

The Bondage of the Will

By

Dr. Martin Luther

1525

Translated from the Latin by Henry Cole in 1823

Edited, Formatted and Published by

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Quoted sections of this book used in *Luther On Human Will* are highlighted in light grey.

Glossary: Many proper nouns have been endnoted within this manuscript, using superscript numerals. The endnotes are found immediately after the last page of text in the Glossary, alphabetically arranged.

Footnotes have been kept to a minimum.

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PREFACE

BY

THE TRANSLATOR

THE Translator has long had it in meditation, to present the British Church with an English version of a choice Selection from the Works of that great Reformer, MARTIN LUTHER: and in November last, he issued Proposals for such a publication. He considers it however necessary to state, that this Treatise on the BONDAGE OF THE WILL, formed no part of his design when those Proposals were sent forth. But receiving, subsequently, an application from several Friends to undertake the present Translation, he was induced not only to accede to their request, but also to acquiesce in the propriety of their suggestion, that this work should precede those mentioned in the Proposals. The unqualified encomium bestowed upon it by a Divine so eminent as the late Reverend AUGUSTUS MONTAGUE TOPLADY, who considered it a masterpiece of polemical composition, had justly impressed the minds of those friends with a correct idea of the value of the Treatise; and it was their earnest desire that the plain sentiments and forcible arguments of Luther upon the important subject which it contained, should be presented to the Church, unembellished by any gaudy ornament, and unaltered from the original, except as to their appearance in an English version. In short, they wished to see a correct and faithful Translation of LUTHER ON THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL—*without note or comment!* In this wish, the Translator fully concurred: and having received and accepted the application, he sat down to the work immediately: which was, on Monday, December 23rd, 1822.

As it respects the character of the version itself—the Translator, after much consideration of the eminence of his Author as a standard authority in the Church of God, and the importance of deviating from the original text in any shape whatever, at last decided upon translating according to the following principle; to which, it is his design strictly to adhere in every future translation with which he may present the public—to deliver FAITHFULLY the MIND of LUTHER; retaining LITERALLY, as much of his own WORDING, PHRASEOLOGY, and EXPRESSION, as could be admitted into the English version.—With what degree of fidelity he has adhered to this principle in the present work, the public are left to decide.

The addition of the following few remarks shall suffice for observation.

1. The Work is translated from Melancthon's Edition, which he published immediately after Luther's death. . . .

4. The Quotations from the Diatribe, are, in the Translation, preceded and followed by a dash and single quotation marks: but with this distinction—where Erasmus' own words are quoted in the original the quotation marks are double; but single, where the substance of his sentiments only is quoted. The reader will observe, however, that this distinction was not adopted till after the first three sheets were printed: which will account for all the quotations, in those sheets, being preceded and followed by double quotation marks. Though it is presumed, there will be no difficulty in discovering which are Erasmus' own words, and which are his sentiments in substance only.

5. The portions of Scripture quoted by Luther, are, in some instances, translated from his own words, and not given according to our English version. This particular was attended to, in those few places where Luther's reading varies a little from our version, as being more consistent with a correct Translation of the author, but not with any view to favor the introduction of innovated and diverse readings of the Word of God.

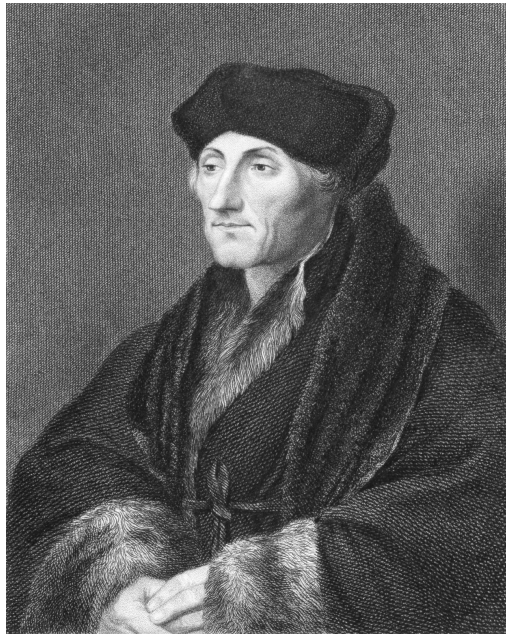
With these few and brief preliminary observations, the Translator presents this profound Treatise of the immortal Luther on the *Bondage of the Will* to the Public. And he trusts he has a sincere desire, that his own labor may prove to be, in every respect, a faithful Translation: and that the work itself may be found, under the Divine blessing, to be—an invaluable acquisition to the Church—"a sharp threshing instrument having teeth" for the exposure of subtlety and error—a banner in defense of the truth—and a means of edification and establishment to all those, who are willing to come to the light to have their deeds made manifest, and to be taught according to the oracles of God!

HENRY COLE.

London, March, 1823.



Martin Luther



Desiderius Erasmus

INTRODUCTION.

*Martin Luther, to the venerable D. Erasmus of Rotterdam,
wishing Grace and Peace in Christ.*

THAT I have been so long answering your DIATRIBE ON Freewill, venerable Erasmus, has happened contrary to the expectation of all, and contrary to my own custom also. For previously, I have not only appeared to seize willingly opportunities of this kind for writing, but even to seek them of my own accord. Someone may, perhaps, wonder at this new and unusual thing, this forbearance or fear, in Luther, who could not be roused up by so many boasting taunts, and letters of adversaries, congratulating Erasmus on his victory and singing to him the song of Triumph. It clearly appears that that Maccabee ⁴, that obstinate assessor, [Martin Luther], has at last found is an Antagonist [Desiderius Erasmus] who is a match for him, against whom he dares not open his mouth! Thus it may have seemed until now.

But so far from accusing them, I myself openly concede that to you, which I never did to anyone before:—that you not only by far surpass me in the powers of eloquence, and in genius, (which we all concede to you as your desert, and the more so, as I am but a barbarian and do all things barbarously,) but that you have damped my spirit and fervor, and rendered me weak before the battle; and that by two means. First, by a clever sort of artful reasoning and logic: you conduct this discussion with a most deceptively attractive and uniform modesty; by which you have met and prevented me from being incensed against you. And next, because, on so great a subject, you say nothing but what has been said before: therefore, you say less about, and attribute more unto "Freewill," than the Sophists ⁵ have hitherto said and attributed: (of which I shall speak more fully hereafter.) So that it seems even a waste of time to reply to these your arguments, which have been indeed often refuted by me; but trodden down, and trampled under foot, by the incontrovertible Book of Philip Melancthon ⁶¹ "Concerning Theological Questions:" a book, in my judgment, worthy not only of being immortalized, but of being included in the ecclesiastical canon: in comparison of which, your Book is, in my estimation, so mean and vile, that I greatly feel for you for having defiled your most beautiful and ingenious language with such vile trash; and I feel an indignation against the matter also, that such unworthy stuff should be borne about in ornaments of eloquence so rare; which is as if

rubbish, or manure, should he carried in vessels of gold and silver. And this you yourself seem to have felt, who were so unwilling to undertake this work of writing; because your conscience told you that you would of necessity have to try the point with all the powers of eloquence; and that, after all, you would not be able so to blind me by your distortions of truth, but that I should, having torn off the deceptions of language, discover and make plain the real dregs beneath. For, although I am plain in speech, yet, by the grace of God, I am not primitive in understanding. And, with Paul, I dare claim good understanding and with confidence take it from you; although I willingly, and deservedly, account eloquence and genius to you, and subtract it from myself.

Wherefore, I thought thus—If there be any who have not drunk more deeply into, and more firmly held my doctrines, which are supported by such weighty Scriptures, than to be moved by these light and trivial arguments of Erasmus, though so highly ornamented, they are not worthy of being healed by my answer. Because, for such men, nothing could be spoken or written of enough, even though it should be in many thousands of volumes a thousand times repeated: for it is as if one should plow the seashore, and sow seed in the sand, or attempt to fill a cask, full of holes, with water. For, as to those who have drunk into the teaching of the Spirit in my books, to them, enough and an abundance has been administered, and they at once despise your writings. But, as to those who read without the Spirit, it is no wonder if they be driven to and fro, like a reed, with every wind. To such, God would not have said enough, even if all his creatures should be converted into tongues. Therefore it would, perhaps, have been wisdom, to have left these offended at your book, along with those who glory in you and decree to you the triumph.

Hence, it was not from a multitude of engagements, nor from the difficulty of the undertaking, nor from the greatness of your eloquence, nor from a fear of yourself; but from mere irksomeness, indignation, and contempt, or (so to speak) from my judgment of your Diatribe, that my impulse to answer you was damped. Not to observe, in the mean time, that, being ever like yourself, you take the most diligent care to be on every occasion slippery and smooth of speech; and while you wish to appear to assert nothing, and yet, at the same time, to assert something, more cautious than Ulysses ⁸, you seem to be steering your course

between Scylla ⁹ and Charybdis. To meet men of such a sort, what, I would ask, can be brought forward or composed, unless anyone knew how to catch Proteus ¹⁰ himself? But what I may be able to do in this matter, and what profit your art will be to you, I will, Christ cooperating with me, hereafter show.

This my reply to you, therefore, is not wholly without cause. My brethren in Christ press me to it, setting before me the expectation of all; seeing that the authority of Erasmus is not to be despised, and the truth of the Christian doctrine is endangered in the hearts of many. And indeed, I felt a persuasion in my own mind, that my silence would not be altogether right, and that I was deceived by the prudence or malice of the flesh, and not sufficiently mindful of my office, in which I am a debtor, both to the wise and to the unwise; and especially, since I was called to it by the entreaties of so many brethren.

For although our cause is such, that it requires more than the external teacher, and, beside him that plants and him that waters outwardly, has need of the Spirit of God to give the increase, and, as a living Teacher, to teach us inwardly living things, (all which I was led to consider;) yet, since that Spirit is free, and blows, not where we will, but where He wills, it was needful to observe that rule of Paul, "Be instant [*steadfast*] in season, and out of season." (2 Tim. 4: 2.) For we know not at what hour the Lord comes. Therefore, I would conjecture that those who have not yet felt the teaching of the Spirit in my writings have been overthrown by that Diatribe. Perhaps their hour has not yet come.

And who knows but that God may even condescend to visit you, my friend Erasmus, by me His poor weak vessel; and that I may (which from my heart I desire of the Father of mercies through Jesus Christ our Lord) come unto you by this Book in a happy hour, and gain over a dearest brother. For although you think and write wrong concerning "Freewill," yet no small thanks are due unto you from me, in that you have rendered my own sentiments far more strongly confirmed, from my seeing the cause of "Freewill" handled by all the powers of such and so great talents, and so far from being bettered, left worse than it was before which leaves an evident proof, that "Freewill" is a downright lie; and that, like the woman in the gospel, the more the case is taken in hand by physicians, the worse it is made. Therefore the greater thanks will be rendered to you

Luther's Introduction

by me, if you by me gain more information, as I have gained by you more confirmation. But each is the gift of God, and not the result of our own endeavours. Wherefore, prayer must be made unto God, that He would open the mouth in me, and the heart in you and in all; that He would be the Teacher in the midst of us, who may in us speak and hear.

But from you, my friend Erasmus, allow me to obtain the grant of this request; that, as I in these matters bear with your ignorance, so you in return, would bear with my lack of eloquent utterance. God giveth not all things to each; nor can we each do all things. Or, as Paul says, "there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:4.) It remains, therefore, that these gifts render a mutual service; that the one, with his gift, sustain the burden and what is lacking in the other; so shall we fulfill the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2.)



Luther Posts His Ninety-Five Theses on October 31, 1517

ERASMUS' PREFACE REVIEWED.

FIRST of all, I would just touch upon some of the heads of your PREFACE; in which, You somewhat disparage our cause and adorn your own. In the first place, I would notice your censuring in me, in all your former books, an obstinacy of assertion; and saying, in this book,—"that you are so far from delighting in assertions, that you would rather at once go over to the sentiments of the skeptics, if the inviolable authority of the Holy Scriptures, and the decrees of the church, would permit you: to which authorities You willingly submit yourself in all things, whether you follow what they prescribe, or follow it not."—These are the principles that please you.

I consider, (as in courtesy bound,) that these things are asserted by you from a benevolent mind, as being a lover of peace. But if anyone else had asserted them, I should, perhaps, have attacked him in my accustomed manner. But, however, I must not even allow you, though so very good in your intentions, to err in this opinion. For not to delight in assertions, is not the character of the Christian mind: no, he must delight in assertions, or he is not a Christian. But, (that we may not be mistaken in terms) by *assertion*, I mean a constant adhering, affirming, confessing, defending, and invincibly persevering. Nor do I believe the term signifies anything else, either among the Latins, or as it is used by us at this day.

And moreover, I speak concerning the asserting of those things, which are delivered to us from above in the Holy Scriptures. Were it not so, we should want neither Erasmus nor any other instructor to teach us, that, in things doubtful, useless, or unnecessary; assertions, contentions, and strivings, would be not only absurd, but impious: and Paul condemns such in more places than one. Nor do you, I believe, speak of these things, unless, as a ridiculous orator, you wish to take up one subject, and go on with another, as the Roman Emperor did with his Turbot⁶²; or, with the madness of a wicked writer, you wish to contend, that the article concerning "Freewill" is doubtful, or not necessary.

Let skeptics and academics keep their distance from us Christians; but let be there with us assertors twice more determined than the stoics themselves. How often does the apostle Paul require that assurance of faith; that is, that most certain, and most firm assertion of Conscience, calling it (Rom. 10:10) confession, "With the mouth confession is made

ERASMUS' PREFACE REVIEWED

unto salvation?" And Christ also says, "Whosoever confesseth Me before men, him will I confess before My Father." (Matt. 10:32.) Peter commands us to "give a reason of the hope" that is in us. (1 Pet. 3:15.) But why should I dwell upon this; nothing is more clearly known and more common among Christians than assertions. Take away assertions, and you take away Christianity. In fact, the Holy Spirit is given unto Christians from heaven, that He may glorify Christ, and confess Him even unto death. And the ultimate demonstration of assertion is to die for confession and assertion. In a word, the Spirit so asserts, that He comes upon the whole world and reproveth them of sin (John 16:8) thus, as it were, provoking to battle. And Paul enjoins Timothy to reprove, and to be steadfast out of season. (2 Tim. 4:2.) But how ludicrous to me would be that reproveth, who should neither really believe that himself, of which he reproveth, nor constantly assert it!—Why, I would send him to Anticyra¹¹, to be cured.

But I am the greatest fool, who thus lose words and time upon that, which is clearer than the sun. What Christian would bear that assertions should be despised? This would be at once to deny all piety and religion together; or to assert, that religion, piety, and every doctrine, is nothing at all. Why therefore do you also say, that you do not delight in assertions, and that you prefer such a mind to any other?

But you would have it understood that you have said nothing here concerning confessing Christ and His doctrines. I receive the admonition. And, in courtesy to you, I give up my right and custom, and refrain from judging of your heart, reserving that for another time, or for others. In the mean time, I admonish you to correct your tongue, and your pen, and to refrain henceforth from using such expressions. For, no matter how upright and honest your heart may be, your words, which are the index of the heart, are not so. For, if you think the matter of "Freewill" is not necessary to be known, nor at all concerned with Christ, you speak honestly, but think wickedly: but, if you think it is necessary, you speak wickedly, and think rightly. And if so, then there is no room for you to complain and exaggerate so much concerning useless assertions and contentions: for what have they to do with the nature of the cause?

ERASMUS' SCEPTICISM.

BUT what will you say to these your declarations, when, be it remembered, they are not confined to "Freewill" only, but apply to all doctrines in general throughout the world—that, "if it were permitted you by the absolute authority of the sacred Writings and decrees of the church, you would go over to the sentiments of the Sceptics?"—

What an all-changeable Proteus is there in these expressions, "absolute authority" and "decrees of the church!" As though you could have so very great a reverence for the Scriptures and the church, when at the same time you signify, that you wish you had the liberty of being a Skeptic! What Christian would talk in this way? But if you say this in reference to useless and doubtful doctrines, what news is there in what you say? Who, in such things, would not wish for the liberty of the skeptical profession? Nay, what Christian is there who does not actually use this liberty freely, and condemn all those who are drawn away with, and captivated by every opinion? Unless you consider all Christians to be such (as the term is generally understood) whose doctrines are useless, and for which they quarrel like fools, and contend by assertions. But if you speak of necessary things, what declaration more impious can anyone make, than that he wishes for the liberty of asserting nothing in such matters? Whereas, the Christian will rather say this—I am so averse to the sentiments of the Sceptics, that wherever I am not hindered by the infirmity of the flesh, I will not only steadily adhere to the Sacred Writings everywhere, and in all parts of them, and assert them, but I wish also to be as certain as possible in things that are not essential, and that lie outside the Scripture; for what is more miserable than uncertainty.

What shall we say to these things also, where you add—"To which authorities I submit my opinion in all things; whether I follow what they enjoin, or follow it not."—

What say you, Erasmus? Is it not enough that you submit your opinion to the Scriptures? Do you submit it to the decrees of the church also? What can the church decree, that is not decreed in the Scriptures? If it can, where then remains the liberty and power of judging those who make the decrees? As Paul, 1 Cor. 14., teaches "Let others judge." Are you not pleased that there should be anyone to judge the decrees of the church, which, nevertheless, Paul enjoins? What new kind of religion and

ERASMUS' SCEPTICISM

humility is this, that, by our own example, you would take away from us the power of judging the decrees of men, and give it unto men without judgment? Where does the Scripture of God command us to do this?

Moreover, what Christian would so commit the injunctions of the Scripture and of the church to the winds,—as to say "whether I follow them, or follow them not?" You submit yourself, and yet care not at all whether you follow them or not. But let that Christian be anathema, who is not certain in, and does not follow, that which is enjoined him. For how will he believe that which he does not follow?—Do you here, then, mean to say, that *following* is understanding a thing certainly, and not doubting of it at all in a skeptical manner? If you do, what is there in any creature which anyone can follow, if following be understanding, and seeing and knowing perfectly? And if this be the case, then it is impossible that anyone should, at the same time, follow some things, and not follow others: whereas, by following the one ultimate certainty, God, he follows all things; therefor, whoever follows not God, never follows any part of His creation.

In a word, these declarations of yours amount to this—that, with you, it matters not what is believed by anyone, anywhere, if the peace of the world be but undisturbed; and if every one be but allowed, when his life, his reputation, or his interest is at stake, to do as he did, who said, "If they affirm, I affirm, if they deny, I deny:" and to look upon the Christian doctrines as nothing better than the opinions of philosophers and men: and that it is the greatest of folly to quarrel about, contend for, and assert them, as nothing can arise therefrom but contention, and the disturbance of the public peace: "that what is above us, does not concern us." This, I say, is what your declarations amount to.—Thus, to put an end to our fightings, you come in as an intermediate peace-maker, that you may cause each side to suspend arms, and persuade us to cease from drawing swords about things so absurd and useless.

What I should focus upon here, I believe, my friend Erasmus, you know very well. But, as I said before, I will not openly express myself. In the mean time, I excuse your very good intention of heart; but do you go no further; fear the Spirit of God, who searches the reins and the heart, and who is not deceived by artfully contrived expressions. I have, upon this occasion, expressed myself thus, that henceforth you may cease to

ERASMUS' SCEPTICISM

accuse our cause of pertinacity or obstinacy. For, by so doing, you only show that you embrace in your heart a Lucian ¹², or some other of the swinish tribe of the Epicureans ¹³; who, because he does not believe there is a God himself, secretly laughs at all those who do believe and confess it. Allow *us* to be assertors, and to study and delight in assertions: and you go ahead and favor your Sceptics and Academics until Christ shall have called you also. The Holy Spirit is not a Sceptic, nor are what he has written on our hearts doubts or opinions, but assertions more certain, and more firm, than life itself and all human experience.

Now I come to the next head, which is connected with this; where you make a "distinction between the Christian doctrines," and pretend that some are necessary, and some not necessary." You say, that "some are obscure, and some quite clear." Thus you merely sport the sayings of others, or else exercise yourself, as it were, in a rhetorical figure. And you bring forward, in support of this opinion, that passage of Paul, Rom 11:33, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and goodness of God!" And also that of Isaiah 40:13, "Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?"

You could easily say these things, seeing that, you either knew not that you were writing to Luther, but for the world at large, or did not think that you were writing against Luther: whom, however, I hope you allow to have some acquaintance with, and judgment in, the Sacred Writings. But, if you do not allow it, then, behold, I will also twist things thus. This is the distinction which I make; that I also may act a little the rhetorician and logician—God, and the Scripture of God, are two things; no less so than God, and the Creature of God. That there are in God many hidden things which we know not, no one doubts: as He himself says concerning the last day: "Of that day knoweth no man but the Father." (Matt. 24:36.) And (Acts 1:7.) "It is not yours to know the times and seasons." And again, "I know whom I have chosen," (John 13:18.) And Paul, "The Lord knoweth them that are His," (2 Tim. 2:19.). And the like.

But, that there are in the Scriptures some things obscure, and that all things are not quite plain, is a report spread abroad by the impious Sophists—those cleaver, deceiving logic-choppers—by whose mouth you speak here, Erasmus. But they never have produced, nor ever can produce, one article whereby to prove this their madness. And it is with

ERASMUS' SCEPTICISM

such scare-crows that Satan has frightened away men from reading the Sacred Writings, and has rendered the Holy Scripture contemptible, that he might cause his poisons of philosophy to prevail in the church. This indeed I confess, that there are many *places* in the Scriptures obscure and hard to understand; not from the majesty of the thing, but from our ignorance of certain terms and grammatical particulars; but which do not prevent a knowledge of all the *things* in the Scriptures. For what *thing* of more importance can remain hidden in the Scriptures, now that the seals are broken, the stone rolled from the door of the sepulcher, and that greatest of all mysteries brought to light, Christ made man: that God is Trinity and Unity: that Christ suffered for us, and will reign to all eternity? Are not these things known and proclaimed even in our streets? *Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what will you find remaining in them?*

All the *things*, therefore, contained in the Scriptures; are made manifest, although some *places*, from the words not being understood, are yet obscure. But to know that all *things* in the Scriptures are set in the clearest light, and then, because a few words are obscure, to report that the *things* are obscure, is absurd and impious. *And, if the words are obscure in one place, yet they are clear in another.* But, however, the same *thing*, which has been most openly declared to the whole world, is both spoken of in the Scriptures in plain words, and also still lies hidden in obscure words. Now, therefore, it matters not if the *thing* be in the light, whether any certain representations of it be in obscurity or not, if, in the mean while, many other representations of the same thing be in the light. For who would say that the public fountain is not in the light, because those who are in some dark narrow lane do not see it, when all those who are in the Open market place can see it plainly?

WHAT you cite, therefore, about the darkness of the Corycian cavern¹⁴, amounts to nothing; matters are not so in the Scriptures. For those things which are of the greatest majesty, and the most obscure mysteries, are no longer in the dark corner, but before the very doors, nay, brought forth and manifested openly. For Christ has opened our understanding to lay hold of the Scriptures, Luke 24:45. And the Gospel is preached to every creature. (Mark 16:15, Col. 1:23) "Their sound is gone out into all the earth." (Psalm 19:4.) And "All things that are written, are written for

ERASMUS' SCEPTICISM

our instruction." (Rom. 15:4) And again, "All Scripture is inspired from above, and is profitable for instruction." (2 Tim. 3:16.)

Therefore come forward, you and all the Sophists together, and produce any one mystery which is still obscure in the Scriptures. But, if many things still remain obscure to many, this does not arise from obscurity in the Scriptures, but from their own blindness or lack of understanding, who do not or cannot discover the all-perfect clearness of the truth. As Paul says concerning the Jews, 2 Cor. 3:15. "The veil still remains upon their heart." And again, "If our gospel be hid it is hid to them that are lost, whose heart the god of this world hath blinded." (2 Cor. 4:3-4.) With the same rashness anyone may cover his own eyes, or go from the light into the dark and hide himself, and then blame the day and the sun for being obscure. Let, therefore, wretched men cease to impute, with blasphemous perverseness, the darkness and obscurity of their own heart to the all-clear Scriptures of God.

You, therefore, when you cite Paul, saying, "His judgments are incomprehensible," seem to make the pronoun *His* (*ejus*) refer to Scripture (*Scriptura*). Whereas Paul does not say, The judgments of the Scripture are incomprehensible, but the judgments of God. So also Isaiah 40:13, does not say, Who has known the mind of the Scripture, but, who has known "the mind of the Lord?" Although Paul asserts that the mind of the Lord is known to Christians: but it is in those things which are freely given unto us: as he says also in the same place, 1 Cor. 2:10, 16. You see, therefore, how sleepily you have looked over these places of the Scripture: and you cite them just as aptly as you cite nearly all the passages in defense of "Freewill."

In like manner, your examples which you append, not without suspicion and bitterness, are nothing at all to the purpose. Such are those concerning the distinction of Persons: the union of the Divine and human natures: the unpardonable sin: the ambiguity attached to which, you say, has never been cleared up.—If you mean the questions of Sophists that have been agitated upon those subjects, well. But what has the all-innocent Scripture done to you, that you impute the abuse of the most wicked of men to its purity? The Scripture simply confesses the Trinity of God, the humanity of Christ, and the unpardonable sin. There is nothing here of obscurity or ambiguity. But *how* these things are the

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Scripture does not say, nor is it necessary to be known. The Sophists employ their dreams here; attack and condemn them, and acquit the Scripture.—But, if you mean the reality of the matter, I say again, attack not the Scriptures, but the Arians¹⁵, and those to whom the Gospel is hid, that, through the working of Satan, they might not see the all-manifest testimonies concerning the Trinity of the Godhead, and the humanity of Christ.

But to be brief. The *clearness* of the Scripture is twofold; even as the *obscurity* is twofold also. The one is *external*, placed in the ministry of the word; the other *internal*, placed in the understanding of the heart. If you speak of the internal clearness, no man sees one iota in the Scriptures, but he that hath the Spirit of God. All have a darkened heart; so that, even if they know how to speak of, and set forth, all things in the Scripture, yet, they cannot feel them nor know them: nor do they believe that they are the creatures of God, nor anything else: according to that of Psalm 14:1. "The fool hath said in his heart, God is nothing." For the Spirit is required to understand the whole of the Scripture and every part of it. If you speak of the external clearness, nothing whatever is left obscure or ambiguous; but all things that are in the Scriptures, are by the Word brought forth into the clearest light, and proclaimed to the whole world.

BUT this is still more intolerable,—Your enumerating this subject of "Freewill" among those things that are "useless, and not necessary;" and drawing up for us, instead, a "Form" of those things which you consider "necessary unto Christian piety." Such a form as, certainly, any Jew or any Gentile utterly ignorant of Christ, might produce. For of Christ you make no mention in one iota. As though you thought that there may be Christian piety without Christ, if God be but worshipped with all the powers as being by nature most merciful.

What shall I say here, Erasmus? To me, you breathe out nothing but Lucian¹², and draw in the gorging excess of Epicurus. If you consider this subject "not necessary" to Christians, away, I pray you, out of the field; I have nothing to do with you. I consider it necessary.

If, as you say, it be "irreligious," if it be "strange," if it be "unnecessary," to know, whether or not God foreknows anything by contingency; whether our own will does anything in those things which

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pertain unto eternal salvation, or is only passive under the work of grace; whether or not we do, what we do of good or evil, from necessity, or rather from being passive; what then, I ask, is religious; what is grave; what is useful to be known? All this, Erasmus, is to no purpose whatever. And it is difficult to attribute this to your ignorance, because you are now old, have been conversant with Christians, and have long studied the Sacred Writings: therefore you leave no room for my excusing you, or having a good thought concerning you.

And yet the Papists pardon and put up with these enormities in you: and on this account, because you are writing against Luther: otherwise, if Luther were not in the case, they would tear you in pieces tooth and nail. Plato is a friend; Socrates is a friend; but Truth is to be honoured above all. For, granting that you have but little understanding in the Scriptures and in Christian piety, surely even an enemy to Christians ought to know what Christians consider useful and necessary, and what they do not. Whereas you, a theologian, a teacher of Christians, and about to draw up for them a "Form" of Christianity, not only in your skeptical manner doubt of what is necessary and useful to them, but go away into the directly opposite, and, contrary to your own principles, by an unheard of assertion, declare it to be your judgment, that those things are "not necessary:" whereas, if they be not necessary, and certainly known, there can remain neither God, nor Christ, nor Gospel, nor Faith, nor anything else, even of Judaism, much less of Christianity! In the name of the Immortal God, Erasmus, what an occasion, yea, what a field do you open for acting and speaking against you! What could you write well or correctly concerning "Freewill," who confess, by these your declarations, so great an ignorance of the Scripture and of Godliness? But I draw in my sails: nor will I here deal with you in my words (for that perhaps I shall do hereafter) but in your own.

THE "Form" of Christianity set forth by you, among other things, has this—"That we should strive with all our powers, have recourse to the remedy of repentance, and in all ways try to gain the mercy of God; without which, neither human will, nor endeavour, is effectual." Also, "that no one should despair of pardon from a God by nature most merciful."

These statements of yours are without Christ, without the Spirit, and

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colder than ice: so that, the beauty of your eloquence is really deformed by them. Perhaps a fear of the Popes and those tyrants, extorted them from you their miserable pawn, lest you should appear to them a perfect atheist. But what they assert is this—That there is ability in us; that there is a striving with all our powers; that there is mercy in God; that there are ways of gaining that mercy; that there is a God, by nature just, and most merciful, etcetera.—But if a man does not know what these powers are; what they can do, or in what they are to be passive; what their efficacy, or what their inefficacy is; what can such an one do? What will you set him about doing?

"It is irreligious, strange, and unnecessary, (you say) to wish to know, whether our own will does anything in those things which pertain unto eternal salvation, or whether it is wholly passive under the work of grace."—But here, you say the contrary: that it is Christian piety to "strive with all the powers;" and that, "without the mercy of God the will is ineffective."

Here you plainly assert, that the will does something in those things which pertain unto eternal salvation, when you speak of it as striving: and again, you assert that it is passive, when you say, that without the mercy of God it is ineffective. Though, at the same time, you do not define how far that doing, and being passive, is to be understood: thus, designedly keeping us in ignorance how far the mercy of God extends, and how far our own will extends; what our own will is to do, in that which you would impose, and what the mercy of God is to do. Thus, that prudence of yours, carries you along; by which, you are resolved to hold with neither side, and to escape safely through Scylla⁹ and Charybdis; in order that, when you come into the open sea, and find yourself overwhelmed and confounded by the waves, you may have it in your power, to assert all that you now deny, and deny all that you now assert.

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BUT I will set your theology before your eyes by a few examples.—What if anyone, intending to compose a poem, or an oration, should never think about, nor inquire into his abilities, what he could do, and what he could not do, nor what the subject undertaken required; and should utterly disregard that precept of Horace ¹⁶, "What the shoulders can sustain, and what they must sink under;" but should headlong dash upon the undertaking and think thus—I must strive to get the work done; to inquire whether the learning I have, the eloquence I have, the force of genius I have, be equal to it, is a waste of time and unnecessary:—Or, if anyone, desiring to have a plentiful crop from his land, should not be so inquisitive as to take the unnecessary care of examining the nature of the soil, (as Virgil¹⁷ curiously and in vain teaches in his Georgics ¹⁸,) but should rush on at once, thinking of nothing but the work, and plow the seashore, and cast in the seed wherever the soil was turned up, whether sand or mud:—Or if anyone, about to make war, and desiring a glorious victory, or intending to render any other service to the state, should not be so cautious as to deliberate upon what it was in his power to do; whether the treasury could furnish money, whether the soldiers were fit, whether any opportunity offered; and should pay no regard whatever to that of the historian, "Before you act, there must be deliberation, and when you have deliberated, speedy execution;" but should rush forward with his eyes blinded, and his ears stopped, only exclaiming war! war! and should be determined on the undertaking:—What, I ask you, Erasmus, would you think of such poets, such farmers, such generals, and such executive officers? I will add also that of the Gospel—If anyone going to build a tower, sits not down first and counts the cost, whether he has enough to finish it,—What does Christ say of such an one? (Luke 14:28-32).

Thus you also enjoin us works only. But you forbid us to examine, weigh, and know, first, our ability, what we can do, and what we cannot do, as being too cautious, extraneous, and irreligious. Thus, while with your over-cautious prudence you pretend to detest carelessness, and make a show of sobriety, you go so far, that you even teach the greatest of all foolhardiness. For, although the Sophists are rash and mad in reality

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while they pursue their careful inquiries, yet their sin is less enormous than yours; for you even teach and enjoin men to be mad, and to rush on with reckless abandon. And to make your madness still greater, you persuade us, that this foolishness is the most exalted and Christian piety, sobriety, religious gravity, and even salvation. And you assert, that if we exercise it not, we are irreligious, strange, and vain: although you are so great an enemy to assertions. Thus, in steering clear of Charybdis ⁹, you have, with excellent grace, escaped Scylla ⁹ also. But into this state you are driven by your confidence in your own talents. You believe, that you can by your eloquence, so impose upon the understandings of all, that no one shall discover the design which you secretly hug in your heart, and what you aim at in all those your eloquent writings. But God is not mocked, (Gal. 6:7,) upon whom it is not safe to run.

Moreover, had you enjoined us this absurdity in composing poems, in preparing for fruits, in conducting wars or other undertakings, or in building houses; although it would have been intolerable, especially in so great a man, yet you might have been deserving of some pardon, at least from Christians, for they pay no regard to these temporal things. But when you enjoin Christians themselves to become rash workers, and charge them not to be inquiring about what they can do and what they cannot do, in obtaining eternal salvation; this, evidently, and in reality, is the sin unpardonable. For while they know not what or how much they can do, they will not know what to do; and if they know not what to do, they cannot repent when they do wrong; and impenitence is the unpardonable sin: and to this, does that moderate and skeptical theology of yours lead us.

Therefore, it is not irreligious, strange, or excessive, but essentially wholesome and necessary, for a Christian to know, whether or not the will does anything in those things which pertain unto Salvation. Nay, let me tell you, this is the very hinge upon which our discussion turns. It is the very heart of our subject. For our object is this: to inquire what "Freewill" can do, in what it is passive, and how it stands with reference to the grace of God. *If we know nothing of these things, we shall know nothing whatever of Christian matters, and shall be far behind all People upon the earth.* He that does not feel this, let him confess that he is no Christian. And he that despises and laughs at it, let him know that he is

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the Christian's greatest enemy. For, if I know not how much I can do myself, how far my ability extends, and what I can do toward God; I shall be equally uncertain and ignorant how much God is to do, how far His ability is to extend, and what He is to do toward me: whereas it is "God that worketh all in all." (1 Cor. 12:6.) But if I know not the distinction between our working and the power of God, I know not God Himself. And if I know not God, I cannot worship Him, praise Him, give Him thanks, nor serve Him; for I shall not know how much I ought to ascribe unto myself, and how much unto God. It is necessary, therefore, to hold the most certain distinction, between the power of God and our power, the working of God and our working, if we would live in proper holy fear toward Him.

Hence you see, this point forms another part of the whole sum of Christianity; on which depends, and in which is at stake, the knowledge of ourselves, and the knowledge and glory of God. Wherefore, friend Erasmus, your calling the knowledge of this point irreligious, strange, and vain, is not to be borne in you. We owe much to you, but we owe all to the fear of God. Nay you yourself see, that all our good is to be ascribed unto God, and you assert that in your Form of Christianity: and in asserting this, you certainly, at the same time assert also, that the mercy of God alone does all things, and that our own will does nothing, but is rather acted upon: and so it must be, otherwise the whole is not ascribed unto God. And yet, immediately afterwards, you say, that to assert these things, and to know them, is irreligious, impious, and vain. But at this rate a mind, which is unstable in itself, and unsettled and inexperienced in the things of godliness, cannot but talk.

ANOTHER part of the sum of Christianity is, to know, whether God foreknows anything by contingency, or whether we do all things from necessity. This part also you make to be irreligious, strange, and vain, as all the wicked do: the devils, and the damned also, make it detestable and deplorable. And you show your wisdom in keeping yourself clear from such questions, wherever you can do it. But however, you are but a very poor rhetorician and theologian, if you pretend to speak of "Freewill" without these essential parts of it. I will therefore act as a whetstone, and though no rhetorician myself, will tell a famed rhetorician what he ought

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to do—If, then, Quintilian ¹⁸, purposing to write on Oratory, should say, "In my judgment, all that pointless nonsense about invention, arrangement, elocution, memory, pronunciation, need not be mentioned; it is enough to know that Oratory is the art of speaking well"—would you not laugh at such a writer? But you act exactly like this: for pretending to write on "Freewill," you first throw aside, and cast away, the grand substance and all the parts of the subject on which you undertake to write. Whereas, it is impossible that you should know what "Freewill" is, unless you know what the human will does, and what God does or foreknows.

Do not your rhetoricians teach, that he who undertakes to speak upon any subject, ought first to show, whether the thing exist; and then, what it is, what its parts are, what is contrary to it, connected with it, and like unto it, etcetera? But you rob that miserable subject in itself, "Free will," of all these things: and define no one question concerning it, except this first, namely, whether it exist: and even this with such arguments as we shall presently see: and so worthless a book on "Freewill" I never saw, excepting the elegance of the language. The Sophists, in reality, at least argue upon this point better than you, though those of them who have attempted the subject of "Freewill," are no rhetoricians; for they define all the questions connected with it: whether it exists, what it does, and how it stands with reference to, etcetera: although they do not carry out what they attempt. In this book, therefore, I will push you, and the Sophists together, until you shall define to me the power of "Freewill," and what it can do: and I hope I shall so push you, (Christ willing) as to make you heartily repent that you ever published your Diatribe.

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THIS, therefore, is also essentially necessary and wholesome for Christians to know: *That God foreknows nothing by contingency, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His immutable, eternal, and infallible will.* By this thunderbolt, "Freewill" is thrown prostrate, and utterly dashed to pieces. Those, therefore, who would assert "Freewill," must either deny this thunderbolt, or pretend not to see it, or push it from them. But, however, before I establish this point by any arguments of my own, and by the authority of Scripture, I will first set it forth in your words.

Are you not then the person, friend Erasmus, who just now asserted, that God is by nature just, and by nature most merciful? If this be true, does it not follow that He is *immutably – that is unchangeably –* just and merciful? That, as His nature is not changed to all eternity, so neither His justice nor His mercy? And what is said concerning His justice and His mercy, must be said also concerning His knowledge, His wisdom, His goodness, His will, and His other attributes. If therefore these things are asserted religiously, piously, and wholesomely concerning God, as you say yourself, what has come to you, that, contrary to your own self, you now assert, that it is irreligious, strange, and vain, to say, that God foreknows of necessity? You openly declare that the immutable *will* of God is to be known, but you forbid the recognition of His immutable *foreknowledge*. Do you believe that He foreknows against His will, or that He wills in ignorance? If then, He foreknows, willing, His will is eternal and immovable, because His nature is so: and, if He wills, foreknowing, His knowledge is eternal and immovable, because His nature is so.

From which it follows unalterably, that all things which we do, although they may appear to us to be done mutably and contingently – that is, by our own free and unhindered choice – and even may be done thus contingently – that is, after we have considered, more or less, the various choices which are set before us – by us, are yet, in reality, done necessarily and immutably, with respect to the will of God. For the will of God is effective and cannot be hindered; because the very power of God is natural to Him, and His wisdom is such that He cannot be deceived. And as His will cannot be hindered, the work itself cannot be hindered from being done in the place, at the time, in the measure, and by

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whom He foresees and wills. If the will of God were such, that, when the *work* was done, the *work* remained but the *will* ceased, (as is the case with the *will* of men, which, when the house is built which they wished to build, ceases to *will*, as though it ended by death) then, indeed, it might be said, that things are done by contingency and mutability. But here, the case is the contrary; the *work ceases*, and the *will remains*. So far is it from possibility, that the doing of the work or its remaining, can be said to be from contingency or mutability. But, (that we may not be deceived in terms) *being done by contingency*, does not, in the Latin language, signify that the work itself which is done is contingent, but that it is done according to a contingent and mutable will—such a will as is not to be found in God! Moreover, a work cannot be called contingent, unless it be done by us unawares, by contingency, and, as it were, by chance; that is, by our will or hand catching at it, as presented by chance, we thinking nothing of it, nor willing anything about it before.

I COULD wish, indeed, that we were furnished with some better term for this discussion, than this commonly used term, *necessity*, which cannot rightly be used, either with reference to the human will, or the divine. It's meaning is too harsh and ill-suited for this subject, forcing upon the mind an idea of compulsion, and that which is altogether contrary to *will*; whereas, the subject which we are discussing, does not require such an idea: for Will, whether divine or human, does what it does, be it good or evil, not by any compulsion but by mere willingness or desire, as it were, totally free. The will of God, nevertheless, which rules over our mutable will, is immutable and infallible; as Boetius¹⁹ sings, "Immovable Thyself, Thou movement giv'st to all." And our own will, especially our corrupt will, cannot of itself do good; therefore, where the term fails to express the idea required, the understanding of the reader must make up the deficiency, knowing what is wished to be expressed—the immutable will of God, and the impotency of our depraved will; or, as some have expressed it, the *necessity of immutability*, though neither is that sufficiently grammatical, or sufficiently theological.

Upon this point, the Sophists have now labored hard for many years, and being at last conquered, have been compelled to retreat. All things take place from the *necessity of the consequence*, (say they) but not from

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the *necessity of the thing consequent*. What nothingness this amounts to, I will not take the trouble to show. By the *necessity of the consequence*, (to give a general idea of it) they mean this—If God wills any thing, that same thing must, of necessity be done; but it is not necessary that the thing done should be necessary: for God alone is necessary; all other things cannot be so, if it is God that wills. Therefore, (say they) the action of God is necessary, where He wills, but the act itself is not necessary; that is, (they mean) it has not *essential necessity*. But what do they effect by this playing upon words? Only this, that the act itself is not necessary, that is, it has not essential necessity. This is no more than saying, the act is not God Himself. This, nevertheless, remains certain, that if the action of God is necessary, or if there is a necessity of the consequence, every thing takes place of necessity, no matter how much the act be not necessary; that is, be not God Himself, or have not essential necessity. For, if I be not made of necessity, it is of little consequence with me, whether my existence and being be mutable or not, if, nevertheless, I, that contingent and mutable being, who am not the necessary God, am made.

Wherefore, their ridiculous play upon words, that all things take place from *the necessity of the consequence*, but not from *the necessity of the thing consequent*, amounts to nothing more than this—all things take place of necessity, but all the things that do take place are not God Himself. But what need was there to tell us this? As though there were any fear of our asserting, that the things done were God Himself, or possessed divine or necessary nature. This asserted truth, therefore, stands and remains invincible—that all things take place according to the immutable will of God! which they call the necessity of the consequence. Nor is there here any obscurity or ambiguity. In Isaiah he says, "My counsel shall stand, and My will shall be done." (Isa. 46:10.) And what schoolboy does not understand the meaning of these expressions, "Counsel," "will," "shall be done," "shall stand?"

BUT why should these things be obscure to us Christians, so that it should be considered irreligious, strange, and vain, to discuss and know them, when heathen poets, and even the common people, have them in their mouths in the most frequent use? How often does Virgil alone make mention of Fate ²⁰? "All things stand fixed by law immutable." Again, "Fixed is the day of every man." Again, "If the Fates summon you." And

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again, "If thou shalt break the binding chain of Fate." All this poet aims at, is to show, that in the destruction of Troy, and in raising the Roman empire, Fate did more than all the devoted efforts of men. In a word, he makes even their immortal gods subject to Fate. To this, even Jupiter ²¹ and Juno ²² must, of necessity, yield. Hence they made the three Parcae ²³ immutable, implacable, and irrevocable in decree.

Those men of wisdom knew that which the event itself, with experience, proves; that no man's own counsels ever succeeded but that the event happened to all contrary to what they thought. Virgil's Hector says, "Could Troy have stood by human arm, it should have stood by mine." Hence that common saying was on every one's tongue, "God's will be done." Again, "If God will, we will do it." Again, "Such was the will of God." "Such was the will of those above." "Such was your will," says Virgil. Whence we may see, that the knowledge of predestination and of the foreknowledge of God, was no less present in the world than the notion of the deity itself. And those who wished to appear wise, went in their disputatious so far, that, their hearts being darkened, they became fools," (Rom. 1:21-22,) and denied, or pretended not to know, those things which their poets, and the common people, and even their own consciences, held to be universally known, most certain, and most true.

I OBSERVE further, not only how true these things are (concerning which I shall speak more at large hereafter out of the Scriptures) but also how religious, pious, and necessary it is to know them; for if these things be not known there can be neither faith, nor any worship of God: nay, not to know them, is to be in reality ignorant of God, with which ignorance salvation cannot co-exist, as is well known. For if you doubt, or disdain to know that God foreknows and wills all things, not contingently, but necessarily and immutably, how can you believe confidently, trust in, and depend upon His promises? For when He promises, it is necessary that you should be certain that He knows, is able, and willing to perform what He promises; otherwise, you will neither hold Him true nor faithful; which is unbelief, the greatest of wickedness, and a denying of the Most High God!

And how can you be certain and secure, unless you are persuaded that He knows and wills certainly, infallibly, immutably, and necessarily, and will perform what He promises? Nor ought we to be certain only that God

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wills necessarily and immutably, and will perform, but also to glory in the same; as Paul, (Rom. 3:4,) "Let God be true, but every man a liar." And again, "For the Word of God is not without effect." (Rom. 9:6.) And in another place, "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His." (2 Tim. 2:19.) And, "Which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." (Titus 1:2.) And, "He that cometh, must believe that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that hope in Him." (Heb. 11:6.)

If, therefore, we are taught, and if we believe, that we ought not to know the necessary foreknowledge of God, and the necessity of the things that are to take place, Christian faith is utterly destroyed, and the promises of God and the whole Gospel entirely fall to the ground; for the greatest and only consolation of Christians in their adversities, is the sure knowledge that God lies not, but does all things immutably, and that His will cannot be resisted, changed, or hindered.

Do you now, then, only observe, friend Erasmus, to what that most moderate, and most peace-loving theology of yours would lead us. You call us off, and forbid our endeavouring to know the foreknowledge of God, and the necessity that lies on men and things, and counsel us to leave such things, and to avoid and disregard them; and in so doing, you at the same time teach us your rash sentiments; that we should seek after an ignorance of God, (which comes upon us of its own accord, and is engendered in us), disregard faith, leave the promises of God, and account the consolations of the Spirit and the assurances of conscience, nothing at all! Such counsel scarcely any Epicure himself would give!

Moreover, not content with this, you call him who should desire to know such things, irreligious, strange, and vain; but him who should disregard them, religious, pious, and sober. What else do these words imply, than that Christians are irreligious, strange, and vain? And that Christianity is a thing of nought, vain, foolish, and plainly impious? Here again, therefore, while you wish by all means to deter us from foolhardiness, running, as fools always do, directly into the contrary, you teach nothing but the greatest negligence, impiety, and eternal damnation. Do you not see, then, that in this part, your book is so impious, blasphemous, and sacrilegious, that its like is not anywhere to be found.

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I do not, as I have observed before, speak of your heart; nor can I think that you are so lost, that from your heart, you wish these things to be taught and practiced. But I would show you what enormities that man must be compelled unknowingly to initiate, who undertakes to support a bad cause. And moreover, what it is to run against divine things and truths, when, in mere compliance with others and against our own conscience, we assume a strange character and act upon a strange stage. It is neither a game nor a jest, to undertake to teach the sacred truths and godliness: for it is very easy here to meet with that downfall which James speaks of, "he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all." (James 2:10.) For when we begin to be, in the least degree, disposed to trifle, and not to hold the sacred truths in due reverence, we are soon involved in impieties, and overwhelmed with blasphemies: as it has happened to you here, Erasmus—May the Lord pardon, and have mercy upon you!

That the Sophists (with their deceptive teachings) have given birth to such numbers of reasoning questions upon these subjects, and have intermingled with them many unprofitable things, many of which you mention, I know and confess, as well as you: and I have railed against them much more than you have. But you act with imprudence and rashness, when you liken the purity of the sacred truths unto the profane and foolish questions of the impious, and mingle and confound it with them. "They have defiled the gold with manure, and changed the good color," (Lam. 4:1., as Jeremiah says.) But the gold is not to be compared unto, and cast away with the manure; as you do it. The gold must be grabbed from them, and the pure Scripture separated from their dregs and filth; which it has ever been my aim to do, that the divine truths may be looked upon in one light, and the trifles of these men in another. But it ought not to be considered of any service to us, that nothing has been effected by these questions, but their causing us to favor them less with the whole current of our approval, if, nevertheless, we still desire to be wiser than we ought. The question with us is not how much the Sophists have effected by their reasonings, but how we may become good men, and Christians. Nor ought you to impute it to the Christian doctrine that the irreligious do evil. That is nothing to the purpose: you may speak of that somewhere else, and spare your paper here.

UNDER your third head, you attempt to make us some of those very

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modest and quiet Epicureans [*those humanistic materialists who believe and teach that this world as we experience it with our senses, is all that there is or ever will be, and that pleasure with the complete absence of pain is the highest good for mankind*]. With a different kind of advice indeed, but no better than that, with which the two forementioned particulars are brought forward:—"Some things (you say) are of that nature, that, although they are true in themselves, and might be known, yet it would not be prudent to prostitute them to the ears of every one."

Here again, according to your custom, you mingle and confound everything, to bring the sacred things down to a level with the earthly, without making any distinction whatever: again falling into the contempt of, and doing an injury to God. As I have said before, those things which are either found in the sacred Writings, or may be proved by them, are not only plain, but wholesome; and therefore may be, nay, ought to be, spread abroad, learned, and known. So that your saying, that they ought not to be poured into the ears of every common person, is false: if, that is, you speak of those things which are in the Scripture: but if you speak of any other things, they are nothing to me, and nothing to the purpose: you lose time and paper in saying anything about them.

Moreover, you know that I agree not with the Sophists in any thing: you may therefore spare me, and not bring me in at all as connected with their abuse of the truth. You had, in this book of yours, to speak against me. I know where the Sophists are wrong, nor do I want you for my instructor, and they have been sufficiently complained loudly against by me: this, therefore, I wish to be observed once for all, whenever you shall group me with the Sophists, and disparage my side of the subject by their madness. For you do me an injury; and that you know very well.

Now let us see your reasons for giving this advice—"you think, that, although it may be true, that God, from His nature, is in a beetle's hole, or even in a cesspool, (which you have too much holy reverence to say yourself, and blame the Sophists for talking in such a way) no less than in Heaven, yet it would be unreasonable to discuss such a subject before the multitude."

First of all, let them talk thus, who can talk thus. We do not here argue concerning what are facts in men, but concerning justice and law:

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not that we may live, but that we may live as we ought. Who among us lives and acts rightly? But justice and the doctrine of Law are not therefore condemned: but rather they condemn us. You pull in from afar these irrelevant things, and scrape together many such from all quarters, because you cannot get over this one point, the foreknowledge of God: and since you cannot overthrow it in any way, you want, in the mean time, to tire out the reader with a multiplicity of empty observations. But of this, no more. Let us return to the point.

What then is your intention, in observing that there are some things which ought not to be spoken of openly? Do you mean to enumerate the subject of "Freewill" among those things? If you do, the whole that I have just said concerning the necessity of knowing what "Freewill" is, will turn against you. Moreover, if so, why do you not keep to your own principles, and have nothing to do with your Diatribe? But, if you do well in discussing "Freewill," why do you speak against such discussion? and if it is a bad subject, why do you make it worse? But if you do not enumerate it among those things, then, you leave your subject; and like an orator of words only, talk about those irrelevant things that have nothing to do with the subject at hand.

NOR are you right in the use of this example; nor in condemning the discussion of this subject before the multitude, as useless—that God is in a beetle's hole and even in a cesspool! For your thoughts concerning God are too human. I confess indeed, that there are certain delusive preachers, who, not from any religion, or fear of God, but from a desire of vainglory, or from a thirst after some novelty, or from impatience of silence, babble and trifle in the lightest manner. But such please neither God nor men, although they assert that God is in the Heaven of Heavens. But when there are sober and pious preachers, who teach in modest, pure, and sound words; they, without any danger, nay, unto much profit, speak on such a subject before the multitude.

Is it not the duty of us all to teach, that the Son of God was in the womb of the Virgin, and proceeded forth from her belly? And in what does the human womb differ from any other unclean place? Who, moreover, may not describe it in unpleasant and shameless terms? But such persons we justly condemn; because, there are countless pure words, in which we speak of that necessary subject, even with decency and

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grace. The body also of Christ Himself was human, like ours. What is more filthy than a mortal human body? But shall we, therefore, not say what Paul says, that God dwelt in it bodily? (Col. 2:9.) What is more unclean than death? What more horrible than hell? Yet the prophet glories that God was with Christ in death, and left Him not in hell. (Ps. 16:10, Ps. 139:8.)

The pious mind, therefore, is not shocked at hearing that God was in death and in hell: each of which is more horrible, and more loathsome, than either a hole or a cesspool. Nay, since the Scripture testifies that God is everywhere, and fills all things, such a mind, not only says that He is in those places, but will, of necessity learn and know that He is there. Unless we are to suppose that if I should at any time be taken and cast into a prison or a cesspool, (which has happened to many saints,) I could not there call upon God, or believe that He was present with me, until I should come into some ornamented church. If you teach us that we are thus to trifle concerning God, and if you are thus offended at the places of His essential presence, by and by you will not even allow that He dwells with us in Heaven. Whereas, "the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain Him," (1 Kings 8:27.) or, they are not worthy. But, as I said before, you, according to your custom, thus maliciously point your sting at our cause, that you may disparage and render it hateful, because you find it stands against you insuperable, and invincible.

IN the example concerning confession and satisfaction, it is wonderful to observe with what dexterous prudence you proceed. Throughout the whole, according to your custom, you move along on the tiptoe of caution, lest you should seem, neither plainly to condemn my sentiments nor to oppose the tyranny of the Popes: a path which you found to be by no means safe. Therefore, throwing off, in this matter, both God and conscience, (for what are these things to Erasmus? What has he to do with them? What profit are they to him?) you rush upon the external bogeyman, and attack the common people.

—'That they, from their depravity, abuse the preaching of a free confession and of satisfaction, to an occasion of the flesh. But, nevertheless, (you say) by the necessity of confessing, they are, in a measure, restrained.'

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O memorable and excellent speech! Is this teaching theology? To bind souls by laws, and, (as Ezekiel says, 13:18,) to hunt them to death, which are not bound by God! Why, by this speech you bring upon us the universal tyranny of the laws of the Popes, as useful and wholesome; because, that by them also the depravity of the common people is restrained.

But I will not rail against this place as it deserves. I will elaborate upon it thus briefly— A good theologian teaches that the common people are to be restrained by the external power of the sword, where they do evil: as Paul teaches. (Rom. 13:1-4.) But their consciences are not to be shackled by false laws, that they might be tormented with sins where God wills there should be no sins at all. For consciences are bound by the Law of God only. So that, that intermediate tyranny of Popes, which falsely terrifies and murders the people's spirits, and vainly wearies their bodies, is to be taken entirely out of the way. Because, although it binds to confession and other things, outwardly, yet the mind is not, by these things restrained, but exasperated the more into the hatred both of God and men. And in vain does it butcher the body by external things, making nothing but hypocrites.—So that tyrants, with laws of this kind, are nothing else but ravening wolves, robbers, and plunderers of souls. And yet you, an excellent counselor of souls, recommend these to us again: that is, you are an advocate for these most barbarous soul-murderers, who fill the world with hypocrites, and with such as blaspheme God and hate Him in their hearts, in order that they may restrain them a little from outward sin. As though there were no other way of restraining, which makes no hypocrites, and is wrought without any destroying of consciences.

HERE you produce parables (in which you aim at appearing to abound, and to use very appropriately); that is,—'that there are diseases, which may be borne with less evil than they can be cured: as the leprosy, etcetera.' You add, moreover, the example of Paul, who makes a distinction between those things that are lawful, and those that are not expedient. "It is lawful (you say) to speak the truth; but, before every one, at all times, and in every way, it is not expedient."—

How copious an orator! And yet you understand nothing of what you are saying. In a word, you treat this discussion, as though it were some

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matter between you and me only, about the recovering of some money that was at stake, or some other trivial thing, the loss of which, as being of much less consideration than the general peace of the community, ought not so to concern anyone, but that he may yield, act and bear with the situation, in any way that may prevent the whole world from being thrown into a tumult. Wherein, you plainly show, that this peace and tranquility of the flesh, are, with you, a matter of far greater consideration than faith, than conscience, than salvation, than the Word of God, than the glory of Christ, than God Himself! Wherefore, let me tell you this; and I entreat you to let it sink deep into your mind— I am, in this discussion, seeking an object solemn and essential; nay, such, and so great, that it ought to be maintained and defended through death itself; and that, although the whole world should not only be thrown into tumult and set in arms thereby, but even if it should be hurled into chaos and reduced to nothing.—If you cannot receive this, or if you are not affected by it, then mind your own business, and allow us to receive it and to be affected by it, to whom it is given of God.

For, by the grace of God, I am not so great a fool or madman, as to have desired to prolong and defend this cause so long, with so much fortitude and so much firmness, (which you call obstinacy) in the face of so many dangers of my life, so much hatred, so many traps laid for me; in a word, in the face of the fury of men and devils—I have not done this for money, for that I neither have nor desire; nor for vainglory, for that, if I wished, I could not obtain in a world so enraged against me, nor for the life for my body, for that cannot be made sure of for an hour.—Do you think, then, that you only have a heart that is moved by these tumults? Yet, I am not made of stone, nor was I born from the Marpesian rocks²⁴. But since it cannot be otherwise, I choose rather to be battered in temporal tumult, happy in the grace of God, for God's Word's sake, which is to be maintained with a mind incorrupt and invincible, than to be ground to powder in eternal tumult, under the wrath of God and torments unspeakable! May Christ grant, what I desire and hope, that your heart may not be such—but certainly your words imply, that, with Epicurus¹³, you consider the Word of God and a future life, to be mere fables. For, in your instructions, you would have us, for the sake of the Popes, the leaders, and the peace of the community, to put off, upon an

occasion, and depart from the infallible Word of God: whereas, if we put off the infallible Word of God, we put off God, faith, salvation and all Christianity together. How far different from this is the instruction of Christ: that, we should rather despise the whole world!

BUT you say these things, because you either do not read or do not observe, that such is most constantly the case with the Word of God, that because of it, the world is thrown into tumult. And that Christ openly declares: "I came not (says He) to send peace but a sword." (Matt. 10:34.) And in Luke, "I came to send fire upon the earth." (Luke 12:49.) And Paul, (2 Cor. 6:5,) "In tumults," . . . And the Prophet, in the Second Psalm, abundantly testifies the same: declaring, that the nations are in tumult, the people roaring, the kings rising up, and the princes conspiring against the Lord and against His Christ. As though He had said, multitude, height, wealth, power, wisdom, righteousness, and whatever is great in the world, sets itself against the Word of God.

Look into the Acts of the Apostles, and see what happened in the world on account of the word of Paul only (to say nothing of the other apostles): how he alone throws both the Gentiles and Jews into uproar: or, as the enemies themselves express it, "turns the world upside down." (Acts 17:6.) Under Elijah, the kingdom of Israel was thrown into turmoil: as king Ahab complains. (1 Kings 18:17.) What tumult was there under the other prophets, while they are all either killed at once or stoned to death; while Israel is taken captive into Assyria, and Judah also to Babylon! Was all this peace? The world and its god (2 Cor. 4:4,) cannot and will not bear the Word of the true God: and the true God cannot and will not keep silence. While, therefore, these two Gods are at war with each other, what can there be else in the whole world, but tumult?

Therefore, to wish to silence these tumults, is nothing else, than to wish to hinder the Word of God, and to take it out of the way. For the Word of God, wherever it comes, comes to change and to renew the world. And even heathen writers testify, that changes of things cannot take place, without commotion and tumult, nor even without blood. It therefore belongs to Christians, to expect and endure these things, with a resolute mind: as Christ says, "When ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be not dismayed, for these things must first come to pass, but the end is not yet." (Matt. 24:6.) And as to myself, if I did not see these