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Doctrinal Theology.

ESCHATOLOGY.

Eschatology is the doctrine of holy Scripture concerning temporal death and the intermediate state of departed souls, the second advent of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, final judgment, the consummation of all things, the everlasting damnation of the wicked, and the eternal bliss of the righteous in the world to come. Concerning all these things God has, in his word, revealed whatever he would have us know concerning them, and while, also in this respect, *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning,*¹⁾ the words of the apostle, *Behold, I show you a mystery,*²⁾ with which he sets forth one particular point of these *ἔσχατα*, apply to all of them. Here, too, *we know in part, and we prophesy in part,*³⁾ and with the psalmist we say, *My soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.*⁴⁾ The last things, being mostly, in their nature, future events, are, as such, objects of Christian hope, and inasmuch as Christian hope is essentially faith concerning things to come, it must be in all its points based upon the

1) Rom. 15, 4.

2) 1 Cor. 15, 51.

3) 1 Cor. 13, 9.

4) Ps. 130, 5.

VARIANT INTERPRETATIONS.

Sensus literalis unus est. This is the fundamental article of Hermeneutics everywhere; in theology, in jurisprudence, in historical research, wherever the sense of the words of human speech is to be established, it must be on this rule, which admits of no exception. Says Dr. Lieber: "No sentence, or form of words, can have more than one 'true sense,' and this is the only one we have to inquire for. This is the very basis of all interpretation. Interpretation without it has no meaning. Every man or body of persons, making use of words, does so, in order to convey a certain meaning; and to find this precise meaning is the object of all interpretation. To have two meanings in view is equivalent to having no meaning. The interpretation of two meanings implies absurdity."¹⁾ This is true and well said. The same author says, by way of exemplification: "The fictitious law case, composed by Pope and Fortesque as having ensued in consequence of Sir John Swale having bequeathed to his friend, Mr. Stradling, 'all my black and white horses,' when there were found six black horses, six white ones, and six that were black and white, or pied horses, is certainly entertaining. Yet the question, as it was stated by those gentlemen, 'whether the pied horses were included in the legacy,' ought never to have arisen. As there can be but one meaning attached to any sentence, the testator could not have meant by his words all black and all white horses, and, at the same time, all black and white horses. The only difficulty arising from this will could be this, whether the testator meant to bequeath to Mr. Stradling all black and all white horses, *or* all black and white horses."²⁾

1) Legal and Political Hermeneutics, 3d Ed., pp. 74 f.

2) *Ibid.*, p. 76.

Thus, also, the words of holy Scripture are the means whereby the precise notions or thoughts which were in the mind of their Author are to be conveyed to the mind of the reader or hearer. From the words of St. Paul those who read them are to understand his knowledge in the mystery of Christ.¹⁾ The prophets themselves searched what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify by the words they wrote.²⁾ The question before the interpreter of Scripture is not what notions he *might* connect with the words of the text, but what thoughts or ideas the Holy Spirit *did* actually connect therewith and utter thereby. In most instances this intended meaning is so clear from the words employed, that there is no room for reasonable doubt as to their signification. In fact, there is no doctrine of Christian theology which is not set forth in unmistakable terms in some text of Scripture which may for this reason be agreed upon by all orthodox theologians as a *sedes doctrinae* of such doctrine. It is because of these texts, chiefly, that also the layman in theology, who does not enjoy the advantages of linguistic and hermeneutical training, can, even without the assistance of learned expositors, derive directly from the inspired Word a correct knowledge of all the doctrines which make us wise unto salvation.

On the other hand, however, there are in the Scriptures not a few texts which afford peculiar difficulties to the interpreter, difficulties which may concern the usage, or form, or arrangement, of the words, or their relation to the context, or the parallelism of the text, or apparent historical discrepancies, or several or all of these together. In many instances, these difficulties can, by close attention to the words, their form and arrangement, the *usus loquendi*, and the previous and subsequent context, and by the careful application of correct exegetical methods, be conclusively overcome, so that a solution is reached which all who are

1) Eph. 3, 4.

2) 1 Pet. 1, 11.

capable of grasping the reasons for and the methods leading to such solution will accept as satisfactory. In a familiar text we read: *For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.*¹⁾ What can this mean, *when we believed*, or, as Luther has it, *da wir's glaubten?* Was the faith of Paul and the Roman Christians a thing of the past? Now, it can be shown that the Greek aorist sometimes denotes the beginning of an action which is still in progress, or the entrance upon a state which still continues. In the passage quoted and in various other places,²⁾ the aorist of πιστεῖν is evidently used in this sense, and ὅτε ἐπιστεύσαμεν means, *when we first believed*, or, *da wir zum Glauben kamen*. This solution, simple as it is, ought to be satisfactory to all who are accessible to a grammatical argument.

But there are still other instances, in which an agreement is not so easily reached. We do not now think of such *cruces interpretum* as the μισίτης of Gal. 3, 20 with its three hundred and more interpretations. We will point out a few other texts more of a kind to represent the class. The words of St. Paul, Eph. 4, 9 f., have been very generally expounded as a passage treating of the descent of Christ into hell and his ascension into heaven, and we find them as proof texts in most of our catechisms and dogmatical handbooks under these heads. Yet there are those who, with Luther, hold that these verses speak of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. The two interpretations are incompatible with each other as far as the *descensus* is concerned. For while Christ's ascension is a part or stage of his exaltation, and one interpretation might include the other in this point, his descent into hell is a stage of Christ's exaltation, and words which mean Christ's humiliation cannot mean his descent into hell. Again, we read: *We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye re-*

1) Rom. 13, 11.

2) Acts 19, 2. 1 Cor. 3, 5; 15, 2. Gal. 2, 16.

ceive not the grace of God in vain. 2 Cor. 6, 1. These words are adduced in the *Formula of Concord* as speaking of the concurrence of the converted man in the performance of good works. We quote: "But this does not occur from our fleshly natural powers, but from the new powers and gifts which the Holy Ghost has begun in us in conversion, as St. Paul expressly and earnestly exhorts that '*as workers together*' we '*receive not the grace of God in vain.*' 2 Cor. 6, 1."¹⁾ But below this paragraph, in the Latin text, we find the following remarks: "2 Cor. 6, 1. *Συνεργοῦντες παρακαλοῦμεν*: We who are servants or co-workers with God beseech you who are '*God's husbandry*' and '*God's building*' (1 Cor. 3, 9) to imitate our example, that the grace of God may not be among you in vain."²⁾ This will never do. *Sensus literalis unus est!* The text, speaking of *συνεργοῦντες*, refers either to the apostle and other ministers, or to their converted hearers, who are admonished by them, and not to both, and if the exposition in the note, § 66, is, as it is, exegetically right, the exposition in § 65, as above quoted, is exegetically wrong. Yet our fathers evidently felt no compunction in publishing the *Formula of Concord* with both interpretations on the same page. St. Paul writes according to the English Bible: *The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.*³⁾ This text is adduced in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* as follows: "Moreover we think concerning the righteousness of reason thus, viz. that God requires it, and that, because of God's commandment, the honorable works which the Decalogue commands must necessarily be performed, according to the passage (Gal. 3, 24): '*The law was our schoolmaster;*' likewise (1 Tim. 1, 9): '*The law is made for the ungodly*'"⁴⁾ Here the assumption is that the text demands the *justitia civilis*, of which civil government is the guardian. Again, we read in the *Formula*

1) F. C. Sol. Decl. II, 65; p. 604.

3) Gal. 3, 24.

2) Ibid. 66.

4) Apol. Art. IV, 22; p. 91.

of Concord: "These two doctrines we believe and confess, viz. that even to the end of the world they should be diligently inculcated in the church of God, although with the proper distinction, in order that, through the preaching of the Law and its threats in the ministry of the New Testament, the hearts of impenitent men may be terrified, and be brought to a knowledge of their sins and to repentance; but not in such a way that they inwardly despair and doubt, but that (since '*the law is a schoolmaster unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith,*' Gal. 3, 24, and thus points and leads us not from Christ, who '*is the end of the law,*' Rom. 10, 4), they be on the other hand comforted and strengthened by the preaching of the holy Gospel concerning Christ our Lord." 1) Here the Law is not viewed as the taskmaster for the government of the members of human society, but as an educator leading us to Christ by working in us the knowledge of sin which is to prompt us to seek Christ and salvation in him as set forth in the Gospel. These two interpretations are again at variance with each other in such a way that if the one stands, the other must fall. In fact, we hold that both must fall in view of the context, according to which the Law is here neither considered as the promoter of the *justitia civilis* among the nations, nor as the monitor who is to lead the members of the church of God to a knowledge of their sins, that they may flee to Christ, but as the domestic servant provided for the Old Testament dispensation in Israel according to the flesh until Christ, in the fulness of the time, should come and, with him, the new era, in which God's people should be no longer under the *παιδαγωγός*, the Mosaic law, whose office was to terminate at the time appointed of the father. If this interpretation is right, as we hold it to be, our example will go to show that two variant interpretations, while they cannot both be right, may both be wrong, even though

1) F. C. Sol. Decl. VI, 24; p. 638.

they appear in the Symbols of the Church, not doctrinally, but exegetically, wrong.

Another example. St. Paul writes to the Ephesians: *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.*¹⁾ Of several interpretations of this text, we would mention two which have found their supporters in the Lutheran church. The one, to which, for several reasons on which we will not now enlarge, we have always given the preference, takes the genitive τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν as *genitivus subjecti*, and the apostles and prophets are then conceived as the architects or builders of the temple of God, as Paul also describes himself elsewhere, when he says: *We are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*²⁾ In the doctrine of the apostles and prophets, as laid down in the Scriptures, Jesus Christ is the chief and central subject. *To him give all the prophets witness,*³⁾ and the words of St. Paul, *We preach Christ crucified,*⁴⁾ are true of all apostles. Thus finding this concept of the apostles as builders who laid the foundation of the church occurring repeatedly in other epistles of Paul, while we know of no other text in which the apostle conceives himself and other holy men of God as the foundation of the church, we have never been able to persuade ourselves to adopt another interpretation, also grammatically admissible, according to which τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν is *genitivus appositivus*, and the apostles and prophets them-

1) Eph. 2, 20.

2) 1 Cor. 3, 10; cf. Rom. 15, 20.

3) Act. 10, 43; cf. 3, 18.

4) 1 Cor. 1, 23; cf. 2, 2.

selves in a certain respect are conceived as the foundation of the church. We know that this view has found the support of some of the most illustrious theologians of the Lutheran church. John Gerhard writes: "The church is set forth as a spiritual house. The corner stone is Christ; the foundation are the prophets and apostles according to their doctrine."¹) Balduin, in his great commentary on the Pauline Epistles, writes: "The apostles and prophets are said to be the foundation, not with respect to their person, but to their doctrine."²) Calov, in his *Biblia Illustrata*, says: "The apostles and prophets are here not viewed as the architects who laid the foundation; but their doctrine is said to be the foundation on which the believers are built, and in which doctrinal foundation the doctrine concerning Christ is prominent. Nor are the apostles and prophets here considered with regard to their persons, since they are themselves even as others built upon the foundation of the church; but with respect to their doctrine, which, according to the will of God, is to be the foundation of the church."³) If this interpretation is exegetically correct, the interpretation preferred by us is exegetically wrong. The genitives must be either subjective or appositive; they might be neither, but they cannot be both. *Sensus literalis unus est*. If this text says that the apostles and prophets *are* the foundation, it just as certainly does not and can not say that they *laid* the foundation. Calov is technically or theoret-

1) Proponitur ecclesia tanquam domus quaedam spiritualis. Lapis angularis est Christus, fundamentum sunt prophetae et apostoli ratione suae doctrinae. Loci Theologici, II, p. 42.

2) Apostoli et Prophetae non dicuntur fundamentum respectu personae, sed doctrinae suae. Comment. in omnes Epistolas Pauli, p. 889.

3) Non hic Apostoli ac Prophetae spectantur ut Architecti, qui fundamentum posuere: sed *doctrina eorum* dicitur fundamentum, cui superstructi fideles sunt: In quo doctrinali fundamento eminet *doctrina de Christo*. Neque hic spectantur *Apostoli et Prophetae* ratione *personarum* suarum, prout ipsi aequae ac alii superstructi sunt fundamento Ecclesiae, sed ratione *doctrinae* suae, quam Deus voluit esse Ecclesiae fundamentum. Bibl. Illustr., IV, 684.

ically right when, holding that the apostles and prophets, with respect to their doctrine, are in this text viewed as the foundation of the church, he says, the apostles and prophets are here *not* viewed as the architects who laid such foundation.

While, however, two variant interpretations cannot both be *exegetically* correct, both may very well be *doctrinally* correct. The *Formula of Concord* is doctrinally right when it says that concurrence in the performance of good works is to be ascribed to the regenerate only, while its reference to the *συνεργοῦντες* of 2 Cor. 6, 1, in substantiation of this point, is exegetically wrong. What the *Apology* says concerning the use of the law is dogmatically correct, because the doctrine it maintains is clearly set forth in various passages of Scripture, though it cannot be exegetically derived from the text quoted from the epistle to the Galatians. Those who hold that the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell is taught in Eph. 4, 9 f. are not accused of false doctrine by those who differ from them in the interpretation of that text, since what St. Paul may not teach in Ephesians is certainly taught in the first epistle of St. Peter. The doctrine which Gerhard and Calov and Balduin find in Eph. 2, 20 by their construction is precisely the same which we find by ours, that the word of the apostles and prophets is *fundamentum doctrinale* of the church. They and others who follow their exegesis do not deny what is taught in 1 Cor. 3, 10, that the apostles, as architects and builders, laid the foundation of the church, but they hold that in Ephesians the *modus concipiendi* is different, while the substance of the doctrine is the same. This is not the only instance of disagreement in exegesis with full agreement in doctrine. In Daniel we read: *Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.*¹⁾ Here, it has been said, the word *many* evidently stands for *all*. We do not accept this. The

1) Dan. 12, 2.

word *many* never stands for the word *all*, but *many* always means *many*, a *great number*, and *all* everywhere means *all*, the *whole number*. Thus, if we had no more comprehensive statement in the Scriptures concerning Christ's redemption, than that *he bare the sin of many*,¹⁾ the doctrine of the universality of the redemption would be without sufficient scriptural foundation. Yet, while we do not agree exegetically with those who, by supposing that *many* stood for *all*, find the resurrection of all the dead taught in Dan. 12, 2, and the redemption of all sinners in Is. 53, 12, we are fully agreed with them doctrinally, knowing that these doctrines are explicitly and clearly taught in other passages of Scripture, as when Christ says: *The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth*;²⁾ and when we read that Christ is *the propitiation for the sins of the whole world*,³⁾ and *gave himself a ransom for all*.⁴⁾

We have an instance in the history of the Reformation which may be of interest as an example to show how in those days the same position was maintained, that discrepancy in exegesis must not be construed into disagreement in doctrine. When, in 1527, Agricola raised certain objections against Melanchthon's *Articuli de quibus egerunt per Visitatores*, he also charged Melanchthon with false exegesis. In Art. XII Melanchthon had stated that the Law must be employed *ut coerceantur rudes homines*, and in substantiation thereof had quoted from Gal. 3, 19, *Lex est posita propter transgressionem, scilicet cavendas*. Luther, in his commentary, had taken a different view of the sense of this text, saying: *Legem dicit positam seu additam et appositam, ut transgressionem abundarent, eodem sensu, quo Ro. 5. dicit: Lex subintravit, ut abundaret delictum. . . . Est ergo*

1) Is. 53, 12.

2) John 5, 28; cf. 2 Cor. 5, 10. Acts 24, 15.

3) 1 John 2, 2.

4) 1 Tim. 2, 6.

*sensus: Lex propter transgressionem posita est, ut transgressio sit et abundet, atque sic per legem homo in sui cognitionem perductus quaerat manum miserentis Dei, qui sine lege peccatum ignorans sibi sanus videtur.*¹⁾ Agricola made a great noise about this discrepancy, and, vehemently advocating Luther's exegesis, posed as a defender of Luther's doctrine against a doctrinal deviation of Melanchthon, while, in fact, it was he who differed in doctrine from both Luther and Melanchthon. It seems that the latter found occasion to defend his orthodoxy against misgivings engendered among his friends. In a letter to Caspar Aquila he says: "Islebius (Agricola of Eisleben) troubles me very much about the text from St. Paul. I am being called into court and, I think, will have to answer a capital charge, because of what I have written. I have, in my exposition, followed that opinion which I find the ancients, too, have embraced and which has nothing absurd about it. In the doctrine itself I agree with Luther, and there is no reason why I should be looked upon as dissenting from him, even though I interpret some passage somewhat differently. For who is there that does not do this?"²⁾ Luther, of course, knew of the difference, and a letter to Agricola, in which Melanchthon briefly answers the several charges preferred by his opponent, appears to have passed through Luther's hands. In this letter Melanchthon says: "I was not ignorant of giving an exposition which differs from his . . . ; nor do I think that Luther is angry with me on this account."³⁾ If Melanchthon had been equally conscious of a doctrinal difference between Lu-

1) Opp. Erl. XXVI, 286 f.

2) De Pauli loco satis me exercet Islebius. Et jam vocor in aulam, causam dicturus capitis, opinor, propter illud scriptum. Ego secutus sum illam sententiam in enarrando, quam video et veteres amplexos esse et nihil absurditatis habere. De dogmate ipso convenit mihi cum Luthero, nec propterea videri debeo ab illo dissentire, etiamsi aliquem locum paulo secius interpretor. Quis enim hoc non facit? Corp. Ref. IV, p. 958.

3) Non ignorabam me aliud exponere atque ille exposuit; . . . nec opinor mihi propterea succensere Lutherum. Corp. Ref. I, 905.

ther and himself, his language would have been different. But he knew that the doctrine he found in the text according to his interpretation was a doctrine also accepted by Luther as taught by St. Paul elsewhere, just as he himself acknowledged the doctrine which Luther derived from the same text by his interpretation as being set forth in St. Paul. He says in the letter already quoted: "For there is no doubt that Paul teaches that the Law was given for these purposes, first, to coerce the flesh by carnal righteousness, and, furthermore, to terrify the conscience. I have applied the interpretation of the Pauline text to the former effect of the Law, Luther applies it to the latter."¹⁾ What he would say is, while we differ exegetically, we agree dogmatically. As two agree with a third, they agree with each other.

In all this there is no sacrifice of any theological principle. The intended meaning of any text can be but one. Scripture is nowhere a waxen nose to be molded or shaped at will, but a sure prophetic word, fit to be a thoroughly reliable source and norm of doctrine and rule of life. As such it also affords a perfectly sufficient safeguard against all perversion of doctrine by faulty interpretation. All errors of human interpreters cannot permanently move or remove one single stone in the doctrinal foundation of Christianity as long as every interpretation is inexorably and unconditionally rejected which is in conflict with any doctrine or point of doctrine clearly set forth in the infallible word of God.

A. G.

1) Non enim dubium est, quin Paulus doceat, legem propter has causas latam esse, primum ad coercendam carnem justitia carnali, deinde ad terrenam conscientiam. Ego interpretationem Paulini loci ad affectum priorem legis accommodavi, Lutherus accommodat ad posteriorem. Ibid. 905. 906.
