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“MECHANICAL INSPIRATION” THE STUMBLING-BLOCK OF MODERN THEOLOGY.

Again and again voices are raised in our day in protest against the old teaching of the Protestant churches in the age of the Reformation, that the human authors of the various books of the Bible composed their writings under a divine influence which made them “the penmen of the Holy Ghost,” and their products “a divine dictation.” Men profess themselves shocked at the statement that “God directed the hand of the sacred writers;” they are scandalized by hearing the prophets and apostles compared to strings of a harp or reeds of an organ from which the Spirit drew various notes at His will. Statements like these, which the older dogmaticians, both in the Lutheran and the Reformed churches, have made *secundum quid*, and for the sake of illustrating a mysterious fact, are taken up with avidity in our day, and pilloried as extreme literalism, bibliolatry, superstition, or as necessitarian fatalism and rationalism. • It is claimed that no person can read his Bible with profit to himself, nor convey its teachings intelligently to others, while holding the “mechanical inspiration”-theory.

1.

In order to understand, in a measure, the reason for this antagonism to the verbal, or plenary, inspiration of the Scriptures,—for it is really this that is being attacked,—it is necessary to observe the manner in which the antagonists char-

WARTBURG LETTERS OF LUTHER.

(Continued.)

Besides affording a glimpse of Luther's literary labors, and troubles as an author writing for a distant press, this letter is of importance because it shows how much, and on what points, Luther still clung to views which he had been brought up to regard as sacred. This letter is an invaluable document over and against certain aspersions of Luther's character in which popular Roman Catholic orators love to indulge. The Luther who "broke with the Pope to marry a runaway nun" is a pretty bold piece of popish fiction.

TO MY DEAR GEORGE SPALATIN.¹⁾

Grace. I have received from my host²⁾ the dialogues and two quaternions of Carlstadt's treatise.³⁾ Good God! do our

1) The original of this letter is in the General Archives at Anhalt; the MS. is Cod. Jen. a. fol. 116. It was published by Aurifaber, Vol. I, 348 b; by De Wette, Vol. II, p. 40; in the Erlangen Corresp., Vol. 3, p. 215. The German version is found in Waleh, 21, 758, and in St. Louis Ed. 21a, 358.

2) The castellan of Wartburg Castle, von Berlepsch.

3) On June 20, Carlstadt had issued theses against the enforced celibacy of Roman priests. To explain his position more fully, he wrote a treatise, entitled *De coelibatu, monachatu et viduitate liber*. ("Treatise on celibates, monks, and widows.") This is the treatise to which Luther refers. See a previous reference in THEOL. QUART., 13, 42.

Wittenbergers intend to give wives also to the monks? But they shall not force a wife on me! The author of the dialogues does not possess sufficient gifts, nor sufficient learning (for an author). Would to God that Carlstadt's writings, too, were more luminous; for there is an abundance of understanding and learning in them.

I do not mean that all I send you should be printed. Accordingly, I would like—unless you think otherwise—to see the printing of Philip's *Apology*⁴⁾ deferred until the presses are idle. This should have been done also with the Psalm *Exsurgat*,⁵⁾ because there is more than an abundance of such writings as are necessary and urgent.

Mercy! is my *Magnificat*⁶⁾ not out of the press yet? I am surprised that the 118th⁷⁾ Psalm is perished. I am sure that

4) This is Luther's German rendering of Melanchthon's Latin defense of Luther against the Sorbonne, which had handed down a vicious verdict on the Leipzig debate. The treatise to which Luther refers is found in the St. Louis Ed. 18, 960 ff.

5) Luther refers to his exposition of those portions of Ps. 68 which, according to the Roman missal, were sung during mass on Ascension Day and Pentecost. The exposition is found in the St. Louis Ed. 5, 657. It is the first literary product of Luther in his enforced exile. He had been brought to Castle Wartburg in the night of May 4 to 5, 1521. Ascension Day and Pentecost came on May 9 and 19, and the bold, defiant language of the 69th Psalm, "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered," must have deeply affected the lonely witness for God's truth who had come away from the lions' den at Worms. Luther sent the manuscript of his exposition to Melanchthon May 26. (See THEOL. QUART. 10, 100.) It probably left the press August 6. (See Weimar Ed. 8, 1.)

6) Luther had begun to issue his exposition of the Virgin's Hymn of Praise prior to Dec. 3, 1520. Three forms came off the press before he started for Worms, and he sent them, March 31, 1521, to Duke John Frederic of Saxony, to whom the exposition was to be dedicated. It was not completed until June 10, when Luther sent the entire manuscript to Spalatin. He was greatly chagrined because of the delay in issuing this book, and frequently complains about it to Melanchthon. (See THEOL. QUART. 13, 48.)

7) According to the numeration of the Vulgate, Luther refers to his annotated translation of Psalm 119. From this Psalm he had drawn his inspiration for the treatise: *Of Confession, Whether the Pope Have Power*

I appended it at the end of my treatise on Confession, in such a way as to put a part of it into the same form that was to contain the concluding section (of that treatise). Hence, if this is lost, the treatise on Confession must necessarily be mutilated. The remainder, however, I sent separately, with the other bundle.⁸⁾ Possibly, you are not looking carefully. Send the sections from the treatise against Catharinus,⁹⁾ which I return herewith, where they belong; for I have the treatise entire.

My constipation, I see, will be permanent, and has to be constantly relieved with drugs. I have an evacuation every fourth, yea, as a rule, every fifth day. A queer stomach this! Farewell, and pray for me. Beware of taking a wife like others, lest there come upon you tribulation of the flesh.

On the Day of Sixtus (August 6) 1521.

MART. LUTHER.

The next letter is a touching epistle to Christian laymen at Wittenberg. The great, strong heart of the Reformer, which had braved him for the battle royal with the princes of the Church and State at Worms, speaks with tenderest solicitude and calm assurance to his humbler followers. The letter is dated August 12, 1521.

to Enjoin Same. (See THEOL. QUART. 10, 169 ff.; 11, 17; 12, 48 ff.; 15, 143 ff.) He was undecided at first whether to publish this psalm separately, or append it to the treatise on Confession. The manuscript had been sent, in the condition here indicated, to Spalatin June 10. But the printers were very tardy, and when, on August 15, Luther received the first three forms, he complained about their bungling work.

8) This bundle probably contained the things mentioned in the letter to Spalatin, dated July 15. (See THEOL. QUART. 11, 221.)

9) By his treatise against Magister Ambrosius Catharinus ("Whether the Pope Be Verily Antichrist," April, 1521), Luther had fulfilled a promise he had made in his book *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. The treatise against Catharinus is really the sequel, and companion, to the *Babylonian Captivity*. The reference in this letter is probably to a few sheets of the second edition which the printer had sent in excess. The second edition appeared in July.

Doctor Martinus Luther to the Poor Little Flock of
Christ at Wittenberg:¹⁾

1. Grace and Peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

When St. Paul had preached in many places, and had at last become a prisoner at Rome, he did not quit his solicitude for those whom he had converted, but prayed for them to God, and comforted and strengthened them by writings, as his Epistles show. Since I have no doubt that by the grace of God I have heard and learned to know the true, pure Gospel, and since it has pleased God to open up this Gospel to you, in part by me, a poor mortal, I shall follow St. Paul's example: I may not and cannot be without anxiety, lest wolves come into the sheepfold after I am gone.

2. And although you have, by the grace of God, so many others who may take my place, that my solicitude seems unnecessary, still the blessing of the Gospel which we enjoy demands that we bear anxiety even when it is unnecessary. We are not yet worthy—and alas! I less than others—to suffer for the truth, except such disfavor, hatred, envy, vituperation, shame, and disgrace as the papists inflict on us. Still, if God had not heretofore resisted these bloodthirsty slayers of souls, they would, as much as in them lies, have made us a prey to their teeth long ago, as David says in Ps. 124, 6. For this reason our affliction has not been more grievous than this, that they have everywhere denounced us in the most shameful manner as Wyclifites, Hussites, and heretics. And since they cannot accomplish more against us, they vent their spite on our fair reputation and Christian honor.

3. But never mind, dear friends, never mind! He sits enthroned on high who will judge our cause. We may by the grace of God glory where they have so far had to feel most miserably ashamed. We have never yet shunned the light,

1) This letter is found as a preface to Luther's exposition of the 37th Psalm in a number of original prints, and in most of the editions of Luther's works, also in De Wette 2, 60. St. Louis Ed. 5, 306 ff.

which they have so far dreaded as much as the evil spirit dreads Judgment Day. They have to acknowledge without thanks, and have to hear to their great mortification and grief, that I have three times appeared before a tribunal, not for my friends, but for themselves, who are my enemies, and have offered to give the reason and foundation of our faith. First (1518), at Augsburg before the Cardinal, thus beginning with the most elevated among my worst enemies, who detested nothing as much as hearing the reasons for my doctrine, and would rather I had not come. Next (1519), I stood my ground at Leipzig, as you know, against men who could not bear to see us; yet all their insolence and cunning was of no avail to them. The third time (1521), recently at Worms, where I took such hazards as to forego the imperial safe-conduct and to risk my life. Oh, what a farce did they enact at that place! I had hoped the bishops and doctors who had met there would subject me to a rigorous test; and, lo! their whole mind was to have me recant. But, by the grace of God, not all the princes and estates would consent to such a procedure. If they had, I should have died for shame at seeing Germany suffer itself in such a gross manner to be made apes and fools of by the papal tyrants. That was the whole scheme of our enemies, as everybody knows.

4. Look now! I glory in having made my offer to them, and in having appeared before them three times, not because I did it, but in order that we may know and extol the grace of God, and make Him our comfort and our boast, who causes our enemies to become abashed and despondent, so much so that jointly they are not doughty enough to listen to, and to refute, a poor beggar who has ventured into their midst; but they flee the light like bats, and like night-owls they shriek their oo-hoo! oo-hoo! in the dark, thinking to scare us.

5. When, do you think, will they, or only one of them, be so bold as to come to us at Wittenberg with a like offer and for a like trial? Surely, this would not only seem very appropriate, since they immodestly boast their superiority over

us, and could thus make it evident that their superiority is not merely in their loud mouths, but in their heads and brains; but they are even obliged to come to us and defend their faith like men, since they have come forward as our judges and shepherds, and take the liberty to pass sentence on us.

6. But what are they doing? They are in the majority, we in the minority; they are in authority, we are their subjects; they are the most learned, we the most unlearned men; they are the most Christian, we the most heretical people. In addition, we offer them, if they are afraid to come, safe-conduct, free board, and lodging. Over and above this, we pray them for God's sake to prove their skill in our affair. But all this is of no avail; they stay for themselves, with their partisans. There is where they pass resolutions, sentences, condemnations without having heard the other side. And when they have done this, they say and bawl out that they are honest Christian men who act in a Christian manner. Not one of them hangs his head for shame.

7. Oh, how would our ears be made to ring if they could claim an ounce of our glory for their side! How would we poor folk be pilloried! But their own shame we are told to regard as an honor and distinction. What a pity that our miserable, downcast, and forsaken Christian faith has for protectors such timid bats and such light-hating deserters, who void into the sand amid hollering and bragging, but crawl into their holes like mice as soon as a single person appears who holds contrary views.

8. And if all this does not help them, they set a few reckless fellows upon us, who are to attack us with libelous writings and mean books, hoping thereby to cover up and deck out their shame in the eyes of the common people, although they know well enough that their writers are about as well suited for their tasks as an ass for playing the harp.

9. Now, then, since, having been attacked by writings, they profess themselves unable to treat with us in public print, we shall henceforth not feel offended if the poor fellows com-

fort themselves in their disgrace by issuing many writings which are not supported by Scripture, and by cursing, vituperations, and maledictions (which they heap upon us). I shall, accordingly, permit them to exhaust themselves with slandering. We are satisfied to have Scripture on our side, while they have no Scripture on theirs. We shall come forward into the lists; let them slink to their hiding-places. Since they desire no better honor, we are willing that they should have that.

10. To come back to my purpose, since you are a poor flock and must suffer yourselves to be tormented because of my name by these far-famed and deeply-learned knights of the rabbit heart, and since you are not all equally strong in spirit, I have undertaken to write you a little letter of comfort, urging you not to become terrified at their rabbits' ensigns, though I am not with you. But, since I am not a man like St. Paul, able to write and comfort men from the rich stores of his mind, I have undertaken to turn Scripture, which, as Paul says Rom. 15, 4, is full of comfort, *viz.*, the 37th Psalm, into German, and to send it to you with my brief notes; for in my opinion this psalm suits very well to our present business, because it quells, in a motherly and very pleasant way, the rising anger against slanderers and malicious knaves. For it is human nature to feel hurt, not only at hearing wicked men utter their calunnies with unbridled license, but at seeing them justified and honored for so doing, and hence prospering for a season until their day of reckoning is come.

11. Let no one, however, entertain any doubts but that our adversaries are of that class of men which is chided, and we of that which is comforted, in this psalm. For, by the grace of God, we are on the side of Scripture, and have found its true meaning, which our enemies fear, dread, and flee, while, at the same time, they are willfully blaspheming the truth. But never mind them. If they had been men worthy of the truth, they would long ago have been converted by the many writings which I have published.

12. When I instruct them, they vilify me. When I en-

treat them, they ridicule me. When I reprove them, they are angry at me. When I pray for them, they scorn me. When I forgive them their wrong-doings, they refuse to be forgiven. When I declare myself ready to be sacrificed for them, they curse me. What, then, am I yet to do beyond what Christ did, who says Ps. 109, 17: "As he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he loved cursing, let him be clothed with it as with a garment."

13. Nobody can bring people into heaven who do not belong there, even though he bring them piecemeal. But any one who belongs in heaven, must enter there even though all devils should fasten upon him, and should tear each other to pieces (to keep him out). St. Paul says, Tit. 3, 10. 11: "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself."

14. For the poor masses, however, who are being led astray by them in ignorance, we should not cease praying, and should do all in our power to snatch them out of the jaws of that slayer of souls at Rome and his apostles. In conclusion, I commend you to God; may He graciously preserve your faith and the understanding which you have in Christ. Amen.