Concordia Theological Monthly

Volume 9 Article 40

6-1-1938

# A Course in Lutheran Theology

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dertakings, and movements in the churches of his own community; gain such information about their origin as is being continually supplied through the pages of the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY; and on the basis of such systematic study, supplemented by indexing and filing of pertinent information, equip himself more and more fully for the task of explaining to his people what separates them from Rome, sectarianism, and the cults and why such separation is a God-pleasing one. TH. GRAEBNER

## A Course in Lutheran Theology

*(Continued)*

Luther points out that the "free-will" heresy has "gained so much ground," p. 362.[26] Indeed, in what period of history and in what part of the Church did it not make its baneful influence widely felt? It had and it has a strangle-hold on philosophy and theology. It is "the myth of all ages," [27] accepted and proclaimed as God's truth. The keenest philosophers have succumbed to it. Kant embraced it and Fichte and the rest. Emerson sang its praises: "For He that ruleth high and wide Nor pauseth in His plan, Will tear the sun out of the skies Ere freedom out of man." [28] And people like to hear W. E. Henly declaim: "Out of the night that covers me, Black as the pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever gods may be For my unconquerable soul. . . . I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." What about the theologians? Erasmus had many predecessors and many more successors. Justin Martyr already championed the cause of "free will." "Unless the human race has the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions, of whatever kind they be. But that it is by free choice that both walk uprightly and stumble, we thus demonstrate." (*Apology* I, 43.) Catholic theology has ranged itself on the side of "free will." The Synod of Trent declares that "men are called through the prevenient grace of God . . ., that so they who by sins were alienated from God may be disposed through this quickening and assisting grace to convert themselves to their own justification by freely assenting to, and

26) *The Bondage of the Will*, Cole-Atherton translation. — St. Louis edition, XVIII, 1944.

27) The subtitle to O. Schumacher's German translation of *De Servo Arbitrio: Martin Luther, Vom unfreien Willen*, is: "Eine Kampfschrift gegen den Mythus aller Zeiten."

28) And L. S. Keyser liked the song. He announces it with the words "Emerson has given us a bracing quatrain." (*A Manual of Christian Ethics*, p. 67.)

 

cooperating with, that said grace: in such sort that, while God touches the heart of man by illumination of the Holy Ghost, neither is man himself utterly without doing anything while he receives that inspiration, forasmuch as he is also able to reject it." (Sess. VI, chap. V.) The Catholic writer Joseph Clayton declared in 1937 (*Luther and His Work*) that this is the major defect found in Luther's teaching: "Luther went further than Augustine — man could do nothing; God's grace did everything. Hence Luther's denial of man's 'free will.' . . . Man is not free, Luther insists, to do the thing that is good and pleasing to God. . . . God alone is the cause of man's salvation." The Arminian bodies, too, are for "free will." And they resent the charge that their teaching is heretical. J. B. Champion (Baptist), for instance, says: "To hold otherwise, as Erasmus and Melanchthon did, is to be Semi-Pelagian synergists! But synergism is merely the personal in God and man interacting with each other. It respects the self-determining constitution which God Himself put into human personality." (*Personality and the Trinity*, p. 39.) And within the Lutheran Church an extensive territory has become the prey of the Erasmian heresy. There was Melanchthon and his adherents. "Ein Vergleich zwischen der zweiten und der ersten Ausgabe seines [Melanchthons] beruehmten Lehrbuchs genuegt, um festzustellen, dass der gelehrte Freund Luthers im entscheidenden Punkt zu Erasmus uebergetreten ist." (Schumacher, *Vom unfreien Willen*, p. 9.) Walther quotes these statements from Melanchthon's *Loci:* "The cause lies in men why some give their assent to the promises of grace while others do not. . . . Three causes concur in a person's conversion: the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the will of man, which gives assent to the Word of God and does not resist. . . . Free will in man is the ability to prepare oneself for grace." (*Law and Gospel*, p. 264 f.)[29] Then came Latermann, who camouflaged the Erasmian and Melanchthonian heresy, which operated with "natural powers," by ascribing conversion to "powers offered and imparted by grace,"[30] and he and his associates gained an incredible number of disciples.

What is the situation today? Referring to theology in general, E. Brunner declares: "The thought of the present day, whether con-

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29) "Darum kann auch die von Luther so leidenschaftlich angegriffene Definition des Erasmus [von Melanchthon] gebilligt werden: 'Liberum arbitrium in homine facultatem esse applicandi se ad gratiam, id est, audit promissionem et assentiri conatur et abiicit peccata contra conscientiam.'" (F. Huebner, *Nat. Theol. bei Melanchthon*, p. 133.)

30) Propositions of Latermann: "Gratia Dei offertur, ut ea oblata in hominis potestate sit, per illam ea, quae ad conversionem et salutem necessaria sunt, praestare et, si pravitati suae indulgere velit, non praestare. . . . Omnes, si velint, possunt se convertere." (See Baier, *Comp. Theol.*, II, p. 301.) — We shall presently show that there is no essential difference between Latermann and Melanchthon.

sciously or not, is thoroughly Pelagian." (*The Mediator*, p. 138.) So also L. Berkhof: "The prevalent conception of it [sin] is fundamentally Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian. Moxon judges that the statement that 'we are all Semi-Pelagians today' is not very far from the truth, 'since it is in close harmony with the tendencies of modern thought.'" (*Vicarious Atonement*, p. 36.)[31] Referring to Lutheran theology, Hoenecke says: "The modern theologians are for the greater part synergists. Many of these have taken up with synergism because of their mistaken notion that it offers the only escape from the predestinarianism of Calvin. But they are more careful than the older synergists to disguise their synergism and Pelagianism." (*Ev.-Luth. Dogm.*, III, p. 286.) They prefer to sing the hymn of *Liberum Arbitrium* to Latermann's tune. Luthardt, the leader of the Lutheran conservatives in Germany of the last generation, taught: "Grace may approach man ever so closely, but *man himself must open* the door that Jesus may enter in." (*Die Lehre vom freien Willen*, p. 427.) He might have entitled his book *De Libero Arbitrio!* In his *Kompendium der Dogmatik*, widely used today, he says: "On the other hand, repentance and faith is demanded *of man* as his achievement [*Leistung*]. . . . Conversion is thus seen to be effected also by man himself. . . . In consequence of the working of God's Spirit, which accompanies the Word, man is able either to accept the Word or to reject it." (Luthardt-Jelke, *Komp. d. Dogm.*, p. 384.)[32] On page 389 Jelke asserts that this does

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31) For instance: "Jesus knew His hearers were capable of unlimited response, and He incited them to the limit of their abilities. . . . It was our Lord's great privilege to liberate the imprisoned within the human soul. . . . The persistent confidence of Jesus stirred human lives so that they discovered the opulence within them." That was not written by Pelagius. O. L. Johnson is speaking, in *Ringing Realities*, pp. 47, 67, 90.

32) Let us take time to examine the Scripture proof offered by Luthardt for the thesis that conversion is man's achievement, that man has the power to accept the Word as well as to reject it. This is his proof: "Matth. 23:37: Ihr habt nicht gewollt; Joh. 5:40; 17:6, 8." Now, John 17:6, 8: "They have kept Thy Word. . . . I have given unto them the words which thou gavest Me, and they have received them," does indeed prove that there are men who accept the Gospel, but does not say one word about faith being man's achievement, the product, in part, of man's power. And Matt. 23:37 and John 5:40: "Ye will not come to Me," do indeed prove that man has the power and will to *reject* the Gospel. But that does not prove that he also has the corresponding power to *accept* the Gospel. The synergists insist that since man can hinder and thwart his conversion, *it follows* that he can achieve it, at least in part. It does not follow. Even if the deduction were logical in itself, Scripture vetoes the deduction. But it is not even a logical inference. When the synergists quoted Matt. 23:37 in support of the contention that, since man can resist God, he can also assist, the fathers would answer: Non sequitur. The faculty of Strassburg: "Non sequitur, si *nolle* sit in potestate et arbitrio hominis, etiam *velle* esse in eiusdem facultate." Quenstedt: "A noluntate ad voluntatem argumentari non licet." Speaker Reed

 

not involve synergism, since man's self-determination takes place *"viribus non nativis sed dativis."* But that is the old dodge of Latermann. The statement that conversion is wrought *viribus non nativis sed dativis*, as used by the synergists, does not mean that the impartation of the new powers of grace constitutes conversion. That would certainly be the Scriptural teaching of conversion by grace alone. But what do the Latermannites really mean? They say that these alleged "new powers" are offered and imparted to the unconverted man and that it depends upon the use which the *unconverted* man makes of these powers whether he will be converted or not. That means that the unconverted man must employ his powers, his *natural* powers, in order to get the benefit of the "new powers." And that is, somewhat camouflaged, the old teaching of Melanchthon and Erasmus: conversion takes place if man makes the right use of his natural powers, if the unconverted cooperates with God by means of his self-determination.[33] — B. Jelke, the editor of the latest editions of Luthardt's *Kompendium*, agrees with Luthardt. And you will not find many modern Lutheran theologians who disagree with him.

The voice of Luthardt-Latermann-Erasmus is also heard in America. "Man's will is able to decide for salvation through new powers bestowed by God. This is the *subtle synergism* which has infected nearly the whole of modern evangelical Protestantism and which is, or has been, taught in institutions bearing the name of our Church." (Th. Schmauk, *The Confessional Principle*, p. 752.) We have space for only a few typical pronouncements. *The Lutheran Companion:* "God puts you in such a position and condition that you can understand what is necessary for your rescue and can choose between life and death, so that it shall depend entirely upon yourself whether you pay heed to, and obey, His advice and be saved or else neglect, despise, and forever be without, this grace." (See *Lehre u. Wehre*, 72, p. 72.) The *Lutheran Companion* of April

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once said in Congress that, though the potato-bug was able to destroy the potato-plant, you could not therefore invest the bug with the power to replace the plant. But the synergists cannot see it. Erasmus could not see it. "First of all, marches forth in front that of Matt. 23:37–39, as it were the Achilles of these flies." (P. 179.) The fathers of Trent could not see it. Man can accept, *"forasmuch as he is also able to reject."* And even Kant could not see it. He taught, as Karl Heim paraphrases his thesis: "I can fall; then I can also rise again. I can go a step backward; then I can go the same step forward again. I have transgressed against the Moral Law within me; then I can fulfil it again in the same freedom." (*The Church of Christ and the Problems of the Day*, p. 78.) — Read up on this logical fallacy in *Lehre u. Wehre*, 43, 165 ff. Pieper, *Christl. Dogm.*, II, 570.

33) This juggling of the term "new powers of grace" is fully discussed in *Lehre u. Wehre*, 36, 306; 58, p. 391 ff., and Pieper, *Chr. Dogmatik*, II, p. 577 f.; *Conversion and Election*, pp. 36, 108.

 

1, 1937: "The first result of the Holy Spirit's ministry is to put man in the position of Adam before the Fall. It restores to him a power that was lost, the power of a true freedom of choice." Dr. F. A. Schmidt: "As we understand it, the radical difference is to be sought in the question, Does man, when subject to the Gospel-call, retain an option, an alternative between two courses of action, and thus a choice of free accountability before God as his Judge? . . . The called sinner, when enabled to yield to the Spirit through the influences of preparing grace, is still free to do one of two things, either to thus yield or to resist. In this respect he has a free option between two alternatives." (*Distinctive Doctrines*, 1915, p. 228 ff.) A few years ago *Lutheraneren* wrote: "The sinner must himself provide a necessary prerequisite for God's act in the soul. . . . The categorical assertion that man, as far as his conversion is concerned, can do nothing at all in spiritual matters before his conversion is a confusing, misleading, and dangerous teaching." (Jan. 17, 1934.) Dr. H. E. Jacobs: "Since God . . . has allowed a certain measure of freedom and contingency in His creatures, knowing from all eternity what will be the result of their use of this trust, He also has determined how in every case their decision and activity will be treated. . . . When therefore, God has willed that He will be determined in a certain decision by the free decision of a creature, that freedom of the creature will certainly be guaranteed in the result." (*A Summary of the Christian Faith*, p. 556.) *The Lutheran*, June 7, 1900: "Conversion is largely one's own act. God first makes it possible; but then the responsibility rests upon ourselves to determine whether or not we will comply with the truth brought to our understanding." Note: Conversion is *altogether* one's own act if you want to express the truth that it is man himself who believes. But if the question is whether God alone creates faith or man cooperates with God, you dare not say that conversion is *largely* one's act. If you do say it, you mean that, before a man is converted, he has the power to determine to believe the Gospel. You mean that, "when God offers the sinner salvation, their free moral agency comes into play. If this is not true, we repeat again that the grace bestowed in conversion must be 'irresistible grace'; and that is Calvinism, not Lutheranism." (L. S. Keyser, *Election and Conversion*, p. 67.) Dr. A. E. Deitz: "The difference in result in the case of two men one of whom finally believes, while the other does not, is due to the difference in the choice or decision which they make." Surely! But Deitz goes on to say: "If we inquire what it is that influences men one way or the other when the Spirit of God brings them face to face with Christ and urges them to accept the Savior, the answer is that they are influenced by the motives, good or evil, which stir in their hearts and which they finally put first." (*Exploring the Deeps*, p. 49.) Good motives stirring in the heart of the unconverted?

 

Dr. J. Aberly: "Others, after the manner of Missouri, have been so cautious lest they should claim for man any credit for his salvation — a very laudable desire — that they have, in order to give all the glory to God's grace, failed to recognize that man's part in the work of salvation is essential even though it is not meritorious. The Formula of Concord reiterates in chap. II the fact that man is not a stone or a block of wood. It is true it dwells on his being capable chiefly of resisting the grace of God. But not to resist — what is it in the final analysis but to receive? The negative statement here as elsewhere must be regarded as defective. What needs to be emphasized is that God respects man's freedom, his personality." (*The Luth. Ch. Quarterly*, 1936, p. 259.) Note that the Formula of Concord does not say that man is capable "chiefly" of resisting. It declares that he is capable of nothing else. And note that Dr. Aberly regards this statement of the confession as "defective." Erasmus would say the same. Dr. Aberly again: "If faith alone knows Jesus as divine, and if this faith itself is the work of grace, how can we escape the doctrine, be it that of Calvin or of Luther, as perpetuated by Missouri?" (*The Luth. Ch. Quarterly*, 1935, p. 81.) *If* faith itself is the work of grace! — Have these men never heard of *De Servo Arbitrio*? Was it written in vain? Have they not studied it? Or do they disavow it? And together with it the Formula of Concord?

It is not surprising that occasionally non-Lutheran theologians cannot see the difference between Arminianism and Lutheranism. It is because the Lutheran theologians to whom they have gone for information are synergists. And it is hard to distinguish between synergists and Arminians. Both are Erasmians.

Luther is "more than astonished" that the Erasmian doctrine "has gained so much ground." And that for two reasons. He has been asking these theologians: Are you unable to see that all of Scripture condemns your doctrine? And now, filled with amazement and horror, he is asking them: Have you no conception of the wicked nature and the fatal effects of your teaching?

The matter at issue here touches the heart of Christianity. The integrity of the Gospel is at stake and our eternal salvation. "But these friends of ours, in a matter of importance which concern eternal salvation, madly trifle to the perdition of souls innumerable." (P. 120.) People say that Luther's controversy with Erasmus was a mere theological squabble, losing itself in abstruse dialectics. They say that time spent on discussing monergism and synergism is time wasted. Why bother and disturb the Church with these fine-spun subtleties? The Church cannot afford to halt in her activities to pay any attention to your trivialities. And this whole synergistic controversy is, after all, much ado about nothing. Did not Erasmus and Melanchthon emphasize the need of divine *grace*, as being one of the causes of conversion, and as the most important one? Does

not Latermann distinctly say that those "new powers" are offered and imparted by *grace*? Have done with your insufferable hair-splitting! — Erasmus himself "enumerated this subject of 'free will' among those things that 'are useless and not necessary.'" He said: "It is irreligious, curious, and superfluous to wish to know whether our own will does anything in those things which pertain unto eternal salvation or whether it is wholly passive under the work of grace." (Pp. 29. 32. — *Diatribe*, XVIII, 1604.) Luther, however, realized the supreme importance of this question. Erasmus's denial of the sole activity of God in effecting salvation "struck Luther on what he considered the pivotal principle of his theology" (Hurst, *Hist. of the Chr. Church*, II, p. 112). "You attacked the vital part at once" ("ipsum iugulum petisti," p. 391), the vital part of the Christian theology. The sweet doctrine of salvation by grace alone is the heart of the Christian religion, and any attempt to overthrow or weaken this glorious truth rouses the Christian to fierce wrath and indignation.

The Erasmian heresy is the repudiation of "the grace of God that bringeth salvation." These men indeed protest that they consider the grace of God necessary for salvation and that they are merely repudiating the SOLA *gratia*. But denying the *sola gratia*, they do away with grace altogether. For a grace that is conditioned on human work and merit, a grace which needs man's endeavors and cooperation to accomplish its purpose, is not real grace; and it is a useless grace, for it would have to wait through all eternity before "free will" exerted its alleged powers. No; if it be by grace at all, it is by grace alone, in no respect of works and man's cooperation; otherwise grace is no more grace, Rom. 11:6. Thanks be to God that He has graciously taken the entire matter into His hand. "Seine Gnade teilet und stuecket sich nicht" — the grace of God is not divisible and piecemeal. (Luther's *Preface to Romans*.) Woe unto us if our conversion and salvation depended on the least amount of spiritual striving and stirring within us! But "grace is therefore needed, because 'free will' can of itself do nothing" (p. 320). It is either sole, free grace or no grace at all. One who believes that he was converted because he met the Holy Spirit half-way cannot sing the hymn "By *grace* I'm saved, grace free and boundless." Unless we would betray the Gospel of free grace, we shall have to say with Luther: "John and Paul here (John 1:16; Rom. 5:15) say that grace is not only not received for any devoted effort of our own, but even for the grace of another. Therefore it is either false that we receive our grace for the grace of another, or else it is evident that 'free will' is nothing at all; for both cannot consist — that the grace of God is both so cheap that it may be obtained in common and everywhere by the 'little endeavor' of any man, and at the same time so dear that it is given us only in and

through the grace of one Man, and He so great! . . . So far is it from possibility that grace should allow of any particle or power of 'free will.'" (P. 377 f. — XVIII, 1952.)[34]

Vitiating the concept of grace, the Erasmian heresy subverts the Gospel. For the Gospel is the proclamation of salvation "by grace," and "by grace alone." If the teaching of Erasmus stands, the Gospel falls. Luther realized the gravity of the issue. "Es handelt sich um das Sein oder das Nichtsein des Evangeliums." (Th. Harnack, *op. cit.*, p. 179.) Erasmus turned the Gospel into Law. The sweet Gospel invitations, asking the despairing sinner to accept the offered salvation as a free gift of pure grace, were turned into legal commands, requiring the fulfilment of certain conditions on the part of the sinner; and the synergist tells the sinner he is able to fulfil them. "In the New Testament the Gospel is preached, which is nothing else than the word by which are offered unto us the Spirit, grace, and the remission of sins obtained for us by Christ Crucified, and all entirely free, through the mere mercy of God the Father, thus favoring us unworthy creatures. . . . But Erasmus understands little of this matter." (P. 187 f.) "In the *evangelical* sense the word: 'Turn ye unto the Lord' is the voice of the divine consolation and promise, by which nothing is demanded of us but in which the grace of God is offered unto us. . . . It is the Gospel voice and the sweetest consolation to miserable sinners. . . . But our friend *Diatribe* not only infers from this passage 'Turn ye unto Me' an indicative sense but also goes on with zeal to prove therefrom the endeavor of 'free will' and the grace prepared for the person endeavoring." (Pp. 164—167.) "John is here [John 1:12] preaching not the power of 'free will' but the riches of the kingdom of God offered to the world by the Gospel. . . . I am not a little astonished that passages which make so signally and so forcibly against 'free will' are brought forward by the *Diatribe* in support of 'free will'; whose stupidity is such that it makes no distinction whatever between the promises and the words of the Law." (P. 199.) Our present-day synergists are no better than Erasmus.[35] They

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34) Cp. Bente, *Trigl.*, Hist. Intr., p. 124 f.: "The synergists asserted: Man, too, must do his bit and cooperate with the Holy Spirit if he desires to be saved. Conversion and salvation, therefore, would depend, at least in part, on man's conduct toward converting grace, and he would be justified and saved not by grace alone but by a faith which to a certain extent is a work of his own. . . . Consistently carried out, both [Majorism and synergism] destroyed the central Christian truth of justification by grace alone and, with it, the assurance of a gracious God and of eternal salvation — the supreme religious concern of Luther and the entire Lutheran theology."

35) "Die lutherischen Synergisten sind in der unangenehmen Lage, dass sie einerseits Luther als den Reformator der Kirche und den Befreier der Christenheit vom Papsttum preisen, andererseits aber auf Erasmus' Seite treten, der das *eigentliche Fundament* des Papsttums ver-

 

say that "it depends entirely upon yourself whether you pay heed to, and obey, His advice and be saved." They say: "Man's part in the work of salvation is essential." They add the saving clause "though it is not meritorious"; but that does not save the Gospel. They make of the Gospel a preaching which demands that the sinner contribute an *essential* part towards his conversion. That is not the Christian Gospel. That is not the Gospel which the despairing sinner needs. It is a bogus gospel, a teaching which turns the sinner into a Pharisee or plunges him into despair.[36]

They say the Erasmian error is a small matter, a minor aberration. Why, it denies Christ! Christ preaches grace, salvation by grace alone, but the Erasmians insist we can get along without the *sola gratia*. If the Erasmians are right, Christ is only half a Savior, and His Holy Spirit is helpless without man's assistance. But let us hear Luther. He charges the supporters of "free will" with a heinous crime. "When they assert 'free will,' they are deniers of Christ. For if I obtain grace by my own endeavors, what need have I of the grace of Christ for the receiving of my grace? . . . While you establish 'free will,' you make Christ void and bring the whole Scripture to destruction. For if the power of 'free will' be not a thing erroneous altogether and damnable but sees and wills those things which are good and meritorious and which pertain unto salvation, it is whole, it wants not the physician Christ, nor does Christ redeem that part of man." (Pp. 371. 375. — XVIII, 1952 ff.) Is it true that man is not altogether corrupt? "Henceforth, then, I must preach Christ as Redeemer not of the whole man but of his vilest part, that is, of his flesh; but that the man himself is his own redeemer, in his better part." (P. 296.) And Luther is not dealing

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teidigt." (F. Pieper, *Chr. Dogm.*, II, 594.) They are fighting for the same cause and employ the same arguments, often the same phraseology. — As to the Latermannites and their "new powers offered by grace," here is a deadly parallel. The *Canons and Decrees of Trent* speak this language: "In adults the beginning of the said justification is to be derived from the prevenient grace of God, . . . that so they may be disposed through his quickening and assisting grace to convert themselves to their own justification by freely assenting to and cooperating with that said grace." (Sess. VI, chap. V.) It sounds as if a Latermannite were speaking.

36) Walther studied under Luther. He says: "Alas, the synergists have put poison in the Gospel, denied the Lord Christ, and made His grace to be of none effect. Let me submit a few statements which reveal the synergism of Melanchthon." (*Law and Gospel*, p. 262. These statements have been quoted above.) The teaching that a man's salvation depends on his self-determination "subverts the whole Christian religion, denies Christ as the sole Foundation of our salvation and the only Savior of mankind, repudiates thus the Gospel, disavows the power of the blood and death of Christ and His redemption, takes from God the glory that He alone saves us, and gives this glory partly to man; yea, since salvation and the mercy of God are made to depend 'at bottom and so solely and entirely' on the conduct of man, on his free personal self-determination, it is given to man *entirely*" (*Lehre u. Wehre*, 1872, p. 322. Cf. Pieper, *Chr. Dogm.*, II, 591).

 

with the gross Pelagians only. To what extent the synergist ascribes powers for good to the unconverted man and makes salvation depend on his conduct and decision, to that extent he denies Christ. Again: "What need was there for Christ to purchase for us, even with His own blood, the Spirit, as though necessary, in order that He might make the commandments easy for us, when we were already thus qualified by nature?" (P. 175.) What need is there for the Spirit to offer to do *everything* for us when we are well able to do a part of it ourselves and, according to Erasmus, are willing to do it? This is the Christian religion: We owe our salvation from beginning to end to the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and he who finds one particle of spirituality in the unconverted man, he in effect denies Christ and the Christian religion. "If we know nothing of these things, we shall know nothing whatever of Christian matters and shall be far behind all people upon the earth." (P. 36.)

Erasmus "enumerates this subject of 'free will' among those things that are 'useless and not necessary' " and admonishes Luther to study instead those things "which are necessary unto Christian piety" and to preach "rather Christ Crucified after the example of Paul" (pp. 29. 80). But that is exactly what Erasmus is not doing. That is exactly what Luther is doing. Says Luther: "Exactly this we are now seeking after and doing" (p. 93), in this very controversy. "*We* preach Christ Crucified. But Christ Crucified brings all these things along with Himself." (P. 80. See Schumacher, *op. cit.*, p. 57.) Luther preaches Christ Crucified; Erasmus denies Christ Crucified as the sole foundation of our salvation. And preaching Christ Crucified, Luther prepares the way for Christian piety, while Erasmus stops up the source of Christian piety. Where Erasmianism *prevails*, the preaching of Christ is more or less meaningless and the preaching of piety useless.

Furthermore, the Erasmian heresy hinders and eventually thwarts the sinner's conversion. If it had its way, the Christian Church would go out of existence. No man will turn to Jesus, the Savior, until his pride is thoroughly humbled. Unless he realizes that he is utterly corrupt, altogether incapable of the good, every thought, endeavor, aspiration, of his mind and heart under condemnation, Jesus means nothing to him. "If the power of 'free will' be not a thing erroneous altogether and damnable, but sees and wills those things which are good, . . . it is whole, it wants not the physician Christ." (P. 375.) Man must be made to see not only his impotency but also the wickedness of this impotency. He must learn to know that he not only cannot do what he would but that he cannot even will that which he should will and do. The discussion of the "free will" men whether man can do what he would is a beating of the air; first ask whether that which man wills is

good.[37] And when Luther tells the sinner again and again: "Original sin will not allow of any other power in 'free will' but that of sinning and going on unto damnation" (p. 361), the Erasmian tells this same sinner: Do not believe it; you are not utterly corrupt and altogether under damnation. The result will be, if the sinner listens to Erasmus, that he will not throw himself upon the grace of God. But this is the way of salvation: "The apostle's intent is by means of these threats to bring the impious and proud to a knowledge of themselves and of their impotency, that he might prepare them for grace when humbled by the knowledge of sin." (P. 201.) "Paul's whole design is to make grace necessary unto all men." (P. 336.)

Again, touching the particular point whether natural man has the power to effect his conversion or to accommodate himself to the working of the Holy Spirit or to leave undone what would hinder his conversion, the synergistic doctrine hinders man's conversion by telling him that he indeed has such powers. The sinner who believes that will never be converted. The happy day when the required cooperation sets in will never come. The sinner will either strive to create this spiritual reaction to the Word and failing in this, will despair, or, imagining that he has provided it, will dispense with the Holy Spirit's gracious work at this point. Hear the warning voice of Luther: "A man cannot be thoroughly humbled until he comes to know that his salvation is utterly beyond his own power, counsel, endeavors, will, and works and absolutely depending on the will, counsel, pleasure, and work of another, that is, of God only. For if, as long as he has any persuasion that he can do even the least thing himself towards his own salvation, he retain a confidence in himself and do not utterly despair in himself, so long he is not humbled before God; but he proposes to himself some place, some time, or some work whereby he may at length attain unto salvation. . . . The rest resist this humiliation; nay, they condemn the teaching of self-desperation; they wish to have left a little something that they may do themselves." (P. 69.—XVIII, 1715. Cp. Pieper, *Chr. Dogm.*, II, p. 54.)

The sinner's conversion can take place only where the Lutheran doctrine of the monergism of grace is applied. "He who hesitates not to depend wholly upon the good will of God, he totally despairs in himself, chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work in him; and such a one is the nearest unto grace that he might be saved." (P. 69.) Blessed is the man who is "brought to know how healthful that desperation is and how near he is unto

37) "Der Kernpunkt der Polemik Luthers liegt nicht bei der Frage, ob der Mensch die Faehigkeit hat zu tun, was er will, sondern bei der andern, ob er tun kann, was er soll." (W. Elert, *Morphologie des Lutherтums*, I, p. 22.)

grace" (p. 243). But woe unto the man who takes the advice of the synergist! He is making a fatal mistake. "Any teaching which admits the least good quality in man by which he can prepare or dispose himself so as to induce God to view him with favor . . . works a delusion upon men that will prove just as fatal as when a physician withholds from his patient the full knowledge of his critical condition." (Dau, *Luther Examined and Reexamined*, chap. 16: The "Fatalist" Luther.)[38]

But is not Erasmianism, compared with Pelagianism, rather innocuous and somewhat tolerable? In some respects it is worse. "And that on two accounts. First, the Pelagians plainly, candidly, and ingenuously assert the 'merit of worthiness,' thus calling a boat a boat and a fig a fig and teaching what they really think. Whereas, our 'free will' friends, while they think and teach the same thing, yet mock us with lying words and false appearances, as though they dissented from the Pelagians, when the fact is quite the contrary.... And, next, under this hypocrisy they estimate and purchase the grace of God at a much lower rate than the Pelagians themselves. For these assert that it is not a certain little something in us by which we attain unto grace but whole, full, perfect, great, and many devoted efforts and works. Whereas our friends declare that it is a certain little something, almost a nothing, by which we deserve grace." (P. 354. — XVIII, 1938.) "Almost a nothing" — the synergists used similar language. Describing the early synergistic controversy, A. Koeberle says: "The Word, the Spirit, and the will, they [the followers of Melanchthon] said, must be united if the act of faith was to come into existence. In this connection the third factor, the human will, was described with evangelical modesty [?] as a *non repugnare* Verbo Dei ('in so far as a man does not reject the Word and strives against his own weakness').... Of course, it was only a minimum of cooperation that was here required, an exceedingly small requirement compared with what was asked by the medieval practise of penance. As the synergists stated it: God gave the dollar, man only the farthing; but, as the Gnesio-Lutherans saw with irrefutable clearness, salvation was thus once more placed in the hands of man. Even the subtle synergism was recognized as a

38) Owing to the gracious intervention of our merciful Lord the pernicious teaching is not always practised, neither by the preacher of synergism nor by the hearer. "When they are engaged in words and disputations, they are one thing, but another when they come to experience and practise." Some "asserted it neither by their life nor by their death but by their pen only; and that, while their heart was traveling another road." "They approach God utterly forgetful of their own 'free will' and despairing of themselves, crying unto him for pure grace only. In this state was Augustine often; and in the same state was Bernard when, at the point of death, he said: 'I have lost my time because I have lived wrong.'" (Pp. 88. 120.) But that does not palliate the criminality of the teaching.

late offshoot of Pelagian teaching." (*The Quest for Holiness*, p. 141.) Why should the synergist think that, because his system requires only a farthing, it is so much better than Pelagianism? That one farthing accomplishes as much, and counts for as much, as the half dollar of the Semi-Pelagians and the dollar of the Pelagians.

Finally, the "free will" heresy is the death of the assurance of salvation. We cannot be certain of the grace of God if it must be merited or obtained by any works of ours. On the contrary, we should in that case be certain of our damnation. Further, if my right conduct must bring about my conversion, I shall always doubt whether my conversion is true conversion. Nay; I shall know that it is spurious. And, particularly, no Christian will have the assurance of the perseverance in faith if this perseverance depends on his own powers, be they what they may. The least injection of synergistic cooperation is pernicious and will be fatal to assurance. The Christian assurance is based entirely on the *sola* also respecting the *gratia conservans*. "Perseverance is not brought about by the will of man but by the preservation of God," says Luther (IV, 1009); and how he glories, rejoices, and exults in this truth! "As to myself, I openly confess that I should not wish 'free will' to be granted me, even if it could be so, nor anything else to be left in my own hands whereby I might endeavor something towards my own salvation. And that, not merely because in so many opposing dangers and against so many assaulting devils I could not stand and hold it fast (in which state no man could be saved, seeing that one devil is stronger than all men), but because, even though there were no dangers, no conflicts, no devils, I should be compelled to labor under a continual uncertainty and to beat the air only. Nor would my conscience, even if I should live and work to all eternity, ever come to a settled certainty how much it ought to do in order to satisfy God. For whatever work should be done, there would still remain a scrupling whether or not it pleased God or whether He required anything more; as is proved in the experience of all justiciaries" (justitiarii; St. Louis ed.: Werktreiber), "and as I myself learned to my bitter cost. But now, since God has put my salvation out of the way of *my* will and has taken it under *His own* and has promised to save me not according to my working or manner of life" (opere aut cursu — Wirken und Laufen) "but according to His own grace and mercy, I rest fully assured and persuaded that He is faithful and will not lie and, moreover, great and powerful, so that no devils, no adversities, can destroy Him or pluck me out of His hand. 'No one' (saith He) 'shall pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all,' John 10:28 f. Hence it is certain that in this way, if all are not saved, yet some, yea, many, shall be saved; whereas by the power of 'free will'



 

no one whatever could be saved, but all must perish together. And, moreover, we are certain and persuaded that in this way we please God, not from the merit of our own works, but from the favor of His mercy promised unto us; and that, if we work less or work badly, He does not impute it unto us but like a father pardons us and makes us better. — This is the glorying which all the saints have in their God." (P. 384 f. — XVIII, 1961 f.)[39] But the Erasmians glory in this wise: thank God for the doctrine that gives man his just due; a conversion and a preservation brought about by the sole activity of God would be an unethical affair, and man would be reduced to a machine; our doctrine saves man's personality. — Whatever they have saved — man's personality is not jeopardized by God's method of salvation — they have saved at the expense of the Christian's comfort and confidence and to the dishonor of the Gospel and of Christ.

Luther is "more than astonished" that a teaching could "gain so much ground" which not only flies in the face of Scripture but also strikes at the very heart of Christianity. He is more than astonished. He is filled with wrath and indignation and denounces the heresy in the fiercest terms. People do not like the style of *De Servo Arbitrio:* "Luther's delirious outbursts against Erasmus," "this inopportune and violent tract." No; Luther did not handle Erasmus with gloves. He uses very strong terms. He speaks of "deceivers," and "lazy and ignorant" deceivers at that. "Do you think the *Diatribe* could be sober or in its right senses when it wrote this?" "It is difficult to refrain from concluding that you are, in this passage, crafty and double-dealing." "Erzschelme und Gaukler." "Like the *unclean* Sophists." And this: "From this very word and act of yours I truly perceive what 'free will' is and what the effect of it is — *it makes men mad.*" Violent language, harsh statements? But how could Luther deal gently with men whose teaching robs the Christian of his comfort, renders conversion impossible, and "makes Christ void"? And when men say that they take exception primarily to *these* statements (that Erasmianism denies the Gospel and Christ) as extravagant and immoderate, Lu-

39) Quoting this Lutheran psalm on the sola gratia, A. Koeberle writes: "If this unfree will, that is so blind that it cannot perceive its own blindness, is saved in spite of that fact, such salvation can never be gained by human cooperation but only through God's purpose and power. But with this knowledge comes the absolute assurance and unconditional comfort that it is really God who has forgiven us and called us out of death to life." (*Op. cit.*, p. 70.) He also quotes from Luther's Preface to Romans: Our salvation "is taken completely out of our hands and placed completely in the hands of God. And this is most necessary. For we are so weak and full of uncertainty that, if it depended on ourselves, none would ever be saved, the devil would overpower every one. But God is reliable so that His predestination does not fail, nor can any one defeat His purpose; and so we have hope in spite of sin."

ther denounces the more fiercely the "free will" delusion, which makes men mad, unable to estimate the dishonor they put upon Christ.

Harsh language? Yes, indeed. Luther will use language like this: "monstrosum portentum, horribilis blasphemia, ludubrium Satanae; such monstrous and horrible blasphemies should have been set forth to the Turks and Jews and not to the Church of Christ" (on Gal. 2:16). And in our more polite age men are passing the very same "extreme" judgment. Walther: "The synergists have put poison in the Gospel." Schmauk: "This subtle synergistic spirit weakens the Church at every point." (*The Confessional Principle,* p. 601.) Landesbischof Dr. Schoeffel: "Luther konnte nicht schweigen. *Es ging um das Heiligtum selbst,* um die Frage, was die Welt rettet, ob eigene Kraft oder Gottes Tat, ob diese allein oder 'auch' der Mensch. Es ging um den Trost der Seelen, um die Heilsgewissheit." (*Kirchl. Zeitschrift,* 1937, p. 79.) Pieper: "Die christliche und die synergistische Lehre verhalten sich zueinader wie Ja und Nein." (*Chr. Dogm.,* III, p. 117.)

The battle of 1525 is still on, and we need to fight it with the weapons and in the spirit of Luther. "Synergism is the old hereditary foe of true Lutheranism. From the beginning, from the days when Luther wrote his book *De Servo Arbitrio,* Lutheran theology has been engaged in combat with the pseudotheology, which pleads the cause of 'free will.'" (G. Stoeckhardt, *Lehre u. Wehre,* 1897, p. 129.) We must fight it out in our own hearts. "The natural man can never of himself get away from the attitude that salvation, at least to some extent, depends upon himself" (*Jour. Am. Luth. Conf.,* 1937, p. 39), and: "This delusion runs in our blood, too" (Prof. M. Doerne of Leipzig. See C. T. M., current volume, p. 66). If we have been enticed into a false position, we must at once retrace our steps.[40] And when the enemy meets us from the outside, there must be no fraternizing, no talk of an armistice; it means war to the end. There is too much at stake. Do we realize what is going on round about us? Luther shall tell us: "This error concerning 'free will' is Antichrist's [des Endchrists] own article; therefore it is not surprising that it has spread throughout the world, for Antichrist [der Endchrist] shall deceive the whole world, as Scripture has foretold, and but a few shall escape him. Vae illi!" (XV, 1562.)

*(To be continued)* TH. ENGELDER

40) In the first edition of *Rechtfertigung und Heiligung* Koeberle had made the statement "Wo Gottes Wort auf den Willen wirkt, da hat er gleich wie vor dem Fall seine Wahlfreiheit zurueckerhalten." (P. 176.) But the corresponding passage in the third edition reads: "It is not as though man through the Word received certain powers from above by whose assistance he could then freely decide by himself to accept grace, to surrender and obey. No; what precedes conversion is nothing but darkness and opposition, enmity and death." (*Op. cit.,* p. 142.)