

Luther and Erasmus  
Free Will and Salvation

*Edited and translated by*

E. GORDON RUPP, MA, DD

*In collaboration with*

A. N. MARLOW, MA

and

PHILIP S. WATSON, MA, DD

*In collaboration with*

B. DREWERY, MA

## CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS . . . . .	xv
-------------------------	----

### INTRODUCTION

The Erasmian Enigma . . . . .	1
The Lutheran Riposte . . . . .	12
The Language of the Debate . . . . .	28

### ERASMUS: ON THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

#### PREFATORY OBSERVATIONS

Erasmus Acknowledges His Limitations and States His Point of View . . . . .	35
His Dislike of Assertions . . . . .	37
The Obscurity of Scripture . . . . .	38
Some Truths Are Not for Common Ears . . . . .	40
The Dangers Inherent in Luther's Teachings . . . . .	41

#### INTRODUCTION TO THE DISPUTATION

Luther Is Opposed Not Only by Scripture but Also by Weighty Authority of the Church Fathers . . . . .	42
How Can Inspiration and Authority Be Tested? . . . . .	44

#### PART I. SCRIPTURE PASSAGES THAT SUPPORT FREE CHOICE

Definition of Free Choice and Discussion of Ecclesiasticus 15:14-17 . . . . .	47
Man Before and After the Fall: The Forgiveness of Sins Restores Freedom of Choice Through Grace . . . . .	48

The Work of the Will, and the Threefold Law of Nature, Works, and Faith . . . . .	49
Different Kinds of Grace, and Three Views of Its Relation to Free Choice . . . . .	51
Further Old Testament Passages Implying Free Choice . . . . .	54
New Testament Texts Examined. Matthew 23:37 and Other Words of Christ . . . . .	59
St. Paul Also Is a Champion of Free Choice . . . . .	61
<b>PART II. SCRIPTURE PASSAGES THAT SEEM TO OPPOSE FREE CHOICE</b>	
Exodus 9:12; Romans 9:17: The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart . . . . .	64
The Problem of the Will and Foreknowledge of God . . . . .	66
Two Kinds of Necessity: The Case of Judas . . . . .	68
Jacob and Esau . . . . .	69
The Potter and the Clay . . . . .	70
<b>PART III. EXAMINATION OF LUTHER'S ARGUMENTS IN HIS <i>Assertio</i></b>	
Genesis 6:3: The Meaning of "Flesh" and "Spirit" . . . . .	74
The Will Is Not Powerless Though It Cannot Attain Its End Without Grace . . . . .	79
Man's Cooperation with God . . . . .	81
What Merit Is There Without Free Choice? . . . . .	84
<b>EPILOGUE</b>	
A Reasonable Approach to the Problem . . . . .	85
A Mediating View, and a Parable of Grace and Free Choice . . . . .	89
The Extravagances of Those Who Totally Deny Free Choice . . . . .	91
The Dire Results of Exaggerated Views . . . . .	95
As to Which Side Is Right, Let the Reader Be Judge . . . . .	97

## LUTHER: ON THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL

### INTRODUCTION

Luther Explains His Delay in Replying and Admits Erasmus' Superior Talent . . . . .	101
---	-----

### PART I. REVIEW OF ERASMUS' PREFACE

Christianity Involves Assertions; Christians Are No Skeptics . . . . .	105
The Clarity of Scripture . . . . .	109

It Is Vital to Know the Truth About Free Choice . . .	113
God's Foreknowledge; Contingence and Necessity . . .	117
Should Divine Truth Be Kept from Common Ears? . . .	124
Should the Truth of God's Necessitating Will Be Suppressed? . . . . .	134
Divine Necessity and the Human Will . . . . .	139
PART II. COMMENTS ON ERASMUS' INTRODUCTION	
The Evidence of Tradition on Behalf of Free Choice . .	144
The True Church, Which Does Not Err, Is Hidden from Men's Sight . . . . .	154
Scripture, with Its "Internal" and "External" Clarity, as the Test of Truth . . . . .	158
PART III. REFUTATION OF ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF FREE CHOICE	
Erasmus' Definition of Free Choice . . . . .	169
Three Views of Grace and Free Choice—or Three State- ments of One View? . . . . .	177
Ecclesiasticus 15:14-17. The Foolishness of Reason . . .	182
Other Old Testament Passages, and the Imperative and In- dicative Moods . . . . .	188
Erasmus' Failure to Distinguish Between Law and Gospel .	194
God Preached, God Hidden; God's Will Revealed, God's Will Secret . . . . .	200
New Testament Passages: Matthew 23:37—Man Must Not Pry Into the Secret Will of God . . . . .	205
Precepts and Rewards in the New Testament: The Ques- tion of Merit . . . . .	208
Erasmus' Arguments Undermine His Own Case . . . .	215
PART IV. DEFENSE OF ARGUMENTS AGAINST FREE CHOICE	
Erasmus' Use of Tropes in Interpreting Scripture . . .	220
Exodus 4:21—The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart . . .	223
How God's Omnipotence Can Be Said to Work Evil . . .	232
How God's Foreknowledge Imposes Necessity . . . . .	239
Two Kinds of Necessity: The Case of Judas . . . . .	246
Jacob and Esau . . . . .	249
The Potter and the Clay . . . . .	255
Erasmus' Way of Reasoning Does Not Let God Be God . .	258
PART V. REBUTTAL OF ERASMUS' CRITIQUE OF THE <i>Assertio</i>	
Genesis 6:3 and the Biblical Meaning of "Flesh" . . . .	263
Other Old Testament Passages—The Universal Sinfulness and Impotence of Man Under the Law . . . . .	266

The Whole Man—Body, Soul, and “Spirit”—Is “Flesh” . . . . . 271  
 How Erasmus Persistently Evades the Issue . . . . . 278  
 John 15:5, etc.: Free Choice Is “Nothing”—*Coram Deo* . . . . . 281  
 Divine Grace and Human Cooperation . . . . . 288

**PART VI. A DISPLAY OF THE FORCES ON LUTHER’S SIDE**

St. Paul: Universal Sinfulness Nullifies Free Choice . . . . . 293  
 Free Choice May Do the Works of the Law but Not Fulfill  
 the Law . . . . . 302  
 “Congruous” and “Condign” Merit . . . . . 309  
 The Righteousness of Works and of Faith; and a Summary  
 of St. Paul’s Testimony Against Free Choice . . . . . 312  
 St. John: Free Choice Is of “the World,” “the Flesh”;  
 Grace Is of Christ, by Faith. The Two Are Opposites . . . . . 319  
 The Two Kingdoms, of Christ and of Satan. The Assurance  
 of Faith . . . . . 327  
 The Mercy and Justice of God in the Light of Nature,  
 Grace, and Glory . . . . . 329

**CONCLUSION**

That the Case Against Free Choice Is Unanswerable Let  
 Erasmus Be Willing to Admit . . . . . 332

**APPENDIX: On the *Adagia* of Erasmus . . . . . 335**

**INDEXES . . . . . 341**

## *Introduction*

### THE ERASMIAN ENIGMA

JAMES A. FROUDE ENDED HIS MEMORABLE LECTURES ON ERASMUS at Oxford<sup>1</sup> in 1894 with the declaration that if you would understand the sixteenth century, "I believe you will best see it as it really was, if you will look at it through the eyes of Erasmus." "The eyes of Erasmus"—the pale blue, the frosty twinkle, the hooded reticences—how well we seem to know them, and how much do they proclaim the man!

It would not be fair to Luther to look at him only through the eyes of Erasmus. But it is true of all the great historical controversies—Newman and Kingsley is another case in point—that we do no service to one side by playing down the merits of the other, for this is a sure way to miss the human poignancy, and even the theological nerve of the encounter. We do not illuminate, we obscure the truth when we underrate the religion and faith of Erasmus.

Not that it was a very great debate, even for its day: More and Tyndale, Erasmus and Hutten, Luther and Zwingli, Cranmer and Gardiner, Jewel and Harding, had better knock-down arguments. When somebody gives us a definitive edition of the debate about Free Choice and Grace between John Eck and Andrew Karlstadt, it may very likely turn out to be a better piece of historical theology, and show that these two stuck rather more closely to their subject.

At best, Erasmus prodded Luther into some splendid epigrams and into uttering hermeneutic principles of worth. At the worst, their debate slammed the door on any reconciliation between two

<sup>1</sup> James Anthony Froude, *Life and Letters of Erasmus* (1895).

great men, and embarrassed their common friends. To use the image of another day, it was a duel in which the two participants got up at crack of dawn, one armed with a rapier, the other with a blunderbuss, where shaking of fists and mutterings usurped the place of battle, and which ended with the two antagonists going their separate ways, undamaged but shaken, and with a frustrating sense of honor ruffled but unsatisfied.

Satirists are notoriously thin-skinned. They lie awake o' nights, brooding on lesser insults than they have dealt to their opponents. And Erasmus had taken pains to be urbane with Luther, whereas Luther's occasional elephantine attempts to dance tiptoe were outnumbered by his enormous gestures of disgust, so that the first part of Erasmus' reply, the *Hyperaspistes*, does not get much beyond personalities and hurt feelings. The second is much better—but if it is, as M. Renaudet says, "a noble proclamation of eternal humanism,"<sup>2</sup> it is, as he admits, a feeble reply to Luther. Luther himself wrote no further answer. But his letters and the gossip of his Table Talk are littered with scorn of Erasmus as a trifler with truth, a scoffer at religion, an unbeliever.

The last was unjust, but Erasmus had asked for it, in his famous sentence about his preference for the "paths of the Sceptics." In the *Hyperaspistes* he put up a convincing defense. He had merely asserted the right of men to be uncommitted, where doctrine had not been thoroughly and formally defined by the Church. But perhaps the charge of skepticism does not rest upon that single passage. His innumerable tilts at authority, the acid of his satire—the widening ripples of gossip that reported his obiter dicta throughout the learned world—his silences: these led many to suspect that he was at heart more radical than he avowed, and is one reason why some have drawn a line of sympathy between him and the Sacramentarians and Anabaptists.

There is, then, an Erasmian engima. His contemporaries recognized it, and the contradictory verdicts of posterity derive from it. One of Luther's favorite stories was of how Frederick the Wise at Worms in October, 1520, had asked Erasmus for a judgment on Luther's case and got instead an epigram. "What a wonderful little man that is!"—the prince smiled ruefully—"You never know where you are with him." And Luther commented: "Erasmus is an eel. Only Christ can grab him."

The psychologists buzz round Luther; Erasmus they have neglected. Yet of the two, it is Erasmus who offers better materials for a case history: the illegitimacy casting shadows down all his

<sup>2</sup> Auguste Renaudet, *Humanisme et Renaissance* (1958), p. 177.

years, his "thing" about his vows, the fantasies about his past that the historians have not finally resolved. There are the obvious ambivalences, one of which Huizinga profoundly noted: "Rest and independence he desired ardently above all things: there was no more restless or dependent creature."

Erasmus has always had friends and lovers: from Sir Thomas More, Beatus Rhenanus, and the customs officer at Boppard down to P. S. Allen, Auguste Renaudet, and J. Huizinga in our day. He has as constantly had critics and enemies: from Zuñiga, Lee, and that "most intimate enemy," Aleander, to Philip Hughes, Josef Lortz, Hubert Jedin. To Lortz as to Aleander, Erasmus represents a worse menace to the Church than Luther: he is the "half Catholic" who spelled the dissolution of faith, whereas Luther called the Church to arms.<sup>3</sup>

Erasmus might have made a fair reply to his modern Catholic critics. He was, as we shall note, more revolutionary than is sometimes supposed. But he kept to his middle way with a stubborn consistency that recalls Newman in the difficult months before and after 1870. Erasmus would never deny the good in Luther however much he deplored Luther's violence, but he also did not cease to attack the bigotry and intolerance of Luther's enemies. If his famous "I'll put up with this Church until I see a better" <sup>4</sup> is something less than the consciously modernist program that M. Renaudet supposed, it at least provides a plausible text for a homily on the theme "Not only Newman but also Erasmus is an ancestor of Vatican II."

Discussion of the spirituality of Erasmus must surely begin with the last moment of truth, his relapse at death into his native Dutch, "*Lieve God,*" and the fevered murmurings of the preceding hours: "*Jesu, misericordia—Domine, libera me*" (one of the great *Anfechtung* texts of the young Luther). We remember how throughout his life at regular intervals he wrote works of piety and edification, from the early *De contemptu mundi* to the last tract on preaching, *Ecclesiastes*. Though many of them had little fresh to say about marriage or the duties of rulers, and justify Luther's malicious insight, "Erasmus contrives his words—they don't grow," their overall impressiveness increases as the number of these tracts mount up.

It has been noted more than once in modern times how persistently his prayers have appeared and reappear in religious anthologies. At least one of his devotional treatises has always been

<sup>3</sup> J. Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland* (1948), Vol. 1, pp. 131, 136.

<sup>4</sup> *Fero igitur hanc Ecclesiam donec video meliorem* (*Works*, X.1258.A).



taken seriously. William Tyndale rated the *Enchiridion* highly enough to make it the subject of his prentice translation, and it may have left a permanent mark on his theology of baptism. The number of editions in the early years of the sixteenth century speak for its popularity. Nobody can read expositions of it by Dr. Mann Phillips<sup>5</sup> or Dr. E. W. Kohls<sup>6</sup> without being impressed, or study the effects of it in Spain and Italy in M. Bataillon's fine volume<sup>7</sup> without realizing that here is one who contributed effectively to the religion of the age.

There is ambivalence, too, in Erasmus' relation to the "modern devotion," though this is aggravated for us by the confusion of historians concerning the relation between the modern devotion and humanism. Certainly where the influence of ideas is concerned, with their background of mysterious moods and tempers of any age, it is precarious to try to solve problems by dates and people and books.

It is noteworthy that in recent days E. W. Kohls and R. R. Post<sup>8</sup> have turned attention to the earliest writings of Erasmus, and startlingly, to the *De contemptu mundi* in their investigation of this problem. Are we to seek the origins of the Erasmian "philosophy of Christ" here in his early studies as a monk? Or are we, with the older historians, to look for it rather as a development from his widening contacts with humanists in following years, in his first visit to England, and in the influence on him of Colet and Vitrier? Certainly there seems in Erasmus something of a love-hate relation to the religion in which he had been schooled, an undoubted influence upon him of contemporary piety, and a growing enmity toward the obscurantisms of the new barbarians in Holland or the Puritanic rigidities of John Standonck in Paris, both of which have some evident relation to the modern devotion at its latter end.

Dr. Gordon Leff<sup>9</sup> in his learned study of late medieval heresy suggests that it arose from the tension between orthodoxy and dissent. He sees the heart of this dissent—and it would be as true of movements of genuine renewal as of eccentric deviationism—in the endemic tension in Christianity between precept and practice.

Hence the return to a primitive Christianity—something more

<sup>5</sup> M. Mann Phillips, *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance* (London and New York, 1949).

<sup>6</sup> E. W. Kohls, *Die Theologie des Erasmus*, 2 vols. (Basel, 1966).

<sup>7</sup> Marcel Bataillon, *Érasme et l'Espagne* (Paris, 1937).

<sup>8</sup> R. R. Post, *The Modern Devotion* (Leiden, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> G. Leff, *Heresy in the Lower Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Manchester, 1967).

constant, more fundamental than any humanist return *ad fontes*, though no doubt reinforced by it at this point of time. It is the return, as against too intricate ecclesiastical and theological complexities, to Christianity as above all a way of life, a vision of God, and a divine life within the soul. It involves the simplification, almost always the oversimplification, of "the simple gospel," and often, as in the Franciscan movement and the modern devotion, a distrust of learning and of books.

We ought not to underestimate the strength of late medieval piety. We do not necessarily need to look to the direct influence of Ficino, Mirandola, and the Platonic Academy for what was already familiar through Augustine and Dionysius. The so-called Erasmian spiritualism, with its "body-soul" or "body-soul-spirit" anthropology, is to be found in Wessel Gansfort before him and in Cornelius Hoen among his disciples, and when we find it in Oecolampadius and Zwingli, we do not need to look to Erasmus as its author.

In Germany, as the studies of Landeen have shown, the modern devotion flowed into older channels of German mysticism, which produced in Biel and Suso, and through them among the humanists of South Germany and Alsace, a pattern of devotion, a "theology of the cross," of resignation, of suffering with Christ, which is nearer to Luther than Erasmus, despite all the latter's emphasis on the Christian life as a "*militia Christi*."

Nobody can study the early theological writings of Erasmus without observing the extent to which their moral and even their spiritual and ascetic content is steeped in classical literature. When we remember the distaste of Erasmus for Hebrew, his comparative neglect of the Old Testament (Luther's extraordinary sensitivity to Hebraic ways is a great point of contrast), we might suspect that Erasmus was in a fair way to substituting classical morality and spirituality for that of the Old Testament and thereby establishing a Christian Gnosticism that put erudition above piety. But this would be to fail to understand Erasmus' own interests at that point in his life, his devotion to "good letters," his concern to use in the service of Christ writings that were for him a real preparation for the gospel, though always subordinated to revealed truth.

We can therefore sidestep the complex questions of how and when Erasmus turned from "good letters" to "sacred letters" and to the employment of the tools and methods of Biblical humanism in the service of the gospel.

There were first the tools of the revived study of the sacred lan-

guages—Greek, Hebrew, and the new cleaner Latin. There was a sense of the need to get to the best manuscripts. There was the important principle, which he owed probably to Valla, that the exact grammatical and philological context of Scripture has priority. The fruit of this was the publication in 1516 of his edition of the New Testament. As a gesture by an individual, and as a challenge to authority, Erasmus' New Testament can be compared for boldness with Luther's Ninety-five Theses. We remember how Erasmus was unprepared for the attacks on him that followed, how under pressure he put back the so-called *Comma Joanneum* of the "Three Heavenly Witnesses" in the First Letter of John, but we forget the daring of the original exclusion. The young dons in Cambridge missed neither the novelty nor the courage, and henceforth whatever else the Cambridge Reformers were or were not, they were Erasmians to a man.

Then there were the bold Prefaces. The first, the *Paraclesis ad lectorem pium*, was a manifesto on behalf of the "Open Bible," which was echoed in Tyndale's words and deeds, so that the English Bibles of the reign of Henry VIII may properly be regarded as within the Erasmian program. The *Ratio seu methodus compendio perveniendi ad veram theologiam* enlarges principles already expounded in the *Enchiridion*. Here is the return to Christ as he becomes contemporary with us in the Gospels, and the insistence on the importance, above all later theologians, of Paul and John (the Pauline content of the *philosophia Christi* in Erasmus must never be underrated).

The return to the Bible meant a return to the Old Fathers as primarily expositors of Scripture, a bypassing of the later Schoolmen and a return to the Biblical theology of the first centuries. At first, and naturally, the emphasis was on the Western Fathers—Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Cyprian—but as the massive printed editions of Erasmus and his friends succeeded one another in the 1520's, a new prominence was given to the Greek Fathers, with important results. Perhaps neither Erasmus nor his friend Rhenanus quite reckoned with the explosive possibilities of their editions of Origen and Tertullian.

The practical emphasis on Christianity as a way of life, and on the direct simplicities of the "philosophy of Christ," has within it a further seminal principle, the distinction between the essentials and nonessentials of religion. The Christian faith is not another Torah, where all must be accepted as equally given, things great and small. There are some truths "which God has willed to be most plainly evident, and such are the precepts for the good

life." These truths are clear and they are few. Others are to be revered as mystery and simply adored (the emphasis on "mystery" is another modern touch). About others Christians may speculate and differ. The distinction between essentials and non-essentials was important for the emperor Charles V, in his delicate maneuverings with Protestants in the 1530's, and he may have learned it from Erasmian counselors. It is a distinction that was important for the two Reformers most inclined to Erasmian irenics—Martin Bucer and Philip Melancthon—and in one great theological tradition it would persist and be majestically expounded in the writings of Richard Hooker and William Chillingworth. The Second Vatican Council and its aftermath seem to show that its irenic possibilities are not yet exhausted.

Antagonism to that element in late medieval religion which Gilbert Burnet referred to as "superannuated Judaism" was common ground among the humanists of England, Holland, France, and Germany. Here is the importance of satire. Somebody has said in our own century that "satire is the last refuge of those who shrink from taking up their Cross." The writings and paintings of sixteenth-century satirists have darker shadows than the more cheerful bawdy anticlericalism of earlier centuries. There is here something more than poking fun at what is, after all, human and endearing weakness: there is contempt and anger, and to this extent humanist satire ate corrosively into the ideals of the age helping to ripen discontent. The Reformers on the whole distrusted it. "It doth not become the Lord's servants to use railing rhymes," said Tyndale, a little primly. Luther refused to praise the "Letters of Obscure Men" because he felt the hurt of the daughter of Zion lay too deep for tears, let alone laughter.

Like his friends Colet and More, Erasmus was a writer of satires, and like them, too, he kept a special edge for the members of the religious orders. Part of his antipathy to Luther is, surely, because he saw in him a typical mendicant theologian, with all the loud violences of the breed. Whether Erasmus did or did not write the devastating, comic *Julius Exclusus*, few of his contemporaries put it past him, nor does it go beyond his other utterances of disgust and hatred for Julius II, the embodiment of all he most despised. When we add the gentler but always astringent *Praise of Folly*, the extraordinary undertones of the *Colloquies*, and a thousand asides in the vast correspondence, we can understand why Erasmus became a rock of offense and a stone of stumbling for many. When we add this trait to the rest of his ambivalences, we realize that we can never altogether dismiss "Erasmus, the liberal"; from Rabelais

and Montaigne to James A. Froude and Mark Pattison,<sup>10</sup> the ancestors and descendants of the "crisis of European conscience" have rightly put him in their pedigree.

How seriously must we take Erasmus as a theologian? This question has an evident bearing on the debate with Luther. Obviously he was not a technical Scholastic theologian in the late medieval manner; he was a man always moved by intellectual appetites and dislikes, and we may suppose he made little effort to understand, for example, the writings of Duns Scotus, or to pursue the intricate systems that had bored and wearied him in Paris. But this does not dispose of the question. In his own blend of modern devotion, of good and sacred letters, in his direct appeal to the Bible and the Old Fathers, is there evidence that this subtle and penetrating intelligence was really at home among the deep imponderables of theology?

E. W. Kohls has put the best case ever likely to be made, and he sees in Erasmus one who at a very early stage in his career had achieved a coherent Biblical theology, a hermeneutic, and a theology of history. This presentation, however, for all its learning and awareness of the whole field of Erasmian literature, has yet to be sieved by the learned world, and one is bound to have reservations about a demonstration taken almost exclusively from the early writings, the *De contemptu mundi*, the *Antibarbari*, and the *Enchiridion*.

The older historians did not lack evidence when they stressed the importance for Erasmus of his visits to England and Italy, of his friendships with More, Colet, Vitrier, and the significance for him of his studies and of the events that opened up after 1517. There have been too many attempts in recent years to dress up the sixteenth-century Reformers—first Luther, then Calvin, then Zwingli—in modern jargon, to show them each in turn to have been theocentric, existential, eschatological. We suspect that Erasmus, too, has been dressed up, and that there is something in the comment of a Dutch theologian: "Erasmus was not a German, and he did not think like this. He was a Dutchman." To find in Erasmus a coherent *exitus-reditus* view of creation and redemption, and anything like a doctrine of justification along Lutheran lines, or a theology of the cross results in a very un-Erasmus-like Erasmus.

In the case of all men at all times, there is, no doubt, a philosophy and theology implicit in their assumptions about life and its

<sup>10</sup> Both James Anthony Froude and Mark Pattison (in his article on Erasmus in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*), on the edge of the coming scientific study of Erasmus, have quite astonishing perceptions which come from sympathy.

meaning, and a whole unconscious field of Christian acceptance is to be posited by all late medieval Christian thinkers. A great deal of what is given as Erasmus' own original and conscious articulation we may suspect simply reflects this background, and Erasmus gives it to us at a level that is always edifying and profitable, but hardly ever profound. Without trying to close a question which Dr. Kohls has thrown wide open, we may suggest that in this debate at any rate there is no suggestion that Erasmus is the theologian at bay. Erasmus is the Kingsley, not the Newman.

In fact, Erasmus' *Diatribes Concerning Free Choice* has all the elements that we have already noted. There is the smooth transition from the classical to the Biblical world, from classical to Biblical allusion and illustration. There is the admission of the authority of Holy Scripture, but the recognition of the paramount authority of the Church. There is the grateful recognition of the cloud of witnesses, of the Fathers, and interesting material for a discussion of the "*consensus fidelium*." There is the insistence that what is essential and worthy of debate in the Christian faith is a small body of plain and practical truth.

Dr. Ivor Asheim in his brilliant study *Glaube und Erziehung bei Luther*<sup>11</sup> considers Erasmus as primarily a moralist with no theology, but only an anthropology; and without conceding all his argument, it is true that practical and moral considerations determined Erasmus' fastening on "Free Choice" for the debate. It was a great count of Erasmus against the Reformers that they had not only not strengthened the good life, but that there had been a decline in moral behavior (the aging Luther would have been inclined to agree with him). For Luther, "free choice" touched the nerve of the gospel—the promises, the glory and the grace of God—whereas for Erasmus, the questions "whether God foreknows anything contingently; whether our will accomplishes anything in things pertaining to eternal salvation; whether it simply suffers the action of grace," belong as he explicitly says among "hidden, not to say superfluous" questions which men investigate with "irreverent inquisitiveness." For Erasmus, the question at issue exposed Luther's fatalism and antinomianism, with their disastrous effect upon the behavior of the masses.

Many scholars have emphasized the importance of the lines:

Therefore, in my judgment on this matter of free choice, having learned what is needful to know about this, if we are in the path of true religion, let us go on swiftly to better things, forgetful of the things which are behind, or, if we are entangled in sins, let us strive with all

<sup>11</sup> Heidelberg, 1961.

our might and have recourse to the remedy of penitence that by all means we may entreat the mercy of the Lord without which no human will or endeavor is effective.

The method and scope of the debate had two serious weaknesses. It was the tedious manner of that age to deal with one's opponent line by line or at least paragraph by paragraph. That is how Luther began, and it was fatal. The pressure of events on Luther in 1525, the watershed of his career, was such that he could not possibly hope to complete the debate on this scale, and he himself later admitted that he took no notice at all of the last chapters of Erasmus, which are perhaps the best part of the work.

Second, the attempt to concentrate on Scripture alone, which as Professor Watson demonstrates elsewhere was impossible, since both debaters appealed to other authorities and to reason, was weakened by the fact that the Scriptural texts proved either too much or too little. Thus the Hebrew mind, as displayed in the Old Testament, knew nothing of secondary causes, and its stress on the divine will and action seemed to justify on the one hand complete fatalism, or on the other an extreme Pelagianism.

Modern Catholic scholars have pointed out the weakness of what Erasmus has to say in relation to the doctrine of grace and of divine foreknowledge and omnipotence. We may be content to draw attention to Dr. H. J. McSorley's balanced and learned study, as the outstanding discussion of the subject in the English language.<sup>12</sup>

He points to the defectiveness of Erasmus' very setting of the problem in his definition of "free choice":

By free choice in this place we mean a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them.

He shows it to be more defective than the definitions of Peter Lombard and Gabriel Biel in that it defines freedom with regard to salvation, and yet makes no mention at all of grace. It is true, as he goes on to point out, that Erasmus' argument is better than his definition and that he improves as he goes on. Erasmus does not intend at all to disparage grace, but to establish a point of human responsibility.

It is noteworthy, too, that the Acts of the Second Council of

<sup>12</sup> Harry J. McSorley, *Luthers Lehre vom unfreien Willen* (Munich, 1967; E. T. *Luther: Right or Wrong? An Ecumenical-Theological Study of Luther's Major Work, The Bondage of the Will*, New York and Minneapolis, 1969).

Orange (A.D. 529), which condemned Semi-Pelagianism, disappeared and were unknown during the Middle Ages and to Erasmus, and only turned up during the Council of Trent.

The reader may care to have two quotations from these Acts, that he may remember how very far the Council of Orange went in an Augustinian (McSorley would say also in a Lutheran) direction.

Canon 5: "If anyone says that not only the increase of faith, but also its beginning and the very desire for belief, by which we believe in Him who justifies the ungodly and come to the regeneration of holy baptism—if anyone says that this belongs to us by nature and not by a gift of grace, that is, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit amending our will and turning it from unbelief to faith and from godlessness to godliness, it is proof that he is opposed to the teaching of the apostles."

Canon 6: "If anyone says that God has mercy upon us when apart from His grace we believe, will, desire, strive, labour, pray, watch, study, seek, ask or knock, but does not confess that it is by the infusion and inspiration of the Holy Spirit within us that we have the faith, will or the strength to do all these things as we ought, and thus subordinates the help of grace to human humility or obedience, without acknowledging that our very obedience and humility is a gift of grace itself, he contradicts the apostle who says, 'What hast thou that thou hast not received?' (I Cor. 4:7) and 'By the Grace of God, I am what I am' (I Cor. 15:10)." <sup>13</sup>

This doctrine, which was that of St. Thomas, is one to which Erasmus pays lip service as a "more probable" opinion, about which he has not finally made up his mind.

On the other hand those who, at the other extreme from Pelagius, attribute most of all to grace and practically nothing to free choice, yet do not entirely remove it: for they deny that man can will the good without peculiar grace, they deny that he can make a beginning, they deny that he can progress, they deny he can reach his goal without the principal and perpetual aid of divine grace.

The other view Erasmus quite wrongly ascribes to Scotus, for it is more properly akin to that of Gabriel Biel; it asserts that even though a man

has not yet received the grace which destroys sin, he may nonetheless, by his own natural powers, perform what they call morally good works which, not "condignly" but "congruously" merit that grace which "makes acceptable."

The question arises how far words such as "Semi-Pelagian" or "Neo-Semi-Pelagian" can profitably be applied to late medieval

<sup>13</sup> H. Denzinger, ed., *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (Editio 28), pp. 86-87.



theologians or to Erasmus.<sup>14</sup> P. Vignaux in his classical essay on *Justification and Predestination in the Fourteenth Century* showed that, for example, what Peter of Auriol meant by "Pelagianism" had little to do with the fourth- and fifth-century controversy. It is true that grace and salvation lie at the bottom of the medieval, as of the Augustinian, debate, but the whole setting has so changed that we might remember Newman's saying "New questions demand new answers."

The faint praise and indeed the criticism of Erasmus' handling of the debate from his contemporary and his modern Catholic critics must surely dispose of the view that here is a great theologian's presentation of a case. But there is more here than classical moralism covered with a veneer of piety. Erasmus does deeply and sincerely believe that Christianity is a religion of grace. The idea that men can be saved without divine assistance would have been wholly abhorrent to him. It may be that at the end of the day it will be conceded that as against Luther he grasps the importance of human responsibility and of an insistence on grace which yet does not take by storm the citadel of the soul. Yet at the end of the day, too, Luther could maintain the great Anselmian retort: "Thou hast not considered the gravity of sin"—or what it means for man to have his existence *coram Deo*.<sup>15</sup>

E. GORDON RUPP

### THE LUTHERAN RIPOSTE

How are we to understand the conflict between Erasmus and Luther? Is it a matter of temperament? Is it a case of the cool (though somewhat testy) philosophical mind over against the rabidity of the dogmatic theologian? or of the rational, ethical concern of the moralist over against the profound intuitions of a passionately religious spirit? Such suggestions have often been

<sup>14</sup> Harry J. McSorley, "Was Gabriel Biel a Semi-Pelagian?" in *Wahrheit und Verkündigung* (Michael Schmaus zum 70 Geburtstag; Munich, 1967).

<sup>15</sup> The difference between Luther's view of man and that of Erasmus is clear in the lines that Luther could never have penned: "*Male habet Lutherus quod Diatribe non tantum exaggerat pronitatem ad malum quantum ipsi commodum est. Fateor in quibusdam ingeniis bene natis ac bene educatis minimum esse pronitatis. Maxima proclinitatis pars est non ex natura, sed ex corrupta institutione, ex improbo convictu, ex assuetudine peccandi malitiaque voluntatis*" (*Works*, X.1454.F). See Auguste Renaudet, *Études Érasmiennes*, p. 350; *Érasme et l'Italie*, p. 177.

made, but they are at best superficial, for Erasmus is by no means irreligious, and Luther is neither an immoralist nor irrational. The two men represent rather two different theological and ethical outlooks, two alternative ways of "thinking together" God and man.

The nature of this difference does not emerge so clearly as could be desired in the two works before us, and that for two main reasons.

To begin with, the *Diatribes* represents a rather one-sided reaction on the part of Erasmus to Luther's position in his *Assertio*, where he states:

I was wrong in saying that free choice before grace is a reality only in name. I should have said simply: "free choice is in reality a fiction, or a name without reality." For no one has it in his own power to think a good or bad thought, but everything (as Wyclif's article condemned at Constance rightly teaches) happens by absolute necessity.<sup>1</sup>

Erasmus' argument concentrates on the last part of this statement (concerning "necessity"), and never really comes to grips with Luther's essential concern. For Luther, it is vitally important to know "whether the will does anything or nothing in matters pertaining to eternal salvation," and he thinks Erasmus ought to be aware that

this is the cardinal issue between us, the point on which everything in this controversy turns. For what we are doing is to inquire what free choice can do, what it has done to it, and what is its relation to the grace of God.<sup>2</sup>

On this subject, however, Erasmus is far from clear.<sup>3</sup>

Then, secondly, the situation is complicated by the fact that in the *De servo arbitrio* Luther accepts Erasmus' choice of the battleground, so to speak. That is, he takes the argument of the *Diatribes* and sets out to answer it point by point, instead of giving a systematic clarification of his own position. It is of course true that Erasmus has accepted Luther's proviso that the whole argument should be brought to the test of Scripture; but this, as he points out, scarcely helps, since they disagree about the meaning of Scripture. He accuses Luther with some justice of interpreting

<sup>1</sup> *Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per Bullam Leonis X novissimam damnatorum* (December, 1520), Article 36 (*WA* 7, 446). The German version in *Grund und Ursach* reads more moderately, making no mention of "necessity" (*WA* 7, 446). It was, however, the Latin of the *Assertio* that Erasmus had read, and he quotes it. See below, pp. 64 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *WA* 18, 614; below, p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?* p. 284.

Scripture to suit his own ends; but the same charge might very well be brought against Erasmus. The fact is that neither man sticks faithfully to the plain, literal meaning of Scripture, or simply to Scripture at all. Each appeals in his own way to "reason" and "experience"; and each exhibits a concern for the practical implications of their debate, both with regard to the welfare of men and the honor of God. Unfortunately, they come to different conclusions because they start from different premises.

To put it very succinctly: Erasmus thinks essentially along traditional Scholastic lines, while Luther does not. In spite of his well-known distaste for Scholastic subtleties, Erasmus presupposes the metaphysical dualism of "nature" and "supernature" on which all Scholastic thinking rests, and in terms of which the relation between man and God, human nature and divine grace, is construed. Luther, on the other hand, takes much more seriously a quite different dualism, namely, that of God and the devil. The significance of this can best be illustrated by contrasting his view of the basic human situation with that of the Schoolmen.

According to the latter, man before the Fall was endowed with certain natural powers (especially reason and free will), together with a supernatural gift of grace. This gift was necessary if man was to attain his true end, namely, eternal life and blessedness, which was beyond the powers of mere nature. But since by these powers (aided by grace) man was able to know and to do the good, he could by doing it merit glory. He was, however, under no compulsion, but had freedom of choice between good and evil; he could obey or disobey God. At the Fall he chose to disobey, and in consequence lost his supernatural gift and was left simply in a state of nature.

What effect the Fall had on man's natural powers was a matter of debate, but most of the Schoolmen agreed that they were weakened, and some that they were considerably impaired—a view which Erasmus shared. Yet nature remains nature even in fallen man. His reason and will may be "wounded," even "corrupted," but they are not destroyed. His passions, the lower ingredients of his nature, may be deeply disordered, so that he is a constant prey to carnality, yet he is not wholly carnal. His nature remains compounded as it always was of animal "flesh" and that rational "spirit" which is the mark of humanity, with the soul in between and capable of leaning toward either.<sup>4</sup> Fallen man therefore still

<sup>4</sup> Cf. below, p. 76, and Erasmus, *Enchiridion* 7 (*Advocates of Reform: From Wyclif to Erasmus*, ed. by Matthew Spinka [The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XIV; Philadelphia, 1953], pp. 318 ff.).

possesses some capacity for the knowledge of and obedience to God.

But what is this capacity worth as regards the attaining of salvation? Can man do anything toward his salvation without the help of grace? If he can, how much can he do? If he cannot, what measure of grace is needed to enable him? On these questions there were widely divergent views, especially in late Scholasticism, and Erasmus reflects the prevailing uncertainty of his time. He himself inclines to the "probable opinion" (as he calls it) that man can take no steps whatsoever toward salvation without "peculiar" grace; yet he does not reject the opposing view as untenable. Indeed, he rather vacillates between them, being evidently unaware that his "probable opinion" represents the mainstream of Catholic tradition.<sup>5</sup>

What Erasmus does reject is the idea that man has no active part to play in securing his own salvation, for at least man has freedom of choice. That is to say, he has in his will the power to "apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation or to turn away from them." It is true that, as Luther observes, Erasmus never quite specifies what those "things" are; but his general argument suggests that he has in mind obedience to God's commandments. It is also true that in the course of the argument man's power to apply himself becomes subject to considerable qualification. Nevertheless, Erasmus continues to maintain that, however little man can do, yet if he "does what in him lies," God will assist him with his grace, for divine grace "always accompanies human effort." Indeed, according to the "probable opinion" the very possibility of such effort depends on prevenient grace, without which the will of fallen man is "compelled to serve sin."

But it is up to man to respond to the divine initiative. Nature must cooperate with grace, the human will with the divine, and this is a matter for man's own choice, so that he is himself responsible for his own eventual salvation or perdition. Salvation is a cooperative enterprise (*synergismos*) of God and man, to which both partners make their contribution, even though man's share in it is so small that it is an excusable and even praiseworthy exaggeration when everything is attributed to God.

Turning now to Luther's view, we find a situation that is both more complex and more dramatic. Before the Fall, as Luther sees it, man's relation to God was characterized by his total dependence on God, whose grace or unmerited love evoked in man the response of faith, that is, trust and obedience. This relationship was and is the truly natural relationship of man as creature to God

<sup>5</sup> Cf. above, p. 11, and McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?* pp. 288 ff.

as his Creator. In this situation, man's reason was enlightened and his will directed by the Spirit of God, so that he knew God as his heavenly Father and obeyed his commandments with filial devotion. He had, and could have, no desire but to obey. He *necessarily* did the will of God, for he had no "will of his own" independent of God's. Yet he acted *voluntarily*, and was in no way coerced, for as inwardly moved by the Spirit he naturally wanted what God wanted. And since the Spirit of God is the Spirit of love, he also acted *freely*, that is, with the spontaneity of divine love.

Then came the Fall. Man fell into the clutches of Satan, who impelled him to make a declaration of independence over against God, persuading him that this meant freedom. How it was possible for the Evil Spirit to supplant the Holy Spirit in man, Luther cannot explain, though he is quite clear that it was not because man had "free choice" between God and Satan. He therefore simply takes man's fallenness as fact, and understands it to mean that man is no longer moved by the Holy Spirit but by an entirely opposite Spirit. Man has turned from faith in God to unbelief (distrust and disobedience), exchanging his right and natural relation to God for a thoroughly wrong and unnatural one.<sup>6</sup> In Pauline terms, having begun in the Spirit, he has ended in the "flesh"; he is no longer spiritual but carnal; and this applies to the whole man, not just some part of him, so that it can be said that everything about him—body, soul, and spirit—is "flesh."

Of course, fallen man remains man; he is not a mere animal, and still less a devil. He retains his powers of reason and will, and he still has some knowledge of God and his law. But both his reasoning and his willing are radically corrupt, being governed from the start by the false premises dictated by Satan. Satan is the antithesis of God, who is love, selfless and self-giving. Satan is the very spirit of egoism and self-love; and it is by this spirit that fallen man is moved and governed. In consequence, whatever man knows of God and his will is caricatured and falsified, seen, as it were, through a distorting mirror.<sup>7</sup> When the will of God runs counter to his own, it seems to him arbitrary and tyrannical, and if he does not simply flout it in blind self-assertion, he complies with it in calculating self-interest, with an eye to escaping punishment or gaining reward. He acts thus *of necessity*, inasmuch

<sup>6</sup> It is therefore confusing when Luther speaks of fallen man as the "natural man."

<sup>7</sup> Hence Luther's attack on "reason" as "the devil's whore." Cf. R. E. Davies and R. N. Flew (eds.), *The Catholicity of Protestantism* (London, 1950), pp. 86 ff.; B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 26, 137, *et al.*

as he has no "will of his own" over against the Evil Spirit by which he is inwardly moved; and just for that reason he acts *voluntarily*, not under any coercion against his will. But he does *not* act *freely*, that is, with the spontaneity of genuine love; nor can he do so unless and until he is set free by divine grace.

Freedom, in the full and proper sense of the term, belongs in Luther's view only to God. God is free as being subject to no other power whatsoever, and as acting therefore solely according to his own will. God's will, however, is in no way capricious or arbitrary, but consistently righteous and good. For what God wills is consonant with his nature, which in Christ—and even in creation, rightly understood—is revealed as love.<sup>8</sup> This it is that shows what real freedom means. It is the spontaneity of a love that is neither evoked by nor proportioned to the qualities of its objects—quite unlike fallen man's loving, which is ordinarily both evoked and measured by what its objects are thought to deserve. God therefore acts with absolute freedom; he does not simply react, as men in their bondage to Satan do.

Luther admits, of course, that man has a sort of freedom in respect of what he calls "things beneath him." That is, he has the ability to choose as he wishes between different possibilities presented to him amid the circumstances of his temporal life. He can even choose to behave or not behave according to the precepts of God's law. He can "do the works of the law"—and he ought to do them, for they are "good works." But "good works do not make a good man,"<sup>9</sup> for they can be done from a bad motive; and the motivation of fallen man is thoroughly bad. Hence the good works even of God's law cannot contribute one iota toward man's eternal salvation, for he sins in the very doing of them; and there is nothing he himself can do to alter this. If he is to be saved, the Evil Spirit that drives him must be driven out by the Holy Spirit of grace. Until this happens, he may do the works of the law, but he can never "fulfill the law," for the fulfilling of the law is love.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> It is true that Luther at times speaks like a thoroughgoing Ockhamist, saying that whatever God wills is right simply because God wills it. But his is Ockhamism with a difference. "Luther knows, as Duns and Ockham do not, of an activity which is entirely free, entirely independent of any law, and yet—or just therefore—supreme righteousness" (Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Vol. I: *Luther* [3 Auflage, Tübingen, 1932], p. 51). In the context of his doctrine of grace, his concept of the freedom of God becomes a doctrine of free grace (H. J. Iwand, *Martin Luther, Ausgewählte Werke* [Dritte Auflage, Erster Band, Munich, 1954], p. 259). See also below, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> *WA*, 7, 32.

<sup>10</sup> For the distinction between "doing the works of the law" and "fulfilling the law" (or the "moral" and "spiritual" observance of the law), see *WA Bi.* 7, 6; *WA* 40, i, 417; cf. 11, 120. See also below, pp. 302 ff.

In this regard he is not free, though he can be set free; hence what he calls his "free will" would more properly be called "self-will," which means bondage to Satan.<sup>11</sup>

There is, however, one respect in which neither fallen nor un-fallen man ever had or can have freedom; that is, in relation to "things above him," as Luther calls them, which pertain to eternal salvation or perdition. This means—to put it in its simplest terms—that whatever else man might be free to choose, he can never in the nature of the case choose the motivation of his choice. All choices are determined by some ultimate principle, and in the final analysis there are only two possibilities: man is governed either by the Spirit of God or by the Evil Spirit. There is no neutral ground on which he can stand between these while he makes up his mind to which he will submit. Man is not capable of freedom in this sense; he has no liberty of indifference. Hence, although his eternal destiny depends on whether he is ruled by Satan or God, yet between these he is not free to choose. He is always governed by one or the other—or buffeted between the two, like a beast over which two would-be riders contend.

Luther's famous—or infamous!—simile of the beast and its riders was not, of course, his own invention. There was a long tradition of its use.<sup>12</sup> But it cannot be claimed that Luther uses it in the traditional way, for he equates the beast simply with the will (instead of free will), makes the riders God and Satan (instead of sin and grace), and gives the beast no option as to which rider it shall have. This undoubtedly raises difficulties, but in mitigation of them the following points may be borne in mind. First, neither God nor Satan is conceived here as acting exteriorly and coercively on man's will, but is thought of as a spiritual power operating inwardly, so that all man's consequent action is quite voluntary and uncoerced. Secondly, God and Satan are not equal contenders for the mastery of man. God is the Creator, to whom man as his creature properly belongs, and to whose sovereign sway both sinful man and his "rider" Satan are ultimately subject. (In other words, Luther's dualism is religious, not metaphysical, and relative, not absolute.)

God as the Creator is in Luther's thought the incessantly active source of all activity, and all his activity is absolutely righteous and

<sup>11</sup> *WA* 7, 450.

<sup>12</sup> It appears to be derived from the Pseudo-Augustinian *Hypomnesticon* (III.xi.20), where it is connected as Luther connects it with Ps. 73:22 f. (p. 140 below). But as McSorley shows (*Luther: Right or Wrong?* pp. 335 ff.) it has antecedents as far back as Origen, and it was widely used among the Schoolmen.

good. Yet the results of God's activity are not invariably good, for when "by the general motion of his omnipotence" he activates the wills of sinful men and devils (including Satan himself), these act in accordance with their character, which is bad. Even a master craftsman cannot do a perfect work with an imperfect tool, and even God's omnipotence can only move evil wills to evil acts. But the evil of man's or Satan's will is not to be ascribed to God as its cause. Here Luther is entirely in accord with the traditional Scholastic teaching that God is the cause of sinful acts but not of their sinfulness. But he cannot agree with the Schoolmen in attributing this to man's free will or freedom of choice, for it is plain evidence that man is not free but in bondage to Satan. Even with regard to man's original fall into this bondage, he will not admit that it was a matter of free choice; and as to how Satan himself became evil, that is a question he will not discuss. There can be no rational explanation of evil.

It is, however, God's purpose to save man from his evil bondage, and to this end he works by means of his Word and his Spirit. That is how he contends with Satan for the control of man. By his Word he confronts men outwardly, and by his Spirit inwardly, first in the form of law, then of gospel. We have not space here to elaborate on this aspect of Luther's thought, and two observations must suffice. First, it is the function of the law, in what he calls its spiritual use, to bring home to men their sinful plight and their inability to save themselves from perdition. In this way, men are made ready for the gospel and its message of grace. Although, therefore, Luther repudiates the Scholastic idea that man can prepare himself for grace by "doing what in him lies," he does not deny that there is a preparation for grace; he affirms it, only as God's doing, not man's.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, it is the function of the gospel, in what Luther calls its proper office, to bring home to man the grace and love of God and evoke in him the response of faith. Where and insofar as this happens, man is restored to his true and natural relationship to God, and thereby enters into the fullest freedom of which he is capable. This is the liberty of the children of God, in which men can freely cooperate with God, not for the achieving of their own salvation, but in the fulfilling of God's purposes in the world with respect both to its spiritual and temporal welfare.

For Luther, man's cooperation with God is not a precondition

<sup>18</sup> It is true that for Aquinas man's "doing what in him lies" depends on prevenient grace, which is God's doing; but for the later Schoolmen it is a matter of man's own efforts. For Luther, however, it is God's doing through his law.



of salvation as it is for Erasmus; it is rather a consequence of salvation. And salvation itself is differently understood. For Erasmus, salvation calls for a "supernaturalizing" of human nature by divine grace in order that man may become acceptable to God and a rightful claimant to the eternal life and blessedness of heaven. For Luther, it means the liberation of man from an unnatural bondage, so that he lives a truly natural life in trustful obedience to God, and can look forward to the heavenly reward, not as in any sense his right, but as the sure and certain promise of God's gracious Word.

Unfortunately, however, the effect of God's Word is not always salvific. It can in fact "increase sin," making bad men worse by hardening them in their resistance to God. As spoken to Pharaoh through Moses, for example, it simply stiffened his self-will and provoked him to open defiance. It can also harden men in self-righteousness, as it hardened the Pharisees when they encountered it in Christ. Why should this be so? In wrestling with this question Luther is led to propound his distinction between the "hidden" and the "revealed" will of God, and his doctrine of double predestination—a subject we shall consider later. Erasmus, however, is satisfied to explain the diverse effects of God's Word on men by attributing them to human freedom of choice, and he finds the problem of divine predestination easily solved by reference to God's foreknowledge of men's merits.

Erasmus knows, of course, that his position is open to the objection (which Luther does not fail to bring) that divine foreknowledge imposes necessity on man, leaving no room for contingency or free choice. He tries to forestall this objection by alluding to the Scholastic distinction between two kinds of necessity: that of "the consequent" ("*consequentis*") and that of "consequence" ("*consequentiae*"). In Scholastic thought the former represents absolute necessity, the latter conditional necessity, and the former excludes while the latter includes contingency. For example, whatever God wills necessarily happens—with conditional necessity, inasmuch as God is under no necessity to will it; but it happens also in the way he wills it to happen, whether necessarily or contingently (that is, with absolute or conditional necessity).<sup>14</sup>

It is along such lines as these that Erasmus discusses the case of Judas and the foreknowledge of God, about which his argument can be summarized as follows: Undoubtedly God foreknew that Judas would betray Christ; yet Judas was not forced (by absolute necessity) to do this, for he could have changed his mind. Hence

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologica* I, q. 14, a. 13 and q. 19, a. 8.

his action was only conditionally necessary, being contingent on his not changing his mind, though of course if he had been going to change his mind, God would have foreknown this as well. To which Luther makes the obvious reply that in that case the change of mind must have been necessary—absolutely and not just conditionally necessary.

As Luther sees it, to say that God's foreknowledge of man's actions leaves room for the contingency of man's free choices is to make it no knowledge at all. It is to say that God foreknows, but he may be mistaken. For choices that are "free" in the sense of "not necessary" are a matter of sheer unpredictable chance. Consequently, Luther dismisses the Scholastic distinction as a mere play on words, and offers an alternative of his own. He is not speaking, he says, of the necessity of force or coercion, but of immutability. Certainly, Judas was not forced to betray Christ, he did it voluntarily; but his will being what it was he could not do otherwise, for the will cannot change itself. Hence he acted as he did of necessity—the necessity of immutability; he certainly did not act freely, for he was under the control of Satan.

But now, if men like Judas cannot change themselves, why does not God so act as to change them? Why does the Holy Spirit not oust the Evil Spirit from their lives? Luther's answer is, not that God cannot because men will not let him, but that for reasons known only to himself he does not so choose. It is in this connection that Luther introduces his distinction between the "hidden" and the "revealed" or "preached" will of God. According to the latter, God does not desire any man to perish, but all men to be saved. Yet it is clear that by no means all men receive salvation, even when the saving will of God as revealed in the gospel is preached to them. The reason for this we do not and cannot know; it has not been revealed to us; it lies in the hidden will of God.

Luther here appears to be saying that there are two contrary wills in God, and a virtual self-contradiction in the divine nature. But that is certainly not his intention. What God contradicts is not himself, but fallen man's distorted picture and false notions of him. The plainest evidence of this, as Luther sees it, is in the incarnation and cross of Christ, where God acts in ways precisely opposite to man's common expectations of him, and not at all in the ways in which unregenerate man would act if he were God. It is therefore far from obvious, not only to physical sight, but also to rational insight, that "God was in Christ." God is in fact profoundly "hidden" in Christ, in whom Christian faith declares him

supremely "revealed."<sup>15</sup> Hence, it is only by faith, which is God's own gift, that a man comes to recognize God in the crucified Man of Nazareth.

Now, it is precisely in line with his understanding of the "hiddenness" of God in Christ, when Luther affirms that God "hides his eternal goodness and mercy under eternal wrath, his righteousness under iniquity." Nor is it difficult to accept this idea when wrath has the effect of preparing men for grace and so plays a part in their salvation. But what are we to say when it simply hardens men and ensures their damnation? Luther's answer in brief is this: Admittedly we cannot see *how* God can be righteous and good, let alone merciful, when he "saves so few and damns so many"; but in faith we can and must maintain *that* he is. Judged by the light of nature (the rationality of fallen man), such an assertion may well seem nonsense, but in the light of grace (the revelation of God in Christ) it makes believable though not demonstrable sense; and in the light of glory (God's perfected Kingdom in the life beyond this life) we shall see the unquestionable truth of what here we can only believe.

Clearly, Luther does not mean to assert any will in God that could supersede or override the will revealed in Christ, although in some of his statements he comes perilously close to it. He had had enough of that sort of duality in the Ockhamist theology of his monastic days, with the use it made of the Scholastic distinction between the absolute and the ordained power of God ("*potestas absoluta et ordinata*"). The idea was that God by his absolute power could have done everything, both in creation and redemption, quite otherwise than he has; and even now he is not bound, as his creatures are, by the order he has in fact established. For although by his ordained power he upholds the laws both of the world of nature and the realm of grace, yet by his absolute power he interrupts the former by working miracles, and severely limits the latter by the mystery of predestination. When, therefore, Luther sought to work out his salvation in terms of God's ordained will, he became obsessed by the terrifying fear that he might be among those predestined by God's absolute will, not to salvation, but to damnation.

In this situation Luther had been pointed toward the cure for his anxiety by his Superior, Staupitz, who told him:

In the wounds of Christ is predestination understood and found, and nowhere else; for it is written, "Him shall ye hear" (Matt. 17:5).

<sup>15</sup> *WA* 1, 112 f. Cf. P. S. Watson, *Let God Be God* (London, 1960), p. 103; H. Bandt, *Luthers Lehre vom verborgenen Gott* (Berlin, 1957), pp. 24 ff.

The Father is too high, therefore he says, "I will give a way by which men may come to me . . . in Christ you shall find who and what I am, and what I will; otherwise you will not find it either in heaven or on earth."<sup>16</sup>

These words Luther never forgot; they are echoed again and again in his writings; and years later we find him giving essentially the same counsel to souls distressed as he himself had been. He is convinced that if only a man can be persuaded to turn to Christ and the unfathomable grace of God in him, he can know beyond all doubt that, far from being among the reprobate, he is assuredly among the elect.<sup>17</sup>

With this, Luther furnishes a practical, pastoral solution of the problem of predestination, which theoretically and doctrinally he cannot solve. His doctrine of predestination, like Calvin's after him, is from one point of view a confession of ignorance and a very proper piece of Christian agnosticism. It might be called a "no throughway" sign, indicating that here all attempts to explain and understand come to an end. At the same time it is a confession of faith and an affirmation of entirely legitimate Christian certainty. It expresses the conviction that man's destiny is ultimately determined, not by his own fallible choices, and much less by luck or chance or arbitrary fate, but by the infallibly wise and good will of the gracious God revealed in Christ.

The idea of predestination had of course been a continual topic of debate ever since Augustine's time, and in Scholastic theology it had been variously interpreted. By some it had been rationalized, as Erasmus would rationalize it, in terms of God's foreknowledge of man's merits. Men were predestined to salvation or damnation according to what God foresaw they were going to deserve as a result of their cooperation or noncooperation with his grace. By others, including the greatest of them all, Aquinas, it had been held in as uncompromising a form, if not given as prominent a place, as it ever was afterward by Luther or Calvin.<sup>18</sup> It then furnished an antidote to the pride and presumption of supposing that man by his merits was the final arbiter of his own destiny. For while the Scholastic theologians could never conceive of God as accepting a man without merit, they could and sometimes explicitly did teach that he was not bound to give a man the grace to acquire

<sup>16</sup> *WA Tr* 2, 112, 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, ed. and tr. by Theodore G. Tappert (The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XVIII; Philadelphia, 1955), pp. 115 ff., 122, 130 ff., 137 f.

<sup>18</sup> See *Summa theologica* I, q. 23, esp. aa. 3, 5, 6.

merit, nor even to accept the merit a man might acquire by grace given. No man therefore could ever be sure of his acceptance with God—unless, as Aquinas suggests, he were granted a special (private) revelation, which was very rare and generally undesirable.<sup>19</sup>

By contrast, both Luther and Calvin find in the idea of predestination a firm basis for the Christian's confidence regarding his salvation—and that on the ground of no other "special" revelation than that given publicly to all the world in Christ. There were subtle and important differences between them in their ways of doing this, but the fact that they did it indicates a much more significant difference between them and their predecessors, which frequent similarities of language should not be allowed to obscure. For them the doctrine of predestination furnished an antidote, not only to pride and presumption, but also to the doubt and despair into which a man might fall (as Luther had done in the monastery) through uncertainty as to God's goodwill toward him.

It does not seem to have occurred to the Reformers that even their versions of the doctrine might become a ground for uncertainty and a threat to the doctrine of grace itself. Yet in the eighteenth century (to mention only one instance) we find John Wesley attacking the Calvinism of his time as constituting just such a threat. The controversy centered on the Calvinists' concept of a limited atonement, according to which the saving work of Christ was directed, not to all men, but only to those already predestined to salvation by an eternal divine decree. To this, Wesley opposed his Arminian conviction that God's grace in Christ was intended for all men without exception; that by the prevenient operation of this same grace a measure of the freedom lost at the Fall was restored to every man; and that there was therefore no man who could not, if he would, accept the salvation offered in the gospel.

The situation in Wesley's time was similar to that in the Early Church, when Gnostic determinism divided mankind into two or more classes on the theory that some men were incapable of salvation and the rest capable in differing degree. Against this, men such as Origen and Irenaeus had asserted human freedom of choice as a means of maintaining the universal scope of the gospel of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Man's free will meant for them the possibility of man's receiving God's salvation.

The situation Luther faced, however, was of a different sort. In his time the freedom of the human will was understood, not simply in terms of receptivity, but as an ability in man to make an active contribution to his salvation in the form of merit. The Augustin-

<sup>19</sup> *Summa theologiae* I, q. 23, a. 1.

ian aphorism that "when God crowns our merits he crowns but his own gifts" had been replaced by the Semi-Pelagian position aptly stated by Erasmus when he says: "If man does nothing, there is no room for merits; if man does everything, there is no room for grace." Hence it was commonly taught that if a man would only do "what in him lay," however little that might be, God would reward him with a gift of grace, enabling him to do more and yet more until he had enough to qualify for glory. In this connection the Scholastic distinction between "congruous" and "condign" merit, or the merit of "fitness" and of "worthiness" should be noted. The former was ascribed to man's well-intentioned efforts, which, although they were not strictly meritorious, it was "fitting" that God should reward with his grace. The latter, as resulting from good works done with the aid of grace thus received, was regarded as meritorious in the strict sense of the term. Such at least was the late Scholastic view known to Erasmus and Luther, although Aquinas taught somewhat differently.<sup>20</sup>

But all this, as Luther saw it, meant an intolerable cheapening of grace.<sup>21</sup> It was worse even than thoroughgoing Pelagianism, which at least did not pretend that salvation could be purchased at such low cost. The fact is, however, that saving grace is not for sale; it is priceless—and free. It is God's free gift to men, given at the immeasurable cost to God of the death of his Son. Hence the idea that man can merit it by exercising his freedom of choice and doing what in him lies is nothing short of blasphemous.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that Luther's thought does not necessarily exclude every possible idea of human freedom in relation to things pertaining to salvation. We have seen that he distinguishes—as Erasmus does not—between different kinds or levels of freedom; and another might conceivably be added to his list without violating his principles. He acknowledges, for example, that even fallen man possesses a capacity for response to God's grace—a "dispositional quality" or "passive aptitude" he calls it in Scholastic terms—which animals and inanimate objects do not; and he repeatedly insists that the response man makes to the divine initiative is in no way coerced but entirely voluntary. What is more, in reply to a question as to why God elects this man and not that, he can say:

<sup>20</sup> Aquinas holds that man can make no effort toward the good, and therefore can acquire no merit, apart from grace; and that any such effort inspired by grace carries both kinds of merit—congruous inasmuch as it is a work of man's free will, condign inasmuch as it is a work of grace.

<sup>21</sup> See below, p. 321.

This difference is to be ascribed to man, not to the will of God, for the promises of God are universal. He will have all men to be saved. Accordingly it is not the fault of our Lord God, who promises salvation, but it is our fault if we are unwilling to believe it.<sup>22</sup>

By most ordinary standards it would not seem unnatural to speak of a real element of freedom here: not the absolute freedom which belongs to God alone, and not the liberty of the children of God, nor yet the freedom of action man has in relation to "things beneath him," but perhaps (if we may put it so) a freedom of responsible reaction to the "things above him."

Granted, a man completely untouched by the grace of God would have no choice but to sin, being under the undisputed control of Satan. but when men are in the position of the beast between two contending riders, it seems reasonable to think them capable of showing a preference for one rider rather than the other—especially as they are not beasts, but men. We may recall here the analogy of a slave and his master, which both Erasmus and Luther use. A slave may obey or disobey his master's commands; in that sense he has freedom of choice, and that is enough for Erasmus. But for Luther this means only freedom with respect to "things beneath" man, and the analogy must be differently applied with respect to "things above" him. A slave is not his own master, and even if he would much prefer a different master from the one he has, yet between masters he is not free to choose.

Nevertheless, we might insist, he is free to have and express his preferences. But then Luther in turn would insist on our facing the question: What reason can be given for such preferences? The significance of this can be illustrated with regard to the debate between Erasmus and Luther which we are at present discussing, for in that debate readers of the present volume will find themselves taking sides. They will be drawn to this side and perhaps driven from that, according as they are moved by what each man says, being persuaded or dissuaded or even repelled by it. Or, to put it another way, they will take sides according as they approve of the one and disapprove of the other, judging the one to be better or truer than the other. Both ways of putting it are legitimate, and to do justice to the situation both are necessary. Yet neither of them nor both together suffice to explain why any man is on either side. Perhaps the only answer to that question ultimately is that, being the sort of person he is, and therefore look-

<sup>22</sup> *WA Tr 4*, No. 4665 (quoted from *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 130).

ing at things in the way he does, a man cannot help preferring the side to which he is drawn—or being drawn to the side he prefers. He may of course be open to conviction by stronger arguments for the other side if any can be produced, but apart from such conviction he is not free to change his mind or change sides. A man is not at liberty to determine how he will think.

It is in a similar vein that Luther denies man's liberty to determine whose "arguments" he will believe, and consequently whom he will serve in the conflict between God and Satan. It is only when God produces arguments that prove stronger and more convincing to him than Satan's that a man becomes able to change his mind and change sides. Yet Luther is clear that it is a man's own fault and not God's if he is not convinced by God's arguments. For it goes without saying that the arguments on God's side are in the nature of the case immeasurably stronger than Satan's, so that anyone genuinely open to conviction must be convinced by them and believe them. Unbelievers therefore are without excuse; and believers have nothing to boast about, since apart from the convincing power of God's Word they would be unbelievers still. There are, it is true, moments in the heat of his controversy with Erasmus, when Luther seems to suggest that God has deliberately not pressed his arguments as strongly as he might; yet as a rule, and especially in his preaching and pastoral counseling, Luther certainly regards man as responsible. He knows, moreover, that even when God does press his arguments, unbelief sometimes becomes only the more stubborn. God's Word can repel as well as attract.

Why God's Word evokes in some cases a positive and in others a negative response remains a mystery however we look at it. The postulate of human "free will" no more explains it than does reference to the "hidden will" of God. It is a mystery to which there are analogies in other areas of life, and especially in personal relationships,<sup>23</sup> but analogies can at most help us to accept the mystery, not to fathom it. We are here at a point where life is only too plainly larger than logic, and conceptual analysis is entirely out of its depth. To do justice to the situation we must be content with a paradox, affirming both divine predestination and human responsibility. Which is not to say that both Erasmus and Luther have won and that both shall have prizes, for it commits us neither to Luther's overconfident statements about predestination nor to Erasmus' much too naïve view of free will. What it means is that we are willing to recognize the limits of our own understanding

<sup>23</sup> Cf. P. S. Watson, *The Concept of Grace* (London, 1960), pp. 98 ff.



and to believe that things beyond our comprehension may make perfectly good sense to God.

PHILIP S. WATSON

## THE LANGUAGE OF THE DEBATE

Luther in this volume is translated from the Weimar Edition, and Erasmus from the edition of Jean Le Clerc, *Des. Erasmi Opera Omnia*, ed. by J. Clericus (Petrus Vander, Lugduni, Batavorum), Vol. IX (1706), columns 1215-1248, although the first edition printed by Frobenius at Basle in 1524 has been consulted throughout. Unfortunately, this first edition has neither pagination nor paragraphing, so that it is useless for the purposes of reference. The paragraphing, headings, and the subheadings are entirely our own, and in the case of Erasmus constitute pioneering work, whereas of course Luther's *De servo arbitrio* has received much more attention from editors and translators such as Packer and Johnston (J. Clarke, London, 1957).

Our problems begin with the titles of the two works. Erasmus calls his a *Diatribē* or *Collatio*, and these two words are in medieval usage virtually Greek and Latin equivalents. "Discourse" is more closely connected with *Collatio*, and therefore the word "diatribe" has been left to render the Greek word; and indeed there is much in the work to justify the term "diatribe" in both the narrower and the wider implications of the term. *Collatio* was used in special senses in medieval universities, and particularly at Paris, to denote expositions of set texts by candidates for degrees, and also discourses on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard over which the candidate for a Doctorate in Theology was required to spend two years of his course. It also denoted the conference held every Sunday afternoon, at which the preacher was required to expound the theme of the morning sermon.<sup>1</sup> The common feature here is that of an exposition or discourse. At the end Erasmus says, "*Contuli*," i.e., "I have completed my discourse," and Luther in his reply plays on the literal sense of *contuli*, "I have compared," by saying that he himself has made assertions, not comparisons. He regards it as his mission, not to complete a discourse on the subject, but to proclaim to Erasmus and the world the great truth of salvation as he sees it.

The word *assertio* is itself loosely used by Erasmus at p. 35 and

<sup>1</sup> See Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, ed. by F. M. Powicke and A. B. Ernden, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1936), Vol. I, pp. 402n, 449, 450, and 467n.

p. 37 in reference to a previous thesis by Luther, and each author makes continued use of the literal meaning of the word in order to criticize the other's attitude.

The word *arbitrium* is itself a problem. It has hitherto usually been translated "will," but at p. 47 Erasmus defines "*liberum arbitrium*" as "*vim humanae voluntatis, qua se possit homo applicare ad ea quae perducunt ad aeternam salutem, aut ab iisdem avertere*"; "a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them." Here at any rate *arbitrium* cannot be equated with *voluntas*, and it has been decided to sacrifice tradition and a certain measure of euphony on the altar of accuracy, and to translate *arbitrium* throughout by "choice." The phrase "*servum arbitrium*" is of course taken from Augustine, *Contra Iulianum* II.viii.23, which is quoted by Luther himself (p. 174, and n. 13) in the great argument which forms the very core of his treatise.

Certain key words are always a difficulty to the translator. *Pietas*, for instance, does sometimes mean "piety" but more often "godliness" or "holiness," and sometimes what we mean by "goodness" or even "religion." *Carnalis* does mean "carnal," but words like "carnal" and "piety" have acquired the religious flavor of a certain period, and can no longer be used without recalling the beliefs of that period. *Carnalis* does not always refer directly to what we should call the sins of the flesh, though the root meaning is of course never absent and never wrong—merely partial or inadequate; so *carnalis* has been rendered by "sensual," "worldly," "secular," "mundane," or "material," though warning is always given in a footnote that *carnalis* (*caro*) is in the original. (Cf. also Luther's discussion of "the flesh," pp. 263 ff.)

Erasmus was steeped in classical Latin, and his prose has an easy, sometimes even a free-and-easy, Ciceronian quality that contrasts with the occasionally cryptic syntax of Luther, though Luther too is a first-rate Latinist. Luther's obscurity stems in part from the ineffable things he is trying to say about grace and free will, and in part from his passionate vehemence which does not stop to verify references or to render the nuances of his meaning. He will use a participial or ablatival phrase in puzzling opposition to, or description of, his main subject, or a temporal clause that obviously means something a little different from what he intended or he will even tolerate an apparent contradiction in respect of which he would probably have agreed with Walt Whitman in being quite unrepentant.

A specially noteworthy device of Luther's is his use of hendiadys. There are several passages where the sense is made clear if one as-

sumes the use of this device. Thus at p. 107 occurs the phrase "*tanta querulari et exaggerari*," which is best translated by some such phrase as "a mass of complaints." Again at p. 112 the words "*non sine suspitione et aculeo*" seem to mean "not without a suspicion of sarcasm"; at p. 145 "*multitudine, autoritate*" is best translated by "the number of authorities"; at p. 159 "*in iis quae pertinent ad salutem vel necessitatem*" means "things that are necessary to salvation"; and at p. 234 "*cum securitate quadam et contemptu*" is best rendered "with a kind of contemptuous self-confidence." At p. 316 the problems of perhaps the most difficult sentence in the whole treatise are eased by taking *per contentionem et partitionem* as "through a polemical partition."

It is true of both Erasmus and Luther that "*le style, c'est l'homme-même*": Luther a daring, subtle, passionate logician in the medieval manner, for all his advanced thinking; Erasmus a cool, dexterous logical fencer but not committed so deeply.

It is most instructive to compare the two men in the frequency and range of their references to classical authors. Here the result is the reverse of what one might have expected, and it is Luther who makes by far the more frequent classical allusions. Erasmus quotes very rarely and even then from obscure authors—Pomponius Mela, for example, several editions of whose work on geography were published between 1498 and 1520—and his mythological allusions are very obscure, as for example the reference to "Diomedean necessity" at p. 83. Few people without previous acquaintance with Erasmus' own *Adagia* would be likely to recognize the significance of the allusion. There are so many places where the *Adagia* throw light on a sentence or phrase in the *De libero arbitrio* that a short appendix has been included to deal with this topic.

Luther, on the other hand, abounds in Latin quotations, and it is possible to deduce his favorite reading from these. He is particularly fond of quoting the *Epistles* and the *Ars poetica* of Horace, and he also has several references to Terence, though none in this work to Plautus. We also encounter Sallust, Cicero, Vergil, Livy, Ovid, Quintilian, Juvenal, and even Manilius, though the line he quotes from Manilius (*Astronomica* iv.14, at p. 121, n. 30) has a Vergilian ring and may have come to Luther in a collection of maxims, for we find him also quoting one of the couplets known as the *Disticha Catonis*, probably from a similar source.<sup>2</sup> He treats

<sup>2</sup> The excellent translation of Packer and Johnston is somewhat marred by the inaccuracy of the classical references in their footnotes. For example, on p. 83 there are five references in footnotes to *The Aeneid*; of these three are

the elder Pliny as a philosopher, which sounds a little strange to us, but in those days all classical authors were felt to have a kind of blanket authority by virtue of being from the classical period.

We find the familiar but baffling "*vox et praeterea nihil*," which we all think we can locate until we come to make the attempt; and in at least one place Luther either quotes an unidentified hexameter or unconsciously creates one when he writes "*ante suum clauso componit tempore finem*" (p. 133). In another place the cryptic words "*velut ille ad rhombum*" are most probably an obscure allusion to the fourth satire of Juvenal.

The list of Luther's references to Greek authors is also impressive. He quotes Homer, Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, Leucippus, Plato, Aristotle, and Lucian. Turning to postclassical writers, we find references to Origen, Porphyry, Justinian, Hilary of Poitiers, Augustine, and Jerome. It is interesting that although Luther professes disgust and contempt for Jerome, he has been unconsciously influenced by the latter's style, for such rare words as *andabata* (p. 171), though they do occur in classical authors, were revived by Jerome, and there is little doubt that Luther remembered them from Jerome's polemics; in fact, at p. 237 Luther coins a word *tropologus* from Jerome's use of the adjective *tropologicus*, and similarly at p. 264, n. 60 *Vergilicentoniae* is another word coined by Jerome. The extent of Jerome's influence on Luther would repay further study.

Erasmus tells us that he wrote his discourse in a few months, and the only difficulties for a translator, apart of course from the theological terms, are places where his fluency has led to an awkwardly placed phrase that he has not revised. A good example is at p. 90, where he is discussing the first cause in relation to fire: "*Quemadmodum vis ignis urit, et tamen principalis causa Deus est, qui simul per ignem agit, quae vel sola sufficeret, et sine qua nihil ageret ignis, si se subduceret illa*," "Just as the power of fire burns, yet the principal cause is God, who acts at the same time through the fire, and this cause would of itself be sufficient, without which fire could effect nothing, if it [i.e., the divine cause] removed itself." Here the clause "*quae vel sola sufficeret*" refers back to "*causa*" and is itself the antecedent of "*illa*." Cicero would probably have written a tidier sentence. Throughout the discourse

---

wrong (one passage is not even from Vergil at all, being the Manilian verse referred to above), while the first four are in the wrong order so that in fact one of the two references correct in number is to the wrong passage anyway. There are also omitted or wrong references in the notes on pp. 237 and 267, and omissions in several other places.

there are occasional problems arising out of what seems to be hurried writing, evidenced in the strung-together style of certain sentences. These problems are discussed in their place.

A difficulty arose in deciding how to translate the numerous passages from Holy Scripture. No modern version could be consistently used, because both Erasmus and Luther base arguments on the very points where ancient and modern translations differ. For example, at p. 47 Erasmus quotes Ecclus. 15:15: "*Si volueris mandata conservare, conservabunt te*"; literally, "If thou shalt be willing to keep the commandments, they shall keep thee." The RSV has: "If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice." Yet at p. 54 Erasmus discusses his Latin text, remarking that the Greek has not the addition "*conservabunt te*," so that it is essential to keep this point in our translation. Similar care must be taken in the Scriptural passages at pp. 56 and 57, where Erasmus in the latter case quotes the Vulgate, and particularly in the long quotation from Deut., ch. 30, at pp. 54 f.

Classical Greek and Roman authors were at no pains to quote correctly, and Luther in particular is their true disciple, going straight for the substance rather than the detail. As he himself remarks, "What is the good of giving a stiff and strict rendering, when the reader can make nothing of it?" Yet he likes to appear in control of his material, and with a typical impatience will give chapter and verse that are quite wrong rather than pause to verify them. In spite of this carelessness, he will base whole arguments on manuscript readings that are not only wrong but nonsensical, as for example, *militantibus* for *ministrantibus*, at p. 268, of the serving women at the door of the tabernacle in I Sam. 2:22. Like Molière, he would have said, "*Il m'est permis de reprendre mon bien où je le trouve.*" It does not appear that Luther was so acute a textual critic as Erasmus or he could hardly have failed to make the obvious emendation here.

Each Scriptural quotation has therefore been treated on its merits, and in some few cases Luther's renderings have been corrected where this seemed necessary. As a rule the term "*sacrae litterae*" has been translated by "Holy Scripture," but occasionally it is in opposition to some such phrase as "*bonae litterae*" in the sense of "literature," and here again, we have treated each case on its merits.

A. N. MARLOW  
B. DREWERY