

The Wars of Missouri that Led to Seminex. A Retrospective. Part III: A Sequel from Bob Bertram

Colleagues,

Last week's ThTh 483 (part II of a book review of Paul Zimmermann's "Inside Story" on the Wars of the Missouri Synod) concluded with a postscript:

D.v., there will be a Part III—a word from beyond the grave, you could almost say. Just discovered a few days ago among Bob Bertram's papers is the one-page text of his address to the New Orleans Convention of the LCMS in 1973. Bob was speaking against Resolution 3-09, which, when it was indeed adopted (574 to 451), condemned Bob and the rest of us as "false teachers not to be tolerated in the church of God."

In just one page Bob says it all. Here it is.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

The WORD for New Orleans

Robert W. Bertram

[1973]

1. Neither pope nor council nor synodical convention can decide that its doctrinal statements are scriptural. Only

the scriptural Word can decide that.

2. If there are doctrinal statements which are believed to be scriptural, that belief can never be imposed but, like the Word itself, can only be confessed – from faith to faith.
3. The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church are the one scriptural statement which every member of the Synod accepts, not because of a majority vote nor even because of a unanimous vote but only because of the Word of God, freely believed and freely confessed.
4. In order for the Synod to decide now that other statements are scriptural enough to be binding on all its members, every member of the Synod would first have to be persuaded – not by a vote but freely by the Word of God – to redefine the Synod's present confession and to become in effect a new Synod.
5. Meanwhile, voting on a doctrinal statement proves only one thing: not that the statement is scriptural but only that so-and-so many voters believe it is scriptural. Their statement deserves to be honored and upheld, but not to the exclusion of those who differ out of the same confession of the same Word of God.
6. The reason all matters of doctrine and conscience are to be decided only by the Word of God [EHS: These are the very words of the LCMS constitution] is that this Word, by its very nature as a promise, can be received only by faith. And faith cannot be coerced.
7. To resort to any other means than the good and gracious Word of God – to such means, for instance, as ecclesiastical power – betrays a lack of faith in the Word itself. As if the Word of God were not enough to operate the Church. As if the Church were some secular organization to be run by the will of its members.
8. Because of our faithlessness the Word of God calls us all to repent. But the Word which calls us is not only

judgment. Of that we have all received aplenty, more than we can bear. The Word we now need most, and from one another, is the Word of pardon and reassurance. Without that Word of promise repentance remains impossible for us all.

9. It is for the proclaiming of that Word that God Himself has called us into this church, and only He can reject us. That, for the sake of His Son Christ Jesus, we trust He will not do. Therefore we have no intention of leaving this church. And we implore those who share His Word with us, in mutual repentance and forgiveness, to bear with us “the dear, holy Cross,” that together we might make a good confession.

God help us. We can do no other.

[The following personal note was attached to this page when the researchers found it among Bob’s papers: “Ed, This year 1993 marks the 20th anniversary of the attached statement. I have no wish to re-open old wounds. But in a weak (or strong?) moment I am tempted to reprint the statement-in the Crossings newsletter? Probably not-if only because the statement was so scantily heard originally. Was denkst du? Bob”

I don’t remember ever seeing this before, neither the page nor the note. But that may say more about me than about Bob. My hunch is that he did not pass it on to me—for whatever reason—and that’s why it was still in his files (cum note). And therefore—Hallelujah!—it still exists for the edification of us all. If those nine theses are “false teaching,” what on earth might “true teaching” be? EHS]