The Freedom of the Christian and The Bondage of the Will

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In view of the chosen topic, this essay must unfortunately be short and rather incomplete. Nevertheless, it is written in undying and thankful memory of those times when we, as young students who enjoyed not only unforgettable lectures and seminars but also personal encounters with then Professor Rudolf Hermann in Breslau, received our inner call to theology. I may indeed say "we," for it was a circle of friends and like-minded individuals, among whom so many are no longer among the living, that gathered around Rudolf Hermann and his work in Systematic Theology. There we were first introduced to Luther's theology, which was not at all as well-known then as it is today. Holl's famous essays, which were published during those years, had not yet appeared, and Theodosius Harnack's interpretation of Luther's theology was known only by the experts.

These were years of great inner turmoil. World War I had shaken every European's confidence in life and security at the deepest level, and behind the winds of war we could sense the deep transformation that was about to occur. The "Decline of the West" was becoming visible on the horizon, and the intelligentsia gave expression to this change in various fields. They were the years in which the first edition of Karl Barth's *Romans* was published. But we came out of a protected world, a world not intellectually prepared for the questions and decisions that awaited it.

In this context we found, in the man to whom these lines are dedicated, a teacher who meant more to us than just someone who gave lectures. He continually nurtured us by teaching us how to combine strictness of thinking with the surety and depth of faith. He nurtured us by reaching back to the sources, especially to Luther's theology. He also helped us understand the great value of German Idealism as the heritage from which we all, more or less consciously, came. What follows is an attempt to maintain this dialectic, an attempt to examine the thesis of the bondage of the will not only historically, but also systematically. This will be done without marginalizing the freedom of the Christian, but actually basing the freedom of the Christian on this thesis. May it also be at the same time a sign of the abiding thankfulness I owe the jubilarian for everything I received from him during my university years, and many times since.

I. THE THEOLOGICAL LOCUS OF THE ASSAULTED CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

Foremost among the problems that Reformation theology and the Reformation understanding of faith have bequeathed to us is the thesis of the bound will. One would not be in error in suggesting that the assertion of human bondage in fact constitutes the defining principle of all Reformation theology. Luther is not alone in very early assaulting the thesis of the liberum arbitrium;[1] the other leading reformers also take this as a starting point for everything they say about man and his being lost.[2] This demonstrates most clearly that the thesis of the bound will

[1] We find the earliest expressions of this in Luther's lecture on Romans, AE 25: 375: "The free will without grace has absolutely no power to achieve righteousness, but of necessity it is in sin:' See also C. Stange, Die ältesten ethischen Disputationen Luthers, 14ff.; and the Theses against the Scholastic Theologians (1517), especially theses 29/30, also thesis 13ff. of the Heidelberg Disputation (1518): "Free will, after the fall, has power to do good only in a passive capacity, but it can always do evil in an active capacity" (AE 31: 40).

[2] Characteristic for this pendulum swing "from Aristotle to Paul" is the preserved speech of the young Melanchthon in "in divi Pauli Apostoli festum diem" (25 January 1520): "As many of us, then, as are born of Adam, are born of wrath and death; by the grace of nature [we are] wretched and thus dragged off to sins, so that

is not just the expression of tired resignation, but is set up as a new, liberating realization. With it, man comes into contact with the grounding principle of his own reality. *Theologus crucis dicit id, quod res est* (A theologian of the cross calls a thing what it is). This is a uniquely realistic approach to life that snatches us away from all illusions, not in order to make us despair, but in order to allow us to get a sense of the mountain that faith is called to move.

The assertion of the bondage of the will is as central to Reformation Christianity as later the assertion of the freedom of the will was to German Idealism. As a result, it was later often understood in stark contrast to Idealism and its philosophy. I want to suggest that this is not correct. It would mean oversimplifying the problem of the freedom of the will. The the-[8]sis of the *servum arbitrium* (bound will) intends to point in a completely different direction than the understanding of it that typically forms the apologetic use of this thesis. Anyone who would interpret this thesis as Goethe did – "Whoever, always striving, exerts himself, we can save" – is led *ad absurdum*, is in error. With this apologetic use, an understanding of the thesis that belongs in its own particular place is turned into a doctrine used for indeterminate purposes, a doctrine which itself remains misunderstood. The application which would later be made of the teaching of bound will – first in Christian ethics – meant the transplanting of an understanding, original and decisive in its own place, into a foreign framework, as if one would take a plant that can only be found growing on high mountains and put it, wilted and without roots, in a glass. No one who wants to see this plant away from the mountains can see it properly. He will ask himself why such a power and brilliance is supposed to shine out from it. Similarly, in the context where the teaching of the bound will is naturally at home, it looks different and has a different environment than where it is encountered in the picture window of Christian apologetics.

Time and again, people have tried to abolish this teaching by saying that Luther had, on this point, fallen back into the Middle Ages. They ask how one could have believed some- thing so horrifying. Truly, Luther appeared to most to be the founder and discoverer of the freedom of man in the sense of modernism, and they could not fathom that they would come upon the assertion of the bondage of the human will right in the center of his theology. They tried to explain this to themselves through the late, anti-Erasmian, antihumanistic Luther. But we know today – and this is a simple, objective fact on the basis of the documents available – that with this assertion of the bondage of the will, the breaking point from the Middle Ages, and also indeed from the late-medieval theology of Occam, is made evident. They asserted the freedom of the will; Luther challenged it. That we have so much trouble imagining that today, is just a sign of how far Protestantism has distanced itself from that which was thought and taught at its beginnings, from that by which it recognized itself as especially close to the Scriptures.

On this point, we are going to have to busy ourselves with a very frustrating reevaluation of Protestantism and Catholicism. Indeed, modern Protestantism – I am thinking here of the line that runs from A. Ritschl to W. Herrmann and E. Troeltsch – may actually, in the teaching that the human will can bring itself to movement, be nearer to Thomism than to the Reformation. The teaching of the natural freedom of the human will forms, also in the High Middle Ages (that is, in Thomas Aquinas), the necessary presupposition for the doctrine of faith and justification. It is to this that Luther's denial of the free will refers, a denial which

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we by our own counsel or powers are unable to halt it. Lust exercises its tyranny in us in many ways, one as another, each is won according to his desire" (Loci communes, ed. Th. Kolde, 266).

was at a very early date damned by Rome.[3]

The way in which Thomas Aquinas connects the question of the freedom of the will, which he discusses at the beginning of his *Summa Theologiae*, with the doctrine of justification, which follows at the end (Ia II ae qu. 113), may be considered paradigmatic. To the question as to whether the *voluntas* (will) sets itself in motion, he answers by referring to an assertion of Aristotelian Ethics: "Likewise the *voluntas*: it moves itself to willing the objects which are on account of the end because it wills the end" (qu. 9 a. 3).[4] The will, which is directed toward the goal, must be able to direct itself toward that which leads to the goal. Thomas says "likewise" because he does not consider the movement of the will as such, but in analogy to another movement, that of the intellect in view of its object, truth. As the intellect finds the goal of realization in itself -the truth is not something given from the outside -so also the will has the goal of all its efforts, goodness, in itself.

That the will has to be started in that direction so that this movement can begin, that it "is moved by an outside force" (a. 4), means nothing more than that this movement, in order to come into being, presupposes an impulse from the outside: "And so we have to conclude that the original volition of *voluntas* comes forth from the *voluntas* by the impulse of some exterior efficient cause" (a. 4). That does not, however, have to do with the movement's direction, but with its advancement, so to speak, with the transition from the condition of potential into that of action. This provides the presupposition which Thomas reaches back to as he, after a long discussion of action and virtue, and sin and grace, then asks the decisive question, "Whether, for the infusion of justifying grace, some movement of the *liberum arbitrium* is required" (qu. 113 a. 2/3). Here he arrives at dealing with the connection between the freedom of the will and justifying grace, a theological thesis against which Luther's antithesis is directed.

Aquinas's *requiratur* indicates unmistakably that the freedom of the will is the creaturely presupposition that man must bring with him if grace is going to prove effective in him. At the [9] very least, that is the question that Thomas asks. The answer is clear: "Now God moves all things according to the mode proper to each, as we see in the physical world, where heavy things are moved by him in one way and light things in another, because of their different natures" (a. 3). It seems apparent that freedom is seen here in the image of movement. We will have to ask our- selves whether this analogy of will and movement is appropriate for that which it claims to clarify.[5] Seen in such a context, it is clear that if we sought to deny that special condition of the *humana natura* which Thomas brings into play here with the concept of the *liberum arbitrium*, man would sink down to being a stone, and his being moved to a situation in which, when he is moved, then he is moved not from the inside out, but rather must be pushed from the outside.

To the one who has taken a position inside this metaphysical system, the assertion of a "bound

[3] In the bull Exsurge Domine, 15 June 1520, Thesis 36. Here, the thirteenth Heidelberg Thesis is directly quoted and rejected. The first of the rejected theses also belongs here: "It is a heretical but com- mon assertion that the sacraments of the New Law offer justifying grace to those who do not set up a barrier:' "Not to set up a barrier;' which the bull wants to save as a human condition for the reception of grace, is the proof of the *liberum arbitrium*. See Denzinger, Enchiridion, 275.

[4] I a II ae qu. 8 a. 2. "The goal is to the field of the objects of our desires what the principle is to the field of the objects of our intelligence."

[5] See Luther's relevant remark: "You know that physical science has always brought and still brings something bad and discomforting to theology, since each individual field possesses its own terminology and its own vocabulary which it uses, and this jargon is valid in those particular matters. Whenever the jargon of natural science is applied to theology, the result is some sort of scholastic theology. The penny is good, where it was minted" (Drews, Disput. 141-42).

will" must seem meaningless and indeed, in view of the relationship between justification and sanctification, destructive. Certainly, God cannot move man from the outside as he does a stone. Or should we imagine the *homo impius* (godless man) in justification as so inhumanly driven from the outside, or grasped by an impersonal power and transferred to another place, as the wind blows a leaf? In order to guard the justifying work of the churchly means of grace against the notion of a magical working from the outside or a power that works independent of man, scholasticism built the *liberum arbitrium* as a dogmatic presupposition into its doctrine of the justification of the godless. The nature of man is not turned off or broken, but redeemed and brought into the gracious act of justification. Essential to his nature, however, is the ability of moving himself or his personality, that is, the principal freedom.

And therefore, in the man who has the use of the *liberum arbitrium*, the motion from God towards justice does not take place without a movement of the *liberum arbitrium*. Rather, God so infuses the gift of *gratia justificans* (justifying grace), that he also at the same time, together with this [gift], moves the *liberum arbitrium* to receive the gift of grace in those who are capable of this motion. With this in mind, and in view of the secret predestination of God, Thomas limits man's *capacitas* (capacity), but this concession does not address the insertion of the *liberum arbitrium* as the condition by which the reception of grace is realized in man. We understand that Thomas is saying: Because God, where he works, works *secundum conditionem naturae humanae*, that is, within the natural conditions of our human nature, then, if we are also lifted up out of that condition by grace, the bed in which the river of grace finds its path is with the *liberum arbitrium* already dug. In a very different sense than what is understood by Lutheran theology, in scholastic theology the personal decision is included in the reception of grace. According to this perspective, we are neither children nor senseless when we receive the sacrament of grace; we are called by God as mature men to a decision. This understanding of the free will leads to the idea that the possibility of decision belongs naturally to man. The doctrine of justification is then based on this. Man in all his potential – good and bad, salutary and corruptive – is seen as God's partner.

What is impious in him is, however, not man according to his potential, but in his reality, which exists as such and in no other way. Here is the huge pendulum swing which is completed with the teaching of the *servum arbitrium*, that is, with the removal of the *liberum arbitrium* as a mediating force from the doctrine of justification. The reality of man comes to light in the justification of the godless. This reality is directed against God -as such and in no other way. The *justificatio impii* (justification of the godless) removes a real state of man, which his potential is in no way able to overcome by itself. The reformers do not begin with the general possibility of human existence, but with the actual reality of the *homo impius sola gratia justificatus* (godless man justified by grace alone). That is the switch which, once thrown, must transform the whole system.

II. THE TRANSFORMATION

The thesis of the "bound will" remains in unique isolation. It is the sign of a break with the past from which Western theology comes – it is at best a reaching back to Augustine, but in reality goes far beyond him – and it leads to a break with humanism, the precursor of modernism, and with its spokesman, Erasmus von Rotterdam. One would not be saying too much in asserting that this thesis, and the view of man implied in it, contributed to allowing those young humanists who would become the strength of the Counter-Reformation to find the way back into the Roman Church. Even Melanchthon, who at first inserts Luther's teaching of the bound will with excitement into his Loci, weakens slowly and later reinserts the teaching of the *liberum arbitrium*, since he believes himself otherwise unable to develop the ethical responsibility of man in his political ethics and doctrine of society. As far as I can

see, with very few exceptions, the teaching of the bound will was not able to maintain itself within Protestant dogmatics; it quickly declined [10] to the understanding that man has a basic inability to become righteous before God out of his own powers – but that is not its original meaning. The intention of the assertion of the bound will is not that man cannot fulfill God's command, but that he neither wants to nor is able to want to, and that is the challenging thesis of this *theologumenon*.

Non potest homo naturaliter velle, deum esse deum, imo vellet se esse deum et deum non esse! (Man cannot by nature desire that God be God, but rather desires that he himself be God and that God not exist.) So reads one of those classic theses of the young Luther, which we find in the *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* of 1517. One has the impression that we today are the first who are beginning to understand completely the meaning of this thesis. In this thesis, it is as if Luther had already seen the shadow of the Nietschian *Übermensch* behind the humanists of his time, and that he had discovered and suffered this human- ness, this all-too-humanness, in himself. He saw and grasped that natural man is a born atheist. Here a new way of speaking about God opens up. It is not about the relationship to God as such, about from-him-down-to-us and from-us-up-to-him. Nor is it about the question with which Thomas begins his theology: Whether God exists? It is also not about our becoming aware of our inseparable dependence on God – which Luther never argued against, but in fact much more often wonderfully developed. In all of this, we do not run into the phenomenon of the bound will.

No, it is much more that case that from the other side, from God, a fact is fixed that man cannot as such allow to stand: that God is God! We encounter God in his revelation, in his word, not as the "behind" behind everything created, not as the great "X" that stands invisibly but tangibly behind everything visible. God is not the central concept of the metaphysical world that becomes graspable to us as a mental, intelligible world in contrast to the sense-world. Rather, God reveals himself with his "I am who I am." He wants us to let him be who he is, and recognize him in his righteousness. In view of this claim of God, Luther determines, with universal validity and indispensability (*necessitas*), that no man by nature can want God to be God! So it obviously comes to an either/or here: either the headstrong man is removed in view of the reality of God – that is, faith – or he transforms God, God in his most original being (himself), into a man-god, into a greatness that fits him, the man, and his measuring stick of worth.

In a way very similar to how he asserts the divinity of God, Luther can assert what is specific to God's law; also here he discovers a latent, insurmountable opposition to all formal fulfillment of that which is commanded. The man possessing *liberum arbitrium* would like there to be no law and that he be altogether free. The will of man and the command of God are opponents, *adversarii implacabiles* (implacable adversaries). That means that even the apparently inborn knowledge of the law in us – as is again and again asserted – does not mean anything for the actual relationship of man to the will of the living God. Man has the astonishing ability to strip the law of its actual meaning intended by God, and out of that to construct his own worthiness, that is, a *bonum*, which appears to us to be meaningful in a certain understanding of worth. So, from the command in which the will of God confronts us, there results a value, the meaning and usefulness of which we judge, and for or against which we decide. This, however, is never inherently the command in which God reveals himself! It does not offer us options from which to choose, even if it for a time appears so.

The command means much more, namely, that man has no choice before God, that his will is there to obey and not to choose, that he finds a law in and over his life that makes clear to him that he is not left to his own devices, but is a being under God's rule and protection. But the

law encounters the desire for the freedom of man, which stands against it. It inflames and uncovers him. So man proposes his own law of life in his *liberum arbitrium*, where he hopes to find his freedom. This follows the lines of Goethe's *Prometheus* poem: "I honor you? What for? Have you ever lessened the pains of one born down? Have you ever dried the tears of one who fears? Have I not been forged into a man by Almighty Time and Eternal Destiny, my Lord and yours?"

One of the most peculiar slants of later Protestant theology is that one thought that although man could indeed recognize the spiritual meaning of the law of God, he just could not do it! As if we would first stumble at not being able to do it! If we could want it, if that *voluntas* that affirms God's law as the law of God, that is rooted in him, that is as rooted in him as our natural *voluntas* is rooted in the law of our own human nature, if that would be given us, then the question of doing it would no longer be in question. But who will move our will toward God's law, so that it will become the law of our life?

So Luther discovers, behind the concept of the liberum arbitrium, an intention and human ability to make oneself into "Lord of all lords and God of all gods," an intention that was not seen before, one that is universally human but at the deepest level anti-God, that removes God, that transforms the divinity of God, that removes the grace-rich lordship of God that allows his word to count. There is a place in Luther's great argument with Erasmus where he says this, "so it will happen, per that dogma concerning the principal part of man, that man is extolled above Christ and the devil, that is, that man will become the god of gods, and lord of all those who exercise lordship" (WA 18: 744.18; AE 33: 228).

Without question, Luther overinterpreted Erasmus. Erasmus never understood the jab that Luther brought against him. By [11] *liberum arbitrium*, and in his subjective reason and moral understanding of Christian perfection, he had meant something else entirely. But Luther sees into the foundation of the thing! He sees the problem of the *liberum arbitrium* with his own eyes, sharpened by the Scriptures and his experience. He sees a man growing out of this seed of the *liberum arbitrium*, who is absolutely *anomos*. His will will be the free will, the *absolutum velle* (absolute willing). He will stand with this, his absolute "willing," and with nothing else. Everything that comes into his hands and before his eyes, everything that enters his spirit or his understanding, will be turned into his – the human's own – possibility. All reality will evaporate for him -the man of free will -into the potential of his origin. He will not find God anymore; rather, the god that he reaches after or rejects with his free will will be the god of his mental, religious, and moral potential. That means neither that God stops being reality nor that man ceases to be attached to him and to have his action or lack thereof be determined and directed by him; but it does mean that he has lost access to his reality. Luther is trying to shield man against his own demise when he shatters the dream of the *liberum arbitrium*. He wants to rescue man from unceasingly reaching into a void; he wants to remind him of his finiteness, of his having been determined to be as he is and nothing else. That is, indeed, *servum arbitrium*!

Great theological realizations always stand "between the times." Just as the young Luther looks backward in his deep assault into scholasticism and, with the *liberum arbitrium*, hits the nerve of the doctrine of justification, so also in his battle with Erasmus he looks beyond his opponent. He sees what lies behind the figures of Feuerbach and Nietzsche; he sees the path that, with its "will to power," will dissolve theology into anthropology, and that will transform the afterlife from a matter of good and evil into a new political morality. He sees the man who will rise up as the naysayer to God. He sees him coming in the distant centuries. He sees him because he recognizes in himself the man who, simultaneously with God, loses his own reality, his being thus and not otherwise. He recognizes the man without history, the man of

the *absolutum velle*!

III. DECISION

This does not, however, affirm that Luther and Erasmus entirely spoke past each other. The point at which Luther began his dispute with Erasmus, the argument that for Erasmus was also concrete and comprehensible, was clearly worked through in this conflict. It is still worthwhile to look at Erasmus's formulation and to understand the application of this entire, historically so important, difference. In his work on the free will Erasmus provides a definition that clearly says what he means and why he has turned his efforts against Luther: "Furthermore, we hold *liberum arbitrium* in this context to mean the power of the human will, by which man is able to apply himself to those things that lead to eternal salvation, or to avert himself from the same." One can say that the main concern in this conflict over the free will is this definition. Luther answers, "You might perhaps correctly attribute to man some sort of *arbitrium*, but to attribute *liberum arbitrium* [to him] in things divine is too much" (WA 18: 662.6; AE 33: 103).

The image in which Erasmus sees man is clear. Man stands like Hercules at the fork in the road. He has the freedom of decision to say "yes" to grace or to turn away from it. And Luther scoffs; such a will is a *vertibile arbitrium*, a changing will. But that is probably not the point upon which everything depends. What is decisive is that with such an understanding of the situation of man before God, everything hangs in the air. A distinction is made between the will itself, the *merum velle*, and an act separated from it, which "is natural in a will that is elicited by the very act of willing and not willing." The act may happen in this way or that way, but the will remains then "free," that is, finally undecided; one can do different things, but the will remains unaffected. There is no *necessitas* (necessity) over it, no real *velle* (willing) and *nolle* (lack of willing), no real *amare* (loving) and *odisse* (hating).

One sees from this that this place of decision, where man is displaced by such an either/or, is a fictitious place where man as he truly is, as the man sought and loved by God, never is. In such supposed free decision, he is only his own shadow. It is the surest means not to encounter the grace of God, but instead to conduct oneself with regard to it only according to one's human possibilities. The half-dead man who fell to the robbers and was fed and saved by the Samaritan did not have the possibility of "conducting" himself with regard to his savior. Lazarus, who lay in the grave and received the call, "Come out!" did not have freedom of choice. Freedom falls away in the real encounter with the grace of God; real freedom falls away where the real liberation of man, freedom as an event from God, comes to meet us. What does this mean then: *se applicare ad salutem* (to turn to salvation)? That is exactly what I am not able to do. That is in fact the deepest misery of man, that he is not able to complete this turning about by himself, by means of his own potential.

The will that drives him, that rules in him, is a will irreversibly directed and oriented toward itself. As the river which runs down the streambed cannot turn itself, so man is unable to turn himself. The real turning toward God does not lie in my possibilities; I would have to cease being who I am, the earthly, fleshly, lost man. That is not to say that the turning about cannot happen, but that when it happens, the limit of all human potential has been reached. This means that the reality of my life begins where God's potential begins. What is impossible with us is possible with God. So Luther can say, "For you do [12] not consider how great a thing you attribute to him with this pronoun *se* or *se ipsam*, whenever you say: he is able to apply himself; but precisely in saying that, you absolutely exclude the Holy Spirit with all his power as being superfluous and unnecessary" (WA 18: 665.13; AE 33: 109).

But now we turn the matter around and look at the great as- set of what appears to be our desperate situation. The desperate part is not that man cannot turn himself by himself; nor is it that he remains in his inmost being an *aversus* against God; but that this man, through that false call to decision, repeatedly has to be whipped again, like a workhorse drooping from pulling its heavy load. That has to end with the man finally lying in despair on the edge of the road. The call to decision has assumed something that it fundamentally cannot assume: *se applicare ad salutem*. As little as the lame man can move himself into the water at the pool of Bethesda, so little can man throw himself into the purifying flood of grace. The leap of faith first succeeds only when the faith is there!

There is no leap out of unfaith into faith. From this perspective, one can also understand Luther's polemic against "works," insofar as these are understood as "acts" of that "free" will that also wants to remain free. In reality, nothing happens in these acts; there is no turning; the man who stands behind them remains who he is. These acts are only the appearance of a turning toward God, one which does not succeed, because the will cannot move itself, or at least is unable to bring itself into movement against itself.

So we see that the bound will is not a lack of will (*noluntas*), nor is it a "determination" from the outside; the bound will is the will according to its human reality at the end of history. Just as the stream has its declination, the fleshly will has its inclination, and nothing belongs to it per se -that is, that lies inside of our human possibilities – that can lead us beyond that. Whenever we turn ourselves to salvation, it is only an apparent turn, a Fata Morgana. We will always seek our own salvation, *salus nostra*; that is, we will seek ourselves. Only when God's salvation turns itself toward us, when a motion from God toward us occurs, when God's action remains outside of the realm of our possibilities, are we able to believe and be saved. This can never occur where man is active, which is why all *Aktpsychologie* is amiss in the things of faith. No *justitia activa* (active righteousness) helps here. Rather, we will be passive, wherever God's grace truly meets us, where it seeks and finds us; passive, in the sense that this encounter occurs for us in suffering.

Everything that *facere quod in se est* (to do what is in one) means, is that we turn ourselves in circles in all directions. The active will must turn in circles. Only suffering can tear us out of this course. One begins to understand Luther in his fight against works first, when he sees this inner connection. The man of the free will lives by his works. "Adam is edified by works!" The call to action is always an edifying affair for the Old Adam. But, "works are destroyed by the cross." Through the cross, the opera are torn down. Since man hides himself behind his works, God must tear down our capability through suffering; he must lay flat all of the wall that we have placed and continue to place between him and ourselves, so that he can truly reach us. Only in naked passivity, in being that which I actually am, does his grace seek to find me. In this way God's reality meets the reality of man. So the two correspond to each other: faith and passive righteousness.

IV. REALIZATION

"How much actually happens between mouth and bite" is a phrase used once in this debate between Luther and Erasmus (WA 18: 677.30; AE 33: 127). Between mouth and bite is as much as to say between imperative and indicative, between "should" and "be." It is evident that the theologians easily stumble -and the philosophers are by no means behind them in this regard – at the fallacy that imperative implies the indicative, that "you should" implies "you can." And in a certain sense, that is the case. How could the "should" be taken seriously if it were not faced with being made possible, if it did not already imply the doing? But between command and deed there lies a special act; and it is an illusion, as to God's command, to want

to derive "be" from "should," "as if immediately, as soon as something is commanded, it is also necessarily possible to do."

It is in fact here that the misunderstanding of the divine law rests, that the brilliance lies which blinds us, which deceives everyone who gets ready to follow it by his own powers. This – one almost wants to say uninterrupted – conflating of command and deed; this "blind" following, as if it only depended on our placing ourselves at the command's disposal; this oversight of man, who is intended by this call as one who wants and not just one who works; leads Luther to postulate at this point of our blindness a special act of realization that makes a knowing deed out of the "blind" one. Whoever is encountered by God's call to a good deed must know who he is: the man whom God wants to make into his partner and cooperator in his will and work. The simple flash of the good in our spirit as an idea does not suffice; the faith that believes that one only needs to reach his hand out toward it in order to have it, is deception, unavoidable deception, to which we must succumb.

Here lies the root of everything tragic, in the life of the individual and of all men. It is the blinding of human existence. Right in between mouth and bite, in this practically momentary coming together of idea and actualization, shines a realization from God, a wonderful opening of our eyes that lets us see that we are indeed bound and shackled. First the shackles would need to fall so that we can place ourselves and our members, hands and feet, in freedom at the disposal of the divine righteousness. It is not easy to depict this "moment" in which God grasps the man who stands in midstep on his way to mak-[13]ing the good a reality, and in which he grants him spiritual perception. The question of who I am cannot be skipped; I am not permitted to "believe" where I am called to perceive. There is a faith of man which must give way to knowing, if we should otherwise find the way from "should" to "do." In the end, it has to do with that Pauline statement: "The law brings knowledge (realization) of sin."

Luther wrote a sentence with regard to this, which is by itself worth a full treatment: "Therefore, the commandments of the law are recited, not in order to affirm the power of the will, but in order to enlighten blind reason, so that it may see how utterly deficient its own light is and how utterly deficient the strength of the will is" (WA 18: 677.7; AE 33: 127). That means, first of all, that the ratio (reason), that very organ and capability out of which man creates his consciousness of freedom and of his possibilities, must be illuminated. The reason is blind in a special way – not because it fails to see, but because it is blinded from the brilliance of the idea. It is not just the sensually focused man who succumbs to the blind force of his passion; there is also at the higher level of reason a kind of blindness which is much more difficult to break through than that other one of our lower passions, which are also controlled by reason. When speaking of the bondage of the will, it has to do with this blindness of the ratio. It is not able to grasp this on its own. To grasp this presupposes a higher intervention, which cannot result from reason. Reason does not have a mediator to show it what the situation is for man as a reasonable being.

The problem of the self-awareness of the reason, of the spirit, presents itself here. For the reason directed at itself – is that not the spirit? This is where Luther places his "realization." The man who sees himself as he is when he is called by God realizes his bounciness. He who does not want the one, cannot have the other. He who stays clear of the statement of the *servum arbitrium*, will have to remain ever blind. Man does not come to self-understanding where he stumbles on the reality for which he is striving with his supposedly good will. The reality, which creates boundaries for me from the outside, can bring me to the path, but this stumbling can never enlighten me! I will get back on my feet again and in the blindness, that is, in faith in the supposed goodness, hopelessly try a second and a third time to turn the imperative into an indicative. I will force heaven onto earth, so long as I have failed to

recognize who I am and who he is, failing to recognize that only in connection with him can I make this a reality. The mouth does not cease snapping at the morsel, even if it again and again fails to succeed.

Luther penned a passage in his writing against Erasmus which makes clear that the realization of the bondage is of a sort that waits for us as a revelation:

> The Diatribe perpetually paints us the fictitious portrait of such a man as either can do what is being prescribed, or at least realizes that he is unable. But such a man is to be found nowhere. If such a one would exist, the spirit of Christ would be in vain. Scripture, however, proposes a man such that not only is he bound, miserable, a prisoner, sick, and dead, but he is also one who adds, by the operating of Satan, his prince, this further misery of his blindness to his other miseries, that he believes himself to be free, happy, absolved, strong, sane and alive. (WA 18: 679.19; AE 33: 130)

This means that the natural man believes in his freedom and must believe in it. The freedom of the will is a principle of faith. With the thesis of the *servum arbitrium*, a faith is destroyed, so that an understanding can take its place. It is not an exchange of faith and faith that is completed here, also not one of theory and theory. Rather we are given understanding in the place where we were caught in a false faith. This is called "illumination"; it is God's Spirit. That is the function of the *lex spiritualis*, that understanding of the law that is born out of the Spirit of God. Without this understanding fulfilling its function in us, we cannot be saved from the illusion of our being free. So law and realization are bound together. Therefore, the things that are done by the law are not ridiculous, but most serious and necessary (WA 18: 679.36; AE 33: 131).

V. OMNIPRESENCE

If one bows to this realization of the bondage of the human will, one must accept one thing: one point will be invisible, which otherwise especially interests us in the area of theology and the psychology that works with it: the transition out of unfaith and into faith, that is, the question of how the act of faith occurs. The other question, why one person comes to faith and the other person persists in unbelief, is related to this. As long as one was working with the freedom of the will and the *facere quod in se est*, this question did not need to become so bitter. One could put the blame on man. He had not done his responsibility. Now it falls back on God. Is God not unjust, when he leads and directs, drives and pushes the one in one manner and the other in another?

Man must destroy himself; he cannot turn himself, if God does not have mercy on him. That has to do with the *necessitas immutabilitatis* (necessity of immutability), which dwells in the human will (WA 18: 693.31; AE 33: 151). Admittedly, one cannot overlook that it appears unthinkable to Luther that the one who recognizes his situation would not immediately know himself to be hidden in God's grace:

> If man would only know his own misery, Satan could retain none in his own reign, because God could not but at once commiserate with one who acknowledges his misery [14] and calls out for help and succor him, as is natural in one who is being praised throughout the entire Scripture by such great praise as being close to those that are contrite in heart. (WA 18: 679.26; AE 33:130)

That is to say, no one knows how he stands, unless he is already hidden in the kingdom of

grace. With the realization of our sin, where the sin is truly real and deep, the situation is the same for us as it was for the rider over Lake Constance. As long as we are in its power, are blinded and shackled by it, we are unable to grasp it. Only when it is taken from us do we see from what an abyss we have been carried away. That is why whoever lives far from the grace of God fails to know it. He lives in the separation of being and consciousness. That is what Luther calls *ignorantia invincibilis*. Exactly because of that, the hope exists for him that he will be saved. The proponents of free will cannot look at the *damnati* (damned) with such hope, for they would suggest that the damned have rejected their salvation of their own accord, just as the proponents of free will have elected it. They do not know that, in view of the grace of God, those who see must become blind, and the blind must become seeing. Only in view of the *servum arbitrium* does the indestructible hope of God's grace stand over the death-field of godlessness.

But that is not all. Not even close. One ought to see that the doctrine of the *servum arbitrium* puts the relationship between those who believe and those who reject God in a new light. For those who believe are indeed the hope of these unbelievers; what happened to them – why should it not also be able to happen to those others! Whoever sacrifices this doctrine, sacrifices his own election and must make a merit, a *kauchema*, out of his situation as a Christian. He must slide back into the decision Christianity of the human freedom of will.

But how can this be, when those who are rejected accuse even God himself, that he in his omnipotence drives them further along that once engaged path and does not allow them to come to conversion? When "therefore God gave them up . . . to the dishonoring of their bodies" becomes for them a history, an irreversible occurrence? Also here, the *non posse non furere contra deum* (not able not to rave against God) must be asserted. "The impious is entirely turned towards himself and to his own concerns. He is not able not to desire, just as he is not able not to exist." (WA 18: 710.11; AE 33: 177). He must cease to be who he is, if he should cease to rave as he does, "since he is a creature of God, even if a vitiated one." He is capable of nothing else, because he is God's and not his own creation, and as such is subject to the omnipotence of God. "The impious, however, is not able to change his own aversions" – and – "God is not able to omit his own omnipotence because of that [sinner's] loathing" (WA 18: 710.6; AE 33: 177). Luther adds: "Here we have that well-known raging of the world against the gospel of God." The impious is then not nothing! But what he is, he is through the fact that he as a creature still stands under God's omnipotence. Whoever would desire that God let the evil ones fall from existence, does not grasp that in so doing he touches God's divinity, which God also still exercises in and over the impious. Should the creator and sustainer command the world to stand still, in order to shut out those who are evil? They live by the fact that God sustains the world and, in it, them. Admittedly, the godless man also should not suggest that he could do otherwise if he wanted to. He must be who he is! "Hence it results that the impious cannot do otherwise but always be in error and sin, that he is not permitted to be at rest, moved by the drive to divine power, but wills, does, and desires in the same way, as he exists himself" (WA 18: 709.34; AE 33: 176). This fact, that man cannot flee from himself, that his will becomes his history-whether it suits him or not, only the gospel as victor can enter the plan here, only faith in the grace of God in Jesus Christ can lift one out of the *circulus vitiosus* (vicious circle) of guilt and history, nothing else – this fact supports the doctrine of the bound will, also in the realm of evil men.

From this perspective, one can also interpret that image, not first invented by Luther, of the rider and the horse (WA 18: 635.17; AE 33: 65), as the man "possessed" either by God or by Satan. "If God is within us and Satan is absent, then on the one hand nothing but a good will is present; if God is absent and Satan is present, on the other hand nothing but a bad will is within us. Neither God nor Satan allow a mere and pure will to exist in us" (WA 18: 670.6;

AE 33: 115). It is clear that man is a passive being in this situation, that his wanting, so far as it concerns the seeking of something, so far as it concerns the drive and movement of his being, is such that a purpose must follow that lies outside of him.

But can we imagine man as a neutral being between God and Satan? Is it truly so, that both have the same right to the man? This is not so; it is not so precisely since only thanks to the fact that God holds evil men in his hand is the working of Satan "not nothing." Also the man possessed by Satan belongs secretly to God; what he possesses for living and moving originates in him! At the same time, on the other hand, the man driven and moved by God does not secretly belong to Satan. The *deus absconditus* is not an "evil" God, even if we are unable to discern the identity of operation between the *deus revelatus* and the *deus absconditus*. Much more, the fact that the impious one under the authority of his master must be who he is, is not the satanic law of his being, but rather he has the omnipotence of God to thank, who bears him in his patience! But what he is must become history. It cannot remain some bare possibility, from which I can meanwhile turn away. The such-and-in-no-[14]other-way of the history of man, who wants to be his own lord, is the outer, if not also the inner, refutation of the illusion of human freedom.

VI. CERTAINTY

It belongs to the most engaging things in theology, and indeed also in the Christian life of faith, that the proponents of free will argue in such a manner that they maintain that, with the thesis of the bondage of the will, certainty collapses; whereas Luther, on the contrary, asserts that certainty consists only in the bound will. Could not the struggle for the certainty of faith in the nineteenth century experience a new lighting from this perspective? Why, then, do the opponents of the free will suggest that with the *liberum arbitrium* the salvation of man is sacrificed to uncertainty? Indeed, it is because it comes to be outside of the control of human consciousness, because it lies extra me (outside of me), that this in Christo coincides with consciousness, even if it is one first attained in faith. Contrariwise, Luther suggests that faith takes salvation out of this immanence of the consciousness, that it affixes my life to that rock of hope that lies outside of me. Certainty and *extra me* fall together in their Reformation meaning. That is the meaning of *assertio* (assertion) in Luther. Only when one took the step of making an in me out of the extra me, did the certainty of faith, from the standpoint of the inner and outer chance happenings of life, shatter on the *promissio Dei*.

It is thus essential to call attention to the fact that Luther did not want to see the *liberum arbitrium* reestablished for the one freed by God to the freedom of faith. In this he goes beyond Augustine. The goal and foundation of the certainty of our faith is not the possibility of certainty inside of man; Luther points toward the frenzied nature and inconsistency of this "inside," as he also points at the uncertainty of the ethical process "if I would live and work eternally";[6] neither psychology nor ethics offer him the possibility of anchoring his hope on something fast. Rather, this is alone the faithfulness of God, the trust that "he may be faithful and not lie to me!" In other words, in the word of the mercy of God, a certainty is set in place, which shows itself to be above all experience and life, which is not offered and established as a part of experience, but nevertheless rules all experience. Since God "takes" my salvation "out of my will, he may perhaps take" it "up in his own will," so that a position of overarching certainty is set in place, which stands against all demons and all adversity.

[6] WA 18: 783.17ff.; AE 33: 288ff. "For on my own part, I frankly con- fess that even if it were possible, I should not wish to have free choice given to me, or to have anything left in my own hands by which I might strive toward salvation, etc."

The question of the certainty of faith is not a question of certainty – certainty is given with the assertion that "God will not lie to me" – it is much more a question of faith. The reality that this salvation is placed *extra meum arbitrium* (outside of my will) is only accessible to faith; if you believe, then you have it. If the sola gratia portrays the extra me of salvation in Christ, then the sola fide portrays the in me. I must live as a believer in order truly to be able to live by means of that certainty. At the same time, faith has to do with a reality; yes, with the reality of God himself, if sin and death are to be removed not in me, but extra me in Christ. The doctrine of the bound will allows us to see the problem of certainty anew as a dispute between the omnipotence of God and the human ratio. "The followers of Erasmus measure the majesty of God according to reason."[7]

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Source: *Logia. A Journal of Lutheran Theology*, No. 17, Issue 2 (2008), pp. 7-15.

[7] There should still be an investigation into this formula, which appears very early in Luther: If you believe, then you have it. This formula contains the shortest version of the problem of certainty, and was understandably very quickly misunderstood. It is intended in the sense of the extra nos. But to clarify this problem could prove to be somewhat more troublesome than that well known philosophical problem of the reality of the outside world. Here, it has to do with a judgment; faith judges differently than reason. Since assertions of faith are assertions of judgment, no ontology helps us here to come further. One should compare the passage quoted above in its whole context: WA 40, I: 360.5.