Leander Keyser

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A Frank Discussion of Dr. Franz Pieper's Book

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Election and Conversion

A Frank Discussion of Dr. Pieper's Book on "Conversion and Election" with Suggestions for Lutheran Concord and Union on Another Basis

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Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking spiritual truth.

Leander Sylvester Keyser (1856-1937) was educated at Wittenberg College Seminary, Springfield, Ohio, and served pastorates in Indiana, Kansas and Ohio. In 1911 he became professor of Systematic Theology at Hamma Divinity School, and was considered one of the leading theologians of the General Synod. Prof. Keyser's books include *The Conflict Between Fundamentalism and Modernism, The Rational Test, A System of Christian Evidence (Apologetics), A System of General Ethics, A System of Natural Theism, and In The Redeemer's Footsteps*.

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1. Missouri's Precise Position

A Notable booklet, by Professor Pieper, D. D., of Concordia Lutheran Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., was issued in 1913. It bears the title, "Conversion and Election," and the significant sub-title, "A Plea for a United Lutheranism in America." The book has attracted much attention in all branches of the Lutheran Church, and is being widely circulated both by sale and gift copies. It is written in a clear and fluent style, and an excellent spirit pervades it all; indeed, it could not display a more irenic and complaisant temper, and at the same time maintain the author's stalwart theological positions. For the fine spirit evinced the whole Lutheran Church should feel grateful. A few brief replies have been made to the booklet by men in the Ohio and Iowa Synods, to whom Dr. Pieper has responded in a supplemental chapter.[1]

The author's sub-title would indicate that he intends his production to appeal to all Lutherans in America, not merely to the Norwegian Lutherans, whose effort at union was the occasion for the issue of his book.

Therefore, we feel that the General Synod must be included in this "plea for a United Lutheranism in America." True, we cannot quite agree with the author that his work is a "plea;" it is rather an argument for Missouri's position, an earnest and powerful one, and an invitation for all other Lutherans to go over upon that platform; yet the conciliatory spirit and the evident desire for Lutheran union displayed in the book are most winsome, and the general tone and manner do not stir resentment.

The immediate occasion for the publication of the book was the union of the Norwegian Lutheran Synod and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church, by the adoption of Articles of Agreement at Madison, Wis. These articles are printed in full in the book, so that those who wish may read them for themselves; and they are of great importance from every viewpoint, and should be read with care. It appears to Dr. Pieper – and to us as well – that the articles are somewhat indeterminate on the doctrine of election, being a kind of compromise between the stiff predestinarianism of

Missouri and the milder views of Pontoppidan, Gerhard and Scriver. To put it as precisely as we know how, some of the articles endorse the position of Missouri in the plainest and most positive terms, but afterward certain paragraphs are inserted that modify it in such a way that the followers of the other view might be tolerated. In short, the articles do not seem to be quite consistent throughout. Therefore Dr. Pieper thinks that the Norwegians should eliminate, or at least qualify, the compromising sections.

However, in this work we shall not undertake to discuss, much less criticize, the Norwegian Articles of Agreement. Our purpose is to deal with the doctrinal position of the Synodical Conference as set forth by Dr. Pieper in his impressive booklet. We would simply add that perhaps the Madison Agreement is the best possible statement the Norwegians are able to make to suit all parties, especially in view of the profound and insoluble mysteries of the eternal decrees of the Godhead – a subject, as we shall try to show later, on which no body of men should presume to dogmatize in such a way as to exclude from church-fellowship any of their Lutheran brethren. We may be wrong, but just now we think it would be best for the Norwegian Lutherans to "let well enough alone," and go on their way with one accord as brethren, and help to do the work of the Lutheran Church in the extension of God's kingdom in America, without presuming to settle those matters which are beyond human comprehension. Thinking and writing on these mysterious subjects are of value in their place; and, moreover, it is native to the minds which God has given us to delve as deeply as we can into these great and holy mysteries; but we do think our theologizing and speculating on them ought not to be made the ground of division among Lutherans who truly accept the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions, even though they cannot understand all things in the same way. More of this later.

Dr. Pieper's book is of great value; indeed, it will be an "eye-opener" to many people outside of the Synodical Conference who have not taken the pains to inform themselves as to that body's precise doctrinal position. For instance, this book ought from now on to preclude the charge of Calvinism against Missouri. No more ought that allegation to be made, because Missouri denies the charge *in toto et ex animo*. We Lutherans ought to know by experience how trying it is to be charged with a doctrine which we have always rejected with all our vigor, namely, the error of Consubstantiation in the Lord's Supper; for, in spite of our oft-repeated denials, there are men

even today who allege this error to be ours.[2] Not only because Missouri repudiates Calvinism should all cease from charging her with it, but also because, as we shall show, she explains her position in such a way as to disclaim the central doctrine of the Calvinistic view of predestination. Now we humbly hope, too, that we shall be able to show that our Missouri brethren should cease to charge Synergism and Pelagianism against their fellow-Lutherans who cannot fully accept their view-point.

What is the precise Missouri doctrine of election? Let it be distinctly understood that she honestly believes she is adhering strictly to the teachings of the Bible and of the Formula of Concord, and also thinks that her opponents are not correctly interpreting them. Of her sincerity no one should for a moment entertain any doubts. In a series of plain propositions we believe we can precisely set forth her position, which is as follows:

1. God from eternity elected some to be saved and did not elect others. (Do not charge Calvinism here, but wait for the rest of the statement.)
2. God's eternal election of those who are saved is in nowise dependent on or conditioned by anything that is in man or that man can do, but belongs only to His own inscrutable counsel, will and purpose. Why God elected those who are finally saved is a mystery which he has not revealed, and therefore we should not seek any explanation of it. Both the Synergists and the Calvinists try to explain it, and that is where they are wrong.
3. The elect are elected and saved solely by grace. *Sola gratia* is the watchword of Missouri when speaking of the elect. Therefore they are not elected "in view of faith" (*intuitu fidei*) or "good conduct," but wholly and solely through the gracious will and purpose of God. To try to explain God's reasons for electing certain ones, either by *intuitu fidei* or "good conduct," is going beyond Scriptural teaching, and is therefore not only synergistic, but presumptuous; for it is prying into the inexplicable mysteries of God's eternal decree.
4. While the Bible and the Confession do not reveal and explain why those who are finally saved were elected out of the mass of mankind, they do clearly tell us why the non-elect are condemned; it is solely because of their willful sin and guilt, especially in rejecting Christ and resisting the Holy Spirit. They get only what they deserve; on this point the Bible is perfectly clear:

"He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;"

"Ho, every one that thirsteth;"

"Ye will not come to me that ye might have life;"

"And this is the condemnation that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

God is perfectly in earnest in offering salvation to all alike, and desires all to be saved, and so it is not His fault if some are not saved. This is the slogan of *universalis gratia* which Missouri proclaims with all her might. Hence she is not Calvinistic, but utterly repudiates the Calvinistic formula of a limited atonement and a limited proffer of salvation. The Calvinist tries to account for the difference between the salvation of the elect and the non-salvation of the non-elect, on the ground that God makes His call effectual with the former, but leaves the others to their fate, because He has predestinated the latter to be lost. If He externally calls the non-elect He does not mean to make the call effectual. This Calvinistic view is utterly repugnant to Missouri.

5. So far as concerns their moral and spiritual condition, both the elect and the non-elect are in the same case; both alike guilty; both alike unable to deliver themselves; the faith or conduct of the one does not decide the matter of their election. Why did God then elect the one class and not the other? That is the mystery of the eternal divine decree into which we have no business to pry, because it has not been revealed in God's Word. This is Missouri's position, then, in a few words: The elect are predestined from eternity, but what the ground or determining cause of their election is, we do not and cannot know. God has not told us. The following is Dr. Pieper's clear and admirable statement of the case (page 21):

> "Let us ascertain briefly in what respect we are facing a mystery at this point. The Scriptures teach, on the one hand, that the grace of God in Christ is extended to all alike, and, on the other, that there is no difference among men, since all are in the same state of total depravity and in the same guilt before God, and their conduct over against the saving grace of God is equally evil. Such being the case, we might conclude, either that all men would be saved by the grace of God, or that all would be lost by their own guilt. Instead, the Scriptures teach that some are saved merely by the grace of God, and the rest are lost solely by their own guilt. Why this different result when the underlying conditions are the same? This is the mystery which no man has ever properly solved, and no man ever will properly solve in this life, because the Word of God offers no solution."

We break the long paragraph, for Dr. Pieper continues:

> "We should bear in mind that no mystery appears when each of the classes, those who are saved and those who are lost, are considered *separately*. In this separate view of the two classes everything is explained by the Word of God. The Word of God names only one cause of the conversion and final salvation of those who are actually converted and finally saved; it is in each and every case the grace of God in Christ. Likewise it names only one cause of the non-conversion, and failure to be saved, of those who are not converted and are not finally saved; it is in each and every case the fault of man; it is owing, in particular, to his resistance against the converting operations of the Holy Spirit. The hardening of man's heart, too, proceeds only on the basis of human guilt.
>
> "But the mystery appears when the classes are compared with one another. The question then arises: If grace is universal and total depravity general, then why are not all converted and finally saved? *Cur alii prae allis?* It is this question that the Word of God does not answer. At this point we must, with the Formula of Concord, acknowledge a mystery insoluble in this life. If a man so much as strives to solve this difficulty, he proves himself a poor theologian, because he does not know the limitations of theological knowledge: he presumes to know more in matters spiritual than is revealed in the Word of God; while he who actually solves this mystery is forthwith proved a false teacher; for he denies either *sola gratia*, that is, that those who are saved are saved solely by the grace of God, or he denies *universalis gratia*, i.e., that all who are lost are lost by their own fault."

Surely the above is an explicit statement of Missouri's position. Every thinker can clearly see wherein it differs from Calvinism, which teaches that by an absolute decree God predestined some to be saved and others to be lost. Missouri will have nothing to do with fore-ordination unto reprobation; she stoutly upholds the doctrine of *universalis gratia*. She stops in the face of the mystery, and bows humbly to what she believes is the teaching of God's Word. So far as we have seen, she does not even venture the statement that God, for good and right reasons, elected those who will be finally saved, while others are not saved. That, however, might be implied when

Dr. Pieper says this mystery will never be solved "in this life;" for such a statement connotes the fact that in the next life all will be made plain, and we shall all be satisfied that God acted graciously and justly, and not arbitrarily. Dr. Pieper would have sufficient Biblical ground to qualify with such a statement, for "will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne" (Ps. 97:2).

We think now that Dr. Pieper's doctrinal position, which is evidently that of the Synodical Conference, has been presented with sufficient fullness and explicitness. Our next duty will be to attempt to discuss the merits of his book.

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1. Since this was written, a committee of the Joint Synod of Ohio has published a reply in pamphlet form.↩
2. Even so profound a writer as Dr. A. M. Fairbairn charges Luther and Lutheran theologians with "consubstantiation." (See his "The Place of Christ in Modern Theology," p. 161.)↩

2. A Note On Lutheran Union

FIRST, OBSERVE THAT THIS PRODUCTION IS A "plea for a united Lutheranism in America." To say it as graciously as we know how, it does not seem to us to be a "plea." It is rather a powerful argument for all Lutherans in America to adopt the Missouri platform; a polemic (in the good sense) rather than a plea. Of course, if the presentation were convincing to all of us, all would be very easy; we would simply go over to Missouri. We want it understood that we are not saying this with the least degree of sarcasm. However, we in the General Synod might put up a strong argument for our confessional position, and then invite all other Lutherans to come and unite with us. If we did that, we would not call our polemic a "plea," but would give it its proper title. Both the Disciples and the Episcopalians are making the same kind of a proposition to all the Protestant Churches:

> "Come over to our position, and then we shall all be lovingly united."

To be perfectly candid, we are persuaded that there is little hope of Lutheran unity until the various Lutheran bodies are willing to grant some liberty of opinion on those great and abstruse questions about which there is, always has been, and always will be, a difference among good and spiritually minded Lutherans. Dr. Pieper and his fellow-churchmen all declare that there is an insoluble mystery about God's eternal decree of election. If so, why make it a source of division among us? Why make it a shibboleth? Why exclude other Lutherans who accept the Scriptures just as heartily and hold just as tenaciously to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, even though they may have a somewhat different understanding of what occurred in the mind of God away back in eternity? Really if we all accept the Bible, the Augustana, justification by faith alone, salvation by grace alone (*sola gratia*), the universal and serious offer of salvation (*universalis gratia*), together with the Lutheran doctrines of the person of Christ, the atonement,

the sacraments, etc., does it matter so much about our particularistic ideas of God's eternal sovereignty and decrees? And we all do accept the above named precious doctrines, every one of them, as we shall show in a later chapter.

After reading Dr. Pieper's booklet, we read over again, for perhaps the fifth time, Dr. Jacobs' excellent discussion of the subject of predestination in his book, "A Summary of the Christian Faith." What a pleasure it has been to read and compare the views of these two expert and sincere Lutheran theologians! Both of them are thoroughly Biblical, appealing to and interpreting the same passages of Scripture; both of them are stalwart Lutherans, accepting confessionally the whole Book of Concord; both of them quote liberally from the same articles of the Formula of Concord; both of them are intensely in earnest, and possessed of great scholarship; both of them are equally cogent and sincere advocates of *sola gratia* and *universalis gratia*; both of them with like vigor repudiate Synergism and Calvinism; and yet Dr. Pieper pointedly rejects the doctrine of election *intuitu fidei*, while Dr. Jacobs accepts and strongly defends it! Surely in such a case, this mooted doctrine ought not to be made the ground of ecclesiastical strife and mutual exclusion. Surely there are some doctrines that the dogmaticians may leave in the sphere of Lutheran liberty, without endangering "*die reine Lehre*" or the welfare of our Lutheran Zion.

It is our purpose to dwell at some length on the question of Lutheran unity in our last chapter, and so we will not develop that subject any further at this time. However, it is pertinent here to make a confession. We have passed through a strenuous mental wrestling match before venturing to submit this work for publication. The question over which we have struggled for weeks has been, "Shall we, or shall we not?" It was by no means an easy question to decide.

First, it would be so much easier, so much more comfortable, to go along quietly, make no disturbance, stir no criticism and no further debate, and just let matters ecclesiastical and doctrinal go their own way. Why challenge Dr. Pieper's work? Would it not be just as well to let it have free course among our Lutheran people?

Then, there is the question of Lutheran comity [civility] and good will, with some prospect of organic union by and by. And Lutheran unity is a consummation so devoutly to be wished that we may truly say it has been a "hobby" with us for many years. And now here is an irenic and kindly pre-

sentation of Missouri's view-point that has charmed many people of the Lutheran Church, and that seems on the surface to be a real plea and overture for Lutheran unification. Some quite favorable reviews and editorials on the production have appeared in several Lutheran periodicals that have hitherto been rather stoutly and frankly opposed to Missouri's doctrinal position. It really appears, on the surface, at least, as if the book might be adapted to promote the glorious cause of Lutheran union. Might not a criticism of Dr. Pieper's book just at this critical time simply stir more debate, unsettle the minds of some who have been almost won over, and thus postpone the day of Lutheran conciliation and peace? In the face of these considerations, we have more than once been tempted to put the lid on our typewriter, refuse to write another line, and consign the manuscript already prepared to the quiet security of the waste-basket.

And yet! There is always that "and yet." Whenever the temptation came to hold our peace, and the desire for a comfortable time allured us, our conscience started up and gave us disquietude. This statement may create a smile, even a smile of condescension; nevertheless, it is the truth. And why? Because in reading and studying Dr. Pieper's book, we became more and more convinced of certain serious faults and weaknesses in the author's method of citing the Scriptures, in some of the premises assumed, and in the conclusions drawn therefrom. Largely the charm of the book is its kind and gentle spirit. Besides, the author has an ingenious way of citing proof-texts, and collating and assembling them, so that readers who do not examine them carefully in the light of their contextual settings and relations, will be inclined to think the argument conclusive. His logic, too, is often ordered in such a way as to carry conviction. And when he assumes a premise, he pushes on relentlessly to the conclusion. Still more, there is much display of erudition in the work; many people, therefore, will be disposed to think that a man who has command of such large stores of learning must be able to say the final word. All these elements make the book fascinating and all but convincing to persons who read, but do not stop to analyze, sift and investigate for themselves.

And yet, spite of it all, we cannot bring ourselves to believe that the author's main propositions are well taken, or that his conclusions are correctly drawn, either from a Biblical or a Lutheran view-point. Indeed, we think the errors of the book are quite serious, as we shall try to show. So the question that rose in our mind, and would not down, was this: What a pity it would

be – indeed, what a misfortune – if some of the great branches of our Lutheran Church should be drawn into a union on a wrong basis, or, at least, a basis that should afterwards be found to be far from satisfactory! Are any of us, who have hitherto had a different conception of conversion and election, ready to go into a union on the Missouri basis? Have we given the subject sufficient study? We think not; the subject needs still more discussion. A union on the proposed basis at this time would be hasty, premature. The other side should be fully presented, and in a new form, at this strategic point. We are persuaded that a union effected on the Missouri basis would not be lasting. The mistake would soon be detected, for you cannot keep men from thinking and investigating.

All the more necessary does it seem to be to present the other side, from the fact that some men appear to think that Dr. Pieper has said the final word; that the question is now a closed one, and that no further discussion is needed. This, we are convinced by our investigations, is a mistake. While we are extremely anxious for peace, we do not want peace on a wrong basis; nor are we willing that all the concessions should have to be made by one side – the side, too, which, we are sincerely convinced, has the stronger Biblical teaching in its favor.

If anyone should accuse us of stirring up feeling, we would reply that Dr. Pieper did not spare the feelings of his opponents. Of course, as we have said, he showed a comparatively gentle and irenic spirit; yet he did not recede one hair's breadth from the rigid Missouri position. He demands that all the yielding be done by those who differ with him and his Synod. Nor is that all. He again and again accuses his opponents of Synergism, which is a term of reproach in the Lutheran Church. If you want to blacken a man's good name theologically, just call him a Synergist. Worse yet, Dr. Pieper calls his theological opponents Pelagians, which is a very opprobrious term in the Lutheran Church. At the same time he demands that the charge of Calvinism against Missouri be withdrawn. To call a Missourian a Calvinist is also regarded a serious blot on his reputation. However, our friend does not seem to realize that it hurts others just as much to be called Synergists and Pelagians as it does our Missouri brethren to be called Calvinists. You see, all through this polemic there is not one iota of yielding on the Missouri side, but every concession is to be made by those who differ from her.

Still more, Dr. Pieper from beginning to end charges his opponents with teaching human merit and work-righteousness. This indictment must by all

means be disclaimed and disproved. It would stultify the rest of us as Lutherans to let it go unchallenged. Every true Lutheran knows that he discards such a doctrine with all his might. If Lutheran concord is to be effected, as we hope and pray it may, the charge of Synergism and human merit must be withdrawn, just as the accusation of Calvinism against Missouri must be withdrawn.

In view of the voluminous replies that have been made to the Missouri contentions, it may seem superfluous to add another polemic on the subject. There is Dr. Stellhorn's great work in German, which we regret to say we have not been able to read. However, we have had the privilege of reading the large book (802 octavo pages) edited by Dr. E. L. S. Tressel, entitled,"The Error of Missouri." (According to the title page, it was edited by Dr. Schodde; perhaps Dr. Tressel stood sponsor for its publication.) This work is in English, and contains the powerful argument of Drs. Stellhorn and Schmidt and of Revs. Allwardt and Ernst. There is also Dr. Jacobs' compact and lucid chapter on the divine purpose in his work, "A Summary of the Christian Faith." Besides, many magazine articles have appeared setting forth the anti-Missouri views. These can be secured and examined by those who are interested in the whole controversy.

Still, we do not think everything has been said on the subject. This little work, we venture to think, will give the arguments in succinct form. In many respects, too, they are put in a different way, perhaps in simpler language and in shorter and more simply constructed sentences. There are several points which, in our humble judgment, have not been made sufficiently clear by the opponents of the Missouri dogmatics: namely, the importance and organic relation of the Call and Illumination in the Order of Salvation; the ethical and psychical character of conversion; the real nature of a free will; the Holy Spirit's movements in creating and implanting spiritual life in the soul, and thus enabling freedom and faith; the danger of misunderstanding the formula, "election in view of faith." Moreover, the books above mentioned, having been issued some years ago, could not anticipate all the arguments of Dr. Pieper in his last work.[1]

The foregoing are our reasons for composing this thesis. In the closing chapter we shall try to outline a broader and more satisfactory platform for fraternal fellowship and cooperation in the Lutheran Church of America. On the basis there proposed we believe all true Lutherans can unite and work, until the time comes when, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we

may be able to adjust our confessional and doctrinal differences; and then organic union may be in sight. We shall now proceed to review Dr. Pieper's book with as much candor, fairness, courtesy and thoroughness as we can command.

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1. At this writing (or rather proof-reading) the English edition of this brochure by Dr. Schuette and his committee, issued for the Joint Synod of Ohio, has not yet appeared, and therefore we cannot say how fully all the points have been developed. There is little doubt, however, that the reply is masterly.↩

3. The Lutheran Regulative Doctrine

A SERIOUS DOCTRINAL BLEMISH in the book under review is this: It puts into a minor place the material, chief and regulative principle of the Reformation, namely, justification by faith. This was the doctrine which Luther made central and pivotal, and by which he judged and decided all other doctrines in the Biblical system. He contended ever that justification by faith alone was "the sign of a standing or a falling Church." He would not subordinate this doctrine to any other doctrine, or to all other doctrines combined, but judged all by it, and assembled and coordinated all around it. This is also the view-point of the Augustana. To our mind it is the view-point of the Formula of Concord. If the eleventh chapter is read and studied in the searchlight of this cardinal principle, it will be much more easily comprehended and evaluated.

But what is the impression made upon one who carefully reads Dr. Pieper's book? That another doctrine has been introduced, not only as the chief one, but also as the regulative one; as it were, the major premise. That doctrine is the doctrine of the divine decrees, the divine sovereignty, election, predestination. This is the beginning and the end, the principal view-point; it controls everything; it never for a moment slips out of sight; all other doctrines must take a secondary place. Even faith is treated meagerly, is subjected to election, is taken quite out of the sphere of freedom, and is so misconceived as to be made a mechanical thing, instead of the ethical and spiritual act it is always represented to be in the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. According to this dissertation, man is not elected in view of the fact that he accepts Christ by faith, but he both has faith and is justified because he has been elected unto salvation from eternity by a mysterious decree. If we mistake not, this is reversing the Lutheran order, making divine sovereignty central, and crowding justification by faith off to one side. Luther and his co-laborers did not begin with an insoluble mystery

pertaining to the Godhead before the world was, but with the plain and simple revelation of Christ and His way of justification by faith; and then, if they wanted to work back to the mysteries, they would judge them all in the light of the simple revelation. It was the Calvinists who began with the *divina decreta*, and made everything else subservient to God's absolute sovereignty. We beg pardon for having to say it, but just in this one respect the Missouri view-point is more like that of the Calvinists and less like that of the Lutherans. We hasten to say, however, for fear of misunderstanding, that Missouri's explanation of the doctrine of election itself is far from being Calvinistic; is, in fact, anti-Calvinistic, as has been shown. Are we not correct in saying that the central and regulative principle of our Missouri friends is election, not justification by faith? Just note how little faith is discussed in this treatise; how little it is urged; what a small and insignificant place it occupies in comparison with election; how it must ever step aside to make room for predestination; how belittlingly the *intuitu fidei* is represented, as if faith were a matter of small importance; note, too, that justification is scarcely mentioned in the entire production; and yet with Paul the great question was how a man could be accounted righteous before God. This is the doctrine, too, that saved Luther and made him the reformer he was; the doctrine to which he always gave the primacy in his theological system. Does anyone suppose that he ever would have made Rome tremble, that he ever would have changed the currents of religious and civil history, if he had spent much of his time in debating the order of God's decrees in eternity? Indeed, he always deprecated controversies on this very subject, as anyone may see by reading the quotations presented in Jacobs' "Summary of the Christian Faith" (pp. 576-580).

Perchance the reply will be made that our Missouri friends do not mean to neglect or depreciate faith and justification, but that just now the doctrine of election is the one in dispute, and for that reason it occupies the foremost place in the controversy. That point we might readily admit, if it were not for the fact that our Concordia friends deal with every passage of Scripture, even the passages that refer to faith and justification, from the view-point of election. Note their theological method: If faith seems to come in the way of election, then faith must step aside, never election. Thus did not Paul; thus did not Luther, who quotes approvingly the salient advice of Staupitz:

> "Begin with the wounds of Christ; then all arguing concerning Predestination will come to an end" (Jacobs, *ut supra*, 578).

Again in Dr. Pieper's disposition toward *intuitu fidei*, he seems to treat faith as if it were so insignificant a thing that it would be absurd to think that it could in the least have affected God's eternal self-determinations. This surely is not the servile place given to faith in John 3:16; nor in Paul's preaching to the Philippian jailor; nor in Christ's words when He said:

> "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, and believe in me;"

Nor when He said:

> "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever *believeth on Him* may have eternal life."

How much the Bible makes of faith! How little, comparatively, of election! Everywhere Christ insisted on faith and belief, while scarcely more than half a dozen times does He refer to "the elect," and almost always in passages whose interpretation is more or less difficult. Note how often faith is mentioned in the epistles. Two of Paul's epistles – Romans and Galatians – were expressly written to prove that men are justified by faith, and not by the deeds of the law or their own righteousness. The letter to the Hebrews devotes a whole chapter – the 11th – to a panegyric on the heroes of faith. It declares that "without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek Him." Our point is that faith is the outstanding doctrine of the New Testament, and therefore should take precedence of a doctrine like election, which is treated more incidentally.

Another mistake of the book is the constant assumption that *faith* is a matter of *merit*. That this is made a major premise is obvious from the fact that Dr. Pieper almost always joins the two terms, "in view of faith" and man's "good conduct," thus putting them in to the same category; also the fact that he constantly charges those who accept the doctrine of *intuitu fidei* with Synergism – that is, with thinking that God elects men on account of some merit in themselves, some natural goodness.

No true Lutheran has ever taught that there is merit in faith. The fact is, Paul, for this very reason, says we are justified through faith and not by works or the deeds of the law. Note how clearly Paul puts it (Rom. 3:27, 28):

> "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

Again (Rom. 4:16):

> "For this cause it is *of faith* that it *may be* according to grace."

In the preceding chapter, verses 24 and 25, he says:

> "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in His blood," etc.

In one place he says we are justified by *faith*, in another by *grace*, showing that in either case it is God's grace that justifies. And here is a classical passage, and a decisive one (Eph. 2:8, 9):

> "For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast."

Thus it is seen that faith has been made, in Scripture, the channel through which justification comes to man for the very reason that it will exclude all human merit, and make man's salvation a pure work of God's grace. *Sola gratia* – it is the teaching of God's Holy Word. Precisely the same is the teaching of our Lutheran theologies that firmly uphold the material principle of the Reformation and the regulative doctrine of Lutheran theology. We always say, *Justificatio propter Christum per fidem*, never *propter fidem per Christum*. Salvation comes to the believer on account of the merits of Christ through faith, not the reverse. It is not faith itself, but only its object – Christ and His vicarious work – that has merit, and is the ground of salvation. (See Jacobs, *ut supra*, page 190.)

From the very nature of faith it can have no merit. Faith is simply the act of the soul by which it accepts God's gift of salvation. There surely can be no merit in a poor, unworthy, guilty sinner accepting the grace which God gratuitously offers him. No; he feels so unworthy that it seems to be even a shame to *accept* salvation at the hands of a justly offended God. The fact is, the necessity of simply *accepting* the gratuity, without the ability to do anything to make him deserving, accentuates and enhances his unworthiness. If it were forced upon him *nolens volens*, he would not feel half so unworthy. If a beggar, who has never served you in any way, but has rather been a parasite on society, comes hungry to your door, and you proffer him food, there is no merit in his simply reaching out his hand and taking the benefaction. No more is there any merit in the unworthy, but penitent, sinner taking the gift of salvation.

Neither does such a sinner feel that he deserves anything on account of his faith. There is nothing in the act of faith that ministers to pride or that gives room for boasting. It is rather the impenitent sinner who boasts of his merits, and shows a self-righteous spirit, and says he needs nothing from God, and does not care for his proffered pardon and salvation.

Now, what is the connection between this discussion and the doctrine of election? It is this: Even if God did, by virtue of his foreknowledge, elect believers unto salvation, in view of their faith, it would not destroy the heavenly doctrine of *sola gratia*, because faith simply accepts the gratuity from the hands of the God of love and mercy. In view of the fact, therefore, that justification by faith connotes salvation by grace alone, we would not deem it unworthy of the wise and holy God to predestine unto eternal life those who He foresaw from eternity would believe on the Redeemer whom He foreordained from eternity to send to them. If He foreordained that men should be saved at all, if they fell into sin, and if He foreordained that they should be saved through faith in Christ (as He did), surely it would not be out of accord with His whole wonderful and gracious scheme, if He should have foreordained that those who He foresaw would exercise such faith should be chosen and kept unto eternal life. So we think that the ethical objection to the *intuitu fidei* doctrine has been removed. Surely, if God honors faith so much as to make it the vehicle of justification in time, it would not derogate from His honor for Him to have taken it into consideration in the counsels of eternity. God must have thought a good deal of faith, or He would not have elected from eternity that men should be justified and saved

through faith. The Biblical grounds for this doctrine will be shown in a later chapter.

Let us put the matter in another way. What was it that predetermined God to send His Son into the world? Was it not the fact that he foresaw that man would sin? Thus we read of "the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world." So it is plain that God must have foreordained the whole plan of redemption *in view of sin*. Then why might He not predetermine salvation *in view of faith*? If He could foreknow that Adam would sin, could He not also foreknow every person who would believe and continue in Christ to the end? And if fore-ordination in view of sin would not dishonor Him, why would fore-ordination in view of faith dishonor Him? All the more so, since sin is something entirely obnoxious to Him and contrary to His will, while faith is a holy principle, an activity begotten in the soul of the believer by His Spirit.

In proof that we have correctly represented Missouri's position in saying that God foreordained the plan of redemption through Christ in view of sin, we quote from Dr. A. L. Graebner's "Doctrinal Theology," page 43, under the locus, "Decree of Redemption:"

> "The decree of redemption is an eternal act of God, whereby He graciously, and with divine wisdom, purposed to work, in the fullness of time, through the Son made manifest in the flesh, a redemption of mankind, and to prepare a way of salvation for the whole human race, whose *fall He had foreseen*, but not decreed."

What could be more lucidly stated than that? So, since God foreknew the fall of man, and, in view of it, foreordained a plan of redemption, He must have foreordained all the articulations and movements of that plan; therefore He could also foresee the faith and perseverance of the elect, and choose them in view of their acceptance of His mercy. The weakness of the above definition by Dr. Graebner is, it fails to say how God eternally purposed to save men – namely, through faith.

We regret to say that faith is not even mentioned. Does not this fact prove our earlier contention – that the predestinarians always make election, instead of justification by faith, the ruling doctrine? Is it not a peculiar oversight that an elaborate definition of "the decree of redemption" should ignore faith, which is included in the "gospel *in nuce*" as Luther called John 3:16?

Dr. Pieper is so jealous of his favorite doctrine that he will not admit for a moment that faith might have been *antecedent* to election. That view, he thinks, would dishonor God. Yet, if he insists on speaking of eternal things in the terms of time, he must admit that the fall of man into sin was *antecedent* to the fore-ordination of the whole gracious plan of redemption. If the one does not detract from God's glory, neither does the other. But the very fact that he will not permit faith to *precede* election proves what we have said before – that election, not justifying faith, is the regnant doctrine in his theological system.

4. Locating The Mystery

NEXT WE MUST CONSIDER THE *LOCUS*, so clearly stated by Professor Pieper, as to just where the mystery of election lies. He locates it in God's diverse ways of treating men – electing some and leaving others to their fate. It is not that God does not want the finally obdurate to be saved; that Dr. Pieper asserts and reasserts many times. We are thankful that our Missouri brethren take this view, and insist upon it so strongly. It is the chief thing that differentiates them from the Calvinists. However, the mystery is, why some are saved and others are not, seeing all are alike guilty and all alike under spiritual disability. That, according to our Missouri brethren, is the inexplicable mystery of the divine election. God alone knows why some are elected and others are not, and He has kept the secret in the inner chamber of His own counsels.

Now we venture to say, humbly and honestly, that by their speculations on the eternal decree, our good brethren have confused matters, and have placed the mystery where the Bible does not place it, but where, on the contrary, the Bible gives the very clearest reason why some people are saved and others lost. For a time let us try to forget what God may have done in eternity, and let us see what He has said and done in time through His gracious revelation. Thus we may be able to determine the ground of His discriminations between the finally saved and the finally lost. What does the Bible say? We might cite hundreds of proof-texts, but a few of the outstanding ones will suffice.

Note, first, how Jesus Christ Himself makes the distinction in John 3:16-19:

> "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that *whosoever believeth on Him* should not perish, but have everlasting life…. He that *believeth on Him* is not judged; he that *believeth not* hath been judged already, *because he hath not believed* on the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men *loved* the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil."

Here Christ makes it very clear why some are saved and others lost; the former *believe* on Christ; the latter *do not believe* on Him. So our Lord does not seem to make any mystery over the difference of treatment that God accords to the two classes of men. Why, then, should men go back to something that occurred in the eternal counsels of God, and find a mystery?

Let us note some other passages. We know that faith and repentance always go together; one connotes the other. At the beginning of Christ's ministry He said:

> "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

In Mark's gospel it is put in this way:

> "Now after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

So again the conditions of salvation are made repentance and faith. Why cannot we preach this truth in all its simplicity just as Jesus did? At another place our Saviour said:

> "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

So those who perish are those who do not repent, implying clearly that those who do repent shall be saved. Here is another classical passage (Mark 16:15, 16):

> "And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation."

Then what?

"He that *believeth*, and *is baptized* shall be saved; but he that *believeth not* shall be condemned."

Here again it is faith and unfaith that make the difference. Our point is that Christ does not posit the difference in the destiny of saints and sinners in God's eternal decree, but in man's acceptance or rejection of the gospel.

When the Philippian jailer exclaimed in his terror, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas took no time to speculate about the mysteries either of faith or of election, but simply answered:

> "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house."

And we know the sequel. Oh! we need more simple, childlike faith, and less refined speculation.

Let us look at another classical passage, a veritable *sedes doctrinae*, in the language of theology. It is found in Paul's famous foreordination thesis, on which the advocates of election depend for many of their arguments, Rom. 8-11. One should read all these chapters, not only the eighth and ninth; indeed, it is best to begin at Rom. 1, and read on through Rom. 11. Paul's argument here refers to the rejection of Israel and the acceptance of the Gentiles. After all he says about the election of some and the rejection of others, he closes the discussion of his great theme in Rom. 11:17-36, a part of which we will quote according to the beautiful version of the Twentieth Century New Testament. We should note that the "cultivated olive" refers to the Jews, and the "wild olive" to the Gentiles. Says Paul:

> "Some, however, of the branches were broken off, and you, who were only a wild olive, were grafted in among them, and came to share with them the root which is the source of the richness of the cultivated olive. Yet do not exult over the other branches. But, if you do exult over them, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. But some branches, you will say, were broken off, so that I might be grafted in. True; it was because of their *want of faith* that they were broken off, and it is because of your *faith* that you are standing. Do not think too highly of yourself, but beware. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. See, then, both the goodness and the severity of God – his severity toward those who fell, and his goodness toward you, provided you *continue to confide* in that goodness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they, too, if they *do not continue in their unbelief*, will be grafted in; for God has it in His power to graft them in again."

So, after all Paul's discussion of fore-ordination, he concludes that it was Israel's unbelief that cut them off, and it was through faith that the Gentiles were grafted in. Paul's reason for turning from the Jews to the Gentiles is given plainly in Acts 13:46. "Seeing ye thrust it (the Word) from you… lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

So our point is that the Bible does not make a mystery out of the fact that some people are saved. It reveals that just as clearly as it reveals why the reprobate are finally condemned. Why should the Missourians say that one is clearly revealed and the other is a profound mystery, when the Bible tells us just as clearly why some are saved as why others are lost? "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be condemned." Ponder the two statements; is not one just as explicit as the other? Again:

> "He that believeth on Him is not condemned; he that believeth not is condemned already."

Compare the two statements. Is not the one as unmistakable as the other? Why locate the mystery here where God speaks plainly.[1] It is because, instead of accepting the Bible's simple teaching, we have tried to cipher out some things that are too deep for our limited capacities. We have tried to posit mystery at a certain point, as if, in the ultimate analysis, the whole world of both nature and grace were not beyond our understanding. Who can understand the eternal decrees of the absolute God? Ah, yes, true enough! But you need not go so far afield to find the inscrutable. Who knows what matter is? Who knows what mind is? Who can figure out the mysterious connection between the mind and the brain? Who can tell how the mind can determine itself in liberty, how it can initiate motion and action? So in regard to faith. Who can tell how we can lay hold on Christ by faith? Who can define the precise point where grace and freedom meet and coalesce, and where faith is sufficiently enabled by the power of God to become self-active? Yes, there are mysteries all along the line.[2]

And yet how plain some things are – the things that are practical and that we need to know. We know that we have bodies and that we have souls; that we feel with our nerves of sensation; that we cognize, feel and will with our minds; that, if we are Christians, we have accepted salvation by faith, and that not in our strength, and yet that we were not compelled to believe; that, if we had not accepted God's gift, we could not have had it: that it was all by grace, even the enabling of our faith. Some dialectician may come along and challenge us thus: "Prove all these things." We reply, we cannot prove them; we know them; they are part of our consciousness and experience. So it is with the plan of salvation; God has clearly taught in His word that the dividing line between the justified and the lost is faith and unbelief. What

He has revealed in time must have been predetermined in eternity. If God in time makes faith – or, at least, the willingness to have faith, as we shall show later – the turning-point in the sinner's career, He must have foreseen this contingency in eternity and chosen accordingly. This would not be inconsistent with His exalted character, nor detract from His glory, nor nullify *sola gratia*.

Why should it derogate from God's glory and grace for Him to elect in foresight of faith? Is faith so small and insignificant a thing in God's eyes? Not according to the Bible:

> "Without faith it is impossible to please Him;"
>
> "Being justified by faith;"
>
> "That whosoever believeth on Him might not perish;"
>
> "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent;"
>
> "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but faith, which worketh by love;"
>
> "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith;"
>
> "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen;"

"By faith" Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and all the rest were sustained and performed their mighty works. The Lutheran Church also gives to faith this exalted place. It is not belittling to God to elect in view of faith. In any case He must have had faith in mind in eternity, for He elected to justify and save sinners through faith.

Further, if election is an inscrutable mystery, kept secret in God's eternal counsel, how does Missouri know that it was not made in view of faith? That would imply a good deal of knowledge about an inscrutable mystery. Again, according to Missouri, each individual who is finally saved was predestined unto faith, which must mean that when he was elected, his faith was elected with him. That view eliminates every vestige of freedom from faith, and therefore spells "irresistible grace." Missouri also teaches – at

least, she did some years ago – that "God gives richer grace to the elect than to the non-elect" (see Tressel's work, page 600). The conclusion must be unconditional election.

The St. Louis theologians are, we think, in error when they set up an antinomy between election and freedom; for since God in eternity elected to create free beings, He must have also in eternity elected to respect their freedom, and relate Himself thereto. This principle does not subtract from His glory, grace and power; it only exalts them, for a God who can respect and permit a moral agent's autonomy, and at the same time carry out his own vast plans, must be infinite in all His perfections.

There is always an element of freedom in faith. Otherwise it would not be the *gift* of God, but would be something forcibly imposed. While no man can believe on Christ by his own natural powers (for man is dead in trespasses and sins), yet when faith is enabled by God's grace in regeneration, it must lay hold upon Christ freely. God will not force any man to accept Christ by faith; nor will God do man's believing for him. When faith is empowered by God's Spirit, man must exercise that power. Even Dr. Walter once said:

> "He who opposes not merely his natural resistance to the operation of the Holy Spirit, but also obstinate and obdurate resistance, him God Himself cannot then help; for God will force no one to conversion; a forced conversion is no conversion." (Tressel's work, page 171, quoted from Walter's "Postille," p. 91.)

Looking upon faith as a matter of merit is the fatal error of Missouri. It colors her whole theology. How a body of Lutherans, studying the Bible, the confessions and the Lutheran dogmaticians, could get such a mistaken conception of simple saving faith is indeed a mystery to us. We need not go back to the eternal divine decrees to find mysteries. If faith is the free gift of God, as the Bible maintains, how can it be a matter of merit? And if, after it has been divinely bestowed or enabled, it simply takes God's gratuity, it surely can claim no desert.

Whether we have gathered up all the links in our argument or not, this is sure: we have made faith in Christ the central and regulative principle, just as Paul did, just as Luther did, just as the Augustana and all other Lutheran Symbols do. If anything in our Lutheran system of doctrine must bend, or step aside, it cannot be faith in Christ; for He is the express image of God's person, His perfect revelation, and faith in Him is our only hope.

At this point, and while we think of it, we wish to commend a gracious statement by Dr. Pieper. He says that his opponents are not as self-righteous as their theories would seem to imply; that their hearts are better than their heads. Down in their Christian hearts, he says, they are not Pharisaical, saying: "We thank thee, Lord, that we are not as other men are."

They do not think that they have been elected and saved because they are better than others either by nature or practice, but solely on account of the goodness and grace of God and the merits of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Pieper has estimated his fellow-Christians correctly, and is to be commended for his gentle and generous judgment. However, while he thinks their hearts are right, though their heads are wrong, we think both their heads and hearts are right. First, they know that they have been saved by grace through faith; and that not of themselves; it is the gift of God; second, they would not want God to elect them out of the mass of mankind by an arbitrary decision, whether in time or eternity; but if he gave the others also an equal and sufficient chance (*gratia sufficiens*), the redeemed can have all the more faith in Him, because of the very fact that He is just and impartial, as well as plenteous in mercy and grace.

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1. Missouri accepts the Apology of the Augsburg Confession as part of her creed. This is what the Apology says (Jacobs' edition, page 150): 'And this faith makes a distinction between those by whom salvation is attained, and those by whom it is not attained. Faith makes the distinction between the worthy and the unworthy, because eternal life has been promised to the justified; and faith justifies." The Formula of Concord says (page 527):

   "In Him (Christ), therefore, we should seek the eternal election of the Father, who, in His eternal divine counsel, determined that He would save no one except those who acknowledge His Son, Christ, and truly believe on Him."↩
2. At one place Dr. Pieper declares that no man is a "good theologian" who tries to explain the mystery of the decrees relative to election. We maintain that we have attempted to explain no mystery in the foregoing argument, but have simply stated what is the plain teaching of

God's Word. How God can foreknow contingent events, and yet leave a moral agent free, is a matter we leave to His omniscience.↩

5. The Heart Of The Question

IT MAY BE THOUGHT that we have not yet reached the heart of the question, because we have not defined faith, nor shown how it is begotten, and why some persons exercise faith while others do not. If there is any mystery about the implanting of faith in the sinner's heart, we do see why it need be referred back to God's eternal decrees. Of course, mystery inheres in all the operations of divine grace upon the soul.

At this juncture we want to have one thing distinctly understood; we do not believe that God ever elected anyone in view of "good conduct." The expression may have been used by some polemicists in an innocent way, but it connotes the idea of human desert, and of that we will have none. We decline to use the phrase "good conduct" in connection with election, or to be responsible for it in any way or in any degree.[1] But with faith it is different, for Paul says, "It is by faith that it might be by grace."

In discussing the nature and office of faith we must think clearly and discriminate sharply, if we would avoid error – the error of Pelagianism, on the one hand, and of Calvinism, on the other.

At this point we wish to say emphatically that we reject, *in toto*, the Pelagian view, because it does not agree with the unmistakable teaching of God's Word, which says:

> "Except anyone be born anew, he cannot *see* the kingdom of God;"
>
> "Without me ye can do nothing;"
>
> "No man cometh to me, except the Father draw him;"
>
> "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit;"
>
> "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned;"

"The mind of the flesh is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be; and they that are in the flesh cannot please God;"

"And ye, when ye were dead in trespasses and sins… but God, being rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ;"

"And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh," etc.;

"For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not;"

"By nature the children of wrath;"

"For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would;"

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5);

"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good who are accustomed to do evil" (Jer. 13:23).

Many more texts might be cited. Those that have been given are, we believe, quoted in their true contextual relation, and mean just what the words say.[2]

Thus the Bible teaches that a fatal moral disability lies upon man's spiritual powers. In a spiritual sense man is said to be "blind," "in darkness," "carnally minded," "conceived in sin," "dead in sin," "in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity," "the slave of sin." Man certainly is by nature in a sad state. How, then, can man be saved through faith when he has by nature not even a moiety of ability to exercise saving faith? "Dead in trespasses and sins" – how can a "dead" man believe on Christ and accept His gift of salvation? We are trying to state the difficulty just as strongly as we can; and it is a difficulty that the Bible itself makes.

Moreover, the difficulty is made still greater by the fact that, wherever in the Bible the offer of grace is made to man, he is not treated as if he were a dead man, but as if he were a living one, and even a free and responsible moral agent. Note that Christ began to preach to unregenerate men by say-

ing, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.” Why command them to do what they were utterly unable to do? Nicodemus was an unregenerate man; yet Christ talked to him about the new birth, told him not to marvel about it, then went on to tell him about God so loving the world that He gave His only begotten Son that men might believe on Him and be saved. What incongruity to talk to a “dead” man about faith and the new birth! The woman at the well was still an unregenerate person when Christ told her about the water of life. In His last commission to His apostles our Lord bade them preach to unregenerate men, and, strangely enough, added that those who would believe their message would be saved; those who rejected it would be condemned. The frightened Philippian jailer was an unregenerate man when he cried out for help; yet Paul said to him, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Why bid a man believe when he couldn’t?

So we might go through the whole New Testament. But the same method obtains in the Old Testament. Isaiah was preaching to rank sinners when he said:

> “Come now, saith the Lord, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet,” etc.

The idea of God’s proposing to reason with such crass, deep-dyed sinners in their unconverted state! The idea of asking “dead” people to reason! and to reason with Him, the all-wise and eternal God! The invitation, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,” was extended to unconverted people. To the same unconverted lot of people God said through the prophet (Isa. 55:6,7):

> “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near: 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; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

Is this another insoluble mystery? If so, it is not a mystery, this time, of God’s sovereign decrees in eternity, but a mystery of conversion, faith, grace and freedom right here before our eyes every day. So we need not go back to eternity to find mysteries. But is it really a mystery, or only a difficulty of human speculation? The plain man, if a Christian, accepts all these varied and seemingly diverse statements of the Bible, and never thinks of them as being contradictory. Why? Because he thinks practically, and the

Bible is a practical book, and expresses itself in a practical way. But when we get to prying and speculating, we at once get into confusion, especially if we do not hold all the facts in mind.

Let us restate the difficulty in a simple and concise way, so that our proposition may stand out clearcut before our thought: On the one hand, the Bible plainly teaches that the unconverted man is dead in sin, totally unable to believe on Christ; on the other hand, it commands, urges and entreats him, while still unconverted, to believe on Christ, and threatens him with dire punishment if he refuses. Shall we stop here, throw up our hands, and call it an inscrutable mystery, as the Synodical Conference brethren do relative to election, and thus represent the Bible as a bundle of contradictions, and so put a club into the hands of the skeptics and scoffers? Or shall we think more acutely and exaltedly, and see whether we will not find the Bible throughout to be a book of wondrous beauty, of perfect harmony, of organic unity? We shall try to pursue the latter pathway; it will not be easy, not so easy, perhaps, as the other way would be, but we hope and pray that it may be worth while. We think we shall be able to steer clear of the Scylla of Pelagianism and Synergism, on the one hand, and of the Charybdis of unconditional election, on the other; but shall uphold and magnify the blessed, holy and comforting doctrines of justification by faith alone and salvation by grace alone, which are the cardinal and correlating doctrines of the Lutheran Church. Let us walk slowly and think patiently.

First, then, the unconverted sinner is "dead in trespasses and sins." We take the strongest Biblical statement of his condition. Being spiritually dead, he can do nothing toward his salvation; can originate no spiritual motions. But worse yet: though *spiritually* dead, he is *carnally* very much alive, and so is violently opposed to God. Yes, the "dead" sinner is full of ethical and spiritual contradictions, just as a vile sinner would naturally be; just as Paul describes the woman who follows sinful pleasure as being "dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. 5:6). Dead as to spiritual things, alive as to carnal things.

But now is this terrible and paradoxical condition to continue always, waxing worse and worse? Is there no eye to pity? no arm to save? "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" Does God know? Does He care? Does He pity? Will He intervene? Yes, we know He will; we know He has. He says as Jesus did:

"I have compassion on the multitude;"

"And He had compassion on them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd; and He began to teach them."

"God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son;"

"The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

This must have been His eternal purpose, but it was entirely a gracious one, and in nowise arbitrary. Now, having devised and perfected a merciful and gracious plan of redemption through Jesus Christ, what does God do to and for those sinners who are so dead to spiritual things and so alive to carnal things?

He sends His Holy Spirit to *apply* the redemption through the holy means of grace. And what is the Spirit's initial movement in performing this function? He *calls* sinners; through the Word He calls them to repentance. Thanks be to God for His gracious Vocation! What a clarion call it is!

"Ho, every one that thirsteth; come ye to the waters;"

"Repent ye, and believe the gospel;"

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden;"

"Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out;"

"The Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and he that heareth, let him say, Come; and he that is athirst, let him come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

Hear the call ringing out clear and sweet, line upon line, precept upon precept.

And here comes in our precious Lutheran doctrine of the Word of God as the means of grace, which the Holy Spirit always accompanies and through which He always operates.

> "My Word shall not return unto me void, but shall accomplish that which I please, and prosper in the thing whereunto I have sent it" (Isa. 55:11).

Now, what does the divine call through the law and the gospel do for the "dead" sinner? Nothing? Absolutely nothing? Does it leave him just as he was? To say that, would be to deny both the sincerity and the efficacy of the Spirit's Call. What does the heavenly Call do for the "dead" sinner? It stirs him to wakefulness; it brings him to a consciousness of his condition. That is its very purpose. Will not God accomplish His purpose? Is He going to call on dead men to wake up and accept salvation, and yet leave them utterly dead? We fear some men have theologized so much about regeneration, conversion and eternal election that they have overlooked and undervalued the importance, grace, power and efficacy of the divine Call, which, we maintain, is just as vital a link or movement in the order of salvation as any other part; and it is a matter of pure grace, too, just as faith, justification and conversion are. Let us find an illustration in the life of Christ. He once stood before the grave of Lazarus, and simply called to the dead man, "Lazarus, come forth." What was the use of calling to a dead man? Why, Christ's call was accompanied with power, as His Word always is, and so Lazarus was awakened by it, and as soon as he was aroused, he began some kind of movement, not by virtue of any natural power he had, but solely by virtue of the power imparted to him by the call of Christ. So when God calls sinners to repentance and faith, He does not leave them just as they were, wrapped in the unconscious sleep of spiritual death. Is this mere speculation? It is the gospel. Hear Paul's way of proclaiming the gracious Call:

> "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee" (Eph. 5:14).

Whatever the calls and invitations of God do or do not effect, they surely do not leave the "dead" sinner just as he was before, else they would be both idle and absurd. Some kind of movement is always effected by God's Word and Spirit. Let no one accuse us of saying that this movement is a natural movement, that is, a movement of the natural man; no, it is effected solely by the Spirit of God; therefore *sola gratia* is preserved, and all Synergism and human merit are excluded. The Call may have to be repeated many times before the dead sinner is fully aroused to his condition and need; in-

deed, on account of his perversity, he may resist it for a time; yes, even throughout his whole life, and thus be finally lost; and that, as we shall show presently, entirely through his own fault. Here our illustration about the raising of Lazarus would be defective, because in his case the whole process was instantaneous, whereas what is known in the purely spiritual realm as "prevenient grace" operates gradually.

But now we must consider another office of the Spirit in the order of salvation. Simultaneously with the Call, or straightway following it, no matter which, there goes another most gracious work of God – Illumination. Thanks be to God for this wonderful function of His grace! The Call of God always carries light with it:

> "The entrance of thy words giveth light;"
>
> "I am the light of the world;"
>
> "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light;"
>
> "Whereby the Dayspring from on high shall visit us, to *shine upon them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death*; to guide our feet in the way of peace;"
>
> "To open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light;" "God hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The Illumination comes by God's grace in two ways: First, by the law; second, by the gospel:

> "Through the law cometh the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20); through the gospel comes the knowledge of salvation from sin:
>
> "Christ hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).

Again we ask whether the "dead" sinner is left in precisely the same condition *after* the Call and Illumination as he was *before*? Surely not, else all these gracious movements of the Holy Spirit would be idle and vain. He must now have some knowledge of his lost and ruined condition; also some

knowledge of the way of salvation through Christ; therefore some sense of guilt, of responsibility, of freedom, of power to relate himself to God's proffer of salvation. And is not "prevenient grace" *grace* just as well as converting grace? Is it not just as pure, simple, powerful and precious? Dr. Jacobs very properly devotes two long chapters to Vocation and Illumination in his excellent work, "A Summary of the Christian Faith." He attributes both to the pure grace and mercy of God, just as he does Justification, Regeneration and Conversion.[3]

Even Dr. Pieper gives a somewhat lengthy chapter to the "preparation for conversion," the "acts preparatory" (*actus praeparatorii*); but he is so wrapped up in his peculiar view of election and conversion that he treats these functions of the Spirit grudgingly, lamely, as if they were practically ineffective, almost negligible factors in the process of conversion. He and others even compare the *motus* effected by preparatory grace on the sinner's soul to the indentations made on a rubber ball by some external impact: the indentations made, the rubber immediately springs back to its original form. Is not that a mechanical and materialistic way of looking upon the acts and effects of the Holy Ghost? What is the use of preparatory acts at all, then, if they create no feeling of responsibility, and effect no ability whatever for the sinner to relate himself to the gracious overtures of salvation? That view makes conversion a purely mechanical thing; it makes God *force* salvation on some people, while it leaves others to their awful fate. The Bible never represents salvation that way, never! See how well-balanced and all-sided Paul is:

> "The wages of sin is is death; but the gift of God is eternal life."

And a "gift" must be accepted, and accepted freely, or it is not a gift. Something that is forced upon you is not a gift. We must, therefore, differ from Missouri's position, because its teachings slight and minify God's gracious work in the preparatory movements leading to conversion.

In conformity with the Bible, we have excellent Lutheran authority for this view. We quote an admirable paragraph from Dr. Jacobs' work, *ut supra*, page 229:

> "How is it (Regeneration) related to Illumination? By illumination man is brought to see his lost condition and to learn of the provision made in Christ for his salvation. This act, as it progresses, includes a *certain disposition of the will toward the offered grace*. Regeneration occurs when the act of *self-surrender* to God's will and promise is accomplished by the inner workings of the Holy Spirit in Word or Sacrament. Illumination influences the will, but it belongs to regeneration to determine the decision."

Admirable, for it honors God's grace and power in the prevenient operations of His Spirit, and makes room for some real effect upon the will of the unsaved sinner. It also makes conversion an ethical and spiritual movement, not a mechanical and coerced one.

Even Dr. A. L. Graebner, in his "Outlines of Doctrinal Theology" (a work that we esteem very highly, and use for reference in the classroom), was almost forced to veer over to this view (stalwart Missourian though he was), when he came to the *locus*, "Conversion and Preparatory Operations":

> "Regeneration, or Conversion in the stricter sense, being essentially the procreation of the true and saving faith, is an instantaneous act or process, but is in adults preceded by preparatory operations, whereby the sinner is convicted of his sinful state and helpless condition under divine wrath by means of the Law, and led to a logical or historical understanding of the contents of the Gospel, and which, with the outer use of the means of grace, in a measure, lie *within the power and reach* of the irregenerate man."

Altogether admirable, and true as well; but it is not in accord with Missouri's position; for if "the contents of the Gospel," "in a measure lie within the power and reach of the irregenerate man," then preparatory grace must have done something in that unregenerate man's will, so that he has the "power" in some way to let himself be disposed to the offer of salvation. If he has a certain "power and reach" in spiritual matters, he is not in quite the helpless condition he was before the Call and Illumination came, for then he was wholly" dead;" now he has a kind of "power and reach." Therefore he is responsible for the proper use of the "power and reach" that God's Spirit has conferred upon him. If he uses that conferred "power and reach" according to God's will and preordained plan, he will be saved; if he refuses, he will be lost. Why must we go back, then, to God's eternal election to find a mystery as to why some men are saved and others lost, when we have the reason given right here before our eyes, proved by a Missouri Lutheran himself, and that by numerous quotations from the Bible? Why make a

mystery of it when the Bible tells us just why the elect are justified and the others condemned?

While we are dealing with this interesting subject, we wish to show how a Concordia theologian of blessed memory involved himself in contradiction, just because, instead of taking justification by faith as the determining principle, he looked at every thing through the eyeglass of election. On page 172 of his "Doctrinal Theology" Dr. Graebner defines Vocation. See how admirable his statement is:

> "Vocation is the act of God by which He, through the means of grace, earnestly offers to all who hear or read the Gospel, or to whom the sacraments are administered, the benefits of Christ's redemption, truly and earnestly invites and exhorts them to accept and enjoy what is thus offered, and endeavors to move and lead them by the power inherent in the means of grace to such acceptance and enjoyment of the benefits of the redemption."

Could anything be more clearly stated? Here is the total rejection of the Calvinistic doctrine of divine election to preterition[4] and reprobation, and of the "will of the sign" over against the "will of the purpose." But now let us turn over to page 175, where our author defines the "effects of the call":

> "By the divine power residing in the means of grace, and working through the same, the calling grace of God effects regeneration or conversion. Where these effects are not attained, this is due to obstinate resistance on the part of man."

Note the contradiction: In the first paragraph quoted, the Call is simply the earnest "offer" of salvation; in the second paragraph it actually "effects regeneration or conversion." That must be a curious act of the Holy Spirit that both *offers* a boon and *forcibly bestows* it. An offer is something to be accepted or rejected; when you accept it, you have it; if you reject it, you cannot have it. If, on the one hand, we cannot accept the offer (referring to the saved), and, on the other, we cannot help but reject it (the lost), then how could the offer have been made sincerely and earnestly? Moreover, if man has no freedom whatever to accept the offered grace, then, if it does come to him, it must have been forced upon him, *nolens volens*; which is contrary to all Scriptural representation and all experience in conversion.

True, our Missouri brethren will reply:

> "We have said again and again that this is the mystery of election; we do not try to solve it; we leave it with the eternal counsels of the Almighty to be revealed in the next life."

But why should we, in our theologizing, make the Bible a book of contradictions and inconsistencies by a method of setting proof text over against proof text? Why not study it more deeply, and see whether we cannot coordinate its teachings and find their inner harmony? Surely if God is the altogether excellent One, He must be harmonious in His own being, and when He gives His children a revelation, it surely cannot be so full of contradictions as to turn them into infidels. We believe in "the divine unity of the Scriptures." By collating Scripture with Scripture, we can, more and more, find the beautiful and higher harmony of its teachings. We like Dr. Jacobs' viewpoint here (page 9, *ut supra*); he defines the proper hermeneutical principle as being an observance of "the organic relation of the various parts of Holy Scripture to one another." True, we confess to some doubt about what is known as the doctrine of "the analogy of faith," for it seems to set up a human standard of interpretation outside of the Bible, while we believe in taking the Bible teaching just as it stands. But then every text ought to be interpreted in its true contextual setting and according to the meaning of the writer, with due attention to the correct exegesis. Mere phrases and brief sentences should not be treated in an insulated way, nor wrenched from their context, nor interpreted merely according to the sound of the words, when the real sense may be something quite different. You cannot truly and fairly interpret any writing in that way – that is, by simply quoting a detached sentence here and there; for sometimes a preceding or succeeding statement of the author may qualify the quoted statement. Take, for instance, 1 Cor. 2:9. Suppose a dogmatician should try to formulate from that passage the doctrine that the glories of heaven are far beyond human conception and imagination, because Paul says: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," etc.

The true interpreter of Scripture would simply tell him to read the next verse, when he would see that Paul was not referring to heaven at all, but to the revelations Christians now have through the Spirit of God. We shall have occasion more than once, in succeeding chapters, to show how our Concordia brethren miss the mark in drawing their peculiar doctrines from the Scriptures by a too infinitesimal treatment of the Bible.

Again, if there are certain passages of Scripture that are difficult and seemingly obscure, we ought not to seize upon them as the norm of doctrine, and try to regulate and gauge everything by them, but should take the plain and clear passages as our guide to lead us into the others, which may by and by, through prayer, study and the leading of the Spirit, also become explicit. And if there are apparent contradictions, we ought not to stop praying and studying, and decide hastily that the contradictions are in the Bible. We would better go on the principle that, as God is a unity in Himself, and there can be no inconsistencies in His being and character, so His revelation must be consistent with itself. Would it not be irreverent to think or say that one part of Scripture contradicts another? or that God has said one thing in one place and a different thing in another? To our mind, it would be more humble and reverent to think that God would not contradict Himself, and that, therefore, if we are patient and prayerful, we will presently discover the sacred harmony that pervades His entire revelation. A good rule is to compare Scripture with Scripture. Perhaps that is what Paul means when he says, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual," for the Bible is a spiritual book.

If we wished to be so unkind, we might drive the Missouri advocates into a logical *cul-de-sac* by their own piecemeal method of handling the Scriptures. They stoutly disclaim teaching and holding the Calvinistic doctrine of eternal election to reprobation; sinners are not elected to be condemned, but are condemned solely on account of their own fault. Now read 1 Pet. 2:8:

> "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense; for they stumble at the Word, being disobedient; *whereunto also they were appointed.*"

Take that passage by itself, as the Missourians take the election passages, and it teaches the baldest Calvinistic doctrine – namely, that God "appointed" the "disobedient" to "stumble at the Word," and even to be "disobedient." And, according to the Missouri view, you would not dare to "interpret" this passage, nor explain it by any other. And so here would be another insoluble mystery – namely, that, in one place, the Bible teaches that sinners are condemned on account of their own fault, and, in another, that they are "appointed" to stumble into condemnation. How many mysteries you could create in that way! But take the better way of interpreting Scrip-

ture, and all is clear. By reading the context, especially verses 6 and 7, you will see who the people are that stumble at Christ and his Word – those who "disbelieve." And, of course, people who reject Christ *are* "appointed" to stumble over many things in God's Word. We have seen them stumble over the most simple and precious doctrines. Such is God's inevitable law – that spiritual blindness comes upon people who reject His Word and His offer of salvation.

After writing the foregoing, we read over again Dr. J. L. Neve's graphic report of the Missouri-Ohio-Iowa free conferences at Milwaukee and Detroit in 1903-4. It would appear that they spent a large part of their time in wrestling over methods of Biblical interpretation. Missouri was against the doctrine of the "Analogy of Faith;" the others for it. We have no time to amplify on this matter now. For our part, we do not hold up any objective rule by which to interpret Scripture, nor do we feel obliged to "harmonize" the various parts of the Bible; we believe they do not need to be harmonized; they need simply to be understood, and then they will be seen to be harmonious. If God is a unity, His revelation will be like Himself. Therefore our simple hermeneutical rule is to take each passage according to its natural and literal meaning in connection with the context, always reading enough to be sure of the author's main proposition. By applying this simple rule – it is the rule of all true literary exposition – we do not find one passage of Scripture teaching one thing, and another something else. Of course, no brief Scripture verse teaches all the doctrines of redemption. John 3:16, though called the "gospel *in nuce*" says nothing about vicarious atonement or the resurrection. You must go to other parts of the Bible to find those doctrines. But all portions of the Scripture are complementary. One of the strongest evidences of the divine authority and inspiration of the Bible is its organic unity.

According to the Bible, the way of salvation is so plain that "the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein." It is not likely, therefore, that God, in revealing that way in His Word, would set it forth in a self-contradictory manner. Let us give a few examples of how text may be set up against text by the piecemeal method. In John 14:27 Christ said:

> "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you."

The angels over Bethlehem's plains sang (Matt. 2:14):

> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men" (old version).

But in Matt. 10:34 Christ said the opposite:

> "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

The Concordia Lutherans do not throw up their hands and say: "Here is a plain contradiction, and therefore an inexplicable mystery, which we must simply accept, but must not try to harmonize." No; they know that the interpretation is very simple – that to the sinner in his sins the Word of God is a sword, while to the true believer it imparts peace. Take another instance. John 16:7:

> "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come."

Set over against it Matt. 28:20:

> "And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Do the Missouri expositors say this is another contradiction, an insoluble mystery? No; they simply interpret the two passages in the larger light of the ascension, glorification, transcendence and consequent immanence of Christ's human nature – that is, by means of the glorious Lutheran doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, just as the Formula of Concord does in Chapter VIII of the Epitome and Solid Declaration.

Thus we must compare Scripture with Scripture in the investigation of other doctrines in order to get the whole truth. The same interpretative rule should hold with reference to election and conversion.

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1. It must be admitted, however, that Luther himself affords some ground for using the word "conduct." He says: "Few are chosen, that is, few so deport themselves toward the gospel that God has pleasure in them." The words "conduct" and "deportment" are synonymous. We note too, that Professor R. C. H. Lenski, of Capital University, Colum-

bus, Ohio, defends the word "conduct" in a recent editorial in reply to Dr. Pieper. With the explanation given by Professor Lenski, who attributes the said "conduct" solely to the grace of God, there can be no objection to the word. However, for ourself we decline to use it, because it may be so easily misinterpreted. It seems to us, too, to assign too much activity and positive cooperation to man before regeneration. At this point it may be well to point out that Luther was not very much afraid of using apparently synergistic expressions, for he says: "Let every man sweep before his own door; then we will all be saved; then it will not require much brooding on what God has determined in His counsel, as to who shall and who shall not be saved." (Tressel's work, page 219).↩

2. Pelagianism also obliterates the distinction between nature and grace, and for that reason, too, we reject it.↩
3. An enigma to us has been how Dr. Pieper could entirely ignore such a masterly presentation as that of Dr. Jacobs in the work already adverted to, "A Summary of Christian Faith." Dr. Jacobs' book bears copyright date, 1905, while Dr. Pieper wrote in 1913; yet Dr. Pieper writes as if Dr. Jacobs had never written a line on the subject of the divine purpose. Had he read and studied his compeer in theology, we doubt whether he would have written with so much assurance. Here is another puzzle: How could he charge the advocates of *intuitu fidei* with Synergism, Pelagianism, work-righteousness and human merit, in view of Dr. Jacobs' most complete and almost classical chapter, in which he repudiates all these errors, and advocates salvation solely on account of the merit of Jesus Christ? All who want to read both sides of the question are referred to Dr. Jacobs' work. It is no less a puzzle to us that Dr. Pieper could repeat his charge of Synergism and Pelagianism against his opponents, in view of the hundreds of denials and disclaimers made by them in Tressel's great work, "The Error of Missouri," containing the arguments of Drs. Stellhorn and Schmidt and Revs. Allwardt and Ernst. These theologians, while they uphold the doctrine of *intuitu fidei*, also uphold *sola gratia* just as stoutly and uncompromisingly as does Dr. Pieper himself. To our mind, they have performed their task with invincible logic and on a sound Biblical and confessional basis. Of course, this commendation does not mean to include an endorsement of the drastic expressions they sometimes used

in the heat of controversy. But these can easily be separated from the masterly arguments of these brethren.↩

4. Preterition: The passing over of the non-elect as in Calvinism.↩

6. Regeneration Working Faith

HAVING SEEN THAT VOCATION AND ILLUMINATION, being the work of the Holy Spirit whereby He produces awakening, enlightenment, knowledge of sin and the way of salvation, and also effects a certain enablement of the will, thus making the sinner a responsible agent respecting his personal salvation, we shall next treat of regeneration and faith and their relations to each other. For we have not yet arrived at these movements in our analysis of the Order of Grace. No; the called and awakened sinner cannot yet believe. He simply has a knowledge of sin and of the way of salvation through Christ. He says:

> "I cannot believe; the more I try the more I fail."

More than once he adds Paul's plaintive cry:

> "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Yes; he realizes that his ethical corruption and spiritual disability are still lying like a corpse in his soul. So far as self-help is concerned, he feels more keenly than ever that he is "dead in sin." What can he do? The electionist says, "Nothing, absolutely nothing!" Then what was the use of the Vocation and Illumination? But he *can* do something, for God by His prevenient grace has given him the ability: he can pray; very lamely and haltingly, it is true; still, with all his doubt and despair, he can pray. That is what Paul did on his way to Damascus:

> "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

and after he reached Damascus:

"Behold, he prayeth."

That is what the sin-stricken Publican did:

"God be merciful to me a sinner."

That is what Peter did, when sinking in the waves:

"Lord, save me or I perish."

So the penitent thief:

"Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

Our Lord said:

"Men ought always to pray and not to faint."

In Dr. Pieper's book of 151 pages, discussing conversion and election with great labor and learning, there is not a word said about the sinner praying for mercy and pardon. Perhaps the election advocates think that the unconverted sinner cannot pray. If so, that is merely an academic theory; it contradicts the experience of millions of Christians, who prayed before they were converted and for conversion, even though they could only say with one of old:

"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Indeed, we have wondered much why the Concordia dogmaticians give no place to prayer in the acts preparatory to conversion. The Bible so often represents the unregenerate as praying for pardon and salvation. (See the instances cited above.) Might this slighting of prayer be due to the fact that the dogmaticians have had little experience in winning adult sinners to Christ? The writer of this book was a pastor for many years, and has had much experience in directing adult sinners of all kinds and classes in the

way of salvation. He has never known an adult conversion to occur without prayer. More than one despondent inquirer has said, "I can't believe!" We have replied: "I know you cannot in your own strength; but you can pray for faith; and God will remove your doubt and give you the power to believe." In every case, so far as we can remember, faith was bestowed in God's good time. If Jacob wrestled all night with the angel for a blessing, should not the awakened sinner also pray for salvation? Indeed, this is one of God's great purposes in the preparatory acts – namely, to bring the sinner to his knees in humble confession and supplication. (It should be remembered that we are here speaking only of the conversion or regeneration of adults, not of regeneration in child baptism.)

Now, if the sinner will pray to God for help, God will, through added prevenient grace, enable him freely to cease his resistance, freely to surrender himself to God alone; yes, even to cease trying to save himself, and simply let God, and God alone, save him.

Having led him thus far, so that he utterly despairs of self-help, and gives himself up entirely to God, God flies to his rescue, breathes into his soul the new spiritual life, which is regeneration, in and by which the ability of faith is conferred upon him; then, by this divinely enabled faith, he lays hold upon Christ as His Saviour and Redeemer; and this exercise of faith, a power given purely by grace, brings justification and all the salutary blessings which accrue therefrom. Regeneration or conversion also effects the mystical union (*unio mystica*) between the sinner and Christ, and thus sets him on the way of progressive sanctification. The whole process is vital, ethical and spiritual; at no point merely mechanical; at no moment is the sinner coerced. In reviewing his experience, he knows that all the way he was drawn, not by force, but by the cords of love. The whole transaction was the work of God's grace. What freedom he had and used was not active and *cooperating*, but only *consenting* freedom; and even the ability to consent was bestowed by prevenient grace.

But how about those who are not saved? With our Missouri brethren, we say that they are lost solely because they stubbornly resisted the Holy Ghost and rejected the overtures of mercy. But we go this much further than Missouri; we add, they had their chance, line upon line, but they did not improve it. Through God's call and gracious invitation and oft-repeated proffer of salvation, they knew well enough that God would gladly give them faith, conversion and salvation if they would let Him; but they would not al-

low Him to save them. They were able to reject God by their own sinful choice; but God also told them through the gospel that He would make them free from the bondage of sin, if they would surrender to Him. Can anyone living in a gospel land deny this? Just hear Christ's words:

> "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost;"

> "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed;"

> "He hath sent me to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Why, that is precisely why Christ came:

> "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

So *all* may be enabled if they *will*. If some choose the bondage of sin, when deliverance is so freely and urgently offered, with ability to accept the offer, we know not what God could do for them and with them but leave them to their own devices. If others, recognizing through the gospel call their lost condition and utter inability, are willing to let Christ emancipate them, they will be saved. God desires to enable all to accept deliverance, but He can save only those who, after He has aroused them by His call and pointed them to the Saviour, are willing to *let* Him rescue and enable them. To our mind, this is the gracious order of the Spirit's application of redemption (which has already been wrought out by Christ's active and passive obedience): Prevenient grace gives all a chance, and therefore locates the responsibility; regenerating grace bestows the new life and enables saving faith; faith accepts justification, by which all Christ's merits are imputed to the believer, which is the sole ground of his salvation; progressive sanctification develops and unfolds the inherent righteousness enabled by regeneration or conversion. It is all of grace – *sola gratia*. The work of sanctification, even, where Missouri and all the rest of us say that the believer's emancipated will cooperates with God's will, is all of grace, just as the work of prevenient enduement is all of grace. There is not one particle of human merit in the whole process from Vocation to Glory. Even the saints in heaven do not praise themselves or boast of any merit, but give all the

glory to "Him that sitteth upon the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever" (Rev. 5:13).

We are wondering now whether any of our brethren will try to find some "cryptic synergism" here, because we assign some degree of enabling power to grace prior to conversion. If so, we shall have to deny the allegation. What we understand by Synergism is this, that man by his *natural* powers is able to concur with God's grace. This idea we repudiate with all our might. So far as regards spiritual energies, true righteousness toward God, and ability to believe on a spiritual Redeemer, the unsaved sinner is "dead in trespasses and sins." How can a dead man do anything? How can a man who is spiritually dead do anything spiritual? Even if the Bible did not teach it plainly, it would still be psychically impossible for an unspiritual mind to perform spiritual functions. Moreover, a soul that is in the bondage of sin and corruption cannot act as if it were free. The fact is, if man could, by his natural ability, do *anything* truly and spiritually good without Christ, he might do *everything* that is spiritually good without Him, for then he might simply *develop* the spiritual powers within him. No, so far as doing anything spiritual and truly righteous before God is concerned, man, in his state of natural depravity, is utterly unable. And, mark you, no man is ever commanded to believe on Christ until he is called through the gospel, just as Paul says:

> "How shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? … So faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ."

Christ's teaching is just the same (John 15:22):

> "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin."

Also Paul again (Rom. 4:15):

> "For the law worketh wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there transgression."

It is all very simple and plain and reasonable, if we just accept the clear Bible statements. In a state of nature, therefore, man has no spiritual ability;

but so soon as the gospel Call and Illumination reach him, he has been touched by a spiritual power, and is not quite the same as before.

After God has prepared redemption through Christ, after He awakens and illumines sinners, and after He graciously offers them the salvation thus provided, then, and then only, is their own choice decisive; but it is decisive then, for at that point their free moral agency respecting the gracious overture comes into play. If this is not true, we repeat again that the grace bestowed in conversion must be "irresistible grace," and that is Calvinism, not Lutheranism. Moreover, there is not one passage of Scripture that teaches that grace is irresistibly bestowed. Indeed, if it were, it would not be *grace*, whatever else it might be called.

There is still another point in the process of Vocation, Illumination and Conversion that requires elucidation: How is it that the sinner can, on the one hand, resist God's Spirit, while, on the other, he cannot do anything to save himself? How can he be free if he cannot act both ways, if he has not the power of alternate choice? Let us use an illustration. Suppose a man who is utterly unable to swim should fall into a deep lake. He is "dead," so far as swimming is concerned. At once a man in a canoe, near at hand, hurries to his rescue, Now, while the man would be utterly unable to save himself, he still might resist his would-be rescuer, might fight him away, might prefer to drown. The unhappy man might do another thing; he might struggle, and fling his arms, and try to save himself, and thus interfere with his deliverer, and make it impossible for him to save him. But his benefactor might speak to him, plead with him to let himself be saved, instruct him not to struggle or try at all to save himself, but simply to leave himself quiescent in his hands; thus by and by the desperate man might be so soothed as to cease all efforts of his own, and surrender himself entirely into the hands of his rescuer. If he did, he would be saved; if he did not, he would be lost. This is a parable, but its meaning lies on the surface; it needs no interpretation.[1]

We shall humbly do our best to illumine another matter. Every Bible student, whether a theologian or not, must realize that spiritual death is not in all respects like physical death. In the spiritual realm the word "death" means the most corrupt and undone condition possible in that sphere. When a material body is dead, it is unconscious, but when a soul is dead to spiritual realities, it is not dead like that; it is not unconscious. Theologians usually distinguish three kinds of death – temporal, spiritual and eternal. The

sinner is in some respects very conscious and very much alive, though dead in other ways. Those who go down to eternal death – called in Scripture the "second death" – are neither unconscious nor quiescent, but recognize their doom, and suffer its pangs. The apostle Paul indicates this truth in the passage so often quoted by all of us who believe in total depravity (Eph. 2:1-3). We give the passage according to what we think the clearest translation:

> "And you were dead (*nekrous*) in (or as to) your trespasses and sins, in which ye once *walked* (Greek, *periepatesate*, walked or trod about) according to the ways of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience; among whom we also once lived in the lusts of our flesh," etc.

You will observe that those "dead" people "walked about" and "lived," even while they were dead. So Paul says in 1 Tim. 5:6:

> "But she that giveth herself to pleasure is dead while she liveth."

Then what is the meaning of "dead in sin?" This: the spiritual powers of the soul have become atrophied, paralyzed, or deadened by sin, while the other psychical powers retain their ability to function, though of course all of them are sadly affected. When man sinned in the garden of Eden, he lost his original righteousness, his spiritual quality, his faith and love in and for God, and became alienated from Him; but we know from the Bible itself that he did not lose his personality, his mental powers, his self-consciousness, his freedom in earthly affairs, his psychical emotion, nor even his conscience entirely. Moreover, he still retained his sight, hearing, and other senses. All these were permitted to remain through the intervening mercy of God, for He might justly have permitted man to be wholly destroyed. Strangely enough, Adam, though spiritually dead, was still, by virtue of his remaining psychical powers, even conscious that he had sinned, for he was ashamed, hid from God, and was afraid to meet Him. When God called him, he could hear the divine voice, could understand the words, and could make reply. However, he showed the depth of the infamy into which he had fallen – that is, his spiritual death-stroke – by refusing to repent and plead for pardon, but, on the contrary, even tried to justify himself by putting the blame upon the woman; while she, being in the same spiritual condition, tried to fix the blame upon the serpent. They were both dead and alive,

those two, and their posterity has ever since inherited the same abnormal and paradoxical nature.

What, then, is this living death of the unconverted sinner? It is that deadened divine image that is within him; it is those corrupted and paralyzed spiritual powers. It is as if he were bearing a corpse about with him in his soul. It casts its terrible blight upon all his psychical faculties, the intellect, the susceptibility, the will. Even in his natural state he must often be conscious of the schism within, and of the dead weight he carries about; but he becomes poignantly conscious of his blight and burden when the call of God sounds in his ears, and the blazing light of the law reveals the hideous obliquity of his being. It is at this point that Paul exclaims in his despair:

> "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

No sooner does the sinner utter this cry for help than God sheds upon him the sweet, mellow radiance of the gospel, which reveals Christ to him as the only source of help; and so he again cries with Paul:

> "I thank God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

But while the sinner has a natural will, so that he is capable of a kind of "civil righteousness" (Augsburg Confession, Art. 18; Apology, page 78), yet in the higher, the spiritual matters it avails nothing; it is utterly helpless. As the Augsburg Confession puts it (Art. 18):

> "It has no power, without the Holy Ghost, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness; since the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; but this righteousness is wrought in the heart when the Holy Ghost is received through the Word."

The Formula of Concord (page 557, Jacob's edition) insists on the same truth:

> "The reason and free will have the power, to a certain extent, to live an outwardly decent life; but to be born anew, and to obtain inwardly another heart, sense and disposition, this only the Holy Ghost effects. He opens the understanding and heart to understand the Scriptures, and to give heed to the Word, as it is written (Luke 24:25): 'Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.'"

Therefore, we maintain that, when the will has attained any power or disposition toward spiritual things by means of the Vocation and Illumination, such disposition or power is in nowise resident in the natural will, but pertains wholly and solely to the spiritual ability that has been imparted by the Holy Spirit. The natural will is corrupted by inherited depravity and actual sin, and therefore can neither choose nor initiate anything good, but is set against it. All these things must be true, for if man were not a willful sinner, he would not be a real sinner at all; and, on the other hand, if he could save himself, there would be no need of Christ and His gospel. And yet again, if God would convert him after the Call and Illumination without his consent, then God would *force* salvation upon him, and therefore it would not be an ethical and spiritual salvation, but a coerced and mechanical one, which would be no salvation at all, in the true sense of the term. Therefore, from the very nature of an ethical salvation, there must be an action of prevenient grace prior to conversion, which enables man in some way to exercise his will to the extent that he is willing to be converted. This agrees with the Scriptures, as we have shown again and again, and it also agrees with our Christian experience; for every converted man knows that, on the one hand, he did not and could not convert himself, and, on the other, that God did not convert him against his will and without his consent. "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Why not see in the Bible a beautiful consistency? It is not a book of real or seeming contradictions. Mysteries there are, and we gladly admit it; but no incongruities, no absurdities, nothing that shocks the spiritually enlightened and sanctified reason.

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1. Another apt comparison might be that of a man in fetters in the dungeon of a prison. When his deliverer comes to announce pardon and release, the prisoner could not unlock his prison door, or remove his chains, or even do a thing to effect his own liberation; but he might resist, fight, refuse to be forgiven and freed. His deliverer might overcome his obstinacy by persuasion, so that by and by he would be *willing to let his benefactor set him free*. So with the sinner.↩

7. Salient Scripture Teaching

LET US EXAMINE a few relevant passages of Scripture to see how consistent and harmonious, how vitally organized, how divinely unified, the whole process of conversion is represented to be. First, take John 7:17:

> "If anyone (*tis*) willeth (*thele*, active, subjunctive) to do (*poiein*) His will (*thelema*, same root as that of *thele*), he shall know concerning the teaching, whether it is from God, or whether I speak from myself."

This is a crucial passage. It would seem that our Lord was not so much afraid to mention the human will as some theologians are. Why? Because He was practical, took man as he is, and knew that it would detract nothing from God's honor and grace for Him to respect the will which He Himself had put into man's being and endued with its wonderful power of alternate choice. However, let us proceed to the analysis of this great passage. The following is Dr. A. Spaeth's exposition (Lutheran Commentary, *in loco*, page 101):

> "And the evidence of the divine character and authority of His teaching is to be found by all those who honestly will to do the Father's will, wherever that will may be found, whether in the law, or in the prophets, or in the conscience of man. The moral character of Christianity is the testimony of its divine power and authority. It is the Old Testament principle: 'The fear of the Lord – the beginning of wisdom,' which is here by the Lord Himself applied to the New Testament revelation of the Gospel. The heart, the conscience, the will of man are involved in his search after truth. Wherever there is an honest will, an upright, sincere resolution, not the actual doing or perfection in doing the will of God (which is impossible), men will be drawn to Christ; they will appreciate the *gift* of God in the Gospel, having made an honest effort to do the will of God as they know it."

This is quite admirable and true. Let us make the explication of the passage a little more germane to the present discussion, for of course Dr. Spaeth did not have the Missouri view of conversion in mind. "If anyone willeth to do His will." Christ was here speaking to unconverted people, as the whole

context shows. Yet He said, "If anyone willeth." Would He have used such language if the people whom He was addressing had no volitional power whatever? We do not believe it is treating Christ with due honor to make Him guilty of acting and speaking absurdly, just because we hold some particularistic theory of conversion and election. But how about the "willing" of those unregenerate people? As Paul says, in the natural state they were "dead in trespasses and sins." Is not this a glaring inconsistency? Not at all, but a beautiful organism. Why had Christ come into the world, and why was He speaking to those people just then? For the very purpose of waking them from their death-sleep. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." His blessed words were not dead words. So He was trying to stir them into life by His preaching of the gospel to them. Did nothing stir within them? Did no enablement come to them while He "spake as never man spake?" What a derogation of Christ's message that view would be! No, He was stirring their wills into action by the spiritual power that accompanied His gracious words. Herein lies the gracious power of the Call.

Now, note carefully: He does not say or mean to say that sinners *can* do God's will, but merely that they shall will or be willing. And what was God's will just at that critical juncture in the life of those Jews? According to the whole tenor of Biblical teaching, it simply was this: that they should be willing to let God save them through Christ. If they had been willing to do just that much – to let God even overcome the opposition of their sinful hearts and wills, He would have saved them, yes, saved them even from themselves; and then they would have known that Jesus was the Messiah of God, the Saviour of the world. Then He would have converted them; and then, afterward, as they continued to be willing to do God's will, they would have known more and more of His divine and gracious doctrine. "The path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day." There is not a gospel preacher on earth who, if he were speaking to unsaved men, would not say precisely the same thing to them. He would never begin by telling them of the divine decrees in eternity. He would never preach to them about their utter inability and consequent irresponsibility. How do our Missouri brethren preach to unconverted sinners? As if they were logs and stones, or as if they were men, capable of receiving, through God's enabling grace, an ethical salvation? God never works on man, a personality, in a mechanical way; always in a vital and ethical way. The fact is, man even in his

sinful state, still has ears and eyes and self-consciousness, through which God, by the gospel, is able to reach that dead spiritual corpse within him and bring it back to life. Therefore Christ said:

> "Take heed how ye hear and what ye hear."

The act of imparting the new life, enabling faith, is regeneration or conversion; the process of reaching man to make him conscious of his corruption and inability and to make him willing to be saved, is Vocation and Illumination. It is all of grace, but it is also ethical and spiritual, not material or mechanical.

It is a pleasure to examine another crucial passage of the Word – Phil. 2:12, 13:

> "So then, my beloved, even as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Twentieth Century New Testament, verse 13:
>
> "Remember it is God who, in His kindness, is at work within you, enabling you both to will and to work."

How beautiful and ethical it all is! True, these words were written to converted men, but we quote them to show that the same general principles apply to the work of sanctification that obtain in conversion, proving again that Biblical teaching is a consistent unity.

If God in sanctification works in us both to will and to do, one would think that the Missouri brethren would deny all human ability and concurrence then as well as in regeneration; but, no, they teach the concurrence of the divine and human wills in sanctification, and therefore teach Synergism at this point. Why are they not afraid of nullifying *sola gratia* here? If man after conversion can use his will, is there not danger that the idea of human merit might creep into his mind? But this matchless passage does not compromise God's grace, because the power to will comes from God's quickening Spirit, and that is the very highest incentive for willing and doing and working out our salvation with fear and trembling. Note this point carefully: God enables the willing, but He does not do the willing for man. He (man)

must *use* the ability given him by divine grace. This is the peculiar function and prerogative of that high enduement of man – a free will, a will in liberty. Surely when God deals with man, he has regard for His own handiwork. Inasmuch He made him a moral personality, He will not treat him as if he were a piece of clay or an irrational animal, to which He would never say, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel."

Observe, now, that the same general principle that prevails in effecting conversion is employed here in sanctification:

> "If anyone willeth to do His will, he shall know," etc.;
>
> "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life;"
>
> "How often would I have gathered you… and ye would not;"
>
> "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak;"
>
> "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them;"
>
> "He that heareth my words and doeth them;"
>
> "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

Just as the will is enabled by converting and sanctifying grace to perform its function in those moments, so it is enabled by preparatory grace to perform its relevant function in that moment. Its function in the latter case is that of passivity or surrender toward God's grace; in the former, that of activity, concurrence and cooperation.

At this point the inquiry may be raised: How can the will have any spiritual ability to function before the sinner is converted? It would be more pertinent to ask: How can God convert a man against his will? If he did that, it would not be a spiritual and ethical transaction, but merely a coerced and machine-like one. It would make conversion a materialistic instead of a spiritual transaction. If man were saved without his consent, he would not be saved at all, for sin would still be retained by him in his will. Remember, too, this vital fact – that when the spiritual will is enabled, or effected, or

created, as you please, by prevenient grace, the sinner is still not saved from his sin and corruption; that body of death still lies within him like a blight and hideous deformity; his will cannot remove it; but he can beseech God to deliver him, and whenever he comes to the point when he is willing to *let* God save him, and God *alone*, God will do His part; He will deliver him from Satan's thrall; He will purify him from defilement; He will draw him from the mire and the clay, and place his feet upon a rock; He will breathe the new life into him.

Perhaps some one will object that there can be no spiritual movement in the soul before conversion. Then why speak at all of the Holy Spirit's preparatory acts? Is not the Spirit's work always spiritual? or does He sometimes act like a material force? Moreover, does not the Spirit in the "acts preparatory" produce conviction of sin? Is not conviction a spiritual *motus* or condition of the soul? A proper estimate of God's holy prevenient grace will save our theology from much confusion; will keep it from becoming lifeless and procrustean.

A most interesting question is that of the inner nature of freedom and faith. Of course, there is much about their nature and functioning that we do not understand; but it is not all mystery. The Missouri brethren so often represent faith as if it were an *entity*, instead of a *power*, *quality* or *activity* of the soul. Dr. Pieper will not have it that the Holy Spirit makes us able to believe; he contends that He does not confer the *ability*, but the actual *belief* itself. With all our respect for his acuteness and sincerity, this seems to us a marvelous psychological conception. Then the Holy Spirit must do our believing for us! Why not call it the Holy Spirit's faith, then, instead of ours? When Christ said to the impatient Jews, "Believe the gospel," He made a mistake; He should have said, "The Holy Spirit will believe for you!" So with every Biblical command to believe. John 3:16 is not expressed correctly; it should be – but we refrain. In the same mechanical way Dr. Pieper treats the will. Freedom is not an enabled power or energy; it is a *something* bestowed; not a principle of life, but a something affixed. But does the Holy Spirit do our willing for us? Then He should have inspired John otherwise; not to say, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely," but, "If the Spirit does your willing for you." The same way with repentance; according to their view, it is not something enabled, but something bestowed. Then God must repent for man; man cannot do his own repenting. Accord-

ing to that logic, God does not give man the ability to walk, but bestows the actual walking upon him. So God would have to do our walking for us.

Take a passage cited by Dr. Pieper in defense of his view, Phil. 1:29:

> "Because unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer in His behalf."

(We quote the whole verse; our friend did not.) Here is his gloss:

> "*To eis auton pisteuein*, not merely the ability to believe on Him."

This is almost the letter that killeth. But if "it is given unto *us* to believe," surely we must do the believing, must exercise the power that has been given us. He does not say, "It was given to the Holy Spirit to believe for us," but it was "given unto *us* to believe." More than that, the part that our friend left out is important:

> "It is given unto you… also to *suffer* in His behalf."

According to his exegesis of "belief," the Philippians should not *suffer* at all, but the Spirit ought to do their suffering for them. But see how beautifully consistent Paul is: just as the Philippians had been enabled by divine grace to believe on Christ, so now they were enabled to *suffer* in His behalf. There are no logical gaps nor organic breaks in the divine *modus operandi*.

Having dwelt at some length on two classical passages, we can tarry to examine just one more – that which depicts the three thousand conversions on the day of Pentecost. Peter preached a powerful sermon to the multitude. He spoke both the law and the gospel to them, and connected the Messiah of the New Testament with the history and prophecy of the Old. His words were not ineffective, for his hearers were smitten in their hearts, and cried out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" See how powerfully they were convicted; yet it was still only preparatory grace, not converting grace. Was that conviction an inner spiritual *motus*, or was it only the indentation made on a rubber ball? Peter did not haggle about the word "do" which they had used, and say, "You cannot *do* anything until you are converted." It was no time

to interject the doctrine of election, either. He simply did the practical thing, as he was led by the Spirit; he replied:

> "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him."

By more exhortation (see the next verses) he brought many of them to the yielding point, and the record goes on:

> "Then they that received his word were baptized; and there were added on that day about three thousand souls."

Observe that Peter does not show much regard for our beautifully schematized theological systems. Perhaps he was not a very good theologian! He even commands unregenerate men to repent, bids them be baptized, and then adds, "Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Here it might even seem that regeneration came after repentance and baptism. Peter, be careful! We are on the lookout for Synergism!

But is there disorder here? Was God the author of confusion on that epoch-making day? Verily not. He observed His regular order, though He did not label the various steps as we do in our theologies. Let us analyze: First, Peter himself was filled with the Holy Ghost; next, he preached the law to the sinful multitude, and vividly pointed out their terrible sin in crucifying the Lord of glory; the Holy Spirit was there, and performed His function through the words of Peter – He wrought conviction; this was the call and the illumination of the Holy Spirit through the law. But Peter mingled a great deal of the gospel in his sermon. Read it over and see how often he spoke of Christ as the Lord and Saviour and Messiah. Thus when he reached the end of his sermon – or this part of it – his hearers, though powerfully convicted, were not wholly in despair, or they would not have cried out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" There is at least a gleam of hope there – something of the call and illumination of the gospel, with their accompanying grace. Peter now knew that they were ready for the next step. Prevenient grace had made them conscious of that dead weight of sin within them, and had also made them willing to be saved from its fell blight and poison.

Therefore he said, "Repent." Now repentance does not mean mere sorrow for sin; it really means, as Luther found out at a most critical time, "a change of mind" – *metanoia* – the very word Peter used here in the verb form. Therefore it means a change of mind respecting sin and salvation or Christ; and so it consists of contrition and faith (Augsburg Confession, Art. XI). So the inner meaning of Peter's command was, "Turn *from* sin and turn to Christ." Faith is also implied in being "baptized in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins." So Peter's exhortation was virtually the same as that with which Christ began His ministry:

> "Repent ye, and believe the gospel."

And now comes the *crux*: How, according to Missouri's view and our own, could those three thousand people repent and believe before they were regenerated or converted? For Dr. Pieper we can see no escape, for he will have it that before conversion man can do, will, wish absolutely nothing. He is like a block or a stone or, perchance, a rubber ball. But, according to our view, the explanation is quite simple: as prevenient grace had aroused those sinners, convicted them, and made them willing to *surrender* to God and to *let* Him save them, Peter knew, being guided by God's Spirit, that, if he told them to repent and believe, and they were willing to do so, not by their own natural strength, but by the strength imparted to them by grace, then the Holy Spirit would continue His gracious work, would breathe the new life into them, and that would give them repentance and faith, or, in other words, would enable them to repent and believe. Then, if they went still further, and submitted to the sacrament of baptism, He would bestow a special gift or enduement upon them, just as many another man has received a special blessing in baptism. Thus the living, organic order of salvation was followed; they were regenerated, justified and saved in a spiritual and ethical way. Salvation was not forced upon them, and yet the whole process was solely by the grace of God. Not a joint or crevice, however fine, where human merit or pride or boasting could creep in.

The question may be asked why God so often commands men to do what they by nature are unable to do. For example, why does He command them to repent and believe, when they can do neither in their own strength? The secret is an open one. God never commands without conferring the ability to obey, "if there first be a willing mind." The very command is spir-

itual, and carries with it the enabling power. Take two examples from the life of Christ. In the presence of a vast multitude of hungry people, and with only a few loaves and fishes available, Jesus said to His disciples, "Give ye them to eat." How could they carry out such a command? But in faith they obeyed Him at every step, and we know the result – they actually fed the whole multitude, and had much more food left than they began with.

Again, a palsied, bed-ridden man, entirely unable to walk, was brought to Jesus (Matt. 9:1-8). After some conversation, He said to the sick of the palsy:

> "Arise, and take up thy bed, and go to thy house." The command without the conferred ability would have been absurd; but the man had a willing mind, and so Christ gave him strength to walk and even to carry his couch. "So is every one that is born of the Spirit."

One thing that we have sorely missed in the Concordia dogmatic – nothing has been said about the regeneration of infants in baptism; nothing about baptismal grace in adult baptism. The whole treatment seems to go on the assumption that regeneration or conversion pertains only to adults. Do not our Missouri brethren believe in regenerating grace in and through baptism? The Lutheran Church makes so much of the vital relation between baptism and regeneration, just as the New Testament does, that we wonder a whole book can be written by a Lutheran theologian on the subject of regeneration without any mention of baptism. Surely most of our children of the Church receive in baptism the seeds of regeneration; then when they are taught about Christ and His love, these seminal principles unfold and active faith is produced, laying hold on the merits of Christ. In her practice Missouri is faithful in the matters of baptism and catechization, but, somehow, in her dogmatic discussions of election and conversion she seems to overlook these important and vital steps in the Order of Salvation. If children are potentially regenerated in baptism, how would that fit into Missouri's doctrine of election? Luther taught us always to look back to our baptism for assurance of salvation; he never once, so far as we know, admonished us to look for assurance to God's eternal decrees.

8. Preparatory Acts Of Grace

IN THE NEXT PLACE, we must notice some things in Dr. Pieper's chapter on "Preparation for Conversion." If we mistake not, he never calls this preparation "grace," but only "acts," "actus," "motus," "praeparatio," etc. Just as if the gospel call were not of grace! This, it seems to us, is casting slight upon a most vital movement of the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption. However, there is probably reason for this careful restraint about calling the preparatory work a work of grace; for it were called grace, and were grace, that would introduce grace before conversion, and that would never do, as it would overthrow this particular dogma of conversion and election.

In a previous chapter the author seems to us to torture language in order to make it appear that those theologians who believe in "new powers imparted by grace" before conversion, always mean *natural* powers. Note how he puts it (page 36):

> "What is intended by the phrase, 'powers imparted by grace,' never denotes, in reality, powers of grace, but *natural* powers."

We wonder whether this is really generous. How could men of sincerity and scholarship say one thing and mean another? Nor do we see how any man could be guilty of such a mental hiatus as to mean that "imparted powers of grace" are "natural powers." Men do not generally think in paradoxes like that. They might almost as well call white black and good evil. But whatever may be said of others, when *we* speak of the effects of prevenient grace, we do *not* mean the natural powers of the will, but the new powers imparted by God's Spirit. We mean what we say, and will not permit a false meaning to be put into our words.

But let us notice some of Dr. Pieper's statements. On page 37 he says:

> "Keep this in mind: previous to his conversion, or before the light of faith is kindled in his heart, man is spiritually *dead*, and can, previous to his conversion, *employ* the spiritual powers offered in God's gracious call as little as one who is physically dead can employ the physical vitality, if it were offered to him."

This is most remarkable. If "spiritual powers" cannot be employed by the sinner, why in the world does God *offer* them to him? That is one of the strangest things you could imagine – God offering spiritual powers to a dead man who can in nowise employ them. And why does God call the sinner if He does not intend to arouse him? Oh! let us not represent God as acting in an irrational way. Does the reader begin to see now why the present writer felt in conscience bound to take up this subject for discussion? We simply could not let such ideas of God's gracious dealings with men go uncorrected, for surely we would not want to try to cement the Lutheran Church into a union on such a basis of theology.

Dr. Pieper says rightly (page 104):

> "Very properly, therefore, the Formula of Concord rejects the teaching that man, when grace is offered to him, in any way 'can qualify and prepare himself for grace.' On the other hand, it is correct to say that *God* prepares man for conversion."

So we all say. But when man has been awakened by the call and illumination to his condition, then he surely can, by his newly acquired power, *let* God prepare him for conversion. The idea that God could "prepare him for conversion," and yet leave him as dead as he was before, is, to our mind, an inconsistent one. In that case God would work over him precisely as an undertaker works over a corpse. This is just as poor anthropology as theology.

But Dr. Pieper cannot always be consistent with his preconceived theories, even when he quotes Luther to corroborate his views. On page 105 he says:

> "Luther was accustomed to express this matter thus: 'Man will not *flee to Christ* unless he has *first tasted* hell.'"

The italics are ours except the word "first." How can a *dead* man "flee to Christ" or "taste" anything? Oh, brethren, brethren, when we are dealing with man's salvation, we must remember that we are dealing with spiritual

and psychical facts, not with material blocks and stones and corpses! Afterward Dr. Pieper quotes Luther as saying:

> "The law prepares for grace (*ad gratiam praeparat*) by revealing and augmenting sin and by humiliating the proud, in order that they *may desire help from Christ*." This quotation is very unfortunate for Dr. Pieper's theory, for a "dead" man could not "desire help from Christ." Luther was right, for even in convicting men of sin by the law, God never fails to accompany the law by the gospel, and thus create a "desire for help from Christ," which desire must be the result of grace. Thus "the law is a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ."

Dr. Pieper continues:

> "Chemnitz stigmatizes as slander the Romanist charge that the Lutherans taught no 'preparation' for the *acceptance* of justifying grace. He says: 'It is untrue when they charge in the Ninth Canon that we deny that any *motions of the will, imparted and quickened by God, precede the acceptance* of justification. For we do teach that repentance or contrition comes first, and these cannot exist without great, sincere, and earnest motions of the will. But we do not say that penitence or contrition precede as something *meritorious*."

By noting the words and phrases which we have italicized above, it will be seen that Chemnitz overthrows Dr. Pieper's central position. He would make the "dead" sinner even more active before conversion than we would ourself, for we would not go so far as to say that "repentance" goes before regeneration, because repentance has its faith side as well as its contrition side. With Chemnitz we also deny that there is anything meritorious in penitence and contrition.

Dr. Pieper frequently refers to and quotes from Latermann and Musaeus. We must confess frankly that we have no direct acquaintance with the writings of these theologians; but, if Dr. Pieper quotes them correctly – and we have no doubt he does – they surely went too far toward synergism. If they say that, before conversion, the sinner is capable of "good conduct" toward grace and of "cooperation unto conversion," we would object; for that would imply, first, some merit in man ("good conduct"), and, second, a positive *activity* of the human will before conversion ("cooperation"), and thus would enable the sinner partly to convert himself; whereas we hold that the prevenient will is purely *passive* at this point, and can only say:

> "Lord, have mercy upon me a sinner; I can do nothing; Thou, and Thou alone, must save me!"

Just as Peter cried, when sinking in the waves:

> "Lord, save me, or I perish;"

He could not do a thing to save himself; he could simply *let* Christ save him. As he *did* let Christ save him, he was saved; but if he had not left Christ save him, he would have perished – unless, perchance, Christ had saved him by physical force, which He will never do for the sinner. So we refuse to be put into the company of Latermann and Musaeus, if they taught what has been attributed to them.

At this point Dr. Pieper again tries to put his opponents into a logical *cul-de-sac* (pages 108-9). He quotes from the Strassburg Faculty. We give the gist of it: How could a will created by grace – in other words, the new power imparted by the Spirit – exercise any choice between good and evil? If it is a *spiritually* enabled will, it surely could choose only in accord with the will of God.

This, we reply, is simply another example of the materialistic and mechanical way of looking at ethical and spiritual realities. It comes from a misconception of an ethical will. More study of the deep principles of Christian ethics would be helpful. A will – that is, a good will – is not something that *must* choose *one* way, and only one, but a faculty that has the power of *alternate* choice. Otherwise it is not a will, in the true sense of the term, but an enslaved will. The corrupt will of the unsaved sinner is not truly a will, for it can choose only one way. Not so with a good will, a spiritually enabled will; it is good by the very token that it is free from bondage, and can elect. We prove this statement from Christ Himself (John 8:34-37):

> "Every one that committeth sin is the slave of sin. And the slave abideth not in the house forever; the son abideth forever. If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

When Adam came from the creative hand of God, was his will a good will or an evil one? A good will, surely, for God never created evil; and yet he had the power of alternate choice, and, sadly enough, made a misuse of it.

Missouri teaches that, after conversion, the will is made free by divine grace. If so, according to her own logic, this will could choose only one way, because it is a will established by grace; yet Missouri teaches that

those who have been converted can backslide. But how can a will established by God's grace ever decide against that grace? This would seem to be another "mystery," this time a psychological one. However, according to our view, that a good will is one that has the power of alternate choice, there is no difficulty.

But even taking Missouri's mechanical view of the will, there might be said to be two wills in man after the call and prior to his conversion – the old evil one and the good enabled one. They would certainly oppose each other. The evil will would try to overcome and destroy the good one that God has stirred into activity; and that would account for the schism that occurs in every sinner's soul when the Holy Spirit convicts him through the law and offers him pardon through the gospel. Note Paul's graphic portrayal of the two wills within him, the one lusting against the other (Rom. 7:13-25). Also Christ:

> "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

The rest of our Concordia friend's dissertation on preparatory work is not only full of contradictions, strained reasoning and *ex parte* interpretations of Scripture, but also reduces the preparatory work of the Spirit through the call and illumination to *nihil*. The idea that all these prevenient impressions are only "from without" is, in our opinion, wide of the mark. That would be an anomalous work of the Holy Spirit that would simply make outside impressions, without in the least affecting the inside of the sinner's soul. Why, even the "rubber-ball" illustration would show more than that, for you could not make the least impression upon the ball's surface without causing a movement of all the atoms within! Much less a human soul where the operations are not mechanical, but psychical and spiritual. But even here our earnest friend cannot preserve his consistency, for in referring to Paul's discourse before Festus and Agrippa (page 114), he says:

> "The context shows that the whole company were listening attentively, and that Festus and Agrippa were *really inwardly moved and powerfully agitated*."

Yet, so far as we know, they never were converted. This shows how difficult it is for any man, however learned and sincere, to sustain an inconsistent theory. If this sounds too severe, it is meant kindly.

It is all but impossible for our brethren across the line to keep their modes of expression in accord with their own views: they are constantly overstepping the line. Even good Dr. Walter had this failing. See this quotation on page 109:

> "Conversion, indeed, does not occur ordinarily without several preparatory phenomena (*Vorgaenge*) *within* man, and in this sense conversion is accomplished by degrees, gradually; but conversion itself in every case occurs in an instant."

Notice "within man," not merely "outside."

Take one of Dr. Walter's favorite illustrations (pages 113, 114) – that of a besieged fortress. "The fortress receives impressions from without; it is bombarded and attacked. The besieged, however, do not make common cause with the besieging force, but try to prevent the taking of the fortress."

To our mind, this is a very ineffective illustration; but let us admit it for the sake of argument. If the walls were violently bombarded from without, and were beginning to topple, it is likely that the people within the fortress would be a good deal impressed, a good deal agitated, just as the human heart is when it is assaulted by the law. Again, if the besieging forces did not succeed in taking the fortress, it would be because the army within were too strong for them, and so they were finally driven away by superior force and skill. Here again the illustration fails, for the Holy Spirit cannot be overcome by force; nor does He act upon the soul by coercion. But suppose the people within the walls finally capitulate; this must have occurred in one of two ways: either because they were *forcibly* overcome while yet resisting, or because they at length became *willing* to surrender. In which way do our Missouri brethren think the transaction takes place in the case of a sinner's conversion?

We must pause here to remark on this matter of the sinner being converted without his consent, or, in other words, by force. If he is positively dead, like a corpse, before his conversion, he must be converted by coercion. If so, how can it be by grace? Could a conversion that was forced upon an unwilling sinner be called a work of grace? Would not that method nullify *sola gratia*? We ask the question kindly, not for the purpose of driving our brethren into a corner; merely as a matter to be seriously pondered. But if the call awakens the sinner to his condition, and prevenient grace en-

ables him to be willing to let God save him, and he so consents, then the whole process is ethical and spiritual, and therefore – *sola gratia*.

Another of Dr. Walter's remarks is found on page 117:

> "When the Lord says, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God,' Mark 12:34, He would say, 'There are *in* thee even now preparatory *effects* of the Spirit;' for the scribe here addressed *had already yielded* to a better understanding of the law."

Note the words, "in," "effects," and "had already yielded;" and yet all of it had taken place in the man's soul before his conversion, for we do not know even today whether he was ever converted or not. Yet our author says:

> "In the same connection Walter rejects every *status medius*. He says: 'Whoever teaches that a man may be converted, and yet not be entirely converted, contradicts the Scriptures, which know but two states, death and life. Whoever is not under grace is under wrath; whoever is not in life is still in death; whoever is not on the way to heaven is on the way to hell; whoever is an unsaved person is a damned person. There is no twilight stage, no middle state between light and darkness.'"

How do these radical statements comport with what he says above about the scribe having "already yielded to a better understanding of the law?" How could a man utterly "dead" and in utter "darkness" commend the lofty spiritual import of the law, as Christ had interpreted it to him? This statement entirely ignores both God's call and illumination before conversion, making them ineffective. Besides, if there is no "twilight" stage, God's method in nature and His method in grace are utterly diverse: for in nature there is always a twilight stage (or, rather, dawn) before the sun comes up in its full glory. Why, the Bible itself recognizes a period of dawn in spiritual matters (2 Pet. 1:19):

> "Until the day *dawn*, and the day-star *arise* in your hearts."

Still another quotation from Walter is given on pages 117 and 118:

> "It sounds very fine when modern theologians say: 'When God gives strength to unconverted man, he is able to cooperate toward his conversion.'"

We pause, lest we be misunderstood, to say we reject the view that the unconverted man can "cooperate toward his conversion;" the word "cooperate" is, to our mind, too strong a word at that stage; the called and illumined sinner can do nothing *toward* his conversion; he can simply *let* God save him; that much ability God gives in the call and illumination – to be *passive* in God's hands; even as long as he tries to save himself, he will balk God's efforts to save him. This lies at the very heart of moral and spiritual realities: a sinner cannot convert himself, nor forgive himself, nor cleanse away his own sins.

Dr. Walter pursues:

> "But that is wrong; for a dead person cannot make use of imparted powers as long as he lacks the strength necessary for the employment of such powers, that is to say, as long as he lacks life. You may roll a dead body back and forth, and by applying electricity cause him to open his eyes or his mouth, and so on, but all this remains a result of forces affecting him from without. Only he who has become subjectively a possessor of power can move himself."

Oh! no! no! the Holy Spirit does not work in that mechanical way on the human heart. Electricity is a *dead* force, a purely mechanical energy, but Paul says (1 Cor. 15:45):

> "The last Adam (Christ) became a life-giving spirit;"

and (2 Cor. 3:6):

> "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."

We maintain once more that, when the Holy Spirit calls the sinner to grace and salvation, He does not assault him like a dead force, but with a living power and persuasion; He awakens him to his undone and defiled condition and shows him Christ as his Saviour. If the Spirit can do that much through the call and illumination, He can also quicken the will, or confer a new will, to the extent that the sinner will be willing to *let* God pardon and save him. Observe also the contradiction in the above quotation from Walter:

> "A dead person cannot make use of imparted powers," etc.

Then how can they be *imparted*, or if they can be, what good does it do for God to *impart* them? And also what good would it do to apply electricity to a dead body – unless it would be merely for scientific and experimental purposes, or perchance to satisfy idle curiosity?

Apology is made to Dr. Pieper for our having to say that his chapter on "The 'Possibility' of Conversion" is a species of hair-splitting that ought to be left entirely in the domain of dogmatic liberty, and should never for a moment be permitted to cause schism in our great and beloved Lutheran Zion. It is somewhat ingenious, but far from convincing. It contains contradictions. Commenting on Isa. 55:6, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found," he quotes Osiander as follows:

> "The Lord is near and can be found when, through the preaching of the gospel, He offers salvation to us. But when He takes away His Word, so that it no longer is correctly understood, He can be neither found nor properly worshiped. Let us, then, *gratefully seize* the opportunity by means of which the Lord in His grace approaches us."

But a "dead" man could not "gratefully seize the opportunity." You see, it is impossible for our dear friends, the electionists, to maintain their consistency. We hope they will not reply that such is the teaching of the Bible, and thus try to fix the responsibility for dogmatic inconsistency upon the inspired volume. And when does God take away His Word? He never does this arbitrarily. When He says (Gen. 6:3): "My Spirit shall not always strive with man," it is because, as the context shows, they have, by their terrible sins and stubborn resistance, "grieved the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4:30); or as is said in Gen. 6:6:

> "And it repented Jehovah that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at the heart."

No, the Bible never represents God as acting in an arbitrary or capricious way.

Further on (page 120), Dr. Pieper himself says:

> "The expressions, 'possibility of conversion,' 'opportunity' of conversion, 'possibility of being converted,' should then be retained in the sense, viz., that the saving grace of God comprises all men, and that the Holy Spirit *operates in all hearers* unto conversion, and that the cause of non-conversion is to be sought solely in man's resistance. This is summed up in the terms *gratia sufficiens*. The Scriptures teach *gratia sufficiens*, that is to say, that God operates through the call in such a manner and to such an extent that *all* hearers of the Word may be 'enlightened, converted and saved,' and that no hearer remains unconverted by reason of some deficiency in the operations of divine grace or by reason of a lack of gracious intent on the part of God."

We do not want to be hypercritical, but since Missouri constantly makes all her favorite figures of speech "go on all fours," as the saying is, we would kindly ask, How can "dead" sinners be "hearers of the Word?" If they are "dead" like logs or corpses, how can it be said that "the Holy Spirit operates *in* all hearers *unto conversion*?" Our brethren ought to remember that every simile is defective in some points, while entirely pertinent in others, that is, the points in which the parallelism is intended. "*Omne simile claudicat*."

What Dr. Pieper says on pages 121-123 on Synergism does not concern us, for, as we have so often said before, we reject Synergism, which means that the unconverted sinner, in his *natural* state, can cooperate with God in his salvation, or that, by means of spiritual abilities imparted in the Call, he can actively cooperate or in any way help to convert and save himself. Most positively do we reject Melanchthon's formula in the last edition of his Loci, when he enumerated "three causes of conversion, viz., the Holy Spirit, the Word, and the will of man" (Jacobs, *id*., page 224). If, after the sinner's awakening through the Call, he would be saved, he must simply surrender to God's saving power, must be quiescent in God's hand, must let God save him; and this He can do, because God's Call to him has been a living, energizing Call.

A word now as to what Dr. Walter called *motus inevitabiles.* This is the scholastic term which he applied to the motions or acts of the Holy Spirit prior to conversion. They are simply inevitable motions, so far as the sinner's will is concerned. In rejoinder we would say that the only *motus* of that kind in the process are the first proffers of grace through the Call. Of course, the sinner must first hear the Word of God. Just how long such *motus* are continued by our heavenly Father we need not try to determine; for He alone knows how to fit His overtures to every person's case. From the very nature of the process there must be such initial movements on God's part: if God did not first give the Call, no one would ever be saved; no one

would ever know about Christ and His redemption. "How shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard?" God always *initiates* the process:

> "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (Matt. 15:16);
>
> "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19; also John 3:16).

Yes, the initiative in salvation always comes from God. But after God, by His gracious Call and Illumination, has sufficiently aroused the sinner to produce conviction and the sense of responsibility, the *motus invitabiles* must cease, and acts involving man's moral and spiritual freedom must begin and continue. Not to be outdone by our learned friends in the use of scholastic terms, these acts might be called *motus morales et voluntarü*.

An instance of treating an opponent unfairly and imposing upon him views that he does not hold, is found on page 123, where a quotation is made from the Strassburg Faculty as follows:

> "Does not God on His part grant that we *will*? Does He merely grant that we are *able* to will, *able* to convert ourselves, *able* to believe?"

We wonder whether there ever has been a Lutheran who said or thought that we poor, undone sinners are "able to convert ourselves?" By running that damaging phrase into the sentence, the writers did not fairly represent their opponents' view. God certainly does confer the ability to will and believe. Surely He does not do our willing and believing for us, any more than He does our walking, breathing, eating, or even our thinking for us; but that is continents away from saying that a man is able to convert himself. To *will* and *believe* belong to a different category from to *convert*, for God enables willing and believing, and then men must use the powers conferred; but as for converting, God alone can and must do that, just as He alone must forgive and save. We have contended all along that, through prevenient grace, the sinner is simply enabled to *let God* convert and save him.

"Then," we fancy Dr. Pieper will reply, "it all depends, after all, on man's choice." Not so. It all depends on God's grace and power, and, of course, on His eternal fore-ordination; for the whole process of salvation must have been predetermined in eternity. But there must come a time in

the process when God's Spirit enables the sinner to choose to let himself be saved or not, as the Scripture teaches:

> "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve" (Josh. 24:15);
>
> "How long halt ye between two opinions? If God be God, follow Him; if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21, spoken to unregenerate men).

If such a moment of option does not come to the sinner before conversion, then conversion is *forced* upon him. Will the theologian, or, for that matter, anyone else, try to think of a man being converted without his consent or against his consent? What kind of a conversion would that be? Figure it out as you will, there must be a point, prior to conversion, when God deals with the sinner's will, which He has called into action. From a psychological view-point this must be true; for God's Call and Illumination give the sinner the *knowledge* of sin and salvation, as the Missourians themselves admit; so, as the mind is a unit, the *cognizing* power could not be called into action without producing some effect upon the *susceptibility* and the *will*. If this is not true, God acts contrary to the psychical laws which He Himself has foreordained and established.

A few more observations are needed to complete this part of the subject. If Missouri means by conversion the whole process of grace from awakening to justification, she should say so positively and clearly, and should not insist on *actus praeparatorae*; then we could agree with her; then, too, much confusion and controversy would be avoided in the Church. That really is what should be called conversion (*conversio*, a complete turning), while the actual bestowal of the new life and of faith should be called regeneration (from *regenerare*, to beget again). In that case, however, Missouri should not call conversion instantaneous. Really we have sometimes suspected that what the rest of us term the Call and the Illumination, the Missouri advocates call conversion; for when Dr. Pieper on page 111 speaks about the *experience* of conversion he makes it such a gentle, zephyr-like transaction that one wonders what all the theological agitation is about. Conversion, he says, occurs "in a way imperceptible to human feeling, and so divinely gentle that few converted persons are able to state the hour of their conversion." Beautiful, indeed! While many adults are not converted in that quiet way, many are, and almost all properly reared children of

Christian parents are. It is the normal way. But, somehow, it does not comport well with Missouri's position, for during the introductory stage (*praeparatio*) the "dead" sinner seems to be more active, alive and *conscious* of what is transpiring than he is in the moment of actual conversion. Is our debate a logomachy [debate about words]?

Our next paragraph is about a good will, a free will, a will disenthralled to the extent needed at the given moment in God's economy of grace. Missouri always treats the will as if it were a kind of material thing or a machine. Therefore, in the interest of Christian ethics, we desire to say that a free will is not something that is pulled down *by force* on one side or the other, but that is placed in *equilibrium*, so that it can elect for itself. That was the will in liberty with which Adam and Eve were originally endowed. Now, in the process of divine mercy and grace in restoring man to his original estate, there must come moments when man is capable of exercising this original enduement. It is restored *sola gratia* just as it was originally bestowed *sola gratia*.

There is one significant phrase in the Madison Agreement of the Norwegians to which Dr. Pieper objects. It is in Sec. 4 (page 8) where the Norwegians say:

> "In other words, we reject every doctrine which… would weaken man's sense of responsibility in respect of the acceptance or rejection of God's grace."

So alert is Dr. Pieper constantly in his defense of his favorite doctrines that he scents danger here. There might be the least hint of Synergism in such language. He says (page 35):

> "The phrase, 'feeling of responsibility over against[1] the acceptance or rejection of grace,' creates the impression as if there existed in man before his conversion a condition or moment of time in which he may decide, as well whether he will accept, as whether he will reject, the grace offered him."

Do our Missouri brethren ever preach the gospel to the unconverted? If they do, do they tell them they have and can have no "feeling of responsibility" in regard to the salvation offered them? If they do tell them this, how can they ever expect any sinner to repent and come to God? If they do not tell them this frankly, but talk to them as if they were responsible beings since

they have heard the gospel, then the Missourians are not preaching their own doctrine, but another doctrine. How do they preach to the unconverted, anyway? If the preaching of the law to the unsaved produces conviction – and surely that is its office – then it must stir a "feeling of responsibility." Why do our brethren preach the law? And when they do preach it to the unconverted, do they expect it to produce no other effect than that of an impact on a rubber ball or of an electric shock on a dead body? You cannot build an operative Church on this doctrine of election. It is too academic and scholastic. It is not a practical or a preachable theology. It may be a theology for the professor's chair, but not for the practical preacher and pastor out in the field, dealing with living, thinking, sinning men and women. Even most of the Presbyterian ministers with whom we have conversed have accepted election in view of faith persevered in to the end of life. They could not make the theology of their creed applicatory in their work.

Oh, brethren, we must have a theology that we can preach to all classes of men and that will make a truthful appeal to them. Again we must raise the relevant question, Can the Lutheran Church of America accept the electionist theology as the only basis of union?

Not to inject too much of the personal element into this discussion, the present writer, who was a pastor for many years, was blessed of God with the joy of winning many unconverted persons to Christ. He had a theology that he could preach, and preach with all his heart; and he always tried to arouse a feeling of responsibility in the sinner's mind, telling him that he could have salvation if he would, and that, if he did not, it would be his own fault. Whether this was the correct theology or not, it *worked*. Today there are many faithful and loyal Lutherans in the churches he served that were brought to Christ by that kind of preaching. Do we want to accept a system of dogmatics that we cannot preach right out with utter frankness and fullness to all classes of people? And, above all, do we want to make such a system the basis of union?

And where did our Lord Jesus Christ try to posit the "feeling of responsibility?" Precisely with the unconverted people to whom He preached. He said to the Pharisees:

> "Ye *will* not come to me that ye may have life."

Was He not trying to stir a "feeling of responsibility" in them, or was he simply trying to make indentations on rubber balls? Our Lord severely upbraided the cities of Galilee, Chorazin, Capernaum and Bethsaida, saying it would be more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon and Sodom than for them in the day of judgment (Matt. 11:20-24). And why this stern rebuke? Because of the mighty works He had done among them. Was He not fixing the responsibility upon those sinners to whom He was preaching? The fact is, He was making their own choice the very thing that determined their eternal destiny. And remember they were unconverted sinners, too. Why, brethren, every command of God, every precept, every invitation, every threat of punishment – every one connotes human responsibility. When Peter, on the day of Pentecost, accused his hearers of their wickedness in having crucified Jesus, he was trying to stir within them the "feeling of responsibility;" and he succeeded, too, for they "were pricked in their heart," and cried out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" When Isaiah said:

> "Come now, saith the Lord, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet,"

he was trying to make those sinners conscious of their "responsibility." So we hope the Norwegian brethren will retain the aforesaid clause.

If there is no "condition or moment" before conversion when the sinner can decide whether he will let God save him or not, then, if he is converted, he must be converted by force, just as we have proved again and again. Such a theology makes all the gracious invitations of the Bible to the unconverted nugatory, not to say insincere. Again, this idea that sinners before conversion have no responsibility, and even no feeling of responsibility, is not true to the facts of every-day experience, for thousands of them do have that feeling, as you will discover if you have a heart-to-heart talk with them. Worst of all, these stiff, immobile, procrustean doctrines of election and conversion would logically lead to fatalism; also the destruction of all sense of moral obligation on the part of unconverted people. What state of society would that bring about? The saving feature about the whole matter is that neither the Missourians nor the Calvinists consistently push their logic to the fatal conclusion. In every-day practice they treat sinners just as if they were responsible human beings. The conclusion is that they have a theology that is not practical, but theoretical, academic and speculative.

Another difficulty about this peculiar doctrine of conversion and election is this: In the first place, Missouri teaches that unsaved sinners are condemned solely through their own fault; in other words, it is their own fault that they are non-elect; yet she teaches, in the next breath, that they could not do otherwise than they do, even though God calls them to repentance. Then how can the blame be theirs? They could not do otherwise than they do. If God calls them, and they can only resist, and God does not even make them willing to allow themselves to be saved, then God fails to make the call effectual in their case, while He *does* make it effectual in the case of the elect. Then who is to blame if the non-elect are not saved? Of course, Missouri will say, "Right there is the mystery!" But it is a mystery created by Missouri, not by the Bible. The Bible says in ringing tones, "Whosoever will! whosoever will!"

Our friends may object to having this remorseless logic applied to their theology; but we reply that men will think; you cannot prevent that; and if theologians will take an inconsistent position, they cannot blame thinking men for drawing the logical conclusions from their premises. We challenge any gospel preacher to preach this doctrine of the irresponsibility of the sinner to the *sinner himself*! For our part, we do not care for a system of theology that you must keep in the classroom, but dare not proclaim from the house-top.

All people intuitively think and speak of men as free moral agents. An old Presbyterian farmer was once declaring stoutly that he believed in the genuine old-fashioned doctrine of election. Some one asked him why it was, then, that so many people are not elected. He replied:

> "Have you ever known a person to be elected who refused to be a candidate?"

He simply could not be consistent with his theory. A well-known Presbyterian divine, now gone to his reward, was wont to say:

> "I believe in the perseverance of saints – if the saints persevere!"

All men who are not in the thrall of a theory think and act in that practical way. We believe in both a theology and philosophy that can be lived and applied. The theology of the Bible is just such a theology. In some places it

properly emphasizes God's sovereign rule; at other places man's free moral agency and responsibility. Both principles are true, and there is no conflict between them. Indeed, it magnifies the power and glory of God to know that He is so great and omniscient that He can make free agents and yet preserve His perfect rulership. If He could not do that, He would not be infinite in wisdom and power.

A mistake that Concordia makes is to try to prove, by a dialectical process, that their doctrine of election gives to believers assurance of final salvation, while the opposing doctrine leaves them in uncertainty. Here we believe there has been some error on both sides, or, perhaps, lack of clearness. Such a thing as absolute and unconditional assurance of final salvation is not taught in the Sacred Scriptures. Such assurance would lead to carnal security. There would then be no need for Christ to say:

"Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation;"

"What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch;"

"Abide in me, and I in you;"

"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered."

Other warnings are:

"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;"

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith;"

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation;"

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give a crown of life."

God's way is right. He gives us enough assurance to keep us from worry and anxiety, yet not so much as to cause us to be "at ease in Zion." Even Paul expressed some concern for his final salvation (1 Cor. 9:27):

> "But I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected."

The Missouri position can never give unconditional assurance, for no one can be sure in this life just what took place in the counsels of eternity (unless God reveals it in time, and Missouri holds that he has not made such a revelation respecting election). True, it might be said, if a man has accepted Christ as his Lord and Redeemer, that ought to be a sure token of his election. Ah! the trouble is, so many believe on Christ for a time, then lose their faith, and so do not persevere to the end. So faith in Christ is not, after all, a sure criterion of election unto eternal life. Anyway, if election is a closed secret with God, no one can ever know until he dies and goes to heaven whether he has been elected or not.

No less can the advocates of election *intuitu fidei* give absolute certitude of final perseverance and salvation. Why? Because the believer may fail to keep on to the end. Many converted persons have backslidden. Even Missouri does not hold to the Calvinistic doctrine, "once in grace always in grace."

So there is small need of bandying argument on this point. For our part, we believe the advantage lies on the side of the *intuitu fidei* doctrine. It will prove a spur to continuance in faith, whereas the Missouri doctrine, if pushed to its conclusion, would be likely to lead either to false security or to despair. We would state our position in this way: In view of all the peace, comfort and joy of faith in Jesus Christ; of the darkness and sorrow of a life of sin and doubt; of the many precious promises of eternal bliss to those who are faithful to the end; of the many assurances that God will be faithful to his part of the baptismal covenant; that He will not, if we trust Him, suffer us to be tempted above our ability; that both Christ and the Father will hold us in their all-powerful hands – in view, we say, of all these things, there surely is small inducement for believers ever to desire to turn back to "the beggary elements of the world." Should they give up their birthright, it would be against every incentive that heaven can place before them. If God-in-Christ holds us in His hands, so that no enemy can pluck us from His grasp, it certainly would be very foolish for us to want to squirm out of His gracious and omnipotent protection. If we did so, we would deserve no further consideration at His hands. We confess that we feel more secure with such assurance than we would if we thought a mysterious decree were

hanging over us. At the same time, we would have more heart to persevere in faith. Thus, on the one hand, the believer is immune from anxiety; on the other, he is saved from carnal security.

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1. The phrase “over against” is not used in the Madison Agreement, but “in respect of.” This is perhaps only a technical oversight.↩

9. Missouri's Favorite Scripture Passages

A PLEASANT PRIVILEGE IS NOW OURS – that of examining our Missouri brethren's favorite passages of Scripture bearing on the doctrine of election. We say a "privilege," for the study of God's Word is the greatest delight. After all our reasoning, we must finally decide according to God's holy oracles; they are the last court of appeal. "To the law and to the testimony! if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isa. 8:20).[1] In this controversy, we have no hesitancy in making the appeal to the Bible. "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple… . The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Ps. 19:7, 8).

The first passage to claim our attention is Rom. 8:28-30 (American Revised Version):

> "And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren: and whom He foreordained, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified."

We begin with verse 29:

> "For whom He foreknew" (*oti ous proegno*).

The Greek verb here used is a form of *pro-gignoskein*, meaning, by its very etymology, *to know before*. Dr. Pieper (page 73) tries to break the force of this verb by identifying it with elect or predestinate. Yet elsewhere in his book he says we should not *interpret* God's Word, but take it just as it says. Here, however, when the plain words do not suit his theology, he gives

them an interpretation to fit. Thus we all have our subjective biases; we are all very human. But we fear he cannot maintain his interpretation. It would make Paul a very poor rhetorician for him to say, "For whom he did predestinate, them He did predestinate to be conformed," etc. The Holy Spirit, who inspired Paul, would hardly have moved him to use such meaningless tautology. Besides, the word translated "foreordain" or "predestinate" is *proorisen* (second "o" is omega), aorist of *pro-orizein*, to determine beforehand. So Dr. Pieper's explication is inadmissible. Therefore, taking the plain meaning of the words just as they stand, they must signify that God foreknew certain persons; foreknowing them, He foreordained them to be made like Christ – that is, to be saved; having thus determined in eternity, He proceeded to carry out the decree in time by calling, justifying and glorifying them. What needs to be settled now is, who are the persons whom He foreknew?

Let us remember that Paul is speaking about those who are saved according to the gospel of Christ. Now, when we look into the plan of redemption as it has been plainly set forth in the Bible, we find that the terms or conditions of salvation always are faith, or repentance and faith (John 3:14-21; John 20:31; Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38; 3:19, 20; 13:38, 39; 16:31; Rom. 5:1, 2, and a hundred others). Therefore, if in time He has revealed persevering faith to be the condition of salvation, He must have foreordained it to be so from eternity; surely, then, for those who He foreknew would comply with His plainly announced condition, He would make his predetermination effective.[2] Thus the election must have been "in view of faith" (of course persevered in to the end). And remember, "it is by faith that it might be by grace." So we have established our glorious Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone, connoting salvation by grace alone. And all has been in accord with God's gracious eternal decree, based upon His infinite foresight or omniscience. We praise God for His absolute knowledge; it gives a solid basis for all His predeterminations, so that none of them can miscarry, and yet all of them are just, right, gracious and kind.

Here it is proper to define still more closely the doctrine of election "in view of faith." Perhaps we should have made the proper distinctions earlier in this discussion. The phrase is liable to misunderstanding from the fact that it seems to the opponent as if we meant that men can believe on Christ before they are converted. On the other hand, if we insist that faith is the gift of God, and is an ability bestowed simply and solely by God's grace

first in regeneration, then why might we not just as well fall in with Missouri, and say that men are "elected *unto* faith?" So we believe that some of the exponents of *intuitu fidei* have not made quite all the distinctions that should have been made at this point. To put it just as accurately as we can, we would say: God has elected sinners in view of the use they will make of divinely imparted and enabled freedom at every point in the Order of Salvation, from the first moment of the Call to the final transfer to glory in heaven. In this process faith plays a large and determining part; yet it does not enter into the prevenient acts, but is implanted in regeneration. Thus *intuitu fidei* is an expression that can be retained for convenience, if it is remembered how it is produced, and what acts of the Holy Spirit precede it. The following is Dr. Jacobs' carefully phrased and finely discriminating definition of "Predestination or Election" ("A Summary of the Christian Faith," page 554):

> "It is the eternal decree, purpose or decision of God, according to which, out of pure grace, He determined to save, out of the fallen, condemned and helpless human race, each individual who He foresaw from eternity would, by His grace, be in Christ unto the end of life."

We must go a step farther. All who hear the gospel Call until they understand its heavenly purport have a sufficient chance (*gratia sufficiens*) to be made willing, to know that God will convert and save them if they will let Him. There God's responsibility ends and the sinner's begins. If God would go farther than to awaken, convict, enlighten and stir the sinner's will into the ability to consent to being saved, He would force salvation upon him; which God will never do; for He always says, "Whosoever *will*, let him come."

Let us add that God always deals with man as man, that is, as a moral agent, not as a block or machine or an irrational animal. Sometimes we get the impression – and we mean it kindly and only as a suggestion – that our Missouri brethren emphasize God's power more than they do His grace. Several times we have been tempted to think that, instead of *sola gratia*, they ought to say *sola vis*.

Now we come to the *crux* of the theologians relative to our main theme – Rom. IX to XI inclusive. Here both the Calvinists and the Missouri Lutherans find their chief Biblical support for their peculiar views. With both alike the doctrine of election as drawn from this passage is regulative in their the-

ology, everything else being made to conform; everything being dealt with from this view-point; whereas the rest of us Lutherans, as did Paul and Luther, make justification by faith the fundamental and regulating principle. Did we say Paul? Yes, for in this very epistle he *first* treats of justifying faith, *then* of election.[3] In the examination of this crucial passage we must move slowly and carefully, and must not allow preconceived notions to exercise an undue influence upon us.

First of all, we must find out what was Paul's main purpose in the doctrinal portion of this epistle, comprising, after the introduction, the first eleven chapters. This purpose is to prove to both his Jewish and Gentile readers that justification comes by faith alone, or rather, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ; this doctrine and fact he maintains over against the error that justification comes by the deeds of the law and works of human merit. There was need for this presentation, for, on the one hand, there were Jews who insisted on the law; on the other, Gentiles who believed in the merit of good character and conduct. His polemic is presented in good homiletical order. After stating his main theme (1:16, 17), where he declares that the righteousness of God is bestowed through faith, he deals first with the heathen world, and shows that it is altogether steeped in sin, and therefore cannot save itself (1:18-32); secondly, he shows that both Jews and Gentiles, on account of their sins, are under the same condemnation and disability (2:1-29); thirdly, he turns to the Jews, and, by a most clean-cut argument, shows them that, while they have been highly favored of God as His chosen people and in being entrusted with the "oracles of God," yet they cannot be saved by the deeds of the law, simply because they are too much in the bondage of sin to keep it (chapters 3 and 4); then comes his matchless argument (chapters 5 to 8 inclusive) for justification by faith alone as opposed to all work-righteousness, whether of Jew or Gentile, ending with the wonderful apostrophe to saving and preserving love in the concluding verses of the eighth chapter.

This brings us to chapters 9 to 11, where God's sovereignty is so strongly emphasized. But it is God's sovereignty exercised in accordance with His predetermined order of salvation, as set forth in the previous chapters, namely, salvation by grace through faith. If not, Paul would be a very inconsistent writer and theologian; yet he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. What does he mean to show in these chapters? The relation between the Jews and the Gentiles; that both are saved by grace through faith, notwith-

standing God's varied providential dealings with them; that God's sovereign will and grace to save them in this way cannot be frustrated by anything that man can do, and that for carrying out this sovereign purpose He raises up both men and nations by a special dispensation and exercise of His power and grace. That this is the gist and point of his whole polemic is clearly set forth in 11:19-23, where it is said that the Jews (or those of them who rejected Christ) were broken off "by their unbelief," while the saved Gentiles stand "by their faith" (11:20). In the next verses he teaches that, if the Gentiles *continue not* in God's goodness, they also will "be cut off;" but if the Jews "*continue not* in their *unbelief*" they shall again "be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again." Cannot anyone see that Paul is logically and consistently carrying out his cardinal principle of justification by faith alone, and showing that all God's predeterminations in eternity and His providential and gracious dealings in time are bent on making this principle effective?

Now, what is the exact idea of election so powerfully presented in these chapters? It is that God predestines and elects and raises up certain nations and representative individuals to carry out His sovereign plans, His purpose to save by grace through faith, because that is the only right way to save the race. We maintain, therefore, that in these chapters no reference is made to the unconditional election of individuals unto eternal salvation or unto eternal reprobation. For that Paul always makes conditional on faith. That God does raise up certain representative individuals to be the instruments of His sovereign purposes, who can doubt? There were Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, Luther. And why He elected these men and not others for their great work, who knows? That He also elected and chose Israel to be the special bearers of salvation to the world, the race from whom Christ should come according to the flesh, admits of no questioning. Just why He chose Israel and not some other nation we are willing to leave to Him. It certainly was not on account of Israel's superior "good conduct." Here the divine Potter had perfect power over the clay. But our faith is simple enough, since God has saved us by grace through faith, to believe that He elected those individuals and the Jewish nation for a wise and gracious purpose, and not in an absolute and arbitrary way. God has His inscrutable methods and purposes, for His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than our thoughts. It is just as easy, and a good deal more reasonable, to believe, for example, that He, by His divine foresight, knew that Abraham would be the

instrument best fitted for His purpose, and therefore He chose him, as it is to believe that He did just as He pleased without a good and sufficient reason, and just because He had the power; for the Scripture teaches that "by *faith* Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place," etc. (Heb 11:8). The same principle will hold in respect to God's other agents who were raised up for a special mission.

Now, with Paul's great principle in mind – salvation by grace through faith – let us seek the meaning of the most difficult sections. In 9:6-9 Paul teaches that not all the seed of Abraham was elected to be the bearers of God's saving plan; not Ishmael, a child of the flesh, but Isaac, the child of promise, whom Abraham and Sarah looked for by faith. Beautiful! Everything is determined and wrought out along God's plan of salvation through faith. Then there is the case of Jacob and Esau, 9:10-13, which we will give in the beautiful version of the Twentieth Century New Testament (in this place a true translation, not a gloss):

> "There is also the case of Rebecca, when she was about to bear children to our ancestor Isaac. For in order that the purpose of God, working through selection, might not fail – a selection depending not on obedience, but on His Call – Rebecca was told, before her children were born, and before they had done anything either right or wrong, that 'the elder would be a servant to the younger.' The words of Scripture are, 'I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau.'"

You will observe that this version does not tone down the election part at all, for "selection" must mean the same thing. Does this prove that God unconditionally elected Jacob unto salvation and passed Esau by? Not at all. It has reference solely to what Paul set out to show, namely, that God was electing the one who would be the fitter to be the ancestor of the people of God and of the Christ who was to be given through them. Why do we say this? Because if it refers to individual salvation, then Esau must have been lost, and that simply because he was not elected, and we have no evidence that he was lost. Moreover, it would imply that all of Esau's descendants must have been lost, for of course these two men, as we have shown, were treated as the representatives of their respective posterities. That God's eternal foresight and selection were correct is verified by the sequel, for Jacob proved to be by far the fitter instrument for God's redeeming plan. With all his faults, he was spiritual, he had visions of God, and grew more spiritual toward the end of his life; while Esau was always crass, worldly and sensu-

ous. Just try to imagine God's having chosen Esau instead of Jacob for the divine purpose, and you will intuitively see how intolerable is the thought. Therefore, even in choosing His special agents to carry out His larger, His worldwide purpose, He does not elect them in an absolute and arbitrary way.

With reference to God's loving Jacob and hating Esau, we will defer to Dr. Jacobs (Lutheran Commentary, *in loco*, p. 190):

> "The word *hatred* here does not mean to dislike or abhor. It simply expresses the preference shown to one who is loved when his claims or interests come in conflict with the other… 'When a Hebrew compares a less with a greater love, he is wont to call the former hatred' (Tholuck)." References to Gen. 29:30, 31; Deut. 21:15.

"That the purpose of God according to election" (Amer. Rev.) – the precise order here cannot be determined from the Greek. It is, *iva e kat' eklogen prothesis*, but the preposition *kata* may be translated "according to" or "by means of" (see any Greek lexicon). Dr. Jacobs prefers the former, and thus puts "election first, the purpose afterward," while the Twentieth Century version makes it "through." We think the latter the more simple and consistent, for surely the order in every mental process would be, the purpose first, then the election of the means for carrying out the purpose.

The next passage is verses 14-16:

> "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy."

Let us remember what Paul was proving – that God had not elected the Jews on account of any work or legal righteousness; for they could claim no such merits; therefore in their self-righteousness they had no right to pronounce judgment upon God's methods and ways. So He told them that His mercy was in His own hands to be shown as He pleased. But on whom does He always clearly show in the New Testament that He wills to have mercy? Right here it is, in another writing of Paul (1 Tim. 1:16):

> "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy that in me as chief might Jesus Christ show forth all His long-suffering, for an ensample of them that should thereafter *believe on Him unto eternal life*."

Hundreds of passages to the same effect might be cited. Thus we interpret Scripture by Scripture, not by some subjective theological dogma. "So then it is not *of* him that willeth, nor *of* him that runneth, but *of* God that showeth mercy." Just as we have shown all along – God is the *enabling source* of all good, of the willing and the running. But remember He will not do our willing and running for us, after He has conferred the ability upon us through His mercy and grace.

Vs. 17, 18:

> "In Scripture again it is said to Pharaoh: 'It was for this very purpose that I raised thee to the throne, to show my power by my dealings with thee, and to make my name known throughout the world.' So, then, where God wills He takes pity, and where He wills He hardens the heart."

All is clear if our minds are not too much possessed by the idea of a mysterious unconditional election. It does not say that God *created* Pharaoh for the purpose of hardening and finally condemning him, but He "raised him up" – that is, gave him an exalted position in the world – in order that He might show His power and grace through him. Suppose God foresaw that Pharaoh would harden his own heart against God (the Old Testament says five times that he did this *before* it says God hardened his heart, Ex. 7-9), then how just it would be to lift him up and make him the conspicuous instrument through whom God would exhibit His power! If God had not done this, we never would have had the wonderful history of God's deliverance of Israel from their bondage in Egypt. Why God raised up Pharaoh for this special purpose, and not some other great ruler, we leave to God Himself. We may some time see that He raised up every great man for some special purpose.

We should remember, too, that, such is God's economy of nature and grace, that what is intended to soften the heart actually hardens it, if God's overtures are rejected. The sun melts the wax, but hardens the clay. This is God's law, and so there is a sense in which God Himself may be said to harden men's hearts. Let us bear in mind, too, that in this place Paul is not dealing with the question of individual election to salvation, but with such

conspicuous personages as He chooses to effect great steps and epochs in His scheme of redemptive grace. When we look at Pharaoh in this way, we can readily see that He was as clay in the hands of God's sovereign power, and, all unwittingly, aided in carrying out His purpose, just as Satan and Judas did when they brought about the crucifixion of Christ. No one can get ahead of God, or balk His great purposes, no matter how much he may abuse his free moral agency. This is the great comfort of elective grace. How often in times of trial we throw ourselves back on God's sovereignty!

Vs. 19-24:

> "Perhaps you will say to me: 'How can anyone still be blamed? For who withstands His purpose?' I might rather ask, 'Who are you that are arguing with God?' Does a thing which a man has molded say to him who molded it, 'Why did you make me like this?' Has not the potter absolute power over his clay, so that out of the same lump he makes one thing for better, and another for common, use? And what if God, intending to reveal His displeasure and make His power known, bore most patiently with the objects of His displeasure, though they were fit only to be destroyed, so as to make known His surpassing glory in dealing with the objects of His mercy, whom He prepared beforehand for glory, and whom He called – even us – not only from among the Jews, but from among the Gentiles also!"

It does not say that the potter *created* the clay, but simply *molded* it; so it does not say that God *created* the "objects of His displeasure," especially not for eternal retribution; it does say that He "bore most patiently with" them, "though they were fit only to be destroyed." Here it is all plain. God bore patiently with men like Pharaoh and others for awhile, even much longer than they deserved, until He saw that they were reprobate; then He used them to carry out His redemptive purpose in saving Israel, and to show His glory and power, and thus make them the bearers of salvation in Christ. Thus God makes the wrath of man to praise Him (Ps. 76:10). Even Dr. Pieper justifies God's dealing with Pharaoh, saying the wicked ruler got what he deserved.

We have now dealt with the difficult passages in these chapters; and yet we wonder whether it was necessary to expend so much labor on them, when Paul himself afterward makes everything plain (9:30-32):

> "What shall we say then?"

Note his own answer:

> "That the Gentiles who followed not after righteousness, attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is *of faith*; but Israel, following after a *law* of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Wherefore? because they sought it not *by faith*, but as it were, *by works*. They stumbled at the stone of stumbling, even as it is written: Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense; and he that *believeth* on Him shall not be put to shame."

There it all is, just as clear as crystal – just why God elects some and does not elect others. If we walk in this rich garden of truth in the light of justifying faith, which God has revealed to us in His Word, we shall not walk in darkness. If there is anything which God has not revealed, we must search for it, if we search at all, in the light revealed, not the reverse.

If it were necessary, we should take pleasure in going through chapters ten and eleven, to show how Paul again and again maintains that Israel was rejected for a time on account of their lack of faith, while many of the Gentiles were grafted in because they did not depend on their good works, but solely on faith; but we simply invite the reader to examine these luminous passages for himself. At this point we desire to quote some cogent and fluent sentences from one of the best theologians of our country who is not a Lutheran – one who has most stoutly defended the evangelical faith against the "new" theology and the rationalism of the times – Dr. Henry C. Sheldon, professor of theology in Boston University. Our selections are taken from his work, entitled "A System of Christian Doctrine." He says:

> "It is not to be denied that the idea of election or predestination is awarded considerable prominence in the Scriptures. It could not have been otherwise, if their pages were to reflect the vast sweep of the divine agency necessarily operative in founding and consummating the kingdom of righteousness. As the working out of this supreme enterprise is immeasurably above creaturely abilities, it would be a glaring incongruity not to represent the far-reaching foresight and powerful direction of God as fundamental to it all. In any reasonable view His sovereignty, considered not indeed as arbitrariness, but as wise authority, must be regarded as determining very much according to its own behests. The existence of the economy of grace is altogether by the choice of God, not of men. The stages of that economy from the first overtures to sinners to their investment with the glory of a supernatural destiny, are properly characterized as His choice. In the adjustment of nations and individuals to the economy His agency is of vast consequence. Free will in man does not annul the necessity of providential ordering in this matter. To get His gracious purpose effectively before the contemplation of man, God must have bearers and interpreters of the same. The fittest interpreters for a given time and place need to be selected, and fitness for this vocation is not independent of foregoing discipline. Israel could never have fulfilled its mission in bringing the divine testimony to the nations without special discipline. Apart from the light shed by suitable antecedents, the world would not have known what to make of the gospel message as it fell from the lips of Christ and the apostles.

"Thus the divine procedure has of necessity the appearance of selection or predestination, and is such very largely in fact. The conjunction of the prepared subject with the message of grace, whatever else may contribute thereto, falls preeminently under the category of divine ordering.

"But how is the divine superintendence managed? Is it so managed as to secure the fittest instruments for the greatest advance of the kingdom of grace and salvation that is practicable in a world of free agents? or is it the sole care to bring into the divine household a certain number, unconditionally chosen, to the everlasting neglect or exclusion of all others? The fault of the Augustinian or Calvinistic predestinarian is that he fastens upon this ultra sense of predestination, and reads it into the Scriptures. Not content with the majestic office which is open to divine sovereignty in ordering the progress of the dispensation toward the grandest attainable result, he will have it that the absolute choice of God fixes the eternal destiny of all souls."

Let us investigate another crucial passage, Eph. 1:3-7; but do not stop there; read on through to 12-14, 19; 2:7-9; 3:11, 12. As the sentences in the other versions are very long and complicated, we will use the Twentieth Century New Testament (a few glosses we will correct):

"Blessed be the God and Father of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who has blessed us on high with every spiritual blessing in Christ: for He chose us in Him before (*pro*) the foundation of the world (*kosmos*), that we might be holy and blameless in His sight, living in the spirit of love. He foreordained us, in His good will toward us, to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ, and so to enhance that glorious manifestation of His loving-kindness which He gave us in the Beloved; for in Him and through the shedding of His blood, we have redemption in the pardon of our offenses . . . (Vs. 11-13): In Him, I say, for by our union with Him we became God's heritage, having been foreordained for this in the intention of Him who, in all that happens, is carrying out His own fixed purpose; that we should enhance His glory – we who have been the first to *rest our hopes in Christ* (Amer. Rev.: 'we who had before hoped in Christ'). And you, too, *having heard* the Word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and having also *believed*, were sealed as His by the Holy Spirit which He had promised."

The italicized words in verses 12 and 13 will show that God's fore-ordination and choosing were all made in view of sinners hoping and believing in Jesus Christ. Note also verse 19.

Eph. 3:9-12. One dogmatician, in order to prove his election doctrine, quoted only this much of verse 11:

"According to the *eternal* purpose."

But you cannot establish a doctrine by such fragmentary citations from the Bible. Using the Bible in that way simply puts a club into the hands of the rationalists and negative critics. In the previous verses Paul declares that the "hidden mystery has now been made known through the gospel;" then he adds:

> "…according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access in confidence *through our faith* in Him."

The "eternal purpose" simply comes back to faith once more. Paul sticks right to his theme.

Another text is 2 Tim. 1:9:

> "Who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which were given us before times eternal" (old ver.: "before the world began").

There is no difficulty here, for the antithesis is not between God's purpose and *faith*, but between His purpose and *works*. Here He says God's "purpose and grace." All we need to do is to remember that Paul says, "It is by faith that it might be by grace," and then we shall know what are God's eternal purpose and grace – simply to save all who will accept salvation by faith. The election advocates ought always to read the whole passage, and not to treat the Bible piece-meal; for here, if they would have read on to the 12th verse, they would have found this sublime statement:

> "For I know Him whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I *have committed* unto Him against that day."

Consider 1 Pet. 1:1, 2:

> "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect, who are sojourners… according to the *foreknowledge* of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." The apostle even says here the "elect *according* to the foreknowledge of God," which shows that God's election is determined by His foreknowledge. Then He could have foreknown those who would humble themselves and accept His grace by simple faith and self-surrender. The fact is, Peter does not give much support to the doctrine of unconditional election, for he says (2 Pet. 1:10):

> "Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to *make* your calling and *election sure*; for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble."

Acts 13:48:

> "And as the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the Word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

This passage is quoted with much confidence by Missourians and Calvinists alike; and we confess that, when we first read it, we could not help feeling that here, at last, was one passage that clearly teaches the divine election to be the cause and antecedent of faith. And we decided that, if this were true, we would lay down our pen, and let Dr. Pieper's book go unanswered. But it is never safe to jump at conclusions. So we decided to look up the Greek for the word "ordained." Not a little was our surprise to find that it is not the word used in Rom. 8:29, 30. There the word employed is *pro-orizein*, which really means to predetermine or to mark out beforehand; but here the word is *tetagmenoi*, the perfect passive participle of *tassein*, which has various meanings; but our classical dictionary (Liddell and Scott) does not give "ordain" or "foreordain" among them. The fact is, there is no prefix here as there is in *pro-orizein*. Among the many meanings given to the word *tassein* are "to arrange or put in order," "to post, station," "to order, command, give instructions," "to fix, settle;" not once "to ordain" or "foreordain." Our New Testament dictionary gives only the following meanings to the participle used in this verse: >"arranged, compact, firm, steady." Now let us give a literal translation of this part of the verse, putting the words in the precise order of the original:

> "And they believed, as many as were (*esan*, imperfect) arranged, settled, or made steady unto life eternal."

Faith comes first, and then the qualifying clause, and the meaning might easily be that God had *made them steady* unto eternal life through their faith. There may not be the least reference here to an eternal decree, for there is nothing that so steadies the soul unto eternal life as faith in Jesus Christ. "And this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our

faith." Again, in verse 46 we see why Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles at Antioch of Pisidia; for they said to the unbelieving Jews:

> "It was necessary that the Word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

Now we do not insist on our interpretation of this crucial verse, but we have at least shown that the meaning is at present too uncertain for theologians to found a dogma upon, especially one that rends our Lutheran Church asunder.

Next we advert to 2 Tim. 2:18-21. We note that a Missouri dogmatician, in trying to establish his favorite doctrine, quotes only a part of verse 19. If we are going to learn just what the Bible teaches, we must cease this "atomistic" use of proof texts. Only then can we be workmen who "need not be ashamed, handling aright the Word of God." We believe in using proof texts to establish doctrines. Only rationalists, negative critics and "new" theology men scoff at their use. But theologians must use them correctly, not torture them, nor disjoin them from their contexts.

Paul was here speaking of two errorists of his time, Hymenaeus and Philetus:

> "men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is passed already, and *overthrow the faith of some*. Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, 'The Lord knoweth them that are His,' and, 'Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.'"

See how the two parts of the seal complement each other, the latter showing that those whom the Lord knows to be His are those who depart from iniquity; and who are they? All those who surrender to God and let Him save them by faith, as is taught all through the gospel. The dogmatician above referred to should have read on through the next two verses, 20, 21:

> "Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some unto honor and some unto dishonor. If a man therefore *purge himself from these*, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work."

And how shall he purge himself? By washing in the "fountain opened in the house of David for all sin and uncleanness." "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps. 51:7).

Another sample of fragmentary Biblical quotation occurs when predestinarians cite Mark 13:20 and 22, and even omit verse 21, to say nothing of failing to refer to the entire context. We will refrain from that method of using God's Word; we will cite enough of the context to show the exact setting and relation, beginning with verse 14:

> "But when ye see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not (let him that readeth understand), then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains; and let him that is on the house-top not go down nor enter in to take anything out of his house… And pray ye that it be not in the winter."

Remarkable that even God's eternal purpose takes into account man's free moral agency in both action and prayer! Oh, the wonderful omniscience of God! Then verse 19 describes the great tribulations of those days, followed by verses 20-23:

> "And except the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would have been saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days. And if any man shall say unto you, 'Lo, here is Christ,' or, 'Lo, there,' *believe him not*; for there shall arise false Christ and false prophets, and shall show signs and wonders, that they may lead astray, *if possible*, the elect. But *take ye heed*: behold, I have told you all things beforehand."

Then in verses 33-37:

> "Take ye heed; watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is… lest coming suddenly, He find you asleep. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!"

Does not this make perfectly clear who the "elect" are? Those who watch and pray, who will not believe the false Christs and prophets; then God will keep them amid all their tribulations, and will even shorten the days so that their faith may not be overborne. A most beautiful commentary this on 1 Cor. 10:13:

> "But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it."

The Bible is a wonderful harmony, not a jumble of contradictions. With God there is no *decretum absolutum*, but He ordains and orders everything to fit into the constitution and need of the moral agents whom He has created and whom, when they fall into sin, He graciously determines to save.

The great passage, John 6:43-51, has also been treated in the same fragmental way, only this part being quoted:

> "No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him;"

but the whole passage following should be read, which runs:

> "And I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets, 'And they shall all be *taught* of God.' Every one that hath heard from the Father, and *hath learned*, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save He that is from God; He hath seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that *believeth hath* eternal life … if any man shall eat of this bread, he shall live forever: yea, and the bread which I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world."

It is plain here how the Father draws people to Christ, namely, by sending His Spirit with His Call: see "taught," "heard," "hath learned," in the above passage, leading to "believeth" and "shall eat." Remember, too, the Father "draws;" He does not "push," "pull," or "force;" just as Jesus once said:

> "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will *draw* all men unto myself."

Thanks be to Christ for the magnetic power of His person and His atoning grace!

John 10:25-30, which we will not treat piecemeal, as is too often done:

> "And Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not; the works that I do in my Father's name, these bear witness of me. But ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep."

Who are His sheep? Verse 9 of this same chapter:

> "I am the door; by me, *if any man enter in, he shall be saved*, and shall go in and out, and shall find pasture."

Continuing, verse 27:

> "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who hath given them unto me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

Thanks be to God for His gracious and eternal election! For thereby He makes absolutely secure those who put their trust in Him:

> "I know Him whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is *able to keep* that which I have *committed* unto Him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:14);

> "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

We need not dwell upon Matt. 13:13-15 and Mark 4:10-12, for every one knows that, when people obstinately reject the overtures of God's mercy and grace, He will harden their hearts, dull their ears and blind their eyes, through the inevitable law of moral and spiritual degeneration, just as He hardened Pharaoh's heart after the wicked king had first five times hardened his own heart. We think now we have dealt with all the important passages relied on by the predestinarians. We think we have fought shy of none of them; if we have, it was an oversight; and we have tried to be fair, first to God's Word, then to all parties concerned.

It will be seen that we have not referred a great deal to either the Formula of Concord or the dogmaticians. We could not do so except in a thorough-going way, and that would carry us far beyond the proposed limits of this work. Besides, they are quoted on both sides by Lutheran theologians of great ability, who accept the entire Book of Concord confessionally. The matter of what the Confessions teach may well be left to such eminent theologians as Dr. Pieper, on the one side, and such stalwart and capable Lutherans as Drs. Stellhorn and Jacobs, on the other. The General Synod, of which the writer is a member, esteems very highly the Secondary Symbols, and has officially declared them to be "expositions of Lutheran doctrine of great historical and interpretative value" (see Minutes of 1909, pages 57, 60, and of 1913, page 126); yet she does not receive them in the confessional sense, as she does the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. Therefore we

are all the more willing to leave it to those who accept them confessionally to settle their meaning. Our main purpose in this thesis has been to discover and determine the teaching of God's inspired Word relative to the questions at issue.

Personally, we appreciate the Formula of Concord more than we can ever tell. We acknowledge our great indebtedness to it in helping us to a better understanding of more than one Biblical doctrine and more than one doctrine of our Lutheran system of faith. Having studied it not a little, we would modestly suggest a thorough reading of its illuminating chapters on "The Righteousness of Faith Before God," for there will be found the coordinating doctrine of Lutheran theology.

Some Additional Thoughts

We add here a few nuggets of thought that have come to our mind while this work has been passing through the press, and which therefore could not be inserted in their proper places:

All God's predeterminations must be governed by His foreknowledge, because if He should determine anything without perfect prescience of all possible exigencies, He might make a mistake, and so might meet with something for which He had not provided and which would balk His will; but since His foreknowledge is perfect, He is able to make provision for every possible contingency. This being so, He must have known by His inevitable foresight who would believe in Christ to the end, and could therefore elect them for eternal salvation, and so dispose every condition and circumstance that nothing but their own free will would prevent their salvation. This, we believe, is Paul's idea of the assurance and comfort of election.

The Missouri teaching confuses God's general and special decrees. By His general decree He provides salvation in Christ for all mankind, and freely offers it to all, while by His special decree He decides actually to bestow salvation upon those only who will freely accept the benefits offered. The

two decrees blend in an ethical harmony. A wealthy man might set aside a fund for the poor of his community; but he might very properly stipulate that he would give help only to those who would accept it.

A proper distinction should be made in the will of God. In some cases in Scripture it means His desire; in others His executed purpose. For example, when the Bible teaches that He wills that all men shall be saved (2 Pet. 3:9), it clearly means that His earnest desire is that all shall be saved. However, when it teaches that He wills to save those who will accept the proffered salvation, then His desire becomes an absolute purpose which He will surely execute. We are wont to use the word "will" in the same twofold way, sometimes to express only our desire, at other times to express our determined purpose. Here is where the true Lutheran view of individual election has its comfort and value – we know that God's purpose or will to save those who believe on Christ and persevere in their faith cannot be frustrated, no matter who or what assails them, for God has absolutely willed to keep them safe so long as they abide in Him. God's will of purpose can never be balked; His will of desire may be frustrated by the wrong choice of His moral agents, because He Himself has constituted them with such a power.

Anent Missouri's error that faith is a matter of merit, note this: She holds, with all other Lutherans, that men are justified solely through faith. Now if faith is a matter of merit, men must be justified on account of some merit of their own; which is the direct opposite of Paul's teaching and of all Lutheran theology.

When our Missouri brethren quote Rom. 9:18:

> "So then He hath mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardeneth,"

To prove that God elects by an inscrutable decree, we reply that the Bible teaches clearly on whom He wills to have mercy, namely, those who believe on Christ (John 3:16; Mark 16:16); also just as clearly whom He wills to

harden, namely, such wicked men like Pharaoh, of whom the Bible says five times he hardened his own heart before it says God hardened it.

Let it always be understood that true Lutheran theologians never teach that God elected anyone on account of faith, that is, because of any merit in faith, but solely on account of the merits of Christ appropriated by faith. Faith is not a cause of election; it is a condition of election.

While, as has been said, we refrain from using the word "conduct" in connection with the decree of election, we must confess that Luther himself was not so chary. After saying that the offer of the gospel is for all, he adds:

> "But what is the actual result? We are told afterward in the gospel, 'Few are chosen;' few so *conduct* themselves toward the gospel that God is well pleased with them; for some hear it and do not esteem it; some hear it, and do not hold fast to it, refusing to do or suffer anything for the sake of it. Some hear it, but pay more attention to money and goods and sensuous pleasures. But that does not please God, and He does not take pleasure in such people. That is what Christ calls not to be 'chosen,' namely, not to *conduct* oneself so that God could take pleasure in him."

Now note whom Luther designates as the elect:

> "But these are the elect, in whom God takes pleasure, who diligently hear the gospel, believe in Christ, prove their faith by their fruits, and suffer on account of it what Providence has ordained." No trouble about an inscrutable decree here. We fear Missouri cannot claim Luther.

The Missouri Lutherans may ask:

> "Why cannot men be satisfied merely with a mysterious divine decree unto individual salvation? Why will they question further?"

The reply is evident: Eternal salvation and eternal retribution are matters of the greatest and most vital personal concern to each individual. Men may

readily leave some things to God's unrevealed will, but not those matters that pertain to their everlasting weal or woe. What God determined in eternity should be the constitution of matter, whether it should be made up of atoms or electrons or vortices, or of one or sixty primary elements – that makes very little difference to any of us; it is merely a matter of scientific curiosity; but, ah! when a decree involves a person's eternal blessedness or suffering, then the heart desires a "sure word of prophecy," a clearly revealed purpose and plan. Thanks be to God He has not left us to grope our way in darkness here:

> "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;"
>
> "The wages of sin are death, but the gift of God is eternal life."

According to the Formula of Concord (which the Missouri Synod accepts confessionally), election is not to be relegated to the realm of mystery, for it says:

> "This (election) is not to be investigated in the secret counsel of God, but is to be sought in the Word of God, where it is also revealed" (Jacobs' edition, p. 525).

Also:

> "But the true judgment concerning predestination must be learned alone from the holy gospel concerning Christ, in which it is clearly testified that 'God hath concluded them all in unbelief that He might have mercy upon all/ and that 'He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance'" (p. 526).

Again:

> "In Him therefore we should seek the eternal election of the Father, who, in His eternal divine counsel, determined that He would save no one except those who acknowledge His Son, Christ, and truly believe on Him" (p. 527).

All of which is so plain we wonder anyone could have ever misunderstood it.

It has been objected that we have no right to read anything into the passage (Rom. 8:29):

> "For whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son," etc.

We are forbidden, so say electionists, to read it thus:

> "For whom He foreknew would have persevering faith in Christ."

Reply: You must supply something. If you do not read it as above indicated, you must read it thus:

> "For whom He foreknew that He would foreordain, them He foreordained to be conformed," etc.,

Which would be tantamount to saying:

> "Whom He foreordained them He foreordained;"

And that would make Paul a vapid writer. It would be like saying, "What I know I know," or, "What I see I see." If Paul meant by "foreknew" "foreordained," why did he not use the right word?

> "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

Then when God in eternity reviewed the multitude of sinners still without faith, how could any of them "please" Him so well that He elected them to eternal residence with Him, without foreseeing that they would exercise faith?

With their strange, mechanical and unpsychological ideas of free will, the Concordia dogmaticians cannot understand how one man can, by his own option, choose to let God save him, while another, also by his own option, rejects God's mercy. Hence they posit a mystery in God's eternal decree to explain the difference. With their mechanical and unethical views of faith, from which they excise every element of freedom, they do not see how one man can (though enabled by prevenient grace) freely and savingly believe on Christ, while another man, even though similarly called, refuses to believe. Hence again they go back to God's eternal counsel for the solution. Yet they declare that he is not "a good theologian" who seeks an explanation! And the strange thing is, they try to account for a psychological mystery by creating a theological one. Now the Bible simply takes the practical, common-sense view of man's psychical constitution, treats him as a moral and responsible agent, and offers him the great boon of salvation on the simple terms of repentance and faith. The ability to repent and believe He confers as soon as man, after his awakening, is willing to let God save him from his dire estate. Just so we who accept the plain and simple gospel preach to sinners to "come and take of the water of life freely," without troubling ourselves about the psychological mysteries involved; just as we see without bothering much about the mysteries of optics, and breathe without understanding all the mysteries of respiration, and eat without trying to figure out all the unsolved problems of digestion and assimilation.

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1. Originally quoted as "…there is no morning in them.↩
2. "What is the force of the words, 'who from eternity He foresaw?'" . . Secondly, that Predestination is not identical with foreknowledge; and, thirdly, that, speaking of course anthropomorphically, but nevertheless in accordance with Holy Scripture, and therefore with absolute truth, foreknowledge is not dependent upon predestination, but predestination upon foreknowledge" (Jacobs, *idem*, page 555).↩
3. In this respect Dr. Jacobs, in the work so often cited, follows the Pauline and Lutheran order. First he treats the whole order of redemption through Jesus Christ, then, at the close of his work, deals with the doctrine of the divine decrees.↩

10. Does The Bible Teach Separatism?

OUR PURELY DOCTRINAL DISCUSSION IS NOW FINISHED. BUT we have still more in view in the publication of this book. We want to see whether we cannot help along the cause of Lutheran fellowship, comity and cooperation. The Synodical Conference is separatistic. It will not fellowship with any other body of Lutherans, and that mainly because of its particularistic dogmas of election and conversion, which other Lutheran bodies cannot accept. The Missourians even refused to have public prayer with the brethren of Ohio and Iowa at the Free Conference at Detroit. To engage in public prayer with their brethren they thought would, in some way, compromise their principles. In our closing chapter we shall try to show that Lutherans can, if they will, have spiritual fellowship and engage in united practical work for Christ and His kingdom, without insisting on absolute agreement on all doctrines, especially those that belong to the department of difficult and refined dogmatic distinctions. However, before we come to our final chapter, we must try to remove a difficulty.

In order to uphold their ecclesiastical exclusiveness, our Missouri brethren cite a number of Scripture passages. They are given in Dr. J. L. Neve's account of the Free Conference of Missouri, Ohio and Iowa at Detroit in 1904, where the Missourians declined to engage in public prayer with their brethren. Dr. Neve has taken them from a writing of Rev. J. Grosse, a representative of the Missouri Synod. We shall examine them, to see whether they are relevant.

First, Matt. 7:15:

> "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."

However, the passage is not apropos, because the Ohio and Iowa brethren and the rest of us Lutherans are not "wolves in sheep's clothing," nor are we "inwardly ravening wolves." That applies only to the "corrupt trees," "to be hewn down and cast into the fire," and to those "that work iniquity," referred to in the succeeding verses. The passage is not relevant.

The next passage: Rom. 16:17:

> "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned: and turn away from them."

Here is another specimen of the disconnected use of Scripture which has caused so much separatism and strife in the Christian Church. If the Missouri brethren had read the next verse, they would have seen the kind of characters to whom Paul referred:

> "For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent."

Such grossness, selfishness and guile cannot be applied to the Lutherans whom our Missouri friends exclude from pulpit and altar fellowship. If the Missouri brethren had read the previous verses, they would have found Paul saying:

> "All the churches of Christ salute you."

It does not seem from this loving salutation that Paul wanted to build up a wall of separation among the churches of his day. But Rom. 16:17 (see above) might just as well be used by other Lutherans against the Missouri brethren:

> "Mark them that are causing divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and turn away from them."

Well might other Lutherans say, if they wished to do so, that it is Missouri that is "causing divisions and occasions of stumbling;" they are the ones who are separating themselves from others by their peculiar doctrines. They

might also say that it is Missouri that is teaching doctrines "contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned;" for, if we understand history, the Missouri Synod did not always teach this strange doctrine of predestination, but it was introduced later by Dr. Walter and his coadjutors. This is what made the trouble; this was why some excellent men now in the Ohio Synod could not remain with it; this is why men like Allwardt, Ernst, Doermann, Holtermann, and others were driven from the Missouri Synod and formed the Northwestern District, which united with the Joint Synod. So, you see, everything depends on who the persons are to whom the words of Paul can properly be applied. To our way of thinking, they cannot be applied to either party by the other. When Christian men, who believe the Bible, accept Christ by faith, and try to follow Him in sincerity and truth, get into a dispute, they ought not to fling Scripture passages that would apply only to heretics, rank liberalists and outright unbelievers and sinners. Misapplying Biblical passages of Scripture is the method of sectarians, not of true and loyal Christian Lutherans.

Another favorite passage of exclusivism is 1 Cor. 1:10:

> "Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

In this instance we again see the harm that is done to the body of Christ by the piecemeal method of handling the Word of God, as if it were composed of *disjecta membra*, instead of being a harmonious and organic unity. Read on a few verses and you will see the kind of strife and divisions in the Corinthian Church which Paul was rebuking: In verse 12 he tells them that he had been told that there were contentions among them; then he goes on:

> "Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Cephas; and I of Apollos; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?"

And then he proceeds to show the Corinthians that Christ and the gospel are the all-important matters, and not the mere human instruments through whom they are given and proclaimed. The simple fact is, the Corinthians were doing what churches so often do today – they were quarreling about

their preachers, thinking more of them than of Christ. This was what Paul was rebuking, not a difference of opinion on some such difficult doctrines as the eternal divine decrees or the relation of grace to human responsibility. Besides, the passage might just as easily be applied by other Lutherans to the Missouri brethren as the opposite, for they ought to try just as much as the rest of us to "be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment." One party in the controversy should not claim all these passages in their favor. They may be quoted by both parties with equal relevancy, if they are to be used at all.

Our next citation is 2 Cor. 6:17, 18:

> "Wherefore, come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Almighty."

No less inept is this selection. Even the passage itself would preclude its application to Missouri's fellow Lutherans, for it says, "Touch no unclean thing." Are other Lutherans to be regarded as an "unclean thing?" But the preceding verses define precisely the kind of people from whom the Corinthian Church was to "be separate" (verses 14-16):

> "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers."

Are the rest of us Lutherans "unbelievers?" If so, why are we spending our days and often our nights in fighting infidelity, rationalism and negative criticism? "For what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity?" We know that Missouri is too charitable to apply the term "iniquity" to the Lutherans from whom she differs. "Or what communion hath light with darkness?" Would Missouri class all Lutherans outside of her own ecclesiastical fold as "darkness?" "And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" Who is "Belial" in the present controversy? "Or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols?" The rest of us Lutherans surely are not idolaters. Thus you see that the above citation is not pertinent.

And this reminds us of an incident. Years ago we happened to go into a tent in which one of the rankest sects of the day was holding a meeting, one of the noisy, shouting kind. They were the so-called "holiness" people, such

as thought they were perfectly sanctified. How they did boast of their superior spiritual attainments! One of them declared that they had gotten so far "beyond all other so-called Christians that they couldn't see them any more with a spy-glass!" An expression that seemed to please and amuse the sanctificationists greatly. And we remember that one of their favorite Bible citations was this very one, "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." It was their *sedes doctrinae*. In our early ministry we were forced into more or less controversy with another fanatical sect called "Come-outers." This same passage was also their stock in trade.

Another much-used passage among Missouri Lutherans is Eph. 4:3-6:

> "Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Our Missouri brethren should try to obey this injunction, just as all of us should. "There is one body and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all."

Here is an urgent enjoinder upon all believers to be united, and we hope that all Lutherans, Missourian and the rest, will heed it. One party needs it just as much as the others. Instead of being an argument for separatism, it is the strongest kind of an argument for union and concord. We all have "one hope," namely, hope in the Lord Christ; "one Lord," the same Christ; "one faith," posited in the same Christ; "one baptism," for the remission of sins in the name of Christ; "one God and Father of us all." In His blessed name, then, why are we not all one body? If all Lutherans who are disposed to be divisive would read what Paul says in the verse preceding the above quotation, they would see how unity is to be conserved:

> "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;" (then,) "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

A good preachment, and needed by all parties.

The next citation is 1 Tim. 5:22:

> "Lay hands hastily on no man, neither be partaker of other man's sins; keep thyself pure."

Like the rest, this passage is not applicable. It refers to association with sinners in a sinful way, not with disciples who trust and love the Lord Jesus and try to follow Him in holiness of life. It is not likely that our good Missouri brethren would become contaminated by having fellowship with other Lutherans, for when it comes to purity of life, one branch of the Lutheran Church has no occasion for saying of the rest, "Lord, we thank thee that we are not as other men are."

We give still another sample of the fragmentary use of Scripture: Titus 3:10:

> "A factious man, after a first and second admonition, refuse."

First, it all depends on who is the factious man, whether he is the separatist or the one who is willing to fellowship. One might be permitted to think that the man who does not insist so much on his own views, but is willing to accord to others some liberty of opinion, would be the less factious, not to put it any stronger. But the passage is torn from its connection, and is therefore not pertinent to the situation; for the next verse, separated from the tenth by only a semicolon, reads:

> "knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned."

In the days of discussion at Watertown, Milwaukee and Detroit, we do not think that the Ohio and Iowa brethren were sinners above others, or that they were "self-condemned." All that we have ever spoken with, or whose writings we have perused, seemed to think that they had maintained their own position with a fair degree of success. But read the preceding verses, beginning with the 8th:

> "Faithful is the saying, and concerning these things I desire that thou affirm confidently, to the end that they who have believed God may be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto you; but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain."

Now how would Missouri like it if we were to apply these trenchant sayings to them and their disposition to divide the Church on questions that create schism? She would say we were quoting Scripture irrelevantly. So we will

not be so ungenerous, for she is in earnest, and does not believe the doctrines for which she is contending are "foolish questionings," etc. No more do we believe that the whole passage has any reference to other Lutherans who are just as sincere, intelligent and loyal.

The last passage cited by Mr. Grosse is Exod. 12:43-48:

> "And Jehovah said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the Passover: there shall not a foreigner eat thereof… And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to Jehovah, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: but no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be unto him that is home-born, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you."

It seems almost like legalism to go back to the old ceremonial law to find a proof text for exclusiveness among Lutherans, but we suppose the Missouri brethren would say that the same principle would apply to the Lord's Supper and other forms of Christian fellowship as applied to the Hebrew feast of the Passover. Let us go on that supposition. Would the Missourians say all the Lutherans who do not agree with them are *uncircumcised*? Well, then, we ought not to go to the Lord's Supper at all, not even in our own churches. Of course, we are speaking of the spiritual circumcision, for Paul says (Rom. 2:28, 29):

> "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

Now what is it to be circumcised in heart? Paul teaches it in his letter to the Romans, whose doctrinal portion, the first eleven chapters, is devoted to an exposition and defense of justification by faith alone. Therefore to have true faith in Christ is to have the circumcision of the heart. We maintain that all true Lutherans accept Christ by faith; therefore, being of the true spiritual circumcision, they have a right to the Lord's table. Luther's Catechisms, the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord teach the same doctrine. More than that, all true Lutherans believe that they receive Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist, and this gives them additional right to come to the blessed sacrament.

Thus we have seen that none of the Scripture passages quoted to uphold Lutheran separatism and division are relevant. A large number of passages, we believe, might be cited to prove that division and strife are wrong, and that mutual love, forbearance and concord are the desire of Jesus Christ. Those proof texts our friends of the Missouri camp never quote. Let us note a few: John 10:16:

> "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."

It would appear as if Christ said this expressly to prevent the disciples before Him from thinking that they were the only true sheep – that is, to preclude their becoming exclusive. Does one part of the Lutheran Church comprise all the sheep who hear the Good Shepherd's voice?

Luke 9:49, 50 (cf. Mark 9:38-40):

> "And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us. But Jesus said unto him. Forbid him not: for he that is not against you is for you."

Here John's narrowness, his sectarianism, was upbraided; for he seemed to think that the chief characteristic of a disciple was to "follow" in the immediate company of Christ and His apostles; but Jesus in rebuking him taught all of us that the chief thing is to be able to cast out devils in His name. We leave it to the judgment of every reader whether all the branches of the Lutheran Church in this country (Missouri included) have not been doing such work in baptizing children, teaching them afterward the way of salvation, and in bringing thousands of adult sinners to Christ.

Let us note some passages in Christ's intercessory prayer (John 17:20-23):

> "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou didst send me. And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovedst them, even as thou lovedst me."

In view of the fact that Christ has millions of Lutheran disciples in this country, we think the above prayer ought to be fulfilled among them; and if it were, what a power for Christ and His truth they would be! One of the crying criticisms of the Lutheran Church today is her manifold and mutually exclusive divisions.

In Matt. 23:8-12 our Lord says:

> "But be not called Rabbi; for one is your Teacher, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father on the earth; for one is your Father, even He who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters, for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted."

Will not all this apply to the Lutheran Church in America? We all acknowledge Christ, and Him alone, as our Master; then are we not all brethren?

There are a number of passages like 1 Tim. 1:4, 6:4, 2 Tim. 2:23 and Titus 3:9, which warn against "foolish and ignorant questionings that gender strife;" but by reading the entire context it will be seen that they cannot be applied either to our Missouri brethren or to those who differ from them, because the great doctrines in dispute, while they may be said, in a sense, to "gender strife," are not to be classed among the "foolish and unlearned questionings." Therefore we cannot make use of them on either side of the debate. However, we believe that such passages as the following are immediately applicable to the Lutheran situation in America. Rom. 12:4, 5:

> "For even as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another."

The whole of 1 Cor. 12 is extremely pertinent, especially verses 12 and 13:

> "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit." Rom. 15:5-7:

> "Now the God of patience and of comfort grant you to be of the same mind one with another according to Christ Jesus; that with one accord ye may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, even as Christ also received you, to the glory of God the Father."

An injunction like this cannot be set aside without virtually un-Christianizing those who are excluded; for we Lutherans all do with one mouth glorify God, giving Him and Him alone the praise for our salvation. 2 Cor. 13:11:

> "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfected; be comforted; be of the same mind; live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

Eph. 4:1-6 has already been quoted, but here we call attention to this:

> "Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Note Phil. 2:2-4:

> "Make full my joy that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; doing nothing through faction or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind, each counting other better than himself; not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others." This is most impressive, and should be well pondered. 1 Pet. 3:8:

> "Finally be ye all like-minded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tender-hearted, humble-minded."

Consider a few passages that enjoin peace among God's people:

> "So then let us follow after things that make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another" (Rom. 14:19).

While this refers specifically to the wrangles over meats offered to idols, it still may stand as a good general motto for the Church.

> "But we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their works' sake. Be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thess. 5:12, 13).

> "But flee youthful lusts, and follow after righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and ignorant questions refuse, knowing that they gender strife; and the Lord's servant must not strive, but be gentle toward all, apt to teach, forbearing," etc. (2 Tim. 2:22-26).

> "Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

> "If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18).

This is a capital passage, for while it does not ask of us impossibilities, and indicates that we must not be indifferent to the truth, it also shows clearly that we should let the idea of peace be a potent motive in our lives; that we should be just as irenic as it is possible for us to be; that we should love peace better than polemics.

> "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated," etc. (Jas. 3:17).

While purity is put first, peaceableness is put second. How often the apostles deprecated contentions, divisions and unnecessary disputes! In 1 Cor. 1:10, 11, 3:3, 11:18, and Rom. 16:17 Paul rebukes the factious spirit. Of course, all parties may apply these passages to their opponents, but that would not be fair; we should all conscientiously consider whether they will not apply to ourselves; perhaps, after all, some of us may have been more anxious to vindicate our views than to show forth the glory of God. The whole of Rom. 14 might well be read in this connection. Take a few verses (1-5):

> "But him that is weak in faith receive ye, yet not for decision of scruples (margin, to doubtful disputations). One man hath faith to eat all things; but he that is weak eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth set at naught him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth; for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? To his own lord he standeth or falleth… One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind."

Vs. 10-13:

> "But thou, why dost thou judge thy brother? or thou again, why dost thou set at naught thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God… So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more; but judge ye this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block in his brother's way, or an occasion of falling." Paul was here speaking about meats and drinks and ceremonial observances, but the general principle should be taken to heart by us Lutherans, to see whether we have not been more given to judging, criticizing and excluding than looking for the things that make for peace and good will.

Those who are interested in our Lutheran polemics will not need many Biblical citations on Christian love. They are scattered all through the New Testament, much more being said about love among brethren than about contending for the faith, even though that is very, very important. Note just a few leading passages to refresh our memories. John 15:12:

> "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you;" also 17:
>
> "These things I command you, that ye may love one another." Rom. 13:8:
>
> "Owe no man anything save to love one another; for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the whole law." 1 Pet. 2:17:
>
> "Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king." 1 Pet. 3:8: . . . "Loving as brethren, tender-hearted, humble-minded." 1 John 1:11:
>
> "For this is the message which ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;" 14:
>
> "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren;" 4:7:
>
> "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God;" 11:
>
> "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another;" 12:
>
> "No man hath beheld God at any time: if we love one another, God abideth in us, and His love is perfected in us." Here belongs the whole of 1 Cor. 13.

Look at Psalm 133:

> "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity… For there Jehovah commandeth the blessing, even life forevermore." Parallel passages, Gen. 13:8; Heb. 13:1.

We hope the foregoing will not be looked upon as sentimentality and preachment. It is meant for ourself as much as for our brethren. Well are we aware that love, which is an emotion, cannot decide the truth in matters of

doctrine, for that function belongs to the intellect; yet there can be no doubt that if the principle of love were always potent in the hearts of men, there would be much less disputation, and that which becomes absolutely necessary for the sake of truth, would be conducted in a much kindlier spirit than has marked many of the controversies of the Christian Church. This part of our discussion will be closed with several pregnant selections from 1 Cor. 13, according to the beautiful Old Version:

> "Charity suffereth long, and is kind;… is not easily provoked, thinketh no evill . . . And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; and the greatest of these is charity."

To clinch and finish the whole Biblical argument: since such Christian virtues as faith, hope, love, brotherly kindness, forbearance, unity and peace are enjoined so much more frequently in the Holy Scriptures than contending for doctrine, they ought to occupy a much higher place than they do in our Lutheran Church; they ought to make us more generous and less critical; they ought to make us more anxious to find common ground than grounds of difference; and in cases where discussion becomes absolutely necessary, they should pervade it all with their gentle and magnanimous spirit.

11. The Question Of Lutheran Unity

THIS BOOK HAS BEEN WRITTEN WITH TWO PRIMARY OBJECTS IN VIEW: First, to see if any new light might be shed on the doctrines in debate; second, to lead up to some humble, and we hope helpful, suggestions on the burning question of Lutheran unity.

It may be thought by some that, to engage first in a doctrinal discussion, is a poor way to promote Lutheran fellowship and cooperation. That objection, however, would not be well taken. We Lutherans are too much concerned for "the pure doctrine" (*die reine Lehre*), and rightly so, to imagine we can ever get together without a full and frank discussion of our doctrinal differences. To ignore what we hold to be the truth, and make compromises before we see a good and substantial basis for union, would be entirely foreign to the genius of the Lutheran Church. From a Lutheran viewpoint it would be premature and ill-advised. Such a plan may do for that doctrinally indeterminate and indifferent movement known as the "Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America," but it is not feasible for Lutherans. By the candid discussion of doctrine, as well as other vital matters, we hope the atmosphere will become more and more clarified, so that we may be brought to see eye to eye. At all events, a mechanical and forced union will not satisfy us Lutherans.

Still another motive impelled us to take up this discussion: we could not, in all good conscience, let Dr. Pieper's book go unchallenged, as if it were the only view that could be tolerated in the Lutheran Church. Suppose the whole Lutheran Church should, for the sake of union, or for any other reason or reasons, go over to that view, and should put it in a creed or platform; then suppose that by and by, after more thorough investigation of the Scriptures, that view should be found to be erroneous – what then? No; it is better not to try to force a union on these deep and difficult doctrines. In the present state of the discussion they should be left in the sphere of Lutheran

liberty for still further study. We already agree on all the vital doctrines, as we shall point out a little later, and so can afford to leave some recondite matters to individual judgment.

Our presentation shows, we think, that the truth is not all on one side; that much Scripture can be cited and many sound arguments adduced for the views of election that are held by most Lutherans outside of the Synodical Conference. This proves that it is useless to talk about Lutheran union solely on that body's conception of the doctrines of election and conversion. And why should our Missouri brethren insist upon their views as the only terms of union? Do not the rest of us have access to the Bible and the Confessions as well as they? We are sure that such insistence on Missouri's part will indefinitely postpone the day of Lutheran union. Is there not "a more excellent way?"

Take a survey of the situation: The Synodical Conference, the Iowa Synod, the General Council, the Joint Synod of Ohio, the Norwegian Synod, and the United Synod of the South, all accept confessionally the whole Book of Concord; and they do so sincerely. "What doth hinder" their being united? What do they separate on? Very largely on the doctrine of election and conversion. The Conference insists that her view is the only true and possible one. Her unmovable stand on these matters leads her to exclusiveness and isolation. Why this constant insistence on these refined theological distinctions? We believe that the Lutheran bodies named would be willing to allow Missouri to believe as she pleased on these doctrines, providing she would not make them the condition of fellowship and cooperation. Therefore we fear that the responsibility for the divided state of the bodies named lies largely at the door of the Synodical Conference. In view of all that can be said and has been said on the other side, is she willing longer to carry the burden of responsibility? If Christ wants all His disciples to be one, does He not want His millions of Lutheran disciples to be one?

And why should Lutherans be divided on particularistic views of the doctrines of election and conversion, so long as they all hold to justification by faith alone, *sola gratia* and *universalis gratia*? The mooted doctrines are profound and difficult. By their very nature they are so. Election goes back into eternity, and tries to work out the nature of the divine decrees. Is it right for poor, finite mortals to think that they can so define what God did before the foundation of the world as to exclude and un-Lutheranize other Christians who cannot see precisely as they do? The same is true of conversion.

All of us believe that men must be converted; that God alone can and must convert them; that they are saved purely by grace. All of us repudiate both Synergism and Pelagianism. Then what causes schism? Why, the attempt to determine that fine line where divine causality and human freedom meet – a line that no man, however incisive, can definitely mark out to the satisfaction of all others. Thus it will be seen that we are causing schism in the body of Christ by wrangling over questions that are too deep for us. From the time of Luther, Brenz, Chemnitz down to the present, the keenest Christian minds have been trying to figure out these profound doctrines; yet they could not in the past, and they cannot now, see alike. Think of the days that were spent by the Missourians and the anti-Missourians at the conferences at Watertown, Milwaukee and Detroit, in 1903-4, in contending over these mooted doctrines, with theological giants on both sides, and yet no agreement could be reached. Why continue to insist on a particularistic view? Must every question be a closed question before we can come together in the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace? Even some of the Missouri theologians have had shades of difference among themselves, yet they tolerated one another. Why not just slightly increase the boundaries of Lutheran toleration?

Let us see why it is neither right nor necessary to divide the Church on these theological subtleties. Both parties are equally sincere and earnest in accepting the Bible as the inspired Word of God. They would make common cause against rationalism and the negative criticism. Both parties are equally devoted to all the Symbolical Books; both quote them again and again to substantiate their different views. In reading Stellhorn, Jacobs and Pieper we have been much impressed with the fact that all of them quote from the same articles of the Formula. And again there is about equal scholarship on both sides. All you need to do is to note their lavish quotations from the Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German, and other languages, and their copious references to many matters that belong to the domain of scholarship, to be convinced that in the way of cultural training and skill they are protagonists worthy of one another's steel. Now, under these circumstances, can they not see that the doctrines about which they contend are of too abstruse and academic a character to be made the gravaman of division? Why not agree to differ as brethren of the same household of faith?

Note another matter – how labored and extended are the arguments that each side employs to uphold its views; how winding and intricate are the

logical processes, with more than one effort to hang an opponent on the horns of a dilemma; how much fine and scholarly exegesis must be used; how many quotations from the learned languages; pages upon pages of the finest distinctions, amounting in some cases almost to hair-splitting! Is it right, we repeat, for the dogmaticians to divide the Church, and keep her divided, on such difficult and erudite questions? If the Missourians should say that their theology is very simple; that they just accept the pure, plain Word of God; our reply is: Then why all this labored argument, all these scholastic terms, all these refined distinctions, in order to try to convince the other party? And still they have not convinced their opponents, who accept the Word of God with just as implicit faith as they – the Missourians – do. This very fact proves that these doctrines belong to the subtleties of dogmatics. We do not ask Missouri to give up her views, but simply not to make their acceptance by others the terms of fellowship and union. Cannot Missouri be as generous as the rest of us?

Another matter worth considering: So many people stumble over what is called *rabies theologicorum*, the anger of the theologians. Many good people think that the theologians are mostly to blame for our divisions. They cannot understand what all the controversy is about. We have heard more than one layman say that the Lutheran Church could be united but for the theological professors, who, they contend, are engaged in hair-splitting, in trying to make distinctions where there are no differences. Of course, they do not understand our sincere concern for the truth, nor can they always discern the sharp edge of dangerous heresy; just as, not long ago, a prominent university professor scoffed at the Nicene Council for "wasting weeks over the discussion of a word!" He was unable to see that the very heart of the Christian religion was then and there involved. However, we maintain that our Lutheran theologians should give as little occasion as possible for such criticism, and should be more anxious for unity than for particularistic views of doctrine that do not involve the foundations of the evangelical and Lutheran faith.

Anent the present discussion we are sure this criticism will be passed by many sincere and earnest people in the Lutheran Church: that while we Lutherans are spending our time and strength in controversy over the old and always divisive doctrines of election and conversion, some of the denominations are busy doing practical work, gathering people into their folds, and even stealing some of our sheep. Whether the criticism will be

just or not, let us reduce to the minimum the occasion for making it. Every time there is a quarrel in the Lutheran Church the proselyting sects rejoice and take advantage of it.

Do not think for a moment that we would want to shut off theological investigation and discussion. That would be inane. Whenever a Church gets to the point that it is indifferent to pure doctrine, gives up depth of thinking, and lightly regards thorough-going scholarship, it will soon become superficial and consequently decadent. Trees that root shallowly are not enduring. Reverent research and exchange of views will lead to still deeper understanding and appreciation of the vast mines of Biblical truth. However, polemics, accompanied by more or less stress of feeling, is not so apt to be judicial and unbiased. Therefore we believe that, if these divisive questions could be left to individual liberty, and were not placed in the list of essentials, they could be discussed with greater calmness, less heat of controversy, less concern for sectarian victory, and thus the truth itself would have freer course.

In the interest of Lutheran comity, we desire here to insert a remark, which we hope will prove helpful. On page 146 Dr. Pieper says:

> "To state the matter concretely, that part of the Lutheran Church which has hitherto taught that the converting and saving grace of God is governed by the correct or good conduct of man, and has in such conduct discovered the ground of explanation for the *discretio personarum*, must surrender that teaching without any reservation whatever. If this is not done, all unity between the parties to the controversy is specious."

This sounds very like an ultimatum. But we hope Dr. Pieper will not be too rigid and insistent. However, on this particular point he has much truth on his side. Therefore we would venture to suggest and advise some yielding on the part of some of the anti-Missourians. It certainly does seem to be a dangerous mode of expression to say that God has elected any man in view of "correct or good conduct," or that "good conduct" in any way prepares him for conversion. Whatever the parties who have used this mode of expression may have meant by it, every one can see, after a moment's attention, that it squints toward work-righteousness and human merit – a heresy that should be rigidly excluded from the Lutheran Church. So let us all agree to avoid and reject this "good conduct" method of expression, and also the thought that it connotes. It is different, however, when you say *electio intuitu fidei*, for, as we have shown, in faith there is no merit, and it

excludes all ideas of merit; and therefore the doctrine of *sola gratia* is sacredly preserved. Now, if the one party will give up the term "good conduct," could not Dr. Pieper and his synodical brethren join them in fellowship on the basis of justification by faith alone, salvation by grace alone, and the genuine offer of grace and salvation to all, with liberty on any peculiar view of election and conversion? Why not hoist the white flag and declare peace?

But there are some branches of the Lutheran Church that do not stand on quite the same confessional basis as the bodies previously named. We refer to the General Synod and some of the Scandinavian bodies. What is to be our share and position in the proposed plan for Lutheran unity? We should like to be included in the project. We ought not to be left out in the cold. We might help the good cause along. (Remember, just now we are thinking more of unity, fellowship and cooperation than of organic union). All of us accept, *ex animo*, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as our creed – *quia*, not *quatenus* – and Luther's Small Catechism as a book of instruction. Now, since all genuine Lutherans in this country accept the Augustana, would not that be the most satisfactory basis for Lutheran comity and cooperation? There all could stand. And, after all, the Augsburg Confession contains the seed and essence of the Lutheran faith, all concisely and lucidly set forth; the other Symbols are only the development of these seminal principles. Why would it not be feasible for all Lutherans to acknowledge all other Lutherans on that platform, and hold fellowship with them? We do not mean that the Concordia Lutherans should give up their confessional basis, nor, indeed, that any branch of the Lutheran Church should surrender her creed or her autonomy; but how excellent it would be if we could all work together amicably in fellowship and effort on the above basis! Should the time ever come when, by means of friendly discussion and negotiation, we could adjust our confessional differences, an organic union might then be effected, and all Lutherans could march abreast against the common foe under one flag.

You see, brethren, that the General Synod and the Scandinavian Synods, in accepting from the heart the Augsburg Confession, necessarily accept the true doctrine of justification by faith alone, which carries with it, pure and undefiled, the precious doctrine of salvation by grace alone. If our Missouri brethren could hear the teachers in our General Synod seminaries insisting on the doctrines of grace, and condemning all human merit and work-right-

eousness, they could not help feeling that we stand solidly on those great basal doctrines. The doctrine most insistently taught by every member of the Wittenberg theological faculty is that the merits of Christ are the sole ground of our salvation, and that those merits are apprehended and appropriated by faith alone. We are sure that all the General Synod seminaries teach the same kind of theology.

Just to venture a little further, hoping we will not be thought guilty of temerity, we think that something like the following might be seriously considered as a feasible platform for Lutheran unification in America: To hold and accept the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as our creed, and Luther's Small Catechism as our book of instruction; then to acknowledge the abiding historical, doctrinal, and spiritual value of the Secondary Symbols of the Book of Concord, and to maintain that a thorough mastery of their contents is necessary in order properly to understand and appreciate the Lutheran system of faith. This would give us a fixed and fundamental Lutheran creed on which all Lutherans could stand, and yet would place the development and theological refinements of the supplemental Confessions in the domain of liberty and free discussion. We believe, too, that this platform would not keep before the Church so many questions that gender division.

A supreme argument for Lutheran unity and cooperation in America is the wonderful doctrinal agreement that already exists among. See how we hold in common everything that is fundamental to purity of doctrine and development in life. There is not an ecclesiastical body in America that is such a compact doctrinal solidarity as is the Lutheran Church. Let us see how true this is.

First, all of us accept the whole Bible as the inspired Word of God. We know of only two men among us who are in the least tainted with the so-called "new" theology and the mutilating Biblical criticism, and they occupy no commanding theological positions in the Church. There is only one other branch of the Christian Church here in America that stands thus united on the Bible; for it is an outstanding fact that most of the denominations are infected, and some of them fairly honeycombed, with the negative higher criticism and the naturalistic views of religion. The Lutheran Church has evidently "come to the kingdom for such a time as this" – to save the Bible and the evangelical faith from the hands of critical vandalism. Oh, that we might cease to oppose one another! Oh, that we might mobilize our forces against the common foe!

A further bond of unity among us is our undivided allegiance to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. What a solid front that gives us! No need of further debate about our fundamental and generic creed. Nowhere else will you find such confessional unanimity.

Nor is that all: every Lutheran body in this country joins all other Lutherans in holding the other Symbols in the highest regard, even where they are not adopted officially in the credal sense. In view of so much unity among us, why should we not cease to fight among ourselves? Why not join hands and hearts in advancing the kingdom of God? Why set up altar against altar? We pray that we may all whet our swords, gird on the whole armor of God, unite our forces, and march in solid phalanx against the common foes of our religion. We believe such a sight would be pleasing to Him who said:

> "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren."

The sectary might raise a fine, technical point just here, namely: You have tried to show that the Missouri Synod has misconceived some parts of God's Word, and has put the Lutheran regulative doctrine in a subordinate place. Would not these facts logically make you exclusive toward Missouri? How can you still be willing to hold fellowship with her? Our reply is: First, by love. Love is "the greatest thing in the world" (1 Cor. 13:13). "Love suffereth long, and is kind… love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up… thinketh no evil… believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things; love never faileth."

Secondly, by logical consistency. We agree on all the fundamental matters, Missouri and the rest of us. We are equally sincere and earnest; with equal fervor we accept the whole Bible as the inspired Word of God; with no reservations we accept the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism; we hold the whole system of evangelical truth, including the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, the divine-human person of Christ, the vicarious atonement, etc.; no less heartily do all of us accept our distinctive Lutheran doctrines: justification by faith alone; salvation by grace alone; the universal offer of salvation; the *communicatio idiomatum* respecting the natures of Christ; the real presence of His body and blood in the Holy Supper; the Word and the sacraments as the means of grace; the regenerating efficacy of child baptism; private confession and ab-

solution (of course not in the sacerdotal sense); the universal priesthood of believers. And these are the essential doctrines. A particularistic view of election and conversion is not fundamental in the Lutheran Church, for from the start some of our best and most loyal theologians have held diverse opinions respecting them. The doctrines on which we agree are so much more numerous and vital than those about which we differ that we could easily fellowship with our Missouri brethren, without asking them to accept all our views respecting the matters at issue. This, we maintain, is a consistent position.

An objection may be sprung: All that has been said in favor of Lutheran union might also be said in favor of union with other branches of the Christian Church. The caveat, however, would not be well taken. First, we Lutherans are much nearer together doctrinally than we are with the denominations. Some of the doctrines that we hold most dear they repudiate. If you think they do not, just spring those doctrines in the presence of their theologians. It would be a long, long time before we could come to an agreement doctrinally with other communions; and perhaps it could never be accomplished, for we Lutherans could never consent to surrender or compromise our precious doctrines of the ubiquity of Christ's glorified human nature, of His real presence in the Holy Communion, of baptismal grace, nor could we subscribe to a platform of indifferentism toward these doctrines. Doctrinally, therefore, a general union is not feasible. Let us confine our attention to what is much more practicable, the possibility of Lutheran unity.

Then, the denominations differ so much from us in practice that union with them is out of the question. Perhaps most serious of all is the fact that, with one or two exceptions, the denominations are honey-combed with liberalizing tendencies in theology and with extremely loose ideas of the inspiration, authority and historicity of the Bible. These latitudinarian views are taught in many of their theological schools, and preached in many of their pulpits. Therefore anything like a real sympathetic union and fellowship with them under these circumstances is impossible. With us Lutherans in America it is different. We can say that we are a unit on the doctrine of the Bible. Here we ought to stand together and present a solid front to rationalism, negative criticism and liberalistic theology. Again we say, the Lutheran Church has "come to the kingdom for such a time as this."

Once more, and this time more of a plea than an argument. Lutherans ought to be willing to overlook some fault in one another. They ought not to be hypercritical. This is not a world of perfection. They should cultivate the charity that "thinketh no evil." As far as possible, they should put the best construction on one another's actions. There are some methods and practices in all branches of our Zion that are not quite to the liking of the other bodies. Most of us can even see things in our own ecclesiastical communions that we should like to see changed. But all of us must refrain from being too severe in our judgments. Nor should we insist on too rigid a discipline in other bodies. For example, to be perfectly frank, it has often puzzled us how saloon keepers and liquor-dealers could be tolerated in any Lutheran Church of America; but even here we are not ready to be too condemnatory in our judgment, for we cannot perhaps quite "put ourself in the place" of those who must put up with such men. If a General Synod minister were to go before a State legislature, or a committee of it, and advocate Sunday base-ball, we believe he would be called to account by the District Synod to which he belonged. We know of such a case in one branch of the Lutheran Church; yet the offender never received a word of synodical rebuke!

Just so other branches of the Lutheran Church should remember the peculiar situation in the General Synod with regard to certain matters – for instance, the lodge question and a little liberalism – that others think ought to call for strenuous discipline. In our branch of the Lutheran Church this gentle principle largely prevails:

> "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." True, this mild method may be abused; but it may also be transgressed.

For years the General Synod seems to have been the object of special criticism. Perhaps it has, in a way, turned out for our good. It has lead our theologians and ministers to examine Lutheran doctrine and practice more thoroughly, and thus make sure that they stood for the pure truth as our Church holds it. However, our critics have usually forgotten the peculiar make-up of the General Synod. Ours is the oldest General body of Lutherans in this country, unless the Joint Synod of Ohio should hold that place of honor. The General Synod was organized in 1820. From the start it used the

English language almost exclusively. From the start it was necessarily thrown into contact with the numerous Reformed Churches around it. The General Synod therefore, has not been able to build up her constituency as most of the other branches of the Lutheran Church in America have done – very largely out of immigrants from Lutheran countries beyond the sea and from the children of the Church. On the other hand, we have largely gone to the unconverted people of all classes around us, and have tried to win them from the power of Satan unto God, just as we should have done and just as all branches of the Lutheran Church should do. In this way we have gathered much spiritually unformed material into our churches; many of these recruits had no religious training whatever; others were brought up in the various denominations around us, but had lapsed into sin. Thus, while we have simply done our duty in bringing sinners from the world to Christ and into the Church, it has given us a heterogeneous constituency; and it takes time and unwearying patience to mold all this material into a homogeneous Lutheran unity. This is our peculiar situation in the General Synod, and has been all along. It will readily account for the fact that some of our congregations and ministers are not and have not been quite as perpendicular in their Lutheranism as they should have been. If the other Lutheran bodies had been started in the same way, and had set for themselves the same spiritual task, they would have had precisely the same problems to wrestle with, and would have suffered from the same embarrassment. While the General Synod has been struggling with her problems, and doing so in all sincerity and devotion, some of the other bodies, not troubled with the same questions, have looked on and have criticized us. For this we do not blame them, for members of the General Synod often did some fault-finding with others, too. But now that we are coming to know one another better, and to understand better the peculiar situation in each Lutheran body, we believe that the time has come for charitable judgment and sympathetic treatment.

The time has come when the whole Lutheran Church must do more home missionary work; when she must not be satisfied only with "gathering Lutherans" and nurturing the children of the Church (noble and paramount a work as this is); but when she must go out into "the highways and hedges, the lanes and the alleys," and bring in the unsaved of all classes and conditions. These people before conversion will not be Lutherans, and many of them will not have Lutheran antecedents; but they need Christ and the Church; and after they have been converted, they must be indoctrinated and

molded into good and true Lutherans. When some of our sister Lutheran bodies do this kind of work on a large scale, as the General Synod has done all along, they will have some of the difficult problems to deal with that have tested the General Synod's skill, patience and strength.

Let it be understood that the mission work which we urge must not be done by the so-called "revival" method. God forbid! It must be done according to our sober and solid Lutheran methods – quiet personal work on the part of pastors and people, careful catechization after conversion, and the true preaching of the law and the gospel. When the whole Lutheran Church of America enters this work with sacred earnestness and prayer, much of our controversy will be laid aside.

The General Synod has learned some valuable lessons through her long years of mission work among the unsaved and unchurched. She has learned, and that by not a little bitter experience, that the so-called "revival" system is not the best way to make good and substantial Christians and church members. She has also learned that the only proper way to bring up the children of the church, and as many other children as possible, is by careful instruction in the home, the Sunday-school and the catechetical class. Of course, many of our pastors were sound in their practices along this line from the beginning, but a good many others had to learn by experience and observation. The General Synod has learned, in addition to the foregoing, that even adults should not be received into the church in a promiscuous way, after they have confessed Christ in conversion, but that they, as well as children, should first pursue a course of careful indoctrination in the catechism under the pastor, before they are admitted into full membership. It has not been our fault that we did not know these things by mere intuition, nor has it been to their credit that some other branches of the Lutheran Church have not had to wrestle with these problems; the whole matter has been due to the peculiar conditions and environments here in this new land of America, where work along so many lines had to be experimental and tentative for a time.

Our task is done. No other feeling than that of love and admiration for our Concordia brethren has actuated us in this undertaking. We have been frank, perhaps a little polemical at times, but always friendly. Our hope and prayer have been that this presentation might accomplish this one object, if nothing more: to make it clear to all parties that no one should be too dogmatic regarding the doctrines in dispute, and especially should not make

them the cause of separation and exclusion. May even this humble effort help to make for Lutheran unity and good will! And may Christ reign in all our hearts and His Holy Spirit guide our Lutheran Zion into the ways of truth and peace!

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