



Meditation Before Studying Theology

God has created me to do for him some definite service; he has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission...I am a link in a chain, a connection between people. God has not created me for nothing. I shall do good, I shall do his work; I shall be a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep his commandments and serve him in my calling.

--J. H. Newman

Prayer Before Studying Theology:

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, Who hast purchased to Thyself an Universal Church by the precious Blood of Thy dear Son, Mercifully look upon the same, and at this time so guide and govern the minds of Thy servants, the Bishops and Pastors of Thy flock, that they may lay hands suddenly on no man, but faithfully and wisely make choice of fit persons to serve in the sacred Ministry of Thy Church. And to those which shall be ordained to any holy function give Thy grace and heavenly benediction; that both by their life and doctrine they may set forth Thy glory and set forward the salvation of all men; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

--Book of Common Prayer, first Ember Collect, attributed to John Cosin

Week #5c

- **Luther's Conception of the Pastoral Office**
- **Luther's Views on Confession, Penance and Spiritual Direction**

The function of the ministry is to proclaim the Gospel that God forgives sins and justifies the ungodly on the basis of faith alone, by this proclamation gathering a people to Himself. The relation of this to

- (a) traditional sacramental conceptions of the ministry;
- (b) the ministry of oversight (episcopal office)
- (c) the priesthood of all believers and
- (d) the authority of the congregation (e.g. to select their own minister)

required some discussion.

The medieval view: when a person is ordained by the instituted ecclesiastical authority (i.e. by a bishop in apostolic succession and in submission to the See of Rome) and a certain indelible character (*character indelibilis*) is imprinted on his soul, so that he is able to offer the sacrifice of the Mass.

The congregation is recognized by the preaching of the Gospel and this preaching is strictly required for the salvation and care of souls, so the congregation may appoint the

minister when the person entrusted with the ministry of oversight has failed to do their duty and refused to make provision for this.

The minister so appointed is to be respected by the people as the messenger of God (through the proclamation of the Gospel in Word and sacrament), but he is to regard himself as a servant of the whole church (the common priesthood, of which he himself is a member and to which, like the others, he was supernaturally ordained when he believed the Gospel and trusted Christ, having been inwardly anointed and ordained by the Word, so that he has the duty of Christian love to confess, teach and disseminate the Gospel as God's Word to his family and his neighbor).

The ministry is not a separate class or order of Christian existence but rather a public teaching gift/function (the *officium* or "office" which God has established publicly to administer the Gospel), given for the edification of all alongside the other gifts and marked out by a divine call for public exercise to the whole gathered community, which call the community itself must discern and confirm by way of ordination.

Where a Christian is alone, they must take upon themselves the task of proclaiming the Gospel, but where there are a number of Christians, for the purpose of preserving good order, a certain person or persons should be set apart for the public proclamation of the Word of God, exercising this ministry in accordance with the divine call and with the consent of the whole church (hence, public recognition of the call and ordination are strictly necessary).

The minister's job is not to be clever; all he can say and give is what Christ has given him to say and give, for these things can come from Christ alone and only on His terms.

- It is also important to note that the office of public ministry of the Word could not arise out of and be simply derived from the priesthood of all believers, according to Luther, for the believers themselves are at once sinners and justified and need God to send them one who can preach the Word to challenge their unrecognized and unchallenged patterns of sin.
- A "democratic" appointment of a minister apart from a divine call to speak the Word would result in the preacher repeating the congregation's own self-understanding without a divine Word being spoken to challenge and transcend the congregation's comfortable relationship with their unrecognized sins.

The ministry of oversight is simply an extension of this basic work, It belongs to all people, but to preserve the peace and order of the church it is best exercised (through parish visitation) by those whose call to teach publicly and care for the people of God have been recognized and consented to by the Church through ordination. (Care by pastors for the pastor and congregation of particular locality)

Note the problems described by Scribner (not only the troubles of P. Schmidt but also the farm-hand described on pp. 93 (bottom)-94 and the differing expectations between pastor and congregation members concerning how things works and what one is entitled.

Confession, Penance and Spiritual Direction

The late medieval view of confession: Part of repentance involves accepting responsibility for the sin one committed and this involves admission of wrongdoing through some form of verbal acknowledgement (see e.g., James 5:6). From 1215 onward, one was required to confess verbally to a priest/confessor at least once a year (this was a prerequisite for participation in the Lord's Supper). To those who confess their sins sincerely (even if only with attrition, rather than contrition, and a minimal desire for amendment of life), the priest assigned an appropriate penance (to be performed later as satisfaction for sin, within the customary bounds of what the person is likely to accept) and pronounced absolution. The confession involved a certain degree of interrogation (which could include certain basic doctrinal matters and occasionally could be rather probing concerning sensitive issues) to determine the circumstances of the sin (but not other parties to the sin, at least not companions in sin) (see last paragraph of Tentler, "Penance," p. 242 for how penance was conceived to function theologically)

The efficacy of penance rested upon

- (1) the adequacy of confession (its completeness)
- (2) the adequacy of one's sorrow for sin
- (3) the power of a sacramentally ordained priest's absolution, which might the power to elevate the penitent's attrition to the level of contrition.

The Reformers rejected much of the theology underpinning this.

- 1) Confession to laymen was suitable.
- 2) There is no ability for fallen human beings to cooperate in their own forgiveness by worthy sorrow
 - a) In Christ forgiveness is already wholly and completely given, so there is no need for the penitent to supply satisfaction for sin (i.e. there was no need to make good what had been done wrong—typically by reciting certain prayers assigned by the priest-- as a necessary state of human cooperation before divine forgiveness can be extended)
 - b) Note, however, that Luther focuses more on the remission of the guilt (*culpa*) of sin than on the penalty (*poena*) of sin. It is unbelief that renders one guilty and damns and belief (=confident trust in Christ and his promises) that overcomes every form of guilt through God's declaration of righteousness. The penalty of sin, to the extent Luther would even think of it this way, would be the liabilities by which we remain at once righteous and a *sinner* and these tendencies must be dealt with by the mortification (our putting to death of the old nature) which follows upon our baptism into Christ.
- 3) Complete confession ("adequate confession") is not only not necessary, but sometimes actually harmful and detailed interrogation is to be avoided
 - a) "Therefore private confession is no place for [reciting] sins other than those which one openly recognizes as deadly [i.e. those sins which we know and feel in our heart and entail full consent to the deed and are universally recognized as serious sins], those which at the time are oppressing and frightening the conscience. For if one were to confess all his sins, he would have to be confessing every moment, since in this life we

- are never without sin. Even our good works are not pure and without sin.” “Behold, all that I am, my life, all that I do and say, is such that it is mortal and damnable”
- b) The problem of minimal preparation before coming to confession remained a problem to be addressed. See the Lutheran example of a brief manual for preparation for confession.
- 4) Neither is there a certain *degree* of contrition required (i.e. a quality, intensity or perfection of the penitent’s sorrow that would count as “sufficient” or “adequate” contrition), only *contrition itself* (for in itself, our contrition is never sufficient, but this does not matter, for we cast ourselves upon the grace of God, not trusting in ourselves and our own righteousness).
- a) Passive contrition or true penance (as a recognition of one’s impotence and an essential component of mortification=putting to death the old nature) lasts for a lifetime and bears fruit in a changed heart. It is normally preceded by terrors of conscience, which are a sort of attrition produced by the preaching of the Law’s demand and our recognition that we cannot by our own strength meet this demand or stand before God. In this event God’s offer of forgiveness through justification is presented under the appearance of its contrary, wrath, to prepare us for the republishing of this offer of forgiveness in the Gospel). Note that the passive character of contrition is derived from the fact that God’s offer of forgiveness requires nothing for its validity apart from what has been given in the sacrifice of the Cross and the promise that God has attached to it. A confident faith (one that trusts and does not doubt Christ’s promises), which is itself the gift of God, is sufficient to receive every benefit which Christ’s death conveys.

Luther originally retained confession as a third sacrament alongside baptism and the Lord’s Supper, since he at that time defined a sacrament as something “expressly given by a divine promise exercising our faith” (see Mt. 16:18-19) but later dropped penance because it lacked a divinely instituted visible sign.

Luther felt that verbal confession before another Christian and a hearing of an external pronouncement of absolution in accordance with the Gospel promises was pastorally helpful and should be continued:

- These are the words of the priest which show, tell, and proclaim to you that you are free and that your sins are forgiven you by God according to and by virtue of the above quoted words of Christ to St. Peter...So it is true that a priest genuinely forgives sin and guilt, although he is in no position to give to the sinner that faith which receives and accepts the forgiveness. For this faith God must give...Every thing, then, depends upon this faith, which alone makes the sacraments accomplish what they signify, and everything that the priest says come true...For any Christian can say to you, ‘God forgives you your sins, in the name,’ etc., and if you can accept that word with a confident faith, as though God were saying it to you, then in that same faith you are surely absolved...Should you, however, not believe that your sins are truly forgiven and removed, then you are a heath, acting toward your Lord Jesus Christ like one who is an unbeliever and not a Christian; and this is the most serious sin of all against God. Besides you had better not go to the priest if you will not believe his absolution; you will be doing yourself great harm by your disbelief. By such disbelief you make your God to be a liar when,

through his priest, he says to you, 'You are loosed from your sins,' and you retort, 'I don't believe it,' or, 'I doubt it.' As if you were more certain in your opinion that God is in his words, whereas you should be letting personal opinions go, and with unshakeable faith giving place to the word of God spoken through the priest. For if you doubt whether your absolution is approved of God and whether you are rid of your sins, that is the same as saying, 'Christ has not spoken the truth, and I do not know whether he approves his own words, when he says to Peter, 'Whatever you loose...shall be loosed.' O God, spare everybody from such diabolical disbelief....To them [sc. the hardhearted], however, who do not as yet seek comfort for their conscience, have likewise not yet experienced this tormenting anxiety. To them this sacrament is of no use. One must first soften them up with the terrible judgment of God and cause them to quail, so that they too may learn to sigh, and seek for the comfort of this sacrament...Whoever believes, to him everything is helpful, nothing is harmful. Whoever does not believe, to him everything is harmful, nothing is helpful.

The criticisms of the medieval scheme of confession/penance by Luther and the other Reformers, however, ensured that a largely resistant populace would feel themselves gladly rid of the burden of confession and even nineteenth century attempts to revive the practice largely failed (so too for Anglicanism, although it possibly took a bit longer for the practice to die out in England). The retention of confession was particularly valuable, it was held, for doubting, scrupulous persons who might be paralyzed by or declining into despair and, for this reason, church ordinances encouraged (even tried to require) confession before reception of the Lord's Supper.

Mutual conversation and consolation of believers and the need to hear Christ's word of absolution spoken externally and tangibly.

One of the aims of pastoral care is to help people move beyond a satisfaction with civil righteousness (i.e. appearing moral to oneself and others by benefiting others and performing and helping others to perform God's prescriptions for human flourishing/good living, yet without having a vertical relationship of trust in God). While civil righteousness has its place, it is always oriented toward things that God has made and are less than God, rather than toward God himself, who alone can properly be our Lord and God and the source of our life. All lesser gods/goals, all substitute sources of identity, security and meaning, must be relativized and replaced by faith/trust/dependence upon God alone, who alone can define our identity, be the source of our security, and give real and lasting meaning to our lives.