

THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY.

VOL. X.

OCTOBER, 1906.

No. 4.

WHY DID LUTHER REFUSE ZWINGLI'S HAND OF BROTHERHOOD AT MARBURG?

The first four days of October mark the anniversary of the memorable meeting between Luther and Zwingli at Marburg. At this celebrated conference Zwingli offered the hand of Christian brotherhood and fellowship to Luther; but Luther refused it. Why did he do this? Before we proceed to answer this question, we shall do well to review the events that led up to this colloquy.

Charles V had concluded a treaty with Pope Clement VII and had solemnly pledged himself to suppress Protestantism. The German Protestants formed a defensive alliance in which the Landgrave of Hesse, Philip the Magnanimous, was anxious to have the Swiss included. Zwingli was equally anxious for this. But an obstacle was in the way—the controversy between the Lutherans and Zwinglians on the Lord's Supper. Who had begun this controversial conflict? That is a question which Reformed writers usually pass over in silence, for they know that Zwingli was the author of this heated and unhappy controversy.¹⁾ It is an undeniable fact that prior to the year 1524 Zwingli and his friends were at one with Luther in teaching the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. In 1521 Oecolampadius, Zwingli's friend, called it

1) See Luther's Works, St. Louis Edition, vol. XX, col. 772; XVII, 1534, Luther's Letters, De Wette, vol. III, 43.

1 COR. 2, 6—10.

(Opening Sermon preached at the Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference, at Chicago, Ill., August 15, 1906.)

According to a custom long established among our churches we have gathered here as representatives of the Lutheran synods which are united in the Synodical Conference of North America. In view of the unceasing attempts of the arch-fiend and his aids among men, to disrupt our union, it is a very miracle of God that we have not failed to demonstrate the unity of spirit existing among us, by our biennial meetings. As we are gathered here to-day, we know with certain assurance that we truly represent the orthodox Church of America, the Church of the true faith.—But it is not for this purpose of representation alone that we have assembled. It behooves us to do whatever lies in our power here to strengthen and preserve the bond of unity which exists between us by the grace of God. This duty determines the line of thought to be followed in this opening service. Let us give careful attention to the words of the Holy Spirit which are presented to us in our text, which exhibits

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH, AS A SPEAKER OF GOD'S WISDOM.

1. *The Church recognizes it as her only duty to preach the wisdom of God.*

“We speak,” says Paul in our text, describing his own work and that of his fellow-apostles. Theirs was the duty, enjoined upon them by Christ Himself, to speak, to preach that which had been entrusted to them, and our entire text properly refers to the manner in which the apostles carried out their instructions. Yet we may with good reason appropriate the words to ourselves, as representatives of the Church of the true faith. For the mission entrusted to the apostles by the clear words of the Lord has descended from them to the whole Church, the communion of saints. Hers is now the duty to speak, to preach what Christ has entrusted to His disciples.

“We speak . . . not the wisdom of the world.” There is wisdom of the world which is not without value to man. The

knowledge of God's creation benefits him in many ways. By seeking after it, he acquires mastery over nature, incomplete, to be sure, but sufficient to increase his enjoyment of life on earth. And if his eyes be open to see what may be seen, he will find peculiar pleasure in following the footsteps of the Creator, in order to praise His wisdom and power as revealed in the works of His hands. But valuable as the wisdom of the world may be in a way, the Church recognizes that this wisdom must not be the burden of her preaching. "We speak . . . not the wisdom of the world;" though we acknowledge its value, such as it is, we leave it to others to proclaim it.

Much less do we speak "the wisdom . . . of the princes of the world, that come to naught." Among those who seek the wisdom of the world there are some who rise above the general level and by virtue of skill and mental power acquire the dignity of princes in the realm of thought. They are the true rulers of the world, since they assume the leadership among their fellow-men, proclaiming with authority what shall be called science among men. Pondering over the problems of the universe, which the sons of men have wrestled with for ages, they have built up most wonderful systems of thought, rarely agreeing in any vital point, but always insisting that theirs is the true wisdom. But, as Paul says, they come to naught; their work is done in vain. Modern systems of philosophy rest upon the ruins of those which went before, and will come to ruin in their turn. Therefore the Church will have none of this wisdom of the rulers of the world; it is not her mission to be a preacher of vain and passing thoughts.

"We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory." Note how carefully Paul distinguishes this wisdom from the wisdom of the world. In a way, the wisdom of the world, the knowledge of created things, is also wisdom of God, because that which may be known of God is manifest in them (Rom. 1, 19); and it likewise is wisdom of God in a mystery, since even the simplest processes of life will forever

baffle all attempts at satisfactory explanation. But here we have a wisdom which is not merely a mystery, but a *hidden* wisdom. Our senses, by means of which we may gather some knowledge of the world, are unable to penetrate the concealment in which the true wisdom of God lies hidden. The most profound thought of man has not even touched upon its outer boundary line. This wisdom, moreover, was foreordained by God before the world unto our glory. It sets forth the most loving and merciful thoughts which arose in God's heart, as it were, before the foundations of the world were laid—thoughts which had as their final purpose the salvation of sinful man.

Though Paul says no more than this about the hidden wisdom of God, yet his words at once call to our mind what Christ said to His disciples, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God," Luke 8, 10. And Paul himself, in a later epistle, speaks thus: "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was made manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory," 1 Tim. 3, 16. To be brief, "the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom of God," is no other than the wisdom of the blessed Gospel that "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John 3, 16.

That is the wisdom of God which the Church preaches. To proclaim this gracious mystery is known by her to be her only mission. She hears her call in the words of the prophet, "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" Is. 40, 9. She responds to the command of her Lord who says unto her, "Go ye and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," Matt. 28, 19. 20.

In pursuance of this mission,

2. *The Church draws the hidden wisdom of God from the only true source, and thus becomes the only true speaker of this wisdom.*

Speaking of the hidden wisdom of God, Paul goes on to say: "Which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Thus it had happened: when the Lord of glory descended upon this sinful world and became man among men, the princes of this world would have none of Him. They refused to hear His words, and when forced to take sides, they spurned Him whom their fathers had desired. It was not enough for them to put those out of the synagogue who did confess that Jesus was the Christ; they condemned the Lord of glory and rested not until He had died the death of a felon. And thus it has been ever since. The princes of this world, the rulers of the thoughts of men, have refused to do homage to the Savior of sinners. In the pride of their hearts they spurn the Son of Man and persecute Him in His disciples. Their hatred betrays their utter lack of knowledge of the hidden wisdom of God. They are blind leaders of the blind, and the Church, seeing their ignorance, scorns their alleged wisdom in her turn and calls it, not a source of the wisdom of God, but a fountain of iniquity.

Hence the Church knows full well that the true wisdom of God may be drawn from no human source. Paul emphasizes this fact by adding, "As it is written: Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Our senses in themselves, as seeing and hearing, furnish no clue to the hidden mystery of God, because it is not revealed in nature. Our deepest thoughts can never reach the depths of God's mercy and loving kindness. Knowing this, the Church seeks no part of the wisdom of God in human knowledge, nor in the movements of her own heart and mind. The source of her wisdom is infinitely higher.

"God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit," says Paul, and here we cannot at once make his words our own. Still

speaking of himself and his fellow-apostles, he declares that their knowledge of the hidden wisdom of God was given to them immediately by God's own Spirit. For in the apostles Christ fulfilled to the letter what He had promised, saying, "When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth," John 16, 13. Having chosen them to be teachers of the world, He fitted them out for their work by special gifts of the Spirit, so that they never failed to speak the true wisdom of God. And what the Spirit revealed to the apostles, they recorded in their writings, "in words which the Holy Ghost taught them," 1 Cor. 2, 13. Thus their writings are, for us, the revelation of the hidden wisdom of God. This, therefore, is the source from which the Church draws all her knowledge, the only possible source of Gospel truth. In childlike faith, but unswervingly, the Church stands squarely upon the written Word of God, and scorns all aid of human philosophy when she draws from this pure fountain the hidden wisdom of God. She will not even permit her own reason to harmonize the teachings of Holy Writ, even though they appear to be in contradiction to one another, but accepts them as they are written, with full trust in the guidance of the Spirit of God.

For that reason, the orthodox Church is the only true speaker of the divine wisdom. An ancient saying of theologians declares that "there is no salvation outside of the Church." This is undeniable. The Church alone draws the hidden wisdom of God from its true fountain, the Word of God. This being the wisdom foreordained by God unto our glory, the wisdom which carries with it life and salvation, it needs must follow that salvation cannot be found except in the Church.

May the Lord Jesus so guide us in our present deliberations here and in our future work that the unity of the Spirit may be preserved among us in the bond of peace. May He preserve us mercifully from all disagreement in doctrine, in order that we may ever be divinely sure that we, the church bodies united in the Synodical Conference, are the Church which is the true speaker of the hidden wisdom of God. Amen.

New Ulm, Minn.

J. SCHALLER.