

A former classmate and roommate of mine, who has since been received by the Lord into the heavenly mansions, was once asked whether it were more important that the Gospel be preached and spread throughout the world or that the Gospel truth be carefully preserved in its biblical purity. His reply was that the one must definitely be done and that the other dare not be neglected.

The truth of this statement becomes apparent when one considers what the effect would be of neglecting either the one or the other of these activities of the church. If the Gospel is not preached, if it is not brought to the attention of our fellowmen, that would be tantamount to hiding it under a bushel. In that case it cannot accomplish that which God pleases and cannot prosper in the thing whereto God sent it. If on the other hand the truth of the Gospel is not carefully preserved in its biblical purity and a distorted, polluted, diluted, or watered-down gospel message is proclaimed, it will lack the power which is inherent in the Gospel to change men's hearts and to make them children of God.

Just as important as the sending of missionaries out into the world and just as important as training men for this task, is the proper thorough indoctrination of these men, so that the message they proclaim may be the unadulterated Word of God in all its inherent saving power. Only that message can and will bring lasting results of our missionary effort.

#### What is essential?

Scripture itself answers this question for us. When our Lord commissioned His apostles as world missionaries, He instructed them to "Go...therefore and teach all 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" (Matth. 28:19-20). Several factors in the answer to the question, "What is essential?" are discernible in this command of our Lord. First of all, the message we proclaim must concern itself with the true and living, the triune God. We are not told to be vague or accommodating in our preaching and teaching, but to instruct and baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Not only is it essential that our message concern itself with the only true God (all other so-called gods are really not gods at all), but in our teaching we are to convey to our hearers everything that our Lord has commanded us to teach. We have no right to be selective, to teach some things to some and other things to others, as we may deem advisable. All men are in God's sight in the same condemnation of sin; all men are in need of the same saving grace of God; and all men need to hear the same saving Gospel in its full strength for their salvation. This is what the Apostle Paul did in his preaching. He told the elders of the church at Ephesus, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

What does this mean in practical terms? Applied to the body of Christian doctrine as it is usually treated by our Lutheran dogmaticians it means that we have to instruct our people, be they members of our congregations in the States, or mission prospects for congregations yet to be founded, or the people of any country in any part of the world whom we hope to win for Christ, in the doctrine of God, in the doctrine of man and his fall into sin, in the doctrine of Christ, His person and redemptive work, in the doctrine of salvation, both the manner of our justification and the Christian life that results from it, and the doctrine of the last things, our ultimate goal for all eternity, the second coming of Christ to take us to Himself into heavenly glory.

In the area of theology proper we must point out that there are two sources of information, the natural knowledge of God which can only tell us that He exists and that His works testify of Him thus arousing our curiosity to know more about Him. This is possible only through the revealed knowledge of God in His sacred Word, where we learn to know who He is and how He is disposed toward sinful mankind. We must point out further that this one true God is triune and that many of His attributes (really different manifestations of His divine essence) are revealed to us in Scripture. Here it will be important to impress the truth of the first commandment upon those we instruct, that there are no other gods beside the true and living God, the triune God.

Next we must tell our hearers that man is God's noblest creature for whom this entire universe was created and is being preserved by God as a suitable habitat for man during his time of grace. We must inform them of the fall of our first parents into sin and the disastrous consequences of this transgression on all their progeny, the curse of sin and the penalty of eternal damnation imposed by God's just and holy Law. We dare not neglect here to call attention to the hereditary character of original sin which pollutes all mankind and predisposes man to actual sins of thought, word, and deed. We must also call attention to man's utter helplessness in this sad situation and his need of a Savior from sin.

The person of this Savior is revealed only in holy Scripture, which tells us of the incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, by which He became true man as well as true God and was therefore uniquely qualified to redeem us from the guilt of our sins. Being put under the Law of God He did what no mortal human being ever had done -- Kept it perfectly. Then He assumed the guilt of the sins of all men and in His own sinless body and bore the penalty for them, death, in our stead and in our behalf, thus satisfying the demands of divine justice and offering us His perfect righteousness as a gift of His grace which we receive through our God-given faith as the receiving organ.

Accepting and believing the biblical account of our salvation is not within the power of any human being. Man's conversion to faith in Christ is the accomplishment of God's Holy Spirit who achieves this through the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments. In this connection men need to be told about faith, justification, sanctification, good works, prayer, cross and comfort, perseverance in the faith, and our election of grace. Here also the means of grace will be treated in detail, Law and Gospel will be clearly distinguished, the sacraments defined and their use explained. In connection with soteriology we also treat of the church as a divine institution for the administration of the means of grace and point out how it differs from other divine institutions such as the government. For the efficient functioning of the church the office of the holy ministry has been ordained by God, and such divine institutions as the family, matrimony, and civil government, each in their peculiar way, help in the continued efficient functioning of the church.

In all of our teaching the final goal of the Christian life, eternal life dare never be lost sight of. As the Christian faces temporal death and leaves this world, he has his sights trained on the new and better life in heaven. A course in dogmatics therefore always includes, yes is actually oriented toward the doctrine of the last things, death, Christ's second coming to judgment, the resurrection at the end of the world, and eternal salvation of all believers in Christ as well as the eternal damnation of all unbelievers.

How much of this material can safely be omitted? It forms a connected whole. It is an integral unit. If any part of it is omitted or soft-pedaled, serious consequences result. Thus lack of proper emphasis on theology proper can result in syncretism, a mixture of biblical theology and heathen mythology, which would leave only a distorted concept of God. Failure to set forth the terrible nature and consequences of sin would result in a mere social gospel, an empty morality, which would merely give hints and suggestions for successful living in this world, but would not prepare man for eternal life. Any distortion of the redemptive work of Christ and its saving power would lead inevitably to some form of work-righteousness, so prevalent in our wicked world as it is, and would destroy the very purpose of all mission work, that of saving lost souls for a blessed eternity. If proper emphasis is not placed on the doctrine of the last things, if men are not aimed and guided at their eternal destiny, eternal life in heaven with their blessed Lord and Savior, then all mission work is a waste of time and effort. Then no lasting results will be accomplished. Living conditions here on earth may be improved for a time to some degree, but all this effort is lost in the end when soul and body are lost forever in the final judgment.

What is essential? I repeat that all is essential that the Lord Himself has commanded us to teach and to preach, namely the whole counsel of God for man's eternal salvation.

#### What is available?

I assume that this question concerns itself with suitable teaching materials for transmitting the doctrine of the Bible to those whom we train and instruct. In this area our own Synod has produced very little in recent decades. We do have available several items that can be used to good advantage in this area:

#### 1. John P. Meyer, Dogmatics Notes, an Outline of Systematic Theology

This is a very thorough and complete outline of Dogmatics elaborated on the basis of Hoenecke's Dogmatik many years ago by the sainted Professor John P. Meyer. It has been used at our Seminary for the last half century as the basis for classroom instruction in Dogmatics. Two Senior students during the past academic year have compiled an index of Scripture passages quoted in this outline. On the 364 pages of this outline approximately 6,000 Scripture references are cited once or oftener from 64 of the 66 books of the Bible (Obadiah and Habakkuk excepted). This constitutes a rather comprehensive coverage of Scriptural sources for doctrine.

#### 2. John P. Meyer, The Way of Salvation. Theology proper

In 1948 the Synod offered Professor Meyer a year's sabbatical leave for expanding these notes into a textbook on Dogmatics. Professor Meyer steadfastly refused to consider such an offer, stating as his reason that exegetical study of the Holy Scriptures is the best source of doctrine. He would much rather see our students go directly to Holy Writ for their instruction in doctrine than to quote the writings of John P. Meyer or of any other human author. However, after his demise his son found on the shelf in his study two copies of a manuscript entitled The Way of Salvation, which proved to be an elaboration of the first portion of his dogmatics notes on the doctrine of theology proper, the doctrine of God. This was published serially in the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, July 1965 to January 1967. Unbeknown to anyone he had thus secretly worked out the manuscript for the first volume of a multi-volume textbook on Dogmatics. It would require

little effort to publish this portion of the work in book form by simply reprinting it from the pages of the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly.

3. John Schaller, Biblical Christology, Milwaukee, Northwestern, 1919

Way back in 1919 John Schaller, then a member of our Seminary faculty, published this 179-page book on Christology. Its characteristic feature is that unlike other textbooks on dogmatics it lists at the beginning of each chapter and portion of a chapter the Scripture passages from which this particular point in Christology is drawn, and then proceeds to show how these quotations from Scripture pinpoint and pin down that particular bit of Christology. Unfortunately the book recently went out of print and is now available only at second hand. Copies of it continue to turn up in the liquidation of the libraries of our retired and departed pastors, all of whom used the book in their student days at the Seminary.

4. Herman A. Preus and Edmund Smits, The Doctrine of Man, Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1962

About the best volume extant on Anthropology at this time is this translation of a summary of the works of Martin Chemnitz and Johann Gerhard on the doctrines of man and of sin. The translation was made by Mario Colacci, Lowell Satre, J. A. O. Preus, Jr., Otto Stahlke, and Bert H. Narveson and was edited by Herman Preus and Edmund Smits. In these translations much detail has been omitted from the voluminous writings of Chemnitz and Gerhard, but the unity and continuity of the material has been preserved by concentrating on key sentences and paragraphs throughout these lengthy presentations. The book is very readable, comprehensive, and thoroughly reliable doctrinally. Unfortunately, the first edition is exhausted and Augsburg has not seen fit to publish a second edition. The book is currently out of print.

5. Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 4 vol., St. Louis, Concordia, 1950-1957

In the English language this is the standard work in dogmatics in the confessional Lutheran church of our times. It is a translation of Pieper's Christliche Dogmatik which appeared 1917-1924 in three volumes and has been used in Missouri Synod circles as the textbook of dogmatics for many years. The translation was made by a group of Missouri Synod scholars under the editorship of Professor Theodore Engelder. In 1957 Professor Walter W. F. Albrecht prepared an elaborate index, Volume IV of the set. Apart from the fact that this work is dated and is now over half a century old and therefore does not take into consideration recent trends in theology, this is still the most comprehensive treatment of Lutheran dogmatics available to confessional Lutheran students today.

6. John Theodore Mueller, Christian Dogmatics, St. Louis, Concordia, 1951

This Handbook of Doctrinal Theology for Pastors, Teachers, and Laymen, as the subtitle calls it, is a condensation or epitome of Pieper's Christian Dogmatics in a single volume of 665 pages including the index. It has eliminated the material found in the footnotes in Pieper and has condensed the remaining material, retaining most of the Scripture references throughout. This makes it a very useful and usable volume for instructing classes where the available time is limited and maximum use of every available class period must be made.

7. Edward W. A. Koehler, A Summary of Christian Doctrine, Oakland, Cal. 1939

Previous to Mueller's condensation of Pieper's Christian Dogmatics Professor Edward W. A. Koehler, a member of the faculty of Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Illinois, from 1909 to 1951 had in 1939 published privately this Popular Presentation of the Teachings of the Bible in order to provide students at River Forest with a convenient handbook of Christian doctrines. He made no effort to refute erroneous doctrines as is often done in such a work, but contented himself with presenting the doctrines of the Bible in positive form, referring those interested in false doctrines taught by others to textbooks on comparative symbolics. This 328-page volume is much more concise and therefore somewhat more limited in content than Mueller's Christian Doctrine. For someone who seeks a brief and direct presentation of any doctrine of the Bible this volume is well suited.

#### Can we join to produce a sound textbook?

This raises a question which has been heard in our circles for more than a quarter of a century. Aware of the fact that our own standard textbook on Dogmatics, Adolf Hoenecke, Dogmatik in four volumes plus an index volume, published after his death by Northwestern Publishing House 1909-1917, is written in German with copious Latin quotations from 16th to 18th century dogmaticians, is now out of print, and is hardly adequate for use because of the language in which it is written, our Synod has been trying for twenty-five years to persuade someone to write an up-to-date textbook on Dogmatics for our use.

I have already alluded to the attempt that was made in 1948 to persuade Professor John P. Meyer to undertake this task. There was the one man who was better qualified than any other in our circles to do this work because he had taught the subject longer than any other man in the history of our Synod. His reasons for refusing this assignment have already been mentioned.

Since that time various suggestions have been made that Hoenecke's Dogmatik might be translated into English as Pieper's Chriſtliche Dogmatik was rendered into the vernacular. This was actually attempted at times by various individuals. I know of one of my former students at the Seminary who made an attempt at it. His knowledge of theological German, however, was somewhat deficient, and his lack of experience in translation work resulted in a product that would have required a great deal of editing if not retranslation before a usable textbook would have emerged.

About the year 1970 the Commission on Christian Literature approached the Systematic Theology department at the Seminary with the request that it consider the production of a textbook for Dogmatics. At the time there were two men in the department with the prospect of two more being added soon. When one member of the department made an attempt at translating Hoenecke's Dogmatik, it soon became apparent that this would not be satisfactory unless considerable editing and supplementing were done, which would virtually result in the writing of a new book.

The Commission on Christian Literature also felt that a translation of Hoenecke would not suffice for the present, much less for the future. They felt that a new attempt must be made to produce a textbook on Dogmatics and closed the letter in which this suggestion was made with the remark: "As we see it, the Wisconsin Synod will not be publishing a work on Dogmatics in our time unless someone undertakes that work as of now, and is given time to work on it. There the matter stands today.

The department of Systematic Theology at the Seminary has considered this problem from time to time, but has found no solution as yet, and that for the following reasons: At present we finally have a full complement of four men in the department. Each of these men carries a full teaching load of ten to fifteen periods per week. None of these men has found time and opportunity even to outline or plan the production of such a textbook, although in meetings of the department we have discussed various phases of such an undertaking and possible methods of attacking the problem. Our department lacks a man who has spent a lifetime teaching this course. Some of us have been teaching the course for ten to fifteen years now and have covered both halves of it from five to seven times. Yet with the perennial shortage of one or two men on our faculty we have had to carry full teaching loads and at times overloads, besides the added work of the summer quarter in recent years, so that no time has been available to any one of us for planning this type of production, much less to undertake it.

What can be done in the future? Perhaps if one of us could be retired while still in good health and given ample time, opportunity, and resources for this type of assignment, it could be worked out as a retirement project. Thought might be given to the advisability of producing a brief compendium of Christian doctrine such as Koehler or Mueller before it is elaborated into a full-fledged comprehensive text on the subject. On the other hand, it is always easier to condense a full-length work into an epitome than to develop a shorter work into a complete treatment of the subject.

Thought might also be given to the type of work desired. Should it be merely a positive presentation of Scripture doctrine without antitheses, or should it treat doctrines both thetically and antithetically? Should the history of doctrine be taken into consideration or reserved for a separate work on Doemensgeschichte subsequent to the publication of the textbook on doctrine? What part should the Lutheran Confessions play in presenting the material? Should a format something like Schaller's Christology be used, in which the Scripture passages are listed and then notes made on them? Or should perhaps a modification of this method be attempted in which the doctrines are drawn directly from their Scriptural sources (the sedes doctrinae) and developed from them into conclusions, rather than stating a doctrine thetically and trying to support it with Scriptural evidence or proof texts? Some thought should also be given to the eventual use of the work. Is it to be designed primarily for use at our Seminary in Mequon, for use in our various World Mission Seminaries, for use at our teacher training school, or for all of these?

Clearly, we stand in need of an up-to-date classroom text in this area of theology. May the Lord direct someone soon to undertake this task.

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H. Vogel