

# ***Anfechtung, Prayer, And Resurrection***

[The 1980 Reformation Lectures : October 30-31, 1980 : Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and Bethany Lutheran College : Mankato, Minnesota]

by Dr. David Scaer

- 1 Every conservatively trained Lutheran pastor in the United States and Canada has come into contact via Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* with Luther's formula for becoming a theologian: *Oratio, tentatio, meditatio faciunt theologum* "Prayer, temptation or affliction, and concentration on the Scriptures make the theologian."<sup>i</sup> The assignment for this year's Luther lectures deals with the first two, prayer and affliction, and a third topic, resurrection, in the Reformer's theology.
- 2 I am not so sure that everyone who could provide an adequate translation of Luther's formula really had a real and personal understanding of it. The last ingredient, *meditatio*, had really nothing to do with self-concentration as a key to understanding reality. If Luther and Pieper had intended that, then the subjectivism of Schleiermacher's *Selbstbewusstsein* with its principle of the *theologisches ich* would have been glorified and deified. *Meditatio* refers rather to the complete sovereignty of the Scriptures in the life of the theologian, i.e., the Bible as the only source and norm of all theology. Among confessional minded theologians there is a living awareness of what the Scriptures meant to Luther and what they should mean to the church today. As the Scriptures have been a controverted issue in Lutheran circles, that topic has been discussed frequently in recent years. *Tentatio*, temptation or affliction, which shall be referred to by the German word *Anfechtung*, and prayer, *oratio*, in Luther's thought have not enjoyed the same attention.
- 3 At first glance the correlation between *Anfechtung*, prayer, and resurrection does not seem obvious. As the three topics were assigned together, an underlying motif had to be sought, simply for the sake of a unified presentation. The three assigned topics are not all of the same fabric. *Anfechtung* and prayer reflect Luther's struggling with himself, with his faith, to find an answer. Resurrection as a topic is easier to grasp, since at the present time it is an activity of God which remains outside of the believer. Unlike *Anfechtung* and prayer, the Christian does not experience the resurrection now, but accepts it in faith. *Anfechtung* and prayer are more subjective, and resurrection more objective.
- 4 *Anfechtung* describes Luther's personal life of faith, not as it is secure in God, but as it found itself under constant danger of destruction by Satan. Prayer is correlated with the *Anfechtungen*, since in prayer the Christian in the midst of the Satanic disturbances seeks and finds divine assistance. *Anfechtung* and prayer continue throughout the Christian's life. The final solution to the Christian's distress is the resurrection. While the Christological motif is part of Luther's concepts of *Anfechtung* and prayer, it is handled chiefly in his concept of resurrection, since from the perspective of the resurrection the Christian becomes totally aware that his life has not only been patterned after Christ's life, but has in fact been an organic part of that life. Since *Anfechtung* was the first of three assigned topics, it has been woven into the remaining two, prayer and resurrection.

Though the motivation at first may have been to achieve an artificial unity among the three lectures, it turned out that Luther's theology suggested the unity of these themes.

- 5 Any study of Luther is hampered by his own refusal to be tied down to one topic for too long. Thus he writes the way most of us think and talk, i.e., moving with unbridled abandon from one topic to another. Any lecture on Luther's theology is like raking up leaves into orderly piles. The lecturer can take no credit for the beauty of the leaves and in the process of piling destroys some of their beauty. But in some way the Reformer must be bridled so that we can share his rushing and majestic view of salvation; but the writer confesses that a bridled Luther is a little less than Luther. With this confession we hope that we can capture enough of his theology and spirit so that his Reformation may continue to live among us a near half millennium later.

## Lecture I: The Concept of *Anfechtung* in Luther's Thought

### I. Definition

- 6 Some words defy adequate translation. *Anfechtung*, as used by Luther, and its Latin counterpart, *tentatio*, may be such a word. Various English works demonstrate this. The English translation of Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* uses 'temptation.'<sup>ii</sup> Herbert J. A. Bouman in his translation of Walther von Loewenich's *Luther's Theology of the Cross* uses 'trials.'<sup>iii</sup> Plass in *What Luther Says* favors 'affliction.'<sup>iv</sup> The American Translation of *Luther's Works* uses all three: 'temptation,' 'trial,' and 'affliction' plus 'tribulation.'<sup>v</sup> Each of these English words develops one facet of Luther's *Anfechtung* and related words. 'Temptation' points to the Christian's life as a period of testing by Satan. In the temptation the Christian is given the opportunity by God to overcome Satan personally, but there can be no suggestion that God is the origin of sin or provokes the Christian to sin. 'Trial' suggests a probationary period before God's bestowing a great good. Through the trial God puts the Christian to the test to measure the depth and sincerity of faith and to bring it to a higher level. Thus trial points to God's control over the Christian's suffering during the *Anfechtung*. Suffering does not happen through chance. 'Affliction' reflects the real suffering and pain the Christian endures during the *Anfechtung*. The Christian does not necessarily experience physical pain, but real agony in his soul about his personal salvation.<sup>vi</sup> 'Tribulation' also refers to the Christian's suffering during the *Anfechtung* but suggests their wider dimension as affliction suffered by all Christians.
- 7 Since Luther's concept of the *Anfechtung* is a multifaceted concept, perhaps it is best left untranslated. Admittedly this is the route of theological and literary cowardice. *Anfechtung* is perhaps better understood not as one vocable in Luther's vocabulary, but as a one word theological concept. This concept of the *Anfechtungen* can be explained summarily in the following sentences.

Through the Gospel the Christian has come to learn of a gracious God in Christ Jesus; however his life experiences present to him a God who is still wrathful and who not only refuses to forgive sins, but reminds him of them. The hard, concrete

experiences of life contradict what he had learned by faith. God on his side through the *Anfechtungen* is drawing the Christian closer to him and throughout the *Anfechtungen* always intends that they should be beneficial to the Christian. The Christian, however, interprets them as forms of God's retribution for sins and as signs of his wrath. In desperation the Christian flees to Christ for salvation. In this God has accomplished his purpose of bringing the Christian closer to himself. Though the Christian can through faith conquer one *Anfechtung*—and indeed he must if he is to survive—he must face a lifelong series of *Anfechtungen*. Resurrection is the only permanent solution. *Anfechtungen* are an aspect of faith, not as that faith trusts in God and totally relies on him for all good, but as that faith faces realities in life and in the world different from those offered in the Gospel.<sup>vii</sup>

- 8 The *Anfechtungen* present a more intense problem for the theologian like Luther who has committed himself totally to the Scriptures as God's Word and whose intellectual knowledge of their promises<sup>viii</sup> is superior to that of others, simply because of an exposure through his professional life and study. What he knows about God's graciousness in Christ is contradicted by what he really experiences in this world.

## **II. *Anfechtungen* as Contradiction**

- 9 *Anfechtungen* in Luther's thought appear as contradiction, since in them the Christian is confronted with the destructive forces of his adversaries over which the Gospel has informed him he already has victory. The salvation offered in faith is in fact withdrawn. The Christian who through faith has been saved from sin, Satan, death, hell, and all other related calamities re-encounters them in the *Anfechtungen*. The opponents actually appear to be resurrected. The most horrible contradiction is that Satan and not God seems to be in control.

### **Satan at Work in the *Anfechtungen***

#### **1. Satan as Source of the *Anfechtungen***

- 10 Every experience that leads a person to unbelief, denial, and doubt comes from Satan and not from God. God cannot be the cause of evil in the same sense that he is the cause of good. The Christian confronted by the *Anfechtungen* is left doubting about whether God or Satan is in control. So effective is Satan's might that he is called by Scriptures not merely the prince of this world, but its god. While not possessing an essential omnipresence, Satan does possess an effective omnipresence by carrying out his will through others. Luther uses the example of a ruler carrying out his will through his military forces. Satan has set up his kingdom side by side with God, and thus the Christian will confront Satan and his agents everywhere.

## 2. Satan Uses Means in the *Anfechtungen*

- 11 Like God, Satan is invisible, but works through visible means. The very *Anfechtungen* which are God's instruments to strengthen faith are Satan's to destroy it. In the *Anfechtungen* the contradictions become visible. Through the world, the flesh, and whatever afflict the Christian, Satan becomes 'incarnate' and wreaks havoc. For Luther human existence for the Christian may be called Satanic since there is no part of it exempted by Satan for carrying out his purposes. Evil men, fanatics, our own sin, consciences, and flesh all serve Satan's purposes. The entire world remains God's creation, but all of it can be used by Satan. Even the person of Christ is not sacred to him. In preaching, Satan presents Christ no longer as the mediator but as the object of fear and dread. This Satan does when he takes a legitimate Word of God and preaches the Law there to lead to despair. Law not only replaces the Gospel, but in Satan's hands becomes God's final Word.

## 3. Satan as Sources of Despair in the *Anfechtungen*

- 12 *Anfechtungen* are not to be regarded as simply problems or troubles disturbing human existence, capable of medical or psychiatric solution, but they are to be regarded as a direct and effectual Satanic working in a Christian's life bringing him to unbelief. In leading Christians into unbelief, Satan assumes the very characteristics of God himself, including a trinitarian existence. In the image of the Creator Father, he appears as the god of this world, a title which he has earned by his apparent universal control. He appears as Christ preaching the Law. Appearing as the Spirit, he works in men's hearts leading them to such despair that they no longer have any hope for salvation.<sup>ix</sup> As already mentioned, he even adopts something resembling omnipresence since he is on the heels of every Christian tempting him to fall into sin. Just as God loves out of inner necessity and not just will, so Satan out of an inner necessity has no other choice but to lead Christians into unbelief.<sup>x</sup> Through the *Anfechtungen* Satan works to become the object of Christian devotion.

## 4. Religious Questions as Means of *Anfechtungen*

- 13 Among pious people Satan can work effectively by using religious questions as *Anfechtungen*. As a serpent he is capable of finding the most insignificant weakness and using it as that smallest opening by which he can enter to begin his troubling work of the *Anfechtungen*. With Eve he called into question whether God was really good. Work righteousness always appears as a most dangerous form of the *Anfechtungen*, since good works in their outward form appear as opposed to sin and have indeed been commanded by God. He also leads the Christian to question God's goodness. Luther sees Satan as such an effective liar in that he can portray a picture of God which is both religious and fictitious. This he does when he plagues the Christian with the lie that God does not really love him. The God of love which the Christian knows through the Scriptural revelation is contradicted by what appears as a God of wrath in this world. Such a perversion of God's nature is the ultimate Satanic lie.<sup>10a</sup>

## 5. *Anfechtungen* and the Final Destruction

- 14 If the Christian interprets the *Anfechtungen* at face value, i.e., without the revelation that in the *Anfechtungen* God is working for the personal benefit of the Christian, he will have thus believed Satan's false message and surrendered his belief in God. Nothing awaits Satan's victim except the final destruction. Luther outlines the procedures of Satan in this way.

From the beginning Satan was a liar. With lies he misled Adam and Eve and since then has never ceased to lie. With the lie he brought death, and soon after that he moved Cain to kill his brother. His kingdom continues to operate under these same principles of lying and deceiving. After Satan captures his victims, there is no festive celebration for them, but he troubles them with murder, unrest, and disobedience. Then, when he has brought people into murder and misfortune, he plagues them further about their sins, until finally they are without any hope. Take for an example Judas who betrayed Christ. First, he deceived himself with lies, then his soul was plagued because he was a traitor and a murderer of his own Lord Jesus. Finally he despaired and hanged himself. Beware of Satan! He is a liar and murderer. Whoever serves and obeys him must eventually pay him as did Judas, his servant.<sup>xi</sup>

## 6. *Anfechtungen* Compared to Forms of Religious Self-Discipline

- 15 Later the beneficial purpose of the *Anfechtungen* will be discussed; however, since Satan is seriously and sincerely working in and through the *Anfechtungen*, they really have no resemblance to self-imposed religious exercises either of the monasteries or of the various rules for living which have been popular from time to time among the Protestants. Such shallow understandings of the *Anfechtungen* are really impossible, when the personal Satanic element in them is fully comprehended.
- 16 In most systems of self-imposed religious discipline, the Christian moves up on the scale from being merely acceptable to God to a rating of high approval from him. The progress is in some sense traceable. The modes of denial are self-chosen. Luther's understanding of the *Anfechtungen* is frequently misunderstood as the punishments for sin or for failing to follow the code imposed by self-denial.<sup>xii</sup>
- 17 In contrast, the *Anfechtungen* for Luther are not only serious, but critical, since the failure to respond in total faith to God by abandoning oneself to him leads eventually to unbelief and damnation. In the *Anfechtungen* the Christian is placed on the boundary line between faith and unbelief, and between God's kingdom and Satan's.

## 7. *Anfechtungen* as the Struggle Between God and Satan

- 18 Though the *Anfechtungen* are personal, fitted out individually by Satan according to the weaknesses of each Christian and his own personal knowledge of these weaknesses, they are also battles within the larger cosmic struggle between God and Satan.<sup>xiii</sup> Each of the

*Anfechtungen* repeats and contains something of Genesis 3. Though the Garden of Evil is a non-repeatable, once and for all episode, this first and hence all-controlling conflict between our first parents and Satan manifests itself in the personal *Anfechtungen* of Christians. They too are permitted by God to be tempted by Satan to test and probe the depth and sincerity of their commitment to God. Again in our *tentatio*, i.e., *Anfechtung*, Satan comes with his own ‘Gospel’ disguised as God’s, and with this ‘good news’ tempts the Christian away from God. In each *Anfechtung* the struggle begins again. For the Christian the struggle is more difficult than for Adam, since today all flesh has a ready ally in Satan and cannot escape the world.

- 19 The *Anfechtungen* reach beyond Genesis 3 into that invisible sphere where God’s and Satan’s forces once met and Satan’s were driven out to earth to wage that battle among men, especially within the church. Thus the *Anfechtungen* of the individual Christian are only a microcosm of the cosmic struggle between God and Satan. They are a refocusing of the strife in the invisible realm, of Genesis 3, and of the battle between Satan and Christ. The divine victory in the resurrection with its concomitant theme of the *Christus Victor* will receive a more extensive discussion in the third lecture; however, without the Christological understanding of the cosmic dimensions of the struggle between God and Satan, the *Anfechtungen* deteriorate into individual, inexplicable sufferings.

### **8. *Anfechtungen* Only As Apparent Dialectic**

- 20 Dialectic in Christian thought refers to irreconcilable differences or contradictions and thus would seem a most appropriate description of Luther’s concept of *Anfechtungen*. The saving message of the Gospel contradicts what the Christian experiences as despair in his own life. In the *Anfechtungen* he must believe that through Satanic devices God is working for his benefit.<sup>xiv</sup> Just as there is no real unresolved dialectic between God and Satan in the invisible realm and as there is no dialectic between Christ and Satan on the cross, so the Christian must believe that the dialectic of his present struggles, i.e., the *Anfechtungen*, will one day be resolved entirely in his favor to the detriment of Satan.

### **III. Appearances of the *Anfechtungen***

- 21 In Luther’s theology the *Anfechtungen* can operate in the Christian’s life in a variety of ways. As mentioned previously, Satan has at his disposal everything within creation. The first of these is the flesh, i.e., the human existence under sin.

#### **A. *Anfechtungen* Through the Flesh**

- 22 For Luther the *Anfechtungen* of the flesh are different than the medieval and Roman Catholic understanding of concupiscence as inordinate and inappropriate sexual desires. Flesh for Luther is human existence opposed to the Holy Spirit, a revival of the Pauline-Biblical view. The spirit-flesh dualism is prominent both in the preaching of Jesus and the writings of St. Paul. The spirit, i.e., that part of human existence belonging to God, understands itself as sinner justified before God. So at the same time the flesh stands in constant opposition to God. The flesh, i.e., the human nature estranged from

God, cooperates with the devil and the world in opposing God and his will. It hates God, languishes in self-grief, is anxious about its own existence, murmurs with impatience against God, and stirs up the conscience with concerns about the Christian's own personal acceptability before God.<sup>xv</sup>

- 23 Attractive but false is the view that the *Anfechtungen* of the flesh deal with the physical side of human existence, such as sexual desires or bodily pain. Luther's anthropology is different from Roman Catholicism's with its idea that physical or material substance is the cause and abettor of sin. Luther sees flesh as struggles within the soul and as 'spiritual' in the sense that the body need not be involved, even though the body may suffer along with the soul's struggles.<sup>xvi</sup> Luther suffered headaches and woke up in drenching sweats, but he also suffered from the *Anfechtungen* even when there were no physical maladies. The world was another source of the *Anfechtungen* for Luther.<sup>xvii</sup>

### **B. *Anfechtungen* Through the World**

- 24 Luther used the term 'world' to describe the creation in its estrangement from God. In its fallen state the world appears as self-existent, independent of God for its creation, and at all points tempts the Christian. Man sees himself controlled by misfortune and fate. Human destiny is manipulated by unidentifiable forces and in this process God appears as absent. Man's existence is threatened by the lack of direction. *Anfechtungen* through the world can be brought about by disease and pestilence, by armed military might, in short, by any disruption in what is considered the ordinary course of events. Before the unexpected, faith trembles and can be lost, and again Satan can triumph. Without in any way surrendering his two kingdom concept, in which God works both in church and state, Luther could understand the state as a Satanic world force against faith. This especially was true of the papacy and the Turks where the world under the guise of religion was opposed to faith.<sup>xviii</sup> Luther also acknowledged a more direct working of Satan in the *Anfechtungen*.

### **C. *Anfechtungen* As Recognizable Opposition to God**

- 25 The temptation to sin directly against God was considered by Luther as part of the *Anfechtungen*. This was especially so of the temptation to disregard God's Word as authoritative in the Christian's life. Eve had put aside God's Word for Satan's lie.<sup>xix</sup> Disregard of God's Word leads to righteousness of works since God's gracious promises have been rejected. The gracious God forgiving sins has been turned into an angry and wrathful God accounting to believers their sins. The Christian is now left to his own devices. The message of free salvation is replaced by the Law's condemnation. The sacraments are defused of their saving power as Zwingli and the left-wing reformers had done in their anti-sacramental attitude with the suggestion that the spiritual power was removed from Baptism so that it would be regarded as merely water. About this Luther wrote: "The devil says: The Word commands that you should believe God. Why then do you put your faith in the water? The water is nothing. It is only a sign. There is no word there, no command, but only water which a cow drinks."<sup>xx</sup>

26 When Satan's word is believed, all comfort is lost and again he has achieved his purpose of destroying faith.

## **D. *Anfechtungen* and the Wrath of God**

### **1. Their Similar Appearances**

27 A great problem in Luther's theology is the relationship of the *Anfechtungen* to God's wrath. The same physical distresses come upon both Christians and non-Christians alike and the Christian is tempted to believe from appearances that he, like the unbeliever, is experiencing God's wrath, even if it is only in an historical and temporal sense. The outward afflictions of believers and unbelievers are indistinguishable from one another. The physical appearances suggest to the Christian that God is still angry with him for his sins. With this Satan has accomplished his ultimate goal in destroying the efficacy of the atonement for the life of faith.

28 A direct solution to the Christian confronted with an angry and wrathful God is provided in Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Gospel preaching. Here the Christian confronts *another* God, the one who through the cross has atoned for all sins. Nevertheless, Satan's force is so strong that he can pervert the Gospel understanding of the Word and sacraments or he can direct the Christian's attention away from these to himself. Man is made to stand alone and is compelled to work out his own salvation. Confrontation with the God of wrath is so horrible because the Christian flees from God, the only source of aid. God becomes so objectionable to the Christian that he resolves his dilemma by himself through a righteousness of works. The *Anfechtung* of work righteousness is not merely adhering to a false doctrine and thus contradicting a divine revelation, but cutting oneself off from the cross which is the only solution. Without Christ and his cross the Christian is entrapped in his *Anfechtungen* with a God of wrath. Left in this condition he must face eternal destruction and may take his own life.<sup>xxi</sup> What really damns is not the failure to articulate the article of salvation, but the personal inability to find in Christ a gracious God and thus receive relief from the *Anfechtungen*.

### **2. Law as Preaching of God's Wrath**

29 Wrath as *Anfechtung*, with the understanding that God does not receive the sinner, has for Luther a place in his practice of theology, i.e., in the preaching of the Law and Gospel. Law and Gospel are for Luther a dichotomy but never in the sense that the Law is equal to the Gospel as God's last word. Where Law and Gospel are given an equivalent value in preaching by not resolving the tension in favor of the Gospel, there the fear derived from the Law and the hope springing from the Gospel stand in an unresolved contradiction. Concentration on divine wrath as central to preaching and theology demonstrates Satan's effectiveness against Christ. In this *Anfechtung* God with his condemning Law lurks to the side of the redemption of the cross. Thus Satan removes Christ away from the gaze of the believer, and the sinner is faced with the majesty of God without the benefit of the mediator. Now he is left alone before the searing wrath of God

and his own personal guilt. Before God's majesty and without Christ, the sinner is left without help.<sup>xxii</sup>

### 3. A Gracious God in the *Anfechtungen*

- 30 The answer to the affliction that God is treating the believer as an unbeliever and as an enemy by showering down upon him his wrath is Christ, in whom God reveals that he is gracious. Luther provides a precise and hence practical answer for the Christian caught in the affliction of knowing only a God of wrath. The Reformer directs his words to the Christians who judge from outward appearances that God is treating them as though they were not his children:

To be sure, public calamities hit saints and prophets, too, but not as happens in the case of the godless and ungrateful out of wrath and punishment for them, but for their salvation, to test and to try their faith, love and patience, that the godly may learn to bear patiently the hand of God in His government.... But the godless are plagued to punish and offend them, so that they are hardened and become worse. For they are not improved by the good and are only made worse by the evil.<sup>xxiii</sup>

- 31 Unless the Christian knows whether the sufferer is a believer or unbeliever, he cannot interpret the tribulation as *Anfechtung* for faith or punishment for unbelief. Luther's real concern is about the Satanically motivated *Anfechtung*. The affliction in the Christian's life should not be seen as a sign of divine wrath. Such introverted soul searching is Satanic, as again the soul is directed away from finding salvation in Christ.

### 4. Divine Discipline not Wrath in the *Anfechtungen*

- 32 The affliction in the life of the Christian is God's discipline and not his wrath in the Christian's life. Though wrath and discipline appear as the same to men, they are different to God who works in each for different purposes. Luther compares the *Anfechtungen* with a father's discipline of his delinquent son. The father is not seeking vengeance on his son, but wants to carry out his corrective purposes through the discipline. The vineyard is pruned not for the sake of punishment, but in order to make it more productive. The tension does not exist in what God intends by the *Anfechtungen*, but in our perception of calamities as if in all of them God were accomplishing his purposes of wrath. The act appears only to the eyes of unfaith as an act of divine anger. To faith, the *Anfechtungen* as discipline proceed from his love. Here is what Luther says about such a situation:

When God sends us tribulation, Satan suggests: See there God flings you into prison, endangers your life. Surely He hates you. He is angry with you; for if He did not hate you, He would not allow this thing to happen. In this way Satan turns the rod of a Father into the rope of a hangman and the most salutary remedy into the deadliest poison. But he is an incredible master at devising thoughts of this nature. Therefore it is very difficult to differentiate in tribulations between him who kills and Him who chastises in a friendly way.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Commenting on Isaiah 27:7, “*Have I smitten him with the blow of a smiter, or killed you with the killing of a killer?*”, Luther clearly distinguishes God’s chastening of Israel from punishment. The Reformer provides this paraphrase to show the difference:

“I will not smite My Church the way someone is smitten by enemies. I will not allow it to be thus smitten, but I chasten it and chastise it.” ... Let every Christian know, therefore, that his tribulation is not evil but good imposed by a good God. It is not as reason and Satan argue: “You are poor, cast off, and thoroughly afflicted. God is hard and unmerciful, He has forgotten you. He is your enemy and your adversary.”<sup>xxv</sup>

- 33 Luther specifically says that in the *Anfechtungen* coming upon the Christian God has no wrath. He attributes to God this paraphrase: “I have no wrath!”
- 34 The divine discipline in the *Anfechtungen* has the express purpose of making the forgiveness of sins more effective in the Christian’s life. Luther makes this quite clear: “This is the effect of the cross, that every sin and the whole body of sin may be destroyed by believing in the forgiveness, lest we fall either into presumption or into despair, but it keeps us in the middle way, that we acknowledge our sin and call upon God.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

### 5. Divine Judgment and the *Anfechtungen*

- 35 Even as Satan could bring the Christian into *Anfechtungen* by a confrontation with God’s majesty without Christ, he can also do it with Christ. Throughout his life Luther was terrified by Christ, the Judge. Christ was seen as a lawgiver like Moses, who turned grace into law and the means of grace into poison. Luther in his colorfully descriptive language calls Christ the hangman and executioner. Certainly Christ will appear on the Last Day as Judge; however, seeing him today as Judge and not Redeemer was for Luther a terrible *Anfechtung*.
- 36 Seeing Christ as Judge so confuses the Christian that he does not know whether God or Satan is dealing with him. Christ who is Revealer of God appears as the tormentor of the soul. The more terrible God appears as judge, the more appealing Satan appears as the only rescue of the soul. God appears Satanic and Satan appears more gracious. In this *Anfechtung* God the Redeemer and Satan the tormentor have switched roles. Unless God intervenes, the Christian begins to hate and blaspheme God.<sup>xxvii</sup> As hate is the direct opposite of faith, Satan has more than achieved his purpose of destroying faith.<sup>xxviii</sup> Christ, as Judge, is made by Satan to preach only the Law, so that Christians are aware only of their transgression and the subsequent damnation. Against this *Anfechtung* Luther suggests that the Christian should say, “(God) has also said, that I will also live. Mercy is greater than sin, and life greater than death.”
- 37 But right here in this horrible *Anfechtung*, where Satan brings the Christian to the point of hating God, God is saving the sinner. The Law, even placed by Satan in the hands of Christ, leaves the Christian in despair with no hope of release. In this *Anfechtung* God

presents Christ as the only hope of sinners. Satan's preparation of the Christian for damnation has become God's preparation for salvation. The Christian brought face to face with hell is rescued for the glories of heaven.<sup>xxxix</sup>

### **E. Death as *Anfechtung***

- 38 Death with its finality is considered by Luther as being among the worst *Anfechtungen*. Without denying God's authority over death, Satan is the bringer of death and has more ways of bringing it about than a druggist has chemicals. Death shows just how effective Satan has been in corrupting the world with original sin. The living creation has been poisoned by Satan, the lord of death. As he meets death, man is overcome with fear and trembling. Much preferable would be a quick death, since its suddenness would relieve man of some of its horrors.<sup>xxx</sup>
- 39 Death as the separation of body and soul does not seem much of a problem either to Luther or some of the heathen. Death without fear would only be a sleep.<sup>xxxi</sup> Satan changes matters by first proclaiming that death should not be feared. After he has proclaimed his 'gospel' of a fearless death by lulling the dying person into complacency, he begins to preach his 'Law' so that not even a superabundance of good works can atone for all the sins committed. Digging into the hidden recesses of the soul, he digs up past sins and even makes good works appear as sins. In the *Anfechtung* of his death, the Christian is threatened by judgment, destruction, and hell. Here again the Christian sees God's wrath, views God as the hangman, and sees nothing but thunder and lightning. As Satan has assembled all his power for the moment of death, Luther calls this moment "*die schwerste Anfechtung*," "the most severe *Anfechtung*."<sup>xxxii</sup> In the Gospel, however, the Christian is released from death.

### **F. Predestination as *Anfechtung***

- 40 Predestination as an abstract theological truth presented Luther with the *Anfechtung* of whether or not he had been predestined by God for salvation. Theologically predestination seemed at variance with universal grace and the atonement, and personally Luther felt that his own unworthiness made him unfit for God's choice. The *Anfechtung* of the feeling of personal unworthiness could again lead him to despair. Connected here was the problem of explaining how God could have permitted Adam to fall. Such an *Anfechtung* was again destroying faith in God as love. So bothered was Luther with predestination that he wished that he were not a human being, as he could do nothing to change his destiny for heaven or hell.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Through such fatalism the Christian could easily be convinced to lead a libertine life. By a permissive life in sin the Christian could succumb to Satan in the *Anfechtung* of predestination.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

### **G. Life with Constant *Anfechtungen***

- 41 Though faith is engendered in the Christian without the *Anfechtungen*, it is plagued with them throughout life, with death being the worst possible moment.<sup>xxxv</sup> As soon as one becomes a Christian, Satan plants himself at the doorstep. Until the Christian dies, he is

without peace. Abraham believes God's promises and then is commanded to kill his son. He does not know whether God or Satan is talking to him. Luther's release from monastic life did not relieve but only increased his *Anfechtungen*. *Anfechtung* belongs to faith almost by definition, since true faith never exists without conflict. Luther is bold enough to say that the greater the Christian's faith the greater the crisis of faith. A faith determined to live without *Anfechtungen* has already come to terms of peace with Satan. The Christian should be the most concerned when the *Anfechtungen* are absent. "No temptations are the worst ones." (*Nulla tentatio - omnis tentatio.*)<sup>xxxvi</sup>

- 42 Luther warned that days of contentment and laziness were the most dangerous, as Satan could catch the Christian unprepared. When the Christian is content, Satan can destroy his confidence in God. The Reformer was plagued even in the solitude of sleep and would wake drenched in sweat. Even in the moment of prayer, Luther was afflicted with a sense of personal unworthiness. Satan never sleeps and, therefore, the Christian must always be on his guard against the *Anfechtungen*.

#### **IV. General Observations on the *Anfechtungen***

##### **A. *Anfechtungen* as Experience**

- 43 *Anfechtungen* deal not so much with a doctrine that is revealed and then believed, but rather with the personal attitude of the Christian who reflects upon the revelation and his own experiences in life and is tempted to resolve the conflict by his experiences. This does not mean that for Luther *Anfechtungen* were not part of the Biblical revelation, because obviously they were. The Biblical saints, especially Abraham and St. Paul, and even Christ himself had endured the same afflictions. But while doctrinal truths are believed in faith, the *Anfechtungen* were personal suffering within the soul.

##### **B. *Anfechtungen* Unrelated to *Fides Historica***

- 44 Luther's *Anfechtungen* were not his concerns about the historical character of Christianity. Unknown to him is the Enlightenment problem of distinguishing the report of the happening from the happening itself. He did not struggle intellectually with the proper reflection of *Historie* in *Geschichte*. Some have tried to see in Luther's *Anfechtungen* a forerunner of their own dialecticism in which intellectual certainty about religious matters is not possible. In our century Barth overcame the tension by ignoring the real questions of history and preaching the faith of the Bible. Bultmann and Marxsen saw the tension between history and Bible faith as a beneficial "*Anfechtung*." Luther did not experience that kind of historical or intellectual "*Anfechtung*." He had and expressed no doubts about the authenticity and the historical character of the Biblical record. Luther's questions came in the realm of the *fides* as *fiducia* and not the *fides historica*. The *fides historica* was the assumed foundation of Christianity and personal faith.
- 45 Luther's *Anfechtungen* were 'psychological' in the sense of whether or not his soul knew a gracious God in Christ Jesus and not intellectual in the sense that he doubted the

Scriptural revelation as authentic. The *Anfechtungen* take place not within the realm of the *sola scriptura*, but within the *sola gratia* and, subsequently, the *sola fide*.

### **C. *Anfechtungen* as Religious**

- 46 *Anfechtungen* do not happen in the raw secular realm, but within the Christian context. They are religious struggles. Without their religious appearance the *Anfechtungen* would be recognizable, capable of being conquered, and not really *Anfechtungen*. In the *Anfechtungen* Satan is more the organizer than he is the creator. He uses valid religious symbols in his own combination to lead the Christian into unbelief.

### **D. *Anfechtungen* as Description of the Christian Life**

- 47 *Anfechtung* is a proper synonym for the life of the Christian lived in faith. It is a bridge that brings the realities of revelation from the Biblical history into the personal life of the Christian. The historical realities of the Bible remain fixed within their own appointed time, but the supernatural realities, e.g., atonement for sin, faith, conquest over Satan, death, and sin transcend history and are made alive for the Christian through faith. As the Christian encounters these supernatural realities through faith, he struggles within his faith. The revelations made to the Biblical figures are unrepeatable because of their place in salvation history, but the *Anfechtungen* are shared not only by them but also by all who through faith accept that history for personal salvation. As Satan afflicted the Biblical saints in their *Anfechtungen*, so he continues to afflict all those who share their faith in Christ. For as faith provides a positive bond between all believers, so the struggles of the *Anfechtungen* provide a negative bond and a definite mark among all Christians with themselves and with Christ. Luther is so bold as to say Christ himself has already gone through all sufferings now endured by Christians.<sup>36a</sup>
- 48 Luther saw relief from the *Anfechtungen* in a variety of ways. One prominent way for relief was prayer, the topic of the second lecture.

## Notes

### Lecture I: The Concept of *Anfechtung* in Luther's Thought

---

<sup>i</sup> Francis Pieper. *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis, Concordia, 1950), 3 vols, Vol. I, p. 186.

<sup>ii</sup> Pieper, op. cit., I, pp. 188-189, has a rather extensive quotation from Luther on his concept of *tentatio*. Perhaps this one sentence is characteristic of the entire citation: "For as soon as the Word of God blooms forth through you, the devil will visit you, make a real doctor of you, and by his affliction will teach you to seek and love God's Word" p. 188.

<sup>iii</sup> Walther von Loewenich. *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, tr., Herbert J. A. Bouman, (Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1976) pp. 154-159. Here both the Latin *tentatio* and German *Anfechtung* are used side by side.

<sup>iv</sup> Ewald M. Plass. *What Luther Says*, (St. Louis, Concordia, 1959) 3 vols, Vols I & III.

<sup>v</sup> *Luther's Works*, Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia, Concordia and Fortress, 1955-1972), p. 286. Hereafter *Luther's Works* will be cited as LW.

<sup>vi</sup> Francis Pieper may be representative of any number of theologians who see Luther's *Anfechtungen* during his struggle for salvation through works during his Roman Catholic period as internal and his *Anfechtungen* after his discovery of free grace as external, op. cit., p. 189. The evidence indicates that for Luther throughout his life the *Anfechtungen* were internal. He did not seem terrified by political and military efforts against him. Perhaps it is embarrassing to see that Luther throughout his life struggled with himself about his doctrine of justification and its disruption of the Church.

<sup>vii</sup> Paul Bühler. *Die Anfechtungen bei Martin Luther*, (Zurich, Zwingli Verlag, 1942), p. 7.

<sup>viii</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>ix</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>x</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>10a</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>xi</sup> Quoted in Bühler, op. cit., p. 18. English translation by essayist.

<sup>xii</sup> *ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>xiii</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 107-111, 221.

<sup>xiv</sup> *ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>xv</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>xvi</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28. (See note 6)

<sup>xvii</sup> *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>xviii</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>xix</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>xx</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>xxi</sup> *ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>xxii</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Plass, op. cit., I, 26.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *ibid.*, I, 12.

<sup>xxv</sup> LW 16, 214.

<sup>xxvi</sup> LW 16, 215.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Bühler, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>xxviii</sup> *ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>xxix</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>xxx</sup> *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>xxxi</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>xxxii</sup> *ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 61-61.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>xxxv</sup> *ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>36a</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 128-32.

## Lecture II: Prayer

### I. Prayer and the *Anfechtungen*

#### A. Prayer as Deterrent

- 49 In Luther's theology prayer and *Anfechtungen* are intimately related. One of the real experiences of the *Anfechtungen* in the life of the Christian is the personal awareness of his total helplessness in the face of the affliction. Through this sense of helplessness the Christian is taught to pray correctly, *Anfechtungen* add both depth and dimension to prayer. Prayer indicates that the Christian has not given up hope and his willingness to seek help from God. That the Christian prays means that Satan has not yet conquered.
- 50 In prayer the devil becomes God's effective agent. If the afflicted Christian refrains from relying on his own power as Satan has tempted him, he is brought by the affliction face to face with God. In his helplessness the afflicted can go no place but to God for aid and assistance. Prayer is the plea for aid.
- 51 Through prayer the afflicted Christian acknowledges that there is help from the Holy Spirit. Prayer in the hands of a Christian becomes a weapon to defend himself against Satan and to fight back. Throughout the *Anfechtung* the Christian is on the defensive and retreats from Satan. With prayer he begins to hold his own ground and then to take the offensive against Satan. In the moment of the *Anfechtung*, Luther says, praising God is the most effective poison in destroying Satan. Very effective, according to Luther, is clenching the fists against Satan. No remedy is more effective than praying the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer destroys Satan as water puts out fire.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Luther believes, however, that most people use this prayer without thinking.
- 52 In his exposition on the Sermon on the Mount, Luther has some of his choicest words on prayer, placing it just one step lower than the office of the ministry, which is higher as it is entrusted with the tasks of preaching and teaching how Christians should live. Prayer must be the part of every sermon. The sinful condition of the world which makes unbelief a constant reality for the Christian requires that he be constant in prayer. "He (God) also wants to indicate that because of all the temptations and hindrances we face, nothing is more necessary in Christendom than continual and unceasing prayer that God would give His grace and His Spirit to make the doctrine powerful and efficacious among us and among others."<sup>xxxviii</sup> Even when the church's doctrine may be in order, the Christians will encounter offense and obstacles. "We battle against these continually with all our might, but the strongest shield we have is prayer."<sup>xxxix</sup> Even without a promise or command, the Christian in the middle of his *Anfechtungen* can find his own real, effective help through prayer. God, however, does not leave us here so that the only reason we pray is that no other solution presents itself. Prayer is motivated not only by the desperate need of the Christian, but by the father-son relationship which God has with Christians. God promises to hear the requests of Christians in the same way that a father will not give his son a serpent when he asks for a fish.<sup>xl</sup> By our need God pushes us to prayer, and by his kind invitations and promises he invites us to pray.

53 For Luther the value of prayer is not psychological in the sense that by this exercise the human being receives a sense of well-being. Prayer is not the power of self-suggestion which enables the person to do those things which he ordinarily finds impossible to do. Prayer's value does not rest in itself, but in the Christian's entrusting everything he is and has to God. Prayer by itself has no intrinsic value. Luther complained bitterly against rote prayer. In our day those, complaints would be valid against prayer chains and circles and the success-oriented prayers of the public media preachers. Even prayers humbly offered by Christians to God for help should not be regarded as a cure-all against all types of problems encountered by the Christian. Quite to the contrary!

### **B. Prayer and the Sense of Unworthiness**

54 Right during the act of praying Luther himself was afflicted by sin, Satan, and his own conscience. Prayer was the occasion for the *Anfechtungen*. As he prayed, Luther was afflicted with the thought that God was not hearing his prayer and that God was becoming angry with him. He asked himself during prayer why God should hear his prayers in distress if God himself had sent that distress into his life. Luther felt himself caught in the contradiction. So troubled was he with the thought of his own sinfulness and his lack of worthiness to pray that all he could do was cry out "Help, dear Lord."<sup>xli</sup> By bringing the Christian to the point where he can only cry out to God for help, God was accomplishing his purpose of saving the Christian.

55 Luther, however, would hardly ever understand prayer as an instrument in the hand of the Christian to manipulate God. Nevertheless, the Christian has to learn that God is near in the hour of need and that in prayer he helps. Rather than seeing the *Anfechtungen* as a hindrance to prayer, the *Anfechtungen* are themselves invitations to pray. God and Satan in unholy alliance work in the life of believers to bring about God's will. If prayer becomes permissible only when a person is pious, then no one would ever be permitted to pray. The prayers of those afflicted in the *Anfechtungen* are indeed valid before God. The sense of our unworthiness does not make us ineligible to ask for God's mercy. It is in the very moment of the recognition of sin, the horrible and humbling sense of unworthiness, that the gracious hand of God becomes visible. The personal recognition of sins provides the opportunity for prayer. Since the Christian's recognition of his sin and confession are imperfect, he does not know for what he should pray. The *Anfechtungen* have done their awful work and left him in distress and confusion. At that moment the Holy Spirit enters in with his help and in our stead offers up to God an acceptable prayer. This assistance provided by the Holy Spirit is above and beyond human comprehension. The concept that the Christian can pray only with the Spirit's aid again accentuates the centrality of God's grace in Luther's theology. Therefore, in prayer the only proper attitude is for the Christian to commit himself entirely into the hands of God. This committing of the self into God's hands means the willingness to suffer all weaknesses and *Anfechtungen* and at the same time never to give up hope that God will provide the necessary and needed help. Only in this kind of situation is the afflicted Christian brought close to God. Prayer releases him from his distresses and attaches him to God. It frees him from the power of the devil and places him again under the omnipotence of God. God's Spirit and Word

again become effective in the life of the Christian and take the place of the anxieties worked by the Holy Spirit. This is the hour of salvation.

- 56 Luther's concepts of prayer and the *Anfechtungen* are classical examples of what at first glance appear as contradictory in his theology. Prayer is the antidote against the *Anfechtungen* caused by Satan, but Luther will credit Satan in driving him to prayer.<sup>xlii</sup>

### C. Prayer as Faith's Plea in the *Anfechtungen*

- 57 Thus *Anfechtungen* and prayer are necessary for the Christian, but not in the sense that *Anfechtungen* and prayer are good works that justify the Christian before God, or even in the sense that the *Anfechtungen* and prayer constitute the nature of faith. This type of suggestion would negate the *sola fide* as pure passivity over the activity of God's grace. *Anfechtungen* are necessary not as a contributory factor to faith, but as a necessary environmental factor. Faith springs up not in a perfect condition of sinlessness, but surrounded by the world, the devil, and the flesh. Faith is engendered unencumbered as a pure act of grace; but as soon as it begins to grow it encounters difficulties which are bent on its destruction. Whatever Christian progress may have taken place is thwarted, stunted, and in some cases destroyed in the *Anfechtungen*. Prayer becomes that signal that faith will no longer retreat in the face of Satan. Prayer is the cry of faith that realizes its own personal helplessness in confronting the *Anfechtungen* and throws itself upon God for all aid. *Anfechtung* describes faith in conflict. Prayer describes faith approaching God for aid in the conflict. Therefore, faith, *Anfechtung*, and prayer exist side by side in the Christian.

## II. Types of Prayer

### A. Constant Prayer

- 58 Prayer should be regarded as a constant activity of the Christian. There are, of course, the commands that Christians should pray without ceasing and the promises of God to hear continually the prayer of the Christians. God never becomes weary of listening to Christians' prayers and answering them. By prayer faith shows that it relies on God totally. The desperate situation of the Christian, however, also provides an adequate motivation for constant praying. Luther cites the example of Joseph, who for thirteen years prayed to God for release from his slavery. The only result was that his plight became worse instead of better. It appears to us that without an immediate answer to our prayers they are to remain unanswered. Through this activity, however, God was strengthening Joseph for the position of lord over Egypt. As long as the distress and affliction last, the Christian is given no other choice but to pray to God continually for aid. The continual praying activity of the Christian indicates that his faith is still active in the midst of affliction.<sup>xliii</sup>

## B. Spontaneous Prayer

- 59 Luther encouraged spontaneous prayer. While laying down special prayers for certain days and parts of each day, Luther urged that Christians pray spontaneously. For example, horrible and monstrous tidings should invoke a plea for God's help and mercy. When experiencing something good, the Christian should be prepared to thank God right at that very moment. Such prayers should be formed by the Christian right on the spot "without any prepared and prescribed words."<sup>xliv</sup> There is no suggestion that Luther approved of spontaneous, unrehearsed prayers in the church service. His words are directed to the Christian life in its ordinary circumstances. The spontaneous prayer reflects the daily situation of the Christian as he at the same time experiences conflicts and God's help. Just as *Anfechtungen* come without warning, so Christians should be prepared to pray at any moment.

## C. Regulated Prayers

- 60 Those acquainted with Luther's *Small Catechism* are also aware that along with spontaneous prayers, the Reformer prescribed a daily regimen of prayers, with the Lord's Prayer being given the most important position. In accord with Luther's rule it should be prayed eight times a day, once at rising, again at bedtime, and before and after each meal. Luther's reason for such attention given to the Lord's Prayer is that its petitions are the continual wishes of all Christians even if during the prayer the mind might wander.<sup>xlv</sup> In his personal life Luther added to the Lord's Prayer, as essential parts of his personal piety, the Ten Commandments and several Bible passages.<sup>xlvi</sup> With the spontaneous prayer and the discipline of daily prayers, Luther was accomplishing the same goal of keeping faith alive. The discipline of reciting the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer brought the sinner to an awareness of his sins and directed him to that place where help could be found.

## III. Absence of Prayer and Motivation to Pray

- 61 Prayer, for Luther, served as an indicator of the presence of faith. *Anfechtung* accomplished this negatively in that it showed that the Christian was in the middle of the battle against Satan. Prayer in a more positive way showed that faith was present since God was being sought for help. Luther was concerned about the absence of prayer, not in the sense that prayer was the means through which salvation was accomplished in the life of the Christian and that the lack of prayer cut off God's grace, but rather in the sense that the lack of prayer signified that Satan was accomplishing his victory over God in the Christian life.<sup>xlvii</sup> The Christian must be concerned over every disinclination to pray. Luther is forever the practical theologian and lays down a procedure for the Christian who has no interest in prayer. First he should pray the Lord's Prayer and then he should be prepared to throw every possible slander against Satan. Where there is no desire to pray, there the heart is hardened against God.
- 62 Luther sees value in the *Anfechtungen* in stimulating prayer in the life of the Christian. First, he suggests that the Christian should examine his own life and the lives of other

Christians. There he will find all sorts of vices. This will drive him to prayer. Secondly, he should look at the condition of the church and the world which are in shambles.<sup>xlvi</sup> All these will get worse and, therefore, there will be more reason for the Christian to pray.

- 63 Prayer finds its origin in the Christian faith surrounded by the *Anfechtungen*. God uses the misery of the human condition to direct the believer to come to him in prayer.

#### IV. The Problem of Unanswered Prayer

##### A. The Response of Faith

- 64 In commenting on Romans 8:26, “For we do not know how to pray,” Luther sees a more positive attitude in God when our prayers are not answered than when they are. “It is not a bad sign, but a very good one, if things seem to turn out contrary to our request. Just as it is not a good sign if everything turns out favorably for our requests.”<sup>xlix</sup>
- 65 The correlation between Luther’s view on prayer and the *Anfechtungen* is unmistakable. From a human point of view, God’s refusal to act makes him appear to be angry with the suppliant. Luther’s favorable views on God’s apparent negative attitude to the prayer of the Christian come from his understanding of God and man. Divine wisdom is superior. Humanity is so sinful that each individual must be torn down to remove what is objectionable to God.<sup>1</sup> God’s ways are simply far above ours. When he begins to work for our benefit, he does it in a way which we simply cannot understand or recognize. Luther’s attitude to unanswered prayer reflects his major themes of grace and faith. God works effectively in the life of the Christian by his grace; but before this grace can become operative, the Christian must become passive. He can no longer rely on himself. When the Christian is in a state of helplessness, God himself begins to adjust our prayers and starts answering them. The Holy Spirit himself prays and makes it possible for us to tolerate God’s working in us. Luther writes:

Therefore, when everything is hopeless for us and all things begin to go against our prayers and desires, then those unutterable groans begin. And then “the Spirit helps us in our weakness” (Rom. 8:26). For unless the Spirit were helping, it would be impossible for us to bear this action of God by which He hears us and accomplishes what we pray for.<sup>li</sup>

With the Spirit, Christians do not give up hope and confidence, even when it appears at first that God is ignoring them.

- 66 The Christian’s ability to accept from God what seems to be his disfavor flows in Luther’s thought not only from the Christian’s acknowledgment of God’s superior wisdom, but also from the hiddenness of God. Luther writes, “For the work of God must be hidden and never understood, even when it happens.”<sup>lii</sup> Jesus’ virgin birth and his suffering and death before his glorification are cited as examples of how God’s ways appear both hidden and contrary to what human beings expect.

67 Luther briefly puts forth two examples of how people receive from God the exact opposite of what they are asking. The man praying for chastity receives more temptations and the one praying for strength is besieged by more weaknesses. Nevertheless, when one bears up under these stresses, God is answering the prayer more effectively than the man could have ever imagined.<sup>liii</sup>

## **B. The Response of Unfaith**

68 Discontent with God's response to prayer indicates essential unbelief. Here Luther goes right to the heart of the matter in accusing those discontent with God of placing themselves above God by putting more value on their wisdom than his. At this point the Reformer is very harsh.

But they want to be like God, and they want their thoughts to be not beneath God but beside Him, absolutely conformed to His, that is, perfect, which is as possible, or rather, as little possible, as that clay which by nature is suitable for a pitcher or some kind of vase can in its present form be like the form or the model which the potter has in mind, into which he intends to shape the clay. They are foolish and proud over this and know neither God nor themselves.<sup>liv</sup>

69 While salvation can only be received by the pure passivity of faith, the entire salvation process within the individual is slightly more complex as it involves the *Anfechtungen*, prayer, and God's response to prayer. Faith engendered solely by God is never without the struggle of the *Anfechtungen*. Unless the Christian pleads to God for aid in the *Anfechtungen*, he can eventually be lost in this struggle between God and Satan in his life. Finally, his attitude to God's response to his prayer will show whether in his faith he really relies on God alone. Thus the Christian who says he relies on God solely but in actuality denies it by refusing to accept how God is directing his life and by asserting his own will makes the *sola gratia* inoperative.

## **V. Prayer and the Holy Spirit**

### **A. The Spirit's Prayers as Actual Reflections of Individual Christians**

70 Luther assigns to the Spirit an important role in the formation of prayers. Luther uses the illustration of an artist looking at rough, coarse material from which he will eventually shape his work of art. God is the artist who sees in us things which we do not even recognize. God takes our innermost feelings and desires and shapes us according to his purpose and design. Prayer for Luther involves the Christian's putting himself at the disposal of God for his purposes. The Holy Spirit refashions the Christian and his prayer.<sup>lv</sup>

71 The Holy Spirit is not for Luther the great leveler so that the prayers of all Christians are essentially the same. This kind of approach would make individual prayers and requests mere formalities so that through some type of mass production God, by the Holy Spirit,

would make all individual prayers conform to one sort of heavenly model. By using the illustration of the rough material to be fashioned into a work of art, Luther recognizes not only that the individual remains important to God as a kind of religious truth but with no practical relevance. Rather Luther sees the individual in the depths of his being actually providing, in a passive way, of course, the rough material from which the Holy Spirit's prayers are made. The prayers of the Holy Spirit are not some kind of *creatio nova* or *creatio ex nihilo* so that the prayers have little or nothing to do with what we really are, what we really think, or what we really want! Quite to the contrary, the prayers prayed for us by the Holy Spirit are the kind of prayers we would pray if we were not burdened by the limitations of our human existence.

### **B. The Holy Spirit and the Christian's Weakness**

72 The Spirit gives a new, wider, and larger dimension to our prayers. Luther makes the wise observation about Paul's words "we do not know how to pray" that they do not mean that Christians are praying for foolish or harmful things, but they have not realized the full dimension of what God intends to give them because of their prayers. He astutely notices that Christians are described as praying out of "weakness" and not "iniquity." A prayer for anything foolish or wicked would not really be a prayer because it would not flow out of a converted will. Thus it is not that we ask for the wrong things, but rather that we do not ask for enough. Luther writes. "Therefore in heeding our prayers and coming to grant our requests God destroys our weak thinking and our still too humble ideas, and He gives us what the Spirit demands for us."<sup>lvi</sup> It is as if a son wrote a letter to his father asking for silver and the father disregarded the letter and prepared to give the son gold. Since the son did not receive the silver he requested, he is concerned that the father has disregarded the letter.<sup>lvii</sup>

73 The co-praying of the Holy Spirit with the Christian demonstrates not that the Christian is getting stronger but that he is still weak. Our weakness prevents us from receiving the good God intends for us. We would continue to flee from the good God wants to give us, if the Spirit did not prevent us. Luther says that we deserve to be called fools who should receive God's terrors so that these terrors could be received with joy.

## **VI. The Substantive Nature of Prayer**

74 In commenting on Romans 12:12, Luther distinguished among three substantive ingredients which characterize prayer's nature: material, sensual; intellectual; spiritual or emotional.<sup>lviii</sup> While all three ingredients can and should be present within one prayer, it seems that for Luther a prayer can possess just one of these characteristics and in some sense still be a prayer.

### **A. Material Nature of Prayer**

75 Material or sensual prayers consist mainly in mouthing the words of the prayers without any participation of the heart.<sup>lix</sup> Such prayers are said to offend God and give the offerer of such prayers a false sense of security because he believes wrongly that such prayers

are really acceptable to God and beneficial to himself. Luther's barbs are directed against the clergy who said their canonical hours without feeling, and, to make matters worse, received money for it.<sup>lx</sup> Also guilty of mouthing useless prayers are the lay people who say the Lord's Prayer without any understanding. This kind of praying is called material prayer because although the outward substance or material is present, what Luther calls the real thing, the personal participation, is missing.<sup>lxi</sup>

- 76 What is amazing is that Luther seems to have reversed himself in seeing some value in such rote material prayers and urges that they be not despised. Luther should at this point speak for himself:

To pray in this way is merely to perform an act of obedience because in addition to this, that it is a work of obedience, it is good in many other ways. First, because it drives away the devil, even if the prayer is only recited in the simplicity of the heart, that is, if "it is sung in the spirit" (1 Cor. 14:15) and thus brings the Holy Spirit to us. This is symbolized in David's playing the harp before Saul.<sup>lxii</sup>

- 77 Several reasons are adduced for not despising what Luther calls material prayers, those prayers which are not sincerely intended by the one who prays or hears them. First, "the devil cannot even endure having the word of God read." Luther cites 1 Corinthians 14:2, "*For one who speaks in a tongue speaks to God*" to prove the point. (Honestly, his exegetical method escapes me, even though I support his conclusion.) Secondly, the word of God affects the soul even if it is not understood. This prayer might be similar in its efficaciousness to the prayer of the church in bringing the child to baptism and faith. Thirdly, it gives the emotions and intellect an occasion to hear God's message. The fourth reason seems to be unclear at first glance. Luther says that "although many people who pray this way do not have the full emotional effect of these words, yet they often have a common and elevated spirit toward God." The Reformer is referring, as it seems, to people who sincerely engage in worship forms in order to pray to God, but whose real thoughts are different from those which are being expressed by the assigned liturgy at the moment of prayer.

### **B. Assessing Luther's View on Material Prayer**

- 78 Some comment must be made on Luther's positive assessment of the material use of prayers, i.e., those prayers prayed in which the intellect is not actually attuned to the message of the words used, e.g., in the liturgy. First of all, there is no reason to be embarrassed by the reversal of Luther's position—if it really is a reversal—from regarding such prayers as offensive to a position which sees in them no small value. It is quite Lutherlike for him to do battle with himself and come in on the same issue from what appear to be opposing positions.
- 79 The "Protestant" side of Luther, if we dare employ the 'Protestant-Catholic' distinction, finds such prayers offensive because for all practical purposes faith, the accompanying *Anfechtungen*, and the struggling with the answer provided by prayer are missing. Then steps the "Catholic" Luther to the fore who must see some value to the objective words of

God regardless of the attitude of the one who speaks them. There is some value in mouthing God's Word even if such obedience is extrinsic and superficial and does not really reflect the exact intentions of the one speaking it. Regardless of the attitude of the speaker of the Word of God, Satan cannot tolerate this Word.

- 80 Whether Satan was driven out of Saul by the Word of God sung by David or whether the Satanically-troubled soul of Saul was soothed by David's music might be exegetically debatable. Nevertheless, Luther sees the Word of God as a sharp defense and assault against the devil. Luther's view that the Word of God is effective on the soul apart from the intellectual understanding of it seems to reveal an anthropology which is not totally clear. All understand Luther's aversion to reason, whether it was Aristotle's, Erasmus's, or the Roman Church's. But are we really skeptical rationalists upon God's Word working through the intellect if we disagree with Luther? The Word of God never operates because of the intellect, but does it not operate through it?<sup>62a</sup>
- 81 Luther's positive assessment of material prayer as giving an opportunity for the proclamation of the Word of God really reflects Luther's understanding of the objectivity of the Word. Certainly Luther would not want his followers to support financially or otherwise monastic or cathedral services just so that there would be constant prayer, but neither would he urge their destruction. The practices of Rome continue into our day. In addition, the Anglican Church within a more Protestant setting has morning and evening services where prayers are offered by those who have no known Christian convictions. Still, such material prayers are not without value in God's total purposes.
- 82 Luther's last references to lay people who intend to be sincerely religious towards God but who do not really understand what they are saying might speak very appropriate and uncomfortable words against all of us who pray in terms acceptable to God and to the church theologians but without real or significant meaning to those who listen to us.

### **C. Intellectual and Spiritual Natures of Prayer**

- 83 Strangely enough Luther says little about the intellectual ingredient in prayer. There is only the suggestion that those who are intellectually gifted must give strict attention to the meaning. Luther seems to say that he can live with the fact that many really do not and will not understand the words of prayer.<sup>lxiii</sup> The intellectual meaning can exist with or without the spiritual participation.
- 84 The imperative to "be constant in prayer" applies specifically to the prayer in its intellectual and spiritual senses. This distinction between praying intellectually and spiritually is taken by Luther from 1 Corinthians 14:15, "*I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the mind also.*" Praying in the spirit means the use of words, i.e., the sensual and material ingredients, without any apparent meaning. The emotion but not the intellect prays. This apparently is carried out by lay people and devout nuns who sincerely place their trust in God but who do not understand the words they are using. Prayer at its best involves the use of words, intellect, and the spirit. Luther writes, "The

mental prayer is the ascent of the mind, as well as the spirit, to God. This is the prayer of which he is speaking when Paul says: 'Be constant in prayer!' <sup>»lxiv</sup>

## **VII. An Assessment of Charismatic Prayer on the Basis of Luther's Commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:15**

- 85 We would be somewhat remiss if we did not comment on the current charismatic use of the phrase "praying in the spirit" taken from 1 Corinthians 14:15 as a reference to the nonintellectual or unintelligible use of tongues. Without commenting on the original situation of babbling in the Corinthian congregation, Luther applies this passage to the situation at his time where the words of prayer did not really reflect the reasoned thought of the pious people praying them. In fact, they had little idea of what the words meant. Was Luther doing an injustice to the original setting of these words by applying them to a situation which was almost the exact opposite of the charismatic situation in the Corinthian congregation? I think not. In the sixteenth century prayers were recited by rote, and in the first-century Corinth they were unregulated babbling. Luther understood the exegetical application as involving first finding the principles and not merely looking for superficial similarities. Tongue speakers in Corinth, monks praying in Latin, which they did not know, and lay people praying in the vernacular but without intellectual comprehension of the words all share a common desire to approach God with the emotion of their inner being but with the words coming out of their mouths not really conforming to what they are thinking. In the case of the charismatics at Corinth, they were really saying nothing, just making sounds. The monk or nun recited prayers in Latin, a language which they had heard but never really learned. The lay person used the vernacular, whose words he could pronounce but whose meaning was far beyond him. While the "spirit" sincerely was coming to God, the "mind" was for the most part inoperative. It was pure emotion.
- 86 I have spent some time on this issue of the essential nature of prayer because these matters of rote praying and tongue speaking still affect us. Luther's way of handling prayer shows him as a practical theologian. True prayer should conform to certain norms and have certain essential characteristics, but the perfect is not always possible. Without lowering his standards, Luther could live with certain inadequacies in others.

## Notes

### Lecture II: Prayer and the *Anfechtungen*

---

xxxvii Bühler, p. 146.

xxxviii LW 21, pp. 228-229.

xxxix LW 21, p. 229.

xl LW 21, p. 230.

xli Bühler, op. cit., p. 147.

xlii *ibid.*, p. 200.

xliii Plass, op. cit., II, p. 1090.

xliv *ibid.*, II, p. 1086.

xlv *ibid.*, II, p. 1085. Cf. LW.

xlvi *ibid.*, II, pp. 1083-1084.

xlvii *ibid.*, II, p. 1079.

xlviii *ibid.*, II, pp. 1084-1085.

xlix LW 25, pp. 364-365.

<sup>1</sup> LW 25, p. 365.

li loc. cit.

lii LW 25, p. 366.

liii LW 25, p. 367.

liv LW 25, p. 366.

lv LW 25, p. 367.

lvi LW 25, p. 369.

lvii loc. cit.

lviii LW 25, p. 459.

lix LW 25, p. 458.

lx loc. cit.

lxi LW 25, p. 459.

lxii loc. cit.

<sup>62a</sup> The Lutheran dogmatics call this the ministerial use of reason.

lxiii LW 25, p. 460.

lxiv loc. cit.

### Lecture III: Luther On The Resurrection

87 In our time the resurrection of Jesus as historical fact has received a great deal of attention because of Rudolph Bultmann who with his demythologizing denied it as historical fact but who valued it because of its existential value for faith. This approach was not totally without merit since it has forced tradition-minded Christians to reexamine the Biblical evidence to find support for what Luther sees as the linchpin of Christianity. Our intention is not to direct Luther's view to the contemporary problem, but to examine Luther within his own context. Luther's sermons on 1 Corinthians 15 delivered in 1533 will be studied. Here the general resurrection and Christ's resurrection are discussed as a unit.

#### I. Denial of Resurrection

88 We operate under a false view if we think that the denial of the resurrection is a contemporary problem. Bultmann's views are basically nothing new. In the last century David Friedrich Strauss startled the world by asserting that all miraculous events in the New Testament were fabricated by the writers. What is startling is Luther's claim that the Roman Church officials of his day did not really believe this article on the resurrection. Denial of the resurrection is motivated by the devil. Luther says, "For the devil surely pressed us hard and assails us and also great men with the temptation to disbelieve this article or to doubt it. Pope, cardinals, and other great men, especially in Italy, are also fine, wise, intelligent, and learned people; yet if three could be found who believed this article, we should say that these were many."<sup>lxv</sup> Luther does not give us the source of this denial of the resurrection among Roman Church officials. Perhaps Luther sees the denial of the resurrection and of anything miraculous as a problem among church leaders in general without making a specific personal reference. The denial of the resurrection among the laity is virtually nothing in comparison with its denial among the clergy who through their preaching can influence their congregations.<sup>lxvi</sup> Christians should not, however, be too surprised by the denial of the resurrection. The Corinthian congregation denied it though it had St. Paul as its pastor.

89 The denial of the resurrection is akin to the denial of sacramental efficacy of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Just as reason denies that Baptism washes away sins and that bread is Christ's body, so also it cannot believe that all men will be revived on the Last Day and that body and soul will be reunited.<sup>lxvii</sup>

90 In some circles, including Lutheran ones in the 1950s, it was fashionable and customary to deny the soul's survival after death. The soul was seen as a functional extension of the body, and resurrection was interpreted as an undefined and uncertain survival after death. Luther's resurrection doctrine presupposes both a soul which survives and a body which decays. The body united with the soul is reinstated to a majesty which it has never previously known.<sup>lxviii</sup> Resurrection means reuniting body and soul in a union which we now experience.<sup>lxix</sup> Reason is seen by Luther as the cause of denying the resurrection because it operated only with what it can see.

To believe that (resurrection) is surely not man's competence and power. For reason does no more than merely to observe the facts as they appear to the eye, namely, that the world has stood so long, that one person crumbles to dust in the grave, from which no one has ever returned.... When reason approaches this article of faith and reflects on it, it is entirely at a loss.<sup>lxx</sup>

- 91 True to this graphic style, Luther points out how the bodily parts of the saints are scattered in several countries and how certain forms of dying make men's bodies turn quickly to dust and ashes so that no trace of them remains. The rebinding of these parts in the resurrection supersedes what reason can understand.
- 92 Luther here is not attempting to say that the resurrection doctrine is absurd in the sense that it is irrational. His diatribe against reason does not mean the suspension of the thought process, but the sum of individual experiences. A fuller meaning for reason would be the collective human experiences. This collective reason has experienced nothing more than the irreversible corruption of dead bodies, and this reason relies more on these experiences than God's Word. Luther's opposition to reason is not an invitation to surrender logic, as he himself sets up complex, argumentative proofs for the resurrection.

## **II. Proofs for Resurrection**

- 93 Luther's "proofs" for the resurrection are historical testimony to Christ's resurrection, the Scriptures, and then the totality of Christian doctrine.

### **A. Historical Proofs**

- 94 Receiving the least attention as proof of Christ's resurrection are the historical experiences of the apostles. In the current debate with the deniers of the resurrection, the defenders have chiefly focused their arguments on the reliability of the apostles as historical witnesses. The argument from history hardly takes up a full paragraph in Luther's exposition of 1 Corinthians 15.<sup>70a</sup> Unlike current discussions there is no prolonged debate about the nature of history and historical reliability and whether or not the apostolic testimony, since it is allegedly biased, qualifies as history according to modern understanding. Luther's comparative lack of concern for a detailed historical argument is all the more astonishing since St. Paul's argument seems to be historical as he lists the witnesses to Christ's resurrection in an almost legal manner.
- 95 Also noteworthy is Luther's lack of distinction between the appearances of Jesus to those who had been with him before the resurrection, i.e., Peter and the Twelve, and those called after the resurrection as were James, Paul, and the group called the other apostles. Any serious debate on the historicity of the resurrection would also—at least it would seem to me—take into consideration the appearances of Christ during the forty day period before the ascension and the subsequent Damascus Road appearance. Luther simply does not make the historical distinction here.

## B. Scriptural Proof

- 96 It is not that Luther totally disregards the argument from history for Christ's resurrection, but he is interested in maintaining the centrality of the Scriptures as the ultimate available source of Christian truth. Even his discussion of the historical reliability of the witnesses of the resurrection is placed within the context of Scriptural prediction. Luther paraphrases Paul in this way, " 'All of these are, in addition to me, reliable witnesses of what we saw and experienced, carried out as foretold in Scripture.' "<sup>lxxi</sup>
- 97 What impresses Luther is Paul's assertion that Christ " 'rose in accordance with the Scripture.' "<sup>lxxii</sup> The doctrine of the resurrection then gives Luther opportunity to extol Scripture for both its historical reliability and its efficacy. Luther is more interested in St. Paul's phrase that Christ rose in accord with the Scripture than he is in the apostle's careful listing of the historical witnesses. Luther's Scriptural obsession forces him to make quick work of the apostle's chief argument based on history so that he can concentrate on the Scriptures.
- 98 Luther interprets Paul's phrase "in accordance with the Scripture" as condemnatory evidence against those finding the Scripture as a dead letter and who therefore assert that true power should be found outside of the Scripture in the Holy Spirit. Such an opinion comes directly from the devil. Luther does work with the distinction between the letter and the Spirit. The letter by itself is dead. This much Luther will grant his opponents. The letter, however, which by itself is dead is the *only* vehicle through which the Spirit works. It is the deposit of all mysteries.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Without the external word there is no working of the Spirit.
- 99 At first glance it might appear that Luther has surrendered too much to his opponents in speaking of the possibility of the Scripture's being a dead letter without the Spirit. The Reformer, however, can both condemn and praise, of course from different perspectives, the use of the Word without the proper intentions of those who are using it. Luther wants to avoid any magical use of the Word, as if the mere use of the Word places an obligation upon God to act in the situation where it is used. Even where the Word is used, God still has freedom in determining what its effect in each situation will be. The Word is always efficacious, but God will determine the effect.
- 100 But God's freedom in his use of the Word to accomplish salvation does not mean that God can accomplish salvation in any way apart from the Word. Quite to the contrary! God's free choice in deciding to be efficacious in each situation is counterbalanced by his decision to act in no place else but in the Word. The Word is the only arena in which God accomplishes salvation.
- 101 Since the Word provides the boundaries for God's saving activity in bringing men to belief, it must also be the only means of convincing men of the truthfulness of the resurrection of Jesus. Unless Luther's concept of the Word as God's only efficacious means is understood, his concentration on the Word as his chief "proof" for the

resurrection seems somewhat unwarranted. Belief in the resurrection is subsumed under his theology of the Word. Here is how Luther presents the matter:

But here you notice how Paul adduces Scripture as his strongest proof, for there is no other enduring way of preserving our doctrine and our faith than the physical or written Word, poured into letters and preached orally by him or others; for here we find it stated clearly; “Scripture! Scripture!”<sup>lxxiv</sup>

- 102 To some Luther’s approach in presenting the belief that Christ’s resurrection is fact as a subcategory of his Word theology may at first glance appear somewhat naive. We would be hard pressed to recall a leading defender of this historicity of the resurrection who would use Luther’s argument today. Conservative Christians, committed totally to Luther’s view on the Scripture as the God-given and efficacious Word, have seen the value of the historical arguments for Christ’s resurrection put forth by those whose views of Scriptural origin and authority may be charitably called inadequate. Here we can mention the names of Stephen O’Neill, I. Howard Marshal, F. F. Bruce, and even Wolfgang Pannenberg, the father of the school of the theology of history. We even hazard the generalization that in recent times the greatest defense of the historicity of the resurrection has come more from Reformed than Lutheran sources. All this seems strange since Luther associates the denial of the resurrection with the denial of sacramental efficacy. Belief in the resurrection for Luther is tied to accepting Scriptures in their totality rather than seeing it as a separate act in history capable of proof.
- 103 No one can say with any certainty what approach Luther would use were he confronting the historical denial of the resurrection today. He may have adopted an approach more saturated with concerns for the historical argumentations. Luther faced a different situation. The secular and religious spheres of knowledge were not divided as they are today. Special categories for religious and secular knowledge were not developed. For him the secular denial of the resurrection was a religiously masked question. The resurrection, as well as all doctrine, was being mocked by the high officials of the church. It was not a question debated by secular scholars, as all scholars and universities were Christian. The problem was not that some doctrines were being accepted and others not, but that all doctrines revealed in the Scriptures were ridiculed. The real problem was not that the church leaders had studied the historical arguments and became convinced that the resurrection did not happen, but that they held that nothing of an alleged supernatural origin contained in the Scripture was worthy of their intellectual attention. The scoffers were dressed as Christians.
- 104 With the Reformed the matter was somewhat different, but the result was the same. They did not treat the Scripture as fable, but by asserting other channels of authoritative operation for the Spirit outside of the Scriptures they were in effect asserting that the Scriptural truth was inoperative and ineffectual.
- 105 The contemporary method of demonstrating the resurrection as historical fact from the Scriptures understood not as divine word, but as historical documents, considered as having the same or more reliability than other human documents, probably would have

been strange to Luther. It does not seem as if Luther would have handled the resurrection as pure historical act outside and apart from God's total revelation through his prophets and apostles.

### **C. Resurrection and the Totality of Christian Doctrine**

- 106 Whether or not Luther would have handled the resurrection of Jesus as an isolated historical event apart from its place in the totality of Christian revelation is open for debate. Like contemporary defenders of the historicity of the resurrection, he does see Christ's resurrection as the doctrine basic for all other doctrines. "Paul stakes everything on the basic factor with which he began, namely, that Christ arose from the dead. This is the chief article of the Christian doctrine. No one who at all claims to be a Christian or a preacher of the Gospel may deny that."<sup>lxxv</sup>
- 107 The term "chief article" is generally reserved for the doctrine of justification. Both resurrection and justification can lay claim to being the chief. Resurrection holds the honor so far as the truth content and value of Christianity is concerned; justification, so far as the personal appropriation and assurance of salvation is concerned. In Bultmann's theology this is reversed, so that justification becomes the basis for the apprehension of Christian truth and resurrection becomes the personal, existential awareness of faith. Resurrection is understood as justification, and thus the two are confused.
- 108 At this point it would seem, at least according to our reasoning, that Luther should attempt to establish some type of historical proof for the resurrection of Jesus. After laying down such proof, the scaffolding of the Christian doctrine could be secured. As mentioned previously, while Luther does see the resurrection as historical, he does not use the historical arguments on which to build the structure of the Christian religion.
- 109 Here is how Luther proves the resurrection of Christ within the totality of Christianity. (1) The resurrection is the one doctrine which is absolutely necessary for Christianity. (2) You are Christian or you want to be Christian. (3) Therefore you must adhere to the doctrine of the resurrection. Let Luther speak for himself at this point.

And since every Christian must believe and confess that Christ has risen from the dead, it is easy to persuade him to accept the resurrection of the dead; or he must deny in a lump the Gospel and everything that is proclaimed of Christ and of God. For all of this is linked together like a chain, and if one article of faith stands, they all stand.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

- 110 As Luther himself will note, this argumentation for the resurrection of the dead is intended for Christians and not for unbelievers. Apart from a word of revelation accepted in faith, the resurrection is contrary to how reason interprets experience. Luther sees that the Christian has a vital stake in the benefits of Christianity, and any denial of Christian doctrine, especially the resurrection of the dead, can mean the end of Christianity. Luther argues from the conclusion to the premises of the argument. Thus it is not that if you

believe in the resurrection, you will believe in forgiveness; rather, since you believe in forgiveness, why would you want to destroy this by not believing in the resurrection?

### **III. The General Resurrection**

#### **A. Resurrection As Necessary for Christianity**

- 111 Luther, putting himself in the shoes of a non-Christian, is quite critical of Paul's argument that Christ's resurrection is sufficient proof for the truthfulness of the doctrine of the general resurrection. It would have no validity in court. Luther calls this begging the question.<sup>lxxvii</sup> The resurrection of the dead is not proven by asserting the resurrection of Christ. Even proving the resurrection of Christ as historical fact does not prove that anyone else will rise from the dead. Arguing from the particular to the universal is not valid, in Luther's opinion.<sup>lxxviii</sup>
- 112 What then is the value of Paul's argumentation on the resurrection? It is not intended for those who have not become acquainted with Christianity but for those who are Christian because they have accepted the apostolic message as it was delivered to them as true. This means that if the resurrection is denied, the Word of which the resurrection message is a part must also be denied. The denial of the Word means disregarding the apostles who brought the Word. This in turn means denying the truthfulness of the apostles and of God whose authorization the apostle claims. Questioning God's veracity is for Luther questioning his existence.<sup>lxxix</sup> The proof for resurrection is an all or nothing argument. Christianity cannot be accepted in pieces. Belief in Christianity without the resurrection is impossible.

For whoever denies God and His Word, His Baptism and Gospel, will not find it hard to deny the resurrection of the dead as well. If you dare to say that God is not God and that the apostles and Christendom do not teach and believe correctly, it is easy for you—and nothing seems better—to knock the whole bottom out of the barrel and say that there is no resurrection, neither heaven nor hell, neither devil nor death, no sin, etc. For what will you believe if you do not believe that God is something?<sup>lxxx</sup>

#### **B. The Resurrection and the Existence of God and the Totality of Revelation**

- 113 Thus, basic to Luther's argumentation for the resurrection is the existence of God himself. In reverse it would appear this way: the existence of God is true. This true God appoints men, designated as apostles who proclaim the truthfulness of God's existence. They also proclaim the resurrection. Therefore, the resurrection is as true as God is.
- 114 Luther's argumentation for the resurrection seems inadequate on historical grounds to those who do not share what for him was assured apriori that God exists. The current historical argumentations, which have their origin in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment, are presented with no apriori assumption, especially God's existence. God was not denied, but his existence played no necessary part in the quest for the truth. Resurrection is

proven as bare historical fact from which some may go on to establish Christianity, including God's existence. However, the question must be asked whether the resurrection of Jesus as bare historical fact without prior belief in God establishes anything clear. Luther starts off with God and concludes with the resurrection. Pannenberg, on the other hand, starts off with history as a given, proceeds to the question of resurrection as history, and concludes with the possibility of God's existence. The resurrection as bare, historical fact without interpretation, as Pannenberg holds, is useless for religion and man's existence. It can create awe and wonder; but can it create too much else? Luther's avoiding the bare, historical argument may in the end prove to be the best possible course of action.

115 While with Luther there is the strong concern that denial of one Christian doctrine can have grave consequences for the rest of doctrine, there is the positive result of seeing revelation as totality. His revelation of himself as gracious necessarily implies a total revelation including resurrection. Therefore, Luther confidently holds that Adam was given a revelation of the resurrection in Genesis 3:15 in the promise that woman's seed would crush the serpent's head. God does not simply reveal that he exists, but he reveals himself as one who accomplishes man's salvation in Christ and perfects this salvation in the general resurrection from the dead.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

116 Thus the real proofs for the resurrection are not historical facts which are left to human interpretation, but rather the existence of God himself.

Thus if you can believe that God is God, you must also not doubt that you will rise from the dead after this life; for if you were to stay underground, God would first have to become a liar and not be God. But if it is true that God cannot lie or deny or abandon His deity, this article, too, must become true. It is as certain before God as if the resurrection had already taken place, even though present appearances belie this, with men lying under the ground, stinking like a rotting carcass, and consumed by maggots and worms.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

117 Luther's argumentation for the resurrection moves from the question of God's existence to an accomplished certainty. While it might appear that he has taken "a leap of faith" for which there is no real evidence, his procedure is logical when it is realized that he has taken the argument for the resurrection from the question of God's nature. Since the discussion about the resurrection is really an extension of the discussion about God, then it follows that the resurrection is no longer a future possibility but has already become an accomplished fact with God. Since the resurrection is accomplished with God, the Christian's hope in the resurrection is not so much a hope of what God will do but confidence in what God already has accomplished. Faith in God and hope in the resurrection as future event are merged when the Christian by faith begins to share God's perspective. Since Luther sees resurrection as a theological (narrow sense) issue, his minimal concern with historical questions is understandable.

118 Luther's understanding of resurrection as a theological issue does not prevent him from seeing it also as Christological.

#### IV. Resurrection, *Christus Victor* and *Anfechtungen*

119 About a generation ago the English translation of Gustav Aulen's *Christus Victor* added a new—and to Lutherans, at first, frightening—dimension to their understanding of the atonement. Aulen attempted by reference to the early church fathers, the Scriptures, and especially to Luther to show that the triumphant theme of the atonement should be held to the exclusion of the satisfaction and moral theories, i.e., that Christ paid a price for men's sin and that he left us an example. Confessionally-oriented Lutherans became so alarmed that they not only strongly emphasized the vicarious satisfaction theme as the center of the atonement but recognized it as virtually synonymous with it. Aulen's view was not new. He simply made an old view new for the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His exaggeration was clearly false. Regardless of his motives, he did call attention to *Christus Victor* as a legitimate theme in Luther's theology. In Luther's theology *Anfechtungen*, resurrection, and the *Christus Victor* motif form an organic unit. Studying these topics together does show the unity of Luther's thought.

##### A. *Anfechtungen* and Resurrection Belief

- 119 Luther discusses the *Anfechtungen* in connection with St. Paul's thought that Christians are the most pitiable of all men if indeed Christ has not been raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:19). For simply for his belief, the Christian suffers at the hands of the world. "The world is so hostile to us; it begrudges us our very life on earth. Daily we must be prepared for the worst that the devil and the world can inflict on us. In the face of this, who would be stupid enough to be a Christian if there is nothing to a future life?"<sup>lxxxiii</sup>
- 121 But Luther does not see the world's scorn and persecution as the chief affliction. These are called child's play.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> The real grief which the Christian endures for the sake of the bliss of the afterlife is the internal *Anfechtungen*. Here the *Anfechtungen* are identified as the fear caused by God's wrath, eternal death, and becoming partners with Satan.
- 122 Perhaps it is debatable whether Paul was referring to Luther's idea of *Anfechtungen* or external miseries as the reason why Christians should be pitied if there is indeed no resurrection from the dead. However, it is clear that Luther understands his *Anfechtungen* as the price which he must pay to be a Christian and to believe in the resurrection and to share its benefits. The *Anfechtungen* suffered by Luther in connection with his belief in the resurrection is the thought that believers have the certainty of the future life and the resurrection, while the unbelievers await judgment and eternal fire.<sup>lxxxv</sup> The Christian struggles because in the *Anfechtungen* he places himself with unbelievers and experiences God's wrath. "(The Christian) must always worry that he has angered God and merited hell, although he may be pious and well practiced in faith. For such thoughts will not cease; rather, they are felt more and more and always become stronger than good thoughts."<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

123 The heathen in contrast goes to his death as if he were an animal with no thoughts of judgment and wrath.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

### **B. *Anfechtungen* as Common Experience of Believers**

124 Luther has a place for a discussion on the *Anfechtungen* in connection with the resurrection because the *Anfechtungen* were part of Christ's suffering and were the necessary prelude to his own resurrection. As Christ's resurrection released him from his *Anfechtungen*, so Christians will be released from their *Anfechtungen* in Christ's atonement, and the Christian's sufferings in his *Anfechtungen* are of the same type, i.e., "anguish and the fear of hell." Since the *Anfechtungen* were experienced by Christ, they become proofs to the Christian that he really belongs to Christ. Let Luther speak for himself here:

However, you must fend this (i.e., the *Anfechtung*) off and cling with a firm faith to the fact that your Christ has risen from the dead. He, too, suffered such anguish and fear of hell (i.e., the type suffered by Christians now), but through His resurrection He has overcome all. Therefore, even though I am a sinner and deserving of death and hell, this shall nonetheless be my consolation and my victory that my Lord Jesus lives and has risen so that He, in the end, might rescue me from sin, death, and hell.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

125 Luther calls these *Anfechtungen* "a reliable sign" to the believers of his Christianity.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

126 While there is no suggestion in Luther's thought that the *Anfechtungen* of the Christian have any contributory value in the atonement, it does become clear that the Christian knows in a personal and direct and not merely intellectual way the sufferings endured by Christ in his atonement. The sufferings of Christ and Christians may differ in their intensity but not qualitatively. While justification is attributed to the Christian in a forensic sense, Christ's sufferings are shared personally by the Christians because Christ and the Christians are organically one. Since the Christian is part of Christ, he *must* suffer not only *like*, but more importantly *with* Christ. In the experience of the *Anfechtungen*, the Christian is unified with Christ. Just as the Christian has no real freedom to avoid suffering, since he is one with Christ, so Satan is also without freedom in bringing this internal affliction into the Christian life. Luther says, "For all of this misery and grief arise because of Christ. It is due to the fact that the devil is hostile to Him and to His Word and to His rule, to Baptism, and to all of Christendom."<sup>xc</sup>

127 At this point Luther is ready to make the connection between the *Anfechtungen* and the resurrection with the *Christus Victor* theme. The *Christus Victor* theme concentrates on Christ's saving work as a struggle with Satan. The struggle is brought to a satisfactory conclusion for Christ through his own resurrection. The Christian finds himself in two places, both within the struggle itself and within the victory provided in Christ's resurrection. Because of the double dimension, the Christian suffers even a further conflict. Within the struggles of the *Anfechtungen* not only does salvation seem uncertain, but hell, association with Satan, and eternal damnation appear as the overarching

realities; however, in Christ who has already risen from the dead, the Christian also knows personally through faith victory over the *Anfechtungen*. Since he is incorporated in Christ, he in God's view has already risen from the dead with Christ. With God the victory of the resurrection is already a certainty. Just as there are no general *Anfechtungen* which the Christian suffers independently of Christ, so there is no general resurrection which Christ shares without the Christian. As Christ is the cause of the Christian's suffering, he is also the cause of his release from suffering through glorification by resurrection. The resurrection is not a mere possibility but a reality for the Christian in his *Anfechtungen*, since Christ himself was already relieved of his *Anfechtungen* in his resurrection.

- 128 Just as Luther can describe Christ's atoning suffering and the Christian's personal suffering by virtually the same language, so the same picturesque language used by Luther in putting forth the *Christus Victor* is used in describing the Christian's personal victory through resurrection.
- 129 Luther is not content to say with St. Paul that Christ died and rose, but, he paints a magnificently gory picture borrowing language of the ancient church: "But (Christ) came forth alive from the grave in which He lay and destroyed and consumed both devil and death, who had devoured Him. He tore the devil's belly and hell's jaws asunder and ascended into heaven, where He is now seated in eternal life and glory."<sup>xc</sup>
- 130 It is obvious that Luther here is using the ancient church's description of Christ's death according to the hook and worm image. The hook is the divine nature and the worm the human nature. Satan, as a fish, devours both and is destroyed. Luther exhausts the imagery by referring to Satan's torn belly and ruptured jaw, a picture appreciated by any fisherman.
- 131 What is noteworthy is Luther's projection of the *Christus Victor* imagery into the Christian's personal victory of the *Anfechtungen*. Let it be called the stomach imagery. In the face of the *Anfechtungen* the Christian can definitely and triumphantly say to Satan, "Therefore devour us if you can, or hurl us into the jaws of death, you will soon see and feel what you have done. We, in turn, will create such a great disturbance in your belly and make an egress through your ribs that you wish you had rather devoured a tower, yes, an entire forest."<sup>xcii</sup>

### C. Relationship of Christ's and the Christian's Resurrection

- 132 Luther's connection between the *Christus Victor* and the Christian's personal triumph over Satan comes in his discussion of Christ's being the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20). Thus Christ's resurrection is not an isolated event occurring only to one person in history, but a cosmic event, which though still unfinished, is nearly completed. "And what is more than that, calling Christ 'the Firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep' Paul wishes to signify that the resurrection is to be viewed and understood as having already begun in Christ, indeed, as being more than half finished ..."<sup>xciii</sup>

- 133 Luther takes total advantage of Paul's imagery of the church as Christ's body. Where the Head has gone, the body must also follow. Now since the Head is seated at God's right hand and has conquered death and the devil and whatever else causes the *Anfechtungen*, the Christian no longer has any need to be concerned. It seems that the combined imagery of the "Head" and "Firstfruits" suggest to Luther a birth in which the child's head comes out before the body. "As in the birth of man and of all animals, the head naturally appears first, and after this is born, the whole body naturally follows."<sup>xciv</sup>
- 134 Suddenly with this perspective all that terrified the Christian previously, the *Anfechtungen*, are now viewed as positive benefit.

#### **D. Adam-Christ Imagery and Resurrection**

- 135 Christ's resurrection has the same efficacy for the resurrection of all men as Adam's sin and death had for the efficacy of the death of all men.<sup>xcv</sup> Luther injects the thought that the general resurrection will be for the judgment of unbelievers and, therefore, they will have little reason to rejoice in it.<sup>xcvi</sup> Luther does, however, point out that Paul does not handle this problem but refers only to the resurrection of Christians. Luther has taken this over from John's Gospel, which speaks of one resurrection to life and another to damnation. The Christian's victory through resurrection finds its certainty in at least two points in Luther's theology: (1) the participation of the Christian in Christ who has risen from the dead already and (2) Christ's place as the head of all Christians in the same sense that Adam was the head of humanity in bringing sin and death.

#### **E. The Resurrection and the Current *Anfechtungen***

- 136 Eschatology is for Luther something that not only will happen in the future, but is already in the process of happening. Faith in the resurrection is not directed to something that God will do in the future but rather to what God is already in the process of doing now. In Christ the resurrection has already begun.
- 137 This does not change the fact that today the Christian experiences death and all the other factors that contribute to the horror of his personal *Anfechtungen*. He does not now experience personally the reality of his own resurrection. Luther sees the resurrection of Christ as being effective in the Christian's perspective of life and death now. Special significance is seen in the Pauline language that Christ is described as raised from the *dead*, but is called the "Firstfruits" of those who have fallen *asleep*. In the first instance the lifeless condition is called *death* and in the second, *sleep*. Christ's submitting himself to what previously was considered an eternal death, i.e., a death for which there is no solution, has changed that death into a temporary sleep for Christians.

And so Christians who lie in the ground are no longer dead, but sleepers, people who will surely rise again. For when we say that people are asleep, we refer to those who are lying down but will wake up and rise again, not those who are lying down bereft of all hope of rising again. Of the latter we do not say that they are

asleep but that they are inanimate corpses. Therefore by that very word “asleep” Scriptures indicate the future resurrection.<sup>xcvii</sup>

- 138 The resurrection is past, present, and future depending on the perspective in which the words are spoken. Christians view their death as sleeping, i.e., they *will* be raised up, hence it is future. They also know of Christ’s resurrection as an accomplished fact and already are sharing in his benefits, hence it is past. Since Christ’s resurrection is corporate and no individual event, God has already initiated the processes of the final resurrection as a present activity.
- 139 The resurrection of Christians means that the Lord who proved by his resurrection that he was indeed the *Christus Victor* becomes totally operative in the lives of his Christians. This means that the *Anfechtungen* can be totally conquered. The *Anfechtungen* can be seen for what they are, temporal and not eternal realities. The *Anfechtungen* are not God’s final Word. Death, wrath, hell were all real, but not in the sense that they would last forever for Christians. Satan preaches these as eternal realities of God and terrifies all Christians. Christ’s resurrection has shown that Satan was still deceiving us all and that the eternal reality for all Christians is life with Christ. By resurrection Christ has shown us that the *Anfechtungen* were only God’s masks behind each of which stood a loving Father drawing us closer to him. In conclusion, to let the Reformer speak with his own eloquent words:

Behold, thus we must view our treasure and turn away from temporal reality which lies before our eyes and senses. We must not let death and other misfortune, distress and misery terrify us so. Nor must we regard what the world has and can do, but balance this against what we are and have in Christ. For our confidence is built entirely on the fact that He has arisen and that we have life with Him already and are no longer in the power of death. Therefore let the world be mad and foolish, boasting of and relying on its money and goods; and let the devil rage with his poisonous darts in our conscience; and let him afflict us with all sorts of trouble - against all of this our own defiant boast shall be that Christ is our Firstfruits, that He has initiated the resurrection, that He has burst through the devil’s kingdom, through hell and death, that He no longer dies or sleeps but rules and reigns up above eternally, in order to rescue us, too, from this prison and death....

In the face of this, why should we let the devil terrify us and make us so despondent, even though he comes face to face with us and reaches out to us, as though he would rob us of everything; even though he kills wife and child, torments our heart with all sorts of misery and sorrow and in the end also destroys the body, assuming that he has thereby taken everything away?<sup>xcviii</sup>

## Notes

### Lecture III: Luther on the Resurrection

---

- lxv LW 28, p. 61.  
lxvi LW 28, p. 62.  
lxvii LW 28, pp. 69-70.  
lxviii LW 28, p. 121.  
lxix LW 28, p. 69.  
lxx LW 28, pp. 69-70.  
70a LW 28, p. 70.  
lxxi LW 25, p. 76.  
lxxii loc. cit.  
lxxiii LW 28, p. 77.  
lxxiv loc. cit.  
lxxv LW 28, p. 94.  
lxxvi loc. cit.  
lxxvii LW 28, p. 94.  
lxxviii LW 28, p. 95.  
lxxix LW 28, pp. 95-96.  
lxxx LW 28, p. 96.  
lxxx1 LW 28, pp. 97-98.  
lxxxii LW 28, p. 98.  
lxxxiii LW 28, p. 103.  
lxxxiv loc. cit.  
lxxxv loc. cit.  
lxxxvi LW 28, p. 104.  
lxxxvii loc. cit.  
lxxxviii LW 28, p. 105.  
lxxxix loc. cit.  
xc LW 28, p. 106.  
xci LW 28, p. 108.  
xcii loc. cit.  
xciii LW 28, p. 110.  
xciv loc. cit.  
xcv LW 28, pp. 113-115.  
xcvi LW 28, p. 114.  
xcvii LW 28, pp. 109-110.  
xcviii LW 28, p. 111.