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Doctrinal Theology.

BIBLIOLOGY.

This chapter of theology was by our earlier dogmatists commonly dealt with in their *Prolegomena*, where they treated of the nature and the principles and source of theology. It was not unreasonable to dwell on the source of doctrine before exhibiting the substance of Christian doctrine as comprised in *Theology proper*, *Anthropology*, *Christology*, *Soteriology*, and *Eschatology*. This was the more pertinent as the principal positions of Bibliology, especially the divine origin and authority of the Bible, were generally conceded, and to impugn the inspiration of the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments would have been looked upon as preposterous by theologians of all churches and schools. The great ancestors of modern Protestant theology, Zwingli, Calvin, Melancthon, never theoretically or dogmatically assailed this stronghold of scriptural theology. Even Calixt, the Noah of the present generation of neologists in what is called the Lutheran Church, did no more than plant the first germs of unscriptural Bibliology for future development and would probably have been amazed and appalled at the growth of thorns and thistles gone into seed in these latter days.

Practical Theology.

PUBLIC WORSHIP IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH.

(Continued.)

III.

The Acts of Public Worship.

The various liturgical acts may be most pertinently and profitably considered in an arrangement based upon the nature of public worship as exhibited in the first chapter of this treatise, according to which we obtain *two* groups of religious acts reciprocally performed by the agents in public worship pointed out in the second chapter. The *first* of these groups comprises those acts by which God offers, appropriates, and seals to the congregation the gifts of his grace, while the congregation receives and enjoys these gifts in the manner intended by the Giver and in the measure of which the individual members of the assembly are rendered capable by the Spirit of God operating through the means of grace. The second group is made up of acts whereby the congregation in its turn offers up the sacrifices of the hearts and lips and hands of the children of God assembled in the common exercise of their holy religion, offerings acceptable to God for Christ's sake and received by him as tokens of their gratitude and filial affection. It should, however, be noted here at once that the elements pertaining to the one or the other group thus described are in the various performances of public worship so blended and combined that the several acts must be classed with the first or the second group according as the respective elements predominate.

A.

God has in his wisdom and goodness provided certain means by which he would confer upon his children the spiritual blessings wherewith he would bless them in his kingdom of grace: the *means of grace*; the audible Word, and the Sacraments. Thus it is that the liturgical acts of the *first* group consist essentially in the administration of the means of grace in public worship. They are placed first because their relation to the acts of the other class ranks them first. The Psalmist says: "*I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*"¹⁾ Faith must be engendered and nourished by the means of grace in order that it should bear the fruits of the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father.²⁾ Luther has well said: "If man should deal with God and receive of him, this must come about, not by man making a beginning and laying the first stone; but God, without man's request and desire, must come first and give him a promise. Such word of God is the foundation, the rock upon which all works, words, and thoughts of man will thereafter be established. This word man must gratefully receive, firmly believing the divine promise and in no wise doubting that as He has promised, so it shall be and come to pass. This faith and confidence is the beginning, middle, and end of all works and righteousness. . . . It is impossible that man of his own reason and ability should with his works ascend into heaven and, preventing God, move Him to grace; but God must prevent all his works and thoughts."³⁾ The administration of the means of grace is the chief purpose for which Christ has instituted the ministry and should be looked upon by the pastor and the congregation as the very soul of public worship, which should receive the most

1) Ps. 119, 32.

2) Rom. 8, 15.

3) Walch XIX, 1269.

careful attention by pastor and people. A church with a poor preacher and a good organist and choir is a caricature, and a prayer meeting without a sermon or Scripture lesson is liturgically considered an incomplete thing, lacking what ought to have been its better part.

The means of grace are in public worship administered chiefly by the ministers of Christ and of the church. It is termed the "ministry of the word,"¹⁾ and among the "elders" those "who labor in the word and doctrine" are of first importance.²⁾ This points to the *Sermon* as the principal act of worship. The *Apology* says: "The foremost worship is to teach the Gospel,"³⁾ or, according to the German text: "The greatest, holiest, most necessary, and highest worship is to preach the word of God;"⁴⁾ and again: "In our churches the priests do properly perform their office, teaching and preaching the Gospel, preaching Christ."⁵⁾

Preaching Christ. There is no briefer way of stating what the sermon in public worship should be. The Law, of course, must also be voiced forth from the Christian pulpit; but chiefly to prepare the way for the Gospel and for Christ in the Gospel. A sermon without Christ as its subject or scope is not in its proper place in public worship. A philosophical discourse on some ethical or esthetical subject, or an entertaining talk on current events or topics of social life, may befit the lecture room or the stage, but should be banished from the Christian pulpit. Public worship is not an entertainment or an opportunity for social intercourse and enjoyment, but the public exercise of reli-

1) Acts 6, 4.

2) 1 Tim. 5, 17.

3) Praecipuus cultus dei est docere Evangelium. Apol. Art. XV, ed. Mueller p. 212.

4) Der allergroesste, heiligste, noethigste, hoechste Gottesdienst . . . ist Gottes Wort predigen. Ibid. p. 213.

5) Ibid. p. 259.

gion, which is the relation between God and man wherein God confers upon man his spiritual blessings and man devotes himself to and rejoices in the service of his God. The preacher in public worship, therefore, properly fills his place when he is the servant of God proclaiming that word of salvation whereby God communicates to those who hear and receive it the blessings and benefits of Christ the Redeemer, draws his children into closer communion with himself, and fits them more and more for his service in true holiness here and hereafter.

Again, the sermon in Christian worship is in full keeping with the nature of public worship only when it is free from error of whatever kind. The minister is in the pulpit not in his own name, but in the name of God, and therefore, while to err is human, the preacher, when he speaks in the name of God, should be sure that what he says is true in all its parts. In his social intercourse, or where his advice is sought for what it may be worth, the minister is entitled to an opinion; but not in the pulpit. There he must not opine or conjecture, but say "We speak that we do know."¹⁾ When, therefore, the preacher after the completion of his sermon prays that God would "mercifully cover whatever in this evening's discourse may not have been in full accordance with His truth," this is, at best, a token of ill-timed conscientiousness; the preacher ought to have been conscientious enough half an hour or an hour earlier not to go into that pulpit with a sermon of which he knew not whether it would stand the test of God's crucible.

Neither is the form of the sermon liturgically indifferent. The preaching of the Gospel is the means whereby God would work on and in the hearts of the hearers. To do this, he directs himself first to the understanding. "The understanding is the avenue to the man. No one is af-

1) John 3, 11.

fectured by the truth who does not apprehend it.”¹⁾ But to approach the understanding, it is necessary to engage the attention of the hearer. *How* this is done, we must not here investigate; but *that* it must be done should be remembered by the preacher both in the preparation and the delivery of his sermon. And he should, furthermore, remember that while attention is a great thing, it is not everything whereby the apprehension of the truth is secured. The most attentive mind will fail to grasp a truth which is not placed within its reach. In public worship God would reach the understanding of that particular congregation of hearers which is then and there assembled. A sermon which would be very appropriate for one congregation may be very inappropriate for another. When a preacher is charged to preach to a congregation of farmers in Virginia, God would lead that congregation of Virginia farmers to comprehend the Gospel of salvation or the doctrine to be exhibited upon a given occasion; a sermon which it might have been eminently proper to preach before a meeting of Oxford students may prove an utter failure in that rural Virginia charge because of its style and diction; and, *vice versa*, the Virginia country parson, whose well-informed congregation would readily comprehend the doctrine of predestination couched in words with which they are familiar, might do well to preach to Oxford or Harvard students on the first rudiments of Christianity lest he overburden their spiritual understanding, while he might quote Latin from St. Augustine and Greek from Athanasius or the New Testament without overtaxing their intellects. Preachers should heed Luther’s words: “The common people must not be taught with high, difficult, obscure words; for they cannot comprehend them. Among those who come to church there are small children, servants, old women and men. To them high teaching is of no use; they will not com-

1) Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology*, p. 59.

prehend it, though they say, 'Oh, he has said precious things;' if you ask them, 'What has he said?' they will say, 'I do not know.' Oh, what pains did Christ our dear Lord take to teach simple doctrine! He employs parables, of husbandry, the harvest, the vine, the sheep, and all this in order that the people might understand, comprehend and keep it. You have populous congregations for whom you must render account to God. Therefore you should have a care to teach them plainly, distinctly, and faithfully." 1)

The sermon should, furthermore, be clear and perspicuous, its contents and parts well arranged. The minister is in public service eminently a steward of God ministering from his master's stores to the wants of the children of the household. To do this, he should not, so to say, throw the spiritual supplies in a promiscuous heap before the congregation. A confused harangue rambling at random hither and thither is not a sermon for a Christian assembly.

The sermon should be solemn and dignified. "Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord," says the Psalmist.²⁾ Burlesque and buffoonery are a disgrace to the pulpit and a desecration of public worship when they are so bold as to usurp the place of a Christian sermon or any part thereof.

In connection with the sermon, the *text* of which the sermon should be an exposition and application claims our attention. The texts still in very general, though not exclusive, use in the Lutheran church are the traditional pericopes or stated lessons, most of which were selected and arranged by Jerome chiefly from the Gospels and Epistles and embodied in a *Comes*, which was first introduced for use in the churches of Rome by Damasus (366—384) and

1) Erl. ed. 59, p. 259.

2) Ps. 93, 5.

into the Gallican and German churches by Charles the Great, who caused a Latin postil or homiliary to be prepared on these texts by Paulus Diaconus, compiled from the writings of the earlier Fathers. This collection, amplified by discourses on additional texts from other lectionaries and lessons for memorial days and festivals of later origin, served as the homiletical handbook upon which the preachers of the middle ages largely relied in the preparation of their sermons. To the lessons of this Canon even the clergy and men of letters generally owed most of what knowledge they possessed of the inspired word in an age when the Bible itself had become a hidden treasure both to the learned and the illiterate, and down to the time when Luther, discovering a complete Bible in the University library at Erfurt, "found with astonishment that it contained many more texts, Epistles and Gospels than were usually expounded in the common postils, and from the pulpits in the churches."¹⁾ And while Luther was preparing the first instalment of his complete Bible for the German people, he was also occupied in elaborating a Postil on the traditional pericopes: the translation of the New Testament and the German Church Postil were both under his pen during his Wartburg exile. Other postil writers and the preachers of the Lutheran church generally followed his example, and it may be safely said that no collection of Scripture texts has so rich and excellent a literature and is so well understood and so highly appreciated as these stated lessons of our church year. We are fully aware that the series might be improved. We miss some of the richest and most beautiful texts, as, the parable of the Prodigal Son, the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, the resurrection of Lazarus, and others, all of which were, however, embodied in the ancient lectionaries, where they were appointed for days of

1) Mathesius, *Historie*, etc., St. Louis ed., I Sermon, p. 5.

worship, such as Apostles' days and others, which are no longer generally observed. And there is no reason why the preacher should not expound these desired texts in evening services, thus restoring what in the course of time has come to be passed by as an old-time station by the wayside which is no longer a stopping place in our days of rapid transit. The objection that the congregations are apt to lose interest in the regular texts as they recur again and again for years and years is not borne out by experience. The contrary is true: our congregations after a year of sermons on free texts invariably welcome back the gospel of the day when the First Sunday in Advent opens a new church year and the preacher once more expounds the old sweet story of the King of Sion to whom the multitude sang Hosanna in the highest; and in most cases, perhaps in all, the pastor's sentiments are with those of the people. Neither is the objection valid that the practice of preaching on the fixed texts will tend to keep the congregation unduly limited in its acquaintance with the Bible. The Christian's knowledge of the Book of God should be both intensive and extensive. The preacher who aims at both in his Sunday sermons will probably come short of both, the sermons being too few and far between. The better way is to leave the extensive study of the Bible to daily readings at home and to go deep and deeper and ever more intensely deeper in expounding and applying the already familiar texts to the congregation.

A custom also handed down through and from the mediæval church is that of greeting the congregation before the beginning of the sermon with a pastoral *salutation* selected from the apostolic benedictions, 1 Cor. 1, 3; 2 Cor. 13, 13; 2 Jo. 3, al. In correspondence herewith the *benediction* from Phil. 4, 7 is pronounced by our ministers immediately before leaving the pulpit. By these announcements of the grace and peace of God in Christ Jesus the entire sermon is most appropriately characterized as the ad-

ministration of the means of grace, the Gospel of our salvation by grace for Christ our Savior's sake.

The *Scripture readings* at the altar are acts of the same class with the sermon. They were practiced from the very beginning of the Christian church as they had been in the Jewish synagogues.¹⁾ Justin the Martyr²⁾ and Tertullian³⁾ mention them. The early church had special *readers* by whom the act of reading the Scripture lessons was officially performed. In the Roman mass of the middle ages there were two regular lessons in the Canon of the Mass, one from the Epistles, the other from the Gospels. The texts to be read were those of Jerome's *Comes* with substitutions from other lectionaries and additions to supply occasions of later origin. Luther retained these texts for the readings as well as for the sermon; but he restored them to their proper purpose, the edification of the congregation. In the early church, the lessons were read in the vernacular of the people as soon as translations had been procured; until then, they had been read in Greek and translated to the congregation by interpreters. In the Roman church, the lessons were no longer read to the congregation, but to God, and the priests dealt with God in Latin. Luther and the Lutheran church demanded that the lessons be read in the language of the people, the reader facing the congregation. The *Epistolary* lesson was *read* or *chanted* first, and after a while, the *Gospel* lesson. The lessons should be read without comment, to indicate that it is the Lord that speaks to his people by the apostles and evangelists, and that, whatever is afterwards said in the sermon must be from the source and according to the norm of the *written word*. Thus the reading of the Gospel and Epistle at the altar has its peculiar significance, and the subsequent reading of the

1) Luke 4, 16 ff. 1 Thess. 5, 27. Col. 4, 16. Apoc. 1, 3.

2) Apol. I, 67.

3) Adv. Gent. c. 22. 29. De praeser. haer. c. 41. 51. De monogani. c. 12.

one or the other in the pulpit as the text of the sermon is by no means a mere repetition.

Still another form of the communication of divine grace to the worshiping congregation is that of a public absolution pronounced by the minister in the name of God in response to a public confession spoken by him in the name of the congregation. The place assigned to this act by some of the earlier Lutheran church-books is immediately after the sermon; others place it at the beginning of the service; and both ways are in use to-day. Where confession and absolution are assigned the first place, their significance is that thereby the congregation qualifies anew as a worshiping assembly of penitent and believing sinners hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Immediately following the sermon, as Luther recommended it, the *Confiteor* with the absolution very fitly ensues as another appropriation of the blessings furnished forth in the sermon, chief among which is the forgiveness of sins.

A. G.

(To be continued.)
