



THE SPRINGFIELDER

April 1976
Volume 40, Number 2

Luther: 1525-1975

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THE YEAR 1525 MARKED an exceedingly complex and difficult time in Luther's life and the Reformation's story. This is not to say, or imply, that any period in Luther's life was ever dull, uneventful, becalmed, with nothing happening. Even in those delightful moments when he strummed his lute and sang with his family, there was constant churning of activity around him. The year 1525 was certainly no exception and it tested, like no other, the rightness of his cause on several counts.

PEASANTS' REVOLT

It was now four years since his heroic stand at the Diet of Worms, eight years since the Reformation broke like a thunderstorm over Europe releasing built-up pressures—political, social, economic, religious. The political and social seas were roiled with peasant unrest. In June of 1524 the Peasants' Revolt erupted, much against Luther's advice to the underdogs. It was not his nature, nor part of his theological stance, ever to confuse the two realms, church and state. The sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, was the scepter in things religious; the sword of naked steel, government, was sovereign for law and order. Luther agonized over the peasants' sorry conditions; he pleaded with the princes to listen to their grievances. He urged both sides to the mediation table, to solve their differences without bloodshed. To the princes and lords he wrote:

We have no one on earth to thank for this mischievous rebellion except you . . . You do nothing but flay and rob your subjects, until the poor common people can bear it no longer. The sword is at your throats . . . It is not the peasants, dear lords, who are resisting you; it is God Himself . . . To make your sin still greater, some of you are beginning to blame this affair on the Gospel . . . If it is still possible to give you advice, . . . try kindness first, for you do not know what God wills to do, and do not strike a spark that could kindle all Germany.¹

In the same treatise, *An Admonition to Peace*, Luther defended the peasants' "right to hear the Gospel and choose their own pastors," as well as the other articles in which they "recite physical grievances," which according to Luther's judgment, "too, are fair and just."²

He was just as blunt with the peasants:

You, too, must have a care that you take up your cause with a good conscience and with justice . . . I beg you, in a kindly and brotherly way . . . not to believe all kinds of spirits and preachers, now that Satan has raised up many evil spirits of disorder and of murder . . . I have never drawn sword nor desired revenge . . . You want to help the Gospel and do not see that by what you are doing you are hindering it and holding it down in the highest degree.³

After the princes smashed the rebellion and slaughtered the completely outclassed peasants, Luther reminded them that they ought to "fear God before whom they are quite guilty," and that even though the victory was theirs, it came not "because they are righteous and devout" but simply "because God is punishing the disobedience of the peasants." Now the princes need to "be merciful toward the prisoners and those who surrender, just as God is merciful toward everyone who surrenders and humbles himself before him, lest there be a change in the weather and God returns the victory to the peasants."⁴

Events outraced Luther's various publications on the heated issue in such a way that they placed him in a bad light, as though he had let the peasants down. Actually this was not the case. A careful analysis of the swift-flowing stream of happenings will show, on the one hand, that Luther's sympathies remained with the common man (he never forgot his own peasant roots), and on the other hand, that he consistently held to his theological principles concerning the two God-given spheres or kingdoms with which the Christian man has to do in this world.⁵

ELECTOR FREDERICK'S DEATH

To complicate matters further, 1525 was the year when Elector Frederick of Saxony, Luther's great friend and protector, died. "We have not only lost peace in the land," Luther confided in a letter to the elector's nephew, John Frederick (May 15, 1525), "but also our head, of whom we stand greatly in need at present."⁶ The elector's death came "in such trying times," he stated in an extremely warm and consolatory letter to Frederick's brother, John, and he commended the new ruler to God's gracious care and guidance, reminding him that "doubtless God has removed the head in order that He Himself may take His place, and teach you to derive strength and consolation solely from His goodness and power."⁷ The Saxon rulers continued to be strongly influenced by Luther's evangelical appeal, contributing enlightened administrations along with their generally godly personal lives and character. From Luther they had learned that the right to govern derived out of the people themselves and that God would endure tyrants only so long.

Meanwhile life at the University of Wittenberg had to go on, and in a letter to the new elector, Duke John, Luther pleads for funds, "for the treasury is empty" and "longer delay will be fatal." Already "many classes have gone down," he said, while some of the unpaid teachers "have gone away."⁸ Luther felt the need to intervene personally, though he was aware that "the University intends writing your Grace itself." Times have not changed much, we are reminded, as private colleges of our day strain to survive.

LUTHER AND HENRY VIII

It was also in 1525 that Luther made his overture to Henry VIII to stand with him, not against him, and to "shut your ears to those ~~poisonous tongues who decry Luther~~ as a heretic." For "why should I be condemned without being refuted," when it is not I but "the bishops who twist the articles of our Christian faith?" But the "favor-

able answer" which Luther hoped for from England's monarch never came; Henry had other distractions and motives, not least being his scrambled married life.⁹

LUTHER'S LITERARY PRODUCTIVITY

It goes almost without saying that 1525 was also a very productive literary period in Luther's life. For him, of course, it never was a question *whether* he was busy at something, but *what* occupied his time. His work on the translation of the Old Testament continued apace, with yet another portion (the third now) completed, specifically the Psalter. He was also lecturing on the Old Testament—Obadiah, Jonah, Micah. People sometimes forget that Luther as *lector Bibliae* was completely at home anywhere in the Bible. But he was primarily an Old Testament man—think of the mammoth eight volumes on Genesis in the new American edition of *Luther's Works!*—even though his *scholia*, or lectures, on epistles like *Romans* and *Galatians* are among his most famous works. It was just around this time, too, that he was instrumental in launching the first hymnals, which were destined to sing the Reformation into the hearts and lives of the people. He personally wrote most of these first hymns and also directly prompted others of known ability to contribute others, usually songs based on the Psalter which he had just turned into readable German.

Talking of publishing, it is pertinent to remember that Luther wrote selflessly, without thought of gain, except for the sake of the Gospel. He personally never sought, nor got, any royalties, though it would be interesting to calculate what these might have been for a writer who was constantly on the best-seller list, averaging more than a title per month for thirty years! "I produce as soon as I conceive," was Luther's homespun way of accounting for the staggering total of more than four hundred titles. Altogether his literary production promises to fill more than one hundred volumes in the yet to be completed Weimar edition of his works. At the Diet of Worms in 1521 the papal legate Aleander and Emperor Charles V could not believe that one man could have produced so much in so short a time, as the books and booklets were piled up on the table in front of Luther to declare his responsibility for them. Whether everything he had produced was worth saving, Luther himself doubted. His esteem focused on the fruits of his labors in the translation of the Bible, his *Large* and *Small Catechisms*, the *Bondage of the Will*, his commentaries on *Romans*, *Galatians*, *Genesis*, and the like. However, he deplored the way some things were being snatched from under his pen and "hurriedly printed and sold before the whole was finished" by unscrupulous printers who were more interested in ducats, or dollars, than in what he was actually saying. As a result, complained Luther, "some bits are left out, here they are displaced, there falsified, and other parts not corrected."¹⁰ He objected that they brazenly print "Wittenberg on the top of some which have never seen Wittenberg!" As far as he was concerned, "this was downright knavery," and he hoped for more integrity in the publishing business.

LUTHER'S MARRIAGE

It may seem somewhat incongruous that, with the Peasants' War barely over (their final gory defeat came at Frankenhausen, May 15), 1525 should also have been the year of Luther's marriage. In the spring of 1523 he had helped "engineer" the "rescue" of twelve nuns. Leonhardt Koppe, a respected merchant in the city of Torgau, regularly delivered herring to the local cloister. On one of his return trips with his covered wagon he bundled off twelve nuns who wanted to escape their "prison," mantling them in such a way as to suggest empty herring barrels.¹¹ Nine of them sought refuge in Wittenberg, and Luther conscientiously sought good husbands for each or suitable positions or homes. He himself did not give marriage much serious thought as a possibility. In fact, late in 1524, he had written to his good friend, George Spalatin, court preacher and secretary to Duke Frederick the Wise:

According to my present frame of mind I have no intention of marrying; not that I am insensible to the emotions of the flesh, being neither wood nor stone, but because I have no desire to, and daily expect to die a heretic's death. However, I shall not limit the power of the Lord working in me, nor depend on the stability of my own heart.¹²

Luther had not ruled out the possibility. Nor had his friends, including his father, neglected the opportunity to urge him to take the step, especially since he was the one who had literally emptied out the monasteries and cloisters by preaching the sanctity of the marriage bond according to Scripture and the evils of the monastic vows constructed by the papists. Katherine von Bora, for her part, one of the escapees, had set her cap for Luther himself. Yet it came as a surprise to all but a small circle of friends present for the simple ceremony (Justus Jonas, Lucas Cranach, the lawyer Apel, and John Bugenhagen, pastor at the *Stadtkirche* or city church) when the word went out that Luther and Katherine were married on June 13. The wedding celebration itself took place as a social event on June 27. Many guests, including Luther's parents, were then present. To Spalatin, because of his connections at the ducal court, Luther sent a note reminding him not only to be present but to see what he could do to "help us in case wild game is needed." To the herring merchant Koppe Luther sent a witty, waggish sort of invitation:

Most worthy "Father Prior," you know what has happened to me? Namely, that the nun that with God's help you carried off from the nunnery two years ago is nevertheless returning to the cloister, not this time, however, to take the veil, but as the honored wife of Dr. Luther, who, up till now, has lived alone in the old empty monastery of St. Augustine at Wittenberg. So pray come to my home-coming, which is on the Tuesday after St. John's festival, but without any wedding present.¹³

Martin and Katherine not only enjoyed a very happy life and home together, but they fashioned what became for all time the model Christian parsonage. The old Augustinian monastery now came under

new and better management and *Lutherhalle* (Luther Hall), as it is still called, resounded with the familiar cadences of happy family living.

Luther was right, not wrong, on all these counts. Some may dispute his actions or judgments, but history has pretty well vindicated the Reformer on all scores, even his hotly debated role in the Peasants' War.

LUTHER VERSUS ERASMUS

But no event of 1525 was of greater moment for the Christian world in ensuing centuries than Luther's production of *De Servo Arbitrio* (*On the Bondage of the Will*), his famous reply to Erasmus' *De Libero Arbitrio* (*On the Freedom of the Will*). Here was David taking on Goliath. The 450th anniversary of this event is worth noting. Like the continental divide, this face-off between Europe's two leading figures not only pitted wits and theological competence one against the other but also decided the future flow of two decidedly different theological stances.

Luther had already given up hope on Erasmus ever standing up for the Reformation. The savant of Rotterdam and Louvain (also trained like Luther in the Augustinian order but never functioning as priest) frankly admitted that he lacked martyr's blood. He was a mediating soul in an age that had no room for compromisers. He was equipped and mentally geared for the quiet of the scholar's life, not for the public arena. Yet nearly every university in Europe sought him for the prestige his presence would bring. Luther's one hope was that Erasmus, upon whom tremendous pressure was building to speak out for the papalists' side (from Pope Adrian VI, friend and fellow Dutchman; from Henry VIII of England; and Duke George of Albertine or ducal Saxony, cousin and rival of Elector Frederick the Wise), would just stick to his scholarly pursuits. Luther deeply respected him for his invaluable manuscript work in producing the first really reliable Greek text on the New Testament. The *textus receptus*, or accepted text, as we still know it, formed the basis for modern translations of the Bible. This included Luther's own magnificent translation of the New Testament into German at the Wartburg Castle, in the amazing period of about ten or eleven weeks, early in 1522, while he was in involuntary hiding or "exile" by his prince's orders.

Because Luther heard that Erasmus was in the process of publishing a work against him and the Reformation, he took the initiative and wrote Erasmus early in 1524, stating among other things:

. . . The whole world must confess that it is through you that there has been such a revival in letters, through which people have got access to the Bible in its purity, and that you possess great and glorious talents, for which we must ever be grateful . . . It is better that you should only serve God with the talent committed to you. But I fear our enemies might persuade you to condemn our doctrine, and then we would have to contradict you to the face.¹⁴

Earlier in the same letter, however, Luther had also stated what must

have smarted sharply when Erasmus read it, true though it may have been:

We perceive that you have not been endued by God with such steadfastness and courage that you can confidently go forward with us to combat this monstrosity (papalism)—hence we do not expect what is beyond your ability to render.

Erasmus had on occasion remarked concerning Luther's so-called immodest and blustering sort of spirit in the dispute that raged throughout the church. Accordingly, Luther now felt justified in reminding Erasmus:

Up until now I have held my pen in check, in spite of your conduct towards me. For although you were not of us, and rejected some of the principal points pertaining to everlasting blessedness, or hypocritically refused to give your opinion on the matter, still I shall not accuse you of obstinacy. What am I do? . . . I beg of you only to be a spectator of our tragedy, and not unite with our opponents, nor write against me, seeing I shall not publish anything against you.

Luther's letter obviously did little to dissuade Erasmus. How could it, we might wonder? Though private, Luther's letter had deprecated Erasmus' competence to enter dispute on a question "which is far above your head." By September 1524, Erasmus had his book *On the Freedom of the Will* in print. In a faithful, old-line Lombard-sort-of-way, it focused on fallen man and his volitional powers as a creature, who, while injured and impaired spiritually, still had sufficient capacity of himself, when prompted by God, to refrain from evil and choose those things leading to salvation. It was typical synergistic doctrine, works-righteous theology, and struck right at the heart of Luther's Gospel, according to which fallen man's conversion or regeneration is entirely and alone the marvelous work of the Holy Spirit in man, *sola gratia*, by grace alone without *any* human cooperation.

LUTHER'S *Bondage of the Will*

Luther's answer, *On the Bondage of the Will*,¹⁵ came a year later in the autumn of 1525. "It was no mere pot-boiler," as Packer-Johnston appropriately observe in their introduction,¹⁶ though it was written with Luther's characteristic breakneck speed. Schwiebert is undoubtedly right in his assessment of the two men and their works on this subject: "To Erasmus the entire subject was essentially a rhetorical exercise in curious and superfluous speculation; to Luther it was the very essence of the Christian faith."¹⁷ Siggins is of the opinion that Luther "swiftly replied" to Erasmus' attack.¹⁸ McSorley, on the other hand, implies that Luther dallied around quite a while, and he cites "Luther's adjustment to married life" as the apparent reason for his delay.¹⁹ The facts are that Luther, to let him speak for himself, had to overcome his personal "disgust, disinclination, and distaste" for what Erasmus had written.²⁰ In early January 1525, in a letter to a friend, Luther had already indicated his intent to reply:

facts further are, McSorley's comment notwithstanding, that rather than distract Luther from a task which he found "distasteful," Katherine was the one through whom Luther's friends prodded, to get Erasmus' attack answered. Considering the fact, too, that, once at the task, Luther "dashed" it off in the amazing time of about a month, McSorley ought be the last to fault him for any delay, in view of the five years consumed in putting his analysis of Luther's reply to Erasmus together, quite unencumbered by wife or worldly involvement as Luther was. (McSorley, incidentally, has now left the order of the Paulist Fathers, been released from his vows, and taken a wife.) Moreover, Luther's *magnum opus* is no easy evening's reading for the average person, but as Siggins points out in amazement at Luther's capacity, "it was composed faster than most people can read it."²² That may overstate the case somewhat, but the truth is that Luther's work has remained a focal point for intensive study, requiring careful mulling and much more than a passing glance, while Erasmus' lies mostly forgotten. Over the long haul, history and close theological scrutinizing have shown that there is more to Luther's claim than arrogant boast, when towards the end of his work he states: "If, therefore, we conduct our argument with Scripture as judge, the victory in every respect belongs to me; for there is not one jot or tittle of Scripture left that does not condemn the doctrine of 'free-will!'"²³

"This is the hinge," wrote Luther as he thanked Erasmus for having stuck at least to the critical question "on which our discussion turns, the crucial issue between us." "Our aim is simply to investigate what ability 'free-will' has, in what respect it is the subject of Divine action and how it stands related to the grace of God."²⁴ Defining free-will 'as a power of the human will by which a man may apply himself to those things that lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from the same,' Erasmus is little more than a Pelagius *redivivus*, says Luther.²⁵ In fact he is a "double-dyed Pelagian," exalting man's ability to merit grace, a thing which the apostle Paul pounds to pulp "with one word when he says that all are justified *freely*, without the works of the law."²⁶ Luther's razor-sharp theological mind noted correctly that for Scripture the bondage of the human will in things spiritual was the opposite side of the coin with the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone (*sola gratia/fide*). The slightest error on the one doctrine would cause immediate, corresponding injury to the other.

McSorley faults Luther because he "excludes man's free cooperation in saving faith"²⁷ and, like Erasmus, he insists on "man's free decision of faith," claiming that "the overwhelming majority of modern Protestant theologians" agree with Trent, Aquinas, Hans Kueng, and a host of others to support this view.²⁸ Perhaps he is right in claiming wide-spread acceptance for this notion of man's "free-will" in spiritual matters, but the question is whether it is right! Luther insists that then "Christian faith is utterly destroyed."²⁹ Atherton, who expedited the re-printing in 1931 of Henry Cole's translation (1823) into English of Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, stated in his prefatory remarks:

This book is most needful at the present day. The teachings of many so-called Protestants are more in accordance with the dogmas of the papists, or the ideas of Erasmus, than with the principles of the Reformers; they are more in harmony with the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent than with any Protestant or Reformed Confessions of Faith.³⁰

Cole himself had characterized "this profound treatise of the immortal Luther" as "an invaluable acquisition to the church—a sharp threshing instrument having teeth for the exposure of subtlety and error, a banner in defense of the truth."³¹

"FLESH" AND VOLITIONAL CAPACITY

A key point in Luther's position is his painstaking care in showing that "flesh" in Scripture regularly means man's ungodly lust, not merely weakness, but total depravity, thus ruling out any possibility of man's even assisting a little in his conversion. In order to drive home this total inability of fallen man to begin, sustain, or complete his salvation, Luther assembles a mass of Scriptural evidence (e.g., Gen. 6, 3.5; 8, 21; Is. 40, 1.2.6.7; Jer. 10, 23; John 15, 5, etc.). God's grace alone works men's conversion, even as it was God's grace alone that effected man's redemption through Christ's meritorious atonement, freely, without human cooperation. Man is more helpless than a log or a stone, Luther thunders, when it comes to regeneration or renewing of the Spirit.³² Though "we try to give ourselves some tiny, little credit," it is clear from Scripture, especially chapter three of Paul's Letter to the Romans, that the apostle knocks "free-will" flat.³³

It needs to be said that Luther by no stretch of the imagination ruled out what we normally call man's volitional capacity, the power to exercise choice and make decisions, some of them mightily important, in routine daily living. Luther granted that a man could even decide whether to go to church or not, sit in a pew, take a hymnal, sing along, read the Holy Scriptures, etc. So, he stated plainly:

If we do not want to drop this term altogether—which would really be the safest and most Christian thing to do—we may still in good faith teach people to use it to credit man with 'free-will' in respect, not of what is above him, but of what is below him. That is to say, man should realize that in regard to his money and possessions he has a right to use them, to do or to leave undone, according to his own 'free-will' though that very 'free-will' is overruled by the free-will of God alone, according to His own pleasure. However, with regard to God, and in all that bears on salvation or damnation, he has no 'free-will,' but is a captive, prisoner and bondsman, either to the will of God, or to the will of Satan.³⁴

FREE WILL—A DIVINE ATTRIBUTE

In this one paragraph Luther encapsulates his whole position. Free-will is really a divine term, a divine attribute no less, properly ascribed to God only, for only the Creator acts with genuinely free

will.³⁵ From God's side, therefore, it is impossible to speak of contingency, or accident, for there is an immutable necessity connected with all that happens when seen from God's side. God's sovereignty and divine providence will forever create problems for us who try to peer into it, since we are bound by creaturely limitations, contingency of events, cause and effect relationships, and time sequence. Only remember, says Luther, I did not say necessity in terms of coercion! Hence he is no fatalistic determinist.

In this discussion Luther knows and honors but one authority, or *magisterium*, and that is the clear light of Scripture, whose internal (to faith) and external (to the outsider) clarity stand unassailable. Neither philosophical thought patterns nor ecclesiastical traditions are safe informants. When Scripture asserts, we must assert; otherwise all Christian truth is lost.³⁶ "What Christian could talk like that?" Luther scolds when Erasmus opts for skepticism in deciding what of Scripture he will accept as authoritative.³⁷ Over against the old Scholastic canard, which Erasmus repeats for his day, that the Scriptures cite their own obscurity, Luther parries: "If Scripture is obscure or equivocal, why need it have been brought down to us by act of God?" He points to the darkness and obscurity in men rather, and then proceeds to draw up a list of salient Bible references sufficient to stop any mouth, including Erasmus'.³⁸

Erasmus' mistake is a common one, to read the Law's command "to do" as proving man's *capacity* under the Law. Luther underscores the goodness of God's Holy Law and upholds the truth that there is nothing deficient in it. But for fallen man the Law now shows "not what he *can* do, but what he *ought* to do."³⁹ So, as the Scriptures make bountifully plain, in the context of the promise of the Gospel and salvation, "the commandments are not given inappropriately or pointlessly; but in order that through them proud, blind man may learn the plague of his own impotence, should he try to do what is commanded."⁴⁰ Luther is not against human striving to be Law-abiding, but the great tragic irony of life and human striving for spiritual perfection on the basis of man's own powers is this, says Luther:

Scripture sets before us a man who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick and dead, but who, through the operation of Satan his lord, adds to his other miseries that of blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, possessed of liberty and ability, whole and alive.⁴¹

GOD'S HIDDEN PURPOSES

Many things remain unanswered for the Christian man, Luther admits, even though Holy Scripture is clear. We must restrict ourselves, therefore, Luther admonishes, to what God has said; and where He has not spoken, explained, or shown the reason why, we should button up the lip. "Wherever God hides Himself, and wills to be unknown to us, there we have no concern," is Luther's advice. This is where God chooses to remain hidden (*Deus absconditus*), for "God does many things which He does not show us in His Word, and He wills many things which He does not in His Word show us that He

wills." There "it is not lawful to ask"; for example, the insoluble conundrum of why some are saved and others lost, in view of all men's total depravity by nature and God's avowed intent to save all (John 3, 16, and many other passages that speak of the universality of God's grace in Christ). "We have to do with Him as clothed and displayed in His Word by which He presents Himself to us," Luther reminds.⁴² What is it we know? That God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5, 19). That God earnestly desires all men to be saved (Matt. 23, 37). That man's own unbelief and rejection of God's grace condemn him, not some prior condition or arbitrary rejection by God (Matt. 23, 37). Luther cites the examples of Pharaoh, Judas, Esau, not to demonstrate how whimsical God can be, as though He set up straw men only to destroy them willy-nilly; but to underscore how God's consequent will falls with terrible severity as recompense upon unbelief. God is sovereign. He rules. He saves. He condemns. None can charge Him with unrighteousness. None dare question the rightness of His judgments. His grace is boundless. His judgment is terrible. But it is never arbitrary; it is linked to man's rejection and unbelief over against God. Above all, remember that His gracious promises never fail, Luther urges.⁴³

THE REGENERATE MAN

Luther knows and grants that Scripture speaks of the regenerate man's "cooperation" with God in godliness of life. But the "cooperating" of the regenerate man with God in doing His holy will in no way changes the situation as far as man's native ability is concerned and his so-called 'free-will.' What he does as a regenerate believer results from God's enabling grace and power,⁴⁴ out of faith, out of faith's power, which is "energetic in bringing forth the *fruits of the Spirit*."⁴⁵

When human reason rears its arrogant head and stiffens its back against the judgments and sovereign activity of God, seeking to draw God before the bar of its own judgment, Luther objects strenuously and warns that man dare never judge his Creator and Redeemer. "The light of glory . . . will one day reveal God," Luther insists against a heady rationalistic streak in man which vaunts itself to say that "there is no God, or that God is unjust," and it will then show "to whom alone belongs a judgment whose justice is incomprehensible, as a God whose justice is most righteous and evident—provided only that in the meanwhile we believe it, as we are instructed and encouraged to do by the same example of the light of grace explaining what was a puzzle of the same order to the light of nature."⁴⁶

This is how Luther closes his argument, advocating that we postpone the answer to some of our questions until the time when we are with God in glory. Meanwhile it is true, Luther acknowledges, that "God does not work in us without us."⁴⁷ But "what is hereby attributed to 'free-will'?" he asks. Only this, that human beings "are fit subjects" for the Spirit's action of grace; for, after all, "God did not make heaven for geese."⁴⁸ But if Christianity is to be preserved, the purity of the Gospel maintained, and *sola gratia/fide* as Holy Scripture's cardinal teaching concerning man's salvation upheld, then the "new creation" of the Spirit in men must be seen as lying entirely

outside of human potential, or initiative, and entirely and alone within the gracious working of the Holy Spirit through the Word.⁴⁹

Theologia Glorae VERSUS *Theologia Crucis*

McSorley charges that Luther "shows a poor understanding" of the thinking that has been going on in the church since Augustine.⁵⁰ But the truth is that when McSorley opts for "free decision of faith"—the cooperating, non-resisting will of man in his salvation—he makes the same choice that Aquinas made in explaining the conversion of the sinner under the enabling or sanctifying grace of God as he called it, the *gratia infusa*, or infused grace. Then, even if it is called *sola gratia*, the capacity of the human will in things spiritual still counts as a vital factor in man's change. Unfortunately, even Augustine led the church in that same direction—even though he is remembered as the great champion against Pelagianism!—when he taught that the Spirit's gift to the corrupt and spiritually bound sinner is *caritas*, charity, or love, an enabling power which blossoms forth under the Spirit's benediction into virtues of many kinds, including faith, and thus works gradually and progressively in the Christian for his perfecting unto salvation.

Luther was the first to label this thinking for what it was, "theology of glory" (*theologia gloriæ*), for it elevates man and his efforts in striving toward salvation. The religious order founded upon Augustine's thinking, of which Luther himself had once been a member and on whose religious discipline he had been weaned, supported this "theology of glory." Luther was the one who detected this strange anomaly, that a contradictory theology, which elevated man and his spiritual strivings, existed right within the Christian church itself, undermining the central article of the sinner's justification before God by grace alone without the works of the Law, *sola gratia/fide*. In "theology of glory" there is room for "the free decision of faith," for 'free-will.' But in theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*)—the only theology which God's Word knows or allows—such "free decision" is absolutely excluded, as the apostle Paul makes so very plain (cf. Eph. 2, 8,9; Gal. 5, 4; Rom. 11, 6, among many passages).

Luther put his finger on the neuralgic point. In "theology of glory" it is infused grace that is key, for it equips man and his feeble will to work out his salvation. Even an agnostic critic like the French existentialist, Albert Camus, detected this flaw in much of what passed for Christianity in our day, when he wrote: "Today too many people are climbing on the cross to get a better view; and in their haste they trample the One who has been there so long." Luther put it more bluntly: they push God aside, puff themselves up, and say, "I am Christ." At Heidelberg already, in 1518, before members of his own Augustinian order Luther laid down the platform for the Reformation when he stated that "without a theology of the cross man misuses the best things in the worst way" (Thesis 24). Little wonder that the theme of his life, and the charge that he left to the church, should be: *Unum prædica, sapientiam crucis!* One thing preach, the wisdom of the cross!

He was right, not wrong, in his stand against Erasmus. The

Gospel itself was at stake. If there is any hope for Christian theology and Christian churches in our day to grow closer together, there is need to evaluate what is being done in the light of Luther's ineluctable teaching in the *De Servo Arbitrio*. The contest still rages between the theology of glory and Scripture's theology of the cross. Luther gave the definitive answer in 1525 which the churches sorely need in 1975, the "sharp threshing instrument having teeth for the exposure of subtlety and error, a banner in defense of the truth."

FOOTNOTES

1. *Works of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia Edition), IV, p. 220ff.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 223f.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 224ff.
4. M. Luther, "A Terrible Account of Thomas Muenzer and God's Judgment Upon Him," quoted in Oskar Thulin, *A Life of Luther*, Philadelphia: (Fortress, 1966), p. 94f.
5. cf. Lloyd B. Volkmar, *Luther's Response to Violence* (New York: Vantage, 1974).
6. M.A. Currie, *The Letters of Martin Luther* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), p. 137.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 142f.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 144f.
11. cf. Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* (New York: Abingdon, 1950), p. 286f.
12. Currie, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 140f.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 122ff.
15. cf. M. Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, tr. by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Westwood, New Jersey: Revell, 1957), hereafter referred to as *BOW*.
16. *BOW*, p. 41.
17. E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), p. 691.
18. Ian Siggins, *Luther* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 162.
19. H. J. McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?* (New York: Newman Press, 1969), p. 297f.
20. *BOW*, p. 64.
21. Currie, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
22. Siggins, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
23. *BOW*, p. 312.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 139ff.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 293f.
27. McSorley, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *BOW*, p. 84.
30. M. Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, tr. by Henry Cole, ed. by Henry Atherton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), p. 8.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
32. *BOW*, p. 142f.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 289-295 *passim*.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
36. *Ibid.*, cf. pp. 67 & 71ff.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 68ff.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-132.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 160. See also pp. 161-169.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 170f.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 195-238 *passim*.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 267-272.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 267f.
50. McSorley, *op. cit.*, p. 329.