

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

that have been engaging us, will reduce to nothing the facts of life. We shall move among men with serenity, but with sympathy, tender-hearted, kindly-affectioned, forbearing and forgiving, not readily ruffled, smoothing away irritations with a patient hand, meek, doing good as we have opportunity, not thinking this life too mean to attend to, but lifting it up, and filling all its offices with love.'

Jesus was transfigured on the mount. The disciples were not transfigured there. Their transfiguration came after they descended to the plain and began to heal the sick and preach the gospel to the poor. They had to set their goodness a work, before men recognized it as goodness and called it glory. But they got the spirit of goodness on the mount; and all the while it was through fellowship with Jesus that their work on the plain became goodness and glory. 'As though by our own power or godliness we had made him to walk!'

And the last practical remark is this. That Christ took the disciples with Him in order that He might not be alone. He cannot bear to be alone. Before He became incarnate He kept coming unto His own, because He cannot bear to be alone. And it was because His own received

Him not, and there was the danger that after all He would have to be alone, that He became flesh and dwelt among us.

Now, says Dr. Davidson, this idea is one we like to dwell upon. For there is no more oppressive or paralysing thought than one that sometimes overcomes us, the thought of the utter nothingness of ourselves and of our life. What do we accomplish? What fruit or gain is there of our lives and the way we spend them? We walk upon the summer road, and see some ant tugging towards the common heap a husk. If it reaches the heap, it will increase it by a husk. But the life of man is not as the life of the ant, increasing the heap by a husk. Christ came to give man's work its worth. He came not to supersede men, but to perfect them. No effort is lost; no man who does work is lost. The effort is perfected in Christ's work, and the man stands beside Him, his fashion brought out by the very light of Christ's glory. For He cannot be alone. He takes them with Him, that He may not be alone. And it is Christ's own glory that shall lighten up on that day when 'they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars, for ever and ever.'

The General Synod of the Evangelical Church of Prussia of the Year 1903.

BY PROFESSOR ED. KÖNIG, PH.D., D.D., BONN.

THE General Synod of the Evangelical Church of Prussia, which recently held its sittings in Berlin for three weeks (from 15th October to 4th November), meets every six years. The very rarity of its meetings thus lends importance to this Assembly. What a number of difficulties waiting to be solved are apt to accumulate during a single year of the existence of any considerable society. How much greater must be the sum total of wishes that are formed in the course of six years, and that

hope to find expression by the mouth of the General Synod! Another circumstance that gives weight to this Assembly is the nature of its composition. It is made up of laymen and theologians. The former class includes a large number of the leading officials of State; a Minister, several Presidents of the Provinces, Generals, and others. The theologians, again, that are members of the General Synod, are partly clergymen of every grade, up to that of General-Superintendent, and partly

professors, representing the different Faculties. The present writer, for instance, had the honour of representing the Evangelical Faculty of the University of Bonn. The significance of the latest gathering of the General Synod was very greatly heightened by the importance of the subjects brought under its consideration. Accordingly, the editor of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES has very kindly allowed me to give to its readers some account of the recent proceedings of that Assembly.

1. One of the first subjects of deliberation concerned the *external situation* of the Evangelical Church of Prussia. The latter has never ceased to suffer from the circumstance that at the beginning of last century, when 'the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation' was dissolved, many possessions of the Church were secularized. Then, when Prussia had emerged victorious from the severe struggles with Napoleon, the Roman Catholic Church of Prussia secured a rich compensation, a result quite in accordance with the energy and cleverness which this Church always exhibits in external matters. But the Evangelical Church of Prussia then received 228,000,000 marks (£11,400,000) too little. This was testified to in a public sitting of the Prussian Chamber by no less a one than Dr. Bosse, the former Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs of Prussia. It is true that during the last decades much has been done to heal this wound. In particular, the liberal hand of the Emperor William II., with his warmly Evangelical sympathies, has placed copious funds at the disposal of the Evangelical Church, and Her Majesty the Empress is the noble patroness of a Society for building churches. The efforts of this Society have led to the erecting of a great many, especially in the rapidly growing city of Berlin. Notwithstanding all this, there are still many congregations, notably in the eastern provinces, which are very anxious to obtain new or enlarged buildings for purposes of worship. These wishes met with the strongest sympathy from the members of the General Synod, and their realization may be hoped for, seeing that on the very day of its opening the Synod was surprised by the announcement of His Imperial Majesty's resolution that clergymen of the Evangelical Church are in future to be exempted from payments to the fund from which they and their survivors draw pensions. A great step towards securing the comfort of the ministers of the Evangelical Church of Prussia has thus been

taken once more, and that is not a matter of indifference. For, while we should not like to see those who serve the Church making the faithfulness of their service depend exactly upon the measure of their recompense, it is true, on the other hand, that Christ's words, 'The labourer is worthy of his hire,' involve a social principle which cannot be permanently neglected with impunity.

2. Turning now to the *internal* Christian life, it was a principal task of the General Synod to determine more precisely the right attitude of the organized Church to various 'associations' (the so-called *Gemeinschaftsleute*). For a number of years it has been the way in Germany that here and there within the regularly constituted congregations there have been formed smaller bodies. Now no one will deny that, in view of the abnormal growth of many congregations, a closer union of persons of like dispositions responds to a natural need of the human heart. The members of a small body of this kind easily come to know one another, become acquainted with mutual needs, and are ready to help each other in trouble and to comfort in sorrow. But, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that among the causes that have co-operated in the forming of such associations have been the aim at something peculiar, and the influence of foreign, especially American, preachers. At all events, it may be observed that these new bodies affect a peculiar form of many doctrines, and set up a strange ideal of morality. For instance, one speaker in the General Synod told how an agent of these associations, in addressing a meeting, called out to a man in the audience: 'You will be damned, for you have your idols in your breast-pocket; your cigars are your idols'! This is a specimen of the favouring of a false ideal of Christian morality which prevails in such societies; and if an inclination to false views, like those of the Darbyites, is associated with this, it can readily be understood how not a few friends of the sound Evangelical faith see in those associations an imminent danger. Hence many speakers, as, for instance, General-Superintendent Braun of Königsberg, very emphatically recommended that the most prudent reserve should be cultivated towards such bodies.

3. Another subject of very serious deliberation was the relation of the Church to a number of practical results of modern culture. To this category belongs in some measure the question of the

Church's attitude to *duelling*, and it was a stirring hour when it came on for debate. But, in spite of the attempt of certain gentlemen of noble birth to represent the duel as a species of self-defence, or a kind of judicial action, it was almost unanimously agreed that '*duelling is sinful.*'

Difference of opinion arose more naturally on the question of how clergymen should act in connexion with the obsequies of persons who in their last will had expressed a wish that their remains should be *cremated*. The Synod of the province of Rheinland, to which the town of Bonn belongs, brought forward a proposal that the clergy in their official costume should be at liberty to deliver a consolatory address to the surviving relatives before the conveying of the corpse to the crematorium. But even the eloquent words of Dr. Hackenberg, who counselled wisdom, justice, and love towards those left behind, failed to move the majority of the General Synod to accept the proposal of the Synod of the province of Rheinland. It was generally feared that, if a concession were made on this point, the spirit of the present age would end with the demand that the clergy should bless even the urns containing the ashes.

The greatest anxiety was caused to the General Synod by the mass of unbelief embodied in *Social Democracy* and opposed to the Church. At the famous Congress recently held at Dresden this party declared itself to be as bitter a foe of Christianity as of the State. How then is the danger to be conjured away which threatens the Church from these un-Christianized circles? This question was earnestly discussed in the debates of the General Synod, and an important conclusion was arrived at. *For the first time* a resolution was passed that part of the Church revenues should be devoted to the following two purposes. In the first place, preachers are to be set apart to attend to the spiritual welfare of working class families, which stream towards the great industrial centres and form a more or less fluctuating population. Secondly, measures are to be taken whereby students of theology and clergymen shall receive instruction on the Social Question, so that they may understand and be prepared to combat the threatening danger. The new century thus marks in this regard also an important stage of development.

4. The weightiest matter, however, that engaged the attention of the General Synod was undoubtedly

what has been called for shortness the 'Professors' Question.' This is the problem of how to satisfy at one and the same time the demands of Science and of the Church in the teaching of theology in the Universities. The proceedings with reference to this point were opened with a speech delivered by Professor Erich Haupt (of Halle) at one of the first full sittings. His speech ended with a motion to pass, for reasons assigned, to the order of the day. But although these reasons included a testimony to Jesus Christ the Risen Saviour, the expression 'pass to the order of the day' was felt to be so objectionable that the majority would not venture to carry back such a resolution to their sorely disturbed provinces. Hence the matter was remitted for consideration to a committee of twenty-one members. The greater number of these were of opinion that the Evangelical theology may be supported in its self-defence against modern views by the following two measures. In the first place, an aim would be made at strengthening the influence of the Church upon the nomination to theological professorships, namely, through the Synodal element (the President, etc., of the General Synod) being required to have a voice in this. Secondly, a proposal was mooted to secure in a new way—by methods to be freshly devised—the habilitation of suitable young theologians who are to be engaged as pastors. The present writer was one of those selected for this committee, and he delivered to it the address which is summarized in what follows, and which gives expression to the fundamental notion which, since his habilitation, has been his ideal and regulating principle.

At the outset I referred to some extreme positions of modern theology, which in my opinion are irreconcilable with biblical religion and are thus of course to be deplored. Not a few theologians at the present day, I pointed out, have come to accept a purely analytical theology, holding it possible to resolve religion into a psychological process and to characterize even Christianity as a stage in the general religious development of the human race. Thus, I went on, the picture which may be drawn of the present condition of theological science contains undoubtedly not a few dark features, and it cannot be wondered at that many of our contemporaries should see in these dark spots storm-clouds which threaten to cover the whole horizon and to discharge blazing thunderbolts at the edifice of Christ's kingdom. But how

is this well-grounded and widespread anxiety in face of an imminent danger to be dispelled? This question, I added, had led, as my hearers were aware, large numbers within the Church to put forward two main proposals for improving the present situation. But I argued that the principal flaw in these methods was their probable fruitlessness.

Previous speakers had spoken of the inutility of the proposed participation of the President, etc., of the General Synod in the nomination of theological professors; and I confessed that I was in agreement with them. For the judgment of the President at the time a professor was called to office would not necessarily be valid for the whole period of that professor's tenure of office. The President's judgment, to be of enduring value, must be supplemented by constant surveillance and, if necessary, by deposition of the professor in question. As to the other plan proposed, namely, that of adopting new methods whereby a preference would be given to one class of young candidates for habilitation, I expressed my inability to see in it any surer means of improving the present situation. Might not these young men afterwards abandon their original standpoint? Besides, if no support were given except to young theologians with biblical leanings, would complaints not arise over the preference given to one party? My main objection, however, to the proposed plan was that it amounted at bottom to *a confession of the poverty of the body of truth contained in the Christian religion*. And yet for centuries the facts and ideas of Christianity had drawn youthful spirits to consecrate their life to its full understanding. The unique position of the Old Testament religion in the midst of ancient culture, and the indescribable majesty of the dazzling figure of Jesus Christ, had in past centuries *sufficed of themselves* to attract spirits to such a degree that they found their ideal in an academical course and within a Theological Faculty. Hitherto the truths contained in Christianity had proved *as* attractive as the objects of investigation in the other Faculties. Why should this power of attraction on the part of Christian truth be now called in question? Why should it in future have aid offered to it? Was there anything in the other Faculties quite analogous to what was proposed? But unless everything was avoided that would tend to place the Theological Faculty in an exceptional position

as compared with the others, the influence of that Faculty would be diminished, a result against which there was no need to warn my hearers, for it was one that could not but be unwelcome to them all. Those who were members of the Theological Faculties should aim at winning over all circles of their contemporaries, and especially the representatives of the other Faculties, by showing them that even a friend of free science may stand independently and from inmost conviction upon the ground of Christianity. But any such influence on the part of the Theological Faculties would be prevented if habilitation in a Theological Faculty were to become an exceptional act through being subjected to outside influences. Full consideration had led me to the conclusion that all *external* measures whereby the character of academic theology might appear to be altered, ought to be avoided.

I explained that I had been all the more strengthened in this opinion by the reflexion that it is no *necessary* result of the hitherto prevailing conditions of life of the theological science of the Universities, that in the persons of some of its representatives it has assumed a hostile attitude to the fundamental truths of the Bible. It is by no means the case that *all* representatives of theological science share in this opposition. Hence there is no necessity for *altering* the conditions under which theological science has hitherto existed. All that is needed is to insist upon the correct observing of these conditions. This appeared to me, I declared, the only possible conclusion, and it was one for which I considered that strong support could be brought forward.

The fundamental condition of existence of theological science, namely, *freedom of research*, is, I pointed out, not something altogether vague and incomprehensible. It is not bounded, indeed, by distance, or by anything outside itself, but is limited, in the first place, by *the subject of investigation itself*. The process of investigation is primarily determined by the necessity of taking an all-round view of the matter to be examined, instead of contenting oneself with looking at one side only. *All* its characteristics must be kept in view with equal earnestness. To take an illustration from my own department, it was quite natural that, after centuries of domination of the Jewish-Christian tradition as to literary questions in the O.T., the *first* glances should be turned on those

features which broke the spell of tradition. But gradually the time comes, when the other side also attracts the eye, and the same interest is accorded to everything in the O.T. books that speaks in favour of the authority of tradition.¹

The second consideration that imposes a limit upon freedom of research I found in *the conscientiousness of the investigator*. This shows itself not only in an all-round examination of the subject of investigator, but in the self-criticism of the investigator, in the mutual criticisms of different investigators, and in the impartial examination of the results reached by those who belong to a different school of the particular branch of science.

As to the investigator's *self-criticism*, we must be always on our guard against taking half-proofs of an assertion for complete ones. To take an illustration from the sphere of linguistic argumentation, with which I have been specially engaged since my habilitation—how often it has happened that a difference in particular lexical expressions has been treated as a proof of difference of authorship! And yet I showed long ago that this is an insufficient evidence. Away then with the adding together of half-arguments as if the sum total could yield cogent proofs!

Again, the *mutual criticism* of investigators must be carried on in a dignified manner, and not with recriminations *a limine*. It has repeatedly happened, however, in recent times, that an attempt has been made by contemptuous treatment to stultify the arguments of scholars who have ventured to assume an independent position. How Friedrich Delitzsch, for instance, has gone out of his way to insult his opponents with irrelevant remarks! Hence no more earnest wish can be expressed than that all these *internal* limits to freedom of research should always be observed on all sides. Would that a serious effort were made once more to apply this standard to decide whether there is any real justification for many of the theories wherewith some of the latest representatives of theology oppose the saving truths of the Bible! If only the *investigator* would not start such theories, the *teacher* would have no occasion to put them forward as serious assertions.

I closed with an earnest appeal to leave the old conditions of life of academic theology undisturbed. With the same weapons and under the same rules

¹ Cf. my recent brochure, *Glaubwürdigkeitsspuren des A. T.* Berlin: Runge. 75 pfennigs.

of combat as the other Faculties we desire to continue our stand in the arena, and to carry the royal cause of Christianity to a triumphant issue.

My words did not, however, quite allay the storm. The demand that the President, etc., of the General Synod should 'in suitable cases' (*in geeigneten Fällen*) participate in the nomination to theological professorships was renewed from one side of the house. The above-mentioned plan in regard to the habilitation of younger clerics was approved of by the same party, and the same majority proposed a resolution in these terms: 'The hope is expressed that none will be called to be professors except men who believe in and confess the Son of God.' Almost exactly a third, namely, fifty-nine members, of the General Synod declined to assent to these resolutions, notwithstanding the deep conviction of the fundamental truths of Scripture which most of them feel. The Government, moreover, which makes the appointments to professorships, is not likely to lend its aid to any attempt to alter the existing condition of the Theological Faculties in the German Universities.

5. Finally, it was natural that the proceedings of the General Synod should take account of the mutual relations of the different *Confessions*. Passing over complaints of the intolerance of the Roman Catholics, I mention only one notable resolution that was proposed regarding the *Jesuits*. To understand it little explanation is needed, for it is no doubt well known that in certain circles in Germany a disposition has not been wanting to annul sec. 2 of the Jesuit Law, which enacts that members of the Society of Jesus shall not be allowed to live within the bounds of the German Empire, except on the footing of individual foreigners, and only in certain specified places. This disposition met with strenuous opposition in the General Synod, and a motion was carried, with very few dissenting voices, that sec. 2 ought to remain in force.

Looking back on these recent sittings of the General Synod, one feels that their outcome must be pronounced satisfactory. The fundamental confession of Evangelical Christianity found powerful expression. The attacks of opponents of our Saviour were sharply warded off without the hand of reconciliation being drawn back. The only point where a lack of clear insight was shown, was in connexion with the problem of how to define correctly the bounds of Christian theology.