
Zion News

A newsletter of Zion Ev. Lutheran Church, Lawrenceville, Georgia – June, 2009

“Come let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God.” Jeremiah 51:10

Luther's Rose - In His Own Words

When asked by those who would produce Luther's works what his seal meant, Luther replied, “Grace and peace from the Lord.

As you desire to know whether my painted seal, which you sent to me, has hit the mark, I shall answer most amiably and tell you my original thoughts and reason about why my seal is a symbol of my theology.

The first should be a black cross in a heart, which retains its natural color, so that I myself would be reminded that faith in the Crucified saves us. *‘For one who believes from the heart will be justified’ (Rom.*

10:10). Although it is indeed a black cross, which mortifies and which should also cause pain, it leaves the heart in its natural color. It does not corrupt nature, that is, it does not kill but keeps alive. *‘The just shall live by faith’ (Rom. 1:17)* but by faith in the crucified. Such a heart should stand in the middle of a white rose, to show that faith gives joy, comfort, and peace. In other words, it places the believer into a white, joyous rose, for this faith does not give peace and joy like the world gives (John 14:27). That is why the rose should be white and not red, for white is the color of the spirits and the angels (cf. Matthew 28:3; John 20:12). Such a rose should stand in a sky-blue field, symbolizing that such joy in spirit and faith is a beginning of the heavenly future joy, which begins already, but is grasped in hope, not yet revealed. And around this field is a golden ring, symbolizing that such blessedness in Heaven lasts forever and has no end. Such blessedness is exquisite, beyond all joy and goods, just as gold is the most valuable, most precious and best metal. This is my compendium theologiae [summary of theology]. I have wanted to show it to you in good friendship, hoping for your appreciation. May Christ, our beloved Lord, be with your spirit until the life hereafter. Amen." †



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"O for a
THOUSAND
TONGUES
to SING"

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When you sing a hymn in church have you ever wondered who wrote the hymn and why? It can help us appreciate the words of the hymn even more if we know who wrote them and under what circumstances. To help us learn more about the men and women who wrote the hymns we sing, we are beginning a new "Hymnwriter" series in the Zion News. This month we are featuring Nicolaus Selnecker. While only 4 of his hymns are included in our hymnal, he was instrumental in the formation of Lutheranism during the volatile years following Luther's death. We hope that this series will be of great benefit to you!

Hymn Writer: Nicolas Selnecker

Adapted from ISC Hymnworks

Castle Chapel

Selnecker was born on December 6th, the festival day of his namesake, St. Nikolaus. The year was 1530, the same year the reformers met in Augsburg to present the Augsburg Confession to Charles V. Selnecker's birthplace was a little town called Hersbruck about sixteen miles east-northeast of Nurnberg. His father, Georg, was a capable organist serving the Church of the Holy Ghost from 1535-1557.

Nicolaus studied music with his father and also with the renowned Nurnberg musician, Caspar Othmayer (1515-1553). He was also one of twelve choristers at the Holy Ghost Hospital. When he was twelve years old, he was appointed organist of the Nurnberg castle chapel for which he was paid an annual stipend of eight thalers and two cart loads of wood.

Wittenberg, Dresden

Selnecker did make it to Wittenberg, arriving there some four years after Luther's death. Many of the original reformers were still there. Because his father was a friend of Melanchthon, Nicolaus was privileged to stay in Melanchthon's home. Nicolaus received his masters degree in 1554 and stayed on as a private instructor. Upwards of two hundred students attended his lectures.

On Melanchthon's recommendation, he was called as third chaplain to the Dresden court of Elector August of Saxony. Within a year he was also asked to serve as instructor to the boys' choir. It was at this time that he

married Margaretha Greiser, the daughter of the Dresden superintendent.

Hit the Road, Nick

After this brief period of happiness, his troubles began to mount. First, he preached against the hunting activities of the nobility which had caused the ruin of their subjects' crops. For this presumably, he was dismissed from his post. Actually, Calvinists had gained a foothold at court and they saw Selnecker as too rigid in his Lutheranism.

Next, he accepted a call as professor of theology at Jena. There, ironically, he was falsely accused by radical Lutherans of being an adherent of Melanchthon and was again deposed from office.

From there he was appointed professor of theology at the University of Leipzig, pastor of St. Thomas Church and superintendent (bishop) of the city. But when elector August died, his son, Christian I again allowed the Calvinists to gain influence. Selnecker wrote and preached against the Calvinist doctrine and was again dismissed because he refused to comply with the order not to use the word "Calvinist" from the pulpit. Still he continued his attacks against the so-called "Cypto-Calvinists" from the private home in which he now lived. Finally, he was banned altogether with his son and son-in-law and had to flee Leipzig in order to escape a prison sentence.

Concordia

Selnecker not only subscribed to the Formula of Concord, he was one of its writers.

Because there was a need for a strong confessional statement to combat the influence of the Roman Catholic church, the Calvinists, and other sects, Selneccer made a motion at a conference in 1576 to adopt a new body of doctrine which would be entirely Lutheran.



After the adoption of this Formula of Concord, he continued to work at improving its text (making better translations of the Latin sources), as well as meeting in 1581 with fellow Formula author, Martin Chemnitz, to produce the *Apology of the Formula of Concord*.

After the death of Christian I, Selneccer was again called to Leipzig. He traveled there severely ill and was immediately put to bed on his arrival. Five days later, May 24, 1592, he died. The theologians gathered round his bedside asked, "Are you ready to die on the basis of the doctrine which for so many years you have joyfully confessed?" To this his simple answer was "Yes."

Psalter

During his tenure in Leipzig, Selneccer worked closely with the boys' choir which J.S. Bach would one day direct. Selneccer also laid the

foundation for the church library. Many of his own publications may well have found a home there. In all Selneccer published some 175 works, 94 in Latin and 81 in German.

An abiding interest was the Psalter:

Oh, how full of comfort and precious is the Psalter, for which I will thank God in all eternity. When I turn to it, my life is restored even though I have often been at the point of death and heaven and earth seemed to be closing in upon me. May a gracious God leave me only my little Psalter; for the rest He can take what he wills.

He published a German edition of the Psalter, which was a commentary and prayerbook meant for the head of the family and for the instruction of his children.

Hymnal

In 1587 he published his hymnal, *Christliche Psalmen, Leider und Kirchengesange*. This collection of psalms, songs, and hymns played an important role in Protestant church music. Its forward contained a full hymn order for the whole church year, one of the earliest of its kind. Among other interesting pieces it contained a German Litanei with organ interludes on the Lamentations of Jeremiah.

Today we find these hymns of Selneccer in our hymnal:

- 292 Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide
- 321 O faithful God, thanks be to Thee
- 334:1 Let me be Thine forever
- 600 O Lord, my God, I cry to Thee

The first verse of "Let Me be Thine Forever" was the daily prayer of Selneccer written during those exile years. Let it also be our prayer during our years of exile. †

*Let me be Thine forever,
Thou faithful God and Lord;
Let me forsake Thee never
Nor wander from Thy Word.
Lord, do not let me waver,
But give me steadfastness,
And for such grace forever
Thy holy name I'll bless.*

As we look at what is going on in our country right now, it can be very discouraging for the child of God. Battles are raging over all kinds of issues which we as Christians should be concerned about: Marriage, abortion, hate speech, stem cell research, and much more. Such important issues should be on our hearts and minds and in our prayers. To that end we offer the following prayer....

A Prayer for our Nation

Heavenly Father, we come before You today to seek Your forgiveness. Your Word says, "Woe to those who call evil good" (Isaiah 5:20), but that is exactly what we have done. As a nation we have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values. We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed our unborn and called it choice. We have killed abortionists and called it justifiable. We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self esteem. We have abused power and called it politics. We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition. We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression. We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment. As a nation we have sinned in countless ways. Teach us all to recognize that our sins are the real cause of all our troubles. Through the message of Your Law convict the people of our nation of sin. Through the message of Your Gospel bring people throughout this country to know and believe that their sins have washed away by the redeeming blood of Christ. Strengthen what is good and right in our nation and help us correct our errors. We commend ourselves, our families, our church, and our nation to Your keeping. Bless us now and always for Jesus' sake. In His precious name we pray. Amen! †

Starting out in Life

In the real estate market we have the phrase "starter home." By that, we mean a house that is priced to meet the budget needs of a couple just starting out. The thought is that as the family budget grows, the family can move to the next level of housing, perhaps buying a bigger home or a newer one.



"For this reason a man
will leave his father & mother
and be united to his wife,
and the two will become
one flesh." Ephesians 5:31

The world has coined a similar phrase: starter wife. Apparently this refers to a wife that is good for a while but, just like a starter home, is later on in life traded for a second wife. Maybe the first wife is good for helping the husband get through school or raise children. Then the "starter wife" is traded for a younger model or a richer version or a more exciting and compatible woman.

God has plenty to say about this concept. Throughout His Word, He tells us that marriage is to be for life. He specifically states that He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) and gives His desire: "Let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth" (Malachi 2:15b).

And again in Matthew 19:6: "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

"Starter wife" is but another example of how the world does not think God's way and is just one more area where the child of God needs to be careful that the Word of God is his/her guide and not the popular propaganda of our spiritual enemy, the world. †

*O blessed home where man and wife
Together lead a godly life,
By deeds their faith confessing!
There many a happy day is spent,
There Jesus gladly will consent
To tarry with His blessing.
(TLH 624:1)*