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## DR. KEYSER'S "CONSENTING FREEDOM" OF THE HOMO CONVERTENDUS.

"Apage tragicas accusationes ecclesiis nostris a Bellarmino in *Praefat. libror. de lib. arb.* intentatas, quasi arbitrii libertatem tollamus, ipsam naturam tollamus, ipsam naturam violamus et nos ipsos non beluarum similes, sed omnino beluas rationis expertes profiteamur,"—these words of Gerhard<sup>1)</sup> come to mind as we glance over the numerous protests contained in Dr. Keyser's review of Dr. Pieper's book against the teaching of "a forced conversion." Dr. Keyser regards the teaching of the Missouri Synod on the origin of saving faith in man as imperiling, yea, destroying, the essential freedom which enters necessarily into every act of human volition; and this constitutes Dr. Keyser's second objection to Dr. Pieper's treatise. This objection is voiced throughout the book in ever varying terms and in ever new connections. A few selections may suffice to show what Dr. Keyser believes to be our teaching:—

How do our Missouri brethren preach to unconverted sinners? As if they were logs and stones, or as if they were men capable of receiving, through God's enabling grace, an ethical salvation? God never works on man, a personality, in a mechanical way; always in a vital and ethical way. The fact is, man, even in his sinful state, still has ears and eyes and self-consciousness, through which God, by the Gospel, is able to reach that dead spiritual corpse within him and bring it back to life. (p. 75 f.)

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1) *L. de lib. arbitr.*, § 8.

Note this point carefully: God enables the willing, but He does not do the willing for man. He (man) must *use* the ability given him by divine grace. This is the peculiar function and prerogative of that high endowment of man—a free will, a will in liberty. Surely, when God deals with man, He has regard for His own handiwork. Inasmuch as He made him a moral personality, He will not treat him as if he were a piece of clay or an irrational animal, to which He would never say, "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel." (p. 77.)

At this point the inquiry may be raised: How can the will have any spiritual ability to function before the sinner is converted? It would be more pertinent to ask: How can God convert a man against his will? If he did that, it would not be a spiritual and ethical transaction, but merely a coerced and machine-like one. It would make conversion a materialistic instead of a spiritual transaction. If man were saved without his consent, he would not be saved at all, for sin would still be retained by him in his will. (p. 77 f.)

The Missouri brethren so often represent faith as if it were an *entity* instead of a *power, quality, or activity* of the soul. Dr. Pieper will not have it that the Holy Spirit makes us *able* to believe; he contends that He does not confer the ability, but the actual belief itself. With all our respect for his acuteness and sincerity, this seems to us a marvelous psychological conception. Then the Holy Spirit must do our believing for us! Why not call it the Holy Spirit's faith, then, instead of ours? When Christ said to the impenitent Jews, "Believe the Gospel," He made a mistake; He should have said, "The Holy Spirit will believe for you!" So with every Biblical command to believe. John 3, 16 is not expressed correctly: it should be—but we refrain. In the same mechanical way Dr. Pieper treats the will. Freedom is not an enabled power or energy; it is a *something* bestowed; not a principle of life, but a something affixed. But does the Holy Spirit do our willing for us? Then He should have inspired John otherwise; not to say, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water freely," but, "If the Spirit does your willing for you." The same way with repentance; according to their view, it is not something enabled, but something bestowed. Then God must repent for man; man cannot do his own repenting. According to that logic God does not give man the ability to walk, but bestows the actual walking upon him. So God would have to do our walking for us. (p. 79.)

If man has no freedom whatever to accept the offered grace, then, if it does come to him, it must have been forced upon him, *volens volens*. (p. 55.)

If, now, we should invite Dr. Keyser to shake hands with Erasmus and Bellarmine, we are sure that we should sorely offend him. And we do not wish to offend. Dr. Keyser repeatedly voices his disgust with any teaching that savors of the Pelagian. He vigorously declares himself an advocate of the total depravity of natural man, and proclaims himself with great earnestness a believer in the teaching of *sola gratia*. He heaps encomium upon encomium on the position of the Missouri Synod because of her strenuous defense of *sola gratia* and *universalis gratia*, and solemnly exonerates her of the imputation of Calvinism and Calvinizing tendencies, and —*mirabile dictu!*—winds up by charging her with the central error of Calvinistic soteriology, irresistible grace.

History frequently repeats itself, and it seems to be the historical fate of the consistent application of the *sola gratia* teaching in conversion that it is decried as a dehumanization of man. What Luther had to suffer for his *lapis-truncus* statement, which was made simply for the sake of illustrating the absolute impossibility of human cooperation in conversion and the monergism of divine grace in the moment of man's conversion, that his followers have had to suffer in all ages. What a pathetic spectacle, however, is created when Lutherans lift up against Lutherans the broken weapons of Rome! That is—we say this with keen sorrow!—what Dr. Keyser has done. In his violent efforts to exhibit the absurdity of that converting act which he imputes to Missouri, there is not a single feature for which a parallel and precedent cannot be found in Bellarmine. *Vide* the citation at the head. With Gerhard we say: Out upon these tragic libels!

To clear the situation of every possible ambiguity, we wish to submit to Dr. Keyser this question: Will you accept, as a matter-of-fact description of what occurs in conversion, this statement: *Nolens fit volens*, the unwilling one is made a willing one? The agent in the verb *nolens* is understood to be the identical individual who is the agent in the verb *volens*, and the action expressed by both *nolle* and *velle* is

understood to be the personal action of this individual, while the agent back of the verb *fit*, which signifies the change from *nolle* to *velle*, is understood to be the Holy Spirit, or divine grace. On both sides of the line which divides the unconverted (*nolle*) from the converted (*velle*) state there is a human will, the will of the individual to be converted. This will is a concrete faculty in every human being, and belongs to the essence of man. The change that is produced in conversion affects, indeed, the will of the converted, just as it affects his intellect and his affections. When a person is converted, his will is converted. But the change does not affect the *materia*, or essence, of the will. It is the same inborn volitional faculty in man that acts prior to conversion and in conversion. No foreign will is substituted for a person's own will in his conversion. *He himself* wills in conversion. He is not coerced into willing to be converted; for that would be equivalent to saying that he does not will in conversion. No, he really *wills, he himself wills*, when he is converted. What is changed in conversion is the quality, or attitude, of the will toward the objects proposed to it by divine grace: the forgiveness of sin for Christ's sake, or the justification of God. Towards these objects the will of the unconverted man operates by *nolle*, by declining, refusing them. Towards these same objects the same will of the same person operates in conversion by *velle*, by desiring to have them, by accepting them. Prior to his conversion the person had a will, but this will could not perform a *velle*, put forth a volition, toward the objects aforesaid. It was put out of commission as far as these objects are concerned. In conversion this will is energized so as to will the things it did not and could not will before. God works the willing, τὸ θέλειν, of a person's salvation, Phil. 2, 13, in the person's conversion. Hence, in reviewing a person's soteriological history on this point, we may say: There was in him always a will, but not always a willing of the things that make for his peace.

In his annotated edition of Baier's *Compend of Positive Theology*, Walther has inserted, in Part II, ch. II, § 13, p. 297 f., on the effects of original sin, the following statements of Gerhard: "Freedom is ascribed to the will, in the first place, when we consider its manner of operating (*modus agendi*); for this is of such a nature that the will, as such, acts freely, that is, it is not forced or violently driven by some impulse from without, nor does it act merely from natural instinct, but embraces or rejects a certain thing of its own accord or inward determining impulse. Thus understood, the terms 'free' and 'voluntary' are synonyms, and to say that the will is not free would be like saying that a warm object is without warmth. We call this freedom a *freedom from constraint*. It is because of this that the will cannot be coerced into doing something against its own inclination. It is also called a *freedom from necessity*, the term necessity being taken for constraint or violence (but not for immutability). . . . *This liberty*, inasmuch as it is a natural and essential quality with which God has endowed the will, *has not been lost by the fall*. The substance of man did not perish; hence his rational soul did not; hence his will did not; hence the essential freedom of his will did not perish. The will is an essential power of the soul, and the soul is nothing else than these very powers, or faculties, that are essential to man. Accordingly, while the soul remains, its essential powers, the intellect and the will, also remain. Again, the power to will freely and without constraint is essential to the will; hence, while the will remains, this power remains also. . . . *In this sense and in this respect we firmly believe and proclaim with a loud voice that there has remained in man, also after the fall, a free will*. So much so that we say with Augustine (Hypogn. 3.): 'He who denies free will is not orthodox.' Away, then, with those melancholy accusations," etc.<sup>2)</sup>

2) *Libertas assignatur arbitrio, primo, habito respectu ad modum agendi, quia talis est, ut voluntas, quatenus talis, libere agat, hoc est, non cogatur aut violenter rapiatur externo motu, nec ex naturali in-*

Again, Gerhard says: "*The entire controversy concerns man's liberty in reference to the object with which the will is occupied, that is, the liberty which is free to do right; viz., whether man after the fall is still endowed with an equal power to assume an attitude to what is good as well as to what is evil. . . . We admit, indeed, that some liberty has remained as regards works that are righteous by the standard of ethical and secular righteousness, and, as Luther puts it, belong to our lower sphere of life. Unregenerate man certainly can direct his power of locomotion as he pleases; he can govern his limbs according to the dictates of right reasoning; he can, in a manner, achieve civil righteousness, and avoid gross overt sins that are at variance with external discipline; yea, he can also perform the outward act of hearing and pondering the Word of God, though even this liberty is weakened rather frequently by external and internal obstacles. . . . The whole question is concerning an object that is spiritually good, concerning works that are righteous by*

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stinctu solum agat, sed sponte sua seu interno motus principio aliquid vel amplectatur vel rejiciat. Hoc sensu liberum et voluntarium sunt synonyma, et voluntatem non liberam dicere est perinde, ac si quis dicere velit calidum absque calore. Vocatur haec *libertas a coactione*, qua fit, ut non possit voluntas cogi ad faciendum aliquid contra suam inclinationem. Item *libertas a necessitate*, quatenus necessitas pro coactione et violentia accipitur (non autem pro immutabilitate). . . . *Haec libertas*, cum sit naturalis atque essentialis a Deo indita voluntati proprietatis, *per lapsum non est amissa*. Substantia hominis non perit; ergo nec anima rationalis; ergo nec voluntas; ergo nec libertas voluntatis essentialis. Voluntas est potentia animae essentialis et anima nihil aliud est, quam ipsae potentiae seu facultates essentialis, proinde manente anima potentiae etiam ejus essentialis, intellectus et voluntas, manent. Vicissim vis libere et absque coactione volendi est voluntati essentialis; manente ergo voluntate, etiam vis illa manet. . . . *Hoc sensu et hoc respectu liberum in homine arbitrium etiam post lapsum mansisse, firmiter credimus et sonora voce profitemur*; adeo ut cum Augustino dicamus Hypogn. 3.: „Eum, qui neget liberum arbitrium, non esse catholicum.“ Apage igitur tragicas accusationes ecclesiis nostris a Bellarmino in praefat. libror. de lib. arb. intentatas, quasi arbitrii libertatem tollamus, ipsam naturam tollamus, ipsam naturam violemus et nos ipsos non beluarum similes, sed omnino beluas rationis expertes profiteamur.

the standard of spiritual righteousness; *viz.*, whether man can, of himself and by his own strength, start those spiritual movements [in himself], accept the grace that is offered him, and perform any action that is acceptable to God. This we deny utterly. . . . Nor is the question concerning the *natural* actions of the soul, such as hearing, reading, pondering [the Word of God], which actions can be called spiritual in a manner, namely, by the figure of catachresis, because they proceed from the soul, which in its essence is spiritual. For we admit a certain freedom in regard to these actions: man may, or may not, read; he can hear, and he can turn away his ears. But the whole question is concerning spiritual movements properly so called, such as rightly to know God, and to hear the Word of God with profit to oneself.”<sup>3)</sup>

To indicate what Luther means by lower sphere of life, Walther quotes from Quenstedt as follows: “The higher sphere embraces things that are strictly spiritual or inwardly holy. . . .

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3) *Tota quaestio est de libertate ratione objecti, circa quod voluntas occupata est, hoc est, de libertate rectitudinis: an δυνάμει illa ad bonum et malum aequaliter se habente homo post lapsum adhuc sit instructus. . . . Fatemur enim, aliquid libertatis remansisse, quoad opera, quae justa sunt justitia morali, politica et oeconomica, quae ad inferius hemisphaerium pertinent, ut loquitur Dr. Lutherus. Potest utique homo nondum renatus locomotivam externam utenque regere; potest externis membris dictamine rectae rationis imperare; potest justitiam civilem aliquo modo praestare et peccata externa graviora, cum paedagogia externa pugnancia, vitare; quin imo potest etiam verbum Dei exterius audire, meditari; interim tamen libertas illa tum externis tum internis impedimentis saepius labefactatur. . . . Tota igitur quaestio est de objecto spiritualiter bono, de operibus, quae justa sunt justitia spirituali, quaeque ad superius hemisphaerium pertinent, de motibus spiritualiter bonis, an homo ex se et suis viribus spirituales illos motus inchoare, oblatam gratiam acceptare, aliqua Deo grata praestare possit; quod διατόμήν negamus. . . . Neque quaestio est de naturalibus animae actionibus, quales sunt audire, legere, meditari, quae suo modo καταχρηστικῶς spirituales dici possunt, quia ab anima, quae spiritualis est essentia, proficiscuntur; agnoscimus enim in hisce quandam arbitrii libertatem: potest homo legere, potest non legere; potest audire, potest aures avertere; sed tota quaestio est de motibus proprie dictis spiritualibus, quales sunt: Deum recte agnoscere, verbum Dei cum fructu audire et legere.*

To this sphere we refer also the action of going to church for the sake of receiving instruction from the sermon, to read and hear the Word of God for the sake of making inward progress; to be seized (held) by a desire for instruction from the Word. All these are operations of prevenient and incipient grace." 4)

Years ago, writing on the subject of faith, we had occasion to say the following:—

"Rightly understood, faith is the human element in justification. Not, indeed, that quota of merit which the *subiectum operationis* in this process, sinful man, contributes out of his own store, or out of some borrowed store, to make up, together with divine grace, the resultant product of the sinner's righteousness; but that activity of the human mind, affections, and will which is brought into play on the part of the sinner, — we have specified in the preceding issue by what cause and in what manner, — and which reaches out toward the proffered hand of grace and toward the pardon and blessing which that hand extends, and which, through the mediation of the sinner's Advocate, results in an intimate union of the criminal with the Judge in this forensic process. God is gracious to the sinner; the sinner acknowledges with trustful satisfaction this attitude of God towards him. God bestows His pardon upon the sinner; the sinner places an implicit confidence in God's verdict upon him. Thus is justification accomplished, and man saved 'by grace through faith.'

"The fact that faith possesses no merit, and cannot be viewed as an impelling cause in the article of justification; that it is a gift of God wrought in us by the preaching of the Word of Grace, and the Spirit of grace through that Word, does not signify that man is not active at all when he believes.

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4) *Hemisphaerium superius* ambitu suo comprehendit res mere spirituales seu sacras internas. . . . Ad hoc hemisphaerium etiam referimus τὸ ire in templum informationis ex verbo praedicato capiendae causa, legere et audire verbum Dei animo proficiendi, desiderio informationis ex verbo teneri; quae omnia opera sunt praevenientis atque incipientis gratiae.

On the contrary, faith represents the very intensest action of which the human mind and heart are capable. Faith is the human echo rising from the deepest caverns of the heart in response to the voice of the Gospel; it is the human answer to the divine call. . . . The believer, in the act of believing, is not an automaton; he is not acted upon only, but he acts. . . . Just as certainly as the gracious inclination and decree of God and the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel represent a personal attitude and activity of God to the sinner, just as certainly the pleased assent and trustful reliance of the human will on God represent a personal attitude and activity on the part of the sinner toward God. The sinner's . . . declaration, 'I know and believe,' is grammatically and logically the statement of an act in which he, the sinner, is, knows himself to be, and desires to be considered, the agent, and the sole responsible agent. His mouth in this declaration is not a speaking-trumpet through which the thought of another is conveyed to the outside world; his heart is not a platform from which another delivers solemn statements of his conviction, but the speaker in this case is also the thinker of the words which he speaks and has willed to speak those words, and wishes to stand by his words, to be held to account for them, and to be judged by them. It is not denied, indeed, that *there is* another present and active in the speaker; and it is another question: How came the speaker thus to express himself? The point being urged now is this: when the believer declares, 'I know and believe!' he predicates action of himself. The act or process of faith, though not of the sinner's creation, still is an operation of his inner energies. It is his own heart with its forces that is at work in this act; it is *his* faith. God loves, Christ redeems, the Holy Spirit calls and enlightens the sinner, but neither God, nor Christ, nor the Spirit believe for or with the sinner, though they all aid him toward faith and induce, work faith in him. The Word, and the preacher of the Word, and the Church which sends the preacher, all show to the sinner the necessity of faith, and the

way to believe; they also urge him to believe, but the sinner's faith, the act of his believing, though brought about and wrought through their instrumentality, is not performed by them, but by the sinner himself." (*Theol. Quarterly*, Vol. X, pp. 3. 4.)

Dr. Keyser struggles to obtain for the person to be converted the ability to believe, and protests against the teaching that divine grace makes the person believe. He constructs a difficulty where there is none. If he is looking for the faculty by which the mind puts forth a volition, that is already there, it is only necessary to make this faculty *do, do, do* what by nature it is unwilling to do. If he is looking for any other faculty besides this concrete one, he is raising grave doubts regarding the correctness of his views of the converting act.

In the whole treatise of Dr. Pieper there is nothing to justify the charge that Dr. Pieper makes faith a coerced or an automatic action of the converted person. That is something which Dr Keyser has put into the treatise which he has reviewed. Why he had to do this we shall see anon. D.

*(To be concluded.)*

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