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BRIEF STUDIES

JOHN GERHARD ON PHILOSOPHY IN THEOLOGY

EDITORIAL NOTE: On June 4, 1956, the day before the close of the academic school year, the faculty and students of Concordia Seminary, as well as many others, gathered in the Chapel for the funeral service of the writer of this article. Donald Meyer was not thirty years old and had not completed his first year as an instructor in philosophy at our seminary when the Lord called a sudden halt to his labors. Human observation and evaluation predicted a long and useful career in his teaching ministry. He was of a keen mind, studious, devout, modest, amiable, apt to teach. But God perfected his knowing in part into the perfect epistemology of seeing Him face to face who had redeemed him. This short study had been prepared by him shortly before illness struck him. We lay it as a wreath to his memory.

In the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy in the seventeenth century the great theologians were writing elaborate systematic theologies which they called *Loci.* Because of the systematic nature of the task they had to consider carefully the relationship between philosophy and theology. Perhaps the greatest of these theologians was Johann Gerhard, whose *Loci theologici* had a great deal of influence upon later Lutheran theology. In a small book called *Methodus studii theologici* he makes a careful study of the use and abuse of philosophy in theology.

The library of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, has a copy of this book, published in 1654. It has as its general purpose to consider the education of the theologian. The discussion of philosophy comes in a section which treats of the propaedeutic to theology in two parts of equal length. The first is on the study of the Biblical languages; the second deals with philosophy.

There are three parts or chapters to the section on philosophy. The first chapter deals with "the multiplex and salutary use of philosophy," the second with the abuse of philosophy in theology, the third on the aids of philosophic studies.

The first chapter begins with the statement that there are three uses of philosophy in theology, the *usus* ὀϱγανιϰός, ϰατασϰολαστιϰός, and ἀνασϰολαστιϰός. The *usus organicus* is philosophy used as a tool. There are two parts to philosophy, Gerhard says, the instrumental, which includes grammar, rhetoric, and logic (the medieval trivium), and the real or theoretical, which includes metaphysics, physics, mathematics, politics, ethics, and economics.

There are three considerations with regard to these. First, both the instrumental and the real parts of philosophy may help in the training of the mind of the theologian. "The knowledge of them stimulates, sharpens, prepares, and perfects the human mind so that in any situation whatever the study of the profound disciplines can progress more expeditiously and with less labor."

Second, the real may help in the explication of terms. The theologian uses two kinds of terms: first, Biblical terms, which are simply derived from a reading of Scriptures, and, secondly, what he calls ecclesiastical terms. Ecclesiastical terms are such as do not appear in Scriptures, although the thought which they are intended to express does occur in Scriptures. Philosophy helps to give a more accurate explication of such terms. From metaphysics we may derive such terms as *being, good, truth, perfection, finitude, infinite, person, existence, essence, act, potency.* From physics one may get accurate descriptions of such terms as *time, place, void, degree;* from politics, *law* and *freedom.*

Gerhard observes that because philosophy serves in the explication of terms, it is not a master but a minister, serving and not ruling. Furthermore, it is necessary that the theologian explicate the term farther than did philosophy, to accommodate it to his purpose, to free it from imperfection, and to enter it properly into theology. As one example he gives the word *justice.* The use of the word in philosophical ethics is somewhat different from its use in theology. Nevertheless, philosophy may help in the accurate explication of the term.

Third, the instrumental part of philosophy may also help the theologian. Logic he divides into four parts: definition, division, or distinction, method, and argument. Logic may help the theologian present his material clearly and orderly, to state controversies lucidly, to confirm them with clarity, and to refute the adversaries. Rhetoric helps the theologian through the explication of figures and tropes.

The second general use of philosophy Gerhard calls by the Greek word κατασκολαστικός. This use might be called the "confirmatory." Some questions cannot be confirmed through any use of reason, for they concern the highest mysteries of faith. Such are the mysteries of the Trinity, of incarnation, of resurrection. However, there are some questions which can be answered through the human intellect, which knows that God exists, that God is good, just, and that He punishes the wicked. The first kind of questions philosophy must ignore. However, philosophy may help to clarify them through supplying illustrations, but must not try to explain them fully. With regard to the second kind of question, the arguments of philosophy are not presented as if the truths of theology were not sufficient, but in a kind of secondary way, only to state that they are apparent also from the light of nature.

The third general use of philosophy, which Gerhard calls ἀνασκολαστικός and which might be called "apologetic," is a negative use. It serves to refute false rational arguments. Almost the whole of this section is given to a quotation from Chapter 5 of Luther's *On Monastic Vows*. Translated from Gerhard's quotation, it reads: "Nature does not extend by itself to the light and work of God; in affirmative statements it provides false judgments, but in negatives it is certain. For reason cannot seize what God is, but what He is not. It does not, then, see what is right and good before God (faith only), but it does know clearly infidelity and that homicide is evil. This even Christ used when he said that every kingdom divided against itself shall fall. . . ."

There are three abuses of philosophy parallel to the three uses. The first abuse relates to the function of philosophy as a tool. One may, first of all, be so taken up with philosophical matters that the concerns of faith are forgotten. Second, in the use of terms derived from philosophy the influence of philosophy may be too great, and such important terms as *justification* may get a changed meaning. Or, finally, logic may become too important, and the theologians may rely upon logic rather than upon the articles of faith to state the truth.

There are four possible abuses related to arguments which confirm. First, one may attempt to prove the mysteries of faith. Secondly, a theologian may postpone testimony from Scripture as though philosophic arguments were more certain than Scriptural sayings. Third, the theologian may make the mistake of judging faith as established and confirmed by philosophy. Fourthly, in mixed questions, when one term is philosophic and the other theological (or one ecclestical and the other Biblical), the theologian may make the mistake of attempting to find confirming arguments from philosophy. Such a statement would be, "The body of Christ is in one place."

Finally, there are several abuses possible under the general category of apologetic. First, axioms of philosophy may be accepted as genuine truths applicable in every instance to religion. Such an abuse would be if one said that ubiquity must be denied to Christ because it countermands a law of physics.

Secondly, when a judgment involving the mysteries of faith looks like a contradiction, the theologian may make the mistake of committing this to human reason. All divine mysteries are above human reason. With regard to some, for example, resurrection, the possibility of its truth is seen. With regard to others, the mystery of the Trinity, for example, not even the possibility is perceptible. The theologian must remember that the contradiction arises because of the limitations of the human mind. There is no contradiction on God's part.

In the final portion of the entire section of philosophy there is a paragraph under the title "On Aids in the Study of Philosophy." Noteworthy there is the comment that the study of Aristotle ought to be preferred to others, first, because of the superiority of his *ratio philosophandi,* secondly, because, in order to argue well against the adversaries of the Christian faith, who employed the Aristotelian terminology, one must use their formulations.

At least one comment seems appropriate at seeing Gerhard's position. We may ask the question whether this position is the one which a Lutheran theologian must always take. It is obvious that Luther did not have the respect for Aristotle that Gerhard had and most certainly did not use the Aristotelian distinctions and method to present his theology. Nevertheless there is a method in Luther's writing, as any careful reading will reveal. There are, furthermore, distinctions and terms which are not strictly Biblical which Luther found useful in presenting his thought. Even without examining Luther in detail on this matter, it seems likely that in him there was conceived a different relationship between theology and the instrumental use of philosophy. At least, theology in the form in which he wanted to write it seemed to demand a different use of the nontheological, the mental, the formal.

The Lutheran tradition seems, then, to have at least two positions on the use of philosophy in theology — that of Luther and that of Gerhard and perhaps also of his contemporaries. If there is no material difference between the two, then it would seem that theologians might differ in the form of their theology and in their terminology without differing in meaning. It might also mean that theologians can argue both with regard to the thought they are communicating and with regard to the form or language by which their thought is communicated. The first is a legitimate enterprise for one interested in the truth of the matter. The second is not. It would, then, seem important to know the terminology to understand the theologian, but that one cannot criticize him because of a particular way of stating the truth.

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HUMANISTIC PEDAGOGY UNCHASTENED BY EXPERIENCE

Late last year a little brochure* was published in Germany, consisting of quotations from the works of Johannes Heinrich Pestalozzi, supplemented by a few quotations from Wilhelm Schaefer's *Lebenstag eines Menschenfreundes* and by six pages of the compiler's introduction. This small German booklet will be read by comparatively few Americans, but it can serve as a take-off for a brief discussion of the unfounded and damaging optimism of naturalistic and idealistic humanism in education.

The compiler of this little volume succeeds in providing therein another eulogy of the genial, selfless, self-sacrificing, and altruistic Pestalozzi, but he succeeds also in revealing (unintentionally?) the naturalistic and idealistic humanism from which Pestalozzi suffered and which characterized his educational theory and practice.

In the introduction the compiler speaks with unqualified approval of Pestalozzi's enchantment with "humanity and education for humanity," of his "belief in the good in man," of his "great and broad goal of the perfected humanity, the genuine *humanitas*," and of his confidence in the inherent powers of man to implant the love of God and man in his own heart and to bring happiness and blessing into his home.

Here, then, is the gigantic idea of the morally autonomous, free man — the perfect man. Here is naturalistic, idealistic humanism whose educational anthropocentrism crowds out educational theocentrism or Christocentrism. Here is pre-World War enthusiasm for, and faith in, this kind of education as the supreme instrument for saving man from misery and prostration. Here is a reaching out to the stars of salvation through an education for which "nothing is impossible." Here breathes the spirit of Rousseau and his theme of *retourner à la nature.* Here is the never-ceasing endeavor of man to leapfrog over his own shadows of sin and spiritual impotence. Here is human Titanism at work.

Pestalozzi was indeed a man of loving and warm heart, but he was in reality a man warmly confused — a man of his time, the age of reason and enlightenment. Influenced by Rousseau's dogma that man is by nature good, the genial Pestalozzi began his promotion of the emerging humanistic pedagogy as an outspoken optimist (*Abend-*

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* *Lasst uns unsern Kindern leben: J. H. Pestalozzi, seine Botschaft und sein Leben.* Selected and edited by Richard Kik. Stuttgart: J. F. Steinkopf, 1955. 68 pages. Boards. DM 2.00.

stunde eines Einsiedlers, 1780), going so far as to write: "Believe in yourself, O Man, and you believe in God and immortality." Largely because of his faith in man, modern humanists have assigned to Pestalozzi a prominent place among the great modern educators. However, in his *Leonard and Gertrude* (1782) there begins to appear a fairly clear line of demarcation between good and evil persons, though the optimism concerning man's natural goodness and his desire to be good still prevails. But in his later gripping volume *Gesetzgebung und Kindermord* Pestalozzi can no longer escape the conviction that there is a "higher" and a "lower" nature of man which determines the development of his character and life. Finally, after the French Revolution, comes the confession from his lips that man, individually and collectively, is by nature evil and cannot be otherwise. The "higher" nature is in man, but it is not an immediate possession of man and of human society. Pestalozzi started out as an optimist, but in the end he became a pessimist, uncertain and confused. In his first volume Pestalozzi raised and proposed to answer the question concerning the nature of man. But what were the findings of the matured, experienced Pestalozzi? They are seldom recorded in histories of education, certainly not in the fulsome eulogies of Pestalozzi. Largely disillusioned and frustrated, Pestalozzi delivered his famous New Year's address of 1808 while standing next to his own empty coffin on the platform, and he said: "Behold my coffin! What remains for me? The hope of my grave. . . . Here I stand. Here is my coffin. Here is my consolation. . . . I behold before my own eyes the skeleton of my work, insofar as it is my work."

Naturalistic and idealistic humanism in education is not dead. It seems to emerge in postwar periods of human misery and despair. After the Persian wars it flowered out in Plato's idealism. After the Napoleonic wars it was revived in the philosophy of Fichte and others. Now, after World Wars I and II, it manifests a new lease on life and, unchastened by experience, it can say as in the *Humanist Manifesto* of 1933: "Man is at last becoming aware that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams and that he has within himself the power for its achievement. He must set intelligence and will to the task" — after, of course, having discarded supernatural religion and guarantees. Today, as ever, this humanism is chauvinistically optimistic about human nature and human perfectibility and human autonomy in education. A. G. MERKENS