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Contrition

By THEODORE ENGELDER

Translated by H. J. A. BOUMAN and ERWIN LUEKER

(Continued)

[ED. NOTE: The title of the original article was stated erroneously in the first translated installment, which appeared in the previous issue. It is *Zur Lehre von der Reue.*]

III

DOES repentance follow faith? Such a question seems strange to Lutherans. We teach: "Now, repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which is born of the Gospel" (AC XII). Faith is "the chief part of repentance" (Ap XII 58, German Text). No, repentance, the essential characteristic of which is faith, cannot follow faith. Calvin and his adherents, however, teach that repentance follows faith. They obviously have a concept of repentance different from ours. The Reformed usage has contributed to the great confusion which reigns within the Christian Church concerning the doctrine of contrition and repentance. In the following we shall present what the Reformed have in mind when they let repentance follow faith, and we shall show how false and harmful this opinion is.

Book three, chapter three, of Calvin's *Institutiones* treats of repentance. There we read: "Repentance being properly understood, it will better appear how a man is justified freely by faith alone, and yet that holiness of life, *real* holiness, as it is called, is inseparable from the free imputation of righteousness. That repentance not only always follows faith, but is produced by it, ought to be without controversy. . . . Repentance may not inappropriately be defined thus: A real conversion of our life unto God, proceeding from sincere and serious fear of God and consisting in the mortification of our flesh and the old man and the quickening of the spirit. . . . As repentance begins with dread and hatred of sin, the apostle sets down godly sorrow as one of its causes (2 Cor. 7:10). By godly sorrow he means when we not only tremble at the punishment, but hate and abhor the sin because we know that it is displeasing to God. . . . We must now show what is meant

when we say that repentance consists of two parts, viz., the mortification of the flesh and the quickening of the spirit. The prophets, in accommodation to a carnal people, express this in simple and homely terms, but clearly, when they say: 'Depart from evil and do good' (Ps. 34:14; Is. 1:16, 17). In dissuading us from wickedness, they demand the entire destruction of the flesh. . . . In a word, then, by repentance I understand regeneration, the only aim of which is to form in us anew the image of God" (Translation by H. Beveridge). It is clear that for Calvin the term *repentance*, or *conversion*, denotes holy sorrow concomitant with faith and the turning away from sin to righteousness. This terminology, according to which repentance indeed follows faith, has found widespread usage in Reformed theology.

Chapter XIV of the *Second Helvetic Confession*, "De poenitentia et conversione hominis," par. 2, reads: "By repentance (*poenitentia*) we mean the change of mind in the sinful man which is wrought by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and accepted in true faith, in consequence of which the sinful man pleads guilty of his inbred depravity and of all his sins which the Word of God charges against him, and heartily grieves over his sins not only before God, but also is filled with a violent aversion to them and is earnestly concerned with immediate improvement and the constant exercise of holiness and virtue, and dedicates all future days of his life to this holy task." Par. 3 continues: "Now this is the true repentance, the sincere conversion to God and all that is good, the emphatic renunciation of the devil and all that is evil." Par. 13 then demonstrates that this mortifying of the flesh may not be regarded as atonement for sin, but rather is a part of the new obedience that results from gratitude for the perfect atonement offered by Christ.

The Heidelberg Catechism treats the doctrine of repentance in the same manner as Calvin. "Of how many parts does the genuine repentance or conversion of man consist? Of two parts: the mortification of the old man and the resurrection of the new. What is the mortification of the old man? To be heartily sorry for sins and to hate and avoid them, the longer the more. What is the resurrection of the new man? To experience heartfelt joy in God and a loving desire to live according to God's will in all good

works" (Qus. 88—90).¹ If further elucidation concerning the place assigned to repentance in the order of salvation [in Reformed theology] is needed, we point to Thomas Apple, *The Organic Structure of the Heidelberg Catechism*: "In the third part of the catechism, which treats of Thankfulness, we have set forth what man is moved to do toward God in return for his deliverance. The first subject presented is that of Conversion, or, as it is in the German, True Repentance. . . . In his full and lucid argument on the subject of repentance, Calvin remarks 'that repentance not only immediately follows faith, but is produced by it.' . . . This mortification of the old man and quickening of the new man is nothing else than the death and resurrection of Christ operating in the Christian. The calls to repentance generally in the Bible are addressed to those who are in covenant relation with God. 'Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,' said John the Baptist and the Savior—in which it is implied that repentance is possible only where the grace of the Gospel kingdom comes to man" (*Tercentenary Monument*, p. 354). A. C. Whitmer in his *Notes on the Heidelberg Catechism* expresses the Reformed concept of repentance in the same way: "The catechism regards conversion not only as a painful sense of sin, but also and especially

¹ Here we may call attention to the fact that the *mortificatio* and *vivificatio* referred to above are something quite different from the *mortificatio* and *vivificatio* which according to Scripture constitute the two elements of repentance. "St. Paul in all his epistles, as often as he treats of how we are converted, draws these two things together: the *death of the old man*, that is, contrition, fear of God's wrath and judgment, and, secondly, *renewal by faith*. For through faith we are comforted and restored to life" (Ap XII 46). *Mortificatio* is brought about by the Law, in contrition, and designates the shattering of self-righteousness and self-trust, so that man is driven to "terror and despair" (SA—III III). In addition to this, our Confessions know of a mortification of the old man that takes place as a result of conversion, namely, the drowning of the old Adam by daily contrition and repentance. John Gerhard: "Are *mortificatio* and *vivificatio* the components of repentance? If *mortificatio* signifies contrition, or the agony arising from recognition of sin and God's wrath, and if *vivificatio* signifies the comfort and peace of conscience conveyed by faith, then we agree. However, if *mortificatio* means renouncing sin and malice, and if *vivificatio* means the activity of sanctification, then we must assign them to the fruits of repentance. The truly penitent person renounces evil and does good (Ps. 34:14; Is. 1:17). In this sense Calvin, Bucanus, and Polanus use these terms as a description of repentance. Here we do not agree with them, because the daily mortification of the old man and the renewal of the new man are a fruit of faith" (*Locus de poenitentia*, Cap. VII, 56). "It is, therefore, wrong for Joh. Crocius to allege that the Apology defines repentance in the same way as the Calvinists" (Huelsemann, *Praelect. in librum Conc., De Poenitentia*, IX).

as a joyful experience, a daily growing holy desire and purpose to show our thankfulness by living for Christ (Rom. 6:19-22). Conversion, in this view, is possible, of course, only in Christians. . . . Conversion and sanctification are respectively the human and the divine side of the process" (pp. 193—205). Man must first be brought to faith before the Reformed preacher will speak to him of repentance or conversion.

Whitmer is not consistent. In the midst of his discussion of repentance he devotes a special paragraph to the "Conversion of Adults." "How about those who grow up unconverted? Evidently their conversion must be different from that of those who yield their hearts to the Holy Ghost. . . . They may come to this turning-point, to a true penitence for sins and faith in Christ, either gradually, through months, after much thought, ending in a calm and intelligent resolution to live a new life, or suddenly, in which case the act will not be so safe and trustworthy" (pp. 200 f.). Here repentance (contrition) and faith are called the two parts of conversion and are presented in the Scriptural order: penitence and faith. The writer should have realized that Calvin's outline will not do. He should also have asked himself how a reader of this explanation of the catechism would fare. First he is told that before he can become converted he must become a Christian. Then, however, he is told that one becomes a Christian by being converted, that is, by way of contrition and faith.

The Westminster Confession agrees with *The Heidelberg Catechism* and Calvin. Chapter XIV treats "Of Saving Faith" and Chapter XV "Of Repentance unto Life." There we read: "Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace. . . . By it a sinner, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sin, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous Law of God, and upon the apprehension of His mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates, his sins as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments." Robert Shaw comments as follows: "It is an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, by faith, that melts the heart into penitential sorrow for sin. Of so generous a nature is evangelical repentance that the penitent soul is never so deeply humbled and grieved for

sin as when it has reason to hope that a gracious God has freely forgiven it. . . . In the order of nature, faith must precede repentance. Evangelical repentance is a turning from sin to God; but there can be no turning to God except through Christ and no coming to Christ but by believing in Him, John 14:6; 6:35" (*An Exposition of the Confession of Faith*, pp. 180f.). Also in *The Shorter Catechism* repentance is presented as following faith (Qus. 86 and 87), while, strangely enough, Qu. 153 of *The Larger Catechism* inverts the order: "That we may escape the wrath and curse of God due to us by reason of the transgression of the Law, He requires of us repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." *The Standard Catechism* of the Methodists likewise describes repentance in this way: "What is repentance? Repentance is the turning from sin to God, the surrender of every principle and motive of conduct that is contrary to the law of love and the welfare of the kingdom of God" (Qu. 116).

It is true, not all Reformed theologians let repentance follow faith. Many describe the matter in this way: "The first step in the upward path which we have therefore now to describe is Repentance. . . . The first element in repentance is awakening. . . . A second is fear. . . . A third element is a vision of good. . . . A fourth element is confession. . . . A fifth element is decision. . . . As has been seen above, the first step upwards, out of unrighteousness towards Christian character, is repentance; and now we go on to the second, which is faith" (James Stalker, *The Ethic of Jesus*, pp. 155—175). "It is with repentance and faith, as elements in that first and radical change (conversion) by which the soul enters upon a state of salvation, that we have now to do" (Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 461). To be sure, the repentance that is explained here, namely, contrition which precedes faith, is not described correctly by Stalker nor by Strong. The latter defines repentance not only as "recognition of sin as involving personal guilt, defilement, and helplessness," but also as "sorrow for sin committed against goodness and justice and therefore hateful to God and hateful in itself," as "an inward turning from sin and disposition to seek pardon and cleansing." The contrition of the unconverted is lumped together with the contrition of the be-

liever. But our immediate concern at this point is to demonstrate that many Reformed place repentance before faith.

The customary Reformed manner of speaking is, however, that *repentance* follows faith. We read: "Faith and repentance, according to the Scriptures, are the fruits of regeneration" (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III, 601). "Though faith and repentance are inseparable and simultaneous, yet in the order of nature, faith precedes repentance. . . . (a) Faith leads to repentance, not repentance to faith. . . . (b) Repentance involves turning to God, but there can be no turning but through Christ. . . . (c) If repentance precedes faith, then it stands between the sinner and Christ. The sinner cannot go to Christ 'just as he is,' but must first make certain that he has repented. (d) If repentance precedes faith, then none but the penitent man is invited to believe in Christ. . . . (e) The doctrine that repentance precedes faith tends to make repentance legal, that is, a reason why Christ should accept the sinner. (f) God out of Christ and irrespective of faith in Christ is a consuming fire. It is impossible to have godly sorrow with this view of God" (William Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, II, 536).²

² "In harmony with the *Geneva Catechism* Calvin knows only of a *poenitentia* that proceeds from *fides*, consisting in the ongoing *mortificatio* and *vivificatio* or *renovatio*" (F. A. Philippi, *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*, V, 121). "The sources are indefinite regarding the process of appropriating salvation and the transformation of the sinner. . . . It must be remembered that the Reformed Symbols do not speak here in the first place of the repentance that is to be produced by the preaching of the Law. *Lex et poenitentia* (*resipiscentia*) are treated by them at a different place [cf. the place assigned to the Decalog in their catechisms]" (G. Plitt, *Grundriss der Symbolik*, p. 113). "In contradistinction to the Lutheran teaching that contrition, or repentance, wrought by the Law, precedes faith, Calvin maintains that repentance follows faith. . . . He admits 'that many are overcome or led to obedience by terrors of conscience before they have imbibed a knowledge of grace' (*Inst.* III, 3, par. 2), but this he would not call repentance. Nor is it necessary that a person pass through this 'initial fear,' these terrors of conscience, for Christ has many ways to draw us to Himself" (E. H. Klotzsch, *Christian Symbolics*, p. 219). As for the latter point, also Herzog-Hauck, RE, s. v. "Busse," says that "Calvin does not emphasize the preceding *terrores* in the doctrine of repentance." In general we may say that present-day Reformed theology emphasizes the necessity of the knowledge of sin as produced by the Law. In this the Reformed follow the lead of J. G. Machen: "Although Christianity does not end with the broken heart, it does begin with the broken heart. The consciousness of sin was formerly (before liberalism gained control) the starting-point of all preaching. . . . If the consciousness of sin is to be produced, the Law of God must be proclaimed" (*Christianity and Liberalism*, pp. 64f.). Likewise Shedd: "Conviction, a sense of guilt and danger, when men are convicted of sin and utter helplessness, is preparatory or antecedent to regeneration" (*Dogm. Theol.*, II, 511 ff.).

We shall not now enter into the error in Shedd's argumentation. Here we only want to establish that it is a genuinely Reformed way of speaking to say that repentance follows faith.³ And that is an improper use of terminology and even involves an admixture of false doctrine.

When we reject the Reformed article concerning repentance, we do not imply that the doctrine of justification per se is impaired by the statement: repentance follows faith. [We recognize that] by saying that faith does not belong to the essence of repentance they do not mean to oppose the article which they firmly confess, namely, that the sinner is justified by faith alone. The point is, that they do not use the term "repentance" in the same sense as do we, who say that man obtains salvation by way of repentance, or of conversion, which consists essentially in coming to faith. Their terms and ours do not connote the same things. We would likewise be missing the point if we were to fault the Reformed for saying that it is impossible to demand the mortification of the old man and the resurrection of the new man of an unconverted or unbelieving person. They would answer that they are not doing this; but that they are dealing with believers when they speak of the mortification of the old man. Since the Reformed define the term *repentance* not as we do, we may not label as incorrect such of their statements as according to our definition of repentance would indeed be wrong.

It is clear from Shedd's presentation that the Reformed operate with a concept of repentance different from ours. The basis for his thesis "faith precedes repentance" is valid only on the supposition — a supposition which we do not accept — that repentance always designates only the mortification of the old man. His argument, among others, is: "The doctrine that repentance precedes faith tends to make repentance legal, that is, a reason why Christ should accept the sinner." This stricture would be valid only if with the Reformed we equated repentance with sanctification; [we agree] of course, that sanctification may not be placed before faith.

³ So also Schneckenburger: "These are, in general, *fides* and *resipiscentia*, and in that order for the Reformed. A Lutheran prefers *contritio* to *resipiscentia* and inverts the order: Repentance precedes faith" (*Vergleichende Darstellung des luth. u. ref. Lehrbegriffs*, p. 117).

It would not be valid, however, in those instances where repentance is understood in the sense of the knowledge of sins, the *terrores conscientiae*, which precede faith. Shedd himself lets this anxiety concerning sin, which he calls conviction of sin, precede faith. He knows as well as we that the sinner is not entitled to claim forgiveness on this basis. Furthermore [he says]: "God out of Christ and irrespective of faith in Christ is a consuming fire, Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29. With this view of God it is impossible to have godly sorrow. Only remorse and terror are possible." Every word of this is, in itself, true. But it has nothing to do with his thesis. It is certainly true that before coming to faith the heart of the sinner can experience only terrors, the terrors of hell. Here is no holy sorrow, sorrow motivated by love to God. This holy sorrow most certainly follows faith. But there is also a sorrow that is a terror of hell. This precedes faith. Shedd, however, proceeds as if this question is of no concern in the discussion of the word "repentance." Note also this argument: "Repentance involves turning to God; but there can be no turning but through Christ, John 14:6; 10:9." Again the argument is based on the opinion that repentance is only an aversion to sin—something which indeed is possible only in the power of Christ. In addition, another difference in defining concepts among the Reformed and the Lutherans becomes apparent in this connection. We call repentance also the conversion to God by faith, the kindling of faith. The "coming to the Father" (John 14:6), in our terminology, means "to be brought to faith." The Reformed call repentance a turning away from sin toward the God of holiness, and use John 14:6 in that sense. In short, their definition of repentance differs essentially from ours.

It is this definition of theirs that we reject as false. The Reformed definition of repentance is not Scriptural. In speaking of repentance, or conversion, Scripture does not refer exclusively to the mortification of the old man. Its primary emphasis is something else. Repentance as used in Scripture connotes, above all, the kindling of faith in a man's heart. "A great number believed and turned unto the Lord" (Acts 11:21). The conversion took place in their coming to faith (*πιστεύσας*). Scripture often uses the word *repentance* in the sense of conversion, and by it designates the coming to faith. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke

12:3, 5). What is the nature of this repentance, whereby a man is saved from perdition? "What must I do to be saved?" — "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house" (Acts 16:30f.). According to Scripture it is one and the same thing to say that the man who repents obtains salvation, and that the man who comes to faith obtains salvation. St. Luke 15 treats *ex professo* of repentance, of "the sinner that repents." The parables describe this repentance as the process by which the shepherd finds the lost sheep and by which the prodigal son returns to his father. A Reformed theologian will hardly deny that the lost sinner returns to the Father precisely in this way, that he by faith accepts Jesus as his Savior.

Try to read the Scriptures according to the Reformed concept of repentance. "Except you repent, you will perish" — [would mean] if you want to escape eternal damnation, you must out of love to God be sorry for your sins and kill the old man. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38) — practice the evangelical virtue of renunciation of sin, and receive forgiveness in Baptism. "John preached the Baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4) — John preached Baptism, which is concerned with sanctification, for the remission of sins. "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2) — the Savior is now establishing His kingdom on earth, and what is the great message that is addressed to men? Believe in the Savior? Not at all, but: You must kill the old man. According to Reformed usage, Christ did not come to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32), but to incite the righteous toward the exercise of righteousness. Truly, Scripture cannot be squared with the Reformed definition of repentance.

According to the Reformed mode of teaching, it is not permissible to describe repentance as including contrition, that is, the knowledge of sin produced by the Law. They say that the word *repent* refers exclusively to daily contrition. But whenever Scripture describes this matter more fully, it always points to the knowledge of sin and the terror that precede faith. For example, Acts 16:29: "He came trembling"; Acts 2:37: "They were pricked in their heart"; Joel 2:12: "Rend your hearts." With Scripture

we let this contrition precede faith, and we designate it as a part of conversion: "Repent—and believe the Gospel." According to Shedd, this will not do. Repentance is always "godly sorrow; it is impossible to have godly sorrow with this view of God—as a consuming fire; there only remorse and terror are possible." Shedd must learn that God has begun the work of repentance in the sinner when God reveals His wrath to him and creates this contrition of the Law in him.

It is wrong for Calvin to set up this thesis: "Repentance always follows faith." What embarrassment must come to him from all those Scripture texts which observe the opposite order! "Repent and believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15). "Testifying . . . repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). This protest of Scripture against Calvin's rule is so strong that occasionally the Reformed forsake the order prescribed by Calvin, as for instance, in *The Larger Catechism*, which quotes the above-mentioned Scripture texts as prooftexts in just this connection.

Calvin indeed insists that his usage does no violence to Scripture. He says in answer to our view: "Christ and John, it is said, in their discourses first exhort the people to repentance and then add that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Such, too, is the message which the apostles received, and such the course which Paul followed, as is narrated by Luke (Acts 15:21). But clinging superstitiously to the juxtaposition of syllables, they attend not to the coherence of meaning in the words. For when our Lord and John begin their preaching thus: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,' Matt. 3:2, do they not deduce repentance as a consequence of the offer of grace and promise of salvation?" He contends for the view that the members of Christ's kingdom renounce sin and lead a godly life in consequence of the gracious forgiveness of sins. This we do not oppose at all. But we do oppose the thought that it is the natural and proper thing in the proclamation of the beginning of the kingdom of the King of Grace to omit the main thing, namely, the entrance into the kingdom of Christ by faith, and to place all the emphasis on what is not the main thing. Shedd must resort to a desperate exegesis. He closes his explanation, referred to above, with the words: "In such passages as Mark 1:15: 'Repent ye, and believe the Gospel,' and Acts 20:21

the end is mentioned first and the means last. In a proposition, a term may have a position *verbally* which it has not logically." We have no objection to the last statement. But we do object when repentance that initiates Christ's kingdom and is the source of joy for the angels of God is conceived of by Calvin and Shedd and others exclusively and primarily as a daily repentance, or sanctification. This gives us pause. We shall pursue this matter further in the next article.

The Reformed usage contradicts the usage of Scripture. This is true even if the Reformed were to say that their concept of repentance is a Scriptural one and that they say nothing but what Luther himself said. It is true, Scripture teaches that out of love for his Savior the Christian daily bemoans his sin and applies himself with all his powers to the task of killing the old Adam. It is true, Luther has much to say of daily contrition and repentance, whereby the old Adam is drowned and a new man daily comes forth who lives forever in righteousness and holiness before God. Luther says that the believer's entire life on earth should be a constant and unceasing repentance (St. Louis XVIII, 71). "In Christians this repentance continues until death, because through the entire life it contends with the sin remaining in the flesh" (SA—III III, 40; cf. LC IV 74f.). "As *semper poenitentes* we are, so to speak, all that we should be as Christians, namely, *semper peccatores . . . et tamen eo ipso et iusti sumus et iustificamur, partim peccatores, partim iusti, i. e., nihil nisi poenitentes*" (R. Hermann, *Luthers These "Gerecht und Sünder zugleich,"* p. 247. Cf. Luther's *Vorlesung über den Römerbrief*, Ficker, II, 267).

Certainly there is a continuous, daily repentance. So far we agree with the Reformed. In two points, however, we do not agree with them. In two points the Reformed presentation does not agree with Scripture. First, we understand daily repentance to mean contrition and faith, with the emphasis on faith. We think primarily of the fact that the Christian, every day sinful and wretched, receives from his gracious Savior forgiveness. "The daily repentance of the Christians (*poenitentia stantium*) is rightly called a daily return to Baptism or to the baptismal covenant. Those who are in faith daily acknowledge themselves to be sinners, by faith appropriate the forgiveness of sins promised in Baptism, and, thus comforted,

strive for fruits meet for repentance in a new life" (Francis Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, III, 323 f.). The Reformed definition, however, makes no mention of faith. Only this is stated: "It consists in the mortification of our flesh and the old man and the quickening of the spirit." Secondly, it is not Scriptural for them to insist that repentance means nothing more than their concept of daily repentance, contrition, and fighting against sin. Scripture includes more, namely this, that the terrified sinner is brought to faith in the Savior and then, in his anxiety over his sins, takes daily refuge with his Savior. When the call "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is nigh at hand" (Matt. 3:2) is sounded, the sinners are invited to acknowledge their sins and to believe in Jesus, the King of the Kingdom of Grace. No, say the Reformed, this call is addressed to those who are already in faith. It is true, they are within Scripture when they speak to the believer concerning the necessity of the dying of the old man and the resurrection of the new. But they are outside Scripture when they limit the concept of repentance to this. Their terminology is not Scriptural. It is also entirely according to Scripture for Shedd to say that regeneration can be effected only in one who has come to a knowledge of his sins. He calls this process "conviction of sin." We do not object to the expression "conviction of sin," for that is correct. It is wrong, however, to refuse to include this in the concept of repentance. St. Matthew includes it. The words of judgment spoken by John the Baptist in announcing the coming wrath of God to the sinners belong to the exposition of the theme "Repent Ye!" Thus the Reformed do not use Scriptural language in their definition of repentance.

This results in a hopeless confusion. Thereby they confound the Scriptures and thus also the understanding of the reader. They keep him from understanding Scripture. A Christian, held captive by the Reformed view, will be amazed by the statement "Repent, and believe the Gospel," and he will ask: Why doesn't the Savior say what according to our rule He ought to say: Believe in the Gospel and repent? Why, in Luke 24:47, does He first mention repentance and then forgiveness of sins? The proper way to say it would be, "Preach the forgiveness of sins and repentance resulting from forgiveness." Does not the third chapter of St. Matthew also

appear contrary to the proper order? John preaches, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is nigh at hand." According to the Reformed Christian, this is addressed to the children of God. How, then, can he call them "generation of vipers"? Why does he deny that they are God's children? Why does he say, "Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees"? We read further that as a result of John's preaching of repentance many were baptized and confessed their sins. Matthew should have written that John preached repentance to them after they had entered the kingdom of heaven through Baptism. Again, since the knowledge of sin and the terrors of sin are not included in the concept of repentance, why is the incisive preaching of the Law by John called preaching of repentance? Furthermore, the Christian thinking along Reformed lines will find it difficult to reconcile that in the repentance chapter (Luke 15) the reason of the Shepherd's joy is said to consist in the fact that He has found the lost sheep, that the man who was lost in sin is saved by faith, with this, that, oddly enough, the cause of the joy of the angels of God is placed not so much in the great fact of the sinner's salvation as rather in his holy life. The Reformed reader of Scripture will become confused.⁴

Worst of all, this confusion extends also to the area of the doctrine of salvation. A careful study of the Reformed treatment of this matter reveals false doctrine.

The Reformed thesis, "Repentance follows faith; by repentance the Scriptures mean the holy contrition of the Christian and renewal," does violence to the language of Scripture as shown in the preceding. But in this instance more is at stake than merely an unfortunate terminology. It is a matter of false teaching. The strict

⁴ In this matter Lutheran theology simply follows Scripture and, for that reason, speaks of repentance in various frames of reference. Sometimes Scripture uses the word to cover the entire conversion of man. In that case *repent* means: Acknowledge and rue your sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 13:3; 15:7). Elsewhere Scripture distinguishes between repentance and faith in Christ. Here repentance refers to what precedes faith, a change of attitude with regard to sin, the knowledge of sin and the fear of God's wrath (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21; Luke 24:47. Cf. FC SD V 7f.). Scripture furthermore states that those who have been converted are converted daily (Matt. 18:3) as long as they live, as this is expressed in the penitential psalms. They are sorry for their sin, they find consolation in Christ, they renounce sin. Hence we speak of a daily contrition and repentance. Just follow Scripture, eliminate none of the concepts with which Scripture designates repentance, and Scripture will remain for you a clear book.

application of the statement that by repentance the Scriptures always mean the daily renewal leads inevitably to false doctrine. Moreover, the willingness of the Reformed to draw the conclusions consistent with the statement arises from a false doctrinal position: the basic legalistic tendency of Reformed theology.

In order to support their thesis, the Reformed are compelled to use indiscriminately the passages of Scripture which speak of a daily repentance and the passages of Scripture which ascribe the attainment of salvation to repentance and conversion. The result of this is the doctrine that contrition and sanctification work salvation. When *The Westminster Confession* treats repentance in the 15th chapter and describes it as daily contrition and sanctification it quotes without hesitation Acts 11:18: "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life"; Luke 13:3, 5: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish"; and Acts 17:30: "But now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." This suggests the following line of thought to the reader: Scripture attaches salvation to repentance; repentance consists in mortifying the old man. Thus the activity of sanctification effects salvation. To be sure, *The Westminster Confession* still wants to cling to justification by grace alone. It says: "Although repentance be not to be rested in as any satisfaction for sin or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ." But then it continues: "Yet it is of such necessity to all sinners that none may expect pardon without it." This says more than that the person who lives in sins cannot console himself with forgiveness. It says that forgiveness is attached to sanctification in some way. How so? In this way, says R. Shaw in his *Exposition of the Confession of Faith*, p. 183: "God, for the vindication of the honor of the plan of mercy, has so connected pardon with repentance and confession, the expression of repentance, that they are the only certain evidences that we are in a pardoned state, while pardon and repentance are equally the gift of God through Jesus Christ." This means that the amendment of life does, indeed, not work the forgiveness but the certainty of the forgiveness; the sinner is directed to depend on good works in order to gain certainty of salvation. The next paragraph in the Confession reads: "As there is no sin so small but it deserves damnation, so there is no sin so great that it can bring

damnation upon those who truly repent." The *Exposition* illustrates: "David, after his 'great transgression,' and Peter, after his denial of his Master, repented and were pardoned." When a Lutheran reads these words, he finds expressed in them the blessed truth that the penitent sinner, the sinner who has come to faith, obtains forgiveness. The Reformed person, on the other hand, for whom repentance is identical with sanctification, finds in them the basis for a horrible doctrine.

The Shorter Catechism teaches: "To escape the wrath and curse of God, due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means, etc. What is faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive, and rest upon Him alone for salvation. . . . What is repentance unto life? Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience." (Qus. 85—87. Cf. *The Larger Catechism*, Qu. 153). Let a Lutheran see if he is able to utter this sentence: In order that I can escape the wrath of God I must lead a holy life! Note also that whereas *The Westminster Confession* describes amendment of life as evangelical grace, *The Shorter Catechism* uses the expression *saving grace* exactly as it characterizes faith: Faith is a saving grace. Repentance is a saving grace.

All this Calvin taught. In the third chapter of the third book of the *Institutiones* he asserts again and again: "Not that repentance is properly the cause of salvation" (par. 21). But again and again he speaks of the necessity of repentance for salvation (the Reformed repentance): "When once the thought that God will one day ascend His tribunal to take an account of all words and actions has taken possession of his mind, it will not allow him to rest or have one moment's peace, but will perpetually urge him to adopt a different plan of life that he may be able to stand securely at that judgment-seat" (par. 7). "Christ came to call sinners, but to call them to repentance. He was sent to bless the unworthy, but by 'turning away everyone' 'from his iniquities.' . . . 'Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let

him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him.' 'Repent ye, therefore, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out' (Acts 3:19). Here, however, it is to be observed that repentance is not made a condition in such a sense as to be a foundation for meriting pardon; nay, it rather indicates the end at which they must aim if they would obtain favor, God having resolved to take pity on men for the express purpose of leading them to repent" (par. 20). In one breath Calvin can say that the sinner is justified by grace alone and that he must exercise repentance "if he wants to attain grace." Are we unfair to him? The Reformed theologian M. Schneckenburger concludes just as we do that Calvin draws works into the treatment of justification. He writes in his *Comparative Presentation of the Lutheran and Reformed Doctrinal System*: "As surely as, e. g., works are excluded from the *negotium iustificationis* as the act between God and the sinner, so definitely is the consciousness of justification for the sinner himself made dependent upon the exercise in good works, proving himself in the new obedience. . . . This whole conception is intolerable to the Lutheran. That man first through the activity of his will, through his good works, becomes certain of his own faith would mean in effect to rob him of all confidence of faith, to condemn him to a new unrest of work-righteousness, and make his justification doubtful" (I, 40f.). "From the viewpoint of Lutherans, the *salus* as eternal salvation is the immediate consequence of *iustificatio* and *filiatio* and is potentially contained in these; from the viewpoint of the Reformed the *possessio salutis* must be differentiated from the *ius*, which justification alone gives, and is to be realized through works; thus the certainty of the *possessio salutis* is not yet given with the unstable and fluid consciousness of justification but only with the activity of the pious life which arises from this consciousness and raises the same out of the area of the subjectively desired to objective reality" (par. 268). The certainty of salvation, then, does not come simultaneously with faith but must be derived from works. The Reformed repentance, holy contrition, and amendment of life effects salvation! Finally, "*Just as salvation is attained through faith to the extent that it really exercises good works*" [italics ours], "so justification, as certainty of the state of grace, is attained *through faith to the extent that it works fruits of con-*

version. . . . The *mortificatio* and *vivificatio* as conversion continually realized in action is the practical behavior directed at one's own self, even as the *bona opera* are the direction of activity to the outside; only by this twofold activity can one become certain of one's faith" (II, 131). When we accuse the Reformed of teaching that works are necessary to be certain of salvation, yes, even to attain salvation, Schneckenburger assures us that we do not do them an injustice.

[Here a section in the original article demonstrates that the Reformed have been consistent in their teaching on repentance.]

The theology of the Reformed has a strongly developed legal character. It is generally known that the article on justification is not the center of Reformed theology. The Reformed K. Hagenbach states, for example: "Certainly he [Zwingli], as well as Luther, subscribed to the Pauline doctrine of justification; but in his case it did not occupy such a prominent position" (*Kirchengeschichte*, p. 436). The article on predestination, on the sovereignty of God, is of primary importance for the Reformed theologian. The conception of God, which is basic for his thought, is not that of a gracious God, who by grace for Christ's sake forgives sin, but that of the Almighty and All-Holy, whose will must carry through, who is primarily concerned with obedience to His commandments. The whole theological thought of the Reformed, therefore, does not have an evangelical, but a legal frame of reference. We want to make that clear in three points.

1. The Gospel is a law for the Reformed which imposes duties on man and establishes conditions [to be met]. In defining the Gospel, Hodge uses nothing but legal terminology. "Being a proclamation of the terms on which God is willing to save sinners and an exhibition of the duty of fallen man in relation to that plan, it [the Gospel] of necessity binds all those who are in the condition which the plan contemplates. It is in this respect analogous to the Moral Law" (Hodge, II, 642). What are the prescribed conditions? "The terms of admission into this spiritual kingdom are faith and repentance" (op. cit., p. 610). According to this view, the Gospel operates with conditions, with conditions of a legal nature, with sanctification (repentance in the Reformed sense). Faith itself is characterized as a condition and as duty and is placed on the

same level with repentance. This mingling of Law and Gospel is characteristic of Reformed theology since the days of Zwingli. "Zwingli does not perceive that the Law is the expression of a different world view; unconsciously the Gospel becomes for him a new law" (Seeberg, *Dogmengesch.*, II, 299). Conversely—in the nature of the case—Zwingli does not hesitate to designate the Law as a gospel. "The Law is nothing else than the eternal unchangeable will of God. . . . But, really, it is then in itself nothing else than a gospel [according to the Reformed view], that is, a good, sure, message from God by which He informs us of His will" (Frank, *Die Theol. d. Concordienformel*, II, 312). Schneckenburger agrees completely with this judgment of Zwingli's theology: "Thus Zwingli calls gospel everything 'that God reveals to men and demands of men'; the gospel 'contains command, prohibition, bidding, performance'" (*Comparative Presentation*, I, 128). The Reformed doctrine of salvation is of a legal nature.

2. According to Reformed teaching, the certainty of salvation is based on the efforts of man. According to Reformed teaching a person cannot become certain of his salvation from the Gospel; for the Gospel knows only a particular grace. Moreover, it does not offer grace—the Spirit deals immediately with man. Therefore the matter comes to this: "To the extent that the enthusiasts set aside the doctrine of the means of grace, they are compelled to direct the sinner asking about the grace of God to an *immediately* effected renewal in the heart of man as basis for his confidence in the grace of God. But this is a doctrine of works. Besides one must not forget that this immediate working of the Spirit to which the enthusiasts from Zwingli and Calvin to Hodge and Shedd direct a poor sinner exists only in the human imagination. . . . So a person who has come under the treatment of a consistent enthusiast can do nothing else than produce *out of himself*, out of his own *natural* inner self, such moods of the soul, conditions, changes and works, as have an external similarity to the genuine product of the Holy Spirit and to found his faith on them" (*Lehre und Wehre*, LXXI, 256; cf. Pieper, *Chr. Dog.*, III, 168). "Because the Calvinists teach particular grace and an immediate operation of grace, they must lead consciences smitten by the Law to base the favor of God on *gratia infusa*, on an internal change, i. e., on

sanctification and good works instead of on the means of grace" (Pieper, *Cbr. Dog.*, III, 247). That is what the Reformed actually do. "Repentance and confession are the only certain evidences that we are in a pardoned state" (Shaw, *Exposition*). Shedd expresses it thus: "If from his present experience and daily life he has reason to think he is truly a believing Christian, then he has reason to expect that he will continue to be one" (*Dog. Theol.*, II, 558). The Lutheran is sure of his ground because he clings to the promise of the Gospel, not primarily because he leads a holy life. So the Lutheran also bases the certainty of his perseverance on the promise of the Gospel alone. The Reformed person thinks legalistically, thinks in this matter primarily of works.

3. Hence it comes about that in Reformed theology, which, to be sure, teaches justification by faith alone, nevertheless emphasis is not placed on justification, on faith in the gracious forgiveness of sins offered in the Gospel, but on sanctification. How do the Reformed, e. g., understand regeneration? We have presented that at some length in the previous article but want to repeat it here because it characterizes so plainly the legalistic mode of thought of the Reformed. How, then, does Calvin understand the passage "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"? He thinks primarily of sanctification! "In one word, then, by repentance I understand regeneration, the only aim of which is to form in us anew the image of God. . . . Accordingly, through the blessing of Christ we are renewed by that regeneration into the righteousness of God from which we had fallen through Adam" (loc. cit., par. 9). The definition which the Savior gives of regeneration — "that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish" (John 3:16) — is not the chief point in Calvin's definition. Indeed, the pertinent chapter has the title "Regeneration by Faith. Repentance." But in the preface we read — and this is very significant: "The title of the chapter seems to promise a treatise on faith; but the only subject here considered is repentance, the inseparable attendant of faith." Thus even in the presentation of the concept regeneration very little is said about faith.⁵ *The Presbyterian of*

⁵ In connection with the passage "He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it" (Phil. 1:6), Calvin thinks of nothing else but sanctification. "God therefore begins the good work in us by exciting in our hearts a desire,

April 20, 1904, has the same definition: "In effecting the wondrous change, the Spirit acts upon the soul from within, implanting by His creative power a new moral nature or principle of action." For the Lutheran regeneration is essentially generation of saving faith, for the Reformed, essentially "implanting a new moral nature." The Evangelical Catechism also at this point does not deny its Reformed character. "Regeneration is the origin of the new life in man as it is effected by the Triune God through Baptism of the water and the Spirit. Without this new life no man can be saved. . . . In holy Baptism God gives man the basis and the motivation for the Good and for Heaven. . . . (Irion, *The Evangelical Catechism*, pp. 238—242)

Even the sweet evangelical word *faith* receives a legal significance in the language of the Reformed. Faith is, as Hodge explains, one of the duties which the Gospel prescribes, a condition which must be fulfilled. And its essence is defined as obedience to God's command. Article XII of the *Confessio Scoticana* I, which deals with faith, nowhere mentions that faith has the function of taking hold of the forgiveness of sins but says, among other things: "Of nature we are so dead, so blind, and so perverse that neither can we feill when we are pricked, see the licht when it shines, nor assent to the will of God when it is reveiled, unless the Spirit of the Lord Jesus quicken that quhilk is dead, remove the darkness of our myndes, and bowe our stubborn hearts to the obedience of His blessed will." When R. A. Torrey describes the results of regeneration, he enumerates the following parts: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the victory over sin, the transformation of life wrought by the renewal of the mind, faith in Christ, the victory over the world, the life in righteousness, love of the brethren, in sum, renewal in every aspect. And then we read: "The fourth result of being born again is that the regenerated man believes that Jesus is the Christ, 1 John 5:1. The faith that John here speaks of is not a faith that is a mere opinion, but that real faith that Jesus is the Anointed of God that leads us to enthrone Jesus as

a love, and a study of righteousness, or, to speak more correctly, by turning, training, and guiding our hearts unto righteousness; and He completes this good work by confirming us unto perseverance" (par. 6). Cf. *Conf. Scoticana*, I, Art. XII.

King in our lives. . . . If you are making Jesus King in your heart and life and absolute Ruler of your thoughts and conduct, then you are born again; for 'whosoever believeth that Jesus is Christ is begotten of God'" (*The Fund. Doctrines of the Chr. Faith*, p. 212). Although Torrey in other instances speaks correctly of faith, here, in the framework of the legalistic view of Reformed theology, he places it on a level with renewal in its varied aspects and then consistently describes it as a Christian virtue.

Thus the genuine Reformed theology places the chief emphasis on sanctification. The majority of sectarian preachers tell their listeners that the quintessence of Christianity consists in the fulfillment of the commandments, in the earnest endeavor to live according to God's will. They learned that from their theologians. Stalker: "Repentance, if understood in its full Scriptural sense, is the sum and substance of the Gospel" (*The Ethic of Jesus*, p. 155), and in his definition of repentance he does not mention faith. W. Hendricksen speaks very plainly in his book *The Sermon on the Mount*: "The man who builds his house upon the rock is a picture of the individual who not only hears the Gospel of the Kingdom, the proclamation of the will of the Father, but who also acts upon it, realizing that his life will have abiding value only then when it is built upon the solid foundation of the *doing of God's will, the joyful recognition of God's sovereignty*. . . . Either the fundamental principle of your life is the cheerful recognition of *God's sovereignty, the doing of God's will through the grace of God and out of gratitude*, so that you are building on the Rock Christ, or your house (i. e., your life) has no foundation at all." The Sermon on the Mount emphasizes "the one fundamental principle of Christianity, the very essence and the root-idea of the 'kingdom of God,' namely, obedience to the will of God, joyful recognition of *God's sovereignty*" (pp. 244—248. Instead of italics bold type in the original). What is the chief thing in Reformed theology?

The *Theologische Quartalschrift*⁶ hits the mark when it says of Zwingli: "Also in the Gospel, sanctification was so predominantly its real goal for him that righteousness and faith came into con-

⁶ Published by The Evangelical Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, Milwaukee, Wis.

sideration only as means for the restoration of the holy life, so that his sermons and writings lack the comfort for all weary and laden consciences and all his teaching of, and all his polemics for, the Scripturalness of the doctrines of the church have just as much a legal character as his admonitions, castigations, and reformations" (1931, p. 16). W. Walther hits the mark when he writes about Calvin: "By regeneration he understands the moral transformation of man . . . 'the Gospel does not concern us until we have entered upon a new life' (*In. III, 3.1*). The faith created by the Spirit of God accepts these *two* proclamations of the Gospel: forgiveness and repentance (*III, 3.11*), obviously therefore also the preaching of repentance or sanctification, inasmuch as without the latter the forgiveness desired by the sinner is not to be obtained. . . . This stress on ethics is found already before the time of Calvin in the Reformed Church. The *Helv. prior* designates as the goal of that 'which we have through the Lord Christ' this: 'He reforms us to the image for which we are created and returns us to it and leads us into the fellowship of His divine life.' The forgiveness of sins is not mentioned here at all; only in the discussion of the Lord's Supper is the remission of sins mentioned once. The amendment of life is the chief concern (103, 34; 104, 12. 20; 106, 33). For the Reformed, God is the sovereign Lord who is concerned only with obedience to His commandments" (*Lehrbuch der Symbolik*, pp. 245 f.). Luther hits the mark when he writes: "See, what are our new sects and enthusiasts doing but leading people back to works?" (*SL III, 691*. Cf. *II, 1828*; *XI, 1415*; *XIII, 1917*)

Schneckenburger essentially agrees with this. "Hereby also justification loses the importance which it has for Lutherans, the actual turning point, the principal beginning of the subjective possession of salvation. It is merely one of the treasures which the repentant person receives in addition to others, namely, that he may apply the satisfaction of Christ to himself" (*Comparative Presentation*, *II, 5*). "Yes, it is entirely Reformed thought that faith itself is conceived in the form of a command and, as a demand on the subject, is directed to the Mosaic Law, i. e., to the authority of the divine will. *Conf. Scoticana*, c. 14: "*unum habere Deum, Verbum eius audire, ei fidem dare, sanctis eius sacramentis communicare sunt primae tabulae opera*" (*I, 117*). Read in this connection

again the passage quoted above: "How salvation is attained through faith to the extent that it really practices good works," etc. Schneckenburger continues: "For the regenerate the Law itself is primarily a means of grace because it urges the exercise of works through which grace is always more completely assimilated by man and salvation is really won" (*Comparative Presentation*, I, 131). "Placing such a high value on works, partly as a necessary complement of faith, partly as the real cause for the enjoyment of salvation, partly as the objective demonstration of the power of Christ, approximates Catholic doctrine" (I, 160). Dr. Walther did not go too far when he wrote "that we are so often papists without a pope and, instead of seizing forgiveness freely through faith, want to earn it first with our repentance, we owe chiefly to the accursed doctrine of Zwingli and others (*Die luth. Lehre v. d. Rechtfertigung*, p. 85). Reformed theology is characterized by legalism.

Hence we may not retract our earlier statement that the Reformed article on contrition involves false doctrine. When the Reformed designate their repentance as saving grace, this is not an involuntary mistake, but it expresses the heart's conviction of the followers of Zwingli and Calvin that works effect salvation. Now it is also clear to us why Calvin in the passage "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is nigh," which proclaims the establishing of the kingdom of Christ, can think primarily of sanctification. "The one fundamental principle of Christianity, the very essence and the root idea of the 'kingdom of God,' is obedience to the will of God, joyful recognition of God's sovereignty." And [we also understand] that [Reformed] exegesis of Mark 1:15 criticized above ("Repent, and believe the Gospel!" — [their interpretation:] "The end is mentioned first and the means last") is not primarily an exegesis of despair but the only one that fits the Reformed understanding of the concepts. Now it is also clear why we stated above that the Reformed sentence: "Contrition follows faith" does not *in itself* harm the doctrine of justification. As the Reformed understand the word contrition the sentence *in itself* expresses the truth that holy contrition and sanctification in general follow faith. But in view of the significance which they ascribe to these things, this is a falsification — and this means finally a denial — of the

doctrine of justification — the doctrine that teaches that obedience toward God is not the center of Christianity but that the justification of the sinner is the highpoint in the Christian life and that faith, and faith alone, creates the certainty of salvation.

As a result of his legalistic tendencies the Reformed person employs the concept repentance in a wrong way. This concept is also employed in a wrong way when a Lutheran preacher preaches about repentance, about conversion, and, as a Lutheran preacher, begins with the absolute necessity of these for salvation and then operates with the Reformed definition of repentance. When an article appears in a Lutheran periodical about conversion, then we expect at the very outset that it discuss the work of God by which justifying faith is worked in the heart of the sinner. For in the Apology we read according to the Latin text: "Very closely related are the topics of the doctrine of repentance and the doctrine of justification"; and, "that is now the other, the most important part of repentance, namely, faith" (XII 57 29).

[Here a feature article of the *Lutheran* of September 4, 1930, is reprinted in condensed form and criticized.]

"Before the writings of Luther appeared, the doctrine of repentance was very much confused" (Ap. XII 4). The confusion soon started again among the Reformed. And if we are not extremely careful in our study of Reformed writings, the confusion will also penetrate our theology.

(To be concluded)