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The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions

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752 False Arguments for Modern Theory of Open Questions

Kindern Israel", V. 21b. Die Berge triefen von Milch, die Hügel strömen von Milch, die Bäche von Wasser, eine Quelle wird vom Tempel ausgehen. Das sind lauter Bilder mit alttestamentlichen Ausdrücken und Farben, hergenommen vom Gelobten Lande, hier aber nach dem ganzen Zusammenhang geistlich zu verstehen.¹⁰⁾ Heseliel führt dies dann weiter aus in seinem großen Gesicht von dem neuen Tempel der neutestamentlichen Kirche, Kap. 47, und die auf Heseliel ruhende Offenbarung St. Johannis beschreibt dies ebenfalls mit wunderbaren Worten weiter und zeigt, wie ein lauterer Strom lebendigen Wassers vom Tempel ausgehen und die Bewohner der Kirche tränken wird, Kap. 22, 1. 2. Der Psalm sagt: „Sie werden trunken von den reichen Gütern deines Hauses, und du tränkest sie mit Wohlust als mit einem Strom.“ Und der Gläubige antwortet: „Ich will schauen dein Antlitz in Gerechtigkeit; ich will satt werden, wenn ich erwache nach deinem Wilde“, Ps. 36, 9; 17, 15. Die streitende Kirche ist eine triumphierende geworden und wird es bleiben in alle Ewigkeit. „Juda soll ewiglich bewohnt werden und Jerusalem für und für“, V. 25; und das letzte Wort ist: „Der Herr wird wohnen zu Zion“, V. 26. Gott wird sein „alles in allem“, 1 Kor. 15, 28.

Das ist der Kleine Prophet Joel mit seiner großen Weissagung.
L. Fürbringer

The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions

A Translation of Dr. C. F. W. Walther's Article Entitled "Die falschen Stuetzen der modernen Theorie von den offenen Fragen,"

Lehre und Wehre, XIV (1868)

(Continued)

A fourth false argument for the modern theory of open questions is the appeal to certain points of doctrine in which former teachers recognized for their orthodoxy have erred. Those who advance this argument justify it in the following manner: In previous eras certain teachers of our Church entertained divergent opinions without being accused of heresy or denied church-fellowship by their fellow-Christians. Ought not a present-day teacher,

10) Prof. Aug. Pieper behandelt in seinem trefflichen „Kommentar über den zweiten Teil des Propheten Jesajas“ diesen Punkt ausführlich und sagt: „Darum kommt er [der Prophet des Alten Testaments] in seinen Darstellungen des Gottesreichs der Zukunft nicht völlig los von den äußerlichen historisch-konkreten Vorstellungen Israel, Abrahams Same, Haus Jakobs, Juda, Jerusalem, Tempel, Altar, Priester und Leviten, die zerstörten Erbteile, Exil, äußere Erlösung und Zurückführung nach Stadt und Land des Herrn und von andern äußerlichkeiten. Und was mehr ist: er durfte sich davon nicht völlig losmachen, wenn er verstanden werden wollte. Nur in den äußerlichen Formen des Alten Bundes konnten seine Hörer und Leser über das zukünftige Gottesreich denken und es verstehen.“ (S. 303.)

they argue, enjoy the same freedom of deviating from the Word of God in the same point? Should he because of such deviation be charged with heresy, deprived of fellowship, and denied the rights and privileges of a minister in the orthodox Church? Would it not be unanswerable to subject any teacher within the Lutheran Church to disciplinary action because he holds and defends a doctrine which men like Andreae, Selnecker, and J. Gerhard of a previous period espoused with impunity? Would it not be ultra-Lutheranism to insist on more strictness in doctrine now than men did in the golden age of Lutheran orthodoxy?

At the present time (1868) the leaders of the Iowa Synod in particular are advancing also this argument in their endeavor to bolster up their theory of open questions. When their attention was called to a deviation from the pure doctrine on the part of some of their men, they almost invariably sought to justify themselves without much reference to the Bible; they appealed mainly to the authority of some former teacher of our Church whose orthodoxy otherwise is undisputed and claimed that the point in question, therefore, necessarily belonged to the category of open questions. When, for instance, their doctrine on the millennium and a twofold resurrection of the flesh, *i. e.*, the resurrection of the saints at the dawn of the millennium and a general resurrection at its close, was attacked, they referred to Selnecker and Dannhauer. Or when we denied that the doctrine of Sunday as it is taught in Scripture and in our Symbols is an open question, they appealed to J. Gerhard. And in regard to this last point they went so far as to admit that the doctrine of Sunday in our Symbols is beyond all doubt the doctrine of Holy Writ, but since such an eminent teacher as Gerhard deviated therein from Scripture, every other teacher should also have the privilege of deviating therein, it being an open question.

It is a most disagreeable task to prove to Protestants, to Lutherans, and in general to men who claim to be theologians and Bible students *par excellence* how utterly groundless and untenable this argument for the modern theory of open questions is. The argument "This is the position of the Church Fathers, and who will dare to declare them heretics?" was a formidable weapon with which the Papists formerly lashed at Luther and the principles of the Reformation. But Luther and the whole Lutheran Church have always appealed to Scripture as the final authority and have consistently refused to recognize the Fathers as an authority curtailing or abrogating the supremacy of the Bible. What else is necessary to prove that this argument is nothing more than a brittle reed? Or was it not permissible, perhaps, for the Papists to appeal to the errors of the Church Fathers who are recognized in all

Christendom as orthodox teachers, yea, as lights and pillars of the Church, but is quite permissible for Lutherans to appeal to the errors of their orthodox fathers?

Some men indeed raise this objection: "Is it right to condemn an error in a contemporary fellow-Lutheran and thereby condemn as heretics also such great theologians as J. Gerhard, Selnecker, and others, who are now standing before the throne of God in glory and perfect bliss?" This objection, however, is met, in the first place, with the same answer that our fathers gave the papists in the Reformation era: "*Patres fuerunt lumina, non numina, indices, non iudices, ministri, non magistri*" (the fathers were lights and not gods, teachers and not judges, servants and not masters). In refusing to make the deviations of our Lutheran fathers either a rule for our faith or a license for further aberrations from the Word of God, we are following their own example and teaching. We are not only treating them as they treated the Church Fathers, but we are conscientiously abiding by their express direction never to set them and their writings above Christ and the Word of God, but always to prove all things and hold fast that which is good. If we, their pupils, should be unwilling to follow this direction, we should prove ourselves unfaithful to the trust committed to our care, and instead of being an honor to our fathers, we should disgrace them in their graves. Our fathers did not declare the Church Fathers to be heretics when they rejected the errors which the papists had drawn from that source and were doggedly defending. And today, in rejecting errors espoused by contemporary men, we do not with the same breath condemn as heretics those old faithful witnesses and teachers of the truth because they entertained the same errors. They were not admonished, and hence, owing to human weakness and not to hardness of heart, they did not see their errors.

Augustine recognized this point and wrote: "Whatever agrees with the authority of Holy Writ in the writings of Cyprian I accept with his praise; whatever does not agree I reject with his permission." (*Ad Crescon. Grammat.*) Kromayer expressed a similar thought in these words: "The libraries of the fathers must be examined with consideration and charity, when either through the fault of their era they were swept along as in a mighty stream and so fell in aberrations, or spoke unguardedly now and then in the heat of controversies, or advanced in understanding while writing or wrote while advancing. For it would be quite difficult to find a father whose writings are entirely free from error. Therefore the nakedness of the fathers must be covered up, so far as this can be done with a good conscience." (*Theol. Positivopolem.*, Part. II., p. 37.) We apply these same words to the old

teachers of our Church who are held in honor for their orthodoxy and fidelity. Those men, however, who make a formal business of ferreting out all possible weaknesses in the writings of the old orthodox teachers in order to find seeming support for their theory of open questions are doing whatever lies in their power to undermine the reputation of these faithful witnesses and destroy the blessing of their writings. Although the writings of the fathers are of inestimable value in the study of true Biblical theology, yet for the champions of open questions they exist for only one purpose,—to show how far one may depart from the doctrine of Scripture without sacrificing one's reputation for orthodoxy and faithfulness to the Confessions. Without hesitation we declare that our esteemed Lutheran teachers were indeed men who could err and actually did err in some points. On the one hand, those errors which were due to their weakness, and hence have been forgiven, must not be viewed with an air of superiority, nor be uncovered in a belittling, derogatory spirit, nor be accepted with the ulterior and therefore reprehensible motive of fostering indifference in doctrine. On the other hand, those errors must be considered in a spirit of love, be covered up in order to preserve the blessing emanating from the fathers, be avoided and used as a warning that we become more circumspect, more free from idolatrous confidence in men in spite of their great fame, wisdom, and piety, and more conscious of the fact that Scripture alone is the perfect, pure fountain of truth, "the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas, together with all teachers, should be estimated and judged. . . . Other writings, however, of ancient or modern teachers (*sive patrum sive neotericorum scripta*), whatever name they bear, must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures." (*Epitome, Trigl.*, p. 777.) Although the old faithful teachers of our Church still are our teachers and examples in many respects, yet in the errors they made they are a warning to us according to the well-known proverb "*Lapsus maiorum sit tremor minorum*," i. e., "May the fall of the great deter the smaller spirits."

Error and sin are similar. Just as all Christians still have sin because of their natural human weakness, so all of them also have their individual errors. And both, their sins as well as their errors, are forgiven. But not only does every wilful sin against the Law of God frustrate grace and condemn; also every wilful error against revealed truth frustrates grace and condemns. Just as one and the same sin is forgiven to one man and not to another, so one and the same error is forgiven to one man and not to another. Likewise, just as he sins against grace who wilfully imitates the sins of the saints which they committed in moments of weakness and tries to justify himself by appealing to the saints,

so he also sins against grace who wilfully imitates the errors of the orthodox teachers which they committed in moments of weakness and tries to justify himself by appealing to those teachers.

Luther held this fact before the eyes of the papists on many occasions. In his essay on "The Abuse of the Mass," written in the year 1521, he says: "In the second place, they [the papists] refer us to the holy Fathers, to Gregory, Bernard, Bonaventura, and others, who used this canon (the canon of the Mass) and considered the Mass a sacrifice. To appeal to the work and life of the saints which is not founded in Scripture is a most dangerous thing, because it is evident that a just man falls seven times and that the saints sin in many ways, Prov. 24:16. Who will convince us that it is not sin to practise and perform an act which cannot be justified from Scripture? In this connection I praise St. Anthony, who gave the sound advice that no one should entertain and carry out an act without authority from Scripture. Yes, it is better to look upon the acts of the saints which they did without Scriptural authority as sin than to adduce them as good examples. Furthermore, you do not rouse any saints to anger when you regard their unscriptural acts as sin. They acknowledge themselves to be sinners. But you do anger God and the saints if you fall through the example of the saints and break your neck. . . . There are two reasons why sins cause no injury to the saints but do destroy the godless. The first is this: The saints have faith in Christ. And since they are buried in such faith (although they do many things in ignorance which are damnable for the ungodly), they always rise again and are preserved. . . . The second reason is this: Through faith in Christ the saints are so wise that they cling only to God's mercy, repudiating their own works and confessing from the bottom of their hearts that their works are unprofitable and sinful. So Bernard said on his death-bed: "I have wasted my time, for I have lived an unholy life."—In Augustine we see many errors, but he recanted them. Would they not have damned him if he had not been preserved in the true faith? For the most part those errors are contrary to faith. But as he confessed faith in Christ and feared God, they could not harm him. Whoever should try to follow those same errors now would be destroyed. This is the case with many who follow the words of the fathers without discriminating between fallible human opinion and the infallible divine truth. It is quite apparent that the saints do err now and then, even in faith, i. e., they are not yet perfect, but they do not perish because of the faith which God has begun in them. Those, however, do perish who accept the errors of the saints as truth and follow them as examples. There is no prospect of salvation for any one who has followed the saints instead of Scripture. . . .

"Such also is the case with the sacrifice of the Mass. Without a doubt many pious Christians still cling to the Mass in simple faith and regard it as a sacrifice. But since they do not depend on this sacrifice, look upon everything they themselves do as sin, and cling to the pure mercy of God, they are saved from perishing in spite of this error. However, when the priests who celebrate Mass follow this error without such faith, elevate their sacrifice, and sell it for genuine goods, they deserve to have this error charged against them and perish eternally because they followed the saints. For God considers, tries, and judges the hearts and reins, Ps. 7:9, i. e., the inner disposition of the heart. Therefore God relents and forgives an error in one man and condemns the same error in another, because one man believes in humble, child-like faith, and the other does not. . . . Since we have finally recognized the error, it is no longer proper to continue therein and consider the Mass as a sacrifice. That would be a sin against faith and against our own conscience, — a sin which no faith, no confession, could excuse. You cannot say: I will err after the manner of a Christian. A Christian errs in ignorance, and St. Paul commands us in Rom. 14:1 that we should bear with an erring Christian (seeing he lives by the grace of God), because it is not right for us to despise and condemn him who does not yet recognize his error as error. It is our duty, however, to point out error to everybody and no longer consider it truth, so that the sins of the godless do not increase and no offense be given to weak consciences. . . . Gregory, Bernard, Bonaventura, Francis, Dominic, and their followers, failing to recognize the true nature of the Papacy, held the Pope and his dominion in high esteem and believed that all his ways and acts were divine, Christian, and ordained of God; yet the Papacy with all its ecclesiastical courts, ordinances, and decrees is manifestly contrary to the Gospel. They have misinterpreted the Gospel, building up and fortifying the Pope and his realm through some glaring errors. Is it not unchristian to believe that the Pope is the 'rock,' Matt. 16:18? Is it not unchristian to interpret the 'sea,' Matt. 14:29, as human beings, on whom St. Peter and the Pope are to walk, i. e., over whom they are to rule? Is it not unchristian to suppose that the word 'feed' should imply the honor, power, and authority of the Pope? There are many similar errors of the saints. Yet, failing to recognize them as errors, they adhered to them in simple, Christian faith; therefore, God forgave them. But those who know and acknowledge them to be errors and still adhere to them as though they were not erroneous do indeed follow the Fathers; nevertheless, they will not be in sweet communion with them in heaven. The Fathers finally renounced their errors and were received in grace. Certain men of our day, how-

ever, consider those errors as articles of faith and promulgate and defend them as such unto their end." (Walch, XIX: 1378—1385.)

In another connection Luther declares that it is permissible, and at times obligatory, to condemn the error of an orthodox person which he entertained in weakness, without at the same time condemning that orthodox teacher. He illustrates this instance in the case of Cyprian as follows: "St. Augustine condemns St. Cyprian's doctrine of anabaptism" (concerning those baptized by heretics); "and ever since, that doctrine has been justly condemned. But we could easily be satisfied with Cyprian, for in him Christ comforts us poor sinners wonderfully by showing us that His great saints also were human just as we are." (*Of Councils and Churches*, XVI: 2657.) Luther does not want to deprive even St. Thomas of his holiness, great as his errors were. He wrote: "Yet I do not doubt that his doctrine (that of St. Thomas), dull and without spirit though it is, is one of the vessels full of the wrath of God which He has sent down upon this earth, Rev. 15:7, 16, 17. Mainly because of this doctrine he became a (papistic) saint and received his canonization from such a man as he deserved. I do not wish to say that he is not holy, although he did teach doctrines that are truly heretical and undermine the teaching of Christ. He may have done this in ignorance. I am sorry, however, that his influence deceived so many noble Christians and induced them to accept arid wastes instead of beautiful flowers. (Cf. Lam. 4:5)." — (*Revelation of the Antichrist*, A. D., 1521, XVIII: 1760.)

It is no doubt necessary at this point to call attention to the following facts: 1. In the writings of otherwise orthodox teachers more than just a few important points of doctrine can be found which are erroneous. But an appeal to the deviations of the otherwise orthodox teachers as a justification for the theory of open questions necessarily leads to complete destruction of all purity and unity in doctrine. 2. "*Quum duo dicunt idem, non est idem,*" i. e., when two men seem to say the same thing, the meaning is not always the same. 3. When influential, esteemed orthodox teachers of a past generation deviated in some point, there was no one, as a rule, who noticed this deviation or, if he did, he did not possess the courage to contradict the influential teacher. 4. Because of increasing wide-spread indifference and vigorous attacks on Christian doctrine, times arise when it is more important and necessary than otherwise to attack even the smallest deviation in a certain point of doctrine.

The foregoing argument may suffice to prove how futile it is to seek support for the theory of open questions in the writings of recognized orthodox teachers because they erred in certain

points. In this entire question much is at stake. We must always defend and preserve the chief principle of Protestantism, the fact that the norm of all doctrine is not posited in human writings, but alone in the Word of God. Let men continue to flaunt a *naevus* from our old, highly honored orthodox teachers whenever their unionistic theory of open questions is attacked. Let them maintain they want the Lutheran doctrine of Sunday which they admit is Scriptural to be considered as an open question because Gerhard erred therein. As good Protestants we shall always meet them with the words "*Amicus Plato, amicus Socrates, amicus Lutherus, amicus Gerhardus, sed magis amica veritas, magis amica Scriptura Sacra.*" And with St. Paul and all the apostles we say: "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," Gal. 1:8.

Oak Glen, Ill.

ALEX. WM. A. GUEBERT, translator

(To be concluded)

Predigtentwürfe für die Evangelien der Thomafius-Perikopenreihe

Siebzehnter Sonntag nach Trinitatis

L u k. 10, 38—42

„Eins ist not“, ein ernstes Wort aus dem Munde der ewigen Wahrheit, das wie ein zweischneidiges Schwert in unsere Seele fahren sollte, die wir nach unserer verderbten Natur so vielem nachjagen, was wir für das Nötigste halten. Dies Wort sagt der Heiland nicht zu leichtsinnigen Weltkindern, sondern zu einer gläubigen Jüngerin. — Auch Christen stehen in Gefahr, das eine, das not ist, zu vernachlässigen, und bedürfen der Erinnerung, es recht zu erkennen und festzuhalten.

„Eins ist not!“

1. Was ist dies eine?

a. Wer das vornehmste Ziel seines Lebens im Erlangen der Güter dieser Erde sieht, der kennt freilich das nicht, was der Heiland als das eine, das not ist, im Auge hat. So sind bei den meisten Genuß, Besitz, Erwerb, Ehre bei Menschen und andere irdische Dinge das Höchste.

b. Das Wort „Eins ist not“ sprach Jesus zu Martha, die sich viel Sorge und Mühe mit der Bedienung des HErrn machte und ihn tadelte, daß er ihre Schwester ihr nicht zur Hilfe schickte. Mit ernstern Worten verwirft Jesus ihre Vielgeschäftigkeit. Verkehrtweise hat man die Worte so gedeutet, als sollten Jünger Christi mit irdischen Dingen sich