

PIETISTS

Selected Writings

**EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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**PREFACE BY
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FROM THE
PIA DESIDERIA*
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I

Thought should be given to a more extensive use of the Word of God among us. We know that by nature we have no good in us. If there is to be any good in us, it must be brought about by God. To this end the Word of God is the powerful means, since faith must be enkindled through the gospel, and the law provides the rules for good works and many wonderful impulses to attain them. The more at home the Word of God is among us, the more we shall bring about faith and its fruits.

It may appear that the Word of God has sufficiently free course among us inasmuch as at various places (as in this city [Frankfurt am Main]) there is daily or frequent preaching from the pulpit. When we reflect further on the matter, however, we shall find that with respect to this first proposal, more is needed. I do not at all disapprove of the preaching of sermons in which a Christian congregation is instructed by the reading and exposition of a certain text, for I myself do this. But I find that this is not enough. In the first place, we know that "all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Accordingly all Scripture, without exception, should be known by the congregation if we are all to receive the necessary benefit. If we put together all the passages of the Bible which in the course of many years are read to a congregation in one place, they will comprise only

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a very small part of the Scriptures which have been given to us. The remainder is not heard by the congregation at all, or is heard only insofar as one or another verse is quoted or alluded to in sermons, without, however, offering any understanding of the entire context, which is nevertheless of the greatest importance. In the second place, the people have little opportunity to grasp the meaning of the Scriptures except on the basis of those passages which may have been expounded to them, and even less do they have opportunity to become acquainted with them as edification requires. Meanwhile, although solitary reading of the Bible at home is in itself a splendid and praiseworthy thing, it does not accomplish enough for most people.

It should therefore be considered whether the church would not be well advised to introduce the people to Scripture in still other ways than through the customary sermons on the appointed lessons.

This might be done, first of all, by diligent reading of the Holy Scriptures, especially of the New Testament. It would not be difficult for every householder to keep a Bible, or at least a New Testament, handy and read from it every day or, if he cannot read, to have somebody else read. . . .

Then a second thing would be desirable in order to encourage people to read privately, namely, that where the practice can be introduced the books of the Bible be read one after another, at specified times in the public service, without further comment (unless one wished to add brief summaries). This would be intended for the edification of all, but especially of those who cannot read at all, or cannot read easily or well, or of those who do not own a copy of the Bible.

For a third thing it would perhaps not be inexpedient (and I set this down for further and more mature reflection) to reintroduce the ancient and apostolic kind of church meetings. In addition to our customary services with preaching, other assemblies would also be held in the manner in which Paul describes them in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40. One person would not rise to preach (although this practice would be continued at other times), but others who have been blessed with gifts and knowledge would also speak and present their pious opinions on the proposed subject to the judgment of the rest, doing all this in such a way as to avoid disorder and strife. This might conveniently be done by having several ministers (in places where a number of them live in a town) meet together or by having several members of a congregation who have a fair knowledge of God or desire to increase their knowledge meet under the leadership of a minister, take up the

Holy Scriptures, read aloud from them, and fraternally discuss each verse in order to discover its simple meaning and whatever may be useful for the edification of all. Anybody who is not satisfied with his understanding of a matter should be permitted to express his doubts and seek further explanation. On the other hand, those (including the ministers) who have made more progress should be allowed the freedom to state how they understand each passage. Then all that has been contributed, insofar as it accords with the sense of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, should be carefully considered by the rest, especially by the ordained ministers, and applied to the edification of the whole meeting. Everything should be arranged with an eye to the glory of God, to the spiritual growth of the participants, and therefore also to their limitations. Any threat of meddlesomeness, quarrelsomeness, self-seeking, or something else of this sort should be guarded against and tactfully cut off especially by the preachers who retain leadership in these meetings.

Not a little benefit is to be hoped for from such an arrangement. Preachers would learn to know the members of their own congregations and their weakness or growth in doctrine and piety, and a bond of confidence would be established between preachers and people which would serve the best interests of both. At the same time, the people would have a splendid opportunity to exercise their diligence with respect to the Word of God and modestly to ask their questions (which they do not always have the courage to discuss with their minister in private) and get answers to them. In a short time they would experience personal growth and would also become capable of giving better religious instruction to their children and servants at home. In the absence of such exercises, sermons which are delivered in continually flowing speech are not always fully and adequately comprehended because there is no time for reflection in between or because, when one does stop to reflect, much of what follows is missed (which does not happen in a discussion). On the other hand, private reading of the Bible or reading in the household, where nobody is present who may from time to time help point out the meaning and purpose of each verse, cannot provide the reader with a sufficient explanation of all that he would like to know. What is lacking in both of these instances (in public preaching and private reading) would be supplied by the proposed exercises. It would not be a great burden either to the preachers or to the people, and much would be done to fulfill the admonition of Paul in Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell

in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." In fact, such songs may be used in the proposed meetings for the praise of God and the inspiration of the participants.

This much is certain: The diligent use of the Word of God, which consists not only of listening to sermons but also of reading, meditating, and discussing (Ps. 1:2), must be the chief means for reforming something, whether this occurs in the proposed fashion or in some other appropriate way. The Word of God remains the seed from which all that is good in us must grow. If we succeed in getting the people to seek eagerly and diligently in the book of life for their joy, their spiritual life will be wonderfully strengthened and they will become altogether different people. . . .

One of the principal wrongs by which papal politics became entrenched, the people were kept in ignorance, and hence complete control of their consciences was maintained was that the papacy prohibited, and insofar as possible continues to prohibit, the reading of the Holy Scriptures. (On the other hand, it was one of the major purposes of the Reformation to restore to the people the Word of God which had lain hidden under the bench (and this Word was the most powerful means by which God blessed his work). So this will be the principal means, now that the church must be put in better condition, whereby the aversion to Scripture which many have may be overcome, neglect of its study be counteracted, and ardent zeal for it awakened.

2

Our frequently mentioned Dr. Luther would suggest another means, which is altogether compatible with the first. This second proposal is the establishment and diligent exercise of the spiritual priesthood. Nobody can read Luther's writings with some care without observing how earnestly the sainted man advocated this spiritual priesthood, according to which not only ministers but all Christians are made priests by their Savior, are anointed by the Holy Spirit, and are dedicated to perform spiritual-priestly acts. . . . [All] spiritual functions are open to all Christians without exception. Although the regular and public performance of them is entrusted to ministers appointed for this purpose, the functions may be performed by others in case of emergency. Especially should those things which are unre-

lated to public acts be done continually by all at home and in every-day life.

Indeed, it was by a special trick of the cursed devil that things were brought to such a pass in the papacy that all these spiritual functions were assigned solely to the clergy (to whom alone the name "spiritual," which is in actual fact common to all Christians, was therefore arrogantly allotted) and the rest of the Christians were excluded from them, as if it were not proper for laymen diligently to study in the Word of the Lord, much less to instruct, admonish, chastise, and comfort their neighbors, or to do privately what pertains to the ministry publicly, inasmuch as all these things were supposed to belong only to the office of the minister. The consequence has been that the so-called laity has been made slothful in those things that ought to concern it; a terrible ignorance has resulted, and from this, in turn, a disorderly life. On the other hand, members of the so-called spiritual estate could do as they pleased since nobody dared look at their cards or raise the least objection. This presumptuous monopoly of the clergy, alongside the aforementioned prohibition of Bible reading, is one of the principal means by which papal Rome established its power over poor Christians and still preserves it wherever it has opportunity. The papacy could suffer no greater injury than having Luther point out that all Christians have been called to exercise spiritual functions (although not called to the public exercise of them, which requires appointment by a congregation with equal right) and that they are not only permitted but, if they wish to be Christians, are obligated to undertake them.

Every Christian is bound not only to offer himself and what he has, his prayer, thanksgiving, good works, alms, and so forth, but also industriously to study in the Word of the Lord, with the grace that is given him to teach others, especially those under his own roof, to chastise, exhort, convert, and edify them, to observe their life, pray for all, and insofar as possible be concerned about their salvation. If this is first pointed out to the people, they will take better care of themselves and apply themselves to whatever pertains to their own edification and that of their fellow men. On the other hand, all complacency and sloth derives from the fact that this teaching is not known and practiced. Nobody thinks this has anything to do with him. Everybody imagines that just as he was himself called to his office, business, or trade and the minister was neither called to such an occupation nor works in it, so the minister alone is called to perform

spiritual acts, occupy himself with the Word of God, pray, study, teach, admonish, comfort, chastise, and so forth, while others should not trouble themselves with such things and, in fact, would be meddling in the minister's business if they had anything to do with them. This is not even to mention that people ought to pay attention to the minister, admonish him fraternally when he neglects something, and in general support him in all his efforts.

No damage will be done to the ministry by a proper use of this priesthood. In fact, one of the principal reasons the ministry cannot accomplish all that it ought is that it is too weak without the help of the universal priesthood. One man is incapable of doing all that is necessary for the edification of the many persons who are generally entrusted to his pastoral care. However, if the priests do their duty, the minister, as director and oldest brother, has splendid assistance in the performance of his duties and his public and private acts, and thus his burden will not be too heavy. . . .

Connected with these two proposals is a third: The people must have impressed upon them and must accustom themselves to believing that it is by no means enough to have knowledge of the Christian faith, for Christianity consists rather of practice. Our dear Savior repeatedly enjoined love as the real mark of his disciples (John 13:34-35, 15:12; 1 John 3:10, 18, 4:7-8, 11-13, 21). In his old age dear John . . . was accustomed to say hardly anything more to his disciples than "Children, love one another!" His disciples and auditors finally became so annoyed at this endless repetition that they asked him why he was always saying the same thing to them. He replied, "Because it is the Lord's command, and it suffices if this be done." Indeed, love is the whole life of the man who has faith and who through his faith is saved, and his fulfillment of the laws of God consists of love.

If we can therefore awaken a fervent love among our Christians, first toward one another and then toward all men (for these two, brotherly affection and general love, must supplement each other according to 2 Peter 1:7), and put this love into practice, practically all that we desire will be accomplished. For all the commandments are summed up in love (Rom. 13:9). Accordingly the people are not only to be told this incessantly, and they are not only to have the excellence of neighborly love and, on the other hand, the great danger and

harm in the opposing self-love pictured impressively before their eyes (which is done well in the spiritually minded John Arndt's *True Christianity*, IV, ii, pp. 22-28), but they must also practice such love. They must become accustomed not to lose sight of any opportunity in which they can render their neighbor a service of love, and yet while performing it they must diligently search their hearts to discover whether they are acting in true love or out of other motives. If they are offended, they should especially be on their guard, not only that they refrain from all vengeance but also that they give up some of their rights and insistence on them for fear that their hearts may betray them and feelings of hostility may become involved. In fact, they should diligently seek opportunities to do good to their enemies in order that such self-control may hurt the old Adam, who is otherwise inclined to vengeance, and at the same time in order that love may be more deeply implanted in their hearts.

For this purpose, as well as for the sake of Christian growth in general, it may be useful if those who have earnestly resolved to walk in the way of the Lord would enter into a confidential relationship with their confessor or some other judicious and enlightened Christian and would regularly report to him how they live, what opportunities they have had to practice Christian love, and how they have employed or neglected them. This should be done with the intention of discovering what is amiss and securing such an individual's counsel and instruction as to what ought now to be done. There should be firm resolution to follow such advice at all times unless something is expected that is quite clearly contrary to God's will. If there appears to be doubt whether one is obligated to do this or that out of love for one's neighbor, it is always better to incline toward doing it rather than leaving it undone.

Related to this is a fourth proposal: We must beware how we conduct ourselves in religious controversies with unbelievers and heretics. We must first take pains to strengthen and confirm ourselves, our friends, and other fellow believers in the known truth and to protect them with great care from every kind of seduction. Then we must remind ourselves of our duty toward the erring.

We owe it to the erring, first of all, to pray earnestly that the good God may enlighten them with the same light with which he

blessed us, may lead them to the truth, may prepare their hearts for it, or, having counteracted their dangerous errors, may reinforce what true knowledge of salvation in Christ they still have left in order that they may be saved as a brand plucked from the fire (Zech. 3:2). If his is the meaning of the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer, that God may hallow his name in them, bring his kingdom to them, and accomplish his gracious will in and for them.

In the second place, we must give them a good example and take the greatest pains not to offend them in any way, for this would give them a bad impression of our true teaching and hence would make their conversion more difficult.

In the third place, if God has given us the gifts which are needful for it and we find the opportunity to hope to win the erring, we should be glad to do what we can to point out, with a modest but firm presentation of the truth we profess, how this is based on the simplicity of Christ's teaching. At the same time we should indicate decently but forcefully how their errors conflict with the Word of God and what dangers they carry in their wake. All of this should be done in such a way that those with whom we deal can see for themselves that everything is done out of heartfelt love toward them, without carnal and unseemly feelings, and that if we ever indulge in excessive vehemence this occurs out of pure zeal for the glory of God. Especially should we beware of invectives and personal insinuations, which at once tear down all the good we have in mind to build. If we see that we have made something of a beginning in this fashion, we should be so much the more energetic in advancing what has been begun, perhaps with the assistance of others. On the other hand, if we see that they have been so captivated by their preconceived notions that, although we perceive in them a disposition to serve God gladly without being able for the present to comprehend what we have said, they are to be admonished at the very least not to slander or speak evil of the truth which they have heard from us, to reflect further on the matter in the fear of the Lord and with fervent prayer, and in the meantime to try seriously to advance in the truth and to serve their God according to the practical principles and rules of conduct which most people who call themselves Christians have to some extent in common.

To this should be added, in the fourth place, a practice of heartfelt love toward all unbelievers and heretics. While we should indicate to them that we take no pleasure in their unbelief or false belief or the practice and propagation of these, but rather are vigorously op-

posed to them, yet in other things which pertain to human life we should demonstrate that we consider these people to be our neighbors (as the Samaritan was represented by Christ in Luke 10:29-37 as the Jew's neighbor), regard them as our brothers according to the right of common creation and the divine love that is extended to all (though not according to regeneration), and therefore are so disposed in our hearts toward them as the command to love all others as we love ourselves demands. To insult or wrong an unbeliever or heretic on account of his religion would be not only a carnal zeal but also a zeal that is calculated to hinder his conversion. A proper hatred of false religion should neither suspend nor weaken the love that is due the other person.

In the fifth place, if there is any prospect of a union of most of the confessions among Christians, the primary way of achieving it, and the one that God would bless most, would perhaps be this, that we do not stake everything on argumentation, for the present disposition of men's minds, which are filled by as much fleshly as spiritual zeal, makes disputation fruitless. It is true that defense of the truth, and hence also argumentation, which is part of it, must continue in the church together with other things instituted to build it up. Before us are the holy examples of Christ, the apostles, and their successors, who engaged in disputation—that is, vigorously refuted opposing errors and defended the truth. The Christian church would be plunged into the greatest danger if anybody wished to remove and repudiate this necessary use of the spiritual sword of the Word of God, insofar as its use against false teachings is concerned. Nevertheless, I adhere to the splendidly demonstrated assertion of our sainted Arndt in his *True Christianity*, "Purity of doctrine and of the Word of God is maintained not only by disputation and writing many books but also by true repentance and holiness of life" (*True Christianity*, vol. 1, p. 39)....

I therefore hold (1) that not all disputation is useful and good.... Just as all disputing is not praiseworthy and useful, so (2) proper disputation is not the only means of maintaining the truth but requires other means alongside it. Even if one resolves to limit debate to occasions in which everything is well arranged and confine it to that which is the sole and entire purpose of disputation.... God may not add his blessing, nor will he always allow the truth to prevail. This is the case with those whose thoughts hardly extend beyond making many people Lutheran and do not deem it important that with this

profession such people become genuine Christians to the very core. They therefore regard true confession of faith merely as a means of strengthening their own ecclesiastical party and not as an entrance upon a life of zealous future service of God. If the glory of God is to be properly advanced, disputation must be directed toward the goal of converting opponents and applying the truth which has been defended to a holy obedience and a due gratitude toward God. Such a *convictio intellectus* or conviction of truth is far from being faith. Faith requires more. The intention must be there to add whatever is necessary to convert the erring and remove whatever is a hindrance to him. Above all, there must be a desire, in promoting God's glory, to apply to ourselves and to all others what we hold to be true, and in this light to serve God. . . .

From all this it becomes apparent that disputing is not enough either to maintain the truth among ourselves or to impart it to the erring. The holy love of God is necessary. If only we Evangelicals would make it our serious business to offer God the fruits of his truth in fervent love, conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of our calling, and show this in recognizable and unalloyed love of our neighbors, including those who are heretics, by practicing the duties mentioned above! If only the erring, even if they cannot as yet grasp the truth which we bear witness to, would make an effort (and we ourselves should point them in this direction) to begin to serve God, in love of God and fellow man, at least to the extent of the knowledge which they may still have from Christian instruction! There is no doubt that God would then allow us to grow more and more in our knowledge of the truth, and also give us the pleasure of seeing others, whose error we now lament, alongside us in the same faith. For the Word of God has the power, if it is not viciously impeded either by those who declare it or by those who hear it, to convert men's hearts. Thus holiness of life itself contributes much to conversion, as Peter teaches (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

5

Since ministers must bear the greatest burden in all these things which pertain to a reform of the church, and since their shortcomings do correspondingly great harm, it is of the utmost importance that the office of the ministry be occupied by men who, above all, are

themselves true Christians and, then, have the divine wisdom to guide others carefully on the way of the Lord. It is therefore important, indeed necessary, for the reform of the church that only such persons be called who may be suited, and that nothing at all except the glory of God be kept in view during the whole procedure of calling. This would mean that all carnal schemes involving favor, friendship, gifts, and similarly unseemly things would be set aside. Not the least among the reasons for the defect in the church are the mistakes which occur in the calling of ministers, but we shall not elaborate on this here.

However, if such suitable persons are to be called to the ministry they must be available, and hence they must be trained in our schools and universities. May God graciously grant that everything necessary thereunto may be diligently observed by the professors of theology and that they may assist in seeing to it that the unchristian academic life, which prevails among students of all faculties and which has been sorrowfully lamented . . . by many pious persons, may by vigorous measures be suppressed and reformed. Then the schools would, as they ought, really be recognized from the outward life of the students to be nurseries of the church for all estates and as workshops of the Holy Spirit rather than as places of worldliness and indeed of the devils of ambition, tippling, carousing, and brawling.

The professors could themselves accomplish a great deal here by their example (indeed, without them a real reform is hardly to be hoped for) if they would conduct themselves as men who have died unto the world, in everything would seek not their own glory, gain, or pleasure but rather the glory of their God and the salvation of those entrusted to them, and would accommodate all their studies, writing of books, lessons, lectures, disputations, and other activities to this end. Then the students would have a living example according to which they might regulate their life, for we are so fashioned that examples are as effective for us as teachings, and sometimes more effective. . . .

The professors should therefore exercise good discipline among those who eat at their table and not permit mischief for the sake of gain. Edifying conversation should be carried on by them at table. Unseemly talk, especially talk in which texts of the Bible, parts of hymns, and similar words are misused by twisting their meaning to evil purpose (whereby more harm is done than one may imagine, for

godly persons are often disturbed in their devotions the rest of their lives whenever they come upon such words), should be averted and earnestly rebuked, not complacently tolerated.

Besides, students should unceasingly have it impressed upon them that holy life is not of less consequence than diligence and study, indeed that study without piety is worthless. . . . Students should constantly be reminded that the rule in human life is, *Qui proficit in literis et deficit in moribus, plus deficit quam proficit*, that is, whoever grows in learning and declines in morals is on the decrease rather than the increase. This is even more valid in spiritual life, for since theology is a practical discipline [*Theologia habitus practicus est*, a common assertion of orthodox theologians in the seventeenth century] . . . everything must be directed to the practice of faith and life. . . .

Surely, students of theology ought to lay this foundation, that during their early years of study they realize that they must die unto the world and live as individuals who are to become examples to the flock, and that this is not merely an ornament but a very necessary work, without which they may indeed be students of what may be called a philosophy of sacred things but not students of theology who are instructed and will be preserved only in the light of the Holy Spirit. Many, instead, hold that while it would be a good thing for a student of theology to lead a decent life, it is not necessary or important, provided he studies diligently and becomes a learned man, whether he allows himself to be governed by a worldly spirit during these years and participates with others in all the pleasures of the world, for there is time enough to change his manner of life when he becomes a minister—as if this were always in our power and as if a deeply ingrained love of the world did not generally cling to people throughout their lives, give them a bad reputation, and accordingly do harm to the ministry. On the other hand, if at the beginning of their study of theology all this were told to students and impressed upon them, I should hope that it would bear much fruit throughout the entire time of their study and, indeed, the rest of their lives.

It would be especially helpful if the professors would pay attention to the life as well as the studies of the students entrusted to them and would from time to time speak to those who need to be spoken to. . . . [I]f the professors should openly and expressly show those who lead a godly life, even if they are behind the others in their studies, how dear they are to their teachers and how very much they are to be

preferred to the others. In fact, these students ought to be the first, or the only, ones to be promoted. The others ought to be excluded from all hope of promotion until they change their manner of life completely. This is the way it ought in all fairness to be. It is certain that a young man who fervently loves God, although adorned with limited gifts, will be more useful to the church of God with his meager talent and academic achievement than a vain and worldly fool with double doctor's degrees who is very clever but has not been taught by God. The work of the former is blessed, and he is aided by the Holy Spirit. The latter has only a carnal knowledge, with which he can easily do more harm than good.

It would not be a bad thing if all students were required to bring from their universities testimonials concerning their piety as well as their diligence and skill. Such testimonials would have to be given only after careful reflection, and never to students who do not deserve them. These measures might bring it about that students doing theology would see how necessary that is to which most of them now seldom give a thought.

It would also be helpful if the professors would employ their skills to observe which studies might be useful and necessary to each student according to his intellectual gifts, his homeland, his professional goals, and the like. Some should pursue polemics with more zeal in preparation for their profession, because it is necessary that the church always have adequately equipped men to contend with enemies of the truth; rather than allowing every Goliath fearlessly to taunt the ranks of Israel, it must have some Davids who can step forward and face the Goliaths [cf. 1 Sam. 17]. . . . Other students need not make polemics their chief study, but they must also be sufficiently equipped to be able to stop the mouths of adversaries when the occasion requires and protect their congregations from error. We especially wish that those who come from lands in which there are Jews would be more diligent in learning about our controversies with these people in order that they might minister to them. On the whole, however, it would be desirable (and several excellent theologians have often expressed this wish) that disputations be held in the schools in the German language so that students may learn to use the terminology which is suited to this purpose, for it will be difficult for them in the ministry when they wish to mention something about a controversy from the pulpit and must speak to the congregation in German, although they have never had any practice in this. Alongside of stu-

dents who study polemics more thoroughly are others who will be adequately trained if they have a good understanding of our doctrines and know only so much of opposing doctrines as may be necessary to be secure from error and be able to show their auditors what is true and not true. When it comes to more difficult matters such men may make use of the help and advice of others.

Unless he has somebody to lead him faithfully by the hand, a beginning student will hardly know what he needs and what he does not need in these matters. . . .

It might also be useful to make more effort to put into the hands of students, and recommend to them the use of, such simple little books as the *Theologia Germanica* and the writings of Tauler, which, next to the Scriptures, probably made our dear Luther what he was. Such was the advice of Luther himself, who in a letter to Spalatin wrote thus of the man of God (as he called Tauler elsewhere): "If you desire to read the old, pure theology in German, you can obtain the sermons of the Dominican friar, John Tauler. Neither in the Latin nor in the German language have I found a purer, more wholesome theology or one that agrees more with the Gospel" [Luther to George Spalatin, Dec. 14, 1516, in WA, Br. 1, 79]. Again Luther wrote: "Once again I beg you, believe me in this case, follow me, and buy Tauler's book. I have admonished you before to get it wherever you can. You will have no trouble finding a copy. It is a book in which you will find such a skillful presentation of pure and wholesome doctrine that in comparison all other books, whether written in Greek, Latin, or Hebrew, are like iron or clay" [Luther to George Spalatin, May 6, 1517, in WA, Br. 1, 96]. Elsewhere Luther said: "I have found more of pure, divine teaching in it than I have found or am likely to find in all the books of the scholastics in all the universities" ["Explanations of the Disputation Concerning the Value of Indulgences" (1518), in WA, 1, 557]. Concerning *Theologia Germanica* (which Luther also ascribed to Tauler, although it was written later, and which I look upon as a particular honor to this city inasmuch as it is supposed to have been written here in Frankfurt), Luther expressed this opinion: "To boast with my old fool, no book except the Bible and St. Augustine has come to my attention from which I have learned more about God, Christ, man, and all things" ["Preface to the Complete Edition of a German Theology" (1518), in WA, 1, 378]. Hence this little book was republished and furnished with a foreword by our dear Arndt in the interest of Christian edification. Moreover, it is in order to praise him

rather than criticize him that we mention that the dear man often made use of Tauler and extolled him in his *True Christianity*. Thomas a Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* is to be placed beside these other two books; a few years ago it was republished for the common good together with a guide. . . .

There is no doubt that such little books, to which something of the darkness of their age still clings, can and may easily be esteemed too highly, but an intelligent reader will not go astray in them. In any case, if diligently used they will accomplish much more good in students and give them a better taste of true piety than other writings which are often filled with useless subtleties and provide a good deal of easily digested fodder for the ego of the old Adam. . . .

Just because theology is a practical discipline and does not consist only of knowledge, study alone is not enough, nor is the mere accumulation and imparting of information. Accordingly, thought should be given to ways of instituting all kinds of exercises through which students may become accustomed to and experienced in those things which belong to practice and to their edification. It would be desirable if such materials were earnestly treated in certain lectures, especially if the rules of conduct which we have from our dear Savior and his apostles were impressed upon students. It would also be desirable if students were given concrete suggestions on how to institute pious meditations, how to know themselves better through self-examination, how to resist the lusts of the flesh, how to hold their desires in check and die unto the world. . . . how to observe growth in goodness or where there is still lack, and how they themselves may do what they must teach others to do. Studying alone will not accomplish this. . . .

How these exercises are to be introduced must be left to the judgment of pious and sensible professors. If I am permitted to make a suggestion, I think it would be of advantage if a godly theologian would at first take up exercises not with many students but with only those among his auditors in whom he has already observed a fervent desire to be upright Christians. With these he should undertake to treat the New Testament in such a way that, disregarding whatever has academic association, attention may be given only to what is useful for their edification. This should be done in such fashion that each student may be permitted to say what he thinks about each verse and how he finds that it applies to his own and to others' benefit. The professor, as the leader, should reinforce good observations. If he sees,

however, that students are departing from the end in view, he should proceed in clear and friendly fashion to set them right on the basis of the text and show them what opportunity they have to put this or that rule of conduct into practice. Such confidence and friendship should be established among the students that they not only admonish one another to put what they have heard into practice but also inquire, each for himself, where they may have failed to observe the rules of conduct and try at once to put them into practice. They should also come to a mutual agreement to keep an eye on one another and, with brotherly admonitions suitable thereto, see how one or another may accommodate himself. In fact, they ought to give an account to one another and to their professor of how, in this or that situation, they have acquitted themselves in the light of the given rules.

In such a confidential relationship in which every matter that concerns the participants (for they must quickly learn not to make rash judgments about others or pass sentence on anyone outside the group) is examined according to the Word of God, it should soon become evident how far one has progressed and where in particular there may still be need for help. The professor would exercise no other authority over the consciences given into his care than, as one who is more experienced, to point out, on the basis of the sole authority of the Word of God, what his opinion in any given case may be; and as the students become more and more experienced the professor should be able to confer with them as colleagues. If this practice were continued for a while with fervent and earnest prayers to God, and each person, especially when he wished to prepare himself for the Lord's Supper, were to describe the condition of his conscience to the whole group and were always to act according to its counsel, I have no doubt that within a short time a glorious advance in piety would result. If the proposal really got into motion, more and more would be attracted, to their advantage, and finally the participants could become young men who are upright Christians (before they enter the ministry, where they should make others Christians) and who take pains to do rather than to teach. This is what real teachers in the school of our Savior ought to be. . . .

6

In addition to these exercises, which are intended to develop the Christian life of the students, it would also be useful if the teachers

46

made provision for practice in those things with which the students will have to deal when they are in the ministry. For example, there should be practice at times in instructing the ignorant, in comforting the sick, and especially in preaching, where it should be pointed out to students that everything in their sermons should have edification as the goal. I therefore add this as a sixth proposal whereby the Christian church may be helped to a better condition: that sermons be so prepared by all that their purpose (faith and its fruits) may be achieved in the hearers to the greatest possible degree.

There are probably few places in our church in which there is such want that not enough sermons are preached. But many godly persons find that not a little is wanting in many sermons. There are preachers who fill most of their sermons with things that give the impression that the preachers are learned men, although the hearers understand nothing of this. (Often many foreign languages are quoted, although probably not one person in the church understands a word of them. Many preachers are more concerned to have the introduction shape up well and the transitions be effective, to have an outline that is artful and yet sufficiently concealed, and to have all the parts handled precisely according to the rules of oratory and suitably embellished, than they are concerned that the materials be chosen and by God's grace be developed in such a way that the hearers may profit from the sermon in life and death. This ought not to be so. The pulpit is not the place for an ostentatious display of one's skill. It is rather the place to preach the Word of the Lord plainly but powerfully. Preaching should be the divine means to save the people, and so it is proper that everything be directed to this end. Ordinary people, who make up the largest part of a congregation, are always to be kept in view more than the few learned people, insofar as such are present at all.

As the [Luther] Catechism contains the primary rudiments of Christianity, and all people have originally learned their faith from it, so it should continue to be used even more diligently (according to its meaning rather than its words) in the instruction of children, and also of adults if one can have these in attendance. A preacher should not grow weary of this. In fact, if he has opportunity, he would do well to tell the people again and again in his sermons what they once learned, and he should not be ashamed of so doing.

I shall here gladly pass over additional observations that might well be made about sermons, but I regard this as the principal thing:

47

Our whole Christian religion consists of the inner man or the new man, whose soul is faith and whose expressions are the fruits of life, and all sermons should be aimed at this. On the one hand, the precious benefactions of God, which are directed toward this inner man, should be presented in such a way that faith, and hence the inner man, may ever be strengthened more and more. On the other hand, works should be so set in motion that we may by no means be content merely to have the people refrain from outward vices and practice outward virtues and thus be concerned only with the outward man, which the ethics of the heathen can also accomplish, but that we lay the right foundation in the heart, show that what does not proceed from this foundation is mere hypocrisy, and hence accustom the people first to work on what is inward (awaken love of God and neighbor through suitable means) and only then to act accordingly.

One should therefore emphasize that the divine means of Word and sacrament are concerned with the inner man. Hence it is not enough that we hear the Word with our outward ear, but we must let it penetrate to our heart, so that we may hear the Holy Spirit speak there, that is, with vibrant emotion and comfort feel the sealing of the Spirit and the power of the Word. Nor is it enough to be baptized, but the inner man, where we have put on Christ in Baptism, must also keep Christ on and hear witness to him in our outward life. Nor is it enough to have received the Lord's Supper externally, but the inner man must truly be fed with that blessed food. Nor is it enough to pray outwardly with our mouth, but true prayer, and the best prayer, occurs in the inner man, and it either breaks forth in words or remains in the soul, yet God will find and hit upon it. Nor, again, is it enough to worship God in an external temple, but the inner man worships God best in his own temple, whether or not he is in an external temple at the time. So one could go on.

Since the real power of all Christianity consists of this, it would be proper if sermons, on the whole, were pointed in such a direction. If this were to happen, much more edification would surely result than is presently the case. We have a glorious example of this in the sermon collection of the precious, gifted, and sainted John Arndt to which these lines are a preface. . . .

I have no doubt that the Christian reader will have abundant pleasure in the present edition and that in his use of it he will be able, with God's grace, to edify himself magnificently. I do not propose to add anything more to this report about our new edition. As I have

indicated above, I prefer to leave to the reader's own experience and judgment what sort of profit he may find in this book in its present form.

At the same time I earnestly admonish the reader not to jump to hasty conclusions if he should at times find, in this and other works of the beloved author, some expressions or teachings which at first sight may seem strange to him. He should thoroughly ponder their true meaning and employ fervent prayer. I have no doubt that he will himself discover that everything is in accord with the Scriptures and the method of teaching prescribed for us there and that it is far removed from all heresy. On the contrary, it is directed toward an honest cultivation of true orthodoxy (not the vain reputation of an orthodoxy that consists merely of doctrinal statements but a living knowledge of effective Christianity) and what such orthodoxy is aimed at, namely, the inner man. . . .

In conclusion, I call fervently on the gracious God and giver of all good things that, as he has once allowed many good seeds of his Word to be scattered abroad through his faithful servant who has long since entered into his peace, and as he has hitherto powerfully blessed many of these grains that fell into godly hearts and bore not a little fruit (for which thanks be to God forever!), so he may continue to give his blessing to the book which is still extant and is now prepared for wider use in this edition, that many who with devout and simple hearts seek their edification on Sundays in these sermons as well as in the Holy Scriptures may also abundantly find it here and return to God their fruits of thanksgiving. May many preachers themselves be revived thereby to preach the heart of Christianity after this model with simplicity and power. In general, may it also be a means for some further reform of the wretched condition of our church which we deplored so heartily above. Everything, however, be to the glory of God himself and (which has the same outcome) the advance of his kingdom for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.