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LUTHER ON THE "A DEBITO AD POSSE" FALLACY IN THE DOCTRINE OF CONVERSION.

(Concluded.)

The first passage of Holy Writ from which Erasmus endeavors to prove spiritual powers in natural man are the following words of Ecclesiasticus: "God from the beginning made man, and left him in the hand of his own counsel. He gave him also His commandments, and His precepts: saying, If thou wilt keep my commandments, and wilt keep continually the faith that pleaseth me, they shall preserve thee. He hath set before thee fire and water; and upon which thou wilt, stretch forth thine hand. Before man is life and death, good and evil; and whichsoever pleaseth him, shall be given unto him." Having carefully examined Erasmus' definition of Free-will ("this empty thing of a Term") and emphasized the fact that the human will is always either good or evil,¹⁾ Luther proceeds as follows:

1) Luther writes: "Moreover, it is a mere logical figment" (a mere logical abstraction) "that in man there is a medium, a mere willing, nor can they who assert this prove it; it arose from an ignorance of things and an observance of terms. As though the thing were always in reality, as it is set forth in terms; and there are with the sophists many such misconceptions. Whereas the matter rather stands as Christ saith, 'He that is not with me is against me.' He does not say, He that is not with me is yet not against me, but in the medium. For if God be in us, Satan is from us, and it is present with us to will nothing but good. But if God be not in us, Satan is in us, and it is present with us to will evil only. Neither God nor Satan admit of a mere abstracted willing in us; but, as you your-

'First he saith, 'God made man in the beginning.' Here he speaks of the creation of man; nor does he say anything, as yet, concerning either Free-will or the commandments. Then he goes on, 'and left him in the hand of his own counsel.' And what is here? Is Free-will built upon this? But there is not here any mention of commandments, for the doing of which Free-will is required; nor do we read anything of this kind in the creation of man. If anything be understood by 'the hand of his own counsel,' that should rather be understood which is in Gen. 1 and 3: that man was made lord of all things that he might freely exercise dominion over them: and as Moses saith, 'Let us make man, and let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea;' nor can anything else be proved from those words, for it is in these things only that man may act of his own will as being subject unto him. And moreover, he calls this *man's counsel*, in contradiction, as it were, to the *counsel of God*. But after this, when he has said that man was made and left thus in the hand of his own counsel—he adds, 'He added moreover His commandments and His precepts.' Unto what did He add them? Certainly unto that counsel and will of man, and over and above unto that constituting of his dominion over other things. By which commandments He took from man the dominion over one part of His creatures (that is, over the tree of knowledge of good and

self rightly said, when our liberty is lost we are compelled to serve sin: that is, we *will* sin and evil, we *speak* sin and evil, we *do* sin and evil." (Cole, p. 123.)—Again: "For when it is granted and established, that Free-will, having once lost its liberty, is compulsively bound to the service of sin, and cannot will anything good, I, from these words, can understand nothing else than that Free-will is a mere empty term, whose reality is lost. And a lost liberty, according to my grammar, is no liberty at all. And to give the name of liberty to that which has no liberty is to give it an empty term. If I am wrong here, let him set me right who can. If these observations be obscure or ambiguous, let him who can illustrate and make them plain. I, for my part, cannot call that health which is lost, health; and if I were to ascribe it to one who was sick, I should think I was giving him nothing else than an empty name." (p. 125 f.)

evil), and willed rather that he should *not* be free.—Having added the commandments, He then comes to the will of man towards God and towards the things of God. . . . When, therefore, Ecclesiasticus says, 'If thou wilt keep the commandments, and keep the faith that pleaseth me, they shall preserve thee,' I do not see that Free-will can be proved from those words. For, 'if thou wilt,' is a verb of the subjunctive mood, which asserts nothing: as the logicians say, 'a conditional asserts nothing indicatively:' such as, if the devil be God, he is deservedly worshiped: if an ass fly, an ass has wings: so also, if there be Free-will, grace is nothing at all. Therefore, if Ecclesiasticus had wished to assert Free-will, he ought to have spoken thus:—man *is able* to keep the commandments of God, or, man *has the power* to keep the commandments."¹⁾

Erasmus asserted that the hypothetical and exhortatory words of Ecclesiasticus were meaningless unless understood as presupposing in man the power to obey and fulfill the condition required. Luther, however, maintains that they purpose to bring man to a knowledge of his spiritual impotence and sin. Luther writes: "But here the Diatribe will sharply retort—'Ecclesiasticus by saying, "If thou wilt keep," signifies that there is a will in man, to keep, and not to keep: otherwise, what is the use of saying unto him who has no will, "If thou wilt"?' Would it not be ridiculous if any were to say to a blind man, If thou wilt see, thou mayest find a treasure? Or, to a deaf man, If thou wilt hear, I will relate to thee an excellent story? This would be to laugh at their misery."²⁾ I answer: These are the arguments of human reason, which is wont to shoot forth many such sprigs of wisdom. Wherefore, I must dis-

1) Cole, p. 127 ff.

2) Compare Prof. Richard's assertion in *The Lutheran Quarterly*, p. 65: "To command a person to repent and to believe, on the presupposition that he has no power to repent and to believe, is hypocritical mockery."

pute now, not with Ecclesiasticus, but with human reason concerning a conclusion; for she, by her conclusions and syllogisms, interprets and twists the Scriptures of God just which way she pleases. But I will enter upon this willingly, and with confidence, knowing that she can prate nothing but follies and absurdities; and that more especially, when she attempts to make a show of her wisdom in these divine matters. First, then, if I should demand of her how it can be proved that the freedom of the will in man is signified and inferred, wherever these expressions are used, 'If thou wilt,' 'If thou shalt do,' 'If thou shalt hear;' she would say, Because the nature of words, and the common use of speech among men, seem to require it. Therefore, she judges of divine things and words according to the customs and things of men; than which, what can be more perverse; seeing that the former things are heavenly, the latter earthly. Like a fool, therefore, she exposes herself, making it manifest that she has not a thought concerning God but what is human. But what if I prove that the nature of words and the use of speech even among men are not always of that tendency as to make a laughing stock of those to whom it is said, 'If thou wilt,' 'If thou shalt do it,' 'If thou shalt hear'? How often do parents thus play with their children, when they bid them come to them, or do this or that, for this purpose only, that it may plainly appear to them how unable they are to do it, and that they may call for the aid of the parent's hand? How often does a faithful physician bid his obstinate patient do or omit those things which are either injurious to him or impossible, to the intent that he may bring him, by an experience, to the knowledge of his disease or his weakness? And what is more general and common, than to use words of insult or provocation, when we would show either enemies or friends what they can do and what they cannot do? I merely go over these things to show Reason her own conclusions, and how absurdly she tacks them to the Scriptures; moreover, how blind she must

be not to see that they do not always stand good even in human words and things. But the case is, if she see it to be done once, she rushes on headlong, taking it for granted that it is done generally in all the things of God and men, thus making, according to the way of her wisdom, of a particularity a universality. If, then, God, as a father, deal with us as with sons, that He might show us who are in ignorance our impotency, or as a faithful physician, that He might make our disease known unto us, or that He might insult His enemies who proudly resist His counsel; and for this end say to us by proposed laws (as being those means by which He accomplishes His design the most effectually), 'Do,' 'hear,' 'keep,' or, 'if thou wilt,' 'if thou wilt do,' 'if thou wilt hear;' can this be drawn herefrom as a just conclusion—therefore, either we have free power to act, or God laughs at us? Why is this not rather drawn as a conclusion—therefore, God tries us, that by His Law He might bring us to a knowledge of our impotency, if we be His friends; or, He thereby righteously and deservedly insults and derides us, if we be His proud enemies. For this, as Paul teaches, is the intent of the divine legislation. Because human nature is blind, so that it knows not its own powers, or rather its own diseases. Moreover, being proud, it self-conceitedly imagines that it knows and can do all things. To remedy which pride and ignorance, God can use no means more effectual than His proposed Law: of which we shall say more in its place: let it suffice to have thus touched upon it here, to refute this conclusion of carnal and absurd wisdom:—'if thou wilt'—therefore thou art able to will freely. The Diatribe dreams that man is whole and sound, as, to human appearance, he is in his own affairs; and therefore, from these words, 'If thou wilt,' 'If thou wilt do,' 'If thou wilt hear,' it pertly argues that man, if his will be not free, is laughed at. Whereas, the Scripture describes man as corrupt and a captive; and, added to that, as proudly contemning and ignorant of his corruption and captivity;

and therefore, by those words, it goads him and rouses him up, that he might know, by a real experience, how unable he is to do any one of those things." 1)

According to Luther the argument: "If thou wilt—therefore thou hast a free power" proves too much, hence, nothing. Erasmus taught, and purposed to prove, that there are remnants only of spiritual powers in natural man. His argument, however, proves the absolute integrity of all the spiritual powers of man. Erasmus wanted to prove Semi-Pelagianism; he does prove Pelagianism, which he himself condemned. The argument *a debito ad posse* lured Erasmus into the very pit which he had dug for his enemy. Luther writes: "But I will attack the Diatribe itself. If thou really think, O Madam Reason! that these conclusions stand good, 'If thou wilt—therefore thou hast a free power,' why dost thou not follow the same thyself? For thou sayest, according to that 'probable opinion,' that Free-will cannot will anything good. By what conclusion, then, can such a sentiment flow from this passage also, 'If thou wilt keep,' when thou sayest that the conclusion flowing from this is, that man can will and not will freely? What! can bitter and sweet flow from the same fountain? Dost thou not here much more deride man thyself, when thou sayest that he can keep that which he can neither will nor choose? Therefore, neither dost thou, from thy heart, believe that this is a just conclusion, 'If thou wilt—therefore thou hast a free power,' although thou contendest for it with so much zeal, or, if thou dost believe it, then thou dost not, from thy heart, say, that that opinion is 'probable,' which holds that man cannot will good. Thus, reason is so caught in the conclusions and words of her own wisdom, that she knows not what she says, nor concerning what she speaks; nay, knows nothing but that which it is most right she should know—that Free-will is defended

1) pp. 130—133.

with such arguments as mutually devour, and put an end to each other; just as the Midianites destroyed each other by mutual slaughter, when they fought against Gideon and the people of God, Judges 7. Nay, I will expostulate more fully with this wisdom of the Diatribe. Ecclesiasticus does not say, 'If thou shalt have the desire and the endeavor of keeping' (for this is not to be ascribed to that power of yours, as you have concluded); but he says, 'If thou wilt keep the commandments they shall preserve thee.' Now, then, if we, after the manner of your wisdom, wish to draw conclusions, we should infer thus:—therefore, man is able to keep the commandments. And thus, we shall not here make a certain small degree of desire, or a certain little effort of endeavor to be left in man, but we shall ascribe unto him the whole, full, and abundant power of keeping the commandments. Otherwise, Ecclesiasticus will be made to laugh at the misery of man, as commanding *him* to 'keep,' who, he knows, is not able to 'keep.' Nor would it have been sufficient if he had supposed the desire and the endeavor to be in the man, for he would not then have escaped the suspicion of deriding him, unless he had signified his having the full power of keeping. But, however, let us suppose that that desire and endeavor of Free-will are a real something. What shall we say to those (the Pelagians, I mean) who, from this passage, have denied grace *in toto*, and ascribed all to Free-will? If the conclusion of the Diatribe stand good, the Pelagians have evidently established their point. For the words of Ecclesiasticus speak of *keeping*, not of *desiring* or *endeavoring*. If, therefore, you deny the Pelagians their conclusion concerning *keeping*, they, in reply, will much more rightly deny you your conclusion concerning *endeavoring*. And if you take from them the whole of Free-will, they will take from you your remnant particle of it: for you cannot assert a remnant particle of that which you deny *in toto*. In what degree soever, therefore, you speak against the Pelagians,

who from this passage ascribe the whole to Free-will, in the same degree, and with much more determination, shall we speak against that certain small remnant desire of your Free-will. And in this, the Pelagians themselves will agree with us, that, if their opinion cannot be proved from this passage, much less will any other of the same kind be proved from it: seeing that, if the subject be to be conducted by conclusions, Ecclesiasticus above all makes the most forcibly for the Pelagians; for he speaks in plain words concerning *keeping* only, 'If thou wilt *keep* the commandments;' nay, he speaks also concerning *faith*, 'If thou wilt *keep the faith*:' so that, by the same conclusion, keeping the faith ought also to be in our power, which, however, is the peculiar and precious gift of God. In a word, since so many opinions are brought forward in support of Free-will, and there is no one that does not catch at this passage of Ecclesiasticus in defense of itself; and since they are diverse from, and contrary to each other, it is impossible but that they must make Ecclesiasticus contradictory to, and diverse from themselves in the selfsame words; and, therefore, they can from him prove nothing. Although, if that conclusion of yours be admitted, it will make for the Pelagians against all the others; and consequently, it makes against the Diatribe; which, in this passage, is stabbed by its own sword!"¹⁾

"Another passage is adduced by our Diatribe out of Gen. 4, where the Lord saith unto Cain, 'Under thee shall be the desire of sin, and thou shalt rule over it.'—'Here it is shown (saith the Diatribe) that the motions of the mind to evil can be overcome, and that they do not carry with them the necessity of sinning.' These words, 'The motions of the mind to evil can be overcome,' though spoken with ambiguity, yet, from the scope of the sentiment, the consequence, and the circumstances, must mean this:—that

1) pp. 133—136.

Free-will has the power of overcoming its motions to evil; and that those motions do not bring upon it the necessity of sinning. Here, again, what is there excepted which is not ascribed unto Free-will? What need is there of the Spirit, what need of Christ, what need of God, if Free-will can overcome the motions of the mind to evil? And where, again, is that 'probable opinion' which affirms that Free-will cannot so much as will good? For here the victory over evil is ascribed unto that which neither wills nor wishes for good. The inconsiderateness of our Diatribe is really—too—too bad! Take the truth of the matter in a few words. As I have before observed, by such passages as these it is shown to man what he *ought to do*, not what he *can do*. It is said, therefore, unto Cain that he ought to rule over his sin, and to hold its desires in subjection under him. But this he neither did nor could do, because he was already pressed down under the contrary dominion of Satan.—It is well known that the Hebrews frequently use the *future indicative* for the *imperative*: as in Ex. 20, 'Thou shalt have none other gods but me,' 'Thou shalt not kill,' 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' and in numberless other instances of the same kind. Otherwise, if these sentences were taken indicatively, as they really stand, they would be *promises* of God; and as He cannot lie, it would come to pass that no man could sin; and then, as *commands*, they would be unnecessary; and if this were the case, then our interpreter would have translated this passage more correctly thus:—'Let its desire be under thee, and rule thou over it,' Gen. 4. Even as it then ought also to be said concerning the woman, 'Be thou under thy husband, and let him rule over thee,' Gen. 3. But that it was not spoken indicatively unto Cain is manifest from this:—it would then have been a *promise*. Whereas, it was not a promise; because, from the conduct of Cain, the event proved the contrary.'¹⁾

1) p. 137 f.

"The third passage"—Luther proceeds—"is from Moses, Deut. 30, 'I have set before thy face life and death, choose what is good,' etc.—'What words (says the Diatribe) can be more plain? It leaves to man the liberty of choosing.' I answer: What is more plain than that you are blind? How, I pray, does it leave the liberty of choosing? Is it by the expression 'choose'?—Therefore, as Moses saith, 'Choose,' does it immediately come to pass that they do choose? Then there is no need of the Spirit. And as you so often repeat and inculcate the same things, I shall be justified in repeating the same things also.—If there be a liberty of choosing, why has the 'probable opinion' said that 'Free-will cannot will good'? Can it choose *not willing* or *against its will*? But let us listen to the similitude" (of Erasmus): "It would be ridiculous to say to a man standing in a place where two ways meet, 'Thou seest two roads, go by which thou wilt, when one only was open.' This, as I have before observed, is from the arguments of human reason, which thinks that a man is mocked by a command impossible; whereas I say that the man, by this means, is admonished and roused to see his own impotency. True it is that we are in a place where two ways meet, and that one of them only is open, yea, rather neither of them is open. But by the Law it is shown how impossible the one is, that is, to good, unless God freely give His Spirit; and how wide and easy the other is, if God leave us to ourselves. Therefore, it would not be said ridiculously, but with a necessary seriousness, to the man thus standing in a place where two ways meet, 'Go by which thou wilt,' if he, being in reality impotent, wished to seem to himself strong, or contended that neither way was hedged up. Wherefore, the words of the Law are spoken, not that they might assert the power of the will, but that they might illuminate the blindness of reason, that it might see that its own light is nothing, and that the power of the will is nothing. 'By the Law' (saith Paul) 'is the knowledge of sin,' Rom. 3.

He does not say—is the abolition of, or the escape from sin. The whole nature and design of the Law is to give knowledge only, and that of nothing else save of sin, but not to discover or communicate any power whatever. For knowledge is not power, nor does it communicate power, but it teaches and shows how great the impotency must there be, where there is no power. And what else can the knowledge of sin be but the knowledge of our evil and infirmity? For he does not say—by the Law comes the knowledge of strength or of good. The whole that the Law does, according to the testimony of Paul, is to make known sin. And this is the place where I take occasion to enforce this my general reply:—that man, by the words of the Law, is admonished and taught what *he ought to do*, not what *he can do*: that is, that he is brought to know his sin, but not to believe that he has any strength in himself. Wherefore, friend Erasmus, as often as you throw in my teeth the words of the Law, so often I throw in yours that of Paul, ‘By the Law is the knowledge of sin,’—not of the power of the will. Heap together, therefore, out of the large Concordances all the imperative words into one chaos, provided that they be not words of the promise but of the requirement of the Law only, and I will immediately declare that by them is always shown what men *ought to do*, not what they *can do*, or *do do*. And even common grammarians and every little schoolboy in the street knows that by verbs of the imperative mood nothing else is signified than that which ought to be done, and that, what is done or can be done, is expressed by verbs of the indicative mood. Thus, therefore, it comes to pass that you theologians are so senseless and so many degrees below even schoolboys, that when you have caught hold of one imperative verb you infer an indicative sense, as though what was commanded were immediately and even necessarily done, or possible to be done. But how many *slips* are there *between the cup and the lip!* So that, what you

command to be done, and is therefore quite possible to be done, is yet never done at all. Such a difference is there between verbs imperative and verbs indicative, even in the most common and easy things. Whereas you, in these things which are as far above those as the heavens are above the earth, so quickly make indicatives out of imperatives, that the moment you hear the voice of him commanding, saying, 'Do,' 'keep,' 'choose,' you will have, that it is immediately kept, done, chosen, or fulfilled, or, that our powers are able so to do."¹⁾

"In the fourth place, you adduce from Deut. 3 and 30 many passages of the same kind which speak of choosing, of turning away from, of keeping; as, 'If thou shalt keep,' 'if thou shalt turn away from,' 'if thou shalt choose.'—'All these expressions (you say) are made use of preposterously if there be not a Free-will in man unto good.' I answer: And you, friend Diatribe, preposterously enough also conclude from these expressions the freedom of the will. You set out to prove the *endeavor* and *desire* of Free-will only, and you have adduced no passage which proves such an endeavor. But now you adduce those passages which, if your conclusion hold good, will ascribe *all* to Free-will. Let me here, then, again make a distinction between the words of the Scripture adduced, and the conclusion of the Diatribe tacked to them. The words adduced are imperative, and they say nothing but what *ought to be* done. For Moses does not say, 'Thou hast the power and strength to choose.' The words 'choose,' 'keep,' 'do,' convey the precept 'to keep,' but they do not describe the ability of man. But the conclusion tacked to them by that wisdom-aping Diatribe infers thus: therefore, man can do those things, otherwise the precepts are given in vain. To whom this reply must be made: Madam Diatribe, you make a bad inference, and do not prove your conclusion, but the conclusion and the

1) pp. 139—141.

proof merely *seem* to be right to your blind and inadvertent self. But know that these precepts are not given preposterously nor in vain, but that proud and blind man might, by them, learn the disease of his own impotency, if he should attempt to do what is commanded. And hence your similitude amounts to nothing where you say, 'Otherwise it would be precisely the same as if any one should say to a man who was so bound that he could only stretch forth his left arm, Behold! thou hast on thy right hand excellent wine, thou hast on thy left poison; on which thou wilt stretch forth thy hand.' These your similitudes, I presume, are particular favorites of yours. But you do not all the while see that if the similitudes stand good, they prove much more than you ever purposed to prove, nay, that they prove what you deny and would have to be disproved:—that Free-will can do *all things*. For by the whole scope of your argument, forgetting what you said, 'that Free-will can do nothing without grace,' you actually prove that Free-will can do all things without grace. For your conclusions and similitudes go to prove this:—that either Free-will can of itself do those things which are said and commanded, or they are commanded in vain, ridiculously, and preposterously. But these are nothing more than the old songs of the Pelagians sung over again, which even the sophists have exploded, and which you have yourself condemned. And by all this your forgetfulness and disorder of memory you do nothing but evince how little you know of the subject, and how little you are affected by it. And what can be worse in a rhetorician, than to be continually bringing forward things wide of the nature of the subject, and not only so, but to be always declaiming against his subject and against himself?'¹⁾

Again and again Luther emphasizes: 1. That in the injunctions of the Law God does not purpose to teach man

1) pp. 141—143.

what he is *able* to do, but rather what he does not and cannot do; 2. that such injunctions are not superfluous, because natural man, though in reality bound, miserable, captive, sick, and dead, yet imagines himself free, happy, at liberty, powerful, whole, and alive. Luther writes: "Wherefore I observe, finally, the passages of Scripture adduced by you are imperative, and neither prove anything, nor determine anything concerning the ability of man, but enjoin only what things are to be done, and what are not to be done. And as to your conclusions or appendages, and similitudes, if they prove anything they prove this:— that Free-will can do all things without grace. Whereas this you did not undertake to prove, nay, it is by you denied. Wherefore, these your proofs are nothing else but the most direct confutations. For (that I may, if I can, rouse the Diatribe from its lethargy) suppose I argue thus—If Moses say, 'Choose life and keep the commandment,' unless man be able to choose life and keep the commandment, Moses gives that precept to man ridiculously. —Have I by this argument proved my side of the subject, that Free-will can do nothing good, and that it has no external endeavor separate from its own power? Nay, on the contrary, I have proved, by an assertion sufficiently forcible, that either man can choose life and keep the commandment as it is commanded, or Moses is a ridiculous law-giver. But who would dare to assert that Moses was a ridiculous law-giver? It follows, therefore, that man can do the things that are commanded. This is the way in which the Diatribe argues throughout, contrary to its own purposed design; wherein, it promised that it would not argue thus, but would prove a certain endeavor of Free-will; of which, however, so far from proving it, it scarcely makes mention in the whole string of its arguments; nay, it proves the contrary rather; so that it may itself be more properly said to affirm and argue all things ridiculously. And as to its making it, according to its own adduced similitude, to be ridiculous, that

a man, having his right arm bound, should be ordered to stretch forth his right hand when he could only stretch forth his left. — Would it, I pray, be ridiculous, if a man, having both his arms bound, and proudly contending or ignorantly presuming that he could do anything right or left, should be commanded to stretch forth his hand right and left, not that his captivity might be derided, but that he might be convinced of his false presumption of liberty and power, and might be brought to know his ignorance of his captivity and misery? The Diatribe is perpetually setting before us such a man who either *can do* what is commanded, or at least *knows* that he *cannot do* it. Whereas, no such man is to be found. If there were such a one, then, indeed, either impossibilities would be ridiculously commanded, or the Spirit of Christ would be in vain. The Scripture, however, sets forth such a man, who is not only bound, miserable, captive, sick, and dead, but who, by the operation of his lord Satan, to his other miseries, adds that of blindness, so that he believes he is free, happy, at liberty, powerful, whole, and alive. For Satan well knows that if men knew their own misery he could retain no one of them in his kingdom, because it could not be but that God would immediately pity and succor their known misery and calamity, seeing that He is with so much praise set forth, throughout the whole Scripture, as being near unto the contrite in heart, that Isaiah 61 testifies that Christ was sent 'to preach the Gospel to the poor, and to heal the broken-hearted.' Wherefore, the work of Satan is, so to hold men that they come not to know their misery, but that they presume that they can do all things which are enjoined. But the work of Moses the legislator is the contrary, even that by the Law he might discover to man his misery, in order that he might prepare him, thus bruised and confounded with the knowledge of himself, for grace, and might send him to Christ to be saved. Wherefore, the office of the Law is not ridiculous, but above all things serious and necessary.

Those, therefore, who thus far understand these things understand clearly, at the same time, that the Diatribe, by the whole string of its arguments, effects nothing whatever; that it collects nothing from the Scriptures but imperative passages, when it understands neither what they mean nor wherefore they are spoken; and that, moreover, by the appendages of its conclusions and carnal similitudes, it mixes up such a mighty mass of flesh that it asserts and proves more than it ever intended, and argues against itself. So that there were no need to pursue particulars any further, for the whole is solved by one solution, seeing that the whole depends on one argument.'¹⁾

"But however"—Luther proceeds—, "that it (the Diatribe) may be drowned in the same profusion in which it attempted to drown me, I will proceed to touch upon a few particulars more. There is that of Is: 1, 'If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the fat of the land:'—'Where' (according to the judgment of the Diatribe), 'if there be no liberty of the will, it would have been more consistent had it been said, If I will, if I will not.' The answer to this may be plainly found in what has been said before. Moreover, what consistency would there then have been, had it been said, 'If I will, ye shall eat the fat of the land? Does the Diatribe from its so highly exalted wisdom imagine that the fat of the land can be eaten contrary to the will of God? Or, that it is a rare and new thing that we do not receive of the fat of the land but by the will of God? So also, that of Is. 21, 'If ye will inquire, inquire ye: return, come.'—'To what purpose is it' (saith the Diatribe) 'to exhort those who are not in any degree in their own power? It is just like saying to one bound in chains, Move thyself to this place.' Nay, I reply, to what purpose is it to cite passages which of themselves prove nothing, and which, by the appendage of your conclusion, that is, by the perversion of

1) pp. 143—146.

their sense, ascribe all unto Free-will, when a certain endeavor only was to be ascribed unto it, and to be proved? 'The same may be said (you observe) concerning that of Is. 45, "Assemble yourselves and come." "Turn ye unto me and ye shall be saved." And that also of Is. 52, "Awake! awake!" "shake thyself from the dust," "loose the bands of thy neck." And that of Jer. 15, "If thou wilt turn, then will I turn thee; and if thou shalt separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth." And Zechariah more evidently still indicates the endeavor of Free-will and the grace that is prepared for him who endeavors, "Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord." Zech. 1.'—In these passages our friend Diatribe makes no distinction whatever between the voice of the Law and the voice of the Gospel: because, forsooth, it is so blind and so ignorant that it knows not what is the Law and what is the Gospel. For out of all the passages from Isaiah it produces no one word of the Law, save this, 'If thou wilt;' all the rest is Gospel, by which, as the word of offered grace, the bruised and afflicted are called unto consolation. Whereas, the Diatribe makes them the words of the Law. But, I pray thee, tell me, what can that man do in theological matters, and the sacred writings, who has not even gone so far as to know what is Law and what is Gospel, or, who, if he does know, condemns the observance of the distinction between them? Such a one must confound all things, heaven with hell, and life with death; and will never labor to know anything of Christ. Concerning which, I shall put my friend Diatribe a little in remembrance, in what follows. Look, then, first, at that of Jeremiah and Zechariah, 'If thou wilt turn, then will I turn thee;' and, 'Turn ye unto me, and I will turn unto you.' Does it then follow from 'Turn ye'—therefore, ye are able to turn? Does it follow also from 'Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart'—therefore, thou art able to love with all thine heart? If these arguments stand good, what do

they conclude but that Free-will needs not the grace of God, but can do all things of its own power? And then, how much more right would it be that the words should be received as they stand — 'If thou shalt turn, then will I also turn thee'? That is, — if thou shalt cease from sinning, I also will cease from punishing; and if thou shalt be converted and live well, I also will do well unto thee in turning away thy captivity and thy evils. But even in this way it does not follow that man can turn by his own power, nor do the words imply this; but they simply say, 'If thou wilt turn;' by which a man is admonished of what he ought to do. And when he has thus known and seen what he *ought to do* but *cannot do*, he would ask *how he is to do it*, were it not for that Leviathan of the Diatribe (that is, that appendage and conclusion it has here tacked on) which comes in and between and says, — 'therefore, if man cannot turn of his own power, "turn ye" is spoken in vain.' But of what nature all such conclusion is, and what it amounts to, has been already fully shown. It must, however, be a certain stupor or lethargy which can hold that the power of Free-will is confirmed by these words, 'Turn ye,' 'If thou wilt turn,' and the like, and does not see that, for the same reason, it must be confirmed by this Scripture also, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart,' seeing that the meaning of Him who commands and requires is the same in both instances. For the loving of God is not less required than our conversion and the keeping of all the commandments, because the loving of God is our real conversion. And yet, no one attempts to prove Free-will from that command 'to love,' although from those words 'If thou wilt,' 'If thou wilt hear,' 'Turn ye,' and the like, all attempt to prove it. If therefore from that word, 'Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,' it does not follow that Free-will is anything or can do anything, it is certain that it neither follows from these words, 'If thou wilt,' 'If thou wilt hear,' 'Turn ye', and the like, which

either require less, or require with less force of importance, than these words, 'Love God!' 'Love the Lord!' Whatever, therefore, is said against drawing a conclusion in support of Free-will from this word, 'Love God,' the same must be said against drawing a conclusion in support of Free-will from every other word of command or requirement. For if by the command 'to love' the nature of the Law only be shown, and what we *ought to do*, but not the power of the will or what we *can do*, but rather, what we *cannot do*, the same is shown by all the other Scriptures of requirement. For it is well known that even the schoolmen, except the Scotinians and moderns, assert, that man cannot love God with all his heart. Therefore, neither can he perform any one of the other precepts, for all the rest, according to the testimony of Christ, hang on this one. Hence, by the testimony even of the doctors of the schools, this remains as a settled conclusion:—that the words of the Law do not prove the *power of Free-will*, but show what we *ought to do*, and what we *cannot do.*"¹⁾

Luther carefully distinguishes between exhortations of the Law and of the Gospel, the former of which being exacting in their nature, while the latter are "the voice of divine consolation and promise, by which nothing is demanded of us, but in which the grace of God is offered unto us." Luther writes: "But our friend Diatribe, proceeding to still greater lengths of inconsiderateness, not only infers from that passage of Zechariah, 'Turn ye unto me,' an indicative sense, but also goes on with zeal to prove therefrom the endeavor of Free-will and the grace prepared for the person endeavoring. Here, at last, it makes mention of the endeavor, and by a new kind of grammar, 'to *turn*,' signifies, with it, the same thing as 'to *endeavor*:' so that the sense is, 'Turn ye unto me', that is, Endeavor ye to turn; 'and I will turn unto you,' that is, I will endeavor to turn unto you: so that, at last, it attributes an endeavor even unto God, and, per-

1) pp. 146—150.

haps, would have grace to be prepared for Him upon His endeavoring; for if turning signify endeavoring in one place, why not in every place? Again, it says, that from Jer. 15, 'If thou shalt separate the precious from the vile,' not the endeavor only, but the liberty of choosing is proved; which, before, it declared was 'lost,' and changed into a 'necessity of serving sin.' You see, therefore, that in handling the Scriptures, the Diatribe has a Free-will with a witness, so that, with it, words of the same kind are compelled to prove *endeavor* in one place, and *liberty* in another, just as the turn suits. But, to away with vanities, the word TURN is used in the Scriptures in a twofold sense, the one *legal*, the other *evangelical*. In the legal sense, it is the voice of the exactor and commander, which requires, not an endeavor, but a change in the whole life. In this sense Jeremiah frequently uses it, saying, 'Turn ye now every one of you from his evil way;' and, 'Turn ye unto the Lord:' in which he involves the requirement of all the commandments, as is sufficiently evident. In the evangelical sense, it is the voice of the divine consolation and promise, by which nothing is demanded of us, but in which the grace of God is offered unto us. Of this kind is that of Ps. 126, 'When the Lord shall turn again the captivity of Zion;' and that of Ps. 116, 'Turn again into thy rest, O my soul.' Hence, Zechariah, in a very brief compendium, has set forth the preaching both of the Law and of grace. It is the whole sum of the Law, where he saith, 'Turn ye unto me;' and it is grace, where he saith, 'I will turn unto you.' Wherefore, as much as Free-will is proved from this word, 'Love the Lord,' or from any other word of particular Law, just so much is it proved from this word of summary Law, 'TURN YE.' It becomes a wise reader of the Scriptures, therefore, to observe what are words of the Law and what are words of grace, that he might not be involved in confusion like the unclean sophists, and like this sleepily-yawning Diatribe." 1) "It is

1) pp. 150—152.

the Gospel voice, and the sweetest consolation to miserable sinners, where Ezekiel saith, 'I desire not the death of a sinner, but rather, that he should be converted and live,' and it is in all respects like unto that of Ps. 30, 'For His wrath is but for a moment, in His willingness is life.' And that of Ps. 36, 'How sweet is Thy loving-kindness, O God.' Also, 'For I am merciful.' And that of Christ, Matt. 11, 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' And also that of Ex. 20, 'I will show mercy unto thousands of them that love me.' And what is more than half of the holy Scripture but mere promises of grace, by which mercy, life, peace, and salvation are extended from God unto men? And what else is the whole word of promise but this, 'I desire not the death of a sinner'? Is not His saying, 'I am merciful,' the same as saying, I am not angry, I am unwilling to punish, I desire not your death, my will is to pardon, my will is to spare? And if there were not these divine promises standing, by which consciences, afflicted with a sense of sin and terrified at the fear of death and judgment, might be raised up, what place would there be for pardon or for hope! What sinner would not sink in despair! But as Free-will is not proved from any of the other words of mercy, of promise, and of comfort, so neither is it from this, 'I desire not the death of a sinner.'¹⁾ "Nothing, therefore, could be more absurdly adduced in support of Free-will than this passage of Ezekiel, nay, it makes with all possible force directly against Free-will. For it is here shown in what state Free-will is, and what it can do under the knowledge of sin, and in turning itself from it, that is, that it can only go on to worse, and add to its sins desperation and impenitency, unless God soon come in to help, and to call back, and raise up by the word of promise. For the concern of God in promising grace to recall and raise up the sinner is itself an argument sufficiently great and conclusive that Free-will, of itself, can-

1) p. 153 f.

not but go on to worse, and (as the Scripture saith) 'fall down to hell:' unless, indeed, you imagine that God is such a trifler that He pours forth so great an abundance of the words of promise, not from any necessity of them unto our salvation, but from a mere delight in loquacity! Wherefore, you see that not only all the words of Law stand against Free-will, but also, that all the words of the promise utterly confute it; that is, that the whole Scripture makes directly against it."¹⁾

Having in the following paragraphs made the important "distinction between God Preached and God Hidden; that is, between the word of God and God Himself," Luther concludes his remarks on the passages quoted by Erasmus from the Old Testament as follows: "The Diatribe next argues—'If what is commanded be not in the power of every one, all the numberless exhortations in the Scriptures, and also all the promises, threatenings, expostulations, reproofs, asseverations, benedictions, and maledictions, together with all the forms of precepts, must of necessity stand coldly useless.' The Diatribe is perpetually forgetting the subject point, and going on with that which is contrary to its professed design; and it does not see that all these things make with greater force against itself than against us. For from all these passages it proves the liberty and ability to fulfill all things, as the very words of the conclusion which it draws necessarily declare: whereas its design was to prove '*that Free-will is that which cannot will anything good without grace, and is a certain endeavor that is not to be ascribed to its own powers.*' But I do not see that such an endeavor is proved by any of these passages, but that, as I have repeatedly said already, that only is required which ought to be done; unless it be needful to repeat it again, as often as the Diatribe harps upon the same string, putting off its readers with a useless profusion of words. About

1) p. 155 f.

the last passage which it brings forward out of the Old Testament is that of Deut. 30, 'This commandment which I command thee this day is not above thee, neither is it far off. Neither is it in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who of us shall ascend up into heaven and bring it down unto us, that we may hear it and do it. But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.' The Diatribe contends—'that it is declared by this passage, that what is commanded is not only placed in us, but is down-hill work, that is, easy to be done, or at least, not difficult.'—I thank the Diatribe for such wonderful erudition! For if Moses so plainly declare, that there is in us, not only an ability, but also a power to keep all the commandments with ease, why have I been toiling all this time? Why did I not at once produce this passage and assert Free-will before the whole world? What need now of Christ? What need of the Spirit? We have now found a passage which stops the mouths of all, and which not only plainly asserts the liberty of the will, but teaches that the observance of all the commandments is easy!—What need was there for Christ to purchase for us, even with His own blood, the Spirit, as though necessary, in order that He might make the keeping of the commandments easy unto us, when we were already thus qualified by nature! Nay, here the Diatribe itself recants its own assertions, where it affirmed that 'Free-will cannot will anything good without grace,' and now affirms that Free-will is of such power, that it cannot only will good, but keep the greatest, nay, all the commandments with ease.'¹⁾ "What therefore does Moses mean by these most plain and clear words, but that he has worthily performed his office as a faithful law-giver; and that, therefore, if all men have not before their eyes and do not know all the precepts which are enjoined, the fault does not rest with him; that they

1) pp. 159—161.

have no place left them for excuse, so as to say, they did not know, or had not the precepts, or were obliged to seek them elsewhere; that if they do not keep them, the fault rests not with the Law, or with the law-giver, but with themselves, seeing that the Law is before them, and the law-giver has taught them; and that they have no place left for excusation of ignorance, only for accusation of negligence and disobedience? It is not, saith he, necessary to fetch the laws down from heaven, nor from lands beyond the sea, nor from afar, nor can you frame as an excuse, that you never had them nor heard them, for you have them nigh unto you; they are they which God hath commanded, which you have heard from my mouth, and which you have had in your hearts and in your mouths continually; you have heard them treated on by the Levites in the midst of you, of which this my word and book are witnesses; this, therefore, only remains—that you do them.—What, I pray you, is here attributed unto Free-will? What is there, but the demanding that it would do the laws which it has, and the taking away from it the excuse of ignorance and the want of the laws? These passages are the sum of what the Diatribe brings forward out of the Old Testament in support of Free-will, which being answered, there remains nothing that is not answered at the same time, whether it have brought forward, or wished to bring forward more; seeing that it could bring forward nothing but imperative, or conditional, or optative passages, by which is signified, not what we *can do*, or *do do* (as I have so often replied to the so often repeating Diatribe), but what we *ought to do*, and what *is required of us*, in order that we might come to the knowledge of our impotency, and that there might be wrought in us the knowledge of our sin. Or, if they do prove anything, by means of the appended conclusions and similitudes invented by human reason, they prove this:—that Free-will is not a certain small degree of endeavor or desire only, but a full and free ability and power to do all

things, without the grace of God, and without the Holy Spirit.'¹⁾

From Luther's remarks on the New Testament passages by which Erasmus endeavored to support his Semi-Pelagian theory we quote the following: "We now come to the New Testament, where again are marshaled up in defense of that miserable bondage of Free-will a host of imperative sentences, together with all the auxiliaries of carnal reason, such as, conclusions, similitudes, etc., called in from all quarters. And if you ever saw represented in a picture, or imagined in a dream, a king of flies attended by his forces armed with lances and shields of straw or hay, drawn up in battle array against a real and complete army of veteran warriors—it is just thus that the human dreams of the Diatribe are drawn up in battle array against the hosts of the words of God!"²⁾ "Another passage is that of Matt. 19, 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.'—'With what face' (says the Diatribe) 'can 'if thou wilt' be said to him who has not a Free-will?'—To which I reply, Is, therefore, the will, according to this word of Christ, free? But you wish to prove, that Free-will cannot will anything good; and that, without grace, it of necessity serves sin. With what face, then, do you now make will wholly free? The same reply will be made to that also—'If thou wilt be perfect,' 'If any one will come after me,' 'He that will save his life,' 'If ye love me,' 'If ye shall continue.' In a word, as I said before (to ease the Diatribe's labor in adducing such a load of words), let all the *conditional ifs* and all the *imperative verbs* be collected together.—'All these precepts' (says the Diatribe) stand coldly useless, if nothing be attributed to the human will. How ill does that conjunctive *if* accord with mere necessity!'—I answer: If they stand coldly useless, it is your fault that they stand coldly useless, who, at one time, assert that nothing is to

1) p. 163 f.

2) p. 165.

be attributed to Free-will, while you make Free-will unable to will good, and who, on the contrary, here make the same Free-will able to will all good; nay, you thus make them to stand as nothing at all; unless, with you, the same words stand coldly useless and warmly useful at the same time, while they at once assert all things and deny all things. I wonder how any author can delight in repeating the same things so continually, and to be as continually forgetting his subject design; unless, perhaps, distrusting his cause, he wishes to overcome his adversary by the bulk of his book, or to weary him out with the tedium and toil of reading it. By what conclusion, I ask, does it follow, that *will* and *power* must immediately take place as often as it is said, 'If thou wilt,' 'If any one will,' 'If thou shalt'? Do we not most frequently imply in such expressions impotency rather, and impossibility? For instance—If thou wilt equal Virgil in singing, my friend Mevius, thou must sing in another strain.—If thou wilt surpass Cicero, friend Scotus, instead of thy subtle jargon, thou must have the most exalted eloquence.—If thou wilt stand in competition with David, thou must of necessity produce psalms like his. Here are plainly signified things impossible to our own powers, although, by divine power, all these things may be done. So it is in the Scriptures, that by such expressions it might be shown what we cannot do ourselves, but what can be done in us by the power of God."¹⁾ "It would be too tedious to repeat here each imperative passage which the Diatribe enumerates out of the New Testament, always tacking to them her own conclusions, and vainly arguing that those things which are so said are 'to no purpose,' are 'superfluous,' are 'coldly useless,' are 'ridiculous,' are 'nothing at all,' if the will be not free. And I have already repeatedly observed, even to disgust, that nothing whatever is effected by such arguments; and that if anything be proved, the whole of Free-will is proved."²⁾

1) p. 169 f.

2) p. 180.

The above quotations, which could be multiplied indefinitely, go to show that Luther condemns both the argument *a præcepto ad posse* and the underlying principle of establishing Christian doctrines by human inferences. According to Luther an article of faith requires a clear word of God, neither more nor less. And an inference which cannot be substantiated by the very words of Holy Writ is not a component part of his theology. Luther utterly despises and ridicules the Reformed and Catholic theologians who, like Erasmus, Zwingli, and others, based their teaching on what they called "logical inferences" and "necessary conclusions." He makes it a point to prove that they abuse both God's Word and their own reason. Indeed, in theology rationalism is to Luther in every instance irrationalism, as well as irreverence and rebellion against God and His Word. In 1528 Luther wrote in a letter against the Bishop of Meissen on the Concomitance theory of the Papists:¹⁾ "What, then, do the priests do? Undoubtedly in every mass they eat twice and drink twice; for in the bread they eat the body and drink His blood, since a body cannot exist without blood. Again, in the cup they drink the blood and eat the body; for blood cannot exist without a body. Indeed, a great improvement of the Christian Church and making two masses out of one! Now I revoke that I have said the bishops were ignorant; for this bishop surely puts me to silence, and teaches me that there are nothing but double masses in the church, and that in every mass Christ is sacrificed, eaten, and drunk twice. Prosperity is awaiting the sacrificial priests (*Opferpfaffen*); now they well may sell one mass for two groschen, since it is but fair for one to pay double money for double goods. Thus, then, throughout all Christendom the service of God is rendered twice as great, and the priests will grow also temporally twice as rich, as before; O the blessed times, it will be a golden year.—With this agrees *Concomitance*,

1) Erl. edition, 30, p. 418 f.

that is, *Consequence*. Since the body of Christ is not without blood, it *follows* that His blood is not without the soul; from this it follows that His soul is not without the divinity; from this it follows that His divinity is not without the Father and the Holy Ghost; from this it follows that in the sacrament, even when celebrated under one species, the soul of Christ and the Holy Trinity are eaten and drunk together with His body and blood; from this it follows that in every single mass the mass-priest (*Messpfaff*) sacrifices and sells the Holy Trinity twice; from this it follows, since divinity is not without the creature, that also heaven and earth must be in the sacrament; from this it follows that the devils and hell are also in the sacrament; from this it follows that whoever eats the sacrament, also one species, devours (*frisset*) the bishop of Meissen together with his mandate and bill; from this it follows that in every mass a Meissen priest devours and drinks (*säuft*) his bishop twice; from this it follows that the bishop of Meissen must have a belly greater than heaven and earth; and who will ever enumerate all the consequences? Finally, however, it also follows from this that all those who infer such conclusions (*alle solche Folger*) are asses, clowns, blind, mad, insane, furious, foolish, and raving: *this consequence is certain.*"

F. B.

WILLIAM TYNDALE,

THE TRANSLATOR OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE.

Tyndale's Life in England.

William Tyndale, the translator of the English Bible, was born about 1485, a few years after Martin Luther, the great translator of the German Bible. Most likely his birthplace was Slymbridge in Gloucestershire, near Wales. It seems that his early education was not neglected, for he writes, "Except my memory fail me, and that I have for-