

Luther on Human Will

A thoughtful and precise abridgment
of the full text of
The Bondage of the Will by Martin Luther
based upon the 1823 translation from the Latin
by Henry Cole
as edited by
Leon C. Stansfield

with

*Ninety-Five Theses for the
21st Century Church*

by

Leon C. Stansfield, M.Ed., M.Div.

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This book is the result of numerous careful editorial processes aimed toward the goal of producing a succinct ***abridgement*** of Martin Luther's ***The Bondage of the Will***. A complete copy of the manuscript of Henry Cole's 1823 public domain translation from the Latin was obtained and meticulously edited. It is being published in its entirety under the title ***The Bondage of the Will***, by Martin Luther, as translated in 1823 by Henry Cole, and edited for the twenty-first century reader by Leon Stansfield. To produce this present abridged volume, significant sections of the edited version of ***Bondage*** have been excerpted to form the main body of this present work. Completely new chapter divisions have been created. The entire edited text in this book including the new additions designed to enhance the total reading experience, are copyrighted.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the greater spiritual health and maturity of the body of Jesus Christ — His church in the world, consisting of every believer in Jesus Christ — all those whom He has called, and who have believed to the saving of the soul.



Druck v J Hesse in Berlin

D.^r Martin Luther

Martin Luther by Hesse

Foreword

On the evening of October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his famous *Ninety-Five Theses* to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany, sparking the Reformation. History was dramatically and significantly changed as the result of the life of Martin Luther. As we approach the five hundredth anniversary of that world-changing event perhaps history will be changed again — one life at a time — as the result of his writings.



Luther nails his Ninety-Five Theses to the Wittenberg Church door

As a young believer, I connected Martin Luther with the Biblical idea that “the just shall live by faith.” I learned that I owed to Martin Luther and to Protestantism the restoration to the church of the concept that the basis for salvation is *by faith alone*, without works. But that is all I

knew, and Martin Luther seemed to have lived so long ago.

In the course of time I obtained a copy of Martin Luther’s greatest work *The Bondage of the Will*, as translated from the original Latin into English by J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston. This book is Luther’s considered, plainspoken and blunt reply to Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam who wrote, also in Latin, *The Diatribe*. In the *Diatribe* Erasmus discussed various aspects of Christian doctrine, and focused somewhat upon the important matter of *the will of man*. **His position was that man’s will played an insignificant but decisive part in man’s regeneration.** In *Bondage* Luther took Erasmus to task on this point, and showed how that Erasmus was, in essence, repeating the Pelagian heresy in a subtle, but extreme form. Luther’s *Bondage* pointed out a number of serious contradictions within Erasmus’ *Diatribe*. It also made numerous major Biblical points regarding the roles which man’s will, God’s will, and God’s grace have in the super-

natural event of being born again by the Spirit of God. Having read this book several times, the author was impressed to read the book again and to mark *each assertion of Luther, each thesis statement*. He was surprised to count approximately *four hundred fifty such statements* after completing the task. This present book is designed to make accessible to a much wider audience *the essence* of Luther's great work:

1. present most of Luther's four-hundred fifty thesis statements
2. simplify Luther's theology as contained in *The Bondage of the Will*
3. omit extraneous discussion contained in *Bondage*
4. present *Ninety-Five Theses For The 21st Century Church*

This work is intended for the serious Christian reader, the Sunday school teacher, the Bible teacher, the pastor, the missionary, the minister of God. Just as in times past and present a great effort was (and is being) made by Martin Luther and a host of others to make the Holy Scriptures accessible to the average reader in his "heart language", so this work is an endeavor to make the great biblical truths restored to the church by Luther accessible to the average reader of the twenty-first century.

A key theological tenet rebirthed in the church during the Reformation — the distinction between *monergism* and *synergism* — has largely been lost over the past five centuries and the church as a whole has drifted far from this essential doctrinal truth. Having spent most of my life in churches which strongly hold to the synergistic position, I credit Martin Luther and God's Holy Spirit for opening up to me the truth which Luther so valiantly defends in his book. **Monergism**, as defined and explained by Martin Luther — although you will not see this word used in the entire text of his work — is the biblical doctrine that God, and God alone, is the source, the determiner, the power, and the author of a person's spiritual birth, while **synergism**, which is widely taught and preached in the evangelical churches, holds to the idea that, while God's grace is absolutely essential for salvation, and that a person's good works merit absolutely nothing toward salvation, in the final analysis it is *the individual person's choice* to become a Christian

and to be born again, or to reject God's grace and be lost. Thus, in this belief man's will must work synergistically with God's will to bring about the new birth. Unavoidably, man's will is actually made superior to God's will. Eternal salvation becomes something which God offers to all mankind and which may be accepted or rejected. God is seen as One who never overrules a person's free will to choose. This view of God is perhaps the ultimate error of humanism, which is and has been the dominant worldview of our age. It is in reality an enormous distortion of the biblical doctrine of God, and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The careful and serious student of the Bible will, by God's help, learn the distinction between these two doctrines and discover the great fallacy of the synergistic position. The careful biblical exegesis of Luther on this point needs to be known, discussed, taught, and used as a basis for all evangelism and Bible teaching in the church, Christian schools, home schools, Christian colleges, and seminaries. The implications for the tenets of faith held by all believers as discussed herein should influence all teaching and preaching of the gospel from the very youngest child to the eldest senior adult.

This present work will serve as the basis for gaining a clear understanding of Luther's biblical teaching on the topics of man's will, God's sovereign will, God's inscrutable will, the source of saving faith, and the grace of God in the salvation experience. The serious reader may confirm the many theses of this book, as well as the accuracy of this abridgement, by obtaining a complete copy of *The Bondage of the Will* in any edition and reading it for himself.

May God Himself bless the reader with a knowledge of His truth.

To God be all the glory!

Leon Stansfield
Stockton, CA
October 31, 2012

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Luther standing - 1817

Who Was Martin Luther?

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Thuringia, Germany, on November 10, 1483 to Hans and Margaret Luther. He was baptized the day after his birth on the feast of St. Martin of Tours, a sainted Roman soldier, from whom his name was taken. His parents were poor, his father being a laborer in the copper mines. They moved to Mansfield during Martin's first year. Later his father became a community leader, elected to the city council there. His father prospered and by 1511 was owner in a number of mines and foundries.

Luther's childhood was one of serious piety and rigorous discipline. At age five Martin enrolled at the local Latin day school. At age thirteen he was sent to Magdeburg to a school conducted by the Brethren of the Common Life. At age fourteen he transferred to a school at Eisenach, where he had relatives. At age eighteen he began studies at the University of Erfurt. At age nineteen he received his baccalaureate (B.A.) and immediately began

studies toward the masters degree. At age twenty-one he passed the exams (M.A.) after the shortest possible period of study, being second in his class. Very soon he began the study of Law, a decision probably influenced by his father.

A number of God-ordained factors interrupted his legal studies and culminated in Luther's call to the ministry: Strict religious upbringing, a natural bent toward piety, recent experiences at the university, a severe self-inflicted accidental wound to the artery in his thigh



Luther in discussion with scholars

at age nineteen, and the several weeks of recuperation and meditation, the sudden death of a close friend, the plague which struck Erfurt --- all of these made Luther keenly aware of the preeminence of death. One additional

“natural” calamity during Luther’s twenty-second year produced the immediate flash point for Luther’s decision to dedicate himself to the priesthood.

In July 1505 while returning to Erfurt from a visit to his parents at Mansfield, “he encountered a severe thunderstorm near the village of Stotternheim. As a lightning bolt threw him to the ground, he vowed to St. Anne in a sudden panic that he would become a monk.”¹

He later wrote: “not freely or desirously did I become a monk, but walled

around with the terror and agony of sudden death, I vowed a constrained and necessary vow.”² Luther entered the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt on July 17, 1505, one of over two thousand such chapters.

Ordained a priest April, 1507, at age twenty-three, Luther conducted his first mass in early May, 1507, attended by his father and some friends. He soon became the chair of moral philosophy in the arts faculty while continuing his studies at the University of Wittenberg. Late during the year of 1510 at age twenty-seven, Luther was selected to accompany Johann von Staupitz, vicar-general of the Saxon congregation of the Augustinians, to Rome, where he apparently spent a month visiting shrines and churches, and observing the very center of life of the Roman Catholic Church. He later wrote that he had encountered a horde of unlettered clergy whose “priests



Luther ordained

said Mass in such an irreverent fashion that it reminded him of a juggling act.”³ Luther’s “earnestness was shocked by the levity of the Roman clergy and by the worldliness so evident in high places.”⁴

With much encouragement from Staupitz, Luther completed the Doctor of Theology October 19, 1512 (shortly before his twenty-ninth birthday) and became a professor of biblical theology. “This was his lifelong calling, and the exposition of the Bible to his students was a task that called forth his best gifts and energies, one that he sustained until ill health and old age made him relinquish at the end of his life.

In between lectures, in a manner of speaking, he began the Protestant Reformation.”⁵



Luther preaching at Wittenberg

Soon Luther succeeded Staupitz in the chair of Biblical Theology. God, however, had been at work in Luther’s spirit, s o u l , a n d conscience. Luther bore a crippling burden of guilt. He later wrote “For h o w e v e r irreproachably I lived as a monk, I felt myself in the presence of God to be a sinner with a most u n q u i e t conscience... I did

not love, indeed I hated this just God...”⁶ “He was increasingly conscious

of the power of sin, and repeated confession brought him no peace... There were times when he felt on the brink of hell and the verge of despair. He tells us that while contemplating the righteousness of God in the monastery tower, probably in 1512 [age twenty-eight], a new concept, a new illumination came to him, and ‘the gates of paradise were opened.’”⁷

“At last I began to understand the justice of God as that by which the just man lives by the gift of God...”⁸ “For justification, no longer an objective transformation, is produced by the word of God, the Gospel. It is in, with, and through the Gospel that God works upon the soul through His Spirit. The soul remains passive and receptive like a woman in the act of conception. Thus Luther made an extremely personal experience the center of a new theology of salvation that was no longer in harmony with the one traditionally taught by the Church.”⁹ It was a divinely orchestrated series of events which caused Luther’s spiritual struggles to spread far beyond the confines of his life and classroom and to change the course of history.

In 1514 Luther began as pastor in a local parish church. A year later he became district vicar over eleven other houses. In early 1517 Luther penned a series of theses against the Scholastic theologians, which he offered to defend at other universities, but had no takers. All of this prepared him for his best-known writing — *The Ninety-Five Theses* — written later in that same year.

The immediate catalysts which moved Luther to action were the St. Peter’s Indulgence sale throughout Germany under the principal agent, Dominican Johann Tetzel, and the absolutely unbiblical teachings regarding pardon for sins through the giving of funds to the church as well as numerous other associated undeniable doctrinal errors. As Luther wrote *The Ninety-Five Theses* he was reacting to the indulgences, but chose to go far beyond their immediate concern and to put in writing some of his developing convictions regarding the essentials of the true Christian life and experience. He posted the Theses on the door of the Wittenberg church intending to hold a debate on the value of indulgences. It was the recent invention of the printing press (c. 1450) and a wide circulation of the *Theses* which turned Luther’s writing from what might have been a local church

squabble into an ever-widening public and national controversy.

Karlstadt responded with four hundred five theses. Luther published a bold sermon on the power of excommunication questioning the pope's seemingly unlimited power. Luther was summoned to Rome to defend himself. Luther met with Cardinal Cajetan, to whom he apologized for certain attitudes and actions, but did not recant. In 1520, at age thirty-seven, Luther wrote a series of pamphlets, *An Appeal to the Nobility of the German Nation*, *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *Liberty of the Christian Man*. In January, 1521, the pope issued Luther's formal excommunication from the church and banned his writings.

Shortly thereafter Luther was secretly taken to Wartburg Castle where he spent a year in hiding. While there he produced a number of important writings, the chief of which was the beginning of his translation of the Holy Scriptures from the original Greek and Hebrew into the German vernacular which eventually had a deep and lasting influence on the language, life, and religion of Germany.



Desiderius Erasmus

In September, 1524, after much pressure from various sources, Desiderius Erasmus, a former Augustinian monk, and great liberal humanist, published his *Diatribes* (Discussion) *Concerning Free Will*, which was essentially an attack upon Luther's central doctrine regarding the Gospel of Salvation. In December, 1525, at age forty-two, Luther published his lengthy (four times as voluminous as Erasmus) response in his *Bondage of the Will*.

In June of the same year, probably while working on *Bondage*, Luther married Katherina von Bora, a former nun. She bore him six children, four of whom survived their parents. Martin and Katherina also raised eleven orphans.

During his most influential years, Luther endeavored with all his strength to deal appropriately with Catholic church error, the radical and fanatical reformists, and the peasants who, during several periods, arose against their overlords. He was consistently against radicalism and violence as a means of reform, but rather insisted that the only true reform agent must be the Word of God. He taught one's duty of civil obedience and the sinfulness of rebellion against lawful authority.



Katherina von Bora

Fittingly, perhaps, Luther died as a result of applying his godly wisdom, and his zeal for peace through biblical conciliation. Early in 1546, at age sixty-two, he was asked to mediate a quarrel between two arrogant young princes, Counts Albrecht and Gebhard of Mansfield. Old and ill, he accomplished the mission but overtaxed his strength and in a few hours died in Eisleben, the town of his birth on February 18, 1546. His body was interred in the Church of All Saints, Wittenberg.

During his lifetime Luther produced 400 works (100 volumes).

INTRODUCTION

A great many things about what is called “Evangelical Christianity” have changed in the five hundred years since Luther wrote. Instead of a few branches in the tree called Christianity, we now have hundreds. Each of these is not without significance to certain groups of followers. Each has chosen, for its own reasons, to emphasize certain aspects of what it holds to be *Christian truth*. Some branches seem to major in major doctrinal points, while others seem to emphasize minor points. Each defines in its own way, more or less, what the “ideal” or “perfect” Christian life should look like.

What is a Christian? What is a believer? What is a true believer? Are you a believer? Is your name written in the Lamb’s Book of Life? Do you have the absolute assurance that when you pass from this life you will enter heaven to spend eternity with Jesus Christ and with all those of all the ages who have loved him and served him?

How did you become a Christian? Was it through baptism? Was it a result of a decision you once made in response to the preaching of the gospel? Was it an emotional thing? Was it at a Billy Graham meeting, or even perhaps at a “Christian Rock Concert?” Was your conversion a sudden thing, or did it occur over a period of days, or weeks? Can you point to a specific time when you became a believer in Jesus?

This book will seek to clarify for every person who has named the name of Christ, some basic truths about salvation which one cannot ignore as one seeks to make his “calling and election sure.” (2 Peter 1:10)

I think the reader will agree that ultimately we come to God on *His terms*, not ours. It is my strong belief that many who have begun the Christian walk have done so with very little understanding of what “being saved” means from God’s perspective. This book will help the believer to

clarify that aspect of salvation. It will also help the believer to more fully understand the biblical truth that his own will and his own decision were not the key factors in his becoming a true believer. Let me begin with a simple anecdote which illustrates a great Biblical truth:

Do you know the current President of the United States of America? You will probably answer “Yes.” But now answer this question: “Does the current President of the United States of America know you?” Very few readers would be able to answer “Yes” to this question. In the same line of thought, if I were to ask you:

“Do you know Jesus Christ?” I expect that you would answer “Yes.” But if I ask you, “Does Jesus Christ know you?” what would your answer be? This is the crucial question of determining if you are truly born again, saved, and in a right relationship with God. You must *know* that *he* knows you.

Jesus made this very plain when he said:

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, **I never knew you:** depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21-23 KJV)

Do you have the inner assurance that Jesus Christ knows you in a saving relationship? It is my goal that as a result of reading this book and coming to understand the great truths which Martin Luther wrote in what he considered his greatest work, *The Bondage of the Will*, you will come to understand in some wonderful new ways just how great is the salvation which Jesus Christ has purchased with his own blood.

Another way to look at the question is this: *Are you saved by an act of your will, or by an act of God's will?* In the author's experience most believers during the early part of their Christian life have a strong belief that it was their own doing, an act of their own will which caused them to become a believer. However, the Scriptures are very clear on this point. No one is saved by an act of his own will. All are saved by an act of God's will. In fact, there are two points at which God's will is active in your salvation: (1) God willed your salvation before the worlds were created (refs: Rev. 13:8; 17:8; Eph 1:4; 2 Thess 2:18), and (2) it was an act of God's will *in time* which caused your new birth (refs: John 3:8; Eph 1:11; Jas 1:18). In addition, God's will is evidenced by the fact that you are *chosen* (John 15:16,19; Eph 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13) and *elect* (Matt 24:24, 31; Mk 13:22,27; Rom 8:28-39; 1 Pet 1:1-5).

The primary focus of Martin Luther's writing in *The Bondage of the Will* is to answer the question: "*Does man have free will?*" The ultimate answer to the question comes down to this: Whose will is sovereign — God's or man's? If God wills a thing (such as a person's salvation) can that person thwart God's sovereign will? The logical and obvious answer is "No, no created being may thwart the will of the Creator."

In essence, an overview of what God has willed in His creation is that (1) the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be preached to every creature, (2) those whom God has chosen will believe, (3) those who believe are given, by God, the gifts of faith and grace by which they are empowered to believe. Without these gifts, because all men are dead in trespasses and sins, no man could ever believe. The Scriptures make very clear that God's way of salvation is *all* due to God's grace, and *not one whit* due to man's will or man's goodness — that no flesh should glory in His sight.

May this book clarify some very important basic biblical truths for you. May this book build you up in the faith. May this book assist you to come to a new understanding of the Holy Scriptures, as you read them and study them in the days and years to come — until He comes.

Martin Luther called them, as translated from the Latin, *assertions*. I choose to call them *theses*, because they follow the pattern of his *Ninety-Five Theses*. They are statements of what Martin Luther believed as a Christian—and what he strongly asserts that every Christian should believe. As the reader will soon see, Martin Luther took the time to define what he meant by assertions, so the reader will have no doubt about what he meant.

Another good word would be *convictions*. We live in a time when living lives based upon Biblical convictions has never been more sorely needed. May your reading and understanding of Martin Luther’s assertions and the commentary contained herein bring blessing and honor to our Lord Jesus Christ as He works mightily in your life through this study.

Please note: All **bold-face** type is taken from the text of the complete book, and endnoted. **Numbered Endnotes** reference from where, in the original translated and edited 1823 Henry Cole text, the numbered section is taken. No actual accounting is made of the “450 Theses” originally counted by the current author/editor. All editing has been done to improve the clarity of Martin Luther’s intent. **Footnotes** are used sparingly, and are indicated with a superscripted numeral (¹) in the text. **Passages of the text which are double indented and more closely line-spaced are so formatted to add emphasis.** Chapter headings in boxes with brief summaries of the chapter have been added. Whenever the second person “you” or “your” is found in the text it is understood to refer to Erasmus, to whom the entire work was addressed. Let us here proceed to Martin Luther’s four hundred fifty theses, convictions, or assertions.

CHAPTER 1:
ASSERTIONS, CONVICTIONS, THESES

Martin Luther begins the discussion by defining the importance of a Christian believer holding certain assertions or convictions regarding his faith, and of the importance of the believer speaking out and defending such assertions, which is the primary reason for his writing the present work.

1. 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.¹⁰

2. 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.¹¹

3. 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.¹²

4. 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.¹³

5. 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 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? ¹⁴

6. 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. ¹⁵

7. 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.¹⁶

8. 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, 16.¹⁷

9. 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 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.¹⁸

10. We owe much to you [Erasmus], 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.¹⁹

11. 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.²⁰

12. 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 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. ²¹

13. The 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 Boetius 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. . . ." ²²

14. 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?"²³

15. 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 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.)²⁴

16. 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.²⁵

17. 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. ²⁶

18. 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 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). ²⁷

19. 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. ²⁸

20. 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. ²⁹

21. 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 rumors 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 tumults, I should say the Word of God was not in the world. But now, when I do see them, I rejoice from my heart, and fear them not: being surely persuaded, that the kingdom of the Pope, with all his followers, will fall to the ground: for it is especially against this, that the Word of God, which now runs, is directed. ³⁰

22. This tumult proceeds, and is carried on, from above, and will not cease until it shall make all the adversaries of the Word as the dirt of the streets. ³¹

23. These things, I say, as they are temporal, are borne with less evil than chronic and evil habits; by which all souls must be destroyed if they are not changed by the Word of God: which being taken away, eternal good, God, Christ, and the Spirit, must be taken away with it.

But how much better is it to lose the whole world, than to lose God the Creator of the world, who can create innumerable worlds again, and is better than infinite worlds? For what are temporal things when compared with eternal? This leprosy of temporal things, therefore, is rather to be borne, than that every soul should be destroyed and eternally damned, and the world kept in peace, and preserved from these tumults, by their blood and eternal damnation: whereas, one soul cannot be redeemed with the price of the whole world! ³²

24. But I, by the grace of God, see these things clearly; because, I see other tumults greater than these that will arise in the age to come in comparison of which, these appear but as the whispering of a breath of air, or the murmuring of a gentle brook. ³³

25. But we know, and are persuaded, that there is a Word of God, in which the Christian liberty is asserted, that we might not allow ourselves to be ensnared into bondage by human traditions and laws. ³⁴

26. The prince of this world will not allow the Pope and his high priests, and their laws to be observed in liberty, but his design is to entangle and bind consciences. This the true God will not bear. Therefore, the Word of God, and the traditions of men, are opposed to each other with implacable discord; no less so, than God Himself and Satan; who each destroy the works and overthrow the doctrines of the other, as regal kings each destroying the kingdom of the other. "He that is not with Me (says Christ) is against Me." (Luke 11:23.) ³⁵

27. Was not the world always drowned in war, fraud, violence, discord, and every kind of iniquity? For if Micah (7:4) compares the best among them to a thorn hedge, what do you suppose he would call the rest? But now that the Gospel is come, men begin to impute unto it, that the world is evil. Whereas, the truth is, that by the good Gospel, it is more mani-

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- ¹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Prepared by an editorial staff at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. New York, McGraw-Hill, © 1967, 15 volumes, Volume 8, p. 1086.
- ² *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Macropedia, Knowledge in Depth, volume 23, University of Chicago, Fifteenth Edition, © 1985, p. 364.
- ³ 1, 1086
- ⁴ 2, 365
- ⁵ 2, 365, bold italics by current author.
- ⁶ 2, 365
- ⁷ 1, 1086-7
- ⁸ 2, 366
- ⁹ 1, 1087
- ¹⁰ MARTIN LUTHER on *THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL*, A Translation of *De Servo Arbitrio* (1525), Martin Luther's Reply To Erasmus of Rotterdam, translated by Henry Cole in 1823, public domain, The 500th Anniversary Edition (1517-2017) edited by Leon Stansfield, LEARNING LINKS PUBLISHERS, page 5.
- ¹¹ Op. Cit. Page 6.
- ¹² Op. Cit. Page 7.
- ¹³ Op. Cit. Page 9.
- ¹⁴ Op. Cit. Pages 9-10.
- ¹⁵ Op. Cit. Page 10.
- ¹⁶ Op. Cit. Page 11.
- ¹⁷ Op. Cit. Page 11.
- ¹⁸ Op. Cit. Pages 16-17.
- ¹⁹ Op. Cit. Page 17.
- ²⁰ Op. Cit. Page 19.
- ²¹ Op. Cit. Pages 19-20.
- ²² Op. Cit. Page 20.
- ²³ Op. Cit. Page 21.
- ²⁴ Op. Cit. Pages 22-23.
- ²⁵ Op. Cit. Page 23.

