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The Way of Salvation in the Lutheran Church

G. H. (George Henry) Gerberding

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TO
THE UNITED ENGLISH LUTHERAN CHURCH
OF THE FUTURE;
JOINED TOGETHER IN THE BONDS OF ONE FAITH, ACTU-
ATED
BY ONE SPIRIT, WORKING HAND IN HAND AND HEART
WITH HEART IN ONE GENERAL BODY, THIS
BOOK IS HOPEFULLY DEDICATED
BY
THE AUTHOR

CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION

PREFATORY SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

CHAPTER I.

All are Sinners

CHAPTER II.

All that is Born of the Flesh must be Born of the Spirit

CHAPTER III.

The Present, a Dispensation of Means

CHAPTER IV.

Baptism, a Divinely Instituted Means of Grace

CHAPTER V.

The Baptismal Covenant can be kept unbroken – Aim and Responsibility of Parents

CHAPTER VI.

Home Influence and Training in their Relation to the Keeping of the Baptismal Covenant

CHAPTER VII.

The Sunday School in its Relation to the Baptized Chil-

dren of Christian Parents

CHAPTER VIII.

The Sunday School – Its relation to those in Covenant Relationship with Christ, and also to the Unbaptized and Wandering

CHAPTER IX.

Catechisation

CHAPTER X.

Contents, Arrangement and Excellence of Luther's Small Catechism

CHAPTER XI.

Manner and Object of Teaching Luther's Catechism

CHAPTER XII.

Confirmation

CHAPTER XIII.

The Lord's Supper – Preliminary Observations

CHAPTER XIV.

The Lord's Supper, Continued

CHAPTER XV.

The Lord's Supper, Concluded

CHAPTER XVI.

The Preparatory Service, Sometimes Called the Confessional Service

CHAPTER XVII.

The Word as a Means of Grace

CHAPTER XVIII.

Conversion—Its Nature and Necessity

CHAPTER XIX.

Conversion—Varied Phenomena or Experiences

CHAPTER XX.

Conversion—Human Agency

CHAPTER XXI.

Justification

CHAPTER XXII.

Sanctification

CHAPTER XXIII.

Revivals

CHAPTER XXIV.

Modern Revivals

CHAPTER XXV.

Modern Revivals, Continued

CHAPTER XXVI.

Modern Revivals, Concluded

CHAPTER XXVII.

True Revivals

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Conclusion

My Church! My Church! My dear Old Church!

INTRODUCTION.

I take pleasure in commending this unpretentious volume to the prayerful attention of all English-speaking ministers and members of the Lutheran Church. The aim of the author is to present a clear, concise, and yet comprehensive view as possible, of the way of salvation as taught in the Scriptures, and held by the Lutheran Church. That he has accomplished his task so as to make it throughout an illustration of the truth as it is in Jesus, and a correct testimony to the faith of the Church of which he is an honored minister, I believe will appear to all who read with an unbiased mind, and a knowledge of the sources of information from which he has drawn. There is always need for such a candid and considerate statement of fundamental truth as this. The signs of the times clearly indicate that there is no security for the Church save in maintaining the Apostolic faith and spirit—not the one without the other, but the one with the other. The supremacy of the Scriptures needs to be recognized with a mightier emphasis, not only of the intellect, but also of the heart. This vital conjunction is maintained in this book. I am certain that a clear view of the way of salvation as taught by the Scriptures and held by the Church will go far not only toward correcting wrong impressions, but will tend to the relief of much mental perplexity, and to the increase of that much-needed spirit of unity throughout our Church, the want of which is not only the greatest reflection on her noble history and holy faith, but the greatest hindrance to her important mission. A kindly Christ-like spirit pervades this book, which is no small testimony to its worth.

Those who stand up for the truth do not always illustrate its spirit. Not all who might desire greater unity in the Church are qualified to promote it. The author of this little treatise has not only manifested the proper spirit, but he has shown as well the faculty of using it for the increase of harmony, without the least disloyalty to the Scriptures, or to the standards of the Church. The appeal throughout is to the Word of God. The faith of the Church is subjected to this test, and it is maintained because it endures the test.

These chapters present a continuity of thought which should not be lost sight of in the reading. In order to a correct verdict, they

should not be read with such discrimination as would accept some and reject others, but from the first to the last in order. That this little book may be owned of God to the establishment of the faith of the Lutheran Church, and for the promotion of a more manifest unity among those who bear her name, is a prayer in which I am sure many will join the author of this work, and the writer of this introductory note.

M. RHODES.

ST. LOUIS, MO., *March, 1887.*

PREFATORY SCRIPTURE PASSAGES.

To the Law and to the Testimony; if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them. — Isa. viii. 20.

Thus saith the Lord; Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. — Jer. vi. 16.

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ. — Eph. iv. 14.

Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines; for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace. — Heb. xiii. 9.

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee. — 1 Tim. iv. 16.

Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. — 2 Tim. i. 13.

And be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear. — 1 Pet. iii. 15.

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints. — Jude 3.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts they shall heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and they shall turn their ears away from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. — 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed. For he that biddeth him God-speed is partaker of his evil deeds. — 2 John 9. 10, 11.

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. — Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

THE WAY OF SALVATION.

CHAPTER I.

ALL ARE SINNERS.

Some time ago we overheard from a person who should have known better, remarks something like these: "I wonder how sinners are saved in the Lutheran Church?" "I do not hear of any being converted in the Lutheran Church," and such like. These words called to mind similar sentiments that we heard expressed long ago. More than once was the remark made in our hearing that in certain churches sinners were saved, because converted and sanctified, while it was at least doubtful whether any one could find such blessings in the Lutheran Church. The writer also freely confesses, that in those days, surrounded by such influences, "*his feet had well-nigh slipped – his steps were almost gone.*" Therefore, he can sympathize with those honest questioners, who have not had the privileges of instruction in the doctrines of sin and Grace, and who are consequently in the dark. He has, therefore, concluded to write a series of plain, practical papers on the "Way of Salvation in the Lutheran Church." It will be his endeavor to set forth the manner or method through which the Church of the Reformation proposes to reach the sinner, and apply to him the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The first question that presents itself is: Who are the subjects of salvation? The answer clearly is: All sinners. But, again: Whom does this embrace? The answer to this is not so unanimous. The views already begin to diverge. True, there is quite a substantial harmony on this point, among all the older Protestant Confessions of faith, but the harmony is not so manifest among the professed adherents of these Confessions.

In many of the denominations there is a widespread skepticism as to the reality of original sin, or native depravity. Doubtless on this point the wish is father to the thought. The doctrine that, "after Adam's fall, all men begotten after the common course of nature, are born with sin," is not palatable. It grates harshly on the human ear.

It is so humbling to the pride of man's heart, and therefore he tries to persuade himself that it is not true. It has become fashionable to deny it. From the pulpit, from the press, from the pages of our most popular writers, we hear the old-fashioned doctrine denounced as unworthy of this enlightened age. Thus the heresy has spread, and is spreading. On every hand we meet men who stand high in their churches, spurning the idea that their children are sinners, and need to be saved. Their creed is: "I believe in the purity and innocence of childhood, and in its fitness for the kingdom of heaven, without any change or application of divine Grace." Ah! yes, we would all like to have this creed true. But is it true? If not, our believing it will not make it true.

Then let us go *"to the law and the testimony,"* to the source and fountain of all truth, the inspired Word of God. Listen to its sad but plain statements. Job xv. 14: *"What is man that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman that he should be righteous?"* Ps. li. 5: *"Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."* John iii. 6: *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh."* Ephesians ii. 3: *"Among whom also we all ... were by nature" — i.e. by birth — "the children of wrath even as others."* These are a few of the many clear, plain statements of the divine Word. Nowhere does it teach that children are born pure, righteous and fit for heaven.

The Lutheran church, then, teaches and confesses nothing but the pure truth of God's Word in the Augsburg Confession, Article II., where it says: "Also they teach, that after Adam's fall all men, begotten after the common course of nature, are born with sin," etc. Also Smalcald Articles, Part III., Article I: "Here we must confess, that sin originated from one man Adam, by whose disobedience all were made sinners and subject to death and the devil. This is called original or capital sin.... This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature that no reason can understand it, but it must be believed from the revelation of Scripture," etc. So also the Formula of Concord, Chapter I., "Of Original Sin," where see a full presentation of our faith and its foundation. Also Luther's Explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed where he says: "Who — Christ — has redeemed me, a poor, lost and condemned creature, secured and delivered me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil."

This, then is the teaching of our Church, as founded on the Word of God. That this doctrine is true, beyond the possibility of a doubt, we can learn even from reason. It will not be disputed that what is in the child will show itself as it develops. The germs that lie hidden there will unfold and bring forth their proper and natural fruit. By its fruits we can know even the child. And what are these fruits? How long will it be before that helpless and seemingly innocent babe, that slumbers on its mother's breast, will show symptoms of anger, jealousy, stubbornness and disobedience? Let that child alone, and, without a teacher, it will learn to lie, deceive, steal, curse, give pain to others, etc. But, without a teacher, it will not learn to pray, confess wrong, and "fear, love and trust in God above all things." Are these the symptoms and evidences of inward purity, or of inbred sin?

Again, that child is subject to sickness, suffering and death. As soon as it draws its first breath its life is a struggle. It must contend against the inroads of disease. Its little body is attacked by dire maladies. It is weakened by suffering and often racked by pain. And how frequently the feeble life succumbs and the lately-born infant dies.

How can we account for this on the ground of infant sinlessness? Do we not all believe that suffering and death are the results of sin? Is there, can there be suffering and death where there is no sin? No; "*the wages of sin is death.*" But this wages is never exacted where the work of sin has not been done. The conclusion then is irresistible. The child is a sinner. It needs salvation. It must be reached by saving Grace. It must be counted in. It is one of the subjects of salvation, and must be brought into the Way of Salvation.

The Church is the Bride of Christ, the institution through which Christ brings and applies this Grace to the children of men. She must begin with the child. She must reach down to the tender infant and carry the cleansing and life-giving Grace of the Redeemer even into its sin-sick soul.

How is this to be done? How does the Lutheran Church propose to reach that child? This we shall try to answer as we advance.

