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## Reason or Revelation?

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## Reason or Revelation?

(Continued)

### III

There are more rationalists in the churches than go by that name. While the rationalists openly proclaim the *sola ratio*, the rule of natural reason, others market their wares under an alias. When the experience-theologians operate with the "enlightened reason" and the Roman Catholics make the church, or the Pope, their authority, they make natural reason a source and norm, the source and norm of theology. But that does not tell the whole story. Even among those who loudly proclaim the *sola Scriptura* there are many who have come under the sway of rationalism. We are not surprised when men who find it necessary to set up other authorities beside Scripture—Scripture and "enlightened" reason, Scripture and the Pope—are doing the work of the rationalists. They are not satisfied with Scripture because their natural, carnal reason is not satisfied with Scripture. As often as a man tells us that he needs additional authorities, he tells us that he is a rationalist. But we do not expect to find rationalists among those who assure us that Scripture is the only and the sufficient source of theology. This, however, is the sad situation: great church-bodies, loudly proclaiming the Scripture principle, are moved and guided by rationalistic principles. Their theologians are convinced that they are working under the *sola Scriptura*; but, bewitched by Satan, they are listening to the voice of his paramour. We are speaking of the Churches of the Reformed faith.

The confessions of the Reformed churches insist on the *sola Scriptura* as strongly as the Lutheran Confessions. Charles Hodge states: "All Protestants agree in teaching that 'the Word of God as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.'" He then quotes

for the Lutheran Church the familiar statements in the Smalcald Articles and the Formula of Concord and proceeds: "The symbols of the Reformed churches teach the same doctrine." He quotes from several confessions; for instance, this from the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." (*Syst. Theol.*, I, p. 151.) Calvin is most outspoken on this point: "Let this, then, be a sure axiom, that there is no word of God to which place should be given in the Church save that which is contained first, in the Law and the Prophets, and, secondly, in the writings of the apostles, and that the only due method of teaching in the Church is according to the prescription and rule of His Word. . . . 'If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God' (1 Pet. 4:11). . . . Then the reason to which we ought here to have regard is universal: God deprives man of the power of producing any new doctrine in order that he alone may be our Master in spiritual teaching." (*Inst.*, IV, chap. VIII, §§ 8, 9.) Scripture is the source and norm, they say,—not reason. L. Boettner declares: "Philosophical speculation and all abstract reasoning should be held in abeyance until we have first heard the testimony of Scripture; and when we have heard that testimony, we should humbly submit." He quotes C. Hodge: "It is the duty of every theologian to subordinate his theories to the Bible and teach not what seems to him to be true or reasonable but simply what the Bible teaches." (*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, pp. 50, 51.) And what Boettner and Hodge say, Calvin said before them: "With regard to the knowledge of God and of His paternal favor towards us men otherwise the most ingenious are blinder than moles. . . . To the great truths what God is in Himself and what He is in relation to us, human reason makes not the least approach." (*Inst.*, II, chap. II, § 18.) Luther might have penned these words.

But now these same theologians, who insist on the right of Scripture, the sole right of Scripture, to determine the Christian doctrine, also insist on the right of reason to determine the doctrine. They bid reason be silent in theology,—she is as blind as a mole,—and then they go to reason for advice, giving reason the right to interpret Scripture. The leading theologians of the Reformed churches are defending the sacred, inalienable rights of reason. C. Hodge: "It is the prerogative of reason to judge of the credibility of a revelation. . . . It is impossible that God should reveal anything as true which contradicts any well-authenticated truth, whether of intuition, experience, or previous revelation. Men may

abuse this prerogative of reason, as they abuse their free agency. But the prerogative itself is not to be denied. We have a right to reject as untrue whatever it is impossible that God should require us to believe. He can no more require us to believe what is absurd than to do what is wrong." (*Op. cit.*, I, p. 50 f.) Again: "The Bible never requires us to receive as true anything which the constitution of our nature, given to us by God Himself, forces us to believe to be false or impossible." (II, p. 390.) W. Shedd: "The proper method of discussing any single theological topic is: 1. exegetical; 2. rational. The first step to be taken is, to deduce the doctrine itself from Scripture by careful exegesis; and the second step is, to justify and defend this exegetical result upon grounds of reason. . . . When the work of deriving doctrines from Scripture has been done, the theologian must defend them against attacks, answering objections and maintaining the *reasonableness* of revealed truth." (*Dog. Theology*, I, pp. 10, 14.) Shedd and Hodge are repeating what the fathers of the Reformed faith said before them. Zwingli proclaimed the prerogatives of reason at Marburg: "*Nihil esse credendum quod ratione comprehendere nequeat, quia Deus nobis non proponat incomprehensibilia.*" Zwingli's theological method was "not to neglect philosophic argumentation by means of rational conclusions" (see his *Christianae Fidei Expositio*), and so he operated at Marburg with the "rational conclusion" that it would be "an absurdity (*Widersinn*)" to teach the Real Presence since that would mean that "wicked men could produce the Lord's body" (*Das Marburger Religionsgespräch*, von Walther Koehler, p. 22). Calvin was in full accord with Zwingli. In his Geneva Catechism he wrote: "Can you prove by means of your reason that nothing strange is contained in this article? Yes, if it is granted that the Lord did not institute anything which is out of harmony with our reason." From Zwingli and Calvin down to the present day the Reformed theologians uphold the rights of reason. In the days of J. Gerhard, Bucanus insisted: "Is all authority to be denied human reason? In so far as human reason received spiritual qualities in regeneration, it can bear true testimony." (See preceding article).<sup>1)</sup> L. Boettner writes in *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (1932): "The purpose of this book is . . . to give a restatement to that great system which is known as the Reformed faith or Calvinism, and to show

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1) In the Index to Calvin's *Institutes*, translated by Henry Beveridge, we read: "Previous to regeneration reason is unable to comprehend those things which belong to our salvation. . . . Reason is blind as to heavenly things until it is illuminated by the grace of God. Book I, chap. II, § 19 f." We have shown in the preceding article that the "enlightened reason which assumes the right to judge Scripture is nothing but natural reason in disguise."

that this is beyond all doubt the teaching of the Bible *and of reason.*" (P. 1.) "If the doctrine of total inability, or original sin, be admitted, the doctrine of unconditional election follows by the most inescapable logic." (P. 95.) "The logical consistency of Calvinism" (p. 44). "Consequently his (Calvin's) own reasoning compels him to hold (to be consistent with himself) that no reprobate child can die in infancy." (P. 147.) "We believe that we have now shown that the doctrine of election is in every point Scriptural and a plain dictate of common sense." (P. 148.) L. Berkhof, in *Vicarious Atonement through Christ* (1936): "This idea does not commend itself to human reason and is also unscriptural." (P. 71.) "It is but reasonable to suppose that God adapted the means precisely to the end which He had in view. . . . If God knows precisely, as He does, who will and who will not accept the offer of salvation, does it seem reasonable to think that He would send Christ into the world to suffer and die for the purpose of saving those of whom He is sure that they will never meet the conditions and be saved?" (P. 156 f.) Reformed theology does indeed champion the rights of reason in theology. Bishop W. T. Manning distinctly says: "The Anglican churches stand firmly for the essential principles for which Protestantism has borne its witness — individual responsibility, the right and duty of private judgment, the *right of reason*, and the supreme authority of truth, etc." (In *The Reunion of Christendom* [1929], p. 220.)<sup>2)</sup>

Reason demands the right to be heard in theology, and as we have seen, the Reformed theologians unhesitatingly acknowledge this right. And in submitting to these claims, Reformed theology has made a pretty complete surrender. Reformed theology is, in its distinctive characteristics, a philosophical system, based on pure

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2) We are here discussing the rationalism inherent in the "system which is known as the Reformed faith or Calvinism." We are not studying that other branch of the Reformed faith which is known as Arminianism. Arminianism is a species of *plain* rationalism. It operates with the *principium cognoscendi* of rationalism. Its *Confession of Faith* states that "the literal sense of Scripture is not so much the sense inherent in the words, taken properly (as many seem to think), but the sense which best accords with sound reason," and its dogmatician Limborch declares that "no interpretation of Scripture is admissible which conflicts with sane reason or contains a manifest absurdity." (See M. Guenther, *Populäre Symbolik*, p. 108.) Guericke: "Die Arminianer rationalisierten all-mäehlich das ganze Lehrsystem." (*Allg. Chr. Symbolik*, p. 172.) In an article entitled "Arminianism in Its Influence upon England — 'Rational Theology,' Latitudinarianism" Dr. J. L. Neve points out that "the liberal-istic trait of that movement brought Rationalism. . . . It was not really a faith but, as J. Tulloch put it, 'a method of religious inquiry which revived the suppressed rational side of the original Protestant movement,' or, as Schaff said: 'It liberalized theological opinions. . . . In some of its advocates it had a leaning toward Socinianism and prepared the way for Rationalism'" (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, April, 1931, p. 146).

speculation. Reason could not ask for more. What reason wants is that the theologian leave Scripture aside and form his own ideas of God and of God's will and of the way of salvation. And that is what Calvinism does. "The entire Calvinistic theology, from Calvin down to the present day, does not so much teach the God who revealed Himself and offers Himself in His Word, but rather puts, at the vital places, speculations concerning the absolute God in place of God's Word. We have seen that it does that in treating of the grace of God, the person and work of Christ, and the means of grace." (F. Pieper, *Chr. Dog.*, III, p. 162.) Again, Reformed theology constitutes a philosophical system, placing the distorted idea of the sovereignty of God in the center and accepting as true what follows from it with logical consistency. Calvin tells us, in his *Institutes*, that whatever does not agree, logically, with this central thought, is absurd and therefore false. Reason demands that the theologian, like the philosopher, reject everything that conflicts with logical thought, and Hodge, who says that reason cannot be wrong, will not accept any system of theology that does not present a logically harmonious whole. He takes the Formula of Concord to task for ignoring the rights of reason. He says: "In this document both the doctrine of cooperation and that of absolute predestination were rejected . . . while regeneration is," according to the Formula of Concord, "exclusively the work of the Spirit, the failure of salvation is to be referred to the voluntary resistance of offered grace. As this system was illogical and contrary to the clear declarations of Scripture, it did not long maintain its ground." (*Op. cit.*, II, p. 325.) And he compliments "the later Lutheran theologians" for abandoning the ground of the Formula of Concord. The Formula of Concord refuses to call on reason for help in constructing a logical system. It sets down what Scripture teaches on any doctrine and will not "allow itself to be diverted therefrom by objections or contradictions spun from human reason" (*Trigl.*, p. 987), and Hodge makes sport of its "illogical system." The system of the Formula is *sola Scriptura*. It sticks to that. Whether the various doctrines fit together on the basis of logical thought does not concern the Formula. It refuses "to draw conclusions." It declares "certain things occur in this mystery so intricate and involved that we are not able by the penetration of our natural ability to harmonize them — which, moreover, we have not been commanded to do." (*Trigl.*, p. 1081.) Such a system, says Hodge, which leaves difficulties unsolved and refuses to draw logical conclusions, has no place in Christian theology; reason commands us to harmonize the teachings of Scripture; we have no patience with the insulsties and puerilities of the Formula of Concord. Calvin employs the phrases "*inscite*

*nimis et pueriliter*," "plus quam insulse," "ignorantly, childishly, most absurd" (*Inst.*, III, chap. 23, § 1). Finally, Reformed theology operates with philosophical axioms, with laws of physics, with judgments of experience, etc.: *Finitum non est capax infiniti; omne corpus in loco est*; the result is the interpretation of the purposes of God; efficacious grace acts immediately, etc. When reason operates with the laws of physics and unlooses the heavy gun: *Omne corpus in loco est*, Reformed theology surrenders the Scripture teaching of the omnipresence of Christ's human nature. On vital points it has capitulated to the demands of reason. It has acknowledged the sovereignty of reason.

Yes, the *sovereignty* of reason. It has granted exclusive rights to reason. It says: *Sola Scriptura*, but at once modifies this by saying: Scripture *and* reason; and when reason and Scripture clash, it declares: Reason is right. The distinctive doctrines of the Reformed faith have been formulated and established by reason. There the judgment of reason is decisive. In the words of Guericke: "The Reformed Church proclaims emphatically the principle of the sole and absolute authority of Scripture but denies it in the practical application. To a number of Christian doctrines it applies the test whether reason can comprehend them and interprets the Word of God accordingly. It thus makes reason the judge of God's Word." (*Allgemeine Christliche Symbolik*, pp. 171, 204.)

Reformed theology is determined to give reason its rights. Convinced of the sacredness and inviolability of these rights, it has gone to great lengths to maintain them. For one thing, it split the Church on that account. Reason as a principle of theology was expelled from the Church of the Reformation. Luther would have Satan's paramour no longer defile the Church of God. But Zwingli and Calvin would not have her outlawed. They established the Church of the Reformed faith in order to give her asylum. When Zwingli characterized his followers as "*turba ista, quae nihil credit, nisi quod verum esse videt*" (see *Theol. Quart.*, 16, p. 202), he might as well have proclaimed to the world that all those who could not remain in the Lutheran Church because they were there not permitted to make reasonableness the test of truth would find a welcome in the Zwinglian-Calvinistic Church. On the behest of reason Zwingli and Calvin split the Protestant host. It was a sad day for the Church when these men yielded to the demands of reason and built *her* a church. Untold harm has come to the Church because of this disruption. Luther described the harm in a letter to Bucer in these words: "I want you to believe me, as I told you already at Coburg, that I so much wish and desire to heal this division that I would give up my life

thrice over for it; for I have seen that fellowship with you will help us much and that the division has brought great harm to the Gospel. I am convinced that all the gates of hell, all the might of the Pope and the Turk combined, all the world and flesh, and whatever other evil there may be, could not have harmed the Gospel in the least if we had remained united." (XVII:1975.)<sup>3)</sup> One thing, however, Luther could not do: he could not acknowledge the rights of reason. But on that one thing the Reformed stubbornly insisted, and so the breach could not be healed. "Ich wollte gern sterben," said Luther; but he knew at the same time: "Es kann keine rechte, wahre Einigkeit werden, denn sie messen diese Sache nur mit der Vernunft." (XXII:1024.) Protestantism suffered untold loss in consequence of the Reformed insistence on the rights of reason.

And Christendom suffered untold loss. The Reformed leaders, submitting to reason, yielded priceless treasures of the Gospel.

They surrendered, in the first place, the precious doctrine of the Real Presence. It seemed too absurd to them to believe that Christ's body and blood are really present in, with, and under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Zwingli complained: My reason protests against such a monstrous doctrine; God does not ask us to accept what is incomprehensible; the wafer is too small to contain the Lord's body. Oekolampadius protested: Did not Christ ascend to heaven? (see Luther XX, 591); a body cannot be in two places at the same time! (see W. Koehler, *Das Marburger Religionsgespräch*, p. 26). Luther denied reason the right to be heard here. "Mathematische Haarspaltereien will ich hier nicht hoeren. . . . I will not listen to reason. Physical proofs, geometrical arguments, I reject absolutely, such as: A large post will not go into a small hole. God is above all mathematics, and God's words — 'This is My body' — must be received with adoring faith" (Koehler, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 26). But the Reformed could not rid themselves of their rationalistic scruples. Calvin kept on insisting on the rights of reason: "The essential properties of a body are, to be confined by space, to have dimension and form. Have done, then, with that foolish fiction which affixes the minds of men as well as Christ to bread." (*Inst.*, IV, chap. 17, § 29.) Calvin measures, in the best manner of *rationalismus vulgaris*, the body of Christ, measures the

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3) See also XXII:1024 f.: "Ich wollte gern sterben, wenn wir die Kirche in der Schweiz und Staedten koennten wiedergewinnen und zurechtbringen, alsdann wuerde sich Papst und Kaiser vor uns fuerchten. . . . Ach, lieber Gott, dies Aergernis hindert viele Leute. Wenn die Lehrer untereinander in der Lehre uneins sind, da einer dies, der andere das vorgibt und nicht aus einem Herzen und Munde lehren, das stoesset viel Leute vor den Kopf, dass sie irre werden, wissen nicht, wem sie glauben sollen."



wafer, and declares: How can these things be? He also measures the universe and finds again that the measurements do not agree. "The presence of Christ in the Supper must be such as neither divests Him of His just dimensions, nor dissevers Him by differences of place, nor assigns to Him a body of boundless dimensions. . . . Let these absurdities be discarded." (L. C., § 19. Or put it this way, says Calvin and Roehr and Semler: "How could they have been so ready to believe what is repugnant to all reason, viz., that Christ was seated at table under their eye, and yet was contained invisible under the bread?" Calvin adds: "The only reason why certain persons reject our interpretation is that they are blinded by a delusion of the devil—the horrible fascinations of Satan." (L. c., § 23.) And then reason takes high moral grounds and speaks through Calvin: "Let there be nothing derogatory to the heavenly glory of Christ. This happens whenever He is brought under the corruptible elements of this world or is affixed to any earthly creatures." (L. c., § 19.) What, says Zwingli, let wicked men produce the Lord's body? And up to this day the Reformed theologians are upholding the rights of reason. Hodge uses the very same arguments as Calvin. He incorporates the statement of the *Consensus Tigurinus*, written by Calvin, in his *Systematic Theology* (III:642): "Every imagination of local presence" (the meaning is: of Real Presence) "is to be entirely removed. For while the signs are upon the earth, seen by the eyes and handled by the hands, Christ so far as He is a man is nowhere else than in heaven and is to be sought only by the mind and by faith. It is, therefore, an irrational and impious superstition to include Him in the earthly elements." Are the Reformed rationalists or not? Are they guided, on this point, by revelation or by reason? Luther answers, on the basis of their own statements: "They have two arguments for their false teaching. First, reason considers it most absurd. Secondly, it is unnecessary that Christ's body and blood should be in the bread and wine. These are their reasons: *absurditas et nulla necessitas*." (XX:580.)

And so, at the behest of reason, the Real Presence had to go, with all the blessings it carries. In His infinite goodness Christ gives His Christians His very body and blood, as a seal of the testament, for the strengthening of their faith; but the Reformed reason sets up the cry: *Nulla necessitas!* They tell the Christians that they do not need such carnal institutions. And they explicitly deny that the Lord's Supper carries a peculiar blessing; they have to deny that since they have eliminated that which is peculiar to the Lord's Supper—the Real Presence. Hodge: "Christ and His benefits, His body and blood, and all their influences on the believer are as truly received by him out of the Supper as

in it. . . . The great Reformer [Calvin] earnestly contends that believers receive elsewhere by faith all they receive at the Lord's Table." (*Op. cit.*, pp. 36, 647.) Oekolampadius: Wenn wir das geistliche Niessen haben, was bedarfs des leiblichen?" (*Das Marburger Rel.*, p. 13.) "Unser Gott lehrt uns nutzbare Dinge, als Jesaias sagt. . . . Durch den Glauben besitzen wir schon, was uns vonnoeten sein wird, und steht nicht in dem auswendigen Brauch." Oekolampads *Antwort auf das Schwaebische Syngramma*, in Luther, XX:596. Rudelbach, *Reformation*, etc., p. 150.) Conceited reason tells Christ that He was mistaken about the need of giving His Christians this additional pledge. "Das ist die andere greuliche Laesterung Oekolampads. Denn wer da fragt, wozu es not sei, was Gott redet und tut, der will ja ueber Gott hin, klueger und besser denn Gott sein. Das ist der recht Muenzerische Geist, welcher auch sprach er wollte beide in Christum und in die Schrift tun, wenn sie sich nach seinem Geist nicht richten wollten." (Luther, XX:881.)

The believer receives nothing more in the Lord's Supper, they say, than he receives elsewhere by faith. What, then, does he receive through the Sacrament? We expect them to answer: The forgiveness of sins. No, not that, says the Reformed reason and Roehr's reason. The Sacrament of the altar does not convey the forgiveness of sins. It is nothing more than a solemn memorial of the redemptive death of Christ. Zwingli: "*Coena dominica mortis commemoratio est, NON PECCATORUM REMISSIO.*" (Opp., III: 258.) And Shedd tells us that "Zwingli regarded the Sacrament as a means of grace and sanctification because of its didactic character. . . . It is because of the spiritual presence of Christ in the soul that the Sacraments are means of grace" (*Dog. Theol.*, II:570). Calvin took the same position. In the *Consensus Tigurinus* he derided the notion that the grace of God could come to us through outward signs: "*acsi visibile signum, dum in medium profertur, eodem secum momento Dei gratiam adveheret!*" Foolish reason will not have God deal with men through such simple, puerile means. Conceited reason wants to soar to heaven and deal with God immediately. "Efficacious grace acts immediately. . . . The efficacy of this Sacrament as a means of grace is not in the signs nor in the service nor in the minister nor in the word but in the attending influence of the Holy Ghost. . . . The efficacy of this Sacrament, according to the Reformed doctrine, is not to be referred to any virtue in the ordinance itself, . . . nor to the real presence of the material body and blood of Christ, . . . but only to 'the blessing of Christ and the working of His Spirit in them that receive the Sacrament.'" (Hodge, *op. cit.*, II:684; III:648, 650.) The Reformed Church forbids its people to go to the Sacra-

ment for the purpose of receiving by means of the Sacrament the forgiveness of sins. It withholds from them what their faith needs. *Ratio inimica fidei*.

Reason likes Baptism as little as the Lord's Supper. And the Reformed see no reason why they should treat Baptism differently from the Lord's Supper. From Zwingli down to the *Watchman-Examiner* (Jan. 22, 1931) they declare: "We have never thought or said that Baptism is a saving ordinance." Scripture, indeed, declares that Baptism saves, 1 Pet. 3:21; but from Zwingli down to Boehl (*Dogmatik*, p. 560) they insist: "Das Wasser kann solche hohe Dinge nicht tun." Not by itself nor through God's institution. God cannot invest water with saving power. It would be unethical for God to do so. The *Expositor's Greek Testament* abhors "the idea of baptismal regeneration"; that would be "an irrational, unethical miracle"; it was "invented by men" (on Rom. 5:12). Reason, that is, unbelief, demands that men should give up the idea that Baptism saves,<sup>4)</sup> and the Reformed make a complete surrender. The best they can do for Baptism is this: "Baptism does not confer the Holy Spirit as a regenerating Spirit but is the authentic token that the Holy Spirit has been, or will be, conferred; that regeneration has been, or will be, effected." (Shedd, *Dog. Theology*, II:544.) But that stipulation only masks the betrayal. Reformed theology has surrendered the real blessing of Baptism.

The Gospel, too, must go, the Gospel as conferring the forgiveness of sins and creating faith. The Gospel is no better than the Sacraments. "The Sacraments do not of themselves bestow any grace. . . . We get rid of that fiction by which the cause of justification and the power of the Holy Spirit are included in the elements as vessels and vehicles." (Calvin, *Inst.*, IV, chap. 14, § 17.) But neither does the Gospel bestow any grace. "The efficacy of the Sacrament," we heard Hodge say, "is not in the word, but in the attending influence of the Holy Ghost." Reformed theology does not recognize the Gospel and the Sacraments as means of grace. It has much to say of the means of grace. Hodge devotes 242 pages

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4) Pieper: "Zwingli glaubt diese Worte Gottes nicht. Es liegt bei ihm ein klarer Fall von Unglauben dem klaren Worte gegenüber vor. Sein eigentlicher und einziger Grund ist der, dass er die Sache fuer ungläublich achtet, dass er sein Zwinglisches Ich gegen die Autorität des Wortes Gottes setzt. So auch Boehl. Er verweist auf die Schriftstellen, welche von der Taufe aussagen, dass sie die Sünden abwasche, von Sünden reinige und die Wiedergeburt wirke (Apost. 22:16; Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5), setzt dann aber hinzu: 'Das Wasser kann solche hohe Dinge nicht tun.' Er setzt den Worten der Schrift einfach sein Boehlisches Nein entgegen. Der Unterschied zwischen der lutherischen und der reformierten Kirche in bezug auf die Lehre von der Taufe ist voellig adaequat damit angegeben, dass die erstere Gottes Wort von der Taufe glaubt, die letztere nicht." (*Chr. Dog.*, III:315.) The devil's paramour likes to repeat: "Yea, hath God said?"

to the subject "Means of Grace" (Pieper only 137 pages) and begins the discussion with the statement: "The phrase [means of grace] is intended to indicate those institutions which God has ordained to be the ordinary channels of grace, i. e., of the supernatural influences of the Holy Spirit, to the souls of men. The means of grace are the Word, Sacraments, and prayer." (III:466.) But then he goes on to divest the Word, with the Sacraments, of divine power. There is no efficacy "in the Word"; in order to become effective, it must "be attended by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit" (p. 473): "The Lutherans teach that there is inherent in the divine Word a supernatural, divine virtue. . . . Luther, glorious and lovely as he was, was impulsive and apt to be driven to extremes. He was constrained to attribute divine power to the Word." The truth of the matter is, according to Hodge, that, "while the Word and Sacraments are the ordinary channels of the Spirit's influence, God has left Himself free to act with or without these or any other means" (pp. 485, 505). And the real truth of the matter is, according to Hodge: Here, in regeneration, "there is no place for the use of means" (II:685). What becomes of the 242 pages? The Reformed denounce the teaching that the Gospel forgives sins and creates faith as a Lutheran heresy. The *Presbyterian Guardian*, reviewing the *Summary of Chr. Doctrine*, by L. Berkhof (Reformed), says: "One could wish that Professor Berkhof had been a little more accurate in his statement that the Bible 'not only enriches us with knowledge but also transforms lives by changing sinners into saints' (p. 16). The author later rejects this apparent Lutheran position by stating that the Word is effective only as it is used by the Spirit; but still such a statement is likely to cause confusion." The Reformed Christian is instructed not to go to Gospel and the Sacraments for the assurance of the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of his faith.

Reason forbids them to do that. Reason refuses to believe that in the spiritual realm God could and would work through means. Efficacious grace cannot work through means, for *finitum non est capax infiniti*; and God would not do it, if He could; that would ill comport with His dignity and glory. Reason has set up the axiom: Efficacious grace acts immediately, and the Reformed theologians swear by it. Zwingli: "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*.) Shedd: "The influence of the Holy Spirit is directly upon the human spirit and is independent of the Word itself." (*Op. cit.*, II:501.) A. Strong: "In the primary change of disposition, which is the most essential feature of regeneration, the Spirit of God acts directly upon the spirit of man." (*Syst.*

*Theol.*, p. 454.) Hodge: "Efficacious grace acts immediately. . . . In miracles and in the work of regeneration all second causes are excluded. . . . There is here no place for the use of means. . . . Regeneration itself is by the immediate agency of the Spirit." (II: 684 f.) Where did Hodge learn this axiom? Scripture nowhere says that grace acts immediately. Scripture teaches the contrary. According to Scripture efficacious grace acts through the Word. "The Word is nigh thee" (Rom. 10:8) to pronounce thee just; "faith cometh by hearing" (Rom. 10:17); "being born again by the Word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). Regeneration is not "by the immediate agency of the Spirit" but by the Spirit through the Word. It is not Scripture but reason that told Zwingli and Hodge that God is above using earthly means, the written and spoken Word. "Back of the Reformed teaching on the means of grace is the rationalistic, unscriptural idea that the power of the divine omnipotence, which alone can produce faith and regeneration, cannot work *through means*. The tyrant in the doctrine of the means of grace is the axiom: 'Nothing intervenes between the volition of the Spirit and the regeneration of the soul.' Under the iron rule of this tyrant they distort Scripture." (Pieper, III: 173, 178.)<sup>5)</sup>

And this surrender of the Biblical doctrine of the means of grace is not a small matter. The very life of Christendom is at stake. The Christian lives by the means of grace. In the Gospel and the Sacraments he finds forgiveness of sins and obtains comfort and strength. There all spiritual blessings are stored up for his needs. Apply the Reformed teaching in practice, and justification would become impossible. The only forgiveness there is, is offered in the Gospel and the Sacraments. And by no other means is faith created and preserved. The Reformed rationalism

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5) Reason dominates the Reformed teaching—and it is not even sound reason. "The Spirit *needs* no guide or vehicle." That is entirely beside the question. The Spirit needs no vehicle, but it has pleased Him to employ the vehicle of the Word. Again, "they say, the honor of God is at stake. But here also the *spiritus entusiasticus* is simply committing a *petitio principii*. It assumes as an *a-priori* truth that the Holy Spirit, if He would act as befits the Deity and retain the divine power in His hand, must refuse the 'vehicle' and not bind His influence to the means of grace. . . . But according to Scripture, God effects all, and the means of grace effect all." (Pieper, III: 180 f.) Besides, it is wicked impertinence when reason presumes to tell God what is fitting or not. Again, "saving faith must rest on Christ." Yes, indeed, but you should be able to distinguish between *causa meritoria* and *causa instrumentalis*. — "The Bible everywhere teaches that the only indispensable condition of salvation is faith." A theologian should know the difference between the *medium δοτικόν* and the *medium ληπτικόν*. Finally, if they insist on the *finitum non est capax infiniti*, we shall have to ask them: Since when is your finite mind able to grasp and judge the mind of the infinite God? — Your reason has made fools of you.

aims a mortal blow at the very vitals of faith. "True, the enthusiasts confess that Christ died on the cross and saved us; but they repudiate that by which we obtain Him; that is, the means, the way, the approach, to Him they destroy. . . . They lock up the treasure which they should place before us and lead me a fool's chase; they refuse to admit me to it; they refuse to transmit it; they deny me its possession and use." (Luther, III:1692.)

What about the Scripture doctrine of the person of our Savior? Does reason claim rights here, too, the right to tell us what to believe concerning the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation? And will the Reformed theologians grant her that right? They take a firm stand in the beginning. They believe that Jesus Christ is the God-man, that the man Jesus is true God, in spite of the protest of reason. When the Unitarians assail them for this on rationalistic grounds, they are unmoved and declare that revelation is above reason. But before long they succumb to their rationalistic predisposition. They refuse to accept the Scripture teaching on the communion of the natures and the communication of the attributes. They refuse to believe that this man Jesus is an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent man. And they refuse to believe it because of the philosophical axiom: *Finitum non est capax infiniti*. They learned, while studying philosophy, mathematics, and physics, that the finite is incapable of holding the infinite. And succumbing to the wiles of Satan's paramour, they are constrained to apply this truth to the mysteries of the Personal Union and judge revelation by reason. At Marburg, Zwingli offered this as his strongest argument: "*Christus est finitus, ut nos finiti sumus. Und sag aber wie wir vor: Christus ist nach menschlicher Art umschrieben, wie auch wir sind umschrieben.*" (*Das Marburger Rel.*, p. 102.) How, then, can Christ be omnipresent according to his human nature? Again: "Whatsoever is not infinite by nature cannot be at all places at the same time; whatever is infinite is at the same time eternal. The human nature of Jesus is not from eternity; hence it is not infinite. If it is not infinite, it is finite; it is not everywhere. But we shall pass on. We alluded to the above in order not to neglect philosophic argumentation by means of rational conclusions." (*Christianae Fidei Expositio.*) *Finitum non est capax infiniti!* What the plain words of Scripture say cannot be taken in the plain sense. The thing is impossible. Danaeus: "Nothing whatever that is proper and essential to the divine nature can be really communicated to any created thing." Polanus: "It is an impious and blasphemous assertion to say that the human nature is almighty and omniscient." (See Masius, *Kurzer Bericht von dem Unterschied, etc.*, p. 99.) Their reason forbids them to accept what Scripture teaches on this mystery. It is in discussing the com-

munion of natures that Hodge makes the statement "The Bible never requires us to receive as true anything which the constitution of our nature, given to us by God Himself, forces us to believe to be false or impossible." (*Op. cit.*, II:390.) *Finitum non est capax infiniti*. Reason is sane and sober when it operates with this axiom in writing manuals of physics. But it is drunken reason ("Nam Satan venit mit eim sussen, lieblichen wein. Das heisst *ratio humana*. Ist ein schone metz, macht viel zu buben". See current volume of *Conc. Theol. Month.*, p. 329) that applies this earthly truth to the revealed truth and insists: "A soul which is omniscient, omnipresent, and almighty is not a human soul." Omnipresence and omniscience are not attributes of which a creature can be made the organ." (Hodge, *loc. cit.*, pp. 416, 417.) And Danaeus cries out: "*Quid obsecro plenitudinis Dei praeter Deum ipsum capax esse potest?* What, for Heaven's sake, can contain the fulness of God but God Himself?"

Quote to them as much Scripture as you will; quote: "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9), and they will answer, as they have always answered: "'Αδύνατον!" It is impossible! Is it possible that you Lutherans can believe the impossible? The Lutheran Confessions declare that the judge of what is possible is not reason but Scripture. Concluding Art. VIII, "Of the Person of Christ," the Formula of Concord "admonishes all Christians to close the eyes of their reason and bring into captivity their understanding to the obedience of Christ, 2 Cor. 10:5." All Christians should take Scripture for their guide: "Of what His (Christ's) human nature is capable through the personal union no one can know better or more thoroughly than the Lord Christ Himself; and He has revealed it in His Word, as much as is needful for us to know of it in this life. Now, everything for which we have in this instance clear, certain testimonies in the Scriptures, we must simply believe and in no way argue against it, as though the human nature in Christ could not be capable of the same." (*Trigl.*, pp. 1033, 1049. Read also § 52.) No, no, say the Reformed; ἀδύνατον! What you Lutherans read into Scripture is impossible by all the laws of physics! And: your Lutheran teaching is a *monstrousum figmentum* and an *impium monstrum!* And: you Lutherans are totally bereft of reason! (See Polanus, above. Further references in Pieper, II:183).<sup>6)</sup>

6) This calls for another footnote on the "fools of reason." When the Reformed pride themselves on the reasonableness of their Christology, we shall have to, first, repeat the remark, that it is the height of unreason to attempt to grasp the Infinite with finite reason, and, secondly, point out to them that there is nothing more inconsistent, self-contradictory, and illogical than their teaching on the Personal Union. For if they are right in denying the communication of the divine attributes to the

Now, this Reformed teaching, inspired by reason, is fraught with untold disaster to the Christian. Let all Christendom heed the warning cry of Luther: "If you would point out a place where God is and not the man, the person would already be divided, because I could then say with truth: Here is God who is not man and who never as yet has become man. However, no such a God for me! . . . No, friend; wherever you place God, there you must also place with Him humanity; they do not allow themselves to be separated or divided from one another." "Beware, beware, I say, of the *Alloeosis*. For it is the devil's mask, for at last it manufactures such a Christ after whom I certainly would not be a Christian, namely, that henceforth Christ should be no more, and do no more with His sufferings and life, than any other saint. . . . Then Christ is to me a poor Savior. . . . We Christians must know that, if God is not also in the balance and gives the weight, we sink to the bottom with our scale." (*Trigl.*, pp. 1029, 1045.)

One more point, and a most important, a most vital, one. Would God have all men to be saved? Scripture bids all Christians to rejoice in the glorious truth of the *gratia universalis* and commands all Christian theologians to teach it. But the Calvinist cannot bring himself to do that. He feels constrained to teach that God will not have a certain part of mankind saved. He feels that it is his Christian duty to teach the predestination to damnation. He feels that he *owes it to reason* to establish and defend the "*decretum horribile*."

Calvinism does not, in the first place, get its teaching of the absolute predestination, the twofold predestination, out of Scripture. Scripture nowhere teaches that God predestinated the greater part, or any part, of mankind to damnation. This horrible idea is purely the result of human speculation. The basic principle of Calvinism, the ideas concerning the sovereignty of the absolute God concerning what He might do, can do, must do, are not derived

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human nature, because the finite cannot hold the infinite, then they are wrong in affirming the Personal Union and teaching that the man Jesus is God. And if they are right in teaching that God became man, in spite of the dictum of reason "Αδύνατον," it is unreasonable to deny that this Man is omnipotent because of the dictum of reason "Αδύνατον." The Apology of the Formula of Concord tells them: "Yes, the Personal Union is just as incredible as the Communication of Majesty, if you apply the *principium*, *Finitum non est capax infiniti*; and if one must, on this principle, deny the Communication of Majesty, the Incarnation itself would have to be denied, on the same *principio*, for the principle would have to work in both instances." And Hase, a rationalist himself, tells them: "It is inconsistent to assert the *higher* unity of the person and balk at asserting the *lesser* communion of attributes." (See Pieper, l. c., p. 172.) — The Reformed *do* maintain that God became man, despite the objections of reason. Here they are willing, thank God, to be "fools."



from revelation but are the results of the reasoning of a philosopher. See Pieper, *Chr. Dog.*, III:162, as quoted above. The *Journal of the American Lutheran Conference*, March issue, p. 26 ff., puts it thus: "Calvin was a humanist and a philosopher. . . . He carried his stern philosophical idea of God into his Christian theology and arrived at predestination, which dominates his whole system. Four, if not all, of the Five Knotty Points of present-day orthodox Calvinism — viz., unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints, total inability —" (yes, also the last point!) "really are the natural outgrowth of Calvin's idea of God as the absolute Sovereign of the universe whose glory must be sought, which idea he found in philosophy. His mind, honest though he was, was preoccupied with philosophical ideas. . . . Calvinism would not have been led to absolute predestination and what it included if it had kept its ideas untinged by philosophical influences. We do not find the God of the Bible in these systems, but an idol of human fabrication." When a man philosophizes about God and about what God should and must think and do, we call him a philosopher. And when he offers us these cogitations as theology we call him a rationalist.

And, in the second place, when the Calvinist has established the teaching of the predestination to damnation in his philosophical mind, he proceeds to buttress and defend it with rationalistic arguments and logical proofs. The great concern of Reformed theology is to show the reasonableness of its position. It considers it its duty to bow to logic. Two rationalistic considerations in particular sway the mind of the Calvinist. First: Since Scripture teaches an election to life, there *must be* (though Scripture does not say so) an election to death. There can be no election of some without the corresponding rejection, or reprobation, or passing by, of the others. Calvin makes much of this argument. "Many admit the doctrine of election but deny that any one is reprobated. This they do ignorantly and childishly, since there could be no election without its opposite, reprobation. . . . It were most absurd" to deny this. (*Inst.*, III, chap. 23, § 1.) Yes, a thousand times yes, according to logic there should be a double predestination; but logic must remain silent here, since Scripture is silent. But the Calvinists dare not bid their master be silent. All standard Calvinistic writings repeat Calvin's argument. L. Boettner, for instance, insists: "The doctrine of absolute predestination, of course, logically holds that some are foreordained to death as truly as others are foreordained to life. The very terms 'elect' and 'election' imply the terms 'non-elect' and 'reprobation.' . . . Those who hold the doctrine of election but deny that of reprobation can lay but little claim to consistency. To affirm the former while denying

the latter makes the degree of predestination an illogical and lopsided decree. . . . Calvin says: "There can be no election without its opposite, reprobation." (*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, p. 104 f.) And he speaks of "the logical consistency of Calvinism" (p. 44) and claims: "If the doctrine of total inability, or original sin, be admitted, the doctrine of unconditional election follows by the most inescapable logic" (p. 95) and: "While other systems are found to be wholly inadequate in their explanation of sin, Calvinism can give a fairly adequate explanation in that it recognizes that God is ultimately responsible since He could have prevented it" (p. 251). When the anxious sinner asks the Calvinist: Must I believe that God does not want all men to be saved but has consigned some *a priori* to hell? the Calvinist tells him: you must believe it, for logic teaches it.

The second stock argument is: We must assume that the result is the interpretation of the purposes of God. God cannot seriously desire the salvation of all men; else all would be saved. Calvin: "How comes it, then, that if God would have all to be saved, He does not open a door of repentance for the wretched, who would more readily have received grace? — *Experience* shows that this will for the repentance of those whom He invites to Himself, is not such as to make Him touch all their hearts." (*Op. cit.*, III, chap. 24, § 15.) The human interpretation of historical facts is thus placed above Scripture. Reason counts for more than revelation. Hodge rationalizes the same way: "It cannot be supposed that God intends what is never accomplished. . . . This cannot be affirmed of any rational being who has the wisdom and power to secure the execution of his purpose. Much less can it be said of Him whose power and wisdom are infinite. If all men are not saved, God never purposed their salvation. . . . We must assume that the result is the interpretation of the purposes of God. . . . If the work of Christ is equally designed for all men, it must secure the salvation of all." (II:323.) Roehr and Semler might easily have written that. And so all along the line. L. Berkhof: "If God knows precisely, as He does, who will and who will not accept the offer of salvation, does it seem reasonable to think that He would send Christ into the world to suffer and die for the purpose of saving those of whom He is sure that they will never meet the conditions and be saved? . . . If we proceed on the assumption that Christ was sent into the world and died for the express purpose of saving all men, then it follows . . . (3) that many whose sins were atoned and for whom the penalty was paid are yet lost and will have to bear the penalty of sin eternally, a very inconsistent position, from which there is no logical escape, except in Calvinism or in absolute Universalism." (*Op. cit.*, pp. 157, 162.)

"Hence it logically follows," says L. Boettner, "that it is not His secret purpose or decretive will that all should be saved." (*Op. cit.*, p. 117.) Scripture says that God loved the world and sent His Son to redeem all. Reason says: That cannot be true. And Calvinism says: Reason is right.<sup>7)</sup>

Let Scripture say as loudly as possible that grace is universal, the Calvinist would rather listen to the blandishments of reason. Abraham Kuyper, one of the leading Calvinistic theologians of the present generation, actually finds it possible to pen these words: "The Redemption of the Cross. 'For God so loved the world,' etc. The Mediator is called 'the Light of the world.' The Lamb of God 'bears the sins of the world.' Christ is called 'the Savior of the world.' 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.' Accordingly 'Christ is the Propitiation not only for our sins but for the sins of the whole world.' To conclude from this with the Arminians of all shades that grace is not particular but meant for all men is absolutely wrong." (*The Biblical Doctrine of Election*, p. 14. Grand Rapids, 1934.)

*Ratio inimica fidei.* What the Christians most need in their spiritual affliction, the assurance that God would have every sinner to be saved, the Calvinist withholds from them, withholds it on the behest of reason.

But how is this? These theologians profess the *sola Scriptura*. They would consider it a crime to speak one word against Scripture. They assure us that Scripture is their sole guide. Calvin insists that "the only due method of teaching in the Church is according to the rule of the Word, the writings of the prophets and apostles" (see above). Hodge insists: "The people of God are bound by nothing but the Word of God." (I:183.) Calvin stated on his death-bed that he never knowingly twisted a single passage of Scripture. (See *CONC. THEOL. MONTH.*, VIII:266.) These men are convinced in their hearts that they drew their distinctive doctrine from Scripture alone. "What we teach on the subject is in perfect accordance with Scripture." (Calvin, *Inst.*, IV, chap. 16, § 19.) They resent the charge that they have "produced new doctrines." But they have done that very thing. They have taken reason for their guide. They have twisted scores of passages

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7) These are the stock arguments. There are others. For instance: "Grace includes each and every one whom He, in sovereign election, has chosen. The fact that there will be those of the human family, as Scripture clearly discloses there will be, who will not be included in the benefits of saving grace, is made more apprehensible by the fact that the entire group of angelic beings who have fallen into sin are deprived of any hope of salvation." (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, Jan.-March, 1936, p. 7.)

of Scripture. *They are rationalists.*<sup>8)</sup> And yet they insist and believe that they are sola-Scriptura theologians. What is the explanation? We have here another instance of the baleful influence of the spirit of rationalism on the minds of men, and of its baneful effects. Some it affects in this way, that they declare: Wherever Scripture is not in accord with reason, Scripture is wrong. That is the case of the gross rationalists. Others it affects in this way, that they declare: Scripture is always right because it is in accord with reason. That is the case of the Reformed. Calvin and Hodge are not dishonest when they deny universal grace and still insist that the Bible is on their side, because, in their mind, the Scripture statements seemingly teaching universal grace cannot mean that, since that would be contrary to reason. If a man has persuaded himself that the words "God loved the world" cannot mean that He loved all men, but mean, as reason assures him, that He loved only the elect, we can understand how he can say that "what we teach on the subject is in perfect accordance with Scripture." But what we cannot understand is how these men can so delude themselves that, after

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8) That is the well-nigh universal judgment. So say the Lutherans. See statement above. Add this from Rudelbach (*op. cit.*, p. 136): "Luther zeigte mit buendiger Kraft, dass dieses (die figuerliche Auslegung der Einsetzungsworte) nur ertraeumte Deutelei und nicht gewissenhafte Auslegung sei, zumal da, wie Billican erhaertete, die einfachste philologische Operation uns gerade auf das Gegenteil fuehre; dass der Zweifelsknoten keineswegs in der Hermeneutik liege, die hier vielmehr eine unwillige Dienerin sei, sondern in der *fleischlich hochmuetigen Vernunft* der Gegner, die sich straeube, das von Gottes Hand anzunehmen, was er uns durch sein Wort gibt, weil es ihrem Sinn ungeeignet duenke." Pieper: "The rationalistic principle which the Reformed introduced into theology reached its full development in the system of the Socinians, Unitarians, and Modernists, who directly state: Holy Scripture is the source and norm of theology in so far as it agrees with human reason." (*Vortraege ueber die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche*, p. 29.) See also Formula of Concord, *Trigl.*, pp. 1033, 1049, 1071, etc. The Catholics pass the same judgment. Cardinal Gibbons: "I understand why rationalists, who admit nothing above their reason, reject the Real Presence." (See preceding article.) And there are Reformed writers who pass the same judgment. Peter Barth declared at the Third Congress for Calvinistic Theology, June 15, 1936, in Geneva, that Calvin was wrong in taking "experience" to be a second source of theology and in operating with "deductions" and adds: "We need not discuss whether human thinking and reasoning—for without doubt these deductions are human reasoning—is to be permitted to deduce from a premise which is absolutely true that there must also be a decree of reprobation." (*Evangelische Theologie*, July, 1938, p. 159 ff.) Another Reformed writer is willing to call Zwingli "a representative of the rationalistic school" (see *CONC. THEOL. MONTHLY*, I:100). Certainly the Reformed theologians are rationalists. Read the preceding pages once more. Their language betrays them. Why, they occasionally speak the very idiom of *rationalismus vulgaris*. Von Rommel: "Luther schlug jeden Ausspruch des gesunden Menschenverstandes mit der Unbegreiflichkeit der goettlichen Macht darnieder." (*Philip der Grossmuetige*, I:252.)

twisting and distorting Scripture to make it agree with axioms of philosophy and canons of experience, they can declare: Scripture is on our side. It passes all understanding how Kuyper can list and write out all those passages which state that the Lamb of God "bears the sins of the world" and then say: "To conclude from this that grace is meant for all men is absolutely wrong." We cannot understand how Calvin and Hodge can take up John 3:16, make it mean: God did not love all the world, but only the "world of the elect," and still honestly believe that they never twisted a single passage of Scripture. We cannot understand how H. H. Meeter can write in *Calvinism, an Interpretation of Its Basic Ideas* (1939): "The authority of the Bible the Calvinist considers to be absolute. . . . The Bible is for him an absolute rule, before which he must bow unflinchingly. . . . Calvin was very insistent on this point. If the Bible had spoken, there was only one thing to do and that was to obey" (p. 43), and then go on to say: "The important question for us is: Does God show any grace, *any attitude of favor*, any good will, any love, to unregenerate, specifically to such that are non-elect, to reprobate sinners? We can begin by saying that as *reprobate, as sinners*, they never are the objects of God's favor, but always of His wrath. . . . This common grace will one day add to their destruction." (Pp. 74, 76.) What is the explanation? Human reason rules over its dupes with more than human power. Satan equips his paramour with supernatural influence. The spirit of rationalism can so delude, blind, and befool men that, after divesting Scripture of its plain meaning,—against all the laws of hermeneutics, all the protests of sane reason,—they honestly believe that they are Bible theologians.

Behold the mystery of iniquity working in rationalism! It despoils the Church of its choicest treasures; it gives the lie to Scripture; and it does this under the guise of faithful allegiance to Scripture. Luther's language is not too harsh: "He tells us further what Mistress Hulda, natural reason, teaches on these matters, as though we did not know that reason is Satan's paramour and can do naught but defame and defile all that God says or does. But before we answer this arch-whore and Satan's bride, we shall first prove our faith with simple, clear Bible-passages." (XX:232.) And Luther was not writing against gross rationalists but against Carlstadt and the Reformed.

TH. ENGELDER

(To be continued)

