

Letter Exchange
between Dr. C. E. Haupt (January 19, 1920)
with reply by E. C. Davis (January 21, 1920)

Lancaster, PA

From C. E. Haupt to E. C. Davis:

Grace Place
City of Lancaster, PA

Rev. Earl C. Davis.

My Dear Sir: Greetings! Grace and Peace!

I'm sure that you'll condone my seeming impertinence in thus writing—perfect stranger as I am—and I beg, therefore, to apologize and at once explain that no unkind thought is concealed in what is here inscribed. The impulse is merely the love of truth for the truth's sake.

My pretext in writing is having noted, in Lancaster papers of late, large advertisements of "Religion for 1920," among the religious announcements; giving statements, over your name as to "new" conceptions of God, man, Jesus, Salvation, Immortality, etc. etc.

It is declared that, under the Fatherhood of God, man is no "fallen" sinner, but just an "incomplete creature;" evolving his own salvation by degrees. The death of Jesus is not a vicarious atonement. He is simply a real leader of others into the ideal life; and his teaching as the standard of our conduct is the universal path for all God's children to follow of themselves. This new plausible concept appeals to such unaided reason as we have in this world; but alas! it is too low and too narrow.

There are thousands of statements in the word of God giving higher visions than the theory that Jesus is only a leader in life and teacher of the correct morals.

You are right as far as you go, but your view of Jesus the Christ of the God-head is too low, too earthly, too human. Evidently you do not fully appreciate Christ. He is

Himself the Great Miracle. Two natures, the Divine and the human blend into His one personality. "In Him dwell all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians II:9).

The Word of God does not in a single passage, declare that we are saved from our "imperfect" condition and environment by the evolution of our own will or character; but by the acceptance into our being, by the power we have to receive truth, of the perfect truth and life of Christ Jesus. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I John V:12). The satisfaction of perfect justice toward each of us is made by the perfect mercy of God. Each is an attribute of the same God. In His infinite mercy, our Creator becomes a Man, so that He might descend into a state of punishment for each of the souls He forms. He makes Himself the substitute for His creatures' punishment as far as punishment extends.

In Luther's statements of salvation, God is not wrath. There is no "vengeance," no "terror;" nothing but Divine Peace on earth and Good Will toward men. This is revealed both as to His life and His punishment for sin by death, and as well His life-giving property. We Lutherans declare that the Word of God has taught, for nineteen centuries, that Christ came, as God out of the Godhead, both to be the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world, and also to be given away, personally, to each and all as they accept Him. Believing is receiving Christ. This makes every one, as he learns who Jesus really is and what the Word of God declares He has really done (i.e. tasted death for every man) full of appreciation, joy, thanksgiving praise; not fear, terror, nor gloom. "By Him we are redeemed and set at liberty."

True safety is not in humanity but in Christ's life-giving Divinity brought by the Holy Spirit and imparted to humanity. Religion consists of two elements, what we give to God and what He gives us. The first is sacrificial, the second sacramental. The gift of eternal life in Christ makes us so grateful and loving that we will do anything we can for Him and His causes. Hence we care for all mankind for His dear sake. This is why we carry out the "Golden Rule" in all the relations and stations in the whole world of mankind.

This conception of the Word and of Luther, is the only one that will satisfy the statements of God's most Holy Word.

It is not force, nor perfunctory forms, that make religion true, but active gratitude shown in worship and service.

It is not the self-evolution, of an imperfect being, into modes yet to be attained; but the devolution of the perfect Christ into man; and thanksgiving unto him for what He has done; for us and to us; both in His person and by His work. Not to accept this is not to accept the assurances of the whole new Testament (testimony); and not to be a dependent believer in Christ as the Savior. Even His own mother, by whom He was miraculously given to the world, calls Him her "Savior" (St. Luke I:47).

Is it not better to adore the Divinity that delivers us from evil rather than the humanity that is delivered from evil?

The only possible hope of everlasting life is the Divinity supplied to us by the distribution of Christ's atonement and life; through the work of the Holy Ghost, given to any who will accept it on hearing the facts in the case. We rest the salvation of each soul that God has created upon the perfect judgement and mercy of the Lord in every special individual case. Surely this is not "wrath, vengeance or terror" in God.

Hoping that these lines may give you an idea of the Lutheran scriptural teachings, I am my dear Sir very sincerely your friend and brother in Christ Jesus,

C. Elvin Haupt

January 19th 1920

From E. C. Davis to C. E. Haupt:

538 West Chestnut Street
Lancaster, Pa

Jan. 21, 1920

My Dear Dr. Haupt,

Your very kind and friendly letter came to me this morning. May I say to you that it does not seem an "impertinence" but a genuinely true and cordial letter. Neither are you entirely unknown to me. The very first day that I was in Lancaster your name was mentioned to me, and you were spoken of as one who embodied in his daily life the highest principles of a Christlike life. Several times since that day you have been pointed out to me on the street as a gracious and Christlike man. Many stories have been related to me of your disinterested deeds to those in distress. So I knew before reading your letter the kind and gracious person who had sent it. The letter itself was also witness to that same spirit. Through it I understand still more clearly the affection and respect with which you are regarded in this city. May I be bold enough to say that the spirit which you manifest in daily life I strive to attain.

I have read your letter with great care. The intellectual content of it raises a point of difference. I am not unfamiliar with your point of view. Not only through historical studies, but through the personal contact with a Lutheran minister, whose friendship I enjoyed for many years, have I been acquainted with your thought upon Christian interpretations. I rather suspect that, provided we could get behind the language that we use to the real spiritual values that we seek to set forth, we should come to see that our differences are more formal and technical, than real and spiritual.

But those intellectual differences are very real to me. I will try to state briefly without citations what seems to me to be the situation. The Lutheran Reformation, as well as other branches of the protestant reformation, seem to me to have been a first step towards getting back to the religion of Jesus. During the years when Christianity was

working its transformation in the Roman Empire, it absorbed many of the Pagan forms and ceremonies of the Roman Religions with which it came in contact. By the time of Luther these pagan forms had quite completely hidden the spiritual content that was once Christianity. As I see the situation, Luther and the other reformers took a first step. In spite of the confusing changes for Protestantism, I see therein a very steady and very searching quest for its real Holy Grail. Slowly and steadily we have been searching, and finding the essence of religion as it was conceived of by Christ. We have been stripping away the husks to get at the real content. So it seems to me, and you will pardon the seeming self-assertion, that, from the point of view of intellectual content, the general views, which I hold in common with many others are nearer the truth than those which you set forth.

Briefly stated I believe that the doctrine of evolution is true. That through a process whose beginning we know not of the universe we live in has been moving towards a purpose. That God is the guiding spirit and life of that process. From the point of view of human life present, and that the future still beckons us forward with God's spirit in us and about us, our great companions in living. All men are, and always have been workers in this process, and partakers in its joys and its sorrows. The Bible is to me the record of seekers after that life and their interpretations of its meaning.

Christ is a great leader, a child of his time. I believe that he marks a great turning point in the religious evolution of mankind. I believe that his conception that God is unto men, as the attitude of parent unto children (See Matthew VII: 7-12) is the greatest religious conception ever set forth. We are all children of the Spiritual Father. That together we are working with God for the development of great Christlike men and women in this life and in all life. This life also is everlasting life, and our faith in everlasting life rests not upon "the Divinity supplied to us by the distribution of Christ's atonement and life" but upon the very nature of man. Man is divine by nature. (I do not believe in the doctrine of the fall of man.) Imperfect though it may be, human nature is to be divine, the embodiment, and the expression [of] God,

not complete, but ever reaching higher and higher standards, here in this life and in the life beyond death.

Well, my dear Dr. Haupt, I did not intend writing at such length but your letter was so cordial and delightful that it set me going. These ideas are very precious to me, but I speak with no dogmatic spirit. I realize full well that the Christian life is not a system of thought but a way of living. So, while I may differ from you in thought concerning matters of even fundamental importance, I cherish the spirit of "the love of truth for truth's sake," and try to keep my mind open. I shall count myself fortunate also to have come so closely in contact with a rare spirit among the minister's of Christ as I have in receiving this gracious letter from you.

Cordially yours,

E. C. Davis