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Have We Lost Our Balance?

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sehr in den Vordergrund, und es wimmelt in ihren Predigten förmlich von Anekdoten aus ihrem eigenen Leben. Ein guter Prediger hält überhaupt das rechte Maß in dieser Sache inne. Er häuft die Exempel, Bilder und Gleichnisse nicht so, daß man die Hauptsache, das Schriftwort, darüber aus den Augen verliert. Durch zu viel bildliche Rede kann man den wahren Sinn auch verbunkeln, anstatt ihn zu erhellen. Von den Predigten D. Fr. Ahlfelds, weiland Pastor zu Nikolai in Leipzig, gilt, daß die Ausschmückung der Rede vielfach übertrieben ist. Ein Beispiel, wie er zu reden beliebte, wird genügen. Betreffs des betenden Pharisäers im Tempel sagt er: „Die edle Palme des Gebets, die zum Himmel aufwächst und nach oben ihre Krone ausbreitet, ist hier ein Brombeerstrauch geworden, der mit stachelichten Zweigen auf der Erde kriecht.“ Das ist überschwengliche bildliche Rede.

Ein guter Pastor hütet sich endlich vor unpassenden, lächerlichen, anstößigen Illustrationen. Spurgeon, der ein Meister im Illustrieren war, sagt: „Ich hoffe, es ist kaum nötig, hinzuzufügen, daß Illustrationen niemals niedrig und gemein sein dürfen. Sie sollten dem Denken der Zuhörer nicht zu fernliegen, und sie sollen stets dem guten Geschmack entsprechen. Sie mögen schlicht und doch keusch und schön sein, aber roh und grob sollten sie nie sein. Ein Haus ist verunziert, wenn es schmutzige Fenster hat, voller Spinnweben, beschmiert und mit braunem Papier verklebt oder mit Lumpen verstopft ist; solche Fenster sind eher Zeichen einer elenden Hütte als eines Hauses. Bei unsern Illustrationen muß niemals die geringste Spur von etwas sein, was die zarteste Keuschheit verletzen könnte.“ Eine nach unsern gegenwärtigen Begriffen unziemliche Illustration ist es, wenn z. B. ein römischer Priester die Süßigkeit und Lieblichkeit des Namens Jesu mit dem Saft, der durch Kochen getrockneter Apfelschnitzel gewonnen wird, vergleicht oder wenn Valerius Herberger in seiner Epistelpostille bei der Auslegung des Spruches „Herberget gerne“, die Gäste zur Dankbarkeit ermahrend, sagt: „Sei auch kein undankbarer Kuckuck. . . . Macht es vielmehr wie der Storch, der seinem Wirt zur Dankbarkeit einen Jungen zurüdläßt.“

Port Hope, Mich.

(Fortsetzung folgt.)

E. Berner.

Have We Lost Our Balance?

Things are said to be in unstable equilibrium when they lose their balance even upon very slight provocation. When men are in the same predicament, they are said to have lost their poise. If this condition is habitual, the individual is said to be erratic. The same phenomenon may often be associated with an organization, partly because of mob psychology, partly because of leadership that is subject to eccentricities. Such a body, organization, or association is said to have lost its balance.

The question has been raised, *Have we lost our balance?* Have various factors, such as the postwar hysteria, the economic depression, the loss of mutual confidence, the craze for luxuries, high-pressure salesmanship, and similar phenomena, disturbed our equilibrium to the point that we permit carnal considerations of any kind to sway our judgment and direct our church-work instead of letting the Holy Scriptures be our sole source of principles and rule of conduct?

There are three fundamental facts which must be kept in mind by every church-body that is organized in keeping with the principles clearly enunciated in Holy Writ. In the first place, the *individual Christian* is the unit of the congregation. The Christian congregation is not a heterogeneous conglomerate of people who have been thrown together by fortuitous contact or welded into an apparent unit by the machinations of some kind of clergy. The Christian congregation is a homogeneous body of poor sinners who have accepted the atonement wrought by Jesus, their Savior. There may be outward differences in wealth, in education, and in station, and there may be just as great differences in the measure of spiritual gifts, or talents, granted by the Lord; but it is the plain statement of the Word of God that every believer has received some gift of the Spirit for the upbuilding of the kingdom. Cp. 1 Cor. 12, 7; Eph. 4, 7. This is true because every believer is a member of the body of Christ, 1 Cor. 12, 12—27; Eph. 4, 16; 5, 30; Rom. 12, 5. Every member therefore and all the members together, as units of the Church of Christ, must work for the upbuilding of the body; otherwise the ideal set forth by the apostle concerning the effectual working in the measure of every part cannot be attained. This is the first point that we must keep in mind, that every plan for the Kingdom and all the work in the Kingdom of Grace, as we do our share, must take into account the individual member of every congregation.

In the second place, the *congregation* is the unit of the synod. The synod is not properly composed of individual people, although individuals are accorded associate membership. Although it is necessary that the synod actually functions as an organization, yet the autonomous character of the constituent congregations has ever been recognized and respected by the synod. The relation of the individual congregation to the synod is analogous to, though not identical with, that of the individual member in the congregation to that body, the difference lying in the fact that the membership of the individual Christian in the congregation is clearly expected and demanded by God, while the membership of a congregation in synod is based upon an inference or a deduction connected with the duties of Christians in keeping with the law of love. But it is the individual congregation that is the unit of the synod, not some aggregation of congregations.

In the third place we must remember that every movement which does not begin with, or at least effectively touch, the lowest unit lacks power for efficient aggregate work. It is true that mass psychology often produces apparent results, as was illustrated by the temporary success attending the drives during the recent war and during the years which followed. But the reaction from the artificial stimulus exercised by such means is now painfully apparent, as any movements based on mass psychology are bound to be. *Education is ordinarily a slow process*, and it *must reach every person* concerned if its results are to be lasting and beneficial. High-pressure salesmanship is apt to offer wonderful displays, but its pyrotechnic glories will not produce conviction. There is undoubtedly a lot of energy in a volcano, but its explosions, as a rule, represent a painful waste of energy and eventually bring destruction to the landscape. The steam engine, on the other hand, is an example of energy under proper direction, with a roadbed and tracks to keep it properly confined, and with an engineer and a fireman to control its movements.

All of which, reduced to the terms of present conditions, means that we must abandon all artificial inflation in our church-work, all expansion without solid foundation, and once more build up on a basis of thorough education, with the unit of the individual church-member and that of the congregation as the chief agencies in effecting a permanent change for the better. To expand our pretheological institutions and our normal schools was a splendid plan, entirely in keeping with Matt. 9, 37, 38; but the plan should have been seconded by one projecting a definite missionary policy for our whole Church together with an educational campaign of a permanent nature. The first of these projects would mean a mapping out of the entire field of missionary endeavor, with the proper allowance for a balance between rural and urban conditions, preferably under the direction of a mission secretary. The second project would involve the systematizing of all means of instruction in order to reach every individual member of every congregation at regular intervals. We cannot depend on our church-papers alone; for they reach only a small percentage of our total membership. We cannot depend on sporadic literature alone; for that rarely has lasting effects. We cannot depend upon radio publicity alone; for that cannot be made an agency of truly Lutheran policies. We cannot depend upon special organizations alone; for they are not really representative.

What we need is *regular and systematic instruction of all the members of our congregations by every pastor* of our Synod. This instruction must cover the work of our Church in all its particulars, in all its changing aspects, with all its changing needs: the mission-fields, the training of the workers, Christian stewardship in all its branches. This information must be dispensed with due regard to

proper pedagogy, with painstaking effort, with an evangelical approach, with tireless patience. It should be made a regular part of the program or of the order of business in every meeting of the voters, of the ladies' aids, of the young people's societies, of the men's clubs, and of whatever other organizations there may be in the congregation. In addition, the needs of the work of the Lord ought to be discussed by every pastor with every member as occasion may offer. If this is done *regularly, systematically, with patient application*, results are bound to show, possibly not in a noticeable degree in one or two years, but eventually and with lasting effect. If the information now offered in our various church-papers is not sufficient, it would be an easy matter to organize the present forms of dispensing information into a news service with regular topics, so that every pastor would have the material at hand in a convenient form.

A necessary concomitant of this plan is faithful Gospel-preaching along the lines which have stood the test of time. We must have less topical and more expository preaching; we must have less striving for oratorical effect and more heart-searching application; we must have less generalizing and more specific presentation; we must have less using of sermonic pabulum and more sermons that have been made on the basis of importunate wrestling with God.

And for this reason there must be more prayer. We need prayer for the men whom we have chosen to lead us in the larger work of our church-body. We need prayer for the individual missionary at home and abroad, who is acting as our representative in bringing the Gospel to the heathen and to the unchurched. We need prayer for the pastor who is trying faithfully to carry out the program outlined above. We need prayer for every individual member of our Church. We need prayer for ourselves,—prayer that will rouse us from the lethargy of our spiritual depression; prayer that will make us willing workers in the kingdom of our Lord. We need prayer to overcome our sluggishness in working and giving for the Lord. And the Lord's promise still stands: "Ask, and it shall be given you."

P. E. KRETZMANN.

Sermon Study on Acts 20, 17—38.

Paul had celebrated the Passover festival of the year 58 at Philippi, Acts 20, 6. His intention was to spend Pentecost at Jerusalem, although we are not told the reason for this wish. Time pressed, and hence Paul decided not to stop at Ephesus since he feared that the trip to this city might unduly delay him. At Miletus, however, his ship lay over for several days, perhaps to unload, or take on, cargo. This apparently unforeseen delay gave him an occasion to send for the elders of Ephesus. In this important city of Asia Minor he had