

Week #7b: Gerhard's Devotional Works

In looking at Gerhard as a representative of Phase II (confessionally acceptable) devotional literature, we will look at what Gerhard has to say about repentance and the public, visible, institutional life of the Church (particularly its sacraments, their use and the minister as dispenser of the sacraments) and compare these with Arndt to show the difference between Phase I and Phase II devotional literature.

Prayer:

Gerhard's prayers resemble a *colloquy*, i.e.

- a semi-structured prayer of intimate personal conversation with God
- which arises within us from
 - our need for ongoing personal conversion and
 - our deep gratitude for what God and Christ have done for us and
- leads on to deeper faith and contemplation.

MDM 36: prayer occurs at the intersection of the old and new natures ("at once righteous and a sinner") in the middle of intense spiritual warfare.

- Daily lapse into sin → daily prayer
- The priesthood of all believers is revealed in prayer: "The one in whose heart the Holy Spirit has made his home will, as a spiritual priest, daily offer to God this incense of prayer" (MDM 22).

Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations* (SM)--there are two ways the devil attacks the soul

- through false teaching (need assent to sound doctrine=pure faith) and
- through false security (need true repentance)

Meditations on Divine Mercy (MDM)=*Exercitium pietatis quotidianum* ("The Practice of Daily Piety"; 1612)

Note how the introduction to MDM (27) follows the parameters of Luther's account of the Christian life:

- (1) God forgives our sins because of Christ (justification) and we offer humble thanks to God [cf. MDM 104].
- (2) The Christian life is one of struggle and hardship but ultimately arrives at a spiritual victory over temptations (*Anfechtungen*), particularly the temptation to despair.
- (3) We attend to the needs of the neighbor (sanctification defined in terms of love of neighbor; cf. MDM 27; MDM 40 ("Your holy will demands that, as much as I am able, I serve my neighbor in all things); and MDM 42 [bottom] and MDM 52, 104, 131).

Note that the account of original sin in MDM 32 clearly excludes human activity from being a cause of our salvation (synergism):

- "The poison of sin has so corrupted and spoiled my entire nature that no power of my soul is free from its infection. The holy gift of the divine image entrusted to me by the first parent of our race has perished in me. I now have no ability to

initiate a saving recognition, fear, trust and love of You. I have no ability to obey your commandments. My will is turned away from the Law.”

- Here there is no unfallen part of the soul, no spark of divinity that remains untouched by the power of the sin and does not need to be redeemed by the work of Christ (contrast Arndt’s medieval mystical sources).
- Compare MDM 75 on inability and 76 on repentance following God’s conversion of the soul and MDM 81 on the capacities of the mind and the need for illumination.
- MDM 70-71: The Word brings illumination of the darkened mind of the sinful human being, leading on to justification in which remission of sins and righteousness are given

The persistence of sin in the justified is understood in terms of self-regard and desire for honor:

- “Although I have been regenerated and renewed in the washing of Baptism through the Spirit of grace (Titus 3:5), I am not totally free from the yoke and captivity of sin. That bitter root lurking in me always strives to shoot forth...I desire my own honor” (MDM 32; compare MDM 117).

Because of this one must engage in self-examination according to the first and second tables of the Law (=Ten Commandments) (MDM 38-41) and conclude by being reminded of the promise of the Gospel.

- Note the division in these prayers between Law and Gospel (a heightened sense of sinfulness and then later joy and relief in the Gospel and what Christ has won for us on the Cross.

Contrition — associated with

- terrors of conscience at conviction of sin: MDM 42-43: affliction, anguish, anxiety,
- which looks to justification for relief (“give to me peace and quiet of conscience, so, justified by faith, I might have peace with God)
- but is not preparatory to or a prerequisite for justification (“My heart condemns me, but You, who are stronger than my heart, absolve me...I despair of myself”)

Thanksgiving for preservation in the good (MDM 79-80)—contrast this with Arndt’s approach:

- Moral exhortation/warning to the complacent in Arndt vs.
- Gerhard’s address thanking God for preserving believers in the good.

Note also Gerhard’s emphasis that the work of Christ and the promises of the Gospel are for me (*pro me*) (MDM 45).

Predestination: SM 162ff.

Anfechtungen:

- “You require that I trust in You, my God, above all things. But in difficult situations my heart often wavers, and I nervously and anxiously doubt Your fatherly care...I ought to call on You, O God, with my whole heart. But my mind often wanders while praying and is anxiously troubled, wondering if my prayers are heard” (MDM, 38-39; see MDM 98, 122-123)

True piety ultimately arrives at a calm conscience (MDM 82; cf. MDM 101) and a confidence that the words of promise are immutably and unchangeably certain (MDM 91; cf. MDM 99, 100).

Consolation is to be found in the promises of the Gospel, which are made manifest and tangible in baptism (MDM 84) and the Lord’s Supper (MDM 86).

A Lutheran spirituality of the Cross: MDM 50-51 (Like Luther on passion meditation: I am moved to reflect that Christ suffered for my sin on the Cross and that it was my sin which made the crucifixion necessary).

- Compare Heerman’s hymn “Ah Holy Jesus”:

Ah, holy Jesus, how hast Thou offended,
That man to judge Thee hath in hate pretended?
By foes derided, by Thine own rejected,
O most afflicted.
Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon Thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone Thee.
'Twas I, Lord, Jesus, I it was denied Thee!
I crucified Thee.
Lo, the Good Shepherd for the sheep is offered;
The slave hath sinned, and the Son hath suffered;
For man’s atonement, while he nothing heedeth,
God intercedeth.
For me, kind Jesus, was Thy incarnation,
Thy mortal sorrow, and Thy life’s oblation;
Thy death of anguish and Thy bitter passion,
For my salvation.
Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay Thee,
I do adore Thee, and will ever pray Thee,
Think on Thy pity and Thy love unswerving,
Not my deserving.

See MDM 95-96 on mortification

- not as a human work
- but as a subject of appeal to God

MDM 99: “Faith is the seed of all good works and the basis of a holy life”

Note that

- love of the world prevents one from savoring the delights of the Word (MDM 132) but
- Gerhard does not have Arndt's strange doctrine (derived from medieval German mysticism) that one must empty the will of worldly things before God may enter in.

Note the appropriation of medieval mystical imagery of Christ's union with the soul in SM 73 and also SM 13 (also transl. in Lund, *Documents*, 258-259)

Note on MDM 31 how the prayers draw upon the liturgy ("sins committed by thought, word and deed"=prayer of confession before communion) and the rite of confession ("we sin against God, our neighbor and our self"/"temptations of the flesh"/ "At times we participate in the sins of others [cf. also pp. 42-43]")