

## The True Love for the Study of Theology<sup>1</sup>

**A**t the beginning of a new student year it is a pertinent opportunity to bring to mind the true love for the study of theology.

There is a *natural* love for study, that is, for intellectual work in general, also apart from the study of theology. In his well-known sermon, that “One Should Keep the Children at School,” **Luther** calls it “a pure pleasure a man gets from having studied, even though he never holds an office of any kind, how at home by himself he can read all kinds of things, talk and associate with educated people, and travel and do business in foreign lands” (SL X, 445; Am. Ed. 46, p. 243).

There is also a natural love for the study of *theology*, that is, to be occupied in matters which belong in the province of theology. This love is found also among such who for their own person stand outside the Christian Church. The old and the new rationalists [Those teachers in the visible church who let human reason and not Scripture be the final source and standard of Theology] to serve as examples. As Unitarians, that is, as those who deny the Holy Trinity and the vicarious [substitutionary] satisfaction of Christ, they stand outside the Invisible Church. But alongside of the intellectually and physically lazy rationalists, there have also always been such, who with great natural love and therefore also with great natural diligence, have orally and in writing treated such matters which we class within the theological province. Thoughts about God and divine things press themselves upon men instinctively as a result of fallen mankind’s still unregenerate natural knowledge of God. “No race is so savage,” says Cicero, “no one at all is so monstrous whose mind will not be infused with a belief in the gods.” (Tusc. Disputt. I,13). Therefore also already the heathen have called such men among them “theologians” (Aristotle Metaphys. I,3), who have meditated and written concerning the origin of things and concerning the worship of their gods.

But of this *natural* love for their occupation with theological matters, I do not now want to speak to you. All these thoughts and endeavours however still remain in the province of *natural man*, in the province of spiritual darkness and the shadow of death, in the province in which the Apostle Paul reminds the Ephesians, when they were still in their former heathen state, with the words that they at that time had “**no hope and were without God in the world**” (Eph 2:12), that “**their understanding was darkened and they were alienated [strangers] from the life which is from God**” (Eph 4:18).

It is quite different with *Christian* theology. Christian theology has its one specific (unique) *object from which knowledge is obtained*, about which also the most important people of this world have not thought, and therefore Christian theology has its one specific (unique) *motive* for its study and for its being carried out in practice, in the Office of the Public Ministry, a *motive* that has never entered into the heart of a single natural man. Keep this in your mind: the object of knowledge of Christian theology is Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world who was crucified for the sins of the world. Its object of knowledge is the eternal incarnate Son of God in His vicarious satisfaction (atonement). Its object of knowledge is the One Mediator between God and man, who out of His wonderful divine love has reconciled with God the entire lost human race by His life, suffering and death, and whose declared will is thus, that everyone who has known His love for sinners by faith in His Word, out of *love* to Him proclaims to the world the message of love which has saved the world. In short, the true *personal* motive both for the study of theology and also for its practical administration in the Office of the Public Ministry on the basis of Christ’s

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Word, that is, on the basis of the *Sola Scriptura* (Ed. that **Scripture alone** is the sole source and standard of faith, doctrine and life), is the personal love for the crucified Saviour, the deep heart-felt love which has been brought about by the Holy Spirit, for Him who *first* loved us, unto death, even the death of the cross, who “**became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross**” (Phil. 2:8).

This was the reason for Christ’s threefold question to *Peter*, who had denied his Saviour, and with it had fallen from his call to preach [from his pastoral call]: “**Simon, son of Jona, do you love Me?**” Upon his answer: “**Yes, Lord, Thou knowest that I love thee,**” Peter was reinstated as Christ’s messenger (ambassador) with the Words of Christ, “**Feed (Shepherd) My lambs, feed (shepherd) My sheep!**” From this we know clearly: without personal love for the Saviour of sinners, nothing can actually be accomplished! For the messengers, who proclaim peace with God alone through the crucified Christ, the world has neither gates of honour, nor medals, nor anything of kindness, but very often contempt, enmity and persecution. Now if the messengers of Christ do not love their Saviour, in fact, more than everything else that is in the world, then they will not continue in Christ’s *Word*, but either completely conceal the only saving message of Christ or yet *mutilate* and falsify it, and therefore fall away from their Christian calling to preach.

Students of Concordia, you have entered our Concordia with the declared intention to serve your Saviour in the days to come in the Office of the (Pastoral) Ministry. Therefore, *now* and *every day* think about this, that your Saviour directs all of you, and every single one of you, to the question, “**Do you love Me?**” *Without this love* in your hearts you will not succeed in your theological studies. But *with this love* in your hearts which has been created (brought about) by faith in the Gospel of Christ, you will overcome all obstacles which come upon you from within and without.

The state of affairs is this: you still have the old man in you who is unwilling to be a servant of Christ, it opposes you with indifference and idleness (laziness). But as soon as you stand, by faith, in the fire of *this* love with which your Saviour has loved *you*, then holy zeal and willingness takes the place of laziness (idleness) as this is expressed in Psalm 110: “**Thy people shall be willing.**” (Psalm 110:3). And as the Apostle Paul writes: “**And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.**” (Gal 2:20). And as Luther in the Catechism confesses in the Second Article, which confession is indeed also your confession: “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is *my Lord*, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and *serve* Him.”

Furthermore: *The world* which is in a bad way also still entices students of theology. The world also entices *you*, students of Concordia, like Demas of whom the Apostle Paul with a grief stricken heart informs Timothy: “**Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world**” (2 Timothy 4:10). When you, however, remember the question of your Saviour, “**Do you love Me?**” and with it the fact that your Saviour has already adopted you for *eternal* life, then the world loses its power of attraction for you.

Finally: also the *devil* in our time is still going about as a roaring lion and also seeking especially to devour theological students. But the fiery darts of the evil one are extinguished as soon as you in faith place Him before your eyes who has purchased you with His own blood and who by His Gospel has called you from darkness into His glorious light.

Therefore, may our *prayer and request* (supplication) be as follows: May the love of Christ, the love with which He has loved us, and which through faith has been poured out into our hearts and kindled our hearts with a mutual love for each other: may this love fill *all our* hearts. May it fill the hearts of our youth, the hearts of those who stand in manhood and the hearts of those who have been permeated with greater age, so that all of us together may continue in the service of our Saviour and grow therein. *This love* is also the God-pleasing motive not only for the diligent

*study* of theology, but also for the diligent and conscientious *teaching* of theology. **“While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being”** (Psalm 146:2).