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A Course in Lutheran Theology

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A Course in Lutheran Theology

(Continued instead of concluded)

The third and final chapter of our study in *De Servo Arbitrio* deals with the question, What portions of this treatise must be discarded by good Lutherans? The Catholic and the thoroughgoing synergists feel bad over the *entire* book. They will never forgive Luther for his mighty vindication of the thesis that salvation is by grace alone. They have put the whole book on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. But there are others, who are not necessarily synergists, who would like to put certain portions of the book on the *Index*. They strenuously object to certain teachings or at least to certain statements contained in our book. Terrible things are being said about *De Servo Arbitrio*. It would fare badly if the average theologian were asked to censor it.

"*De Servo Arbitrio* has been quite generally misapprehended." (F. Pieper, *Chr. Dogm.*, I:668.) It is being continually misread. It may be that a few of those who are saying terrible things about it have not read the book at all. They have found some quotations from the book, did not look them up in their context, and blame Luther for making unwarranted statements. What of those who read the book attentively and still hear Luther saying these terrible things? There are men who because of their ingrained synergism are unable to read and understand Luther right. They are continually bringing up the charges we are about to examine. But the same charges are made by others who are free from synergistic proclivities. They honestly misread certain portions. It should not be hard to show these men that their objections are not well founded.

Let us examine those portions which, they say, a good Lutheran must discard and which Luther himself, when he got the right balance, discarded. First, there is Luther's discussion of the *discretio personarum*. He dealt with the vexing question *Cur alii, alii*

non? in this way that he refused to answer it. He had learned from Scripture that the sole cause of a man's salvation is the grace of God. He had learned from Scripture that the sole cause of a man's perdition is his wickedness. But when he investigated the question why, since the grace of God is universal and the wickedness and guilt of man is universal and equal in all, not all are saved or not all are lost, he found no answer. His reason could not account for the difference in the outcome. And Scripture does not account for it. And so Luther refused to look for a solution of the *cruz theologorum* in this life. He waited for "the light of glory" to solve it. He condemned the attempts of theologians to find an answer satisfactory to reason as wicked presumption. He denounced this prying into the hidden counsel of God, this attempt of blind reason to shed light on the inscrutable judgments of God as impertinent, as impudent, as sacrilegious, and blasphemous. Here are some of his statements: "Why it is that some are touched by the Law and some are not touched, why some receive the offered grace and some despise it, that is another question which is not here treated on by Ezekiel, because he is speaking of the preached and offered mercy of God, not of that secret and to-be-feared will of God, who, according to His own counsel, ordains whom, and such as, He will 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 majesty, which He reserves unto Himself and keeps hidden from us, and that much more religiously than the mention of ten thousand Corycian caverns." (P. 171, Cole-Ather-ton.—St. Louis ed., XVIII, p. 1794.) "He desires that all men should be saved, seeing that He comes unto all by the word of salvation, and it is the fault of the will which does not receive Him, as He saith Matt. 23:37: 'How often would I have gathered thy children together, and ye would not.' But why that Majesty does not take away or change this fault of the will in all, 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, as Paul saith Rom. 9:20: 'Who art thou that repliest against God?'" (P. 173.) "It belongs also to this same God Incarnate to weep, to lament, and to sigh over the perdition of the wicked, even while that will of Majesty, from purpose, leaves and reprobates some that they might perish. Nor does it become us to inquire why He does so but to revere that God who can do, and wills to do, such things." (P. 181.) "If, therefore, 'free will' be of one and the same nature and impotency in all men, no reason can be given why it should attain unto grace in one and not in

another." (P. 216.) "Again, it may be asked, Why does He not, then, change, in His motion, those evil wills which He moves? This belongs to those secrets of Majesty where 'His judgments are past finding out,' Rom. 11:33. Nor is it ours to search into, but to adore, these mysteries. If 'flesh and blood' here take offense and murmur, let it murmur, but it will be just where it was before. God is not on that account changed." (P. 230.)

Scripture does not solve the difficulty; humbly wait for the greater enlightenment which heaven will bring. If Scripture did give an answer now, it would have to be in words whose meaning we in our present low state of mental and spiritual attainments could not grasp, that is, in words which do not exist in human language. Wait! Towards the conclusion of *De Servo Arbitrio* Luther writes: "Let us therefore hold in consideration the three lights—the light of nature, the light of grace, and the light of glory, which is the common, and a very good, distinction. By the light of nature it is insolvable how it can be just that the good man should be afflicted and the wicked should prosper; but this is solved by the light of grace. By the light of grace it is unsolvable, how God can damn him who by his own powers can do nothing but sin and become guilty. Both the light of nature and the light of grace here say that the fault is not in the miserable man but in the unjust God; nor can they judge otherwise of that God who crowns the wicked man freely without any merit and crowns not but damns another *who is perhaps less, or at least not more, wicked*. But the light of glory speaks otherwise." (P. 389. — XVIII, p. 1966.)

Wait till God Himself reveals these secrets to you; wait humbly and in the fear of God. You cannot wait that long? Then hear Luther: "Ask reason herself whether she is not from conviction compelled to confess that she is foolish and rash for not allowing the judgment of God to be incomprehensible when she confesses that *"all the other divine things are incomprehensible."* (P. 387.) You feel you must have an answer to these questions which satisfies your reason? Let Luther tell you what you are doing. "A cause and reason are assigned for the will of the creature but not for the will of the Creator, unless you set up over Him another Creator." (P. 231.) "That Majesty which is the creating cause of all things must bow to one of the dregs of His creation. . . . It is absurd that He should condemn him who cannot avoid the merit of damnation. And on account of this absurdity it must be false that 'God has mercy on whom He will have mercy and whom He will He hardeneth,' Rom. 9:18. He must be brought to order. He must have certain laws prescribed to Him." (P. 266.) Luther does not mince words. Dealing with those who think they must and can find an answer to the *Cur alii prae aliis? Cur non omnes?* he uses

the word "blasphemies." "Nor can reason of herself form any other judgment than the *Diatribes* here does. For as she herself snores over, and looks with contempt upon, divine things, she thinks concerning God that He sleeps and snores over them, too, not exercising His wisdom, will, and presence in choosing, separating, and inspiring but leaving the troublesome and irksome business of accepting or refusing His long-suffering and His anger entirely to men. That is what we come to when we attempt by human reason to limit and make excuses for God, not revering the secrets of His majesty but curiously prying into them—being lost in the glory of them, instead of making one excuse for God, we pour forth a thousand blasphemies. And forgetting ourselves, we prate like madmen, both against God and against ourselves, when we are all the while supposing that we are, with a great deal of wisdom, speaking both for God and for ourselves." (P. 217.—XVIII, p. 1829.)

Do not bother, for the present, about those phrases which you fear might lay Luther open to the charge of Calvinism. We shall go into that later.⁴⁵⁾ What these quotations do prove is that Luther

45) For the present, be assured that, when Luther refuses to answer the question "why some are touched by the Law and some are not touched, why some receive the offered grace and some despise it," because "that secret will is not to be curiously inquired into," he is certainly not indicating the answer after all and intimating that the adverse will of God is the reason why some are not saved. He knows only one reason for that: "Ye would not." Will he in the next breath say: The real reason is because God did not care to save them? Yes, indeed, Luther states: "That will of Majesty, from purpose, leaves and reprobates some." Why? Luther declares with a loud voice: "It does not become us to inquire why He does so." We cannot now know the reason. And have you a right to insinuate that Luther in his heart held the reason to be the Calvinistic *gratia particularis*? Study in this connection Stoeckhardt on Romans, p. 442: "Das ist hier, Roem. 9, 18, die *ultima ratio*: Gott erbarmt sich, welches er will, und verstockt, welchen er will. Er hat an Moses sein Erbarmen, an Pharaoh hingegen seine Macht erzeugt, weil er es so wollte. Gott macht es mit den einen und mit den andern, wie er will. Dabei sollen wir es bewundern lassen und *a priori* wissen und glauben, dass der Wille Gottes allewege heilig, gut und gerecht ist. Dass Gott bekehrt, wen er will, und verstockt, wen er will, gehoert zu den unerforschlichen Wegen, Gnadenwegen und unergreiflichen Gerichten Gottes, von denen Paulus am Schluss dieses Abschnitts, 11, 33, sagt, die wir nicht begreifen koennen und nicht erforschen sollen. Gewiss, Gott hat hierfuer seine weisen und gerechten Motive. Doch die hat er uns eben verborgen; die werden wir dereinst im Licht der Herrlichkeit erkennen. Es sei an diesem Ort nochmals betont, dass Paulus von keinem geheimen, absoluten Verwerfungsdekret Gottes weiss. Was er an unserer Stelle von dem Willen Gottes sagt, und zwar sofern er auf die Verstockung geht, schliesst kein solches Dekret in sich und schliesst den allgemeinen Gnadenwillen Gottes nicht aus. Auch von denen, die schliesslich verstockt werden, gilt, dass Gott den Tod des Suenders nicht will. Gott hat auch ihnen Gnade angeboten, sie ernstlich bekehren und retten wollen. Aber sie haben nicht gewollt. . . .

defers the answer to the question why not all are saved or lost, grace and guilt being universal and equal, to the light of glory and warns all mortals against prying into these matters. We thank Luther for inculcating that. Others, however, deplore that Luther made these statements. They think that this should be omitted from a course in Lutheran theology.

J. Koestlin presents their view in this way: "Beyond question, the point in Luther's theory upon this subject [that God works all in all], which was most calculated to give offense to those who were inclined to accept his strictest statements touching the general doctrine of grace, was the relation which he represented the universal divine agency as bearing to the ungodly. . . . But we shall now very soon meet with declarations of much harder sound. . . . Why does God not improve also those whom he leaves under Satan's power? To this we might reply that the explanation, at least in the case of those who have heard the Word of grace, is found in the fact that they do not obey. But Luther says: All hearing is in vain if God do not Himself inwardly speak and draw. No one obeys simply because God displays all the treasures of His grace. Such obedience is seen only in the case of those who have first, by the efficient inward agency of God, become true sheep. . . . What is, then, in view of all this, the reason why God leaves the evil will in so many unchanged? Luther replies bluntly: 'It is not for us to inquire about that, but it is ours to adore the divine mystery. Who art thou that thou shouldst call God to account, Rom. 9:20?'" (*The Theology of Luther*, Hay's translation, I:485 f.) So there are men who do not want to be reprimanded by Luther for their insisting on an answer to the *Cur alii, alii non?* They complain that Luther's language is too harsh. And it is an old complaint. Why, even "some of the later Lutheran dogmaticians, well-meaning men, list among 'the rather hard statements (*duriusculas phrases*)' Luther's and Brenz's avowal that they could not in this life answer the *Cur alii prae aliis?* Gottfried Hoffmann, for instance, writes in his *Synopsis Theologiae*, 1730: 'Loca, quae ceu duriora allegari solent inprimis petuntur ex Lutheri libro *De Servo Arbitrio*, ubi ad quaestionem: quid est igitur, quod Deus clementer conferat donum fidei Iacobo et non Esavo, Davidi et non Saulo, Petro et non Iudae, alteri latroni et non alteri, cum eadem sit peccati massa, etc., iusto citius ad

Auf Grund von Roem. 9, 17-20 und aehnlichen Stellen redet Luther in seinem Buch *De Servo Arbitrio* von dem verborgenen Willen oder Majestaetswillen Gottes. Was er davon sagt und damit meint, fasst sich kurz in folgendem Passus zusammen: 'Aber warum die goettliche Majestaet dieses Gebrechen unseres Willens nicht wegnimmt oder nicht in allen Menschen aendert,' etc. (XVIII: 1795 f.)" The passage, as translated in Cole-Atherton, p. 173, is given above.

βάθος consilii divini confugit" (F. Pieper, *op. cit.*, II:53). It is of course the thoroughgoing synergists who are loudest in their condemnation of Luther's position on this question. They resent what they call Luther's "harsh" language. What shall we say? Should we prepare an expurgated edition of *De Servo Arbitrio*, discarding Luther's judgment that no man ever has given, or ever will in this life give, a Christian answer to the question why some are saved who are in the same guilt as those who are not saved?

We shall stick to the old, unrevised edition, for several reasons. The first reason is that Luther's judgment on this matter is the judgment of Scripture. As long as Rom. 11:33-36 stands, so long shall *De Servo Arbitrio* stand. Since Scripture leaves this matter unsolved, do not blame Luther for keeping silence.

In the second place, Luther only performed his duty as a Christian theologian when he denounced the prying of Madam Reason (Luther's language) into the secrets of God as wicked impertinence. Do not blame him for his hard words. They are hard—hard on reason. Proud reason does not like to be told that it knows nothing of these matters and begins to pout and protest exactly as the pert and ignorant miss does when she is put in her place. We feel no sympathy for the men who feel aggrieved at being disciplined by Luther. They "prate like madmen," says stern Father Luther. Well, just read the following—a fair sample of what many others have been saying—and ask yourself whether Luther's language is too strong. "One way out of the dilemma is to say, as some theologians do, that there is an unsolvable mystery in both predestination and conversion and that it is quite impossible for us to determine either why God elects some men to salvation and passes others by" (this use of the phrase "pass by" will be discussed later) "or why some men actually believe and are saved while others are not. This postulating of a double mystery relieves the theologian of the effort to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable elements in the problem. Still the inquiring mind wistfully seeks for some other answer and wonders whether it is a fact that this is the end of the investigation, whether it is actually impossible to go further." (A. E. Deitz, *Exploring the Deeps*, p. 44.) Here is a Lutheran theologian (Hartwick Seminary)—and there are many like him—who openly declares his dissent from Luther's position. He certainly knows that the man who wrote *De Servo Arbitrio* is among the theologians who postulate a mystery here. But that is the least. He sees fit, in addition, to insinuate whatever is insinuated by the statement that "this postulating of a double mystery relieves the theologian of the effort to reconcile," etc. Worst of all, he feels capable of making the effort. His "inquiring mind" cannot let the matter rest where Scripture lets it rest. And so he boldly

goes out beyond his depth and asks others to follow him and charges those who are warning him and refuse to follow him with mental inertia and laziness. Read his declaration once more; read Luther's opinion of such men once more and judge whether his words are too hard. And then you might turn to page 182 (XVIII:1802) and see how Luther meets the charge that his method is not worthy of a deep thinker. "But here Reason, who is always very knowing and loquacious, will say: This is an excellently invented scapegap, that, as often as we are pressed close by the force of arguments, we might run back to that to-be-revered will of majesty, and thus silence the disputant as soon as he becomes troublesome; just as astrologers do, who by their invented epicycles elude all questions concerning the motion of the whole heaven." Luther answers: "It is no invention of mine but a command supported by the Holy Scriptures," and proceeds to lecture the men who cannot control their "inquiring mind" in this wise: "From these words it is, I think, sufficiently manifest that it is not lawful for men to search into that will of majesty. And this subject is of that nature that perverse men are here the most led to pry into that to-be-revered will, and therefore there is here the greatest reason why they should be exhorted to silence and reverence. In other subjects, where those things are handled for which we can give a reason and for which we are commanded to give a reason, we do not do this [exhort men to silence]. And if any one still persists in searching into the reason of that will and does not choose to hearken to our admonition, we let him go on and, like the giants, fight against God."

That's Lutheran theology. It has no patience with the wistful search of the inquiring mind for an answer to this question. It speaks after the manner of P. Piscator: "Some maintain a childish and drunken notion, saying: 'If it depended only on God's grace and election and not in part on man's will, or if it rested with God alone and not with the free choice of man, whether a person is to become a believer and accept salvation in the Word, then God were a respecter of persons, *cum non aequalibus aequalia dividat*, since He does not give faith to one as well as to the other.' These dolts deserve a sound thrashing for presuming to charge God with unfairness because His unsearchable judgments do not square with their foolish reason." (See *Baier*, III:584. *Chr. Dogm.*, II:588. *Conversion and Election*, p.68.) Why, even Gustav Aulén employs harsh language in this connection. He points out that "Luther refused to hunt for a rational solution of this problem" ("Er weiss, dass es Fragen gibt, die sich nicht durch den Glauben eindeutig und spielend beantworten lassen"). And then, quoting *De Servo Arbitrio*: "If God's righteousness were such that it was considered

to be righteousness according to human judgment, it would be no longer divine. But as He is the one and true God and, moreover, incomprehensible and inaccessible by human reason, it is right, nay, it is necessary, that His righteousness should be incomprehensible. . . . But they would be no longer 'past finding out' if we were in all things able to see how they were righteous (p. 386)," he says: "Wollten wir sagen: Gott kann nicht 'gerecht' sein, wenn er so oder so handelt, enthielte dies eine anthropozentrische Ueberhebung." (*Das christliche Gottesbild*, pp. 226, 233.) Do you know the real meaning of "anthropocentric presumptuousness and arrogance"? That theology is anthropocentric which judges God by human standards, and such a theology springs from self-conceited arrogance. Is the severe castigation it gets at the hands of Luther out of place? ⁴⁶⁾

There is another reason why Luther's warning against prying into the mystery of the *discretio personarum* must stand. It is bad enough that men feel that they can and must defend God against the charge of unjust dealing and then proceed to lay down rules which God must follow if He would be just. But when we examine these rules, we find that an additional evil has been wrought, an evil carrying fearful disaster in its wake. Those theologians within the Lutheran Church whose inquiring mind insists on finding the solution of our problem have laid down a rule for God to follow which no longer permits God to follow the rule of the *sola gratia*. These men want to keep the *gratia universalis* intact; but obsessed with the idea that it is incumbent on them to discover a good reason why, grace being universal, not all are saved, they declare that the reason *must* be this, that those who are saved are better than the others and not in the same guilt. That was the solution offered by the father of "Lutheran" synergism, Melancthon. "Since the promises of grace are universal and there cannot

46) Quoting this same passage (p. 386), F. Bente says in *Concordia Triglotta*, Historical Introduction, p. 218: "According to Luther divine justice must be just as incomprehensible to human reason as God's entire essence," and gives the rest of the quotation: "What is man, compared with God? What can our power do when compared with His power? What is our strength compared with His strength? What is our knowledge compared with His wisdom? What is our substance compared with His substance? In a word, what is all that we are compared with all that He is?" Bente continues: "Christians embrace the opportunity offered by the mysterious ways of God to exercise their faith. Luther: . . . 'If, therefore, I could by any means comprehend how that same God can be merciful and just who carries the appearance of so much wrath and [seeming] injustice, there would be no need of faith. But now, since that cannot be comprehended, there is room for exercising faith (p. 71).'" In the next paragraph Luther speaks of "the insatiable desire of mortals to search into secret things,"—that insatiable desire which eats up and destroys faith.

be contradictory wills in God, there *must necessarily* be some cause in us to account for the difference why Saul is rejected and David accepted, in other words, there must be in each a different kind of action." (Loci, ed. Detzer, I:74.) That was the solution offered by the scholastics: "If merit is of no account, there is no difference between the evil and the good, and it follows that both are saved alike. This argument has moved the scholastics to invent the *meritum condigni*; for there must be (they think) a difference between those who are saved and those who are damned." (Apology, *Trigl.*, p. 213.—And poor Melancthon, obeying the drivings of his inquiring mind, later adopted the solution he here rejected!) And Erasmus offered the same solution. "The *Diatribes* before made 'free will' one and the same in all men; and now, in the course of its argumentation, forgetting its own definition, makes one 'free will' to be cultivated and the other uncultivated, according to the difference of works, of manners, and of men, thus making two different 'free wills,' the one that which cannot do good, the other that which can do good, and that by its own powers before grace." (P. 218.—XVIII:1830.) So what is the result of the attempt to solve the difficulty? And why does Luther so insistently exhort "these men to silence and reverence"? Because, "if they go on, they fight against God," and it will be a losing fight, because they cannot prove that "free will" can do the least thing. (P. 183.) They fight against God in refusing to obey His command to keep silent and in offering a solution which subverts God's holy Gospel, the Gospel of the *sola gratia*.

That is the fearful tragedy enacted by those who permit their philosophizing mind to rule their theology. They think they must answer the question in a way that safeguards, in their mind, the justice of God, and they fall for the synergistic solution. It happened to H. E. Jacobs. "The differences in results in the call do not depend upon differences in God's will" (Surely not!) "or upon the call having an irresistible efficacy attached to it in one case and having no efficiency attached to it in the other. The efficacy of the Word and call is constant" (Absolutely right; but what follows is absolutely wrong); "the difference in results is determined by a difference in man's attitude towards the call." (*A Summary of the Christian faith*, p. 217.) It happened to C. E. Lindberg. He finds fault with F. Pieper's *Conversion and Election* because "the author gives no explanation why the Spirit works faith in some except as God has elected them." He quotes Pieper's statement: "When studying the cause why men are saved, we never get beyond *sola gratia Dei*; when studying the cause why men are lost, we never pass beyond *sola culpa hominum*." But he adds the remark: "Dr. Pieper holds that the election of the finally saved is a mystery

and no explanation should be attempted." (*Chr. Dogm.*, p. 103.) What is Dr. Lindberg's own position? On page 89 he writes: "Should we again claim: It is a mystery? . . . If the awakened sinner ceases to resist and becomes passive through the illumination of the Spirit, this passivity cannot be called synergism, Pelagianism, etc. When resistance ceases, the Spirit effects conversion." So the difference in the result is explained — explained by the attitude taken by man. And the same thing happened to Dr. Deitz. He rejected the answer that an insolvable mystery is here involved. Wistfully he sought for some other answer, and this is the result of his investigation: "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." Well, that goes without saying. That requires no deep thinking. But what these men have set out to discover is the cause which accounts for the difference in the choice. And this is what Dr. Deitz has found: "If we seek to go further and 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. One man, for instance, thinks of the pleasures of a selfish life and is unwilling to forego them, while another thinks of the blessings of the Christian life and reaches out to attain them. Each decides for himself. . . . God determined in eternity actually to bring to faith and so to eternal life all who did not finally resist His work of grace in their hearts." (*Op. cit.*, p. 47 f.) The reason why one was converted is that he obeyed the good motives stirring in his heart. Here is an unconverted man in whose heart good motives are bestirring themselves, and this unconverted man has the spiritual power to obey these motives! It is the old story. The solution found by Dr. Deitz is the same as that found by Dr. F. A. Schmidt (see page 409 of the current volume of *CONC. THEOL. MONTHLY*), by Latermann (see p. 406, note 30. Latermann and Deitz use identical language), by Melancthon, by Erasmus — a solution which denies the same guilt and therefore also the *sola gratia*.

Men who love both the *gratia universalis* and the *sola gratia* must give up the attempt to solve the mystery confronting them with respect to the *Cur alii, alii non?* They may save the *gratia universalis*, but they are bound to lose the *sola gratia* if they persist in their attempt. Let them not think that they can depart from Luther's position on this point as taken in *De Servo Arbitrio* and still retain the chief point of *De Servo Arbitrio*. Thank God that they subscribe to the chief thesis — that grace does all. But if they

insist on blaming Luther for his refusal to answer the *Cur alii, alii non?* they may end up by discarding the *sola gratia*. Delete this section, and the whole book will have to go.

There is one more reason why a good Lutheran cannot object to Luther's treatment of this matter. And that is, that the Formula of Concord treats the matter in exactly the same way. One who finds fault with Luther is at odds with the Lutheran Confession, too. Our Confession declares: "Likewise, when we see that God gives His Word at one place but not at another; removes it from one place and allows it to remain at another; also that one is hardened, blinded, given over to a reprobate mind while another who is indeed in the same guilt is converted again, etc.,— in these and similar questions Paul, Rom. 11:22 ff., fixes a certain limit to us how far we should go. . . . And this His righteous, well-deserved judgment He displays in some countries, nations, and persons in order that, when we are placed alongside of them and compared with them [and found to be most similar to them], we may learn the more diligently to recognize and praise God's pure, unmerited grace in the vessels of mercy." (Thor. Decl., Art. XI, § 57 ff.) Do not stop with Luther and Brenz, says Dr. Pieper, when you are listing "rather hard statements"; you will also have to take in the Formula of Concord! (*Op. cit.*, II:53.) If these portions of *De Servo Arbitrio* must be discarded, certain sections of the Formula will have to be junked, too.

We shall not discard Luther's discussion of the *Cur alii, alii non?* It is one of the most important parts of *De Servo Arbitrio*. We thank God that Luther took that position and taught us to take the same position. No man can qualify as a Lutheran theologian who is still trying to find a uniform cause for the different result, salvation in one case, perdition in the other. Dr. Pieper says: "I mistrust every theologian who is not able to hold his tongue here. He is apt to commit great follies." (*Die Grunddifferenz*, p. 14.) These three points belong to the rudiments of Lutheran theology: 1) The sinner owes his salvation entirely and exclusively to the unmerited grace of God. 2) If a sinner is lost, the fault is entirely and exclusively his own. 3) The reason why one is saved while the other who is in no greater guilt is lost is beyond mortal ken. When we hear a theologian inculcating those three points, our hearts go out to him. "Wird an diesem Punkte Einigkeit erzielt, das heisst, verzichten wir von Herzen auf eine vernunftgemaesse Antwort auf die Frage *Cur alii prae aliis?* so ist das ein Zeichen, dass wir wahrhaft eines Geistes sind, sowohl die *universalis gratia* als auch die *sola gratia* ungeschmaelert festhalten und den Rationalismus, der im Interesse der vernunftgemaessen Vermittelung die Lehren der Schrift modelt, gruendlich bei uns ausgefegt haben."

(F. Pieper, *op. cit.*, p. 28.) No, we cannot delete this section from *De Servo Arbitrio*. In the interest of the *sola gratia* it must stand. No course in Lutheran theology is complete without it.

The list of grievances against *De Servo Arbitrio* specifies, in the second place, Luther's disquisition on the *Deus absconditus*, the hidden God, the *voluntas abscondita*. We have already touched this matter in our examination of the first grievance. For God's dealing with regard to the *Cur alii, alii non?* falls under the general head of God's unsearchable ways, of the secrets of His unapproachable majesty.⁴⁷⁾ We have treated—the reader will understand the reason—the *Cur alii, alii non?* problem separately. Frequently, however, this particular point is not specified. The objection is of a general nature and runs thus: Luther should have omitted the discussion of the hidden will of God and His dread majesty. Let Dr. J. Aberly voice the objection: "I would not be understood as committing myself to an acceptance of the entire theology of Luther. The distinction between the *Deus revelatus* and the *Deus absconditus*, as he develops it, seems too dualistic." (*The Luth. Church Quarterly*, Jan., 1934, p. 40.) The criticism appears occasionally in a milder form: "The *Deus absconditus* (the hidden God) seems to have been a fundamental conception with the younger Luther." (*Jour. of the Am. Luth. Conf.*, Nov., 1937, p. 41.)⁴⁸⁾ The implication of this is that Luther later saw the error of his ways. And the demand is made by this group that Luther's pronouncements on the hidden God be expurgated from *De Servo Arbitrio*.

Which are these allegedly offensive statements? There is a great number of them. We have already quoted some of them. "That secret and to-be-feared will of God . . . is not to be curiously inquired into" (p. 171). "The God incarnate weeps over the per-

47) Pieper: "To sum up, Luther teaches: There are in God depths which our human understanding cannot fathom, an unsearchable will. Luther here enumerates God's omniscience, His all-controlling agency, and particularly the question *Cur alii prae aliis?* . . . The words 'For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things,' Rom. 11:36 are, as Luther points out, words of the divine majesty. They describe the absoluteness of God, who is the beginning, middle, and end of all things, who in His majesty rules and shapes all things according to His wisdom and knowledge, which is absolutely incomprehensible to us. In short, there are ways and judgments of God which we cannot understand. That is the *Deus absconditus*, the *voluntas absoluta*" (*Chr. Dogm.*, II:44, 47.)

48) The writer in the *Journal* is not swayed in his implied criticism of Luther by a synergistic view-point. He had stated in his article: "The certainty of our salvation depends on this only, that God by free grace has chosen us for salvation. . . . We are by nature scatter-brained especially in spiritual matters. The natural man can never of himself get away from the attitude that salvation, at least to some extent, depends upon himself."

dition of the wicked, even while that will of majesty, from purpose, leaves and reprobates some that they might perish" (p. 181). Here are some more: "This is not the place, this is not the time, for adoring those Corycian caverns but for adoring the true Majesty in its to-be-feared, wonderful, and incomprehensible judgments, and saying: 'Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven,' Matt. 6:10, whereas we are nowhere more irreverent and rash than in trespassing and arguing upon these very inscrutable mysteries and judgments. And while we are pretending to a great reverence in searching the Holy Scriptures, those which God has commanded to be searched we search not; but those which He has forbidden us to search into, those we search into and none other, and that with an unceasing temerity, not to say blasphemy. For is it not searching with temerity when we attempt to make the all-free prescience of God to harmonize with our freedom, prepared to derogate prescience from God rather than lose our own liberty? Is it not temerity, when He imposes necessity upon us, to say, with murmurings and blasphemies: 'Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?' Rom. 9:19." (P. 241.) "The apostle restrains the impious who are offended at these most clear words by letting them know that it is defined to a certainty that they have nothing of liberty, or 'free will,' left but that all things depend upon the will of God alone. But he restrains them in this way: by commanding them to be silent and to revere the majesty of the divine power and will, over which we have no control but which has over us a full control to do whatever it will." (P. 240.) "Who are we that we should inquire into the cause of the divine will? It is enough for us to know that such is the will of God; and it becomes us, bridling the temerity of reason, to reverence, love, and adore that will. For Christ, Matt. 11:25, 26, gives no other reason why the Gospel is hidden from the wise and revealed unto babes than this: So it pleased the Father." (P. 194.) "Here, where we are come . . . to the very and greatly to-be-reverenced secrets of the divine Majesty, viz., why He works thus? — here, as they say, you burst open all bars and rush in, all but openly blaspheming. What indignation against God do you not discover because you cannot see His reason why and His design in this His counsel! . . . Why do you not restrain yourself and deter others from prying into these things which God wills should be hidden from us and *which He has not delivered to us in the Scriptures?* It is here the hand is to be laid upon the mouth, and it is here we are to reverence what lies hidden, to adore the secret counsels of the divine Majesty, and to exclaim with Paul: 'Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?' Rom. 9:20." (P. 67.)

It is thus that Luther speaks of the *Deus absconditus*. God is

a hidden God. Mortal mind cannot understand, cannot fathom, the nature of God. "He dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see," 1 Tim. 6:16. We can know only so much of God as He has revealed to us. And much He has not revealed to us because we can never understand it. He has made known to us His grace in the Gospel, and through the Gospel we may approach Him. Outside of the Gospel we dare not approach Him. There He is a consuming fire to us. And the fire of His wrath consumes those who dare to set themselves against Him, who criticize His ways because they cannot understand them, who refuse to bow to the absolute sovereignty of His will, who refuse to count themselves as nothing and God all in all. Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. He is glorious in His work of salvation. He is glorious in His unsearchable judgments.

Is there anything wrong with these statements? Be careful what you say. For it is Scripture that makes them. If you want to inveigh against "harsh" teachings, do not address Luther, but Scripture. "Luther taught the Bible doctrine that there is in God a hidden will which He has reserved to His majesty, Deut. 29:29; that His judgments are unsearchable and His ways past finding out, Rom. 11:33; that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His will and that the very hairs of our head are numbered, Matt. 10:29, 30; that no evil can occur anywhere without His permission, Amos 3:6; Is. 45:7. To deny these truths is to reject the Bible and to destroy the sovereign omniscience and omnipotence of God. Those who attack Luther for believing that also the evil in this world is related to God will have to change their bill of indictment: their charge is really directed against Scripture." (Dau, *Luther Examined and Reexamined*, p. 109.) Let Luther speak for himself on this point. "If you, Friend Erasmus, believe that those paradoxes are the words of God, where is your countenance, where is your shame, where is, I will not say your modesty, but that fear of, and that reverence which is due to, the true God when you say that nothing is more useless to be proclaimed than that Word of God? What, shall your Creator come to learn of you, His creature, what is useful and what not useful to be preached? What, did that foolish and unwise God know not what is necessary to be taught until you, His instructor, prescribed to Him the measure according to which He should be wise and according to which He should command? What, did He not know, before you told Him, that that which you infer would be the consequence of this His paradox? If, therefore, God willed that such things should be spoken of and proclaimed abroad without regarding what would follow, who art thou that forbiddest it? The apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the

Romans, discourses on these same things, not 'in a corner' but in public and before the whole world, and that with a free open mouth, nay, in the *harshest terms*, saying: 'Whom He will He hardeneth,' Rom. 9:18. And again: 'God, willing to show forth His wrath,' etc., Rom. 9:22." (P. 65. — XVIII:1711.) "Wir muessen daher die Unterscheidung zwischen dem geoffenbarten und dem verborgenen Gott als *schriftgemaess* stehen lassen." (Pieper, *Chr. Dogm.*, II, p. 44.) We cannot support the motion to revise and delete this section of *De Servo Arbitrio*. It is God's truth.

A further reason why we cannot support this motion is that the proponents of it are laboring under a misapprehension of Luther's book. They may withdraw their motion if that can be shown. A good many of them have the idea that Luther made too much of the matter of the *Deus absconditus*, that he, in fact, made it the center of his theology, dominating and perverting his Gospel-preaching. They say that Luther emphasizes the dread majesty of the sovereign Lord so strongly that the terrified sinner fears to approach Him. They say that the darkness of the secret will of God obscures the bright light of the Gospel. Have they studied the book attentively? How can they fail to see that Christ, the sweet Gospel of free and universal salvation, forms the center of our book? Luther *intended* to put Christ into the center ("Rather do we teach nothing but Christ Crucified," p. 80. "Auch wir lehren nichts anderes als Jesum Christum, den Gekreuzigten," XVIII:1723. "You just now advised that 'Christ Crucified be rather taught'; but this we are now seeking after and doing," p. 93), and he *succeeded* in that. In what writing is Christ set before the eyes of a lost world as the gracious, the all-gracious Savior more winningly than in *De Servo Arbitrio*? And Luther is continually asking, begging, imploring, the sinner to put the *Deus revelatus* into the center of his heart, to concern himself with the Gospel, to base his hope on, to live and move and have his spiritual being in, the free and universal grace of God. "I know of no writing of Luther in which he so often and so forcibly, and that *ex professo*, inculcates the truth that every sinner should and can with all confidence lay hold of, and rely on, the *revealed* God, that is, on the *means of grace*, as his writing against Erasmus." (Pieper, *op. cit.*, II:181.) Hear Luther: "But I here observe, as I have observed before, that we are not to dispute concerning that *secret will* of the divine Majesty and that that human temerity which, with increased perverseness, is ever leaving those things that are necessary and attacking and trying this point is to be called off and driven back, that it employ not itself in prying into those secrets of Majesty which it is impossible to attain unto, seeing that they dwell in that light which is inaccessible, as Paul witnesseth, 1 Tim.

6:16. But let the man *acquaint himself with the God Incarnate*, or, as Paul saith, with Jesus Crucified, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. . . . We are to argue in one way concerning the will of *God preached*, revealed, and offered to us and worshiped by us, and in another concerning *God Himself not preached, not revealed*, not offered unto us and worshiped by us [mit dem wir nichts zu schaffen haben, XVIII:1794]. In whatever, therefore, God hides Himself and will be unknown to us, that is nothing unto us; here that sentiment stands good: 'What is above us does not concern us.' . . . In the present case we are to consider *His Word only* and to leave that will inscrutable, seeing that it is by His Word, and not by that will inscrutable, that we are to be guided." (P. 171-181.) You have not read our book attentively, if you fail to see that it is Christocentric throughout.⁴⁹ Do not delete this section because you think that Luther made too much of the *Deus absconditus* and too little of the Gospel. You are laboring under a misapprehension. You have misread Luther.

And do not make the mistake of thinking that what Luther says concerning the *Deus absconditus* and concerning the *Deus revelatus* is assigning contradictory wills to God. Do not keep on saying that "the distinction between the *Deus revelatus* and the *Deus absconditus* as Luther develops it seems too dualistic," and that you are therefore compelled to reject this part of the theology of Luther. Rather follow Luther's earnest admonition; accept both series of the statements of Scripture and do not try to harmonize them. It may seem to you that here there are two different persons

49) W. Elert: "An der Begründung des Glaubens, naemlich an der Gewissheit des Heils, ist Luther aber auch in dieser Schrift viel, wenn nicht alles, gelegen. . . . Der Grund des Glaubens ist hier kein anderer als sonst bei Luther, naemlich das 'Evangelium, quo offertur Spiritus et gratia in remissionem peccatorum per Christum crucifixum, die misericordia praedicata, der Deus praedicatus, Christus als lux mundi, als unsere sapientia, als agnus Dei und unser redemptor, mediator, et salvator.'" (*Morphologie des Luthertums*, I:107.) G. Aulén: "The tendency of the present day is to make *Deus absconditus* the index" of *De Servo Arbitrio*. However, "here, as everywhere where Luther speaks of the *Deus absconditus*, he states most emphatically that it is not our business to search the unsearchable and unapproachable divine Majesty. It is for us to abide by the *Deus revelatus*. . . . It is presumptuous and constitutes the *crimen majestatis* to attempt to justify the ways of God before the forum of human reason and the human sense of justice. That does not mean, however, that faith must remain uncertain as to the nature of the divine will; *Deus absconditus* does not make the matter uncertain. It does not imply that the *Deus revelatus*, the revelation in Christ, no longer informs faith on God's 'nature' and disposition. Luther does not take away what has just been given; he does not make of the revelation in Christ an empty pretense." (*Das christliche Gottesbild*, p. 227 ff.) Erich Seeberg, in *Christus, Wirklichkeit und Urbild* (1937), discusses this matter thoroughly in the section entitled "Der christozentrische Charakter der Schrift *De Servo Arbitrio*" (p. 297-316).

speaking and that one is saying the opposite of what the other is saying—God is contradicting Himself. Yes, Luther said: "We are to argue in one way concerning the will of God preached and in another concerning God Himself not preached, not revealed." But that is what Scripture says. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," Rom. 9:15. That seems to be in contradiction to "God so loved the world," John 3:16. And now impertinent reason begins to argue and say that both statements cannot be true and that the statements covering the *Deus absconditus* must be deleted from *De Servo Arbitrio* and from Scripture; there must be no "dualism"!—Theology governed by blind reason is a wretched theology. Sound theology accepts every statement of Scripture, assured that the light of glory will show the perfect harmony. If we adopt the theology that is afraid of "contradictions," we shall have to eliminate from Lutheran theology the important chapter on the distinction between the Law and Gospel. According to the Law God's wrath is directed against every human being. According to the Gospel there is nothing but love in the heart of God. Is, then, the supreme rule divided between two opposing wills, virtually two opposing persons? A Lutheran, as one who has learned the distinction between the Law and the Gospel, will not say so. He will not speak of "dualism" in connection with Luther's presentation of the doctrine of the *Deus absconditus*.

Luther did not make too much of this matter. But he did indeed make much of it, much more than many Lutherans dare to do. Why did he do that? The answer to that is the final reason why we cannot agree to have this section stricken from *De Servo Arbitrio*. It is a useful and salutary doctrine. It is salutary, first, in that it so thoroughly humbles the pride of our reason and our flesh. Luther is dealing in hard sayings. Yes, they are hard—on our flesh. "The Apostle Paul discourses on these same things . . . in the harshest terms, saying: 'Whom He will He hardeneth,' Rom. 9:18. . . . What is more severe, that is, to the flesh, than that word of Christ: 'Many are called, but few are chosen'? Matt. 22:14. And again: 'I know whom I have chosen,' John 13:18." (P. 65.) Our self-righteous flesh is disgusted with the doctrine that those who are saved were not one whit better than the others, that he who is saved owes it entirely to the gracious will of God. That leaves nothing to the credit of man. And our flesh does not like to hear that. But no man can be saved unless his pride is so thoroughly humbled that, left with no spiritual worth and power, he is ready for the almighty help of the Gospel. It is a most salutary teaching. Nothing better can happen to a man than to have the props of self-reliance knocked out from under him. We thank Luther for doing that in this section of *De Servo Arbitrio*.

"Luther regarded the teaching that everything is subject to God's majesty as being of service to His gracious will. We read: 'Two things require the preaching of these truths [concerning the infallibility of God's foreknowledge, etc.]; the first is the humbling of our pride and the knowledge of the grace of God; the second, Christian faith itself. First, God has certainly promised His grace to the humbled, i. e., to those who deplore their sins and despair [of themselves]. But man cannot be thoroughly humbled until he knows that his salvation is altogether beyond his own powers, counsels, efforts, will, and works and depends altogether upon the decision, counsel, will, and work of another, i. e., of God only.'" (F. Bente, *op. cit.*, p. 217. See XVIII:1715. — Cole-Atherton, p. 69.)

The pride of reason also needs to be humbled. No man can become a Christian theologian, and no man can attain to Christian knowledge, unless he imposes absolute silence on his prying reason and is ready to accept the statements of Scripture just as they stand. And nothing humbles and crushes the pride of reason so much as this doctrine concerning the *Deus absconditus*. As long as there is a spark of sanity in reason, it will have to acknowledge that these things are beyond it. And because Luther does not look for any sanity in reason when it takes up spiritual matters, he is so insistent, so vehement, in his demand that Erasmus and every one else should muzzle its mouth and acknowledge its impotency. Read his statements once more and notice how often he begins and ends the discussion by calling reason to order, castigating "that human temerity which, with increased perverseness, employs itself in prying into those secrets of Majesty which it is impossible to attain unto."⁵⁰ It is most salutary to have Luther and Scripture tell us not to take reason for our guide, and particularly not in this matter. All of us know something about it by nature. We know much more through the revelation of Scripture. The facts confront us — but also the danger that, permitting reason to act as interpreter, we be led either into skepticism or despair. We thank Luther for his warning. He is hard on reason, and people do not like it that he makes so much of the incapacities of reason. But we like this section. It provides a most useful study.

The second reason why we thank Luther for making so much of the teaching concerning the *Deus absconditus* is because this

50) J. Koestlin: "If we now inquire for the content and fundamental character of this will, how it is related to the revealed will, or how we can be assured that there is no conflict between the essential will and that expressed in the Word, Luther would have the veil drawn at once over this will and all further questionings in regard to it excluded. It is enough for us to know, he says, that there is in God an inscrutable will. With anything further than this we have nothing to do. The maxim: 'What is above us is no concern of ours (*quod supra nos, nihil ad nos*) has here a fitting application.'" (*The Theology of Luther*, I:492.)

teaching is, like all doctrines of Scripture, full of comfort. Dr. Bente says on this point — and be sure to read the whole of his admirable essay (*op. cit.*, p. 209 ff.) —: “The truth of God’s majesty serves God’s gracious will. . . . Of the manner in which, according to Luther, the truth concerning God’s majesty serves the Gospel we read” (You see that Dr. Bente is sparing of his own words; he prefers to give as much space as possible to Luther himself): “Moreover, I do not only wish to speak of how true these things are, . . . but also how becoming to a Christian, how pious and how necessary it is to know them. For if these things are not known, it is impossible for either faith or any worship of God to be maintained. That would be ignorance of God indeed; and if we do not know Him, we cannot obtain salvation, as is well known. For if you doubt that God foreknows and wills all things, not contingently but necessarily and immutably, or if you scorn such knowledge, how will you be able to believe His promises and with full assurance trust and rely upon them? When He promises, you ought to be sure that He knows what He is promising and is able and willing to accomplish it; else you will account Him neither true nor faithful. That, however, is unbelief, extreme impiety, and a denial of the most high God. But how will you be confident and sure if you do not know that He certainly, infallibly, unchangeably, and necessarily knows and wills and will perform what He promises? Nor should we merely be certain that God necessarily and immutably wills and will perform [what He has promised], but we should even glory in this very thing, as Paul does, Rom. 3:4: “Let God be true and every man a liar.” . . . For this is the only and highest possible consolation of Christians in all adversities, to know that God does not lie but does all things immutably and that His will can neither be resisted nor altered nor hindered.” (P. 44. — XVIII:1695.) — Would you want this deleted from *De Servo Arbitrio*?

But do not some of the statements quoted, after all, smack of Calvinism? And are there not quite a number of statements in *De Servo Arbitrio* which must be stamped as deterministic? Let us look into that.

(To be concluded)

TH. ENGELDER

Kleine Danielstudien

5. Der Menschensohn, Kap. 7, 13. 14

Im vorigen Artikel dieser kleinen Danielstudien ist schon das 7. Kapitel in Betracht gezogen worden, das Gesicht von den vier Tieren, die aus dem Meer emporsteigen. Diese vier Tierymbole sind der Löwe, der das babylonische Weltreich bezeichnet, der Bär, der das medisch-persische