

THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY.

VOL. X.

JULY, 1906.

No. 3.

THE MISSOURI SYNOD AND DIETRICH'S CATECHISM.

The late Intersynodical Conference which was convened at Fort Wayne during August, 1905, had met for the stated purpose of examining the proof-texts of Scripture bearing on the doctrine of election. As frequently happens during discussions of this nature, matters not really essential to the business in hand were touched upon by the speakers. Thus the Fort Wayne Convention was advised that the Missouri Synod had adopted a new catechism for use in its churches and schools in lieu of Conrad Dietrich's Catechism, formerly the authorized catechism of the Missouri Synod; and that this action was tantamount to a repudiation of Missouri's former teaching on the subject of election, inasmuch as Dietrich's Catechism taught the doctrine which the Missouri Synod at present rejects. We quote the information as it was communicated to the public through church papers at the time.

Dietrich's Catechism was referred to in order to prove that the opponents of Missouri stand where this Synod (Missouri) stood formerly. Dietrich's edition of Luther's Smaller Catechism was for years published by the Missouri Synod and used in its churches. This catechism teaches on election: The grounds for election are threefold, to-wit: 1. the unfathomable goodness and mercy of God; 2. the unlimited atonement proclaimed in the Gospel; 3. the abiding saving faith in Christ. This catechism has for some years been replaced by another edition which, it is claimed, is in greater harmony with the present teaching of the Synod.

(Dr. Nicum in report to *The Lutheran* of August 31, 1905, regarding the Intersynodical Conference held at Fort Wayne, Ind., Aug. 8—10.)

The latter (the Joint Synod of Ohio, and the German Synod of Iowa, and some others) undoubtedly made a strong point against Missouri by showing that Dietrich's Catechism (that is, his edition of Luther's Small Catechism), which had been used in the churches of the Missouri Synod for many years, really occupied the position maintained by Ohio and Iowa, and that "this catechism has for years been replaced by another edition which, it is claimed, is in greater harmony with the present position of the Missouri Synod."

One would suppose that if it can be shown, from their own publications, that the Missouri theologians formerly taught what they do not teach now, there is some reason to hope that they may see the error of their way, and return to their former position, which, as their opponents claim, is that which has been and is held by the great majority of Lutheran theologians, as in accordance with the Scriptures and the Confessions of the Church.

(Editorial in *The Lutheran* of August 31, 1905.)

Now, as before stated, the question here raised was really foreign to the express purpose for which the Conference had met. For supposing that the claim of Missouri's opponents was correct, what would the opponents gain by it, so long as the acknowledged proof-texts of Scripture bear out Missouri in the pending controversy? The claim of the opponents necessarily implies that Missouri had discovered that Dietrich's Catechism was not in agreement with what Missouri considered Scriptural teaching on the subject of election. Let us assume that Missourians were mistaken in their view of what Scripture really teaches on that subject, still, if they thought that they had discovered the true teaching of Scripture and at the same time discovered a disagreement between the teaching of Scripture and their catechism, it became their duty to either change their catechism so as to bring it into harmony with Scripture, or, if that proved impracticable, to abolish the catechism. The consistency of faith would have demanded such action peremptorily, and Missouri would have been dishonest, had she failed to take such action. If her hymns were found to contain sentiments contrary to Scripture, those hymns must be expurgated, or the entire hymnbook withdrawn. If her liturgies were proven to deviate from the teaching of Scripture,

the liturgies must be cashiered. All this would be sound practice, in accordance with God's Word, and entitling the Missouri Synod to the praise and commendation of all lovers of purity, *i. e.*, strict scripturalness, of doctrine. Hence, the fact of the change in itself does not prove the Missouri Synod heterodox; for she might have become strictly orthodox through just such a change. The point to be established against Missouri is this: Has this synod, by adopting a new catechism, departed from the teaching of Scripture? Before this question every other question pales into insignificance. It is desirable that this question remain the paramount issue, if the public discussion of doctrinal differences between the Missouri Synod and her opponents is to be continued. And it has been chiefly for this reason that comparatively little has been said on our part since the Fort Wayne Convention regarding the misleading reports, that Missouri had for doctrinal reasons exchanged Dietrich's Catechism for another: we would like to keep the discussion to the main point at issue. For our part, the discussion of this matter of the change of catechism might be postponed, in order that the discussion of Scripture may not be disturbed. It appears, however, that our opponents really believe, as the editor of *The Lutheran* has conditionally stated, that "a strong point was made" by the introduction of this matter. And as silence might be construed to mean consent, it becomes a duty to speak.

We were astonished to find that the report to which we have referred could gain acceptance. For two things must be quite plain to men like those who were discussing election at Fort Wayne: 1. that the report misrepresents Dietrich's Catechism; 2. that it misrepresents the Missouri Synod.

No matter what Conrad Dietrich may have taught in his other writings, or what *τρόπος παιδείας* he may have adopted in presenting the doctrine of election, in his Catechism he does not say or teach that man was elected in view of faith. The claim that Dietrich's Catechism posits three causes of election, and that faith is one of these causes, rests, in a merciful esti-

mate, on a very superficial acquaintance with the teachings of this famous catechism.

The first mention¹⁾ in this catechism of the subject of election occurs in Qu. 281:

Why is He called the Holy Ghost? Because He is the author of true holiness, and truly sanctifies all the elect.

It must be remembered that Dietrich is careful to distinguish between sanctification in the broad and in the narrow sense, between that sanctifying act by which the Holy Ghost leads men unto faith, works faith in them, grants them the power to believe, and between those sanctifying acts by which the Holy Ghost employs the faith already existent in men unto good works. In Qu. 281 he speaks of sanctification in the broad or wide sense; for his very next question reads:

What is meant by the sanctification of which the Third Article treats? It is properly that act of the Holy Spirit in which He calls us through the Gospel, enlightens us by His gifts, and sanctifies and preserves us in the true faith.

Eight questions further, after the doctrine of the call and the illumination of sinners have been treated (Qu. 290), Dietrich puts this question:

What is sanctifying, as used here in the narrow sense? It is the act of the Holy Spirit in which He sanctifies us through the Gospel in the true faith in Jesus Christ, and moves us to holy works which are pleasing to God.

Evidently, then, when Dietrich discusses the office of the Holy Ghost in general, before entering upon a detailed account of the various parts and functions of this office, and says: "The Holy Ghost truly sanctifies the elect," his meaning cannot be any other than that the Holy Ghost calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and preserves the elect. In Dietrich's view the elect whom the Holy Ghost sanctifies are not people who have already passed through the initial stages of the new life, have accepted the call of grace, and have been enlightened by grace, but people

1) "The elect" are first mentioned in Qu. 244 in connection with Christ's kingdom of glory.

for whom nothing at all of a spiritual nature has been done as yet. The Holy Ghost begins His operations upon them in their wicked natural state. He finds them, as He finds the rest of mankind, "dead in trespasses and sins," and "children of wrath." But He finds them also "the elect according to the foreknowledge of God," in spite of their trespasses and sins and their guilty state. And as He finds them, so He undertakes to sanctify them, from beginning to end. First He calls them. How does Dietrich view this act? Qu. 288 he says:

What is the call? It is the act of the Holy Spirit by which He through the Gospel graciously calls and gathers us, offers us the grace of God, and gives us power to accept it.

The call, according to this presentation, has a double force, that of the means by which it is effected: it presents grace and it confers grace; it conveys grace to the sinner, it bestows grace on the sinner, and it induces the sinner to accept grace. Mark well, this is the first act of that sanctification by which the Spirit sanctifies the elect, and which Dietrich has adduced as the second reason why He is called holy.

The first proof-text which Dietrich cites for the doctrine of the call is 2 Tim. 1, 9: "God hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." Dietrich's line of thought is quite plainly this, that the elect are called, because they are elect. Now it is Dietrich's teaching that the call makes believers. Accordingly, already at this point, at the very first mention of the subject of election in his catechism, Dietrich teaches that the elect believe, because they are elected. For, he teaches, 1) that the called are called, because they are elected; 2) that the believers believe, because they are called. It will not be easy to deduce from these premises any other conclusion than that the believers believe, because they are elected. If Dietrich had viewed the faith of the elect as antecedent to the act of their election, it would have been illogical, it would have been false for him to say: "The Holy Spirit sanctifies the

elect." He might, and must have said: "The Holy Spirit elects the sanctified." At least at this point, then, Dietrich's Catechism presents the divine election as a solid wall of grace, with not a chink in it for the *ex praevisa fide* theory to squeeze through and to light up the mystery of the antemundane counsels of God.

This presentation is not varied, when Dietrich takes up the subject of election for special elucidation, but the original teaching already exhibited in the initial questions of the Third Article is consistently maintained. Qu. 320 reads:

For whom is this glory and happiness of eternal life designed? Only for believers, who continue in the true faith unto their end, Matt. 24, 13; because for these, by the election of God, the kingdom is prepared from the foundation of the world. Matt. 25, 34.

What, then, is the divine election of grace? It is that act of God by which He, according to the purpose of His will, alone out of His grace and mercy in Christ has resolved to save all those who shall steadfastly believe in Christ, to the praise of His glorious grace.

This answer states what? It names, 1) the elector, *God*; it states, 2) the moving cause of election, *the purpose of His will, His grace and mercy in Christ*; it describes 3) the elect, *those who shall steadfastly believe in Christ*; it states, 4) the end or aim of election, *to the praise of His glorious grace*. The third point requires special attention. In his *Institutiones* Dietrich dissects this answer in exactly the same manner as we have done. Ad 3) he remarks: "Objectum electionis sunt homines (non angeli), et quidem non promiscue quivis, quoquo modo se habentes (contr. Huber. act. Huberian. part. 2. p. 7. 20), sed in Christum *perseveranter* credituri, quae descriptio electorum est a causis intermediis, nempe fide, ejusque relato, in Christum, et adjuncta perseverantia ad finem. *Praesupponitur autem causa efficiens fidei principalis Spiritus s. et intermedia ministerium verbi, per quod is fidem in renatis accendit.*" We would emphasize in this citation, firstly, that Dietrich declares that sub 3) he has given merely a "description of the elect as viewed from the standpoint of intermediary causes." We shall have occasion later to refer to the use of the term "cause"

by Dietrich and the old dogmaticians. Secondly, we wish to emphasize that Dietrich himself is very careful to add his *caveat ad 3*), viz., that faith must not be viewed in this matter aside from its efficient causes, the Spirit and the Word. Why this warning?!

The proof-texts which Dietrich offers for his statements in Qu. 321 are, first and foremost, the standard election text, Eph. 1, 3—6. The deep language of this text: "God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as He hath chosen us in Him;" "God hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself;" "God in His grace" (comp. "wherein" with its antecedent) "hath made us accepted in the Beloved,"—these profound utterances Dietrich has reduced to the simple statement: "God has elected believers in Christ." In this simple form he proposes to present the mystery of election to the child's mind, who shall use his catechism.—The second proof-text which he adduces is John 15, 16: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." This text is to rivet upon the reader's memory the *sola gratia* characteristic of the believer's election. Dietrich means to say: The believers in Christ who were chosen were not men who had chosen God. Now, if believing means deciding in favor of God, choosing God, which it certainly does mean, and if Dietrich wished to teach that the believers in Christ were elected, *because* they believed, it was misleading, it was incorrect, it was false to cite John 15, 16 at this place. For if it had been Dietrich's view that God elected in view of foreseen persevering faith in Christ, God would have chosen such as had chosen Him first, and such an act of God could never be substantiated by John 15, 16.

These are the only texts which Dietrich cites in full under this question, but he adds several references which he would have the reader look up in his Bible, viz., Matt. 25, 34: "Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." This reference brings out

the truth that those who enter heaven enter a place that was made ready for them before they ever had breath or being, and that they "inherit" their Father's possessions, not take possession of what they have acquired. For if one should argue that the following verses show *why* the kingdom was prepared for just these people, namely, that it was done on account of their God-pleasing conduct, he would have to assume as the reason in the divine mind for the *discretio personarum* not foreseen faith, but foreseen works. That would not be a mild synergism, but a veritable hyper-synergism, a synergism with a vengeance, a synergism that would virtually place the Day of Judgment ahead of the elective act, and represent God as suspending His choice until He has pronounced the verdict of the Day of Doom on the sinner's conduct on earth up to the very hour of his death; in other words, it would exhibit God as electing sinners unto eternal life after He has in His prescience beheld them dying in the faith, or as deciding that He will take them to Himself in heaven, after He has seen them go to heaven. What practical purpose such an election is to serve, this is, indeed, a mystery. — Dietrich's second reference is to Acts 13, 48: "As many as were ordained unto eternal life believed." This text illustrates, by way of an example, by an historical incident, who those believers in Christ are of whom Dietrich has said that God elected them: they were men like the Gentiles who had heard Paul preach at Antioch in Pisidia and had accepted his Gospel. And why did they believe? Because they "were ordained to eternal life," *i. e.*, elected. We should have to throw out of Dietrich's Catechism at this place this reference, too, if it were Dietrich's aim to teach an election *intuitu fidei*. — Phil. 4, 3 is the third reference: "I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which labored with me in the Gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow-laborers, whose names are in the book of life." This and the four remaining references²⁾ simply serve

2) Luke 10, 20: "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." Dan. 12, 1: "Thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found

to enrich the child's memory with a very sweet phrase of Scripture, and to impress the mysterious act of the election on the mind by a very forcible illustration.

We have given Dietrich's definition of election *in toto*, with all the Scripture proof which he offers. What does it teach? It names the causes of election and describes the elect. The elect, namely, are believing Christians. Now, this Qu. 321 is one of the questions which are said to have compelled the Missouri Synod to discard Dietrich's Catechism. All our opponents on the doctrine of election read these words: "God has resolved to save all those who shall steadfastly believe in Christ" thus: "God has resolved to save all those of whom He foresaw that they would," etc. If we had so read Dietrich, we should certainly have become suspicious. But we never read him thus. We do not believe that when a person states: God has elected believing Christians, that means: God foresaw that certain persons would believe, and elected them on the ground of such foreknowledge. We believe that if a person desires to express the latter sentiment, there is a way in the language of men to do that, but Dietrich's is not that way. Dietrich, in his catechism, simply states the sound doctrine, that the elect are believers, and not unbelievers. Dietrich, by his brief characterization of the elect, merely wants to preclude a Calvinistic conception of election, an election without any regard to the means and method of attaining the end of election.

That this is the sole and the whole reason why Dietrich says: "God elected believing Christians" is shown by the context. His next question reads:

What is the nature of that decree of God, according to which He has resolved to save those who believe in Christ? It is not unconditional, but is so fixed, according to a certain order, as to embrace all the causes and means of our salvation.

written in the Book." Rev. 20, 15: "Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Hebr. 12, 23: "To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven."

Here again the phrase, "not unconditional," has been cited against us. As a rule, two negatives amount to an affirmative. But that Dietrich does not understand "not unconditional" in the sense of "conditional" is shown by the adversative clause which he places over against the statement: "It is not unconditional;" for he proceeds, "But is *so fixed, according to a certain order.*" What Dietrich wishes to contrast is not a decree of election which imposes upon the person elect the fulfillment of a condition and a decree which imposes no such condition, but a decree which lays down the bare fact: This person shall be saved, and a decree which declares: This person shall be saved for this reason and in this manner. Now, if we bear in mind what Dietrich had before stated regarding the various stages of the *ordo salutis*, in particular, that he had denied to man all power whatever to prepare himself for the reception of divine grace, or to accept such grace, or to quicken spiritual life in his dead heart, and that his faith is by the operation of God, it is manifest that he has left no condition in the strict sense of the word to be fulfilled by the elect. What he seems to call a condition is, in reality, the plan or order which God has laid down for the salvation of sinners. We might call this an unhappy use of the term "conditional," and might prefer an apter phraseology, but since the author has by his presentation of the doctrine of conversion sufficiently guarded his teaching at this place against misconstruction, we do not find it impossible to connect a correct meaning with his words.

By this statement, then, Dietrich wishes to clear himself of all semblance of teaching an absolute election, an arbitrary, blind choice at random and haphazard. The nature of the divine decree of election, — this is what Dietrich wishes to say, — is that it proceeds according to a certain order; and that order is that "all the causes and means of our salvation" shall be "embraced" in the decree. In other words, in the decree of election God does not decide upon the bare fact that He will save someone, but He decides why and how He will save someone.

What are the causes and means as embraced in this decree? Dietrich names them in the question immediately following. This is *the renowned question which is said to teach a three-fold cause of election*, and which is believed to have put Dietrich's Catechism out of commission in the Missouri Synod. The question reads:

What are those causes *and means* of salvation? 1. The boundless mercy of God, 2 Tim. 1, 9 (Qu. 288); 2. the infinite merit of Christ, which is to be proclaimed through the Gospel, Eph. 1, 3—6 (Qu. 321); 3. persevering faith in Christ, 2 Thess. 2, 13.

We have italicized the *punctum saliens* in this question. Dietrich does not use the term "cause" in this question, or elsewhere in his works, exclusively in its strict and native sense, to denote the power or efficient agent producing any thing or event, but, in employing this term, he follows, to a great extent, at least, scholastic usage, which in his days admitted of a wide and varied application. Even the end aimed at used to be denominated a "cause" in those days, namely, the final cause. *This explains why Dietrich can couple "causes" with "means."*^{2b)} He views salvation as the great end to be attained by the divine election, and he purposes to tell how this end is attained, what is the efficient agent or agents, and what the instrumental agent or agents for securing the end. All these he names in one compacted statement, without separating the forces that move God from the forces that move man towards the achievement of the end of salvation. His second division couples the merit of Christ with the Gospel. Logically and materially these are two separate objects, and if exact logical precision had been Dietrich's aim, he should undoubtedly have divided them, and instead of naming three "causes and means"

2b) A curious parallel is found in Luther's Church Postil (second sermon for First Sunday after Trinity, Erlang. Ed. 12, 437): "Christ begins to teach what is the new birth, and how it is effected, though at this place He does not yet comprise all points which belong to it, but shows, in the first place, only causas efficientes, causes and means (Ursachen und Mittel), by which this new birth," etc.

should have named four. But such was not his aim; he leaves it to the reader, *whom he has previously instructed* as to the truly efficient causes of salvation and the instruments which God has appointed for obtaining salvation, to separate in his mind the *causae causantes* from what should strictly be called means. *He refers the reader to former questions and answers, and demands that their contents shall not be left out of consideration at this point.* And that he cannot intend to have persevering faith in Christ regarded as a *causa causans* is evident, because he names this concept at a place where, according to the very arrangement of his question, we should expect him to name means; he puts the concept of faith last, after the Gospel. Moreover, he cites as his proof passage 2 Thess. 2, 13: "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth," *ἐν πίστει, i. e.,* the salvation to which God has chosen is actually effected in this way that the Holy Spirit sanctifies the elect by faith in the truth. Faith is the means of salvation *ex parte hominis*, as the Gospel, the Truth, is the means *ex parte Dei*.

Moreover, in this famous Qu. 323 Dietrich speaks of "those causes and means." Which? Those to which he had referred in the preceding answer, viz., the causes and means "embraced" in the decree of God. Faith, too, was embraced in the elective act. God determined that His elect must be saved not without faith, but by faith, faith being the means. Now, if God elected in view of faith, faith could not be "embraced," included as an integral part, in the elective act, but faith would be outside of that act as the guiding principle of God's choice. Faith would be the outside rule enabling God to make what is called a "rational" choice.

So, this assertion of a threefold cause of election in Qu. 323 of Dietrich's Catechism is utterly baseless. This good old theologian is misrepresented by those who pretend to maintain his teaching at this late day.

Dietrich's Catechism teaches an election unto faith. If this has not already appeared from the foregoing citations, we

offer here another proof. In Qu. 325 Dietrich puts the momentous question:

Whence is it, then, that not all and every person, for whom these means of salvation are designed, is equally chosen to eternal life? It is because God has purposed not to elect them absolutely and unconditionally, but with this *appointment* and in this order, *that they should* through the Gospel *believe* in Jesus Christ, and by true faith in Him be saved. But because the greatest number do not believe, it necessarily follows that only those who believe unto the end, and therefore but few, are chosen.

We have again taken the liberty to italicize. Dietrich does not say that the reason for the *discretio personarum* is that God knew that the elect would believe, and that the non-elect would not believe, but that God elected the elect "with this appointment, that they should believe."

One thing we shall grant our opponents with regard to Dietrich's Catechism, viz.: his phraseology is not that which Missourians during the present controversy have employed towards their opponents. But Missourians are not the first people, nor are they the only ones at this late day who have discovered that the use of scholastic terminology in dogmatics is not an unalloyed blessing. Dietrich himself is not consistent in the use of the terms causes and means. In Qu. 324—the question following immediately after the question which is claimed to teach three causes—we find the following language:

But are not these means of salvation appointed for all men without exception?

Certainly; for, etc.

"*These means*"—which? Why, those mentioned in the preceding question. But that question spoke of "*causes and means*"? So it did. And now Dietrich calls the same matters "*these means*" which he had before called causes and means. But perhaps he has dropped the causes in Qu. 324, and by the pronoun "*these*" refers not to the whole of the preceding question, but to a part of it, namely, to that part which named the means. If any one so interprets the expression "*these means*," he grants that the preceding question has named *at*

least two means—which is what we have claimed. And since “the boundless mercy of God” and “the infinite merit of Christ” rather answer to the designation “cause” than to that of “means,” the means to which Dietrich in Qu. 324 points as having been mentioned in Qu. 323 must be “the Gospel” and “persevering faith in Christ,”—which is what we have claimed.

However, we doubt the correctness of this interpretation. Dietrich’s answer to Qu. 324 does not agree with it. It reads:

Certainly; for 1. God sincerely desires to have mercy upon all men; and wills that all should be saved and that none should perish. This corresponds to point 1 in Qu. 323.

2. Christ is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world; He is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

This corresponds to point 2 a under Qu. 323.

3. God calls all to the benefits of Christ, with the sincere will that all should become partakers; and the Gospel is preached to every creature, to the end that all men everywhere should repent and come to the knowledge of the truth.

This corresponds to point 2 b under Qu. 323. And this is all there is contained in Answer 324. There is no equivalent for point 3 in Qu. 323. In Qu. 325 Dietrich says, that God has made “this appointment and this order, that they” (*i. e.*, “each and every person for whom these means of salvation are designed”) “should through the Gospel believe in Jesus Christ and by true faith in Him be saved.” Here he declares the power of the Gospel to be as universal in the intention of God as is the commission to preach the Gospel. We have seen before that Dietrich deduces faith only from the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel. He might have added a fourth feature to his 324th answer. For faith is also a means, and God desires to bestow it as sincerely as He bestowed His love, His Son, and His Word of grace. Now two of those three matters which Dietrich in Qu. 324 mentions and calls means, we should strictly name causes, namely, the two first. Hence, we hold that no argument pro or con the part which faith is

supposed to play in the elective act of God can be deduced from the use of the terms "causes" by Dietrich. Dietrich is not exact, and does not aim to be exact, in the use of these terms. This lack of exactness begets a sort of indistinctness in his statements. No doubt, Dietrich was laboring to maintain the strict teaching of the Form of Concord and at the same time to accommodate himself also to the dogmatical language of his day. This is a defect, but it is not sufficient to stamp him a heterodox teacher. For at the decisive point Dietrich is clear and plain: he has nowhere in his Catechism represented faith as a *causa causans* of election. Even this lack of exactness has not caused the Missouri Synod to dispense with his Catechism. Dietrich has satisfied the teachers of his Catechism in the Missouri Synod on what, after all, is the main issue, viz., Does man, in any wise, cooperate towards originating faith in himself? To this question he has returned a plain and unqualified *no* for his answer. He has said:

Qu. 283. Can, then, no one, in his conversion to God, do anything by his own power?

Not at all; for just on this account "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him."

Qu. 284. Why is this?

Because by the fall of our first parents all the powers of our intellect and will are so entirely corrupted, that we are not able of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves.

Qu. 285. Has man, then, since the fall, a free will before conversion?

1. In civil and external actions he has, although it is weakened in various ways, on account of

- a. the corruption of nature,
- b. the wiles of the devil,
- c. the power of passion,
- d. the errors of judgment.

2. In spiritual matters man is wholly dead and has no freedom of will, so that he cannot prepare himself for divine grace, *nor accept it when it is offered* (italics our own!), nor awaken himself to conversion and renewal, *just as a dead man cannot restore himself to life or communicate any power to himself.* (Italics our own!)

Qu. 286. Whence, then, does conversion to God and faith in Jesus Christ (note the juxtaposition!) come?

It is a gracious gift of the Holy Ghost, who works both in us by His mighty power.

In unmistakable language Dietrich passes the *subjectum conversionis*, fallen man, on from the state of spiritual death to that of spiritual life, with no probationary state intervening, and ascribes the transfer to God alone. He treats "conversion to God" and "faith in Jesus Christ" as equivalent terms.

Nor does he distinguish between two kinds of resistance to explain the origin of faith in some persons, the failure to believe in others. He knows but of one kind of resistance, and that explains unbelief.

Qu. 325. Whence is it, then, that not all and every person, for whom these means of salvation are designed, is equally chosen to eternal life?

It is because God has purposed not to elect them absolutely and unconditionally, but with this appointment and in this order, that they should through the Gospel believe in Jesus Christ, and by true faith in Him be saved. But because the greatest number do not believe, it necessarily follows that only those who believe unto the end, and therefore but few, are chosen.

Qu. 326. But why is it that not all persons are endowed with faith through the Gospel, and believe in Christ?

This is because of their own fault, inasmuch as they voluntarily despise and reject the Word preached, and thus resist the operations of the Holy Ghost.

Qu. 327. But whence does it come that the greater number is rejected and damned?

This also is due to their own fault, to their impenitence and unbelief; for he that believeth not shall be damned, and the wrath of God abideth on him.

Plainly this presentation leaves the question: *Cur alii prae aliis?* the mystery which it is. We may know why some are saved and why others are not saved. But there is no answer on the question why some are saved rather than others from the Scriptures, which teach with equal emphasis both the

universality and equality of sin and the universality and equality of grace.

Dietrich's Catechism was in use in the churches and schools of the Missouri Synod about thirty years before the Catechism now in use was adopted. During that time the schoolchildren and catechumens of the Missouri Synod were taught the doctrine of election which the Missouri Synod now holds. Dietrich's Catechism proved no bar to teaching that doctrine. The allegation made at Fort Wayne is not new. In 1881 C. S. K. wrote in *The St. Louis Theological Monthly*³⁾ as follows:

After the death of the blessed Prof. A. Biewend, which occurred April 10, 1858, Dr. Walther instructed the whole Concordia Gymnasium, which was then yet at St. Louis, in the catechism. The ten commandments had been catechised on by Prof. Biewend. Dr. Walther continued where the latter had left off, and, towards the end of the year, he catechised on the doctrine of election in the Third Article according to Dietrich's Catechism. The writer of this article . . . begs leave to produce, not from memory, but from his notes taken down at the time, the following sufficient evidence to show that Dr. Walther has not in the least changed his position relative to the doctrine of election, but that he is the same man in theology in regard to this point that he was over 22 years ago, at least. He, for instance, said that the answer to Qu. 321 in Dietrich stated, first, that election of grace is an "*act of God,*" then, that it is "*a voluntary act,*" then, that it is "*no unconditional act;*" he said that "*not a condition of election,*" but "*a description of the elect*" was given in the words: "all those who shall perseveringly believe in Christ," and that the answer finally pointed out the "*ultimate end*" of election, which is "the praise of His glorious grace." Further notes make Prof. Walther say the following: "The Calvinists say God elected a few, but as He did not know how to get them to heaven, He decreed to send His Son."—"Election is the cause of the faith" (of the elect). "Right! God Himself gives faith." In the catechisation on the words: "All things work together for good to them that love God" (in Rom. 8, 28—30, under Qu. 322), he said: "When an elect sins, that also must work for good to him. If any one is not elected, neither good nor evil will be of avail to him." "*It flows from God's*

3) Vol. I, p. 131 f.: "Dr. Walther once and now."

mercy (Erbarmung) alone that He elected some. God is incomprehensible, not only in His nature and works, but also in His decrees. When the Calvinists cannot comprehend what God does, they cast a goodly portion away, and God is made to be a hideous God, and a liar and cruel tyrant. Many errors are connected with the absolute decree, viz.: that Christ did not die for all men, that grace is irresistible, etc." Speaking of the elect who continue in faith unto their end, Prof. Walther said: "God did *not* elect a person (einen) on account of faith, but a person always continues in faith because God elected him." In regard to answer to Qu. 323, Dr. Walther said: "The two first" ("the boundless *mercy of God* and the infinite *merit of Christ*") "are the only causes, but the third" ("persevering faith in Christ") "and what belongs to the same, are the means."

The history of the new catechism of the Missouri Synod begins about a year after the publication of the first edition of Dietrich's Catechism. Up to 1857 various catechisms and explanations of catechisms were in use. In that year the ministerium of St. Louis, which three years before had been appointed a committee for that purpose, reported to the general body then convened at Fort Wayne, Ind., that it had completed the draft for the proposed edition of Dietrich. Another committee was appointed to examine the manuscript, and upon its favorable report the manuscript was ordered printed. On February 28, 1858, Dr. Walther in *Der Lutheraner* announced that the catechism had left the press of Wiebusch and Son, and in his review of the same said:

Unless all teachers in explaining the catechism follow a common model, the consequence must necessarily be not only that a great divergence will arise in the presentation of the pure doctrine on the part of the teachers within the same church-body, but also that the individual teacher will not adhere to a uniform presentation, but, in proportion as he is faithful and diligent, will adopt every year a method as regards terminology, quantity of material, and mode of inculcating, which in his opinion is an improvement upon that of the preceding year. Such topics as Law and Gospel, faith and repentance, justification and sanctification, the sacrament, etc., will be explained now in this, now in that manner. Now, although none of the explanations offered need be false, still the damage resulting from a constant change in the mode of teaching is very great. Neces-

sarily, such a constant change not only creates confusion in the children's minds, but also reacts in a harmful manner upon the teacher himself: it engenders in him a kind of uncertainty greatly detrimental to him in his office and causes him to vacillate in points of doctrine. This cannot but prove a great hindrance to the building up of the Church in the true unity of the Spirit, and conflicts with the apostle's admonition: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you: but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." 1 Cor. 1, 10.

These remarks afford a glimpse of the state of affairs in the Synod prior to the coming of Dietrich's Catechism, and they indicate with what expectations the catechism was issued. Hopes of another kind accompanied its publication. The reviewer continues:

With no intention of denying the great value and excellence of any other orthodox catechism our synod has chosen just this older catechism of Dietrich, because in preference to all other catechisms which were known to synod this one seemed best suited to our times and our peculiar conditions in this country. Our congregation members and our children are not dwelling in this country in quiet possession of the pure doctrine. Surrounded by sects of the most varied description, they notice not only that the good old pure and sound doctrine and the time-honored customs of their church are assailed and rendered suspected, but also that the false teachings and consequent practices of sects, partly of the rationalistic, partly of the enthusiastic stripe, are lauded with enticing glamor, and their adoption advocated to them. Manifestly, then, we need a text-book for our schools and homes which not only presents with particular care and depth the pure doctrine of our church, its customs and entire practice, thoroughly proves their soundness from God's Word and strikingly disproves the objections raised against them, but which also exhibits in a clear and lucid manner the groundless and dangerous character of the errors, the sentimentalism and the mispractices in vogue in our country. We need a catechism which possesses, besides the common merits of orthodox catechisms, this additional merit, that it offers to our congregation members the necessary weapons for successfully defending the truth which by the grace of God has been bestowed on them, and for vanquishing error in whatever garb it meets them, hence, a catechism which so furnishes them that in the

midst of the whirlpool of sects in this country they are able to comply with the admonition of the holy apostle: "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." 1 Pet. 3, 15.

Such were the ideals which the makers of Missouri's first synodical catechism proposed for their constituents. Were these ideals ever attained? *Nine months after* the above notice, an anonymous contributor is permitted to state a grievance regarding the use of Dietrich's Catechism in *Der Lutheraner*.⁴⁾ He writes:

My dear friend,—

I have to ask your advice this time in a very peculiar matter. I know you will gladly give it. The time to begin the instruction of catechumens has arrived again, and, as on every previous occasion, I am again perplexed, yea, more so this time than ever before. Formerly my perplexity arose from not knowing which book to follow in my instruction and to place into the children's hands. Nearly every year I adopted a different course, different explanations, and gave a different amount of time to various doctrines. Not that I was lazy or negligent. I wrote out my instruction in full every time, but I was never satisfied at the new start with what I had written and presented in the preceding year. Now this difficulty has been removed. Synod has republished Conrad Dietrich's Small Catechism. We have the book; we have introduced it; my children have it. Now guess what difficulty perplexes me at present. Do not laugh at me. What to do with the book I know as little as my pupils. Are the children to learn only the proof-passages? What purpose, then, do the questions and answers serve? If they are to learn also the questions and answers, how is that possible? Hardly one or two will accomplish this. Am I to have them merely read the questions and answers? Of what use will that be? However, if I am to explain the questions, I hardly know what to explain; everything is so clear and plain. Then again, many things seem to me to be wanting which I had found in Spener, or in the Dresden Catechism, or in Huth, etc. There are no terse applications such as one finds scattered in those catechisms. In some places the matter is brief and condensed, in others it is too much expanded. And how lumbering are some of the answers! In fine, I am disgusted. And when

4) Vol. 15, p. 57 f. Nov. 30, 1858.

my disgust and perplexity occasionally is great, I am angry at heart because synod did not publish a different catechism, one elaborated with an eye for the special needs of our time, etc.

This brother was advised to consider that every undertaking presents peculiar difficulties at the beginning, but persistent effort and faithful perseverance would overcome those difficulties. Moreover, it would not be easy, the reply states, to find a person capable and of sufficient authority in the Church at that day to elaborate an entirely new catechism adapted to American conditions. — The difficulties, however, seem to have continued. In the issue for September 15, 1864, a writer proposes "Another method for treating Conrad Dietrich's Catechism."⁵) He says, amongst other things:

It is impossible, in view of the present state of our schools, to have the children memorize the long questions, and yet the children must be able to give an account of them. What remedy can be proposed? A simple one, viz., by means of the questions themselves. A close examination of the questions reveals the fact that most questions contain, 1. a generalizing, 2. a particularizing answer. In other words, from a long answer containing general and particular matter, a brief and yet complete answer may be culled. This brief answer the children are directed to commit to memory; the remainder they are merely asked to remember. Thus the children are encouraged to take up the long questions, especially when the latter are divided, — as sometimes must be done, — into main and secondary questions, and in this wise the children, without becoming aware of it, are taught the entire contents of the question.

The process is as follows: You take the catechism in your left hand and a pencil in your right hand, and examine, *e. g.*, Qu. 84 in the Sixth Commandment: What is meant by committing adultery? In the answer you underscore and have the children underscore these words: "to yield to the lust of the flesh." These words, you tell the children, must be memorized; the remainder, "outside of lawful wedlock," and the four special points you tell them to remember. In like manner, in Qu. 86, etc.

A person wielding a good pencil might in this manner digest (*durcharbeiten*) the entire catechism and communicate results at

5) Vol. 21, p. 13.

conferences or synodical meetings. This would prove useful in several ways: 1. The great number of self-appointed masters with their peculiar modes and methods would perish and would be strictly bound to the catechism; 2. the woes and agonies of the children would be at an end; 3. the contents of the catechism would be brought much nearer to their grasp; and lastly, 4. children in New York and San Francisco, in New Orleans and at Lake Superior would return the identical answer to a given question.

These suggestions show that the expectations with which Dietrich's Catechism had been issued were being realized very slowly, yea, that not a few were despairing of realizing them. The demands for a plainer, simpler, briefer catechism at length became so insistent that "An Abridged Edition of the Catechism of Dr. Johann Conrad Dietrich" was published by the Publication Board of Synod. The six hundred and eleven questions of Dietrich had been reduced to one hundred and fifty-four in the Abridgment. Before us lies a copy of the *tenth* edition of this Abridgment, of the year 1883. Dietrich's elaborate presentation of the doctrine of election has been entirely dropped in the Abridgment. And this had been done before there was so much as a thought of the coming predestinarian controversy. What changes were made were meant to answer practical necessities. To borrow a secular phrase, the Missouri Synod was confronted with a condition, not a theory, and strove to supply an existing want.

It was in this same spirit that ultimately the idea of publishing the Catechism now largely in use in the Missouri Synod was weighed and executed. The facts are of too recent date to be here reiterated. Synod was in no haste to rid itself of its Dietrich for doctrinal reasons. The proposition to publish a new catechism was not submitted to Synod until 1890. The Committee reporting on the matter states:⁶⁾

We are prompted by the following reasons to submit this petition to Synod: In the first place, we cannot but yield to the conviction that Conrad Dietrich's explanation of the catechism now in general use among us was intended to offer to *confirmed* young

6) Records of Sixth Delegate Convention 1890, p. 81 f.

Christians further instruction and a more thorough inculcation of the doctrines of the Catechism, but that for schoolchildren it contains too much matter. Moreover, the doctrines are treated by Dietrich in too rigid connection, so that it is very difficult for a teacher to select just so much doctrinal matter as he regards appropriate for his pupils, by using only a part of the questions and passing over the rest. Accordingly, we believe that it is meeting a want of our beloved youth to offer them a briefer explanation of the Catechism, in which they find just the right quantity of spiritual food.

In the second place, it is our opinion that in many places Dietrich's Catechism employs a language which is adapted to the grasp of college students of the middle grades,—for whom he had primarily written the catechism,—but that his language is difficult to understand for many children in our parochial schools, especially in the lower grades. Accordingly, we believe it to be in the interest of our schoolchildren that an easier exposition of the catechism be given them, which presents the pure doctrine of the catechism in plain and simple words.

In the third place, we are convinced that it will conduce to the spiritual welfare of our children to have as the basis of religious instruction an explanation of the catechism which, from beginning to end, closely follows Luther's Small Catechism and affords a clear knowledge and understanding of the text of the catechism in all its parts. If good catechetical literature, especially Luther's writings and the confessional writings of our church, are used in the elaboration of the desired handbook, a churchly and ecumenical character can be preserved, in our judgment, also to this new work.

In conclusion, we wish to remark, that we do not wish to be understood as advising a rescission of the former resolution of Synod by which Conrad Dietrich's book was recommended for use to our congregations; for, no doubt, Dietrich will be used with blessed results also in the future, especially in the instruction of more advanced children," etc.

It was not until 1896 that the new catechism received Synod's sanction,⁷⁾ Synod at the same time expressing the hope that this new catechism would meet a want long felt, and would prove a great blessing to the congregations. Every teacher would now be able, by the aid of this catechism, to teach all the saving doctrines easily in the space of a year, and the pastor

7) Records of Eighth Delegate Convention, 1896, p. 113.

would no longer be forced, in teaching his catechumens, to lay aside so many questions. However, this is not meant as an order that every congregation must adopt this catechism; this may or may not be done. Synod is satisfied with having declared that in this little book the pure and unadulterated doctrine of the divine Word is presented in a form which, according to her conviction, will prove very salutary.

Ten years have elapsed since the introduction of Schwan's Catechism, as the catechism of Synod is popularly called. Many, probably the greater portion of our congregations, have adopted it and are using it exclusively. However, Dietrich is used still, sometimes by the side of Schwan, sometimes exclusively. At Concordia Seminary this city Dietrich's was the student's text-book in English Catechetics as late as 1905. For practical reasons Schwan was used for the first time in the fall of that year. We were curious to know just to what extent Dietrich's Catechism was still in demand and addressed an inquiry to that effect to the Agent of our Publication Concern, who replies under date of June 5th, as follows:

Schwan's Catechism was published in April, 1896. Since that time we have sold, besides the latter, 71,491 copies of Dietrich's Catechism. Dietrich is still printed by us just as in previous years, and so far no order for it has remained unfilled.

On the average, then, there are still used annually in the Missouri Synod at the present time 7100 copies of Dietrich's Catechism. We are confident that there is not a synod in America, nor anywhere else in the world, the Ohio and Iowa Synods, and the General Council not excepted, which makes as extensive an use of Dietrich's Catechism as does the Missouri Synod.

Therefore we hold that whoever says that the Missouri Synod on doctrinal grounds dispensed with the use of Dietrich's Catechism does not know what he is saying, or does not care, or both.
