

THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

VOL. IX.

OCTOBER, 1929.

No. 10.

The Means of Grace.

With Special Reference to Modernism.

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Introduction.

"The true treasure of the Church is the holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God." That is the statement made by Luther in Thesis 62 of the Ninety-five Theses. It shows that the great Reformer, as early as 1517, had reached a clear and definite conviction concerning the most important treasure which God gave to His Church on earth. It is not in subjective and mystical experiences of an individual that the strength of the Church lies nor in similar conceptions held by a group of individuals, but in the objective acceptance of the gift of redemption wrought by the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ. No amount of contemplation will give a person the possession of the reconciliation effected by Christ, and all the excessive religiousness of our days will not take the place of the simple belief in the truth of Scriptures which is demanded by the Lord as the first step in the proper relationship to Him. It was our Lord Jesus Himself who began His public ministry with the call: "Repent ye and believe the Gospel." Mark 1, 15. And the same call goes forth throughout the Scriptures, as when Paul in Rom. 10, 16 and 2 Thess. 1, 8 demands obedience to the Gospel, just as he writes, Eph. 1, 13: "In whom [Christ] ye also trusted, after that ye heard the Word of Truth, the Gospel of your salvation; in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise."

For that reason the topic which is to be treated in the present essay and in its discussion is of vital, of fundamental importance in the life and work of the Church. When the Ephraimites had been defeated by the Gileadites under the command of Jephthah, as we read in Judges 12, the Gileadites took the passages, that is, the fords of Jordan, before the Ephraimites, challenging every man who wanted to pass over to pronounce the word *Shibboleth*. Since

Dr. Luther's Warning against Sedition.*

A Faithful Admonition to All Christians to Beware of Riot
and Rebellion. 1522.

JESUS.

May God grant grace and peace to all Christians reading or hearing this letter! Amen.

1. By the grace of God the blessed light of Christian truth, heretofore suppressed by the Pope and his followers, is risen anew in these years, which has publicly exposed and confounded their manifold pernicious and infamous deception, all manner of iniquity

* Our brethren of the California and Nevada District of the Missouri Synod are urging that Luther's complete works be rendered into English and are advocating that the work be done by our clergy, the pastors of each Synodical District taking over their proportionate share. The Los Angeles Conference has made a beginning and is herewith submitting a translation of Luther's treatise entitled *Eine treue Vermahnung an alle Christen, sich vor Aufruhr und Empoerung zu hueten* (St. L. Ed., Vol. X, 360 ff.).

THE EDITOR.

and tyranny, so that riot seems to be brewing and priests, monks, and bishops, together with the entire clergy, will be slain and routed unless they themselves offer a sincere, marked reform. For the common man, aroused and angered because of losses suffered with respect to property, body, and soul, too sorely vexed and most faithlessly pressed beyond all measure, henceforth is no longer able or willing to suffer, and he has just cause to strike with flail and club, as the common peasant threatens to do.

2. Now, although I am not at all displeased to hear that the clericals are in such fear and worry, if perchance they would search their hearts and moderate their furious tyranny, — would to God their terror and dismay were even greater! — nevertheless I feel quite convinced and also without all fear of a future riot or rebellion, particularly of such a one as would succeed and attack all the people, for the reason that I should not, and ought not to, doubt that God will confirm His Word and would much rather allow heaven and earth to pass away than have one tittle or letter of His Word fail as He Himself declares, Matt. 5, 18; 24, 35.

3. Therefore let any one who may and will threaten and terrorize that the Scripture may be fulfilled, which says of such clerical evil-doers, Ps. 36, 2: "Their iniquity is found out that men hate them." Likewise Ps. 14, 5: "They fear where there is no fear." Again, Prov. 28, 1: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." And Lev. 26, 36: "The sound of a shaken leaf shall frighten them." And Deut. 28, 65—67: "The Lord shall give thee a trembling heart, and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee. In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning!" Such terror and fear the Scripture works in all enemies of God as a beginning of their damnation. Therefore it is proper and pleases me well that such torment is beginning with the Papists, who persecute and condemn divine truth. Presently there will be still more smarting.

4. And let me say more: If I had ten bodies and could merit so much grace with God that He would chastise them with this fox-tail of temporal death or riot, I should nevertheless, from the bottom of my heart, yield them all up for the wretched common people. Alas, Lord God! there is no such mild punishment at hand; an unspeakable severity and wrath, of which there is no end, has already set out upon them. Heaven is iron, the earth brazen; no praying avails any more; the wrath, as St. Paul says of the Jews, 1 Thess. 2, 16, is come upon them to the uttermost. What we

are speaking of now is not merely insurrection in the sight of God. Would to God that, since there is no help for the masses, we might nevertheless snatch a few and save them from the horrible gulf and abyss.

5. The Scriptures allot to the Pope and his followers an end far different from physical death and riot. Daniel says (chap. 8, 25): "He shall be broken without hand," that is, not with the sword and physical force. And St. Paul, 2 Thess. 2, 8, speaks thus of him: "Our Lord Jesus Christ shall consume him with the spirit of His mouth and shall destroy him with the brightness of His coming." The artists also portray Christ seated upon the rainbow, a rod and a sword proceeding out of his mouth. This is taken from Isaiah, chap. 11, 4, where the prophet says: "He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked." However, the artists made a mistake in painting a flowering rod. It should be a rod or lance, and both, lance and sword, should extend over the one side only, over the condemned. Again we read Ps. 10, 15: "Break Thou the arm of the wicked, seek out his wickedness till Thou find none."

6. From these passages we learn that the antichristian reign of the Pope will be destroyed simultaneously with himself in this manner, that his knavery, fraud, villainy, tyranny, seduction, will be exposed and end in shame in plain view of all the world, by Christ's Word, which is the spirit, lance, and sword of His mouth. For lies and deception are destroyed only by being exposed and recognized. As soon as the lie is detected, it needs no further blow; it falls and vanishes of itself with utter disgrace. That is the meaning of Ps. 10, 15: "Seek out his wickedness till thou find none." Nothing more is required than searching and exposing it.

7. Now, the Pope's pomp, with all its prebends, cloisters, high schools, laws, and doctrines, is nothing but a lie; reared upon lies, it has only by pretense and good appearance deceived, seduced, and oppressed the world and has harmed body, property, and souls. Therefore nothing more is required than recognizing and exposing it, and it will tumble down with Pope, priests, and monks into complete shame and disgrace. For no man is such a fool as to pursue, and not hate, open lies and falsehood. Now, when such an *exposé* of papal knavery has been made and the spirit of Christ's mouth is in full sway, so that the Pope with his lies is as nil and utterly despised, then the Last Day will simultaneously also break and appear, and Christ will completely destroy the Pope by His

advent, as Paul declares 2 Thess. 2, 8. In this affair the best feature is this, that the Pope and his henchmen, their hearts hardened as they are, will not believe but deride it, that they may fulfil the word of Paul, 1 Thess. 5, 3: "*Cum dixerint: Pax!*" "When they shall feel secure and say, There is as yet no trouble, then sudden destruction will come upon them." Now, in order that the Papists may never mend their ways and seek grace, they are not to believe this, but rather to say: Indeed, the Last Day is still far distant; and then, in the twinkling of an eye, before they will be aware of it, they will all lie in a heap in the very depths of hell-fire.

8. As I have just now said, since I am persuaded by these passages that by man's hand or by a riot the papacy and the clerical state will not be destroyed, but that his iniquity is abominable to such a degree that no punishment will be adequate except the divine wrath itself, without any means, I have never yet allowed myself to be moved to restrain those who threaten with fist and flail. I know very well that they will not succeed; though some will be attacked, the attack will not become a general one. For even before this when men still feared their anathemas and the wrath of God was not yet in action, probably more priests have been dispatched without any noise and rebellion; but now that the rebellion has begun and their anathema is no longer dreaded, they shall tremble without cause, just as they have hitherto with their false ban caused us to tremble and have delighted, with pride and pleasure, in our fear.

9. Yet, though the fist will not succeed, and though there is no need of my restraining it, nevertheless I am constrained somewhat to instruct the poor souls. And for the present I shall concern myself about civil government and the members of the nobility, who really ought to render support from a sense of duty, as being the ordained power, every prince and lord in his own domain. For whatever is done by constituted authority is not to be regarded as revolution. But now they suffer it all to go unchecked, and one hinders the other; several even support and justify the cause of Antichrist. God will surely find them out and reward them according as they have employed their power and authority either unto the deliverance or unto the loss of their subjects, as regards their body, goods, and souls. But the common man's temper must be calmed, and he must be told to abstain also from such sentiments and words as tend toward riot and to undertake nothing in this matter except by order of the government or cooperation of the

powers that be. The following considerations ought to induce him thereto:—

10. First, the fact that, as stated, there will be no action, and words and ideas expressed and conceived about this matter are altogether vain. For, as already heard, God Himself will be, and wants to be, the Avenger in this instance, and they [the Papists] are not at all worthy of the proposed light punishment. Besides, we notice that the princes and lords are very much disagreed among themselves and they are doing nothing that would even make it appear as though they wished to lend any assistance in this matter. This has all been so decreed and ordered by God that He alone might punish them and pour out His wrath upon them. Still, as said above, this does not excuse the princes and lords; they ought to do their part and, as much as lies in them, restrain with the sword which they bear, thus perhaps, to some extent forestalling and mitigating the wrath of God, even as Moses did, Ex. 32, 28, who had three thousand of the people slain in order that God's wrath might be turned from the people; similarly, Elijah, 1 Kings 18, 40, and Phinehas, Num. 25, 11. Not that we are now to slaughter the priests, which is not necessary; no, only with words we should keep them from practising over against the Gospel, and try to make our words effective. More than enough can be done to them by words and letters, so that neither striking nor stabbing will be necessary.

11. Secondly, if, however, there should be a riot and God would be pleased to punish them so graciously, yet the method is unprofitable, nor does it ever produce the reform desired. For riot is devoid of reason and usually strikes the innocent more than the guilty. For this reason no riot is justifiable, however just its cause may be, and it always results in more harm than good, confirming the adage: "Ill begets worse." For this purpose the government and the sword have been instituted, to punish the evil-doers and to protect the righteous in order that riot may be prevented, as St. Paul says, Rom. 13, 4 and 1 Pet. 2, 13, 14. But when Mr. Everyman rises, he can neither mark nor maintain the distinction between the evil-doers and the righteous, but strikes into the masses, without regard as to whom he is hitting, which cannot be done without great, yea, monstrous injustice.

12. Hence take heed to the powers that be. As long as they do not raise a hand and issue commands, restrain your hand, tongue, and heart and undertake nothing. Should you be able to influence the political authorities to act and issue orders, you are

free to do that. If they are not willing, you must not will it either. However, if you continue, you are already unjust and much worse than the other party. I side, and ever will side, with that party which suffers from riot, no matter how unjust its cause may be and I shall oppose that party which instigates riot, no matter how just its cause may be, because riot cannot proceed without doing harm and shedding innocent blood.

13. Thirdly, riot is forbidden by God. Deut. 16, 20 He says through Moses: "*Quod iustum est, iuste exequaris*"; "That which is altogether just shalt thou follow." Likewise Deut. 32, 35: "To Me belongeth vengeance and recompense." Hence originated the true proverb: "He who strikes back is in the wrong." Again: "No one can be his own judge." Now, riot is nothing but personal judging and avenging oneself. This God cannot tolerate; therefore it cannot be otherwise but that riot will invariably make matters much worse; for it is opposed to God, and God is not with it.

14. Fourthly, in this case riot is certainly a special instigation of the devil. Because he sees the bright light of the truth, which exposes his idols, Pope and Papists, the world over, and which he is unable to meet in any way, the rays having dazzled his eyes, so that, totally blinded, he can do no more than lie, blaspheme, and advance the most foolish stuff, being so completely blinded that he even forgets pretense, color, and hypocrisy, which hitherto he was accustomed to allege, as those lying tongues, the Pope, Eck, Emser, and their ilk, prove by their bulls and writings, — he now rushes in and wants to instigate a riot through those who glory in the Gospel, hoping thereby to heap reproach upon our doctrine, as though it were of the devil and not of God; as some already glory from the pulpit in consequence of the performance he began at Erfurt with the priests.

15. But, God willing, he shall not succeed. We must suffer the insult from him; he, however, shall also, in return, suffer something that will abundantly repay him. Those who read and understand my doctrine correctly do not instigate riot; they have not learned it from me. That some nevertheless do such a thing and boast our name, what can we do about it? How much do the Papists, under the guise of Christ's name, perpetrate things which Christ has not only forbidden, but, what is more, destroy Christ! Are we to keep our followers so pure that even St. Peter would not stumble among us, while among the Papists there are nothing but Judases and Judaslike schemes, although they protest that their

doctrine is not of the devil? However, as I say, thus the devil seeks occasion to inveigh against our doctrine as best he can. If he were capable of something worse, he would certainly do it. He has become weak; he must suffer, God willing, because he takes recourse to such lame, loose, foul designs. He shall not and will not succeed in starting a riot, as is his heart's desire.

16. Therefore I pray that whoever desires to glory in the name of Christian, would conduct himself as St. Paul prescribes, 2 Cor. 6, 3: "That we give our adversaries no occasion to vilify our doctrine." For we see how adept the papists are in letting the beam stand in their own eyes and searching and scratching with all diligence in our eyes, expecting to find a little mote there. They do not want us to censure them for possessing hardly anything praiseworthy, but if one of us is not wholly spiritual and an angel, then our whole cause is said to be wrong; then they rejoice and dance and sing as if they had gained a complete victory. Therefore we should beware of giving occasion for blasphemy, with which they are filled to the point of overflowing; not for their sakes, as they cannot but blaspheme and let "the mouth speak out of the abundance of the heart," Matt. 12, 34, even if they must accomplish it by lying, as we see them actually doing; but for the sake of the holy Gospel that we may preserve it from shame and "silence them" according to our best ability, as St. Peter teaches, 1 Pet. 3, 16, so that they may not with truthful testimony heap reproach upon us. For whatever evil they may say of us they at once connect with our doctrine; and thus the holy Word of God, from which we derive all our honor, must bear our shame. But they desire their own doctrine to be above dishonor, though they produce naught but shame, these noble-minded, tender-hearted, righteous people!

(To be concluded.)
