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## Contrition (Concluded)

Theodore Engelder  
*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

Erwin Lueker  
*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

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# Contrition

By THEODORE ENGELDER

Translated by ERWIN LUEKER

(Concluded)

## IV

**I**s the intention to abstain from sin and to live for God a part of the contrition which precedes faith?

Many Lutheran compends answer this question in the affirmative. Luthardt states: "The process of conversion, wrought by God within man, begins with the self-judgment of repentance, which consists of a change of attitude, manifested in the acknowledgment of sin, sorrow for sin, and the earnest intention to break with sin and live to God" (Luthardt-Jelke, *Komp. der Dog.*, p. 394). Luthardt is speaking about contrition. He had just said: "The signs of a true contrition (those within man) are abstention from evil and yearning for sanctification." Rohnert takes the same position: "The means whereby the Holy Spirit accomplishes conversion is . . . the Word of God and, in the first place, the Law and then the Gospel. Through the preaching of the Law the magnitude of man's guilt, his whole sinful corruption, and God's wrath over sin is revealed to him, so that he sees it with inner horror, his conscience is terrified, and he experiences painful contrition (*contritio cordis, terrores incussi conscientiae*). He now realizes that he deserves nothing but condemnation; he feels the mortal pangs of sin, feels the impossibility of changing himself and of existing before God. Hence his heart is full of fear and suffering, full of grief and shame, full of godly sadness ( $\lambda\upsilon\pi\eta$  τοῦ θεοῦ, 2 Cor. 7:10), full of aversion and hatred toward sin (Ps. 97:10; 6:9), which has brought him into such misery. Therefore he turns away from it and renounces it. Far from excusing himself, he contritely confesses his guilt (Ps. 32:3, 5; Prov. 28:13; Song of Sol. 1:8, 9); he accuses himself and cries in anguish of heart: 'O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' So in this mourning over sin he trembles in the pangs of death as the wages of sin; his soul tastes death (Rom. 7:10 f.); the natural mind goes to pieces (*mortificatio*; Apol. 174).



But all this is still only the *negative side of repentance* (*Die Dogmatik d. ev.-luth. Kirche*, p. 357)." [Here C. E. Lindberg (*Christian Dogmatics*, pp. 315 f.) and J. Stump (*The Christian Faith*, pp. 255 f.) are cited as other exponents of this view of contrition.]

In other Lutheran dogmatics, on the other hand, good intentions are entirely absent in the definition of contrition as worked by the Law. According to these writers, they are not a part of contrition. F. Pieper teaches: The word repentance designates in the narrow sense "contrition (*contritio*), the knowledge of sin produced by the Law (*terrores conscientiae*)"—the good intention is not mentioned. "Conversion is effected in the moment when, turning away in despair (*terrores conscientiae*) from his own morality or his own righteousness, man accepts the grace of God offered him in the Gospel, etc." Again nothing about a good intention! "Since conversion is effected by the Gospel with the aid of the Law, the inner motions of the heart which go to make up conversion are (a) the terrors of conscience (*terrores conscientiae*), which arise from the knowledge of sin engendered by the Law ("He came trembling . . . and said: Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Acts 16:29-30); (b) the trust of the heart (*fiducia cordis*) in the gracious promise of forgiveness extended to man in the Gospel, Acts 16:31. Conversion then consists of contrition and faith" (*Christliche Dogmatik*, II, 604, 545, 551). Purposely no mention is made of any good intention in the description of contrition. G. Stoeckhardt defines it thus: "This contrition is nothing else than 'terrors of conscience,' 'pure wrath and despair.' The Law vivifies sin and transgression in the conscience of the sinner and therefore fills the heart with anguish, fear, wrath, and terror of hell. To such extremities the Law leads man—even into hell" (*Lehre und Wehre*, XXXIII, 158). Dietrich's *Catechism* (Qu. 138): "What is contrition? Contrition is the earnest and sincere sorrow of heart, which, because of the sin recognized through the divine Law, is terrified and smitten before God's wrath and his righteous punishment." E. Hove: "This contrition is wrought by God through the Law and is a distressing sense of God's wrath against sin" (*Christian Doctrine*, p. 253). M. Loy: "By the Law is the knowledge of sin,' Rom. 3:20. When this enters the soul with its divine demands and penalties, from which



there is no escape, the effect is either rage and recklessness in declaring war against the imposition of intolerable burdens or the terrors of contrition. 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die.' When it has realized that it has sinned and read its sentence, whither shall it flee for comfort? Its own conscience condemns it, and it can find no solace there. The conscience of every man condemns him in his own confession of guilt and can give him no comfort. His only possible help could be in God, and He reveals His wrath against all ungodliness of men. Condemned of all, helpless and hopeless, whither shall he flee from the hell within him and all around him? That is contrition as the result of an earnest acceptance of the Law of God with its righteous requirements and its terrible denunciation of wrath upon the soul that sinneth." Not a word about the good intention! "The knowledge of sin, the consciousness of its guilt, the compunctions of conscience for the transgression of the divine Law in its holiness, are all necessary to prepare the sinner for the reception of the grace of Christ offered in the Gospel. They thus constitute an indispensable part of repentance." The good intention is consistently omitted (*The Augsburg Confession*, p. 745).

The former make the good intention an essential feature of contrition. The latter refuse to say even a word about good intention in their definition of contrition. This they have learned from the Augsburg Confession and the other symbolical books of the Lutheran Church. "One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin (*contritio seu terrores incussi conscientiae agnito peccato*); the other is faith, which is born of the Gospel. . . . Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance" (AC XII [the original followed the German text]). The good intention is there; but it is not there before faith is present. When contrition which precedes faith is discussed, nothing is said about amendment of life. The Apology treats the subject more fully but does not include good intention in the contrition worked by the Law. "We say that contrition is the true terror of conscience, which feels that God is angry with sin, and which grieves that it has sinned, and this contrition takes place in this manner when sins are censured by the Word of God" (XII 29). The Smalcald Articles teach exactly the same thing:



"This, then, is the thunderbolt of God by which He hurls to the ground both manifest sinners and false saints, and suffers no one to be in the right, but drives them all together to terror and despair. This is the hammer, as Jeremiah says, 23:29: Is not My Word like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? This is not *activa contritio*, or manufactured repentance, but *passiva contritio*, true sorrow of heart, suffering and sensation of death (III Art. III 2). The Formula of Concord does not present it otherwise: "Through this means, namely, the preaching and hearing of His Word, God works and breaks our hearts and draws man so that through the preaching of the Law he comes to know his sins and God's wrath and experiences in his heart true terrors, contrition, and sorrow, and through the preaching and consideration of the holy Gospel concerning the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ a spark of faith is kindled in him" (SD II 54). As Luther defines it in the Smalcald Articles, so he defines it elsewhere: "Now we want to proceed to the psalm [51]. Here the doctrine regarding true repentance is presented to us. There are, however, two parts to true repentance: the awareness of sin and the awareness of grace, or to use better known terminology, fear of God and confidence in His mercy. David presents these two parts to us in this prayer, as in a magnificent picture, so that we may look at them. For in the beginning of the psalm we see him in difficulty because of his awareness of sin and the weight resting on his conscience; but at the end he comforts himself by confidence in the grace of God" (SL V, 475; cf. XI, 709—715). [In the following Luther references the "SL" is omitted.]

The Scriptures agree with those who, with the Lutheran Confessions, refuse to permit the good intention to be derived from, or combined with, the contrition of the Law. The Scriptures teach that the unconverted cannot form a good intention, not even through the working of the Law, but that the good intention is found only in the heart of the believer. When the Scriptures treat the kinds of plans, resolutions, and intentions which arise in the natural heart, they say: "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, etc." (Matt. 15:19). Nowhere do they say that good intentions occasionally arise to exterminate the innate love of sin. They emphasize, on the contrary, that nothing good



dwells in the flesh (Rom. 7:18). As long as man has not yet come to faith, he is "dead" (Eph. 2:5), without any power for good, alive only for evil, having only "enmity against God" in his heart (Rom. 8:7). The Scriptures agree with the confessions when these, e. g., in Art. II of the Augsburg Confession ("Of Original Sin"), deny the unconverted man all and every power, ability, inclination, disposition for good, and when they designate as gross Pelagian and papistical errors the teaching that the unconverted man "can be obedient to God's Law from the heart" and that "man can by his own natural powers make the beginning toward good." According to the teaching of the Scriptures, the good intention cannot come into being through the working of the Law. The Law can only "kill" (2 Cor. 3:6). It cannot instill living powers; it can only arouse the powers of death (Rom. 7:5, 8), can only bring hatred toward God and lust for evil to ever fuller expression. The Scriptures support the Confession when it thus describes the effect of the Law: "Whenever the Law alone, without the Gospel being added, exercises this its office, there is death and hell, and man must despair, like Saul and Judas, as St. Paul, Rom. 7:10, says: "Through sin the Law killeth'" (SA III III 7). Luther puts it in the same way elsewhere: "When sin, death, wrath and judgment of God, hell, etc., are revealed to a person by the Law, it is impossible for him not to lose patience, not to murmur, to hate God and His will . . . therefore the Law occasions deep hatred of God, and this means not only that a person through the Law sees and acknowledges sin but also that this proclamation [of sin] increases sin, kindles (*inflari*), ignites, and magnifies it. . . . When sin has thus been revealed by the rays which the Law casts into the heart, nothing is more hated and more unbearable to man than the Law. . . . A person does not love that from which he flees but is hostile to it; a person is not delighted by it but bitterly hates it. Hence this flight shows that the human heart has a boundless hatred toward the Law and therefore also toward God, the Giver of the Law" (IX, 415, 424, on Gal. 3:19). "Thus the opinion stands firm that, without grace, the Law kills and increases sin. Even though it externally restrains the hand, it nevertheless inflames the spirit all the more against its will. Since the sinner, who, before [coming to] grace, is commanded to search out his sins,



must necessarily be aware of the Law of God, against which he has sinned, it must necessarily follow that he again arouse the lusts and hate the Law, love for which is imparted only by the Gospel." (XVIII, 852)

On the positive side the Scriptures teach that the good intention is found only in the heart of the believer. For the new spiritual life exists only in the heart of the believer. "Ye are risen through faith" (Col. 2:12; cf. Eph. 2:1-8). Good works, including good intentions, which are the beginning of good works, are the evidence and the result of spiritual life. Before one can speak of good works and good intentions, man must be brought to faith. Where contrition alone is present, there is nothing but death. But "*haec fides vivificat contritos*" (Ap XII 36). And it is this faith, which, in the area of good works, is active by love in the production of good intentions (Gal. 5:6). The man who said: "The good that I will," "I delight in the Law of God," "I intend to fulfill the commandments of my beloved God" (Rom. 7:19, 22), was a man who through faith had become a partaker of the redemption of Christ. The exhortation "Bring forth fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:8) presupposes that a person must be converted before he can bring forth *fruits* of repentance. First life, faith, then fruits! The Scriptures therefore agree with the Confession when it says: "For this is certainly true that in genuine conversion a change, new emotion, and movement in the intellect, will, and heart must take place, namely, that the heart perceive sin, dread God's wrath, turn from sin, perceive and accept the promise of grace in Christ, have good spiritual thoughts, a Christian purpose and diligence, and strive against the flesh" (FC SD II 70). The good, Christian intention is found only in the converted person. "When man has been converted and thus enlightened and his will is renewed, it is then that man wills what is good (so far as he is regenerate or a new man) and delights in the Law of the Lord after the inward man" (Ibid. 63; cf. 85). The good, Christian intention is a fruit of faith: "We believe, teach, and confess that although the contrition that precedes, and the good works that follow do not belong to the article of justification before God, yet one is not to imagine a faith of a kind that can exist and abide with, and alongside of, a wicked intention to sin and to act against the conscience. But after man



has been justified by faith, then a true living faith worketh by love, Gal. 5:6, so that thus good works always follow justifying faith, and are surely found with it, if it be true and living" (FC Ep III 11). The Confession has this order: "Contrition, faith, and a good purpose" (FC SD XI 11). The good intentions follow faith . . . "faith, which . . . comforts the conscience, and delivers it from terrors. Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance, as John says, Matt. 3:8: 'Bring forth fruits meet for repentance.'" (AC XII [German text])

Luther and the Lutheran Confessions teach that contrition brought about by the Law does not include the good intention but rather that the latter is a fruit of faith. This fact is universally known. Elert, the Lutheran, knows it. "It is the definitive expression of Luther's doctrine of repentance when he says that it consists *et seria agnitione peccati et apprehensione promissionis* (W 44, 175, 4 ff.). This conception of repentance is espoused by the Confessions as well as by the later dogmatists . . . and, conversely, the sermon cited above states: 'Repentance in his name' occurs in this manner: Christ gives those who believe in Him sanctification through the same faith, not for a moment or an hour but throughout all of life' (12, 514, 30). Also here *converti* is a turning from unbelief to faith as well as a 'change and improvement of the whole life by faith'" (*Morphologie des Luthertums*, I, 128 f.). [Here the author cites G. Plitt (*Einleitung in die Augustana*, pp. 343, 347), s. v. "Busze" (In Herzog-Hauck *Realencyklopädie*), G. Wehrung (*Geschichte und Glaube*, pp. 275 f.), and Schneckenburger (*Darstellung d. luth. und ref. Lehrbegriffs*, II, 117—121) to show that Lutherans, liberals, and Reformed agreed with the author's interpretation of Luther's position.]

The good, earnest intention to break with sin and to live unto God does not come from the work of the Law. To be sure the demands and threats of the Law occasion a kind of "good" intention. The person smitten by the Law determines not to commit again the sins which brought him such misery. The majesty of God compels the sinner to acknowledge his duty to God. It grieved Judas that he had betrayed innocent blood, and he was determined not to repeat this sin again under similar circumstances. The drunkard resolves to quit drinking. Anyone who operates with



the Law is all the more concerned with "good" purposes, since he believes thereby to escape the curse of the Law. "So great is the foolishness of the human heart that in this struggle of conscience, when the Law has exercised its office, he not only fails to lay hold of the doctrine of grace, which in the most positive manner promises and offers him the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake but even now looks for more laws through which he seeks counsel for himself. He says: If I live longer, I want to amend my life, [I want to] do this or that. Similarly, I want to go into a monastery, live as frugally as possible, be satisfied with bread and water, go barefooted, etc." (IX, 417). So there is no dearth of "good" purposes here. But "before he is a child of God, his *propositum* is a powerless one." The power to break with sin is lacking. Oh, yes, in individual cases he succeeds in carrying out his intention to practice this or that virtue. Many a drunkard holds his appetite for drink in check. But often it remains a mere intention. His *propositum* is powerless. This is true primarily because the power for sanctification, the love of God, the true hatred of sin, is not present. He can, as stated, suppress individual expressions of sin, but the love of sin he cannot suppress. He doesn't want to! He clings to sin with all the fibers of his heart. He quits one sin in order to serve another more zealously. It is his passion that is sinful for the very reason that it is contrary to God. "The amendment of life which may possibly result from the Law is only an external one, only an aversion to sin because of its evil results, not inner dislike of sin itself, not desire and readiness for good" (*L. n. W.* LXIII, 276). His "good" intention is not a "Christian intention" (FC); it is basically hypocrisy. The person who is smitten by the Law but not yet seized by the Gospel finds himself in a truly desperate situation. He knows that his sins, his sinful nature, bring damnation to him. He curses his sins—and yet he loves them. He cannot and will not forsake his sinful way—he curses himself and curses the God who curses him on account of his love for sin. And such a man should be capable of a good purpose? No; the Christian "purpose and urge" to war against the flesh is found only where there is Christian contrition, the sorrow over sin which proceeds from love of God and of holiness (FC).



Only the converted person is capable of a good intention. This point must be strongly emphasized on account of the wide dissemination of the opposite view (which is based partly on misunderstanding and confusion of concepts, partly on false doctrines, as will be shown in the final section of this article). We trust that the reader will not become weary if we offer him an additional number of statements by Lutheran theologians. Luther: "The first part of repentance, namely, sorrow, is occasioned only by the Law; the other part, namely, the good intention [to amend one's life], cannot be from the Law. . . . The repentance which is worked by the Law alone is a half repentance or a beginning of repentance or a repentance *per synecdochen*; for it has no good intention.— A good intention, they thought, was a self-made purpose henceforth to avoid sin by human power, while it really is, according to the Gospel, a motion in the heart, aroused by the Holy Spirit, henceforth to hate sin because of God's love, although sin in the flesh still struggles violently against it . . . against such useless teachers of despair the Gospel teaches that repentance must not be despair alone but that the penitent should also hope and thus hate sin because of love for God which is a genuine, good intention" (XX, 1629 f.). [Here is also given the statement by Elert cited in part above. Also Huelsemann (*Praelectiones in libr. Concordiae*, "De poenit.," III), Gerhard (*Loci*, "De poenit.," LXXI), and Conrad Dietrich (*Inst. Cat.*, p. 175)]

Let's hear several testimonies from our times. M. Reu: "The *contritio impii* consists, and can only consist, in the terrors of conscience, the crushing by God's judicial wrath, which man is not able to escape however much he desires to do so; [it consists] by no means in sincere heartfelt sorrow over his ingratitude to the heavenly benefactor and his great offense to Him. The latter presupposes faith worked through the Gospel. . . . Through it [faith] a person experiences the inner crushing and dying of the old inclination, the love for sin; for how can heartfelt sorrow over sin and the intention to sin exist side by side? One must first come to faith before one can attain aversion to sin and hatred of sin, for then a person is averse to sin and hates it for its own sake because of its power to defile man and separate him from God." (*Die Heilsordnung*, pp. 16 f.) *The Pastor's Monthly* (Jan-



uary 1934, p. 32): "The fruit of Zacchaeus' repentance is brought forth at once. He who before had been an oppressor of the poor now becomes their friend and generous benefactor. . . . Zacchaeus burns his bridges behind him; once for all he turns his back upon his former life of sin. Here is true *metanoia*, a change of mind which involves inevitably a change of life as well. Here is peace and joy in the assurance of God's grace; and its genuineness is attested by the strength it gives to break the evil habits of a lifetime to restore, to make good, as far as possible, every wrong committed."<sup>1</sup> J. Meyer: "In repentance a sinner abandons the sinful thoughts and lusts and desires of his heart. . . . In repentance faith in our Savior is kindled in the heart. . . . The penitent has taken his stand against sin, having been united with his God in faith" ("Jesus' Call to Repentance," *Theol. Quartalschr.*, XXVI, 39 ff.). F. Bente: "The knowledge of sin and contrition worked by the Law without synchronous ministrations of the Gospel and preceding faith is saturated with bitterness, wrath, and hatred toward God and His holy Law. It is not the beginning of the sonship of God but a carnal, servile contrition as can only occur in an unregenerated person who is hostile to God. In this therefore God can have no genuine pleasure. . . . Contrition first acquires a spiritual nature through faith. The Law cannot produce childlike, genuine, willing contrition joined with love to God. It springs up only when God adds the Gospel to the Law and makes His gracious countenance shine on the frightened sinner and through faith gives him the comfort of forgiveness. . . . Without this comfort in the heart the sorrow which the Law works is nothing but despair, hell, and death. If the unconverted man is averse to sin only from fear of the curses of the Law, he still turns his hard face toward sin and his back to God. Only by faith there arises childlike contrition, inner dislike for sin and aversion to sin, and inclination toward the good; then man does not avoid evil and back away

<sup>1</sup> Here the author points out how often the restitution of Zacchaeus is traced to a change of mind preceding faith and quotes J. Haas, *The Truth of Faith*, pp. 109 f.: "There must be, as in the case of the publican, honest, heartfelt humiliation before God, which exhibits itself in its sincerity through actual deeds of restitution when the wrong can be partly righted. Zacchaeus exemplified his repentance through deeds of righting the wrong. . . . Repentance leads to faith."



from it merely externally, but he turns his back to sin, flees before it, turns his heart, his mind, and will to God, and pursues the good." (*L. u. W.*, LXIII, 274 ff.)

Is the good intention evoked by the demands and threats of the Law, or is it exclusively the work of the Gospel, the result of faith? The Lutheran doctrine on this point finds adequate expression in the well-known formula which is not of recent origin but comes in its basic form from the old Lutheran period: "Is this your sincere confession, that you heartily repent of your sins, believe on Jesus Christ, and sincerely and earnestly purpose by the assistance of God the Holy Ghost henceforth to amend your sinful life, then declare so by saying yes."

Does the good intention belong to the contrition of the Law? Is it found in the heart of a person in whom the Law has accomplished its work but who has not yet come to faith through the Gospel? According to the Lutheran doctrine, according to the teaching of Scripture, it is the believer who sincerely repents of his sins because of his love for God and has the good, earnest, intention henceforth to amend his sinful life. Whence is it that so many Lutheran dogmatics unite the good intention with the contrition of the Law?

In many instances this is caused by a confusion of concepts and other misunderstandings. If a person appeals to the penitential psalms or 2 Cor. 7:9 in support of the statement that the good intention is always united with contrition, then the contrition of the Law is erroneously identified with Christian contrition. He fails to understand that these two things are essentially different. Faith, which "shows the distinction between the contrition of Peter and Judas" (Ap XII 8), creates an essential change in the disposition of man, in his views, resolves, and feelings of the heart. Judas undoubtedly determined not to commit the regretted deed again. Peter determined not to repeat the regretted deed. But the intention of Judas was a fleshly one, united with hatred toward God. The intention of Peter, on the other hand, was a Christian one: it grew out of faith and love. One should not simply identify contrition with the contrition which exists in the child of God. This is precisely the mistake of which so many are guilty: "They confuse daily contrition with the contrition before faith. Daily



contrition is described in Psalm 51. There David calls it an offering which he brings to God and of which he also says that it pleases God. That, then, is not the contrition before faith but deals with the contrition after faith. This contrition is not a mere work of the Law, in which only the Law is active, but it is at the same time a work of the Gospel. The Gospel brings the love of God into the heart" (Walther, *Gesetz u. Evangelium*, pp. 243 ff.). Stoeckhardt presents the matter thus: "Out of the renewed heart, which has the Holy Spirit in it, there arise pure spiritual emotions. Among these is contrition . . . the divine sorrow now arises" (2 Cor. 7:9). "He now hates sin because it is contrary to God, because of his love for God . . . through the power of God the Holy Ghost, who now dwells in him, he can now also refrain and desist from sin. The terrors of the Law, through the work of the Gospel, have become a blessed contrition, which no one regrets. . . . From this vantage point we now have the right understanding of the penitential sobs and penitential prayers of the saints; for example, the penitential psalms of David. In faith, as a converted sinner who has received grace, he composed and prayed the penitential songs. His penitential prayer, the divine sorrow therein revealed, was a fruit of the Gospel, a fruit of faith." (*L. u. W.*, XXXIII, 204)

The person who appeals to Luther in this confusion of concepts has a misconception of Luther's statements. Luther says, to be sure: "Contrition is, according to the true testimony of all teachers, sorrow over sin, united with the intention to amend one's life" (XX, 1628). "Therefore learn here what genuine repentance is. Peter weeps bitterly. This is the beginning of repentance, that the heart understands sin correctly and sorrows over it; that a person does not desire and love sin and continue in it" (XIII, 397). "This is a genuine repentance, that, first of all, the heart fears God's wrath because of sin and heartily desires to be rid of it and begins to desist from it . . . for it is impossible, if the heart is really contrite and it grieves you that you have heretofore sinned against God, that you should again yield yourself to such sins" (XIII, 1186). In this and related passages, however, Luther does not teach that the good intention is found in the initial contrition, the contrition of the Law, the contrition which is present before the



existence of faith; for here he speaks of Christian, of daily contrition. That such is the case he indicates when in the first quotation he immediately adds: "The first part of repentance, namely, sorrow comes from the Law alone. The second part, namely, the good intention [to amend the life], cannot be from the Law . . . the repentance which the Law alone achieves has no good intention." The Gospel teaches "that the penitent should also take hope and, out of love for God, should hate sin. This is genuine good intention." In the second passage he had previously said: "As Peter denies Christ, not a spark of faith remains in his heart; but when afterwards conscience is aroused and plagues him, faith is present again. . . . Such faith, however, we cannot achieve by ourselves; the Lord must look at us as He looked at Peter." In this, just as in the third passage, Luther uses the expression "genuine repentance." He differentiates the repentance, the contrition, which is found in the heart of the person who is still unconverted from the contrition as it is found in the heart of the believer and becomes a Christian contrition and repentance.

For the proper understanding of the relevant statements of Luther the following interpretation of Stoeckhardt is useful: "Contrition which is worked by the Law, Luther describes in his Smalcald Articles, and frequently elsewhere, as despair, hostility toward God. How so? Does Luther not contradict himself? In his writings he often emphasizes the contrition which comes from love for God, from love of righteousness. In his sermon on repentance in 1517 he writes: 'Therefore first bring a man to the point where he loves righteousness, and without your teaching he will be contrite over his sins; he loves Christ and thus unsparingly hates himself.' And further: 'If you, even though no other man would be contrite or confess and be crushed, nay, even though the whole world acted differently — if you would like to be contrite, without taking into account a single commandment, only for love of a new and better life, then you have true contrition' (X, 1224). Now, such contrition as comes from love for God and for the good, as hates sin for God's sake, is truly a genuine, good, God-pleasing disposition. But here Luther does not speak about a contrition which comes from the Law, about the terrors of the Law, but about a contrition at a later stage, about the nature and form



which contrition has assumed in a penitent, believing Christian and thus about a fruit of the Gospel. He clearly explains his meaning when in the sermon concerning the sacrament of penance in 1518 he makes the assertion: 'But where there is no faith, there is no contrition' (X, 1241). . . . The contrition which comes from faith and love for God is that 'genuine contrition'<sup>2</sup> of which Luther often speaks, a God-pleasing disposition. That is genuine humility and fear of the Lord" ( *L. u. W.*, XXXIII, 198, 204). [Here G. Plitt (*Einleitung in die Augustana*, II, 343—354) and R. Seeberg (*Lehrb. der Dogmengeschichte*, IV, 133 ff., 207 f.) are quoted as a correct historical presentation of the above interpretation.]

In this matter one cannot appeal to Chemnitz. In describing contrition he certainly speaks of the good intention. In his *Enchiridion* he treats (70 ff.): "De contritione, that is, concerning contrition and sorrow over sin, which is usually called repentance." "What factors make up such repentance, contrition, or sorrow? First of all, a knowledge of sin belongs to it . . . in the second place, that a person realizes God's wrath over sin. In the third place, this [factor] especially belongs to true repentance that the heart is smitten and crushed through the revelation of sin and the wrath of God. . . . Therefore the heart is no longer comfortable in sin, no longer has a desire and love for it, but sorrows over it and turns away from it." In this description, however, Chemnitz has a Christian in mind. His question is: "What factors belong to such repentance, contrition, or sorrow in order that a preacher may know how he should preach repentance and a *Christian* can always examine himself whether he is truly penitent."

Nor can one appeal to J. Gerhard. C. Lindberg quotes him as follows: "According to Gerhard, the *partes contritionis* are the following: (1) *vera peccati agnitio*; (2) *sensus irae divinae adversus peccata*; (3) *conscientiae angores et pavores*; (4) *vera coram Deo humiliatio*; (5) *ingenua peccati confessio*; (6) *serium*

<sup>2</sup> "Genuine contrition" is here put in quotation marks because the word "genuine" is here used in a special sense: to indicate the kind of contrition God wants and creates through the Gospel. The view that the contrition which is worked by the Law is no genuine, real contrition is to be rejected. "Yes, it is genuine contrition. The Law had performed its office for Judas." (Stoeckhardt, *Passionspredigten*, I, 129)



*peccati odium ac detestatio*," and then [Lindberg] names, among other "marks of true contrition": "(C) detestation of sin and therefore an internal resolution to forsake sin" (*Cbr. Dog.*, pp. 315 f.). But while Gerhard in section LXIII of his *locus* "De poenitentia" actually describes contrition with the above words, he, nevertheless, says expressly and emphatically in section LXXXI: "The fourth question is whether contrition includes the intention to live a holy life. If contrition alone is present, it does not arouse in man the hope of forgiveness and a good intention. . . . The true and God-pleasing intention to live a new life cannot be present except in the renewed person."

Ordinary language and usage also promotes the confusion of concepts. [Is it not true that] the person who really regrets a certain deed would evidently not care to repeat it? Yes, that makes sense. [But is it also true that] whenever the Law has really worked contrition, then the good earnest intention to desist from sin is likewise present? No, this is not true. Intention and intention must be differentiated. That the word "contrition," as we use it in daily life, always makes one think of "good" intention does not prove that a person must connect the good Christian intention with the contrition of the Law. The Scriptures forbid us to think of it in this connection. It teaches us that the good Christian intention is associated not with the contrition of the Law but only with evangelical contrition. Luther undoubtedly has this in mind when he says: "Otherwise the word 'contrition' sounds too juridical, as one speaks of sin and contrition in earthly matters, as of a deed which one has done and afterwards feels differently about and wishes that he had not done it" (XI, 709). The ordinary usage of a word does not always correspond to the theological, Scriptural usage of the word.

Undoubtedly Reformed usage is responsible for this situation. The Reformed consistently speak of good intentions in connection with contrition. But they mean the contrition of a Christian as has been shown in the third article of this series. When we use Reformed doctrinal books, we should be careful not to repeat their statements regarding the contrition which precedes faith.

In some instances, then, the false place assigned to the good intention results from a confusion of concepts. In the case of



others, however, it results from false doctrine openly taught, namely, from synergism. Because synergism ascribes new spiritual powers to the unconverted man, adopts a conversion by degrees, and makes allowance for holy decisions of the will in contrition, as has been demonstrated in the second article of this series, it naturally has a place for the good, earnest resolve in the heart of a person who has not yet come to faith. When theologians are synergistically inclined, such as Luthardt, who treats conversion "partially as a work of grace, partially as an achievement of man," and Lindberg, who believes in a *status medius*, it is quite natural that they should let the good intention be connected with initial contrition and arise as a result of the work of the Law.

Theologians who espouse synergistic presuppositions and combine the good intention with the contrition of the Law, teach a dangerous, soul-destroying doctrine. What has been said in the previous article about the perniciousness of the synergistic doctrine of contrition applies specifically also to the matter of intention. It may suffice to point out here that any reference to the good intention, which is supposed to be effected by the Law, is of Pelagian origin. [Here the author shows that this Pelagian view is taught by Romanists (*Catechismus Romanus*, P. II, c. V, Qu. XXII), synergists, pietists, and rationalists (C. Dietrich; Herzog-Hauck, *PRE*, s. v. "Busze"; J. Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, s. v. "Repentance"; Hahn, *Lehrbuch des Christlichen Glaubens*, 106 f.).]<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In this connection the author points to the misconception of Agricola which F. Bente describes as follows: "A commingling of the Law and Gospel always results in a corruption of the doctrines of conversion, faith, and justification. Such was the case also with Agricola, who taught that justification follows a contrition which flows from, and hence is preceded by, love toward God. Turning matters topsy-turvy, he taught: Repentance consists in this, that the heart of man, experiencing the kindness of God which calls us to Christ and presents us with His grace, turns about, apprehends God's grace . . . begins to repent and to grieve heartily and sorrowfully on account of its sins, wishes to abstain from them, and renounces its former sinful life. 'This,' says Agricola, 'is repentance (*poenitentia*, *Buessen*) and the first stage of the new birth, the true breathing and afflation of the Holy Spirit. . . . He also resolves, since he has fared so well, never to sin any more or to do anything that might make him unworthy of the benefit received . . . : This is forgiveness of sins.' (Frank, 2, 247.) These confused ideas plainly show that Agricola had a false conception, not only of the Law and Gospel, but also of original sin, repentance, faith, regeneration, and justification. Essentially, his was the



What are we to say about those doctrinal presentations which are not based on synergistic premises but result from a confusion of concepts and other misconceptions? They represent a bad situation. They cause confusion. They are a hindrance to clear thinking. In Luther's treatment of the matter everything is clear. This theological teacher says expressly: The repentance of which I now speak is evangelical repentance. The good intention of which I speak can only be effected by the Gospel. When he speaks of the contrition which precedes faith, he doesn't say a word about any kind of God-pleasing behavior, but says: "Here is nothing but sin and wrath" (XI, 709, 775). But when a Lutheran theologian states that repentance consists of two parts — contrition and faith — and then in the description of contrition speaks about the good, God-pleasing intention but does not expressly and emphatically say that this good intention comes with the Christian contrition, then he gives rise to wrong ideas in the minds of students. Yes, even if he said expressly that this good intention belongs to the contrition which is connected with faith, the student would ask himself in amazement: Why then does my teacher talk about it in advance? Why does he not wait with it until he describes the results of faith? Schneckenberger seeks to clarify the situation by saying that this "occurs only through an anticipation of that which, of course, through the addition of still more factors, is to become the positive side of that negative contrition" (II, 117 ff.). But such an anticipation is evil. If in describing the contrition effected by the Law a person wants to say something about the good intention, then one should say that this is not yet the occasion to say something about it. Otherwise much confusion arises. [As examples of such confusion the author points to Rohnert's presentation to which he had referred before, to that of Philippi (*Kirchl. Glaubenslehre*, V, 212 ff., 277), and the *Lutheran Standard*, October 20, 1928]

How much harm results if a student later on preaches and practices in this manner! His listeners will get the idea that it is

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Roman doctrine, which makes an antecedent of what in reality is an effect and a consequence of conversion and justification." "Hist. Intr.," *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Luth. Church* (St. Louis, Mo., 1921), p. 169.



contrition of the Law which must bring forth the good intention. So far as the unconverted hearer is concerned (to pursue our point only in this direction), one of two things will happen. Since he finds intentions of a certain kind in himself, he will imagine that the Law has accomplished its task for him, although the Law has only then fulfilled its office for him when it has driven him into despair in every respect and has left no good at all in him. In this case the hearer is led into carnal security. Or it may happen that the hearer realizes that the [good] intention really and truly to desist from sin does not arise in him. As long as he is in this plight, he does not dare to occupy himself with the Gospel. He has heard that he must first let the Law exercise its function on him. And this includes that it arouses good intention! So he waits for the coming of the good intention before he flees to the Gospel—and may in the meanwhile despair.<sup>4</sup>

This discussion of the doctrine of contrition presents nothing new, as the reader may have noticed. The subject has frequently been treated in detail in our periodicals, but on account of the prevalent confusion the well-known statements, clearly presented in the XII Article of the Augustana and the Apology, must be emphasized again and again. If we want to discharge our office as evangelical preachers, we dare not attribute to the Law what the Gospel alone can accomplish. Here the matter rests—in order to speak again with the fathers: "Acknowledgment of sin and contrition, which is effected by the Law without simultaneous application of the Gospel and which is prior to faith, is saturated with bitterness, wrath, and hatred toward God and His holy Law. It is not the beginning of divine sonship but a carnal, servile contrition, found only in an unregenerate person who is hostile to God, and in which, therefore, God can have no genuine pleasure"

<sup>4</sup> The author points out that the above also applies to those who speak of a desire for salvation in Christ, supposedly wrought by the Law, or who say: "In repentance which leads to faith 'there must be honest, heartfelt humiliation before God'" (J. Haas, *The Truth of Faith*, p. 109). He quotes *L. u. W.*, XXXIII, 197: "The desire for salvation in Christ is the first motion of faith. Yet this comes only through the Gospel." *L. u. W.*, LIV, 343: "Similar language is used in our country. Contrition worked by the Law, the crushing of the heart, is defined as bowing, bowing of the heart, before God's judgment in the Law; to the extent that the Law achieves this inner bowing, it is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ."



(*L. u. W.*, LXIII, 274). "The Law makes sin and transgression alive in the conscience of the sinner and therefore fills the heart with anxiety, fear, wrath, and terrors of hell. To such extremities the Law leads man — to hell. . . . As the Law leads to hell, so the Gospel again leads the sinners out and transplants them into heaven. . . . First sin, then grace. First death, then life. First fear, then comfort. Through hell the way leads to heaven." (*L. u. W.*, XXXIII, 158 ff.)

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#### OUR CREEDS ARE TO BE USED

In an essay, entitled "The Perfect Law of Liberty," published in the *Theological Quarterly* (April 1957), the author directs the attention of his readers to the diligent use of our creeds. Having pointed out the necessity of creeds as tools for teaching Christianity and maintaining the truths of the Bible, he writes: "But it is not enough that our church has adopted certain creeds and confessions of faith. It is not enough that our pastors have pledged themselves to all the teachings of the Book of Concord. It is not enough that the members of our congregations have memorized and claimed to believe Luther's Small Catechism. For, after all, Christianity is not merely a matter of the mind. It is not merely a matter of memorizing something like two times two equals four or Boise is the capital of Idaho. Christianity is also a matter of the heart and of the will. To memorize creeds and then bury them in a corner of the mind where they will not affect the lives of ourselves and others, will benefit no one. To bury a creed in the corner of our minds is just as sinful as it was for the man in the parable to bury his one talent in the ground until his master would return and call for it. Our creeds are to be used. They are to be read and studied. They are to be proclaimed to the world. Yes, we want the Word of God kept pure even as we want our food kept pure. But even as pure food does not benefit anyone until it is distributed and eaten, so also the pure Gospel does not benefit anyone until it is distributed and received. See to it that the Word of God is taught in the community. Use an aggressive campaign to reach the unchurched people near your church. Personal contact still remains the most effective means of influencing an individual. Also the members of the congregation can do this."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER