

10-1-1940

Reason or Revelation?

Th. Engelder

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Engelder, Th. (1940) "Reason or Revelation?," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 11 , Article 69.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol11/iss1/69>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

admonition and ecclesiastical discipline. "Between the Church and the world there is no permanent *modus vivendi* possible."⁵²⁾

Finally, the attitude must be inculcated that every responsibility is an opportunity. In our own day the area where this needs particularly to be instilled is in the relation of a Christian citizen to his government. The Table of Duties appended to the Small Catechism offers excellent counsel to subjects, but it is no longer exhaustive for us. In a democracy the duties of citizenship are not discharged merely by obeying, praying, and paying; the intelligent use of the franchise and of political office is quite as obligatory. We may not ask for daily bread unless we are prepared to work for it; we may not ask for a pious spouse unless we are prepared to espouse a pious person; we may not ask for pious servants unless we engage pious persons as our employees; we may not ask for discipline in this community unless we contribute to it by disciplining ourselves; and we may not in a republic or a democracy ask for pious and faithful rulers unless we are prepared to deposit our vote to elect them or for good government unless we are prepared to do those things that experience shows are essential to getting it.⁵³⁾

Cleveland, Ohio

ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN

Reason or Revelation?

(Continued)

Rationalism is an evil thing, working untold harm. And harmonizing Scripture as practiced by Lutheran theologians is a form of rationalism. The harmonizers operate with the principles of rationalism. True, they do not apply them as widely as the gross rationalists. They restrict the harmonizing operation to selected portions of the Christian doctrine. But there they are engaged in the evil business of rationalism, in a wicked and harmful business.

First, a wicked business. Scripture forbids it. Scripture asks us to accept every one of its teachings, even though every one seems foolish to reason, and to accept its teachings as they stand, even though certain teachings seem contradictory to others. Scripture asks us to bring all reason into captivity to the obedience of Christ, to the obedience of Scripture, 2 Cor. 10:5, and to desist from all

52) Eliot, o. c., p. 96.

53) Dr. Theodore Graebner's essay on *Christian Citizenship* (St. Louis: 1937), originally read before the Synod of the English District at River Forest, Ill., is unqualifiedly the ablest exposition of the duties of a Christian in a democracy currently available in our circles.

harmonizing adjustings. Scripture asks us to realize that we know only in part (1 Cor. 13:12), that we know only so much as Scripture has revealed, and that, where Scripture is silent, we must remain silent and not attempt to reconcile particular election with universal grace and solve the problem *Cur alii, alii non?*

No Christian will, in his sober mind, claim the right to speak where Scripture is silent nor the right to refuse to accept certain teachings of Scripture until their rational agreement with other teachings is established. The Formula of Concord warns all Christians against such rationalistic proceedings. It tells them that harmonizing is not their business. "In addition to what has been revealed in Christ concerning this, God has still kept secret and concealed much concerning this mystery and reserved it for His wisdom and knowledge alone, which we should not investigate, nor should we indulge our thoughts in this matter nor draw conclusions and inquire curiously, but should adhere to the revealed Word. For our curiosity has always much more pleasure in concerning itself with these matters [with investigating these things which are hidden and abstruse] than with what God has revealed to us concerning this in His Word, because we cannot *harmonize it, which, moreover, we have not been commanded to do.*" The Formula is speaking of election, particular election, and universal grace, and of the fact that "God gives His Word at one place but not at another." (*Trigl.*, p. 1087.)¹ Luther warns the Christians against seeking an answer to the question why "God crowns the wicked man freely without any merit and yet crowns not but damns another, who is perhaps less, or at least no more, wicked," since Scripture does not answer it. (XVIII:1794, 1966.) Walther asks: "What should a Christian do when he finds that two doctrines which seem to contradict each other are both clearly and plainly taught in Scripture?" He quotes the statement of the Formula of Concord which denounces harmonizing, and in the closing paragraph of the article admonishes all Christians, and all Lutherans who would be

1) Dr. F. Bente on this declaration of the Formula of Concord: "In judging of the charge in question [the charge that the Formula of Concord fails to modify the doctrines of *sola gratia* or *universalis gratia* in a manner satisfactory to human reason], it should not be overlooked that according to the Formula of Concord all Christians, theologians included, are bound to derive their entire doctrine from the Bible alone; that matters of faith must be decided exclusively by clear passages of Holy Scripture; that human reason ought not in any point to criticize, and lord it over, the infallible Word of God; that reason must be subjected to the obedience of Christ and dare not hinder faith in believing the divine testimonies, even when they seemingly contradict each other. We are not commanded to harmonize, says the Formula, but to believe, confess, defend, and faithfully to adhere to the teachings of the Bible." (*Hist. Intro.*, *Trigl.*, p. 205.)

true to the Confession "to believe, teach, and confess both truths" (election of grace and universal grace), "since both are clearly revealed in Scripture and since a high, unsearchable divine mystery here confronts us. It is an easy matter, a cheap art, to find all sorts of reasonable objections to such teachings and point out seeming contradictions; but it is a sad thing when believing Christians permit such considerations to create the least doubt in their hearts. Why, it would no longer be a mystery of faith if reason found everything to be harmonious. We close with repeating Luther's statement 'If harmonizing were in order, we could not retain one single article of faith'" (*Lehre u. Wehre*, 1880, p. 270). Scripture requires us to receive all its teachings as they stand and not to tamper with any of them in the interest of harmonizing.

We would hardly want to call that a specifically Lutheran view of the matter. It belongs to the rudiments of Christian theology. There are many outside of the Lutheran Church who will insist, with the Formula of Concord, that harmonizing is not our business. Here is a typical statement, by R. A. Torrey: "But some one may ask: 'How shall we reconcile the Bible doctrine of the true deity of Jesus Christ with the Bible doctrine of the real human nature of Jesus Christ, the doctrine that He was real God with the doctrine that He was equally truly man?' The answer to this is very simple. Reconciling doctrines is not our main business. Our first business is to find out what the various passages in the Bible mean, taken in their natural, grammatical interpretation. Then, if we can reconcile them, well and good; if not, we should believe them both and leave the reconciliation of the two apparently conflicting doctrines to our increasing knowledge as we go on communing with God and studying His Word." (Better say: the *lumen gloriae* will bring the reconciliation.) "It is an utterly foolish and vicious principle of Biblical interpretation that we must interpret every passage of the Bible so that we can readily reconcile it with every other passage. It is this principle of interpretation that gives rise to a one-sided, and therefore untrue, theology." Torrey goes on to show that men applying this vicious principle of harmonizing become either "one-sided Calvinists" or "one-sided Arminians" (synergists), and concludes: "It is utter foolishness, to say nothing of presumption, to thus handle the Word of God deceitfully. . . . So we should have no difficulty in recognizing the fact that truths that still seem to us to be contradictory do now perfectly harmonize in the infinite wisdom of God and will some day" (in the *lumen gloriae*) "perfectly harmonize to our minds." (*The Fundamental Doctrine of the Christian Faith*.) Quoting from *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, 1934, p. 143, we submit another fine Christian presentation of this matter. "It is most interesting and encouraging

to find time and again that men who simply follow the truth of Scripture are bound to state this truth without following the logic of human reason. We find this to be true in many sections of the book by Pieters *The Facts and Mysteries of the Christian Faith*, also in the chapter with the caption "The Mystery of Divine Selection." We read: "So God chooses men to love Him and makes love to them until He wins them. . . . Hence arises the doctrine of election. Now, to be sure, no sooner do we try to think the matter through from the intellectual side than we find ourselves in great difficulty. If we seek to relate this consciousness of divine selection to other things we know about God and ourselves, a host of unanswerable questions confront us. "If God chooses one, why not all? Does God not love all men? Why does He choose one and not another? If God must first draw men before they can come to Christ, then are not some men free from blame in rejecting Christ, seeing God has not drawn them?" It would be easy to lose our way among such problems. There is much that we do not know, but this need not surprise us. In every department of thought our ignorance is always much greater than our knowledge; yet the important thing to remember is that *we must live by our knowledge, not by our ignorance.* . . . Let us, then, live by what we know and be content to acknowledge our ignorance of that which God has not revealed to us. It is equally vain and foolish, on the one hand, to deny election because we cannot harmonize it with the teaching that God loves all men and, on the other, to reject the love of God for all because we cannot make it agree with election. Both are revealed, precious, and necessary truths."

That is the Christian attitude, the attitude required by Scripture, by God. God has invested every statement and teaching of Scripture with absolute authority. It is a wicked thing to look askance at any teaching of Scripture because other teachings of Scripture seem to contradict it. It is not God, but Satan's paramour, who asks us to harmonize. And, in his sober mind, the Christian refuses to do so.

So much in general. Now let us emphasize some particulars. Harmonizing is an evil, wicked business, because it sets reason above Scripture. The gross rationalists set reason above Scripture and cannot see any wrong in this. But now we find that the harmonizing Lutherans, too, are doing this very thing. That is a grave charge. But we must maintain it. In the first place, the harmonizers set out to shed light on what Scripture presents to us as mysteries of faith. Some, many, mysteries they will accept, but some they are bound to clarify. They insist on solving, for instance, the mystery of the *discretio personarum*. And they tell us that they have solved it—through the synergistic solution.

And that means that their reason has provided them with a solution which Scripture does not give. But that means: where Scripture failed them, reason came to the rescue. They have to tell people that it is useless to go to Scripture when certain pressing problems and disturbing questions arise, but they should look to the keen mind of the philosophizing theologian for help. That is a denial of the *sola Scriptura*. It means, in effect, that occasionally reason serves better than Scripture. It is setting reason above revelation.

In the second place, the harmonizers care more for logical consistency and for reasonableness than for mere statements of Scripture. What has started this business of harmonizing? The fact that certain teachings of Scripture seem to be contradictory to each other. Particular election does not agree, applying the yardstick of reason, with universal grace. Reason calls upon us to reconcile these "contradictory" teachings. That is the whole stock in trade of the harmonizers: appliances for adjusting Scripture to meet the requirements of logical thought.

We ask: Must theology meet the requirements of logical thought? Scripture denies this. The teachings of Scripture are not such as the eye and ear of reason can see, hear, comprehend. 1 Cor. 2. Scripture declares that its teachings are foolishness to men. 1 Cor. 1 and 2. They are hidden from the wise; they are revealed unto babes; babes accept them with unquestioning faith; the philosopher who makes reasonableness the test of truth will never grasp the real meaning of Scripture. Luke 10:21. Scripture does not submit its teachings to the test of logical consistency. It is above the law of contradictories. We have heard this before, in the first article of this series, when we were dealing with the gross rationalists; but we shall have to repeat it. Remember, we are not rattling dry bones, treating issues dead and buried. We have the gross rationalists still with us, and we have the harmonizers with us. They have yet to learn that rudimental principle of Christian theology which insists that the laws of reason and logic do not shape the Christian doctrines. So we shall have to repeat and amplify what we said on pages 331 and 420 above. God, God's revelation of the plan of salvation, must not be measured by our conceptions of what constitutes reasonableness. We shall offer no further proof for this than the bare word "God." "If there is a God at all, He is so far above man that the human mind cannot measure His thoughts; else He were no God." And so Luther declares: "What matters it if philosophy cannot fathom this? The Holy Spirit is greater than Aristotle." (XIX:29.) What matters it if we cannot reconcile particular election and universal grace? God revealed both truths, and they must stand in spite of our inability to fit them together. Logic does not rule theology. It serves

theology. There is the necessary *usus rationis ministerialis*. (See p. 333 above.) But it must not rule theology. It dare not say: These words cannot mean what they say, for that would involve a contradiction. Scripture is greater than Aristotle and all logicians and mathematicians. Christian theology can bear all manner of logical absurdities and mathematical impossibilities. The Christian theologian is not ashamed to write the following: "Gott ist unabhaengig von Zeit und Raum und Kausalitaet; aber gewiss gelten doch auch fuer ihn die Gesetze der Logik? Nein, auch diese sind einbægiffen in das Wort 'schuf'. Uns erscheint nichts einfacher und klarer als der Satz, dass zweimal zwei vier ist. . . . Dennoch gilt dieser Satz nicht weiter, als die gegenwaertige Welt reicht. Gott hat dieses Zahlenverhaeltnis fuer Himmel und Erde festgelegt. Er ist ihm nicht unterworfen. Er laesst uns einen kleinen Blick in seine Unabhaengigkeit von jedem Zahlenverhaeltnis tun, indem er sich als den Dreieinigen offenbart. 'Der Vater ist Gott, der Sohn ist Gott, der Heilige Geist ist Gott; und sind doch nicht drei Goetter, sondern es ist ein Gott.' Dasselbe gilt von allen Regeln der Logik: dem Satz von der Identitaet, vom Widerspruch, vom ausgeschlossenen Dritten. Gott hat diese Denkgesetze zugleich mit Himmel und Erde und fuer Himmel und Erde erschaffen. Er will auch, dass wir all unser Leben nach ihnen einrichten. . . . Aber er selbst ist diesen Gesetzen nicht unterworfen. Dafuer gibt er uns ein Beispiel, wenn er uns auf eine fuer uns alle ueberaus wichtige Frage eine unserer Vernunft so aergerliche Antwort gibt. Wir fragen: Warum werden etliche Menschen selig? und Gott antwortet: Das ist allein meine Gnade. Warum gehen andere Menschen verloren? Das ist durchaus ihre eigene Schuld. Fragen wir weiter, wie denn das stimme: gleiche Schuld, gleiche Gnade und doch so verschiedene Resultate, so verweigert uns Gott nicht nur die Antwort, sondern verweist uns auch die Frage als eine vorwitzige und fordert uns auf, ihm zuzutrauen, dass alles in Ordnung sei, und uns seiner Gnade zu freuen." (*Theol. Quartalschrift*, 1938, p. 267.) Professor Meyer learned this from Father Luther. "So, then, I hear that Christ is God, just as the Father, and still it is true that there is but one God. That sounds too ridiculous, and reason cannot grasp it. Aye, and it is not supposed to grasp it. You are to say: When I hear the Word, spoken from above, I believe it; though I cannot grasp it nor understand it, can make nothing of it, cannot figure otherwise with my reason than that 2 and 5 are 7, still, if He should say from above: No; 2 and 5 are 8, I would believe Him, against reason and sense. So, then, if I want to figure and judge, I cannot believe; but I shall believe Him and trust in Him whom I know to be wiser than I am and who can figure better than I can. Now apply that here: reason will not

hear of it that two Persons are one God, for that would be saying that 2 is not 2, but 2 is 1; here you have the Word and reason in conflict. Here reason must abdicate; it can no longer be master, judge, and doctor; it must doff its little hat and say, Two is one; though I cannot see and understand it, I believe it. Why? Because God has spoken it from above." (X:1095.) Hear Luther again: "The articles of faith are against all philosophy, geometry, and arithmetic, yea, against all that is created. 'It is'; 'it is not'—nobody can harmonize that." (XXII:1024.) And now Lutheran theologians are up in arms because of seemingly contradictory teachings of Scripture! Hear Luther once more and learn that God and Christian theology and Christianity is superior to the laws of science and logic. "Die Menschenkinder denken, wenn sie raten koennen, so muesse die Tat wohl kommen. Wie kann es fehlen? sagen sie; es ist so gewiss, als dass 7 und 3 10 machen. Und wahr ist es, *mathematice*, nach der Zahl und Rechnung machen 7 und 3 gerade 10, und fehlet nicht, der Rat ist getroffen; aber *physice*, nach der Tat oder im Werk, da geht es also, dass Gott kann die sieben Stueck in *ein* Stueck schmelzen, und aus sieben eins machen; wiederum, die drei teilen in dreissig; so sind es denn nicht mehr die gewissen zehn in der Tat, die es vor waren im Rat." (V:804.) Do not tell Jesus that common arithmetic and the laws of supply and demand will not permit Him to feed five thousand men with five loaves. Jesus figures differently from us. Do not tell God that His teaching of particular election contradicts His teaching of universal grace. God's logic transcends human logic.

That is a commonplace of Christian theology. But in view of the fact that the harmonizers have not yet grasped it, it will bear repetition. We repeat it in the words of F. H. R. Frank: "Aber ist nun vielleicht die Meinung des Bekenntnisses dieses, dem Christen einfach zuzumuten, er soll es bei jenem scheinbaren Widerspruch bewenden lassen und im Glauben ihn ertragen? . . . Die Gedanken, mit denen der Glaube und die Theologie zu tun haben, resultieren aus Tatbestaenden, die als solche noch gaenzlich *ausserhalb des Gebietes der Logik stehen*. Wenn daher das Bekenntnis den Widerspruch nicht sofort als Zeichen der Unwahrheit auffasst und den Glauben, der ihn nicht zu loesen vermag, auffordert, ihn zu ertragen, so ist damit nicht zunaechst ein logischer, sondern nur ein Widerspruch der unzureichend ermittelten oder zu ermittelnden Tatbestaende gemeint, und es waltet dabei, wie sehr auch darauf gedungen wird, die Tatsachen selbst, soweit sie ermittelt sind, um des scheinbaren Widerspruchs willen nicht anzutasten, die Glaubensgewissheit, dass letzterer *nur fuer das menschliche Verstaendnis*, nicht aber an sich bestehe. Darum erscheint es als ein Postulat des Glaubens, den Widerspruch als an

sich nicht vorhandenen zu setzen; und wenn es uns nicht befohlen ist, 'zusammenzureimen,' wie Gottes geheimer Wille mit dem offenbarten sich widerspruchslos einige, so ist es doch ein notwendiges Gebot des Glaubens, und wird als solches von dem Bekenntnis aufrechterhalten, dass man Gotte nicht kontradiktorische Willen zuschreibe, so naemlich, als wenn Gott, der doch die ewige Wahrheit ist, ihm selbst zuwider sein koennte." (*Die Theologie der Konkordienformel*, IV:186 f.) We repeat it in the words of A. B. Svensson: "It can certainly happen that God's logic lies upon a plane so high that we can never grasp it here in time." (See preceding article.) We repeat it in the words of Th. Graebner: "Reason is incapable of bridging the gulf between special election and universal grace. *Cur alii prae aliis?*" The problem presents "the paradox that of two contradictory propositions both may be in reality true, though logically irreconcilable." (*CONC. THEOL. MONTHLY*, 1934, p. 164.)

It will bear further repetition. *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, on Rev. 22:20: "This is one of the antinomies of the religious consciousness which is illogical only on paper."² John R. Rice: "There are thousands of things the Bible states that I cannot understand. Thank God, I can believe them, and that is all God requires of me." (*What Must I Do to be Saved*, p. 155.) And E. Lewis, not at all a conservative: "One can appreciate the impatience of Dostoevski, which led him to exclaim: 'I spit on the philosophy that cannot see beyond "two plus two equals four."'. . . There are ways to truth other than the way of logic. . . Your business is not to force the Christian faith into a logical strait-jacket and to reject what will not submit to the treatment, but to declare it in living wholeness. Do not forget that the Stone which the logic-choppers reject because it is too hard for their shaping-tools, is still the Head-stone of the corner in the building of faith." (*The Faith We Declare*, pp. 24, 227.)³

Must theology meet the requirements of logical thought? Scripture says, No; but the harmonizers say, Yes. When two doctrines, both clearly revealed, seem to contradict each other, they consider it their duty to harmonize. They modify one of the teachings in the interest of logical consistency. Theology must constitute a system. It must not contain contradictory elements. And Scripture

2) "Surely I come quickly." Did the apostles believe that? Were they, then, not disappointed? About this matter, too, the harmonizers trouble themselves much and offer various adjustments.

3) Some of the writers just quoted fail to apply their principle fully. Lewis is liberalistic. Rice denies the efficacy of Baptism. Frank is for "systematic" theology. That shows the need of hammering home the Scriptural teaching that logic must not rule theology.

must not be represented as containing contradictory teachings. And now we say: The theological method of the harmonizers is an evil, wicked thing. For it is setting reason above Scripture. Since particular election and universal grace are, as reason figures, contradictories, one or the other of these teachings must be modified, even though Scripture clearly teaches both of them. The Calvinistic harmonizers have chosen to eliminate universal grace and raise the charge against the Lutherans, who retain both teachings, that "they are not systematic in their thought." This, says the *Theologische Quartalschrift* (1940, p. 204), "in the last analysis places reason above Scripture." And when the Lutheran harmonizers, in order to be systematic in their thought, tamper with particular election, they, too, place reason above Scripture. Insisting on the rights of reason, they override the rights of Scripture.

Again, the harmonizers can achieve their purpose only by doing violence to the words of Scripture. They are forced to misinterpret Scripture and to divest certain passages of their clear meaning. The Calvinist is forced, in order to maintain his teaching that God does not love all men, to interpret the passage "God so loved the world" so as to make it say: "God so loved the world of the elect." And we have to tell him that he harmonized Scripture by misinterpreting, perverting Scripture. The Lutheran harmonizers, who need to get rid of particular election, treat Scripture in the same way. They have convinced themselves that, since Scripture teaches universal grace, it cannot teach particular election, cannot teach the *sola gratia*. And they are forced to tamper with the passages which state that election is by grace alone, not determined in any way by the better conduct of some. These passages, to their mind, cannot mean what they say. They must be given a new meaning.

One of the methods used to discount these passages is to stamp them as "dark" passages and by appealing to the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture give them a different meaning. Here is a pertinent statement: "This universal comfort of the Gospel can only be preserved if the few texts of Holy Writ, in part not easily understood, which treat of a selection of a few persons, who will infallibly be saved, are not interpreted in such a way that the many clear texts of the universal grace of God towards all men are darkened and suppressed, but if, on the contrary, the few dark passages are interpreted by means of the many clear passages." Another similar statement: "The author" (of a certain book being reviewed) "says 'it is vain and foolish to deny election because we cannot harmonize it with the teaching that God loves all men.' Our reply is this: If a doctrine cannot be harmonized with John 3:16, it must be contrary to the Word of God and should therefore

be dropped." 4) There is something fundamentally wrong with this argumentation. It is certainly not wrong to let Scripture interpret Scripture. It is right and proper and necessary to explain obscure passages in the light of clear passages. But it is wrong to take a clear passage and explain away its meaning on the plea that it is obscure. And the passages teaching particular election, the election of grace, are clear passages. Every single word of Eph. 1:4 f. is plain, simple, intelligible: "He — hath chosen — us — in Him — before the foundation of the world — to the praise of the glory of His grace." 2 Tim. 1:9 is as clear as the noonday sun: "He hath saved us according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." What man has the right to stamp these passages as "dark" passages? They are dark and in need of clarification and modification only to him who imagines that particular election would do away with universal grace. The passages themselves are clear, and it is wrong to refuse to accept them in their plain sense. It is just as much of a crime against Scripture as that which the Unitarians commit when they take the passages teaching the humanity of Jesus as clear passages and treat the passages teaching the deity of Jesus as dark passages, in need of modification and of adjustment with the former. The plea of the Lutheran harmonizers that they are interpreting "dark" passages in the light of clear passages does not clear them of the charge that they are discarding portions of Scripture.

"Walther absolutely denied the claim that those passages which treat of the election of those who are saved are obscure and difficult. He therefore demanded: Both truths must be accepted by one who would be a Christian, yes, and an orthodox Lutheran.

4) It amounts to the same when modern theology holds that "the whole of Scripture" determines the meaning of the individual passages and teachings. Any teaching that does not agree with this mythical "whole of Scripture" (each theologian constructs his own "Schriftganzes") must be modified, reconstructed, and adjusted to fit the "whole." Or put it another way: "Since the moderns conceive of theology as the science of Christianity, they demand that the Christian doctrines form a whole, harmonious according to reason. They say that it is the business of theology to show how the various doctrines integrate." (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1888, p. 327 f. — The writer calls attention to the article of Walther: "What should a Christian do, etc?" [*Lehre u. Wehre* 1880, p. 321 ff.], which denounces this principle, applied for the purpose of removing the seeming contradiction between particular election and universal grace, as unscriptural, un-Lutheran, unchristian.) — L. Dahle, quoted in the preceding article, uses the phrase "if we go back to the *fundamental principles* of Scriptural teachings." He is advocating the possibility of conversion in "Hades." It is not a clear doctrine of Scripture, he says, but the "fundamental principles" demand it; the "whole of Scripture" or something similar calls for it. That is the method of all harmonizers: the Christian doctrine is not based on individual passages but on the "whole of Scripture"; and individual passages, be they never so clear, may be stamped as "dark" passages when valid considerations demand it.

To correct one doctrine of Scripture by another because reason insists that this passage is obscure and involves a contradiction, to correct it, yes, delete it entirely, on the plea that dark passages must receive their interpretation through the clear passages,— *dieses ist ein entsetzlicher Frevel.*" (*Lehre u. Wehre*, 1891, p. 68.) Dr. Walther wrote this in *Lehre u. Wehre*, 1883, p. 313: "So wahr das ist, dass Schrift aus Schrift erklart werden muss, naemlich die *dunklen* Stellen aus den klaren, so falsch ist es, wenn man nun auch die *klaren* Stellen wie dunkle behandeln und aus andern klaren Stellen erklaren und aufhellen will. Das heisst dann nicht Schrift aus Schrift *auslegen*, sondern Schrift aus Schrift *korrigieren* wollen." He quotes Luther who, when the Reformed used this very same argument to establish their doctrine of the Lord's Supper, told them: "This rule: one passage must be interpreted by another, deals, of course, with a special case and states that a doubtful and dark passage must be interpreted by a clear and certain passage. But to interpret clear and certain passages by means of other passages is making sport of the truth and hiding the light behind clouds. Do you say that all passages must be interpreted by means of other passages? That would be turning Scripture into an endless, rude chaos. Is that clear enough?" (XX:327.)

"Contradictory" teachings of Scripture can be harmonized in only one way: one of the teachings must be ruled out by divesting the passages teaching it of their clear meaning. The harmonizer must bid Scripture be silent when reason requires it.— What becomes of the *sola Scriptura*? The harmonizers with whom we are here dealing stand for the *sola Scriptura*. They do not take the position that they are at liberty to depart from the teaching of Scripture in any single instance. The Calvinist does not take the position that, though Scripture teaches universal grace, he is at liberty to deny it. The harmonizing Lutheran does not say: Scripture teaches particular election, but there Scripture is wrong. But in effect the harmonizers refuse to let Scripture be the sole source of doctrine. When they deny either that Scripture teaches universal grace or that it teaches the *sola gratia*, particular election, they are not permitting Scripture to speak on these points. They are putting their own words in the mouth of Scripture. They are silencing Scripture.

Another point: the will to harmonize springs from an evil source. It is the pride of reason which demands the reconciling of "contradictory" Scripture teachings and refuses to accept the mysteries of faith as unsolvable. Satan's paramour is too proud to acknowledge the absolute rule of God's Word.

God wants humble Christians and humble theologians. He

will not have us set our judgment above His judgments. He calls for blind obedience. Even though we cannot see how these two contradictory teachings harmonize, we must accept them both as true, knowing that the sole trouble is our weakness of understanding. God wants humble theologians, who recognize their intellectual limitations, are ready to admit that God's logic is higher than theirs, and therefore accept God's Word even when they cannot understand it. "Kannst du es nicht verstehen, so zeuch den Hut vor ihm ab." (Luther, VI:873.) There is not a Christian theologian who will not at once say, in his heart: It behooves me to uncover my head in the presence of God; when God's Word speaks, it is for me to bow my head in humble obedience. "When standing on the border-line between the finite and the infinite, . . . who among us is too proud to exclaim, There are some things which I do not understand?" (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, April, 1939, p.149.)

Carnal reason is too proud to say that, and so we must wage a continual conflict with the pride of our reason. It is the duty of "all Christians . . . not to indulge in a presumptuous manner in subtle inquiries concerning such mysteries with their reason, but with the venerated apostles simply to believe, to close the eyes of their reason and bring into captivity their understanding to the obedience of Christ, 2 Cor. 10:5" (Form. of Conc., *Trigl.*, p.1049). We must close the eyes of our reason. And that is not easily done. It is one of the hardest tasks imposed upon the Christians. It constitutes a heavy cross. Our flesh refuses to yield blind obedience to God's Word. In his book "*Religious or Christian*" O. Hallesby has chapters on "Christianity's Intellectual Crosses" and "Blind Obedience," in which he says: "Modern man no doubt feels that he encounters an intellectual cross in Christianity at nearly every step of the way. . . . There has never existed any such thing as a Christianity without the intellectual crosses which I have mentioned. . . . In the New Testament writings we have the source of the whole paradoxical, irrational content of the faith" of the Christian Church. . . . "How could people believe thus? How could they believe in such a Christ without being untrue to themselves? without committing a '*sacrificium intellectus*,' deliberate intellectual suicide?" (Pp. 9, 16, 19, 64.) It is not an easy thing to make our reason close her eyes and give blind obedience. Jesus requires a great sacrifice from us when He says: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee" (Matt. 5:29), and an equally great sacrifice when He asks us to pluck out the eye of our reason and cast it from us. "Es ist eine solche Lehre, die da will unsere Weisheit zur Naerrin machen und der Vernunft die Augen ausstechen." (Luther, XI:672.) We do not like to have men tell us that our Lutheran teaching on particular election and

universal grace is "illogical," due to "unsystematic thinking." And we have to keep on fighting against our own flesh, which would have us remove these offenses to reason. Who shall gain the victory, the pride of reason or the humility of Christ, by which we are willing to become "fools, whole fools, in Christ" (Luther's phrase, XVIII:39)?

In this conflict between the pride of reason and the humility of Christ Christian theologians have not always stood their ground. Asked to accept with blind obedience "contradictory" teachings of the Bible, they have not been willing to become fools in Christ. Their pride of reason is too strong. We are not saying, of course, that they are conscious of submitting to the pride of reason. They say that their only motive is the safeguarding of the precious doctrine of universal grace, and they are honest in saying that. But they are deceiving themselves, and frequently they unconsciously betray themselves. They do that when they tell us that *according to logical thinking* particular election and universal grace are contradictories. (See preceding article on the case of Melancthon.) All attempts at harmonizing Scripture with reason are due to the pride of reason.⁵⁾

Secondly, harmonizing the teachings of the Bible is an evil thing because it works deadly harm. It works havoc with the Chris-

5) Here would be the proper place to insert our regular footnote on the habit theologizing reason has of making fools of her pupils. Men do not care to be God's fools. Then let them be the fools of reason. Let us point out, first, that the harmonizers are guilty of the folly of all rationalists. Reason puts herself down as a fool when she sets herself up as judge of the incomprehensible. Augustine: "Thou fool, the God you can comprehend is no God!" Luther: "Ask reason herself whether she is not from conviction compelled to confess that she is foolish and rash for not allowing the judgment of God to be incomprehensible when she confesses that all the other divine things are incomprehensible?" (XVIII: 1964.) And, secondly, the harmonizing rationalizers commit their own particular follies. One of them is the folly of judging of a matter without having full knowledge of all the underlying conditions and relations. "The facts are not all in," the wise scientist will tell the tyro who thinks he knows all because he has observed one or two phenomena. And we shall not know all the "facts" till we reach heaven. Another folly is thus castigated by D. G. Barnhouse: "A Scotsman said: 'It is very easy to solve an insoluble problem if you begin by taking all the insoluble elements out of it.' And that is how a great deal of modern thinking does with Christianity. Knock out all the miracles; pooh-pooh all Christ's claims; say nothing about Incarnation; declare Resurrection to be entirely unhistorical, and you will not have much difficulty in accounting for the rest; and it will not be worth the accounting for." (*His Own Received Him Not*, p. 129.) Barnhouse is speaking of the full-grown rationalists and their cheap way of squaring the teachings of the Bible with reason. But the Lutheran harmonizers are doing the very same thing. They get rid of the problem why all are not saved, all being in the same guilt, by the simple expedient of denying the equal guilt. And they say that that is "systematic thinking."

tian doctrine. Wherever the harmonizers get in their work, the Christian doctrine suffers. In fact, if the principle of the harmonizers were consistently applied, nothing would remain of the Christian doctrine. As Luther says: "If harmonizing were in order, we could not retain one single article of faith." "Zum andern, weiss er wohl, quod allegare inconueniens non est solvere argumenta. Wenn es genug waere, dass einer spraeche, es reimt sich nicht, so koennte kein Artikel des Glaubens, ja kein Recht in der Welt bestehen. Aber der stolze, hochmuetige Geist laesst sich duenken, wenn er bloss daher sagt, es reimt sich nicht, so muesse es also sein und duerfe es nicht beweisen." (XX:960.) You cannot retain the doctrine that Jesus is both God and man, as Torrey told us, if the harmonizer has his way. Nor the doctrine of the Trinity. Luther: "Now, to be sure, we Christians are not so utterly devoid of all reason and sense as the Jews consider us, who take us to be nothing but crazy geese and ducks, unable to perceive or notice what folly it is to believe that God is man and that in one Godhead there are three distinct Persons. No; praise God, we perceive indeed that this doctrine cannot and will not be received by reason." (X:107.—Read the entire passage. Some of it belongs to the chapter on the wickedness and folly of harmonizing: "Proud, supercilious reason setting up itself as judge and master of the Divine Being, whom it has never seen nor is able to see.") All heresies had their rise in the principle of harmonizing. "Gerhard, in speaking of the practice of letting human reason, in order to avoid so-called contradictions between certain statements of Scripture, retouch and reconstruct these statements, says: '*Hic est fons omnium haeresium.*' Here is the fountain of all heresies." (*Lehre u. Wehre*, 1883, p. 7.) Why do the Universalists deny eternal damnation? Because that would contradict the Scripture teaching of the justice and mercy of God. Why do the Reformed deny the Real Presence? Because that is in conflict with the laws of physics and in contradiction to the article of Christ's ascent to heaven. "The beginning, middle, and end of all errors is this, that men refuse to accept the simple words of God and want to let reason deal with the divine miracles and set the thing straight, as Paul says, 2 Cor. 11:3, that Satan led Eve away from the simplicity of God's word into his subtility." (Luther, XIX:1390. See also XI:672: All heresies are due to this, that men refuse to put out the eyes of reason. XX:796: Make reason the judge, as Oecolampadius does, and every part of Scripture will contradict every other part.) Very little, nothing, would remain of the Christian doctrine if reason were permitted to revise it and remove the contradictions and offenses. In his sober moments even the liberal theologian realizes that. "When revelation is made plausible

by reason, not much remains of the authority of revelation." (E. Aubrey, *Living the Chr. Faith*, p. 70.)

If the Lutheran harmonizers were consistent, they would have to deny all Christian doctrines. They are far from doing this, thanks to the grace of God. But where they do apply the harmonizing principle, important, vitally important, doctrines suffer. Fundamental truths are sacrificed. There is the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture. The harmonizers, as we have seen, are compelled to deny it. And there is the *sola gratia*. The Lutheran harmonizers, as we have seen, are compelled to deny it. Looking for a rational solution of the difficulty connected with particular election and universal grace, Melanchthon invented the "different conduct," and in order to uphold that as the solution, he denied the *sola gratia*. No; he did not invent it. Before him, the semi-Pelagians operated with the harmonizing fiction of the different conduct. And at one time Melanchthon condemned this as a wicked teaching. He wrote in the Apology: "Here they will say: If we are to be saved by pure mercy, what difference is there between those who are saved and those who are not saved? . . . This argument has moved the scholastics to invent the *meritum condigni*; for there must be (they think) a difference between those who are saved and those who are damned." (*Trigl.*, p. 213.) But later on he adopted this same solution. He forgot that the synergistic solution is a wicked solution, destructive of the fundamental teaching of the *sola gratia*. Let no man forget this. "If we Christians, comparing ourselves with the rest, would ascribe to ourselves a different conduct or a lesser guilt, we should have forsaken the foundation of our Christian faith, the *sola gratia*." (Pieper, in *Lehre u. Wehre*, 1925, p. 102.) The Lutheran harmonizers vitiate the central article of the Christian religion. They are teaching, at bottom, Catholic doctrine. Dr. Pieper's judgment is not too harsh (Melanchthon himself pronounced the same judgment in the Apology): "The synergists assert that conversion and salvation depend not solely on the grace of God in Christ but also upon the better human conduct. Thus all who would be wiser than Scripture and would answer the question, *Cur alii prae aliis?* in this life, land in the Romish camp, in the doctrine of works. . . . When men, in order to fill existing *lacunae* and remove seeming contradictions, in order to get a scientific system, revise and retouch individual teachings, the result will be the subversion of the central doctrine of Christianity, justification by faith without works." (*Chr. Dog.*, II: 55.) The harmonizing operation of Melanchthon and his successors has hurt the doctrine of the Christian faith in vital spots. *Ratio inimica fidei*.

And as a consequence of this it has sorely hurt the Lutheran

Church. For one thing, it has brought shame and disgrace upon her. Her glory is the ministration of the Gospel of the grace of God, of *gratia universalis* and of *sola gratia*. When Rome had established the gospel of Satan, the religion of works, God raised up the Lutheran Church to testify, particularly, the Gospel of the *sola gratia*. Her boast and her glory is to be known as the Church which knows nothing but the grace of God. But she is not known for that everywhere. Many, even among theologians, think that the Lutheran Church ascribes the salvation of the sinner in part to his own work.⁶⁾ They identify Lutheranism and synergism. The blame for that attaches to the rationalizing Lutherans, who have departed from the teaching of our glorious Confession and, driven by the urge for harmonizing, have embraced synergism. So many have done it and they speak so loudly that outsiders mistake their voice for that of Lutheranism. The harmonizing effort has brought shame and disgrace upon the Lutheran Church.

And it imperils her very life. It is an alarming situation that synergism is widely held and taught within the confines of the Lutheran Church. For that strikes at the very vitals of Lutheranism. Our Church could not survive if the teachings engendered by the urge for harmonizing gained complete mastery. That would put her into the Catholic sisterhood. As it is, it has sapped her of much of her strength. Her strength lies in the *sola Scriptura* and the *sola gratia*. If all Lutheran pulpits and all Lutheran periodicals and all books by Lutheran authors knew nothing but what the Bible says and knew nothing but the grace of God, the Lutheran Church of today would exert a power beyond measure and description. But the harmonizers have silenced the genuine Lutheran voice in wide territories of the Lutheran Church. By so much she has lost power and influence.

Put it in terms of Lutheran union. Men say that, if the Lutherans of the world were united and the various divisions marched as one army, under one banner, the power of our Church would be increased a hundredfold. And that is true. We deplore the divided state of Lutheranism. It hampers our work, and that results in incalculable spiritual losses. But what has caused this

6) Dr. Craig, writing in *The Presbyterian* of Jan. 30, 1930, says: "Why is A saved, but not B? The Arminians say that God graciously bestowed sufficient grace on both to enable them to believe and obey the Gospel, that A made use of this sufficient grace, but B did not. The Lutherans say that both A and B were alike the objects of divine grace, but B persistently resisted this divine grace, while A did not. The Calvinists say that A was the object of sufficient grace, while B was not." H. H. Meeter, in "Calvinism," p. 64: "While the Modernist attributes the whole of man's salvation to his own efforts and the Arminian and the Lutheran ascribe only part of it to God and part to man, the Calvinist ascribes to God all the glory."

sad division? You know what caused the split in the Protestant hosts in the days of the Reformation and how grievously that harmed the cause of Christianity. It was the insistence of Zwingli and Calvin on rationalizing portions of the teachings of the Bible. (See on this matter August number, pp. 566 f.) And this same spirit later divided the Lutheran hosts. It was a sad day for the Lutheran Church when Melancthon, in order to harmonize the Scripture teaching of particular election and universal grace, introduced synergism among the Lutherans. For that is one of the chief causes of the division in our Church. That is what is keeping the Lutherans apart today. There are still many Lutherans who, following their reason, hold that in the interest of universal grace the teaching of a particular election must be modified (see preceding article), and are convinced that all who teach a real particular election are teaching Calvinism. As long as they hold to this idea, the Lutherans cannot get together. We want them united, God wants them united, and they will be on the way to a true union as soon as all agree on the thesis that, where two doctrines are clearly revealed, the Christian is bound to accept both of them, even if they seemingly contradict each other. And in such a union there will be strength; the power of God that inheres in the Gospel of the *gratia universalis* and the *sola gratia* will be the more widely applied. If there is to be harmony in our Church for the more efficient prosecution of her work, the work of the harmonizers must cease.

Finally, the harmonizing effort is fraught with deadly peril to the individual Christian. The false doctrines evolved in the harmonizing process endanger the souls of men. The teaching of the possibility of salvation in "Hades," one of the products of the harmonizing process, is not a harmless speculation; it is conducive to carnal security. The denial of Verbal Inspiration, another product, is a fundamental error. And so is synergism. It is a deadly poison. It tends to hinder the conversion of the sinner. A man who has the synergistic idea that his conversion hinges on something found within himself will never be converted. Luther: "For as long as he has any persuasion that he can do even the least thing himself towards his own salvation, he retains a confidence in himself and does not utterly despair of himself; he will not humble himself before God; but he proposes to himself some place, some time, or some work whereby he may at length attain unto salvation. But he who knows that his entire salvation depends on the will of God totally despairs of himself, chooses nothing for himself; and such a one is the nearest unto grace, that he might be saved." (XVIII: 1715.) Following the synergistic directions, no man will ever be converted to the Christian faith. For

the Christian faith builds on the *sola gratia*. Synergism is a fundamental error.⁷⁾

Moreover, this business of harmonizing is in itself, aside from its by-products, a dangerous business. It is the pride of reason that is back of it. And is it a small matter when a poor mortal presumes to improve on any teaching of Scripture and sets the judgment of his puny intellect above the Word of the great God? Pride is one of the mortal sins. Hear, once more, the warning cry of Luther: "God's Word will not stand trifling. If you cannot understand it, uncover your head before it." (VI: 873.) Trifling with God's Word, treating it as something that here and there needs clarification and correction by theologians, springs from wicked pride. It is fatal to indulge and nurse such a spirit. Faith cannot dwell in the proud heart.

Again, the harmonizer is engaged in the business of undermining the foundation of faith. God's Word is the foundation of faith. But if you tell people that Scripture needs harmonizing, that certain statements of Scripture cannot be accepted until they are made to meet the requirements of logic, you are making them doubt the clarity, the certainty, the truth, of Scripture. For if you have persuaded yourself and them that *one* statement of Scripture is in need of revision, how will you convince them that all the other statements are not in need of revision? Can faith build on such an uncertain word? And can it build on what you are offering in place of the clear statements of Scripture, on your own logical and theological constructions? "*Ratio inimica fidei*" applies here, too.

It is an evil business. The Christian finds it so hard to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. The life of his faith depends on this, that he trusts in the promises of the Gospel despite the objections of his reason. And he is daily engaged in this life-and-death struggle between faith and reason. We shall study this matter more fully in the concluding article of this series. Faith becomes so difficult in the face of the contradiction between the Law and the Gospel. The Christian needs to be encouraged daily to trust in the promise of the Gospel in spite of what experience, reason, and the Law say. And now come the harmonizers and tell him that at times it is right and proper to give reason a voice in determining the meaning of God's Word!

7) We are not implying that those who teach these errors cannot be Christians. On the case of Melancthon, for instance, see Pieper, *Chr. Dogmatik*, II: 582. But we do say that the conscious and persistent denial of the *sola gratia* is destructive of faith. And — to add a superfluous remark — in what we are here saying we are addressing not so much the professed harmonizers as, rather, ourselves. They need to be warned, surely; but we are mostly concerned with ourselves.

If the Christian should apply this advice in the hour of spiritual affliction, it might be his undoing.

It is hard to keep the faith. That calls for the power of the Holy Ghost. "Lieber Gott, wie ist's so grosse Muehe und Arbeit, dass ein Christ bleibe, wenn er gleich helle, duerre, gewisse Wort' Gottes vor sich hat! Was soll's denn werden, wo man die Worte fahren laesst und gibt sich auf der Vernunft Folgern und Kluegeln?" (XIX: 1390.) It requires all the power and persuasion of the Holy Spirit to keep the Christian clinging to the bare Word. But the harmonizers are telling him that he would do better, at times, to accept their ratiocinations in preference to the bare word of Scripture. They are interfering with the work of the Holy Ghost. As much as lies in them, they are undoing it.

Rationalism is a wicked thing, fraught with untold disaster—and harmonizing doctrines is a form of rationalism. Do we fully realize that? We have discussed at length the attempts to harmonize particular election with universal grace. Do we fully realize that all such attempts spring from the pride of our rationalizing flesh? Let us be on our guard! Hear Dr. Stoeckhardt: "The doctrine of election is the touchstone by which God tests our hearts. He is probing our hearts as to whether we are sincere in our protestation that the Word of God determines throughout our doctrine and confession, that for us God's Word counts for more than human opinion,—whether we are really willing to subject our reason to the obedience of Christ. God help us that we may stand the test!" (*Lehre u. Wehre*, 1880, p. 309.) Hear Dr. Pieper: "Here, in the doctrine of the election of grace, the final examination in theology is held. The Scriptural doctrine of the election of grace sweeps away the last remnants of Pelagianism and rationalism. Many acclaim Scripture as the sole source and norm of the Christian doctrine, and they do that *bona fide*. But when they are asked to hold both truths, the *universalis gratia* and the *sola gratia*, without any rational mediation, simply and solely on the authority of Scripture, many, even such as count themselves as Lutherans, feel that that is asking too much; they set aside the Scripture principle and rationalize themselves with the later Melanchthon into the synergistic camp. Goeschel well says concerning the Eleventh Article of the Formula of Concord: 'An diesem Artikel wird es wirklich immer deutlicher, wie die Konkordienformel gegen allen Rationalismus, auch den feinsten, den Rationalismus der Glaebigen, ohne Ansehen der Person kraeftig zu Felde zieht. Eben dadurch hat sie sich von vielen Widerspruch zugezogen bis zu dieser Stunde; sie ist dem Rationalismus aller Stufen entgegen, und darum ist ihr auch aller Rationalismus abgeneigt, auch der Rationalismus, der sich selbst nicht dafuer haelt.'" (*Chr. Dog.*, III:568.)

(To be concluded)

TH. ENGELDER