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## The Province of Human Reason in Religion

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view made God the cause of sin. What could be pardoned in Flacius could not be pardoned in his followers. This is true likewise with respect to the inference drawn from an article and opposing faith or an article of faith if the inference has been thoroughly explained and it is of a nature which everybody can easily understand. People, as a rule, are not so dense as to let themselves be deceived where simple mathematical processes are involved. Now, whoever can handle figures can understand, and more easily at that, inferences drawn from doctrines of faith" (*Sigalion. Argentor., 1668, p. 201 s.*)

All this, as stated above, we heartily accept; but to construct on the basis of this difference the theory sponsored in the quotations submitted we have to oppose as both illogical and dangerous.

(To be continued)

A.

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## The Province of Human Reason in Religion

(A Conference Paper)

### I

At the very outset it is necessary to define what I mean by human reason. By this term I mean the entire sum of natural knowledge and powers of the human mind, including intuition and conscience and the ability to reason correctly. This human reason is a very precious gift of God and is therefore also to be prized very highly. It is a sign of great folly, corruption, aye, of Satanic delusion, to despise and teach others to despise God's gifts in nature. "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving," 1 Tim. 4:4.

It is true, Scripture tells us: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." It is true, Scripture also tells us: "If any man come to Me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." But in these passages of Scripture God does not tell us to despise His natural gifts. What He does teach is that we are to esteem His spiritual gifts higher than any gift of nature, for it is through His spiritual gifts only that our natural gifts will prove to be real and lasting blessings. If—remember, we say, if—it is necessary, *in order to retain the spiritual gifts of God*, especially eternal life and God's favor,—if for this purpose it is necessary to sacrifice any earthly gift, though it be our eyesight or our life, the Christian must be willing

to make that sacrifice. But we are not to throw away the least of God's natural gifts unnecessarily. Jesus had His disciples gather even the fragments that remained from a meal so that nothing would be lost.

Now, among these natural gifts, our power to reason soundly and to understand correctly is certainly one of the most valuable. Human reason, as it expresses itself especially in articulate human language, is that gift of God which lifts man above the beast. Even the heathen recognized this. Cicero writes: "*Quis hoc non iure miretur, summeque in eo elaborandum arbitretur ut quo uno homines maxime bestiis praestent in hoc hominibus ipsis antecellat.*"\*

I would call attention to a German work that speaks of this at length, Bettex, *Natur und Christentum*. Our Church has never become guilty of teaching that contempt for nature, natural gifts, and creation which many others teach.

This priceless gift of human reason before the fall of man into sin was, just like all his other natural gifts, though limited, yet perfect. Since man fell into sin, reason has become corrupt, and man has become foolish. All his mental powers, *e. g.*, perception, apperception, recollection, etc., have degenerated and have weakened. Men themselves recognize this folly in man. Almost every one is familiar with Shakespeare's expression "What fools these mortals be!" (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act III, Scene 2.) However, even in corrupt man we find this gift of God, and in some of these humans we find a mental capacity of considerable brilliancy.

The most serious corruption of human reason is found in those who deny God and refuse to recognize that which heaven and earth and all creatures demonstrate and proclaim, the glory, majesty, and eternal Godhead of the Creator. Ps. 19. Therefore Scripture rightly declares: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

When a person becomes a child of God, a believing Christian, he is regenerated, changed. The Holy Spirit begins to work in his mind and heart, and thereby also his powers of reason are affected. Such a person is delivered from his worst follies. The unbelieving fool loves his sin, his Pharisaism, and is even proud of them. "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things," Phil. 3:19. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess," Luke 18:11, 12.

The Christian has gained so much intelligence and enlighten-

\* *De Oratore*, Lib. I, c. 8.

ment by the Holy Spirit that he now detests these shameful sins, and desires to be freed from the shackles of vice and wickedness. And yet, even the Christian's reasoning powers on this earth never reach that perfection which they had before the fall of man, and, of course, they remain limited.

This gift of God, human reason, is to be used properly. All men know something of this; the Christian certainly knows that sound reason definitely belongs to those talents which God gives to us with the command to invest and to use so that thereby we may glorify Him and benefit our neighbor. In the parable of the Pounds, Luke 19:12-26, we are told that the Lord expects those to whom He has given gifts so to use them as to gain more. He was very angry with the servant who had not done this and said, "Take from him the pound and give it to him that hath ten pounds." The Bible therefore demands of us that we walk not as fools but as wise.

And what is the proper use of human reason? We should certainly use it for the purpose for which it was given, for the management of our *temporal affairs*. All sane men recognize this. Those who lose all sense of this are placed in asylums. There is no difficulty about this; we ourselves have learned to read and to write and to cipher, and we teach our children this knowledge, and we also study history, and man from his reason has learned that history repeats itself. I need not discuss details to show that men with their reason have accomplished no little in mechanics, chemistry, physics, have made valuable discoveries and inventions.

Permit me to digress here just far enough to warn against a common error, namely, the overestimation of man's reason because of these accomplishments. Let us keep in mind that everything which man has discovered has been here since the creation of the world. In one respect, moreover, the discoveries and inventions of man rather reveal or indicate his stupidity than his ingenuity and shrewdness and wisdom. It took man thousands of years to discover some of the evident powers of nature, which God had given from the very beginning. Man has been *very slow* to discover and to use the gifts which God has given in such rich abundance. Men could have used the telephone, the telegraph, wireless, aeroplanes, steam engines, automobiles, thousands of years ago. All the material and powers for these things were here from the creation of the world. But it took man thousands of years to discover them and to use them. Indeed, to this day man has not found or employed all of God's gifts. True, our age has accomplished far more than earlier ages, but altogether man's progress is slow.

Again, let us also remember that this progress in mechanics, resulting in discoveries and inventions, is in accordance with the

will of God, for God said to man in the very beginning: "Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." Man has not added to this creation as much as a grain of sand or a drop of water, and he has not even discovered or found all the natural blessings which exist all about him. God wants us to use our reason in fighting against sickness, crime, poverty, and disaster of any nature.

I have said that man's reason even at best is limited. It is *limited even as to things of this earth*. Remember that we are now speaking of reason in earthly matters. Our concept of time and space in which we live is limited. By our natural reason we cannot discover how this world came into existence. We know nothing of its end. We know nothing of its purpose. We do not know whether space is limited or unlimited; we can conceive of neither. To this day, man does not know what is keeping the sun burning. There is much about the weather and the proportion of the sexes of which we know nothing. Just as our five senses are limited (we can see just so far and no further; we can hear just so much and no more), so our reason is limited. This dare never be forgotten by one who wishes to use his reason correctly.

## II

But now let us face the real question. What use may we make of our reason when it comes to religious matters?

The first proper use of reason in religious matters to which I would call attention is in the field of *natural* religion. Our natural reason tells us of the existence of the Creator. We appeal to the universal conviction of mankind. It is true, because of the corruption of natural reason there have been those who called themselves infidels and atheists. But in reality every man has all about him the revelation of God in nature, and if he follows what his own reason tells him, he recognizes that this creation about him did not produce itself but was fashioned by an all-wise Being. Therefore we also find the knowledge of a supreme being, the consciousness of a higher power, and the worship of some god or gods everywhere upon this earth, among all men. Plato, Cicero, Horace, Homer, Herodotus, and many more recognized the existence of divinities. Cicero, in his *De Natura Deorum*, has this sentence: "*De quo autem omnium natura consentit, id verum esse necesse est.*" Now, it is true, because of the weakness of corrupted reason and because they saw much of the folly of the superstitions of the ignorant rabble, much doubt, uncertainty, probabilism, and skepticism entered the minds of these poor people. Cicero has this sentence: "*Mirabile videtur quod non rideat aruspex quum*

*aruspicem viderit.*" Moreover, since they, *forgetful of its limitations*, wished to use their natural reason in order to sound the very depths of God's secrets, they became lost in a very labyrinth of conjectures and fallacies. The story is well known which Cicero tells of the tyrant Hiero, who demanded of a wise man to tell him what kind of being God is. This wise man requested a day's time to consider the matter. When the day had passed and he was asked to give an answer, he demanded two more days for the proper investigation of this question. When the two days were over, he demanded three days more. When the tyrant hereupon asked him why he increased the number of days, the wise man answered, "Because the longer I think upon this matter, the darker it appears to me."

But all this is not to cause us to despise, for instance, the proofs for God's existence based upon natural reason. Sound reason must come to the conclusion that a being of infinite wisdom and power has created this world. There is the proof which is based upon the intuition of man. This is called the *ontological* proof or argument, which argues that the very idea of God in man's consciousness proves that there is a God. The use of the word *God* in our language and the reference to God by men when in distress shows this. Then there is the proof taken from the universal consent of mankind, the *argumentum e consensu gentium*. The Bible speaks of this in Rom. 1 and elsewhere. Then there is the *cosmological* proof, which forces us to assume a cause for this universe. And finally, there is also the *teleological* proof, which rests upon the universal order and adaptation of cause and effect and purpose in creation.

It is a proper use of our rational powers to insist upon these proofs and to argue from them. But we must be forewarned that no one is made a Christian through this argumentation, though it be ever so acute and ever so philosophically true.

Again, it is a right use of our reason in religious questions when we argue in favor of that which is morally right and condemn that which is morally wrong, when we speak of the Law of God which condemns wickedness and approves goodness. While it is true that in questions of law, legality, right and wrong, punishment and reward, God's revelation has influenced mankind, even those who are not Christians, yet we must admit that in man by nature there is a moral sense of right and wrong, and that we use our reason correctly when we refer to this. Our own conscience revolts against certain sins, and Scripture also tells us that the conscience excuses or condemns men from their actions, Rom. 2:14, 15. Man knows very well that there is such a thing as human depravity. Cicero in one of his Philippics tells Mark

Anthony: "Mark Anthony, you are guilty of such things as I would not even mention here among decent people." Sallust speaks of those who live "*pecudum ferarumque ritu*," and even though some people for the sake of argument would declare that man is only a higher animal, yet they are very ready, if treated like an animal, to say, "Here, I am not a dog; I want to be treated like a human being."

The heathen Romans prided themselves on the justice of their laws, founded upon their natural ability to judge between right and wrong by reason only. They recognize the right of a man to appeal to a higher authority or the proper authority. Paul said to the centurion, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" This appeal was made to the natural sense of justice. Again, Paul told Festus, when that Roman judge wished to take him to Jerusalem and have him judged by the Jews: "I stand at Caesar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged; to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die; but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar," Acts 25:10, 11. Throughout Scripture we find men, in these questions of natural right, to act not only according to divine revelation but according to their own common sense. David told Saul: "Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt," etc. 1 Sam. 24. Jesus, having healed a man on the Sabbath, appealed to the Pharisees' natural sense of what is right when He said: "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath-day?" Luke 14:5. St. Paul, speaking of the Cretans, said that even one of their own men called them liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. Their natural reason showed them the despicable shame of these things.

Also in *defending the Holy Scriptures*, in apologetics, we may use human reason; we may call attention to the *harmony* of the Scriptures, to the fulfilment of the prophecies, to its beneficial, blessed effects upon those who use it aright. Here again, we should not expect such argumentation to produce Christians, but it is certainly not wrong to use our reason, to urge these rational arguments in defense of the Scriptures. Let us keep in mind that the Bible also speaks of our duty to *stop the mouths of the braggarts* who claim that the Bible contradicts itself, that it is a conglomeration of poorly related facts, a mere mass of heterogeneous mystic claims, foolish tales, rash statements, evident falsehoods, and gross errors. True, by this we may not convert such vain talkers; but by using good, sound reasons we may stop their

mouths, so that they have nothing valid to urge in reply. The very fact that we should by our good deeds also put to silence the ignorance of foolish men appeals to our common sense, 1 Pet. 2:15: "For so is the will of God that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men"; 1 Pet. 3:16: "Having a good conscience, that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ."

We should also use our reason in refuting the unreasonable arguments of skeptics and unbelievers. Infidels often claim that a miracle is impossible. That claim not only contradicts the Scriptures but is perfectly unreasonable, for it demands of us to believe that God has created something greater than Himself, something which He cannot change at will. Our common sense demands that he who believes that there is a God, a Creator, must admit that this Creator can control and change His creation at will. Many similar unreasonable statements of skeptics may be, and at times are, met by reason alone. It is also reasonable to say that man is by nature a religious being and that he has a natural need of religion.

### III

So far we have not as yet touched upon a very important use of reason in religion. That is what the dogmatists call the *usus instrumentalis*; that means, that we should use our reason to understand *what* God is telling us in Holy Scripture. True, He is speaking to us of things of which our reason knows nothing, *e. g.*, forgiveness of sin, heaven and hell, the Trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit's person, etc. But He speaks of these things in human words. He employs human language, and He addresses us in this language so as to make known to us to a certain degree at least what we ought to know concerning those spiritual truths of which we have no knowledge except that which He Himself can and does reveal to us. Thus, in reading His Word, we should use our common sense, our reason, *not to sit in judgment upon the truth or justice of what God is saying but to learn exactly what it is that He tells us.* God is God; our reason is not God but a creature and must therefore be subject to God.

The Lutheran Church has always insisted that the Bible is written in language which we are to understand in accordance with the natural laws of language. It is therefore necessary that we again review the nature of language. In general, we call language a *convention* among men. By convention we mean something upon which men have agreed among themselves. There are a number of languages, but in order to state clearly what we mean, we shall simply speak of one language. In any one language there are cer-



tain sounds which, when they are made with the proper emphasis and, even better, with proper intonation and gesture, will mean certain things to those who understand them. Men have agreed on the meaning of these signs. Let us use a few plain illustrations: Persons who wear a cross thereby indicate that they are members of some Christian Church. You never see a Rabbi wearing a cross. No one should wear a watch-charm showing the square and the compass emblem except a Freemason. Any other wearing this emblem would be considered dishonest. If I say in English: "Give me that money," these sounds mean a certain thing to those who understand English; a German who does not know English does not know what I am saying, he does not understand what these words mean. Again, if I say to a German: "Gib mir das Geld," he understands that, whereas a native of India who has never learned German would not know what these sounds mean. However, words are not only used as sounds, but they are also used in script and in print. The Malayalam script or the Tamil script means nothing to me, but English script and the print of several other languages I understand. Now, God made use of this system of sounds and of signs by which man makes his opinions and feelings known to others. We know very well that God's Word is written in the letters of the Hebrew and in the letters of the Greek language. And we study these languages in order to learn what He says. We use our reason, our mental powers. We also translate these writings into the language which is more familiar to us. We use our reason, our mental powers; and that is perfectly justified. And because the same sounds may at different times mean different things, we follow those rules of human language in understanding Scripture which we also use in understanding any other book. The Bible was not written in mystic, secret, cabalistic language.

In order to understand a man aright when he uses words, we must know of what he is speaking. When a printer is speaking of his type and is mentioning their *justification*, he is using this word "justification" in a sense entirely different from that in which it is used in the Bible. He is speaking of properly spacing the lines in a column of type. Again, in the Bible the word "law" is used in different senses. The Bible declares: "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." Here the Law does not refer specifically to the commandments. In this verse the word "Law," "Torah," comprehends the whole Word of God, with special emphasis upon the Gospel, just as it is used in a similar sense in Micah 4:2: "The Law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem." We may also compare Ps. 1:2. But when Paul speaks of the Law in distinction from the Gospel, he means

the commandments, with their threats and their promises. In interpreting Scripture here, we use our reason, and we demand of others that they interpret it according to the manner in which reasonable people deal with other writings also. In the same manner we deal with figurative language. Our reason also tells us that we are to understand a man literally unless there is something to inform us that he is speaking figuratively. When I point to a photograph of a woman and say, That is my mother, no reasonable person misunderstands me to mean that it is actually, in person and in flesh and blood, the woman from whom I was born. They know that it is a photograph of my mother. But when a man in his last will and testament writes: "I leave, give, and bequeath to my son Charles the house and ground on the southwest corner of Broadway and Olive Street in the City of St. Louis, State of Missouri, as it stands in my name today," no reasonable person would dare to claim that he is using figurative language and that he means a picture of this building. Apply these rules to the explanations given of the Lord's Supper by Reformed and by Lutherans. The Reformed use their reason to sit in judgment upon God's statement "This is My body." They say: We do not believe that. That is impossible. He could not have meant that. And while they would not dare to say that He should have said, This represents My body, yet according to their claim they have found a better expression than that which Jesus uses. That in itself is an improper use of human reason.† Then in the explanation of these words they refuse to use their reason according to the *usus instrumentalis*, which would tell us that we must understand these words literally, because they are the words of a last will and testament. The Lutherans, on the other hand, do not sit in judgment upon God's Word. They say: "However much this may all seem above our reason, since God has said it, it is true. After all, we are more rationally reasonable in this matter than those who insist that they will rationally explain away the words of the Lord Jesus.

Speaking of the words of Jesus in John 6:53 "Except ye eat of the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you," it is not only contrary to Scripture, it is positively foolish and unreasonable to apply these words to the sacramental eating and drinking in the Lord's Supper, for Jesus Himself tells us that all who believe, even little children, who do not eat and drink sacramentally, have eternal life. But of this eating and drinking here in John 6 we are told that no one can receive spiritual life

† Cf. *Proceedings of Twenty-sixth Convention of the Southern District of the Missouri Synod*, p. 12.

or enter into heaven except he partake of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood in this particular manner. This therefore must refer to the spiritual eating and drinking by faith. Here again we see that those persons who wish to base their teaching upon reason are unreasonable, because they fail to recognize the figurative character of a Scripture-passage, and those people who base their religion upon the express Word of God, explained in accordance with the sound laws of language and logic and rightly understood, are, after all, more reasonable because they make a right use of their reason in apprehending what is taught in the Word.

Here we have already touched on the perfectly reasonable principle that dark, mysterious, difficult passages be explained according to those passages which are perfectly clear. All reasonable persons make use of this principle also in the explanation of secular writings. No doubtful or ambiguous statement in a book or document is cited to refute a clear and unmistakable statement of the same author. The writer's teaching is taken from his clear, definite statements, not from words whose meaning is not clear to us.

Again, when Jesus said: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now," He was certainly not promising His disciples revelations which would contradict what He had said up to that time. St. Paul expressly declares: "I have not shunned to declare unto you *all the counsel of God.*" And Jesus Himself said: "All things that I have heard of My Father, I have made known unto you." And when Jesus spoke His last words to His disciples, He told them that they were to teach all things whatsoever He had commanded them. He did not promise them any further revelation except that of the Pentecostal Holy Spirit. In short, the rules of hermeneutics, which stand approved by the laws of human language in general, must be observed in finding the meaning of the Bible.

Another rule of good common sense, a rule which will appeal to every one with good sound reasoning powers, is this, that, in learning Scripture, we must proceed from simple matters to the more difficult matters. In the study of mathematics, in the study of languages, in the study of history, in any study, we must begin with a few simple concepts and gradually proceed to that which is more difficult. Just so in the study of Holy Writ. "As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby," 1 Pet. 2:2. St. Paul also tells the Corinthians: "I have fed you with milk and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it." And another writer tells his readers: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you

again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat," Heb. 5:12.

Horace, upon the basis of pure common sense, tells us that the proper meaning of a word is decided not by etymology but by usage, which is the judge, the law, and the norm of correct speech. But the Baptists, against such sound reason, insist that βαπτίζω means "to immerse," because that was its original meaning, whereas from Mark 7:4 we know that this word was used of washing in general. That Baptist claim is just as foolish as if I today, when speaking of the acts of a criminal, would say to an ordinary audience, "His conversation was wicked." Every one would misunderstand that. I could not defend the use of such an obsolete meaning by referring to its Latin derivation. True, the word "conversation" originally meant "manner of life," but today, by common usage, it refers to one's speech, dialog, or exchange of opinions through familiar verbal expressions.

#### IV

Much has been said, much has been written, on the legitimacy of drawing conclusions or inferences from the explicit words of the text of the Scriptures. The truths of God's revelation, we note, are either explicitly stated in so many words, or they may be inferred as being implied in the words, although not explicitly stated. In one of His disputations with the Sadducees, Jesus Himself based His assertion concerning the resurrection of the dead not on some explicit statement of the Scriptures but upon a conclusion which He drew from the statement of the Old Testament that God is the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob. He said: "Now, that the dead are raised even Moses showed at the bush when he called the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob; for He is not a God of the dead but of the living." In a similar manner St. Paul argues on the basis of conclusions which he draws from the explicit statement of Scripture. He writes: "He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" He is speaking to people who believe that God gave His only-begotten Son to die upon the cross for their sins. And Paul draws the conclusion, He that gave the best that He had, He certainly will give us also the other gifts that are necessary for our welfare. There are many such valid conclusions drawn from statements of Holy Writ in the writings of the apostles. And all teachers of undoubted loyalty to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church have drawn such inferences from the explicit statements of the Word of God. Luther comforted sinners by telling them, "If Jesus died

for all, then He died for you, too, although your name is not expressly mentioned in the Bible." That is a perfectly legitimate conclusion and inference based upon the Word of God. Dr. Walther, in explaining 1 Tim. 4:13, "Give attendance to reading," writes (*Brosamen*, p. 333): "What is the preacher to read? There can be no doubt as to what he is to read. It is true, the apostle does not mention the Book, but just because he does not mention the Book, we are all the more certain that he means that one great Book, 'the Book,' 'the Scriptures,' 'the Word of God,' because it is the Book of all books, the only book which really deserves the name of 'the Book.' This is a correct conclusion or inference. If space permitted, we could mention many more such legitimate inferences and conclusions based upon the express words of Scripture. But let these suffice.

However, we must remember that no such inference, no such conclusion, dare contradict any explicit statement of Holy Writ. If one argues, The Bible teaches that all men are sinners, and the Bible teaches that Jesus was a true man; therefore Jesus must also have been a sinner, his conclusion contradicts the express statement of Holy Writ, which tells us that Jesus was separate from sinners, perfectly holy, indeed, holiness itself. If one contends, God is almighty and can do whatsoever He will, therefore, since He did not convert Judas, He did not wish Judas to come to repentance, his inference contradicts an express statement of God, which tells us that God would have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

In this connection it ought also to be remembered that the universally accepted principles of logical argumentation hold good also in religious controversies; for instance, "The burden of the proof is with the affirmative." To show how foolish they are who fail to heed this rule, Mark Twain told the story of a guide in Palestine who showed him the grave of Adam. When Mark Twain asked him how he proved that this was Adam's grave, the guide told him that no man had ever proved that it was not his grave.

Thus, "A thing cannot be and not be at the same time and in the same way," is recognized by St. Paul when he states, "Our word to you was not yea and nay," 2 Cor. 1:18. St. Paul even uses reasoning when he argues concerning righteousness by the Law and righteousness by faith. He tells us that a man is justified by laws if he obeys them: "The man that doeth them shall live in them," Gal. 3:12. It will not help any one to say, I believe in the Law; if he wishes to be justified by the Law, he must have obeyed the Law. That holds good even in human courts. Again, when God justifies the ungodly by giving him the assurance, "My son, thy sins be forgiven thee," there is absolutely no other way for the sinner

to appropriate this assurance to himself but by believing it. In the very nature of things, an unconditional promise and assurance can only be accepted by believing it.

Finally, we must call attention to the use of reason in the application of Scripture. We must use good common sense and reason in applying any particular command or word of God to any particular case, person or condition. When we discuss dancing, for instance, and speak of dancing as being sinful, we must remember for whom and under what conditions this is sinful and what is sinful about it. When we say that a Christian ought to be a regular attendant at the house of God, we must use our good common sense in applying this to the case of the sick or of children or of aged persons. In discovering whether a certain action is a transgression of a commandment or not, we must frequently use good sound reason and judgment. But this use dare never go so far as to undertake to break some law of God or to prefer our own view to that which God expresses in His Word. In short, in all these cases the proper service of reason in religion is to serve *instrumentaliter*. We use our reason in arriving at the intended meaning of God's Word and in applying it to present-day conditions. We use our reason also in removing seeming contradictions of two or more passages of Scripture, e. g., Rom. 3:28 and Jas. 2:24. But having arrived at the true sense of any passage, we never sit in judgment upon its truth or justice. God is always right. His foolishness is wiser than the wisdom of men, 1 Cor. 1:25. Therefore we are "casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ," 2 Cor. 10:5 (margin: "reasonings"; Hirschberger: *Vernunftschlüsse*). MARTIN S. SOMMER

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### Luther über Kirche und Amt \*)

#### 1. Was die Kirche eigentlich ist

„Wir wollen diesmal einfältiglich bei dem Kinder glauben bleiben, der da sagt: ‚Ich glaube eine heilige christliche Kirche, Gemeinschaft der Heiligen.‘ Da deutet der Glaube klärlieh, was die Kirche sei, nämlich eine Gemeinschaft der Heiligen, das ist, ein Haufe oder Sammlung solcher Leute, die Christen und heilig sind; das heißt ein christlicher heiliger Haufe oder Kirche. . . . Die Christen sind ein besonder berufen Volk und heißen nicht schlecht *Ecclesia*, Kirche oder Volk, sondern *Sancta, Catholica, Christiana*, das ist, ein christlich,

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\*) Diese Auszüge aus Luthers Schriften werden in diesem Jubiläumsjahr geboten hauptsächlich um solcher Leser willen, die Luthers Werke nicht besitzen.