

The Fall of the Missouri Synod from its Golden Age

Part 1

The occurrence of golden ages in the church, especially in regard to falls from these ages.

“After my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore, watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20:29-31).

In Romans 16:17-18 the apostle Paul also had written about false prophets rising in the churches, commanding: “I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned; and avoid them; for those who are such, do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.” Just as Peter (2nd Peter 2:10-19) and others, such as Jude (verses 4-19) and John (1st John 2:18-19; 4:1; 2nd John 10) also warned the churches of them.

Yet here in Acts, the apostle obviously had been given by the Holy Spirit a prophecy which was limited to Paul’s description of it, one specifically concerning the

Ephesian congregation, about current members, perhaps even pastors, who, to be sure, currently were observing the originally-preached gospel and the other biblical doctrines which the apostle had taught them, but, at some season in the future, would speak “perverse things to draw away the disciples after themselves.”

In addition to this, it was prophesied that men from the outside would join the congregation. Once inside it, they would not spare the flock from devils’ doctrines.

Thus the apostle warned this congregation of something that definitely would take place. However, the Holy Spirit did not say when this would happen, nor give the names of the people which would be promoting this.

Indeed, this would be God’s test of this congregation by which it could and should stand up for the truth, and remain faithful to him and to his Word (Deuteronomy 13:3); in order that “the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:35) as to whether they have the intent to be faithful to God’s Word or not; and in order “that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1st Corinthians 11:19), that is to say, so that those who faithfully pass their test may be evident to the rest of the congregation. To be sure, a God-sent test, like any gospel reformation, will result in a winnowing process of the faithful from the unfaithful church members. This will be the Lord’s intent.

Hence if the Ephesian congregation would follow Romans 16:17-18, all will be well, as God intended. If it would not follow Romans 16:17-18 faithfully, it would become unorthodox and a biblically-erring body, and ever would sink lower in this regard.

In Revelation 2:2-3 we are told of the response of the Ephesians and the result of their testing. It was positive. Just the same, the Almighty scolds the congregation for leaving its biblical first love (Verse 4), and demands with a severe threat that it repent (verse 5). This is directed, in addition, to the head pastor (“angel” = “human messenger,” verse 1), who, according to some religious writers, probably was Timothy.¹

Thus we see from Acts 20 that after any golden age in the church (Matthew 13:31-32), usually by the third generation, false prophets will arise. Congregations with “itching ears” (2nd Timothy 4:3) will follow them, and a fall from that gospel golden age will occur. Indeed, this has been the template throughout history, not according to God’s will, but because church members have become bored with the gospel. Scripture describes them as people who have “turned their ears away from the truth” (2nd Timothy 4:4). This decline, this falling away from the gospel, has been common in all golden ages. It is a tragic and sorry pattern. To be sure, it is damnable. It is due to

¹ Edward Hayes Plumptre, “Timothy,” *Dr. William Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible*, editor H. B. Hackett (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870), volume IV, page 3255A. This article is

men who are unappreciative of the gospel. How this repeated behavior of gospel rejection must greatly sadden our gracious God who “would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1st Timothy 2:4).

For example, almost the entire, Old Testament book of Judges is a history of the twelve tribes repeatedly falling away from one golden age of gospel belief after another. Later, another golden age began under Samuel and continued under “the sons of the prophets” in which more and more unbelievers were regenerated and acquired a saving faith in the gospel promise, after hearing law and gospel preaching. This golden age rose throughout David’s reign into Solomon’s, when a decline set in; that is, when more and more believers listened to false prophets and believed in false doctrines, until finally spiritual darkness covered the land, for the people generally became unregenerated, and only a tiny flock of true believers remained. This has been the common pattern throughout human history.

Look at New Testament history also! John the Baptist, followed by our Lord and his apostles introduced a gospel golden age. After that came papal darkness for centuries. Then God raised up Luther (Revelation 14:8) for a gospel golden age known as the Reformation.

reprinted in McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981), volume X, page 416B.

After that the gospel jumped the ocean, and it became America's turn. God blessed America with one. With the Missouri Synod as the flagship body of believers, beginning in late 1840's, peaking in 1950, and declining ever since. Indeed, the beginning of efforts to erode this golden age in the Missouri Synod began around 1930 in New York City, gaining momentum ever after with two, bell weather signs of it in 1950: the adoption of the *Common Confession* by that synod, and the death of the famous, radio preacher Walter Maier of that synod.

Furthermore, realize also that the golden ages of gospel belief fall into two categories: the few prolonged, and the numerous short-lived ones. Examples of the second sort are the various golden ages of the twelve tribes in the book of Judges, the one begun under Samuel, and the subsequent ones begun in Judea before the Babylonian Captivity by various, reformer kings. These ages of gospel belief rose in the first generation, peaked in the third, and then began their decline.

Instances of the prolonged ones will be the international, golden ages under Paul and Luther which involved more than one nation. For example, under Paul the Christian church expanded across many boundaries (Romans 15:19) for centuries until the "falling away" (2nd Thessalonians 2:3) began with the descent into papal Roman Catholicism.

Almost contemporary with the spread of the gospel were waves of various false doctrines that rolled

over the church, caused by false prophets. Moreover, God did not let a rejection of his gospel go unpunished. Judea in 70 A.D., and in the years before, was punished with a devastating war for rejecting Christ and his gospel. Likewise North Africa and Asia were punished with war by Islam for becoming worldly and falling away from the gospel.

Under Luther the gospel spread internationally across northern Europe and Scandinavia in just a matter of years. Nevertheless, Zwinglism, Calvinism, and other heretical "isms" quickly followed Luther. Likewise, God sent a punishing war on the German lands after they had received the Reformation lukewarmly, or had rejected it. The devastating Thirty Years War occurred about one hundred years after the Reformation was introduced. Just the same, there were biblical, faithful Lutheran churches in Bach's day even into the 1900's, though in ever dwindling numbers.

Looking back through church history, a biblical student in the 1800 and 1900's could and should have declared with divine confidence, and convinced his audience with the same divine certainty based on the historical pattern regarding gospel golden ages, that "in the third generation the Missouri Synod will begin to fall from its golden age through the efforts of false prophets rising up from its own midst."

What is more, looking forward into the future, it could and should be said of any future, gospel golden age

which God would start in any nation of his choosing: “In the third generation of this golden age, this nation will begin to decline from its golden age through the efforts of false prophets rising up from its own midst.” Yet at that time would anybody be knowledgeable of this to teach it publicly?

According to the statistics which I have from around 1890 in America, the number of citizens which were listed as members of a Christian church, including the Roman Catholic, never reached 50% of the total American population. This number then should be adjusted because not all church members had been regenerated (see Matthew 13:24-30). Nevertheless, their moral lives, and the fact that a similar percentage were in positions of power in politics and society, exerted incidentally a great amount of peer pressure on their unbelieving neighbors who regarded Christian morality as the norm of society, and became conscience-bound to observe the same. This was evident in my youth. Just the same, all along the movie companies, and the publishers of immoral books and trash magazines were competing aggressively to lower the bar of morality in America by increment, to make as much money as possible by appealing to the filth of the flesh as far as they dare without provoking a Christian public outcry.

Again, in Acts 20 the Ephesian congregation had been warned exceptionally against falling away from the faith by the efforts of false prophets. According to the

report in Revelation 2, they stayed faithful and alert, and were successful. Would anybody in the future be alert to the knowledge of these falls from golden ages, and would act to prevent these falls from happening to the best of his ability?

Conclusion: In the future, then, Christians could and should recognize when they would be in a golden age. They also could and should realize that it will last only through three generations before it declines, less than one hundred years. There will be a rise, a peak, and then a decline. That is, in a country more and more people will become regenerated through law and gospel preaching which the Spirit of God will send, until the number of them in the third generation will reach its peak. Then some of the church members will become bored with the gospel. False prophets will arise, and will teach seductive false teachings. After this more of the third generation and later ones will lose their regeneration so that they will be Christian in name only. As a result, formalism and legalism will be substituted for a genuine sanctified life. These churches will turn into mere clubs, which would have to maintain some kind of spiritual identity and slogan to keep up appearances. Yet they will employ various schemes, fads, and gimmicks which appeal to the sinful flesh of their club members to retain them, and especially, to retain their monetary donations. They will not resort to biblical law and gospel preaching. In spite of these efforts, membership in these churches will continue

to decline, because their members will conclude that it will be pointless to attend any longer, and to pay out money for no appreciable benefit.

Part 2:

What would be some typical occurrences in a fall from a golden age?

Examine what happened to the Missouri Synod!

Realize that God knew that the Missouri Synod would go down the same sorry path which other bodies of believers in the past golden ages took! That is, it would not maintain the golden age indefinitely as it could and should, but their members and their descendants would give up on the gospel, and perk up their “itching ears” for false doctrines, eventually losing their regeneration in the process, and return to the mire and darkened state of unbelief.

To be sure, some leading men in the synod, such as editors, professors, and the President of the synod, whose observations could get published publicly, noticed a sad transition going on, and, more importantly, courageously spoke out about it in their synodical publications.

For instance, while the president of the synod in 1930, Friedrich Pfothauer, referred neither to a golden age, nor to a predictable fall from it, he did quote Luther’s description of this phenomenon in a synodical sermon of his, saying: “God’s Word and grace is a passing rain shower which does not return where it once was.”²

This is how Luther put it: “Let us remember our former misery, and the darkness in which we dwelt. Germany, I am sure, has never before heard so much of God’s Word as it is hearing today; certainly we read nothing of it in history. If we let it just slip by without thanks and honor, I fear we shall suffer a still more dreadful darkness and plague. O my beloved Germans, buy while the market is at your door; gather in the harvest while there is sunshine and fair weather; make use of God’s grace and Word while it is there! For you should know that God’s Word and grace is like a passing shower of rain which does not return where it has once been. It has been with the Jews, but when it’s gone, it’s gone, and now they have nothing. Paul brought it to the Greeks; but again when it’s gone, it’s gone, and now they have the Turk. Rome and Latins also had it; but when it’s gone, it’s gone, and now they have the pope. And you Germans need not think that you will have it forever, for ingratitude and contempt will not make it stay. Therefore, seize it

² Friedrich Pfothauer, “God’s Word and Grace are a Passing Shower,” translator Matthew C. Harrison, *At Home in the House of my Fathers* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2009), page 777f.

and hold it fast, whoever can; for lazy hands are bound to have a lean year.”³

Pfotenhauer then explained: “Faithlessness, unthankfulness, and disdain are always the cause when God’s Word and grace is a passing rain shower which does not return to where it once was. Unthankfulness and disdain are the winds behind the clouds of divine grace. The winds disturb these clouds, set them in motion, and they up and flee away. Faithlessness and disdain are the reason God’s Word and grace do not return. Faithlessness and disdain, after they had driven away the grace of God, now breathe their hot breath against the diligence that had engendered the Word of God. That destroyed, the field once green and blooming now becomes deserted and desolate....

“Hear the warning that our text directs to us: “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end’.... (Hebrews 3:12-15).

“If we are honest about it, there are indications that in church matters we have all sorts of unrest and problems. These are warnings that the weather will

change and change suddenly. Behind the clouds of grace, unthankfulness and disdain are beginning to blow. Oh, let us then earnestly tremble, heartily repent, and admonish one another; so as long as it is day, God’s Word and grace shall not become for us a passing rain shower which does not return. Let us buy, because the market is gathered at the gate of the city. The sun is shining and the weather is good. Let us make use of God grace and Word because we have them! Let us grab hold of them and keep them!”⁴

Six years after this in 1936, in an address to a conference, which address was printed in the *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Pfotenhauer pointed out: “In the circles of our Synod there is the complaint that spiritual life among us is in regression. This complaint is justified. Church history teaches that the generations that have inherited the benefits from previous generation don’t treasure them as highly as their fathers, who fought and worked for them.

“That spiritual life among us has declined is evident from many and various observations. The main Sunday Divine Service is carried out in a shoddy fashion, and as a consequence, the Christian training of the Church in the family is neglected. Once-flourishing parish schools are shrinking, in many cases without due cause. Many are satisfied with Sunday School and

³ Harrison, *House*, page 777, footnote.

⁴ Harrison, *House*, pages 780-781.

inadequate confirmation instruction instead of making every possible effort to have Christian schools. Attendance at the Divine Service is of secondary importance for many, particularly in the summer months when the automobile allows the whole family to go places other than church. The ways of the world are ever more prevalent among us. The difference between the way we live and that of the children of this world is ever decreasing.”⁵

In 1930 Franz Pieper, a professor of doctrine at the Saint Louis seminary of the Missouri Synod (who died in 1931), had this indictment about the “fever for unification” at that time: “The reverent fear of God’s Word means that we in God’s Church acknowledge nothing as having the authority of establishing doctrine *alongside* of the Word of God. In our time, a ‘fever for unification’ is rife in the Church. It is a spirit that cultivates the idea that various theological directions enjoy the same right in the Church. It is a spirit of unification without unity in the doctrine of the Word of God. This does not accord with the reverent fear of God’s Word. God’s Word claims sole rule in the Church of God. God gave His word to His Church to that end. The Church shall only speak from God’s mouth. God’s Word shall be the only source and norm of churchly doctrine....

⁵ Harrison, *House*, page 795.

⁶ Harrison, *House*, page 684, 685.

“We so-called Missourians and our confessional partners have hitherto by God’s grace adhered to the correct manner of proceeding with respect to *churchly unification*. We have been ready advocates for the so-called ‘free conferences’, that is, for doctrinal discussions toward the establishment of doctrinal unity; where it is not present. But we have only established brotherly fellowship in the faith with those who confess... the unfalsified doctrine of Christ....”

“This effort at false unity will win the victory and force its way in at our front, on our flanks, and in the very center... if we, through our own fault, let go of the reverent fear of God’s Word.”⁶ Inexcusably, this is what happened officially twenty years later with the adoption of the *Common Confession* in 1950, and informally all along during those intervening years by a number of clergy.

For instance, “The goal of altar and pulpit fellowship with the American Lutheran Church was almost attained at the 1938 synod which met in St. Louis. The floor committee on inter-synodical and doctrinal matters (whose chairman was Dr. Walter A. Maier) recommended to the synod that it accept the report of the standing committee on church union that it had reached doctrinal agreement with the ALC.”⁷

⁷ Eugene Brueggemann, “Lutheran Zionism – The Missouri Synod’s Pursuit of Purity,” *The Daystar Journal* – <http://thedaystarjournal.com>

The conclusion of this committee was a lie. In fact, there was not a good faith “unity in the doctrine of the Word of God,” as Pieper put it. This doctrinal agreement with the American Lutheran Church was a “false unity,” as Pieper defined it; an unbiblical unity. It was a specious, doctrinal agreement. To be sure, those members of the committee who publicly gave the impression to the 1938 synodical convention that it was a biblical, doctrinal agreement were guilty of perfidy, and publicly should have been removed from membership in the Synod on the spot.

John T. Mueller, another professor at the Saint Louis seminary, made these observations likewise in 1930, which were published in the Missouri Synod’s theological journal: “The ‘little leaven’ is today our worst enemy... It is well for us honestly to face this fact....

“We have every reason to heed Paul’s warning and to beware of the *little* leaven which now endangers our Church.... In true penitence and humility let us first ‘sweep before our own doors’....

“There is the leaven of *externalism*, which honors God with the mouth, but leaves the heart far removed from His gracious communion. There is the leaven of *satiety*, which is nauseated at the wholesome manna of pure doctrine. There is the leaven of spiritual *pride*, which boasts of our state of Christian perfection and often shows

itself in weariness and disgust at what our fathers treasured so highly. There is the leaven of *spiritual security*, which smiles at the thought that we must take heed lest we fall.”⁸

There also was a spiritual decline in the clergy of the Missouri Synod, especially among the younger men, that was noticeable by the rest. This fact became more known generally and unexpectedly in another article in the Missouri Synod’s theological journal after a questionnaire was submitted in one of its journals for a response. E. J. Friedrich remarks under the heading: “The Alarming Symptoms, Regarded by Some as Evidence of a Decline,” “Among the eighty brethren who replied to the questionnaire submitted in the last issue of this journal sixty-five went on record as being deeply concerned about the preaching that is being done in our Synod at the present time. They claim to have observed certain definite symptoms which must be regarded either as positive evidences of decline or as a handwriting on the wall warning us that a decline is bound to come unless we give more attention to the preparation and the delivery of our sermons. The following paragraphs present a number of the most interesting statements received on this point....

⁸ J. T. Mueller, “Facing Our Worst Enemy – the Little Leaven,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* (Saint Louis: Concordia, January, 1930), Volume 1, Number 1, pages 35, 37.

“A younger brother, who has much opportunity to hear others preach, says: -

“I have not heard a doctrinal sermon from our younger men in ten years. Recently I heard two sermons of a series of four on “The Last Things.” There was not a word of the doctrine. The sermons were excellent moralizing’....

“Corroborating these expressions is the report of one of our District Presidents. He writes:-

“[At two pastoral conferences] To a man the older pastors deplored the decline of expository and doctrinal preaching. Emotional and inspirational preaching is usurping a place in our midst to which it is not entitled’....

[Another correspondent noted:] “Much of our preaching is cold, lifeless, merely repetition of formula, without the life that should characterize a sermon dipped out of one’s own heart. If doctrine means nothing to the preacher, how can it mean anything to the hearer?’.”⁹

Hence if the average congregational member of the Missouri Synod would have kept himself well-informed of the current, spiritual events, for example, by subscribing to the *Concordia Theological Monthly*, he could and should have realized that there was an alarming, spiritual decline in motion at that time.

⁹ E. J. Friedrich, “Reflections on the Status of Our Preaching,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* (Saint Louis: Concordia, December, 1933), Volume IV, Number 12, pages 917, 919, & 924.

Just the same, the above, joyless assessments by these first-hand witnesses also demonstrate that the fields were ripe for harvest by false prophets.

In other words, “At whatever time we find people who have such feelings, as the Jews at the time of Isaiah, who say openly, Isa. 30:10: ‘Don’t prophesy those things to us that are right; but speak to us things that please us. Look at our errors for us’. Teachers very often give a place to this demand of the people. They are, as we read in Eze. 13:18, ‘sewing pillows under every armhole, and are making kerchiefs under the head of every stature to capture souls’;¹⁰ that is, they are omitting the reproofs of sins; they are omitting the scoldings, exhortations, and threats of divine judgment and are saying only the things that the very wicked and those who are ignorant of repentance can approve. This Christ is here calling ‘hiding the candle under the bed’....

“We read about a lighted candle... in Mat. 5:15.... Although these people may have the candles of the Word; yet, because they cover it in the aforementioned way [they put the Word of God under a basket], they themselves see nothing solid, nor can they instruct others. Second, we must be careful not to place the candle under the bed. Those place the Word of God under the bed who either surrender themselves to the pursuit of pleasures and the

¹⁰ Ezekiel 13:18 (New King James Version): “Woe to the women who sew magic charms on their sleeves and make veils for the heads of people of every height to hunt souls!”

lusts for sinning, whence it happens that the light of the Word can benefit no one and they themselves fall into the peril of eternal burning, or elicit from the Word of God only those things which are mild and which flatter people so that they obligate to themselves those who are total strangers to a true zeal for Christianity.”¹¹

Indeed, the writings of the Old Testament prophets are filled with the Almighty’s indictments of the twelve tribes who once believed the saving gospel, but then became cold toward it. This is why God inspired them to write. See also God’s New Testament indictments in Revelation chapters 2 and 3!

Regarding the false prophets in the Missouri Synod, what activities were they engaged in around this time? Briefly it was this.

“An insight into the origins and motives of this church-political manipulation of the Synod was given by another ‘insider’, a prominent St. Louis seminary scholar (now at ‘seminex’), who stated in a graduate class in July 1968... that the ‘progressive’ movement got started in a smoke-filled pastor’s office in New York City in 1930, when three LCMS pastors... decided, after synod had turned down the Chicago Theses and had authorized the drafting of the Brief Statement, that they would start a

movement to ‘change Synod’. Their goals were to prepare the LCMS for outreach into America by use of English (vs. German), and by moving Synod toward a more open doctrinal stance. To attain these goals they urged the election of conservative leaders (e.g., Behnken) who would listen to their suggestions of names for seminary presidents, professors... and other officials.... [The professor] said he joined that growing underground movement in 1940.”¹² - Endnote 273: “Letter to author from Pastor Ray Mueller, S. T. M., of St. Louis, September 2, 1976.”¹³

Furthermore, “Already in 1934, Dr. Lawrence Meyer initiated a series of closed meetings designed to ‘formulate plans for the future of the Missouri Synod’. Dr. Ludwig Fuerbringer, who attended the first of these meetings, commented later to Dr. T. Engelder, ‘I have never sat in such an un-Lutheran meeting’. In later years it was revealed (and the evidence is now documented) that one of their goals was to elect a new synodical president at the 1935 convention of Synod. Such electioneering had never taken place before in the history of Synod! Their plan succeeded, and in 1935 Dr. John Behnken was elected president of the Missouri Synod, succeeding Dr. F. Pfothner.

¹¹ Martin Chemnitz, Polycarp Leyser, and John Gerhard, *The Harmony of the Four Evangelists*, translator Richard J. Dinda, Volume One, Book Three, Part Two (Malone, Texas: The Center for the Study of Lutheran Orthodoxy, 2014), pages 194 & 193.

¹² Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion* (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), page 80f.

¹³ Marquart, *Anatomy*, page 163.

“In the 1940’s, charges were raised against doctrinal error in the pages of **The Lutheran Witness**. Early in 1945, Dr. Louis J. Sieck, president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, boldly participated in a joint worship service with non-Lutheran clergymen.

“This was clearly an open act of rebellion against Synod’s Scriptural demand for ‘full unity of doctrine prior to fellowship’ based on Romans 16:17, 18. At a meeting of the Chicago Study Club with synodical President Behnken present, this unionistic action was discussed. Dr. Behnken said, ‘We don’t want to have a heresy trial in the Missouri Synod’. At a subsequent meeting, with the president of Synod again attending, Behnken said, ‘I do not propose to preside at the dissolution of Synod’.

“The situation was truly volcanic and the eruption came in September, 1945, when 42 pastors and two professors from our seminary in St. Louis released for dissemination throughout the synod, the infamous ‘Chicago Statement of the 44’, and its accompanying documents. For the first time in the history of the Missouri Synod, these men were demanding ‘fellowship without full unity of doctrine’ and declaring that ‘exegesis’ is the basis of all sound doctrine instead of THE SIMPLE CLEAR STATEMENTS OF THE BIBLE 1

“The schism within Synod could no longer be swept under the rug. As a child growing up in Long Island, NY, I can still remember hearing one statement over and over again; namely, ‘There is nothing wrong with the Missouri Synod that a dozen funerals won’t cure’....

“Under intense pressure to discipline the ‘44’ who were introducing doctrinal error into Synod, Dr. Behnken appointed a President’s Committee of Ten to deal with the committee of the Statementarians and uphold the Scriptural stance of the Missouri Synod. Harold Romoser was appointed chairman of the President’s Committee....

“During the course of several meetings, Dr. Behnken admitted that his committee had ‘backed the Statementarians to the wall’ and that elements of ‘THE STATEMENT OF THE 44’ were ‘potentially divisive of fellowship’. Yet, tragically, he refused to discipline the Statementarians.... At the close of Behnken’s final meeting with his committee, Harold Romoser told Dr. Behnken, ‘you have sprung the escape hatch for the Statementarians and served notice that error may be publicly advocated in Synod without correction and discipline. You have set the stage for the destruction of the Missouri Synod as an orthodox church body’.”¹⁴

What is more, after President Behnken terminated the meetings of his Committee of Ten in January of 1947,

¹⁴ William Bischoff, “Harold W. Romoser Fought the Good Fight,” *Christian News*, March 30, 1998, page 11.

this committee did not receive “the courtesy of an explanation why the Presidency of Synod [the President and the four Vice-Presidents] did not fulfill its December 17th promise to consider issuance of the committee’s report in its January 6 meeting, but found it necessary to intervene in the negotiations and to carry on independent negotiations with the Statementarians’ committee.”¹⁵

Learn also what kind of intent and motive there would be in the minds of the average false prophet! First of all, see that *Black’s Law Dictionary* makes this distinction between intent and motive: “Motive is what prompts a person to act, or fail to act. Intent refers only to the state of mind with which the act is done or omitted!”¹⁶

The following, scriptural passages will relate what the all-knowing Almighty knows is in the mind of false prophets, namely, what would be their ungodly intent and motive; their method and its result. Thus be alert! “Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they would be of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world!” (1st John 4:1.)

Indeed, “there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who secretly will bring in destructive heresies.... Many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the

way of truth will be blasphemed.... They will exploit you with deceptive words” (2nd Peter 2:1, 2, & 3).

Moreover, “they are insolent, arrogant.... When they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh.... While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption” (2nd Peter 2:10, 18, & 19).

In addition, false prophets will “come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.... You will know them by their fruits.... Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit” (Matthew 7:15, 16, & 17). Likewise, “certain men have crept in unnoticed.... These speak evil of whatever they do not know.... serving themselves.... These are murmurers, complainers... they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage” (Jude 4, 10, 12, & 16).

What is more, Scripture describes their language as having “enticing words” (Colossians 2:4); “good words and fair speeches” (Romans 16:18); and “a show of wisdom” (Colossians 2:23).

Furthermore, they are “deceivers” (2 John 7), “weeds among the wheat” (Matthew 13:25-40), and “the blind leading the blind into the ditch” (Matthew 15:14). They appear to be “clouds.” However, they do not carry

¹⁵ Harold W. Romoser, “A Footnote to History: RE The Chicago Statement,” *The Faithful Word* (Spring, 1969), Volume 6, Number 1, page 24.

¹⁶ “Intent,” *Black’s Law Dictionary* 5th edition (Saint Paul: West, 1979), page 727B.

any spiritual refreshment to us (Jude 12). They appear to be late autumn trees. Yet they do not hold any spiritual fruit to benefit us (Jude 12).

Look below at a fuller definition of the words, intents, and motives which Holy Writ has given above! Likewise, use the following terms in your condemnations of false prophets in your writings!

For example, deceit is “a fraudulent and deceptive misrepresentation... to deceive and trick another, who is ignorant of the true facts, to the prejudice and damage of the party imposed upon. To constitute ‘deceit’, the statement must be untrue, made with knowledge of its falsity or with reckless and conscious ignorance thereof.”¹⁷

Duplicity - “Deliberate deception.”¹⁸

Fiduciary – “A person holding the character of a trustee, or a character analogous to that of a trustee, in respect to the trust and confidence involved in it and the scrupulous good faith and candor which it requires. A person having duty, created by his undertaking, to act primarily for another’s benefit in matters connected with such undertaking.”¹⁹

Breach of duty – “Any violation or omission of a legal or a moral duty. More particularly, the neglect or failure to fulfill in a just and proper manner the duties of an office.... Every violation by a trustee of a duty... whether willful and fraudulent... is a breach of duty.”²⁰

Malfeasance – “The doing of an act which a person ought not to do at all.”²¹

Malice aforethought – “The intentional doing of an unlawful act which was determined upon before it was executed.”²²

Contempt – “A willful disregard or disobedience of a public authority” [of a creed, for example]²³.

Fraud – “‘Bad faith’ and ‘fraud’ are synonymous, and also synonyms of dishonesty, infidelity, faithlessness.... As distinguished from negligence, it is always... intentional.... Includes anything calculated to deceive... concealments... suppression of the truth....”²⁴

Contract – “An agreement between two or more persons which creates an obligation to do or not to do a particular thing.”²⁵ This agreement would be in regard to the vow which a pastor would take at his ordination and also at his installation as a pastor of a congregation to

¹⁷ “Deceit,” *Black’s Law Dictionary*, 5th edition (Saint Paul: West, 1979), page 365B.

¹⁸ “Duplicity,” *Black’s*, page 452A.

¹⁹ “Fiduciary,” *Black’s*, page 563B.

²⁰ “Breach of duty,” *Black’s*, page 171A.

²¹ “Malfeasance,” *Black’s*, page 862A.

²² “Malice aforethought,” *Black’s*, page 863A.

²³ “Contempt,” *Black’s*, page 288B.

²⁴ “Fraud,” *Black’s*, page 594B.

²⁵ “Contract,” *Black’s*, page 291B.

preach faithfully and only what the Bible teaches, and what the Lutheran *Book of Concord* confesses.

Duty – “That which is due from a person; that which a person owes to another. An obligation to do a thing.”²⁶

Bad faith – “The opposite of good faith.... Refusal to fulfill some duty or some contractual obligation, not prompted by an honest mistake as to one’s... duties, but by some interested or sinister motive.... Is not simply bad judgment or negligence, but rather it implies the conscious doing of a wrong because of dishonest purpose or moral obliquity.... A state of mind affirmatively operating with... ill will.”²⁷

Now keep these definitions in mind as you look at a few of the statements made by men who proved to be false prophets in the Missouri Synod!

First of all, hear what the existing creed of the Missouri Synod was in regard to prayer fellowship! The following was read before the 23rd Convention of the Texas District of the Missouri Synod by Professor Fritz of the Saint Louis seminary.

“May we unite in common prayer with such Lutherans as are not in doctrinal agreement with us at joint meetings held for the purpose of discussing our doctrinal differences?... I fear that those who criticize us

do this merely on the supposition that for common worship all that is required is that those who worship together be Christians. With such wrong premises, of course, wrong conclusions will follow.... Some of these people are doctrinally very indifferent, even have modernistic tendencies; they do not at all desire to stand out for doctrinal purity and are not interested in arriving at a strict doctrinal agreement on the basis of the Scripture. What we consider real doctrinal differences, they ridicule as hair-splitting differences. Their desire is for a union at any price, not for real unity of faith. In what common prayer could we unite with such people? We would pray for unity of faith on the basis of the verbally inspired Word of God. They would pray for a mere getting together irrespective of any real doctrinal agreement. How could we from the outset unite with such uncommon prayer?”²⁸

For example, Theodore Graebner, another professor at the Saint Louis seminary, agreed with this creed, for he wrote in his book in 1932: “It should be clear that wherever an act of worship is involved, Christians must apply those principles which govern all worship. Whether that worship is the spoken word or any form of outward participation is immaterial....

²⁶ “Duty,” *Black’s*, page 453B.

²⁷ “Bad faith,” *Black’s*, page 127A.

²⁸ William H. Bischoff, “Article VII of the Augsburg Confession,” *The Faithful Word* (February, 1970), Volume 7, Number 1, page 13.

“This text [Ephesians 5:18-20] plainly says that worship is acceptable when performed through the power of the Spirit to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. It is to be ‘in spirit and in truth’, John 4,24. To be ‘filled with the Spirit’ means to possess the knowledge of salvation and to accept all that God has taught us regarding His holy and gracious will.... From such and similar texts we are permitted to conclude that participation through song or any form of musical accompaniment in the worship of those who in any point antagonize God’s truth is as great a wrong as mixed worship and prayer.”²⁹

Nevertheless, after the dissenting movement got underway to “change synod” by moving it toward a more open doctrinal stance, and had gained more followers, forty-four pastors and professors of this movement signed the *Chicago Statement* of 6-7 September, 1945, and sent it to the rest of the clergy of the Missouri Synod. This *Statement* rejected, among many other things, the creed about prayer fellowship, which the Missouri Synod had held all along, and declared instead: “We affirm our conviction that any two or more Christians may pray together to the Triune God in the Name of Jesus Christ if the purpose for which they meet and pray is right

according to the Word of God. This obviously includes meetings of groups called for the purpose of discussing doctrinal differences.”³⁰ Graebner was one of these forty-four signers.

Of course, this change by Graebner naturally should raise some questions. For instance, if after he once promised to teach one way at the seminary, but later taught another way, why did he not resign? Why did he not leave for conscience’ sake and go to a synod that would confess his later stand on prayer fellowship?

A newspaper once addressed this matter. “The *New York Mail and Express* in very plain and earnest language calls upon Dr. C. A. Briggs, professor in the Union Theological Seminary, to resign his chair in that institution. It declares that he does not now teach as he promised when he entered upon his professorship, and has neither moral nor legal right to promulgate his new doctrines in the Seminary. It says... It is high time that he resigned and left the seminary; and in default thereof, that the trustees turned him out; and, in default thereof, that students should cease to go to that seminary.”³¹

This was, by no means, an isolated incident. This perfidy has continued on through the decades that followed, and the centuries that preceded, since

²⁹ Theodore Graebner, *Pastor and People – Letters to a Young Preacher* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1932), pages 158-160.

³⁰ William H. Bischoff, “Article VII of the Augsburg Confession,” *The Faithful Word* (February, 1970), Volume 7, Number 1, page 14.

³¹ *The Lutheran Witness* (November 21, 1890), Volume 9, Number 12, page 96.

dishonesty in creed has been, and always will be, a prominent, willful sin of false prophets.

Likewise, “*The National Republican, Washington, D. C.*, has this to say: ‘The duty of the clergymen who do not believe in the fundamental doctrines of the churches from whose pulpits they preach is plain enough. There is plenty of room on the outside of any institution, religious or secular, for those whose consciences rebel against accepting its articles of faith. There is no particular courage involved in self-righteously airing one’s inability to believe in the doctrines of an institution to which one has voluntarily yielded his alleged allegiance. The courage comes in when the dissenter abandons the advantages which come to him through his professed affiliation and takes his chance in the wide field, where one can believe and teach what he pleases without being guilty of disloyalty to the cause he is supposed to represent’.”³²

Indeed, no less than Graebner himself earlier condemned this matter of insincerity and dishonesty in clergymen, thus incriminating his own later actions. “Three Union Seminary graduates... in the course of their examination for the Presbyterian ministry, were asked whether they recognized the fact that in Matthew and Luke Jesus was distinctly spoken of as ‘born of a Virgin by the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon her’. They

answered, ‘Yes’. But when they were asked, ‘*Do you believe it?*’ one of them answered, ‘No,’ – the others, ‘I cannot’, or, ‘I don’t know’. A member of the examining board has since testified that none of these candidates could sincerely preach that Jesus was ‘conceived by the Holy Ghost’. Yet they were licensed for the Presbyterian ministry, and are preaching in Presbyterian pulpits today....

“Would you entrust your spiritual welfare to a man who begins his game of hoodwink in the first sentence of his sermon?...

“There is to our mind, a cowardly intellectual dishonesty involved by saying ‘the divine Christ’, when all the infidel preacher means is ‘the divinely endowed’....

“Beware of false prophets, *which come to you in sheep’s clothing*, but inwardly they are ravening wolves’.”³³

What would be the significance of comparing this former creed of Graebner with his latter? In the Old Testament the Lord required the Israelites in their new promised land to memorize a song of divine deliverance. Why? He explains. His purpose for this was to self-incriminate them when in the future they would fall away from their saving gospel faith. The all-wise Almighty declares: “It will be, after many evils come upon them that this song will testify against them as a witness; for it

³² John T. Mueller, “The Theological Observer,” *Theological Monthly* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1924), Volume IV, Number 4, page 114.

³³ Theodore Graebner, “Saying One Thing and Meaning Another,” *The Lutheran Witness* (Saint Louis: Concordia, January 23, 1917), Volume XXXVI, Number 2, page 16.

will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants” (Deuteronomy 31:21). Thus the Lord saw to it that in the years before (1920’s) and during its infant stage (1930’s), so to speak, of its own falling away from its gospel golden age, the Missouri Synod’s own men would make similar self-indictments.

Now read of additional accounts of insincerity and dishonesty among seminary professors and clergy occurring decades later in the same synod! Moreover, realize that insincerity and dishonesty are not fruits of the Holy Spirit! They are evil fruits of the sinful nature. They are the results of unregenerate thinking.

“Concerned inquirers were assured by Harms [the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod’s president at that time] ‘that in my frequent conversations with professors who are in question in the areas you mentioned, I have the insistent statements and confession that they promote completely, and wholeheartedly our traditional position on inspiration, inerrancy, and revelation’.

“Two ‘bomb-shell’ pronouncements date back to those early Harms years. The first was a decision of the Texas District Board of Appeals [of the LCMS], handed down on July 3, 1963:

We believe the defendant supplied and has presented a preponderance of evidence to accentuate a situation in Synod that amounts to liberality [sic] and treason.... We believe there is a situation in Synod similar to that which

prevailed to and even during the Reformation period, when the Roman Catholic church excommunicated men such as Luther for being too catholic, while it retained in its fellowship the skeptics and scoffers, since they did not attack nor defy authority.... The defendant presented sufficient evidence to sustain the charges of liberality [sic] and treason in some quarters of Synod....

“Even more pointed was Synodical Vice-President Dr. R. Wiederaenders’ statement to the District presidents and the seminary faculties on December 2, 1963:

Despite repeated efforts we have not dealt honestly with our pastors and people. We have refused to state our changing theological position in open, honest, forth-right, simple and clear words. Over and over again we said that nothing was changing when all the while we were aware of changes taking place. Either we should have informed our pastors and people that changes were taking place and, if possible, convinced them from Scripture that these changes were in full harmony with ‘Thus saith the Lord!’ or we should have stopped playing games as we gave assurance that no changes were taking place.

With increasing measure the synodical trumpet has been giving an uncertain sound.”³⁴

Hence beware of false prophets in whatever time period you may live! Their false teachings will drain saving faith from your mind until it would be gone. Listen to Scripture’s description of their selfish will by which your vital saving faith ever would be torn down! Do not let this happen! Fight to keep your saving faith alive!

³⁴ Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion* (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), page 91.