

Table Talk

OF PREACHERS AND PREACHING



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CCCLXXXVIII.

Some there are that rail at the servants of God, and say: What though the Word and sacraments be upright and the truth, as indeed they be, when God speaks of them; `tis not therefore God's Word when a man talks thereof.

CCCLXXXIX.

Divinity consists in use and practice, not in speculation and meditation. Every one that deals in speculations, either in household affairs or temporal government, without practice, is lost and nothing worth. When a tradesman makes his account, how much profit he shall reap in the year, but puts nothing in practice, he trades in vain speculations, and finds afterwards that his reckoning comes far too short. And thus it goes also with speculating divines, as is seen to this day, and as I know by experience.

CCCXC.

No man should undertake anything, except he be called thereunto. Calling is two-fold; either divine, which is done by the highest power, which is of faith; or else it is calling of love, which is done by one's equal, as when one is desired by one's friend to preach a sermon. Both vocations are necessary to secure the conscience.

Young people must be brought up to learn the Holy Scriptures; when such of them as know they are designed for the ministry present themselves and offer their service, upon a parish falling void, they do not intrude themselves, but are as a maid who, being arrived at woman's estate, when one makes suit to marry her, may do it, with a good and safe conscience towards God and the world. To thrust out another is to intrude; but when in the church a place is void, and thou sayest: I will willingly supply it, if ye please to make use of me; then thou art received, it is a true vocation and calling. Such was the manner of Isaiah, who said: "Here I am; send me." He came of himself when he heard they stood in need of a preacher; and so it ought to be; we must look whether people have need of us or no, and then whether we be desired or called.

CCCXCII.

To the poor is the Gospel declared, for the rich regard it not. If the pope maintained us not with that he has got, though much against his will, we might even starve for want of food. The pope has swallowed stolen goods, and must spew them all up again, as Job says: he must give them to those, to whom he wishes evil. Scarce the fiftieth part is applied to the profit of the church; the rest he throws away; we obtain but the fragments under the table. But we are assured of better wages after this life; and, truly, if our hope were not fixed there, we were of all people the most miserable.

CCCXCIII.

I would not have preachers torment their hearers, and detain them with long and tedious preaching, for the delight of hearing vanishes therewith, and the preachers hurt themselves.

CCCXCIV.

One asked me: Which is greater and better—to strive against adversaries, or to admonish and lift up the weak? I answered: Both are very good and necessary; but the latter is somewhat preferable; the weak, by striving against the adversaries, are also edified and bettered—both are God’s gifts. He that teaches, attend his teaching; he that admonishes, attend his admonishing.

CCCXCV.

Dr. Forsteim asked Luther whence the art proceeded of speaking so powerfully, that both God-fearing and ungodly people were moved? He answered: it proceeds from the first commandment of God: “I am the Lord thy God;” i.e. against the ungodly I am a strong and jealous God, towards the good and godly a merciful God; I do well and show mercy to them, etc. For he will have us preach hell-fire to the proud and haughty, and paradise to the godly, reprove the wicked, and comfort the good, etc. The instruments and work-tools of God are different, even as one knife cuts better than another. The sermons of Dr. Cordatus and Dr. Cruciger are taken more to heart than the preaching of many others.

CCCXCVI.

The world can well endure all sorts of preachers except us, whom they will not hear; in former times they were forced, under popedom, to hear the ungodly tyrants, and to carry those on their shoulders that plagued them in body and soul, in wealth and honor. But us, who by God’s command reprove them, they will not hear; therefore the world must go to rack. We must vanish by reason of poverty, but the papists, by reason of punishment; their goods are not of proof, and are rejected of God.

CCCXCVII.

A good preacher should have these properties and virtues: first, to teach systematically; secondly, he should have a ready wit; thirdly, he should be eloquent; fourthly, he should have a good voice; fifthly, a good memory; sixthly, he should know when to make an end; seventhly, he should be sure of his doctrine; eighthly, he should venture and engage body and blood, wealth and honor, in the Word; ninthly, he should suffer himself to be mocked and jeered of every one.

CCCXCVIII.

The defects in a preacher are soon spied; let a preacher be endued with ten virtues, and but one fault, yet this one will eclipse and darken all his virtues and gifts, so evil is the world in these times.

Dr. Justus Jonas has all the good virtues and qualities a man may have; yet merely because he hums and spits, the people cannot bear that good and honest man.

CCCXCIX.

Luther's wife said to him: Sir, I heard your cousin, John Palmer, preach this afternoon in the parish church, whom I understood better than Dr. Palmer, though the Doctor is held to be a very excellent preacher. Luther answered: John Palmer preaches as ye women use to talk; for what comes into your minds, ye speak. A preacher ought to remain by the text, and deliver that which he has before him, to the end people may well understand it. But a preacher that will speak every thing that comes in his mind, is like a maid that goes to market, and meeting another maid, makes a stand, and they hold together a goods-market.

CCCC.

An upright shepherd and minister must improve his flock by edification, and also resist and defend it; otherwise, if resisting he absent, the wolf devours the sheep, and the rather, where they be fat and well fed. Therefore St Paul presses it home upon Titus, that a bishop by sound doctrine should be able both to exhort and to convince gainsayers; that is, to resist false doctrine. A preacher must be both soldier and shepherd. He must nourish, defend, and teach; he must have teeth in his mouth, and be able to bite and to fight.

There are many talking preachers, but there is nothing in them save only words; they can talk much, but teach nothing uprightly. The world has always had such Thrasos, such boasting throat-criers.

CCCCI.

I know of no greater gift than that we have, namely, harmony in doctrine, so that throughout the principalities and imperial cities of Germany, they teach in conformity with us. Though I had the gifts to raise the dead, what were it, if all other preachers taught against me? I would not exchange this concord for the Turkish empire.

CCCCII.

God often lays upon the necks of haughty divines all manner of crosses and plagues to humble them; and therein they are well and rightly served; for they will have honor, whereas this only belongs to our Lord God. When we are found true in our vocations and calling, then we have reaped honor sufficient, though not in this life, yet in that to come; there we shall be crowned with the unchangeable crown of honor, "which is laid up for us." Here on earth we must seek for no honor, for it is written: Woe unto you when men shall bless you. We belong not to this life, but to another far better. The world loves that which is its own; we must content ourselves with that which it bestows upon us, scoffing, flouting, and contempt. I am sometimes glad that my scholars and friends are pleased to give me such wages; I desire neither honor nor crown here on earth, but I will have compensation from God, the just judge in heaven.

From the year of our Lord 1518, to the present time, every Maunday Thursday, at Rome, I have been by the pope excommunicated and cast into hell; yet I still live. For every year, on Maunday Thursday, all heretics are excommunicated at Rome, among whom I am always put first and chief. This do they on that blessed, sanctified day, whereas they ought rather to render thanks to God for the great benefit of his holy supper, and for his bitter death and passion. This is the honor and crown

we must expect and have in this world. God sometimes can endure honor in lawyers and physicians; but in divines he will no way suffer it; for a boasting and an ambitious preacher soon condemns Christ, who with his blood has redeemed poor sinners.

CCCCIII.

A preacher should needs know how to make a right difference between sinners, between the impenitent and confident, and the sorrowful and penitent; otherwise the whole Scripture is locked up. When Amsdorf began to preach before the princes at Schmalcalden, with great earnestness he said: The gospel belongs to the poor and sorrowful, and not to you princes, great persons and courtiers that live in continual joy and delight, in secureness, void of all tribulation.

CCCCIV.

A continual hatred is between the clergy and laity, and not without cause; for the unbridled people, citizens, gentry, nobility, yea, and great princes also, refuse to be reprov'd. But the office of a preacher is to reprove such sinners as lie in open sin, and offend against both the first and second table of God's commandments; yet reproof is grievous for them to hear, wherefore they look upon the preachers with sharp eyes

CCCCV.

To speak deliberately and slowly best becomes a preacher; for thereby he may the more effectually and impressively deliver his sermon. Seneca writes of Cicero, that he spake deliberately from the heart.

CCCCVI.

God in the Old Testament made the priests rich; Annas and Caiaphas had great revenues. But the ministers of the Word, in which is offered everlasting life and salvation by grace, are suffered to die of hunger and poverty, yea, are driven and hunted away.

CCCCVII.

We ought to direct ourselves in preaching according to the condition of the hearers, but most preachers commonly fail herein; they preach that which little edifies the poor simple people. To preach plain and simply is a great art: Christ himself talks of tilling ground, of mustard-seed, etc.; he used altogether homely and simple similitudes.

CCCCVIII.

When a man first comes into the pulpit, he is much perplexed to see so many heads before him. When I stand there I look upon none, but imagine they are all blocks that are before me.

CCCCIX.

I would not have preachers in their sermons use Hebrew, Greek, or foreign languages, for in the church we ought to speak as we use to do at home, the plain mother tongue, which every one is acquainted with. It may be allowed in courtiers, lawyers, advocates, etc., to use quaint, curious words. Doctor Staupitz is a very learned man, yet he is a very irksome preacher; and the people had rather hear a plain brother preach, that delivers his words simply to their understanding, than he. In churches no praising or extolling should be sought after. St Paul never used such high and

stately words, as Demosthenes and Cicero did, but he spake, properly and plainly, words which signified and showed high and stately matters, and he did well.

CCCCX.

If I should write of the heavy burthen of a godly preacher, which he must carry and endure, as I know by mine own experience, I should scare every man from the office of preaching. But I assure myself that Christ at the last day will speak friendly unto me, though he speaks very unkindly now. I bear upon me the malice of the whole world, the hatred of the emperor, of the pope, and of all their retinue. Well, on in God's name; seeing I am come into the lists, I will fight it out. I know my quarrel and cause are upright and just.

CCCCXI.

It is a great thing to be an upright minister and preacher; if our Lord God himself drove it not forward, there would but little good ensue. Preachers must be endued with a great spirit, to serve people in body and soul, in wealth and honor, and yet, nevertheless, suffer and endure the greatest danger and unthankfulness. Hence Christ said to Peter thrice: "Peter, lovest thou me?" Afterwards he said: "Feed my sheep;" as if to say: Peter, if thou wilt be an upright shepherd, and careful of souls, then thou must love me; otherwise, it is impossible for thee to be an upright and a careful shepherd; thy love to me must do the deed.

CCCCXII.

Our manner of life is as evil as is that of the papists. Wickliffe and Huss assailed the immoral conduct of papists; but I chiefly oppose and resist their doctrine; I affirm roundly and plainly, that they preach not the truth. To this am I called; I take the goose by the neck, and set the knife to its throat. When I can show that the papists doctrine is false, which I have shown, then I can easily prove that their manner of life is evil. For when the word remains pure, the manner of life, though something therein be amiss, will be pure also. The pope has taken away the pure word and doctrine, and brought in another word and doctrine, which he has hanged upon the church. I shook all popedom with this one point, that I teach uprightly, and mix up nothing else. We must press the doctrine onwards, for that breaks the neck of the pope. Therefore the prophet Daniel rightly pictured the pope, that he would be a king that would do according to his own will, that is, would regard neither spirituality nor temporality, but say roundly: Thus and thus will I have it. For the pope derives his institution neither from divine nor from human right; but is a self-chosen human creature and intruder. Therefore the pope must needs confess, that he governs neither by divine nor human command. Daniel calls him a god, *Maosim*; he had almost spoken it plainly out, and said *Mass*, which word is written, Deut. xxvi. St Paul read Daniel thoroughly, and uses nearly his words, where he says: The son of perdition will exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, etc., 2 Thes. ii.

CCCCXIII.

The humility of hypocrites is, of all pride, the greatest and most haughty, as that of the Pharisee who humbled himself, and gave God thanks, but soon spoiled all again, when he said: "I am not like others, etc., nor as this publican." There are people who flatter themselves, and think they only are wise; they condemn and deride the opinions of all others; they will allow of nothing but only what pleases them.

CCCCXIV.

Ambition is the rankest poison to the church, when it possesses preachers. It is a consuming fire. The Holy Scripture is given to destroy the desires of the flesh; therefore we must not therein seek after temporal honor. I much marvel for what cause people are proud and haughty; we are born in sin, and every moment in danger of death. Are we proud of our scabs and scalds? we, who are altogether an unclean thing.

CCCCXV.

Honor might be sought for in Homer, Virgil, and in Terence, and not in the Holy Scripture; for Christ says: “Hallowed by thy name—not ours, but thine be the glory.” Christ charges us to preach God’s Word. We preachers should of the world be held and esteemed as *injusti stulti*, to the end God be *justus, sapiens, et misericors*; that is his title, which he will leave to none other. When we leave to God his name, his kingdom, and will, then will he also give unto us our daily bread, remit our sins, and deliver us from the devil and all evil. Only his honor he will have to himself.

CCCCXVI.

It were but reasonable I should in my old age have some rest and peace, but now those that should be with and for me, fall upon me. I have plague enough with my adversaries, therefore my brethren should not vex me. But who is able to resist? They are fresh, lusty, young people, and have lived in idleness; I am now aged, and have had much labor and pains. Nothing causes Osiander’s pride more than his idle life; for he preaches but twice a week, yet has a yearly stipend of four hundred gilders.

CCCCXVII.

God in wonderful wise led us out of the darkness of the sophists, and cast me into the game, now more than twenty years since. It went weakly forward at the first, when I began to write against the gross errors of indulgences. At that time Doctor Jerome withstood me, and said: What will you do, they will not endure it? but, said I, what if they must endure it?

Soon after him came Sylvester Prierio into the list; he thundered and lightened against me with his syllogisms, saying: Whosoever makes doubt of any one sentence or act of the Romish church, is a heretic: Martin Luther doubts thereof; ergo, he is a heretic. Then it went on, for the pope makes a three-fold distinction of the church. First a substantial, i.e. the body of the church. Secondly, a significant church, i.e., the cardinals. Thirdly, an operative and powerful church; i.e., the pope himself. No mention is made of a council, for the pope will be the powerful church above the Holy Scripture and councils.

CCCCXVIII.

Our auditors, for the most part, are epicurean; they measure our preaching as they think good, and will have easy days.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were Christ’s enemies, yet they heard him willingly; the Pharisees, to the end they might lay hold on him; the Sadducees, that they might flout and deride him. The Pharisees are our friars; the Sadducees, our gentry, citizens, and country folk; our gentlemen give us the hearing, and believe us, yet will do what seems good to them; that is, they remain epicureans.

CCCCXIX.

A preacher should be a logician and a rhetorician, that is, he must be able to teach, and to admonish; when he preaches touching an article, he must, first, distinguish it. Secondly, he must define, describe, and show what it is. Thirdly, he must produce sentences out of the Scriptures, therewith to prove and strengthen it. Fourthly, he must, with examples, explain and declare it. Fifthly, he must adorn it with similitudes; and, lastly, he must admonish and rouse up the lazy, earnestly reprove all the disobedient, all false doctrine, and the authors thereof; yet, not out of malice and envy, but only to God's honor, and the profit and saving health of the people.

CCCCXX.

“Their priests do teach for hire.” Some there be who abuse this sentence, wresting it against good and godly teachers and preachers, as if it were not right for them to take the wages ordained for the ministers of the church, on which they must live. They produce the sentence where Christ says: “Freely ye have received, freely give.” They allege also the example of St Paul, who maintained himself by work of his hands, to the end that he might not be burthensome to the church.

These accusations proceed out of hatred to the function of preaching, to which Satan is a deadly enemy. These ungodly people, by filling the ears of the simple with such speeches, not only occasion the preachers to be condemned, but also the function of preaching to be suspected; whereas they ought, with all diligence, to endeavor that the ministers, for the Word's sake, might again be restored to their honest dignity.

It is true, as Christ says: “Freely ye have received, freely give;” for he will have the chief end of preaching to be directed to God's honor only, and the people's salvation; but it follows not that it is against God for the church to maintain her ministers, who truly serve her in the Word, though it were against God and all Christianity, if the ministers of the church should omit the final cause, for which the office of preaching is instituted, and should look and have regard only to their wages, or aim at lucre and gain, and not uprightly, purely, and truly proceed in the office of teaching.

Like as the ministers of the church, by God's command, are in duty bound to seek and promote God's honor, and the saving health and salvation of the people, with true and upright doctrine, even so the church and congregation have command from God to maintain their ministers, and honorable nourish and cherish them; for Christ says: “Every laborer is worthy of his hire.” Now if he be worthy, then no man ought to cast it in his teeth that he takes wages. St Paul more clearly expresses himself: “The Lord hath also commanded, that they which preach the gospel, should live of the gospel.” He puts on the office of the law, and says: “Do ye not know, that they which do minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar.” Moreover he makes use of a very fine similitude, saying: “Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard and eateth not of the fruit thereof?” But especially mark the comparison which he gives in his epistle to the Corinthians: “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your carnal things?” Indeed, every Christian, but especially the officers of the church, ministers, and preachers, should so carry themselves that they fall not into suspicion of being greedy and covetous: yet they must not so conceive it, as if it were wrong to receive of the church and assembly, that which is needful for the maintenance of the body.

Therefore no man should take umbrage that godly rulers provide for the churches, by honestly maintaining her true ministers; nay, we should bewail that the majority of princes and rulers neglect

the true and pure religion, and provide not for our children and posterity, so that, through such meanness, there will be either none, or most unlearned ministers.

CCCCXXI.

Scripture requires humble hearts, that hold God's Word in honor, love, and worth, and that pray continually: "Lord, teach me thy ways and statutes." But the Holy Ghost resists the proud, and will not dwell with them. And although some for a time diligently study in Holy Scripture, and teach and preach Christ uprightly, yet, as soon as they become proud, God excludes them out of the church. Therefore, every proud spirit is a heretic, not in act and deed, yet before God.

But it is a hard matter for one who has some particular gift and quality above another, not to be haughty, proud, and presumptuous, and not to condemn others; therefore God suffers them that have great gifts to fall many times into heavy tribulations, to the end that they may learn, when God draws away his hand, that then they are of no value. St Paul was constrained to bear on his body the sting or thorn of the flesh, to prevent him from haughtiness. And if Philip Melancthon were not now and then plagued in such sort as he is, he would have strange conceits.

CCCCXXII.

I learn by preaching to know what the world, the flesh, the malice and wickedness of the devil is, all which could not be known before the Gospel was revealed and preached, for up to that time I thought there were no sins but incontinence and lechery.

CCCCXXIII.

At court these rules ought to be observed: we must cry aloud, and accuse; for neither the Gospel nor modesty belong to the court; we must be harsh, and set our faces as flints; we must, instead of Christ, who is mild and friendly, place Moses with his horns in the court. Therefore I advise my chaplains and ministers to complain at court of their wants, miseries, poverty, and necessities; for I myself preached concerning the same before the prince elector, who is both good and godly, but his courtiers do what they please. Philip Melancthon and Justus Jonas were lately called in question at court, for the world's sake; but they made this answer: Luther is old enough, and knows how and what to preach.

CCCCXXIV.

Cursed are all preachers that in the church aim at high and hard things, and, neglecting the saving health of the poor unlearned people, seek their own honor and praise, and therewith to please one or two ambitious persons.

When I preach, I sink myself deep down. I regard neither doctors nor magistrates, of whom are here in this church above forty; but I have an eye to the multitude of young people, children, and servants, of whom are more than two thousand. I preach to those, directing myself to them that have need thereof. Will not the rest hear me? The door stands open unto them; they may begone. I see that the ambition of preachers grows and increases; this will do the utmost mischief in the church, and produce great disquietness and discord; for they will needs teach high things touching matters of state, thereby aiming at praise and honor; they will please the worldly wise, and meantime neglect the simple and common multitude.

An upright, godly, and true preacher should direct his preaching to the poor, simple sort of people, like a mother that stills her child, dawdles and plays with it, presenting it with milk from

her own breast, and needing neither malmsey nor muscadine for it. In such sort should also preachers carry themselves, teaching and preaching plainly, that the simple and unlearned may conceive and comprehend, and retain what they say. When they come to me, to Melancthon, to Dr. Palmer, etc., let them show their cunning, how learned they be; they shall well put to their trumps. But to sprinkle out Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, in their public sermons, savors merely of show, according with neither time nor place.

CCCCXXV.

In the Psalm it is said: Their voice went out into the whole world. But St Paul to the Romans gives it thus: “Their sound went out into all the earth,” which is all one. Many sentences are in the Bible, wherein St Paul observed the translation of the Seventy Interpreters, for he condemned them not; and whereas he was preacher to the Greeks, therefore he was constrained to preach as they understood.

In such sort did he use that sentence, 1 Cor. xv.: “Death is swallowed up in victory,” whereas in the Hebrew, it is “in the end;” ye `tis all one. St Paul was very rich and flowing in words; one of his words contains three of Cicero’s orations, or the whole of Isaiah and Jeremiah. O! he was an excellent preacher; he is not in vain named *vas electum*. Our Lord God said: I will give a preacher to the world that shall be precious. There was never any that understood the Old Testament so well as St Paul, except John the Baptist, and John the Divine. St Peter excels also. St Matthew and the rest well describe the histories, which are very necessary; but as to the things and words of the Old Testament, they never mention what is couched therein.

St Paul translated much out of Hebrew into Greek, which none besides were able to do; in handling one chapter, he often expounds four, five, or six. Oh, he dearly loved Moses and Isaiah, for they, together with king David, were the chief prophets. The words and things of St Paul are taken out of Moses and the Prophets.

Young divines ought to study Hebrew, to the end that they may be able to compare Greek and Hebrew words together, and discern their properties, nature and strength.

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