

5-1-1945

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Recommended Citation

Schwan, H. C. (1945) "Propositions on Unevangelical Practice," *Concordia Theological Monthly*: Vol. 16 , Article 28.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol16/iss1/28>

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Concordia Theological Monthly

Vol. XVI

MAY, 1945

No. 5

Propositions on Unevangelical Practice *

1. Evangelical practice consists not in this, that we teach and treat nothing except the evangelical message (the Gospel), but in this, that we treat everything in evangelical fashion.

2. This means that since we expect justification before God, the renewal of the heart, and the fruits of the Spirit only through the Gospel, we in everything that we do have this one thing in mind, to give free course and sway to the Gospel.

3. For this very reason, when we follow evangelical practice, we do not discard the Law or make its edges dull through bringing in the Gospel, but we rather preach it with all the more seriousness in its full severity, however in evangelical fashion.

4. The Law is used in an evangelical way if it is employed solely for the purpose of preparing the soil for the evangelical message (the Gospel) and of submitting a divine norm for the manifestations of the new life which spontaneously arises through the evangelical message.

5. It is not evangelical practice to cast the pearls before the swine, but much less is it evangelical practice to keep them in one's own pocket.

6. Evangelical practice drops not one iota of the things which

* These propositions, written in German, were discussed at the 1862 convention of the Central District of the Missouri Synod. The original number was thirty-two, but lack of time prevented consideration of the last eight, and hence the latter are not given here. The name of the author, or authors, is not mentioned. But since the President of the District, the Rev. H. C. Schwan, later on President of the Missouri Synod, in his presidential address speaks of "offering" the propositions to the convention, he seems to have been the, or one of the, authors. The translation is largely the work of the sainted P. T. Buszin, School Superintendent of our Northern Illinois District.—A.

God demands, but it demands nothing else and no more than faith and love.

7. Evangelical practice demands manifestation of faith and love if we desire to be saved, but it does not issue commands about their various manifestations as far as aim, amount, and mode are concerned.

8. Evangelical practice demands fulfillment of even the smallest letter of the Law, but it does not make the state of grace dependent on the keeping of the Law.

9. Evangelical practice endeavors indeed to prepare the way for the operations of the Gospel by the Law; but it does not endeavor to aid the Gospel in its real functions by the Law; and since it expects the fruits of the Spirit to be produced solely by the Gospel, it is willing to wait for them, too.

10. Evangelical practice considers nothing an essential gain that does not come through the Gospel, that is, through faith; therefore it rather bears with all manner of defects, imperfections, and sins than to remove them merely in an external manner.

11. Evangelical practice limits pastoral care (*Seelsorge*) to specific applications of the Law and the Gospel; the scrutiny and judging of the hearts it leaves to God, the Searcher of hearts.

12. Evangelical practice insists on good human order, but still more does it insist on Christian liberty, and for that reason it lets *adiaphora* remain real *adiaphora*, that is, it leaves the decision concerning them to the conscience of the individual.

13. Evangelical practice is faithful in little things; yet it considers matters in their larger aspects and totality more important than individual details.†

14. To be wise as serpents, to redeem the time, not to let Satan gain an advantage over us, to become all things to all men in order that by all means some might be saved, are likewise elements of evangelical practice.

15. Evangelical practice is equally far removed from Antinomian and from legalistic practice.

† This proposition is difficult to translate. The original reads: *Evangelische Praxis ist treu im Kleinen, hat aber doch mehr das Grosse und Ganze im Auge als das einzelne*. What the authors have in mind is, for instance, that preaching the Gospel to a large group is more important than restricting the preaching to a few, even though, through the time and strength thus gained, the hearers, by dint of meticulous supervision and drill, might be fashioned into exemplary Christians. The principle voiced now and then, *klein, aber rein*, if presented in an unmodified, sweeping form, would have struck the authors as emanating from Geneva rather than from Wittenberg.—A.

16. Evangelical knowledge and disposition should issue in evangelical practice, but do so rather seldom and slowly.

17. Usually we do not advance beyond legalism, or we fall into Antinomian laxity; to such an extent the Gospel is foreign to our nature.

18. There is danger in both directions. For us at present the greater danger is still in the direction of legalism.

19. Apart from the natural tendency of the old Adam and our origin in pietistic circles, etc., our present situation and the necessary reaction against the prevailing moral laxity in principles and in life are responsible for this state of affairs.

20. Or how many are there not who secretly fear more to give the blessings of the Gospel to an unworthy person than to deny them to a poor sinner or to curtail them? Whose conscience is not hindering him to follow the example of Paul and to become all things to all men? But where this is the case, one surely still finds legalistic practice.

21. Legalistic practice does not consist in this, that one does not treat anything except the Law, but in this, that one treats everything in a legalistic manner, that is, in such a way that one's main aim is to see to it that the Law gets its due and that one tries to accomplish through the Law or even through laws what only the Gospel can accomplish.

22. In addition, the more (as is often the case where the inner motive power really still is the Law) fiery zeal asserts itself which not even permits love to be the queen of all commandments, which spurns Christian wisdom as its counselor, and which even when it appears merely to teach, to reprove or to admonish, in reality applies coercion, and at that the worst kind of it, namely, moral coercion—all the more unevangelical our practice gets to be.

23. Unevangelical, legalistic practice is found not only in churches and congregations, but likewise in schools and in the homes, and besides in our fraternal intercourse.

24. The instances of unevangelical practice which are still most frequent with us in the realm of ministerial work, the cure of souls, and congregational government are perhaps the following:

a. In sermons: overabundant castigation (*durchgeisseln*) of individual sins, unwholesome conditions or perhaps even of matters of personal dislike—the portraying of well-known sins of well-known persons, instead of laying bare the bitter roots out of which all evil fruits grow—mere so-called testifying without real instruction and admonition—unnecessary or premature or unedifying polemics—urging that repentance and faith be manifested, instead of preaching that which produces repentance and

faith—a pietistic classification of the hearers—attaching conditions to the Gospel promises (*Verklausulierung des Evangelii*)—preaching faith preponderatingly as to its sanctifying power—presentation of the grace of God only to build demands on such presentation;

b. With respect to Confession and the Lord's Supper:

To demand more for admission than is absolutely required for its salutary use—schoolroom catechizing and inquisitorial searching of the heart of those announcing—postponing reproof till announcement for Communion or Confession—to use refusal of Holy Communion as a coercive, terrifying or disciplinary means—to refuse even when a state of unrepentance cannot be proved;

c. With respect to Baptism:

To be either entirely unwilling to baptize children of heretics or unbelieving people who, however, are in contact with the Word (*die unter dem Schall des Wortes leben*), even if there is no intrusion in somebody else's domain (*in ein fremd Amt greifen*) or only after various human guarantees have been given—to put the acceptance of sponsors on a level with admission to Holy Communion;

d. At marriages:

To refuse to perform marriages of people who are outside the congregation even if they are not manifestly wicked—a meticulous insistence on a certain form of parental consent and of engagement;

e. At funerals:

Absolute refusal of burial in the case of all who did not somehow belong to the congregation or at least requested the visit of the pastor—adherence to the principle that at every funeral the salvation or damnation of the deceased must be asserted publicly, that sins have to be castigated and the occasion must be used to take a fling (*anzustechen*) at the sins and failings of the survivors;

f. In the care of souls:

Constant trimming and pressing (*hobeln und feilen*) on everybody till all wrinkles have been removed—acceptance of every kind of gossip (*Zutraegereien*)—mixing into house, family, and matrimonial matters even if no public offense has been given—to judge of one's attitude of heart on the basis of a few words and works—the application of moral coercion through exaggeration, etc.;

g. In congregational government and church discipline:

Exaggerated demands at the reception of new members—a denial of, or peremptory fixing of time limits for, participation in

the spiritual treasures of the Church as a guest, especially for attendance at the Lord's Table—mandatory imposition of dues on church members, requiring the same amount from all—or coercive taxing of the individuals—use of church discipline as a measure against matters which are not evident, mortal sins, or even against self-provoked sins—to consider a person as convicted in his own mind or as opposing maliciously because he is not able to reply to the arguments and charges uttered against him, or even assents—to lay more weight on the correct form of the proceedings than on the achieving of the purpose of the discipline—to demand the same form and the same degree of publicity for all confessions of sins which may have to be made—the endeavor to make the chasm between those who are in and those who are outside the congregation really large, instead of building bridges for the opponents and for those who are on the outside.

The Hades Gospel

The Gospel of a second probation, of salvation in Hades, of the possibility of conversion after death, is very popular today. Most of the modern theologians, liberals and conservatives, have become its heralds. It has found its way into the Reformed churches.¹⁾ It has found its way into the Lutheran Church.²⁾ Statements like these: "The purpose of the descent of Christ into Hades was to preach to the spirits in prison, 1 Pet. 3:19; those who disobeyed in the past were now to have the Gospel preached to them, 1 Pet. 4:6, and to receive the benefit of the propitiation" (J. A. W. Haas, *The Truth of Faith*, p. 95) are being repeated in many Lutheran pulpits, magazines, and theological handbooks. P. Althaus is glad to record that "modern theology (with but a few exceptions) has swept away the limitations set by the old Protestant teaching which restrict

1) On the trial of Professor Charles Augustus Briggs, who taught that in the intermediate state certain unbelievers will be given another opportunity for conversion, see *Lehre und Wehre*, 1893, p. 162. The Presbyterian General Assembly called this teaching a dangerous hypothesis.

2) "Schleiermacher postulated in his *Glaubenslehre* (paragraph 161, 1) a continued probation after death. . . . This view became normative for many others. . . . The doctrine of the *descensus* also underwent a significant change. In contrast to the seventeenth century view, it was now regarded as a means of offering grace to those who are held in the infernal prison, and this redemptive work of the Savior was said to extend through all ages. The *locus classicus*, 1 Pet. 3:18-20, was interpreted as teaching the universal scope of salvation. Thus the doctrine of a future probation made its way into Lutheran theology" (O. W. Heick, in *The Lutheran Church Quarterly*, Oct., 1944, p. 432).