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Miscellanea

The Preaching of Repentance and Conversion

At our Seminary chapel morning devotion recently our dean urgently presented the need of a more direct preaching of repentance in our Synod. Especially did he wrestle with the consciences of our young theological candidates whether or not they actually were intending to be such preachers. He pleaded with them to search their own souls whether they were living in a daily experience of sin and grace and thus were able to preach repentance to others. "Some of you," he said, "may need to experience conversion." He spoke of times of great "spiritual awakening" in the long gone past, "even here in this Mississippi Valley region." Only a heart of stone could have remained untouched by this appeal.

I remember once how a pastor of our Synod, now departed from this life, argued with me whether there might not come a time when such preaching would no more be necessary. I replied: "Yes indeed, when there are no more sinners needing conversion." Are there others who belong to that category of preachers still?

Somehow the direct, keen, Scripturally illumining pulpit messages of conversion, deep, strong, probing, have decreased even in our Synod. I do not imagine that by so saying I will, as in years back, be brought before the ministerium for asking (it was in 1922) whether there was adequate indoctrination going on! When the truth exists, it can and must be expressed, whatever the result. I have long felt that the conversion element has diminished. Earnest, experienced Christians of our Synod are constantly concerned about this matter. Should not we all?

What Sermons Sometimes Lack

It is not that sermons do not touch on the need of another life. Not that they do not speak of a saving Savior. But the point is often lacking. Do you know anything about a real conversion? Are you converted? Do you live in a daily conversion? And then that so bitterly often wanting element in much sermonizing: *How shall a sinner come to conversion?*

That "how," so clear in the Scriptures and in Lutheran preaching of the past (and present in part), is the crux. "How?" To tell the "how" is the problem. That calls for experience in grace, in Word, in zeal for soul's conversion, and not only for church-membership and church activity. These latter can exist in the Lutheran Church as in all denominations, even in pagan religions. I wonder if the unending reading of modernized Reformed sermon literature and theology has not sadly depleted the pulpit messages even in American Lutheranism. No doubt it accounts for a great deal. The "way of salvation," that Reformation jewel, almost belongs to a forgotten experience; is it not so? The preaching may be so general, so "pleasant" for the unconverted, who hate the message of conversion, that the pastor modifies the strenuous

point, the crucial turn, the troublesome question, the difficult doctrine to be set forth, unless the preacher himself has a clear experience of sin and grace.

What a time and age of possibilities for preachers of repentance! If we miss that opportunity today, what will happen to the Church when the aftermath of the World War comes? One trembles to think. Therefore we rejoice when we hear preaching and teaching which is clear, doctrinally lucid, and Spirit-empowered. And that we do hear, even in our Synod.

Indoctrination and Conversion Related

There was mention made above of "adequate indoctrination." Oh, how closely this stands related to the preaching of repentance! The Reformation, Pietism, the nineteenth-century deep spiritual conversions, and local similar phenomena of today find indoctrination and conversion twinned. Even on the radios we note that fact. It cannot be otherwise. An Eastern theological seminary, Lutheran, has lately sent out a questionnaire to other Lutheran seminaries as to the spiritual life of the theological students. That is timely. They might also have included: What about the knowledge of the Word of God and a living, vital, clear, pulsating grasp of the "way of salvation" in its fulness? What of a consistent presentation of conversion in true setting?

Lay Christians of our Synod, encourage your pastor when he preaches a full salvation, even clearly emphasizes and explains conversion. Remember, the worldly (and we have many such among us) dislike pertinent Scripture-messages. They enjoy "soft" things, "interesting" sermons, pretty messages, or it may be some craven oratory (a scant article in our body, and just as well). Be a wall of fire about your pastor. He has many tribulations that he never publicly mentions precisely as to this matter of preaching a sharp, clean-cut, clear message of repentance—the "great conversion" and the "daily conversion."

Baptism Grace and Daily Repentance

Possibly, if a more clear relation between Baptism and a daily repentance were brought out more definitely in doctrine and instruction as in pulpit, help could be given to many souls. And, remember, if the message fails for some years of life, the "good seed" of the Word may in later years spring up and bear glorious fruit. That sowing in hope is the secret joy of the true conversion preacher. His face will radiate with joy when once he has been "homed" above.

Take courage, you young pastors of the pulpit! And grow not weary, you my elder brethren, in that charge! But preach more clearly the Scriptural doctrine of repentance. Let us remind each other of this, you me, as I you. And you, our dear folks of the pew, keep us awake! If we grow lax, remind us. That used to be a virtue and is Scripturally called for. Should we become weak and flaccid doctrinally, pray for us; but also find a way to stimulate us to stronger Biblical and doctrinal solidity, meatiness, consistent clarity, and fidelity to our Reformation creed which we have confessed and on which we even once were ordained. Note St. Paul's beautiful and modest apostolic

desire for mutual exchange of spiritual gifts between himself and his lay friends in Rome (Rom. 1:11). That from the mightiest spiritual mind of all ages!

What if we all studied more the Lutheran "old-fashioned books" (as the meager-minded of our day pleaurably style them)? We could then be more spiritually serviceable for our present day and certainly then also more definitely futuristic and ahead of our own crumbling, defeated, pessimistic, and tottering time. I voraciously read the ultra-modern literature. But just therefore I see so clearly its doom-nature and its inescapable advancing tribulations. God is one. His truth is one. His way to be saved is one. Sin changes only its clothes, never its nature in the sight of God. When we well know the Lord in the past, we can be equally certain of our Lord for our day and for the coming future. Two things never change: sin and Christ. Therefore, too, we need sharp preaching of conversion, in its full Biblical content, relations, and meaning, even if its vocabulary be guardedly different.

Ever and forever into the tremendous Scriptural clarity on conversion! That "psychological approach" sinners of our day have not been able to modify in such a way as pleasantly to save themselves from sin and guilt.

The peace of Christ come to us and abide with us!

DR. A. HULT, in the *Lutheran Companion*

Gegen die Evolutionstheorie

Die Anthropologie (Lehre vom Menschen) hat nach mancherlei Umwegen zu früheren Auffassungen zurückgefunden. Bald nach der Jahrhundertwende hat der Breslauer Prof. Klaatsch schwertwiegende Einwände gegen Darwin und Haedel erhoben und nachgewiesen, daß sowohl die fünffingrige Hand des Menschen als auch sein überaus urchimliches harmonisches Gebiß Bildungen sind, die den entsprechenden der Menschenaffen gegenüber nicht als Abkömmlingsformen gedeutet werden dürfen. Prof. Edgar Daque in München faßt das Ergebnis paläontologischer Befunde zum Weltbild der Stammesgeschichte in die Sätze zusammen: „Je reich das Material ausfiel und je gründlicher es vergleichend anatomisch studiert werden konnte, um so mehr zeigte es sich, daß von gradlinig und harmonisch sich entwickelnden Stammreihen nirgends etwas zu finden ist. Alles löst sich in eigene Typen- und Formkreise auf. Das gewöhnliche Stammbaumbild, wie es durch die klassische Deszendenz- oder Abstammungslehre vorausgesetzt wurde, hat sich nirgends entdecken lassen.“ Dr. Herbert Frißche, der in der „Woche“ über den heutigen Stand der Wissenschaft berichtet, schließt: „Der Mensch als Eigenlinie und, recht verstanden, als sein eigener Vorfahr steht heute als der große Universalist vor uns. Er steht der Tierheit gegenüber. . . . Er ist wieder zur Mitte der Schöpfung geworden und damit auch zum zentralen Sinn alles lebendigen Werdens. Weder ist er ein enthaarter Schimpanse noch der ‚geschlechtsreif gewordene Affenembryo‘ der Darwinschen Ara, sondern er ist ein Eigener, ein dem Herzen der Schöpfung nahe geliebtes Kind.“

(Allg. Ev.-Luth. Kirchenzeitung, 21. Febr. 1941.)