

The Relation of Time to Eternity in God's Dealing with Man as Concerning the Doctrine of Election

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[This paper was delivered at the Northern Conference of the Michigan District at Manistee, Michigan, on September 21, 1954.]

Sola Gratia—by grace alone—these two words describe the most precious treasure that has come down to us as our heritage through the Reformation. Through the fall of Adam natural man is dead in trespasses and sins. Lacking all true fear and love of God he is a debtor under His law and subject to the penalty of everlasting condemnation. But God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life, Rom. 5:18. The world, all men, was justified, declared righteous, before God by Jesus' death on Calvary. No condition to establish that sentence was left unfulfilled, so that even faith as a work of man to make this declaration complete is ruled out. We can tell the trembling doubter who says, "It's not for me because I can't believe it," that it's still for him in spite of his doubts or even unbelief, and thus bringing the unconditioned Gospel as a power of God unto salvation, lead men to faith— *Sola Gratia*.

Sola Gratia it is also when it comes to this faith. It is God's free gift through Word and Spirit created in us in an instant, in a moment,¹ when a Saul becomes a Paul, as we are brought out of spiritual death to a new spiritual life, when He who commanded the light to shine out of the darkness shines in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of your-selves, it is the *gift* of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. Man lost if dependent upon himself receives new life and security from God by grace alone and rejoices and takes comfort in the blessed hope of eternal life found in his Savior Jesus Christ, whom he embraces as his righteousness and peace in time and for eternity.

The *Sola Gratia* finds its expression in Scripture not only in connection with the doctrine of justification and conversion but also in connection with the doctrine of election and thus will provide the ultimate answer to the question before us which is: The Relation of Time to Eternity in God's Dealing with Man as Concerning the Doctrine of Election. In treating this question the following statement is placed before you for your consideration: *The eternal damnation or eternal salvation of any given individual is never dependent upon the fact that God from eternity knew how that individual would deport himself in time.*

Let us first consider the case of the lost. This may be somewhat of a digression from the main topic because there is no election to damnation, but it may serve to clarify the question dealt with because of a special and urgent request, particularly with reference to the case of Judas Iscariot, which Luther also wrestles with and labors under in his *De Servo Arbitrio*, concluding correctly that since God's foresight is infallible, what He foresees will indubitably happen. It is a case that troubles many. I recall an instance when one of our laymen was greatly disturbed by the thought that God must be a ruthless being because the Scriptures foretold that Judas would betray his Lord and go to his own place. The Scriptures had to be fulfilled. So Judas had to be what he was and consequently was eternally lost. So he reasoned. This individual was severely tempted to blame God for the loss of Judas by taking the Calvinistic view of a double decree—one to salvation and another to damnation—and an attitude which can best be expressed in the words "What's the use? If God wants you to go to hell, nothing is going to stop it." Satan periodically tempted another pious old Christian, who has now entered the rest of the people of God, to similar thoughts against God. In his temptation the first question he would invariably ask was: "Is God omniscient?" He knew the answer would be "yes." Then he would follow

¹ Cf. the supplementary statement "In an Instant and in a Moment," pp. 8,9.

with one or all of the following three questions: “1. Why did God make the devil if He knew the devil was going to fall? 2. Why did God make man if He knew man was going to fall? 3. Why did He not make the devil and man so they couldn’t fall?” The last question may be answered by saying that if God had created the angels and man so that it would be impossible for them to sin (*non posse peccare*) instead of making them so that it was possible for them not to sin (*posse non peccare*), then there could be no true morality since that depends on a freedom of choice in which the angels and man were to choose for themselves that goodness with which they were created over against the possibility of doing otherwise. But it does not completely satisfy our reason. For we know that the good angels and the perfected saints are now confirmed in their bliss and that in the new heaven and the new earth the possibility of a fall is excluded. Why could it not have been thus from the beginning? Even less satisfying to our sin-blinded reason is any attempt to explain why God made beings of whom He knew that they would fall into sin. We are tempted to say with Calvin, “God ordained the fall of Adam according to His will and that men follow God’s will even in their most sinful disobedience.” The origin of evil is a deep mystery for which the carnal mind of man finds no other answer than: Since evil originated in beings which God Himself created knowing that they would fall, then He, indirectly at least, is the cause and source of evil. Here we must bow before the Word, which tells us that with God there is no variableness or change of light and darkness, that He cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man. We must treat our reason the way Luther, according to a story, treated the man who had come to him repeatedly with idle and useless theological speculations and coming to him again asked the question: “Where was God before He had created the world?” He received the answer: “Out in the woods cutting switches to use on people who ask so many foolish questions.” Let us use the switch on our reason and subject it to faith not only when it seeks to find out what is not revealed but also then when it abuses what is revealed by reasoning from God’s omniscience that He decreed from eternity all the evil that took place in time, including the sad end of Judas, since He knew of it beforehand. This is the position of Calvin who says: “God foresees nothing that He does not determine.”

This is confusing God’s omniscience with His will. The fact that a person knows ahead of time that something is going to happen does not mean that he wills or wants it to happen. You have an individual in your confirmation class about whom you entertain grave fears as to how he is going to turn out. Later on your fears are justified. You didn’t want it. In fact you did everything to prevent just that thing. Or you have a divorce case about which you finally say it is hopeless and it turns out that way. We don’t want those things, just as the people who very accurately predict weekend traffic fatalities don’t want them. Or we may entertain grave fears regarding the result of our dealing with those in error. Yet we are not indifferent to the thought of an unfavorable outcome. The opposite may be the case. We very much do not want what we fear. So it is also with God’s knowledge and His will. He knows the myriads upon myriads of stars in the firmament. From all eternity He knew of Judas’ sad end at the end of a rope. He knows those who are going to hell, one and all. From everlasting He knew what their end would be. But the fact that He *knew* it does not mean that He *wanted* it. Nor does His using the sinful acts of the lost in His providence, as in the case of Judas, alter this fact. His will regarding the fallen race of mankind is clearly expressed in passages such as: “As I live, saith the Lord, I have *no pleasure* in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked should turn from his way and live.” Ezek. 33:11. “The Lord is *not willing* that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” II Pet. 3:9. God “*will* have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.” I Tim. 2:4.

The ultimate cause for the loss of man then lies neither in the foreknowledge nor the will of God but in something else. What is it? We return to the case of Judas to see what Scripture reveals concerning him. It tells us he was a thief. He was led by his own sinful flesh to love money more than his Lord. It tells us that Satan entered his heart. It stood open because he had erred from the faith in spite of the Word of life he had so frequently heard as one of the Twelve. Luther says of his act in *De Servo Arbitrio*: “He did it voluntarily and not because he was forced to it,” which places the blame on Judas.

So men are lost not because God willed what He knows beforehand but because of what they are and what they do. That applies not only to individuals but also to entire families and tribes, e.g. the people who left God at the building of the Tower of Babel. If for generations their children walked in darkness it was their and

their forefathers' fault and not God's. The loss of man is not determined by the divine element from eternity but by the human element in time, and it is sheer blasphemy in the face of His Word to blame Him for the eternal misery of the lost by confusing His omniscience with His will, for behind all history stands our God, sometimes mysterious in His ways, yet ever gracious, revealing His will in His own Son, who says: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together unto myself, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."

Our second proposition is: *that similarly the fact that God from eternity knew how the individuals who are ultimately saved were going to deport themselves in time is no cause for their election and ultimate salvation.* At this point we can only too easily be misled by our reason to draw what appears to be a very logical conclusion by saying that since the cause of man's damnation does not lie in the will of the eternal God but in man's nature and conduct, therefore the ultimate cause of man's salvation and of man's election to salvation must also lie not in an eternal decree of God but in the nature and conduct of certain individuals in time. Thus we make eternity depend upon time and upon man himself by motivating God's eternal decree by something that man does or does not do in time and in doing so, even in the slightest degree, we knock the *Sola* out of the *Gratia* and destroy the *Gratia* itself. That is doing the same thing that a flea trainer would be doing if he would prove that his flea could hear because it jumped at his command and then, pulling the legs out of the flea, would seek to prove from the fact that the flea now no longer jumps at his command that it can no longer hear. He would be wrong regardless of how true it is that a deaf flea will not jump at his command since there are different causes for similar effects. He would be ignoring a new and determining factor: the flea is deaf but that it has no legs. So reason must never arbitrarily go its own way but must consider the determining factors in the case as revealed in Scripture, and they show that there can be no more connection between God's eternal decree and man's conduct in time as a cause for that decree than there is between the flea's hearing and its not jumping, because of another factor that now enters in and that is that man by nature is totally devoid of any power to come to Christ. He can go and does go the other way, since the carnal mind is enmity toward God, but being dead in trespasses and sins and without any spiritual power whatever he cannot come to Christ any more than the flea can jump without legs. Dead is dead, there is *no* life and *no* strength. That alone rules out any cause in man for election to salvation, and any one who bases his hope for life on such a cause in himself has fallen from grace.

Yet things are found in Lutheran theology that could, to say the least, lead into that temptation. It was not always thus. Luther entirely ruled out the human time factor in his *De Servo Arbitrio* directed against the humanist Erasmus. He considered it to be one of his greatest writings and mentioned it in a letter to Capito in 1537 as the only other product of his pen besides his catechisms that he was satisfied with. It is one of the best antidotes against every type of synergism. We quote him from this work as follows: "That many are converted and saved must be acknowledged as a work of divine grace alone (*solius divinae gratiae opus*—note the *Sola Gratia*); that many are not converted and perish must be acknowledged to come about only through the fault of the perishing themselves (*ipsorum pereuntium culpa unice fieri*)." He then urges the acceptance of this truth, with its many difficulties for reason, by simple faith in which alone the Christian mind can rest secure, and bows reverently before mysteries which God has not chosen to reveal.

But the great Luther's position was soon to be attacked by one in his own fold. Melanchthon was—as Luther states it—often plagued by his philosophy, and when Luther's death removed the stabilizing influence of the great reformer, Melanchthon soon (already in 1548) took into his Loci Erasmus's expression *facultas se applicandi ad gratiam* (the faculty to apply one's self to grace) and spoke of *in nobis esse aliquam discriminis causam* (in us there is some cause for God's discriminating) and *a dissimilis actio* in men. He was in no small measure responsible for the many doctrinal controversies following Luther's death, some of them involving basic facts connected with the doctrine of election—eventually clearly set forth in the Formula of Concord, which places the cause of election in God in eternity and not in man in time. Says the F.C.: "Predestination or God's eternal election concerns only the pious children of God, whom He was delighted in, and is the cause (*haec est causa*) of their salvation, which He also works and ordains everything that pertains to it, on which (predestination) our salvation is so firmly grounded that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it." (Slight

deviations from the German in this translation are due to the closer adherence to the Latin text, if any one should have any questions). This is God's truth and no philosophy. It takes our eyes away from man in time and lifts them up to God in eternity as the sole cause of election and ultimate salvation. It teaches an election unto faith.

This presentation (usually viewed *a posteriori* i.e. looking back from time rather than forward from eternity) is sometimes called *der erste Lehrtropus* by those who place another mode of teaching election beside it, as is done e.g. by George Fritschel. This mode which they call *der zweite Lehrtropus* came into the church by the scholasticism of the dogmatists beginning with Hunnius (Aegidius) and at this point one is sorely tempted to join Koehler and say: *Die verfluchte Dogmatik!* For dogmatists unwittingly created a bad situation by their over-systematizing intellectualism. They tried to explain everything and somehow make it palatable to human reason in dealing with error instead of refuting it in the simplicity of faith. So it came about that even the great dogmatists in order to combat Samuel Huber's *allgemeine Wahl* and the naked decree of the Calvinists, and with no intent to cause the havoc it wrought, introduced the expression *intuitu fidei* or *intuitu fidei finalis*. Men like Gerhard, Quenstedt, Hollaz sensed its dangers and ever and again sought to counteract it, although they use it at times in such a way that misunderstanding can hardly be avoided. The old Baier (used by Walther) contains this expression, and tracing its use by Lutheran dogmatists, we see it supported by other expressions such as *intuitu fidei in Christum ad finem perseverantis, ex praevisa fide, quos praescivit credituros in filium suum hos et praedestinavit, credentes et in fide usque ad finem vitae perseverantes elegit, quos in Christum finaliter credituros esse praevidit, et ordinavit ad salutem aeternam*. Strange language this is—strange to Luther and the Formula of Concord. A language that is well suited to support the claim that God chose those of whom He knew that they would come to faith and would persevere in faith to the end, making His decree dependent upon what He foresees. That is in substance the erroristic so-called *zweiter Lehrtropus*.

This *zweiter Lehrtropus* is given equal recognition with the *erster Lehrtropus* in the double talking *Opgjoer* which quotes what our Norwegian brethren call "that infamous question" 548 in Pontoppidan's *Sandhed Til Gudfrygtighed* as follows: "God has predestinated all those to eternal life who from eternity He has seen would accept the proffered grace, believe on Jesus Christ, and remain steadfast in this faith unto the end." Brewed in Germany by the 17th century dogmatists it was carried to America where the bitter broth had to be eaten out in the 19th century in the trying conflicts of the *Gnadenwahlstreit*, in which the conservative Lutheran Church confirmed its return to Luther and the Formula of Concord, a position which can only too easily be lost again, for the ghost of Erasmus still stalks about and the spirit of Melancthon has not ceased to threaten the church with manifold temptations to return to the false position of the *zweiter Tropus*. In conjunction with this position a synergistic doctrine of conversion was taught which made man in time and not God in eternity ultimately responsible for such conversion. Here we mention the teaching concerning the better conduct of some, of the refraining from willful resistance, of the necessary state of passivity mentioned in such quotations as, "The actual final result of the means of grace depends not only on the sufficiency and efficacy of the means themselves, but also upon the conduct of man in regard to the necessary condition of passiveness and submissiveness under the Gospel Call"; and the subtly synergistic "Man's will is able to decide for salvation through new powers bestowed by God." If this is true then the determining cause for faith lies in time and in man and not in God and eternity and so also with the decree of election which would thereby be based on something in time foreseen and foreknown by God.

Is this scriptural? Some (among them Pontoppidan) claim that it is on the basis of Rom. 8:29: "Whom He did foreknow (προέγνω) He also did predestinate." Does γινώσκειν here mean the mere intellectual knowledge of God's omniscience or a *nosse cum affectu*, a knowing in love? Luther translates *zuvorversehn*. Let us note that the prothesis (*Vorsatz*) concerning the called (in the sense of having already been brought into the kingdom as in I Cor. 1:2 et al.) comes first in v. 28, then the knowing, the acknowledging of the certain number of elect, then their predestination, etc. To interpret γινώσκειν, which is so often used of an intimate knowledge in love, as a mere intellectual foreknowledge does not fit in the context. Nor could we, even if we accepted that interpretation, conclude that such intellectual foreknowledge was the cause for election, for this passage speaks only of foreknown persons (οὔς) and says nothing whatever about a foreknown cause. To seek

to establish one on its basis is an *argumentum e silentio*. *Ex nihilo nihil sequitur*. Then too, as noted before, we must not confuse God's omniscience with His will. Nor could anything God knew beforehand about any individual human being or any group of human beings determine His will concerning their election since there is no difference between men, as Scripture clearly indicates.

They are all dead in trespasses and sins and children of wrath. What is born of the flesh is flesh. That already settles the question and is in itself sufficient to eliminate any further argument. So we will have to put the prothesis, the *Vorsatz*, the determination first, then the loving acknowledgement of individual persons (οὐς), followed by the predestination and God's carrying out of the *ordo salutis* as enumerated in this familiar passage which describes the golden bridge which reaches from eternity to eternity over the abyss of perdition. Thus election to life is not dependent upon what man is and does in time but upon what God decreed from all eternity. It follows on *His own* purpose, determination, and grace, which were *given* us in Christ Jesus before the world began (II Tim. 1:9). The statements of Eph. 1:4–5 “Before the foundation of the world,” “Predestinated unto adoption,” “According to the good pleasure of His will,” likewise emphasize this truth. So we come to the conclusions: 1. There is no *decretum horribile* regarding those who are lost. Their ultimate damnation has its cause solely in what man is and does in time. That God foreknew it does not mean that He willed it. 2. Conversely the election to life does not find its cause in anything that God foreknew about man's conduct in time but in God's eternal decree according to which God elects *unto* faith (not *because* of it) and carries out the *ordo salutis* by His chosen means and keeps us by His power through faith unto salvation. I Pet. 1:5.

That is Scripture. Here a quotation from an excellent exegetical treatise on Is. 43:10 and James 2:5 from *Lehre und Wehre*, Vol. 59 (1913), pp. 438 and 439: *So ist also die Wahl zum Glauben ... ausdrücklich in der Schrift gelehrt. Hingegen das intuitu fidei müssen wir für ein blosses Menschenfündlein halten, bis man uns auch nur eine Schriftstelle gezeigt hat, in welcher es ausgesprochen ist. Das wird man wohl vor dem Jüngsten Tage nicht tun; denn es widerspricht e contrario der Wahl zum Glauben. Auch in der unglücklichen Deutung, die ihm in dem Opgjoer gegeben wird, kann es nicht passieren. Denn wenn Gott unter der Voraussetzung des Glaubens erwählt hat—die Voraussetzung gibt ja nur als Bedingung einen vernünftigen Sinn—so hat er nicht zum Glauben erwählt.—Die Vertreter der Wahl zum Glauben sitzen wohlgegründet in der Schrift, die des intuitu fidei aber daneben. Doch: “Recht muss Recht bleiben! Und dem werden alle frommen Herzen zufallen” (Ps. 94:15).*

In conclusion a few scattered questions. Why, if it is God's power that makes and keeps us, are we admonished to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling? The application of such admonitions is part of the *ordo salutis*. They serve to strengthen the new man in the fight of faith against the old man, a fight without which we cannot be saved, and in which we are to look to God without whom we cannot conquer for (as this passage, Phil. 2:12–13, further states) it is He that worketh in us both to will and to do according to His good pleasure. The doctrine of election should not make us indifferent but on the contrary lead us to follow the *ordo salutis* and heed such admonitions ourselves and bring them to others. The election is not *nude*, that is, apart from the means of grace and their ministrations to produce and sustain faith. Does an irresistible force do this? No. God creates (Eph. 2:5) a new heart, which freely accepts the Savior without any compulsion and willingly continues in such faith to the end. But does this not contradict His universal will of grace? *Cur non omnes? Cur alii prae aliis?* That is rightly called the *crux theologorum*. Here is a mystery that cannot be solved in this life, and all attempts to do so have led into error in the past and will never have any other result. We here think not only of the synergistic errors so far mentioned but also of the error of Calvinism, one of whose outstanding spokesmen, Hodge, brushes aside all mystery in the doctrine of election with his very reasonable explanation of the famous *crux* when he says: “It cannot be supposed that God intends what is never accomplished; that He purposes what He does not intend to effect; that He adopts means for an end which is never to be attained. This cannot be affirmed of any rational being who has the wisdom and power to secure the execution of His purposes. Much less can it be said of Him whose power and wisdom are infinite. If all men are not saved, God never purposed their salvation and never devised, and put into operation, means designed to accomplish that end.” An inevitable result of his position is a denial of the objective justification of all through

the merit of Christ of which he then says: “If equally designed for all men, it must secure the salvation of all.” (Systematic Theology II. 323.) Thus human reason will either dash itself to pieces on the Scylla of synergism or will be sucked down into the Charybdis of Calvinism in its attempts to ferret out what is hidden in God. The only safe channel is the submission of reason to faith in the Word.

That is why the Formula of Concord brings the warning: “One must with *special* diligence distinguish between what God has revealed and what He has not revealed—for God has kept silence on and concealed much concerning this mystery (of election) and reserved it only for His wisdom and knowledge, and we should not seek to search out or pursue it with our thoughts and speculate and brood about it, but rather hold ourselves to the revealed word. This is a highly necessary reminder.” This reminder is especially in place when it comes to considering the sin against the Holy Ghost, and the resulting hardening of hearts such as occurred in Pharaoh and in Israel which Paul in Rom. 11:25 calls a mystery. Why does God in certain cases permit final hardening to come upon those who harden themselves and cut off their time of grace already in this life? Luther says: “He who attempts to know God by searching out such questions will only break his neck. That is the fall of Lucifer who wanted to come out on top and got nowhere.” In His dealing with men and nations God’s judgments are often unsearchable and His ways past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord and who hath been His counselor? Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To God is the glory forever and ever, Amen. Can we dare to attempt with our finite minds to grasp eternity and to understand the eternal God before whom a thousand years are as one day and one day as a thousand years, all whose deeds are done in truth and are Yea in Him and Amen in Him? Let us leave hand off the unsearchable! Some day we may know. This doctrine of election has not been revealed to us for idle, useless, and extremely dangerous speculation, but to give us poor mortals, so insecure in this transient life, the assurance of eternal security in the everlasting God, the Jehovah who says “*hyEh;) e r#§e) j hyEh;) e, I am that I am,*” who *was* before the mountains were brought forth and *is* our dwelling place in all generations, so that we can rejoice in the *Sola Gratia* and say with Paul: “I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

In the practical field a few random observations and applications concerning the doctrine of election are in place. A person can be ignorant of this doctrine and still be saved. Called to the deathbed of an unconverted person, we would not begin with the doctrine of election, but would come with John 3:16. The poor sinner would need no more than the power of its simple message. We would offer him the milk and not concern ourselves about the heavy meat of the Word, or the refutation of errors of which he knows nothing. Luther says that many simple Christians in the synergistic Catholic Church are saved on their deathbed as they fix their eyes on the crucifix and put their trust alone in the merits of the Savior, ignorant of the soul destroying errors of the Church with which they are outwardly connected—predestined from eternity without having known it. He states this in connection with the doctrine of election to emphasize that God found His children even in the dark days of the Middle Ages when the Gospel truth which he, Luther, again brought to light, was veiled and hidden in error. When we colloquize those who come to us from liberal Lutheran bodies, it would be a mistake to assume from the beginning that they are personally in error on the *Sola Gratia* because the theologians in those bodies stand wrong on the doctrine of election. We will speak to them of the simple Gospel truth, the *verbal* inspiration of the Book that presents it, its infallibility, the differences in practice, and work up to more difficult questions cautiously and with discretion lest we confuse a simple faith that more often than not is not conscious of all that is involved in the doctrine of election. Caution must also be exercised so that we may teach this doctrine as the Gospel in its superlative for the comfort and not to the confusion of our confirmation classes. If we continue to proclaim the *Sola Gratia* firmly in connection with the doctrines of man’s depravity, objective justification, and conversion we have gone a long way in warding off synergistic thoughts in the doctrine of election, which besides bringing the comfort this doctrine gives, is the chief aim of our teaching it, for he who trusts in himself loses his Lord.

We must now give attention to a question that is very disturbing. What about the souls of those who teach this doctrine falsely or compromise its truth? Erasmus threw up to Luther that such, whom he (Luther)

acknowledged as saints, taught and wrote things in favor of man's freedom to choose salvation by his own will. In answer Luther stated in his *De Servo Arbitrio* that they despaired of themselves and relied on grace alone when it came to death, e.g. St. Bernard. Another case in point is Melancthon, whose synergistic statements steeped the Lutheran Church into thirty years of bitter conflict, which ended with the Formula of Concord. Among the things he wrote on a slip of paper as he longed for heaven shortly before his end were the words "That he would soon see the Son of God and comprehend some mysteries that he was unable to penetrate on earth." He mentioned especially the question why God made man as He did. He finally bowed to God's mysteries. Poor Philipp! He was saved in the only way possible for us miserable sinners *Sola Gratia*, as we have reason to hope. When it came to facing his Maker on his deathbed, he apparently left the philosophy that had plagued him so much all his life on his desk in his study, and perhaps just the means that God employed to bring this about was the vigorous testimony of those who opposed his errors.

But the fact that we refrain from judging the ultimate condition of the hearts of those who teach falsely does not mean that we may tolerate false doctrine. God searches the hearts. He knows who are His in the *Una Sancta*, the invisible body of Christ He leads to glory, where there will be no weakness and no error. What *He* knows in time and for eternity is *one thing*; what *we* should note and mark well in our earthly sojourn is *quite another*. It is the confessional principle that separates us on earth from some whom we will meet in heaven. It is laid down in Rom. 16:17 to be observed here below in religious fellowship by the members of the *Una Sancta*. To ignore it leads to no good, as is readily seen when we consider the consequences of a union with those who compromise the truth in the doctrine of election in their public doctrine as laid down in their confessions and taught by their theologians. For the fact that a simple Christian can die in grace ignorant of the doctrine of election does not mean that those whom God has entrusted with the responsibility of being watchmen in Zion may be ignorant of it or unclear on it, since the doctrine of election is the touchstone that proves a man's theology, either revealing its synergism or its adherence to the *Sola Gratia*. Any error in it strikes at the heart of the Gospel truth and corrupts its testimony. Luther drastically expresses this at the end of his *De Servo Arbitrio* when he says to Erasmus: *Jugulum petisti.—Du bist mir an die Gurgel gefahren.—*You have grabbed me by the throat. Unsoundness in this doctrine works like a vicious leaven and leads to loose thinking, indifference to other doctrines, lack of doctrinal discipline, lax practice, and unionism. It is a first step on the road to liberalism; therefore the public doctrine of any church body must sound a clear note both thetically and antithetically in this doctrine and we as pastors must know it well. To strengthen ourselves in this knowledge valuable aids next to the Scriptures are Luther, the Formula of Concord, Hoenecke, Pieper, A.L. Graebner's Outlines, The *Brief Statement*, and Stoeckhardt's commentaries on Romans, Ephesians, and I Peter. *Sola Gratia!* Let that be our *Shibboleth!*

Hallelujah! Let praises ring!
 Unto the Lamb of God we sing,
 In whom we are elected.
 He bought His Church with His own blood,
 He cleansed her in that blessed flood,
 And as His bride selected.
 Holy, holy is our union and communion.
 His befriending gives us joy and peace unending. Amen.

In an Instant and in a Moment

(Supplementary)

Just a few things in connection with the statement “In an instant and in a moment” in the introduction. The “begotten anew or from above” of John 3:3, the “begotten of the spirit” of John 3:6 and 8, the “begotten of God” of I John 5:1, and the “new creature” of II Cor. 5:17 and Gal. 6:15 all indicate regeneration or conversion to be the kindling of a new life which was not there before in any degree or measure and that in the same manner in which life is brought about in physical conception in the moment that conception takes place. One moment there is no life, the next moment life is there. See also James 1:18 and I Pet. 1:23. This new life is there as soon as there is even a small spark of faith or faint longing for the grace of God in Christ, just as life is there as soon as conception has taken place. Again in Rom. 6:13 the converted are described as “raised from the dead,” raised from spiritual death to spiritual life. Under this picture we think of the daughter of Jairus, the youth of Nain, and Lazarus who one moment were dead, the next moment were alive, there being no so-called *status medius*. By an act of God in which they had no active part they were instantly brought from death to life. So we are by a transitive act of God, by the power of the Gospel, brought from spiritual death to spiritual life in a moment; however in making this comparison between these In an Instant and in a Moment physical resurrections and conversion the factor of irresistibility to the Word must be ruled out in the deep mystery of conversion; for Jerusalem would not and Israel destroyed itself. But the point that conversion is a sudden translation from death to life (Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:12) and from darkness to light (II Cor. 4:6) certainly follows to support the above statement. Man may not be aware of the exact time of conversion. Certainly infants are never aware of it. The Spirit of God worketh when and where He will.

That does not mean that nothing that has any relation to the ultimate conversion precedes the conversion itself. There are the so-called *terrores conscientiae* of varying degree and duration worked by the condemning power of the law which sometimes troubles greatly and may even lead to despair. But such disturbances of heart and mind do not in any measure or in the slightest degree contain anything of a new life any more than do the sufferings of the damned in hell. Of such feelings Luther says in the Smalcald Articles: *Das ist nicht activa contritio, eine gemachte Reue, sondern passiva contritio, das ist das rechte Herzeleid, das Leiden und Fühlen des Todes*. With all his troubled conscience, and even in his deepest despair—yes, just in these things—natural man is just as dead in trespasses and sins as ever. They are death and hell (cf. the deep remorse of Judas) and never life and salvation and therefore never an essential part of conversion; though they may be looked upon as processes which in the hands of God are utilized toward conversion and may be called beneficial for that reason only (though not in themselves), but never under any circumstances a beginning of a new life, or something meritorious on the part of man.

This we shall have to maintain over against the so-called *Durchbruchstheorie* of Pietism and Methodism which is completely shot through from end to end with synergism and negates the *Sola Gratia*. When these movements speak of the moment or *Augenblick* they mean something entirely different than we do, as different as day from night, for to them the moment is the time when a process in which man has contributed his own efforts (*Busskampf*) is completed with the *Durchbruch* or break-through accompanied with varying and often intense emotional experiences and manifestations, a moment before which no one, not even those who have been baptized and reared in the church, should be considered fully regenerated and converted. We on the other hand speak of the moment when by God’s grace alone a new life comes into being by the Gospel without any effort whatsoever on our part. Cf. Eph. 2:8–9.

It is interesting to note what the theologians of our church have held on this point in the past. Here are quotations from various sources: “The quickening itself takes place *in that moment* in which faith is produced in us, and the true Sun of Righteousness, Christ, rises in our hearts.” Quenstedt, III, 483. “Conversion is the action of the applying grace of the Holy Spirit by which He . . . transfers the adult, spiritually dead, from his state of sin to a state of faith, successively as to the preparatory acts *but in an instant (in instanti vero)* as to the ultimate act.” Quenstedt III, 500—“To place holy thoughts before the work of the Holy Spirit is to put the effect before

the cause.” Calov X, 146—“To teach that there are beginnings of faith before regeneration has taken place is to assume the child to exist before the father; since through regeneration faith comes into existence.” Calov X, 148—“The translation itself from the state of wrath to the state of grace takes place *in an instant and in a moment (in instanti et in momento)*, since it is impossible that any one should even for a moment (*per momentum*) be both in the state of wrath and in the state of grace, both in life and in death. Conversion in the wide sense has successive preparatory acts ... but conversion most properly (*propriissime*) is (*est*) and is called (*dicitur*) the translation from death to life, from the state of wrath to the state of grace, which God alone works in an instant and in a moment (*in instanti et momento*) as we have said.” Quenstedt III, 7—*Wer lehrt, dass man wohl bekehrt und doch nicht ganz bekehrt sein könne, der widerspricht der Heiligen Schrift, die immer nur von zwei Zuständen weiss, entweder Tod oder Leben. Wer nicht in Gnaden steht, ist unter dem Zorn; wer nicht im Leben ist, ist noch im Tode; wer nicht auf dem Weg zum Himmel ist, ist auf dem Weg zur Hölle; wer nicht ein seliger Mensch ist, ist ein verdammter Mensch. Es gibt keine Dämmerung, keinen Mittelzustand zwischen Licht und Finsternis* (Walther in a report given in 1873). From Hoenecke III, 272, we read: *Die Bekehrung selbst ist nicht ein Akt, der sich längere Zeit hindurchzieht, sondern geschieht im Moment*. Pieper II, 552, states: *Die Bekehrung geschieht im Augenblick*.

The expression *non in instanti sed successive* is variously used by some dogmaticians; but it leaves the door wide open to synergism as soon as it is applied to conversion in the proper sense of the word, as Baier also does when he speaks of a *progressus conversionis* (III. 222, § 38). There are other things that could be touched on, such as the distinction between *regeneratio* and *conversio* which Hollaz and Philippi try to demonstrate, and the distinction between *conversio activa and passiva* found in some dogmatical writings, but it is best to speak of conversion or regeneration synonymously in the proper sense which designates the kindling of a new life in a heart dead in trespasses and sins. Then it will be realized that the *in instanti et in momento* is very important in guarding the *Sola Gratia*, also the truth of objective justification; for pietism and synergism are by no means dead in the Church today and we must be as much on guard against them as against a dead orthodoxy.