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The Means of Grace as Viewed by the Reformed

1

When we speak of the means of grace, we have in mind certain divinely appointed *media* by which God earnestly desires to, and actually does, offer, convey, and seal to sinners the merits secured for all men by His dear Son, our divine Mediator and Redeemer. That is the *Lutheran* definition of the means of grace.¹⁾ And concerning this definition there is no doubt or discrepancy among our *Lutheran* dogmaticians.²⁾ Nor are they in doubt about

1) Cf. Hase: *Media (adminicula) gratiae sunt instrumenta, quibus solis Spiritus Sanctus ad gratiam applicandam utitur. Hutterus Redivivus*, p. 245 s. Hollaz: *Media salutis sunt media divinitus ordinata, per quae Deus acquisitam a Mediatore Christo salutem hominibus in peccatum prolapsis ex gratia offert, veramque fidem donat et conservat, iuxta atque omnes meritum Christi fide amplectentes in regnum gloriae introducit. Ibid.* A. L. Graebner: "The means by which the benefits of Christ are offered and appropriated to the sinner and by which not only the capability of accepting what is offered but also such acceptance itself is wrought in him are the means of grace, the written and the spoken Word of the Gospel and the Holy Sacraments." *Outlines of Doctrinal Theology*, p. 180.

2) It is understood of course that some of our later dogmaticians at times used the expressions *media salutis* in a narrower and a wider sense, by which considerable confusion was caused among all who were not intimately acquainted with their peculiar theological parlance. Hollaz, the most popular representative of later *Lutheran* orthodoxy, thus says: *Media salutis duplicis sunt ordinis: Media stricte dicta, ex parte Dei δοτικά, sive salutem exhibentia, sunt Verbum et sacramenta; ex parte nostra medium ληπτικόν, sive oblatam salutem apprehendens est fides, merito Christi innixa. Media salutis late dicta sunt ελεγχωτικά, sive executiva et in regnum gloriae introducentia, scil., mors, resurrectio mortuorum, extremum iudicium et consummatio saeculi. Ibid.* (*Examen, De mediis salutis in genere, qu. 2.*) When used in this wider sense of the term, even prayer may be classified among the *media salutis*, though this *usus loquendi* is not advisable, since in the means of grace proper God primarily deals with us, while in prayer we primarily deal with God. Cf. Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, III, 254. Nevertheless, when our dogmaticians speak of the means of grace in their proper sense (*media exhibentia, i. e., Verbum et sacramenta*), they always speak distinctively and unmistakably.

the *Scripture proof* for their doctrine. The Gospel is δύναμις θεοῦ εἰς σωτηρίαν, Rom. 1:16; Christian believers were born again διὰ λόγου ζώντος θεοῦ, 1 Pet. 1:23; baptism is εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, Acts 2:38; the Church is cleansed τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι; the blood of Holy Communion is Christ's blood of the new covenant,³⁾ ἐκχυνόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.⁴⁾ In short, scarcely on any other article of faith have our Lutheran dogmaticians taken so firm and united a stand as on the doctrine of the means of grace.⁵⁾

The reason for this remarkable concord and unity must be sought not merely in the perspicuity and emphasis of Scripture on this point but also in the fact that from the very beginning of the Reformation Luther had to contend for the Scriptural doctrine concerning the means of grace with the same force with which he fought for the *sola gratia*; for to him it was clear from the start that without the true, Scriptural teaching regarding the *media salutis* he simply could not hold that of the *sola fide*, which has for its correlative the *gratuitam remissionem peccatorum propter Christum in Verbo et sacramentis traditam*.

That is why Luther so vehemently and unceasingly unsheathed the spiritual sword against the triple adversary of Romanism, Calvinism, and Socinianism (Modernism) for the Scriptural doctrine of the means of grace. *Deus non dat interna nisi per externa, Spiritum Sanctum non mittit absque Verbo*. The means of grace are the "*Leiter, auf der die Gnade zu uns herabsteigt, der Steg und die Bruecke, dadurch sie zu uns kommt, die*

3) Let us bear in mind that in Biblical usage the word "testament" commonly means covenant, as also the Greek expression διαθήκη, and rightly explain the term to our parishioners, to whom the expressions "Old Testament" and "New Testament" usually do not mean that which they should. (Cf. the Hebrew בְּרִית הַחֲדָשָׁה, καὶ ἡ διαθήκη, Jer. 31:31, which means the *new covenant*. Our English use of *testament* in the Authorized Version is due to the Vulgate translation *testamentum*.)

4) Luther's contention in his Large Catechism must be maintained as Scriptural against all exegetes who wish to weaken the force of these words: "*Iam ille non aliter quam per verba 'pro vobis traditur et effunditur' nobis offertur et donatur. Nam in his utrumque habes: et quod Christi corpus sit et quod tuum sit, tanquam thesaurus et donum concessum gratuito.*" *De Sacramento Altaris, Pars V, § 29*. This is no eisegesis; but all theologians who, following the Calvinists, repudiate Luther's exposition, fail to do justice to the words of institution.

5) Cryptocalvinism is no exception to the rule, for vacillating Melancthon, who flagrantly changed Article X of the Augsburg Confession and after 1530 manhandled the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper in different ways, did so not because he personally doubted the correctness of Luther's presentation but because he desired to please the Calvinistic leaders, who inveigled him into his hypocritical, offensive duplicity. Cf. Dr. Bente, Introduction to the Symbolical Books, Triglot, p. 175 ff.; Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, IV, 441 ff.

Kleider, in die sie sich huet." "In ihnen ist Christus selbst gegenwaertig. Christus selbst ist Prediger und Taeufer."⁶⁾ As Luther, so also our Confessions, which of course set forth Luther's doctrine, emphasize the *media salutis* as the means ordinarily ordained for the salvation of sinners. *Per Verbum et sacramenta tamquam per instrumenta donatur Spiritus Sanctus.* (A. C., Art. V.) *Constanter tenendum est, Deum nemini Spiritum vel gratiam suam largiri nisi per Verbum et cum Verbo externo et praecedente, ut ita praemuniamus nos adversum enthusiasts, i. e., spiritus qui iactitant se ante Verbum et sine Verbo Spiritum habere, etc. Quid quod etiam papatus simpliciter est merus enthusiasmus, etc. Hoc in universum antiquus est Satanas et serpens, qui etiam Adamum et Evam in enthusiasmum coniciebat et ab externo Verbo abducebat* (A. S., III, VIII, §§ 3, 4, 5 sq.).—*Pater neminem trahere vult absque mediis; sed utitur tanquam ORDINARIIS mediis et instrumentis Verbo suo et sacramentis.* (F. C., XI., 76; Luthardt, op. cit., p. 329 f.)

Why this almost vehement insistence, this ceaseless repetition, this constant emphasis, on the necessity of the means of grace? Lutheranism stands and falls with the doctrine of the means of grace! Its trinity of salvation doctrine cannot exist if one of its parts is eliminated, just as the doctrine of the Holy Trinity cannot be maintained if one Person is denied. Lutheranism, on the basis of Scripture, holds (1) that *sola gratia* God has supplied complete righteousness for sinful mankind through the *obedientia activa et passiva* of His Son; (2) that *sola gratia* God now offers, conveys, and seals this *iustitia evangelii* to sinners through the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments; and (3) that *sola gratia* God through the means of grace engenders saving, justifying faith, which appropriates the *merita Christi* proffered in the *media gratiae*. Nothing therefore remains for the sinner to do; the supplying, offering, and applying grace of God does all. *Soli Deo gloria!* "The Lutheran theologians, in general, had reason to illustrate very particularly the doctrine of the operation of the Word of God. It was done in order to oppose the enthusiasts and mystics, who held that the Holy Spirit operated rather irrespectively of the Word than through it, and to oppose also the Calvinists, who, led by their doctrine of predestination, would not grant that the Word possessed this power *per se*, but only in such cases where God chose."⁷⁾

Of the opponents of confessional Lutheranism the Socinians

6) Cf. Luthardt, *Kompendium der Dogmatik*, XIII, p. 329 f., where the historical material is briefly presented.

7) Schmid, *Doct. Theol. of Ev. Luth. Ch.*, tr. by Hay-Jacobs, p. 507.

(Modernists) gave the Lutherans the least trouble, for they simply denied all three of the truths stated above, teaching in their place a bland and crass doctrine of work-righteousness, just as does superficial humanism today. The Romanists crudely and imperfectly taught the first two doctrines, adding of course the unbiblical element of the *ex-opere-operato* bestowal of the *gratia infusa*, but they vehemently denied the third, the *sola fide*. The Calvinists taught both the *satisfactio vicaria* and the *sola fide* but denied almost frantically the second truth, *viz.*, that God offers, conveys, and seals through the means of grace the *fides iustificans*, which appropriates the *iustitia Christi*. In many ways the Calvinists were the most acrimonious and relentless of the opponents of Lutheranism's doctrine concerning the *media salutis*.

2

The reasons for this rather remarkable historic phenomenon are not hard to find. For one thing, the Calvinists always regarded the Lutherans as their weak but recalcitrant brethren in the faith, who would not free themselves entirely from the papistic leaven and against whom therefore they felt extremely bitter, especially also since the Lutherans testified most strongly against their unionistic spirit.⁸⁾ Moreover, there was found in the Reformed opponents of Lutheran orthodoxy a good deal of spiritual pride and self-sufficiency, as Dr. Pieper rightly points out in the passages quoted before. But the chief reasons why the Reformed rejected the Lutheran doctrine of the means of grace were doctrinal. Calvinism as such simply cannot stand if it admits the Lutheran teaching of the *media salutis*. Here the two Protestant denominations diverge nevermore to meet unless either of the two yields its specific doctrine. But as time has proved, neither will consistent Calvinism yield, nor can confessional Lutheranism give up its Scriptural doctrine, though, of course, mediating "Lutheran" theologians (especially Cryptocalvinists of modern times, experimentalists, etc.) have long ago forsaken the Lutheran principle.

There are, in the main, four doctrines of Calvinism that make it impossible for that Protestant group to profess adherence to the Scriptural doctrine of the means of grace as confessed by the Lutheran Church. The first is the rationalistic tenet that divine grace acts sovereignly and therefore immediately, that is, without any divinely ordained means. That principle was already enunciated

8) Cf. the expressions of Zwingli on this score, especially after Marburg in 1529, Dr. Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, III, 192 f.; 198 f.; I, 26 f.; also Calvin's fury against Westphal after the latter in 1552 had written his famous *Farrago*; Meusel, *Kirchl. Handlexikon*, VII, 224 f.; Dr. Bente, *Introductions to Symbolical Books*, p. 181 ff.

by Zwingli, though this somewhat crude theologian was unable properly and subtly to motivate it. Zwingli denied that God works faith and conversion through the Gospel, since, as he claimed, many who hear God's Word do not come to faith, while others again are converted long after they have heard the Gospel.⁹⁾ Against the Lutheran doctrine (as also against the papistic error, which invariably he identified with the Lutheran teaching, though recognizing a difference between them in degree), he stoutly maintained that "the Spirit needs no guide or vehicle, since He Himself is the Power and Conveyor by which all things are borne, and therefore He does not require Himself to be borne" (*Fidei Ratio*, Niemeyer, p. 24 f.). However, though Zwingli did not possess the skill of cleverly formulating and motivating this tenet (a gift supremely possessed by Calvin), he already in that early time proclaimed it in all its essential parts, so that later Reformed dogmatists, such as Calvin, Boehl, Hodge, and others, could do but little more than integrate it more scientifically with the Calvinistic system in general, which distinctively has for its basis the sovereignty and sovereign action of God.¹⁰⁾ No matter how zealously such extraordinary Reformed divines as Calvin and Hodge have tried to support from Scripture their rationalistic tenet that God works sovereignly and therefore immediately, or without means, they, just like Zwingli, after all, never got beyond the mere assertion that "so it is and so it must be, since God is the sovereign Lord who does whatever pleases Him."¹¹⁾ But Holy

9) Cf. W. Walther, *Lehrbuch der Symbolik*, p. 224 f.; Guenther, *Symbolik*, p. 270 ff.; *Popular Symbolics*, p. 215 ff.; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III, p. 467 ff.; etc.

10) "The fact that Calvinism has for its fundamental principle the idea of the sovereignty of God is not a matter of minor importance, differentiating it just a trifle from other religious systems. It is of far-reaching consequence for the whole system, giving to Calvinism in the stellar heavens of religious systems the position of a lone star that dwells apart. Other religious systems, particularly Lutheranism, with which it is constantly being compared, have not been able to ascend above a subjective, anthropological-soteriological position, resting in the thought of man's salvation as a sort of final question. Calvinism with its theological standpoint, looking at the world as God's world, originating in Him and existing for Him, being concerned as with a fundamental question about God's sovereignty, takes a far broader view than the soteriological one of man's salvation. . . . To the Calvinist Christ died not only to save men. He died for God's world. In a very real sense it can be said that He died for science. He died for the restoration of society. He died for the restoration of the political world. He died for the restoration of all things." (Prof. H. Hy. Meeter, Th. D., *The Fundamental Principles of Calvinism*, p. 80 ff.)

11) Cf. such statements of Hodge as: "In the work of regeneration all second causes are excluded." "Nothing intervenes between the volition of the Spirit and the regeneration of the soul." "The infusion of a new life into the soul is the immediate work of the Spirit." "The

Scripture simply does not teach the Calvinistic rationalistic tenet upon which Calvinists place so much emphasis; it does not fit in with its *ordo salutis*, and as long as Calvinism maintains this basic error, it can never profess the Scriptural doctrine of the means of grace.

The second peculiarly Calvinistic doctrine, which keeps the Reformed groups from accepting the Bible teaching of the means of grace, is that concerning predestination or election. The fact that very strict and less strict Calvinists¹²⁾ differ here with one another makes very little difference. All teach the distinctive doctrine that in the final analysis God's election is the cause of man's salvation or damnation, because they hold to the tenet of divine sovereignty and absoluteness with unmitigated force. The sovereign God, who does as He pleases, either saves or damns to His great glory; and may this action be either direct or indirect, always it is traceable to His sovereign will.¹³⁾ But as long as Cal-

truth (the Gospel in the case of adults) attends the work of regeneration, but is not the means by which it is effected" (*Systematic Theology*, Chas. Hodge, II, 684 ff.). Cf. also Dr. Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, III, 121 ff., "Die Gnadenmittel," which in our estimation is the most complete and satisfactory chapter ever written on the subject. We suggest that at least this part of his *Christian Dogmatics* be translated into English and placed into the hands of all our pastors, since we shall not enter into, and continue in, the second century of our Church with the past signal Gospel blessings attending our work unless we retain the doctrine of the means of grace in its full truth and purity. Romanistic, Reformed and Socinian errors will threaten our future generations more than they have threatened us in the past, and we must teach them to be on their guard.

12) Cf. Supralapsarians: God created some to salvation, others to damnation; Infralapsarians: God merely permitted man to fall. For a satisfactory popular presentation of the matter cp. *Concordia Cyclopaedia*, sub Predestination and Election; also *Popular Symbolics*, pp. 124 ff.; Walther, *Lehrbuch der Symbolik*, pp. 278 ff.; Dr. Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, III, p. 559; etc.

13) "Die Wurzel, aus der die Praedestinationslehre erwachsen ist, liegt in der besonderen Gottesvorstellung. Gott ist der Herr, der Allherr, der Alleinherr, der von Ewigkeit alles vorherbestimmt hat, der die alleinwirkende Kraft in allem ist; der Souveraen, fuer den es kein anderes Gesetz gibt als seinen Willen, der also ueber das Schicksal der Menschen nach seinem Willen verfuegt, der seinen Willen, einen Menschen zu verdammen, selbst dann durchsetzt, wenn dieser auf die ihm gewordene Berufung eingeht, so dass er nicht von den Erwaehten zu unterscheiden ist, der seinen Willen, einen Menschen selig zu machen, selbst dann durchsetzt, wenn dieser sich noch nach seiner Heiligung in die tiefsten Suenden stuerzt. Gott ist der Selbstherr, der allein seine Verherrlichung im Auge hat, zu der auch das furchtbare Schicksal der einen und das selige der andern dienen soll. Denn unter der Ehre, an der Gott alles gelegen ist, wird nicht die Anerkennung seiner erbarmenden Liebe verstanden, sondern die Anerkennung seines unbeschaenkten Herrseins." (Walther, *Lehrbuch der Symbolik*, p. 279 ff.) No wonder that Calvin himself called this decree of predestination a *horribile decretum*.

vinists hold to this specific (horrible) doctrine of predestination, they cannot maintain the Scriptural doctrine of the means of grace; for the elect in the last analysis need no means of grace, since they are enlightened and brought to faith by the Holy Spirit without means, through His inward illumination, while to the non-elect the means of grace can do no good, since they are bound to perish from the start. If God indeed proclaims to them the doctrine of salvation, He does so only in order that they may have no excuse. The preaching of the Word is only a means for the judgment (*Gerichtsmittel*) of those who are not predestinated to salvation. (Cf. Walther, *Lehrbuch der Symbolik*, p. 225.) However, Calvinism will never surrender its specific doctrine of predestination, because this is required by, and supplementary to, its doctrine of divine sovereignty. The two stand and fall together. Absolute predestinationism is indigenous to its rationalistic system.

A third Calvinistic doctrine which stands in the way of the return of the Reformed to the Scriptural doctrine of the means of grace is that of particular, or limited, divine grace. In considering the Calvinistic doctrine, we must bear in mind that in the sphere of Reformed doctrinal thought we are faced by a system which is everywhere rationally consistent. From the Calvinistic tenet of God's sovereignty follows also that of particular, or limited, grace, just as does the peculiar doctrine of predestination, which we have just considered. But as long as the teaching of limited grace is held by the Calvinists, they can and will never adopt the Scriptural doctrine of the means of grace; for the elect need no means of grace, since the Holy Ghost will take care of their conversion by immediate divine illumination, while for those not predestinated there is no grace that may be conferred on them by means. The Calvinistic system is everywhere marked by an absolute either-or, which simply does not permit the individual believer to comfort himself with the universal promises of divine grace.¹⁴⁾ This un-

14) Cf. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 449: "Since Calvinism denies the *gratia universalis* and insists that the grace of God in Christ Jesus is particular (*gratia particularis*), that is, designed for, and confined to, a limited number of men (the elect), it is obliged to teach that there are no real means of grace for the non-elect. On the contrary, for all those whom God has predestinated to eternal condemnation the means of grace become 'means of damnation,' as Calvin asserts. '*Est universalis vocatio, qua per externam Verbi praedicationem omnes pariter ad se invitat Deus, etiam quibus eam in mortis odorem et gravioris condemnationis materiam proponit.*' (Inst., III:24, 8.) It is true, Calvin ascribes the damnation of the non-elect also to their own rejection of divine grace, which is offered to them in the 'universal call' of God through the preaching of the external Word; but this is one of the many inconsistencies of Calvinistic soteriology. In reality, according to the Calvinistic view, there is no divine grace for the non-elect, and hence there is no occasion for them to despise or reject it. He writes: 'Only the

scriptural insistence by Calvinism on the partiality of divine grace is one of the greatest tragedies of its dour system and has given to the Reformed denominations that intolerable severity in teaching and living which distinguishes them so strikingly from the Lutheran churches. Alas, unable to bear the harsh yoke, practically all Reformed denominations in recent years have in practise repudiated Calvin's doctrine; however, they did not return to the Scriptural position, as espoused by Lutheranism, but chose the broad way of Modernism, as we shall point out later, with an adequate motivation of this disastrous course.

The last fatal doctrine that prevents Calvinism from accepting the Scriptural doctrine of the means of grace is the inherent legalism of its system, which results in such a tragic commingling of Law and Gospel that Lutheranism with its blessed comfort of the gracious universal promises of the Gospel must ever remain to it both unintelligible and undesirable. We shall not occupy ourselves with the intense legalistic stress with which Calvinism has revived the Old Testament legal enactments and their corollaries in their practical application to the Christian life. But this one-sided emphasis on Calvinistic legalism is not the worst fault of the Reformed system. The real tragedy of Calvinism consists in this, that in its system the Law has so completely overshadowed all teachings that *nothing is left of the Gospel* in its proper Scriptural and Lutheran sense. In fact, in Calvinism the Gospel itself has been frozen solidly into Law, so that it has no cheer or warmth for the poor sinner seeking divine grace but only ice-cold desolation and congealing rigor. Lutheranism defines the Gospel as the message of God's grace in Christ Jesus, who died for the sins of all men and now *χάριτι* offers to all men appealing to His grace life and salvation. Such a definition of the Gospel, however, is repugnant to Calvinism. "The Calvinists deny the *gratia universalis* and the operation of the Holy Ghost through the divinely appointed means of grace. In consequence of these errors they do not proclaim the universal Gospel-promises of grace to all sin-

elect experience the inward power of the Spirit and receive in addition to the outward signs also the *res* or *virtus sacramenti*.' (*Inst.*, III: 24, 15; *Consens. Tigur.*, c. 16.) In short, according to Calvin, there is no saving grace for the non-elect, even though at times he charges the *reprobi* and *impii* with rejection of divine grace. In Calvin's case this mode of speech is only a meaningless repetition of the language of orthodox Christianity, which rightly speaks of a rejection of divine grace on the part of the *improbi* and *impii*, since on the basis of Scripture it teaches that divine grace is universal and the divine call to salvation therefore serious. Grace can be rejected by men only in case it is seriously offered to all (*vocatio serie*), as our dogmatists have always pointed out."

ners but condition the sinner's salvation on his compliance with the prescribed conditions on which God will accept the sinner.¹⁵⁾

Calvinism therefore cannot accept the Scriptural doctrine of the means of grace as proclaimed and defended by the Lutheran Church. Its only means of grace, in the final analysis, is the eternal, absolute predestination of God unto salvation. Upon that arbitrary, sovereign act of the almighty God depends a sinner's salvation, and on nothing else. In the elect the Holy Spirit, in conformity with God's eternal election, in due time, by immediate action, effects faith and regeneration and thus brings them to actual participation of Christ and His redemption, nevermore to fall away from grace, since the elect, once brought to faith, can never lose their faith but only its exercise.¹⁶⁾ But how can the

15) Cf. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 484; *Popular Symbolics*, p. 223 ff.; Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, III, p. 291 ff.: "Daher kommt es, dass Calvinisten Definitionen vom Evangelium aufstellen, die tatsaechlich Gesetz sind und mit den Definitionen aller andern Werklehrer uebereinstimmen. Sie beschreiben naemlich das Evangelium als blossen 'Heilsplan' oder als eine Erklaerung der Bedingungen, durch deren Leistung der Mensch der goettlichen Gnade theilhaftig werde. Alexander Hodge antwortet auf die Frage: 'What is included in the external call?': 1. A declaration of the plan of salvation. 2. A declaration of duty on the part of the sinner to repent and believe. 3. A declaration of the motives which ought to influence the sinner's mind, such as fear or hope, remorse or gratitude. 4. A promise of acceptance in the case of all those who comply with the conditions' (*Outlines*, p. 333 ff.). Den Calvinisten ist das Evangelium alles andere, nur nicht die Verkuendung und die Darbietung der von Christo erworbenen Vergebung der Suenden. Ebenso sagt Charles Hodge von dem 'universal call': 'Being a proclamation of the terms on which God is willing to save sinners and an exhibition of the duty of fallen men in relation to that plan, it of necessity binds all those who are in the condition which the plan contemplates. It is in this respect analogous to the Moral Law' (*Syst. Theol.*, II:642). Nebenbei bemerkt: Aus dieser calvinistischen Auffassung des Evangeliums wird auch verstanden, in welchem Sinn selbst strenge Calvinisten gelegentlich von einem 'general offer of the Gospel' reden. Sie koennen im Widerspruch mit ihrer Lehre von der partikularen Gnade so reden, insofern sie unter Evangelium nicht die Proklamation der Vergebung der Suenden verstehen, die fuer alle und die einzelnen Personen der Menschenwelt durch Christum vorhanden ist, sondern die Bekanntmachung eines Grundsatzes oder die Bekanntmachung von einer Anzahl Pflichten und Bedingungen, die zunaechst ueberhaupt nicht auf Personen gehen, sondern erst dann eine Beziehung auf Personen gewinnen, wenn diese sich den Pflichten unterzogen und die gestellten Bedingungen erfuellt haben." In our opinion this is the keenest judgment which we have ever met with on the Calvinistic predicament in dealing with the Gospel. The system unfortunately has no place for the Gospel, and so it is transmuted into a quasi-Law, which has no comfort for the poor, miserable sinner who seeks remission of sins. This is the amazing tragedy of Calvinism's one-sided emphasis on God's sovereignty.

16) "The Calvinistic dogma of final perseverance is a distortion of the Scripture teaching on final perseverance. The dogma: Once in grace, always in grace; no true believer can totally fall from grace, though he commit enormous sins, denies the Scripture teaching both as to temporary believers, Luke 8:13, and as to the temporary total loss of faith

repentant sinner, the believer in Christ, comfort himself in hours of spiritual trial with the assurance of his election? Calvinism, unable to point the individual sinner to the universal Gospel-promises, must direct him to the *inward assurance* of the divine grace wrought there immediately by the Holy Ghost, or the *gratia infusa*, if this papistic term may be employed in Calvinistic doctrine. W. Walther in his classic *Lehrbuch der Symbolik*, on the basis of Calvinistic writings, presents the matter thus: "‘Wenn wir die Gewissheit unserer Erwaehlung suchen, so muessen wir uns an die *signa posteriora* halten, die sichere Zeugnisse von ihr sind.’ ‘Das Zeugnis der Erwaehlung ist die Berufung.’ Denn die Erwaehlten, und nur die, werden berufen. ‘Wir muessen also bei unserer Nachforschung den Weg einschlagen, dass wir von der *Berufung Gottes* ausgehen und bei ihr stehen bleiben.’ (Inst., III: 24, 1. 4.) Da aber auch *Nichterwaehlte* berufen werden, so muss die Frage lauten: Bin ich *wirksam* berufen? Die wirksame Berufung schafft in mir den Glauben und das Bewusstsein der Vergebung und die Heiligung. Weil aber dies alles auch solche zu besitzen meinen, die schliesslich doch verworfen werden, so muss es noch genauer lauten: ‘Die, welche den Herrn Jesum *wahrhaft* glauben und ihn aufrichtig lieben, sich bemuehend, vor ihm in allem guten Gewissen zu wandeln, die koennen gewiss ueberzeugt sein, dass sie in dem Stand der Gnade sind, und koennen sich freuen in der Hoffnung der Herrlichkeit Gottes, welche Hoffnung sie niemals zuschanden werden laesst.’ (Westm., 579, 11.) . . . ‘Hoechst selten,’ schreibt Calvin, ‘wird einer gefunden, dessen Herz nicht bisweilen von diesem Gedanken gequaelt wird: Woher sollte das Heil anders kommen als aus Gottes Erwaehlung? Was fuer eine Offenbarung gibt es ueber die Erwaehlung? Wenn dieser Gedanke einmal bei jemand maechtig geworden ist, so peinigt er entweder den Ungluecklichen mit schrecklichen Qualen oder macht ihn voellig bestuerzt.’ (Inst., III: 14, 4.)” That is Calvinism’s own admission that its rigid Law system has no other comfort for the troubled sinner than his own good works—his true faith, his true love, his eager endeavor to walk in purity of life and keep his conscience unspotted. Such is the dreadful penalty which Calvinism must pay for casting aside the Scriptural doctrine of the means of grace. In his *Fidei Ratio* Zwingli said: “I believe, yea, I know, that all

possible on the part of the elect.” (Pop. Symb., p. 127.) Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 436: “*Tenendum est, quantumvis exigua sit ac debilis in electis fides, quia tamen Spiritus Dei certa illis arrha est ac sigillum suae adoptionis, nunquam ex eorum cordibus deleri posse eius sculpturam.*” (Inst., II: 2, 12). The doctrine of the inamissibility of faith is taught by the Calvinists to remove the uncertainty which the individual Reformed believer must feel with respect to his state of grace in view of the fact that he dare not believe in universal grace (*gratia universalis*).”

Sacraments not merely do not distribute or convey grace but not even bring or administer it." (Cf. *Pop. Symb.*, p. 215.) For certainty of salvation he therefore had to point his followers to their good works, and thus he again landed in the camp of Romanism, which to escape he foolishly thought it necessary to reject the Biblical doctrine of the means of grace as promulgated by Luther on the basis of the clear Scripture-passages.

It is perhaps needless to add that neither Zwingli nor Calvin practised according to their anti-Biblical theories, but pointed to the objective Scripture-promises in all cases where troubled Christians appealed to them for advice. W. Walther writes of this: "Darauf antwortet Calvin immer wieder mit Luther: Sie (die Heilsgewissheit) stuetzt sich auf die objektiven Verheissungen Gottes, deren *scopus* Christus ist. Denn weil wir in Christo erwaeht sind, muessen wir, wenn wir unserer Erwaehlung gewiss sein wollen, *unsern Blick auf Christum richten.*" (III:24, 5.) (Cf. *Lehrb. der Symbolik*, p. 250.) Only, this "looking to Christ" did not satisfy Calvin as it did Luther; for Calvin, following his system of absolute predestination, had to admit such a thing as a *vain looking to Christ*, namely, in all those cases where the individuals are non-elect. Calvinism has thus proved itself unable to comfort afflicted sinners because it refused to let them apply to themselves in all their full, rich comfort the objective promises of divine grace offered in the Gospel. Calvinism repudiated the means of grace; it therefore repudiated also the Gospel and the salvation which the Gospel holds out to sinners. For Calvinists to be saved means therefore to reject their false doctrines and by that "fortunate inconsistency" which often is found in errorists to believe and maintain in practise what is cast aside in theory.

3

Calvinism, in its rigid system of speculative truths, is inherently rationalistic. It is so when it repudiates the means of grace ordained by God for the salvation of sinners. (Cf. the rationalistic axiom: God needs no *dur* or *vehiculum* when He comes to men.) It is so also when, in the final analysis, it comforts the sinner by the good works he has done (naturalism). But Calvinism is a most vexing and perturbing theological system, and since the means of grace must be repudiated anyway and salvation be secured by good works, Modernism represents the theological line of least resistance, which innate Calvinistic rationalism naturally suggests. It is therefore not strange that Modernism has made such dreadful havoc in Calvinistic circles, rejecting the means of grace in their entirety, together with Christ's vicarious atonement, and teaching *ex professo* salvation by good works. Modernism has

no means of grace, since it has no grace at all to bestow. It represents a complete return to the pagan teaching of work-righteousness and demands of the individual nothing more than some efforts to placate the existing deity by good deeds. No matter by what name Modernism may seek to ingratiate itself, whether by one that is seemingly orthodox or by one that proclaims its paganism openly, it is just this and nothing more.

The type at present popular in many circles is a mediating one, ingratiating itself as a quasi-return to Christian orthodoxy. Thus Kagawa of Japan writes in his widely read book *Christ and Japan*: "Christ is able to save not only the individual but society as well. How, then, can society be saved? By actually realizing through the development of the cooperative movement the brotherhood love and the socialized love which Christianity in various forms conserved across a period of nineteen hundred years. Then, if we utilize it on an international scale and in the interests of world peace, the benefits derived from such cooperative effort, war will be definitely eliminated from the life of mankind." (P. 125.) Before this he had written: "Christ gave His life for love. This love it is that moves me. Christ, who died for sinners, summons us to become the concrete expression of this redeeming love to the so-called scum of society, of the nation and of the world. I am profoundly convinced that aside from the practise of redeeming love there is no way to dedicate our capital, our machines, and our social order to God." (P. 115.) Kagawa is only carrying out the socialized program of orthodox Calvinism in action.

No less famous than Kagawa, indeed even more so, is Karl Barth, who is now holding forth in Switzerland, after the Nazi government expelled him from Germany. Barthianism has been repudiated at various times by orthodox Calvinists, but Barthianism is nothing else than Calvinism in modern application and approach. In Barth's system we find Calvin's principle of the sovereignty of God and man's utter helplessness in the destiny-shaping hands of God and also his tenet of the utter unreliability of the means of grace (the Word and the Sacraments) to reveal God to man, so that man can come into contact with God only through His immediate self-revelation, which occurs, of course, when man contemplates the Holy Scriptures. The Bible, according to Barthianism, is not the Word of God, but by studying it, the "Word of God" reveals itself in man. Here we have Calvin's old principle of the Holy Spirit's immediate action upon man's soul. No wonder Dr. Brunner is now lecturing in Princeton.¹⁷⁾

¹⁷⁾ There are so many good books on Barthianism that one hardly knows which one to recommend. Often mentioned are the following: *A Conservative Looks to Barth and Brunner*. *An Interpretation of*

No one would feel inclined to connect Neo-Thomism with Calvinism, just as little as the casual observer would join Calvinism with Romanism in general. But the undercurrents of basic thoughts are the same in both apparently so contradictory systems. Neo-Thomism is a revival of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas against the atheistic isms of today, such as humanism, behaviorism, atomism, secularism, positivism, and the like. But Neo-Thomism is intrinsically rationalistic, as also historic Calvinism is intrinsically rationalistic. The common denominator of both is a sanctified intellectualism which opposes itself to the Schleiermacherian emphasis on feeling in religion. Both, too, are strictly theocentric, just as the isms which Neo-Thomism opposes are basically anthropocentric. Both again seek the cure of modern social ills not in the preaching of the Gospel but in an intensified activity of the Church as the "embryo of the world."¹⁸⁾

The old bland naturalism of a decade ago, which finally turned out to be only a crude sort of pantheism, is now being replaced by a new *supernaturalism*, which again acknowledges God's transcendence and rejects the crass, atheistic mechanicalism of yesterday. But in this again we find an application of the orthodox Calvinistic principle of the sovereignty of God. So also is *religious experimentalism*, commonly joined more or less with religious mysticism, innately kin to Calvinistic subjectivism, which, as we have shown, seeks assurance of salvation in the mysterious unmediated operation of the Holy Ghost in the soul of the called. Both Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard center their mysticism at this very point, which later was to be developed in a more virile, aggressive form by Barth-Brunner. Even Niebuhr's ethical collectivism may be viewed as a faint, modernized reflection of Calvinism's program of mass redemption by group ethization. It is of course not our intention to blame Calvinism for every possible modern departure from divine truth, just as little as Lutheranism can be blamed for the myriad social and religious disturbances that followed upon the Reformation. Calvinism, nevertheless, has wielded an unspeakable influence upon the religious thought of

Barthian Theology, by Holmes Rolston; *The Teaching of Karl Barth*, by R. B. Hoyle. These are somewhat old, but they are nevertheless useful. Brief, but helpful articles appeared in the *Religious Digest* of 1938 and before. We recommend for comparison the articles in the September number of the *Religious Digest*, 1938, "Emil Brunner Comes to America"; "Why I Am Not a Barthian"—the latter a very good criticism of Barthianism from the orthodox Calvinistic viewpoint.

¹⁸⁾ *Present Theological Tendencies*, by E. E. Aubrey; *Present Tendencies in Religious Thought*, by A. C. Knudson; *Religious Realism*, by D. C. Macintosh; *Trends of Christian Thinking*, by C. S. Macfarland. These are some of the many books which may aid the reader in gaining a survey of modern religious thought.

today, and through the inherent rationalism of its system, by which it, in a very one-sided manner, exalts the sovereignty of God, rejects the means of grace as the instruments through which the Holy Spirit operates toward man's salvation, limits the divine counsel of salvation, emphasizes the feeling of salvation as the source and foundation of its assurance, it has opened wide the doors for a thousand enthusiastic schemes in religion. By its subjective experimentalism Calvinism finally drifts back to scholasticism, and in both we find those potent rationalistic germ thoughts which today bud out into ever new varieties of man-made religious schemes and speculations.

4

But they do not matter. All the isms of the world do not matter. They float about for a while in the air like white summer clouds and then disappear. But they do waste much precious time, which really belongs to the study and preaching of the Gospel. God's ancient rule stands even today: "For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God διὰ τῆς μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος σῶσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας," 1 Cor. 1:21. This verse of learned, loyal St. Paul was central in Luther's Reformation. God indeed is sovereign, and never was God's sovereignty more majestically stressed than in Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio*. But Luther did not place the sovereign God into the center of the Christian religion, which he preached anew. While Calvin was preeminently a Law-preacher, Luther was preeminently a Gospel-preacher. Luther preached the Law only as ancillary to the Gospel, and it was the God of the Gospel, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, reconciled by the death of His Son, upon whom he gazed in all his theological thinking and preaching. In the center of his religious thought beamed the grace of God in Christ Jesus,—grace for *all*, and *plenary* grace to cover all sin. And this grace of God in Christ, the *merita Christi*, Luther sought to obtain not in some immediate divine action but in the Gospel and the Sacraments, which his simple childlike faith received and trusted as a loving child trusts a father's promise. There is where we must take our stand today in the maelstrom of confusing religious thought, proclaimed by errorists who, "ever learning, are yet never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7), no matter how learned they may seem to be. As we as a Church enter into the second century of our existence, may we hold fast also to the doctrine of the means of grace, which Luther again proclaimed to the world in its whole purity and guard against the rationalistic idiosyncrasies both of Calvinistic and papistic enthusiasts. Also of Calvinism as such it is true what Luther said of Papism: *Simpliciter est merus enthusiasmus*.

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