

The Doctrine of Election and of the Believers' Certainty of Salvation

Under this title, we find in the *Evangelisk luthersk kirketidende* [Evangelical Lutheran Church times] (Decorah, Iowa) from 8 June this year a set of theses which demand our special interest for this reason, because the representatives of the Norwegian Synod, who are in confessional agreement with us, show in them how far they think they are able to go in order to bring about the unification of the splintered Norwegian Church. It is certainly known to all of our readers that the *Synode for den norsk-evang.-lutherske Kirke i Amerika* (Norwegian Synod) has already cultivated negotiations for quite some time with the *Forenede Kirke (Ohio'sche Partei)* [a United Church]¹ and the Haugean Synod who tend to manufacture a unity of teaching in this regard. The attempts have remained unsuccessful to this point despite sincere endeavors on part of our brothers in the faith because they would not offer their hand to a suspect union.

From 10-13 November 1908, there was a discussion at which each of the three entities named above was represented through a committee. The orthodox Norwegians presented the following theses on this occasion:

“1. The doctrine of election belongs/pertains to the most difficult teachings in Scripture, “solid food;” it is not a chief doctrine in the Word of God, for a person can be a believing Christian and be saved if he has not arrived at the recognition or appropriation of it, if he only clings to what Scripture says of sin and grace. 1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12-14; 2 Pet. 3:15-16.

“2. Holy Scripture teaches an eternal election or predestination to salvation, but no election or predestination to damnation. Matt. 20:16; 22:14; Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 1:26-29; Eph. 1:3-5; 2 Thes. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; Jas. 2:5; (also chapters 9-11 of Romans can be stated along with these).

“3. Holy Scripture teaches that those who will be saved are chosen, and merely that the chosen will be saved. Matt. 24:22, 24, 31; 20:16; 22:14.

“4. Scripture teaches that the cause of election is the mercy of God and the merit of Christ, but nothing in us. Eph. 1:4-5; Tit. 3:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10.

“5. Holy Scripture teaches that only those, who remain in the faith until the very end, are chosen and will be saved. However, even though persistent faith is foreseen by God, as is everything else, then because it is absolutely a gift and work of God, it can not be considered as something on our part which had induced God to make his decision of election. Rev. 2:10; Matt. 10:22; Acts 15:18; Eph. 2:8-10.

“6. According to the rule by which God saves people in time, according to the same rule he has decided to save them. Jas. 1:17-18.

“7. According to the Word of God, there is no contradiction between the general gracious will of God and eternal election even though we can not put these things together according to our own understanding. Therefore, election may not be separated from the general grace on which it has its foundation, not to mention be placed in contradiction to it. It is one and the same powerful, gracious will by which the elect are converted and saved and towards those who hard themselves, who will be condemned. Eph. 1:3ff.; Mt. 22:1ff.; Rom. 8:28-30.

“8. Scripture simply stands on this: If a person is not chosen or not saved, one may seek the cause for this not in some predetermination of God or in some deficiency in his gracious call, but exclusively in the resistance of people from now until the end of time against that earnest, common, gracious call of God; if a man is elected and saved, then it is exclusively due to the free grace of God in Christ. Hos. 13:9; Matt. 23:37; Rom. 11:33-36; Eph. 2:4ff.

¹ <http://www.plu.edu/~archives/sie/oral/interviews/t017.html>

“9. One should not want to explore this choice in God’s secret counsel, but to seek it in his Word where it is revealed. However, the Word of God leads us to Christ, who is the Book of Life, in which all those who are saved have been written and chosen as it stand written, “he chose us in him before the creation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). Formula of Concord, Epitome Article 11: 6-7.

“10. According to the definition of election, which the Formula of Concord gives on the basis of Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:3ff; Matt. 22:1ff; election is not merely that action of God that he has determined those who remain persistent in faith to be lead into heaven, but it is that action of the gracious and merciful will of God that he has preconceived and determined from eternity for the sake of Christ every single one of the people who will be saved, to save those who will be saved through conversion to Christ and preservation of faith in him, in other words, through the common order of grace, which avails before all, and in which he will earnestly lead all people alike.

“The dogmaticians of the 17th Century use *the other form of teaching about election*, which restricts election to that action of God that he had decreed all those for eternal life of whom he had foreknown that they will remain in faith until the very end. However, it can nevertheless maintain the unity of faith, if one understands it in this way, as John Gerhard has set it forth with the following words, ‘The merit of Christ is the cause of our election; however the merit of Christ is no use without faith, therefore we say, that *intuitu fidei* is a component of the decision of election. We confess with a loud voice that we teach that God has found nothing good in man which should be elected to eternal life, he has seen neither good works nor the use of free will; indeed what is more he has not even seen faith itself in this way that through it he would be moved or for the sake of it had elected some; we say rather that it is the merit of Christ alone whose worthiness God considered and that he has made the decree of election from pure grace. However, the merit of Christ is only found in men through faith, therefore we teach that election has taken place with regard to the merit of Christ *which should have been grasped through faith*. We therefore say that all those and only those are elected by God in eternity for salvation of whom he has seen beforehand that they would come to a true faith in Christ, their Redeemer, by means of the efficacy of the Holy Spirit through the ministration of the Gospel and would persistly remain in faith to the end.’”²

Of these theses, there were three meetings of the larger committees which each lasted for four days where the first six came up for discussion. While they temporarily put aside the first, they discussed Theses 2-6 without being able to come to an agreement. Thereupon the following theses were put together and presented to a subcommittee but were not discussed further. They do not essentially distinguish themselves from the foregoing theses. The word order and sentence structure have changed. There is also a confession concerning the love of God, the plan of salvation, and the accomplishment of salvation. A thesis concerning the certainty of salvation or election is also included. In this presentation, the theses now ran as follows:

“The testimony of God’s universal love, of his love toward the entire fallen race of men, runs throughout Holy Scripture as a red thread. Gen. 3:15; Ezk. 33:11, 18:23; 1 Tim. 2:4; 1 Pet. 3:9.

“By virtue of this love of his, God decided in his wisdom from eternity to send his Son to earth so that he would redeem it and reconcile it with God through this redemption. John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 John 2:2.

“The Holy Scripture further teaches that God has decided for the sake of Christ’s reconciliation to send his Spirit into the world in order to bring to mankind the message of his

² Gerhard, Loc. de Electione [Par.] 161.

reconciliation with them through the means of grace, with the assurance that he would be effective through it for all salvation and blessing. John 16:7; 2 Cor. 5:19; Matt. 28:19f.; Mark 16:15, 20.

“The Holy Scripture further teaches that God has decided that only those who believe should be saved and that therefore he has determined an appointed order, the order of salvation, outside of which no one can be saved according to his revealed Word, and in which those who should be saved must be found and it is only as an effect of the working of the Holy Spirit without force. Matt. 16:16; John 3:16; Eph. 2:4f.; Ezk. 18:31, 36:26-27.

“1. Holy Scripture teaches an eternal election or predetermination to salvation, but no election or predetermination to damnation. Matt. 20:16; 22:14; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:4f.; 2 Thes. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:1f.; Jas. 2:5.

“2. According to Rom. 8:28f.; Eph. 1:4f.; and Matt. 22:1; the Lutheran Confession designates election not merely as that action of God that he has decided in general not with coercion but according to his Word and his way those who remain constant in faith entirely to the end to lead into heaven, but as that action of his gracious and merciful will that he has thought and decided from eternity for the sake of Christ each individual person who will be saved, without coercion through conversion to Christ and through keeping him in the faith, in other words: through the general order of salvation, which avails before God and through which he will lead all men with similar earnestness to lead each individual of those who will be saved. (The so-called first doctrinal principle of election) Formula of Concord, Article XI p. 485; Rom. 8:28f.; Eph. 1:4f.; Matt. 22:1f.; 2 Thes. 2:13.

“3. Holy Scripture teaches that those who will be saved are chosen, and merely that the chosen will be saved. Matt. 20:16, 22:14, 24:22, 24, 31; Rom. 8:28f..

“4. Scripture teaches that the cause of election, that is, that which has moved God to make the decision of election is the mercy of God and the merit of Christ, but nothing in us. Eph. 1:4f.; Tit. 3:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10.

5. The Holy Scriptures teach that only those who remain constantly [beständig] in the faith until the end will be saved, and that God, as an all-knowing God, has foreknown them as such. However, the faith foreknown by God, which is exclusively his own gift and work, may not be viewed as something on our side, by which God would have been moved to determine [fassen] the election call [Wahlbeschluss]. As Paul and later the Confessions teach, faith is assumed in the election call [Wahlbeschluss]. Offb. 2:10; Mt. 10:22; Apgsch. 15:18; Eph. 2:8-10; 2 Thess. 2:13.

6. According to the same rule by which God in time rescues men, he has determined those to rescue. James 1:17ff; Mark 16:16; John 3:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

7. Between the general gracious will of God and the election there in no way exists a contradiction according to the Word of God. Therefore, one also may not separate election from the general gracious will of God in which it has its foundation, let alone set election in contradiction to that will. It is one and the same powerful gracious will through which the elect are converted and saved, and against which those who will be damned harden themselves. In the meantime, we cannot make that clear to our understanding, if we also apply ourselves to it according to the Word of God. John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4; 1 Peter 3:9; Ephesians 1:4; Romans 8:29; Matthew 20:16.

8. Accordingly, Scripture does not remain a bare mystery there, which God has reserved for himself like other matters of his guidance, ways, and courses on the whole and in individual cases, but rather in this teaching God wants us to simply remain firm upon that which is unclear to human reason: When a man is not elect and saved, it is not allowable to seek some cause in

any predetermination of God or in some shortcoming in his gracious call, but exclusively in the man who persistently resisted this earnest, gracious call of God until the end; when a man is elect and saved, all credit belongs to the free grace of God in Christ alone. If we place the cause of damnation in something to do with God, we then become Calvinists; if we place the cause of election or salvation entirely or half or even in the smallest part in something to do with the man, we become Pelagians or Semipelagians or Synergists. Hosea 13:9; Romans 11:33-36; Matthew 23:37; Ephesians 2:8-10.

9. One should not find election in the secret counsel of God, but in the Word, where it is revealed. The Word of God, however, leads us to Christ, who is the Bock of Life in which all those who should be saved are listed and noted, as it stands written: He has elected us in Christ, before the foundation of the world was laid. Ephesians 1:4; Formula of Concord 11; Epitome 6.7.

10. The certainty of the believer in regard to his election or salvation is not an absolute certainty, that is, one given *a priori*, a certainty independent from all, but a faith-certainty, an orderly certainty, that is a certainty tied to the gracious word and the gracious standing, a certainty effected there, since the believers cannot be cast under fear and jitters and chance, held steady in the power of the divine promise concerning election in faith and by the eternal life attached to it, that he will one day stand at his Savior's right hand and live eternal life with him. A Christian can and should have such a certainty concerning his election and salvation. John 14:1-3; Romans 8:31-39; Philippians 1:6, 3:20ff; 1 Thessalonians 5:23ff; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Peter 1:3-0; 1 John 3:2ff. Hebrews 6:18ff; Job 19:25-37; Philippians 2:12; Romans 11:20-22; 1 Corinthians 9:27; Hebrews 11:1; Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 1:8ff.

11. The dogmaticians of the 17th century employed the so-called double way of teaching [*Lehrform*] concerning the gracious call [election], which limited that dealing of God, that he has determined all those for eternal life, concerning which he has foreknown would remain constant in the faith until the end. However, it can nonetheless remain faith alone, in the case it is understood correctly, as John Gerhard handled it in the following words: (Here follows the same citation as in the conclusion of the first set of theses).

12. The doctrine of election belongs to the difficult teachings, to the solid food [*starke Speise*]. It is no chief doctrine in the Word of God, for a man can be a believing Christian and be saved if he grasps merely to what the Scriptures say about sin and grace, even if he himself has heard nothing about election or understood it little or had not himself adopted it. 1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12, 13:14; 2 Peter 3:15ff; 1 Peter 1: 3, 9; Philippians 1:6.

The above-mentioned statement shows how zealously our Norwegian brothers have striven among the divided churches of their fellow Norwegians in America after such long contention again to institute unity of belief and confession. These attempts deserve recognition; we indeed know from our own sorry experience how inexpressibly the work of the Lord that the church of the Reformation in our land is doing is hindered through the schisms which arose as a result of the unholy polarization over fundamental articles of the Christian faith. Whoever can contribute something crucial to the arbitration of the factions will be able to appear as a man especially blessed [*begnadigter*] by God. We also have a firm trust in our Norwegian brethren that they are completely serious with their confession of the biblical-Lutheran truth, that they henceforth will remain in that confession in every circumstance, indeed that they would rather take as a burden the guilt, in case the disruption maintains, than deny their confession of the Gospel up until now. We, therefore, could perhaps have for this reason alone doubted whether we should in an open way discuss the new theses.

As soon as we had the chance to examine them more closely, it was immediately clear to us that their content in general, but specifically in regard to our opponents, must give the

impression that the Norwegian Synod in the question of election is no longer entirely of one mind with us, but leaning toward Ohio. Now we find in the newest issue of the *Theologische Zeitblätter* (Columbus, Ohio, September 1910, pages, 293-301) a discussion of the Norwegian theses written by pen of Dr. Stellhorn, which delivers the clearest evidence that our suspicion about the Norwegian Synod was not groundless. First Dr. Stellhorn comments concerning the Norwegian theses of 1908 concerning conversion and describes the result of the past discussions between the Norwegians as such a one “that we completely can and must recognize as an expression of our own doctrinal position in contrast to that of New Missouri” (page 293). Furthermore he says again, “Now the Norwegian brothers are not in agreement with New Missouri, but with us in this doctrine of conversion,” and again: “They should also agree with us in the doctrine of election if they are thinking and dealing logically according to the exposition of their own Dr. Stubs” (297). Next he cites the theses also the Norwegians that we also cited previously and comes to the conclusion: “The Norwegian synod apparently stands in the teaching of vocation and conversion, of election and certainty, not on the stance of New Missouri, as it appears they also imagine one would conclude by their behavior over against Missouri. They stand completely upon our position in the doctrine of vocation and conversion and must for that reason agree with us also in the doctrine of election, even though, without a doubt due to the influence of the long, intimate relationship with Missouri, their phraseology partially approaches that of New Missouri” (299f.). Therefore one is not able to remain in doubt in this area, since according to the opinion of Dr. Stellhorn the deviation of the Norwegian Synod from the “new Missourian” tracks brings them also in contradiction to us in the Wisconsin Synod, as he explains in the conclusion of his article (pg. 301), the “*Wisconsiner Theologische Quartalschrift*” as the “semi-Calvinistic sisters of” the periodical “*Lehre und Wehre*.”

With this interpretation Dr. Stellhorn spares us the trouble of bringing forth proof, which we couldn't avoid anyway, for taking a public position on the new theses of the Norwegian Synod. While one may otherwise appeared to have just cause for accusing us of unbrotherliness because we have uttered our thoughts about those theses before the entire church, now one can hardly expect us to take a stance of patient delay. Moreover, it is told to us that all the districts of the Norwegian Synod have examined and at least favorably received them. Concerning the resolution of the Iowa district in this case, Dr. Stellhorn says in the following translation [paraphrase?] (pg. 300): “He explains himself to be in agreement with the explanation of the doctrine of election put forth by our committee members, so far as they are presented in the printed minutes [*Saetzen*]. He also pronounces therein that the double *Lehrform* concerning election, as represented in the confession of the Lutheran Church and by John Gerhard, should not be abandoned [*kirchentrennend*], and he would cry out greatly if that should happen.”

We hereby see the alternatives before us to be either to keep silent and thereby acknowledge as correct Dr. Stellhorn's view of the Norwegian Theses, so far as their content, or to openly review and evaluate the theses. To be silent now would be a betrayal of the truth that we have confessed up until now, as well as also being an unfaithful act toward the Norwegian brothers in the faith who stand so overtly in the greatest danger of losing the Scriptural doctrine of election. Thus it comes to this, that we German Lutheran, still always in the same struggle, must for the time being forfeit our hopes of a union due to all kinds of fishy circumstances. The necessity remains for us all to sharpen the gaze for the distinction of doctrine so that we may not forfeit something unwittingly, which we should have prized highly as the profit from a struggle of many years.

We are not accusing our Norwegian brothers of intending to make a compromise with their thesis. One such agreement can only be reached when both contending parties submit to

something upon which then can come together over the ground that lies between them. That can happen in matters of doctrine only when there is no deception, when the parties on the right and the left have departed from the truth and for that reason both want to return to it. Where, however, the knowledge of the pure truth is present on one side and the other party has fallen into error, to give a compromise is to know a sad state of affairs, since the people who stand on the side of the truth have forfeited something out of some human considerations, in order to come to some understanding with their opponents. The truth must remain uncompromisingly intolerant over and against error, otherwise it surrenders itself and goes to its ruin in error.

Of this fact, our Norwegian brothers are just as aware as we are; therefore, it is certainly not to be taken in the sense of a concession that in their theses election is not clearly indicated as an election to faith. The issue of this truth comes to expression in the twentieth theses, where it says, God has “from eternity for the sake of Christ considered and determined each person who will be saved,” to save them “without force through conversion to Christ.” In these words it comes unmistakably to expression, that the faith flows out of the election, that is, that the elected therefore come to faith because God has determined from eternity to make them believers. And yet, already here lies, in our judgment, a weakness of the theses, through which they can obtain the appearance of a compromise. Having again and again over ten long years proven out of the Word of God that election is essentially and truly in the full sense a cause of all that which serves for the salvation of each man, the expression election to faith has become for us a Schibboleth, as the declarative distribution formula for the administration of the Lord’s Supper was over against the Reformed and *Unierten* [Unionists?]. As little as we are able to abandon the designation of the Lord’s Supper as the true body and blood of Jesus Christ in an attempt for unity with the Reformed and *Unierten*, so little now the confession that faith flows out of election for the sake of union with Ohio and *Schmidtianern*. It may be that the biblical teaching concerning election has not even crystallized, so to speak, in this formula in the tight circle of the Norwegian Synod, and that one may still therefore employ that expression without treating it as a matter of confession. However, it must still be carefully pointed out that between us and the Norwegian-Lutheran Church close relations exist and that, for that reason, the question of the acceptance of this Schibboleth must be debated in the case of a union between us and them. From this point of view, the absence of the aforementioned expression to us appears to be a significant deficiency in the theses.

It appears to us to be far more substantial that the biblical teaching of the connection between election on the one hand and conversion and preservation in the faith on the other is indicated as 'the so-called first way of teaching (*Lehrform*),' to which the other way of teaching is then compared in the eleventh thesis. Because of that, missing is the emphasis of the fact that one can speak about a first and a second way of teaching only in the sense of historical sequence. But one can not say this in this sense- as if the two ways of teaching ever had equal authority (*je nebeneinander Hausrecht*) in the Lutheran church. In a wholly correct manner, the so-called first way of teaching has been traced back to clear Scripture passages from which it has been inferred. For the so-called second way of teaching, the dogmaticians of the 17th century are cited as author and authority. This type of comparison is unclear and can cause perverse conclusions, e.g., that one would be able to prove his genuine Lutheran position (*Lehrstellung*) either by Scripture or by the dogmaticians.

Because of that, one of the beneficial effects of the election controversy, only by God's grace, is that we have become free of a bit of traditionalism that threatened to gain a footing among us. We do not consider ourselves to be Lutheran if and because we agree with the great teachers of our church, indeed, never even for this reason that we stand in unison with the

confessions of the Lutheran church. Rather with all of our intentions, we stand united in this that we are Lutheran only for this reason: because our teaching is based upon clear Scripture. To us, 'biblical' and 'Lutheran' are identical. Since a teaching is revealed in Scripture, it is a Lutheran teaching for that very reason. We recognize that we would be declaring ourselves a sect if we wanted to make human opinions and human statements the criterion for being 'Lutheran.' Therefore, if two ways of teaching are so diametrically opposed, as is the case with the Biblical doctrine of the election to faith and the dogmaticians' teaching of *intuitu fidei*, then we will not speak in such a misleading way about 'two ways of teaching,' so that the idea is hinted at, namely, that both ways of teaching would really be Lutheran. That is not possible; only one or the other can be Lutheran and it is that then, only because it agrees with Scripture.

It is valid here to also guard a piece of gospel freedom- a freedom which we American Lutherans have really come to the full possession and use of, for the first time, through the election controversy. In theory, it was firmly established among us as far back as I can remember that the Holy Scripture is the only true *principium cognoscendi*³ for all real theologians. In theory, we did not quote the fathers as authorities of our teaching, but only as witnesses to the truth. At the same time, it was also the case that consciences were frequently bound with such quotations. What the fathers had written was considered to be Lutheran precisely for this reason- they had written it. Because of their undeniable zeal for the purity of doctrine and because of their well-known acuteness in the fight against false doctrine, often their sayings were practically used as demonstrations for the truth and, therefore, as touchstones of truth Lutheranism. It has been beneficial that the fathers of our church were regarded so highly and that we sit so modestly at their feet. It would have been dangerous for us if we had torn ourselves away from our historical foundation and neglected the treasures that are stored up for us in the writings of the fathers.

However, through the fact that our opponents in the election controversy want to use the sayings of the fathers concerning a certain point as a *big stick* in order to polarize us. Through the fact that they advanced the principle that a person is no true Lutheran if he does not share the position of certain representatives of Lutheran theology in a fixed point of doctrine and does not approve of their sayings. Also through the fact that they carry on a controversy with human authorities of teaching and slander us as heretics on the basis of the fathers. Through all of these circumstances, inwardly by God's grace, we have also become wholly free from the coercion of human authority (at the very least, in this matter) and true Lutherans in practice in this that we do not acknowledge a way of teaching (*Lehrform*) as Lutheran simply because one Lutheran or even many have presented it and adhered to it.

To us, this piece of priceless Gospel freedom appears to come into danger if one still acknowledges two entirely different concepts in the alluded point of doctrine in any way at all where they are set next to each other as first and second ways of teaching without indicating clearly (*scharf*) that this enumeration is only in a historical sense. The Norwegian Theses do not want to be understood as a historical discussion of doctrine, but as the present confession of our brothers. We would have been better off designating 'the so called first way of teaching' in plain

³ **foundation of understanding, source of knowledge.** Richard Muller says, "According to Protestant scholastics, theology has two *principia*, Scripture and God, i.e., the revelation and the one who reveals himself. The scholastic systems frequently begin with a definition of theology followed by a statement of its *principia*, viz., a *locus* on Scripture and a *locus* on God. Thus, (1) the *principium cognoscendi*, the principle of knowing or cognitive foundation, is a term applied to Scripture as the noetic or epistemological *principium theologiae*, without which there could be no true knowledge of God and therefore no theological system; it is sometimes further distinguished into the *principium cognoscendi externum*, the external written Word, and the *principium cognoscendi internum*, the internal principle of faith which knows the external Word and answers its call, i.e., faith resting on the testimony of the Spirit. The *principium essendi*, the principle of being or essential foundation, is a term applied to God considered as the objective ground of theology without whom there could be neither divine revelation nor theology." ("*principium theologiae*" *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1985]. Pp.245-246.)

terms as the Scriptural and therefore only true Lutheran teaching, it should clearly be stated about the 'so-called second way of teaching' that it had no basis in Scripture but was a product of dogmatic speculation and for that reason, is a purely, human concoction to a Lutheran, even that it is contrary to the Scripture under all conceivable conditions (*unter allen erdenklichen Voraussetzungen*).

The fact that we take this position regarding this so-called second way of teaching, it is obvious that we cannot declare that we are in agreement with the eleventh of the Norwegian set of theses. There second way of teaching began to exist not only as a historical one, but it is also accepted as existing rightly under certain conditions. As small as it certainly seemed to be to our Norwegian brothers, to offer a reprehensible compromise to their opponents, just as quickly our opponents in Ohio have found this (concession) in that (thesis) and have substantiated a difference between us and the Norwegians with pleasure. For if the Ohians have provoked anything, it is the fact that under no condition do we want to grant even a little spot to the term *fides praevisa*⁴ or to *intuitus fidei*⁵ within the framework of the teaching of the election.

With this we have expressed the only tenable view. As we have already accomplished repeatedly, it is a tendentious/biased accusation when one says of us because of this position that we have abandoned the fathers of the 17th century. Since we stand in the gospel freedom from human authorities, it is not at all under consideration for us who has invented and advocated a way of teaching. Rather, we only consider whether it is Biblical and is supported by Biblical means. Even if we recognize the opposite, it is completely out of the question for us whether one could allow the related way of teaching to be valid under certain conditions. If it is without Biblical basis, it becomes untenable indeed for us, and it must at the very least be avoided. Yes, and what is more, whoever has proffered and used this must be formally condemned in the fight for the pure doctrine. There is not room, indeed, for a *tolerari potest*⁶.

That the teaching of the *praevisio fidei*⁷ as the chief factor in the election of persons is unscriptural, the theses already bear witness by the fact that they are in no way supported through the testimonies of Scripture. Our brothers see as clearly as we that the passages which deal *ex professo*⁸ with election never specify as the basis for the choosing of certain persons that God has foreseen that they would come to faith and persist to the end. However, this statement should be accepted as a piece of doctrine concerning the election of grace to a certain degree if it is understood only in the way that Gerhard understood it. This is a dangerous concession; for in the controversy with our opponents, it never really (*im Grunde*) depended on this, whether Gerhard or other fathers of the 17th century have defended a way of teaching with any success. In other words, we have never regarded our fight as a controversy of historical teaching, in which it is only a matter of conflicting views about historical facts, but as a matter of the Biblical teaching and the proof that we have the Biblical, and therefore Lutheran teaching. On the basis of Scripture, we have decided ourselves to be against the doctrine of the consideration of faith in the election of a person. Why should we now make the concession that the opposite could also be correct if one defends in the way that Gerhard did? What sort of unity of faith would this be if the one party stands on Scripture and the other admittedly only on a view which Gerhard has expressed?

⁴ Faith foreknown

⁵ In view of faith

⁶ It can be tolerated

⁷ Foreknowledge of faith

⁸ openly

But certainly, such a position would contain hardly a stronger, inner contradiction than that which Gerhard had accepted, and the rest of the 17th century with him. Let us examine the words of Gerhard a little more closely for ourselves. The thesis, under question, has spoken these words: *Etiam fidei intuitum decreto electionis esse includendum*-- that also the view of faith (namely, in addition to the merit of Christ) must be included in the decree of election. Gerhard justified the thesis with the words: *cum Christi meritum nemini prosit absque fidei* (since the merit of Christ benefits no one other than through faith), and later with the words: *quia tamen Christi meritum non nisi per fidem in hominibus locum habet*⁹ (since the merit of Christ is still not apportioned to man other than through faith). First of all, let us allow to be valid for a moment, that the two foundational statements really say the same thing, as Gerhard apparently thought, and let us set before our eyes his argument according to the manner of the old school of logic:

We are elected to eternal life for the sake of the merit of Christ.

A person takes part in the merit of Christ only through faith.

Ergo: *We are elected because God has foreseen that we will come to faith and remain steadfast to the end in that faith.*

The two premises of this conclusion stand in Scripture in nearly the same words and, for this reason, are absolutely correct. If Gerhard would have been able to cite only one unmistakable passage of Scripture for his conclusion ('consequence' in a syllogism), it would also prove his correctness by it and he would remain correct even if one were also to prove that the dogmatic syllogism which Gerhard advances is logically untenable. On the other hand, we can conclude that no compelling dogmatic statement on which faith hinges can be deduced from Biblical premises, which is not equally expressed in Scripture according to its sense. Otherwise, one does not arrive at such deductions with a high degree of probability. At best (*Im besten Falle*), the conclusion here then would be likely, never sure and certain.

However, he is not even probably correct. For the argument of Gerhard suffers from considerable logical flaws. According to Scripture's way of speaking, that the merit of Christ is apportioned to a person means nothing else than that he takes part in justification, the forgiveness of sins. We are justified for the sake of Christ's merit which we apprehend in faith. As soon as we insert the statement in the syllogism in this way (*in dieser Form*), it becomes blatantly obvious that we have here no conclusion before us:

We are elected to eternal life for the sake of the merit of Christ.

We acquire the justification through faith in the merit of Christ.

Ergo: _____?

Indeed, what follows then? Nothing at all; these premises come to no conclusion. They contain statements about two different actions, which God fulfills in us, election and

⁹ *Locum habere* means 'to be valid or applicable, hold good, have a place.' "locus" (14) *Oxford Latin Dictionary* p.1040.

justification. In both cases the same basis is certainly specified for the actions, the merit of Christ; for it never would have occurred to Gerhard that faith is the basis of justification. However, out of that, namely that two actions of God have the same basis, which lies entirely outside of man, it can not yet follow, that the one action proceeds from the other; that [would] mean in this case, that God has not esteemed alone the merit of Christ in regard to the election of persons, but also the fact, that the man grasps this merit in faith. If such a conclusion would be allowed, we could conclude entirely other things from clear passages of Scripture, for example: we were elected for the sake of the redemption of Christ; we were according to 1 Peter 1:18f freed from the lordship of sin through the redemption of Christ; therefore God has taken into account the good works of believers in regard to election.

It is clear from it, that Gerhard, without recognizing the error, assumes with his argumentation that which he wants to prove, namely the order of the acts of God, that in his foreknowledge he first justifies the man through faith in the merit of Christ and then determines to choose him. Gerhard could have silently assumed that to be correct, if this order stood firm in Scripture, but he certainly wanted to prove it from his argumentation! He afforded a *circulus in probando*, because he was caught up in a preconceived notion.

The fact is entirely ominous, if one takes into consideration, that he in an offhand way sets down both sentences as simultaneous: the merit of Christ benefits no one without faith, and: only through faith is the merit of Christ imparted to the man. It is certainly true that according to the context he clearly wants to have the first sentence understood in the sense of the second; it is certainly self-evident that it is out of the question for him to deny that the general proofs of the kindness of God are only imparted to the human race in the merit of Christ, that long ago God would have eradicated the human race, if it were not for redemption of Christ, and that the patience of the Lord, which is proven according to 2 Peter 3:10 in the extension of the time of grace, has its basis in the merit of Christ. However that sentence is all the more alarming when we take it in the sense that the merit of Christ avails nothing for a single one for his salvation without faith. As a result we come especially to speak about it that through this sentence a decisive weight in the salvation of sinners is accredited to faith as an activity of man. Here we point it out, that Gerhard leaves completely unconsidered the connection between election and universal justification of all men. For the election of certain men for salvation it suffices according to Scripture perfectly, that God esteems the full redemption which Christ has accomplished for each one. As the redemption through Christ could happen without consideration of this faith, namely, whether that redemption would be grasped by all men in faith, then this election to eternal life, based on this redemption, can also certainly happen without the assumption that certain men would believe in Christ. That [redemption?????] even avails for us the merit of Christ before and without faith, so that God has chosen us in him before the foundations of the world were laid, and in addition, he has decreed that we should be his children (Eph. 1,4ff) – in other words: It is the fruit of the merit of Christ without the contribution of our faith that we are chosen for faith!

The greatest contradiction in the position of Gerhard and the other dogmaticians of his century lies however in the connection of *sola gratia* and *intuitus fidei*. Gerhard subscribes from his heart to *sola gratia*, when he writes: “We confess with ringing voice, that we teach that God has found nothing in men, who should be chosen for eternal life; he has neither good works, nor exercise of free will (N.B. [we reserve??] for God the final judgment), nor even distinguishable faith in this way, so that he may have moved through these things or have chosen on account of them certain men; but we say that it is alone and with nothing else the merit of Christ, whose worthiness God has regarded and because of which God has reached the conclusion of election

out of pure grace.” There must have been already misgivings aroused, so that he immediately continued speaking with a “but.” The *sola gratia* is actually delicate; it is the apple of the eye for Christian doctrine, and every “but”, which one sets against it, acts as a thumb poke in the eye. Yet, the sentence, to which Gerhard adds the “but,” could always be properly understood when one translates thusly: “but because the merit of Christ is not imparted (*nicht zu teil werden*) to the man, even if it is through faith (*non nisi per fidem in hominibus locum habet*), we therefore teach that the election has happened in respect to the merit of Christ, which should be apprehended in faith.” The gerundive form “apprehendendi” claims of itself this apprehension and would then have the sense that it would be the aim for the election of God to make these men blessed in the common way of salvation, by bringing bring them to faith and keeping them in it. But Gerhard does not want the gerundive understood in this way; for him it has this sense, namely, “that in faith it would be apprehended,” and thus it would have the sense of passive future participle. He continues thusly: “we say thus, that all of those and those alone who have been chosen by God for salvation, of whom he has also foreseen, that they through the effective power of the Holy Spirit through the office of the gospel would truly believe and persists in that faith until the end of life.”

With that the *sola gratia* comes to a halt; faith stands now next to the grace (and the merit of Christ) as an activity of man, the *fides* as *credere*, actually not faith, but the believing. Without recognizing this Gerhard lifts up what he previously had said: “yet even the faith itself...in the manner, so that he would be moved through it.” If the faith as *credere*, and thus as an activity of man is really out of the question, but really only Christ, whom faith grasps is the question, then the expression *intuitu fidei* is invalid as an empty manner of speech. If I say, “he emptied the glass,” then I naturally mean *per metonymiam* the contents of the glass, and the glass itself is no longer part of the question; I can just as well leave the container unnamed and say, “he drank up the water.” However, if God, in the matter of the election, looked at the believing as *credere*, as an activity of man, then it is really *intuitu fidei* according to its proper sense; then it is also said along with that, that God, in the matter of election, has not only looked at what Christ has done for us, but also what we would do with this Christ. It has been demonstrated by neither Gerhard nor by the recent advocates of *intuitu fidei* how one should then imagine that God should not have been moved through that, which he has looked at so energetically; how one should thus avoid making the activity of faith into the decisive motive for the choosing of people. The mere affirmation that one therefore holds firmly to the *sola gratia*, does not nullify the inner contradiction, which is set forth through the manner of speaking itself.

For a dogmatician like Gerhard, who otherwise has invested his entire life’s power for the defense of *sola gratia*, one can overlook such an unrecognized contradiction. We do that entirely correctly, when we accept with measured respect that the dogmaticians of the 17th century had really meant without sophistry that the *sola gratia* persisted *fully and rightly [voll zu Recht]* with their urging for the foreseen believing. Incidentally, we don’t have to worry about it with those who have long ago fallen asleep in the Lord, but about those, who are now erring in the church, since they elaborate every often called upon passage of the fathers in its most extreme context (*Konsequenzen*). The antitheses, against which every father had to fight, they do not bring to test for goodness and orthodoxy, i.e. the weapon, which they imagine to have found in the *intuitus [Die Gegensätze, wider die jene Väter zu kämpfen hatten, veranlaßten sie nicht, die Waffe, die sie in dem intuitus gefunden zu haben wähten, auf ihre Güte und Echtheit zu prüfen]*; our modern opponents, however, have exalted for thirty years this doctrinal position [*Lehrtronus*] as a jewel, even though it has been proven to them repeatedly, that their jewel is not only worthless, but it carries the most harmful power in itself. Instead of allowing it to fall, they have even

allowed every evil power to make its effect and have stepped even further from point to point in their combat of pure Scriptural doctrines. From *intuitus* the attitude of man was exaggerated as critical for conversion; from the apparent importance [*Hochschätzung*] of believing one devolved to the denial of universal redemption and justification. If such people now operate still further with the *intuitus*, then we know exactly who must value the expression. He not only involves a breaking of *sola gratia*, but he should even prove that, so that with respect to the salvation of a man not only the grace of God is decisive but also the attitude of the man cooperates with it.

Under these circumstances we can not befriend ourselves with the thought that one closes any kind of compromise with the so-called second doctrinal statement (*Lehrform*) concerning the election by grace. If we wanted to accept it, namely that it can be given here or there to anyone, who uses the expression about the consideration of believing without sophistries and deceptions and does not recognize which aberrations from the truth he involves, then we do not have to deal with such naïve people. In a confession, which should conform to the truth as it is known by us and to a certain extent wants to be looked at as a deposit of our winnings from the doctrinal strife, a concession excludes itself from the proponents of the doctrine of *intuitus* as a divulgement of that which we have achieved through the grace of God. We do not want to enter again into the clutter of those views, which dominated in the first times of the election controversy. It remains firm in our American-Lutheran church what is to be understood concerning *intuitus fidei*, and by that we want to remain. On account of the confession we can have fellowship with no one, who is not ready to throw away the so-called second doctrinal statement (*Lehrform*) as unscriptural.

In this case we seek no strife with our Norwegian brothers. Through the confession, which they pronounced in the first ten theses (in the second collection (*Fassung*)), they show that they are fully in agreement with us and concerning the cooperation of man for his salvation, they want to have nothing to do with it. Only against the Methodists, since they want to initiate an unification, have we made the above objection, and we must bring them in this shape before the public eye so that the outcry might not arise in the adversarial camp; we had prepared the withdrawal, while we silently had sanctioned an attempt at unification, which was not allowed to be carried out without weakening the confession. Incidentally, in spite of Dr. Stellhorn's confident demonstration this section will satisfy the *Schmidtianer* among the Norwegians surely in no way. It will emerge that we maintain the right thing with our judgment of the opponents in these circles, where the proceedings in the Norwegian language were conducted. One observes that the committees concerned about the theses contained in their first collection for 12 days long were trying to come to terms, that one discussed there only Theses 2-6, which essentially contained the biblically doctrinal concept of the election by grace, and that one achieved in it no accord. Thus it will happen again with the discussion of the second set of theses. Even if one inverted sequence of the theses and began with Thesis 11, then everything would yet remain with the old; only the Norwegians who are faithful to the Bible would be the ones, who are unable to give in to the demands of their opponents. The contradiction between both parties is drastic and can only be abrogated through it, namely that the opponents of the truth finally give the honor to God, that he actually out of pure grace has chosen in Christ the people who would be saved, without looking at the believing, which he still must first decide to work, and that he brings them as a result of this decision in his time actually to faith.

J. Schaller

Corrigendam. - In an earlier article about the Norwegian unification theses (Jahrgang 6, p. 34) this sentence is found: "Already in both theses it is clear, that the expression "Berufung" is not

used here in the biblical sense, in which he includes conversion...but in the sense of “rufen,” “einladen” and excludes conversion.” - Instead of “in the biblical sense” it should say, “in the customary sense.” We make this correction, because the misprint here and there has lead to a false understanding of our meaning.

Aug. Pieper.

Translated by:

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