

The Leaven of the Sadducees

by Walter Wegner

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In one respect, this paper on the Sadducees could be considered under the head of “old business.” At our District Convention at Winona two years ago, we were privileged to hear an essay prepared and presented by Professor Carleton Toppe on the subject of Pharisaism. In the introduction of that essay the following statement was made: “In our study of ancient Pharisaism and Sadduceeism we discovered that behind modern dress lurk many ancient heresies and that there are ageless lessons to be learned from age-old dangers to the Church of Jesus Christ. There are also modern Pharisees and Sadducees. More than that, the better we become acquainted with the doctrines of the Pharisees and Sadducees of old, the more clearly we shall see that all the errors and corruptions that have afflicted the Church these past 1900 odd years were contained in essence in what the Pharisees and Sadducees taught and stood for. Since the Pharisees and Sadducees there has really not been anything new under the sun. They were the original heretics. All the rest have taken leaves out of their books. And when Jesus warned, ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees,’ He had already named and denounced all the dangers He foresaw would threaten His Church after He left this world.” (*See Quartalschrift*, January, 1951, p. 34f). Since Professor Toppe’s essay restricted itself to a discussion of the Pharisees, the District resolved that a similar discussion of Sadduceeism be presented at the 1950 Convention. This paper is the result of that resolution. The material will be presented under the general topic, **The Leaven of the Sadducees**, and our discussion will be guided by these three questions:

- I. What is the Leaven of the Sadducees?**
- II. How does the Leaven of the Sadducees Manifest Itself Today?**
- III. How Shall We Counteract the Leaven of the Sadducees?**

I

To determine what the leaven of the Sadducees is, we shall make a survey of the seven New Testament passages that mention the Sadducees by name, taking into account also some of the information that historical sources outside of the New Testament provide in answer to this question.

1. St. Matthew 3, 5ff.

The first New Testament reference to the Sadducees is far from complimentary to this group but in this it is only typical of all the passages that follow. In the third chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel we read that when John the Baptist was preaching “the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1, 4; Luke 3, 3), there “went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.” Picture, if you can, the expression of surprise that must have appeared on John’s face when he saw, of all people, “many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism.” Then visualize the greater surprise that registered on the faces of these Judean aristocrats when John publicly addressed them: “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance. And think not to say within yourselves, ‘We have Abraham to our father;’ for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”

One cannot read this passage without being struck by the unusual fact that on this occasion the Sadducees were acting in harmony with the Pharisees. One is accustomed to hear of the Sadducees opposing the Pharisees, undermining their prestige, embarrassing them in public, denying the validity of their “traditions of the elders” and their “unwritten Law;” therefore it is strange indeed to see these habitual enemies join forces on

this occasion. And yet, this action, which to us seems strange, was one to which the Sadducees themselves were well accustomed. According to the record of the Jewish historian Josephus, the Sadducees were quite adept in this game of siding in with their opponents whenever such action seemed to be to their personal advantage. Josephus writes: "When the Sadducees become magistrates, sometimes against their will and by force they follow the ideas of the Pharisees, for otherwise the people would not put up with them." (Antiquities XVIII, 1. 4) Talking out of both sides of the mouth at once is by no means a 20th Century innovation. The picture we get of the Sadducees is not that they were men of principle and firm conviction, but rather vacillating unionists, ready to compromise wherever and whenever the highway of compromise promised to lead to an advantageous goal. Small wonder, then, that John addresses them as a "generation of vipers"—hypocrites and base deceivers, who came to his baptism not to repent and receive remission of sins and to serve God with newness of life, but merely to serve their own selfish interests. Perhaps these Sadducees came to spy on John; perhaps they came to curry favor with this wilderness preacher who was attracting such a sizable following; or perhaps they came merely because the Pharisees came and they were determined not to let their rivals steal a march on them; but whatever reasons may have lurked in their hearts, we can be sure that those hearts contained no thought of repentance and bringing forth "fruits meet for repentance."

The words of John the Baptist remind us of another Sadducean trait, namely their *aristocratic pride* in their ancestry. John's warning "Think not to say within yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'," was directed against the commonly held mistaken notion that all physical descendants of Abraham were automatically God's chosen children simply by virtue of their ancestry. But if there was anyone in Israel who disliked having his ancestry belittled, it was the Sadducee of Jerusalem. The Sadducees represented the proud upper class of Hebrew society, a class that prided itself on its wealth, social connections, and its family tree. Josephus states that the Sadducees receive into their party "none but the rich, and do not have the general populace favorably disposed to them, whereas the Pharisees have the multitude on their side." (Ant. XIII, 10, 6) And again: "Their doctrine reaches only a few men, but those hold the highest offices." (Op. cit. XVIII, 1, 4) Wealth, culture, noble ancestry, high social standing, and positions of prominence are in themselves neither morally right nor wrong. But our subsequent studies will reveal how the Sadducean aristocracy consistently used its privileged position in a selfish and materialistic manner.

2. St. Matthew 16, 1–4

The next reference to the Sadducees occurs in the 16th chapter of Matthew, where the Evangelist relates a conversation they had with Jesus. We read: "The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired Him that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, 'When it is evening, ye say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and lowring.' O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.' And He left them and departed."

In this passage we see again the syncretistic, unionist spirit of the Sadducees in action. Dr. Kretzmann's *Commentary* states very aptly (ad loc): "Here is a combination showing how far unionist tendencies may lead if the object is opposition to Christ: the Pharisees, legalists, with their unceasing harping upon the details of Law and tradition; and the Sadducees, rationalists, with their denial of large parts of the Old Testament and all those doctrines that did not suit their reason. At other times these two Jewish sects were at sword's points; but for the purpose of resisting Christ they gladly unite their forces." To which we need add only the remark that whenever churchmen depart from the foundation of God's Word, they invariably and inevitably become enmeshed in entangling alliances, which serve not to further, but only to hinder the cause of Christ's Gospel.

Now why did the Sadducees approach our Lord on this occasion? St. Matthew states that they came to *tempt* Him by asking Him to show them a "sign from heaven." Hypocritically they requested of Jesus a miracle or some other deed, which would prove that He is the promised Messiah. With fair words they imply that upon seeing such a sign they will believe in Him and accept Him as the promised Deliverer. But down in their hearts they felt certain that Jesus would be unable to furnish the sign they demanded, whereupon they intended to use

this information in their campaign to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people. Taking the word “hypocrite” in its original meaning of “one who plays a part on the stage; one who pretends,” then we can find no better example of hypocrites than these Sadducees and their friends for the day who here approached Jesus with their tongue-in-the-cheek request.

Our Lord, understandably, did not give them a sign from heaven; instead, He gave these sign-seekers a rebuking reply that included the question: “Can ye not discern the signs of the times?” By “the signs of the times” the Lord had in mind the divinely given evidence proclaiming the fact that the Messiah had come. For example, John the Baptist had appeared as the herald and forerunner who, according to Isaiah 40, 3ff and Malachi 3, 1; 4, 5, was to announce the presence of the King of kings. No one who believingly accepted these Scripture prophecies could see and hear John without recognizing that the day of the Messiah had come. But even though these Sadducees had seen John with their own eyes, and with their own ears had heard his voice crying in the wilderness, they failed to recognize his identity and the significance of his appearing. They failed to discern the signs of the times. Other signs of the times they treated with the same unbelieving disregard. The Prophet Isaiah, e.g., had foretold that when the Messiah comes, “then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.” (Is. 35, 5–6; cf. also 61, 1–3). While the Sadducees knew full well that Jesus of Nazareth had restored sight to the blind, caused the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and the dumb to speak and sing, yet they did not accept Him as the promised Messiah. And in looking for the reason for their failure to recognize and accept Jesus as the Messiah, we dare not overlook the fundamental fact that the Sadducees did *not* accept all of the Scriptures as the Word of God. Josephus writes: “The Sadducees do not regard the observance of anything besides what *the law* enjoins them.” (Ant. XVIII, 1, 4; cf. also XIII, 10, 6) There is some debate as to what Josephus meant by “the law.” Some say that he used the term “the law” as the name for the whole Old Testament. Others hold that he here used the term “the law” in the narrower sense in which it was commonly used among the Israelites, referring specifically to the Pentateuch, the Five Books of Moses, but stripped of the multitudinous traditions with which the Pharisees had overlaid the Law of Moses. This is the view held, e.g., by Prof. W. Oesterley, who writes: “The written Law, or Pentateuch, was the supreme authority according to Sadducean teachings.” (W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Books of the Apocrypha*, p. 144.) While Biblical scholars have by no means reached agreement on the question, there is evidence to support this view that the Sadducees acknowledged *only the authority of the Five Books of Moses* (although, as Prof. E. Hengstenberg remarks, “internally they acknowledged the 5 books of Moses just as little as the rest.” E. W. Hengstenberg, *History of the Kingdom of God under the Old Testament*, II, 381.) A clear expression of the Sadducees’ attitude toward the Scriptures of the Old Testament is furnished by an incident recorded in Jewish literature (e.g. in C. Taylor’s edition of the *Pirke Aboth*, Excursus III) where a certain Sadducee quoted as follows: “and therefore I say that the Prophets and Hagiographa (in other words, all of the OT outside of Moses) are called words of Qaballah (mere tradition), because they were received by *diadoche* (succession or tradition) ... and by no means are they equal to the Five Books, which are all precepts and ordinances.” Still another example may be cited to illustrate the Sadducees’ attitude toward the Scriptures outside of the Pentateuch. In the 4th century A.D. a certain Pharisee accused a Sadducee named Jacob of Kefar Nibburaga, who was teaching in the city of Tyre, of teaching false doctrine. When the rabbi summoned Jacob to appear before him he pointed out that the teachings of this Sadducee were not in harmony with 10th chapter of Ezra, and therefore sentenced him to be whipped. But Jacob protested: “What! Will you have me whipped on the strength of mere Qaballah (mere tradition)?” And not until the rabbi cited further proof quoted directly from the books of Moses did Jacob the Sadducee acknowledge his error and gracefully submit to the whipping. (Cf. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, sub *Sadducees*.) We can, therefore, well understand why men who had such a low regard for the writings of the OT Prophets should fail to “discern the signs of the times” which were so plainly in evidence in the days of our Lord’s earthly ministry.

In concluding His answer to the Sadducees’ request for a sign from heaven the Savior said: “A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.” When Jesus here spoke of a “wicked and adulterous generation,” He was characterizing the

contemporary Jewish nation as a whole; yet this characterization applies with special force to the Sadducees. The adjective “wicked” (πονηρός) is applied in the Scriptures to persons who not only have immoral tendencies in their hearts, but who also actively exercise these sinful inclinations in their daily lives. A brief examination of the historical records shows that the Sadducees qualify as “wicked” in the full sense of this word. Dr. Guignebert calls attention to the fact that in the literature of the Talmud, Sadduceeism is virtually identified with Epicureanism. (ch. Guignebert, *The Jewish World in the Time of Jesus*, 162) A passing acquaintance with the Epicureans, who are mentioned once in the NT (Acts 17, 18), is sufficient to make one realize that it is no compliment to the Sadducees to be identified with this group whose name even today is the byword for luxurious sensualism and moral laxity. From the Talmud we learn also that the Pharisees were accustomed to pronounce the Sadducees unclean “if they walk in the wicked ways of their fathers.” (Nidda iv, 2.) An earlier writing, the so-called Psalter of Solomon (a pseudepigraphic writing dating from the last century of the OT era), gives a picture of the worldly, even dissolute life of the Sadducees. It describes them as a dominating class holding influential and powerful positions; they are wealthy, but their prosperity has produced in them a spirit of insolence, self-reliance, and a disregard for God; they are guilty of gross sensual sins, profaning the sanctuary and its sacred objects and sacrificial offerings; they are said to be “men-pleasers,” hypocrites, whose concern for respectability is only external. The following excerpt from the 4th Psalm of Solomon will serve as a typical description of the Sadducees. The writer of this “psalm” begins by addressing a representative of the Sadducees with these words:

“Wherefore sittest thou, O profane man, in the council of the pious,
 Seeing that thy heart is far removed from the Lord,
 Provoking with transgressions the God of Israel?
 Extravagant in speech, extravagant in outward seeming beyond all men,
 Is he that is severe of speech in condemning sinners in judgment.
 And his hand is first upon him, as though he acted in zeal,
 And yet he is himself guilty in respect of manifold sins of wantonness.
 His eyes are upon every woman without distinction,
 His tongue lieth when he maketh contract with an oath.
 By night and in secret he sinneth as though unseen,
 With his eyes he talketh to every woman of evil compacts.” (V. 1–5).

(Cf. Robert Henry Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, Vol. II: *Pseudepigrapha*, 625ff.)

In his trenchant way, Luther referred to the Sadducees as “rude swine” (*grobe Säue*; St. L. Ed., XII, 2421), and modern writers are also accustomed to speak quite frankly of the worldliness of these men who quite obviously did not place a premium on high moral character. And when the NT gives us glimpses of the readiness of the Sadducees to resort to illegal methods to gain their selfish ends (cf. e.g. their underhanded dealings with Judas Iscariot; the illegal night trial of Jesus; the bribery of the soldiers who had guarded Jesus’ tomb), then we become doubly aware of our Lord’s reason for characterizing them as *wicked*.

Jesus’ characterization (Mt. 16, 3) continues by naming these men not only “wicked” but also an “adulterous generation” The word “adulterous” (μοιχαλῖς) is used here not in its literal, but in its figurative sense of “unfaithful to God.” Thayer’s *Lexicon* has the following entry under this word: “As the intimate alliance of God with the people of Israel was likened to a marriage, those who relapse into idolatry are said to *commit adultery* or *play the harlot* (Ezek. 16, 15ff.; 23, 43ff., etc.); hence μοιχαλῖς is figuratively equivalent to faithless to God.” In this sense the term “adulterous” can with peculiar aptness be predicated of the Sadducees. Ever since that day when large numbers of Israelites worshiped the golden calf at the foot of Sinai’s Mountain, there is traceable a persistent tendency on the part of a greater or smaller portion of the nation to imitate the

pagan customs and fashions of their heathen neighbors and even to adopt their idolatrous religious practices. As proof of this we need only recall how it was necessary for God throughout Israel's history to raise up one prophet and reformer after another to warn, denounce, and punish those who "followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them. And they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images ... and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger." (II Kings 17, 15–17.) But, despite God's warnings, the Jewish nation continued to play the role of an unfaithful, adulterous wife, until the cup of their iniquity was full, and God punished the harlotry of the Ten Northern Tribes of Israel with captivity (722 B.C.) and extinction, and later permitted also the Southern Kingdom of Judah to be carried away by Nebuchadnezzar (605 B.C.) into the 70 years of the Babylonian Captivity. Under God's gracious guidance the years of the Babylonian Captivity served as a correcting chastisement for the Kingdom of Judah, and the adulterous wife repented and was restored by her patient and forgiving husband and God. In evaluating the results of the Babylonian Captivity, Dr. Arthur Klinck has written: "The most striking benefit of the captivity was the *extinction of idolatry*. While in possession of their own Temple, the people of Judah had repeatedly fallen into gross idol-worship. But now that they saw at first hand the impurity of the many heathen cults in Babylon, they longed to reestablish their pure worship of Jehovah at Jerusalem. Their religious thinking underwent a thorough chastening. Never afterwards were idols openly tolerated among God's chosen people." (Arthur Klinck, *Old Testament History*, 102f.) However, the heathen influence of the Israelites' pagan neighbors continued to exert a fatal fascination upon the hearts of many even after the Captivity. And while it is true that in general the people did not openly adopt heathen forms of worship, yet many of them exhibited a growing tendency to adopt or imitate the pagan ways of thinking and speaking and living which they saw demonstrated before their eyes by the heathen nations with which they came into contact and who now ruled over them. This heathenizing tendency becomes apparent particularly after the conquest of Palestine by Alexander the Great (332 B.C.). Alexander has been called the "Apostle of Greek Culture" because of his leading part in spreading Greek culture, or "Hellenism," throughout the world of his day. When Alexander conquered Palestine, the streams of Hellenistic influences overran the land, and these influences were met with a ready welcome especially on the part of the wealthy and aristocratic class. "The wealthy aristocrats, who desired worldly success above all else, accepted Hellenism because they could become influential through agreement with the current trends. Hellenism was attractive. While Hellenism gained in popularity and support, the forces opposed to it consolidated. In the contest between the Hebrew religion and Hellenism there was no common ground for agreement or compromise. The aristocrats accepted Hellenism but the middle and lower classes of the Hebrews clung tenaciously to the Law and the ancient customs. They called themselves the Faithful, the Pious, and the Godly (and were later known as the Pharisees), and they accused those who yielded (to Hellenism) of worldliness and paganism." (George Hall and Arthur Arnold: *A New Testament Handbook*, 33.) It is this latter group, infected with worldliness and paganism, whom we meet in the NT as the Sadducees. Hengstenberg writes: "(The Sadducees) are nothing more than the same heathen, godless party in Israelitish clothing." (Op. Cit., 380) And so it is that our Lord's significant descriptive term: "an adulterous generation," applies with special appropriateness to the Sadducees because of the fatal degree to which this group was imbued with this Hellenistic spirit with its pagan veneration of worldly wisdom and culture and of things material and beautiful, with its proud emphasis on man's own reason together with his skills and abilities, with its enticing philosophy that life itself was essentially good and should be enjoyed to the utmost, with its primary concern for the body and the intellect rather than for the soul, and with its characteristic readiness to accept and to assimilate what other religions had to offer. (On the syncretistic aspect of Hellenism, also as it manifested itself in Sadduceeism, cf. e.g.: W. O. E. Oesterley, op. cit., 22, 32ff. Emil Schuerer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, 2nd Division, Vol. II, 40; H. A. Ironside, *The Four Hundred Silent Years*, 32ff. et passim.)

Our next NT reference to the Sadducees is closely related to the passage just discussed; in fact it follows immediately upon it in the 16th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, verses 5–12. Here we read: "And when His disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said unto them, 'Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.' And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'It is because we have taken no bread.' Which when Jesus perceived, He said unto them, 'O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?' Then understood they how that He bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." In comparing this passage with the parallel account in St Mark's Gospel (8, 14ff.), we notice a significant difference in the wording of Jesus' warning to His disciples. In Matthew we read: "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees," while in Mark the same thought is expressed in these words: "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod." The interchangeability of these terms indicates the close relationship that existed between the Sadducees and Herod the Great as well as his family and successors. In commenting on the interchange of these terms by Matthew and Mark, Luther makes the following observation: "*Was Markus schreibt ist aber einerlei mit dem was Matthäus schreibt. Denn Herodes war eine epikurische Sau wie auch die Sadduzäer waren, und bekümmerte sich nichts um das □□□□onftige Leben bei Gott.*" (Luthers Evangelien-Auslegung zusammengestellt von Chr. C. Eberle, 608). Lenski (in his Commentary, on Mark 8, 11) gives the further explanation: "The Sadducees must thus be classed with the Herodians, who sought the support of the Herodian family." Edersheim also identifies the Sadducees with the "Herodians" who are mentioned twice in the NT (Mt. 22, 16 and p.p. Mark 12, 13; Mark 3, 6), and indicates that the name "Sadducees" may be applied to these men when speaking of them as a religious party, while the name "Herodians" would be used when referring to them as a *political* party. (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Eerdmans' Edition, Vol. II, 67.) It is quite obvious that the Sadducees supported the Herodian family not merely because they were in agreement with the Hellenizing policies of the Herods, but primarily because they were ambitious to retain the places of political influence and financial advantage the Herodian government granted them. This fact enables us to understand better the reasons for the Sadducees' bitter opposition to Jesus. Since they had the mistaken idea that Jesus' purpose was to set Himself up as an earthly King whose claims might in some way menace the Herodian regime and their own positions of prestige and power, they regarded Him as a threat to their personal and political interests and agreed that He must be put out of the way. (For the views of a modern Jewish scholar on this point, see e.g. Abram Leon Sachar, *A History of the Jews*, 3rd Ed., 1948, p. 131f.) It is against this background of Sadducean selfishness that we see Caiaphas the Sadducee arise in the Jewish Council and say of Jesus, "It is expedient for us that He should die" (Jn. 11, 48), because if we let Him alone we shall lose "our place." Thus it was their love for the things of this world that caused the Sadducees to "set themselves against the Lord and His Anointed." How vividly the Sadducees exemplify the truth enunciated by our Lord: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon!"

Since our Savior, in loving concern for His own is desirous of having His followers avoid the deadly errors of the Sadducees, He states His earnest warning: "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Sadducees." When the disciples failed to grasp the full meaning of these words, Jesus patiently made it clear to them that He was warning them against the "doctrine" (the *didache*) of the Sadducees. This word for "doctrine" is used in the Greek NT either in the sense of the *act* of teaching (cf. e.g. Mark 4, 2; 12, 38), or the *substance* of one's teaching (e.g. Jn. 7, 16; 18, 19). It is clearly in the latter sense that Jesus warns against the *doctrine* of the Sadducees as the sum total of all that they taught and stood for. And we dare not overlook the fact that the "doctrine" of the Sadducees includes not only what they taught in so many *words*, but also what they taught by their *deeds* and by their *example*.

Jesus characterizes the Sadducean doctrine as a *leaven*, or yeast. In ancient times the fermenting action of yeast was regarded as a process of corruption. The Greek author Plutarch, who lived in the latter part of the same century in which our Savior was born, reflects this ancient view when he speaks of leaven as being "itself

the offspring of corruption, and corrupting the mass of dough with which it is mixed.” (See article on “Leaven” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.) This figurative meaning of leaven as something “corrupt and corrupting” is found in most of the NT passages in which the word occurs, although in Matthew 13, 33 (and p.p. Luke 13, 21) Jesus uses the word not in an evil but in a good sense when He states: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven.” The point of comparison in all the NT passages is the characteristic action of leaven to work in a hidden, silent, and mysterious way in permeating and changing the lump of dough into which it is introduced. “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,” says Paul, meaning that the sinful practice of one person can corrupt an entire congregation (I Cor. 5, 6), or one error in doctrine can lead to a complete loss of the truth of God’s Word (Gal. 5, 9).

Because the doctrine of the Sadducees has such subtle, sinister, and insidious qualities, our Lord warns us to “take heed of it” and “beware of it.” When we see a sign lettered with the words “Beware of the dog!” we readily understand its meaning and stay away because it’s dangerous to come close. In a similar way all followers of Jesus must understand the Lord’s meaning when He says, “Beware of the leaven of the Sadducees.” It’s His way of saying: Keep yourself constantly away from all Sadducean ways of thinking, believing, speaking, and living, for failure to do so can result in the eternal ruin of your soul. Because of the soul-destroying character of the leaven of the Sadducees, Jesus points to the necessity of our being able to *recognize* it whenever it appears; therefore He says *take heed* of it. The verb “take heed” (ὁρᾶτε) expresses the idea of looking at the leaven of the Sadducees with a critical and discerning mind and coming to a realization of its true nature as a venomous soul-poison. Accordingly, you and I have this duty to perform: we must carefully study the leaven of the Sadducees and thus be able to recognize it in all its forms, so that we can then keep ourselves free of it. These words meant much to me as I was preparing this essay. For the question came within, and was several times suggested by others: “Why spend your time on something so ‘negative’ as the doctrine of the Sadducees? Couldn’t the District Convention in this Centennial Year have a much more profitable discussion on some vital topic of current interest to the Synod today, some subject not out of the dim distant past, but one which would be more applicable and practical to Lutheran Christians of the 20th Century?” But over against such tempting thoughts comes the realization that the Savior through His Written Word speaks also to you and me *today*, warning, exhorting, and encouraging us as individuals and as congregations, as a District and as a Synod: You of the 20th Century, you of the 100-year-old Wisconsin Synod, you individual pastors, professors, teachers, and laymen: “*Keep on guarding yourself against the teaching of the Sadducees.*” (Translation of C. B. Williams, *The NT in the Language of the People*.) The fact that our Synod is 100 years old does not mean that we have outgrown the necessity of heeding Jesus’ warning. A glance, too, at the doctrine and life of the Church and at the *Zeitgeist* of the world today will make us realize that His warning is needed as much this very day as it was on the day when it was first spoken. It’s as timely as today, as modern as tomorrow. I trust that these thoughts will serve as an added incentive for all of us gathered here to continue our study of the leaven of the Sadducees, so that we too will ever be able to “take heed and beware of it” to the safeguarding of our personal God-given faith in Jesus our Redeemer, and to the preservation of doctrinal purity in our Synod in the new century which we are now entering.

4. St. Matthew 22, 23–33

Returning now to our list of NT references to the Sadducees, we come to Matthew 22, 23–33 (with its parallel accounts in Mark 12, 18ff., and Luke 20, 27ff.). To our knowledge, the Sadducees never formulated a Creed; but if they had done so, we can be certain that their creed would *not* have contained the words: “I believe in the resurrection of the body.” For St. Matthew tells us: “The same day came to Him the Sadducees, which *say that there is no resurrection.*” Josephus likewise refers to the Sadducees’ rejection of the doctrine of a future resurrection of the body from the grave, stating, “The doctrine of the Sadducees is this, that the souls die with the bodies.” (Ant. XVIII, 1, 3; cf. Wars, II, 8, 14. Similar references are found in the Talmud, e.g. *Sanhedrin* 10, 1 and 90, 12.) The Greek philosophers of the NT era frankly rejected the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of the dead. Such a doctrine seemed unreasonable to them for there was no “scientific evidence” to prove that if a man dies he shall live again. The scoffing rationalism of the Greek mind comes to the fore, e.g.,

in that incident in the market of ancient Athens where the Apostle Paul was ridiculed as a “babbler” by certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers “because he preached unto them Jesus *and the resurrection*.” (Acts 17, 18.) The Sadducees of Jerusalem shared the negative views of these Greeks whose wisdom and culture they so highly admired, and they too “say that there is no resurrection.” Why? Because when you think it through it doesn’t make sense, it’s unreasonable! And they could prove it, too, right from the Bible—at least, so they thought. So they come to Jesus with a quotation from one of the books of Moses (Deut. 25, 5), and then relate the case of a woman who, in accordance with the provisions of the Levirate Law, had married seven brothers, one after the death of another, until finally the woman died too. The case of this one woman, the Sadducees maintained, as well as of others like her, was logical proof that there could be no resurrection. For if this woman and her seven husbands were ever raised from the dead, there would be nothing but endless jealousy, strife, and confusion. “Which one’s wife will she be, for they all married her?” Their argument seems to center in this, that the very requirements of decency and order rule out the possibility of any resurrection. But whereas the Sadducees set out to prove that there is no resurrection, the entire incident proves something far different: it proves that the Sadducees were not ready to take the Bible at its word, but preferred to elevate reason above the Scriptures and accept only so much of the Bible as they felt to be in harmony with the principles of logic and “right reason.” For, says Jesus, if they had followed the Bible, instead of their reason, they would have known that the Bible clearly teaches that death does not end all; the Scriptures do *not* deny the doctrine of the resurrection; in fact, that teaching can be found in those very Books of Moses which outwardly the Sadducees claimed to uphold, while in their hearts they rejected what Moses wrote. Furthermore, if they had known the Scriptures, and the omnipotent God of the Scriptures, they would have realized that He whose almighty power made human bodies out of nothing in the first place, will also be powerful enough to call them back from the grave in such a way that the problem of this woman and her seven husbands will be resolved at once. In fact, there’ll be no problem at all. “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.” What a tragic state of affairs, when those who are supposed to be the religious leaders of the people must be told: “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.”

5. Acts 4, 1–22

The next reference to the Sadducees takes us into the Book of Acts: Chapter 4, 1–22, and describes the first recorded encounter of the early Christians with the Sadducees. Three days after Jesus had silenced their rationalizing arguments against the resurrection of the dead, the Sadducees and their wicked collaborators had caused Jesus to be nailed to the Cross. His body had been laid to rest in Joseph’s tomb but, as He Himself had foretold, on the third day He rose again from the dead. But the Sadducees were determined to prevent the story of His resurrection from spreading among the people. Therefore when the soldiers who had guarded the tomb reported to them what had taken place, they immediately “bribed the soldiers with a large sum of money and said to them: ‘Tell the people that His disciples came by night, while we were sleeping, and stole Him away’.” (Mt. 28, 12–13; Williams’ Transl.) We can understand, then, why these bitter foes of the doctrine of the resurrection would be “thoroughly vexed” (Lenski’s Transl.) when they learned one day that Peter and John were preaching to a large gathering in Solomon’s Porch in the Temple, proclaiming “in the name of Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” So “they arrested them and put them in prison until the next morning, for it was already evening.”

Those who arrested the two Apostles are called “the priests, and the captain of the Temple, and the Sadducees.” The relationship of the Sadducees to the “priests, chief priests, and high priest” must be kept in mind for a proper understanding of the NT references to these groups. Josephus expressly states (Ant. XX, 9, 1), in full agreement with the NT record, the high-priestly families belonged to the Sadducean party. The ordinary priests, who took their turn in the daily Temple services, were not necessarily Sadducees, although some of these, too, may have had Sadducean inclinations. But those who in the NT are called the “chief priests” or “high priests”—terms referring to the former living high priests, the incumbent high priest and the priestly members of his family (Acts 4, 6), and very likely also the heads of the twenty-four “courses” of priests; in other words, the aristocratic and most influential members of the priesthood—were all Sadducees. (Cf. e.g. Schuerer, op. cit.,

Vol. II, 30f.; also G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, Vol. I, 69; see also Edersheim, op. cit., Vol. II, 322.) It is this fact which in recent years has led a majority of Biblical scholars to conclude that the name *Sadducees* is in all probability to be traced back to the High Priest *Zadok* who was elevated to that office by King Solomon (I Kings 2, 35), and whose descendants, according to Ezekiel (44, 10–16; 48, 11; 43, 19; 40, 46), were to be the only priests in the new Temple after the exile. (Cf. Adam Fahling, *The Life of Christ*, 46; also Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar z. NT aus Talmud u. Midrasch*, Band IV, 340, cf. also the Jewish legend in the *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan*, c. 5, which connects the name *Sadducees* with the proper name *Zadok*, and Schuerer's comments in favor of this identification, op. cit. For the contrary view that the name *Sadducee* is to be derived from the Hebrew word צַדִּיקִים “the righteous,” see Edersheim, op. cit., I, 322f.) This close connection of the Sadducean party with the powerful interests of the high priest and the leaders of the Sanhedrin explains why the Sadducees wielded such great influence despite the relatively small size of their party (estimated to number ca. 400 in the days of Jesus, over against ca. 4,000 Pharisees). Unlike the Pharisees, these Sadducean priests confined their activities mainly to Jerusalem, which explains why our Lord had so few meetings with them. Furthermore, being primarily a priestly party, they were in charge of the Temple and all its activities—which is shown also by the part which the Sadducees played in arresting Peter and John in the Temple courts. The Temple was the symbol of their authority and prestige among the people, and anything that tended to detract from the glorification of the Temple was regarded as a threat to their power. The Temple was also a source of rich revenue for the Sadducees. They were the ones who had made the Temple a “house of merchandise” and a “den of thieves” with their booths and tables for the selling of sacrificial animals and the changing of money—transactions from which they derived an immense profit. The extortions of the Sadducean Temple authorities are lamented by a Jewish rabbi in these words recorded in the Talmud (Pesachim 57a); “Woe’s me on account of the house of Annas, woe’s me on account of their serpent brood... They are high priests and their sons treasurers of the Temple, and their sons-in-law assistant treasurers.” When Jesus, therefore, not once but twice (John 2, Mt. 21) “entered the Temple of God and drove out all who bought and sold in the Temple, and overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons” (Mt. 21, 12, RSV), the Sadducees regarded this not only as a challenge to their authority but also as a threat to their illegal income, and were all the more determined to rid themselves of this Prophet from Nazareth of Galilee. (Cf. e.g. H. E. Fosdick, *The Man from Nazareth*; p. 67. Fosdick, being a modern Sadducee, fails to see the fundamental errors of the Sadducees of Jesus’ day; he does, however, correctly evaluate the pecuniary motives in their rejection of Jesus.) How they must have chuckled in sinful glee over the rare bargain they struck when they arranged to eliminate this threat to their pocketbook for a mere thirty pieces of silver! Knowing the unscrupulous character of these Sadducees, also their bitter hatred against Jesus and their vehement denial of the doctrine of the resurrection, we can only admire all the more the Spirit-inspired, fearless answer, which Peter and John gave to the Sanhedrin the morning after their arrest. (Acts 4, 5ff.) With conspicuous boldness the Apostles testified to the Sadducees of “Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead!” And when they had finished speaking, the Sadducees found themselves silenced by Jesus, (Mt. 22, 34.) and they were compelled to release the Apostles, “because they could not find any way to punish them.” (Acts 4, 21, Williams’ Transl.)

6. Acts 5, 17ff.

In the previous chapter of Acts (4, 18. 21) we read that the Sadducees had threatened Peter and John and warned them “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” But the Apostles answered, “You must decide whether it is right in the sight of God to obey you instead of Him, for we cannot keep from telling what we have seen and heard.” And when they were released, the Apostles “continued with great power to give their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God’s favor rested richly on them all.” Acts 4, 33; Williams.) As the number of Christians continued to grow, the anxious concern of the Sadducees over this troublesome movement likewise grew. Finally they could restrain themselves no longer. They felt the time had come to carry out their threat, and so we read in Acts 5, 17ff.: “Now the high priest took a stand, and all his friends, the party of the Sadducees, and they were filled with envy, and they had the (12) Apostles arrested and

put them in the common jail. But in the night an angel of the Lord threw open the jail doors and let them out.” (Williams.) The divine irony in the fact that the Lord sent an *angel* to free the Apostles from their Sadducean captors becomes apparent when we read in Acts 23, 8 that the Sadducees “hold that there is ... no such thing as an angel or spirit.” (Ibid.) In view of the fact that the Books of Moses, which the Sadducees professed to uphold, contain a considerable number of references to angels, it may strike us as strange that the Sadducees denied the existence of the angels. It is assumed (cf. e.g. G. F. Moore, op. cit., 68) that the denials of the Sadducees in this matter restricted themselves at first to the rejection of the fanciful superstitions and legends which the Pharisees had added to the Biblical doctrine of the angels; but in the course of time, incited by their ambition to refute the Pharisees, the Sadducees were driven to the opposite extreme of flatly denying the existence of *all created spirits*, including the angels of God, as well as the souls of men. (This denial is closely related to their previously mentioned denial of the resurrection and the doctrine of a future retribution. Josephus: Ant. XVIII, 1, 3; Wars, II, 8, 14.) What a powerful warning the Sadducees thus are against the dangers of going to fanatical extremes in matters of doctrine; what an eye-opening demonstration they give of the resolute death-march of error whereby one false doctrine leads inevitably to another and still another until finally the entire foundation of faith is completely undermined; what a tragic example they leave of the fatal folly of forsaking the firm foundation of the inspired Word of God!

The doctrinal aberrations of the Sadducees did not end with their rejection of the angels. Having denied the providential care God affords His people through the ministry of His holy angels, the Sadducees took the next step and denied the providence of God in its entirety. Josephus is again our witness, and he says that while the Pharisees made everything depend upon “fate” (*heimarmene*, fr. *meiromai*: to receive as one’s portion), in the sense of divine intervention of human affairs, the “Sadducees deny fate entirely... They say that good and evil are at man’s choice, and the doing of the one or the other at his discretion.” (Wars, II, 8, 14.) “They deny fate by asserting that it is nothing, and that human affairs are not brought to pass by its means. They ascribe, on the contrary, all to us, maintaining that we are ourselves the cause of our prosperity, and that we also incur misfortune through our own folly.” (Ant. XIII, 5, 9.) In other words, the Sadducees would have us tear out of our Bibles the 23rd Psalm and its many comforting counterparts throughout the pages of Holy Writ. It must have been a bitter pill for the Sadducees to swallow when the Pharisee Gamaliel arose in the Sanhedrin and gave his famous counsel of indecision regarding the work of the Apostles: “If this movement has its origin in men, it will go to pieces, but if it has its origin in God, you can never stop it. It is to be feared that you may find yourselves fighting God.” (Acts 5, 38–39; Williams.) To this advice the Sadducees in their helplessness had to agree, and by their assenting vote in the council chamber that day they gave their tacit approval to the doctrine of divine providence, which officially they denied. The inconsistencies of doctrinal errorists are unlimited.

With their denial of divine providence, the Sadducees also undermined the Scriptural doctrine and practice of *prayer*. If God does not take an interest in the affairs of men, if He does not preserve, defend, guard, and protect His people, then it follows quite naturally that there is little use in praying to Him. There is no actual statement of the Sadducees on record to the effect that they denied the validity of prayer, or that they refused to pray publicly when their office required it; but such a rationalistic conclusion must have been inescapable for them. It is significant, too, to note that while the NT several times refers to prayers uttered by Pharisees, there is not a single reference in the NT to any Sadducee who lifted up his hands in prayer to God in response to His fatherly invitation and promise: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” (Ps. 50, 15.) (NOTE: Certain rabbinical records indicate that the Sadducees, when away from Jerusalem, refused to participate in the prayers in the local synagogues, particularly because the Pharisaic founders of the liturgy of the synagogue, in opposition to the Sadducees, had formulated prayers with strong emphasis on the doctrines of the resurrection of the dead and divine providence. Cf. Dr. K. Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, 284.)

Self-evidently, the Sadducees’ view of men’s completely free will and his innate abilities to work out his own destiny implied that man was not sinful by nature, but rather able in his own right to stand before God on the basis of his own good works. Because of the emphasis generally placed upon the self-righteousness of the Pharisees, we may unwittingly get the impression that the Sadducees differed from them in this respect. The truth however is that, if anything, the self-righteousness of the Sadducees *exceeded* that of the scribes and

Pharisees. One writer has keenly analyzed the situation in these words: “The self-righteousness of the Pharisees was based upon the belief that they were *doing* the will of God; but the Sadducees were far more self-righteousness, for they believed that they could *do and will* rightly by personal effort.” (N. Levison, *The Jewish Background of Christianity*, 164.) This gives us still another insight into the Sadducees’ reasons for rejecting Jesus, they neither wanted nor needed a Messiah to “fulfill all righteousness” for them when they could do that for themselves.

7. Acts 23, 1–10

We come now to the last of the NT passages that mentions the Sadducees by name: Acts 23, 1–10. Again we meet the assembled Sanhedrin, gathered this time to question the Apostle Paul about a near-riot which had occurred when Paul appeared in the Temple. We read in verse six and following, “when Paul knew that part of them were Sadducees and part of them Pharisees, he began to cry out in the council chamber, ‘Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a Pharisee’s son, and now I am on trial for the hope of the resurrection of the dead.’ When he said that, an angry dispute arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the crowded court was divided. For the Sadducees hold that there is no resurrection, and no such thing as an angel or spirit, but the Pharisees believe in all of them. So there was a vociferous yelling ... (and some of them) got up and fiercely contended ... (and when) the dispute kept growing hotter and hotter, the colonel became alarmed that Paul might be torn in pieces by them, and so ordered the army to march down and take him out of their hands and bring him back to the barracks.” (Williams.)

This disgraceful affray reveals how the two parties had largely lost sight of the original issues that separated them, and how they were now fighting merely for the sake of upholding their party. When the Pharisees and Sadducees began their existence as separate and opposing parties (ca. 150 B.C.), the original and fundamental difference between them was on the question of the authority of the so-called “Traditions of the Elders.” The Sadducees maintained that the written Law alone was of binding authority, and that the oral traditions had no validity except as mere human opinions of former teachers (and Josephus informs us that the Sadducees counted it a “virtue” to *contradict* their teachers; (Ant. XVIII, 1, 4.) The Pharisees, on the other hand (see R. Travers Herford, *The Pharisees*, 29–35), insisted that the unwritten Traditions were of equal authority with the Scriptures, and as a matter of fact, as Professor Toppe pointed out to us two years ago (See *Quartalschrift*, January, 1951, pp. 39, 41, 45), the Pharisees elevated the Traditions above the written Word. But in the course of time the real points of dispute between the two parties degenerated into habitual arguments, mostly over trivial matters, until finally in the days of Jesus and thereafter “the Sadducees stood for nothing in particular, except their hereditary antipathy to the Pharisees, an antipathy which found expression in caviling questions and paltry annoyances rather than in serious controversy.” (G. F. Moore, op. cit., 279. There are abundant examples of the manifestation of this caviling spirit between the two parties throughout the 2-volume work by Louis Finkelstein, *The Pharisees*.) In their dispute over Paul, it was not a question of which *doctrine* was right or wrong, but rather of which *party* was going to save face. These men thus afford a glimpse into the depths to which blind party spirit can sink. The attitude of the parties over against each other was much like that of the two union bricklayers in London over against a non-union stranger who passed by. One turned to the other and reportedly said: “Look ’ere, Bert, ’oo’s that walkin’ along over there?” Bert looked at the stranger and replied: “I dunno, but ’e ain’t one of us. Better ’eave a brick at ’im.” The anecdote undoubtedly stretches the point, but it is illustrative of the very manner in which the Sadducees, like those brick-layers, were completely unconcerned about learning the real truth of the points at issue between themselves and the Pharisees, and fought and argued for their own warped views in order to save face for their party and to down every opponent who didn’t belong to their own group or share their ways of thinking.

Summary

We are ready now to summarize the principal characteristics of the Sadducees. This summary can be given very adequately in these words by F. Rupperecht (*Bible History Reference*, Vol. II, 67): “The Sadducees were a small party among the Jews, founded as a reaction from the Pharisees, also in the days of the Maccabees,

primarily consisting of the priestly aristocracy and therefore of no great influence (with the common people). (They were, however, highly influential in political affairs.) They were rationalists, accepting only so much of the O. T. Scriptures as suited them—indeed, they are said to have rejected all but the books of Moses. They denied the existence of angels and spirits, and were entirely worldly-minded... The members of the sect naturally were determined foes of the Lord, and made common cause with the Pharisees in condemning Him to the cross.”

II

With the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple and the collapse of the Jewish state, the Sadducean party disappeared from the stage of history. Jerusalem and the Temple had been the center of their selfish interests; politics had been their strong point; and when these were gone, the death-knell had rung for the Sadducees *as a party*. Their *spirit*, however, has lived on through the ages, and is alive at this moment. Among Jews of today, the Sadducean viewpoint is represented in the theology of modern Liberal Judaism. But the leaven of the Sadducees has long ago worked its way far beyond the narrow confines of Judaism, and observing eyes will be able to detect its destructive influences at work throughout the world, both in the secular world as well as in the churches and pseudo-churches within this world. In this portion of our study we propose to “take heed” of **the leaven of the Sadducees as it manifests itself today**.

Recall for a moment the baneful influence, which the Hellenistic world-view had on the Sadducees. Then listen to the considered opinion of competent historians who tell us frankly that the prevailing philosophy of life “in our own day is really Hellenism reincarnate.” (Edwyn Bevan, *The House of Seleucus*, Vol. I, 17. Oesterley, op. cit., 12.)

In other words, the very rationalistic and materialistic *Zeitgeist*, which helped produce Sadduceism, is still warping the *Weltanschauung* of men and women and children today. The slogan: “Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die,” which was popular in the days of the Sadducees, has grown in popularity today; as proof of that we need only open our ears to hear people from coast to coast singing their “hit-parade” favorite, “Enjoy yourself, enjoy yourself, it’s later than you think.” For the average man of the world, money and what money can buy is the measure of all things, even as it was for the selfish, materialistic Sadducees. Without openly denying God’s existence, the worldly minded Sadducees relegated Him to virtual oblivion in their way of thinking and living; and here again the world is following in Sadducean footsteps. Two months ago, J. Edgar Hoover described the trend in the American way of living in these words: “Selfishness is the keynote of the day, and materialism is the inspiration for living. God in many instances is not accepted in the home, and concepts of morality have been relegated to the junk-heap.” Mr. Hoover was speaking primarily of city-life; but the blight of materialism is moving out over rural areas as well. The Secretary of the Rural Church Life Program of the National Lutheran Council stated on February 2 of this year: “To an alarming degree, rural church people are being influenced by the secularism that is rapidly spreading in the more prosperous areas of the land. Rural American people are being caught in the net of a social pattern in which it is easier, more desirable, and less expensive to beget a refrigerator than a child. Bigger farms, bigger tractors, and smaller families seem to be the slogan of rural America under the growing influence of materialism.” We hear and read much of the growing menace of delinquency, lawlessness, and crime. But should this surprise us when we see that many, young and old, not only treat God as though He were non-existent, but like the Sadducees, also are unconcerned about heaven or hell, and neither look forward to eternal life, nor fear eternal death? Then, too, the Sadducees were rationalists, accepting only such things as they felt they could harmonize with their reason. How they would have rejoiced to hear the recent statement of John Dewey: “There is but one method for ascertaining fact and truth: that conveyed by the word ‘science’ in its most liberal sense.” The modern world venerates science to such a dangerous degree that one scientist, Anthony Standen, felt the honest necessity of publishing a book this year (*Science Is A Sacred Cow*) to counteract the unquestioning reverence generally accorded to scientists and their pronouncements. Writes Mr. Standen: “Statesmen, industrialists, ministers of religion, civic leaders, philosophers, all are questioned and criticized, but scientists—never.” Think of how

“science falsely so called” has caused countless thousands, in a manner quite Sadducean, to doubt the Biblical truths of the Creation of the world and God’s providential preservation of all things, and to substitute for it some kind of evolutionistic theory, whereby man is declared to be nothing but a highly-developed animal who has no such thing as a soul. And if these modern Sadducees say that man has no soul, and there is no heaven or hell after this life, then it’s quite understandable, too, that so many of them should advocate “mercy killing” and even wax bold and blasphemous as did Prof. Ernest Hooton of Harvard who declared last January: “If ‘thou shalt not kill’ is a ‘law of God’ that ... (prohibits euthanasia), let us have done with such a savage and subhuman deity and substitute a god of mercy and loving-kindness.” Thus without even entering the churches of our land but by merely walking its city streets and country lanes, we find on all sides carbon copies of those very conditions which prevailed in the select circle of the Sadducees of Jerusalem.

But now let’s open the doors of some of today’s churches, and look inside to see what the leaven of the Sadducees has done there. If the Sadducees of Jesus’ day were to come back to life today, I believe they’d feel most at home in the Unitarian Church. A quarter of a century ago Ernest Gordon wrote a book titled *The Leaven of the Sadducees* in which he quoted the statements of various Unitarian leaders, which revealed the remarkable similarity between Unitarianism and Sadduceeism. If we look at the pronouncements of Unitarian ministers since that book was published, we find that if anything they have identified themselves with Sadduceeism even more fully. A tract currently issued by the American Unitarian Association (*What Is the Unitarian Religion?*) includes statements such as these: “We believe that the Bible contains much of the most inspiring literature concerning man’s relation to God and to his fellowmen... We subject it’s teaching to the same tests of reason and conscience and laws of literary value that govern other books.” “We believe Jesus to have been born a normal man and to have been naturally born of Joseph and Mary, endowed with powers differing in degree but not in kind from those of other men.” “We believe that human nature is imperfect but not inherently bad.” “We do not believe in immortality of the soul. Many others do, but all of us agree that the best preparation for whatever the future may be is to live abundantly here and now. We reject as unfair to man the doctrine of eternal punishment.” The American Unitarian Association also distributes a booklet titled *Unitarians Believe* (by Frederick May Eliot), in which the Unitarian attitude toward prayer and divine providence is set forth in these words: “An arbitrary and capricious God—a God who pays no heed to human needs until they are called to His attention—a God who will set aside his plans because some person beseeches him to do so—any such God as that seems to us unworthy of the respect or worship of an intelligent human being... A God who can be influenced by prayer, so that he changes his mind is the same sort of God who needs to be roused out of sleep in order to take care of his human children; and we simply reject altogether any such thought of God.” Two weeks ago the Unitarians celebrated the 125th anniversary of the founding of the American Unitarian Association with a convention in Boston. A report on this convention in *Time* magazine (June 5, 1950) stated: “The well dressed, easygoing Unitarians enlivened their sessions with jokes instead of hymns.” At this convention they voted unanimously in favor of a closer union with the Universalist Church. One Unitarian said the only difference between Unitarians and Universalists is this: “The Universalist thinks that God is too good to send men to hell, and the Unitarian thinks that men are too good to be sent there.” He might have added that neither group believes in the existence of hell. It is quite natural that the Unitarians and Universalists should feel strongly attracted to each other, for both espouse the same type of modern Sadduceeism, as can be seen, e.g., from these statements made by the Rev. Brainard Gibbons of Wausau, Wisconsin, in his convention sermon at the last biennial assembly of the Universalists at Rochester, New York: “Universalists today consider ... the Bible a marvelous work of man, not the miraculous handiwork of God; Jesus a spiritual leader, not a divine Savior; man’s fate in human hands, not superhuman clutches.” (Quoted in CTM, June 1950, p. 74.) The most fitting reply to today’s Unitarians and Universalists is the answer which Jesus gave to the Sadducees of His day: “Ye do err, not knowing the Scripture, nor the power of God.”

When you enter a Christian Science Reading Room or church, you won’t have to carry with you a Geiger counter to detect the leaven of the Sadducees; for here, too, its working is apparent to the naked eye. The Sadducees rejected much of the Bible; Mary Baker Eddy’s followers do the same, claiming that the Bible contains errors and contradictions. The Sadducees rejected Christ; Christian Science says of Him: “Jesus Christ

is not God.” (*Science and Health with Key to the Scripture*, 361.) The Sadducees bribed the soldiers to lie about Jesus’ resurrection; Mary Baker Eddy spreads the same lie in her statement: “His disciples believed Jesus dead while He was hidden in the sepulcher; whereas He was alive.” (Ibid, 44.) The Sadducees virtually denied the efficacy of prayer; and, contrary to the popular belief that its practitioners attempt to heal by prayer, Christian Science also denies the efficacy of prayer. Whatever “healings” Christian Scientists may accomplish are done not by the power of prayer but by the power of suggestion. (See *Science and Health*, etc., 411–414.) It has been aptly pointed out that the reason why Mary Baker Eddy clothed her rejection of prayer in such veiled terms was undoubtedly “in order not to shock the person in course of being proselytized.” (Th. Engelder et. al., *Popular Symbolics*, 451.) The Sadducees denied that there is any such thing as an angel or spirit; Mary Baker Eddy perpetuates this denial when she says: “The supposition that there are good and evil spirits is a mistake.” (Op. cit., 70.) The Sadducees wholly perverted the Scriptural doctrine of sin; this same perversion exists in Mary Baker Eddy’s teaching that sin is “without real origin or existence,” and “it belongs to the nothingness of error,” (Ibid, 286) and “man is incapable of sin” (Ibid, 475). The Sadducees had no room in their system of doctrine for a day of judgment or future retribution; Mary Baker Eddy similarly disposes of the final judgment with her dictum: “No final judgment awaits mortals; for the judgment day of wisdom comes hourly and continually” (p. 291). I once met a former Lutheran woman who said she left the Lutheran Church and joined the “Church of Christ, Scientist” because there at last she learned “the wonderful teaching that ‘God is Love!’” If only she, and other deluded souls like her, would open their ears to the voice of divine love pleading with them in Jesus’ words: “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Sadducees,” also of the leaven of that Sadducee in woman’s dress who founded the Church of Christ, Scientist!

Let’s leave the Christian Science temple and look into the “Kingdom Hall” of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Here we’ll find the surroundings far less pretentious, and we’ll very likely find the people to be of a lower social level, but nevertheless we’ll find the same Sadducean leaven at work. The religion of the Jehovah’s Witnesses (also known as International Bible Students, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, the Russellites, and several other names) has been described as a “mixture of rationalism and materialism,” (Casper Nervig, *Christian Truth and Religious Delusions*, 98) which already points to their spiritual kinship with the ancient Sadducees. An examination of their writings brings out this relationship so clearly that one almost wonders whether “Pastor” Russell or “Judge” Rutherford may not have adopted the Sadducees as their model teachers. The presses of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society have poured forth such a veritable flood of literature that one hardly knows where to begin in analyzing their views. For our present purpose, we may restrict ourselves to one book: *Let God Be True*, published in 1946. Here we find the oft-repeated claim of the Russellites: We “accept God’s Word, the Bible, as the truth” (p. 10). But this so-called acceptance of God’s Word is made to depend not on the testimony of the Holy Ghost but on the testimony of human reason with this statement that not divine revelation but “*sound thinking* assures us that the true and living God must have given searching mankind some inspired written revelation about Himself” (p. 9). The book in question has a section titled “Written Word Versus Tradition” (p. 12–18), which is reminiscent of the Sadducees’ insistence on the written letter of the Law in opposition to the oral traditions of the Pharisees. Here we find this statement: “The Scriptures do not teach us to put faith in the oral traditions of religionists, which traditions men have since recorded and published as being equal to the inspired Scriptures or even superior to the Scriptures where there is a conflict between the two” (p. 13). But it is plainly evident from the entire book that what the Russellites reject as mere “oral traditions of religionists” are those very *Creeds* of the Christian Church which set forth the basic teachings of Holy Scripture. Thus the Jehovah’s Witnesses reject not only the Universal Creeds, but with them the very Scriptures whose teachings they summarize. Regarding Jesus they say: He was not “equal in power and glory with Almighty God” (p. 37), the doctrine of His deity is “unreasonable” for “if Jesus was the immortal God, he could not have died” (p. 91). Regarding the soul of man they declare: “The claims of religionists that man has an immortal soul, and therefore differs from the beast, is not Scriptural” (p. 59). Regarding the future punishment of the wicked and unbelieving in hell, the statement is made: “The doctrine of a burning hell where the wicked are tortured eternally after death cannot be true ... (1) because it is wholly unscriptural; (2) because it is unreasonable” (p. 80). The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is also one “which no thinking person will accept”

and is disposed of with these blasphemous words: "Such a doctrine is not of God... God-fearing persons who want to know Jehovah and serve Him find it a bit difficult to love and worship a complicated, freakish-looking, three-headed God" (p. 82f). In all these rejections and denials the "Witnesses" are following the pattern established over 1900 years ago by the Sadducees. The haughty and sarcastic manner in which they ridicule and reject the teachings of other church groups, including our own, is thoroughly in the manner of Caiaphas, the Sadducee, who wanted to silence all others with his sneering remark, "Ye know nothing at all!" A further similarity of the Russellites to the Sadducees is found in their "worldly-mindedness," which in its coarse form manifested itself in the life of "Pastor" Russell, whose wife divorced him for "unmanly conduct and gross familiarity with other women." He tried to avoid paying her alimony by pleading poverty, but the courts of Pennsylvania prevented this fraud when they discovered that he had just turned over an estate of \$317,000 to the Bible and Tract Society of which *he* was the president and owner. He also gained notoriety by a swindle, which he perpetrated on his followers, when he sold them "Miracle Wheat" at \$60.00 a bushel promising them fifteen times the usual crop. (Cf. Nervig, op. cit., 100.) While such gross excesses are not common among Russell's followers, the same materialistic attitude is evident in their clinging to a religion that holds out to them not the promise of eternal salvation in heaven, but the promise of material bliss (cf. e.g. F. E. Mayer, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, 43) in an earthly kingdom centering around the mansion for "the faithful" which has already been built near San Diego. The mansion in San Diego is separated from the Temple in Jerusalem by many miles, but the leaven of the Sadducees forms a bond of close union between them.

In looking for various manifestations of the Sadducean leaven in our day, we dare not overlook the lodge. "The pattern of all anti-Christian lodges is Freemasonry, which, while not a church, may be defined as an unchristian cult, teaching a universal religion (of works) to which Jews, Christians, and heathen may agree." (J. T. Mueller, *My Church and Others*, 77.) With typically Hellenistic "readiness to accept what other religions had to offer" (W. Oesterley, op. cit., 38), the Sadducees may be regarded as the forerunners of the modern unionist lodge religion which states, "at its altar men of all religions may kneel; to its creed, disciples of every faith may subscribe." (Albert G. Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, 162.) Like the Sadducees, the lodges deny man's natural sinfulness, declaring, e.g., that with their own good works done in accordance with the lodge system of morality, "its members may advance their spiritual interests, and mount by the theological ladder from the Lodge on earth to the Lodge in heaven." (Ibid.) And, like the Sadducees who shouted "Away with Jesus!" the lodges also do away with Him by rejecting His deity (Cf. S. H. Swanson, *Christ and the Lodge*, 25ff.), and by eliminating His name from their prayers. And if the Sadducees undermined the Scriptural doctrine of prayer with their false teaching regarding divine providence, the lodges also nullify the prayers of their members by this very fact that the name of Jesus is denied, for only prayer "in His name" is acceptable to the Father. (John 14, 13f, 15, 16; 16, 23; cf. John 14, 6; Rom. 5, 1ff.) The disrespect of the Sadducees toward large portions of the Scriptures is comparable in every way to the studied neglect of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible by the lodge, while at the same time they try to cover up such neglect with statements such as this: "The Bible is used among us as the symbol of the will of God." Their real attitude toward the Bible becomes apparent when the Masons go on to say: "Whatever to any people expresses the will of God may be used as a substitute for the Bible in a Masonic lodge." (Mackey, 114.) Furthermore, the aristocratic pride and party-spirit of the Sadducees is frequently demonstrated by the various "fraternal" orders; and the Sadducean love of worldly pleasures, *sinful* pleasures, is given free and unashamed reign in many a lodge-hall on Saturday night, at many a weekend party at the lodge "country homes," and at many a national convention of the various orders. In view of all this we can only ask in all amazed astonishment, How can some people who want to be Christians, yes, even some Lutherans, continue to hold membership in the Masons or the Moose, the Eagles or the Elks, or any of the others? Some offer the excuse, "The lodge permits us to think of Jesus when the chaplain reads the prayers." But Jesus didn't say, It's all right to join the Sadducees if you just remember to think of Me occasionally; He said rather: "Take heed and *beware* of the leaven of the Sadducees!" It's dangerous for your soul! Some pastors will attempt to defend their compromise with the lodge by rationalizing along these lines: "It's better for the church if I accept lodge members into the congregation, for then at least I have them where I can preach to them do them some good." But that too is the Sadducees' way of elevating *human reason* above the Word of God,

which states clearly and to the point: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? ... Wherefore, *come out* from among them, and *be ye separate*, saith the Lord” (II Cor. 6, 14, 17).

The leaven of the Sadducees is no respecter of age. It can do its destructive work in old hearts as well as young, and can contaminate the faith of boys and girls as well as that of their fathers and mothers. The ancient Sadducees took steps to see to it that their leaven was doled out also to the young, in proper amounts carefully calculated to be digestible and attractive to the mind of youth. It may not be generally known, but it is nonetheless a fact that the Sadducees at one time had their own youth movement, which in certain respects showed a remarkable similarity to the present-day Scouting movement. In the First Book of Maccabees (1, 11ff.) we read that in the days when the Sadducean party was first taking definite form the Hellenizing influences were turning many Israelites into Greek ways of life, that “certain of the people went to the king, who gave them license to do after the ordinances of the heathen whereupon they built a place of exercise at Jerusalem according to the custom of the heathen.” In building this “place of exercise,” or gymnasium, in Jerusalem, “these men no doubt had an eye to tactics in the way they chose to inaugurate their campaign. For a gymnasium would appeal especially to youth, and if the Jewish youth could be won over to pagan practices, then the future was theirs.” (Fair-weather and Black, in the Cambridge Bible, *The First Book of Macc.*, p. 67.) Dr. Oesterley (op. cit., 32f.) points out that the *gymnasium* was one of the most potent means whereby the Greek spirit was fostered, and he adduces quotations describing the gymnasiums and their activities. We learn that there were youth groups, called ἔφηβοι (from the Greek word ἔφηβος: youth) organized in connection with these gymnasiums, and that the boys belonging to these organizations wore a distinctive uniform consisting of a broad-brimmed hat, a κλάμις, or shawl, brooched around the neck and hanging over their shoulders, and high-laced boots. In the Second Book of Maccabees we learn that it was particularly the rationalistic pre-Sadducean party which encouraged these youth groups, especially under the high priest Jason (ca. 175 B.C.), of whom we read that “he deliberately established a gymnasium under the citadel itself, and made the noblest of the youth wear the petasus,” or broad-brimmed hat. (II Macc. 4, 12.) We have then this picture: groups of Jewish boys, organized into troops under the auspices of the high priest, meeting for physical training in the local gymnasium, and marching about the streets of Jerusalem in their distinctive uniforms. If the similarity between the Sadducean ἔφηβοι and the modern Boy Scouts would end with their uniforms and other external features, we should be happy indeed. But when we realize that the ἔφηβοι troops were used as agencies to instill into the hearts of the boys unscriptural attitudes, including the Hellenistic syncretism, or religious cooperation and toleration of all faiths; and when we furthermore realize that the Boy Scouts of America similarly encourage the syncretistic and unscriptural view which “recognizes any and all churches as ‘divinely-appointed agencies,’ regardless of what they may teach or believe” (*Scouting in the Light of Scripture*, p. 13), then we see that the Scout movement also has its elements of the destructive leaven of the Sadducees, which we are to avoid at all costs. If the God of the Scout movement is acceptable to the Sadducees—and according to the *Handbook for Boys* (p. 108) and the *Handbook for Scoutmasters* (p. 392) He would be—then He definitely is not acceptable to Lutheran Christians, and all the “Lutheran Committees on Scouting” in the world cannot make Him acceptable. The pastors of our Synod who compiled the booklet *Scouting in the Light of Scripture* were obviously aware of the relationship of Scoutism to Sadduceeism: for in the concluding paragraph of the booklet (p. 16), these passages are quoted as the Lord’s simple and plain directive to His people concerning the Scout movement: “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Mt. 16, 6); “Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (I Cor. 5, 6); “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you” (II Cor. 6, 17).

Turning our attention now to the church groups that are generally regarded as Christian in character, we find that the leaven of the Sadducees has not failed to work its way into these bodies also. Take the Roman Catholic Church as an example. Passing over such Sadducean traits within the church of the pope as its denial of man’s complete depravity, its supercilious attitude over against the written Word of God, the worldliness and moral laxity which characterized many of its popes and parish priests in the past, its indifference to the

encouragement of the study of the Bible, and its perversion of the doctrine of prayer by introducing the mediatorship of the saints, we may single out one example where the working of the leaven of the Sadducees is apparent at a glance. I refer to the doctrine of purgatory. In many Catholic churches you may purchase for five or ten cents a booklet bearing the title: *Assist the Souls in Purgatory* (published by the Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration, Clyde, Mo.). The first chapter of this booklet attempts to answer various questions about purgatory, such as what is purgatory, where is it, how long will it last, and how can we know that there is a purgatory. In answer to this last question the booklet states: "Both Holy Scripture and the doctors of the church teach that there is a purgatory." But it is significant to note that in the entire chapter not a single passage of Scripture is directly quoted or referred to! To make up for this embarrassing deficiency of Scripture proof, the booklet continues by stating: "*Reason* also tells us that there is a purgatory. It cannot be doubted that there are persons who during their life never commit mortal sin, or who at death are not in the state of mortal sin, but who are, nevertheless, not free from faults and imperfections when they enter eternity. *Reason* itself must tell us that such souls would not be worthy to enter at once into heaven, where nothing defiled may enter, and that, on the other hand, they could not be consigned by God to eternal torments, for this would be contrary to His infinite and perfect justice. Hence, *we must conclude* that there is a middle state where souls are purified from their stains... Such a place is purgatory" (p. 4). So we see that among Roman Catholics too, just as among the Sadducees, human *reason* is elevated *above* the Word of God and permitted to establish doctrines that are *contrary* to the Holy Scriptures. Still another example of this same type of rationalism is found in the Roman Church's mutilation of the Sacrament of the Altar on the alleged grounds—also invented by human reason—that if the consecrated wine were administered to the laity, this might result in the accidental spilling of the blood of Jesus; and reason has conveniently supplied the further rationalization that a true body always contains blood (the "concomitance" theory), and so it is sufficient for the layman to receive the Sacrament in one kind only. Other doctrines and practices which the Church of Rome has established on the weak foundation of human reason include the adoration of the saints, the immaculate conception of Mary, and the infallibility of the pope. All of which combine to corroborate the correctness of the criticism that "the theology of Rome is shot through and through with rationalism." (Engelder et. al., op. cit., 157.)

When we look for further similarities between Roman Catholicism and Sadduceeism, we are reminded of the practice of the Sadducees to curry the favor and support of the family of the king and other political leaders in the Roman government, using their connection with these temporal rulers to the selfish advantage of their own group. Do we need to look far for evidence of similar practices on the part of the Church of Rome today? We need only recall the avidity with which the Vatican State seeks and receives official ambassadors from the various world governments, and how in our country at the present time Rome is seeking government support for its parochial school system, and again we see that the leaven of the Sadducees is at work. Whenever the Church seeks the assistance of the State in carrying out its mission on earth, it is relying on the arm of flesh, which is undeniably a trait of materialistic Sadduceeism. Our practice of insisting on maintaining the complete separation of Church and State finds its justification also in these words of our Lord: "Beware of the leaven of the Sadducees!"

If it is true that Roman Catholicism has a generous admixture of the leaven of the Sadducees, it is equally true that this leaven has not spared the non-Catholic churches. This becomes apparent from a brief survey of the prevailing doctrines and practices in Protestantism in general. Without attempting a formal analysis of Protestantism, we shall here consider a number of items gathered from the editorial and news columns of various newspapers, magazines, and sundry publications in recent months. Recent statistics on church membership in the United States indicate that the largest Protestant church group in our country is the Methodist Church; but it is also one of the most unionist and doctrinally indifferent churches in the land. The spirit of unionism and doctrinal indifference that prevails within Methodism comes to the fore at the present time in the newspaper accounts of the large-scale "preaching missions" which the Methodists are currently conducting in various communities, at which they solicit the cooperation of all Protestant pastors and churches—a type of unionism in which the majority of Protestants are more than willing to participate, as witnessed by the "union services" and joint church work fostered by the various local ministerial alliances and

councils of churches, also the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, and the World Council of Churches on the international level. The unionist nature of the Methodist Church made it possible for Bishop Francis McConnell to say: "There is nothing in the Methodist system of doctrine which would forbid the adoption of any scheme of union that might seem to promise success for the development of spiritual efficiency." (*Essentials of Methodism*, 85.) The Methodist attitude toward the liberal truth of certain Bible teachings is reflected in the same bishop's statement, "Total depravity is not an essentially Methodist doctrine." (Ibid. 12.) The spirit of unionism and doctrinal indifference has leavened also the laity of the Methodist Church. Dr. George W. Crane, a lay leader in the Methodist Church whose syndicated column ("The Worry Clinic") is carried by newspapers throughout the country, gives expression to this spirit in statements such as these: "There is still too much theology and ancient Hebrew expounded from our pulpits and far too little horse sense and applied psychology." (May 22, 1950.) Again he wrote: "It is not always a sign of intelligence or wisdom to maintain a fixed idea. Even a Christian should not be so inflexible in his beliefs that he would deny a hearing to any other religion... Christians should not become so bullheaded that they are narrow and unscientific." (May 29, 1950.)

Harry Emerson Fosdick represents an extreme form of rationalism in American Protestantism. Ernest Gordon (op. cit.) rightly calls him "a modern Sadducee." The validity of this opinion was amply corroborated when presses and periodicals announced the publication of Fosdick's latest book, *The Man From Nazareth* (Harper & Brothers, 1949). The title of the book in itself reveals that Fosdick, like the Sadducees of old, regards Jesus only as a *man* and *not God*. When the book is opened, we find Fosdick repeating his former blasphemous assertions, including that there is "no credibility to the story of Jesus' virgin birth" (p. 158); he puts the "legend" of the virgin birth into the category of Greek mythology, and states that the "only logical conclusion" is this: "Joseph begat Jesus" (p. 159). The newspaper announcement of the publication of the latest volume of *Who's Who in America* mentioned the name of Dr. Millar Burrows, an ordained Presbyterian clergyman who is now serving as Professor of Biblical Theology at Yale University Divinity School. "Who's Who" reminds us that Dr. Burrows is the author of a book published in 1946 under the title: *An Outline of Biblical Theology* (The Westminster Press). A glance into the book reveals certain rationalistic, Sadducean tendencies, as can be seen e.g. in Dr. Burrow's treatment of the doctrine of the angels, where he states: "It must be admitted that we have no evidence of the existence of angels. On the whole it seems best to regard the idea of such divine messengers as a part of the ancient mythological framework of biblical religion which we have discarded" (p. 123). This man has been called to teach *Biblical Theology*, yet he himself undermines the source of all theology when he speaks of "the Bible with all its imperfections and uncertainties" (p. 24).

As 1949 came to a close and 1950 dawned, newspapers were reporting the second triennial meeting of the "Inter-seminary Conference" sponsored by the Federal Council of Churches (and held on the campus of Augustana College and Theological Seminary, Rock Island, Illinois). Representatives of 88 seminaries and 41 Protestant denominations attended this weeklong meeting. Not only did these future Protestant pastors publicly worship and pray together daily in complete disregard of the fact that they were not one in faith, but they also listened, with no audible protest, to statements such as these: "There is no hope for modern Protestantism unless it becomes more radical" (Prof. Kermit Eby of the University of Chicago); "Protestantism is due for some changes... We've got to liberalize our ideas of God and Christ to fit the present day, not the year one... Present-day men and women are trained in the ways of science, to look before believing and to believe only what they see. We can't ram doctrines blindly down their throats" (Pres. Harry Richardson of Gammon Theological Seminary in Georgia). Despite what was termed "the tragic area of dissent" in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, discussions and committee meetings were held to consider plans for a joint Communion Service at the Inter-seminary Conference's next meeting.

Perhaps there is no doctrine that has been twisted as much by human reason as the doctrine of the Sacrament of the Altar. The *denial* of the Real Presence, urged long ago by Zwingli and Calvin on the grounds that this doctrine is not in accord with "right reason," is still zealously maintained by the greater part of Protestantism today, and gives ample evidence of the fact that the principle of rationalism is firmly entrenched in Protestant theology. A renewed reminder of this came with the announcement of the Moody Press in Chicago

of its publication this year of *The New Testament in the Language of the People*, translated by Charles B. Williams, a Baptist professor and editor. This translation has many features, which would give some justification for the statement that “it is the best translation of the New Testament in the English language.” But with its many excellencies, this translation reflects withal the rationalistic interpretation of the words of our Lord: “This is My body, This is My blood.” In Matt. 26:26-28, Mk. 14:22-24, Lk. 22:19-20, and I Cor. 11:24-25 the translator puts these words into the Lord’s mouth: “This *represents* My body, This *represents* My blood.” In two footnotes (pp. 116 and 188) the translator is compelled to admit that the original Greek does not say “represents” but “is.” His translation of these passages is what Dr. Sasse calls Calvin’s interpretation of the Lord’s Supper: “A desperate attempt to explain away the statements of Paul which he cannot comprehend.” (Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand*, p. 151.) Thus we have an example of how still today Protestantism is infected by that same virus of rationalism, which prompted the Sadducees of old to elevate human reason above the Word of the Lord. Among other doctrines which have suffered at the hands of rationalism in Protestant theology we may mention the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures, original sin, Holy Baptism, conversion, predestination, sanctification, the means of grace, the personal union of the two natures in Christ. The inevitable consequence of all such religious rationalism is “the veiled or open denial of the central doctrine of the Christian faith: the justification of the sinner by grace alone through faith in the vicarious atonement of Christ, without the deeds of the Law.” (Prof. M. Lehninger, Wis. Synod Centennial Convention Essay, in *Quartalschrift*, Jan. 1950.) When Luther withheld the hand of Christian fellowship from the Reformed (Zwingli) at Marburg in 1529, he gave as his reason: “Yours is a different spirit from ours.” That same “different spirit,” the spirit of rationalism and unionism, is still very much alive in Protestantism today. We can see its influence daily in the churches that surround us; we meet it all too often in the religious literature and newspapers of today; we hear it in our conversations over the back fence with our Reformed neighbors. Surrounded as we are by this spirit, which was also the spirit of the Sadducees, we have every need to give constant heed to our Savior’s exhortation: “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Sadducees.”

The church that is dearest to our hearts is the Lutheran Church. And because this is so, it grieves us most of all to find that the leaven of the Sadducees has crept also into the Church of the Augsburg Confession. The door was opened to the Sadducean leaven through the unbridled use of human reason in attempting to arrive at answers to questions which are beyond the ability of reason to answer. If only his followers had heeded Luther’s warnings, under God this would not have happened. Luther had constantly forbidden human reason a place in the establishment of articles of faith; for, he declared, “natural reason” as an authority in religion leads only to “dark chaos.” “Human reason disgraces and insults God.” And as the shadows of his life lengthened and Luther saw “the cult of reason rearing its ugly head in the inner circle of his friends” (cf. E. Plass, *This Is Luther*, p. 43), particularly in the theology of Philip Melanchthon, he became doubly apprehensive of “that cursed harlot” human reason, which he regarded as “the fruitful mother of all heresies.” With all earnestness Luther forewarned: “Until now you have heard the true and faithful Word; now beware of your own thoughts and your own wisdom. The devil will light the candle of reason and deprive you of faith.” But some would not be warned, and after Luther’s death Melanchthon and a few others began to exalt the intellectual function of the natural human mind in matters of religion. Their big fault was that they didn’t know what Paul knew, and what all theologians must know: namely when it is time to take reason into captivity and to lay the hand upon one’s lips and be silent before Him who says: “Be still, and know that I am God.” The controversies raised by those early Lutheran rationalists were effectively settled by the Formula of Concord (1580), which disavows rationalism in every form. One statement from the Formula of Concord may be quoted as an example of the many others like it which warn against the errors of human reason: “We admonish all Christians ... not to indulge in a presumptuous manner in subtle inquiries ... with their reason, but with the venerated apostles simply to believe, to close the eyes of their reason, and bring into captivity their understanding to the obedience of Christ, II Cor. 10, 5.” (Triglotta, 1049,96.) But later on, during the 18th century “Age of Rationalism,” reason again exerted its authority in all areas of life, including religion, and its leavening influence permeated also the Lutheran Church throughout Europe. In those days when reason reigned supreme, the Lutheran Church reached the lowest level in all its history. The Cross of Christ was removed from the center of the Bible by many

pastors, and some congregations complained that their pastors “no longer preached Christ nor even mentioned His name.” Sermons became mere pious moralizing, setting forth rules and regulations for a “virtuous” life, but failing to show how such a life can be lived only in believing union with Christ. Also conspicuous by their omission from the sermons of that age are all references to angels, the coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment. Catechetical instruction was emptied of its Gospel content, and in some cases the pupils were subjected to catechizations on such edifying topics as “perspiration, emetics, and laxatives.” (See M. Reu, *>Luther’s Small Catechism*, 231.) The Sacraments were no longer used as Means of Grace, but were regarded as symbolical acts whereby the individual “imitates Christ” and “gains self-respect.” The Liturgy was mutilated almost beyond recognition; and Holy Communion, which had formerly been celebrated at least once a week (Augsb. Conf. XXIV, 34), was increasingly neglected, until at the lowest ebb of rationalism the celebration was generally restricted to four times a year, after the manner of the Reformed. Prayer was often overlooked so completely that the son of a Lutheran pastor in Denmark wrote in his autobiography: “I never learned to pray as a child.” (Wm. Beck, *Memoirs*, p. 11; quoted in E. Gordon, op. cit., 242.) The old Lutheran hymns were so altered that their original authors would never have recognized them; and the few new “hymns” that were written were generally so shallow and non-Christian that they would have honored God far more by remaining unwritten. The general decline in morality, even among the clergy, is apparent from this contemporary description: “(The rationalist pastors) spent the whole week drinking and dancing... Theological students swore like butchers, were passionate card-players and veritable dance-horses in the exclusive balls of the city.” Beck, loc. cit.) These sad conditions were paralleled to a considerable extent in some of the Lutheran groups, which were establishing themselves in America during those years (particularly in the Eastern States). Through their fellowshiping with non-Lutheran pastors and congregations, also due largely to the fact that the early Lutheran congregations in America drew their pastors from the training schools of Europe, rationalism permeated the doctrine and life of the Church of the Reformation also in our country. Today the pendulum of theological thought has for the most part swung away from the gross rationalism of those early days, but the Lutheran Church in America to this day feels the influence of the spirit of those former days. We think, e.g., of the rationalizing tendency on the part of certain Lutherans to make concessions to the theory of evolution at the expense of the Word of God, and the apparent readiness of some to accept certain results of Higher Criticism and to adopt what is termed the “scientific approach” to the Bible, even when this involves the rejection of the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Dr. Spaude, in his book on *The Lutheran Church Under American Influence*, lists among other present-day remnants of the former Age of Rationalism: a weakening of loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions (p. 364ff.), a trend toward doctrinal indifference (370f.), and a decline of the liturgical worship in the Lutheran Church (371f.). And in connection with this last point, the greatest loss is the previously mentioned decline in celebrating and participating in the Service of the Holy Communion. Listen to these words of Dr. Paul Kretzmann: “The humiliating fact in connection with this review is this, that in spite of all reconstruction across the sea, some of the Pietistic and Rationalistic leaven still clings to the Lutheran services in many parts of our country. It is only by continued effort and patient education that the last remnants of this sad period in the history of our Church may be removed.” (P. E. Kretzmann, *Christian Art*, 290.) (Cf. also Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 145–149; F. R. Webber, *Studies in the Liturgy*, 121f, 205f; C. P. Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology*, 197ff.; E. T. Horn, *Outlines of Liturgics*, 124f, 127f; also B. I. Bell, “*The Altar and the World*, ” 1–3; et. al.)

In our discussion of Lutheran union movements, we dare not overlook the situation that now confronts us in the Synodical Conference. At its Synodical Convention in Milwaukee scheduled to begin next week (June 21–30, 1950), the Missouri Synod will vote on whether or not to adopt the new “Common Confession of Faith” which has been proposed as a basis of church fellowship with the American Lutheran Church. Because of the bonds of fellowship that already exist between the Missouri Synod and ours; we of the Wisconsin Synod are vitally interested in this matter. Official representatives of our Synod writing in our periodicals have presented certain valid arguments that make it appear that the proposed “Common Confession,” if adopted in its present form, would result not in unity but in unionism. Certain writers within Missouri Synod circles have expressed the same thought, and Dr. G. Elson Ruff of the ULC (in *The Lutheran*, April 5, 1950) refers to the new

document as a “Missouri Compromise.” It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the merits and demerits of the “Common Confession.” Opportunity for that may well arise during the sessions of this Convention, and such discussion must be carried on the basis of careful and prayerful study of all the issues involved and in the light of the Word of God. Meanwhile, while there still is time to do so, we ought to encourage one another to pray for our brethren in the Missouri Synod, asking the Holy Ghost to give them grace and wisdom to make the correct and God-pleasing decision on the question which confronts them. We need to beseech Him to keep all unionism out of the Synodical Conference; and at the same time we ought not neglect to pray and work for the realization of that purpose to which we have dedicated ourselves in the Constitution of the Synodical Conference, namely: “to unite all Lutheran Synods of America into one orthodox American Lutheran Church.” Nor should we neglect that prayer which is a part of the Formula of Concord, and which every Lutheran pastor would do well to pray again and again: “May Almighty God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ grant the grace of His Holy Ghost that we all may be one in Him, and constantly abide in this Christian unity, which is well pleasing to Him! Amen.” (Triglotta, 837,23.) We must recognize that in this question of establishing fraternal relations with other Lutheran groups there are dangers in two directions: in the direction of the Scylla of sinful unionism and the Charybdis of sinful separatism. The one is as much an error as the other. The spirit that would unite churches without regard to doctrinal agreement is no more a part of the leaven of the Sadducees than a fanatical separatism and blind party spirit. If it is true of our Synod, as it was stated in the Centennial issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran*, that there are “many defects and sins, both of omission and of commission in the record of the past,” and that “its present spirit of devotion leaves much to be desired because of fleshly weakness, yes, because of attacks of pride and lovelessness,” and that “it has not always dealt in consistent faithfulness with its Lord or its brethren,” then, indeed, we have reason to humble ourselves in penitence before Him who asked us to “beware of the leaven of the Sadducees,” and to ask Him for the wisdom to detect and the ability to purge out every bit of that leaven in whatever form it may manifest itself in our circles. (Quotations above are from *Northwestern Lutheran*, May 21, 1950, p. 171.)

We may consider one other door through which the leaven of the Sadducees may enter to permeate our Lutheran church life, and that is the door of materialism, or secularism. Webster defines “materialism” as “the tendency to give undue importance to material interests”; and “secularism” as “the belief that education and other civil matters should be without religious element.” That both of these “isms” were a part of the Sadducees’ philosophy is apparent; that they are also the philosophy of the majority of Americans today has also been pointed out. The question is, how well have we Lutherans in this country, surrounded as we are by this materialistic, Epicurean philosophy, succeeded in remaining impervious to its influence? A visiting lecturer at Augustana Seminary recently told the student body that American Lutheran Church history demonstrates that Lutheran synods in this country lost their conservatism and became increasingly more liberal to the extent to which, and in the respective order in which they became “Americanized,” i.e., adopted the “American way” of doing things and were permeated more and more with the materialistic philosophy of American life. In giving examples, he listed first, as the most Americanized and most liberal Lutheran group the ULC, then the Augustana Synod, then the ELC, then the American Lutheran Church, then the Missouri Synod, and finally the Wisconsin Synod. If we wish to learn a lesson from this development within American Lutheranism, and if we want to avoid one of the fatal steps which invariably leads downward into the chaos of theological liberalism, then we will do well to avoid also that form of materialism which is sometimes called “the American Way of Life,” but which is more accurately defined as “seeking first the things of this world” to the neglect of the things of the Kingdom of God. True Americanism, which we prize and foster, is something far different from this crass secularism. But if that is what “being Americanized” means, then we must resist it at all costs. At the end of that chapter in his book “The Four Hundred Silent Years” in which Dr. H. Ironside discusses the rise of the worldly party of the Sadducees, he writes these pertinent lines: “Power and blessing, victory and spiritual freshness are the portion of those who cleave to the Lord alone. Weakness and barrenness as surely follow upon amalgamation with the world, as in the case of the Jews in the days upon which we have been dwelling” (p. 66).

Materialism, with its characteristic refrain: “My soul, take thine ease,” brings to Christians the temptation to seek ease and peace at the expense of faithfulness to God’s Word. In the current controversy over

Lutheran participation in the Boy Scout movement, our human flesh may feel it would be far more “expedient” (Remember Caiaphas!) to compromise with Scoutism and thus settle the matter and have peace. In fact one member of the Synod was quoted in the press as saying: “I don’t see why I should have to stand for these insults... The Synod will have to change its mind or lose members.” (*Milwaukee Journal*, May 18, 1950.) Shall we yield to this line of reasoning? The leaven of the Sadducees would urge us to say “Yes!” Again, in the current union movements, our Synod is among the minority being stigmatized as those who “help frustrate every move for a larger fellowship” among Lutheran synods. We have gained the “unenviable distinction of being unable to agree with any other Lutheran synod on anything.” (*Christian Century*, May 24, 1950.) Our materialistically-minded flesh might tempt us to escape such reproach by urging us to get rid of our “narrow-mindedness” and become more tolerant of other Lutherans whose doctrines may happen to differ somewhat from ours, and even join with them for the sake of having one large and united Lutheran Church. But all such flesh-inspired arguments in favor of union—whether motivated by a desire to unite in order to impress the world with our size, or to secure for ourselves rest and reprieve from the battle for confessional loyalty—are sliced from a loaf that is baked with the leaven of the Sadducees, and must be discarded as we would discard a piece of poisoned bread. If our Scripture-based and conscience-bound confessional position exposes us to ridicule and shame, then pray God for the cheerful strength to accept it in the spirit of the Apostles who, when they had been beaten by the Sadducees, “departed from the presence of the council, *rejoicing* that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” (Acts 5, 41.)

Still another form of Sadducean materialism is the flesh-born tendency to permit the love of pleasure and the love of money to interfere with our love toward God and our service in His Kingdom. The following passage from II Maccabees 4, 13f relates how the Sadducean priests of the pre-Maccabean era permitted their love for worldly pleasures to lead them to neglect their God-given duties. This passage again refers to the high-priest Jason of whom we heard previously: “To such heights did the passion for Greek fashions rise, and the influx of foreign customs, thanks to the surpassing impiety of that godless Jason—no high priest was he! The priests were no longer interested in the services of the altar, but, despising the sanctuary, and neglecting the sacrifices, they hurried to take part in the unlawful plays held in the gymnasium after the quoit-throwing had been announced.” Did similar things ever happen in the Lutheran Church? We have already seen that some of the pastors during the Age of Rationalism loved worldly pleasures more than the work of the Church; and anyone who is familiar with Luther’s Preface to his Large Catechism knows that Luther himself found such conditions prevailing in his day when he made his visitation of the Lutheran churches in Saxony. He speaks of pastors who neglect their high office “for sheer laziness and care for their paunches, assuming no other relation to this business than if they were pastors and preachers for their bellies’ sake, and had nothing to do but to spend and live on their emoluments as long as they live... Alas, they are altogether shameful gluttons and servants of their own bellies, who ought to be more properly swineherds and dog-tenders than caretakers of souls and pastors.” (Triglotta, 567, 1.2.) Strong words! And yet a strong odor demands a strong deodorant. I’m not going to ask whether pastors still do such things today. I should merely like to suggest that when we are tempted to listen to that ball-game when we really should be getting at next Sunday’s sermon, or when we’re tempted to go fishing instead of making those much-needed missionary calls, then would be a good time to take the Large Catechism down from the shelf and read through the entire Preface. It’s addressed “especially to all pastors and preachers,” and all will find some fitting exhortation. We’ll undoubtedly come away from it somewhat chastened and humbled, but certainly we’ll be encouraged by it to turn off the baseball broadcast when necessary and get back to our desk, and to put away the fish pole and go out instead to be a fisher of men. Solomon once said, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven” (Eccles. 3, 1), and then he goes on to name quite a list of things which have their proper time; and we can well imagine that if Solomon had lived in the 20th century, he might have included in that list also “a time for baseball, a time for fishing, a time for golf, and a time for pitching horseshoes.” Even the Savior once told His own disciples that there was a time to “come apart and rest awhile.” But as pastors in the service of our Master, we need to learn from Him that all our rest and recreation must serve to equip us *better for our work* as His ambassadors, never to *keep us from* it.

Laymen, of course, should realize that the devil tempts them, too, to neglect the Lord's work also through love of money or love of pleasures. Has he perhaps succeeded in getting some of us to love our money so much that we preferred to keep it for ourselves rather than to heed His appeal in our synodical Building Fund Collection? Has he perhaps succeeded in getting some of us, for the sake of a Sunday morning outing, to despise preaching and God's Word? Has he perhaps succeeded in getting some of us to neglect our prayer closet, our family devotions, and our Bible reading because we were too much engrossed in mundane affairs? These are questions which each will have to answer to his own heart; and if the answer to any of them is "Yes," then we have admitted that the leaven of the Sadducees has been at work in our hearts, and that we need to listen anew to our Savior's words: "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Sadducees."

III

The more we become aware of the inroads which the triple evils of rationalism, unionism, and secularism are making into the faith and life of 20th century Christians, the more eagerly we seek an answer to the question: **What can we do to counteract this leaven of the Sadducees**, which threatens to blight the spirituality of pastors and people? Fortunately for us, ours is not the first age in the Church's history compelled to answer that question. Others before us have coped with this problem successfully, and we stand to benefit by their experience and example. From the Book of Acts we learn that when the Apostles in Jerusalem had to contend with Sadduceeism, the weapons with which they fought were as amazingly simple as they were effective. No special program was set up - no commissions and sub-committees, no Anti-Sadducee Society, no special equipment. They used the only equipment the Lord has given to His Church to be the weapons of its warfare. We know them today as the *Means of Grace* and *Prayer*. (See Acts 4, 20. 24-31.)

When the Apostles first felt the opposition of the Sadducees, they countered by continuing to speak the things they had seen and heard. They "*spake the Word of God* with boldness; they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." This is the way in which we, too, must counteract the leaven of the Sadducees today: we must *preach the Word*, the whole counsel of God, Law and Gospel. We must preach the Law to show men their great and damning sinfulness, and preach the Gospel to show them the greater love of God who covers their sinfulness with the garments of righteousness when believing hearts accept His forgiving grace in Christ.

In directing our preaching specifically against the leaven of the Sadducees, we shall need to emphasize those very Biblical truths that Sadduceeism seeks to deny or pervert. When Sadducean rationalism raises doubts about the deity of Jesus and the truth of His resurrection, then our preaching will emphasize anew how "He was *declared to be the Son of God* with power ... *by the resurrection* from the dead" (Rom. 1, 4); and that "if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins." (I Cor. 15, 17.) When Sadducean speculation questions the inspiration and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures, we will preach what God Himself tells us, namely that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (II Tim. 3, 16), and that the teachings of the inspired Apostles come to us today "in the words which the Holy Ghost teaches" (I Cor. 2, 13). When Sadduceeism spreads the delusion that man has spiritual abilities to enable him to work out his own eternal destiny, our sermons will underscore man's complete inability to contribute anything to his salvation: "You were *dead* in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2, 1), and only "*by grace* are ye saved through faith; and that *not of yourselves*, it is the *gift of God, not of works*, lest any man should boast." (Ibid, v. 8. 9.) When Sadducean pride in our own little accomplishments or our purity of doctrine threatens our congregations, then from our pulpits will sound the warning: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud." (Proverbs 16, 18. 19.) When a spirit of dead formalism raises its head, our preaching will need to emphasize what John the Baptist told the Sadducees: "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance!" (Mt. 3, 8), and again: "Faith without works is dead" (James 2, 20). When Sadducean materialism blinds the eyes of our people and burdens their hearts with earthbound cares and vain worries over "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" then our preaching will point them anew to the hills from whence cometh our help: from the compassionate Lord whose bountiful goodness "satisfies the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145, 16). "Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you" (I

Pet. 5, 7). Your worries are needless; “There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For He shall give His angels charge over thee” (Ps. 91, 10. I Pet. 5, 7). Your worries are needless; “There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For He shall give His angels charge over thee” (11), so that no matter how many evil days or wicked enemies align themselves against us, it is true that “they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (II Kings 6, 16). When Sadducean indifference to doctrine would lure our people into unionist alliances, our sermons must sound anew the clarion call: “I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them!” (Rom. 16, 17.) When in a restless search for happiness and prosperity our people become so preoccupied with their farms and their factories, their families and friends, their picnics and parties that because of them they neglect to pray and to worship, to hear the Word of God and to partake of the Sacrament, then as ambassadors for Christ we need to call them back to Him who said: “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11, 28). There is no onslaught Sadduceeism can make which is not squarely met and effectively rebuffed by the Sword of the Spirit: the Word of God. The pastor who desires to counteract the leaven of the Sadducees and to enable his people to do the same, will therefore do this one thing above all else: “Preach the Word, (be instant) stay at it in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (II Tim. 4, 2). The leaven of the Sadducees is false doctrine; the only remedy is *true* doctrine.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the Word of God as a weapon against Sadduceeism can be wielded effectively only by pastors. The Psalmist urges all the Lord’s people to take the “two-edged sword in their hand.” (Ps. 149, 6.) Spurgeon makes the comment: “The Word of God is all edge; whichever way we turn it, it strikes deadly blows at falsehood.” (C. H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, ad loc.) Every layman needs to equip himself with this two-edged sword and to deal such deadly blows at falsehood in the ceaseless struggle against the errors of Sadduceeism. To do that, the Christian layman will make it his desire and constant occupation to read and hear and meditate on God’s Word. Scripture-loving, Bible-reading laymen will not despise or become tired of sound, Lutheran, doctrinal preaching from the Bible, knowing that whenever such preaching was neglected or slighted in the Church, there the leaven of the Sadducees quickly entered and began its faith-destroying work. The Lutheran layman who desires to use the most effective means to counteract the leaven of the Sadducees within his family circle will also teach the Word in all simplicity to his household, will use the Word regularly in his family devotions, and will make full use of the Bible Class and other teaching agencies through which his church enables him and his family to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (II Peter 3, 18.) The more a Lutheran Christian grows in the grace and knowledge of Christ His Lord, the more he will be minded to act on the Lord’s directive to share God’s Word with others who are still held in the bonds of sinful rationalism and materialism. If your neighbor down the block or the man on the next farm is living only to acquire more of this world’s goods, your Savior bids you to go to him to show him that “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Sit down with him some evening and lead him to consider his great need of a Savior. Show him the folly of laying up treasures on earth but forfeiting the eternal treasures of heaven. Urge him to “labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.” Lead your neighbor to Christ and to His Church, so that he too can join you in singing: “What is the world to me with all its vaunted pleasure When Thou, and Thou alone, Lord Jesus, art my Treasure!” There is no more effective way for the members of our congregations to counteract the leaven of the Sadducees in the world than by doing such personal mission work in grateful response to our Lord’s bidding: “Ye shall be witnesses unto Me.”

Do we desire an example of the effectiveness of the Word of God to purge out the leaven of the Sadducees? We need only glance back over the century of Synodical history we have just concluded. It is no secret that the Lutheranism of some of the men who entered our Synod in its early days was rather weak. We have already spoken of the diluted type of Lutheranism in the Eastern States in the 1850’s, a type of Lutheranism which was tainted by Reformed and rationalistic and unionistic tendencies, and which left its mark also on some of the pastors and congregations of the young Wisconsin Synod. The Synod’s first constitution was modeled after the constitution of one of the most rationalistic and unionistic synods of the East, and its

confessional position left much to be desired. But what happened? God graciously guided such men as Johann Bading, Carl Gausewitz, Adolph Hoenecke and others into the Synod, men who were above all else *preachers of the Word*, men whose loyalty to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions was unswerving. Their faithful teaching and *preaching of the Word* left an indelible mark upon the Synod. As the Word of God did its work, rationalism, unionism, and doctrinal indifference were purged out, and the Synod's doctrinal standards were raised to a genuinely Scriptural and Lutheran level. The triumph of the Word of God over the leaven of the Sadducees was so remarkable that Neve's History of the Lutheran Church in America can state: "From a 'mild and conciliatory' attitude the Lutheranism of this (Wisconsin) Synod has developed into one of uncompromising fidelity to the Lutheran Confession" (J. L. Neve, *A Brief History*, etc., 321). The Word of God triumphed gloriously over the leaven of the Sadducees in our Synod in past generations; may we, the present generation, likewise *preach the Word* with the faithfulness of our fathers, so that we may pass on our glorious heritage with even greater glory to generations yet to come!

"*Aber soll nun Gott seine Kirche und Wort erhalten, so muss es durch die Jugend geschehen.*" These words of Luther (St. L. Ed. VII, 906), spoken 413 years ago, are as true today as they were on the day when they were first heard by Luther's congregation in Wittenberg. They are words we cannot afford to overlook, for, under God's guidance, the future of our congregations and of our Synod depends upon our children. And what our children will do with our Synod in the future depends to a large extent on what we do with the children of our Synod today. Jesus asks us to do one thing with our children: "Feed My lambs!" Feed them with the One Thing Needful, the Word of God, the wholesome Bread of Life—not with bread that has been contaminated with the leaven of the Sadducees! To this end we must faithfully bend every effort to bring the pure truth of the Word to our children through every possible agency: through the home and through the pulpit, through the Sunday School and through the Saturday School, through the Summer School and through the Vacation Bible School, through the Confirmation Class and through the Junior Bible Class, and through every other medium which enables us to mold their hearts and lives with the Gospel of Christ, and through that Gospel to set forth every one of them as perfect men and women in union with Christ. (Col. 1, 28.) Our program of Christian Education must strive to bring the Word of God to our children not only in *every* possible way, but also in the *best* possible way. And to us of the Wisconsin Synod today that means the *Christian Day School*. With all its good points, the public school system is still a secular system, a system permeated with the leaven of the Sadducees. Shall we not, therefore, make every effort to protect our children from this leaven by providing schools for them where the Gospel reigns supreme? Obviously, such schools cost money; and a question which every congregation must answer when it considers the establishment of a Christian Day School is this: Can we afford it? I believe the question can be more readily answered if we ask it this way: Can we afford *not* to provide a Christian school for our children? Do we sincerely want our children to have the best and most effective training, not only in the knowledge needed for this life but especially for eternal life? Then we can't afford to be without a Christian Day School, for history has proved it to be the *most effective* means of training children in the way of life and salvation. Do we want our Synod and our congregations to thrive and grow, to be vibrant and strong in the future as well as today? Then we can't afford to neglect the Christian Day School, for the lessons of history clearly show that only the church with a sound education program for its children survives. Those church groups which in times past permitted their schools to decline and disappear are today the very churches in which a love for the pure truth of God's Word has likewise declined, churches which are plagued with indifference and lukewarmness on the part of their members, and the greatest laxity in doctrine and life. If we love our children, if we love our Savior and His Word, if we love our Church—then we won't want to be without a Christian Day School. Then we will be willing also to make personal sacrifices, if need be, so that our congregations can afford to establish and maintain such schools, knowing that we can't afford to be without them! As one Lutheran educator has put it: "Count the cost, figure in all accompanying problems, add the work and toil that goes with them, and it will still be less expensive for the Church to maintain and promote schools than to suffer the fate which lies ahead without them." (Clarence A. Kurth, in *New Frontiers in Christian Education*, First Yearbook of Luth. Educ. Assoc., p. 54.) We dare not let Sadducean selfishness keep us from contributing the necessary funds which will enable us to use every possible means to carry out in the

most effective way the one task which all of us have in common, whether we are laymen or pastors, teachers or professors; that task of course is: *Preach the Gospel* to every creature!

The doctrine of the Means of Grace is not only distinctive of the Lutheran Church, but is also of utmost importance and benefit to us in our daily lives. For it is through the means of grace that the Holy Spirit *brings us to faith* in Jesus our Redeemer; it is through the means of grace that He *keeps* us in the faith; it is through the means of grace that He *strengthens* our faith and makes us fruitful unto every good work. That is why a Lutheran Christian cherishes not only the Word, but also Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

Holy Baptism with its pledge of our being the children of God, in intimate union with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost through faith, is of priceless comfort to us each moment that we live, and is an inexhaustible source of the strength, which we need to contend with the evils of Sadduceism. The daily believing remembrance of our Baptism will enable us each day to drown the Sadducee within us with all his sins and evil lusts, and it will enable the new man within us to arise and walk before God in a new life which turns its back on Sadduceism. We shall therefore prize this gracious water of life as an indispensable shield and buckler to be used in the daily battle against Sadduceism.

For the same reasons we shall let nothing deprive us of the benefits of Holy Communion: the renewed assurance of the *forgiveness of our sins*; and *life*—the abundant life with Christ and in Christ, already here in this world; and *salvation*—eternal salvation through Him who gave His body and blood that we might be rescued from death to live with Him eternally.

If we remember that *rationalism* was one of the negative factors that caused the decline of the frequent celebration of Holy Communion, ought we not be concerned about correcting the condition this Sadducean leaven has brought about? In the Augsburg Confession we state: “We hold one Communion every holy-day, and, if any desire the Sacrament, also on other days, when it is given to such as ask for it.” (Art. XXIV, 34; Trigl., 67.) However, a survey of the practice within our Synod today reveals that the majority of our congregations celebrate the Sacrament with far less frequency than did the Church of Luther’s day, and that the communicants in our Synod partake of the Sacrament an average number of only two and one-half times each year. (1949 statistics: Synod average, 2.49; W. Wis. District average, 2.39.) How tragically far we have fallen away from that practice which our confessional writings set forth as the normal Lutheran practice! Is it not time to ask ourselves whether we are doing all that our Lord expected of us when He gave us the Sacrament and said: “This *do*”? Can you think of any reason even remotely suggested in the Bible why our congregations should *not* celebrate the Lord’s Supper at each regular service? Can you find any reason offered in the Scriptures why the communicant members of our congregations should not *desire* and *receive* the Sacrament at every service at which it is celebrated? Sadducean rationalism and materialism may advance such reasons, but the Scriptures—never! Can we honestly say that we need the blessings of the Sacrament any less frequently than we need the blessings of the spoken Word in our divine services? Is our present communion practice determined to some extent by inherited habits and customs rather than *entirely* by Scripture? These questions are submitted with the plea that every member of this convention considers them earnestly and prayerfully. They suggest that we may have to change our ways of thinking and our accustomed practice with respect to the celebration of the Sacrament. But, finally, what must be our guide: *our* way of thinking and doing, or the Apostolic way of teaching and practicing? Clearly, the latter! (Cf. e.g. Acts 2, 42; I Cor. 11, 2. 17. 18. 20, 22b. 23ff. Cf. also the reference to Apostolic practice in the *Apology*, XXIV, 8; Trigl., p. 385b. Cf. also the Didache, Chap. 14.) In this Centennial year when we give thanks to God for having purged our Synod to such a remarkable degree of the leaven of rationalism, ought we not also with quiet resolve set about to remove also that vestige of the Age of Rationalism which still clings to our Synod in the practice of infrequent Communion celebration and participation? Ought we not set for ourselves the goal of restoring the Communion practice of our fathers in the days of the Reformation and of our forefathers in the days of the Apostles? We want to do that not merely “for old times’ sake,” not merely *because* this was done by our fathers in the days of old, but *for the very same Scripture-based reasons* which prompted them to regard the celebration of Holy Communion a normal part of every chief service of worship on “every Lord’s Day and on the other festivals.” (*Apology*, XXIV, 1; Trigl.,

383.) We, as they were also, are in *Constant* need of the blessings of this Sacrament to which the Lord Him-self is *constantly* inviting us.

How shall we go about making such a restoration? Certainly not in the manner of Carlstadt and the Wittenberg fanatics who endeavored to *force* the people overnight to change their religious habits. Luther saved the day with his sound evangelical advice at Wittenberg, and he still has sound evangelical advice to offer to all today who see the need of creating a greater hunger and thirst for the Sacrament in the hearts of our people. This is what he says in the Preface to the Small Catechism (Trigl., 539), in words addressed primarily to pastors, but of significance also to every layman: “You must not make any law in this matter, as the Pope does. Only set forth clearly the benefit and the harm, the need and use, the danger and the blessing connected with this Sacrament, and the people will come of themselves without your compulsion. But if they do not come, let them go and tell them that such belong to the devil as do not regard nor feel their great need and the gracious help of God. But if you do not urge this, or make a law or a bane of it, it is your fault if they despise the Sacrament. How could they be otherwise than slothful if you sleep and are silent? Therefore look to it, ye pastors and preachers.” The matter is as simple as that: preach the Word and let the Gospel take its course. Where the pastor with “urgent preaching” will present all that the Bible teaches regarding this wonderful Sacrament, there, Luther says, the members “will come running and racing of their own accord and urge you to give them the Sacrament.” (Ibid.) We pastors, he states also, “are to preach in such a manner that of their own accord, without our law, they will urge themselves and, as it were, compel us pastors to administer the Sacrament.” (Trigl., 537.) May there be an ever-increasing amount of such “urgent preaching” and such God-pleasing “running and racing” in our Synod, so that all of us will learn to make *full* use of all the weapons of our warfare in the struggle against Sadduceeism. But remember, this will not come about by itself. “*Therefore look to it, ye pastors and preachers!*”

The Apostles were always men of prayer. While waiting for the promise of the Comforter to be fulfilled, they all “continued with one accord in *prayer* and *supplication*.” (Acts 1, 14.) When it came time to choose a successor to Judas, we read that *they prayed* to the Lord “who knows the hearts of all men” (Acts 1, 24), and the Lord guided their choice. After Pentecost it is said of the early Christians, “they *continued steadfastly* in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and *in prayers*.” (Acts 2, 42.) Of Peter and John we read that they “went up together into the Temple *at the hour of prayer*.” (Acts 3, 1.) Having learned of their Lord how to pray, they made prayer to Him their staff and stay. And so, when they met with their first open opposition from the Sadducees, they did only what we should have expected them to do: “They lifted up their voice to God with one accord.” (Acts 4, 24ff.) They called upon Him in their day of trouble, and He delivered them. And if we would learn of them to do battle against the evils of Sadduceeism, we must learn to get down with them on our knees in prayer. The Church Militant must ever be the Church Suppliant.

One of the most precious gifts and privileges which God has bestowed upon His people is this very privilege of prayer: the privilege of asking Him as dear children ask their dear Father, and having His fatherly assurance in our hearts that He Himself has commanded us so to pray and has promised to hear and answer. Yet, how often doesn’t the Sadducean leaven of rationalism cause even Christians on occasion to doubt the efficacy of prayer, and the fleshly leaven of materialism cause them to neglect prayer, so that the Lord finds it necessary to admonish us to “lift up holy hands *without doubting*” (I Tim. 2, 8), and to “watch and *pray*, that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mt. 26, 41).

Of the many things that might be said of prayer as a weapon against the temptations and attacks of Sadduceeism, we shall select only one for special emphasis. What is it that we should ask of God in prayer as we discern the leaven of the Sadducees threatening to hinder our efforts to build the Kingdom of God? The Apostles answer the question for us. The prayer which they sent to the throne of grace when they were persecuted by the Sadducees is preserved for us in the Scriptures in these words: “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy Word.” (Acts 4, 29.) And when modern Sadduceeism threatens us, we too shall need to pray for *boldness*, *παρρησία*, that confident assurance which shows itself even in our words and manner of speaking, even in the face of opposition; *boldness* which comes from “being with Jesus” (Acts 4, 13), and which is ours through the Means of Grace.

What greater work could our Synod do in this present hour, and to what greater task could it dedicate itself as it enters upon the second century of its existence, than to testify boldly to God's inspired Truth and to preach His Word with power? Such fearless testimony to the truth may create enmities and estrange friends; it may subject us to public scorn and reproach. But all that should only drive us to our knees with a renewed plea for a double measure of emboldening grace.

In the days which lie ahead, we as a Synod and as individuals shall need to lean heavily upon the power of prayer, and on this prayer in particular: *And now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy Word. Amen.*

A Postscript

The reactions of several brethren to the essay on "The Leaven of the Sadducees" recently published in the *Quartalschrift* (in the issues of July and October, 1952) prompt the writing of this postscript. Some were disturbed by what they interpreted as a legalistic demand for the restoration in our day of the communion practice current in the days of the Apostles and in the period of the Reformation. The following statements are therefore submitted, not in the interest of compromise or retraction (since it is neither the desire nor any longer the prerogative of the writer to change the essay as adopted by the District Convention to which it was read), but rather in the hope of removing the misgivings with which some read those pages of the essay which discuss the destructive effects of Rationalism on the Lutheran doctrine and practice of Holy Communion, and particularly those pages which suggest an approach to the question of awakening a greater hunger and thirst for the Sacrament. (Cf. October issue, pp. 249–251; 264–266.)

An outward or mechanical restoration of the practice of celebrating Holy Communion on "every Lord's Day and on the other festivals" (Apology XXIV, 1) dare not be made an end in itself, and it would certainly be unevangelical to insist on such a restoration for the mere sake of external conformity to historical Lutheran practice or liturgical principles. The statements of our Lutheran Confessions, which mention the contemporary practice of regular congregational celebrations and frequent lay participation (cf. e.g. Augsburg Confession XXIV; Apology XV, 40; XXIV, 1–8), were neither intended by their writers nor are they to be interpreted by us as rules or laws which establish either a minimum or maximum number of times which Lutheran congregations and members are to celebrate and receive the Sacrament. The Book of Concord expressly declares: "We are to force no one ... to receive the Sacrament, nor fix any law, nor time, nor place for it." (From Luther's Preface to the Small Catechism.) In the words of the Large Catechism, our Lord "wishes to have the Sacrament free, not limited to special times, like the Passover of the Jews"; and by His words "as oft as ye do it" He would say to us: "I institute a Passover or Supper for you which you shall enjoy not only once a year, just upon this evening, but often, when and where you will, according to everyone's opportunity and necessity, bound to no place or appointed time." (Large Catechism V, 47.)

The Communion practice of the first and sixteenth centuries is therefore not to be held before the eyes of 20th Century Christians with any legalistic demand that it be slavishly copied today. However, the regularity with which congregations of the Apostolic and Reformation eras celebrated the Sacrament, and the degree of frequency with which the members received the Sacrament are important to us as evidences of the high regard in which they held the Lord's Supper. Not only their doctrine but also their practice testifies to their faith in the Real Presence and in the gracious effectiveness of the Lord's Supper. It would be difficult to find a stronger testimony for the appreciation of the Early Christians for the Sacrament than their *practice* of regular Communion mentioned in Acts 2, 42 and described also in extra-biblical historical writings. (Cf. e.g. Epiphanius' description of Apostolic Communion practice quoted in Apology XXIV, 8.) It is not only by means of a correct confession of Scripture teaching regarding the Lord's Supper but also by means of their Communion *practice* that our Reformation fathers substantiate their honest claim: "The Mass is retained among us, and celebrated with the highest reverence." (Augsburg Confession XXIV.) Their examples commend themselves to all who desire to heed our Lord's Communion invitation, to enjoy His sacramental presence and promises, and to receive His gracious help for the daily battle against devil, world, and flesh. How great would

be our loss if we were to overlook either the doctrine or the practice of our spiritual forefathers who in the Holy Scriptures and in our Confessions “have spoken unto us the Word of God” and whose faith we do well to follow, considering the end of their conversation.

In summary, the plea of the portion of the essay in question (pp. 264–266) is *not* a plea for a mere mechanical or outward restoration of Apostolic and Reformation Communion *practice*, but rather a plea for the recapturing of the *spirit* and *attitude* which motivated their practice—a spirit and attitude derived from their faith in the Real Presence and their understanding of the Sacrament as a Means of Grace. As the essay pointed out, this can be brought about in only one way: “Only set forth clearly the benefit and the harm, the need and use, the danger and the blessing connected with this Sacrament, and the people will come of themselves without your compulsion.” (P. 266, quoted from Luther’s Preface to the Small Catechism.) If such preaching of the Word leads us, as it led our spiritual forefathers, to a celebration on “every Lord’s Day and on the other festivals,” we would all recognize this as a fruit of the Gospel and thank our gracious Lord for it. The Editors of the *Quartalschrift* have informed the writer that they understood this portion of the essay on the “Sadducees” in this evangelical sense when they requested it for publication. It is his hope that all readers of this magazine will read and understand it in the same sense.