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WHY DID LUTHER REFUSE ZWINGLI'S HAND OF BROTHERHOOD AT MARBURG?

The first four days of October mark the anniversary of the memorable meeting between Luther and Zwingli at Marburg. At this celebrated conference Zwingli offered the hand of Christian brotherhood and fellowship to Luther; but Luther refused it. Why did he do this? Before we proceed to answer this question, we shall do well to review the events that led up to this colloquy.

Charles V had concluded a treaty with Pope Clement VII and had solemnly pledged himself to suppress Protestantism. The German Protestants formed a defensive alliance in which the Landgrave of Hesse, Philip the Magnanimous, was anxious to have the Swiss included. Zwingli was equally anxious for this. But an obstacle was in the way—the controversy between the Lutherans and Zwinglians on the Lord's Supper. Who had begun this controversial conflict? That is a question which Reformed writers usually pass over in silence, for they know that Zwingli was the author of this heated and unhappy controversy.¹⁾ It is an undeniable fact that prior to the year 1524 Zwingli and his friends were at one with Luther in teaching the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. In 1521 Oecolampadius, Zwingli's friend, called it

1) See Luther's Works, St. Louis Edition, vol. XX, col. 772; XVII, 1534, Luther's Letters, De Wette, vol. III, 43.

THE OLD LUTHERAN DOCTRINE OF FREE-WILL IN THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION.

During the year 1905 Prof. Richard of the General Synod published, in the *Lutheran Quarterly*, a series of articles proposing to establish his claim, that some kind of synergism was the old Lutheran doctrine which by the Form of Concord was suppressed and a new doctrine of free-will put in its place at the behest of the Flacianists. These articles followed in the wake of an attack of Prof. Richard on Prof. Pieper's published address at the Free Conference at Watertown, Wis., entitled, "The fundamental difference in the doctrine of conversion and election," which was successfully met by Prof. Pieper himself in *Lehre und Wehre*. Prof. Richard seems to have keenly felt the cutting blows of his antagonist and has read up Reformation literature to a great extent to bolster up his badly shaken theory. Since nothing has been written on our side, he may, at this time, imagine, that he has won the case by his many authorities whom he cites in defense, but which he manages in the same way as will be shown he does the Augsburg Confession. Hence the present article.

We have not space to follow Dr. Richard through the whole series and will at present but endeavor to shed some light from Scripture and common sense on Prof. Richard's arguments, as presented in the April number, 1905, of the *Lutheran Quarterly*, on what is covered by the above caption. There he strains every nerve to down the truly convincing logic of Prof. Pieper by citing *some* historical facts, by an array of quotations from Reformation authors, who might suit his theory, and by arranging so-called dilemmas. We need not do like Prof. Richard who wisely refrains from placing the arguments of his opponent before his readers that *they* might judge of the tenability of his position, but covers his logical failings by prejudicing them against the Missourians, as "detractors" of such great men as Thomasius, Frank, Luthardt, Dieckhoff, Cremer. We will tell, of course as briefly as possible, all he has to tell, and then

point out where his arguments fall short in spite of his verbally accurate quotations.

In the first instance, let us form the state of controversy, because it is right here where Dr. Richard sadly betrays his untheological mind. With us, whom he is going to convince, the question is: Has *the Lutheran Church as such* started with and stuck to the teaching that natural man has free-will in spiritual things?— in other words: Did the Lutheran Church of the years 1530 to 1560 *confess* that man does cooperate (*συνεργεῖ*) with God to his salvation (beginning in conversion)? The affirmation of this question is, from the whole scope of his article, the burden of his argumentation. But as this would be somewhat too great a task, he comes down to the assertion: “or rather the doctrine of free-will that *prevailed* in the Lutheran Church from A. D. 1530 to the death of Melancthon in A. D. 1560.” We must needs ask: If Prof. Richard was going to show only the *prevailing* doctrine *in* the Lutheran Church, why did he not extend the time for a much longer period, even up to the present? Orthodoxism, pietism, vulgar and scientific rationalism might furnish him with the most fearful array of “historico-thetical” weapons for his contention of the prevalence of his type of Lutheranism, which “is not a mathematical quantity, nor a fixed point, but a *system* of doctrines having some freedom of motion within certain metes and bounds.” Why does he, then, exclude the writings of Ammon or Wegscheider, whose systems *prevailed in* the Lutheran Church to which they had subscribed, when “Lutheranism has some freedom of motion within certain metes and bounds”? They agreed that man has free-will and would give the most brilliant arguments, that their doctrine prevailed. But probably thinking “in limitation the master shows himself,” he is content to answer the question by proving that it prevailed between 1530 and 1560. But this reasoning cannot satisfy a logical mind. Does it follow that when one part—even the largest—is congruent to something, the whole is congruent? Not in logical thinking. The *required* parts must be congruent. In answering the question in hand

one of the required parts of congruency is: whether or not the Confession of the Church at that time up to the present bear out the contention. — Now we admit — though by far not to the extent Prof. Richard desires — that some teachers in the Lutheran Church, especially after the death of Luther in 1546, held, that natural man has free-will in spiritual things. They were the Melancthonians and Crypto-Calvinists. They wrote much in behalf of free-will, made confessions, and tried hard to obtrude them on the Lutheran Church. But are they to be accepted as unimpeachable witnesses for the sense of the Confession, even though their master wrote it? Is there excluded all possibility that they used dubious words in their private writings and yet for a while the Church connected the true sense with them, while they did not? Or, on the contrary, — and this is oftener the case, — may not those teachers subsequently have connected a different sense with their own words in the Confession as in most cases false teachers do until they are left by the Church to shift for themselves? May it not also happen that a teacher of the Church, entertaining different views in his private writings, when occasion arises to confess the faith of the Church, leaves all his notions behind and sticks to the truth? All these possibilities are overlooked by Dr. Richard, and he takes it for granted that “the confessions must be interpreted by the private writings” of their adherents. But we at least take exception to this “universally recognized principle.” We hold it to be the bulwark of Romanism, when tradition is to determine the sense of the Scriptures and private writings the sense of the creeds of the Church. We prove the Confession by the Scripture and interpret it accordingly. We hold “the fathers” as good witnesses only in so far as they agree with the Church. What Protestant would think of enlightening the faith of the first Church by the writings of the early fathers, or the Catholic creeds by the writings of Origen, Rufinus, and Jerome! The fact is, Dr. Richard has slyly put a perverted “principle of interpretation” in place of the true rule, which is, that the meaning of words and phrases of a document must be interpreted

by the usage of such words and phrases by contemporaneous writers, which is quite a different thing.

And does not history bear out our refusal of Dr. Richard's authorities as witnesses? Were they not the engenderers of strife in the Church? Did they not try underhand methods and machinations at the courts of the princes? Were they not those that were foisting new confessions on parts of the Church and trying to introduce their ideas in the Augsburg Confession by changing its articles? Where did the necessity arise of doing so when their doctrines were prevailing? Further, how was it possible that their doctrine did not prevail after all, if it was a divine doctrine? Ought not such as held it to be divinely taught have left a Church that went—as Prof. Richard maintains—within six months so far from the truth as to set up the Form of Concord just to condemn free-will? In remaining and claiming the Lutheran name by endorsing this new symbol they can be considered only in two ways, either as repenting their errors or as hypocrites subscribing what they did not believe. But in both cases their prior writings cannot be claimed as true witnesses to the Confession of the Church.

This kind of proof is buckled up by the hackneyed theory that Luther and Melancthon underwent a great change in regard to their “deterministic views” since 1527. “It is now as different from the teaching on the same subject found in Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio* and in the first edition of the *Loci* as the light of the sun is different from the light of the moon. . . . Melancthon no longer affirms that ‘all things occur necessarily according to the divine predestination, and that there is no freedom of our will.’ On the contrary, he now affirms that ‘God has given man *reason* and *choice*’ and that ‘we *choose*, we act.’”

This theory—not invented by Dr. Richard—just suits his case as he seems to have a liking for such perversion of history, of which we will show some samples later on. We maintain that it is only a theory made to cover the difficulty of a so-called Lutheran finding himself opposed to Luther's denial of free-will and the vacillation of Melancthon between

his Confession with the Church, on one hand, and his determinism in his earlier life and his philosophic explanation of conversion, on the other. Luther and Melanchthon are thrown together either to cover Melanchthon's failings, or to provide a cover for Melanchthonians to appear as real Lutherans. The facts are as follows. Of "deterministic views" Melanchthon bore the larger share. He taught them *ex professo* in his earliest edition of the *Loci* as his own. In Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio* we find such views only cited as belonging to certain pagan philosophers, but not endorsed. Luther taught according to the Scriptures the hidden God and His mysteries past finding out, but he directed men to the revealed God and His Gospel. Confer quotations by Dr. Richard in the *Lutheran Quarterly*, April, 1903. Luther never eradicated any "deterministic views" from his writings, nor did he retract or "let them drop into the background," because he did not hold such views. In regard to the doctrine of free-will he underwent not the slightest change. He did not allow free-will in spiritual matters to man up to his last hour. We quote in corroboration a passage from his last work, the Commentary on his beloved Genesis, written in 1545: "But if we are no more *than men*, that is, if we do not hold to the Blessed Seed by faith, we are all like Cain. When our nature is left without the Holy Spirit, it is led by the evil spirit by which Cain was driven. If, now, there be in man so much ability or free-will as to restrain himself before the power of the devil, there ought to have been such gift in Cain, to whom primarily belonged the primogeniture and the promises of the Blessed Seed. But a like habituality there is with all of us. Whenever our nature is not assisted by the Spirit of God, it can not stand upright of itself. Why, then, do we boast so many vain things about free-will?" (Walch I, 502.)

And now we must be allowed to ask: "In what way do the changes of Melanchthon from Stoicism affect the scriptural truth of "no free-will in rebus divinis," confessed by the Church? We consider Melanchthon right in making that change in so far as he did not mix his new view with the question of conversion. That Melanchthon did *not* mix at this time (1527) is evident

from the passages quoted by Dr. Richard: "God moves trees in one way, cattle in another way, men in another way, according to the nature of each." "God imparts (natural) life and motion, while we *choose* and *act*. All beginning is from God." This is scriptural doctrine regarding God as the cause of all, and yet allowing for the contingencies arising out of reasonable beings created by Him. Melancthon did wisely in conforming thereto instead of his original stoic notions. In his *natural capacities* man according to Scripture is not to be "compared to a block, or to a stone, or to a dead image." No true Lutheran held thus and the Form of Concord guards against such teaching in so many words. All the consequences and inferences of Dr. Richard in transferring these observations of Melancthon to the spiritual sphere of man's life are gratuitous. It was not here where Melancthon stumbled. That was later when he *sought* a reason why some are converted while others are not. He did not find it, neither does Dr. Richard. His explanation, according to above statements, makes man the *sole* operator of his salvation, whilst he intends man to be only *cooperator* or *synergist*: even less, though a little. It seems to be a habit with Dr. Richard to demonstrate too much and therefore nothing, as we will show such demonstration to be in vogue in more places. From the premises of Dr. Richard it is evident that he will be unable to show that the doctrine of free-will has prevailed in the time which he set down, as the old Lutheran doctrine.

Dr. Richard uses the Augsburg Confession as a witness for the prevalence of his doctrine of free-will in the period in question. To accomplish his purpose he has to put it twice in a wrong position. For once he places it on a level with the Word of God. *He makes it the maker and constituent of the Church*, which is, according to the Scriptures, solely the Word of God. Its prerogatives he ascribes to the Confession. Afterwards he treats the Confession as a testimony of how the faith of the Church *was made up*—both times to the dishonor of the Confession (and the Church). This is the deep "psychology" of the subtle Philistine, of which he boasts so much in the January number, 1904. For one purpose the Confession is to

him the creator of the Church. Whoever subscribes to it belongs to the Church. This is rigid. But as soon as it is held up to him as the faith of the Church, he vehemently asserts: It's only a witness for what teaching was then in vogue. I am not bound by its words. It must be interpreted in accordance with the private writings of its time.

We are almost persuaded that Dr. Richard does so unconsciously in the present article, simply from a habit acquired in the General Synod, where the words and phrases of the Confession are similarly used in such a Pickwickian sense, and even the words of subscription. While they say with so many words, that they "hold the Augsburg Confession to be a correct exhibition of the fundamental doctrines of the divine Word," a multitude of its professed adherents imagine "the underlying idea" is: the fundamental doctrines of the Augsburg Confession is what they are bound to—they to determine what those fundamental doctrines are. Dr. Richard can therefore not object if we try to arouse the subconsciousness of his deep psychology. Its mystery is the reason why "Lutheranism is not a mathematical quantity, nor a fixed point, but a *system of doctrines* having some freedom of motion within certain metes and bounds. And all must sooner or later come to realize that it is psychologically impossible to make all Lutherans think alike and hold alike on all doctrines embraced in the Lutheran System, as it is physically impossible to make all clocks tick alike and strike alike in marking the passing hours of the day." We admire Dr. Richard's good piece of oratory. But it is, aside from the contradictory qualities of "a system," which appears to us a veritable logical conundrum, sounding brass in the light of God's Truth: "That they all may be one, even as we (the Father and the Son) are one." If our Lord said that His Church *be one*, it is psychologically possible, all clocks to the contrary notwithstanding. For what we do not know—that sophism may apply to the Philistines within the promised land yet outside the promise, each fighting for *his* interpretation of *his* creed, the maker of *his* Church, but each agreeing with the other to differ.

(To be concluded.)