St. Polycarp, Martyr: Icon of the *Unio Mystica*

Although the doctrine of the *unio mystica*, or "mystical union", is by no means the central article of the Christian faith, nor a prominently controverted one at the time of the conservative Reformation, its importance should not for that reason be overlooked. Truly, in a day and age in which the entire notion of the miraculous is mocked and disbelieved not only by those outside the Church, but by those ostensibly inside it, as well, this Biblical teaching cries out for a sturdy defense. Perhaps more poignantly, the *unio mystica* commends itself as a key for pondering aright the brutal persecution of Christians the world over, now and in every era. With respect to this second consideration, one is challenged to find a worthier and more fitting teacher than the second-century Christian martyr, St. Polycarp of Smyrna, who, especially in his death, testified to the reality of the mystical union of Christ and the Christian.

In the treatment of St. Polycarp which follows, we will bear in mind not only the definition of the *unio mystica* given by Johannes Quenstedt below, but also the idea of the *imitatio Christi*, or “imitation of Christ”, as a dynamic reality which flows from the mystical union. For purposes of this paper, “mystical union” will be taken in the broadest possible sense so as to refer back to and include the qualities of the *unio fidei formalis* and its benefits, as well, even though the latter can and should be dogmatically distinguished from the former.\(^1\) It should also be noted that critical analysis of the received text of *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* is not the purpose of this essay. Rather, it is the goal of this author to engage the text from as naïf and credulous a standpoint as possible, and thus to show both the moral and theological significance of the martyrdom of St. Polycarp of Smyrna, hopefully in a manner which has enduring usefulness.

Considered dogmatically from a Lutheran perspective, the modus loquendi *unio mystica* is first to be found among the Lutheran scholastic theologians of the seventeenth century. David Hollatz, Johannes Quenstedt, and Abraham Calov all make explicit mention of the mystical union in their writings as one of the benefits flowing from justification.\(^2\) Quenstedt's gloss of the term serves as a fitting summary:

---

1. cf. David Hollatz, quoted in H. Schmid. *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2014, p. 482: “Although the mystical union, by which God dwells in the soul as in a temple, may, according to our mode of conception, follow justification in the order of nature, it is however to be acknowledged that the formal union of faith, by which Christ is apprehended, put on, and united with us, as the mediator and the author of grace and pardon, logically precedes justification. For faith is imputed for righteousness, so far as this receives the merit of Christ, and so unites it with ourselves as to make it ours.”
2. Johannes Quenstedt, quoted in Schmid, 481ff.
The mystical union is the real and most intimate conjunction of the substance of the Holy Trinity and the God-man Christ with the substance of believers, effected by God Himself through the Gospel, the Sacraments, and faith, by which, through a special approximation of His essence, and by a gracious operation, He is in them, just as also believers are in Him; that, by a mutual and reciprocal immanence they may partake of His vivifying power and all His mercies, become assured of the grace of God and eternal salvation, and preserve unity in the faith and love with the other members of His mystical body.\(^3\)

Confessional sedes for the doctrine can be variously adduced. Beginning with the second generation of confessional writings and working our way back, we read among the rejected teachings enumerated by the Formula of Concord the teaching “[t]hat not God Himself, but only the gifts of God, dwell in believers.”\(^4\) And affirmatively, we read that “in the elect, who are justified by Christ and reconciled with God, God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who is the eternal and essential righteousness, dwells by faith.”\(^5\) Martin Luther, in his magisterial 1535 commentary on Galatians, develops the “Great Exchange” motif of imputation, so central to Evangelical theology, in which all that is Christ’s is reckoned to the believer, and all that is the believer’s, to Christ. “As concerning justification,” Luther writes, “Christ and I must be entirely conjoined and united together, so that He may live in me and I in Him.”\(^6\) The Apology of the Augsburg Confession affirmatively quotes a lengthy portion of St. Cyril of Alexandria’s commentary on St. John’s Gospel: “that we have no mode of connection with Him, according to the flesh, this indeed we entirely deny…. [W]e must consider that Christ is in us not only according to the habit, which we call love, but also by natural participation, etc.”\(^7\)

The Lutheran orthodox dogmaticians and confessors, then, strenuously maintained that the Christian, being justified through faith in Christ, is not some mere recipient of abstract pardon from a distant God. Rather, having been united with Christ in Baptism and being continuously fortified in such union with Him through the Lord’s Supper, the Christian is indwelt by the Triune God Himself. To be in such a union while in our mortal state, however, is not a thing of unmitigated bliss, for it entails conformity to the pattern of Christ’s humiliation, to all which He underwent “for us men and for our salvation,” in order that we might follow in the train of His exaltation, as St. Paul writes: “For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His” (Romans 6.5).\(^8\) Thus a fine point of dogma moves us inexorably to a consideration of Christian death, a consideration which is both

---

3. Ibid, 482.
4. Epitome of the Formula of Concord, Article III, sec. 18; all citations of the Lutheran Confessions are from Concordia: The Symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, ed. F. Bente, trans. W. H. T. Dau, St. Louis, 1922.
5. Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, Article III, sec. 54.
7. Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article X, sec. 56.
historical and existential.

It is historical, because Scripture and early martyrrology give us examples of Christian death which approximate the pattern of Our Lord’s death to various degrees: like Christ, St. Stephen prayed for his executioners; like Christ, SS. Peter and Andrew were both crucified, etc. To some extent every martyr, ancient and modern, follows the example of Christ’s death by execution somewhat more nearly than those Christians on whom a martyr’s death is not bestowed. Such a consideration is also personal and existential, for every Christian death is a consummation of baptism, of the death we die to sin that we might live to God. Moreover, no man knows the day or the hour when his own life may be demanded from him, nor whether he will be martyred for the faith. In this historical and existential consideration of Christlike death, we turn to St. Polycarp of Smyrna.

The student of patristic martyrrology, even if he be the most hardboiled rationalist, is hard-pressed to read the second chapter of the Revelation to St. John without thinking of the Beloved Disciple’s own student, Polycarp:

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. ‘I know your tribulation and your poverty…. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death.’”
(Revelation 2.8-11)

Bishop of the church in Smyrna from the early to mid-second century, Polycarp was executed in 156 AD in a local outbreak of persecution orchestrated by the Roman proconsul Statius Quadratus. An inaugural figure in the life of the post-apostolic Church, he was one of the first (and most irenic) episcopal envoys to the bishop of Rome. His epistle to the Philippians is among the earliest of the patristic florilegia. He is the first martyr (after the Biblical martyrs SS. Stephen and James, the brother of St. John) the extant details of whose death are both well-known and reliable. The church custom of venerating the relics of saints also traces its origin to the reverential treatment of the bones of Polycarp following his death. These various “firsts” do much to commend Polycarp to the special remembrance of the Church, yet it is the contention of this writer that the Christian teaching regarding mystical union ought to be at least as closely associated with St. Polycarp as the aforementioned hallmarks. Both in structure and content, the Martyrdom of Polycarp provides a sort of literary iconography of the unio mystica that is beyond the reach of even the best, most careful
dogmatic formulation.

“It was almost as though all the preceding events had been leading up to another Divine manifestation of the Martyrdom which we read of in the Gospel,” writes the author of the Martyrdom, one Marcion; “for Polycarp, just like the Lord, had patiently awaited the hour of his betrayal – in token that we too, taking our pattern from him, might think of others before ourselves.”9 The writer here alludes to instances of Christians actively seeking opportunities for martyrdom. Henry Chadwick notes “a tendency towards acts of provocation on the part of the over-enthusiastic believers, especially among the Montanists who were especially prone to identify reticence with cowardice and moral compromise.”10 In contrast to the grasping pride of the zealots and sectarians, Polycarp’s self-controlled submission to arrest and execution bore no trace of vanity or supererogation, conforming instead to the pattern of Christ described by the Apostle Paul in the latter’s Epistle to the Philippians:

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2.4-8)

Notably, the “kenotic hymn” of the Apostle is a description not of some Stoic self-forgetfulness on the part of Christ, but of His self-giving love on behalf of the Church. One hears echoes of this in the above-cited portion of the Martyrdom. Christ as the New Adam reverses the incurvatus in se of the Old Adam through baptismal regeneration, which is consummated in death, calling and moving the New Man not only to selflessness, but to acts of love. This He does incarnately, in each child of Adam, through faith. Polycarp’s tranquil acceptance of martyrdom, then, is archetypal after the pattern of Christ: from the outset, it is not simply acclaimed in the Martyrdom merely as a meritorious virtue or quality in se, but an act of love which serves the brethren.

The straight parallels between the events of Holy Week and those of Polycarp’s arrest and trial form the bold outlining for our developing iconograph. The Martyrdom describes how the servants (of the household where Polycarp had at first been hidden) betrayed his whereabouts under torture:

The circumstance that the traitors were men of his own household, and that the Police Commissioner – to whom chance had even given the actual name of Herod – was resolved on bringing him into the arena, manifestly meant that he was to fulfill his destiny by sharing the experiences of Christ, and that his betrayers should likewise be doomed to the punishment of Judas.

Although J. B. Lightfoot sees something overwrought in the consignment of the pitiable servants to the status of “betrayers”, one can also see a parallel between the torture which broke them and the demonic temptation to which Judas succumbed.

The structural similarities continue: Polycarp’s betrayer accompanies the armed band of policemen to where he is; they arrest him at night without struggle; he cares for the physical needs of his captors by preparing food for them (cf. Christ’s healing of Malchus’s ear); he is seated on an ass and taken to the place where ultimately he is to die; he has two audiences with the authorities: one with the Police Commissioner (the aforementioned Herod), and another with the proconsul himself. “[T]he idea of literal conformity to the sufferings and death of Christ runs like a thread through the whole document,” Lightfoot notes, manifest in the obvious structural similarities to Christ’s Passion, as well as in the evidently conscious priority on the part of the author to highlight subtle similarities. “This triple parallelism—Herod, the traitor, the martyr—is brought into juxtaposition, so as to enforce the idea that he became Χριστοῦ κοινωνός.”

Several lines later in the Martyrdom, the author makes much of Polycarp’s expulsion from the carriage of Herod and Nicetas (the location of his first audience) after his refusal to heed their advice: “They turned him out of the carriage so impatiently that he barked his shins as he was getting down. Without even turning his head, however, and as if nothing had happened, he stepped nimbly away at a brisk pace, as they led him towards the circus.” A cynical reading would see this as a quaint attempt to draw a parallel from Polycarp’s slight injury here to the flogging of Jesus after His audience with Caiaphas. However, it is the conscious connecting of Polycarp’s suffering to that of Christ’s that is significant here, not the putative strength of the parallel. The motif here is that of Isaiah 53: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth” (v. 7). There is a communion, then, in the suffering of Polycarp the member, however slight, with the suffering of Christ the head. Each liberated captive in the train of the ascendant Lord imitates Him, and in this μίμησις, proclaims and manifests Christ to the brethren and to the

unbelieving world. “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ,” St. Paul writes in his First Epistle to the Corinthians (11.1).

The tradition of *imitatio Christi* given by Christ to the apostles, then, is given by them to the confessors and martyrs, all the way up to the present day. Such “imitation of the imitators of Christ”, as it were, the Apology calls the “third honor” which is to be rendered to the saints: “The third honor is the imitation, first, of faith, then of the other virtues, which every one should imitate according to his calling.”

This is closely related to what Hermann Sasse describes as the “succession of doctrine” which is essential to the Church (if not exhaustive of its essence *per se*). The *imitatio Christi*, however, is a doctrine which must be embodied, i.e., attested in deeds born of faith, just as much as it is orally proclaimed. It is the essence of what it means to “speak the truth in love,” as Paul writes in his exhortation to the Church at Ephesus:

> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love. (Ephesians 4.15-16)

Without love, faith is false, and doctrine, however factual, is a dead letter. In so many words, “imitate Christ” is the sum of all apostolic moral exhortation to the Church of all ages. Each subsequent generation of saints, then, turns and repeats the same message to those coming after them: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13.7). In word and deed, life and death, Polycarp in a real sense says both, “imitate me, as I imitate Christ,” and “imitate me, as I imitate Stephen, James, Peter, Paul, et al.” *Martyria* is a gracious strengthening of the Body of Christ even before it is a witness to the world, the latter flowing from the former.

Turning again to the narrative of events in the *Martyrdom*, we see a shift from uncanny typology to signs, wonders, and testimony before kings. “As Polycarp stepped into the arena there came a voice from heaven, ‘Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man’.” Here the veil begins to lift, and the hidden reality of the mystical union is attested. Polycarp walks more closely in the footsteps of his Lord as the *denouement* of his own passion builds. “The man” whom he is exhorted to “play” is Christ (“*ecce homo*”), the New Adam, whose Spirit is poured out ever more lavishly, strengthening Polycarp and giving him words to speak. Here we see the Trinitarian nature of the mystical union in accordance with Christ’s prophecy in St. Matthew’s

---

gospel:

[Y]ou will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matthew 10.18-20)

A cajoling like unto that of Christ by Pilate ensues: “‘Take the oath, and I will let you go’, [the governor] told him. ‘Revile your Christ.’ Polycarp’s reply was, ‘Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?’”15 Such words at such a juncture, we are told by Christ, come from the Spirit of the Father. This is a confession which is beyond the reach of a mere man; it is spoken by a man in whom God dwells. “And all the time he was saying this and much else besides, he was overflowing with courage and joy, and his whole countenance was beaming with grace.”16

As the martyred saints before him had done, Polycarp is set to fill up in his body “what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the Church” (Colossians 1.24). Much suffering remains for the Church as Christ’s militant, mystical body, but Her suffering is qualitatively different from the once-for-all suffering and death accomplished by Her Lord on Calvary. Christ in His person “suffered for sins once for all,” on Good Friday in 33 AD, “the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God” (I Peter 3.18). The suffering of Christ, the Head of the Body, is propitiatory, and “it is finished.” The suffering of the members, however, is not propitiatory, but eucharistic and ongoing, until history is rolled up like a scroll. It is this eucharistic character of Christian suffering which is made stunningly manifest in the final events of Polycarp’s martyrdom.

After the governor gives up on his attempts to secure Polycarp’s recantation, the bishop is evidently given to the mob, who are allowed to handle his execution themselves. Once again, Polycarp shows himself a meek and docile victim after the manner of His Lord. Yet as with St. Peter, there is a one-off semblance to certain small details: Peter was famously crucified upside-down, not counting himself worthy to die in the exact same fashion as his Lord; similarly, Polycarp will not allow himself to be nailed to the stake at which he is to die.17 The author makes the connection from Polycarp, thus tied, to “a noble ram taken out of some

---

15. Ibid.
17. Admittedly, that Polycarp was loth to allow too much resemblance to the details of Christ’s execution, as was Peter, is something of an inference. The author of the Martyrdom attributes his refusal to be nailed to the stake to fearless confidence that “He who gives me strength to endure the flames will give me strength not to flinch at the stake, without your making sure” (Ibid).
great flock for sacrifice: a goodly burnt offering all ready for God.” It is quite credible that this is an allusion to the ram which God provides for Abraham to sacrifice instead of his son, Isaac.\textsuperscript{18} In any case, the prayer which Polycarp then offers, right before flame is set to the pyre, is unarguably a eucharistic prayer, mirroring in content and structure the eucharistic canon which he as bishop intoned before the altar every Lord’s Day. Andrew Louth opines that Polycarp’s prayer is “perhaps the most impressive act of identification with Christ, in a way that reaches beyond imitation”; the prayer “[suggests] that Polycarp is the offering, incorporated into Christ, whose offering is represented in the bread and wine offered and consecrated at the Eucharist.”\textsuperscript{19} Polycarp’s own words attest this: “May I be received...this day in thy presence, a sacrifice rich and acceptable, even as thou didst appoint and foreshadow, and dost now bring it to pass.”\textsuperscript{20}

The modern reader (and we are all such) is tempted to be incredulous at the details which are recounted after Polycarp’s prayer ends: the fire forms “the shape of a hollow chamber”, creating “a wall round about the martyr’s figure;

…and there was he in the centre of it, not like a human being in flames but like a loaf baking in the oven, or like a gold or silver ingot being refined in the furnace. And we became aware of a delicious fragrance, like the odour of incense or other precious gums.

Finally, when they realized that his body could not be destroyed by fire, the ruffians ordered one of the dagger-men to go up and stab him with his weapon. As he did so, there flew out a dove, together with such a flow of blood that the flames were extinguished; and this filled all the spectators with awe, to see the greatness of the difference that separates unbelievers from the elect of God.\textsuperscript{21}

That the truth of the Gospel may be confirmed by signs and wonders in any age is something no orthodox Christian should deny; that it is thus confirmed in Holy Scripture, none can deny. That it is in keeping with the character of Our Father in heaven to provide such miracles as would strengthen the faithful in their direst hours of need, we modern believers would do well to ponder and consider. In this respect, all martyrdom is a miraculous event. “The oftener we are mown down,” Tertullian writes in his \textit{Apologeticus}, “the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”\textsuperscript{22}

The seed-like quality of the blood of martyred Christians comes, of course, from Him who shed His

\textsuperscript{18} This sacrifice, made after Abraham’s demonstration of his justifying faith (cf. James 2:21ff) is arguably eucharistic, as well.
\textsuperscript{19} A. Louth, introduction to \textit{The Martyrdom of Polycarp}, in Radice, 117.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Martyrdom}, 130.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
divine blood for them and for the life of the world, whose blood is their true drink. That anyone would willingly face death rather than disavow what is to all rational appearances a mere idea flies in the face of rationalistic presumptions; unbelievers conclude that the delusions of mental illness are to blame. In one way, they are not wrong, as a mind changed by extraordinary, non-natural means is indeed the proximate cause of the martyr's refusal to recant. “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship,” writes St. Paul to the Church at Rome. “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12.1-2). To some nonconformists it is given to test, prove, and demonstrate the will of God not only by living sacrificially and eucharistically, but by dying sacrificially and eucharistically. The ability to face such death with joy is not not human, but beyond that which is human (non humanum, sed superhumanum). Like all icons, the glowing bishop upon the pyre gives a glimpse of reality beyond himself, yet it is a reality in which he himself participates more fully than we who look; thus to look at him is to look through him, and vice-versa. To focus on the details, down to the most gritty, fleshy particularities, enhances our view of that which we seek to see through Polycarp: Christ the Victor over sin, death, grave, and all principalities and powers; Christ, who is at the same time hidden and manifest in the suffering saint. Christ is conquering through Polycarp, nearer to him than he is to himself.

Thus we are led back to a consideration of the fine dogmatic point which led into the foregoing iconograph, and beyond it, to a consideration of devotional and pastoral usefulness. When we reflect on the truth that the cure of souls is the ultimate goal of all theology, and bear in mind the needs of consciences beset by fear, temptation, and doubt—needs with which we Lutherans are especially and rightly concerned—the courage of St. Polycarp at the last does indeed have something to say to us regarding the chief article: justification by grace through faith on account of Christ. Polycarp does not go to his death hoping to be justified; he knows that he is justified, i.e., that he has a gracious God. If he were not justified, Christ would be absent from him, and he would be powerless to “play the man.” As he stands bravely on the pyre, he does not hope to gain Christ so much as to lose Adam, finally and fully, through the flames which promise the consummation of his baptism in the final conflagration, thereby gaining Christ all the more. His hope is the certain hope of Christians—hope for that which is already, but not yet. Bodily death is transfigured into
the door to eternal life, for the death that Polycarp is dying, Christ has already died.

It is precisely its relevance to death and dying which makes the teaching of the *unio mystica* so vital to Christianity, and which in turn commends St. Polycarp to us as a teacher and icon of the doctrine. That God tabernacles in the heart of every Christian, sanctifying and preserving them through His mysterious indwelling, is not some vain idea dreamt up by men wishing to be more godlike than they ought, thereby retracing the contours of Adam’s and Lucifer’s sin. The teaching is not one of unmitigated comfort, nor is it a preaching of the “victorious Christian life” as this phrase is often construed by modern sectarians. To confess the mystical union is to recognize that in His drawing all men to Himself, Christ draws the Church and each individual member thereof into His *suffering* body. To be united to Christ is to be united to the Suffering Servant and the Man of Sorrows; thus, it is to be acquainted with grief, and, through such acquaintance and participation, to bear witness to His glory before the world. We live in a day and age in which Christ is reviled more and more openly and Christians are led to the slaughter through terrorism and state-violence. Even in the poshness of Western society, the Church is under threat from a pincer movement of Anti-Christ forces: false belief within, and open hatred of God without. Yet we have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood, and one wonders what we could withstand if we were to encounter persecution as demonic as that faced by the brethren in the Middle East at the hands of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

Whither and howsoever we Lutheran Christians go in this darkening age, nothing and no one can or will sustain us but Christ in Word and Sacrament. And as far as the former is concerned, a truncated redaction of the full counsel of God will not do. We must not seek to norm truth with comfort, but realize that the reverse is true: that comfort is normed by truth. At the same time, we must not rob ourselves and our posterity of the comforting truths of doctrines which are politically unpopular in the current Lutheran ecclesiastical situation. The mystical union is one such doctrine. It may not be the doctrine on which the Church stands or falls, perhaps not in the way we are wont to regard this category, but it is a doctrine which we cannot cease assiduously to defend and proclaim. The Church will never perish, but individual Christians indeed be cast “into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice.” Doctrinal reductionism can indeed be the cause of such a fall. Anxious consciences and imprisoned bodies need to know without a doubt not only that their sins are forgiven, but that they, like St. Polycarp, take passage through all tribulation in the very wounds of Christ, that their sufferings are those of the members of the Body to those
of the Head, and that the end is certain. To claim this is not merely to impute meaning to seemingly meaningless suffering for the sake of comfort, but to avail ourselves of the comforting truth which God has revealed in Christ and in His Word written. A firm and unwavering knowledge of this truth, etched in the minds of the faithful through catechesis and proclamation, will not be a mere luxury in the dark days which are to come. Thus we end with the words of the great nineteenth-century Anglican divine, the Rt. Rev. Charles C. Grafton, which he preached at the dawn of the twentieth century, words which are as perennial and timely as they were once prophetic:

Oh, the coming terror and the woe! Oh, the trials of that coming century of blood! Already the second beast ariseth out of the earth. A worldwide modern civilization takes the place of the Roman. It hath all the power of the first beast. It doeth great wonders. It brings down fire from heaven and works mighty miracles of power. None can advance to profit or honor but they must first receive its sign in the hand or forehead, and be branded as its slave, to think as it thinks and work as it bids.

The world and the apostate Christianity, rejecting the Trinity, the Incarnation, the deity of Christ, His vicarious atonement, His resurrection in the flesh, His Church and altar, and priesthood, and Sacraments, and inspired Word, grows more boastful and triumphant.

Do the powers of heaven seem to be shaken? Do the stars fall? Does the sign of the cross of persecution begin to appear? Then lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh. As the world waxes evil the Church becomes purified. She feels the nearer presence of her Lord's approach. She has all along known He would be true to His word. She discerns His footsteps. She feels a glow as the cloud which hides Him begins to fade. Her heart quickens and her pulses beat. The witnesses are seen, full of the resurrection and ascended life, upon their feet. Ere the great final world's earthquake, as many behold they will repent and give glory to God. The Church already kindles with the missionary zeal as of another Pentecost. She waits but to break forth in the fulness of the revealed glory of the new creation into the song of Moses and the Lamb.

Blessed is it, dear and Right Reverend Fathers, and you, priests of the altar, and all ye members of Christ by baptism, anointed as kings and priests unto God, to live in such times as these—times when you can bear witness by your lives to the Catholic faith, when you can do great things for Christ and His Church. —Naught else, ye know, is so entirely worth the doing. Naught else will stand when He appeareth.—

T. David Demarest

Epiphanytide 2015

Reference List:


Luther, M. *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, Schmucker, S. ed. (Philadelphia; Smith, English, & Co., 1890)


Schmid, H. *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2014)