

nothing to the prospering of the fruits of the earth? Among common sayings are these: God has given you beautiful children, though their father has helped to generate them; God restored my health, though the doctor helped along; the king has overcome his enemies, though generals and soldiers have contributed their good share. Nothing can grow, if heaven does not send the rain. Nevertheless, good soil produces good fruits, while bad soil can produce no good fruits. But since human endeavor alone accomplishes nothing without divine help, everything is attributed to divine benefaction. "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless the Lord guard the city, the guards watch in vain" (Psalms 126,1). In the meantime the builders and the guards do not cease in their building and in their vigilance.

Furthermore in Matthew 10,20: "For it is not you who are speaking, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks through you." This passage seems at first sight to annul the freedom of the will. But in fact it wants to free us from distressing anxiety, when premeditating on what to say in behalf of Christ. Otherwise it would be a sin, if preachers were to prepare themselves carefully for their sacred sermons. Not everyone should expect that, because the Spirit once inspired uncouth disciples, he too would be able to preach as if he had been given the gift of tongues. This may have happened once, nonetheless [the recipient] had to conform his will to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and acted together with him. This is obviously the duty of the free will. Or should we assume that God has spoken to us through the mouth of the Apostles, as he did with Balaam through the mouth of a donkey?²

A passage from John could drive us further into the corner: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him" (John 6,44). The word "draw" seems to point to necessity and exclude the free will. But actually it is a nonviolent drawing. It causes a person to want a

² Numbers 22, 23 ff.

thing just as readily as he can refuse it. And as we show a little boy an apple and he comes running; a sheep a willow twig and it follows, so God moves our soul by his grace and we give ourselves willingly.

In the same way is to be understood what John says: "No one comes to the Father but through me" (John 14,6). As the father glorifies the son, and the son the father, so the father draws [us humans] to the son, and the son to the father. Yet we are drawn in such a way that we soon run willingly. Thus we read: "Draw me: we will run after thee" (Canticles 1,3).

In the Pauline letters there are also passages which seem to destroy completely any influence of the free will. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything, as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Corinthians 3,5). One can save the free will in two ways here.

First, several orthodox [Church] Fathers distinguished three steps in human action: (1) thinking, (2) willing and (3) doing. In the first and third steps they attributed no operation to the free will. Grace alone causes our Spirit to think good things; by grace alone is he guided to carry out the thought. But in the middle step, i.e., the willingness, both grace and human will are effective. The main cause is grace, and the secondary one our will. Since the whole is attributed to the one who has executed all things, it is improper of man to claim a good action for himself, since even the fact that he consented and cooperated with divine grace, is God's gift.

Secondly, the preposition "from" points to the origin and source, and therefore Paul distinctly states "of ourselves" as "from ourselves," i.e., "out of ourselves."³ This could also be said by someone who admits man to be able to effect good by natural powers, since he does not possess these of himself either.

For who would deny that all good has its origin in God

³ Erasmus distinguishes in his text *a nobis* from *ex nobis*, Paul using the former, by explaining with the Greek ἀφ' ἐαυτῶν ὡς ἐξ ἐαυτῶν.

as a source? Paul inculcates this, in order to deprive us of our arrogance and overconfidence, as also when he says: "What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received it, why dost thou boast as if thou hast not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4,7). You hear vainglory being restrained in this saying. This is what the servant, too, would hear who accounted to his master for the profit made on usury.⁴ If he attributed to himself his well-invested labors, [the master may ask] what have you received that you did not possess? And nevertheless, the master praises him for his untiring strenuous efforts.

The same song is sung in James 1,17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," and Paul in Ephesians 1,11: "Him who works all things according to the counsel of his will." These words aim at this that we should not arrogate anything to us, but attribute everything to the grace of God who has called us while we turned away from him, has cleansed us through faith, and who has also granted that our will can cooperate with his grace, although the latter by itself would be completely sufficient and in no need of any help coming from the human will.

49) *To Rule and to Effect*

The passage in Philipians 2,13, "For it is God who of his own good pleasure works in you both the will and the performance," does not exclude the free will. If you relate "of his good pleasure" to man, as Ambrose of Milan does, you'll understand that the good will cooperates with the effective grace. Just before (Philipians 2,12) we read: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." One can conclude from this that both God works in us, and that our will and effort strive solicitously with God. Nobody should have to reject this interpretation, because, as stated, immediately preceding is the passage "work out your salvation"—ἐργάζεσθε, which signifies more correctly "to toil," than the word ἐργεῖν, which is attributed to God, God

⁴ Matthew 25, 20 ff.

being ὁ ἐργεῖν, the one who effects and rules. But ἐργεῖν refers to that which effects and impels. But even granted that both ruling and effecting mean the same, this passage teaches us clearly that both God and man work.

What could man effect if our will were the same for God as the clay for the potter? "For it is not you who are speaking, but the spirit of your father who speaks through you" (Matthew 10,20).⁵ This was said to the Apostles. Nevertheless we read in the Acts: "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them" (Acts 4,8). How could the two contradictory statements be reconciled, according to which not man, but the Spirit speaks, and accordingly to which Peter speaks filled with the Holy Spirit, unless the Spirit speaks in the Apostles in such a manner that at one and the same time while speaking obediently to the Spirit it is also true that they do not speak, not in the sense of not acting [i.e., making speech], but in the sense that they are not the first cause of their sermons.

We also read about Stephen: "And they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the spirit who spoke" (Acts 6,10). And yet he himself spoke before the Sanhedrin. Paul says: "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2,20), and nevertheless, according to Paul the just man lives by faith (Romans 1,17). How is it that he does not live, when he is living? Because he ascribes it to the Spirit of God that he is living.

Equally: "Yet not I, but the grace of God within me" (1 Corinthians 15,10). If Paul had done nothing, why did he state before that he has done something? Not only that, he even said: "In fact I have labored more than many of them" (1 Corinthians 15,10). If it is true what he says, why does he correct this, as if he had spoken incorrectly? The correction obviously does not intend that one should think he had done nothing, but he wanted to avoid the appearance of having attributed to his own strength what he had accomplished with the help of divine grace. The

⁵ Cf. Erasmus, Section 48.

correction aimed at the suspicion of insolence and not at the possibility of cooperation in action.

God does not want man to attribute everything to himself, not even when he merits it. "When you have done everything that was commanded you, say 'we are unprofitable servants: we have done what it was our duty to do'" (Luke 17,10). Would he not distinguish himself who keeps all the commandments of God? I do not know whether such a man can be found anywhere. And yet, those who might accomplish this are told to say "we are unworthy servants." Nobody denies their accomplishments; rather are they taught to avoid dangerous arrogance.

Man says one thing, God another. Man says he is a servant, an unworthy one at that. What does God say? "Well done, good servant" (Luke 19,17); "No longer do I call you servants, but friends" (John 15,15). He calls them "brethren" (John 20,17) instead of "servants." And those who call themselves unworthy servants, God calls his sons.⁶ And indeed those who have just called themselves servants God summons: "Come, blessed of my Father" (Matthew 25,34), and they hear of their good deed, of which they themselves knew nothing.

I believe it to be an excellent key to the understanding of Holy Scriptures, if we pay attention to what is meant in each passage. Once one recognizes this, one will find it proper to select from the parables and examples such as are to the point. In the parable of the steward, who about to be relieved of his post, falsifies the notes of his master's debtors, there is much that does not add to the sense of the parable.⁷ Only this can be gathered from it, that everyone should strive to distribute most freely, thereby aiding his neighbor, the gifts he has received from God, before death overtake him.

The same concerns the parable we just mentioned above:

⁶ Romans 9, 26.

⁷ Luke 16, 1-9.

But which of you is there, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, who will say to him on his return from the field, "Come at once and recline at table?" But will he not say to him, "Prepare my supper, and gird thyself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk; and afterwards thou thyself shalt eat and drink?" Does he think that servant for doing what he commanded him? I do not think so.

The sum total of this parable is that one ought simply to obey the commandments of God and do zealously one's duty without claiming any praise for it.

Otherwise the Lord himself dissents from this parable when he gives himself as a servant, while granting his disciples the honor of reclining at table.⁸ He also expresses thanks when he exclaims: "Well done good servants" (Luke 19,17), and "Come blessed" (Matthew 25,34). Thus, he is not saying: "The Lord will judge you unworthy of grace, unprofitable servants, after you have done everything," but rather says: "You say, we are unprofitable servants" (Luke 17,10). Paul who worked more than all the rest calls himself the least among the Apostles and unworthy to be called Apostle.⁹

Similarly: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's leave" (Matthew 10,29). First we must bear in mind what the Lord is discussing. He does not wish to teach the so-called forced necessity of all happenings. His example aims rather at taking from his disciples their fear of men. They should realize that they stand under God's protection, and that no man can harm them without his permission. This he will only do if it furthers them and the gospel. Paul says: "Is it for the oxen that God has care?" (1 Corinthians 9,9). Obviously the subsequent remarks of the Evangelist contain an hyperbole, i.e. an oratorical exaggeration, "As for you, the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10,30). How much

⁸ John 13, 4 ff.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 15, 9.

hair falls daily to the ground; is it also counted? So, what is the purpose of this hyperbole? Obviously that which follows it, "Therefore, do not be afraid" (Matthew 10,21). Just as these modes of expression have the purpose to remove the fear of man and to strengthen his trust in God, without whose providence nothing happens, so the above quotations do not purport to abolish the free will, but to deter us from arrogance which the Lord hates. The best is to attribute everything to the Lord. He is mild and will not only give what is ours, but also that which belongs to him.

How could one state that the prodigal son¹⁰ had squandered his portion of the property, if he never had a part of it in his hands? What he possessed he had received from the father. We too acknowledge that all the gifts of nature are gifts of God. He possessed his portion even at the time his father has still retained it in his hands and indeed possessed it more securely. What does it mean that he demanded his portion and separated himself from his father? Obviously it means that man claims title for himself to the gifts of nature, and does not use them to fulfill God's commandments, but to satisfy his carnal desires. What is the meaning of this hunger? It means an affliction by which God goads on the sinner's disposition to know and to abhor himself, and to undertake the desired return to the father. What signifies the son speaking to himself, planning to confess and to return home? It signifies the will of man turning towards grace, which has stimulated him, and which, as stated, one calls the prevenient one.¹¹ What signifies the father who hastens to meet his son? He signifies the grace of God which furthers our will, so that we can accomplish that which we wish.

This interpretation, even if it were my own invention, would certainly be more probable than that of my opponents who interpret "stretch forth thy hand to which thou

¹⁰ Cf. Luke 15, 11 f.

¹¹ Cf. chapter III, footnote 3 and 11.

wilt" (Ecclesiasticus 15,17) to mean, "the grace of God stretches out your hand at will," only in order to "prove" that the will of man can accomplish nothing.¹² Since my interpretation, however, is handed down from the orthodox Fathers, I do not see why one should despise it. This pertains also to the poor widow placing her two mites, i.e., her entire property, into the treasury.¹³

I ask, what merit can he gain who owes completely to him from whom he received these forces all he is able to do by his natural intelligence and free will? Nevertheless, God credits us precisely with this that we do not turn our hearts away from his grace, and that we concentrate our natural abilities on simple obedience. This proves at least that man can accomplish something, but that nevertheless he ascribes the sum total of all his doings to God, who is the author whence originates man's ability to unite his striving to God's grace. This is what Paul means, when he says: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15,10). He recognizes the author. But when you hear, "His grace has not been fruitless" (ibid.), then you recognize the human will, whose striving cooperates with divine help. The same is indicated when it says: "Not I, but the grace of God with me" (ibid.). For in Greek it is *ἡ σὺν ἐμοί*.

And the Hebrew prophet of wisdom wished that divine wisdom assist him; standing at his side and working with him.¹⁴ She assists as a moderator and helper, like an architect supporting his assistant, ordering what is to be done, showing the correct method. If he commences to do something wrongly, she will recall him, and as soon as he fails, she hastens to his aid. The work is ascribed to the architect, without whose help nothing could have been accomplished. Nevertheless nobody would say, that helpers and apprentices have no share in the work whatsoever. What the architect is for the apprentice, grace is for our will.

¹² Cf. Erasmus, Section 41.

¹³ Mark 12, 41 ff.

¹⁴ Wisdom 9, 10.

Therefore Paul says. "In like manner the Spirit also helps our weakness" (Romans 8,26). One does not call another weak who can do nothing, but one whose strength is insufficient for completing his undertaking. Nor is he called a helper who does everything alone. All Scripture exclaims: help, aid, assistance and support. But who could be designated as helper unless he helped one doing something? The potter does not "help" the clay in the forming of a vessel, nor the carpenter his axe in the making of a bench.

50) *Free Will and Good Works Made Possible through Grace*

We oppose those who conclude like this: "Man is unable to accomplish anything unless God's grace helps him. Therefore there are no good works of man." We propose the rather more acceptable conclusion: Man is able to accomplish all things, if God's grace aids him. Therefore it is possible that all works of man be good.

As many passages as there are in Holy Scripture mentioning [God's] help, as many are there establishing the freedom of the will. These passages are innumerable. I would have won already, if it depended on the mere number of proofs.

VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

51) *Need for a Moderate Opinion*

Up to now we have been compiling scriptural passages establishing the freedom of the will, while conversely others seem to cancel it out completely. Since the Holy Spirit, who inspired both, can not contradict himself, we are forced, whether we like it or not, to seek a more moderate opinion.

When one has arrived at this view, others at that view, both reading the same Scripture, it is due to the fact that each looked for something else and interpreted that which he read for his own purpose. Whoever pondered the great religious indifference of man and the great danger of despairing of salvation, has, while trying to avert this calamity, succumbed unsuspectingly to another danger, and has ascribed too much to the free will. The others instead—who considered how enormously dangerous for true piety the trust of man in his own prowess and merits can be, and how unbearable the arrogance of certain persons is who boast of their good works and sell them to others according to measurement and weight like selling oil and soap—having very studiously avoided this danger, have either diminished the freedom of the will so that it could contribute absolutely nothing to good works, or they have eliminated it all together by introducing an absolute necessity in all happenings.

52) *Some Reformers' Views Justified*

Evidently these people considered it quite apt for the simple obedience of a Christian that man depend completely on the will of God when he places his entire trust and all his hopes in his promises; when he, conscious of his own wretchedness, admires and loves his immense mercy which he gives us plentifully without charge; when he, furthermore, subjects himself completely to his will, no matter whether he wants to save or destroy him; when he accepts no praise whatsoever for his good works, and rather ascribes all glory to His grace, thinking that man is nothing else but a living tool of the divine Spirit, which the latter has cleansed and sanctified for himself through his undeserved goodness, and which he guides and governs according to his inscrutable wisdom; furthermore, when there exists nothing anybody could claim as his own accomplishment, and when he hopes for eternal life as reward for steadfast faith in God, not because he had earned it by his own good works, but because the goodness of God was pleased to promise that reward to those who have trust in him; whereby, consequently, man has the duty to beg God assiduously for imparting and augmenting his Spirit in us, to thank him for every success and to adore in all cases God's omnipotence, to admire everywhere his wisdom, and to love everywhere his goodness.

These utterances are also very praiseworthy to me, because they agree with Holy Scripture. They conform to the creed of those who died once and for all to this world, through their baptism have been buried with Christ, and after the mortification of the flesh live henceforth with the Spirit of Jesus, into whose body they have been ingrafted, through faith.¹ This is incontestably a pious and captivating conception, which takes from us every conceit, which transfers all glory and confidence to Christ, which expels from us the fear of men and demons, and which, though making

¹ Meant is the Mystical Body of Christ, Cf. Romans 6, 4.

us distrustful of our human potentialities, makes us nonetheless strong and courageous in God. This we applaud freely, up to the point of exaggeration [which we want to avoid].

53) *Errors and Injustice in the Reformers*

But the rational soul in me has many doubts when I hear the following: there is no merit in man; all his works, even the pious ones, are sin; our will can do no more than the clay in the potter's hand; everything we do or want to do is reduced to unconditional necessity.

First, why do you read so often that the saints, rich in good work, have acted with justice, have walked upright in the sight of God, never deviating to the right or to the left, if everything is sin, even what the most pious does — [in fact] such a sin that one for whom Christ has died would nonetheless be condemned to inferno, were it not for God's mercy?

Secondly, why does one so often hear of reward, if there is no merit it all? How would disobedience of those following God's commandments be praised, and disobedience be damned? Why does Holy Scripture so frequently mention judgment, if merit cannot be weighed at all? Or why must we stand before the seat of judgment if nothing has happened according to our will, but everything according to mere necessity? It is disturbing to think of all the many admonitions, commandments, threats, exhortations and complaints, if we can do nothing, but God's unchangeable will causes the willing as well as the carrying out in us. He wants us to pray perseveringly. He wants us to watch, to fight and to struggle for the reward of eternal life. Why does he continuously want to be asked, when he has already decided whether to give us or not to give us, and when he himself, unchangeable, is unable to change his resolutions? Why does he command us to strive laboriously for what he has decided to give freely? God's grace fights and triumphs in us when we are afflicted, ejected, derided,

tortured and killed. Such atrocities the martyrs suffered. Nonetheless [such a martyr] is to have no merit. Indeed, it is called a sin, if he submits his body to tortures, in the hope of heavenly life. But why would an exceedingly merciful God wish to be thus engaged with his martyrs? Cruel would appear a man if he did not give, unless having tortured to despair, that which he had [already] decided to bestow freely upon his friend.

Perhaps, as soon as one confronts this obscurity in the divine decision, one ought to adore that which we are not supposed to comprehend, so that man says, "he is the Lord, he can do everything he wishes, and since he is by nature good, everything he wills can only be very good." It is still plausible enough to say that God crowns his gifts in us; he permits his benefits to be our advantage; he deigns with undeserved goodness to attribute to us what he has caused in us, well deserved, as it were, if we trust in him, and in order to obtain immortality. But I don't know how those can be consistent who exaggerate God's mercy towards the pious in such a way as to permit him to be almost cruel against the others.

A goodness which imputes to us its excellence might possibly be tolerable to a pious soul. But it is difficult to explain how it is compatible with justice (not to speak with mercy), to condemn the others, in whom God did not deign to cause good, to eternal tortures, although on their own they could not possibly effect any good, since they either possessed no free will, or only one good for sinning.

54) *Two Illustrative Stories*

If a king were to give enormous booty to one who had done nothing in a war, and to those who had done the fighting barely just their salary, he could respond to the murmuring soldiers: am I injuring you by giving the others freely and gratuitously? But really, how could one consider him just and gentle, if he crowned magnificently for his victory a general whom he had furnished with machines,

troops, money and all supplies aplenty for war, while another, whom he had thrown into war without armaments, he ordered put to death on account of the war's unhappy ending? Before dying, could he not say with justice to the king: why do you punish me for what happened through your fault? If you had equipped me similarly, I would have won too.

Again, if a lord emancipates an undeserving servant, he can answer the remaining grumbling servants: You lose nothing if I am kind to this one; you still have your measure. Everybody would judge the lord cruel and unjust though, were he to have his servant flogged for his stature, or protruding nose, or some other lack of elegance. Would he not be justified in complaining against the lord who had him flogged: why should I suffer punishment for something that is not in my power to change? And he would be quite justified in saying this if it were in the lord's power to change the defects of the servant's body, just as it is in the hand of God to change our will. Or if the lord had given the servant that which now offends him, like cutting off his nose, or hideously deforming his face with scars, just as God, according to the opinion of some, has worked all evil in us. Or take the example of a lord giving orders to do a great deal to a servant lying in chains, "go here, do that, run, come back," and threatens him greatly if he were not to obey. But [the lord] did not set [the servant] loose, rather he flogged the disobedient fellow. Would not the servant justly consider the lord insane and cruel, if he had him flogged to death because he had not done that which was not in his power?

55) *Reservations Concerning Justification by Faith*

[Let us continue:] In this affair they greatly exalt faith and love of God. We hold these equally dear. We are convinced that the life of Christians is so contaminated with wickedness, stemming from nothing else but from the coldness and drowsiness of our faith which is a superficial

belief in words, while, according to Paul, he is justified who within his heart believes. I do not especially want to quarrel with those who attribute everything to faith as the fountainhead, although it seems to me that faith and love, and love and faith come about and nurture each other mutually. Certainly faith is nurtured by love, as the flame in a lamp is nurtured by the oil. For we have greater faith in him whom we love dearly. There is no scarcity of voices who, more correctly, take faith as the beginning of salvation and not its sum total. But we don't want to argue about that.

56) *Exaggerating and Underrating*

But care should be taken not to deny the freedom of the will, while praising faith. For if this happens, there is no telling how the problem of divine justice and mercy could be solved.

The ancients could not explain such difficulties. Some felt compelled to assume two gods: one for the Old Testament, who was able to be only just, but not simultaneously merciful, and one for the New Testament, who could only be merciful, but not just. This godless idea Tertullian has sufficiently refuted.² Mani, as already mentioned,³ fancied two natures in man, one which is incapable of not sinning, and one incapable of not doing good. Pelagius, who was concerned about God's justice, attributed more to free will than to necessity. Not too distant from this position are the [Scotists] who ascribe to human will at least the ability to earn with natural powers through ethically good works that highest grace, by which we are justified. They seem to me to be inviting man to strive by affirming good hope in obtaining salvation. Also Cornelius by giving alms and by praying⁴ has merited being instructed by Peter, like Philip

² Found in Tertullian's largest extant work, *Adversus Marcionem* (c. 207). Cf. chapter II, footnote 1.

³ Cf. chapter II, footnote 2.

⁴ Acts 10, 4 f.

instructed the [Ethiopian] eunuch.⁵ When Augustine searched zealously for Christ in the Epistles of Paul, he deserved finding him. Here we could state, in order to assuage those who permit man no possibility for any good unless indebted to God, that we owe our entire life work to God, without whom we could accomplish nothing; furthermore, that the free will contributes very little to an effect; finally, that it is also a work of divine grace that we can turn our heart to the things of salvation and cooperate with grace. Augustine gained a more unfavorable view of the free will, because of his fight with Pelagius than he had held before. Luther, on the other hand, who at first attributed something to the free will, has come to deny it completely in the heat of his defense. Thus Lycurgus was criticized by the Greeks because in his hatred of drunkenness he ordered the vines cut down,⁶ whereas by adding a little more water to the wine drunkenness would have been avoided without losing the use of wine.

57) *Human Nature and Salvation*

In my opinion the free will could have been so defined as to avoid overconfidence in our merits and the other disadvantages which Luther shuns, as well as to avoid such as we recited above, and still not lose the advantages which Luther admires. This, it seems to me, is accomplished by those who attribute everything to the pulling by grace which is the first to excite our spirit, and attribute only something to human will in its effort to continue and not withdraw from divine grace. But since all things have three parts, a beginning, a continuation and an end, grace is attributed to the two extremities, and only in continuation does the free will effect something. Two causes meet in this same work, the grace of God and the human will, grace

⁵ Acts 8, 26 ff.

⁶ Lycurgus (9th century B.C.), Spartan lawgiver. Seems a confusion with Domitian. See Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, Domitian, VII, 2.

being the principal cause and will a secondary, since it is impotent without the principal cause, while the latter has sufficient strength by itself. Thus, while the fire burns through its natural strength, the principal cause is still God, who acts through the fire. God alone would indeed suffice, and without Him fire could not burn. Due to this combination, man must ascribe his total salvation to divine grace, since it is very little that the free will can effect, and even that comes from divine grace which has at first created free will and then redeemed and healed it. Thus are placated, if they can be placated, those who will not tolerate that man has some good which he does not owe to God. He owes this also to God, but in another way and under another title. Just as an inheritance coming in equal share to the children, is not called a benevolence, because it belongs by common law to all. If beyond this common right a donation is made to this or that child, it is called liberality. But children owe gratitude to their parents also under the title of their inheritance.

I will try to express in parables what we have been saying. Even the healthy eye of a man does not see in the darkness, and when it is blinded, it does not see anything in light either. Thus the will can do nothing, though free, if withdrawing from grace. But the one with good eyes can close his eyes before the light and see nothing. He can also turn his eyes away. They will not see what he could have seen. The one with blind eyes owes his gratitude in the first place to God, and only then to the doctor. Before sinning our eyes were healthy. Sin has ruined them. Who- ever sees, what can he pride himself in? He can impute to himself his cautious closing and turning away of the eyes.

Listen to another parable. A father raises his child, which is yet unable to walk, which has fallen and which exerts himself, and shows him an apple, placed in front of him. The boy likes to go and get it, but due to his weak bones would soon have fallen again, if the father had not supported him by his hand and guided his steps. Thus the child comes, led by the father, to the apple which the

father places willingly into his hand, like a reward for his walking. The child could not have raised itself without the father's help; would not have seen the apple without the father's showing; would not have stepped forward without the father's helping his weak little steps; would not have reached the apple without the father's placing it into his hand. What can the child claim for himself? Yet, he did do something, but he must not glory in his own strength, since he owes everything to the father.

Let us assume it is the same with God. What does the child do? As the boy is being helped up, he makes an effort and tries to accommodate his weak steps to the father's guidance. The father could have pulled him against his will. A childish whim could have refused the apple. The father could have given the apple without his running, but he would rather give it in this manner, because it is better for the boy. I readily admit that our striving contributes less to the gaining of eternal life, than the boy's running at the hand of his father.

58) *Criticism of Carlstadt: Grace and Freedom like Soul and Body*

Here we saw how little is attributed to the freedom of the will. Nevertheless to some it still seems too much. They want only grace to act in us, and want our will only to suffer [passively], like a tool of the Divine Spirit, so that the good can, under no circumstances, be called ours, unless divine goodness imputes it to us freely. Grace is effective in us not through the free will, but within free will, just as [they say] the causality of the potter is within the clay and not through it.

Whence comes then the mention of the crown and the reward? It is said that God crowns his gifts in us, and orders that his favor be our reward. Whatever he has effected in us, he gives, in order to make us worthy of partnership in his celestial kingdom. Here I don't see how they define a free will which effects nothing. For, if they said

that moved by grace it acts simultaneously, it would be easier to explain. Just as according to the natural philosophers our body obtains its first movements from the soul, without which it could not move at all, yet it not only does move, but also moves other things, and just as a partner of work participates also in its honor. If God so works in us as the potter on the clay, what good or evil could be imputed to us? For, we must not bring into this discussion the soul of Jesus Christ, who too was a tool of the Divine Spirit. And if the weakness of the body stands in the way of man meriting anything, so [Christ] before his death was terrified: he wished that not his will, but that of the Father be done.⁷ And nonetheless they acknowledge this [will] to be the fountain of merit, though depriving all other saints of all the merit of their good works.

59) *Addressed to Luther*

Those who deny any freedom of the will and affirm absolute necessity, admit that God works in man not only the good works, but also evil ones. It seems to follow that inasmuch as man can never be the author of good works, he can also never be called the author of evil ones. This opinion seems obviously to attribute cruelty and injustice to God, something religious ears abhor vehemently. (He would no longer be God if anything vicious and imperfect were met in him). Nonetheless those holding such an implausible view have an answer: He is God; He is able to do only the best and most beautiful. If you observe the fittingness of the universe, even what is evil in itself, is good in it and illustrates the glory of God. No creature can adjudge the Creator's intentions. Man must subject himself completely to them. In fact, if it pleases God to damn this or that one, nobody must grumble, but accept what pleases him, and be convinced that he does everything for the best. What would come of it if man were to ask God why he did not make him an angel? Wouldn't God answer

⁷ Matthew 26, 39.

rightly: you impudent one! If I had made you a frog, could you then complain? The same, if the frog disputes with God: why have you not made me a peacock, conspicuous for its multicolored feathers? Would not God be justified in saying: ungrateful one! I could have made you a fungus or a bulb, but now you jump, drink and sing. Again, if a basilisk or snake were to say: why have you made me a deadly animal hated by all, and not a sheep? What would God answer? Doubtlessly he would say: I like it this way. It suits the decoration and order of the universe. You have suffered as little injury as all the flies, gnats and other insects. Each I have fashioned to appear as a miracle for him who contemplates it. And a spider, is she not a beautiful animal, even if different from the elephant? Truly, there is a greater miracle in the spider than in the elephant. Are you not satisfied in being a perfect animal in your kind? Poison was not given to you to kill others with, but to protect yourself and your little ones. Just as oxen have horns, lions have claws, wolves teeth, horses hoofs. Every animal has its utility. The horse bears burdens, the ox plows, the donkey and dog help at work, the sheep serves man for food and clothing, and you are needed for making medicine.

60) *Further Exaggeration and Difficulties*

But let us cease reasoning with those devoid of reason. We began our disputation with man, created in the image and likeness of God, and for whose pleasure He created all things. We note that some are born with healthy bodies and good minds, as though born for virtue, again others with monstrous bodies and horrible sickness, others so stupid that they almost have fallen to the level of brute animals, some even more brutish than the brutes, others so disposed toward disgraceful passions, that it seems a strong fate is compelling them, others insane and possessed by the devils. How will we explain the question of God's justice and mercy in such cases? Shall we say with Paul: "O the

depth . . ." (Romans 11,33)? I think this would be better than to judge with impious rashness God's decisions, which man cannot explore. And truly, it is even more difficult to explain how God crowns his favors in some with immortal life, and punishes his misdeeds in others with eternal suffering. In order to defend such a paradox they resort to other paradoxes and to maintain the battle against their adversary. They immensely exaggerate original sin which supposedly has corrupted even the most excellent faculties of human nature, makes man incapable of anything, save only ignoring and hating God, and not even after grace and justification by faith can he effect any work which wouldn't be sin. They make that inclination to sin in us, remaining after the sin of our first parents, an invincible sin in itself, so that not one divine precept exists which even a man justified by faith could possibly keep. All the commandments of God have supposed no other purpose than to amplify the grace of God, which, irrespective of merit, grants salvation.

However, they seem to me to minimize God's mercy in one place, in order to enlarge it elsewhere, in the same manner, as one placing parsimoniously before his guests a very small breakfast, in order to make dinner appear more splendidly; or just as imitating a painter who darkens that [part of a canvas] which will be closest to the spot he wishes to be emitting the light in the picture.

At first they make God almost cruel, who, because of somebody else's sin, rages against all mankind, cruel especially since those who sinned have done penance and were punished severely as long as they lived. Secondly, when they say that even those justified by faith can do nothing but sin, so that loving and trusting God we deserve God's hatred and disfavor: doesn't this diminish divine grace that man justified by faith can still do nothing else but sin? Moreover, while God has burdened man with so many commandments which have no effect other than to make him hate God more and make his damnation more severe, does this not make God a harsher tyrant than even Dio-

nysius of Sicily, who zealously issued many laws which, as he suspected, would not be observed by the multitude, unless strictly enforced? At first he closed his eyes to this, but soon, seeing that almost everybody transgressed in some way, began to call them to account, rendering them all punishable. And yet, God's laws were such that they could have easily been observed if only men had wanted to do so.

I do not want to investigate now, why they teach it to be impossible for us to keep all of God's commandments, for that is not our purpose here. We wish to show how they, by eagerly enlarging grace on account of salvation, have actually obscured it in others. I do not see how such [views] can endure. They liquidate the freedom of the will and teach that man is driven by the Spirit of Christ whose nature cannot bear fellowship with sin. At the same time, they say man does nothing but sin after having received grace.

Luther seems to enjoy such exaggerations. He pushes other people's exaggerations even further, driving out bad knots with worse wedges, as the saying goes. Some had daringly advanced another exaggeration, selling not only their own, but also the merits of all the saints. What kind of works [is meant]: songs, chanting the psalms, [eating of] fishes, fasting, dressing [simply], titles? Thus Luther drove one nail through with another, when he said the saints had no merits whatsoever, and that the works of even the most pious men were sin and would adduce eternal damnation if faith and divine mercy had not come to the rescue. The other side was making a considerable profit with confession and reparation. Human conscience was thereby exceedingly entangled. Likewise, all kinds of strange things were related concerning purgatory. The opponents [i.e. Luther] correct these mistakes by saying confession is the Devil's invention, and should not be required, and they think no satisfaction is necessary for sin, because Christ has atoned for the sin of all; and think there is no purgatory. One side goes so far as to say that the orders of any prior of a monastery are binding under pain of hell, while they have no scruples

in promising eternal life to those who obey them. The opponents answer this exaggeration by saying that all the orders of popes, councils and bishops are heretical and anti-Christian. The one side exalts papal power in an exaggerated way, the other side speaks of the pope such that I do not dare to repeat it. Again, one side says the vows of monks and priests fetter man forever under punishment of hell, the others say such vows are godless and not to be made, and once made, to be broken.

61) *Differences between Exhortation and Doctrine*

The whole world is now shaken by the thunder and lightning born of the collision of such exaggerations. If both sides hold fast to their exaggeration, I foresee such a battle as between Achilles and Hector: since both were headstrong, only death could separate them. True, there is the popular saying, if you want to straighten a curved stick, bend it in the opposite direction. But this applies to the correction of morals. I do not know whether to employ it in matters of dogma.

In the case of exhortations and dissuasion I see sometimes a place for an exaggeration. If one wishes to encourage the timid man, one would be right in exhorting: "Don't fear, God will speak and do everything in you." And in order to dampen a man's godless insolence, you might profitably say, man can do nothing but sin; and to those who demand that their dogmas be thought equal to the canonical books say that all men are liars.

When in the investigation of truth, however, axioms are propounded, I believe one must not use paradoxes, because they are so similar to riddles. I like moderation best. Pelagius attributes much too much to the free will; Scotus attributes quite a bit. But Luther mutilates it at first by amputating its right arm. And not content with this, he has killed the freedom of the will and has removed it all together.

I like the sentiments of those who attribute a little to the

freedom of the will, the most, however, to grace. One must not avoid the Scylla of arrogance by going into the Charybdis of desperation and indolence. In resetting a disjunct limb, one must not dislocate it in the opposite direction, but put it back in its place. One must not fight with an enemy in such a manner that turning the face, you are caught off guard.

According to this moderation man can do a good, albeit imperfect work; man should not boast about it; there will be some merit, but man owes it completely to God. The life of us mortals abounds in many infirmities, imperfections and vices. Whoever wishes to contemplate himself, will easily lower his head.⁸ But we do not assume that even a justified man is capable of nothing but sin, especially because Christ speaks of rebirth and Paul of a new creature.

* Why, you ask, is anything attributed to the freedom of the will, then? It is in order to justify blaming the godless ones who resist spitefully the grace of God; to prevent calumnies attributing cruelty and injustice to God; to prevent despair in us; to prevent a false sense of security; to stimulate our efforts. For these reasons the freedom of the will is asserted by all. Yet it is, however, ineffectual without the continuous grace of God, in order not to arrogate anything to ourselves. Someone says, what's the good of the freedom of the will, if it does not effect anything? I answer, what's the good of the entire man, if God treats him like the potter his clay, or as he can deal with a pebble?

62) *Final Conclusions*

Hence, if it has sufficiently been demonstrated, this matter is as follows: It does not promote piety to investigate this any further than must be, especially before those who are unlearned. We have proven that our opinion is more evident in scriptural testimony than the opinion of the opponents. It is a fact that Holy Scripture is in most instances either obscure and figurative, or seems, at first

⁸ "Crista" means comb of a rooster.

sight, to contradict itself. Therefore, whether we like it or not, we sometimes had to recede from the literal meaning, and had to adjust its meaning to an interpretation. Finally, it has been plainly shown how many unreasonable, not to say absurd things follow, if we eliminate the freedom of the will. It has been made plain that the opinion, as I have been elucidating it, when accepted, does not eliminate the pious and Christian things Luther argues for—concerning the highest love of God; the rejection of exclusive faith in merits, works and our strength; the complete trust in God according to his promises. Hence, I want the reader to consider whether he thinks it is fair to condemn the opinion offered by the Church Fathers, approved for so many centuries by so many people, and to accept some paradoxes which are at present disturbing the Christian world. If the latter are true, I admit freely to my mental sloth and inability to grasp. I know for certain that I am not resisting the truth, that I love from the bottom of my heart true evangelical liberty, and that I detest everything adverse to the Gospels. Thus I am here not as a judge, as I said at the outset, but as a disputer. Nevertheless, I can truly affirm that I have served religiously in this debate, as was demanded once upon a time of judges trying matters of life and death. Though I am an old man, I'm neither ashamed nor irked to be taught by a younger if he teaches with evangelical gentleness more evident truths.

Here some will say: Erasmus should learn about Christ and disregard human prudence. This nobody understands, unless he has the Spirit of God.

Now, if I do not yet understand what Christ is, certainly we must have gone far astray from our topic and goal, though I should love nothing more than to learn which Spirit so many doctors and Christian people possessed—because it seems probable that the people believed that their bishops have already taught for thirteen centuries—who did not understand this.

I have come to the end. It is for others to judge.