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Divergent Teaching on the Plan of Salvation

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the whole question as a trifling affair. . . . Such indifferentism would have been far more deadly than all the divisions between the branches of the Church." Robinson (*The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit*, 184. 198): "At first sight it may seem to the Protestant a tragedy of history that their agreement on fourteen out of the fifteen articles of the Christian faith should have been nullified by their inability to agree on the fifteenth. Yet, disastrous as was the resultant division of Lutheran and Reformed Protestantism, it did represent genuine and cardinal differences of conviction, which had to work themselves out in the subsequent history of the two churches. . . . As a contemporary theologian of Germany has said: "The vital point in our knowledge of the Gospel lies in our answer to the question, How is the Holy Spirit given?" (Professor Hirsch. His words are: „Als das Kernstück evangelischer Erkenntnis muß doch wohl die Beantwortung der Frage gelten: Quomodo detur Spiritus Sanctus?")" *Der Congregationalist*, 1929: "Luther stressed the objectivity of the presence. To Zwingli, with a strong humanistic interest upon him, religion was a matter of the Spirit."

Wir danken Gott, daß Luther zu Marburg feststand. Gott hat ihn stark gemacht. „Ich habe dich wider dieses Volk zur festen, ehernen Mauer gemacht; ob sie wider dich streiten, sollen sie dir doch nichts anhaben; denn ich bin bei dir, daß ich dir helfe und dich errette, spricht der Herr“, Jer. 15, 20. Und durch Luthers Treue und Standhaftigkeit hat Gott die Kirche vor unfäglichem Unheil bewahrt und ihr großes Heil zuteil werden lassen. (Fortsetzung folgt.) T. H. Engelder.

Divergent Teaching on the Plan of Salvation.

The Presbyterian of January 30, 1930, published an article by Dr. S. G. Craig, at that time its editor ("Diversity of Opinion within the Organized Church Relative to the Plan of Salvation"), which is to a great extent informatory and to some extent misinformatory. The first section of the article treats of *the Pelagian and the Christian* teaching on the plan of salvation. "Pelagius, who was the first to teach a formal doctrine of self-salvation in the Church and who may be regarded as the father of all who have taught this doctrine within the Christian Church, held that God sent Christ to make expiation for past sins and to set us a good example, also that He gave the Law and the Gospel to lighten the path of righteousness and to persuade men to walk in that path. Pelagius, however, was explicit not only in asserting the entire natural ability of men to keep the commandments of God, but in denying 'grace' in the sense of inward help from God and in maintaining that all the power exerted in the saving process is that which inheres in men as men. . . .

We are not unmindful of the fact that there is rampant in the Church to-day in practically all its branches a Pelagianism that out-Pelagianizes Pelagius in the completeness with which it maintains that man is his own savior. Of expiation, of a need of atonement, Modernism will hear nothing and is often positively scornful of the whole notion. Everywhere we find cited with approval these somewhat stirring, but certainly unchristian verses by W. E. Henley ending with the familiar words: 'It matters not how strait the gate, how charged with punishment the scroll, I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.' . . . The triumph of Modernism would therefore mean the overthrow of Christianity. Hence we make bold to say that if the existing church organizations are to continue to function as agents for the propagation of the Gospel of the grace of God, they must extrude this modern Pelagianism with no less firmness and thoroughness than did the early Church the Pelagianism of Pelagius." This section also deals with Semi-Pelagianism, which accounts for the use of the word "grace" in the portion quoted. And it deals too gently with this form of Pelagianism. It says: "But while Semi-Pelagianism and Arminianism ascribes a larger function to man in the plan of salvation than do Augustinianism and Calvinism, yet they hold that any power that men exert in saving themselves is secondary and subsidiary, itself the result of a previous activity on the part of God, and so confess that in the last analysis it is God, and God alone, who saves the soul." According to Semi-Pelagianism (Catholic theology) and Arminianism and synergism it is *not* God alone who saves the soul. The situation cannot be adequately set forth unless the matter be treated also under the heading: Pelagianism-Arminianism-Synergism vs. Monergism.

The next section bears the heading: "Questions which Divide Christians" and goes on to say: "But while those who have the historic right to call themselves Christians unite in affirming that salvation in the last analysis is from God, there are deep and far-reaching differences in the testimony they bear as to the method God employs in making individuals the recipients of salvation. The most significant of these differences have to do 1) with the question whether God in applying the benefits of salvation deals with men directly or indirectly, and 2) with the question whether all that God does for any man, having to do with his salvation, He does for every man. Nearly all the great divisions in Christendom find their explanation, in large part at least, in the different answers that Christians give to these questions." "The first of these questions has to do with the question whether God in applying the benefits of Christ's saving work to the individual deals with him directly or indirectly. According as we accept one or the other of these alternatives, we are *Sacerdotalists* or *Evangelicals*. The larger portion of the Church — Greek Catholics,

Roman Catholics, and Anglo-Catholics — holds to the sacerdotal conception of the plan of salvation, *i. e.*, they hold that God in applying the benefits of Christ's saving work operates upon the individual, not directly, but indirectly, through instrumentalities which he has established for communicating His saving grace to men. And as these instrumentalities, more specifically the Church and its Sacraments, are administered by men, this means that a human factor is placed between the soul and God. According to this understanding it is to the Church that men must immediately look for salvation. The evangelical portion of the Church, a portion which includes the whole Protestant Church, — Lutherans, Calvinists, and Arminians, — maintains, on the contrary, that God in applying the benefits of Christ's saving work deals directly with the individual soul. And so that soul is immediately dependent on God Himself for its salvation." This classification, Sacerdotalists and Evangelicals, serves a good purpose. It brings out the iniquity of the Catholic system, which places human intermediaries between the soul and God and invests men and man-made institutions with the quality of saviorship. It is a most important issue, Does God save or does the Church, the priest, save? However, the question whether God in applying the benefits of salvation deals with men directly or indirectly is not fully covered by giving the conflicting views of Sacerdotalist and Evangelical. Another, a most important, a fundamental, difference must be taken into account. A wide gulf separates the churches in the doctrine of the *means of grace*. One division — from Quakers up to the Reformed bodies — holds that God deals directly, immediately, with the soul, while the Lutheran Church teaches that God deals with us only through the Gospel and the Sacraments. The Enthusiasts (*Schwaermer*) bid the sinner wait for an immediate revelation or testimony of the Spirit. The Lutherans direct him to the promise of the forgiveness of sins given in the means of grace. And in this sense the Lutherans do indeed "hold that God in applying the benefits of Christ's saving work operates upon the individual not directly, but through instrumentalities which He has established for communicating saving grace to men." The article does indeed mention the Lutheran position in one brief sentence, quoted below. But the matter is of such vital importance that it should have been fully treated in an article of this nature.

The article finally discusses the contradictory doctrines of *Arminians, Lutherans, and Calvinists*. "The second of the more significant of the differences that exist as to the plan of salvation has to do with the question whether all that God does to save men he does for all men alike. The answer that Evangelicals give to this question determines whether they are Lutherans, Arminians, or Calvinists." Dr. Craig is, of course, well qualified to speak for the *Calvinists*.

"Calvinists hold that God does more for the salvation of some than He does for the salvation of others, and that it is this something more that results in the fact that they are actually saved while others are not. . . . Calvinists have somewhat different ways of conceiving the matter. Some Calvinists hold that in all that He does looking to the salvation of men God has in mind only those who are actually saved. Other Calvinists hold that God in some of His saving activities has all men in mind, while holding that in other of His saving activities He has in mind only those who are actually saved. For instance, some Calvinists hold to what is known as a limited atonement, according to which Christ died only for the sins of the elect, while other Calvinists hold that Christ died for all men, but that the Holy Spirit operates effectually and so savingly only in the elect. . . . To believe in the efficacy of saving grace, unless we believe that all men are actually saved, is to confess that God does some things for some men looking toward their salvation that He does not do for others and hence that there is an election according to grace."

Over against this, what is, according to Dr. Craig, the teaching of the *Arminians* and of the *Lutherans*? "The Lutherans and the Arminians hold that what God does for the salvation of any man He does for all men and hence that the question whether any individual is saved hinges on what the individual himself does. In other words, the Arminians and the Lutherans hold that what God has done is to make possible the salvation of all, but not to make certain the salvation of any. . . . Arminians and Lutherans have their own way of conceiving the matter. Arminians hold that in virtue of the work of Christ sufficient grace has been bestowed upon all men to enable them to do what is needful to be done and that the use they make of this gracious ability determines whether they will be saved. The Lutherans stress the means of grace, that is to say, the Word and the Sacraments, to such an extent as to practically confine God's activities in applying salvation to these means of grace. They hold that, while the sinner is dead in sin and so can make no positive contribution to his salvation, yet he is able to resist, and successfully to resist, the grace of God and hence that the question whether or not the individual is saved turns on the question whether he persistently resists the means of grace. We do not stay to deal with the difficulty which confronts the Lutheran in his effort to reconcile his representation that God in His saving activities has all men in mind with the fact that the means of grace, to which he confines God's saving activities, has gone to but a small portion of mankind;—a difficulty that many modern Lutherans get over by positing the so-called doctrine of a 'second probation';—but at any rate it seems clear that both Arminians and Lutherans, though they maintain that apart from the grace of God no one would be saved,

yet hold that all that God has done is to make possible the salvation of all men, that He has done nothing which insures the salvation of any."

There is something wrong here. In the first place, most of this may be good Arminian doctrine, but it is not good Lutheran doctrine. The Lutheran Church does not teach that "God has done nothing which insures the salvation of any man." It teaches as emphatically as the Arminians that Christ redeemed all men and that God would have all men to be saved, and it teaches as emphatically as the Calvinists "the efficacy of saving grace." It refuses to be classed with the Arminians, as the article persistently classes it. It teaches monergism. The salvation of any man is altogether the work of divine grace, in no wise the work of any man. We believe in the *sola gratia* and at the same time in the *gratia universalis* and the *gratia efficax*.

In the second place, the idea that because of "the difficulties" involved a doctrine must be abandoned or modified is foreign to the Lutheran mind. It is difficult to believe in the efficacy of universal grace, seeing "that all men are not actually saved." This difficulty has induced the Calvinistic mind to change universal grace into particular grace. The Lutheran Church leaves God to deal with the difficulty, maintaining over against Calvinism the *gratia universalis et efficax* and over against Arminianism the *sola gratia*. And when Dr. Craig confronts us with the difficulty arising from the fact that "the means of grace has gone to but a small portion of mankind," he makes no impression on us. How to reconcile this fact with universal grace and with the truth that God's grace comes to man only in the means of grace is God's business. Modern Lutherans have tried to solve the difficulty in the way mentioned. And we thank Dr. Craig for employing the modifier "modern." Confessional Lutherans let the difficulty stand.

In the third place, when he states that "the Lutherans and the Arminians hold that the question whether any individual is saved hinges on what the individual himself does," he is confusing Lutheranism and synergism. We will not blame Dr. Craig overmuch for this. Synergists are wont to masquerade as Lutherans, and so the stranger is easily deceived. But we could wish that Dr. Craig had looked into the matter more closely and here also used the modifier "modern." The majority of modern Lutherans do hold that an individual's salvation hinges on what he himself does. But Formula-of-Concord Lutherans, Small-Catechism Lutherans, do not so hold. Because of this confusion, Dr. Craig naturally finds it extremely difficult to differentiate between "Lutherans" and Arminians. A Formula-of-Concord Lutheran teaches the *sola gratia*; the Arminian teaches cooperation. There you have a most pronounced difference. But how will a man differentiate between synergist and

Arminian? Both teach a certain amount of cooperation. Now look at Dr. Craig's attempt to differentiate! "Arminians hold that the use men make of this gracious ability determines whether they will be saved. The Lutherans hold that the question whether or not the individual is saved turns on the question whether he persistently resists the means of grace." In both cases it hinges on what the individual himself does—a distinction without a difference. You can hardly tell a synergist from an Arminian. But if you ask a Formula-of-Concord Lutheran what brought about his salvation, he will answer at once, *Sola gratia*. If you ask him why some are lost, he will say, Because they persistently resisted the means of grace. But he will not say: I am saved because I made the right use of this gracious ability bestowed upon all men, because I refrained from persistent resistance. No, *sola gratia*.

One more paragraph from the article to show that Dr. Craig is familiar with the Calvinistic and the Arminian and the synergistic systems, but not with the Formula of Concord. "The difference between the Arminian, the Lutheran, and the Calvinist as to the plan of salvation may be summarily expressed thus: Arminian, Lutheran, and Calvinist alike regard A and B as lost sinners. Moreover, they alike affirm that apart from the saving activity of God A and B will both remain lost sinners. But A is saved, while B remains a lost sinner. Why is A saved, but not B? The Arminian says that God graciously bestowed sufficient grace on both to enable them to believe and obey the Gospel, that A made use of this sufficient grace, but B did not. The Lutheran says that both A and B were alike the objects of divine grace, but B persistently resisted this divine grace, while A did not. The Calvinist says that A was the object of efficient grace, while B was not, in the words of the *Shorter Catechism*, that A was made a partaker of the redemption purchased by Christ by the effectual application of it to him by the Holy Spirit, while B was not." That is a fair presentation of the Calvinistic plan of salvation and of the Arminian-synergistic plan of salvation. But it does not at all present the Lutheran doctrine. Why is B lost? Because he persistently resisted the divine grace. That is correct. Formula of Concord: "For few receive the Word and follow it; the greatest number despise the Word and will not come to the wedding, Matt. 22, 3 ff. The cause for this contempt for the Word is not God's foreknowledge (or predestination), but the perverse will of man, which rejects or perverts the means and instrument of the Holy Ghost which God offers him through the call and resists the Holy Ghost, who wishes to be efficacious and works through the Word, as Christ says: How often would I have gathered you together, and ye would not! Matt. 23, 37." (Art. XI, § 41.) Why is A saved? Because he did not persistently resist, because he suppressed this wicked resistance! Since conversion consists in this very thing, that

"God changes stubborn and unwilling into willing men through the drawing of the Holy Ghost" (Form. of Conc. II, § 88), that would be equivalent to saying that A is converted because he is converted. You cannot expect to find such a statement in the Formula of Concord. No; the sole cause of A's conversion is God's grace, working efficaciously through the means of grace. "Man is and remains an enemy of God until he is converted, becomes a believer, is regenerated and renewed by the power of the Holy Ghost through the Word when preached and heard, out of pure grace, without any cooperation of his own." (II, § 5; XI, § 23.) When men declare that B is not saved because of his pertinacious resistance and A is saved because of the absence of this resistance, they mean, as Dr. Craig points out, that salvation "hinges on what the individual himself does." But the Lutheran Formula of Concord will have nothing of this. Man is not able "to aid, do, work, or concur in working anything towards his conversion, either wholly or half or in any, even the least or most inconsiderable, part." (II, § 7.) The Formula of Concord warns A against ascribing his conversion to anything in his condition or conduct alleged to be better than B's condition or conduct in order that, when A is placed alongside of B and compared with him (and found to be most similar to him), he "may learn the more diligently to recognize and praise God's pure (immense), unmerited grace in the vessels of mercy." (XI, 60.) It is inconceivable how men can identify Lutheranism with synergism and consequently class it with Arminianism, seeing that the Formula of Concord "exposes, censures, and rejects, fourthly, the doctrine of the synergists, who pretend that man . . . can to a certain extent do something towards it, help and cooperate thereto, can qualify himself for, and apply himself to, grace." (II, § 77; *Trigl.*, p. 911.)

Of course, Dr. Craig, informed on the Lutheran doctrine, will at once ask: Why, then, since God's grace is meant for B as well as for A and since A is in the same state, corruption, and guilt as B, is not B saved as well as A or A lost as well as B? My system and the Arminian-synergistic system give a most satisfactory answer. Your system leaves everything in a muddle. — The Formula of Concord says: Even so. "As regards those things in this disputation [as when we see that one is hardened, blinded, given over to a reprobate mind while another, who is indeed in the same guilt, is converted again, etc.] which would soar too high and beyond these limits, we should with Paul place the finger upon our lips and remember and say, Rom. 9, 20: O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" (XI, § 57. 63.) Since the judgments of God are unsearchable and His ways past finding out, Rom. 11, 33, any system which finds no difficulties in these matters is unbiblical.