

The Role of Apologetics and Polemics in the Pulpit

By Prof. Gerald Hoenecke

[Prepared for The Metro-North Pastoral Conference, Calvary Ev. Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, March 20, 1978]

The Role of Apologetics and Polemics in the Pulpit

While appearing occasionally in a conference announcement of our Northwestern Lutheran, the subject of this paper is anything but popular. If something of this nature appears in a religious periodical or church news, it might be in the form of polemics against employing polemics. The reason is obvious. There has been such an increasing watering down or outright denial and rejection of Scripture truths and an associated toleration of error, all in the interest of a false ecumenism, that there is not only no room for apologetics or polemics, but engaging in them would seem to be completely inconsistent with the trend, to say the least. Even the Evangelist Billy Graham, despite his public correction, in part, of an article in the January issue of McCall's Magazine, appears to be moving in the direction of that trend.

That there is such widespread and growing indifference with respect to Biblical doctrine, indifference that has penetrated also conservative church circles, - this fact alone should alert us to the danger to which also we are exposed in this matter. Surely we dare not become smug and complacent, taking the attitude: This could never happen to us. Here might well be the opening Satan is looking for to get his foot in and weaken our hold on the truths of Scripture. A place, too, where he might hope to find us with our defenses down is in our mission activity, the very spot where he has succeeded with others in the past. At any rate, there never will be a time when we can afford not to be alert to attempts of Satan to weaken our firm stand on all the truths of the inspired, inerrant Word of God. This means that we will need to become ever more firmly rooted in the teachings of Scripture and thus also more proficient in defending its truths against attacks from without and in combating error wherever and whenever we are confronted with it. This, too, belongs to carrying out the Lord's injunction, not only to "lengthen thy cords," but also to "strengthen thy stakes" (Is 54:2). Thus we need also not be embarrassed or apologize that our conference program includes a paper on the subject:

I. Apologetics and Polemics in our Christian ministry.

The title of our paper obviously assumes that both apologetics and polemics have a place and are thus to be employed in our Christian ministry. Not to do so would be to act contrary to the clear directives and instructions, also the many examples of the Scriptures. Before, however, substantiating this, it will be in place in each case to clarify for ourselves what the two terms really mean.

A. Apologetics

The Random House Dictionary defines apologetics: "The branch of theology concerned with the defense or proof of Christianity." We are not fully satisfied with this definition. For we do not consider it our task or duty to demonstrate or prove to the skeptic or unbeliever the truth of the Christian religion. The Lutheran Cyclopedia does far better: "Christian apologetics is the scientific vindication of the truth and absoluteness of the Christian religion against unbelief" (Luth. Cycl.; Erwin L. Luecker, Ed. Concordia, p.41). Someone has correctly said: "The best apology of the Christian religion is its proclamation." In other words, the power to convict and convince is in the Word itself. This Word is "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow" (He 4:12). The gospel in that Word is "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Ro 1:16). We are born again, writes Peter, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth

forever" (1 Pe 1:23). Therefore, we note also that the great Apostle Paul, who had a broad, no doubt also scientific training, did not employ his scholarship and knowledge to convince people of the truth. In fact, he told the Corinthians: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God ... And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor 2:1,4,5). Paul's position is wholly in keeping with Jesus' words: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (Jn 7:17). Rather than demonstrate or prove the truth of Scripture, it is the task of apologetics to expose the untruthfulness and untenableness, yes, the folly of unbelief, of objections and opposition to Scriptural truth. Dr. Reu in his Homiletics speaks of this as allocution, which he defines as "the formulation and refutation of objections," a device by which "the actual or possible objections and the divergent viewpoint of the hearer are fairly met and overcome" (Reu, Homiletics, p. 393, 173) .

In this Jesus set us a good example. When He was charged by the scribes with casting out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils, He responded:

Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. (Lk 11:15-20)

When the Pharisees reasoned in their hearts that He was blaspheming when He forgave the sins of the paralytic, He asked: "Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed and walk?" Whereupon He put them to shame by proceeding to heal the paralytic with the simple words: "I say unto thee, Arise and take up thy bed, and go thy way unto thine house" (Mk 2:9, 11). To the Pharisees' insinuation that by eating with publicans and sinners He showed Himself to be as bad as they, He responded: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick...I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mt 9:12f). He answered the Pharisees' charge that His disciples had desecrated the Sabbath: "Have ye not read what David did...or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath" (Mt 12:3,5-8). When at another time the scribes charged His disciples with transgressing the tradition of the elders by eating with unwashed hands, He answered, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition" and applied Isaiah's words to them: "Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophecy of you-saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mt 15:3,7-9). Finally, when after Jesus had called Himself the Light of the world they said: "Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true," He set them straight by saying: "Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true; for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I came, and whither I go. Ye judge after the flesh: I judge no man. And yet, if I judge, my judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me" (Jn 8:12-18).

As Jesus, so also His great Apostle Paul made frequent use of apologetics, for example, in his use of the dialectic method of presentation. He either answers a charge or objection actually raised against his teaching or anticipates an objection, at other times even sets up an imaginary opponent, and in each case presents a fitting and only too telling answer. Romans especially abounds in examples of this highly effective rhetorical device. Thus he begins chapter two: "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things...And thinkest thou this, O man that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the

judgment of God?" (2:1,3). Anticipating an objection to his putting the self-righteous Jew in his place, he asks: "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?" His answer: "Much every way: chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God" (3:1,2). Aware that someone might draw a wrong conclusion from his praise of the boundless grace of God in the justification of the sinner - for "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" -, he asks: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" To his frequently used strong rejection of this blasphemy, "God forbid," he adds what might be called a strong logical rebuttal: "How shall we that are dead (better, have died) to sin, live any longer therein?" (6:1,2). Having said, that we needed to get out from under the law in order to be able to keep it and thus serve God "in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter," he asks a question that might easily arise in the mind of the reader: "What shall we say then? Is the law sin?" His first words in a longer answer to this question are: "God forbid: Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin taking occasion by the commandment wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead" (7:7,8). One more example from Romans. Paul had in chapters 9 and 10 presented the extremely sad story of Israel, who had "stumbled at that stumbling stone," and of whom the Lord had to say through Isaiah: "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." Envisioning a question posed because of the unbelief and apostasy of Israel, Paul asks, "I say then, Hath God cast away his people?" Again he answers "God forbid." and points as proof to his own example and to the answer God gave to Elijah as concerning the "remnant according to the election of grace" (v. 5). "I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knees to the image of Baal" (v. 3). Hardly a better example of Paul's use of the dialectic method can be found than his refutation of the denial of the resurrection of the dead in the Corinthian congregation. Assuming what is denied to be true, he points to the inevitable and disastrous consequences: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen; ...and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." All of which, however, is shown to be not in the least in doubt because Paul can add: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Cor 15:12-20). (Other examples of Paul's use of this method: Ro 2:17-24; 7:13; 1 Cor 15:35-44; Ga 2:17; 3:19-22).

B. Polemics

Both Jesus and Paul, the other apostles as well, also frequently employ polemics in their teaching and preaching. Polemics differs from apologetics in that it warns and contends against error, condemns and rejects it. The Random House Dictionary defines polemics: "The branch of theology dealing with the history or conduct of ecclesiastical disputation and controversy." The Lutheran Cyclopaedia (p. 824) calls it "The controversial side of theology; in a narrower sense, the principle and methods of argument as applied to controversy within the Christian Church. In this sense polemics is distinguished from apologetics, which is concerned with the defense of Christianity against those who attack it from without."

Saying that Jesus employed polemics is not to charge Him with a negative theology. His presentation, His preaching and teaching the truth from the positive side know no equal. And yet, because of the danger error poses for the souls of men, He in His Savior love could not keep silence over against both error and the errorists. Besides, being not only a teacher of the truth, but the very Truth personified, every lie and every error were an abomination to Him, as He had already stated through the prophet Jeremiah: "Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongue, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord" (Jr 23:31f).

It is, therefore, not in the least surprising, but rather to be expected, to find Jesus actively engaged in combating error and its proponents. He did this whenever He came into direct contact with them. While His dealing with them was always marked by extreme patience and loving concern for their souls, while He, therefore, ever tried by careful instruction to lead them from their error to the truth; He minced no words when denouncing to their face the false teachers and their false doctrines. We already heard Him telling the Pharisees

and scribes that they were the ones Isaiah called hypocrites, who honored God with their mouth and lips while their hearts were far from Him. For they taught as truth the commandments of men. And how can we forget the sevenfold woe, His final word to them, which Jesus pronounced upon these same enemies of the truth and in which He again laid bare their hypocrisy and soul-destroying religion of work-righteousness. His indignation on that occasion reached its climax in the word: "Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in...Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Mt 23:13-33).

Jesus was just as outspoken when He warned others against these errors and errorists. One of the objects of His Sermon on the Mount was to expose, refute, and condemn the self-righteous religion of the scribes and Pharisees. He introduced that part of His sermon: "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:20). Toward the close of that sermon He spoke the well-known warning: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Mt 7:15). When on another occasion the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Him desiring a sign from heaven and He had put them to silence and was again alone with His disciples, His first words to them were: "Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Mt 16:6). Only one more example to show that Jesus made no secret of His denunciation of the false teachers and their errors. In Luke (20:45-47) we read: "Then in the audience of all the people He said unto His disciples: Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief room at feasts, which devour widow's homes and for a show make long prayers; the same shall receive greater damnation."

The inspired apostles of the Lord were no less outspoken in denouncing false teachers and their false teachings, nor did they hesitate, when necessary, to call them by their names. Hardly any of the warnings against error and errorists has received as much attention in the last decades than that of Romans 16: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned: and avoid them. For they that are such serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (16:17f). Just as well known is Paul's denouncement of the Judaizers in Galatians: "There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Ga 1:7-9). And who of us is not acquainted with Paul's description of and warning against the Antichrist, whom Luther and all true Lutherans, to say nothing of others, have correctly identified with the Papacy: "Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Th 2:3,4). To the elders of the church of Ephesus Paul said: "For I know that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock; also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Ac 20:29-31). Writing to Timothy, Paul twice warns against false teachers by name, "Of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tm 2 :17f); again, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil; the Lord reward him according to his works" (2 Tm 4:14). Errorist are also called by name in the Book of Revelation.

For the sake of brevity I quote without comment a number of other apostolic warnings against error and errorists. "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision" (Php 3:2). "Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon or of the sabbath days...Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind" (Col 2:16,18). "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and

commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Tm 4:1-3). "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, denying even the Lord that bought them and bring unto themselves swift destruction" (2 Pe 2:1). "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 Jn 4:1). These warnings were meant to be taken seriously, as everything else in God's Word, and to be translated into action. "Avoid them:" is Paul's urgent injunction in Romans 16. To Timothy he writes with respect to those who "teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness": "From such withdraw thyself" (1 Tm 6:3,5). John writes: "If there come any unto you that bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 Jn 10).

This is so serious a matter that God has harsh words to say about the shepherds who neglect to warn God's people against those who would mislead them: "His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark: sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, everyone for his gain, from his quarter" (Is 56:10f). Thus it is also as might be expected, that the Bible's list of qualifications for a shepherd of Christ's flock should not only describe him as "holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught," but also includes "that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Tt 1:9). The reason given by Paul: "For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake" (Tt 1:10f). Accordingly Paul strongly urged Titus: "Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" (Tt 1:13). In fact, Paul wanted all Christians to become involved in this defense of the gospel, and so wrote to the Philippians: "Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Php 1:27). That is also why the Lord has Jude write to "them that are sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called": "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jd 1:3).

Considering all that has been said, it is not in the least surprising that also our Lutheran confessions, to which we subscribe because they clearly and correctly present Scriptural truths, abound in apologetics and polemics. Clear-cut antitheses, introduced with "they (the churches) condemn" or "we condemn," invariably follow the positive statements of the teachings of Scripture. Nor did the fathers hesitate to call the false teachers by name. The very first article of the Augsburg Confession, "Of God," is a good example of this. After stating clearly the Scriptural doctrine concerning God, it continues: "They condemn all heresies, which have sprung up against this article, as the Manichaeans, who assumed two principles, one Good, and the other Evil; also the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and all such. They condemn also the Samosatenes, old and new, who, contending there is but one Person, sophistically and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Spirit are not distinct Persons, but that the 'Word' signifies a spoken word, and 'Spirit' signifies motion created in things." This example, multiplied many times over throughout the Augsburg Confession and the other confessional writings, suffices to show that our fathers of the Reformation period engaged in apologetics and polemics in no uncertain a way. Nor did our Lutheran dogmaticians, old and new, who followed them do otherwise. That this is not done by them in a vindictive, self-exalting spirit, is clear from a statement in the Preface to the Christian Book of Concord:

As to the condemnations, censures, and rejections of godless doctrines, especially of that which has arisen concerning the Lord's Supper, these indeed had to be expressly set forth in this our declaration and thorough explanation and decision of controverted articles, not only that all should guard against these condemned doctrines, but also for certain other reasons could in no way have been passed by" (Conc Trigl., p. 19).

Luther's words on the subject also bear hearing: "A pastor must combine feeding and fending (wehren). Otherwise, if the fending is not done, the wolf will devour the sheep and fodder together." - "A preacher must be a fighter and a shepherd. He must have teeth in his mouth. Teaching is a very difficult art. Paul contends (2 Tm 4:2; Tt 1:9), as does Peter (2 Pe 2), that sound doctrine must be urged and that those who contradict must be answered" (Plass, *What Luther Says*, II, p 935f). With respect to preachers who failed to warn against error in their sermons, Luther once is to have said: "Those who do not want to shed light on the abominations of the papacy in sermons are giving us bad advice" (Plass, II, p 1018).

II. Our Use of Apologetics and Polemics in the Pulpit.

To understand and appreciate Luther's own frequent use of especially polemics, also his strong words about the preachers who failed to do this, we need but call to mind the bitter, open opposition to and public denunciation of the Scriptural truths which he by God's grace had been privileged to rediscover and proclaim to starving souls. Now we may not need to do this to the same degree as Luther did, yet all that we have said so far ought to make it clear that the question for us is not, "Should we engage in apologetics and polemics in our ministry" but "To what extent and in what manner?" Thus also the question about using these in the pulpit can hardly be "Should we," but rather "How, and how much?"

Consider the alternative of not doing it, or perhaps reserving this for confirmation and Bible classes. What percentage of our people do we reach in these classes? Only a small number. Thus the majority of our people would be deprived of this aspect of the ministry of the Word, yet we are no less responsible to this majority than we are to those who attend our confirmation and Bible classes. Paul's words to the elders of Ephesus, read to us at our ordination or installation, say it very clearly: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Ac 20:28). And do not forget what Paul immediately added: "For I know this, that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock, also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (v. 29,30). It certainly is obvious from these words that all the flock needs to be, yes, is to be warned against the wolves, the false teachers and their false teachings. But unless they hear it from the pulpit, the majority of our people would not get to hear such warnings at all.

But how much apologetics and/or polemics ought we employ in our sermons? This will of course depend to a great extent upon the nature and content of the individual text. Even texts which present only positive truths might at times call for the use of some apologetics or polemics, that is, where it would help to bring out more clearly the positive side of the truth. Thus in treating a text like Romans 3:23 and 24, which clearly states how a sinner is justified before God, one could hardly avoid speaking of those who in their carnal pride ridicule the Biblical teaching "by grace alone through the merits of Christ" and mislead souls by teaching that man can make it on his own, if not altogether, then at least in part. There is of course a considerable number of texts, also in the various pericope series, which actually contain an apologetic or polemic element. A hurried survey of the Ancient Church gospel selections revealed such elements in the following texts. Simeon's song of praise for the Sunday after Christmas (Lk 2:33-40) contains the words: "This child is set for a falling and rising up of many in Israel, and for a sign spoken against." The Epiphany text (Mt 2:1-12) tells of Herod's scheming to do away with the Christchild. The text for the 5th Sunday after Epiphany (Mt 13: 24-30) speaks of the enemy sowing tares among the grain. In the gospel for the third Sunday in Lent (Lk 11:14-28) we hear the Pharisees charging Jesus with casting out devils by the chief of the devils; in the text for the 5th Sunday in Lent (Jn 8:46-59); with having a devil; in that for the 3rd Sunday after Trinity (Lk 15;1-10), with having something in common with publicans and sinners because He sat and ate with them. The text for the 8th Sunday after Trinity (Mt 7:15-23) contains Jesus' "Beware of false prophets," that for the 10th Sunday after Trinity (Lk 19:41-48), His complaint: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I...and ye would not." In the gospel for the 17th Sunday after Trinity (Lk 14:1-11) Jesus, being closely watched as to what He might do to the man with dropsy, asks his enemies the question: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" The next Sunday's gospel (Mt

22:34-46) presents Him showing up the hypocritical Pharisees who tempted Him with the question: "Master, which is the great commandment of the law?" In a similar way these Pharisees are put to silence by Him when in the gospel for the 23rd Sunday after Trinity (Mt 22:15-22) they ask Him: "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" The gospel for the 25th Sunday after Trinity (Mt 24:15-29) has Jesus warning in prophesy against "the abomination of desolation" and the false Christ's and false prophets. The Ancient Church epistles contain much less obvious apologetical or polemical material. In the epistle for the 3rd Sunday after Trinity (1 Pe 5:6-11) Peter warns: "The devil as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour, whom resist steadfast in the faith;" in that for the 26th after Trinity (2 Pe 3:3-14) he warns against the scoffers that "shall come in the last days, saying; Where is the promise of his coming?" Paul in the epistle for the 23rd Sunday after Trinity (Ph 3:17-21) warns against "the enemies of the cross of Christ," and in that for the 27th after Trinity (1 Th 5:1-11), against those who in the day of the Lord shall say, "Peace, and safety," and upon whom sudden destruction shall come.

While the sermons on these gospel or epistle texts need not - or should we say, ought not - contain a full-scale apologetic or polemic treatment, this element in these texts should certainly not be overlooked, also not in the application to our present day. In other words, we are in our preaching by no means to do according to the slogan: "Accentuate the positive; eliminate the negative." Our Junior Homiletics Notes put it this way: "Clear, positive preaching involves also the antithesis against error. God commands this; the apostles did this." I like especially Dr. Fritz's way of saying it: "A faithful pastor (shepherd) will not only lead the sheep to the green pastures and the still waters of the Word of God (Ps 23), but will also protect them against the wolves that seek to carry them away and devour them (Mt 7:15). As a zealous worker in building Christ's kingdom a minister of the Gospel will not only use the Word of God as a trowel wherewith to build the walls of Zion, but also as the sword of the Spirit against the enemies who seek to hinder the work and even destroy what has been built (Ne 4:17,18). As a good watchman, who seeks to protect his Master's house, a Christian preacher cannot be a dumb dog that cannot bark when thieves and robbers attempt to break in and steal (Is 56:10). (Fritz, *The Preacher's Manual*, Conc., p. 90f). Dr. Pieper, commenting in his dogmatics on Titus 1:9-11, writes, "The popular demand that the public teacher refrain from polemics is not supported by Scripture....The demand that polemical theology be excluded from Christian theology is contrary to Scripture." Pieper adds: "Walther does not go too far when he writes: 'A man may proclaim the pure doctrine, but if he does not condemn and refute the opposing false doctrine, does not warn against the wolves in sheep's clothing, the false prophets, and unmask them, he is not a faithful steward of God's mysteries, not a faithful shepherd of the sheep entrusted to him, not a faithful watchman on the walls of Zion, but, as the Word of God says, an unfaithful servant, a dumb dog, a traitor. The terrible consequences of the minister's failure to use the elenchus are before our eyes - many souls lost and the Church deeply hurt. Polemics are absolutely needed. Not only because a doctrine is more fully apprehended in the light of its antithesis, but mainly because the errorists so craftily mask their error behind a show of truth that the simple Christians, if not forewarned, are despite their love of the truth only too easily deceived. The pastor cannot wash his hands in innocence, pleading that he has always preached the full truth, if he did not at the same time warn against the error, and, when necessary, identify it by naming the errorist; if his sheep, either while he is still serving or after he had to leave them for another field, become the prey of ravening wolves in sheep's clothing, he is guilty of their blood" (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol I, p. 49f).

We would hardly think of disagreeing with Dr. Walther. It is when it comes to the question, how to use apologetics and polemics in our preaching, that there may well be some differences of opinion. At the same time, there are certain aspects of the "how" which ought always be observed. To begin with, we need to be sure that we are not setting up "straw men." In other words, we need to ascertain that the objection to a given doctrine we are correcting or the error we are denouncing or warning against really exist.

Not to do this might well lead to embarrassment for ourselves and cause hearers to question our credibility when they discover that we are not basing our statements on facts. This would especially be the case if we felt it necessary to name those whom we are trying to correct or against whom we are warning. It should also be self-evident that we do not speak about errors or errorists of which the hearers know little or nothing and by which they are therefore not being disturbed. R. E. O. White in "A Guide to Preaching," while not dealing

with the subject at hand, has a comment which is nevertheless applicable here: "The congregation will swiftly judge whether their time is being wasted with purposeless observations on unreal issues or castigations of things remote from their own experience and thought" ("A Guide to Preaching," Eerdmans, p. 16). Of course, considering the number and variety of news media our people today are exposed to, there may be little of this that they escape hearing about and being potentially influenced by.

Obviously the pulpit is also not the place to give a full-scale presentation of all the errors of a given church, if indeed it becomes necessary and advisable to speak of a particular church. What is not relevant to the text is not only not necessary to expose or warn against, but entirely out of place. Students not infrequently become guilty of this, e.g., speaking of the widespread negative attitude toward the inspired, inerrant Scriptures, as seen in the historical-critical approach to the Bible, in the application of a text which not even remotely deals with the subject. Doing this where not called for will not only weaken such an application, but will also detract from the effectiveness of any other application based on the text. If the preacher at a given time feels the need to make an application not flowing out of the text at hand, let him choose a different text, one which the hearer will easily recognize as calling for just that kind of application.

It goes without saying that the apologetic or polemic element dare never become the regular or predominant fare in our sermons. It is one thing unjustly to be charged with becoming negative in our preaching because we do, in keeping with the Scriptures, resort to correcting objections to the truth and combating errors when necessary. It is quite another matter to invite and deserve that charge because we have actually become negative. As we tell our Juniors, always positive preaching should precede, and have priority. Alfred Krauss, a Reformed homilete, quoted by Dr. Reu, said it well: "When it becomes necessary to give confessional differences a place in the sermon, the proper treatment will always be to take the positive truth as one's point of departure and pay only so much attention to the negative position as is inevitably demanded by the presentation of the positive" (Reu, Hom., p. 74).

All important in all of this is of course the spirit in which apologetics or polemics are carried on - at any time, but especially in the pulpit. Doing this in the right spirit can well spell the difference between turning people off and inducing them to continue listening. Peter was well aware of this. When he urged Christians to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you," he added with emphasis, "with meekness and fear" (1 Pe 3:15). In this the servant of the Word ought to set a good example, and so Paul writes to Timothy: "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." The reason and purpose? "If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledgement of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (2 Tm 2:24;26). It is sad enough that people only too often misjudge a well-meant and objectively administered correction or warning and consequently pay little or no attention to it. It is really sad when we have caused or contributed to such a reaction by the way we express ourselves. Little if any good, but rather harm will result when the hearer detects on the preacher a fleshly zeal, a vindictive or even a pharisaic attitude. Reu's comment on this is not too strong: "The sermon, as expression of the confessionally determined life of the Church, dare never degenerate into the weapon of a bigoted and heretic-baiting confessionalism. In this way, too, it would become a disturbing factor in the service" (Reu, Hom., p. 73). Paul told the Colossians: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col 4:6). Someone correctly said: "Practice polemics not for polemics' sake, but for salvation's sake." The hearers must be given to understand, even though not expressly told, that the preacher is prompted by love: love for the Savior, love for His Word of truth, but no less love for the souls of those whom he is serving with the Word and who might suffer eternal loss if not also properly equipped to stand up against those who oppose the truth or teach and spread pernicious error.

In whatever we do in the pulpit, whether presenting the blessed truths of Scripture or warning against those who oppose themselves to these truths and teach otherwise, may we never forget that we are voices of our loving Savior, graciously called and privileged to help Him bring to fulfillment His prayer: "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth" (Jn 17:17).