

CONCORDIA
THEOLOGICAL
QUARTERLY

CTQ

Volume 47, Number 1

JANUARY 1983

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The Concept of *Anfechtung* in Luther's Thought

David P. Scaer

I. Definition

Some words defy adequate translation. *Anfechtung*, as used by Luther, and its Latin counterpart, *tentatio*, may be such a word. Various English works demonstrate this fact. The English translation of Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* uses "temptation."¹ Herbert J. A. Bouman in his translation of Walther von Loewenich's *Luther's Theology of the Cross* uses "trials."² Plass in *What Luther Says* favors "affliction."³ The American Translation of *Luther's Works* uses all three, "temptation," "trial," and "affliction," plus "tribulation."⁴ Each of these English words develops one facet of Luther's *Anfechtung* and related words. "Temptation" points to the Christian's life as a period of testing by Satan. In this temptation the Christian is given the opportunity by God to overcome Satan personally, but there can be no suggestion that God is the origin of sin or provokes the Christian to sin. "Trial" suggests a probationary period before God's bestowing a great good. Through the trial God puts the Christian to the test to measure the depth and sincerity of faith and to bring it to a higher level. Thus trial points to God's control over the Christian's suffering during the *Anfechtung*. Suffering does not happen through chance. "Affliction" reflects the real suffering and pain the Christian endures during the *Anfechtung*. The Christian does not necessarily experience physical pain, but real agony in his soul about his personal salvation.⁵ "Tribulation" also refers to the Christian's suffering during the *Anfechtung* but suggests the wider dimension as affliction suffered by all Christians.

Since Luther's concept of the *Anfechtung* is a multifaceted concept, perhaps it is best left untranslated. Admittedly this is the route of theological and literary cowardice. *Anfechtung* is perhaps better understood not as one vocable in Luther's vocabulary, but as a one-word theological concept. This concept of the *Anfechtungen* can be explained summarily in the following sentences:

Through the Gospel the Christian has come to learn of a gracious God in Christ Jesus; however his life experiences present to him a God who is still wrathful and who not only

refuses to forgive sins, but reminds him of them. The hard, concrete experiences of life contradict what he had learned by faith. God on his side through the *Anfechtungen* is drawing the Christian closer to him and throughout the *Anfechtungen* always intends that they should be beneficial to the Christian. The Christian, however, interprets them as forms of God's retribution for sins and as signs of his wrath. In desperation the Christian flees to Christ for salvation. In this God has accomplished his purpose of bringing the Christian closer to himself. Though the Christian can through faith conquer one *Anfechtung* — and indeed he must if he is to survive — he must face a lifelong series of *Anfechtungen*. Resurrection is the only permanent solution. *Anfechtungen* are an aspect of faith, not as that faith trusts in God and totally relies on him for all good, but as that faith faces realities in life and in the world different from those offered in the Gospel.⁶

The *Anfechtungen* present a more intense problem for the theologian like Luther who has committed himself totally to the Scriptures as God's Word and whose intellectual knowledge of their promises⁷ is superior to that of others, simply because of an exposure through his professional life and study. What he knows about God's graciousness in Christ is contradicted by what he really experiences in this world.

II. *Anfechtungen* as Contradiction

Anfechtungen in Luther's thought appear as contradiction, since in them the Christian is confronted with the destructive forces of his adversaries over which the Gospel has informed him he already has victory. The salvation offered in faith is seemingly withdrawn. The Christian who through faith has been saved from sin, Satan, death, hell, and all other related calamities re-encounters them in the *Anfechtungen*. The opponents actually appear to be resurrected. The most horrible contradiction is that Satan and not God seems to be in control.

A. *Satan as Source of the Anfechtungen*

Every experience that leads a person to unbelief, denial, and doubt comes from Satan and not from God. God cannot be the cause of evil in the same sense that He is the cause of good. The Christian confronted by the *Anfechtungen* is left doubting about whether God or Satan is in control. So effective is Satan's might that he is called by Scripture not merely the prince of this world, but its god. While not possessing an essential omnipresence, Satan does possess an effective onnipresence by carrying out his

will through others. Luther uses the example of a ruler carrying out his will through his military forces. Satan has set up his kingdom side by side with God, and thus the Christian will confront Satan and his agents everywhere.

B. Satan Uses Means in the Anfechtungen

Like God, Satan is invisible, but works through visible means. The very *Anfechtungen* which are God's instruments to strengthen faith are Satan's to destroy it. In the *Anfechtungen* the contradictions become visible. Through the world, the flesh, and whatever afflict the Christian, Satan becomes "incarnate" and wreaks havoc. For Luther human existence for the Christian may be called Satanic, since there is no part of it exempted by Satan from use in carrying out his purposes. Evil men, fanatics, our own sin, consciences, and flesh all serve Satan's purposes. The entire world remains God's creation, but all of it can be used by Satan. Even the person of Christ is not sacred to him. In preaching, Satan presents Christ no longer as the mediator but as the object of fear and dread. This Satan does when he takes a legitimate Word of God and preaches the Law there to lead to despair. Law not only replaces the Gospel, but in Satan's hands becomes God's final Word.

C. Satan as Source of Despair in the Anfechtungen

Anfechtungen are not to be regarded as simply problems or troubles disturbing human existence, capable of medical or psychiatric solution, but they are to be regarded as a direct and effectual Satanic working in a Christian's life meant to bring him to unbelief. In seeking to lead Christians into unbelief, Satan assumes the very characteristics of God Himself, including a trinitarian existence. In the image of the Creator Father, he appears as the god of this world, a title which he has earned by his apparent universal control. He appears as Christ preaching the Law. Appearing as the Spirit, he works in men's hearts leading them to such despair that they no longer have any hope for salvation.⁸ As already mentioned, he even adopts something resembling omnipresence since he is on the heels of every Christian tempting him to fall into sin. Just as God loves out of inner necessity and not just will, so Satan out of an inner necessity has no other choice but to lead Christians into unbelief.⁹ Through the *Anfechtungen* Satan works to become the object of Christian devotion.

D. Religious Questions as Means of Anfechtungen

Among pious people Satan can work effectively by using religious questions as *Anfechtungen*. As a serpent he is capable of

finding the most insignificant weakness and using it as that smallest opening by which he can enter to begin his troubling work of the *Anfechtungen*. With Eve he called into question whether God was really good. Work-righteousness is always a most dangerous form of the *Anfechtungen*, since good works in their outward form appear as opposed to sin and have indeed been commanded by God. Satan also leads the Christian to question God's goodness. Luther sees Satan as such an effective liar that he can portray a picture of God which is both religious and fictitious. This he does when he plagues the Christian with the lie that God does not really love him. The God of love which the Christian knows through the Scriptural revelation is contradicted by what appears as a God of wrath in this world. Such a perversion of God's nature is the ultimate Satanic lie.¹⁰

E. Anfechtungen and Final Destruction

If the Christian interprets the *Anfechtungen* at face value — without the revelation that in the *Anfechtungen* God is working for the personal benefit of the Christian — he will have thus believed Satan's false message and surrendered his belief in God. Nothing awaits Satan's victim except final destruction. Luther outlines the procedures of Satan in this way:

From the beginning Satan was a liar. With lies he misled Adam and Eve and since then has never ceased to lie. With the lie he brought death, and soon after that he moved Cain to kill his brother. His kingdom continues to operate under these same principles of lying and deceiving. After Satan captures his victims, there is no festive celebration for them, but he troubles them with murder, unrest, and disobedience. Then, when he has brought people into murder and misfortune, he plagues them further about their sins, until finally they are without any hope. Take for an example Judas who betrayed Christ. First, he deceived himself with lies; then his soul was plagued because he was a traitor and a murderer of his own Lord Jesus. Finally he despaired and hanged himself. Beware of Satan! He is a liar and murderer. Whoever serves and obeys him must eventually pay him as did Judas, his servant.¹¹

F. Anfechtungen Compared to Forms of Religious Self-Discipline

Later the beneficial purpose of the *Anfechtungen* will be discussed; however, since Satan is seriously and sincerely working in and through the *Anfechtungen*, they really have no

resemblance to self-imposed religious exercises either of the monasteries or of the various rules for living which have been popular from time to time among the Protestants. Such shallow understandings of the *Anfechtungen* are really impossible when the personal Satanic element in them is fully comprehended. In most systems of self-imposed religious discipline, the Christian moves up on the scale from being merely acceptable to God to a rating of high approval from Him. The progress is in some sense traceable. The modes of denial are self-chosen. Luther's understanding of the *Anfechtungen* is frequently misunderstood as the punishments for sin or for failing to follow the code imposed by self-denial.¹² In contrast, the *Anfechtungen* for Luther are not only serious, but critical, since the failure to respond in total faith to God by abandoning oneself to him leads eventually to unbelief and damnation. In the *Anfechtungen* the Christian is placed on the boundary line between faith and unbelief, between God's kingdom and Satan's.

G. *Anfechtungen as the Struggle between God and Satan*

Though the *Anfechtungen* are personal, fitted out individually by Satan according to the weaknesses of each Christian and his own personal knowledge of these weaknesses, they are also battles within the larger cosmic struggle between God and Satan.¹³ Each of the *Anfechtungen* repeats and contains something of Genesis 3. Though the Garden of Eden is a non-repeatable, once and for all episode, this first and hence all-controlling conflict between our first parents and Satan manifests itself in the personal *Anfechtungen* of Christians. They too are permitted by God to be tempted by Satan to test and probe the depth and sincerity of their commitment to God. Again in our *tentatio* Satan comes with his own "Gospel" disguised as God's, and with this "good news" tempts the Christian away from God. In each *Anfechtung* the struggle begins again. For the Christian the struggle is more difficult than for Adam, since today all flesh has a ready ally in Satan and cannot escape the world.

Anfechtungen reach beyond Genesis 3 into that invisible sphere where God's and Satan's forces once met and Satan's were driven out to earth to wage that battle among men, especially within the church. Thus the *Anfechtungen* of the individual Christian are only a microcosm of the cosmic struggle between God and Satan. They are a refocusing of the strife in the invisible realm, of Genesis 3, and of the battle between Satan and Christ. The divine victory in the resurrection with its concomitant theme of the *Christus Victor* will receive a more extensive discussion; however, without

the Christological understanding of the cosmic dimensions of the struggle between God and Satan, the *Anfechtungen* deteriorate into individual, inexplicable sufferings.

H. Anfechtungen as Apparent Dialectic

“Dialectic” in Christian thought refers to irreconcilable differences or contradictions and thus would seem a most appropriate description of Luther’s concept of *Anfechtungen*. The saving message of the Gospel contradicts what the Christian experiences as despair in his own life. In the *Anfechtungen*, however, he must believe that through Satanic devices God is working for his benefit.¹⁴ Just as there is no real unresolved dialectic between God and Satan in the invisible realm and as there is no dialectic between Christ and Satan on the cross, so the Christian must believe that the dialectic of his present struggles, the *Anfechtungen*, will one day be resolved entirely in his favor to the detriment of Satan.

III. Appearances of the *Anfechtungen*

In Luther’s theology the *Anfechtungen* can operate in the Christian’s life in a variety of ways. As mentioned previously, Satan has at his disposal everything within creation. The first of these is the flesh, the human existence under sin.

A. Anfechtungen through the Flesh

For Luther the concept of *Anfechtungen* of the flesh are different than the medieval and Roman Catholic understanding of concupiscence as inordinate and inappropriate sexual desires. “Flesh” for Luther is human existence opposed to the Holy Spirit, a revival of the Pauline-Biblical view. The spirit-flesh dualism is prominent both in the preaching of Jesus and the writings of St. Paul. The spirit, that part of human existence belonging to God, understands itself as sinner justified before God. At the same time the flesh stands in constant opposition to God. The flesh, the human nature estranged from God, cooperates with the devil and the world in opposing God and His will. It hates God, languishes in self-grief, is anxious about its own existence, murmurs with impatience against God, and stirs up the conscience with concerns about the Christian’s own personal acceptability before God.¹⁵

Attractive but false is the view that the *Anfechtungen* of the flesh deal with the physical side of human existence, such as sexual desires or bodily pain. Luther’s anthropology is different from Roman Catholicism’s with its idea that physical or material substance is the cause and abettor of sin. Luther sees struggles of

the flesh as occurring within the soul and as "spiritual" in the sense that the body need not be involved, even though the body may suffer in conjunction with the soul's struggles.¹⁶ Luther suffered headaches and woke up in drenching sweats, but he also suffered from the *Anfechtungen* even when there were no physical maladies. The world was another source of the *Anfechtungen* for Luther.¹⁷

B. *Anfechtungen through the World*

Luther used the term "world" to describe the creation in its estrangement from God. In its fallen state the world appears as self-existent, independent of God for its creation, and at all points tempts the Christian. Man sees himself controlled by misfortune and fate. Human destiny is manipulated by unidentifiable forces and in this process God appears absent. Man's existence is threatened by the lack of direction. *Anfechtungen* through the world can be brought about by disease and pestilence, by armed military might, or, in short, by any disruption in what is considered the ordinary course of events. Before the unexpected, faith trembles and can be lost, and again Satan can triumph. Without in any way surrendering his two-kingdom concept, in which God works both in church and state, Luther could understand the state as a Satanic world force opposed to faith. This especially was true of the papacy and the Turks, where the world under the guide of religion was opposed to faith.¹⁸ Luther also acknowledged a more direct working of Satan in the *Anfechtungen*.

C. *Anfechtungen as Recognizable Opposition to God*

The temptation to sin directly against God was considered by Luther as part of the *Anfechtungen*. This was especially so of the temptation to disregard God's Word as authoritative in the Christian's life. Eve had put aside God's Word for Satan's lie.¹⁹ Disregard of God's Word leads to work-righteousness, since God's gracious promises have been rejected. The gracious God forgiving sins has been turned into an angry and wrathful God accounting to believers their sins. The Christian is now left to his own devices. The message of free salvation is replaced by the Law's condemnation. The sacraments are defused of their saving power as Zwingli and the left-wing reformers had done in their anti-sacramental attitude; the spiritual power was removed from Baptism so that it would be regarded as merely water. About this idea Luther wrote:

The devil says: The Word commands that you should believe

God. Why then do you put your faith in the water. The water is nothing. It is only a sign. There is no word there, no command, but only water which a cow drinks.²⁰

When Satan's word is believed, all comfort is lost, and again he has achieved his purpose of destroying faith.

D. *Anfechtungen* and the Wrath of God

1. THEIR SIMILAR APPEARANCES

A great problem in Luther's theology is the relationship of the *Anfechtungen* to God's wrath. The same physical distresses come upon both Christians and non-Christians alike and the Christian is tempted to believe from appearances that he, like the unbeliever, is experiencing God's wrath, even if it is only in an historical and temporal sense. The outward afflictions of believers and unbelievers are indistinguishable from one another. The physical appearances suggest to the Christian that God is still angry with him for his sins. With this idea Satan has accomplished his ultimate goal of destroying the efficacy of the atonement for the life of faith.

A direct solution to the Christian confronted with an angry God is provided in Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the preaching of the Gospel. Here the Christian confronts *another* God, the one who through the cross has atoned for all sins. Nevertheless, Satan's force is so strong that he can pervert the Gospel understanding of the Word and sacraments or he can direct the Christian's attention away from these to himself. Man is made to stand alone and is compelled to work out his own salvation. Confrontation with the God of wrath is so horrible because the Christian flees from God, the only source of aid. God becomes so objectionable to the Christian that he resolves his dilemma by himself through a righteousness of works. The *Anfechtung* of work-righteousness is not merely adhering to a false doctrine and thus contradicting a divine revelation, but cutting oneself off from the cross which is the only solution. Without Christ and His cross the Christian is entrapped in his *Anfechtungen* with a God of wrath. Left in this condition he must face eternal destruction and may take his own life.²¹ What really damns is not the failure to articulate the article of salvation, but the personal inability to find in Christ a gracious God and thus receive relief from the *Anfechtungen*.

2. LAW AS PREACHING OF GOD'S WRATH

Wrath as *Anfechtung*, with the understanding that God does not receive the sinner, has for Luther a place in his practice of

theology — in the preaching of the Law and Gospel. Law and Gospel are for Luther a dichotomy but never in the sense that the Law is equal to the Gospel as God's last word. Where Law and Gospel are given an equivalent value in preaching by not resolving the tension in favor of the Gospel, there the fear derived from the Law and the hope springing from the Gospel stand in an unresolved contradiction. Concentration on divine wrath as central to preaching and theology demonstrates Satan's effectiveness against Christ. In this *Anfechtung* God with his condemning Law lurks to the side of the redemption of the cross. Thus Satan removes Christ from the gaze of the believer, and the sinner is faced with the majesty of God without the benefit of the mediator. Now he is left alone before the searing wrath of God and his own personal guilt. Before God's majesty and without Christ, the sinner is left without help.²²

3. A GRACIOUS GOD IN THE ANFECHTUNGEN

The answer to the affliction of the thought that God is treating the believer as an unbeliever and as an enemy by showering down upon him His wrath is Christ, in whom God reveals that He is gracious. Luther provides a precise and hence practical answer for the Christian caught in the affliction of knowing only a God of wrath. The Reformer directs these words to Christians who judge from outward appearances that God is treating them as though they were not His children:

To be sure, public calamities hit saints and prophets, too, but not as happens in the case of the godless and ungrateful — out of wrath and punishment for them, but for their salvation, to test and to try their faith, love and patience, that the godly may learn to bear patiently the hand of God in His government But the godless are plagued to punish and offend them, so that they are hardened and become worse. For they are not improved by the good and are only made worse by the evil.²³

Unless the Christian knows whether the sufferer is a believer or unbeliever, he cannot interpret the tribulation as *Anfechtung* for faith or punishment for unbelief. Luther's real concern is with *Anfechtung*. The affliction in the Christian's life should not be seen as a sign of divine wrath. Such introverted soul-searching is Satanic, as again the soul is directed away from finding salvation in Christ.

4. DIVINE DISCIPLINE, NOT WRATH, IN THE ANFECHTUNGEN

The affliction in the life of the Christian is God's discipline and not His wrath against the Christian's life. Though wrath and

discipline appear the same to men, they are different to God who works in each for different purposes. Luther compares the *Anfechtungen* with a father's discipline of his delinquent son. The father is not seeking vengeance on his son, but wants to carry out his corrective purposes through the discipline. The vineyard is pruned not for the sake of punishment, but in order to make it more productive. The tension does not exist in what God intends by the *Anfechtungen*, but in our perception of calamities as if in all of them God were accomplishing His purposes of wrath. The act appears only to the eyes of unfaith as an act of divine anger. To faith, the *Anfechtungen* as discipline proceed from His love. Here is what Luther says about such a situation:

When God sends us tribulation, Satan suggests: See there God flings you into prison, endangers your life. Surely He hates you. He is angry with you; for if He did not hate you, He would not allow this thing to happen. In this way Satan turns the rod of a Father into the rope of a hangman and the most salutary remedy into the deadliest poison. But he is an incredible master at devising thoughts of this nature. Therefore it is very difficult to differentiate in tribulations between Him who kills and Him who chastises in a friendly way.²⁴

Commenting on Isaiah 27:7, "Have I smitten him with the blow of a smiter, or killed you with the killing of a killer?", Luther clearly distinguishes God's chastening of Israel from punishment. The Reformer provides this paraphrase to show the difference:

I will not smite My Church the way someone is smitten by enemies. I will not allow it to be thus smitten, but I chasten it and chastise it. . . . Let every Christian know, therefore, that his *tribulation is not evil but good* imposed by a good God. It is not as reason and Satan argue: You are poor, cast off, and thoroughly afflicted. God is hard and unmerciful, He has forgotten you. He is your enemy and your adversary.²⁵

Luther specifically says that in the *Anfechtungen* coming upon the Christian God has no wrath. He attributes to God this paraphrase: "I have no wrath!"

The divine discipline in the *Anfechtungen* has the express purpose of making the forgiveness of sins more effective in the Christian's life. Luther makes this point quite clear:

This is the effect of the cross, that every sin and the whole body of sin may be destroyed by believing in the forgiveness, lest we fall either into presumption or into despair, but it

keeps us in the middle way, that we acknowledge our sin and call upon God.²⁶

5. DIVINE JUDGMENT AND THE ANFECHTUNGEN

Even as Satan could bring the Christian into *Anfechtungen* by a confrontation with God's majesty without Christ, he can also do it with Christ. Throughout his life Luther was terrified by Christ the Judge. Seeing Christ as a lawgiver like Moses turned grace into law and the means of grace into poison. Luther in his colorfully descriptive language calls such a Christ the hangman and executioner. Certainly Christ will appear on the Last Day as Judge; however, seeing Him today as Judge and not Redeemer was for Luther a terrible *Anfechtung*.

Seeing Christ as Judge so confuses the Christian that he does not know whether God or Satan is dealing with him. Christ who is Revealer of God appears as the tormentor of the soul. The more terrible God appears as Judge, the more appealing Satan appears as the only rescue of the soul. God appears Satanic and Satan appears more gracious. In this *Anfechtung* God the Redeemer and Satan the tormentor have switched roles. Unless God intervenes, the Christian begins to hate and blaspheme God.²⁷ As hate is the direct opposite of faith, Satan has more than achieved his purpose of destroying faith.²⁸ Christ as Judge is made by Satan to preach only the Law, so that Christians are aware only of their transgression and the subsequent damnation. Against this *Anfechtung*, where Satan is seeking to bring the Christian to the point of hating God, God "has also said, that I will also live. Mercy is greater than sin, and life greater than death."

But right here in this horrible *Anfechtung*, where Satan is seeking to bring the Christian to the point of hating God, God is saving the sinner. The Law, even placed by Satan in the hands of Christ, leaves the Christian in despair with no hope of release. In this *Anfechtung* God presents Christ the Redeemer as the only hope of sinners. Satan's preparation of the Christian for damnation has become God's preparation for salvation. The Christian brought face to face with hell is rescued for the glories of heaven.²⁹

E. Death as Anfechtung

Death with its finality is considered by Luther as being among the worst *Anfechtungen*. Without removing God's authority over death, Satan is the bringer of death and has more ways of bringing it about than a druggist has chemicals. Death shows just how effective Satan has been in corrupting the world with original sin. The living creation has been poisoned by Satan, the lord of death.

As he meets death, man is overcome with fear and trembling. Much preferable would be a quick death, since its suddenness would relieve man of some of its horrors.³⁰

Death as the separation of body and soul does not seem much of a problem either to Luther or some of the heathen. Death without fear would only be a sleep.³¹ Satan changes matters by first proclaiming that death should not be feared. After he has proclaimed his "gospel" of a fearless death by lulling the dying person into complacency, he begins to preach his "Law" so that not even a superabundance of good works can atone for all the sins committed. Digging into the hidden recesses of the soul, he digs up past sins and even makes good works appear as sins. In the *Anfechtung* of his death, the Christian is threatened by judgment, destruction, and hell. Here again the Christian sees God's wrath, views God as the hangman, and sees nothing but thunder and lightning. As Satan has assembled all his power for the moment of death, Luther calls this moment "die schwerste *Anfechtung*," "the most severe *Anfechtung*."³² In the Gospel, however, the Christian is released from death.

F. Predestination as *Anfechtung*

Predestination as an abstract theological truth presented Luther with the *Anfechtung* of wondering whether or not he had been predestined by God for salvation. Theologically predestination seemed at variance with universal grace and the atonement, and personally Luther felt that his own unworthiness made him unfit for God's choice. The *Anfechtung* of the feeling of personal unworthiness could again lead him to despair. Connected here was the problem of explaining how God could have permitted Adam to fall. Such an *Anfechtung* could again destroy faith in God as love. So bothered was Luther with predestination that he wished that he were not a human being, as he could do nothing to change his destiny for heaven or hell.³³ Through such fatalism the Christian could easily be convinced to lead a libertine life. By a permissive life in sin the Christian could succumb to Satan in the *Anfechtung* of predestination.³⁴

G. Life with Constant *Anfechtungen*

Though faith is engendered in the Christian without the *Anfechtungen*, it is plagued with them throughout life, with death being the worst possible moment.³⁵ As soon as one becomes a Christian, Satan plants himself at the doorstep. Until the Christian dies, he is without peace. Abraham believes God's promises and then is commanded to kill his son. He is unsure

whether God or Satan is talking to him. Luther's release from monastic life did not relieve but only increased his *Anfechtungen*. *Anfechtung* belongs to faith almost by definition, since true faith never exists without conflict. Luther is bold enough to say that the greater the Christian's faith the greater the crisis of faith. A faith determined to live without *Anfechtungen* has already come to terms of peace with Satan. The Christian should be the most concerned when the *Anfechtungen* are absent. "No temptations are the worst ones." ("Nulla tentatio — omnis tentatio.")³⁶

Luther warned that days of contentment and laziness were the most dangerous, as Satan could catch the Christian unprepared. When the Christian is content, Satan can destroy his confidence in God. The Reformer was plagued even in the solitude of sleep and would wake drenched in sweat. Even in the moment of prayer, Luther was afflicted with a sense of personal unworthiness. Satan never sleeps and, therefore, the Christian must always be on his guard against the *Anfechtungen*.

IV. General Observations on the *Anfechtungen*

A. *Anfechtungen as Experience*

Anfechtungen deal not so much with a doctrine that is revealed and then believed as with the personal attitude of the Christian who reflects upon divine revelation and his own experiences in life and is tempted to resolve the conflict on the basis of his experiences. This does not mean that for Luther *Anfechtungen* were not part of the Biblical revelation, because obviously they were. The Biblical saints, especially Abraham and St. Paul, and even Christ himself had endured afflictions. But while doctrinal truths are believed in faith, the *Anfechtungen* are personal suffering within the soul.

B. *Anfechtungen and the Fides Historica*

Luther's *Anfechtungen* were not his concerns about the historical character of Christianity. Unknown to him is the Enlightenment problem of distinguishing the report of the happening from the happening itself. He did not struggle intellectually with the proper reflection of *Historie* in *Geschichte*. Some have tried to see in Luther's *Anfechtungen* a forerunner of their own dialecticism in which intellectual certainty about religious matters is not possible. In our century Barth overcame the tension by ignoring the real questions of history and preaching the "faith" of the Bible. Bultmann and Marxsen saw the tension between history and Bible faith as a beneficial "*Anfechtung*."

Luther did not experience that kind of historical or intellectual “*Anfechtung*.” He had and expressed no doubts about the authenticity and the historical character of the Biblical record. Luther’s questions came in the realm of the *fides* as *fiducia* and not the *fides historica*. The *fides historica* was the assumed foundation of Christianity and personal faith. Luther’s *Anfechtungen* were “psychological” in the sense of involving the question of whether or not his soul knew a gracious God in Christ Jesus. They were not intellectual in the sense that Luther doubted whether the Scriptural revelation was authentic. *Anfechtungen* take place not within the realm of the *sola scriptura*, but within the realm of *sola gratia* and, subsequently, *sola fide*.

C. *Anfechtungen* as Religious

Anfechtungen do not happen in the raw secular realm, but within the Christian context. They are religious struggles. Without their religious appearance the *Anfechtungen* would be recognizable, capable of being conquered, and not really *Anfechtungen*. In the *Anfechtungen* Satan is more the organizer than he is the creator. He uses valid religious symbols in his own new combinations to lead the Christian into unbelief.

D. *Anfechtungen* as Description of the Christian Life

Anfechtung is a proper synonym for the life of the Christian lived in faith. It is a bridge that brings the realities of revelation from the Biblical history into the personal life of the Christian. The historical realities of the Bible remain fixed within their own appointed time, but the supernatural realities — atonement for sin, faith conquest over Satan, death, and sin — transcend history and are made alive for the Christian through faith. As the Christian encounters these supernatural realities through faith, he struggles within his faith. The revelations made to the Biblical figures are unrepeatable because they preceded or were contemporaries of the accomplishment of salvation, but the *Anfechtungen* are shared by all who through faith accept the salvation accomplished long ago. As Satan afflicted the Biblical saints in their *Anfechtungen*, so he continues to afflict all those who share their faith in Christ. For as faith provides a positive bond among all believers, so the struggles of the *Anfechtungen* are a definite mark of the Christian and provide a negative bond among all Christians — a bond with each other and with Christ. Luther is so bold as to say Christ himself has already gone through all sufferings now endured by Christians.³⁷

FOOTNOTES

1. Pieper, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 188-189, has a rather extensive quotation from Luther on his concept of *tentatio*. Perhaps this one sentence is characteristic of the entire citation: "For as soon as the Word of God blooms forth through you, the devil will visit you, make a real doctor of you, and by his affliction will teach you to seek and love God's Word" (p. 188).
2. Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, tr. Herbert J.A. Bouman (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), pp. 154-159. Here both the Latin *tentatio* and German *Anfechtung* are used side by side.
3. Edwald M. Plass, *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), I and III.
4. *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Publishing House, 1955-1972), 16, p. 286.
5. Francis Pieper may be representative of any number of theologians who see Luther's *Anfechtungen* during his struggle for salvation through works during his Roman Catholic period as internal and his *Anfechtungen* after his discovery of free grace as external, *op. cit.*, page 189. The evidence indicates that for Luther throughout his life the *Anfechtungen* were internal. He did not seem terrified by political and military efforts against him. Perhaps it is embarrassing to see that Luther throughout his life struggled with himself about his doctrine of justification and its disruption of the church.
6. Paul Buehler, *Die Anfechtungen bei Martin Luther* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1942), p. 7.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
10. *Loc. cit.*
11. Quoted in Buehler, *op. cit.*, p. 18 (English translation by essayist).
12. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-111, 221.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 28. (See note 6.)
17. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
23. Plass, *op. cit.*, I, 26.
24. *Ibid.*, I, 12.
25. *LW* 16, p. 214.

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26. *LW* 16, p. 215.
 27. Buehler, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
 29. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.
 30. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
 31. *Loc. cit.*
 32. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
 33. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.
 34. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
 36. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
 37. *Ibid.*, pp. 128-32.

This essay was delivered at Bethany College, Mankato, Minnesota, in October 1980 and is printed here with the permission of *The Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, a publication of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, an institution of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.