

## Our "Scientific" Study of Theology

"For we know in part and we prophesy in part," 1 Co. 13:9

In our seminary we should practice a so-called scientific study of theology. That is, to be sure, not that which abroad from the 18<sup>th</sup> century up to the present has been called "scientific theology" or also "theological science". For even so strongly as this has had to modify or broaden its position to the Holy Scriptures throughout the course of time, it has yet remained the same throughout all stages in that it has maintained these three things: 1) in the first place its system must be scientifically or philosophically conceded as true in accordance with the *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus - that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all*; 2) it must lay the foundations; 3) it must be able to prove its individual statements as the real subject matter of its theology by means of careful analysis and an endless chain of logical conclusions. This "scientific theology" tended entirely in the form of reasonable proof, regardless of whether it was based on the "facts" of common natural experience or Christian experience *or* on the all-supreme newly discovered law of evolution. It was intended to be at all events a science, ἐξῆς ἀποδεικτικὴ ἀναγκάλος<sup>1</sup>, lest, as Schleiermacher said, the knot of world history comes so apart, that Christendom is united with barbarianism and education with unbelief.

Our theology is something entirely different. It stands on the fact of supernatural revelation of God and its divine inner power, which brings itself to bear in the human heart "not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" [1 Co. 2:4]. It doesn't need the crutches of human proof; indeed, that must be thrown away if our theology should demonstrate its own wonderful life-energy. It absolutely needs to stand on its own feet, so that the honor is the Lord's and not man's. Therefore it presents us with no other assignment, than

that we correctly understand the revelation of God, the Holy Scriptures, in its own language and bring it unadulterated in our language to the person. With this work, that which we call a scientific practice of theology should come into action, that is, a scientific course of study and a scientific reproduction of the theological materials.

What are we trying to say here? We are placing the expression "scientific" merely in contrast to the so-called practical education of preachers of the Gospel, which is still indispensable in our circles. The work of this sort of education is to teach the students as complete as possible (in a more or less popular way, depending on their background) the chief parts of God's truth by using the best translations and the other original language sources. It is also to make them familiar with the techniques of preaching, teaching catechism, and private *Seelsorge*<sup>2</sup> as thoroughly as possible. This has brought great blessings to the church in our land and has given us a great number of very competent pastors.

Meanwhile, we all know what Luther says in "To the Councilmen of Germany" (LW 45, p.35ff.) and how true<sup>N</sup> he speaks. We cannot allow ourselves to be satisfied with just the practical mode of theology. It is as Luther says. Therefore, if we don't come to a truly scientific understanding of theology, we won't preserve the gospel with us in the long run.

What then do we mean by a scientific study of theology? We are here taking the word in the purely technical and methodical sense. God has revealed himself to us through human words, through human terms and word connections. It is through them that God wishes to communicate to us and for us to make our own the understanding of his thoughts, the feelings of his heart and the obedience to his will, so far as he considers it possible, necessary and helpful for this imperfect world. This is no complete revelation, as Paul assures us (1 Co. 13:12); it gives us only

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<sup>1</sup> -perhaps - *a skill or practice that proves from necessary things*

<sup>2</sup> I thought it was best to leave this untranslated. I would think it is a technical term.

a mirror image wrapped in mystery of the true essence, of the thoughts, attributes and mind of God (Ro.11:33-36). It is, however, in such good condition in its manner, that it completely reaches its goal if, for the time being, we just grasp its sense altogether outwardly and humanly in detail, on the whole and at its deepest foundations.

And with that we have already explained the meaning of the word "scientific." However, to say it once more abstractly, it means nothing else than to grasp every individual term of divine revelation exactly, precisely, and in its peculiar certainty and to recognize them clearly; to acquire the terms in their full number; and to recognize them in their contexts and deepest foundations and to appreciate them adequately. To express it altogether abstractly: scientific means three things: **exact, complete and thorough.**

We have God's Word not in one, not in ten, not in one hundred, but in many thousand concrete and abstract individual terms, which, to be sure, all stand in correlation to one another. They express, with regard to the contents, contrary or related, causal or conditional, objective or personal and a thousand other relationships, which form just such groups or stand alone, and finally present one single large thought-picture - the whole council of God concerning our salvation.<sup>3</sup> However, each of these individual terms has something all its own, which no other term has, and is used by God to bring us the *πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ* - *the manifold wisdom of God* [Eph. 3:10] concerning our salvation to exact knowledge in its fullness. And over every single one of these terms and thoughts a question stands written for every theologian who is learning God's Word; that is, the question which Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch: "And do you understand what you are reading?" First of all, it is appropriate to grasp God's Word exactly in every single term and to sharply distinguish it from every other similar term. In other words, we need to have every single term clear and distinct. We can't let ourselves be dismayed by the

possible accusation of intellectualism. The popular, vague, imprecise term leads to misunderstandings in every field of thought. In theology it instantly embraces error. Sloppy language is in no field a virtue; in theology it is *eo ipso* a sin. Here the presenting of the glory of the LORD and of the immortal soul is appropriate. It is true: God's Word isn't meant only for the intellect; it is no palaestra intellectualis - *intellectual training room*<sup>4</sup>, but rather it is a tonic<sup>5</sup> for the heart, which should seize the sinner in the center of his essence and change his attitude of the flesh into godliness. But we fall directly into fathomless *Schwärmeret*<sup>6</sup> as soon as we no longer recognize that every piece of the saving truth has been given to us once for all, exclusively in human words and terms, and that its power of God on the heart can only then be fully demonstrated when it is clearly grasped by the mind and purely transmitted to the heart in its conceptual certainty. If the prophets, in the visions that were granted to them, saw pictures which they weren't able to describe with distinct words, if Paul has heard inexpressible words, which no human can speak, then these were immediate revelations for their own personal assurance. They are of no use to us. God has bound us exclusively to the revelation through his Word, about which he says, "O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD!" [Jer. 22:29] "Preach the Word" [2 Ti. 4:2]. "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" [Lk. 11:28]. And it is a distinguishing characteristic of Lutheranism to remain firm in this: "that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word," "that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments" (Smalc. Art. III, 8).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "der ganze Heilsrat Gottes" I couldn't think of a simpler definition.

<sup>4</sup> This is my translation of the latin phrase. It seemed to me the most accurate.

<sup>5</sup> The word translated was *Kordial*, which I couldn't find. All I came up with was the English word *cordial*, which is a tonic, medicine or liqueur for the heart or stomach. It seems to fit.

<sup>6</sup> Again, being a technical term, I left this untranslated.

<sup>7</sup> For this quote I copied the English from the Triglotta.

Therefore, the scientific study of theology - and that means first of all the exact and distinct understanding of every single expression concerning salvation, indeed every expression of the entire Scriptures altogether - is an entirely imperative requirement for the future teachers of the Word. No one can ever understand the entirety of the council of God unless he first has a firm grasp on its individual parts; nor is anyone able to rightly appreciate the seriousness of the revelation of God, who hasn't recognized its consistency from beginning to end.

By way of suggestion, we would like to try to demonstrate this with just one biblical concept<sup>8</sup> - the main concept of the revelation of God - the concept of justification. This concept has much in common with the concepts of repentance, conversion and rebirth. Justification, like these others, is indispensable for salvation; it takes place through the grace of Christ Jesus; it is worked only through the Word; and it makes us children of God and heirs of eternal life. And yet it is so different from these other in its specific essence, that replacing this term with another, even just mixing the concepts corrupts in one's heart the entire council of God concerning salvation and the whole Gospel, and it turns it into paganism. With the doctrine of justification, it must be clear to the teacher and be made clear to the students that [1.]<sup>9</sup> justification is not an act of God *in* a person, but rather over him and to him<sup>10</sup>. It is a forensic act, not sanative. It consists of imputing Christ's merit to us and not counting our sins against us but remitting our guilt. [2.] Justification is the declaring righteous of the godless who has no righteousness, not the declaring righteous of righteous people. [3.] Justification credits to faith; it does not assume it as a preceding condition but rather works it as a necessary consequence. [4.] Justification doesn't happen secretly in heaven but rather openly on earth through the gospel before it, in which form

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<sup>8</sup> *Heilsbegriff* - should I say salvation concept? We don't normally use expressions like that.

<sup>9</sup> I put in these numbers in order to understand this better. The German was actually just one long sentence - a list of clauses ending with semicolons.

it alone can be grasped by faith. [5.] As a declaration of God over all sinners, justification is just as much an objective fact and truth as the judgment of damnation that was brought by the law. [6.] Just like the judgment of damnation, justification is the first and the last, the definitive and unchangeable judgment of God, which will remain until Judgment Day. [7.] No sinner is excluded from this, but nevertheless, it is of no help to the one who doesn't believe it.

Just the same, it must be understood between teacher and listeners, that the doctrine of justification is the actual center and heart of the council of God concerning salvation and of the entire revelation of God, and it governs, explains and preserves all the other doctrines. Luther has written so much about this that we can spare ourselves of the rest; just compare the preface to his large explanation to the Letter to the Galatians. If this article of faith would be correctly understood from all sides, there would be no divisions in Christianity. It is the Alpha and Omega of all revelation, to which every Christian must flee in every distress and trial of life and in the hour of death, if one should not despair.

What we have here said concerning the necessity of the exact understanding of the concept of justification goes for every other concept of salvation, and finally every concept of the Scriptures. Whoever is not clear in this and is not able to present it clearly is not suited to be a public teacher of the Word. He will neither be rightly happy concerning his own salvation, nor will he be able to rightly teach, rebuke, comfort and convert others. Clarity in every concept concerning salvation is the very first requirement for the teacher of the church. "Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully" (Jer. 23:28).

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<sup>10</sup> p5 - "daß rechtfertigen eine Handlung Gottes nicht im Menschen sondern **über ihn** und an ihn..." The translation for the preposition *über* here I wasn't completely sure of. Perhaps otherwise "above" or "upon" him.

And then Paul says in Acts 20:27 to the Ephesian elders, "For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you **the whole will of God.**" Finally, every public teacher of the Word, be it apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher of any kind, must be able to testify to this before his hearers or students, if he wants to be found faithful. The public office of teaching has been ordered by God, won with Christ's blood and richly intended by God with all necessary gifts for its carrying out (1Co. 12; Eph. 4). What for? "To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching," etc. (Eph. 4:12-16). How can we accomplish this practical goal unless we offer to our hearers the entire riches of the divine truth, which was given to us by God in the extensive Scriptures for just this purpose, namely, that we do not let our Christians remain infants, but bring them up to be full men in Christ, and so lead the body of Christ to the spiritual completion desired by God!

Of course it is true: not everything in Scripture is of the same practical importance, whether it be history or the doctrine of salvation. In God's Word there are also main parts and secondary parts, important, more important, and most important things. The scientific study will arrange them as subjects of greater or lesser consideration, according to their degree of importance for the salvation of individual souls and the well being of the church. Many a simple Christian can have a right faith and can lead a god-pleasing life, without being fully clear on the *communicatio idiomatum - the communication of proper qualities*, or without having understood the importance of Abishag the Shunammite for the Old Testament theocracy. However, for the theologian, for the present or future teachers of the Word, there is absolutely nothing in the entire

Holy Scriptures that is unimportant. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" [2 Ti. 3:16]. Whoever is a man of God in the special sense must also be ἀρτιος, πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐξητισμένος - "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Ti. 3:17). He should know the Scriptures completely, not only according to the abstract doctrine of salvation, but also according to the salvation history given therein. For only these two together, in their being interconnected, completely make up the council of God concerning salvation. No theologian is competent in the full sense, who has not made his own, together with Dogmatics, the entire history of the kingdom of God, from Genesis 1 to the last verse of Acts.

It is a sign of an unhealthy theological spirit, a *Schwärmerei*, which more or less is inherent in every nature of sects, or rather actually makes up all sects, that one rides on theological hobby-horses, that it, to select according to one's own taste and especially practice certain favorite subjects of the Scriptures as the only or mainly important ones. One does this while treating the other parts or even just one part of the revealed truth of God superficially, or placing them away altogether. Even the doctrine of justification, which governs the rest of the council of God concerning salvation, is not allowed to be our only theme. It has as its prerequisites the knowledge of the corruption of original sin, of the enslaved will, of the wrath of God and the power of the devil, of death and judgment. It includes the doctrines of the love of God, of the grace in Christ, of the vicarious satisfaction, of the incarnation, the two states of Christ, the entire work, suffering, resurrection and ascension of Christ, the doctrines of the Word, of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the doctrines of the church and its office and of heaven and hell. But each of these doctrines is dealt with specially and extensively in the Scriptures. It can neither be correct nor complete without these being preached and understood. Therefore, these



doctrines must also come to the proper presentation. On the other side, we can't exclusively nor just one-sidedly stress the law, repentance and sanctification, good works and service. That's what finally makes Pharisees, judges, hypocrites and modernists. The law is always and everywhere only the maid in the house of God, just the schoolmaster until Christ, who (maid)<sup>11</sup> does the unimportant duties for the mistress, the free woman, the gospel. It wasn't Martha with her well-meant service of love, but Mary with her hunger for the Word of grace who chose what was better. Even our theological disciplines may not be practiced one-sidedly. We cannot exclusively or just chiefly practice Dogmatics and put history far in the background. With time that becomes orthodoxistic, sterile and unapproachable. We can't give history an overabundant stress. That breeds a vanity of wisdom, indifference towards the pure doctrine, laxity in the practice and Unionism. We can't go without the fullness of the knowledge and the depth of religious emotion, nor the poetry of the Scriptures, of song in its manifold moods and of maxims about and for the practical life in this world, all of which were intended by the Holy Spirit. Teachers and hearers must also pray and make petitions, wail and cry, praise, thank, rejoice and shout for joy in and with the Holy Spirit, and learn every-day wisdom. Otherwise Job, the Psalms, Song of Songs, and thus also other songs, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and other proverbs of wisdom wouldn't be anything special in Scripture. The knowledge and utilization of the entire Bible also belongs to the God-desired competency of a theologian.

Finally there must also be thoroughness. This word stands in contrast to superficiality, to spiritual bungling, which is certainly also the basis for imprecision and only finding half of the essence. The thorough person digs in the depths. He wants to get to the heart of the matter. He is not satisfied with what is immediately before him, the outward appearance; he wants to look into

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<sup>11</sup> The antecedent

the heart of the matter, to come to know its most inner essence. We can't remain with just the concrete details of Dogmatics and history. No detail is thoroughly recognizable by itself. It needs to be compared with others, associated with others, contrasted to others and also placed apart from others. And it is worthwhile to find the narrower and wider contexts of a section or of the whole. Finally, we have to come to the final recognizable foundation of the revealed thoughts of God, a uniform whole outlook in theology. To give a few well known biblical examples: the Scriptures often list the Ten Commandments in their outward, concrete detail; they also sum them all up, though, in the double commandment of love toward God and toward our neighbor and in the single commandment of love - Mk. 12; Ro 13; 1 Co. 13. And it is a proof of Luther's thoroughness, that he starts out the explanation to each commandment in his catechism with the words: "We should fear and love God, that". Whoever does not know and does not teach that has not come to know the meaning of the law. Likewise, all the individual truths of the gospel are summed up in the one all-embracing basic truth of the love of God. It is the Lord himself who says, "God **so** loved the world," etc. Scripture says, "God **is** love." Finally, our salvation lies in that. It is true in revelation [through the Word] just like in nature: the most glorious treasures are found in the depths. Who can recognize the extremity of the corruptness of original sin, the sinful mind as hostility toward God, the devilish nature of all sin, without having recognized love as the commandment of all commandments! Who could work utter despair of one's own righteousness without this sermon, into which (despair)<sup>12</sup> only the preaching of grace can put down roots! Who can measure, even to some degree, the length and width and height and depth of this grace, without at least having looked somewhat into the fathomless ocean, the unquenchable fire, the heaven-width and the eternal immutability of the love of God as the ultimate foundation of all grace. It is by this power that we are able to say with Jeremiah as long as the sun and moon run

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<sup>12</sup> The antecedent

their courses, "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never<sup>13</sup> fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'the LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him'" (La.3:22-24).

Certainly there is also a danger in going back to the essence, context and ultimate foundation of all things: the temptation to speculate, to philosophize and to go above and beyond the revealed Word. Then our theology instantly becomes human wisdom and human delusion. 1 Corinthians 1:19-21 is fitting here. Outside of Scripture no one knows anything about the essence, context and ultimate foundation and purpose of all things. The greatest commandment and the greatest art in theology is not wanting to know or say more than what God has revealed to us in his Word. The wickedest figure in the Scriptures is the lying prophet who preaches his own dreams.

We summarize: Theology has to do first of all with the revealed Word of God. Studying God's Word exactly, entirely and thoroughly - that is a truly scientific, fully fruitful and blessed study.

However, we are speaking about what we **should** have, not about what we **do** have; about our ideal, not about our actuality, about our goal, not our possession, our assignment, not our achievement. - Why so many words concerning this? It is because we are in danger, with these considerations, of fooling ourselves that the scientific practice of theology is already a fact and truth with us. One needs only to give a high-sounding name or title to something on earth - an institute, an office or a person - and the body responsible for it immediately deludes itself and is arrogant concerning the thing. Among brothers there is indeed no more harmful thing than delusion, and before God no worse loathing than arrogance. Two kinds of delusion are especially

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<sup>13</sup> Pieper's comment before the verse - as long as the sun and moon, etc. - is brought out a little better with the German translation: "Seine Barmherzigkeit hat **noch** kein Ende."

mentioned in Scripture: that of righteousness and that of wisdom, which are both equally wicked (Mt. 23; 1 Co. 1:20). The delusion of knowledge wishes to rule over absolutely everything. The so-called scientific theology has ruined the gospel on and on and has again and again been put to shame by the gospel. God opposes the arrogant.

How does it stand with us in actuality concerning the scientific practice of theology?

When we contemplate the demands which this places on teachers and students, and when we hold up our scientific equipment to it honestly, must we not despair of a solution to our assignment and of all success for our work? Doesn't a mastery of the two original languages - just to make a suggestion here<sup>14</sup> - belong to a clear, universal and thorough recognition of God's Word? And where is that to be found with us to such a degree? We're not talking so much about the relatively easy New Testament Greek, its limited vocabulary and its simple sentence structure, although the appearance of more and more new German and English textbooks bears loud enough witness to the fact that even the grammatical specialists, for example, in research even just of prepositions and conjunctions, have up till now still not gotten to the heart of it everywhere. But Hebrew! The Old Testament language research boasts that it has now come much further in knowledge of Hebrew than Abenesra, David Kimchi, Reuchlin and Luther; and that we have to admit. The lexicological and grammatical works of Gesenius, Ewald, Olshausen, Kautsch, Stade and especially König have made possible a knowledge of the Old Testament language, which was not possible at Luther's time. We are indebted to them for several translations and commentaries, which, together with greatly advanced archaeology, correct Luther's translations in many ways. On the other hand, the entire Assyriology until now has only brought us an improved understanding for about 45 vocables and otherwise has led the study of the Old Testament in the wrong direction. How incomplete, though, the understanding of

Hebrew still is, even with the present specialists, is a result of the single fact that the Gesenius Grammar, which has up till now been published, revised and increasingly produced many times, is being worked on to be to completely turned on its head.

And now we here in America? We have the pitiful end result daily before our eyes, which our preparatory education produces, precisely with Hebrew, for the majority of our theological students, as it has also produced for us, we who should now be teachers. Are the most capable ones of Hebrew among us more than just poor blunderers, if we're going to be honest? Luther, with his lexical and grammatical knowledge of the biblical languages, which was lacking in many ways, had two large advantages over all the modern biblical linguists: he had the Spirit of the Scriptures and the unending practice with them in the original languages. No language can be learned strictly from a grammar book. That just results in a dead, mechanical knowledge. Only the unending intimate contact with the language conveys its meaning to the one who is of the same spirit and has the same interests as the language. Therefore, Luther also understood the Old Testament better and in general had translated it better than the rationalists after him and the present modernist Hebrew linguists, who make more translation errors in detail than Luther, due to their unchristian spirit. We would be saved by doing it in Luther's fashion, if it could be assumed that the language background education of our preparatory students<sup>15</sup> took them far enough in the beginning levels, so that we could work intensively in the Greek and Hebrew Bible. That is unfortunately only the case with a small number of our preparatory students.

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<sup>14</sup> "Um hier nur anzudeuten" I'm not sure of the connotation.

<sup>15</sup> Pieper uses the words "Vorbildung" - (*background education*) and "Schüler" - (*students* before the level of university, i.e. grade school through high school, but maybe college would be included in this.) I think he is referring to Northwestern College, but didn't they also start with Greek in the prep system back then? I've translated "preparatory education" and "preparatory students", mainly thinking of our college level in preparation for Seminary. Maybe you would like to translate that differently.

A scientific practice of theology, which is worthy of its name, should altogether have a kind of language and formal philosophical, spiritual training<sup>16</sup>, which our preparatory education does not and can not offer. In order to procure this, the church, that is, in the form of our synod, must first consider again their next real assignment - the education of churchworkers. The church, if it wants to educate capable pastors and teachers, must then, towards this goal, finely tune the curriculum and organization<sup>17</sup> of their preparatory establishments and the size and structure of their faculties and their work. It can't let the character of its colleges be influenced by the well-meant wish to offer young people of all sorts a Christian higher education for various kinds of educated private occupations. The church can do that when it has already taken care of its main task in full measure. What we especially need for the theological course of study is a sound education in the main subjects of the Gospel (Bible history and catechism), in the languages (German, English, Latin, Greek and Hebrew), in the main subjects in the area of history and the other classes for a bachelor of arts degree.<sup>18</sup> With all this, however, the students need to learn how to think and to study.

As it stands at present, there can only be talk of a scientific practice of theology in our seminary in a very modest sense. We professors daily feel our lack in knowledge, thinking and teaching capability, and the workload which has been placed on us few doesn't really allow us to come to a proper furthering of education for ourselves in nearly any area. We should have more professors. The three years of seminary, which has been what we've had till now, is not enough for the necessary deepening of the students' learning. We have to stuff too much down the students' throats. The students are forced to choke it all down without properly being able to

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<sup>16</sup> "Durchbildung" is the word. This is my best suggestion. I couldn't find this German word, nor can I think of a good English word for it.

<sup>17</sup> Possibly "materials" instead of "organization" for *Apparat*.

digest it. Luther says in the preface to the Small Catechism, "And take your time with it." We don't have that time at present. Professors and students don't get to the necessary independent or personal study. We live too much hand to mouth. We are lacking in new purchases for the library and in general many scientific-theological materials.

All this should have strongly cut down for us the delusion of our scholarliness and brought us to the humble realization that we haven't come very far with our scientific achievements. We can say perhaps in truth that we are heading for a scientific study of theology with some seriousness. However, for the most part, we need to look to reach our goal through practical channels.

We placed the saying of Paul at the beginning of this article as a motto:

Ἐκ μέρους γινώσκομεν καὶ ἐκ μέρους προφητεύομεν - *we know in part and we prophesy in part*. The apostle says this concerning the revelation of God in general, about its manner on this side of heaven. God has revealed himself to us in the gospel through human words, human terms and human concepts. This revelation is complete for the purpose of our salvation, but it is no complete revelation of God. He has kept silent, even in the gospel, about so much, which our curiosity would like to have uncovered. Luther speaks correctly about a hidden God; the Scriptures, the prophets, the Lord and Paul also. We cannot and should not learn, while we are here, the last 'How?' and 'Why?' and 'What for?' of all things. We wouldn't be able to handle it, but would have to die because of it (Ex. 33:20, 23). Therefore God made it easier for our mental capacity and let himself be made known to us through human words. That is humanly clear, complete and thorough, but it remains human words, just human images, terms and thoughts, which are being conveyed. It is only a mirror, which God gives us to perceive, as in a picture, in

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<sup>18</sup> This last phrase is my free translation of "bei den höheren Klassen des Gymnasiums in der philosophischen Propädeutik."

a symbol - in a "puzzle," Paul says (1 Co. 13). Therefore, the outward means of reception is for us the understanding, which comes through the hearing- and reading- study of the Word, and the inner part of faith, "which believes this Word of God." We live by faith, not by sight [2 Co. 5:7]. Therefore all human perception of God, even of the inspired writers, is in part. Even Paul's understanding concerning our inheritance in glory was like the perception of an infant, compared to that of a grown man. - For our part, we must learn to apply this word of Paul even to the knowledge of God offered to us in the Scriptures. Since Paul there has been no one who has understood the Scriptures more exactly, more completely and more thoroughly than Luther, and he confesses that he must remain a daily student of the catechism. What are we poor blunderers then doing by talking a lot about a scientific knowledge of the Word of God! Indeed, we would have to despair of any success of our theological teaching and learning, if it weren't written: "They will all be taught by God" (Jo. 6:45; Is. 54:13; Jer. 31:34). It will indeed remain as Luther said it, that doctors of aphorisms may well make the Pope, the King and universities, but "know for certain, no one will make you a doctor of the Holy Scriptures except the Holy Spirit from heaven" - and that we must gain such and all kinds of teachers of the Word through humble prayer to God. Yes, we must despair of our skill, but not of our work altogether, which God has assigned to us. The same apostle, who calls out, "And who is equal to such a task?" also says, "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant" (2 Co 3:5-6).

The theologian, whether it be teacher or student, lives, just like the Christian, not in the state of completion but in the state of becoming. What we lack in scholarliness we want to seek to make up for through prayer and faithfulness in our work. The promise in Jo. 16:13ff. is also for us, that the Holy Spirit will lead us in all truth, which we don't yet know. Finally, the seminary time is of



course just the introduction into the theological study, which first really begins, with each faithful pastor and teacher, with the entrance into the office, and it may not end until God takes the office away from us. May God just keep us from laziness and comfort, which seek rest and good days for the flesh in the pastoral and teaching office, and which don't worry about the injuries of Joseph; from arrogant pride, which fools oneself into thinking that one knows his thing as good as any; from a loathing and weariness of his Word and from a hypocritical spirituality,<sup>19</sup> which unites all vices in itself and causes all the efforts of a sober and fruitful course of study to be in vain. We have pastors educated practically, who, through prayerful, untiring diligence in private theoretical and practical study of Scripture in the original languages and in German and English translations, have brought their education to an astonishing knowledge of the gospel and to a richly blessed activity in preaching, teaching catechism and *Seelsorge*. Let us just not forget the classic saying of Luther: "oratio, meditatio, tenatio faciunt theologum" - *prayer, meditation, and trial make the theologian*, and his admonition: "Truly, you cannot read Scripture too much; and what you read, you cannot understand too well; and what you understand, you cannot teach too well; and what you teach, you cannot live too well. *Experto crede Ruperto* - *believe one who has experienced it*. It is the devil, it is the world, it is our flesh that rage and struggle against us. So, dear Lords and Brethren, Pastors and Preachers, pray, read, study, be diligent! Truly, at this wicked, scandalous time, it is not the time to laze around, to snore and sleep. Use your gift, which has been entrusted to you, and reveal the mystery of Christ" (Erlangen, LXIII, 370-372)<sup>20</sup>. So let us grow daily in knowledge and rejoice over every new piece of this "like one who finds great spoil" (Ps. 119:162).

A u g. P i e p e r.

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<sup>19</sup> "die frommtuende Geistereit" - I don't exactly know what that means.

<sup>20</sup> Pieper had quoted this from Walther's *Pastorale*, so I quoted it from p. 12 of the English:

Walther, C.F.W. *Walther's Pastorale, that is, American Lutheran pastoral theology*, by C.F.W. Walther. Translated and abridged from the 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (1906) by John M. Drickamer. New Haven, MO: Lutheran News, 1995.