

THE CONTROVERSY CONCERNING PREDESTINATION

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C.F.W. Walther's theological defense of Lutheran doctrine on predestination, clarifying distinctions between God's foreknowledge and election as taught by the Formula of Concord.

4 Chapters

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01 - First Section

Trustworthy advice for pious Christians that would like to know whose doctrine in the present controversy concerning predestination is Lutheran, and whose is not.

Dear Reader: If in a doctrinal controversy we wish to find out which side contends for the truth, and which side contends for error, it is necessary above all things to understand thoroughly, which is the actual controverted point in question. For this reason, false teachers have at all times endeavored to shift and misstate the actual controverted point in the doctrinal controversies stirred up by them. Some Zwinglians of old, for instance, acted upon this principle. The chief controverted point in the dispute between them and Luther was this: whether the true body and the true blood of Christ is present in, with, and under the blessed bread and wine, is distributed by the ministers and therefore also taken and partaken of with the mouth by all communicants. This Luther had affirmed, but the Zwinglians had denied it. However, when Luther proved his doctrine so clearly from the Word of God and confuted the Zwinglian doctrine so powerfully, that everybody saw and the Zwinglians themselves perceived, that they had been defeated: some of the latter shifted the controverted point, asserting that they had only contested the doctrine, that the body of Christ is present in the Lord's Supper like an ordinary body and is crushed by the teeth of the communicants. Luther, it is true, had really used this expression once; but he had added at the same time, how he meant it, namely not in that gross manner which the Capernaïtes of old had imputed to Christ (John 6:52-60), but in this sense that the essential body of Christ is really and truly present and is really and truly eaten with the bodily mouth. The teachers of the pure doctrine, however, have always above all things stated precisely the actual controverted point in question, whenever controversies had arisen. A plain proof of this, among other things, is our dear Formula of Concord. For when after Luther's death serious controversies concerning certain points of doctrine had arisen within our Lutheran church, which controversies were to be adjusted by means of the Formula of Concord, the latter in the first place always stated the actual controverted point in every one of these articles. If we look into the Formula of Concord, we find that the first ten articles of this book always begin with the words: "Status controversiae. The chief question in this controversy." However by the word: "The chief question" nothing else is understood but: "The chief controverted point." Only the eleventh article treating of predestination does not begin thus; and why not? For no other reason but because (as the first Part of the Formula of Concord expressly states in the very beginning) at that time "no public controversy had arisen (yet) among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession." (Compare the new Jubilee edition of the Book of Concord, page 378. New Market edition page 353.) But because now, within the American-Lutheran church, a "public controversy has arisen" concerning the doctrine of predestination, it is of course necessary, in order that no one may "fish in troubled waters", and that all pious Christians, even the most simple, may see their way clearly in this "controversy", that has arisen, to state in the first place and above all things the actual controverted point in the present controversy. What, then, is the actual, and at the same time the chief controverted point?

It consists simply in the following twofold question: 1st, whether God from eternity, before the foundations of the world were laid, out of pure mercy and only for the sake of the most holy merit of Christ, elected and ordained the chosen children of God to salvation and whatever pertains to it, consequently also to faith, repentance, and conversion; or 2nd, whether in His election God took into consideration anything good in man, namely the foreseen conduct of man, the foreseen non-resistance, and the foreseen persevering faith, and thus elected certain persons to salvation in consideration of, with respect to, on account of, or in consequence of their conduct, their non-resistance, and their faith. The first of these questions we affirm, while our opponents deny it, but the second question we deny, while our opponents affirm it.

02 - Second Section

However our opponents may shuffle, this is and remains the actual and chief controverted point in the present controversy, as long as our opponents do not retract. The principal means by which our opponents endeavor to support their doctrine, consists in continually quoting passages from the private writings of the fathers of our Church, published subsequent to the Formula of Concord. But whenever a controversy arises concerning the question, whether a doctrine is Lutheran, we must not ask: "What does this or that 'father' of the Lutheran Church teach in his private writings?" for he also may have fallen into error; on the contrary, we must ask: "What does the public Confession of the Lutheran Church teach concerning the controverted point?" for in her confession our Church has recorded for all times, what she believes, teaches, and confesses, for the very reason, that no controversy may arise concerning the question, what our Lutheran Church believes, teaches, and confesses in reference to certain doctrinal points, or that such controversy may at least be adjusted without difficulty. Thus, for instance, the Formula of Concord in its second part expressly declares as its object that in setting forth its views "a public and positive testimony might be furnished, not only to those who are now living, but also to posterity, showing what the unanimous opinion and judgment of our churches were, and perpetually ought to be, concerning those controverted articles." (See Jubilee edition of the Book of Concord p. 391; New Market edition p. 596.)

If, therefore, many pious Christians suppose the doctrine concerning predestination to be too difficult for them to know and decide whose doctrine in the present controversy concerning this article is Lutheran and whose is not, such dear Christians are sadly mistaken. Nothing is easier for a pious Christian than to know and to decide this. He only must take care not to leave his Lutheran castle and not to be decoyed upon the slippery soil of human reason; he only must abide by the clear words of our Lutheran Confession. Then he will soon be able to know and to decide whose doctrine is Lutheran and whose is not.

Since, however, just the eleventh article of the Formula of Concord, which treats of predestination, is rather lengthy, we will give our pious readers a plain, trustworthy advice, which they can follow without difficulty, and by following which even a simple Christian is enabled to form a settled opinion in regard to the present controversy concerning predestination, even though a hundred ever so learned philosophers would argue with him. Our advice is this: In the first place, dear reader, bear in mind only TWO SHORT SENTENCES which the time-honored Confession of our Church premises, before entering upon the lengthy explanation of the doctrine concerning predestination, and in which it clearly and plainly states those points, to which we must cling chiefly and above all things, and from which absolutely nothing must lead us away, if in the doctrine concerning predestination we are not to fall into errors, but to abide in the straight path of the Holy Scriptures. The first of these sentences is the following:

I. "In the first place, the difference between the eternal foreknowledge of God and the eternal election of His children to everlasting salvation must be accurately observed. For praescientia vel

provisio, that is, that God foresees and foreknows all things before they come to pass, which is called the foreknowledge of God, extendeth to all creatures, whether they be good or wicked. But God's eternal election vel praedestinatio, that is, the ordaining of God unto salvation, doth not at once pertain both to the good and the wicked, but only to the children of God who have been elected and ordained to eternal life, before the foundations of the world were laid; as St. Paul (Ephesians 1:5) testifies, saying: 'He hath chosen us in Christ Jesus, and predestinated us unto the adoption of children.'" (See Jubilee edition of the Book of Concord p. 478; New Market edition p. 711.) From this, my dear Lutheran Christian, whose desire it is to abide until death with our dear Lutheran Church and by her pure doctrine also in these latter perilous times, thou canst clearly see, in the first place, that the doctrine of our opponents evidently is not Lutheran, when they say, that the Formula of Concord treats of predestination in a wider sense. Our opponents indeed know very well how much depends upon this. Their entire system is based upon the assertion, that the Formula of Concord treats of predestination in a wider sense. Upon the truth or falsity of this assertion depends everything they affirm and deny in opposition to us. But their assertion is positively false. The Formula of Concord does not treat of predestination in a wider sense. On the contrary, as thou canst see from the above-cited words, the Formula of Concord in the very beginning bases its whole doctrine upon this, that predestination, unlike the foreknowledge and consequently also unlike the general decree of God concerning man's salvation, does not at once extend to the wicked as well as to the good, and consequently does by no means refer to both, but that it refers "only to the children of God", and only to those children of God "who have been elected and ordained to eternal life, before the foundations of the world were laid", who, therefore, will surely be saved. To this, therefore, dear Lutheran Christian, thou must firmly adhere first of all, for this is the point of which also the Formula of Concord says that it must be observed "in the first place." Let nothing induce thee to leave this castle. If any one attempts to make thee believe, that the doctrine of a so-called predestination in a wider sense, which refers not only to the chosen children of God who have been ordained to eternal life, but "at once" to the good and the wicked, if any one attempts to make thee believe that this doctrine is Lutheran, do not lend thine ear to the voice of the tempter, but say: My dear Confession teaches quite another doctrine, and by that I will abide.

03 - Third Section

But, my dear Lutheran Christian, bear in mind also the second principal point which our Lutheran Confession places likewise at the head of its explanation of the doctrine concerning predestination. For thus our Confession intends to make also this second principal point a guiding-star, as it were, for all Lutherans, which is to keep them from all errors in regard to this doctrine, and to which, therefore, they must adhere also in the first place and above all things. This second principal point in the doctrine concerning predestination is the following:

II. "The foreknowledge of God (praescientia) foresees and foreknows evils also, but this is not to be understood as if it were God's gracious will that they should occur c. The foreknowledge of God is not the origin or the cause of evil (for God does not create or cause evil, nor does He aid or promote it) c. But the eternal election of God not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but through His gracious will and good pleasure in Christ Jesus, is also a CAUSE which procures, works, aids, and promotes our salvation and whatever pertains to it; and upon this our salvation is so firmly grounded that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; for it is written: 'Neither shall any pluck my sheep out of my hand', and again; And as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed'. Matthew 16:18; John 10:28; Acts 13:48." (See Jubilee edition of the Book of Concord p. 478 sq.; New Market edition p. 711. sq.) From this, my dear Lutheran Christian, thou canst clearly see, in the second place, that the doctrine of our opponents is not Lutheran also for this reason, because they declare predestination to be nothing more than the following: in the first place, the foreknowledge of God that certain persons will receive the gospel in true faith and persevere in this saving faith unto the end, and secondly the decree that He will actually save the persons that thus persevere in faith. Now it is indeed undeniably true that God from eternity has foreseen all persons that persevere in the saving faith unto the end; it also cannot be denied, that God has made the decree to grant everlasting salvation to all those and only to those that persevere in the saving faith; but this is not the doctrine of predestination which, according to the Formula of Concord, as we have seen, "pertains only to the children of God who have been elected and ordained to eternal life, before the foundations of the world were laid;" but it is rather the general decree concerning man's salvation which God has made concerning all men, the wicked as well as the good. Predestination, however, which refers only to the chosen children of God, is, as our Lutheran Confession has it, "through God's gracious will and good pleasure in Christ Jesus, also a CAUSE, which procures, works, aids and promotes our salvation and whatever pertains to it; and upon this our salvation is so firmly grounded that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." According to our Confession, therefore, predestination is not only a decree of God according to which He is willing to save men, provided that they persevere in faith unto the end, but it is rather such an ordination of God, which is such a CAUSE of the salvation of the elect, as to "procure, work, aid and promote" at the same time "whatever pertains to it," namely, to their surely obtaining salvation, consequently also, to their being led to repentance, conversion, and faith, and to their persevering unto the end. And besides, according to our Confession, the salvation of the elect "is so firmly grounded" upon the eternal election "that the gates of hell shall

not prevail against it"; for it is written: 'Neither shall any pluck my sheep out of my hand'." That, however, also faith is included in this statement, that the eternal election is a cause which procures everything pertaining to our salvation or to our obtaining salvation, is not only self-evident, since faith is the only means of appropriating that salvation which Christ has earned for all men; but the Formula of Concord does also expressly declare that faith is includeir art of reasoning and skill of logic, in order to prove that the first principal iC * @ wid* @ sense, extending to all men" this would be a riddle indeed, if the Formula of Concord in our second principal sentence did not say so clearly that predestination is also a cause of faith. This solves the riddle. For since our opponents have set their minds on the notion, that predestination cannot be a cause of faith, but that, on the contrary, faith is rather a cause of predestination, and that affirming the reverse is Calvinism: the first principal sentence of the Formula of Concord faces them like a huge rock which they can neither pass over nor pass by. For since, according to the first principal sentence, predestination refers only to the chosen children of God and not also to the wicked, that predestination of which the Formula of Concord treats, cannot be predestination in the wider sense, extending to all men" this would be a riddle indeed, if the Formula of Concord in our second principal sentence did not say so clearly that predestination is also a cause of faith. This solves the riddle. For since our opponents have set their minds on the notion, that predestination cannot be a cause of faith, but that, on the contrary, faith is rather a cause of predestination, and that affirming the reverse is Calvinism: the first principal sentence of the Formula of Concord faces them like a huge rock which they can neither pass over nor pass by. For since according to the first principal sentence, predestination refers only to the chosen children of God and not also to the wicked, that predestination of which the Formula of Concord treats, cannot be predestination in a wider sense. But what do they do now? They exercise all their art of reasoning and skill of logic, in order to prove that the first principal sentence does not say, or at least does not mean at all what it says! that it indeed speaks of a predestination referring not to all men, but that it means sentence in which predestination is called the cause of faith, as the second warden, immediately confronts him. These two wardens also assist each other. For if an opponent says that the second principal sentence does indeed declare predestination to be a cause of faith, but that this is to be understood only of predestination in a wider sense: the first principal sentence which states, that predestination refers only to the children of God, as the first warden assists the second. But if an opponent says, that the first principal sentence indeed does not speak of predestination in a wider, but in a stricter sense, that, however, it does not say anything about the doctrine, that faith results from this predestination: the second principal sentence speedily comes to its relief by confessing this doctrine in plain terms. In short, our opponents are different `ç ãHc pĩ upon it means by a word now this, now something else, without always adding in what signification it uses this word in the different passages; yea, without even mentioning, that it uses this word in quite different significations, and means by it now this, now something else? So confused a writing would be utterly unqualified to be a Confession which, above all other writings, ought to be clear, plain, distinct, and quite unmistakable. The two principal sentences, therefore, which we have quoted from the Formula of Concord, like twouteran church! Do then in the first place indeed adhere steadfastly in opposition to all Calvinistic errors to the doctrine, that God is willing to grant faith, perseverance in faith, and finally everlasting salvation to all men; that through the word He offers all this earnestly, strongly, and efficaciously, and that, consequently, it is not the fault of predestination, but of man himself, namely of his obstinate resistance, if so great a number either

do not obtain faith, or do not persevere in faith unto the end, and thus are lost eternally. But adhere also firmly to this: That ye believe and persevere in faith, of this not ye yourselves are the cause; it is not the consequence of your having been better than others and therefor [sic.] more willing to determine for the way to heaven, consequently also for faith itself; on the contrary, the cause of this is, according to the Formula of Concord (p. 483), that God, "before the foundations of the world were laid, in His counsel and purpose, ordained the manner in which He would bring me" (consequently you also) "to salvation, and preserve me therein," and that "in His eternal purpose, which cannot fail or be overthrown, He ordained your salvation, and to secure it, placed it into the omnipotent hands of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, out of which none shall be lost." Our opponents are inclosed between the two principal sentences of the Formula of Concord as between two fires: if they try to escape the one, they are burnt by the other, and if they try to escape the latter, they are burnt by the former. There is no way of getting out of the dilemma: our opponents must either admit that ours is the Lutheran doctrine, or they must renounce the Formula of Concord as being an erroneous, Calvinistic book.

04 - Fourth Section

God be praised for having given us such a glorious Confession, which resembles a castle well-fortified on all sides!

O ye dear faithful children of God within our beloved Evangelical Lutheran church! Do then in the first place indeed adhere steadfastly in opposition to all Calvinistic errors to the doctrine, that God is willing to grant faith, perseverance in faith, and finally everlasting salvation to all men; that through the word He offers all this earnestly, strongly, and efficaciously, and that, consequently, it is not the fault of predestination, but of man himself, namely of his obstinate resistance, if so great a number either do not obtain faith, or do not persevere in faith unto the end, and thus are lost eternally. But adhere also firmly to this: That ye believe and persevere in faith, of this not ye yourselves are the cause; it is not the consequence of your having been better than others and therefor [sic. or all times treasured up for all Lutherans, as in their ark of the covenant, and by God's gracious dispensation has been handed down to us also. O then let us prove also by our conduct that we did not act the hypocrite in celebrating this jubilee; for in the year of this very jubilee of our Confession God has permitted assaults to be made out of our own camp upon an important doctrine of our Confession, in order to put us to the test whether we would prove faithful wardens of the treasure which in our Confession He entrusted to us. O do let us prove faithful! As in other doctrines let us also in the doo not perish, because God, as Calvin in contradiction of the plain word of God does impiously teach, assigned them to eternal damnation (for God "will have all men to be saved"), but through their own fault; not because God excluded them, but because they excluded themselves; not because God with His grace passed them by, but because they passed by God's grace which desired to save them. Those, however, that are saved, do not owe it to themselves, but only to God's mercy in Christ; for God Himself in the prophecy of Hosea comprises these two truths in the following few words: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." (Hosea 13:9) Whoever, therefore, tries to make you believe that we teach that horrible Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, grossly transgresses the eighth commandment, in bearing false witness against his neighbor and slandering us; and God will judge it hereafter; for with heart and soul we condemn Calvin's doctrine of predestination, so help us God!

Now then, ye Lutheran readers, remember: Last year all of us celebrated a jubilee, because 300 years ago God bestowed upon our Church her glorious last public Confession, namely the Formula of Concord, in which the doctrine of the Reformation, the pure doctrine of Luther, purified from all corruptions that had crept in after Luther's death, has been for all times treasured up for all Lutherans, as in their ark of the covenant, and by God's gracious dispensation has been handed down to us also. O then let us prove also by our conduct that we did not act the hypocrite in celebrating this jubilee; for in the year of this very jubilee of our Confession God has permitted assaults to be made out of our own camp upon an important doctrine of our Confession, in order to put us to the test whether we would prove faithful wardens of the treasure which in our Confession He entrusted to us. O do let us prove faithful! As in other doctrines let us also in the doctrine concerning predestination return to our Confession which in this point has been departed from so

soon. For we need but two short sentences of our dear Formula of Concord which, if firmly adhered to, are fully sufficient to keep us from all corruption of this doctrine. These two sentences which on pp. 7 and 9 [in the original (ed.)] we have caused to be printed in large type, shine like stars in our Confession, that no Lutheran may allow the pure doctrine of his church to be perverted or explained away by any sophistry, subtlety, or the plea: "The fathers! The fathers!" These two sentences, therefore, every Lutheran ought to commit to memory now, in order to have them always at hand, and along with the word of God to use them as his good, bright, Lutheran sword and his good, impenetrable, Lutheran shield. In the above, dear Lutheran readers, we have offered you our plain advice, if you would like to know whose doctrine in the present controversy concerning predestination is Lutheran, and whose is not. We can assure you from experience that this advice has stood the test already in many cases. Examine it, therefore, and if you find it good, follow it! But if someone offers you another advice as a better one, I beseech you: Examine it also and inquire with care, whether that advice really is a better one! For not every advice is a better one, which is recommended as a better one. When, for instance, in Luther's days a controversy had arisen concerning the meaning of Christ's words: "This is my body," the fanatic Schwenkfeld desired also to offer a better advice than all the rest, for adjusting the controversy. But what was his advice? If any one advises you not to be so very particular about the words of our Confession, and endeavors to prove by all kinds of crafty devices that the words of the Confession mean something else than they read, then think of Schwenkfeld!

Perhaps you will say now: "But what after all is the true biblical-Lubrethren! If any one advises you not to be so very particular about the words of our Confession, and endeavors to prove by all kinds of crafty devices that the words of the Confession mean something else than they read, then think of Schwenkfeld!

Perhaps you will say now: "But what after all is the true biblical-Lutheran doctrine concerning predestination? For shall I be anything the better for being able to confute all erroneous doctrines concerning this article, if I do not know what doctrine is the true one?" There you are quite right. We therefore intend, with the help of God, to issue soon a second tract on the doctrine concerning predestination and to expound the pure Lutheran doctrine concerning predestination in the most simple manner. For this purpose we ask you for your faithful prayer in the name of Jesus.

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