

“On the Concept of Theology”

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The word “theology” does not appear in the Scriptures, but was appropriated by the Christian Church from the terminology of Greek paganism. In and of itself, the expression is colorless and indefinite. However, one can grasp it as a technical term for the doctrine of God according to the analogy of similar scientific expressions (mineralogy, cosmology, and the like). There remains a wide range of notions concerning what now is intrinsic to theology, and how this came to be. Consequently, on the one hand it cannot surprise us that over the course of time the expression has been used for very different concepts. On the other hand, it behooves no man to impose his own definition of the term “theology” as the only possible and right one and to desire to suppress the others. If it pleases one to stretch the concept so widely that under the term “theology,” along with the Christian doctrine of God, he can also deal with the teaching about the gods of the ancient Greeks, of the Indians, along with the perspectives of Islam [*Muhammedanismus*]. We have no intention of reproaching him for this. We also reserve the right to ourselves to restrict our use of the term so that it creates a truly useful foundation for our churchly efforts and goals.

According to the literal sense of the word, under all circumstances “theology” must deal with God. For us, there can be no question of any other god except the true God, the Lord of heaven and earth, as he has revealed himself and borne witness to himself in the conscience of every man—but in that pattern which the Holy Scriptures show us—the gracious and compassionate God, who has sent his Son into the world, that we may live through him. On the foundation of the revelation of God in nature, a theology can scarcely arise whose propositions must be acknowledged as unassailable truth. Such a theology would not pass the test of completeness, since God in nature has pointed out only a few sides of his essence. On this point, historical experience teaches that no theology able to pass muster has ever arisen on the basis of the natural knowledge of God, but [13] only such teachings about gods, which have given true rest to no soul. On the contrary, we possess in the Scripture a source of knowledge for theology, which not only completely replaces all other sources for the knowledge of God, but also goes far beyond them. To be sure, the knowledge of God which the Scriptures make possible for us, in comparison to the knowledge which will be shared with us before the throne of God, is also called only a rough draft (1 Corinthians 13:9-12). For us here on earth, it is nonetheless the most perfect knowledge there can be, and the only knowledge in which a man finds true rest and blessed peace.

In addition to this distinctive manner of speaking, we have by now accustomed ourselves to speak about theology variously, as though it stood on the same plane with secular sciences, as far as man could appropriate it as it suited him even as far as he has gifts and pleasure in doing that. The expression “professional theologians” belongs here along with other expressions which suggest that theology in its truest sense could be carried on with just as strictly subjective a participation by men, as, say, geography and mathematics. With equal justice, the unregenerated

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man could be designated a theologian, as soon as he has qualified for the profession. This concept is true to the extent that the divine truths, similarly to the concepts of worldly sciences, are communicated through words. So, the unregenerate man can link certain notions with these words, and he is in a position to share his representations with others in turn. Indeed, the human capacity for thought surely extends far enough to enable the learned unbeliever to work according to the yardstick of a church confession, and to speak in an incontrovertibly orthodox manner. How twisted the concept is, that this intellectual capacity alone would make a man into a theologian, should be shown quite clearly on this basis: divine truths simply cannot be treated in an objective and purely intellectual way, for they are distinct from the truths of secular sciences. As soon as a man encounters divine truths in whatever form, the choice is placed before him, whether or not to accept them. They aim straight at his emotion and his will, no less than at his understanding. He must not only decide whether he objectively regards the teaching as right, but he must also take a decided position with heart and emotions vis-à-vis that truth. The indifferentism of pure objectivity is excluded here according to Matthew 12:30 and John 3:18. If the learned man retains inward reservations against the truth of Scripture, especially against the Gospel, all his intellectual familiarity with the Scripture does not make him a theologian. Theology is not exclusively a matter of the understanding, but above all things, a matter of the heart.

Our old dogmatians were accustomed to express this fact by calling [14] theology not a *scientia*, but rather a *habitus*. Based on this, theology is the controlling complex of concepts in the soul of the theologian, and not just because the theologian chiefly busies himself with theological concepts, but above all because his whole intellectual life is concentrated upon these concepts. His theological perspectives bleed color on to everything else he thinks, and leave behind recognizable traces even on so colorless a science as pure mathematics. As the pantheistic, deistic, monistic philosopher cannot help permitting his perspective about God to play a deciding role in his concept of biology, astronomy, or of history, so the Christian theologian involuntarily will be influenced and governed, in all areas of human science, by his perspectives about divine matters. Above all, objective science remains an unattainable ideal. Thus, in theological precincts objectivity is completely unthinkable and never yet actualized.

Furthermore, theological truths cannot permit their inmost essence to be totally uninfluenced by the emotions. Thus, the theological *habitus* also includes a thoroughly decided position of the heart toward God and his truth. To speak of a purely intellectual theology is a contradiction in terms. Man either faithfully receives the truth, which God has revealed in his Word, or he pushes it away in unbelief. Only in the former case is there any talk of true theology, since the right understanding of the truths of faith escapes the unbeliever entirely. Here is an example, which is not completely parallel, but yet analogous in a certain sense. Among astronomers only he counts as a true member of the guild, who faithfully receives the dogmas of modern star science, and permits himself throughout to be guided by them in his research. In the case of theology, Scripture speaks with unmistakable words. Jesus testifies that faith is the foundation to all true theological knowledge in John 8:31 (“so if you remain in my word, you will know the truth”), and when he sets the essence of eternal life in the knowledge of God and of the Savior in John 17:3. He can intend nothing else than that knowledge grasps faith. Yes, proper theological knowledge without faith is so unthinkable to the Lord, that here he identifies knowing and believing. According to Scripture, it is thus completely improper to call someone a true theologian who has never had faith or has abandoned it again. To salve his wretched conscience, Pastor Jatho of Cologne introduces the recitation of the Apostles’ Creed in

church with the words “now we hear how the ancient church confessed its faith.” [15] (See the report of the “*Vossische Zeitung*” [major paper in prewar Germany] on the “Reformation” of 11 April 1908, p. 254.) Thus he reveals his faithless rejection of the one truth that saves men, but testifies of himself before the whole world that he does not belong in the number of Christian theologians, although apparently he has a command of the constellation of intellectual concepts which comprise Christian dogmatics. Saul likewise lacked the essence of theology in spite of all his Pharisaical learning and thorough knowledge of the Old Testament, until the Lord overpowered him with his grace on the way to Damascus, and brought him to the knowledge of faith: Jesus Christ is Lord, and apart from him there is no salvation.

In every instance, true theology begins with rebirth, with the conversion of the man. Thus John 6:44 teaches us. God draws to the Son, while he teaches; whoever is thus taught by God, must become a true adept in divinity. As soon as such a person comes to the Son, in other words, as soon as he is converted, he has learned. Jesus introduces the Scriptural Word of the Old Testament: they will all be taught by God. This pertains only to those in whom the Gospel has burst forth as God’s transforming power, which we at various times call enlightenment, conversion, or rebirth. We correctly say of this, not only that revealed knowledge of God is essentially the same as true theology and vice versa, but also that Christian theology and conversion suit each other as correlative concepts. When we permit the true theology to be placed together with conversion, self-evidently we thereby give no set weight to theological knowledge, but only to the *terminus a quo* of all true theology. Theology would be perfected here on earth, if it knew all the truth that lies revealed in Scripture, and had all of it constantly present to its awareness in all particulars. No Christian reaches this point in this age. Our knowing is still a rough draft, in an entirely different sense from the rough draft knowing of the inspired prophets and apostles. As far as a Christian’s confession of faith goes, thus far theology extends in his case. In the essence of knowledge, there is nevertheless no difference between the intellectual and the simple Christian.

Consequently, in the modern distinction among Christian between theologians and non-theologians, we recognize a repristination of the papist false teaching of the difference between clergy and laity, even if the starting point of error is distinct in the two cases. The Scriptural teaching of a spiritual priesthood of all Christians is antithetical to every concept such as this. As a spiritual priest, every Christian not only has the right to deal directly with God without a middleman, [16] but he has also the necessary equipment to exercise the specifically theological function of testing doctrine. John could not have made it the task of all Christians to test the spirits (1 John 4:1) if a theological knowledge capable of attaining this goal had not been imparted to all Christians by virtue of conversion. If Christians ought not let themselves be entangled in various and vain teachings (Hebrews 13:9), so they must equally well possess the theological capacity to discern what is and is not a vain teaching. Christ’s warning about false prophets (Matthew 7:15ff.) would be a vain admonition, if for even the simplest Christian such a measure of theological knowledge did not stand at the ready, so that he can determine for himself, whether or not a university professor in Berlin is a false prophet. Every true Christian is a theologian by the grace of God. The professional theologian, the preacher, or the public teacher of the church *as such* has no proprietary interest [in theology], apart from that which comes from his being steeped in spiritual knowledge more than his hearers, and that consequently he has been made earnest to lead them to further knowledge. Romans 12:7 also pertains here, where the apostle sets prophecy, the public proclamation of divine truths, in such a

relationship to the faith of the one prophesying, that he admits the possibility of prophecy only where knowledge of faith is available, and only as far as it reaches.

From the considerations mentioned above, to us it also follows that the predicate *theosdotos*, divinely given, pertains to theology as a *habitus*, as our dogmaticians used to say. If the beginning of true theology is given with conversion, then theology depends just as little on human striving and doing as does conversion. “They will all be taught *by God*” is just as true as the prayer: “convert me, and I shall be converted.” It goes along the same lines. It does not depend upon someone’s willing or running, that he comes to saving faith. Just as little does it depend upon somebody’s willing or studying, that he becomes a true theologian. The well-known story of the Brahmin, who has read the Old Testament fifty times and the New Testament eighty-four times, and yet is no Christian and does not want to become one, also repeats itself in Christian countries. By their fruits you shall know them, says the Lord. If it were a matter of industrious and ongoing work, or a matter of a busy course of study, Germany today would be full of great theologians. But those industrious people, who are equipped with the best apparatus of learning, and on many points justifiably count as the world’s leading experts, have shut their ears in theology to the truth, and turned aside to the clever fables of philosophy. They do not *want* to be taught by God, for they deny almost without exception the divine [17] origin of the Scripture. They set themselves up as masters over God’s Word. They judge and condemn the eternal truths according to the measure of their cramped reason. In this way, item after item of saving truth publicly goes by the boards, yes, they themselves throw individual points of doctrine on the scrap heap. They look with pity upon the Lutheran theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries, who were so steeped in Scripture that they *enjoyed* no freedom at all from the written Word. Modern theology is not a *habitus theosdotos*, and does not want to be. We do not need to set ourselves up as judges of this kind of theologian. They judge themselves. It may be true in individual instances, that the attitude of their hearts is different from what they publish in their books as the result of their philosophical speculations. We do not go beyond the limits which Holy Scripture sets, if we not only declare the modern theology of Germany to be false, but also consider the modern negative theologians over there as a category to be unregenerate, unbelieving men. By their fruits you shall know them. Therefore we also say, that not a trace of real theology, of the *habitus theosdotos*, can be found among them. The dogmatic-theological tapestry of terminology, in which they cloak their unbelief, shows itself to us as a sheep’s pelt in which the devouring wolf conceals himself. The informed person knows how rarely the German publishing market desires a book with real theological content, while the theological sewer [*Aftertheologie*] of the marketplace overflows with its unmistakable byproducts.

Whoever does not want to be taught by God, and that through the written Word, the one possible way, to him true theology remains far away. So is it preached in the orthodox Lutheran institutions of higher learning of our country, at the theological seminaries, that personal Christianity is the *conditio sine qua non* of true theology. This personal Christianity is not in the sense of the sects, among whom all the weight is placed on the outward amendment of life, but in the sense of the Scripture, which indicates personal faith in Christ, trustful surrender to the Lord, as the essence of Christianity. “You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” Thereby we defend ourselves scrupulously from two false paths, which could arise from the pietistic tendency. We do not hold the opinion that it is sufficient for a man who wants to enter into service in the church, to know only the rudiments of Christian doctrine, and make up the deficiency of basic knowledge through eagerness for the good cause and through eloquence. We always remain aware of the fact that no measure of learning can be too great for one, who must

be powerful in admonishing by means of wholesome doctrine and in fighting gainsayers (Titus 1:10). Further, [18] we exclude the opinion that the divine Word is powerful for the salvation of souls only in the mouth of a regenerate man. If that were so, the salvation of souls would be made dependent upon the spiritual condition of other men, and not solely on the power of the grace of God in the Word.

Accordingly, we do not need to prove in advance that we do not make Christian experience into a principle of theology, as happens, in the false theology of Germany. It is not *what* a man has personally experienced in conversion, which makes him into a theologian, so that now he could unfold the full knowledge of God from that prior event without further means. Rather, it is *that* he has personally experienced conversion, and puts himself in a position to advance further into the hidden things of divine truth. Conversion itself is such a hidden working of God, that the one to whom it is granted to be a sharer in it, can never research and grasp the inner workings of it. His Christian consciousness is not an additional source of knowledge, from which he could continue to create. It only sets for him the momentary standpoint of his knowledge. Further increase in knowledge must proceed along the same path where the first beginnings of theology were planted in the heart. Progress in theology must also be *theosdotos*, mediated through the only vehicle of true knowledge of God, though the Word of Scripture. Only he who *stays* with the words of Christ, who permits those words to work within himself over and over again, can know the truth anew day by day and place his trust in it. A true theologian will be assailed frequently enough by the temptation of wandering into speculation, and of making his own reckoning of divine truths according to philosophy. What he achieves in this way is not progress in his theology, but at best a deteriorated presentation of known truth, and for the most part only wretched, if glittering, fool's gold. True theology must be actual divine erudition; on the one hand it has God and his truth as its objects, and on the other hand, it is effected, preserved, and increased by God through the means of his Word.

In this connection we must also observe a distinction between our theology and that of the apostle. According to the modern experience-theology, the theology of the holy writer is only the result of a speculative development of his personal experience of salvation. The theology of a Moses, Isaiah, Peter, or Paul was *theosdotos* in the most eminent sense of the term. It was a gift, which was given to them in an unmediated way. According to extent as well as trustworthiness, it was in no way dependent upon the energy and completeness of their speculative considerations. [19] There is no talk in their case, as there is in ours, of the necessity of a course of study. The Holy Spirit bestowed upon them what they ought to teach, preach, and write. To be sure, he did this in such a way, that the very form of presentation was to a certain extent independent of the writers' own intention. In any case, any deficiency there might be in their intellectual development, or in their logical and rhetorical schooling, could exercise no influence at all upon the truth and verbal correctness of their preaching. One rightly calls this an *infused* theology. The knowledge of truth which the apostles and prophets had was given to them in its perfection and inerrancy all at once in an unmediated way. Only so could the objectively sure Word of God be given to us as the single source of theology. There is no more talk in the church of such an infused theology after the time of the apostles. Whatever of the truth any Christian possesses, has been given to him by and by as the fruit of his study of the Holy Scripture.

From the fact that theology is a *habitus theosdotos*, derives the further truth that true theology has always remained the same and will stay the same. In face, external unity in the presentation of theology can also be attained. It dovetails with the perfection of this good gift of

God, which also comes down from on high (James 1:17). Theology comes from God through his Word. Just as God in himself is free of contradiction, so must the theology given by him also be. This applies most outstandingly to the inspired theology of the holy writers of the books of the Bible. They had one instructor, the Holy Spirit. He had the same goal in view in his working upon all of them, namely, that he should extend the redemption completed by Jesus Christ to mankind through their preaching. Therefore it is *a priori* unthinkable that contradictions should be present in the Holy Scriptures, that also perhaps the apostles would have had different doctrinal concepts in opposition to one another, or that this theological discrepancy should be reflected in their writings. In the Scripture itself, every thought of such contradiction is rejected as expressly as can be. The untrue notion of a discrepancy of doctrinal concepts among the apostles and apostolic men had cooked up great unhealthiness in the Corinthian congregation. Paul condemns their factional squabbling with the words: “among you one says: I am a Paulinist, another, I am Apollosan, a third, I am Cephan, a fourth, I am Christic.” It is clear that in this conflict it was [20] not simply a matter of personal preference toward one or the other of the named preachers. Christ himself is listed, whom the Corinthian congregation as such had known face to face as little as they had known Peter. Paul likewise points out that the Corinthians were dealing with supposed theological differences. The Corinthians were regarding the listed personalities as representatives of differing doctrinal viewpoints. He keeps going like this: “How? Is Christ divided? Has Paul, then been crucified for you, or were you baptized in Paul’s name?” (1 Corinthians 1:12ff.) To be sure, Paul conveys to us none of the arguments deployed on the battlefield of this extremely heated debate, because he had to declare the entire difference of opinion among the factions at Corinth to be without any basis in fact. In Chapter 3, where he takes up the question concerning the qualification of the factions, he stresses that in doctrine or theology, there is no difference whatever among the teachers mentioned. Only in the results of their preaching, in the total number of those who were converted under each one’s preaching, could one speak of any difference at all. “Who is Paul? Who is Apollos? They are servants, through whom you have become believers, and that very thing, as the Lord has given to each individual.” (v.5)

If we create our theology strictly from Scripture, which those men wrote, so must the theological knowledge in one [present-day] writer be the same as that in another, apart from the greater or lesser completeness of that knowledge. One may know more than another does from Scripture about the person and work of Christ. As far as the knowledge of the less advanced one extends, it must be the same as that of the other writer. As soon as a discrepancy of knowledge has been substantiated, it is apparent that one or the other errs. That one *always* errs, whose knowledge does not flow from God’s Word and is not based on it. Since every error is a deviation from divine truth, so also is every deviation from Scripture an error. The divine Word, the source, is but *one* truth. Theology, the knowledge of faith which flows from Scripture, must be *one* and the same in all who possess it. To be sure, there is not only a single [theology] for the present moment, but one for all ages of the Christian church. In this sense, true theology is that which always, everywhere, [and] by all has been believed [Vincent of Lérins]. Consequently, our theology does not actually differ from that of the apostle. In light of the solidarity between theology and the revelation of God in the Word, there can be no talk of doctrinal development, as though the theology of our day had discovered doctrines which go beyond the revelation of Scripture. Progress in knowledge of individual doctrines has been imparted to the church, especially progress [21] in the expression of doctrines known from Scripture, but true theology

has never distanced itself from Scripture; it has always remained the same, and must remain the same until the end of days.

Consequently it is always possible, according to the apostle's admonition in Ephesians 4, to preserve the unity of the Spirit. Unity of the Spirit is actually unity of theology, of knowledge of faith, and of the frame of mind created through it. Outside, one has so completely accustomed himself to division of opinions in theology, that one claims not only justification [*Berechtigung*] for this phenomenon, but justification for it alone. Constant flow of insights, constant changes in opinions, untrammled doctrinal freedom, today this was, tomorrow that way—that must be the hallmark of true life in theology, and shifting must be its steady basis. This is actually how things end up, if one claims unconstrained doctrinal freedom for those who stand at the podium and set the tone. In Europe, they should ask with astonishment how it is possible that here in America this or that synod has firmly expounded the same theology for decades. They should also ask how such synods, which have nothing to do with one another administratively, are completely united with one another in doctrine, function according to the same foundations and stand shoulder to shoulder in the struggle against error. Instead, in Europe they presume that our unity of faith could only exist on the precondition of theological and scientific backwardness. With regret they look down upon our theology. It is derided in its entirety as a standpoint they have overcome, when compared to more recent theology. Such judgments betray the most regrettable deficiency of true theological knowledge, as is it imparted to faith from the inspired Word of God. May our American Lutheran church ever possess the outward luster of erudition, so that there is no doubt that true theology is alive and well among us, and that we owe the preservation of this *habitus theosdotos* to the undisrupted involvement with the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God. Through this manifold and unequivocal Scriptural foundation, the most precious boon of unity in the Spirit has been preserved among us.

Now it is plain that we do not permit ourselves to be corrupted and influenced by modern theology, as it is in full swing outside. Under the circumstances, we are sure that we can uncover their little conjuring tricks, if they vainly make Christian experience of Christian consciousness into the starting point of their doctrine. What [modern theology] now further generates, is either plainly false, or it is just as plainly gathered from the witness of Scripture, and in no way from Christian consciousness. [22] Schleiermacher himself, to whom a Biblical word counted for less than nothing—when it did not stick in his craw—still speaks in his dogmatic productions about things, which he had learned only from Scripture, and had not developed out of his own consciousness. But modern theological and homiletical literature is based so totally upon this false principle of knowledge, that it shows itself brazenly everywhere. One who is not careful in the use of such assistance could lose gradually the sure ground of Scripture beneath his feet, and with it, the only foundation of true theology. Further, it is undeniable that the productions of modern theology have a corrupting gleam. Learned men produce quite a number of things today, in a giant outpouring, which in and of themselves are suitable for use as aids in the study of Holy Scripture. We are also free to make that kind of product of European scientists useful for our own purposes. We do not want to forget, in that case, that the scent of the soil from which they have sprung always more or less clings to these productions. This poisonous vapor could very easily ruin our taste for true theology. If it were ever to reach that point, true theology would also cease among us. Defend us from this, dear Father in heaven!

Our dogmaticians in addition ascribe to the theological *habitus* the characteristic of being *practical*. *Habitus theosdotos practicus* is their expression in full. The word “practical” is not to be taken in the enervated sense which is current among us from everyday speech, as though

theology was characterized throughout by a knowledge which performs services necessary to the achievement. Much more do our dogmaticians think of the term as a designation of the capacity which aims at definite goals, and they go back with that to the etymological significance of the expression. Theology is an *effective habitus*, thus, a *habitus*, which is not only stamped upon patterns of thought and emotion, but which also rules the striving and willing of man, and runs in such definite tracks, by which a goal desired by God is attained.

Thereby the concept of a false mysticism is rejected in advance. True theology has many mystical components in its knowledge. Already the relationship of faith to God is a mystical thing full of secrets, which is not grasped by reason, and which is much the less capable of being spelled out in a logically satisfactory way. Add to this what is known of the essence of God, of the incarnation of the Son of God, of his humiliation and exaltation, of his unity with the totality of the faithful (Head-body), and much else. On the whole, where we are conscious [23] of the restrictions on our capacity for knowledge, where we remain standing with stunned amazement before the secrets of God, the mystical element in true theology moves to the fore. Also, insofar as these things become the frequent objects of prayerful contemplation and self-abnegation of the Christian, one can certainly speak of a healthy mysticism. However, as soon as the pretension rears up for this contemplation, that this contemplation is in and of itself the one actual capacity of theology, immediately it goes down the wrong road. Unhealthy mysticism strives for an unmediated consciousness of the unification of the soul with God. As a result, it veers off completely into the life of emotion. Clear knowledge of revelation, as far as it lies before us in the Word, retreats into the background as unnecessary to this unhealthy mysticism. It strains to set aside the constraints which always separate the infinite God from his creation. So the outspoken mystic usually gets comfortable with pantheism. He thinks he can identify himself with God. From the outset, the one-sided emphasis upon emotion in mysticism is already unfavorable to the practical influence of such theology. Eventually the pantheistic streak takes from [theology] its strength and exactitude, and finally, all practical power.

The practical essence of theology has its basis in God. According to his gracious will, true theology must effect the salvation and blessing of the sinner. God has this practical goal in view, when he gives the beginnings of the knowledge of faith to the heart through conversion. When Jesus gathers his little sheep from the ruined herd of humanity, he aims thereby not only at them hearing his voice, and coming to knowledge of their Shepherd, but that he enables them to share in this way in salvation and eternal life. In those whom we designate as theologians in a special sense, in congregational preachers, from God's point of view, the proximate goal of their theology, of their involvement with the Word of God, is that they save themselves (1 Timothy 4:16).

But while theology steers for this goal, it likewise manifests itself in the theologian as a practical *habitus* to the extent that it also governs his whole life of the will, his strivings, his decisions, and thereby also influences and in fact rules his actions. A theology that does not do this is condemned already. Since with faith the beginning of all true theology is found, it is as true of theology as it is of faith, that it is effective through love. This proceeds most clearly from the well-known passage 2 Timothy 3:16ff. Next, we should set aside for a moment the fact that it is a pastor who is addressed here as a man of God. Every other believing Christian is also a man of God, where the Holy Spirit has created in him the new man on God's pattern, and has begun the restoration of the image of God. Such a [24] man gets from Scripture, doctrine for the broadening of his knowledge and of his theology, and in addition it serves him for a warning, for improvement, for upbringing in righteousness. In this way he will become *artios*, entirely so

constituted, as he has to be (Luther says “perfect”), namely, prepared for every good work, not only that he knows what is good in God’s sight, but that he is also willing to do it. Therefore, without further ado one can redirect Luther’s well-known words about faith to theology, and say: “it is a living, busy, effective, mighty thing in the heart, that it is impossible for it not to do good works without letup . . . therefore the man becomes willing and pleased, to suffer every sort of thing, to the love and praise of God, who has demonstrated such grace to him.” (St. Louis Edition, XIV, p.99).

Holy Scripture indicates that the foremost external goal of the practical habitus of theology is the salvation of other men. To those who have the Gospel not only in their heads but in their hearts, the exalted Lord gives the assignment in Matthew 28 to make other men his disciples, and shows at verse 20 exactly that theological instruction once again as the means to this end. Where the Scripture expressly speaks of the work of the teacher in the church, it especially promotes this. As a servant of the Gospel, the great theologian Paul, as he bears witness in Ephesians 3:6-9, even received the assignment “to enlighten every man, what then is the bond of the mystery, which has been hidden in God since the creation of the world.” We must not forget, that there, where Paul describes the man of God as ready for every good work, even to a professional theologian, as we say, to a teacher of the church he gives injunction, how he must carry out his official assignment conscious of his goal. Paul also admonishes him to hold firmly to his theology (1 Timothy 4:16), since through it he will not only save himself, but also those who hear him.

The practical power of the *habitus* of theology directs itself further, that the true theologian also actually aims at this goal. He cannot quit telling whose power he himself has experienced. We reckon with certainty and without any illusions on this point, that Christians in our congregations have a heart for every sort of mission activity, and are prepared to take part in the salvation of other people. We develop wide-ranging plans for the construction of churches, of parochial schools, of institutions of higher learning to train younger people for special service in the church, since experience teaches that theology is a *habitus practicus* among our Christians, which impels them to this labor for the kingdom of God. As long as true theology rules in our chancels and finds a ready welcome among its hearers, so long can we reckon with confidence on [25] the participation of all congregations in all the labors, whose goal it is, to bring salvation in Christ near to men. The inward call, which moves young people to give themselves to the difficult preparation for the highest office of all, the preaching office, is nothing other than the theology in their hearts, the *habitus practicus*, which comes with conversion. Our preparatory schools and seminaries will fill up to the same measure that true theology is alive and well in our congregations.

The dangers that threaten our theology are consequently the same as those that on the whole threaten Christendom. Everything which hinders the life of faith in some particular, hinders theological progress in that particular, and likewise threatens theology itself. Everything that weakens the life of faith, weakens theology and likewise threatens its permanence. Everything that kills the life of faith annihilates true theology. True theology cannot coexist with false doctrine. False doctrine damages faith, hinders the progress of the knowledge of faith, and in the final analysis arrests true theology along with faith. The secular outlook ruins theology, running rampant only where indifference to truth is already present. The secular outlook necessarily results in one point of true knowledge after another being abandoned, and so theology as a whole goes under. We see among our people how these influences slowly but surely carry in their train the loss even of already present points of proper knowledge of God.

We hear that over in Europe the same progression of ruin has been observed. One must regard the decline in numbers of men preparing for the ministry, here as in Europe, as an unambiguous symptom that these influences have already exercised their destructive effect far and wide. True theology has a hard lot in these evil times. That it still lives among us and ripens its divine fruits, is grace from on high. God preserve true theology in us and among us!