

# THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

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## Foreword.

In making a survey of conditions as the new year is beckoning to us to gird our loins for another twelve months' service, if such be the will of our heavenly Father, we are again struck by the vast change that has taken place with respect to prominent issues before the Church if we compare our times with those of our fathers forty or fifty years ago. In those days there was a good deal of doctrinal discussion, Methodists arguing with Baptists on their distinctive teachings, Calvinists opposing Arminians, and Lutherans of one synod debating with those of another synod on the positions of their respective bodies. The starting-point invariably was the Bible, and the debate usually concerned itself with the question whether the tenets of a certain denomination were Scriptural or not. Inasmuch as both parties to the debate appealed to the Scriptures as their authority, the interpretation of the Bible became a very important matter, and often there was to be witnessed a thorough investigation of special texts which one or the other of the contestants had quoted in support of his belief. In the last analysis, what kept Protestants apart was a difference in principles of interpretation with respect to the sacred Book, the authority of which all acknowledged, a difference which resulted in disparity of doctrine on an ever-increasing scale, the stream widening as it proceeded on its course. To take an example, the Lutherans and the Reformed agreed in regarding the Bible as true in every word and as a guide to be followed in all religious matters, but they differed as to the interpretation of certain important passages, the Lutherans holding that the words of Scripture must be taken as they read, the exegete using such light as the Bible itself affords (*Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur*), while the Reformed held that reason must be permitted a vote when we determine the sense of a Scripture-passage, an attitude which, of course, resulted in their having two guides to whom they entrusted themselves in establishing the content of divine revelation, namely, the

Scriptures and human reason. When Calvinists taught their doctrine of a double predestination, they appealed to the Scriptures as their authority, contending that the proper explanation of certain Bible-passages compelled acceptance of such teaching. When they, together with the other Reformed churches, denied the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, they did so with the declaration that the Scriptures, rightly interpreted, taught this very view. We are alluding to this matter merely to emphasize that all Protestants professed to place themselves on the Scriptures and to view the Bible as the supreme arbiter in their doctrinal disputes. We cannot now discuss the question what led men to take such divergent views on the meaning of Scripture statements; obviously, as we stated before, they were not agreed as to some fundamental principles of interpretation. But it remains true that the controversies which they waged related in the main to the sense of Scripture declarations.

How the situation has changed! The issues which disturb the Church primarily in these days no longer have to do with the meaning of this or that passage in Holy Writ. The great question nowadays is whether the Bible is true at all; whether there is such a thing as an inspired book, containing the revelation of God; whether we can continue to take our arguments from Holy Writ, feeling convinced that there we have the inerrant norm of truth. Formerly people who attacked the divine character and authoritativeness of the Scriptures were considered as being outside the pale of Christianity, enemies of the Church of God, to be classed with Mohammed and other outspoken opponents of the Christian religion. To-day many such people pose as Christians; churches are filled with men who refuse to be bound by the authority of the Word of God, who will accept of the Bible merely what suits their fancy, and who will not concede to it any higher inspiration than to the works of Plato and Shakespeare. As a result, the battle is about the very foundations, the Scriptures themselves, the fall of which would, of course, involve all the great Gospel-truths revealed to us by our God. We can illustrate by pointing to Unitarianism. When it arose, it sought to defend its false teachings by an appeal to the Scriptures. Those acquainted with the works of Channing will recall how he endeavors to show that the Bible is on the side of the Unitarians. Present-day Unitarianism, especially as found at the universities, worries but little about the great Scripture-texts which teach the deity of Christ. It brushes them aside as irrelevant, as being the expression of a primitive

age, whose beliefs we no longer can share, and blithely marches onward under the flag of reason and science.

A brief survey of the topics treated in the religious journals of conservative church-bodies will bear out the contention that the battle-ground has shifted. What is it that is being combated there? Formerly it was in the main some real or supposed doctrinal error; nowadays it is the unbelief which seeks to rob the Scriptures of their holy, divine nature, the unbelief manifested in the teaching of evolution and of destructive critical views of the origin of our Biblical books. Instead of doctrinal discussions and debates we read apologetic articles in which the inspiration and the authority of the Bible are defended. No one, it seems to me, can deny that the journals are justified in bestowing their attention in the field of polemics chiefly on the unbelief mentioned. Formerly heresy was the main opponent. Unbelief kept in the background and, though shooting a shaft now and then, was not taken so very seriously. Now heresy has stepped to the side and turned over the rôle of principal challenger to unbelief, and the latter is rushing forward with sword unsheathed and proclaims that it will give no quarters.

The Church in general will do well to heed the peculiar nature of the attacks made in these times on the Christian religion and to prepare its defense accordingly. More than formerly the pastor and teacher will have to be on the alert, using such opportunities as present themselves to show the futility of the arguments advanced against the authority of the Scriptures and the great Gospel-truths. If apologetics was ever justified, it is justified to-day, when all about us the Christian faith is being assailed and the secular press seems particularly anxious to spread the destructive views held by so-called "liberal" writers and speakers. No pastor or teacher can acquaint himself too well with the great questions involved and be too assiduous in preparing to defend the Bible against its many foes.

But at the same time a word of warning is in place. We should be making a great mistake if we turned the Christian Church into an establishment where merely weapons of defense are forged. The result would be that the establishment would soon be deserted. A Church which is primarily given to apologetics will not grow. Powder and bullets have their uses and do excellent service when wolves try to enter the premises, but they cannot feed far-est ec-souls and attract weary men to our colors. If the Church dogma-continue and to grow, it will have to be by that old me<sup>p. 444.]</sup>

by the apostles and by Jesus, our Lord, Himself — the preaching of the Gospel. This, of course, is a well-known truth, but it is so easily forgotten, and when the attacks on Christianity come thick and fast, we are inclined to think that it is time to drop the trowel of the Gospel entirely and to rely on the sword of apologetics. That would be as fatal a mistake as that of the peasant who in his zeal to make war on the weeds in his fields neglected sowing any good seed. When summer came, his fields were clear of pestiferous weeds, but they were destitute of grain as well. In a word, doctrinal discussion must not cease; the Church, while exerting itself to show by good and solid reasons that the pretensions of evolution and negative criticism are untenable, must not disregard the divine injunction to preach the Word, to teach people to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. Evidently that congregation would not be doing its duty which provided merely apologetic lectures to be delivered in its midst. Perilous and critical as the times are, we must not think that we can serve the Church acceptably without continuing to indoctrinate those who have been placed in our charge. The tendency of to-day is to give but scant attention to the teaching of the Bible truths, and undoubtedly the many vicious onslaughts of unbelief have to a large degree contributed to create this tendency, ministers thinking that their prime concern must be to ward off the attacks that are launched against the faith. But yielding to this tendency would simply mean that the child entrusted to our care would become more and more anemic and soon would lack the vitality necessary to throw off the poison which is continually entering the system.

Here, then, is a convenient place to draw attention to the marvelous opportunity offered this year to all Lutheran pastors and congregations of attending in a special way to this very important business of indoctrination. The quadricentennial of the two Catechisms of Luther has come and suggests that these precious writings of the great Reformer be made the subject of special sermons or discourses. Here the pastor is furnished an occasion second to none for informing his parishioners on the origin and the contents of the Catechism and thus to discuss Christian doctrine before them. It is a pleasure to note that wide-awake pastors <sup>Bills</sup> already drawn up plans to bring to their congregations the <sup>especial</sup> truths of our Small Catechism in a series of special sermons. <sup>great</sup> <sup>Sc</sup> sermons are well prepared and delivered, what a source <sup>them</sup> <sup>as</sup> <sup>g</sup> they will prove to the congregations privileged to hear

them! Besides, 1929 marks the four-hundredth anniversary of the Colloquy at Marburg between Luther and Zwingli. Here, too, an opportunity is afforded every Lutheran pastor and teacher to enter upon the deep, irreconcilable differences between the Lutheran and the Reformed churches and to show that the separate existence of the Lutheran Church is dictated by fidelity to the Holy Scriptures.

To summarize briefly, if anybody says that apologetic preaching and teaching are needed in the Church to-day in view of the prevalence of general culture and the reading habit, which means that our people cannot fail to get in touch with the venom which is being spread by the enemies of the Gospel, we readily assent. But the most important activity of the Church must ever remain the teaching of the Word, the heart of which is the message of redemption through the blood of Christ. Here we have a case where one thing is to be done and another thing not to be left undone. God helping us, the THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY will in the future, as in the past, seek to assist the Church in its battle with unbelief by submitting apologetic material to its readers. But the discussion of doctrine, thetical and antithetical, will remain its chief aim.

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