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Lutheranism in America
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Professor Brenner

Sermon by Pastor G. Stoeckhardt on 1 Peter 1:24,25

“Because ‘All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever.’ Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.”

“The Word of God and Luther’s teaching never passes away! That is the inscription, which we Lutherans have written upon our banner¹, and especially today, on our Luther-Jubilee, we unfurl our banner. What the man, who was born 400 years from today, taught the world and proclaimed is still preached today. Sunday after Sunday, we build upon his teaching. That teaching of Luther is nothing other than the pure, undefiled teaching of the divine Word, of which we already have confirmed for ourselves anew. Today, as we look back in intervals of a hundred years, we also confess and extol the second part, that Luther’s teaching will never pass away. For the Word of God remains for eternity. For long centuries now the teaching and church of Luther has already resisted and defies the spirit of the times and its lies. *“All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever.”* The work of the hands of men passes away. What have the hands of men in the four hundred years since the end of the Middle Ages not in every way attempted and also brought forth successfully? But how many magnificent buildings of human beings have fallen in the path of this century and lay in ruins! The entire world, craft, skill, industry, has acquired an entirely different look in this new age, and also the spirit of men, the structure, science, and culture² has run a new path. Especially the last century has brought a revolution of all kinds of social standings and relations. However, *“the Word of the Lord endures*

¹ *Fahne* is a military flag or standard.

² *Gesittung* can mean culture, civilization, or morality.

forever.” Yes, even the word that is proclaimed to us, which Luther has proclaimed to us.

Luther’s teaching has remained and remained the same. The eternal Gospel has weathered every storm, has suffered no change or variation.

We boast: “The Word of God and the teaching of Luther never passes away.” Especially this specific form of teaching, which Luther has put forward for us, remains in the succession of ages, and we are of good confidence, that it will remain and not pass away or become obsolete until the end of the world. This teaching is in every part the antithesis of the lies and the deception of the Antichrist. Yet the Antichrist still remains, until Christ comes, and he remains as he is and as he was. This the word of prophecy testifies. The Antichrist is the Endchrist³, the arch-enemy of Christ and His Gospel in this end time of the New Testament Church. So also the confession of the truth, which the errors and the lies of the Antichrist exclude and condemn. All sorts of heresies have come on, as it was prophesied, to the time of the Antichrist in this end time, as upon a heap. People have attacked the Word of God and especially the teaching of Luther from all sides. In the meanwhile, however, it was the eternal Gospel, the eternal truth, and so they have been unable to do anything. The foundation of the truth is not shaken. The teaching of Luther is the good defense and weapon which God has given directly into the hand of Christendom in the last days, and this emerges in every struggle, its cutting edge and sharpness if need be, and it is not worn out by constant use. The history of Luther up to the present has demonstrated it, that the teach of Luther does not pass away, and we are certain it will remain, so long as this earth stands and the old evil foe has his bearing upon the earth and seeks to delude the sons of men with his craftiness and lies.

It is one and the same Word, even the eternal Gospel, which from the beginning of days up to the end of days the illuminates the darkness of this age and the shows sinners the way of

³ *Endechrist.*

life. The same light, which already became clear to Adam and Eve in paradise, shines upon us. Still in all the changing and succession of the time, in contrary to the diverse, manifold errors, which the devil set in the world, is this one teaching has turned up and is employed once on this, once on that side. The individual tensions are the sons of men in the divine image and conversation, the Church in the course of time, in struggle against the many shaped lies always appearing clearly before the eyes. The history of the old covenant, as that of the new, falls in two main periods, a time of growth and a time of decline. The seed of Abraham became a holy family, and this family a holy people, and this people was expanded like a fruitful grapevine; by the time of David and Solomon many heathen also had a portion in the blessing of Israel. The heart and core of the history of Israel, however, was the promise about the future seed of the woman and serpent-treader⁴, about the seed of Abraham, who would bring salvation to all the world, about the Messiah King and His magnificent kingdom. Then, however, Israel withdrew from the living God and the faith of the fathers and burned incense to idols; only a small flock remained true. Yet the Word of God, the promises remained, and continued into the last times, into the time of rebellion, always clearer, more defined, and with more assurance. The Savior should certainly come out of Zion, should be born of a virgin in Bethlehem. As, then, Christ appeared and the new covenant was started, the Gospel about Jesus, the crucified, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world, in a few hundred years was made public to all the known people of the world. Then came stagnation and decline. Then rebellion entered in, the Antichrist appeared. But especially in this time of the new covenant the Good News of Christ, especially the Gospel of St. Paul, the Word of the grace of Jesus Christ, will most clearly and powerfully bear witness and not pass away until Christ comes. Today, on our Luther jubilee, 400 years after the birth of the reformer, of the prophet of the Church of the last days, we for that reason give to

⁴ *Schlangentreter*.

God in the Highest, who created heaven and earth and all things, praise and honor and thanks, that He has preserved the teaching of Luther for the course of centuries and transmitted it intact to us and our children.

We thank God that He has guarded the teaching of Luther and defended us for 400 years against every attack of the scoundrel.

1. Against the lies and terrors of the Antichrist.
2. Against the deception of the sects and enthusiasts.
3. Against all false, glistening pietism.
4. Against the rationalism of this century.

I.

The Antichrist is and remains the arch-enemy of Christ, His Gospel, and His Church in this end time of the new covenant. In struggle against the Antichrist, Luther himself first had recognized the teaching of the Gospel through the grace of God and then confessed, preached, and defended it steadfastly. Truly, there was nothing trifling about this fundamental struggle and victor of our Luther, out of the Lutheran Church has sprung forth. It was life out of death. Christendom had faded, it had lost its salt and light. The foundation had been shaken, everything had turned upside down. The Antichrist, as was prophesied, had set himself up in the temple of God and alleged to be God. The pope, a sinful, mortal man, bound the thoughts, hearts, and consciences of Christian to his person. He spoke with considerably blunt words: "I am the lord your god, you must obey me, I determine death and life, heaven, hell, and purgatory. I am Christ, I am the way and the truth and the life." This blasphemer, however, did not reveal himself for who he was, the firstborn of Satan, the God of this world, who set up his seat in the temple of God. He let the temple of God, the Bible, the articles of the Christian faith stand outwardly, he encircled himself and his seat with loud, angelic sanctity, with a royal household of spiritual

princes, cardinals, bishops, all the saints of heaven he gathered around his throne, he adorned his lies with noisy worship and alluring melodies. However, he also took in addition to the adornment and pomp of hell, the works of the devil in his service, he gave his faithful dispensation from the most detestable depravity and crimes, he caroused with big wigs in every pleasure of the world and the devil.

No member of the Christian Church has tasted the hellish poison, which lies hidden in the papacy, to the same extent as Luther. Even as a child it had mortified him. He had wrestled with this diabolical holiness to the point of blood, and by the grace of God triumphed. He finally recognized, that whatever kind of hell there may be, Rome had been built upon it, and now he rebuked this disgraceful Sodom and Gomorrah before the world. He instructed the Christians, that the holiness of the pope, of the priests, and the righteous of the monks was in fact nothing better than that filth, in which the man of sin rolls about. He revealed the supposed vicar of God and of Christ as the real Antichrist, since he condemned Christ and His grace and the Article of the forgiveness of sins. He testified and preached about Christ, the only Savior, and called out aloud: "by grace, through faith, not by the works of the law, not by the works of the pope." His word, his witness had triumphed. Whoever was of the Truth, heard his voice, and delighted in the eternal Gospel. Babylon, the great city, had fallen, judged by the breath of the divine mouth. That was the most prodigious struggle, which would be fought in the spiritual realm since the time of the apostles. There Michael set out with his angels and cast the old serpent down. This struggle, this battle is the hour of the birth of Luther's teaching. Today we still God centuries later for this great deed of His power and love, which he has accomplished by His servant Luther.

And what God has given us through Luther, that He has now also wonderfully preserved up to this hour against all the assaults of the devil and the Antichrist. God had marvelously strengthened this man Luther until his end, so that he did not yield a hair's breadth concerning the recognized truth. Soon the child of wickedness, the pope, seized took hold of other means and weapons and made the dark rubrics of his lies, which no longer found believers, into the red rubrics, and shed the blood of the servants of God in streams. The pope has tortured more Christians to death, than the old heathen emperors. The most bloody war of the last centuries are concocted by the pope. The pope establishes himself as an arch-artist in all the arts and tricks of hell, in perjury, assassination, poisoning, and so forth. No greater monster has ever appeared upon the earth. So he sought with might and terrors to sweep Luther's teaching off the face of the earth. Still, God be praised, he was not successful. The Word of God is efficacious and in full swing up to this hour. In the duration of time, the hands of the pope, this assassin, have certainly to some extent been bound. He has also already in small part received the reward for his unrighteousness. Especially in the last decades the kings and princes of the earth, have begun to rob the raiment, treasures, and jewels of the great prostitute, which she has collected, as is prophesied. However, we also know according to the revelation, that the wounds, which are dealt to this beast, again will heal, so that this beast again and again, even if it appears exhausted to death, lifts up its head and will flare its nostrils and rage against the Savior of God and God Himself until the end, until Christ finally casts that one down into the pool, which burns with fire and brimstone. Yet we are of good trust: the Word of God and the teaching of Luther, which the pope has not been able to find fault throughout these centuries, will not be lost, even if, on the other hand, many of the evil plans of the Antichrist should succeed. Luther's teaching will remain and outlive the murder and lies of the pope. The victory song, which the multitude of

saints saved from the Antichrist sing, rings forth in heaven and on earth, without interruption, now and forever.

II.

However, in the course of the centuries there have been still other enemies rising up against the Church and against the teaching of Luther. The devil has left no means untested, in order to silence the saving truth. Many sects and enthusiasts have come and have scattered their evil seeds among the good seed of the Gospel. But we thank God, since he shielded the teaching of Luther and the Church also against the many-headed monster of the spirit of enthusiasm⁵ and has kept us intact. Already by the time of the Reformation our fathers sang and complained: “Many sects and many enthusiasts come here upon a heap.” As soon as the bright son of the Gospel had begun its new revolution around the darkened earth, so also the venomous plants and fungi shot forth everywhere out of the field of the Church. The enthusiast spirit already made Luther’s life and work sour. Luther laid all emphasis upon the Word, upon the written and the preached Word, upon the outward office of the Word, and also had placed the visible Word, the Sacrament, in the foreground. He taught, that in Word and Sacrament alone Christ is revealed, that alone through Word and Sacrament the grace of Christ is imparted and the saving faith is worked and preserved. Then the enthusiasts entered in and slandered the teaching of Luther as dead service of letters. Their war-cry was: Not the letters, not Word and Sacrament, no, the spirit alone, the spirit must do it! But it was not the Holy Spirit of God, it was their own spirit, who they set in motion, yes an evil spirit from the abyss, which puffed up their spirit. And this false spirit now put the most peculiar ideas in their heads. Each taught something new about God, divine things, and the way of salvation. With the pope they dragged a yoke in the ground. For the pope it was entirely correct that only the Word of God would bring disgrace. Through the grace

⁵ *Schwarmgeisterei.*

of God Luther has immediately also recognized this deceit of error and surrendered to the false spirits and brethren no title of truth. He has struggled with weapons of righteousness with the right hand and the left.

After the death of Luther these false teachers, who appeared to be true protestants and regarded themselves as promoters of the reformation, sought to win for themselves entrance into the Lutheran Church under the Lutheran name and expressions. They had already seized a great number of professorships and pulpits. But the Word of God and Luther's teaching should not pass away. The deceivers would be exposed. The Church of Luther affirmed the confession of the Reformation. The last symbol of the Lutheran Church, the Formula of Concord, is a monument to this difficult struggle and the battle for Lutheran truth. Meanwhile, in the course of the years and centuries the sects have captured many provinces of Christendom, having sown their wicked seed, even in many lands, in which the correct, pure faith originally blossomed. Especially this fatherland of ours, this new world has been a brood of sects and enthusiasts from the beginning. Yet they have not succeeded in wiping out the bright, beautiful light of Luther's teaching. Especially in this land of sects the pure teaching of Luther has sprung roots through the grace of God and obtained a home. We have here in our place the Gospel of Christ entirely and undisturbed, we have the pure Word and Sacrament. On today's jubilee, we give God praise and thanks, since He has pulled up the weed running rampant from the fences of the sects, and we are certain he will also henceforth grant the pure, unadulterated teaching of the divine Word free course.

III.

For two hundred years our fathers were diligently seeking to keep the teaching of Luther safe against ever subtle and gross errors and antagonism. Meanwhile, the Lutheran people

gradually became saturated and bored with the salutary fare. The life no more matched the teaching. And many preachers blamed the pure teaching for the errors of living. The theologians also to some extent operated one-sidedly with their understanding in things of faith. The spirit of the first witnesses disappeared. There appeared men who exposed and rebuked this shame of Israel. It was to some extent godly men, who reminded the protestant Christendom, that the pure teach alone does not save, if it is not joined with the faith, and who, therefore, urged living faith, living Christianity. Someone gave them the name “pietists.” But Satan, the jack-of-all-trades, indeed soon took possession of this movement. The pietists properly and with earnest rebuked the sins of worldly Christendom and the deplorable state of church life, but they did not know and bring the proper medicine. The Gospel, which Luther had preached, the Gospel of the free grace of God in Christ, the chief article of justification, but also the other articles⁶ of Christian doctrine, chiefly the doctrine of Word and Sacrament, they allowed to lie more and more by the side. With pious, beautiful words they sought to touch the heart and through personal devotion to rouse new life. In pious feelings and movements of the heart, in pious outward dealing, in self-concocted practices, they sought salvation and true Christianity. The power for believing and for believing failed them. Not faith on the Lord Christ, but their own repentance and contrition of the heart became the way commended to the people as the way that led out of the world to God, from the sinful earth to heaven. God be thanked, there were also in that time true witnesses of the truth and guards upon the wall of Zion, who, illuminated by the Spirit of God, recognized the deep danger of pietistic piety and warned Christians about this glistening by-way⁷. Surely they⁸ did not succeed in leading the Lutheran people back to the piety of the Father. Pietism is nowadays is with many Protestants, especially with such who want to be Christian, the most

⁶ German could be singular.

⁷ Or “wrong way.”

⁸ Pietists.

popular form of Christianity. By far the greatest number of the Protestant churches, which were from the Lutheran house, are today gathered under the banner of the union. And even in this land the protestants have established for themselves the union among the German population and claim for themselves the inheritance of the Reformation. This united Christianity, however, is nothing other than watered down pietism. Little does one want to know about confession and doctrine, as little one wants to disavow the chief article of Scripture.⁹ Some sentiments, some dealings, some practices, is the slim remnant of Christianity there. We thank God, that He illuminated us with the bright, enduring light, prophetic Word, especially in this pietistic, unionistic, hazy time¹⁰. That will also further destroy all fog and haze.

IV.

Also against the rationalism of this last century God has protected the teaching of Luther. Pietism had already weakened Christianity. The Word, the written Word, the preached Word, Word and Sacrament were no longer the magnet, upon which the eyes of Christians were directed. And once the devil has dragged the Word into the background, then he has also soon won the entire game. Soon the Lutheran Church had altogether lost the Word and faith. In the Church of Luther a general departure from the faith had entered in. In the beginning of this century thick, heavy darkness, heathenish ignorance had set in over the protestant Germany. Rationalism, the rational belief, the unbelief ruled in the church, school, and household. Outwardly, according to the letter, they permitted the Christian confession, yes the Lutheran confession to continue correct. But in worship, in preaching and instruction they taught one not a word about the faith of the fathers, about Christ, the Savior. What they taught and preached was nothing but shallow morality and virtue, such as the old heathens had also already confessed. Yet

⁹ *Von Bekenntniss und Lehre will man wenig wissen, so wenig man die Hauptartikel der Schrift leugnen will.*

¹⁰ German: *pietistisch-unionistisch verschwommen Zeit.*

our fathers knew to speak about this sad deterioration of the Church. This darkness was not essentially different from the darkness of the papacy. For the papist superstition is indeed also only a fruit of unbelief. The pope and whoever is a good papist, in truth believes in no article of the Christian faith. Also the old night and captivity, in which the Church before Luther's time had languished, was after three hundred years once more unfolded over every land. It seems as if the light of the Gospel and the pure teaching of Luther, the decline of the last age should only in a matter of time frustrate and cut short, as if by the end each and every light would be extinguished. But no, the eternal Gospel, as preached by Luther, should and cannot vanish. The old expression is proven correct: "The Word of God and Luther's teaching never passes away!" God sent His Word and His Spirit and made the dead bones living. Some fifty years ago a new awakening followed. The old faith awoke, and especially the faith of the Lutheran fathers. The old Bible, Catechism, and prayer books were circulated again in many places. The Church of Luther raised its head joyously and courageously, as out of hibernation. We praise God today for this grace, that He has kindled the light of the Gospel anew in our century.

Meanwhile, this last time does not renounce its way, it is a time of decline. O, we Lutheran Christian folk have again in the last decades experienced a lamentable defeat. *Many from those revivalists, who announced the new day, have gone back, becoming weary in the midst of struggle and progress.* The Gospel of Christ, and especially the teaching of Luther, which was then only beginning to rise out of night and mist, was augmented and counterfeited.¹¹ The preachers and theologians, and especially those who wanted to be Lutheran, to be sure not only had the vulgar masses of the godless world against him, but indeed the entire progress, the entire demeanor of this century. And now in order to make preaching about the crucified Christ bearable, they hit upon the idea of reconciling Christianity, the Bible with the consciousness of

¹¹ *welche nur eben erst aus Nacht und Nebel hervortauchte, wurde ungemünzt und gefälscht*

the time. So they took the old Lutheran doctrines and articles of faith and have converted them to modernity and reasonableness. The old rationalism is looked upon as out of date. One does not want to set Christ and the faith entirely by the side. However, one only teaches about Christ and the faith, so far as it appears suitable to the reason and good taste of the modern times. And this refined rationalism is proclaimed as the authentic Christianity and Lutheranism. From nearly all the pulpits of formerly Lutheran Germany these new wares are brought to market. One speaks there about Christ, grace, blessedness, but as it pleases human wit, as about a wisdom of this world. Recently the covenant between Christianity and reason, between faith and unbelief, between Christ and Belial is follow through from every side. In one church, two preach from the same pulpit, the one confesses Christ, the other blasphemes Christ. So then the entire house and foundation has indeed become rotten and decayed. Therefore, there remains for protestant church of Germany, which has lost footing, power, and salt, nothing else remaining, that to buttress themselves upon the state and worldly authority. Only the state can still keep the Church erect and now rules the church according to worldly, heathenish principles. They sigh over it, stretch out there hands to Rome and yearn for the stability and regiment of the papacy. We cannot praise God enough, that he has constructed here in this new world a new Lutheran Zion in this time of the devastation and ruin of the old Lutheran Church. We have and hear the pure and clear teaching of Luther, without all the additions of reason. And by the teaching [of Luther], by the Word we build and extend the Church of God on earth. The Lord is well near us on the battlefield with His Spirit and gifts. We confess from our own experience: "The Word of God and Luther's teaching will never pass away." Amen.

This sermon is from a compilation of essays and sermons on Luther and the Reformation published to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Luther's birth. I found this book at a book auction. George Stoeckhardt lived 17 February 1942–9 January 1913. He was a professor in exegetics at Missouri's seminary in St. Louis.