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THE ARMINIAN ARGUMENT IN ROM. 7, 14—25.

“Of whom speaketh the apostle this? of himself, or of some other man?” That is the question which has perplexed the teachers of the Church from the earliest times. The real question, however, is not whether we have in this passage a strictly personal reminiscence of the apostle, a biographical note relating exclusively to his own inner life, with no reference to the experience of others, but whether the spiritual phenomena which the apostle recounts apply to him as an unregenerate or a regenerate person, hence, whether these phenomena are significant manifestations by which any person may determine his own spiritual condition.

The Greek fathers understood the entire passage to apply to the unregenerate. So did Augustine in his early days; however, he changed his opinion in the course of the Pelagian controversy and ever since that time defended most strenuously the view that it is the ego of the regenerate that is speaking in this passage. The view of Augustine became current in the Church of the Reformation, while the majority of the papists, Socinians, and Arminians followed the view of the Greek fathers. Luther cites the seventh chapter of Romans [in the Augustinian sense] about one hundred and ten times. . . . The Lutheran Confessions, too, appeal frequently to Rom. 7, 14—25 for proof that the old Adam still clings to believers in this life, and that this passage is a description of the Christian's daily contrition and repentance which “continues until death.” (Book of Concord, Jacobs' Ed., p. 596, 7. 8; 329, 40.) With this view the unanimous opinion of all the later Lutheran theologians coincides. In the controversy with Latermann the Leipzig Faculty handed down

CAN MAN UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE BY HIS OWN NATURAL POWERS?

The Bible is a divine revelation. This implies that it can and should be understood. The written Word of God is not an abracadabra, a mystical and magical combination of letters and words. In order to produce its intended effects upon man it must first be understood by him. God's thoughts must first come in contact with man's thoughts. The human mind must first become aware of, and acquainted with, the divine mind. Thus, and thus only, can the divine Word produce its gracious results in man's heart. If it were otherwise, it would be sufficient to have an ever-closed copy of the Book on the parlor table; then also our missionaries might save themselves all the trouble of learning foreign languages and simply read the English or German Bible to the heathen and thereby expect to convert them. Then Paul could not have written what he has written 1 Cor. 14, 13—19 concerning the necessity of interpreting words spoken in an unknown tongue. But, as said, the Bible is not a mystical collocation of words. Its primary aim is to be understood. This we learn from such passages as Matt. 24, 15, Acts 8, 30, and Rom. 15, 4. That it *can* be understood appears from Eph. 3, 3. 4, 2 Tim. 3, 15. 16, and other passages.

But now the question presents itself: Can man understand the Bible by his own reason or strength? Can he attain the knowledge of Scripture by the natural powers of his own mind? As to this question there is in some minds some uncertainty, confusion of thought, and even positively erroneous thinking which arises, in a measure, from the failure to distinguish between literal knowledge and spiritual knowledge. The latter is that knowledge of Scripture which is coupled with assent and, in regard to its promises, also with confidence. It is, therefore, a practical knowledge. The former, however, is a mere intellectual acquaintance with the literal meaning of Scripture, whence it is properly called both intellectual knowl-

edge and literal or grammatical knowledge. It is also known as theoretical knowledge, historical knowledge, external knowledge, and so forth. Logicians call this kind of knowledge simple apprehension, as distinguished from judgment and reasoning. This term which has also been adopted by dogmaticians, denotes that the mind takes hold of something apart from other things. It designates that act of mind by which we merely become aware of something, or have a notion, idea, or impression of it brought into the mind. So the "apprehensio simplex Scripturae," or "cognitio sensus literalis" is a mere outward acquaintance with the literal meaning of Scripture. The mind merely perceives this intended sense of the words, without affirming, denying, or passing any judgment.

Now, is this literal knowledge attainable by the natural powers of man's mind? Some answer this question in the negative. They assert that no man can understand a single iota of Scripture, unless he have the Spirit of God. They assert that no unconverted person can perceive the proper sense which is contained in the words of Scripture and expressed by them, that is, the grammatical and literal sense, unless the Holy Spirit graciously enlighten or teach him. This assertion, however, is based on a misconception of the mission of the Holy Spirit. He was not sent that He might lecture on rules of Hebrew and Greek grammar and teach the meaning of words, but rather that He might give us the practical knowledge of Scripture.

But the above assertion also involves enthusiasm. It is tantamount to the claim of the enthusiasts that the Holy Spirit enlightens and converts men immediately, that is, without the external word. For so long as men do not perceive the meaning of the divine Word that Word stands to them in the relation of a nonentity. So far as they are concerned, it is practically the same as if it were non-existent. Through a non-existent word, however, the Holy Spirit does not sanctify and save sinners. "God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or along with the preceding external Word." To say, therefore, that the literal knowledge of Scripture is not a prerequisite,

but the result of the gracious operation and illumination of the Holy Spirit is enthusiasm pure and simple. It flatly contradicts the classic and correct statement of the Smalcald Articles from which we have quoted. The above assertion which is made by the Romanists, Rathmann, and others more than justifies us in suspecting them of enthusiasm. It is well known that Rathmann denied the inherent power of the words of Scripture to convert and sanctify, which he held was done only when the Holy Spirit with His virtue joins Himself to the Word in the mind or heart of man, and only when it is legitimately and savingly used. He distinguished between the external and internal Word of God.

The divinely established method according to which God will not deal with us except through His external Word absolutely demands that we be able to understand that Word by our own mental powers. This demand the good and wise God has met by making us intelligent beings and the Bible an intelligible Book. God has endowed man with the noble faculty of reason. By the fall this intellectual power has indeed been greatly impaired; but man has thereby not ceased to be a rational creature. He has indeed lost the soundness of his reason, but not his reason itself. He still possesses the power to think and to express his thoughts as well as to understand the thoughts of others when expressed in intelligible words of human speech. Now, in just such words God has made known to man all things that pertain unto life and godliness. 'In order that this revelation might be a revelation, He caused it to be written, not in the language of heaven, which no mortal is able to understand, but in the language of men. "In Scriptura sacra Spiritus Sanctus in oratione sua factus homo est." The Rabbins say: "The Law speaks in the tongue of the sons of men." It is true, the words which His inspired penmen employed are not words which man's wisdom teacheth, but words which the Holy Ghost teacheth. 1 Cor. 2, 13. But these words were in every case human words, and withal plain, intelligible, unambiguous words. The oracles of God are no Delphic oracles. There is

no ambiguity in His utterances. Clearness, distinctness, perspicuity is one of the prominent features of the Book of books. Being intended to make wise the simple as well as intellectual giants, it employs plain, simple, familiar language. The Author of this Book, who is by far the greatest Master of a clear style, said to Israel: "This commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth [in thy own familiar speech], and in thy heart [understanding], that thou mayest do it," Deut. 30, 11—14. We admit, of course, that the Bible, which was written many centuries ago in a language not now spoken and in a remote country whose manners and customs were very different from ours, contains words and expressions that are hard to be understood, such as we find, *e. g.*, Gen. 41, 43 (Abrech), Ex. 39, 1—31, et al. But these words and expressions are an exegetical crux for the regenerate as well as for the unregenerate. In fact, Christian translators and lexicographers have often consulted Jews and other unbelievers in order to ascertain the true meaning of biblical words and phrases.

Speaking of translators, leads us to remark that the same plainness of speech which characterizes the original Hebrew and Greek text is also a prominent characteristic of Luther's translation and of the Authorized Version. The language of Luther's Bible is that of the common people among whom he was living. He says in his "Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen": "Ich hab mich dess geflissen im Dolmetschen, dass ich rein und klar Deutsch geben moechte." When he revised his translation of the New Testament, he wrote to Spalatin, asking him to suggest suitable words, "not words of the court or camp, but simple words; for this book wishes to be luminous in simplicity." Of the King James Version Marsh says in his Lec-

tures on the English Language, p. 632: "To attempt a new translation of the Bible in the hope of finding within the compass of the English language a clearer, a more appropriate, or a more forcible diction than that of the standard version, is to betray an ignorance of the capabilities of our native speech, with which it would be in vain to reason."

This clearness and plainness of the Bible is the same for *all* readers, alike for the regenerate and the unregenerate. As the true and intended meaning is but one,—*sensus literalis unus est*—, so also the external clearness is but one. The Holy Spirit has not shed a light on the sacred page for the believer which is not there also for the unbeliever. Neither does the Spirit's action by which man is led to the saving knowledge of the Bible consist in casting an additional light on the Scriptures, but in shining in the heart of man. The action is not upon the Book, but wholly on the reader. This Book is luminous. It is a "lamp," a "light," "a light that shineth in a dark place."

Now, since the Bible is an intelligible Book written for intelligent beings, it follows that all men of ordinary intelligence can, by their own natural powers of mind, come to the literal knowledge of its statements.

This conclusion is abundantly supported by both Scripture and experience. The scribes and Pharisees were devoid of spiritual light; yet they sat in Moses' seat and had the key of knowledge. The very name "grammateis," *i. e.*, scribes, teachers or interpreters of the law, implies that they were able at least in a measure to discover and set forth the meaning of the written law of Moses. They understood also, for instance, what Christ meant when He called God His Father. John 5, 17. 18; Matt. 26, 63—65. Of disobedient and gainsaying Israel St. Paul says that it *knew* (ἔγνω) the Gospel. Rom. 10, 19. 21. It is also a matter of record that Jerome, Buxtorf, and others consulted unconverted Jews in regard to the true meaning of biblical words and expressions. And is it not well known that in our own day critics and expositors who ignore or reject the

teachings of Scripture have nevertheless distinguished themselves by their historical and philological labors upon the sacred Volume? Therefore we conclude that man can understand the true meaning of the words of Scripture by his natural powers of mind.

Of course, this knowledge is *imperfect*. There are various barriers on the part of man which rise as a wall of separation between him and the true sense of the words. Such obstructions are imperfect knowledge of the language in which he reads the Bible, negligent and desultory reading, and, above all, doctrinal error and prejudice. Luke 18, 34; John 8, 43—47; 2 Pet. 3, 15—17. These impediments account for the imperfection of his knowledge, for his understanding the Bible only in a measure.

Besides this purely theoretical and intellectual knowledge of Scripture there is also a *γνώσις πρακτική*, a practical knowledge. Zacharias calls this knowledge the "knowledge of salvation," Luke 1, 77; by coming to this knowledge of the truth men are converted and saved. 1 Tim. 2, 4; 2 Tim. 2, 25. St. Paul says that this knowledge of the truth "is after godliness," *κατ' εὐσέβειαν*, *i. e.*, it leads to godliness, promotes holiness of life. It is, therefore, not a dry, barren, fruitless brain knowledge that leaves the heart cold and untouched and the life and conversation unchanged, but an appreciative, approving, and practical knowledge. The mind regards the truths of the divine Word, especially those of the Gospel, as true and as treasures worthy of all acceptance, and simultaneously prompts the heart and will to receive and embrace them. This knowledge of the head and heart delivers the alarmed and terrified sinner from the dungeon of dread and despondency; it puts confidence, hope, peace, and joy in his bosom; it purifies his heart and gives him strength to struggle against the devil, the world, and the flesh, and to walk in godliness and good works. The Bible describes this knowledge which produces such a wonderful and mighty transformation in the heart and life of man as an integrant part of faith and as true faith itself. John

6, 69; Eph. 5, 8; Matt. 13, 23, and other passages. It uses a variety of figurative expressions to describe the origin of this knowledge, *e. g.*, revelation, illumination, opening the understanding or the heart. Matt. 11, 25; 16, 17; 2 Cor. 6, 4; Eph. 1, 18; Luke 24, 45; Acts 16, 14; 26, 18. The frequent use of knowing and receiving as convertible and exegetical terms — 1 Cor. 2, 14; John 17, 8; Matt. 13, 19, 20, *et al.* — shows that this salutary knowledge is a mental acceptance and appropriation of the things offered in the Gospel, whereby man makes these proffered things his own and firmly clings to them as a treasure which he would not lose again.

Now, can man who is able to attain the literal knowledge of Scripture by his own reason or strength by the same human powers come to this practical knowledge of Scripture? The Pelagians unreservedly answer this question in the affirmative, while the Semi-Pelagians and Synergists assert that this knowledge is partly the gift of God and partly the product of man's natural or communicated powers, thereby overthrowing or restricting the *soli Deo gloria* as well as the *sola gratia*. Thus Clement of Alexandria wrote: "As a physician furnishes health to those who cooperate toward health, so God (gives) eternal salvation to those who cooperate toward knowledge." Ὡς δὲ ἰατρὸς ὑγίαν παρέχεται τοῖς συνεργοῦσι πρὸς ὑγίαν, οὕτως ὁ θεὸς τὴν αἰδίου σωτηρίαν τοῖς συνεργοῦσι πρὸς γνῶσιν. (*Strom.* VII, 727.) Over against these assertions our Church declares: "Although man's reason or natural understanding has still indeed a dim spark of the knowledge that there is a God, as also (Rom. 1, 19 sqq.) of the doctrine of the Law, yet it is so ignorant, blind, and perverted that, even when the most intelligent and learned men in the world read or hear the Gospel of the Son of God and the divine promise of eternal salvation, they are, nevertheless, unable with their own powers to perceive, apprehend, understand, or believe and regard it as true, but the more diligence and zeal they use to comprehend these spiritual things with their reason, the less they understand or believe, and regard all these things only as foolishness or fables,

before they are enlightened and taught by the Holy Ghost." (*Sol. Declaratio* II, § 9. Mueller, p. 589 sq.)

This declaration, however disagreeable to human pride, fully agrees with the Bible. One of the principal passages man to gain the salutary knowledge of the Gospel is 1 Cor. 2, 14: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither *can* he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." St. Paul is here speaking of the *natural* man. The Greek word is *ψυχικός*, animalis, psychical, soulish. The *ψυχή*, or soul, is the principle of animal life, which man has in common with the brute creation, including the passions, appetites, etc. This term—psychical or soulish—describes him as a man who is wholly and solely under the sway of the *ψυχή* and its passions and appetites. His soul, in this depreciatory sense of the word, with its thoughts, desires, and will, has not been touched and influenced by the Spirit of God; for he is here placed in opposition to the spiritual man. Jude 19 it is expressly stated that he has not the Spirit. Being a psychical man, he also has an earthly, sensual (psychical) wisdom, James 3, 15, the wisdom of this world, the wisdom of men, as opposed to the wisdom of God, to the wisdom that is from above and is pure. This earthly, sensual wisdom is the standard, the only standard, according to which he judges all things, including "the things of the Spirit of God." Which are these things? They are none other than those that are revealed in the Gospel of the cross, 1 Cor. 1, 18, the things that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man." These things God revealed to the apostles by His Spirit. The apostles spoke these things, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth. In their inspired writings these things are still offered to all.

"But the natural man *receiveth not* the things of the Spirit of God." He refuses to accept them and to treasure them up in his heart. He rather rejects them. How is this rejection

to be explained? The Apostle replies: "For they are foolishness unto him." They stand to him in the practical relation of being something absurd. He understands, indeed, the meaning of the words in which these things are offered to him, but these things themselves appear to his earthly, sensual mind to be foolish things. So they have no charm for him; they awaken no admiration in his heart; he has no desire to embrace them and to make them his own; he rather regards them with aversion and repugnance and therefore rejects them.

This notion which he has of the contents of the Gospel is, of course, not a correct knowledge. The contents of the Gospel are *not* folly, but wisdom. Christ, the great central subject of the Bible, is the power of God, and the wisdom of God, 1 Cor. 1, 24. The things which God has prepared and offers in the Gospel are things which the angels desire to look into, 1 Pet. 1, 12. To regard these things as foolishness is an evidence of ignorance, crass ignorance. The person who considers genuine coin of the realm counterfeit money and refuses to take it has no true knowledge of fact; the person who regards those things which God has prepared as foolishness has far less correct notions of spiritual things. No wonder the Bible calls such a man *darkness*, Eph. 5, 8.

But the holy Apostle does not simply say that the natural man *does* not know the things of the Spirit of God, he also declares that he is *not able* to know them: "Neither *can* he know them," *καὶ οὐ δύναται γινῶναι*. He has no power, no ability, no capableness whatever to see these things in their true light and significance to him. He is absolutely incapable of having true notions of them. "Neither *can* he know them," that is the strongest denial of the assertion that man is able to understand the Gospel by his own intellectual powers in any measure or manner whatever.

But we ask, *Why* is the natural man incapable of knowing the things of the Spirit of God? The answer given by Paul is: "Because they are spiritually discerned." *Ἀναγρίψεν*, to discern, means to investigate and give judgment upon. The con-

tents of the Gospel are not to be accepted blindly, but with examination and judgment, Acts 17, 11. But this must be done upon scriptural lines and in accordance with their own essential character. Now, they are essentially *pneumatika*, spiritual things; therefore they must also be judged of *πνευματικῶς*, in a spiritual fashion, that is, in a mode empowered and guided by the Spirit. But this manner of judging is lacking in the natural man. He is a psychical man and has not the Spirit. Therefore he *cannot* know the things of the Spirit of God.

The Apostle is here speaking of natural man in general. Hence his statement applies to *all* natural men, to the wise as well as to those who are otherwise, to intellectual giants no less than to the ungifted. Some would have us believe that intellectual culture brings people nearer to the Gospel. That is a mistake. The things of the Gospel are foolishness to *all* natural men, to the most cultured as well as to the barbarians and bushmen. You may train, discipline, refine the mind by means of logic, philosophy, and the like; but all this mental culture does not prepare or predispose the natural man to gain a true notion of the Gospel. Athens was the very flower of ancient civilization; its schools of philosophy were the most illustrious in the world. Yet her proud philosophers called Paul a "babbler," *σπερμολόγος*, a word used for the rag and bone pickers on the street and for the quack who had picked up a few scraps of information and retailed them as if he were a scholar.

The inability of natural man to know spiritual things aright appears also from Eph. 4, 18, where St. Paul says of the Gentiles that they walk "in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them." They are darkened in reference to the understanding. Their understanding is destitute of spiritual light. They cannot see spiritual or divine things. This darkness of spiritual ignorance in their understanding is not partial and faint, enabling them to see spiritual things to some extent; it is not twilight, but the total

absence of light. Their spiritual ignorance is so great that the Apostle simply calls them *darkness*, Eph. 5, 8. This *abstractum pro concreto* denotes that they are devoid of *all* spiritual light, of *all* ability to see or know spiritual things.

That man cannot gain the practical knowledge of the Bible appears also from the prayers of the saints. Such prayers for inward light are to be found in Ps. 119. In this long and lovely Psalm David magnifies the Word of God. David had a considerable measure of appreciative and appropriating knowledge of the divine Word. He was able to say: "I have more understanding than all my teachers. I understand more than the ancients," vv. 99. 100. Nevertheless he desired to obtain a still better knowledge. But he does not presume to gain this knowledge by his own reason or strength; he looks to God for this knowledge. Lifting up his heart and eyes unto heaven, he says to the Author of light: "Teach me Thy statutes. Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law. Make me to understand the way of Thy precepts. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Thy Law. Give me understanding, that I may learn Thy commandments. Give me understanding, that I may know Thy testimonies. My lips shall utter praise, when Thou hast taught me Thy statutes," vv. 12. 18. 27. 34. 73. 125. 171. No less than sixteen times he asks God in this single Psalm to give him understanding, that he may know His Word. Thereby he confesses again and again that he is not able of himself to understand the divine Word. Compare also the intercessory prayers of Paul, Eph. 1, 17. 18; Phil. 1, 9. 10; Col. 1, 9. Now, if the saints are unable to understand the Word of God by their own natural powers, how, then, can unenlightened sinners understand it?

We conclude, therefore, that no man can know the Scriptures aright by his own natural powers. The salutary knowledge of the divine Word is altogether beyond the grasp of his unenlightened intellect. In no wise and measure and in no sense is man the efficient cause of this knowledge. In no wise and measure and in no sense is this knowledge a natural knowl-

edge, a knowledge of human origin. Although it is *in* man, it is not *of* man.

How, then, is this light of true knowledge produced in man? Entirely and alone by the Holy Spirit. He is the sole Author of Scripture, and He is also the sole Interpreter of Scripture. He interprets the Scriptures, not by shedding additional light on them, but by shining in the heart. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Cor. 4, 6. He enlightens the eyes of our understanding, that we may see and know divine things, Eph. 1, 18. He opens our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of His Law, Ps. 119, 18. He opens our heart and understanding, that we may understand the Scriptures, Acts 16, 14; Luke 24, 45. All that understand the Scriptures have been taught of God, John 6, 44. 45. All these passages ascribe illumination to God and the Spirit of God. The salutary knowledge produced by this illumination is, therefore, a *spiritual* knowledge, Col. 1, 9, and wisdom that is from above, James 3, 17.

It is to be noted, moreover, that the Bible refers this spiritual knowledge of its statements to the Spirit *in solidum*, *i. e.*, entirely, from beginning to end. Some would have us believe that God merely *enables* man to know, merely gives him the *power* to know, and ascribe to man the *act* of knowing. But God does not simply make it possible for man to know His Word, leaving it to man to convert this possibility into reality, He also produces in him the *act* of knowing. He gives the light of knowledge, 2 Cor. 4, 6. He works all in all. It is true, this knowledge is a mental act in man. Not God, but man is the subject in whom this mental operation takes place. It is the enlightened person that says: *I see; I know; I understand.* Nevertheless, it is not man, but God who brings about, produces, or effects this operation in man's mind, heart, and will. All synergism on the part of man is, therefore, excluded. Man must give all the glory to God. "My lips shall utter praise,

when Thou hast taught me Thy statutes," Ps. 119, 171; cf. 1 Cor. 4, 7.

Thanks are due to God for this knowledge all the more, because it is a *gift of grace*. "It is *given* unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 13, 11; Luke 8, 10; Eph. 1, 17; 1 John 5, 20. God takes pity on poor, benighted, ignorant men, and opens to them the Scriptures, and grants them the knowledge by which they are sanctified and saved. Therefore they join in the new song of the elders and say to the Lamb on the throne: "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof," Rev. 5, 9.

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