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ACTS OF GOD.

The acts of God are of two kinds, *internal* acts and *external* acts.

INTERNAL ACTS OF GOD.

The internal acts of God are again of two kinds, *personal* internal acts and *essential* internal acts.

The personal internal acts of God are those acts which terminate within the Godhead and pertain to the divine Person or Persons by whom they are performed as peculiar to such Person or Persons. Thus in Ps. 2, 7 we read: "*The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day HAVE I BEGOTTEN thee.*" Here the act of begetting is predicated of THE LORD, but of the Lord as distinguished from another divine person, whom he addresses by the personal pronoun, *thee*, and names *his Son*, which implies that the Person speaking is the *Father* of the Person spoken to. The act whereby the Father is personally the Father is the act of generation or begetting, an act which is not an act of the Son, nor an act of the Holy Ghost, but a definite act of the first Person in the Trinity. This act is truly an *act*,

predicated of its subject by an active verb, *I have begotten*. But while the verb is transitive, and the object is not the subject, yet the act terminates within the Godhead, the Son also being God, of the same one and indivisible essence with the Father.¹⁾ And thus this divine act is an internal act, *opus ad intra*, performed before the world was made, before anything existed beside God.²⁾

Nor is this the only personal act of God terminating within the Godhead. There is in the one Godhead a Person distinct from the Father and the Son, personally called the Spirit, or the Holy Ghost;³⁾ and as the Son is a divine Person by a personal act of the Father, by eternal generation, so the Holy Ghost is a divine Person by another personal act, eternal spiration, performed by the Father and the Son, the act whereby the Spirit proceeds from the Father⁴⁾ and from the Son⁵⁾ as a divine Person distinct from the Father and the Son, and yet of the same divine essence,⁶⁾ the act of spiration being likewise an internal act of God.

The precise nature of these acts is, of course, beyond human comprehension, as the mystery of the Trinity itself.

The essential internal acts of God are such exertions of essential attributes of God as terminate within the Godhead, but in which the three Persons of the Trinity concur. Such acts are the eternal decrees of creation, of redemption, and of predestination.

The divine decrees are, as such, exertions of the divine will, of that essential attribute whereby God consciously prompts his own acts. But not every act of volition in God is a decree. In his decrees, God purposes to himself what he will do, and such purposes of God "cannot fail or be

1) John 10, 30: *ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἓν ἐσμεν*. Cf. John 1, 1. Ps. 110, 1. 1 John 5, 20.

2) John 1, 1.

3) Matt. 28, 19. Gal. 4, 6. Rom. 8, 9.

4) John 15, 26. Rom. 8, 9. Job 33, 4.

5) Gal. 4, 6. Rom. 8, 9. 1 Pet. 1, 11.

6) Acts 5, 3. 4. 1 Cor. 3, 16. 2 Cor. 3, 17.

overthrown." 1) *I have purposed it*, says God, *I will also do it.* 2) *Our God*, says the Psalmist, *is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased;* 3) and Isaiah, *The Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?* 4) Whatever God does in time, he has purposed in eternity. 5) Yet these eternal decrees are not absolute determinations of divine will; they are described to us as *counsels*, 6) whereby God in his wisdom and prudence, 7) grace and mercy, 8) ordained what he at the time and in the manner conceived in such counsels would perform. 9)

All this will appear more fully as we exhibit from the *sedes doctrinae* the various decrees of which we are explicitly informed in the Scriptures. They are the decrees of Creation, of Redemption, and of Predestination. What the Scriptures teach concerning these decrees refers not only to the substance of each decree considered in itself, but also to the relations between the various decrees and the proper order in which they should be arranged.

According to the supralapsarian scheme the decree of predestination would obtain the first place, the decree of creation, the second, and the decree of redemption, the last, or, perhaps more precisely stated, there would remain but one decree, that of predestination, comprising all the mystery of the divine will concerning the assertion of his sovereign majesty in time and eternity, and covering the plan in general and the details of its execution. This scheme, briefly outlined, is that God, before the world, determined to exhibit the glory of his righteousness and of his goodness in the enactment of a great work, the result of which should endure forever; that he, then, decreed to make an-

1) Formula of Concord, Sol. Decl., Art. XI, Müller, p. 714.

2) Is. 46, 11.

3) Ps. 115, 3; cf. Ps. 135, 6.

4) Is. 14, 27.

5) Eph. 1, 7—10. 2 Tim. 1, 9.

6) Acts 4, 28; 2, 23. Eph. 1, 11.

7) Ps. 136, 5—9. Eph. 1, 7—10.

8) Ps. 136, 5 ff. Eph. 1, 7 ff. 2 Tim. 1, 9. Rom. 11, 5.

9) Acts 17, 26. Eph. 1, 9 ff. 2 Tim. 1, 9. Eph. 3, 11.

gels and men and a world for them to live in, and, upon the foreordained fall of a multitude of angels, and of the human race, to consign the fallen angels and a greater part of mankind to everlasting perdition for the praise of his righteousness, but to save a smaller part of mankind unto eternal bliss to magnify the glory of his grace; that, finally, for the execution of the decree as concerning the elect among men, he further decreed to provide for these elect, and for them only, a Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and, by faith in him, to justify, sanctify, and glorify the elect, and them only.

The infralapsarian scheme differs from the former only in placing the decree of predestination after that of creation, while both agree in assigning the last place to the decree of redemption, making Christ, not a cause and basis of predestination, but a means of the execution of the absolute decree of election as distinguished from the equally absolute decree of reprobation.

The Lutheran doctrine differs from both forms of Calvinism in reference to the substance as well as to the relation of the three decrees. The substance of each decree will be considered under its proper head. The relations are those indicated by our order of arrangement. The decree of creation is the first and, but for sin, would have been sufficient to secure the end and aim of creation.¹⁾ But foreseeing the sin of all mankind, God foreordained the Savior of all mankind in the decree of redemption, whereby he secured a way by which all men might be saved through faith in Christ Jesus.²⁾ And to this decree was added a third decree, whereby God elected in Christ and predestinated unto life the heirs of salvation, thus securing to them what in spite of the gracious will of God the self-constituted vessels of wrath reject through unbelief.³⁾

1) Rom. 11, 36.

2) John 3, 16. Eph. 1, 7—10. Luke 2, 30—32.

3) Eph. 1, 4. 11. 2 Tim. 1, 9; 2, 10. Eph. 3, 10. 11. Rom. 8, 30. Mark 13, 20. 22.

THE DECREE OF CREATION.

All the works of God are to him *γνωστὰ ἀπ' αἰῶνος*, *known from eternity*.¹⁾ The knowledge of another's works or acts may be merely a matter of the understanding. But a foreknowledge of one's own acts necessarily includes a determination of the will, a purpose to perform such acts, with the certainty of successful execution. Thus, to state that God from eternity foreknew his works is to state that in eternity he purposed or decreed within himself to perform them in the manner before determined. Again, the Scriptures say that *in wisdom* God made all his works of which the earth is full, that *in wisdom* he made the heavens.²⁾ Wisdom is that in God whereby he ordains the proper means to the proper ends. Now, even when we see a man devising ways and means for obtaining a certain end, we conclude that he wills that end, and in legal procedure the preparation of means and measures for the achievement of a certain purpose is considered *prima facie* evidence of the existence of that purpose. Thus, also, Job speaks of the wisdom of God exhibited in the plan of creation, saying, *When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder; then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out*.³⁾ More especially does the record of the creation of man point to the divine counsel and decree which was carried out in the crowning act of the hexaemeron, when the holy penman, admitting us, as it were, into the very council chamber of the holy Trinity, informs us that *God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*.⁴⁾ And this plan did not only underlie the creation of our first ancestors, but extends also to their progeny, as St. Paul says, *God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face*

1) Acts 15, 18.

3) Job 28, 26. 27.

2) Ps. 104, 24; 136, 5.

4) Gen. 1, 26.

*of the earth, and hath DETERMINED, the times BEFORE APPOINTED, and the bounds of their habitation.*¹⁾

But while the work of creation was an external act of God, or a series of such acts, the decree of creation was an internal act of God, terminating within the Godhead, the three persons of the Trinity concurring therein.²⁾ From the counsel referred to in the words, *Let us make man*, etc., the execution is clearly distinguished, as the record proceeds, *So God created man*, etc.³⁾

While, however, the plan or decree of creation and its execution are and must be carefully distinguished, the perfect congruity prevailing between the two must not be overlooked. That the world and all the myriads of creatures in the universe came into being according to a uniform plan conceived in one mind is a truth which even the various misconstructions and perversions to which it has been exposed from Thales to Darwin could not eliminate, but tend to substantiate. This congruity between what was in the mind of God and what came into being as his handiwork is very clearly set forth in the Mosaic narrative of the creation of man. There the divine counsel is first given in detail, *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*⁴⁾ Thereupon the execution of the decree is also described in detail, *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*⁵⁾

1) Acts 17, 26. Cf. Gen. 1, 27. 28.

2) Gen. 1, 26: *Let us make man.*

4) Gen. 1, 26.

3) Gen. 1, 27.

5) Gen. 1, 27. 28.

THE DECREE OF REDEMPTION.

Of the supralapsarian theory, the assumption of a pre-determination of man to a state of sin and wrath and spiritual death, there is no vestige in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. On the contrary, we are told that God made man in his image and after his likeness, and that, as all other works of God, man, as he came from the Creator's hand, was *very good*.¹⁾ We are, furthermore, told that in pointing out to him the forbidden tree, God said to man, *Thou shalt NOT eat of it*,²⁾ adding the earnest warning, *For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*.³⁾ That this injunction and warning acted, not as an incentive to sin, but as a preventive, we see from the narrative of the first temptation; for it was this word of God whereby Eve warded off the first onslaught of the tempter,⁴⁾ and which Satan endeavored to put out of the woman's heart and mind in order to bring about her fall.⁵⁾ It was not the will of God that man should fall.

But in his divine omniscience God had foreseen what he had not foreordained, and even before the foundation of the world he devised a plan by the execution of which he would redeem the fallen world unto himself. *For God so loved THE WORLD that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*.⁶⁾ *And when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law*.⁷⁾ And this Redeemer of mankind, as St. Peter says, *verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world*,⁸⁾ and his work was predetermined in the counsel of God. When he was handed over to the gentile judge, to be crucified by wicked hands, it was done *by the determinate counsel and foreknowl-*

1) Gen. 1, 26. 27. 31.

3) Ibid.

5) Gen. 3, 1. 4.

7) Gal. 4, 4. 5.

2) Gen. 2, 17.

4) Gen. 3, 3.

6) John 3, 16.

8) 1 Pet. 1, 20.

*edge of God,*¹⁾ and Herod and Pontius Pilate, under whom Jesus suffered and died, did what God in *his counsel had determined before to be done.*²⁾ Thus it is that *in Christ we have redemption through his blood, according to the riches of his [God's] grace, wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the MYSTERY OF HIS WILL, according to the GOOD PLEASURE which he hath PURPOSED IN HIMSELF: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together all things in Christ.*³⁾ According to these words of St. Paul, the gospel of Christ and the redemption in him, whereby we are made abundantly wise unto salvation, is a manifestation of the mystery of the divine *will*, the revelation of a divine decree which but for that revelation would have remained hidden in the heart of God, who, according to his *good pleasure*, which he has *purposed in himself*, executed his counsel in the fulness of times.

The execution of this decree was begun in remote antiquity. The singling out of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Judah and David, as ancestors of the promised Messiah, the setting apart of his peculiar people and the wondrous ways by which he led that people through the centuries before the fulness of the times, were preparatory measures to the great series of events extending from the Annunciation to the death and burial of Christ and the completion of the work upon which the seal of divine authority was stamped by the glorious resurrection of the Savior of mankind.

THE DECREE OF PREDESTINATION.

*Many are called, but few are chosen,*⁴⁾ says Christ, and St. Peter speaks of the *elect according to the foreknowledge of God;*⁵⁾ and St. Paul teaches of the *election of grace.*⁶⁾ Of this election the same apostle writes to the Ephesians,

1) Acts 2, 23.

2) Acts 4, 28.

3) Eph. 1, 7—10.

4) Matt. 22, 14; cf. 20, 16.

5) 1 Pet. 1, 2.

6) Rom. 11, 3.

*He hath chosen us in him (Christ) BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, that we should be holy and without blemish before him,*¹⁾ and in the same epistle we are informed of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the ETERNAL PURPOSE which he PURPOSED IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.²⁾

. Here, then, we have still another divine counsel and decree, also eternal, but, in point of order, following the decree of redemption, since the eternal purpose was *purposed in Christ Jesus*, the elect being chosen *in him*. The foreordained Redeemer of mankind was a determining factor in the decree of election and predestination. The clause ἐν αὐτῷ³⁾ is not syntactically connected with ἡγάς, which would require the form τοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ, but with the verb, ἐξ-ελέξατο, and the πρόθεσις τῶν αἰώνων is described in the words, ἦν ἐποίησεν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.⁴⁾ These statements preclude two misconstructions of the doctrine of election. The decree of predestination was not an absolute decree of the sovereign will of God, but a decree which was determined by Christ the Redeemer, by faith in whom sinners should be saved. But on the other hand we were not chosen *intuitu fidei in Christum*, viewed as being in Christ previous to the act of election; election does not *presuppose*, but *includes* faith. This also appears when St. Paul says that God *did predestinate us*, not in view or consideration of, but *unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself*.⁵⁾ And thus election is, as the apostle says, an *election of grace*,⁶⁾ not of a particular grace, but of that *grace which was given us in Christ Jesus*,⁷⁾ which is the grace whereby God encompassed the world,⁸⁾ and which is *frustrated* by those

1) Eph. 1, 4.

2) Eph. 3, 9—11.

3) Eph. 1, 4.

4) Eph. 3, 11.

5) εἰς υἰοθεσίαν, Eph. 1, 5.

6) Rom. 11, 5.

7) 2 Tim. 1, 9.

8) John 3, 16.

who refuse to be saved by the faith of the Son of God, who loved them and gave himself for them.¹⁾ Yet, while the grace of God whereby he was prompted in the act of election is universal, election itself is particular, restricted to the heirs of salvation.²⁾ *Many are called, but FEW are CHOSEN.*³⁾ We are *elect according to the foreknowledge of God,*⁴⁾ who says, *I know whom I have chosen,*⁵⁾ and of whom the apostle says, *Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate.*⁶⁾ This is also indicated by such words as ἐκλέεσθαι and ἐκλογή, which signify a selection *from out of* a greater number, as Christ also expressly says, *I have chosen you out of the world.*⁷⁾ The end and aim of this act is the salvation of the elect, who *were ordained to eternal life,*⁸⁾ that they might *obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory,*⁹⁾ being *predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren.*¹⁰⁾ But here again it should be noted that the salvation and the way of salvation unto which the elect were predestinated is not prepared for them particularly and exclusively, but the salvation prepared and the way of salvation laid out for all sinners. For thus writes St. Paul: *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*¹¹⁾ The salvation through faith, preached by the gospel, the power of God unto salvation to Jews and Gentiles,¹²⁾ by resisting which the unbelievers resist *the Holy Ghost*¹³⁾ and *judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life*¹⁴⁾—is the salvation to which the elect are

1) Gal. 2, 20. 21.

3) Matt. 22, 14; 20, 16.

5) John 13, 18.

7) John 15, 19.

9) 2 Tim. 2, 10.

11) 2 Thess. 2, 13. 14.

13) Acts 7, 51.

2) Eph. 1, 11.

4) 1 Pet. 1, 2.

6) Rom. 8, 29.

8) Acts 13, 48.

10) Rom. 8, 29.

12) Rom. 1, 16.

14) Acts 13, 46.

predestinated. But while this grace is not coercive, not irresistible, the salvation of the elect is by the eternal purpose of God secured, they being *predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*¹⁾ And thus the entire work of leading those who shall constitute the church triumphant from a state of sin and wrath and spiritual death, through a state of faith and grace and spiritual life, to a state of glory and eternal life, is the divine execution of that eternal decree whereby God, before the foundation of the world, and prompted only by his grace in Christ Jesus, purposed to call, enlighten and sanctify, keep and preserve, by the means of grace, according to the counsel of his will, all those whom, by eternal election of grace in Christ, the Redeemer of the world, he has chosen from fallen mankind and predestinated to eternal glory.

This is what God has revealed in the Scriptures concerning the decree of predestination. What is beyond this is hidden in mystery and must not be made the subject of human speculation, but left where St. Paul left it when he said, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*²⁾

EXTERNAL ACTS OF GOD.

The external acts of God are either *immediate* or *mediate*.

The *immediate* acts of God are concurrent acts of the three Persons in the Trinity terminating in objects not within the Godhead, and performed without the employment of intermediate or instrumental causes. Acts of this kind are the creation of heaven and earth out of nothing, the immediate revelation of divine truth to the prophets,

1) Eph. 1, 11.

2) Rom. 11, 33.

the immediate suggestion of concepts and words to the inspired penmen, the miracles of Christ performed by an act of his divine will, the resurrection of all the dead at the end of the world. Thus we learn that the three Persons of the Godhead concurred in the creation of the world before there were any intermediate causes to be employed in the performance of this work, when the Psalmist says, *By the WORD of the LORD were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the BREATH OF HIS MOUTH.*¹⁾ And of the resurrection of the dead, we read, *As the FATHER raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the SON quickeneth whom he will,*²⁾ and, *If the SPIRIT of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, HE that raised up Christ from the dead shall quicken your mortal bodies by HIS SPIRIT that dwelleth in you.*³⁾

The mediate external acts of God are concurrent acts of the three Persons in the Trinity terminating in extradivine objects and performed with the employment of intermediate or instrumental causes. Of this class are the production of plants, animals, and human beings in the course of nature, the work of regeneration or conversion through the means of grace, the mediate call of ministers through the Christian congregation, the forgiveness of sins through the church and the ministers of the church. Thus Job, who was born in the course of nature, was by mediate action God's handiwork, saying, *The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life;*⁴⁾ and David says, *I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are THY works,*⁵⁾ while he says with equal truth, *In sin did MY MOTHER conceive me.*⁶⁾ Sinners are called to repentance by God himself; *he has saved us and called us by an holy calling,*⁷⁾ but by mediate action, as the apostle

1) Ps. 33, 6. Cf. Gen. 1, 1. 2.
3) Rom. 8, 11.
5) Ps. 139, 14.
7) 2 Tim. 1, 9.

2) John 5, 21.
4) Job 33, 4.
6) Ps. 51, 5.

says, *Whereunto HE called you BY OUR GOSPEL.*¹⁾ We are *born of God,*²⁾ and *of the Spirit,*³⁾ but *by the word of God,*⁴⁾ *through the Gospel.*⁵⁾ God forgives sins;⁶⁾ but we are clean *through the word of Christ,*⁷⁾ and to his disciples he says, *Whose soever sins YE remit, they are remitted unto them.*⁸⁾ All these acts, though performed through intermediate agents or instruments, are truly and really divine acts, which no man can perform of himself, and which have their power and efficacy from no other source than the will and power of God, who worketh all things, whether by immediate or by mediate action, *after the counsel of his own will,*⁹⁾ and *according to his mighty power.*¹⁰⁾ A. G.

1) 2 Thess. 2, 14.

3) John 3, 6.

5) 1 Cor. 4, 15.

7) John 15, 3.

9) Eph. 1, 11.

2) John 1, 13. 1 John 3, 9.

4) 1 Pet. 1, 23.

6) Col. 2, 13. Ps. 103, 3.

8) John 20, 23.

10) Eph. 1, 19.