Church had already been absorbed by the Episcopalians and other sects; and the remainder was headed toward the same disaster.

And what stand did our fathers take? From the very outset it was their object to bring back the wayward Lutheran churches to their home. Before their arrival in St. Louis, the Saxons had already adopted a constitution in which they pledged themselves to the Lutheran symbols. And all constitutions adopted subsequently embodied the same platform. Every congregation which they founded after 1839, the synod which they organized in 1847, and all manner of organizations within local congregations or synod,—they all were planted four-square on the Lutheran basis. Nothing daunted by ridicule and malice, Walther, Wyneken, and Sihler unfurled the Lutheran banner, determinately, aggressively, victoriously. And throughout their lives they stood by these colors, never shirking or faltering in defending them against attacks from without or within. Our fathers restored the Lutheran symbols, the Book of Concord of 1580, to its original place of honor and authority in the Lutheran Church.

And why and how did they subscribe to these symbols? Our fathers have been charged with basing their faith and theology, not on the Scriptures, but on Luther, the Lutheran dogmaticians, and

the confessions. What is the truth? Indeed, they cited the symbols, also Luther and other teachers of our Church; not, however, to prove that their doctrines were true and divine, but to establish them as truly Lutheran and as always taught by the Lutheran Church. In order to prove that these doctrines held by the Lutheran Church are true and divine, our fathers appealed to the Scriptures, even as Luther and our symbols do.

The Bible, says the Formula of Concord, is "the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged." To this our fathers subscribed with all their hearts. Again: The true saying faith is "to be founded upon no church teachers, old or new, but only and alone upon God's Word, which is comprised in the Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles as unquestionable witnesses of divine truth." Such were the sentiments also of our fathers. Indeed, they were fully aware of the fact that no one could subscribe to our confessions without recognizing that the Scriptures alone are the norm and basis of faith, and without at the same time rejecting the very attitude with which they were falsely charged.

According to our fathers no amount of quotations from Lutheran teachers and symbols, even if piled up to the skies, is sufficient to prove a single doctrine as true and divine. They declared with Luther: "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel." Never for a moment did our fathers regard the Lutheran confessions as an inspired source and norm of truth. Nor did they subscribe to them without previous critical investigation. On the contrary, they tested, tried, and judged the symbols, their standard being the Scriptures, the only *a priori* reliable norm of truth.

Our fathers adopted the Book of Concord *because* they had found its doctrines to be in complete agreement with the Bible, because they had found them to be the identical doctrines of the Word of God. In the formula of Concord the Lutheran confessors declare that they subscribed to the Augsburg Confession, "not because it was confessed by our theologians, but because it was taken from, and firmly founded in, the Word of God." This was the reason also why our fathers adopted the Lutheran Confessions.

And the manner of their subscription reveals the same splendid spirit of joyousness, straightforward honesty, and definiteness in which true Lutherans always and everywhere have been wont to take the Lutheran pledge. Our fathers subscribed sincerely, seriously, and with all their heart. They did not limit and restrict their subscription to mere fundamentals, nor to what has been called the confession in the confession, nor to its thetical and antithetical declarations.

In a closing paragraph of the Smalcald Articles Luther protests: "These are the articles on which I must stand, and, God willing, shall

stand even to my death; and I do not know how to change or to yield anything in them. If any one wishes to yield anything, let him do it at the peril of his conscience." Such was the determination also of our fathers.—Brenz subscribed, declaring: "All these confessions agree with the Holy Scripture, and . . . I testify in this my own handwriting that I thus hold, confess, and constantly will teach, through Jesus Christ, our Lord." Such were the sentiments also of our fathers.—Brixius wrote: "I subscribe to the Articles of the reverend Father Martin Luther and confess that hitherto I have thus believed and taught, and by the Spirit of God I shall continue thus to believe and teach." Such was the mind also of our fathers.

In the Preface to the Book of Concord the confessors of 1580 declare: "Therefore we also have determined not to depart even a finger's breadth either from the subjects themselves or from the phrases" of the Confession. In the Preface to the Thorough Declaration we read with respect to the Augsburg Confession: "We intend also, by the grace of the Almighty, faithfully to abide until our end by this Christian Confession. . . . And it is our purpose, neither in this nor in any other writing, to recede in the least from that Confession." Such was the Christian spirit and manner, in which our fathers also were committed to the Lutheran symbols. The "spirit of Missouri" has frequently been spoken of with aversion. But the truth is that the spirit of our fathers was in every respect none other than the sincere, serious, straightforward, and earnest spirit of our early confessors themselves, Luther included.

Indeed, our fathers were both faithful Bible Christians and genuine Lutherans, and the latter not in addition to, but because of, the former. Genuine Lutherans,—for they adhered most faithfully to the doctrines set forth in our symbols. True Bible Christians,—for they adopted these symbols only because they had found them to be drawn from the Word of God, which alone they recognized as the final and infallible norm of Christian truth. For this reason, too, our fathers adopted the old Lutheran slogan and placed it at the head of the *Lutheraner*: "*Gottes Wort und Luther's Lehr' Vergehet nun und nimmermehr.*" Speaking of our fathers, the sainted Dr. Koren truly said: "*Die Missourier heissen nicht bloss Lutheraner; sie sind es auch.*"

And what was their success?—Congregations, synods, and theological schools restricted in doctrine and practise to the Book of Concord, published 350 years ago, cannot thrive in free and progressive America!—such was the unanimous verdict of the sects as well as the Lutherans when our fathers began their work in this country. All were agreed that confessionalism would prove a millstone about the neck of Missouri.

In an address delivered March 10, 1846, the famous Reformed theologian Dr. Philip Schaff maintained that it was "impossible to

build a confessional Lutheran Church (let alone the exclusive Lutheranism of the Formula of Concord) on the Reformed English soil of America"; that it would be "easier to direct the course of the Mississippi to Bavaria than to convert the Chinese through German sermons." In the *Lutheran Observer*, Benjamin Kurtz, denouncing our fathers as obsolete "resurrectionists of elemental, undeveloped, halting, stumbling, and staggering humanity" and as priests ready "to immolate bright meridian splendor on the altar of misty, musky dust," declared that the men of Missouri, "bent on going backward," were of necessity bound to go "downward." They all protested: You Missourians are entirely out of date, you are altogether too narrow, too bigoted, too rigid, too rigorous, too exclusive, to prosper anywhere. The road of confessionalism will lead you to inevitable ruin.

These dire prognostications, however, did not impress or move our fathers in the least. They knew that it was God's truth for which they stood. They were persuaded that divine truth is nowhere too narrow, too bigoted, too rigorous, too exclusive, but just right everywhere. And they believed that it is safer to go down confessing the truth than to live by falsehood and by disloyalty to God and His Word. Moreover, our fathers were fully convinced that the only road which could lead our Church to real success was the very one which they had chosen. They fully realized that a Lutheran Church deserving that name could survive only as long as she remained faithful to her principles. Lutheranism, they held, could not live without the Lutheran standards.

On the other hand, our fathers were persuaded that true Lutheranism, standing, as it does, for nothing but the pure Word of God alone, was able to thrive anywhere. They knew that, while Calvinism, Puritanism, etc., depended for their success on favorable legislation, Lutheranism, in order to live and prosper, was not in need of any external helps or props whatever. Moreover, they were satisfied that, the freer the political atmosphere, the better Lutheranism would be able to develop in harmony with its own innate principles and expand by its own inherent power and resident spiritual forces.

Our fathers have been charged with lack of vision. And true, their foresight was not a mere matter of shrewd calculation. Theirs was a spiritual vision, which saw things by faith and in the light of God's Word and promises. And the facts have shown long ago that this was the true vision, keener and farther-reaching than the sight of calculating reason. Even such critics of our fathers as Schaff lived long enough to see that their prophecies were false. Surely history has fully vindicated the faith of our fathers. The ship which they launched 1847 in Chicago has fully demonstrated its seaworthiness.

No, indeed, the Lutheran symbols did not prove to be a millstone about the neck of our Synod, but rather a life-buoy that kept her afloat for these many, many years. And as for America with its principles of free thought, free speech, free press, and complete liberty of conscience and religion — why, nowhere in the world did genuine Lutheranism ever come out purer and thrive better than in our country. Read our *Statistical Year-book* for 1922. It tells the story. Its figures are eloquent with the success of our fathers! Behold this venerable body assembled at the very place where Wyneken began his work (1838) eighty-five years ago and Sihler (1843) eighty years ago! Its pastors, teachers, leaders, and congregations here present or represented all subscribe to the Lutheran symbols in the spirit and manner of our fathers. Surely the labor of our fathers was not in vain.

Furthermore, our fathers must be credited also with having in a large measure given strength and impetus to confessional movements outside of our Synod, at home as well as abroad. Abroad: in Germany, in Alsace, in Australia, and South America. But especially at home; for to-day there cannot be found in America a single Lutheran synod that flouts our Confessions as they did in the early days of our fathers.

Walther was the leaven in the lump. He himself saw it working. As early as 1846 he felt justified in stating: "No doubt but God has arisen in order to remove the rubbish under which our precious Evangelical Lutheran Church was buried for a long time also here in America." And in 1866, in a letter to Pastor Brunn: "It is true that our testimony extending over a period of twenty years has by the grace of God cooperated in causing some synods to speak again of the Confession, and to base and pledge themselves upon it, at least formally."

The Ohio Synod, the Iowa Synod, the synods constituting the former General Council, the synods of the former United Synod in the South, etc., all are committed to our symbols. Even the General Synod finally consented to take the Lutheran pledge. And the United Lutheran Church, the Merger of 1918, adopted a constitution with a doctrinal basis that includes all Lutheran symbols. More or less markedly, therefore, the entire Lutheran Church of America bears the stamp of Walther.

Of course, this does not signify that they all live up to the Lutheran standards. "It is a long stride," says Walther, "from the formal acknowledgment of the symbols to a true knowledge of them and a truly Lutheran spirit and the consequent discipline of doctrine and life." But it does signify and mean that the powerful waves of confessionalism emanating from our fathers reached far beyond their own boundaries.

Brethren, let us follow our fathers. May we never grow indifferent and disloyal to our symbols! May they always govern our teaching and preaching as well as our life and practise! Wherever, in the past, Lutherans adhered faithfully to their Confessions, they flourished. But wherever these symbols were trodden in the dust, the Lutheran Church always fell an easy prey to her enemies: to unionism, sectarianism, liberalism, and infidelity. Accordingly, dear brethren, if we shall but continue to walk in the steps of our fathers, God will continue to bless us even as our fathers. By His grace, we, too, shall prove to be real builders of the Church of the pure Word and Sacraments. May there never be an arm uplifted in our midst, therefore, to haul down the flag which our fathers hoisted! May there never be an effort made to remove our beloved Synod from the foundation that made her strong and influential!

Everywhere Christians are in need of the Lutheran Confessions, but nowhere more so than in our own country, the paradise of freedom and religious liberty. Where cults and sects galore freely fly their colors, the Scripture light of Lutheranism dare not remain under the bushel. When falsehood is broadcasted, the pure Gospel-truth entrusted to our Church must strive for an ever wider hearing. Let us therefore keep our flag afloat, — always following the faith of our fathers!

II.

Let Us Follow Our Fathers in Their Firm Adherence to the Inspiration and Inerrancy of the Bible.

When our fathers embarked for America, the old Fatherland was still in the grip of vulgar rationalism. This demon had dethroned revelation, subjected the Scripture to carnal reason, denied its supernaturalism, eliminated its miracles, scrapped the creeds, rejected all doctrines specifically Christian, ostracized Christ's atoning sacrifice, and revived the old heathen belief that man is saved by efforts of his own in leading a decent, moral life. Such were the views also of the rationalists, by whom our fathers (Loeber, Keyl, Walther, Buenger, Sihler, etc.) were surrounded and instructed in schools, colleges, and universities. The well-known story of how Wyneken was examined for the holy ministry by a rank infidel who scoffed at the miracles of the Bible, illustrates the condition then prevailing everywhere. Spiritual death reigned supreme. Only a few oases remained, where the grace of God had kept the living waters flowing.

Our fathers were among the first to regain the old Gospel-truth. And once having experienced its life-giving power, they loathed the teachings of the rationalists, even as the rationalists abhorred the doctrine of grace. When, therefore, our fathers began to live, confess, preach, and practise in accordance with their new convictions, they met with opposition everywhere. They were derided and ridi-

culed as muckers, pietists, and hypocrites by the multitude, and harassed and persecuted as fanatics and disturbers of the peace by rationalistic superintendents and civil magistrates.

As a result the fear began to grow on our fathers that, in the stifling atmosphere surrounding them, their faith, and especially the faith of their children, could not survive and certainly would not be able to expand and develop its being. They longed for a country where they might believe, and teach, and preach, and practise, and worship according to the dictates of their consciences, unhampered by authorities, civil or ecclesiastical.

And what was it that bound their consciences? It was the Holy Bible, which they regarded as the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Ghost, inerrant in all its statements, the norm of faith and life, binding on every Christian and Christian congregation. Their principle was: "To the Law and to the Testimony!" They believed even as Christ says: "The Scripture cannot be broken." They followed the faith of Paul, "believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets." With the Formula of Concord they declared: "We receive and embrace with all our heart the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged."

A clear word of Scripture made heaven and earth a place too narrow for Luther. The same was true of our fathers. They held: "*Scriptura locuta, causa finita* — Scriptures having spoken, the question is decided, settled." The fundamental premise of all their teaching, preaching, writing, arguing, and laboring was: "The Bible is infallible." With childlike faith they believed every fact and doctrine there recorded: creation of heaven and earth, the miracles, the revelations, and the prophecies; Christ's incarnation, virgin birth, atoning sacrifice, and resurrection; supernatural regeneration, justification, and eternal salvation. There was not a single statement of the Bible to which our fathers took exception.

"The dearest child of faith is the miracle." This favorite quotation from Goethe was reversed by our fathers. Faith, they said, does not beget, but is begotten by, the supernatural facts and truths of Christianity. The miraculous is not the product, but the cause of faith. From beginning to end redemption and salvation, they held, is the work, not of natural resident forces in man, but of intervening supernatural divine grace and power.

Indeed, as you all well know, our fathers thoroughly purged theology, notably the doctrines of justification, conversion, and election by grace alone, from the leaven of every kind of unbelief. Their theology was Scriptural throughout. From rind to core it was nowhere infected with the virus of rationalism. And this attitude they never abandoned or modified in the least.

When our fathers bade farewell to the Old World, hopeful signs of a coming revival of faith began to multiply in Germany. Hengstenberg, Claus Harms, and other theologians were zealous in restoring the old Christian truths and in purging the sanctuary from the desecrations wrought by the rationalists. Christians began to rejoice, and theologians diagnosed: "Rationalism is on its death-bed, breathing its last." Apparently a new Gospel-day was dawning.

But Satan, too, was busy. In previous centuries he had propagated his lies chiefly by hiding or perverting the Scriptures. Now he planned to make short work of it all. His scheme was to deal a fatal blow to Christianity by destroying the Bible itself. The foundation blasted, the superstructure would come down of itself, he argued. The bottom blown out of theology, it would be a simple matter to dispose of its doctrinal cargo.

It was Schleiermacher who began the deadly work. He abandoned the old Scripture-method and injected into reviving theology the serum of "science." He fooled the theologians into believing that there was a superior, a scientific way of establishing the Christian doctrines, viz., by theological reasoning on the basis of facts, such subjective facts as religious feeling, experience, and Christian consciousness. In phraseology the "new theology" resembled, or at any rate seemed to resemble, the old. In reality, however, it was a theology detached from the Scriptures, devoid of the pure Gospel, and employing disingenuously and deceptively old terms in an entirely new and erroneous sense. Schleiermacher's success was nothing short of phenomenal. A galaxy of illustrious theologians followed in his wake. "Scientific Theology" — that was the phrase conjured with in every university.

The "new theology" was presented by its various protagonists in various modifications, with different degrees of deviation from the Christian truth. But they all abandoned and disavowed unanimously the infallibility and absolute reliability of the Scriptures. All were enthusiastic advocates of the new scientific method. They all pooh-poohed the old way of establishing a doctrine by simply quoting a clear text of Scripture, — the method employed by Christ and the apostles and restored by Luther. Theology, they said, had advanced to a higher plane, to the scientific stage. Hence it was no longer in need of an inspired, inerrant Bible and had no further use for the old, crude proof-text method.

Such was their boast. But in reality the theology inaugurated by Schleiermacher marked the beginning of the end. It took the lid off. Before long seven demons much more radical began their work of destruction. Everywhere the walls of schools and universities began to reverberate with the slogans of Higher Criticism, Darwinism, Evolutionism, Naturalism, Pan-Babylonianism, etc. With uncanny zeal and feverish haste the modernists and radicals

poured an incessant stream of destructive literature into the churches. For decades, attack after attack, broadside after broadside, was directed against the Bible: its authenticity, integrity, authority, revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, miracles, and supernatural doctrines.

The result was appalling. The Holy Scriptures were torn into shreds. Not a book was left intact. Frequently nothing remained but the empty covers of the Bible. The dogmatic cathedral reared by Lutheran theologians of rocks quarried by Luther from the Scripture came down. Every Christian doctrine went by the board. Religion and morality were destroyed. Materialism, atheism, and agnosticism began to flourish. It was a spiritual world war that was fought: Christianity pitted against modern heathenism; Scripture against reason; faith against science falsely so called. It was a war that left the churches devastated and the so-called Christian nations in a condition which, in a measure, also made for the late bloody war with its cruel aftermaths.

Entire Christendom was flooded with liberalism, its farthest waves finally striking even the mission-fields in Japan, China, and India. The alarming extent to which the Reformed sectarians (who, by the way, are rationalists inherently) took to the virus is evidenced by the Fundamentalists and their frantic efforts to check the contagion — as reported daily also by our secular press.

Among the chief sufferers were the Lutheran churches in Germany. Even their most conservative universities have for years not harbored a single theologian holding a prominent chair, who dared to endorse and defend the inerrancy of the Bible. Nor did the Lutheran Church in America prove entirely immune against the infection. Aside from stray liberalistic utterances some of her theologians made bold to deny the absolute inerrancy of the Scripture. It was the first attack of American Lutherans on the foundation of our theology since the days of the rationalist Quitman. —

What of our fathers? How were they affected by these onslaughts on the Bible? Did they grow faint when they beheld even such Lutherans as Hofmann, Kahnis, Frank, and Luthardt arrayed against them? Did they make concessions or offer quarters to the enemy?

Our fathers fully realized that — the inerrancy doctrine removed — the entire Lutheran theology would be in the air, built in the clouds. "If the foundations be destroyed," they said, "what can the righteous do?" But they were not confounded. They fought many a trying battle, but perhaps none with greater cheerfulness and equanimity than the one for the inspiration of the Bible. When this doctrine became increasingly the center about which the storms were brewing, they were not discomfited. They remained calm when the

waves ran high. They were satisfied that the rock on which their theology was built could not be swept away.

They were sure *a priori* that their cause must come out victorious, all portals of hell and the sophistries of human reason to the contrary notwithstanding.

Our fathers were in possession of the "good thing" spoken of Heb. 13, 9. Their hearts were established, "established with grace," the grace of the Gospel. In true repentance, they, by the power of God, clung to the Word of pardon, which carried conviction to their hearts — conviction, divine conviction, also with respect to the words of Christ: "The Scripture cannot be broken." Indeed, it was high ground which they occupied: the verbal inspiration and absolute inerrancy of the Scriptures. But they knew that just such was the pinnacle upon which God Himself had placed the Scriptures. Faith made our fathers sure that heaven and earth would pass away rather than one iota of the Bible.

As to scientific theology, which puts aside the Word of God, our fathers held that it was impossible for any one to arrive at any knowledge whatsoever regarding God's gracious will toward sinners by philosophic, scientific, or any other kind of human reasoning. Divine revelation from above alone, they held, can supply this need. Scientific theology, parading as Christian, yet boasting that its doctrines are neither drawn from, nor established by, the Scriptures, our fathers viewed and denounced as a mere satanic delusion and deception.

The same firm and definite stand they took regarding the objections advanced against the inspiration doctrine by scientists. Our fathers held: God is the Author of the book of nature, man, and history, as well as of the Book of Revelation. Hence the former, correctly read and interpreted, can never conflict with the declarations of the latter. Even when unable to solve an apparent contradiction, our fathers felt satisfied that a future better reading of the book of nature and history would in every case vindicate the clear Word of God. It was in keeping with the mind of our fathers when recently an Eastern theologian remarked: "Wherever and whenever there has been sufficient documentary evidence to make an investigation, the statements of the Bible have stood the test."

Accordingly, our fathers feared nothing for the inspiration doctrine from the sciences — nothing from philosophy, nothing from astronomy, nothing from geology, paleontology, archeology, psychology, history, and lower, higher, or any other kind of criticism. Our fathers were assured that nothing ever would or could turn up anywhere that might upset the Bible — nothing that has occurred in the past or will occur in the future; nothing that has been, or ever will be, discovered in the heavens above or on or in the earth below.

"He that believeth shall not make haste." By building on the rock, faith partakes of the nature of a rock. Faith is a divine conviction, supernaturally wrought by the Holy Spirit, hence impregnable against, and altogether unapproachable by, any kind of human argument, scientific or otherwise. Such being the faith also of our fathers, they held their ground; surrendered nothing; made no concessions; deviated not a hair's breadth from the old Lutheran position concerning the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures. They delivered to us a fortress intact—nowhere a rock torn from the foundation, nowhere a breach, all walls strong and plumb.

Results? Down to the present day not a solitary modernist has ever been heard on the floor of the Synod which our fathers founded. Nor has a liberalist ever occupied a chair in her colleges and seminaries or filled a pulpit of her congregations. Concordia Publishing House—also founded by our fathers—in its publications, from the first issue of the *Lutheraner* down to its latest book or pamphlet, there cannot be found a single sentence endorsing Darwinism, evolution, or any other liberal doctrine. The entire literature of our Synod does not contain a single statement which in any way denies the incarnation, the virgin birth, the atonement, the resurrection, or any other Christian miracle, nor even a single passage that charges the Bible with any kind of error—religious, historical, chronological, astronomical.

This large convention, together with all the pastors, professors, teachers, and laymen which it represents, believes and confesses the old creeds of Christendom—the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—sincerely, unanimously, without reservation, or without taking exception to a single clause. We all, with all our hearts, still sing all our old Lutheran hymns, including "O grosse Not, Gott selbst ist tot," "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden," "Christ ist erstanden von der Marter alle," etc. As for the old Lutheran liturgies and sacred forms for Baptism, the Holy Eucharist, ordination, etc., there cannot be found among us a single pastor or congregation desiring to modify them doctrinally.

From the day of its organization in 1847 down to this convention in 1923 there have not appeared within our Synod any symptoms of doctrinal liberalism. By the grace of God all this is a fruit of the firm and faithful stand of our fathers. And that the entire American Lutheran Church is infected in a much smaller degree than any other large denomination, this, too, is due, in a measure, to the same cause.

Such, dear brethren, being the blessings in the past, may we also in the future tread where our fathers trod! As yet the last battle has not been won. The assaults on the Bible are growing in number, virulence, and boldness. Especially in our country the churches as well as the general public are being literally swamped with liberalism

and evolutionism. The fight must be continued! Indeed, if ever, now is the time for Christians everywhere to gird their loins and to take a decided stand. I say, "a decided stand." For modernists are merely cultured heathen with whom Christians cannot worship in the sanctuary. In the state, in business, and as neighbors we are able to associate and live in peace with everybody. But in the Church, harmony can no more obtain between Christians and outspoken liberals than between God and the devil. Wherever liberals are tolerated in Christian pews, pulpits, and chairs, the Church has sprung a leak and must eventually go down.

The Fundamentalists, referred to above, are, in a way, putting up a noble fight. Yet they are bound to lose unless they sever absolutely every tie now binding them to the Darwinists, so numerous and prominent in their churches. Brethren, *Obstamus principiis!* Let us guard against surrendering the first inch of the holy ground, delivered intact to us by our fathers. Let us continue to stand firmly and determinedly by our old Lutheran doctrine of the inspiration and complete inerrancy of the Bible. Let us never depart from the Word of Christ: "The Scripture cannot be broken."

But, mark well, we shall succeed only if we abide in the faith which made our fathers strong. May we, therefore, realize daily and increasingly our own sinfulness and helplessness, at the same time seeking refuge in the pardoning grace of God! "Repent and believe!" this, as said above, is the only road leading to Christian certainty. Faith is the God-given assurance that Christianity is real, that the Word of God is true. Living faith alone can save us also from the floods of modern unbelief. No amount of learning, scientific knowledge, or apologetic reasoning (valuable as it may be) can serve as a substitute. As long as we are firmly rooted in the saving Gospel-truth, the center of the Bible, nothing will be able to destroy our simple trust in any other part of it. Unbelief alone can do the deadly work.

And following the faith of our fathers also in their firm adherence to the Scriptures, we shall be found in good and great company. In fact, all true Christians of all ages and places are with us, at least in their hearts. Luther, the Lutheran confessors, and the Lutheran teachers and preachers down to the days of pietism,—they all without exception are in the throng. Still farther ahead we hear the early Church and the Nicene fathers declaring: We believe in the Holy Ghost, "who spake by the prophets." And the innumerable multitudes from all countries and nations are led by the chorus of the apostles and prophets themselves, Christ, our glorious Savior, striking the key-note: "The Scripture cannot be broken." "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

Dear brethren, there are many other points on which, in treating

this subject, I should expatiate and in which we all ought to follow (or, must I say, return to) the path our fathers trod. Permit me merely to hint at some of them. Behold our fathers continually stressing the central truths of Christianity: man's spiritual helplessness, God's universal love and mercy, Christ's atoning sacrifice, unconditional absolution, universal justification, and salvation by repentance and faith alone! Let us follow them. — Behold their splendid spirit: their sincerity, seriousness, and conscientiousness; their constant watchfulness against doctrinal indifferentism and all forms of worldliness; their firm stand against every kind of union with the sects, the lodges, and other ungodly societies! Let us follow them! — Remember and consider also their untiring zeal in laboring for the Kingdom; their unflagging efforts especially in behalf of our parochial schools; their pastoral wisdom and care for the individual soul; their spirit of sacrifice and willingness to bear the cross! — In all these and many other points, may we always be found walking faithfully in the steps of our sainted fathers!

“God preserve unto us a pious ministry!” that was the constant prayer of Walther. Pious ministers are God-fearing ministers, and God-fearing ministers are ministers who fear the Word, the written Word of God. Pastors and teachers have always proved to be either the greatest boon of the Church or its greatest curse — the former, when they walked in the fear of God's Word, for then they were true builders of the Church; the latter, when they rejected the Word, for then they made havoc of the Church. What qualified Luther to bring about the Reformation was the fact that he truly feared the Word of God. And what, in the last analysis, was the secret of the marvelous success of our fathers? Their fear of the Word of God. On the other hand, the present most desperate condition of Protestantism everywhere: distracted, torn and tattered, outraged, dishonored, and prostitute — what caused it? The destructive work of teachers and preachers who, having lost the fear of God and His Word, became traitors to the faith they had sworn to uphold and defend.

May we all, therefore, follow Walther also in his prayer for a pious ministry! Nor let us fail to include our laymen, who, in exercising their Christian rights, have come to the front as never before. May God always mercifully preserve us *both* a ministry and laity that fear the Word of God! Hail Missouri as long as the fear of God and His Word will remain her outstanding characteristic! For thus says the Lord: “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at My Word.” Is. 66, 2.
