

Saturday, October 13. 2007

The Use of Reason and the Use of Aristotle

In giving Chemnitz's stance with regard to the Scriptures and his hermeneutical principles, it is necessary to consider his view of reason and the use of Aristotelian terms and conceptual usages. Chemnitz is a sharp thinker who recognizes the necessity of precise definitions and nice distinctions. He will draw valid conclusions from clear propositions of Scripture. But he follows Luther in holding that there is no place in theology for reason corrupted by natural man. In spiritual matters reason must take its premises from the Word. While at times it may be harmless to borrow Aristotelian terminology (such as *causa efficiens*, *causa instrumentalis*, *causa finalis*, *rem sacramenti*, etc.), it can become dangerous and limit the Word of God because these terms of Aristotle are designed for the secular world. There is a vast difference between the earthly kingdom and the spiritual or heavenly kingdom, where we deal with things which eye has not seen nor ear heard nor entered into the mind of man.

-- Bjarne Wollan Teigen, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz* p. 21.

It is worth noting that Chemnitz avoids the use of Aristotelian terms and concepts, yet still uses reason and logic in presenting theology. In particular, Teigen wrote "In spiritual matters reason must take its premises from the Word." He does not say that in spiritual matters, the whole deductive system of premises and conclusions is useless. No, he says that the premises must come from the Word. It follows (if I may), that scriptural premises will render scriptural conclusions.

Sometimes we have too much distrust of reason. A certain kind of distrust is healthy, as described above. But if we reject something simply *because* it was arrived at by the use of reason -- a glorious gift of God and a servant in the house of theology -- then we have gone too far, and thrown down an important tool or weapon that our Lord has given His Church.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Doctrine at 13:46

Thank you for quoting my father's book. I think that one of the most important parts of his book is just this - the emptiness of the Aristotelian paradigm. I notice that the official WELS site includes some of the Aristotelianism here mentioned and it would be hoped that WELS would clean up its expression on the subject. There is no charge of MALA DOCTRINA on my part, just an observation that the WELSian doctrinal pronouncement isn't as good as it could be.

Anonymous on Oct 14 2007, 14:54