

Up-to-Date Theology at Concordia Seminary¹

At the opening of the St. Louis Seminary, on September 8, the President (Dr. Pieper) addressed the students on a most timely subject. In our time — these were the thoughts he elaborated — there is one qualification of theology that is stressed with unusual emphasis, *namely*, that it must meet the demands of the times, and be up to date. At the same time we Missouriians, so called, are charged with failing to meet this requirement of theology. The theology of the Missouri Synod has fallen under censure as being out of date. This charge lacks foundation. You, students of Concordia, will study with us a theology that is up to date, really up to date, both as regards form and contents.

As regards the form, a theology that is up to date requires principally efficiency in the various *languages* in which we have an opportunity and are called upon to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. That an adaptation to languages is necessary to an up-to-date church was foreshadowed by the events of the first Pentecost. Since there were gathered at Jerusalem on that day “**men out of every nation under heaven**,” the Galilean orators on that festival day were impelled by the Holy Spirit not to speak Hebrew only, but to employ the various mother-tongues of their hearers — Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, etc. This method of adaptation we follow in our own work. In our country and under the conditions under which we have to do our work, two living languages in particular, the *German* and the *English*, are necessary — besides other languages — for our Gospel ministry. Accordingly, we are up to date in imparting theological training at our school through the medium of these two languages, and you are studying a theology that is up to date by cultivating a knowledge of both these languages. Under our present conditions the bilingual Lutheran pastor is, with us, up to date.

Again, knowledge of the *Greek* and the *Hebrew* languages is also quite up to date. Both these languages are closely related to the theology of all ages. For Greek and Hebrew are the languages in which God originally issued His holy Word to the Church and the world. The Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament are, and to the end of time will remain, the *basic text* of Holy Writ. True, the entire Christian doctrine can be ascertained and taught even from a translation. But at all times there have been errorists who have sought to vindicate their perversions of the Christian doctrine by an appeal to the original text of the Scriptures. Over against such “erring allegers of Scripture,” as Luther calls them, knowledge of the original Greek and Hebrew text of Scripture is necessary. It is, therefore, an assured fact that, as God has deposited His Word, when He first issued it, in the Hebrew and the Greek languages, it is certainly His will that there should always be available in His Church teachers who are conversant with the original languages of the Holy Scriptures. In view of this fact Luther said that we shall not preserve the Gospel without the languages. Hence the study of these languages is up to date, and will so remain till the last day. Our Synod expects of its St. Louis students in particular that they will cultivate a knowledge of the Greek and the Hebrew languages.

Lastly, knowledge of the *Latin* language is up to date. For more than a thousand years this language was the universal language of the Church in her public activity, and, besides the German language, it was also the language of the Church of the Reformation. Great treasures of spiritual knowledge have been deposited in the Latin language. And, as was remarked before, our Synod expects of those studying theology at St. Louis that they do not neglect the five languages which they learned during their preparatory courses at college, but that they use all diligence to increase and perfect their knowledge of these languages while studying here. This may suffice for the time being, as regards the external form of up-to-date theology.

However, also as regards the *contents* of theology you will here study a theology that is up to date. Everybody admits that in this respect *that* theology is up to date which offers to the men of

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our time, regardless of the language they speak, all that they need to the end of obtaining everlasting life. You know what that is: the Apostle Paul has stated it in his First Epistle to the Corinthians in these words: **“I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”** More explicitly the same apostle states the matter thus: **“There is no difference,”** namely, among men; **“for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”** In other words, only *that* theology is up to date which maintains the Scriptural teaching of the *substitutionary atonement of Christ*, that is, which teaches that God is gracious to men, not because they have laboured to fulfil the Christian law, but for the reason that Christ, the eternal Son of God, who was made flesh, in the place of men perfectly kept the divine Law which binds all men, and in the place of men fully suffered the punishment which was to be inflicted on men because of their transgression of the Law.

At no time, indeed, was this theology popular in the world. In the days of the Apostle Paul it was to the Jews a *stumbling-block* and to the Greeks *foolishness*. This holds good, in increased measure, of our own time, even among nominal Christians. The modern demand for an undogmatic, “practical” Christianity, for a creedless religion, means that we are to surrender the deity of Christ and His *substitutionary atonement*, and that we are to substitute as a basis of salvation man’s own moral quality. But this theology is not up to date. Since the Fall it has never fitted into this world, and it is not adapted to our time either. As regards the salvation of men, it has in all ages yielded to men only a negative result. Speaking by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul declares in Gal. 2, 16 this fact: **“By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.”** The theology which is up to date at all times, as regards its contents, Scripture has comprised in these words: **“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law,”** Rom. 3:28. Referring to this up-to-date theology, the Reformer of the Church says: *“In my heart reigns alone and shall continue to reign, this article, namely, faith in my beloved Lord Christ, so that of all the spiritual and godly thoughts I might have day or night He will be the beginning, middle and end.”* Verily, only that theology which has for its contents the matter aforestated is up to date.

Dr. Pieper closed his address with the wish, which we would herewith pass on to all our theologians outside of Concordia Seminary: “This theology you are to study with us, and by the grace of God are to make it your own. Every other theology which brushes aside the *substitutionary atonement* is not adapted to our times, and by the grace of God you will shun it in whatever form it may appear. May God grant it! Amen.”

Dr.W H T Dau..