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Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther
on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences
by Dr. Martin Luther, 1517

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DISPUTATION OF DOCTOR MARTIN LUTHER
ON THE POWER AND EFFICACY OF
INDULGENCES

OCTOBER 31, 1517

Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed at Wittenberg, under the presidency of the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and of Sacred Theology, and Lecturer in Ordinary on the same at that place. Wherefore he requests that those who are unable to be present and debate orally with us, may do so by letter.

In the Name our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said Poenitentiam agite, willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance, i.e., confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests.
3. Yet it means not inward repentance only; nay, there is no inward repentance which does not outwardly work divers mortifications of the flesh.
4. The penalty [of sin], therefore, continues so long as hatred of self continues; for this is the true inward repentance, and continues until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope does not intend to remit, and cannot remit any penalties other than those which he has imposed either by his own authority or by that of the Canons.
6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring that it has been remitted by God and by assenting to God's remission; though, to be sure, he may grant remission in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in such cases were despised, the guilt would remain entirely unforgiven.
7. God remits guilt to no one whom He does not, at the same time, humble in all things and bring into subjection to His vicar, the priest.
8. The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and, according to them, nothing should be imposed on the

dying.

9. Therefore the Holy Spirit in the pope is kind to us, because in his decrees he always makes exception of the article of death and of necessity.

10. Ignorant and wicked are the doings of those priests who, in the case of the dying, reserve canonical penances for purgatory.

11. This changing of the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory is quite evidently one of the tares that were sown while the bishops slept.

12. In former times the canonical penalties were imposed not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.

13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties; they are already dead to canonical rules, and have a right to be released from them.

14. The imperfect health [of soul], that is to say, the imperfect love, of the dying brings with it, of necessity, great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater is the fear.

15. This fear and horror is sufficient of itself alone (to say nothing of other things) to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near to the horror of despair.

16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ as do despair, almost-despair, and the assurance of safety.

17. With souls in purgatory it seems necessary that horror should grow less and love increase.

18. It seems unproved, either by reason or Scripture, that they are outside the state of merit, that is to say, of increasing love.

19. Again, it seems unproved that they, or at least that all of them, are certain or assured of their own blessedness, though we may be quite certain of it.

20. Therefore by "full remission of all penalties" the pope means not actually "of all," but only of those imposed by himself.

21. Therefore those preachers of indulgences are in error, who say that by the pope's indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved;

22. Whereas he remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according to the canons, they would have had to pay in this life.

23. If it is at all possible to grant to any one the remission of all penalties whatsoever, it is certain that this remission can be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to the very fewest.

24. It must needs be, therefore, that the greater part of the people are deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.

25. The power which the pope has, in a general way, over purgatory, is just like the power which any bishop or curate has, in a special way, within his own diocese or parish.

26. The pope does well when he grants remission to souls [in purgatory], not by the power of the keys (which he does not possess), but by way of intercession.

27. They preach man who say that so soon as the penny jingles into the money-box, the soul flies out [of purgatory].

28. It is certain that when the penny jingles into the money-box, gain and avarice can be increased, but the result of the intercession of the Church is in the power of God alone.

29. Who knows whether all the souls in purgatory wish to be bought out of it, as in the legend of Sts. Severinus and Paschal.

30. No one is sure that his own contrition is sincere; much less that he has attained full remission.

31. Rare as is the man that is truly penitent, so rare is also the man who truly buys indulgences, i.e., such men are most rare.

32. They will be condemned eternally, together with their teachers, who believe themselves sure of their salvation

because they have letters of pardon.

33. Men must be on their guard against those who say that the pope's pardons are that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to Him;

34. For these "graces of pardon" concern only the penalties of sacramental satisfaction, and these are appointed by man.

35. They preach no Christian doctrine who teach that contrition is not necessary in those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessionals.

36. Every truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without letters of pardon.

37. Every true Christian, whether living or dead, has part in all the blessings of Christ and the Church; and this is granted him by God, even without letters of pardon.

38. Nevertheless, the remission and participation [in the blessings of the Church] which are granted by the pope are in no way to be despised, for they are, as I have said, the declaration of divine remission.

39. It is most difficult, even for the very keenest theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the abundance of pardons and [the need of] true contrition.

40. True contrition seeks and loves penalties, but liberal pardons only relax penalties and cause them to be hated, or at least, furnish an occasion [for hating them].

41. Apostolic pardons are to be preached with caution, lest the people may falsely think them preferable to other good works of love.

42. Christians are to be taught that the pope does not intend the buying of pardons to be compared in any way to works of mercy.

43. Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better work than buying pardons;

44. Because love grows by works of love, and man becomes better; but by pardons man does not grow better, only more free from penalty.

45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a man in need, and passes him by, and gives [his money] for pardons, purchases not the indulgences of the pope, but the indignation of God.

46. Christians are to be taught that unless they have more than they need, they are bound to keep back what is necessary for their own families, and by no means to squander it on pardons.

47. Christians are to be taught that the buying of pardons is a matter of free will, and not of commandment.

48. Christians are to be taught that the pope, in granting pardons, needs, and therefore desires, their devout prayer for him more than the money they bring.

49. Christians are to be taught that the pope's pardons are useful, if they do not put their trust in them; but altogether harmful, if through them they lose their fear of God.

50. Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the pardon-preachers, he would rather that St. Peter's church should go to ashes, than that it should be built up with the skin, flesh and bones of his sheep.

51. Christians are to be taught that it would be the pope's wish, as it is his duty, to give of his own money to very many of those from whom certain hawkers of pardons cajole money, even though the church of St. Peter might have to be sold.

52. The assurance of salvation by letters of pardon is vain, even though the commissary, nay, even though the pope himself, were to stake his soul upon it.

53. They are enemies of Christ and of the pope, who bid the Word of God be altogether silent in some Churches, in order that pardons may be preached in others.

54. Injury is done the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or a longer time is spent on pardons than on this Word.

55. It must be the intention of the pope that if pardons, which are a very small thing, are celebrated with one bell, with single processions and ceremonies, then the Gospel, which is the very greatest thing, should be preached with a hundred bells, a hundred processions, a hundred ceremonies.

56. The "treasures of the Church," out of which the pope grants indulgences, are not sufficiently named or known among the people of Christ.

57. That they are not temporal treasures is certainly evident, for many of the vendors do not pour out such treasures so easily, but only gather them.

58. Nor are they the merits of Christ and the Saints, for even without the pope, these always work grace for the inner man, and the cross, death, and hell for the outward man.

59. St. Lawrence said that the treasures of the Church were the Church's poor, but he spoke according to the usage of the word in his own time.

60. Without rashness we say that the keys of the Church, given by Christ's merit, are that treasure;

61. For it is clear that for the remission of penalties and of reserved cases, the power of the pope is of itself sufficient.

62. The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God.

63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last.

64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last to be first.

65. Therefore the treasures of the Gospel are nets with which they formerly were wont to fish for men of riches.

66. The treasures of the indulgences are nets with which they now fish for the riches of men.

67. The indulgences which the preachers cry as the "greatest graces" are known to be truly such, in so far as they promote gain.

68. Yet they are in truth the very smallest graces compared with the grace of God and the piety of the Cross.

69. Bishops and curates are bound to admit the commissaries of apostolic pardons, with all reverence.

70. But still more are they bound to strain all their eyes and attend with all their ears, lest these men preach their own dreams instead of the commission of the pope.

71. He who speaks against the truth of apostolic pardons, let him be anathema and accursed!

72. But he who guards against the lust and license of the pardon-preachers, let him be blessed!

73. The pope justly thunders against those who, by any art, contrive the injury of the traffic in pardons.

74. But much more does he intend to thunder against those who use the pretext of pardons to contrive the injury of holy love and truth.

75. To think the papal pardons so great that they could absolve a man even if he had committed an impossible sin and violated the Mother of God--this is madness.

76. We say, on the contrary, that the papal pardons are not able to remove the very least of venial sins, so far as its guilt is concerned.

77. It is said that even St. Peter, if he were now Pope, could not bestow greater graces; this is blasphemy against St. Peter and against the pope.

78. We say, on the contrary, that even the present pope, and any pope at all, has greater graces at his disposal; to wit, the Gospel, powers, gifts of healing, etc., as it is written in I. Corinthians xii.

79. To say that the cross, emblazoned with the papal arms, which is set up [by the preachers of indulgences], is of equal worth with the Cross of Christ, is blasphemy.

80. The bishops, curates and theologians who allow such talk to be spread among the people, will have an account to render.

81. This unbridled preaching of pardons makes it no easy matter, even for learned men, to rescue the reverence due

to the pope from slander, or even from the shrewd questionings of the laity.

82. To wit:--"Why does not the pope empty purgatory, for the sake of holy love and of the dire need of the souls that are there, if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a Church? The former reasons would be most just; the latter is most trivial."

83. Again:--"Why are mortuary and anniversary masses for the dead continued, and why does he not return or permit the withdrawal of the endowments founded on their behalf, since it is wrong to pray for the redeemed?"

84. Again:--"What is this new piety of God and the pope, that for money they allow a man who is impious and their enemy to buy out of purgatory the pious soul of a friend of God, and do not rather, because of that pious and beloved soul's own need, free it for pure love's sake?"

85. Again:--"Why are the penitential canons long since in actual fact and through disuse abrogated and dead, now satisfied by the granting of indulgences, as though they were still alive and in force?"

86. Again:--"Why does not the pope, whose wealth is to-day greater than the riches of the richest, build just this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of poor believers?"

87. Again:--"What is it that the pope remits, and what participation does he grant to those who, by perfect contrition, have a right to full remission and participation?"

88. Again:--"What greater blessing could come to the Church than if the pope were to do a hundred times a day what he now does once, and bestow on every believer these remissions and participations?"

89. "Since the pope, by his pardons, seeks the salvation of souls rather than money, why does he suspend the indulgences and pardons granted heretofore, since these have equal efficacy?"

90. To repress these arguments and scruples of the laity by force alone, and not to resolve them by giving reasons, is to expose the Church and the pope to the ridicule of their enemies, and to make Christians unhappy.

91. If, therefore, pardons were preached according to the spirit and mind of the pope, all these doubts would be readily resolved; nay, they would not exist.

92. Away, then, with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Peace, peace," and there is no peace!

93. Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Cross, cross," and there is no cross!

94. Christians are to be exhorted that they be diligent in following Christ, their Head, through penalties, deaths, and hell;

95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven rather through many tribulations, than through the assurance of peace.

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CONCERNING CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

by Martin Luther

LETTER OF MARTIN LUTHER TO POPE LEO X.

Among those monstrous evils of this age with which I have now for three years been waging war, I am sometimes compelled to look to you and to call you to mind, most blessed father Leo. In truth, since you alone are everywhere considered as being the cause of my engaging in war, I cannot at any time fail to remember you; and although I have been compelled by the causeless raging of your impious flatterers against me to appeal

from your seat to a future council--fearless of the futile decrees of your predecessors Pius and Julius, who in their foolish tyranny prohibited such an action--yet I have never been so alienated in feeling from your Blessedness as not to have sought with all my might, in diligent prayer and crying to God, all the best gifts for you and for your see. But those who have hitherto endeavoured to terrify me with the majesty of your name and authority, I have begun quite to despise and triumph over. One thing I see remaining which I cannot despise, and this has been the reason of my writing anew to your Blessedness: namely, that I find that blame is cast on me, and that it is imputed to me as a great offence, that in my rashness I am judged to have spared not even your person.

Now, to confess the truth openly, I am conscious that, whenever I have had to mention your person, I have said nothing of you but what was honourable and good. If I had done otherwise, I could by no means have approved my own conduct, but should have supported with all my power the judgment of those men concerning me, nor would anything have pleased me better, than to recant such rashness and impiety. I have called you Daniel in Babylon; and every reader thoroughly knows with what distinguished zeal I defended your conspicuous innocence against Silvester, who tried to stain it. Indeed, the published opinion of so many great men and the repute of your blameless life are too widely famed and too much revered throughout the world to be assailable by any man, of however great name, or by any arts. I am not so foolish as to attack one whom everybody praises; nay, it has been and always will be my desire not to attack even those whom public repute disgraces. I am not delighted at the faults of any man, since I am very conscious myself of the great beam in my own eye, nor can I be the first to cast a stone at the adulteress.

I have indeed inveighed sharply against impious doctrines, and I have not been slack to censure my adversaries on account, not of their bad morals, but of their impiety. And for this I am so far from being sorry that I have brought my mind to despise the judgments of men and to persevere in this vehement zeal, according to the example of Christ, who, in His zeal, calls His adversaries a generation of vipers, blind, hypocrites, and children of the devil. Paul, too, charges the sorcerer with being a child of the devil, full of all subtlety and all malice; and defames certain persons as evil workers, dogs, and deceivers. In the opinion of those delicate-eared persons, nothing could be more bitter or intemperate than Paul's language. What can be more bitter than the words of the prophets? The ears of our generation have been made so delicate by the senseless multitude of flatterers that, as soon as we perceive that anything of ours is not approved of, we cry out that we are being bitterly assailed; and when we can repel the truth by no other pretence,

we escape by attributing bitterness, impatience, intemperance, to our adversaries. What would be the use of salt if it were not pungent, or of the edge of the sword if it did not slay? Accursed is the man who does the work of the Lord deceitfully.

Wherefore, most excellent Leo, I beseech you to accept my vindication, made in this letter, and to persuade yourself that I have never thought any evil concerning your person; further, that I am one who desires that eternal blessing may fall to your lot, and that I have no dispute with any man concerning morals, but only concerning the word of truth. In all other things I will yield to any one, but I neither can nor will forsake and deny the word. He who thinks otherwise of me, or has taken in my words in another sense, does not think rightly, and has not taken in the truth.

Your see, however, which is called the Court of Rome, and which neither you nor any man can deny to be more corrupt than any Babylon or Sodom, and quite, as I believe, of a lost, desperate, and hopeless impiety, this I have verily abominated, and have felt indignant that the people of Christ should be cheated under your name and the pretext of the Church of Rome; and so I have resisted, and will resist, as long as the spirit of faith shall live in me. Not that I am striving after impossibilities, or hoping that by my labours alone, against the furious opposition of so many flatterers, any good can be done in that most disordered Babylon; but that I feel myself a debtor to my brethren, and am bound to take thought for them, that fewer of them may be ruined, or that their ruin may be less complete, by the plagues of Rome. For many years now, nothing else has overflowed from Rome into the world--as you are not ignorant--than the laying waste of goods, of bodies, and of souls, and the worst examples of all the worst things. These things are clearer than the light to all men; and the Church of Rome, formerly the most holy of all Churches, has become the most lawless den of thieves, the most shameless of all brothels, the very kingdom of sin, death, and hell; so that not even antichrist, if he were to come, could devise any addition to its wickedness.

Meanwhile you, Leo, are sitting like a lamb in the midst of wolves, like Daniel in the midst of lions, and, with Ezekiel, you dwell among scorpions. What opposition can you alone make to these monstrous evils? Take to yourself three or four of the most learned and best of the cardinals. What are these among so many? You would all perish by poison before you could undertake to decide on a remedy. It is all over with the Court of Rome; the wrath of God has come upon her to the uttermost. She hates councils; she dreads to be reformed; she cannot restrain the madness of her impiety; she fills up the sentence passed on her mother, of whom it is said, "We would have healed Babylon, but she is not

healed; let us forsake her." It had been your duty and that of your cardinals to apply a remedy to these evils, but this gout laughs at the physician's hand, and the chariot does not obey the reins. Under the influence of these feelings, I have always grieved that you, most excellent Leo, who were worthy of a better age, have been made pontiff in this. For the Roman Court is not worthy of you and those like you, but of Satan himself, who in truth is more the ruler in that Babylon than you are.

Oh, would that, having laid aside that glory which your most abandoned enemies declare to be yours, you were living rather in the office of a private priest or on your paternal inheritance! In that glory none are worthy to glory, except the race of Iscariot, the children of perdition. For what happens in your court, Leo, except that, the more wicked and execrable any man is, the more prosperously he can use your name and authority for the ruin of the property and souls of men, for the multiplication of crimes, for the oppression of faith and truth and of the whole Church of God? Oh, Leo! in reality most unfortunate, and sitting on a most perilous throne, I tell you the truth, because I wish you well; for if Bernard felt compassion for his Anastasius at a time when the Roman see, though even then most corrupt, was as yet ruling with better hope than now, why should not we lament, to whom so much further corruption and ruin has been added in three hundred years?

Is it not true that there is nothing under the vast heavens more corrupt, more pestilential, more hateful, than the Court of Rome? She incomparably surpasses the impiety of the Turks, so that in very truth she, who was formerly the gate of heaven, is now a sort of open mouth of hell, and such a mouth as, under the urgent wrath of God, cannot be blocked up; one course alone being left to us wretched men: to call back and save some few, if we can, from that Roman gulf.

Behold, Leo, my father, with what purpose and on what principle it is that I have stormed against that seat of pestilence. I am so far from having felt any rage against your person that I even hoped to gain favour with you and to aid you in your welfare by striking actively and vigorously at that your prison, nay, your hell. For whatever the efforts of all minds can contrive against the confusion of that impious Court will be advantageous to you and to your welfare, and to many others with you. Those who do harm to her are doing your office; those who in every way abhor her are glorifying Christ; in short, those are Christians who are not Romans.

But, to say yet more, even this never entered my heart: to inveigh against the Court of Rome or to dispute at all about her. For, seeing all remedies for her health to be desperate, I looked on her with

contempt, and, giving her a bill of divorcement, said to her, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still," giving myself up to the peaceful and quiet study of sacred literature, that by this I might be of use to the brethren living about me.

While I was making some advance in these studies, Satan opened his eyes and goaded on his servant John Eccius, that notorious adversary of Christ, by the unchecked lust for fame, to drag me unexpectedly into the arena, trying to catch me in one little word concerning the primacy of the Church of Rome, which had fallen from me in passing. That boastful Thraso, foaming and gnashing his teeth, proclaimed that he would dare all things for the glory of God and for the honour of the holy apostolic seat; and, being puffed up respecting your power, which he was about to misuse, he looked forward with all certainty to victory; seeking to promote, not so much the primacy of Peter, as his own pre-eminence among the theologians of this age; for he thought it would contribute in no slight degree to this, if he were to lead Luther in triumph. The result having proved unfortunate for the sophist, an incredible rage torments him; for he feels that whatever discredit to Rome has arisen through me has been caused by the fault of himself alone.

Suffer me, I pray you, most excellent Leo, both to plead my own cause, and to accuse your true enemies. I believe it is known to you in what way Cardinal Cajetan, your imprudent and unfortunate, nay unfaithful, legate, acted towards me. When, on account of my reverence for your name, I had placed myself and all that was mine in his hands, he did not so act as to establish peace, which he could easily have established by one little word, since I at that time promised to be silent and to make an end of my case, if he would command my adversaries to do the same. But that man of pride, not content with this agreement, began to justify my adversaries, to give them free licence, and to order me to recant, a thing which was certainly not in his commission. Thus indeed, when the case was in the best position, it came through his vexatious tyranny into a much worse one. Therefore whatever has followed upon this is the fault not of Luther, but entirely of Cajetan, since he did not suffer me to be silent and remain quiet, which at that time I was entreating for with all my might. What more was it my duty to do?

Next came Charles Miltitz, also a nuncio from your Blessedness. He, though he went up and down with much and varied exertion, and omitted nothing which could tend to restore the position of the cause thrown into confusion by the rashness and pride of Cajetan, had difficulty, even with the help of that very illustrious prince the Elector Frederick, in at last bringing about more than one familiar conference with me. In these I again yielded to your great name, and was prepared

to keep silence, and to accept as my judge either the Archbishop of Treves, or the Bishop of Naumburg; and thus it was done and concluded. While this was being done with good hope of success, lo! that other and greater enemy of yours, Eccius, rushed in with his Leipsic disputation, which he had undertaken against Carlstadt, and, having taken up a new question concerning the primacy of the Pope, turned his arms unexpectedly against me, and completely overthrew the plan for peace. Meanwhile Charles Miltitz was waiting, disputations were held, judges were being chosen, but no decision was arrived at. And no wonder! for by the falsehoods, pretences, and arts of Eccius the whole business was brought into such thorough disorder, confusion, and festering soreness, that, whichever way the sentence might lean, a greater conflagration was sure to arise; for he was seeking, not after truth, but after his own credit. In this case too I omitted nothing which it was right that I should do.

I confess that on this occasion no small part of the corruptions of Rome came to light; but, if there was any offence in this, it was the fault of Eccius, who, in taking on him a burden beyond his strength, and in furiously aiming at credit for himself, unveiled to the whole world the disgrace of Rome.

Here is that enemy of yours, Leo, or rather of your Court; by his example alone we may learn that an enemy is not more baneful than a flatterer. For what did he bring about by his flattery, except evils which no king could have brought about? At this day the name of the Court of Rome stinks in the nostrils of the world, the papal authority is growing weak, and its notorious ignorance is evil spoken of. We should hear none of these things, if Eccius had not disturbed the plans of Miltitz and myself for peace. He feels this clearly enough himself in the indignation he shows, too late and in vain, against the publication of my books. He ought to have reflected on this at the time when he was all mad for renown, and was seeking in your cause nothing but his own objects, and that with the greatest peril to you. The foolish man hoped that, from fear of your name, I should yield and keep silence; for I do not think he presumed on his talents and learning. Now, when he sees that I am very confident and speak aloud, he repents too late of his rashness, and sees--if indeed he does see it--that there is One in heaven who resists the proud, and humbles the presumptuous.

Since then we were bringing about by this disputation nothing but the greater confusion of the cause of Rome, Charles Miltitz for the third time addressed the Fathers of the Order, assembled in chapter, and sought their advice for the settlement of the case, as being now in a most troubled and perilous state. Since, by the favour of God, there was no hope of proceeding against me by force, some of the more noted of

their number were sent to me, and begged me at least to show respect to your person and to vindicate in a humble letter both your innocence and my own. They said that the affair was not as yet in a position of extreme hopelessness, if Leo X., in his inborn kindness, would put his hand to it. On this I, who have always offered and wished for peace, in order that I might devote myself to calmer and more useful pursuits, and who for this very purpose have acted with so much spirit and vehemence, in order to put down by the strength and impetuosity of my words, as well as of my feelings, men whom I saw to be very far from equal to myself--I, I say, not only gladly yielded, but even accepted it with joy and gratitude, as the greatest kindness and benefit, if you should think it right to satisfy my hopes.

Thus I come, most blessed Father, and in all abasement beseech you to put to your hand, if it is possible, and impose a curb to those flatterers who are enemies of peace, while they pretend peace. But there is no reason, most blessed Father, why any one should assume that I am to utter a recantation, unless he prefers to involve the case in still greater confusion. Moreover, I cannot bear with laws for the interpretation of the word of God, since the word of God, which teaches liberty in all other things, ought not to be bound. Saving these two things, there is nothing which I am not able, and most heartily willing, to do or to suffer. I hate contention; I will challenge no one; in return I wish not to be challenged; but, being challenged, I will not be dumb in the cause of Christ my Master. For your Blessedness will be able by one short and easy word to call these controversies before you and suppress them, and to impose silence and peace on both sides--a word which I have ever longed to hear.

Therefore, Leo, my Father, beware of listening to those sirens who make you out to be not simply a man, but partly a god, so that you can command and require whatever you will. It will not happen so, nor will you prevail. You are the servant of servants, and more than any other man, in a most pitiable and perilous position. Let not those men deceive you who pretend that you are lord of the world; who will not allow any one to be a Christian without your authority; who babble of your having power over heaven, hell, and purgatory. These men are your enemies and are seeking your soul to destroy it, as Isaiah says, "My people, they that call thee blessed are themselves deceiving thee." They are in error who raise you above councils and the universal Church; they are in error who attribute to you alone the right of interpreting Scripture. All these men are seeking to set up their own impieties in the Church under your name, and alas! Satan has gained much through them in the time of your predecessors.

In brief, trust not in any who exalt you, but in those who humiliate

you. For this is the judgment of God: "He hath cast down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble." See how unlike Christ was to His successors, though all will have it that they are His vicars. I fear that in truth very many of them have been in too serious a sense His vicars, for a vicar represents a prince who is absent. Now if a pontiff rules while Christ is absent and does not dwell in his heart, what else is he but a vicar of Christ? And then what is that Church but a multitude without Christ? What indeed is such a vicar but antichrist and an idol? How much more rightly did the Apostles speak, who call themselves servants of a present Christ, not the vicars of an absent one!

Perhaps I am shamelessly bold in seeming to teach so great a head, by whom all men ought to be taught, and from whom, as those plagues of yours boast, the thrones of judges receive their sentence; but I imitate St. Bernard in his book concerning Considerations addressed to Eugenius, a book which ought to be known by heart by every pontiff. I do this, not from any desire to teach, but as a duty, from that simple and faithful solicitude which teaches us to be anxious for all that is safe for our neighbours, and does not allow considerations of worthiness or unworthiness to be entertained, being intent only on the dangers or advantage of others. For since I know that your Blessedness is driven and tossed by the waves at Rome, so that the depths of the sea press on you with infinite perils, and that you are labouring under such a condition of misery that you need even the least help from any the least brother, I do not seem to myself to be acting unsuitably if I forget your majesty till I shall have fulfilled the office of charity. I will not flatter in so serious and perilous a matter; and if in this you do not see that I am your friend and most thoroughly your subject, there is One to see and judge.

In fine, that I may not approach you empty-handed, blessed Father, I bring with me this little treatise, published under your name, as a good omen of the establishment of peace and of good hope. By this you may perceive in what pursuits I should prefer and be able to occupy myself to more profit, if I were allowed, or had been hitherto allowed, by your impious flatterers. It is a small matter, if you look to its exterior, but, unless I mistake, it is a summary of the Christian life put together in small compass, if you apprehend its meaning. I, in my poverty, have no other present to make you, nor do you need anything else than to be enriched by a spiritual gift. I commend myself to your Paternity and Blessedness, whom may the Lord Jesus preserve for ever. Amen.

Wittenberg, 6th September, 1520.

CONCERNING CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

Christian faith has appeared to many an easy thing; nay, not a few even reckon it among the social virtues, as it were; and this they do because they have not made proof of it experimentally, and have never tasted of what efficacy it is. For it is not possible for any man to write well about it, or to understand well what is rightly written, who has not at some time tasted of its spirit, under the pressure of tribulation; while he who has tasted of it, even to a very small extent, can never write, speak, think, or hear about it sufficiently. For it is a living fountain, springing up into eternal life, as Christ calls it in John iv.

Now, though I cannot boast of my abundance, and though I know how poorly I am furnished, yet I hope that, after having been vexed by various temptations, I have attained some little drop of faith, and that I can speak of this matter, if not with more elegance, certainly with more solidity, than those literal and too subtle disputants who have hitherto discoursed upon it without understanding their own words. That I may open then an easier way for the ignorant--for these alone I am trying to serve--I first lay down these two propositions, concerning spiritual liberty and servitude:--

A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one.

Although these statements appear contradictory, yet, when they are found to agree together, they will make excellently for my purpose. They are both the statements of Paul himself, who says, "Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all" (1 Cor. ix. 19), and "Owe no man anything, but to love one another" (Rom. xiii. 8). Now love is by its own nature dutiful and obedient to the beloved object. Thus even Christ, though Lord of all things, was yet made of a woman; made under the law; at once free and a servant; at once in the form of God and in the form of a servant.

Let us examine the subject on a deeper and less simple principle. Man is composed of a twofold nature, a spiritual and a bodily. As regards the spiritual nature, which they name the soul, he is called the spiritual, inward, new man; as regards the bodily nature, which they name the flesh, he is called the fleshly, outward, old man. The Apostle speaks of this: "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. iv. 16). The result of this diversity is that in the

Scriptures opposing statements are made concerning the same man, the fact being that in the same man these two men are opposed to one another; the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh (Gal. v. 17).

We first approach the subject of the inward man, that we may see by what means a man becomes justified, free, and a true Christian; that is, a spiritual, new, and inward man. It is certain that absolutely none among outward things, under whatever name they may be reckoned, has any influence in producing Christian righteousness or liberty, nor, on the other hand, unrighteousness or slavery. This can be shown by an easy argument.

What can it profit the soul that the body should be in good condition, free, and full of life; that it should eat, drink, and act according to its pleasure; when even the most impious slaves of every kind of vice are prosperous in these matters? Again, what harm can ill-health, bondage, hunger, thirst, or any other outward evil, do to the soul, when even the most pious of men and the freest in the purity of their conscience, are harassed by these things? Neither of these states of things has to do with the liberty or the slavery of the soul.

And so it will profit nothing that the body should be adorned with sacred vestments, or dwell in holy places, or be occupied in sacred offices, or pray, fast, and abstain from certain meats, or do whatever works can be done through the body and in the body. Something widely different will be necessary for the justification and liberty of the soul, since the things I have spoken of can be done by any impious person, and only hypocrites are produced by devotion to these things. On the other hand, it will not at all injure the soul that the body should be clothed in profane raiment, should dwell in profane places, should eat and drink in the ordinary fashion, should not pray aloud, and should leave undone all the things above mentioned, which may be done by hypocrites.

And, to cast everything aside, even speculation, meditations, and whatever things can be performed by the exertions of the soul itself, are of no profit. One thing, and one alone, is necessary for life, justification, and Christian liberty; and that is the most holy word of God, the Gospel of Christ, as He says, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me shall not die eternally" (John xi. 25), and also, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John viii. 36), and, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. iv. 4).

Let us therefore hold it for certain and firmly established that the

soul can do without everything except the word of God, without which none at all of its wants are provided for. But, having the word, it is rich and wants for nothing, since that is the word of life, of truth, of light, of peace, of justification, of salvation, of joy, of liberty, of wisdom, of virtue, of grace, of glory, and of every good thing. It is on this account that the prophet in a whole Psalm (Psalm cxix.), and in many other places, sighs for and calls upon the word of God with so many groanings and words.

Again, there is no more cruel stroke of the wrath of God than when He sends a famine of hearing His words (Amos viii. 11), just as there is no greater favour from Him than the sending forth of His word, as it is said, "He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions" (Psalm cvii. 20). Christ was sent for no other office than that of the word; and the order of Apostles, that of bishops, and that of the whole body of the clergy, have been called and instituted for no object but the ministry of the word.

But you will ask, What is this word, and by what means is it to be used, since there are so many words of God? I answer, The Apostle Paul (Rom. i.) explains what it is, namely the Gospel of God, concerning His Son, incarnate, suffering, risen, and glorified, through the Spirit, the Sanctifier. To preach Christ is to feed the soul, to justify it, to set it free, and to save it, if it believes the preaching. For faith alone and the efficacious use of the word of God, bring salvation. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. x. 9); and again, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. x. 4), and "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. i. 17). For the word of God cannot be received and honoured by any works, but by faith alone. Hence it is clear that as the soul needs the word alone for life and justification, so it is justified by faith alone, and not by any works. For if it could be justified by any other means, it would have no need of the word, nor consequently of faith.

But this faith cannot consist at all with works; that is, if you imagine that you can be justified by those works, whatever they are, along with it. For this would be to halt between two opinions, to worship Baal, and to kiss the hand to him, which is a very great iniquity, as Job says. Therefore, when you begin to believe, you learn at the same time that all that is in you is utterly guilty, sinful, and damnable, according to that saying, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. iii. 23), and also: "There is none righteous, no, not one; they are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. iii. 10-12). When you have

learnt this, you will know that Christ is necessary for you, since He has suffered and risen again for you, that, believing on Him, you might by this faith become another man, all your sins being remitted, and you being justified by the merits of another, namely of Christ alone.

Since then this faith can reign only in the inward man, as it is said, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. x. 10); and since it alone justifies, it is evident that by no outward work or labour can the inward man be at all justified, made free, and saved; and that no works whatever have any relation to him. And so, on the other hand, it is solely by impiety and incredulity of heart that he becomes guilty and a slave of sin, deserving condemnation, not by any outward sin or work. Therefore the first care of every Christian ought to be to lay aside all reliance on works, and strengthen his faith alone more and more, and by it grow in the knowledge, not of works, but of Christ Jesus, who has suffered and risen again for him, as Peter teaches (1 Peter v.) when he makes no other work to be a Christian one. Thus Christ, when the Jews asked Him what they should do that they might work the works of God, rejected the multitude of works, with which He saw that they were puffed up, and commanded them one thing only, saying, "This is the work of God: that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent, for Him hath God the Father sealed" (John vi. 27, 29).

Hence a right faith in Christ is an incomparable treasure, carrying with it universal salvation and preserving from all evil, as it is said, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark xvi. 16). Isaiah, looking to this treasure, predicted, "The consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord God of hosts shall make a consumption, even determined (verbum abbreviatum et consummans), in the midst of the land" (Isa. x. 22, 23). As if he said, "Faith, which is the brief and complete fulfilling of the law, will fill those who believe with such righteousness that they will need nothing else for justification." Thus, too, Paul says, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. x. 10).

But you ask how it can be the fact that faith alone justifies, and affords without works so great a treasure of good things, when so many works, ceremonies, and laws are prescribed to us in the Scriptures? I answer, Before all things bear in mind what I have said: that faith alone without works justifies, sets free, and saves, as I shall show more clearly below.

Meanwhile it is to be noted that the whole Scripture of God is divided into two parts: precepts and promises. The precepts certainly teach us what is good, but what they teach is not forthwith done. For they show

MILESTONES OF THOUGHT

Erasmus - Luther
DISCOURSE ON
FREE WILL

Translated and edited by

ERNST F. WINTER

Iona College



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abroad, as you wrote yourself in your *Paraclesis*¹⁴ with much more wisdom than now. Those who are unwilling for souls to be redeemed, like the Pope and his adherents, let it be left to them to bind the word of God and keep men from life and the kingdom of heaven. . . . [630] With the same prudence you advise that wrong decisions made in councils should not be openly acknowledged, lest ground for denying the authority of the fathers be thus afforded. This is indeed just what the Pope wanted you to say! And he hears it with greater pleasure than the Gospel itself. He will be most ungrateful, if he does not honor you in return with a cardinal's cap, together with all the revenues belonging to it . . . I must tell you again: men's ordinances cannot be observed together with the word of God, because the former bind consciences and the latter looses them. . . . The authority of the Fathers is therefore nothing . . . for Christ is a higher authority.

Spontaneity of Necessitated Acts

[632] You say: Who will endeavor to reform his life? I answer: Nobody! No man can! God has no time for your self-reformers, for they are hypocrites. The elect who fear God will be reformed by the Holy Spirit. The rest will perish unreformed. Note how Augustine does not say that the works of none or of all are crowned, but that the works of some are. "Therefore there will be some who reform their lives."

You say, by our doctrine a floodgate of iniquity is opened. Be it so. Ungodly men are part of that evil leprosy spoken of before. Nevertheless, these are the same doctrines which throw open to the elect, who fear God, a gateway to righteousness, an entrance into heaven, a way unto God . . . These truths are published for the sake of the elect, that they may be humbled and brought down to nothing and so

¹⁴ A book published in 1516 in which Erasmus pleads for the study of Christian philosophy.

be saved. The rest resist this humiliation. They condemn the teaching of self-desperation. They wish to have left a little something that they may do themselves. Secretly they continue proud, and enemies of the grace of God.

. . . [634] . . . As to the other paradox you mention, that whatever is done by us, is not done by free will, but of mere necessity, let us briefly consider it, lest we should let such a pernicious remark go unchallenged. I observe: if it be proved that our salvation is not of our own strength or counsel, but depends on the working of God alone (which I hope I shall clearly prove later in the main discussion), does it not evidently follow that when God is not present to work in us, everything we do is evil, and that we of necessity act in a way not availing unto our salvation? For if it is not we ourselves, but God only, who works salvation in us, it follows that nothing we do before His working in us avails unto salvation. By necessity I do not mean compulsion. I meant what they term the necessity of immutability. That is to say, a man void of the Spirit of God does not do evil against his will, under pressure, as though taken by the neck and forced into it, . . . but he does it spontaneously and willingly. And this willingness and desire of doing evil he cannot, by his own strength, eliminate, restrain or change. He goes on still desiring and craving to do evil. And if external pressure compels him to act outwardly to the contrary, yet the will within remains averse and chafes under such constraint. But it would not thus rise in indignation, if it were changed, and made willing to yield to a constraining power. This is what we mean by the necessity of immutability: that the will cannot change itself, nor give itself another bent, but, rather, the more it is resisted, the more it is irritated to crave, as its indignation proves. This would not be the case if it were free or had a free will. . . .

. . . [635] On the other hand, when God works in us, the will is changed under the sweet influence of the Spirit of God. It desires and acts not from compulsion, but responsively of its own desire and inclination. It cannot be

altered by any opposition. It cannot be compelled or overcome even by the gates of hell. It still goes on to desire, crave after and love that which is good, just as once it desired, craved after and loved evil . . . Thus the human will is like a beast of burden. If God rides it, it wills and goes whence God wills; as the Psalm says, "I was as a beast of burden before thee" (Psalm 72,22). If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run, nor which it will seek. But the riders themselves contend who shall have and hold it.

Grace and Free Will

. . . [636] And now, what if I prove from your own words, in which you assert the freedom of the will, that there is no such thing as free will at all? What, if I should show that you unwittingly deny what you labor with so much sagacity to affirm? If I fail here, I promise to revoke all that I wrote against you in this book; and all that your Diatribe advances against me shall be confirmed!

You make the power of free will small and utterly ineffective apart from the grace of God.¹⁵ Acknowledged? Now then, I ask you: If God's grace is wanting, or if it be taken away from that certain small degree of power, what can it do for itself? You say it is ineffective and can do nothing good. Therefore it will not do what God or His grace wills. And why? Because we have now taken God's grace away from it, and what the grace of God does not do is not good. Hence it follows that free will without the grace of God is not free at all, but is the permanent bond-slave and servant of evil, since it cannot turn itself unto good. This being determined, I allow you to enlarge the power of free will as much as you like, make it angelic, divine, if you can. But once you add this doleful postscript, that it is

¹⁵ Luther may here be referring to sections 15, 16 or 20 in Erasmus.

ineffective apart from God's grace, you at once rob it of all its power. What is ineffective power, but plainly no power at all. Therefore, to say that free will exists and has power, though ineffective, is, what the Sophists call a contradiction in terms. It is like saying, free will is something which is not free.

. . . [638] But, if we do not want to drop this term altogether (which would be the safest and most Christian thing to do), we may still use it in good faith denoting free will in respect not of what is above him, but of what is below him. This is to say, man should know in regard to his goods and possessions the right to use them, to do or to leave undone, according to his free will. Although at the same time, that same free will is overruled by the free will of God alone, just as He pleases. However, with regard to God, and in all things pertaining to salvation or damnation, man has no free will, but is a captive, servant and bond-slave, either to the will of God, or to the will of Satan.

Summary of Preface

These observations on the heads of your Preface embrace nearly the entire subject under debate, almost more so than the following body of the book. The essence of it all could have been summed up in the following "dilemma":¹⁶ Your Preface complains either of the words of God or of the words of men. If the latter, it is all written in vain. If the former, it is all blasphemy. Wherefore it would have saved much trouble, if it had been plainly mentioned whether we were disputing concerning the words of God, or the words of men. But this will, perhaps, be handled in your Introduction which follows, or in the body of the work itself . . . We teach nothing save Christ crucified. But Christ crucified brings all these doctrines along with Himself, including

¹⁶ Luther uses "dilemma" in an original sense of a syllogistic argument which presents an antagonist with two (or more) alternatives, equally conclusive against him, whichever alternate is chosen.

"wisdom also among those that are perfect." No other wisdom may be taught among Christians than that which is "hidden in a mystery," and this belongs only to the "perfect"—and not to the sons of a Judaizing, legal-minded generation, who, without faith, boast of their works!

III

REFUTATION OF ERASMUS' INTRODUCTION*

(*Erasmus 8*)

Denying Church Fathers' Authority

[639] . . . At the beginning of our disputation proper you promised to argue according to the canonical books, "since Luther recognizes no [extracanonial] authority." [640] Very well! I welcome your promise . . . You tell us that you are much influenced by so great a number of the most learned men . . . Biblical scholars, holy martyrs, many renowned for miracles, together with the more recent theologians, many schools, councils, bishops and popes. In a word, on your side, you say, is learning, ability, numbers, greatness, courage, holiness, miracles, while on my side there are only Wycliffe and Lorenzo Valla . . . [642] But tell me this: was anyone of them made a saint, did anyone of them receive the Spirit or work miracles in the name of the free will, or by the power of the free will, or to confirm the free will? Far from it, you will say, but in the name and by the power of Jesus Christ were all those things done, and for the confirmation of the doctrine of Christ . . . Wherefore your appeal to the holiness, the Spirit and the miracles of the Fathers is pointless. These do not prove the free will,

* W.A. 639-661

V

COMMENTS
ON ERASMUS' TREATMENT OF
PASSAGES DENYING FREE WILL *

(Erasmus 30)

Figures of Speech

. . . [700] . . . In this part of the discussion the Diatribe invents a new trick of eluding the clearest passages, i.e., it will have it that in the clearest and simplest passages there is a *trope* (figure of speech). And as before, when speaking in defense of free will it eluded the force of all the imperative and conditional passages of the law by tacking on conclusions and similes, so now, where it speaks against me, it twists all the words of divine promise and declaration, just as it pleases, by discovering a figure of speech in them . . . Let this be our sentiment: that no implication or figure is to be allowed to exist in any passage of Scriptures . . . We should adhere everywhere to the simple, pure and natural meaning of the words, according to the rules of grammar and the habits of speech which God has given unto men . . . [702] . . . For me this is a serious cause. I want to be as certain about the truth as I can, in order to settle men's consciences. I must act very differently. I say then that it is not enough for you to say there may be a figure. I must

* W.A. 699-756

inquire whether there need be and must be a figure. And if you do not prove that there must necessarily be a figure, you achieve nothing . . . The Word of God must be taken in its plain meaning, as the words stand . . .

. . . [703] . . . Let this, therefore, be a fixed and settled point: if the Diatribe cannot prove that there is a figure in these passages which it seeks to overthrow, then it is compelled to grant me that the words must be understood according to their literal meaning, even though it should prove that the same figure is contained in all the other scriptural passages and commonly used by everyone. By gaining this one point, all my arguments which the Diatribe sought to refute are at the same time defended. Thus its refutation is found to achieve nothing.

(Erasmus 31 & 32)

Evil in Man

. . . [709] . . . Perhaps it will be asked how can God be said to work evil in us, in the same way as He is said to harden us, to give us up to our desires, to cause us to err, etc.?

We should indeed be content with the words of God and simply believe what they say, for the works of God are utterly indescribable. However, to humor Reason, i.e., human folly, I will just act the fool and the stupid fellow for once, and try by a little babbling, if I can make any impression upon it . . .

Now then, Satan and man, being fallen and abandoned by God, cannot will good, i.e., things which please God or which God wills, but are ever turned in the direction of their own desires, so that they cannot but seek out their own . . . So that which we call the remnant of nature in Satan and wicked man, as being the creatures and work of God, is no less subject to divine omnipotence and action

than all the rest of the creatures and works of God. Since God moves and works all in all, He necessarily moves and works even in Satan and wicked man. But he works according to what they are and what He finds them to be, i.e., since they are perverted and evil, being carried along by that motion of Divine Omnipotence, they cannot but do what is perverse and evil. Just as it is with a man riding a horse lame on one foot or on two feet. His riding corresponds to what the horse is. That is, the horse moves badly. But what can the man do? He is riding this horse together with sound horses. This one goes badly, though the rest go well. But it cannot be otherwise, unless the horse be made sound.

Here you see then that when God works in and by evil man, evil deeds result. Yet God cannot do evil Himself, for he is good. He uses evil instruments, which cannot escape the sway and motion of His Omnipotence. The fault which accounts for evil being done when God moves to action lies in these instruments which God does not allow to lie idle . . . Hence it is that the wicked man cannot but always err and sin, because under the impulse of divine power he is not permitted to remain motionless, but must will, desire and act according to his nature . . . [710] . . . We are subject to God's working by mere passive necessity . . . God is incessantly active in all His creatures, allowing none of them to keep holiday . . . He cannot but do evil by our evil instrumentality, although He makes good use of this evil for His own glory and for our salvation. . . . [712] . . . God is God, for whose will no cause or reason may be laid down as its rule and measure. For nothing is on a level with it, not to speak higher. It is itself the measure of all things. If any rule or measure, or cause or reason existed for it, it could no longer be the will of God. What God wills is not right because He ought to or was bound to so will. On the contrary, what takes place must be right, because He so wills it.

(Erasmus 33-37)

Foreknowledge and Necessity

. . . [715] Let the Diatribe invent and go on inventing, let it cavil and cavil again, if God foreknew that Judas would be a traitor, Judas became a traitor of necessity, and it was not in the power of Judas, nor of any creature, to alter it, or change his will from that which God had foreseen . . . [716] . . . If God be not deceived in that which he foreknows, then that which He foreknows must of necessity come to pass. Otherwise, who could believe His promises, who would fear His threatenings, if what He promised or threatened did not necessarily ensue? How could He promise or threaten, if His foreknowledge deceives Him or can be hindered by our mutability? This supremely clear light of certain truth manifestly stops all mouths, puts an end to all questions, gives forever victory over all evasive subtleties . . .

. . . [719] . . . Of course, this seems to give the greatest offense to common sense or natural reason, that God, who is proclaimed as being so full of mercy and goodness, should of His own mere will abandon, harden and damn men, as though delighted in the sins and great eternal torments of the miserable. It seems iniquitous, cruel, intolerable to think thus of God. It has given offense to so many and many great men down the ages. And who would not be offended? I myself have been offended at it more than once, even unto the deepest abyss of despair, so far that I wished I had never been made a man. That was before I knew how healthgiving that despair was and how near it was to grace. This is why so much toil and labor has been devoted to excusing the goodness of God, and to accusing the will of man. Here those distinctions have been invented between the ordinary will of God and the absolute will of God, between the necessity of consequence and the necessity of

the thing consequent, and many others. But nothing has been achieved by these means beyond imposing upon the unlearned, by vain words and by "the contradictions of so-called knowledge."²⁴ For after all, a conscious conviction has been left deeply rooted in the hearts of learned and unlearned alike, whenever they have made a serious approach to this matter, so that they are aware that, if the foreknowledge and omnipotence of God are admitted, we must be under necessity . . .

Luther's Conclusion

[754] What I have to say on this point is as follows: Man, before he is created to be man does and endeavors nothing toward his being made a creature. And after he is made and created, he does and endeavors nothing toward his preservation as a creature. Both his creation and his preservation come to pass by the sole will of the omnipotent power and goodness of God, who creates and preserves us without ourselves. Yet, God does not work in us without us, because He created and preserves us for the very purpose that He might work in us and we might cooperate with Him, whether that occurs outside His kingdom and under His general omnipotence, or within His kingdom and under the special power of His Spirit. So I say that man, before he is regenerated into the new creation of the Spirit's kingdom does and endeavors nothing to prepare himself, and when he is regenerated he does and endeavors nothing toward his perseverance in that kingdom. The Spirit alone, without ourselves, works both blessings in us, regenerating us and preserving us when regenerated . . .

. . . [755] . . . I will not accept or tolerate that moderate middle way which Erasmus would, with good intention, I think, recommend to me: to allow a certain little to free will, in order to remove the contradictions of Scripture and

²⁴ Cf. 1 Timothy 6, 20.

the aforementioned difficulties. The case is not bettered, nor anything gained by this middle way. Because, unless you attribute all and everything to free will, as the Pelagians do, the contradictions in Scripture still remain, merit and reward, the mercy and justice of God are abolished, and all the difficulties which we try to avoid by allowing this certain little ineffective power to free will, remain just as they were before. Therefore, we must go to extremes, deny free will altogether and ascribe everything to God!

VI

SUMMARY
ON THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL*

[756] We are now coming to the last part of this book, in which, as I promised, I am bringing forward my own resources against free will. Not that I shall produce them all, for who could do that within the limits of this small book, when the whole Scriptures, in every letter and iota, stand on my side? There is no need, because free will lies vanquished and prostrate already . . .

*Doctrine of Salvation by Faith in Christ
Disproves Free Will*

. . . [767] . . . Paul now proclaims with full confidence and authority: "But now the righteousness of God has been made manifest independently of the Law, being attested by the Law and the Prophets; the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ upon all who believe. For there is no distinction, as all have sinned and have need of the glory of God. They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth as a propitiation by his blood through faith, etc." (Romans 3,21-25). Here Paul utters very thunderbolts against free will. First, he says, the righteousness of God without the law is manifested. He distinguishes the righteousness of God from the righteousness of the Law, because the righteousness of faith comes by grace, without the law. This saying, "without the law" can mean nothing

* W.A. 756-786

else, but that Christian righteousness exists without the works of the law; the works of the law availing and effecting nothing toward its attainment. As [Paul] says further on: "For we reckon that a man is justified by faith independently of the works of the law" (Romans 3,28). And earlier he has said: "For by the works of the law no human being shall be justified" (Romans 3,20). From all this it is clearly manifest that the endeavor and effect of free will are simply nothing. For if the righteousness of God exists without the law, and without the works of the law, how shall it not much more exist without free will? The supreme concern of free will is to exercise itself in moral righteousness, or the works of that law by which its blindness and impotency derive their assistance. But this word "without" abolishes all morally good works, all moral righteousness and all preparations for grace. Scrape together every power you can think of as belonging to free will and Paul will still stand invincible saying, the righteousness of God exists without it! And though I should grant that free will by its endeavors can advance in some direction, namely, unto good works, or unto the righteousness of the civil or moral law, it does yet not advance towards God's righteousness, nor does God in any respect allow its devoted efforts to be worthy unto gaining His righteousness; for He says that His righteousness stands without the law . . .

Personal Comfort in the Doctrine of Bondage

. . . [783] . . . As for myself, I frankly confess, that I should not want free will to be given me, even if it could be, nor anything else be left in my own hands to enable me to strive after my salvation. And that, not merely, because in the face of so many dangers, adversities and onslaughts of devils, I could not stand my ground and hold fast my free will—for one devil is stronger than all men, and on these terms no man could be saved—but because, even though there were no dangers, adversities or devils, I should still be forced to labor with no guarantee of success and to

beat the air only. If I lived and worked to all eternity, my conscience would never reach comfortable certainty as to how much it must do to satisfy God. Whatever work it had done, there would still remain a scrupling as to whether or not it pleased God, or whether He required something more. The experience of all who seek righteousness by works proves that. I learned it by bitter experience over a period of many years. But now that God has put my salvation out of the control of my own will and put it under the control of His, and has promised to save me, not according to my effort or running, but . . . according to His own grace and mercy, I rest fully assured that He is faithful and will not lie to me, and that moreover He is great and powerful, so that no devils and no adversities can destroy Him or pluck me out of His hand . . . I am certain that I please God, not by the merit of my works, but by reason of His merciful favor promised to me. So that, if I work too little or badly, He does not impute it to me, but, like a father, pardons me and makes me better. This is the glorying which all the saints have in their God!

VII

CONCLUSION*

[786] I shall here end this book, though prepared, if necessary, to pursue this Discussion still further . . . And now, my friend Erasmus, I entreat you for Christ's sake to keep your promise. You promised that you would willingly yield to him who taught better than yourself . . . I confess that you are a great man, adorned with many of God's noblest gifts, with talent, learning and an almost miraculous eloquence, whereas I have and am nothing, except to glory in being a Christian.

Moreover, I give you hearty praise: alone, in contrast to all others, you have discussed the real thing, i.e., the essential point. You have not wearied me with those irrelevant points about the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences and such trifles . . . For that I heartily thank you . . .

However, if you cannot treat this issue differently from the way this Diatribe does, I pray you, remain content with your own gift and study, adorn and promote literature and the languages, as hitherto you have done to great advantage and with much credit. I confess that your studies have also helped me. For them I honor and sincerely respect you. But God has not willed yet, nor granted you to be equal [to the subject matter of this debate]. [787] I entreat you, do not think me arrogant, when I pray that the Lord may speedily make you as much superior to me in these matters, as you are superior to me in all others. It is nothing new for God to instruct a Moses by a Jethro, or to teach a Paul by an

* W.A. 786-787

Ananias. And as to what you say, "you have greatly missed the mark, if you are ignorant of Christ": I think you see yourself how matters stand. But not all will err, if you or I may err. God is glorified in a wonderful way in His saints! So that we may consider those being saints that are farthest from sanctity. Nor is it an unlikely thing that you, as being a man, should fail to understand aright, and to note with sufficient care, the Scriptures, or the sayings of the Fathers, under whose guidance you imagine you cannot miss the mark.

That you have failed is quite clear from this: "you assert nothing, but have made comparisons." One who is fully acquainted with the matter and understands it, does not write like that. On the contrary, in this book of mine, I have not made comparisons, but have asserted and still do assert. I wish none to become judges, but urge all men to submit!

May the Lord whose cause this is, enlighten you and make you a vessel of honor and glory. Amen.