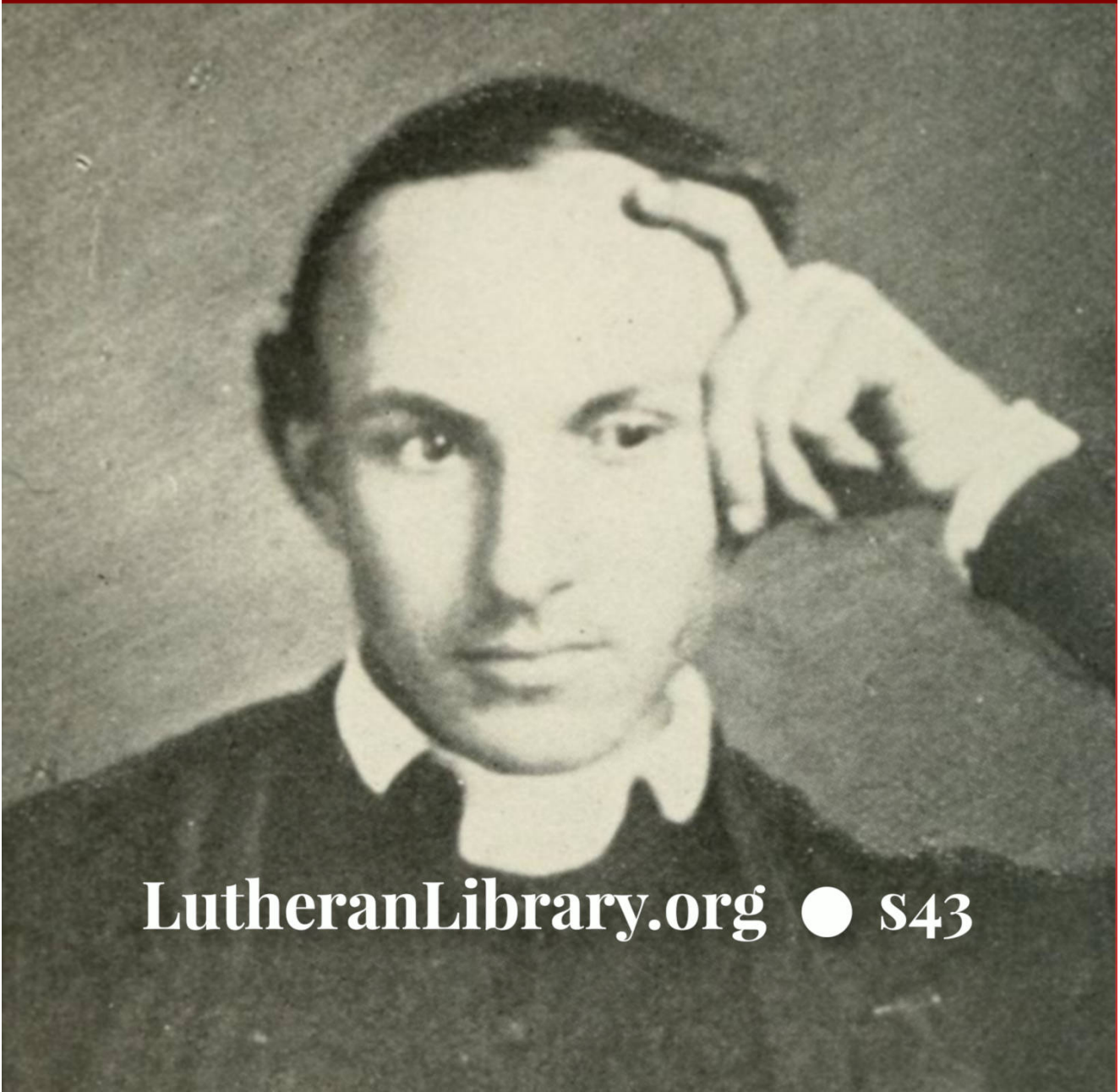


Matthias Loy

The Burning Question (Predestination)



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By Matthias Loy

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Contents

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[About The Lutheran Library](#)

[Contents](#)

[The Burning Question: The Present Predestination Controversy in the American Lutheran Church](#)

[The Claims of the Missouri Synod](#)

[Established Doctrine of 300 Years](#)

[Missouri Claims The Formula Teaches New Doctrine](#)

[Forsaking the Old Paths On The Word of A Few Men](#)

[The Two Opposing Doctrines](#)

[1. God Determined From Eternity To Save Our Lost Race Through Christ By Faith.](#)

[2. God Arbitrarily and Indiscriminately Drew From The Multitude of Lost Souls Those To Be Adopted As Children of God.](#)

[Dr. A. Pfeiffer's Presentation of The Lutheran View of Election.](#)

[It's Not Easy To Prove Missouri's New Doctrine](#)

[Dr. Walther's Theses.](#)

[The Trouble With Dr. Walther's Conception of Election.](#)

[Missouri Now Teaches Two Divine Decrees.](#)

[Why This Teaching Must Be Exposed and Resisted.](#)

[1. It is an Outgrowth of Philosophical Speculation.](#)

[2. It Is Damaging To The Revealed Doctrine of God and His Attributes.](#)

[3. Its Exegetical Principles and Practices Are Problematic.](#)

[4. It Endangers The Central Doctrine of Justification By Faith, and Thus Threatens To Revolutionize The Lutheran Doctrinal System.](#)

[5. It Undermines the Precious Biblical Doctrine Of The Means of Grace.](#)

[6. It Is Destructive Of The Comfort The Gospel Is Designed To Bring.](#)

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The Burning Question: The Present Predestination Controversy in the American Lutheran Church

THE *COLUMBUS THEOLOGICAL MAGAZINE* starts upon its mission in troublous times. To the circumstances which make the trouble, it, in a large measure, owes its existence. For a number of years, indeed, the publication of an English theological journal, conducted on the basis of our Ev. Lutheran Confessions, has been the subject of conversation among individuals, and sometimes of deliberation in ecclesiastical conventions. There was a general feeling that while for our ministers and the more intelligent among our laity, our periodicals designed for the people generally are not the appropriate vehicles for their publication. But much as the subject was discussed, insuperable obstacles always presented themselves to the execution of any proposed plans for the issue of a theological journal.

The difficulties in the way of such an undertaking have not vanished. On the contrary, they seem to us greater now than ever. But in the history of our Lutheran Church in this country we have reached a point at which the necessity is laid upon us to make the venture. A doctrine of more than ordinary intricacy has been thrust into the foreground of discussion within our own organization. We are not at liberty to ignore it: the trouble has come, and it must be faced. But the discussion of such a subject in a periodical designed for general circulation among the people is a precarious matter. There is danger that many will become perplexed, disquieted, offended. We wish it were otherwise, but we see no way of performing what seems to us a duty, save that of establishing another medium of communication with those who are able and willing to study the doctrine now unhappily in controversy in the Lutheran Church.

Our purpose is not to limit our *Magazine* to the discussion of that subject. Should we be sustained in our undertaking, we shall endeavor to render it such a theological journal as has long since been desired among us. But as the doctrine of predestination is that which furnishes the occasion of issuing it at the present time, a large share of our space will, at least in the first volume, be allotted to discussions pertaining to that “burning question.”

It is not in any harsh and condemnatory spirit that we would enter upon the consideration of this mooted topic. That there are differences between us it would be useless to make any effort to conceal. That they are honest differences Christian charity requires us to assume. It is not antecedently probable that a body of intelligent Christians could make themselves and others so much trouble, and render well as to us, without having a ground in conscience for their course. But whether they have not sadly erred is a different question, and that is the point to which earnest attention should be directed.

That they have erred, and have troubled Israel by promulgating their error, is our sincere conviction. What, under such circumstances, can we do but lift up our voice against the evil, and help, with such strength as we possess, to protect the Church against its influence? If others have opposite convictions, they have a right to that respectful hearing which we claim for ourselves. Angry words are not arguments. Passion and prejudice may for a time sway the multitude, but truth alone is of permanent power.

Conscious of no wish but that the truth may triumph, we are willing to hear all that may be said for the doctrine which we are constrained to reject, and our prayer is that God may protect us against the carnal desire to win honor for ourselves by triumphantly maintaining our position, instead of pursuing the earnest purpose to glorify our Lord by maintaining His precious truth.

The Claims of the Missouri Synod

There is, indeed, much on both sides that is fitted to arouse unkind feeling. The Missouri Synod claims that the doctrine of predestination which she has put forth is the very doctrine which is confessed in our *Formula of Concord*, and it is mortifying to its defenders that others who have

subscribed that *Formula* are not willing to accept it, all the more so as that synod has been little accustomed to have her doctrinal statements challenged by those associated with her in the Synodical Conference.

On the other hand, we are not wholly proof against the provocation to become indignant at the innovation which mars our visions of peace and prosperity in our general organization. But as it is disciples of Christ on both sides that are engaged in the controversy, we can trust in the grace of God that such influences will not be permitted to warp the judgment of to lead to expressions that will wound, but not convince. It would be disastrous if on either side the contest became a scramble for the mastery at the cost of brotherly love.

We trust that it will not be considered an attempt to take undue advantage of circumstances when we remark that the presumption, in the whole argument, is in our favor. There could be no fairness in judging the case without taking this into account.

Established Doctrine of 300 Years

For three hundred years there has, by the admission of all parties, been in the Lutheran Church an established doctrine, which the Missouri Synod is now striving to displace. It is taught with one consent by all the prominent writers of the Church throughout that period. There was no other in vogue that claimed to Lutheran name. That is the doctrine which we maintain and defend.

It is said, indeed, that prior to that time there was a different doctrine taught in the Church; that this different doctrine is set forth in the *Formula of Concord*; and that this original doctrine, from which the theologians are alleged to have subsequently departed, is that which Missouri is now trying to restore. But this assertion cannot change the presumption. It must be proved before it can have any weight against the antecedent probability involved in an admitted historical fact. Before we can be expected to believe that the Lutheran Church ever had any other doctrine than that which all her great teachers set forth since the time of the *Formula of Concord*, it must be shown from the works of her representative men in that earlier period what that doctrine was and that there was some unanimity in

teaching it. Not only has this not been done, but it will hardly be claimed that it can be done.

Instead of such proof it is alleged that the *Formula of Concord* teaches the different doctrine, and that this teaching is authoritative. The confessional authority of this book we heartily recognize. On that point there is no dispute. But the proof adduced from the *Formula* itself in favor of the new doctrine is far from convincing. It is difficult for us to believe that any one who has not that doctrine in his mind before, will ever find it in the *Formula*. But this is a question for separate consideration.

Missouri Claims The *Formula* Teaches New Doctrine

The point which we would here emphasize is the great improbability that our Confession sets forth a doctrine which can not be shown to have been previously the faith of the Church, and which can be shown not to have been subsequently the faith of the Church. The advocates of the new theory claim a Lutheran confessional doctrine which, so far as history exhibits the facts, virtually never had any Lutheran confessors. It would be a case of marvelous singularity if none of those great theologians who lived after that confession was published, some of them being among the original signers of the noble document, ever found the meaning which many now regard it as plainly expressing. Unquestionably the presumption is against the men who allege that only now, after the *Formula* has been accepted in the Church for three hundred years, within which period learned works have been written by great theologians to explain it, its meaning has been discovered at St. Louis. We mean no sarcasm; but in the interest of truth we must state things as they are, though they look like daggers.

The doctrine which has been taught in the Lutheran Church during these three centuries has been established by the Scriptures, and defended against all foes, to the satisfaction of a host of eminent theologians whose linguistic learning and whose logical acumen have not been surpassed in any church or in any age. They sifted evidence closely; they thought upon the subject profoundly; they defended their doctrine triumphantly. They were not ignorant of the objections which could be urged against them. These objections were examined and refuted. The Calvinists against whom they

had to contend were not intellectual pygmies; many of them were foes worth of the steel of our Lutheran giants. But never in the clash of arms were our warriors discomfited. *Had they defended a cause so weak as their doctrine of election in foresight of faith is now represented to be, they could not have come forth victorious from the conflict with men so determined and so skillful.* The presumption certainly is not that a house which stands unmoved when the floods come and the winds blow is built on sand.

Forsaking the Old Paths On The Word of A Few Men

Let it be observed that we do not give in these considerations as convincing evidence that the doctrine which our theologians teach and which we feel bound to defend is true. It might be false, notwithstanding these presumptions in its favor. That which we propose to adduce as proof is the solid argument which our theologians also adduced from the Scriptures. But we do claim that when there is so much to render it antecedently probable that the doctrine of our great writers is the unanimous doctrine of the Lutheran Church, and that it has good ground in Holy Scripture, it is not right, upon the authority of a few men, in these latter days, though these men have shown themselves to be learned and faithful, to abandon the old position without thoroughly examining the reasons for it; and least of all is it right to look with distrust, if not with scorn, upon those who will not, without a reason in conscience, forsake the old paths.

The Two Opposing Doctrines

To make the points of controversy plain it will be necessary to state, as clearly as possible, the two forms of doctrine that are now placed in opposition to each other.

1. God Determined From Eternity To Save Our Lost Race Through Christ By Faith.

The theologians of our Church have, ever since the *Formula of Concord* was published, with one consent taught, that in the counsel of God it was determined from eternity to save our lost race through Christ by faith. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16. This is the one decree of salvation, and there is no other. From this no man is excluded, and to this every man is referred.

“Therefore in Christ we should seek the eternal election of the Father, who in His eternal, divine counsel decreed, that besides those who acknowledge Christ to be His Son and truly believe on Him, He will save no one.”

The grace of God is universal and the redemption is also universal. Salvation is prepared and designed for all men alike. But when this salvation is brought to men, not all alike appropriate it. Some obtain the heavenly blessing, the larger portion of men rejects it. Only those who believe are adopted as God’s children and made heirs of heaven. “As many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” John 1:12. But those who believe, when the merits of Christ are set before them in Word and Sacrament, are known to God from eternity. These He elected before the foundation of the world.

2. God Arbitrarily and Indiscriminately Drew From The Multitude of Lost Souls Those To Be Adopted As Children of God.

Not a certain number were arbitrarily and indiscriminately drawn from the multitude of lost souls to be adopted as children of God and everlastingly saved, but “as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name,” and “he that believeth shall be saved.”

What God according to His purpose accomplishes in time He has purposed from eternity. He gives the believer power to become the son of God, and to the believer who endures to the end He gives eternal life. The object of election is not man in his unbelief, but man endowed with faith. Believers are elected to sonship and salvation; and as God knew from eternity who would be believers, He from eternity elected them in foresight

of their faith; as it is written, “Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son.” Rom. 8:29.

Election in its strict sense is thus only a part of the general decree of salvation, not a coordinate factor that enters as a disturbing element. The purpose of God from eternity is to save all them that believe. By His foreknowledge He saw from the beginning who among the multitudes of men would become believers. These He elected. Our theologians therefore call foreknowledge the eye of election, without which it would be blind. It is not a cause of predestination, but simply the means of recognizing, humanly speaking, the persons whom it was God’s purpose to adopt and save, i.e. of discerning the faith which distinguishes the accepted in the Beloved from the rejected in their unbelief. Not even faith is strictly a cause.

That which moves God to elect is His grace and the merits of His beloved Son: the former in the internal, the latter the external moving cause. Faith is merely the divine requisite without which, in the purpose of God, the causes of election could not be operative in the individual.

“The text, Matt. 22:14, ‘Many are called, but few are chosen,’ does not imply that God does not desire to save all men, but the cause of the damnation of the wicked is that they either do not hear the Word of God at all, but obstinately contemn it, closing their ears and hardening their hearts, and thus obstruct the ordinary means of access of the Holy Spirit, so that He cannot perform His work in them; or, if they have heard it, they again neglect and disregard it; of which neither God nor His election, but their own wickedness is the cause.” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, XI:12.)

As there are two moving causes, so there are also two directing principles of election. The primary and mediate principle is the purpose (*prosthesis*), which here does not denote the antecedent will of universal mercy, but the purpose to save those who shall persevere in faith until their end. This purpose is declared where the Scriptures tell us that whosoever believeth shall not perish, but have everlasting life. The proximate and immediate directing principle is the divine foreknowledge (*prognosis*), by which those who shall thus believe in time are known to God from eternity, and are thus elected. The divine election takes place on account of the mercy of God and the merits of Christ as its cause, and according to the divine purpose and foreknowledge as its norm. God’s mercy would save all men. The redemption which is in Christ Jesus renders that possible, but

actual only in the believers. Those in whom the gracious will of God in Christ is realized are the “elect according to the foreknowledge of God.” 1 Pet. 1:2.

Dr. A. Pfeiffer’s Presentation of The Lutheran View of Election.

The distinguished Dr. A. Pfeiffer thus presents the doctrine in his work against Calvinism:

"Of the election of the true children of God we, on the sure basis of His Word, steadfastly teach that, in accordance with His gracious antecedent will, God will have all men to be saved, and that He omits nothing on His part by which this His purpose may be fulfilled through the means which He has graciously instituted; wherefore also Christ actually acquired His perfect merit as a full ransom for all, and the Holy Ghost offers to all the actual enjoyment of these means, together with the powers to use them properly. But since God, with the eye of His omniscience, foresaw already from eternity that not all men would accept and savingly appropriate His grace extended through the Word and Sacraments together with the merit of Christ, but that most of them would rather despise and wantonly reject it, therefore, in accordance with His consequent will, and in foresight of each one's conduct toward His grace, He elected and predestinated to eternal life only those of whom He foresaw and foreknew that they would in true faith accept and employ the grace which was intended for all and, according to the prescribed order, offered to all men, and would constantly persevere in this faith unto their end. On the other hand, He rejected and determined to punish with eternal damnation, and to exclude from the communion of eternal life, those of whom He likewise foreknew that they would resist His gracious purpose directed to their salvation, refuse the proffered powers, not believe the Word of grace, or, if they should believe for a time, fall away again. Therefore the eternal election of the children of God to eternal life is to be considered, not an absolute decree or, so to speak, a blind grasp, but a truly deliberate election. For God did not decree absolutely, this man shall live, that one shall die, whether they reject or accept my grace; but He at the same time had regard to something which pleased Him, namely, to the merit and satisfaction of Christ Jesus, so that those who would accept and

appropriate this should be saved, but that those who would reject it and deprive themselves of it should be damned. For God 'hath chosen us in Him' (Christ) 'before the foundation of the world.' Eph. 1:4. 'Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.' Acts 4:12. 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' John 3:16. But this merit of Christ is, by virtue of divine foresight in election, viewed as it is received and retained by men in true faith. In virtue of this foresight of God, accordingly, it was already from eternity considered as accepted and savingly appropriated by the elect. For that the eyes of divine providence in the eternal election had respect to faith we learn from the words of the apostle in Heb. 11:6, that 'without faith it is impossible to please God.'

"Thus the election of the children of God to eternal salvation may properly be considered a syllogism in the thoughts and mind of God. Of this we must first find the major premise, the purpose of God, of which St. Paul also speaks when he calls the elect and those that love God 'the called according to His purpose,' Rom. 8:28. Now this is the purpose of God: Every one that shall heartily believe on Christ Jesus and thus appropriate His merit, and also persevere in this faith unto the end, shall be elected and have eternal life; even as it is written: 'He that believeth on Him is not condemned but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. He that believeth on the Son hat everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.' John 3:18, 36. 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.' Mark 16:16. 'He that endureth to the end shall be saved.' Matt. 10:22.

"Therefore, too, the Lord exhorts and cheers His churches with the words: 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.' Rev. 2:10. The minor premise, then, is given by the divine *prognosis*, the infallible prescience or foreknowledge; for as, in virtue thereof, God knoweth all things and has beset us behind and before, Ps. 139:5, and there is nothing hidden from Him, but everything was clear and manifest from eternity, so also He could foresee and foreknow who would believe and who would not believe; so that the minor premise in the divine decree of

election is this: Peter, John, Daniel, Abraham, etc., will believe in Christ and persevere in this faith unto the end. This proposition, as was already remarked, is given by God's foreknowledge of all men's actions, which is so accurate and infallible that everything has in this view been as certain from eternity as though it had already actually taken place. St. Paul, in treating of election, speaks of this foreknowledge, Rom. 8:29, in these words: 'Whom He did foreknow (*proegno*), He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son.' Finally, since the required faith and its proper attributes are found in this one or that one, the conclusion follows: Therefore Peter, John Daniel, Abraham, etc., shall be elected and saved. Such a proposition, then, is the eternal election of grace, by virtue of which God, indeed, separated some from the entire mass of the human race and elected them to eternal life; not, however, by an absolute decree, without any consideration of faith or merit, but in view of the fact that such elect would in faith accept and steadfastly retain the merit of Christ. On the other hand, however, the severe sentence upon the wicked, as it was spoken from eternity, likewise rests on a syllogism such as this: He that believeth not in Christ unto the end shall be eternally damned. The eternal foreknowledge, then, gives the minor premise, This wicked man will not believe; whence the conclusion follows, not absolutely, but through the given premises, Therefore he shall be eternally damned.'" — *Anti-Calvinismus*, p. 250-256.

It's Not Easy To Prove Missouri's New Doctrine

Those who would thoroughly acquaint themselves with the doctrine which we advocate, need only refer to any of the standard dogmaticians of our Church. They explain it and defend it fully, so that no one need be at a loss to know exactly what is taught and upon what grounds it is maintained. To present the new doctrine which is promulgated by the Missouri Synod is not so easy a task. Indeed, in some of its aspects it seems yet in process of formation, and in regard to its principles, purposes and proofs, and therefore in regard to its formulation in detail, there is some diversity among its advocates. We can therefore not expect to satisfy all its adherents in our effort to state it. But we are conscious of no desire to misrepresent it, and

shall hold ourselves in readiness to make any corrections that any of its friends may show us to be required by justice or charity.

Dr. Walther's Theses.

In his carefully prepared Theses published last year in the *Lutheraner* Dr. Walther begins by confessing that God created all men to salvation and earnestly desires that all men should be saved; that the Son of God redeemed the whole human race without exception; that by the means of grace the salvation which our Lord secured and the power to appropriate it by faith are sincerely offered to all; and that no man is lost because God did not have the will to save him, but that men perish only because they obstinately reject the proffered grace which is designed to save them. He accordingly rejects and condemns the Calvinistic errors of a predestination to damnation, of a limited atonement, and of a restriction of the efficacy of the divinely appointed means of grace to a few arbitrarily favored individuals. So far all is well, and if this were consistently adhered to, there could be no reason or justification for the threatened rupture in the Synodical Conference. But all this, as we understand the theory now maintained by the Missouri Synod, has nothing to do with election in its proper sense, except so far as this universal will leads to the appointment of means for the execution of a particular purpose which is limited to a few.

The Trouble With Dr. Walther's Conception of Election.

The trouble begins just as soon as the conception of election is introduced. After these preliminary statements, which are perfectly proper when the subject is treated in the manner of our Lutheran dogmaticians, who assign to election a place subordinate to the general benevolence of God seeking the salvation of all men, but which seems to have no logical connection with the new form of doctrine, Dr. Walther proceeds thus: "We believe, teach, and confess that the objects of election or predestination are only the true believers who shall continue in faith until the end of their lives, or are then believers; we therefore reject and condemn the Huberian error that

election is not particular, but that it is universal and pertains to all men.” Probably without intending it, this is misleading, especially when taken in connection with the quotations from standard Lutheran writers. Of the *Formula of Concord* we will not speak at present, as the meaning of that is one of the disputed points. But there can be no question as to the meaning of Conrad Dietrich and of Quenstedt in the extracts presented. The former says that “election is the act of God by which, according to the purpose of His will, He has, out of mere grace and mercy in Christ to the praise of His glorious grace resolved to save all those who shall steadfastly believe in Christ.” Quenstedt says that “the second attribute of election is its particularity, or that it is particular; for not all are elected, as Samuel Huber falsely thought, but only some. i.e. those who believe in Christ until their end.” It is not disputed that Dietrich and Quenstedt taught the objects of election to be believers, and that, as election took place before the foundation of the world, these believers were foreknown of God and were as such elected. As they contemplated election it was effected in foresight of faith, because the appropriation of Christ made the distinction in the eye of God between those whom He chose and those whom He did not choose.

From his carefully chosen words it would seem that this is the doctrine which Dr. Walther teaches. We would gladly believe it to be so; we would rejoice to find him in harmony with these honored teachers in the Lutheran Church, if he only permitted us. But in other places he repudiates the doctrine that men were elected in view of their possession of Christ’s merit by faith, and teaches that God chose some persons from the condemned mass of sinners, that He might lead them to faith. *The object of the divine act of election is thus by no means believers, but sinners under condemnation, whom God purposes to make believers, and whom He selects for the very purpose of making them believers that they may be saved.*

Thus in *Lehre und Wehre*, (1880, p. 271) it is said “that God has predestinated us to faith, to sonship, to justification; that God, when He from eternity elected us to eternal life, at the same time resolved that He would by His Holy Spirit in time sanctify us and lead us to faith, and thus through faith bring us to salvation. From this it follows of necessity, that when God now, in time, by His Holy Spirit sanctifies, calls, converts us, i.e. makes us believers, He thus executes His decree of predestination, and that our call, conversion, justification, as well as our salvation are necessary

consequences of our election and have their ground in this.” The persons who are elected are not believers, but such as are ordained to become believers and through faith to obtain eternal life. Their election is the cause of their becoming believers. It is therefore only by anticipation that the object of election is said to be those who truly believe. What is meant is that every elect person is led by the way of faith to salvation, and thus in virtue of his election necessarily becomes a believer, not, as the language would seem to imply and as the authors cited unquestionably teach, that from the mass of fallen humanity those who believe are chosen to sonship and salvation.

The Missouri doctrine is that God elected some persons, not in view of the faith by which they appropriated Christ and by which they were thus distinguished from the rest as well-pleasing in His sight, but merely because it was the good pleasure of His will to sanctify and save these particular persons. If we ask why these and not others were elected, the answer is, not that these were seen in Christ and thus accepted in the Beloved, but that it so seemed good in His sight, we know not why: it is an unfathomable mystery.

They further teach that this election is unchangeable, so that the elect person cannot be lost; that it is indeed foolish and dangerous to seek the certainty of one’s election by prying into the secret eternal decree of God, but that a believing Christian should seek to be certain of it from God’s revealed will; and that the believer thus may have and should have the assurance of faith that he is among those whom God has definitely and irrevocably determined to save and who therefore must be saved.

What this election is, of which it is said to that the individual may thus be said to be infallibly certain, is negatively defined in the declaration that it is not a mere divine foreknowledge of the persons who shall be saved; not the mere purpose of God to redeem and save mankind, thus making it universal; that it does not embrace those who believe only for a time; and that it is not a mere decree of God to save all those who will believe until their end. What it is positively has not been so explicitly set forth, but may be gathered from the various utterances which are found in the Missouri publications. These do not leave any doubt that, in their conception, it is an eternal act of God by which, according to His immutable purpose and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, He, out of His mere free grace

in Christ, without any foresight of faith, chose certain persons to eternal life.

Missouri Now Teaches Two Divine Decrees.

While the theologians of the Lutheran Church have constantly taught one decree of God, according to which, by His infinite mercy, He would save men through Christ by faith, this doctrine places two divine decrees irreconcilably side by side. One of these is the general purpose to save all men through Christ; the other is the special purpose to save a few by giving them the persevering faith which alone leads to salvation. In exhibiting the doctrine its exponents, even by their own admission, meet difficulty after difficulty. Although, for a purpose which it is not easy to surmise, a long array of testimonies from Lutheran authors is presented in their writings, a specimen of which we have given above, they virtually admit that since the days of the *Formula of Concord* no standard Lutheran theologian has taught it. They appeal to this symbol of the Church as their warrant but they must admit that since the symbol was published the Church never so understood and so confessed it. They fall back on the Scriptures, but there too they meet with insuperable obstacles, admitting that their theory involves the Word of God in contradictions which it is impossible for man to reconcile, but which we are, for the benefit of their position, a priori to regard as reconcilable in the mind of God.

Why This Teaching Must Be Exposed and Resisted.

Our loyalty to the Scriptures and to the Church will not permit us to go with them in their new departure. Faith and love leave us no choice now but of oppose them, and contribute what little may be in our power to preserve the purity of doctrine in our American Lutheran Church.

1. It is an Outgrowth of Philosophical Speculation.

We are constrained to resist the new doctrine, first because it is an outgrowth of philosophical speculation, and its acceptance in the Church as an article of faith would be a dangerous submission to the dictates of human reason.

It is an effort by the finite mind to solve an insoluble mystery. God wills that all men should be saved, but only a few are saved in fact. Why, if God's desire is to save all men, does the greatest number perish? This is the tremendous problem of the ages. If He has the will, has He not the power? If He has the power, has He not the will? The denial of the will, or the denial of the power, furnishes an easy solution of the problem; but one is as unscriptural and as blasphemous as the other. Reason will never find a clue to the mystery. All the light that we can have upon it must be derived from the Scriptures. They answer many questions in this regard; they answer all that for our peace and comfort need a reply; but they leave many queries which curiosity would dictate wholly unanswered. They teach us that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. That is a way of salvation provided for all.

In Christ there is an atonement made for every man, and there is now nothing on the part of God to hinder the accomplishment of His merciful will in the whole human race. So far as God's righteousness is concerned, it is now possible for Him to save and therefore to elect unto salvation every perishing soul. Why is it not done? The Bible gives us the answer in the words: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." Matt. 23:37.

And our confession repeats the answer when it declares the greater number of men to be lost because they "obstruct the ordinary means of access of the Holy Spirit, so that He cannot perform His work in them." That explains as much as need be explained. With that the mind which humbly trusts in God can be satisfied.

It is only proud reason that makes trouble by the caviling questions: How, since faith is a gift of God, can any person believe unless God has absolutely resolved to give him faith? How could faith be that which in the eye of God distinguishes the person to be elected from the person not to be elected, when God must first decide on which individuals He will bestow

faith and on which not? If God purposes to bestow faith on all men, what hinders Him from doing it? If He does not do it, is it not plain that He formed the purpose to save a few elect, and that upon these, because He elected them, He absolutely resolved to bestow faith that they might be saved?

To escape an intellectual difficulty which is needlessly started in connection with the clear doctrine of Scripture concerning man's salvation, a theory is thus devised which cuts the knot and seems to make all easy, but which makes a hopeless rupture in the divine plan. It is God's will that all should be saved: this is clear as the sunlight, and the glory and comfort of this incontrovertible truth dying men should not suffer to be obscured by any difficulties that may occur. He *will* save all who do not obstruct the Holy Spirit's ordinary way of access to the soul.

If it be said that such a doctrine implies some human ability and makes the soul's salvation and election rest ultimately upon man's power, our reply is, first, that, whatever it may imply, it is the doctrine of the Scriptures and of our Confessions, and, secondly, that it involves only the ability to reject the grace of God which bringeth salvation to all, and such ability even the advocates of the new theory have so far not denied.

All that do not obstinately resist the proffered grace will surely be saved, and in view of their possession of Christ's merit through the faith of the operation of God they were from eternity elected to salvation. If it be said, further, that the means of grace are not placed so that they might have an opportunity to be saved, and the question be asked, How can the fact that a man or a people never hears the Word be reconciled with God's will to save them? Our answer is that the ways of God are past finding out: we do not know, and do not care to know; God knows, and that is enough. We cannot accept as a solution the philosophical speculation about a special plan of salvation, called the decree of election, which determines who shall really and inevitably be saved, and which is placed alongside of the revealed general plan of salvation to render it practically nugatory.

2. It Is Damaging To The Revealed Doctrine of God and His Attributes.

We are in conscience constrained to oppose the new theory because it is damaging to the revealed doctrine of God and His attributes. In their

publications the Missourians say that the non-elect have no right to complain that God did not give them the measure of grace which leads to actual salvation, because He does not owe them anything and is not bound to give it; and that if any one should make such an objection, the answer is contained in the Scripture words: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil because I am good?"

We wish we could say that this does not reveal the animus of the new doctrine. When every appeal, on the basis of theology in the narrow sense, is met with the declaration that "God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy," the other clause of the passage, "and whom He will He hardeneth," not being so frequently cited, the effect is, at least for the moment, to render us speechless, not from perplexity, but from sorrow. Does God then really so treat His miserable creatures, that when in their anguish they look up to Him for some crumb of comfort, He closes the door upon them with the cold rebuff that He owes them nothing? Truly, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table!

And is that really the divine goodness to which the text cited refers, to give salvation to a few, and withhold it from others because He owes them nothing? He owes us nothing; that is unquestionable. He would do us no injustice if He sent us all into outer darkness; we have all richly deserved it. On that ground we admit all that Missouri can claim. On that ground no election is possible, except so far as divine justice is satisfied through the atoning blood of Christ; on that ground we go a step farther, and maintain that no election of an individual is possible, except as he has appropriated by faith the merit of Christ, without which he is and remains a child of wrath. But that is not the point which we have now in view. God's justice would not be violated by selecting only a few out of the wretched mass and giving them eternal blessedness: He owes it to none, and therefore wrongs none by declining to save them. But the new theory claims that God, now that a universal redemption is effected, can elect to salvation whom He will, without the possession of faith in fact or in foresight, and that He elects those whom He proposes to save, and gives them faith unto salvation because He has elected them to salvation. If there is no obstacle in man that hinders a universal election, why does He not elect all and give all faith unto salvation? The reply made is that such captious questions must not be asked, but must be crushed in their birth as presumptuous meddling with God's counsels. But it is not so. God tells us that He has the will to save all

men, and that the reason why not all are saved is the resistance offered by the greater number to the Holy Spirit when He comes to execute the divine will.

When this ground of divine revelation is abandoned and another plan is devised and promulgated, we have a right to challenge it with such questions and show that it runs to ruin. The new theory claims that God resolved to save men without any reference to their acceptance or rejection of Christ; that those who actually are saved obtain eternal life in pursuance of such a resolve, faith being not at all taken into account in the election to which their salvation must be ascribed; and yet that He resolved to save only a few, though He might easily have saved all. Does that present to our souls the God of boundless mercy whom the Scriptures reveal?

If a rich man sees a score of famishing persons lie in their agony before him, all moaning in the pangs of gnawing hunger, he may select two or three and furnish them with bread. He does not owe them anything, and those who are left to perish can reproach him with no injustice. Is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own? But what manner of heart must he have, if he could easily help them all, and yet confines his pity and his help to the few? If he furnishes bread for them all, and in their weakness carries it to their very mouths, he can do nothing but pity them if they refuse to eat, and thus die in their obstinacy. But his refusal to give them bread, on the simple plea that he owes them nothing, would stamp him as a monster of cruelty. God is love; let not such thoughts enter our hearts respecting Him!

A doctrine of predestination that makes Him a being that is willing to let His miserable creatures perish everlastingly, though He could save them from perdition, misrepresents our merciful God, who has no pleasure in the death of the sinner.

3. Its Exegetical Principles and Practices Are Problematic.

Nor can we see how it would be possible for us on the judgment day to answer for our conduct, if we consented to the exegetical principles and practices by which the adherents of the new theory endeavor to render it plausible. They teach that God has an antecedent general will to save all mankind, and an antecedent special will to save a comparatively small

portion of mankind. They teach that this latter alone is of such a nature as to accomplish its purpose: "God has from eternity elected a number of men to salvation," they say; "He has resolved that these shall and must be saved; and as surely as God is God they will be saved, and not a soul else." (*West. Ber.* 1877, 24) They admit that to the human mind, regenerated as well as unregenerated, this involves a contradiction, but urge that we must leave that to God who is able to reconcile it. They warn us not to draw conclusions. We must not say that God has an efficacious will to save a few and an inefficacious will to save all. We must not say that in His gracious purpose of salvation He passed any by, or that He had any purpose not to save a portion of mankind but we must say that those whom He resolved to save will as surely be saved as God is God, and no others.

They tell us that God gives grace to all men sufficient unto salvation, but that it suffices to save only in the case of the elect: these are saved because He elected them, and no others are saved. They tell us that God comforts the souls of the elect by rendering them sure of their election, and therefore of the inevitableness of their salvation; and that He does this not by a special revelation to each individual, but by calling them and working faith in them, so that by these signs they may infallibly know their election; and yet they admit that many are called, but few are chosen, and that of those who believe some are not elected and finally fall away: in other words, we are to draw infallible inferences from fallible signs, reach apodictic [absolutely certain] conclusions from contingent premises, and rest our eternal hopes upon such palpable fallacies.

They tell us we must not think in regard to their theory, for that runs it into irreconcilable contradictions; they tell us, when the theory is to be applied, that we must think, else no inferences could be drawn, but that we must think falsely, else the inference would not be comfortable.

We have gone to the precious evangelical school of the Lutheran Church too long to learn this new language and these new methods now, when our pilgrimage is approaching its end and the celestial city seems so near. True, the Missouri teachers do not say that their speculation is the rule according to which all our thinking must be ordered. They tell us that these statements which seem so irreconcilable with each other and which lay such an extraordinary tax upon our minds, are drawn from the Word of God, and that they only ask us to subject our reason to divine authority. They would

not be Christians if they consciously set up a humanly devised scheme, and required brethren to stultify themselves by accepting it.

But where are all those strange and contradictory things written which they ask us to believe? They can be brought into the inspired record only by adopting a principle and applying a process that would revolutionize and ruin biblical exegesis.

They tell us that when the Scriptures speak of men's being called according to a divine purpose, we must not think of God's will and decree to save men through Christ by faith, of which the Scriptures speak in so many passages, but of a special resolution formed with regard to a few who shall and must be saved, and in whom therefore faith must needs be wrought, although of the existence of such a resolution there is no account in Scripture and its assumption is in direct opposition to Scripture.

They tell us that when the Holy Spirit says that "whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate," though we may think of the predestination to sonship, as that is mentioned in another passage, we must not think of the foreknowledge of faith, as that, although the Scriptures do say that "as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name," is not expressly said in regard to election.

They tell us that when the Bible declares us to be chosen in Christ and to be predestinated unto the adoption of children by Him, we must not here keep in mind that only to those who believe, God gives power to become His children, and that we are and can be in Christ Jesus only by faith; but that we are to consider the passage, as the seat of this special doctrine of election, independently of all others, and must therefore understand the expression "chosen in Christ" to mean "selected for His sake" from among the mass of men, though in that sense all men are in Christ and an election is inexplicable.

They tell us that "predestinated unto the adoption of children," must refer not to believers, but to men in their unbelieving state, because it is not here said that in the mind of God they were viewed as believers before they were predestinated, although the Scriptures do elsewhere say that only believers are accepted in the Beloved as dear children.

We cannot have part in any such treatment of the Holy Scriptures. We prefer to abide by the safe old hermeneutical rule that as the Bible has one Author and reveals one harmonious truth, it is consistently self-interpreting.

Nor does the new hermeneutical rule help the new theory of election. It, in fact, defeats itself. If the doctrine is to be derived from the *sedes doctrinae* alone, without any light from other passages, it is impossible to prove that there is any election to eternal life at all; for these passages tells us that we are “predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren,” Rom 8:29, and that “God hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself.” Eph. 1:4-5.

4. It Endangers The Central Doctrine of Justification By Faith, and Thus Threatens To Revolutionize The Lutheran Doctrinal System.

The new theory endangers the great central doctrine of justification by faith, and thus threatens to revolutionize our whole doctrinal system. “The just shall live by faith” has lost none of its importance since Luther’s day. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Salvation is through Christ, by faith in His name: not through Christ without faith, not by faith without Christ. The great commission reads: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.” Mark 16:15-16. That is the clear and consolatory way of salvation which our Church has inscribed upon her banner and which she has carried triumphantly, as the peace and joy and hope of millions, through the centuries.

She never for a moment entertained the unworthy thought that man’s faith could be a merit, on account of which God grants eternal life as the believer’s due. How could she harbor such a fancy, when it is destructive of all that makes the doctrine of justification so precious? If faith were saving as a good work under the law, we would still, because of the imperfection of all our works, including faith, be under the curse. But it is the divinely ordained means of embracing Christ, and as such it does put us in possession of a merit and righteousness which renders us pleasing in God’s sight, as those are not who do not believe and have not that righteousness. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Heb. 11:6.

But now comes a new wisdom proclaiming a new way. It tells us that justification by faith is all well in its place, but its place is that of subordination to the great gospel of election. It declares that God does lead men to salvation only by leading them to faith which appropriates, Christ's merits, but that He leads only those to such a saving faith whom He has purposed to save, and that this purpose extends over only a comparatively small portion of our lost race. It claims that the distinction between the men that are saved and the men that are not saved is not made by the fact that the former embrace Christ by faith and are accepted in the Beloved, while the latter reject the proffered salvation by unbelief and are rejected, but that it is made by a simple decree of God ordaining the salvation of the few to whom faith is given in consequence, "who shall and must be saved, and no others." The theory is that God elects without taking faith into account at all. Faith is not necessary to salvation in the mind of God; He elects to salvation without reference to it.

Do those who teach the theory mean that God blindly plunges His hand into the writhing mass of miserable men and draws out at random such as may happen to come within His grasp? They shrink from such a doctrine, as a horror creeps over us while we write the thought which their speculation suggests. Do they mean that God finds nothing pleasing in any of the ruined race, but arbitrarily takes from the accursed multitude as many as may fill the number decided upon by His pleasure, so that He may render them pleasing? We would fain think not; for wherein does that differ from such a wild grasp as that described, and how could such a chance draught of part of a multitude in any proper sense be called an election? Do they mean that certain persons were found pleasing in God's sight, and that He therefore singled them out from the rest who were displeasing to Him and whom He could therefore not elect according to His good pleasure? But the Holy Spirit tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God; and if a portion of men was pleasing to Him without faith, why should not the others be pleasing to Him without faith also, and why should faith be necessary to render any man acceptable to God?

The adherents of the new theory may seek to rescue it from opprobrium by alleging that they teach the election to be made only in Christ. So it is; without all controversy, so it is. But do they mean by this that men are accepted of God and adopted as dear children in view of their possession of Christ's righteousness by faith? Then all is well. But then God accepts

believers only, whether this acceptance be viewed in time, or whether it be viewed as the act of God before the foundation of the world was laid; in other words, then as only he who believes can be accepted as a child of God, only he who was in the eternal vision of God a believer could be elected as a child of God. And this is the election in foresight of faith which our Church has constantly taught, but which the new departure of Missouri rejects.

What do they mean then by urging their admission that election is “in Christ”? They mean that for the sake of the redemption effected by Christ for all men, some few are chosen, without any reference to the appropriation of His merits by the individuals thus favored. But if God could decree that certain persons, without any regard at all to their faith or unbelief, their appropriation or rejection of Christ’s merits, shall and must be saved, what should hinder His decreeing this in regard to all, since the redemption avails for those not elected as well as for those elected? And what use can there then be for such a doctrine as that of justification by faith, except as an appendage to the doctrine of election, showing how the foregone conclusion with regard to a few favored mortals is executed in time, and serving as a comfort of dubious morality to those who can persuade themselves that they are among the select few? That sun and center of our whole theology, and, what is more, of all our life and hope — who will blame us if we cannot consent to be a party in obscuring it and finally putting it out?

5. It Undermines the Precious Biblical Doctrine Of The Means of Grace.

We are constrained to oppose the new theory, furthermore, because it undermines the precious biblical doctrine of the means of grace, which the Lutheran Church so purely and so fully confesses and which she has always held so dear. Its advocates do not, indeed, say that grace is not offered to a large portion of mankind, even when they are recipients of the means; they do not say that the grace is irresistible in the other, comparatively small portion. But they do teach that God has determined to save a definite number, and that as surely as He is God these and no others shall be saved. These must obtain the salvation to which He has unalterably ordained them.

But God accomplishes His purpose by His ordinary means. He has resolved that the chosen ones shall and must be saved through the Word and Sacraments. What then does the theory imply in regard to the efficacy of these means? The question is not whether they actually produce the designed effect in all. About that there can be no dispute. A large part of mankind does remain in its sin and condemnation, notwithstanding the offer of salvation; and the Lutheran Church, in full accord with Holy Scripture, declares the reason of this to be that the Holy Spirit cannot perform His work in them. But the question is whether, according to the new doctrine, it was possible that it should be otherwise according to God's own ordination, than that only such part should be saved through the appointed means. Its advocates say, indeed, that God's general will is to save all men, and that the means of grace, under this general will, are efficacious in all cases, whether the persons to whom they are brought are elect or non-elect; but they say also that God has fixed the unalterable decree to save a few, and that these and no others will be saved. Accordingly, when the means of grace are brought to an elect person, the purpose of God, which no power can prostrate, *must* work faith in him and bring him to the Savior. He shall and must be saved, according to the divine decree; and he *must* be saved by the grace of God working its will, without possibility of defeat. In other words, the grace of God, in the case of the elect, works *irresistibly* through the means; or, if this be denied, the only alternative is that His grace works irresistibly *without* the means. One way or other, the select few whom He has resolved under all circumstances to save, *must* be saved.

But how is it in the case of those whom God has not thus resolved to save? Have the means of grace any saving efficacy in their case? Missouri has not the hardihood to say explicitly that they have not. But by implication the new teachers do say it. They teach a saving efficacy that cannot save; not that does not, because the saving power is resisted, but that cannot. They declare that man's resistance has nothing to do with election; that the reason why any one's resistance is effectually overcome and he is brought to final salvation, is that he is elected. As no others but the elect are saved, the means of grace cannot bring salvation to any others but the elect. God has resolved that all resistance shall be overcome when an elect person is the subject of their administration, and therefore they *must* be rendered believers; He has not resolved that the non-elect shall be brought to faith and salvation, and therefore the means have not the saving efficacy when

such persons are the subjects. The most that could be said in such a case is that the means still contain grace, but in the absence of a decree ordaining the salvation of an individual they are inoperative.

The new theory departs from the clear and consolatory doctrine of the Lutheran Church and depraves the Lutheran system by introducing specifically Calvinistic elements. Indeed, offensive as the statement may be regarded, the new theory is only a modified form of Calvinism; and the modifications only render the system inconsistent without eliminating its horrors. It is in fact an absolute election, notwithstanding the strenuous efforts to save it from this reproach by explanations showing that the decree, absolutely formed with regard to the favored persons, is executed in a certain order; and the fixed and unalterable determination to save these favored persons implies that the means used must not only have the power to accomplish the end, but must in the case of such persons exert that power and attain that end, while in the case of others, in regard to whom God has formed no such purpose, the means, though they be still called efficacious, cannot exert power unto salvation, as the elect, and no others, shall be saved.

The Calvinistic doctrine of the means of grace is therefore the necessary outcome of the Calvinistic decree of election; and sooner or later the new doctrine must work itself out into Calvinistic consistency, or be abandoned. All efforts to stop the evil working by telling people that they must draw no conclusions, i.e. that they must not think, will be futile: error eatest as doth a canker. A remorseless application of the knife is mercy.

6. It Is Destructive Of The Comfort The Gospel Is Designed To Bring.

There is one more reason which we must mention for our opposition to the new Missouri doctrine. It is destructive of the comfort which the Gospel is designed to bring. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Rom. 15:4. A doctrine which cannot abide this test must be rejected.

It is true, the principal teacher of the new doctrine claims that it is especially consolatory. We have failed to see how this is possible, and many of those who have learned in his school and accepted his theory have failed

to discover what he claims. We fear that those who find comfort in it are laboring under some strange delusion, and that when sharp conflicts come their comfort will forsake them. It not only can give no consolation, but it is well fitted to destroy such peace and joy and hope as the pure Gospel imparts. Let it be closely and calmly considered. God has resolved that a few persons, whom He has selected without any reference to their appropriation of Christ's merits by faith, shall and must be saved, and besides these few none are saved. The poor sinner belongs to either the one class or the other. If he could know that he belongs to those who shall and must be saved, there would be this consolation, at any rate, that whatever lack of mercy there may be towards others, whom God might have saved, as well as himself, if it had been His pleasure, he at least is among the singularly and inexplicably favored ones who are exalted above their fellows. But whether I am one of this select class I can know only by prying into the decree of God and extorting from Him the secret, or by a special revelation declaring to me that my name is recorded in the book of life, and that I shall, come what may, infallibly be saved.

But the teachers of the new doctrine admit that in this way the secret cannot be found out. They admit even that it would be dangerous to attempt such a prying process, which would lead to Epicurean security on the one hand or gloomy despair on the other. In this aspect of the case there is no spiritual comfort in it and could be none. But that, they say, is not at all the way in which comfort is to be extracted from the doctrine. It must be obtained by an experimental method, by an argument *a posteriori*. All those, they inform us, whom God has resolved to save, He leads to Christ by faith. His purpose is to save only in this way. Every one that believes therefore has the certainty of being on the way by which God leads the elect to eternal life, and may hence confidently conclude that he is one of the elect.

But the theory is not yet sufficiently developed to make such an inference satisfactory to any soul that thinks. It presupposes some things which the advocates of the theory are not yet ready to admit. If only those whom God has resolved to save are effectually called; if the means of grace are efficacious only in the case of the elect; if only he whom God has predestinated to salvation ever becomes a true believer; if no one ever falls and is condemned who has truly believed in Christ, — then the fact that I am called and have faith legitimately leads to the conclusion that I am one

of the elect. But if a person who is not elected may notwithstanding be effectually called, may be a sincere believer, and may finally fall away and perish, how can the consciousness that one believes in Christ furnish any assurance that he is one of the favored few? He may be one of these whom God has not embraced in His decree of election, and who shall perish notwithstanding all his efforts to be saved. Nay, though he be a believer, he must, if he lets the new theory become effectual in his soul, be through fear of death all his lifetime subject to bondage, as his sin will convince him that he is a child of wrath, and nothing, with such a doctrine of election staring him in the face, can give him any ground of assurance that he will not be everlastingly damned as one whom the divine purpose of salvation did not include.

But the Missourians may say, have we not the comfort of the general will of God to save all men, and must we not, if we believe the Word of God, believe the solemn declarations of God that He sincerely wills the salvation of all? Most assuredly we must. But that is the comfort which the Gospel, not the Missouri doctrine of election brings; and in order that this comfort may not be destroyed, we must reject the Missouri doctrine which finally falls helplessly and inconsistently back upon it. For if we let that doctrine stand, the universal grace is so limited that we can not fell to it for refuge.

The new doctrine would have us believe that there is saving grace only for the few embraced in God's purpose of election, and draw comfort from this on the ground that God will have mercy not only on these few, but on all men, we belong to the few on whom He will really have mercy unto salvation because we belong to the many on whom He has mercy, but whom His mercy does not save unless they belong to the select few. We must turn our cup of salvation upside down to receive some special manna on the under side, then turn it up again, with all its contents spilled out, dropping the special gift also in the process, and having nothing, absolutely nothing, as the result of our maneuver. We shall, by the grace of God, be neither enticed nor driven into such folly, but shall abide by the old and well-established doctrine of the Church, that God desires with equal sincerity the salvation of all men, and that He saves, and has elected unto salvation, all those who do not obstinately resist the saving work of the Spirit. This gives us the sure comfort that God loves all of us, that He does everything necessary to save all of us, and that if any one is not saved it is

because he would not come unto Christ that he might have life. The grace of God unto salvation that is for all men is also for me. What power could deprive me of that comfort, and what more could I want?

We have written with no consciousness of ill will or bitterness towards those who advocate the new doctrine. We have labored together with them for many years, and have felt ourselves in harmony with them in the confession of Gospel truth and in loving devotion to the great work which God has called the Lutheran Church to perform in this favored land. But for the very sake of that faith and love which has hitherto bound us together we cannot go with them in their new departure. Rather, with more self-sacrifice than any reader has the means of knowing, we begin this new publication mainly to oppose their error, and to defend the old truth.

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