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Theo Graebner

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Predestination and Human Responsibility.

The assertion of an irrational factor in the doctrine of predestination has been the reply of our Church both to the Calvinistic and the synergistic antitheses. Reason is incapable of bridging the gulf between special election and universal grace. *Cur alii prae aliis?* Our essay does not presume to offer an answer. *Ignoramus atque ignorabimus.* But the transcendent nature of the problem¹⁾ thus raised is worthy of investigation, not so much for the purpose of satisfying our reason, thwarted at this point, but for the purpose of recognizing the unfathomable depth of the problem and the scope of its effect on our conceptions of human personality and divine foreknowledge.

I.

Personality involves free will and moral responsibility. Divine foreknowledge involves Necessity,²⁾ the doctrine that nothing is contingent (so that it can be *or* not be), that nothing is done by a free act of the human choice. The classical expressions of Luther in his book on *The Bondage of the Will* are here reproduced:—

"God foreknows nothing by contingency, but he foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His immutable, eternal, and infallible will. . . . It follows unalterably that all things which we do, although they may appear to us to be done mutably and contingently and even may be done thus contingently by us, are yet in reality done necessarily and immutably with respect to the will of God. As His will cannot be hindered, the work itself cannot be hindered from being done in the place, at the time, in the measure, and by whom He foresees and wills." (P. 38 f.) This absoluteness of God is not the subject of theology. It involves "that secret and to-be-feared will of God, who, according to His own counsel, ordains whom, and such as, He wills to be receivers and partakers of the preached and offered mercy; which will is not to be curiously inquired into, but to be adored with reverence as the most profound secret of the divine

1) The paradox that of two contradictory propositions both may be in reality true, though logically irreconcilable.

2) Luther's profound criticism of this term is worth the attention of our philosophers: "I could wish indeed that we were furnished with some better term for this discussion than this commonly used term Necessity, which cannot rightly be used either with reference to the human will or the divine. It is of a signification too harsh and ill suited for this subject, forcing upon the mind an idea of compulsion and that which is altogether contrary to will; whereas the subject which we are discussing, divine or human, does what it does, be it good or evil, not by any compulsion, but by mere willingness or desire, as it were, totally free." (*The Bondage of the Will*; tr., Cole-Vaughn, Eerdmans, 1931, p. 39.)

majesty, which He reserved unto Himself and keeps hidden from us." (P. 171.) On the other hand, man "is to be allowed a 'free will,' not in respect of those things which are above him, but in respect only of those which are below him; that is, he may be allowed to know that he has, as to his goods and possessions, the right of using, acting, and omitting, according to his 'free will.'" (P. 79.) "I know that 'free will' can by nature do something; it can eat, drink, beget, rule, etc." (P. 313.) But now, "if God be not deceived in that which He foreknows, so that all which He foreknows must of necessity take place," and if Wyclif was right in maintaining that "all things take place from necessity, that is, from the immutable will of God" (p. 201), then what remains of human responsibility, of man's personality and will? Here Luther acknowledges an irrational element: "Why that Majesty does not take away or change this fault of the will in all,"—man's resistance to the Gospel,— "seeing that it is not in the power of man to do it, or why He lays that to the charge of the will which the man cannot avoid, it becomes us not to inquire; and though you should inquire much, yet you will never find out." (P. 173.)³

The absoluteness of God implies necessity in all temporal affairs, human and cosmic. Infinite wisdom must include a perfect knowledge from eternity of all existences and events. God's foreknowledge can never be disappointed. All existences and events will be as God has from eternity foreknown them; therefore the opposite to what is, and the different from it, cannot be; the power to the contrary does not exist. The inference is not merely the *non-existence* of a power to the contrary, but its *impossibility*.

Divine governance and human freedom constitute an insoluble problem. Under the aspect of God's providence, necessity; under the aspect of human conduct, the contingency and freedom of man's actions. Nor does the *concursus*, or cooperation of God in the acts of His creatures, with all its refinements of *concursus generalis, specialis, specialissimus*, nor the distinction of *necessitas hypothetica* and *absoluta* supply more than a resting-point for our thinking as

3) The concurrence of God also in evil acts is thus explained by Luther: "Since, therefore, God moves and does all in all, He necessarily moves and does all in Satan and the wicked man. But He so does all in them as they themselves are and as He finds them; that is, as they are themselves averse and evil, being carried along by that motion of the divine omnipotence, they cannot but do what is averse and evil. Just as it is with a man driving a horse lame on one foot or lame on two feet; he drives him just so as the horse himself is; that is, the horse moves badly." (P. 224.) "But whoever wishes to understand these things, let him think thus: that God works evil in us, that is, by us, not from the fault of God, but from the fault of evil in us." (P. 227.)

it hovers over the abyss. Hoenecke discusses prophecy in its relation to man's freedom. He says (*Dogmatik*, II, p. 269): "Dass darin kein absoluter und darum kein unleidlicher Determinismus liegt, zeigt eine Unterscheidung der Weissagung." The distinction which he urges is that between the Messianic and the preparatory prophecies; a valid distinction, — which, however, leaves our problem untouched. For what is more unreasonable than Hoenecke's concluding sentence: "Die Weissagung also, wiewohl sie sich notwendig erfuehlt, hebt doch die menschliche Freiheit nicht auf"? And what is more Scriptural?

The difficulty was well stated by Rev. Stallmann in *Schrift und Bekenntnis* (Zwickau, 1920): "Solche Wahlfreiheit des Menschen in aeußerlichen Werken und natuerlichen Dingen wird auch nicht durch Gottes Allwissenheit, wozu ja seine Praesenz oder sein Vorauswissen aller zukuenftigen Dinge oder Ereignisse ohne Unterschied gehoert, aufgehoben. Fuer unsere Vernunft bleibt hier allerdings ein unerklaerliches Geheimnis bestehen, da einerseits das unfehlbare Vorherwissen aller guten wie boesen Willensentschluesse der Kreaturen von seiten Gottes eine unbedingte und zwingende Notwendigkeit derselben mit sich zu bringen, andererseits die Zufaelligkeit [contingency] jener Entschlusse Gottes Vorherwissen darum aufzuheben scheint."

Dr. Pieper, more succinctly: "Wenn wir auch den Begriff des blossen goettlichen Vorauswissens festhalten, ohne damit den Begriff der Wirkung oder Hervorbringung der vorausgewussten Dinge zu verbinden, . . . so bleibt dabei fuer unser menschliches Begreifen dennoch eine Schwierigkeit bestehen, die wir nicht beseitigen koennen. Gottes unfehlbares Vorauswissen einerseits und die Ungezwungenheit des menschlichen Willens und die menschliche Verantwortlichkeit andererseits sind zwei Wahrheiten, die wir auf Grund der Schrift festhalten muessen, ohne dass uns in diesem Leben die Erkenntnis moeglich waere, wie beide nebeneinander bestehen koennen." (*Christliche Dogmatik*, I, p. 553.) Any effort, says Dr. Pieper, to harmonize these two principles will either result in surrendering the infallible omniscience of God or in yielding the autonomy (*Ungezwungenheit*) of the will and human responsibility for sin.⁴

4) In agreement with Luther's *Bondage of the Will* our Confessions (*Apology* and *Formula of Concord*) definitely assert natural man's inability to exercise choice in spiritual matters and his ability to use his will in "outward matters," also in the moral field. The doctrine may be summarized thus: 1. Man has absolutely no free will whatsoever in spiritual matters. By spiritual matters are meant the attitude of man toward the call of the Gospel, the preaching of repentance, God's offer of salvation as a free gift, etc., briefly stated: the operations of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. These, natural man resists, since his will always and

II.

Our difficulties increase when we consider the nature of free will. That we exercise choice is not to be denied. But there seems to be good reason, also psychologically, for Luther's hesitancy⁵⁾ to use the term free will even in reference to man's natural endowment of choosing between courses. It is foolish to talk of liberty as belonging to will itself, for the will itself is not an agent that has a will; the power of choosing itself has not the power of choosing. Predicating liberty of the will is apt to lead to conceiving of the will as separated from the agent, or the will is regarded as being out of sympathy, detached from the other faculties of the soul. The soul of course is

only tends to do and choose the evil. 2. This inability of man does not destroy his responsibility. Man is able to recognize the choice before him. He has the capacity of knowing both good and evil and is conscious of guilt when he sins, rejects grace, etc. Therefore man is responsible for the choice which his will makes. 3. Determinism is rejected. Man is not a machine that works according to external forces and causes in external matters. The Confessions refer to "the delirium of philosophers, who taught that everything that happens must so happen and cannot happen otherwise and that everything man does, even outward things, he does by compulsion and that he is coerced to evil works and deeds, as unchastity, robbery, murder, theft, and the like." (*Trigl.*, p. 787, Art. II, Sec. 18. See Luther in Footnote 2, above.) 4. Man has a free will in external things (physical acts). "In the things that are subject to reason, in those matters wherein man may exercise his ability to understand, in the things wherein the senses of man are active, therein man has free will to take or leave, to do or not to do, to choose one or the other." The Confessions take the matter back only to the reason and intellect of man. Preexisting causes and external influences are not considered. They begin with the knowledge that is found in the mind of the man, and starting with this as a basis, they state that in external matters man has a free will, *viz.*, he is able to choose that which his mind tells him is the better or which his will decrees or which his understanding sets up as the strongest motive. 5. Also in the field of morals natural man has a certain freedom of choice. "Of free will they teach that man's will has some liberty to choose civil righteousness." (*Trigl.*, p. 51, Ar. 18.) "Since there is left in human nature reason and judgment concerning objects subjected to the senses, choice between these things and the liberty and power to render civil righteousness are also left." (P. 335, Sec. 70.) This is based upon the conception of man as a rational creature even after the Fall. As such he may "of his free will do, or abstain from doing, anything good or evil." (P. 339, Art. II, Sec. 19.) The line dividing such moral acts from spiritual things is clearly drawn; as a rational creature he has such moral powers, while with respect to "divine things" (p. 905, Sec. 159) he has neither will nor understanding.

5) Luther had already adverted to the *theological* difficulty of assuming free human acts under the absolute foreknowledge of God.

only a unit. The will is only the soul willing. Again, it is manifest that no act of the will is without necessity, because the acts of the will are connected with the dictates of understanding. Every act of choice or refusal depends on an antecedent cause. Things thus represented to understanding in order to determine the choice would be purposeless if the will were not dependent on the dictates of understanding. And since every act of the will has a cause, it is evident that every act of the will is excited by some motive. This is necessary because it has a necessary connection with its cause. If there is no motive, then the mind aims at nothing. But every act of the will must be the effect of motives; for volition is not from any self-determining power in the will, but is caused by previous inducements. (The famous argument of Jonathan Edwards.)

From the standpoint of pure reason it should be admitted that the doctrine of necessity has very much in its favor. The only arguments for the doctrine of free choice are those derived from consciousness and from conscience. The first runs thus: Our consciousness—the mind observing its own activity—tells us that we have the power of choosing between one path and another, the purchase of one hat or another, the choice of one route between St. Louis and Chicago and another, etc. We are aware of acting in the light of what we determine to be the best reason. Man is conscious that he has the power of deciding or of withholding decision, and that, even if he decides, he can defer carrying his decision or choice into effect.

Yet such reasoning is not as strong as it appears to be. We are not really conscious of "will." Consciousness does not discern certain faculties of the mind separate from their workings; it is only aware of the mind's *operations*, not of a power or faculty behind such operations. And to assume a "will" behind the actions of the mind is as little valid as assuming a substance called "matter" behind the phenomena which we observe with our eyes. Furthermore, the assumption of the possibility of a contrary choice is more difficult than appears on the surface. Let it be assumed that the will has the power of making a different or contrary choice to that which it does make, what follows? Either that the will *chooses* the contrary of what it chooses, which is nonsense; or it does *not* choose the contrary, and then evidently there was something lacking in this contrary which was not sufficient to bring about the effect of a choice. The thing actually chosen was the only possible choice. And this eliminates the freedom of the will.

The other argument for free will is derived from conscience, which tells us that we are responsible for our acts. This means that we are under no compulsion to do or to leave undone. The murderer, the thief, can choose to do or not to do. The law considers him

a free moral agent. It holds him accountable. Closely inspected, this is of course not a demonstration of the freedom of choice, but a principle based upon it. To urge it as proof for the freedom of the will would be an intolerable begging of the question.

Are we, then, committed to necessity? On purely rational grounds, yes. But now the thought suggests itself—Is there not a possibility that reason is not a true guide in this matter? Is it not possible that the intuition which we have of a freedom of choice and the voice of conscience supporting this intuition are truths of a higher order than the rational? Is it possible that we can *demonstrate* free will and responsibility, though reason cannot supply any *proof*? And if this holds good, as I think it does, regarding the doctrine of free will, and since its contradictory, necessity, is likewise demonstrable, what will prevent us from extending this principle (of truths that can be demonstrated but not proved; see Foot-note 1, above) to related fields, both in philosophy and theology?

III.

As a matter of fact, Christian thought assumes both, an overruling power of God, which makes all events necessary, and a freedom of choice, which makes us truly responsible for what we do.

The motives of Joseph's brothers were perfectly clear. Their acts were free. By their acknowledgment, Gen. 42, 21; 50, 15, they had acted on their own evil intentions. Yet Joseph reveals to them that "*God did send me before you to preserve life. . . . God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So, now, it was not you that sent me hither, but God,*" Gen. 45. The determinacy of God's plans had not eliminated free choice on the part of the brothers, as little as it eliminated the freedom of David's act in counting the people, 2 Sam. 24, 1; 1 Chron. 21, 1; cp. 21, 8, 17.

The entire factor of prophecy enters into this problem. Regarding the suffering and death of Christ, everything was determined. Jesus was "delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." Yet by "wicked" hands the Jews had taken Him and crucified Him, Acts 2, 23; cp. vv. 36, 37. The motives for the betrayal by Judas were not so strong as to eliminate the responsibility of the traitor for his act; he went and hanged himself; yet the betrayal was taken up into God's eternal plan and foretold in ancient prophecy, Acts 1, 16. The gospels refer to many events in the life of Christ with such phrases as "that the Scripture might be fulfilled"; and our Lord Himself brings His entire Passion under the head of fulfilment that was by absolute necessity. Yet both the good and the evil persons involved in the events of our Lord's life and Passion acted as free moral agents. Everything was "necessary," and everything was free.

The same sharp dualism runs through all the work of the Church and the events of the individual Christian as such. On the one hand, the Christian is assured and comforted by the knowledge that there is no detail in his life which God has not included in His counsels and has predetermined before the individual is born. Of that we are assured through example and testimony by the entire Scriptures. Yet these same Scriptures impress upon us the necessity of *prayer* and make the course of our life, the success of our undertakings, the escape from perils, *contingent* upon prayer. The same God who has fixed all things in advance is the God who commands us to pray and pledges His truthfulness to us for the hearing of prayer.

Is the span of our life absolutely fixed? Of this there can be no doubt whatsoever. Can we do things to shorten or lengthen life? Universal experience says yes, and to this bears witness the "that thou mayest live long on the earth" in the Fourth Commandment. Each of these propositions excludes the other (as in all the examples given above); yet both are true.

Have we, then, disestablished the Law of Contradiction which is fundamental to all our reasoning? We have done no such thing. But we have established the fact that in this field (of Necessity and Free Will) the law is without force; in other words, reason has lost its power.

This is a truly astonishing result of our study. Yet the Christian life runs its quiet course without any concern over the abyss of irrationality upon which it rests. The Christian reposes his hope for the recovery from illness upon the power of God alone; yet he will employ a physician and medicine, and rightly so. The heathen, who are lost, have no excuses to offer since they refuse worship to the true God whom they recognize in nature, Rom. 1, 19; yet we lay the salvation of the heathen upon the consciences of our people, and rightly so, Mark 16, 15, 16, though—in the light (or shall we say darkness?) of pure reason—most irrationally so.

The scope widens until all our voluntary and involuntary acts, our habits and our character, our secular and our religious employments, appear, on the one hand, as being under necessity and, on the other, are matters for which we are truly responsible and held accountable both to God and man. The last sentence requires a correction. It does not only so "appear," but *such is the actual reality*. Obviously we have here the true reason for the irrational element in the doctrine of predestination.

The existence of an irrational factor in this doctrine has been the point of controversy between those who accept the doctrine of the Formula of Concord and those who have supplied a rational explanation of this mysterious thing, either by a (Calvinistic) denial

of universal grace or by a (synergistic) denial of universal total depravity. You have no longer an irrational element in this doctrine if those who are lost are under a decree which from everlasting consigned them to perdition; and you have also eliminated the unreasonable factor if you assume that some men conduct themselves with greater willingness under the call of grace. Now, the Scriptures assert the paradoxical nature of this doctrine, Rom. 9, 14—21; 11, 33, 34; cf. Phil. 2, 12, 13. And our Confessions reach a point where they bid us place a finger upon our lips and acknowledge our inability to harmonize everything that is involved in election. From this conclusion there is no escape. Concede that in predestination we are dealing in a most patent manner with the relation of God's foreordination to human personality, to human responsibility, that is, to the human will,—and the insoluble nature of the problem, its resistance to any alchemy of human reason or philosophy, is evident.

Philosophy is unable to accomplish anything in this field. In his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant has listed the doctrine of necessity and free will among those which reason is unable to deal with successfully. In parallel columns he gives first the logical proof for the freedom of the will and then the logical argument against it in order to demonstrate that rational thought does not operate in this field—as little as our lungs operate in water or the gills of a fish function in air. Dubois Reymond, 1891, made a list of seven problems, cosmic riddles, insoluble by science or reason. The seventh is the problem of free will. "*Ignoramus*" said the German scientist and then added "*Ignorabimus!*" Not because the data are insufficient, as when we have an unsolved problem in mechanics, chemistry, or astronomy, but because the human mind is so constituted that it does not operate in this field.

Nothing should induce us to render less wide and unfathomable the gulf which exists between the doctrine of God's foreordination and that of human moral responsibility; between the doctrine of predestination and the doctrine of universal grace; between the statement that only the elect will be saved and the statement that those who are lost are lost by their own responsibility. Though acknowledging the truth of both propositions in each of these statements amounts to saying that both opposites of two contradictory judgments are true, that a fundamental law of thought therefore is violated, that the thing is irrational, unreasonable,—though such tremendous assumptions are involved in accepting the doctrine of the election of grace and that of full human responsibility, we should not be dismayed by the necessity of such an acknowledgment. By making it, we simply acknowledge a limitation of human reason which is arrived at by the most rigid logical procedure and is a clear doctrine of the inspired Word.

THEODORE GRAEBNER.