

Decision Theology in the Light of Scripture

By Daniel S. Drews

[Presented to the Pastor-Teacher-Delegate Conference, South Central District, Gethsemane Ev. Luth. Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, January 26, 1989]

"But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. Whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Joshua 24:15)." So Joshua enjoined the Israelites after they had witnessed mighty deed upon mighty deed as the LORD delivered the land of Canaan into their hands. Joshua's message was clear: Israel, you have been blessed by the LORD's grace, protection, and providence. It will be to your eternal shame to turn aside from Him to worship worthless, powerless idols.

"How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him." Not only had the northern kingdom been guilty of religious syncretism (combining aspects from differing religions into one) since the introduction of the golden calves by Jeroboam I (I Kings 12:28-30); now the intermarriage of King Ahab to the Phoenician Jezebel had introduced the pagan fertility cult of Baal and Ashteroth to Israel. The courageous prophet Elijah spoke for the LORD at Mt. Carmel, where the LORD would consume a sacrifice in answer to Elijah's prayer, leaving Baal's prophets looking foolish, run out of town on a rail, and slaughtered. Elijah's message? Those who worship the LORD must worship Him alone; any syncretism in which man or idol is worshiped, even alongside the Triune God, detracts from God's glory. He will not tolerate it.

"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)." The Israelites had life. They had enjoyed blessing. Moses' encouragement was not to incite people outside the grace at God to become "LORD-worshippers." It was to incite people who knew by experience what the LORD had done to continue serving Him alone.

Life is full of choices. Decisions must be made. Some are mundane: shall I eat chicken-fried steak or tacos? Shall I wear my black suit or my gray one? Some are ethical: Shall I help the disabled motorist or pass by because it might be a mugger? Should I bail my son out of trouble or would it be better to show "tough love" and make him suffer the consequences for his actions? But the focus at this study is one decision in particular, and man's spiritual ability to make that decision—the "decision" to become a believer in Jesus Christ for salvation. The thesis set forth in this paper with the support of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions is that if a man is saved, i.e. by believing in Jesus for salvation, it is entirely the act of God's grace, and any body of theology that purposes to teach that natural man can decide for Christ denies the *sola gratia* and must be viewed with extreme caution in the many areas such "decision theology" appears.

HOW TO BE BORN AGAIN

The title of Billy Graham's book belies its underlying premise that if a person outside the Christian faith wants to become a Christian, he need simply follow the steps prescribed in this book, sketched in the many pamphlets available at Christian book stores, or proclaimed in "Decision" magazine and in stadium-filling crusades. Jerry Falwell, former leader of the Moral Majority and popular fundamentalist pastor, relates how widespread the influence of Graham's theology has been:

Better than one-third of the adult population have had a life-changing religious experience. For 50 million people, this experience involved Jesus Christ, and for 39.5 million people this was a conversion that included asking Christ to be personal Savior.¹

Since Billy Graham has been around the longest, and most other "decision-theologians" take their cue from his methodology, let's delve into "How to be Born Again." We'll see that we're not just nitpicking over terminology used to describe conversion, but that simply saying that man by nature has the ability to cooperate in his conversion (a.k.a. synergism, i.e., "working with" God) allows work-righteousness to pervade and corrupt the whole body of doctrine.

The name "Adam" is the Hebrew word for "man." and his wife is not named "Eve" until the expulsion from Eden. Ever since the atheistic origin theory propounded by Darwin became widely assumed as "fact," many Biblical scholars (perhaps scholars of the Bible would be a more accurate description, since their approach is hardly Biblical) have sought to allegorize the first eleven chapters of Genesis in order to have their cake—believe the Bible true—and eat it too—believe evolutionary theory true. In such an approach. Adam and Eve are seen as merely representative of humanity as a whole. As they were created, so are we. As they are confronted with moral choice and the opportunity to exercise their free will to choose between God and disobedience, so do all of us. As they sinned, so do we. As they needed a Savior, so do we. That this is the approach of Billy Graham to Creation and the Fall is readily apparent from "How to be Born Again."

"Let us create man in our image," said Elohim on the sixth day of time. This means, "God created *all* of us in His image; everyone is answerable to the light that He revealed to them."² What does God expect or look for in this crown of creation?

God created us in His image, and He desires that the creature worship the Creator as a response of love. This can be accomplished when 'free will' is exercised. Love and obedience which are compelled do not satisfy.³

No difference is seen between the spiritual condition of Adam and Eve before the Fall and ours by nature:

And that is what God gave Adam and Eve—and what He gives us—our freedom to choose. Our "terrible freedom." God gave humankind the gift of freedom. Our first parents had the choice whether to love God or rebel and build their world without Him. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was their test—and they flunked.⁴

And just as Adam and Eve lived in a temporary state of innocence, so we are said to be guiltless until we reach the age of accountability:

The Bible teaches that when we reach the age of accountability—usually somewhere around ten or eleven years of age—God looks upon us as full-grown adults, making moral and spiritual choices for which we will be held accountable at the judgement. Each of us has an individual guilt before God. From the moment we are conceived we have the tendency toward sin; then we become sinners and ultimately, sinners by practice. That is why the Bible says we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.⁵

¹ Falwell, Jerry. *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, p. 15.

Graham, Billy. *How to be Born Again*, p. 65.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

Here is pitiable evidence that such staunch defenders of Biblical truths such as the Virgin Birth, deity, and resurrection of Christ have their own fanciful way of sidestepping simple words that convey simple comforting truths (*all* sinned except the unaccountable, make disciples of *all* nations by baptizing except for infants, *this is my body* means *this represents my body*, etc.). For this reason, as Adam and Eve were not guilty until they chose to sin, so we are said to have only an inclination to sin which proceeds to become depravity:

Sin is like cancer. It destroys step by step. Slowly, without our realizing its insidious onslaught, it progresses until finally the diagnosis is pronounced: sick to death.⁶

"Dead in trespasses and sin" is what we become, not what we are born.

But even this death is not really fatal. Even in this state of death, man has some powers, such as willingness to yield to God:

The context of John 3 teaches that the new birth is something that God does for man when man is willing to yield to God. We have seen that the Bible teaches that man is dead in trespasses and sins, and his great need is life. We do not have within ourselves the seed of the new life; this must come from God Himself.⁷

But in order for this new life to come from God, a person must be willing:

Any person who is willing to trust Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and Lord can receive the new birth now.⁸

When Scripture says we are by nature dead spiritually, Graham would have us read "almost dead:"

If we had to repent without God's help, then we would be almost helpless. The Scripture teaches that we are dead in trespasses and in sins. A dead man can do nothing, therefore we need God's help even in our repenting.⁹

If a person wants to be saved, he must make use of these natural spiritual powers, however small, to respond to what God has done.

This is the crux of the matter. It is how a decision theologian (Semi-Pelagian, Arminian, synergist) attempts to answer the question "*Cur alii prae aliis?*"—why are some saved and not others?" If God's grace is universally extended to all (God our Savior wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth, I Tim. 2:14), the reasonable conclusion is that some are saved due to something meritorious in man. Salvation is seen as a covenant in which God has done His part, and now you've got to do yours. Man's part is summed up in three phrases: repent of past sins, invite Jesus into the heart as Savior, submit to Him as Lord:

All you have to do to be born again is to repent of your sins and believe in the Lord Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior.¹⁰

It's all you have to DO!

The predominant theme of Paul's epistles to the Galatians and Romans is that a person is justified (declared righteous, forgiven) by faith alone and not by anything he does in accordance with any law. Faith is a

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

concept completely alien to works or actions in the matter of justification. But to the synergist, preoccupied with man *doing* his part, "Belief is a deliberate act at committing one's self to the person of Jesus Christ."¹¹ Listen again to Rev. Graham: "Placing your faith in Christ means that first you must make a choice ... In order not to be condemned you must make a choice—you must choose to believe."¹² Far from our Savior's winsome Gospel invitations: "Believe, come, trust" and the like. The "you must, you must, you must" of synergism reads like another 10 commandments. And in this system of theology, the ultimate determining factor in a person's salvation is his decision, and not the grace of God:

The Holy Spirit will do everything possible to disturb you, draw you, love you—but finally it is your personal decision ... He gives the Holy Spirit to draw you to the cross...but even after all of this, it is your decision whether to accept God's free pardon or to continue in your lost condition.¹³

An observer at a crusade relates:

Nothing could be more anti-scriptural than the exhortation of a very popular, contemporary evangelist. As a couple at hundred people came down the aisle to the front after the sermon, the evangelist addressed the fifteen thousand in their seats: You have prayed for these who now stand before me, he said, and that is good; you will pray for them tomorrow, and that is good, but there is no use of your praying for them now. For *not even God can help them—they must decide by themselves*. The wording here may not be absolutely verbatim, but the phrase italicized is precisely, word for word, what the evangelist said,¹⁴

No matter what God has done, the explicit determining factor for man's salvation is his decision. And, lest we belabor the point, consider popular author Tim Lahaye's account of how he brought a couple to be born again:

Just as God has physical laws that govern his physical universe, so he has spiritual laws that govern his relationship to man.

1. God loves you. and has a wonderful plan for Your life (John 3:16, John 10:10b).
2. Man is sinful and separated from God, thus he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life (Romans 3:23, 6:23).
3. Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through him you can know God's love and plan for your life (Ro.5:8. Jn. 14:6. II Cor. 5:21).

I skimmed through the first three laws, calling attention to the verses and the meaning of each diagram ' because I knew they already believed the Gospel, but had never asked Jesus Christ into their lives. Then I said, "This fourth law is the one I want you to look at closely. It is:

4. We must receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord by personal invitation.

I continued by saying, "From this law you can see that it isn't enough to accept Christ as your Savior to forgive your past mistakes, you need to accept Christ as your SAVIOR and LORD. You need a Lord to guide your future. This diagram will show you what I mean. The chair represents the control center of your will. The thing that makes us so different from animals is that God has given us a free will. We can do as we please. That is what the Ego means on the throne in the circle. It is the big "I." The dots represent big and little decisions in life that must be made, where will I work, whom will I marry, how will I treat my partner, what kind of friends will I have, and many other decisions. The problem with this life is that Christ is on the outside and the Ego is making the decisions. As long as a person makes

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 192.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

¹⁴ Clark, Gordon H. *Predstination*, p. 174.

decisions based on "what I want" or "what is good for me," he will be filled with degrees of frustration, fear, confusion, no purpose, guilt, and many other problems.

Now if a person is willing to receive Christ into his life as Lord and Savior, the result will be different. Christ will come into his life and take over the throne of his will. The first thing Christ does is pardon and cleanse of all sins. That produces peace in his heart because when a person's sins are forgiven he no longer fears God. When Christ comes into his life he has a new source or power which enables him to fulfill his thrilling new purpose in life. Furthermore Christ, through his Spirit, gives us a abundance of life: new love, joy, and peace—which are man's basic needs."

I went on to say, "It really isn't hard to receive Christ into your life. John 1:12 says, 'But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.' In Revelation 3:20 the Lord Jesus said, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him.' Receiving Christ is simply recognizing that you want him to come into your life to forgive your past and guide your future so you ask him by prayer to come in. By this act of your will you give yourself emotionally, mentally, and physically to Christ."

Then I said.. "Now I want to ask you two something. Which of these circles represents your life right now?" I held the circles up so they could see them clearly.

Within a few seconds they agreed that the first circle represented their lives. Then I asked, "Do you know any reason why you couldn't invite Christ into your lives right now?" Tom said, "I don't, its just what I need." His wife said simply, "Me too." Right then these two young people prayed their first prayer. They weren't profound or long prayers, they simply admitted to God that they were sinners and asked the Lord Jesus into their lives as Lord and Savior.¹⁵

Certainly the Gospel is there. But it is "skimmed over" to get to the decision-making process. And how likely is it that this couple could have already believed the Gospel, yet said their first prayer at this time? And notice the conditional Gospel: willingness to submit to Jesus as Lord and Savior (a cliched expression for sanctification/good works/commandment keeping) is the price tag for Christian pardoning and cleansing sin.

Because justification and sanctification are so confused, the certainty of salvation if strongly assailed. Consider the description of justification offered by televangelist or is it religious broadcaster?) Pat Robertson and how he starts out using the correct forensic terms, but eventually makes it conditional and gradual:

We are justified because of the unmerited favor of God. That is what grace is—favor we did not work for. We have faith in the fact that Jesus Christ died for us, that He rose again, and that He offers us eternal life through believing in Him. When we do this, Jesus comes into us, lives in us; and we become identified with Him through His sacrifice. Then, when God looks at us, He does not see our sin; He sees the blood of Jesus. And He says, in effect, about each one of us, "This person has not done anything wrong. He is covered by the blood of Jesus. Therefore, I pronounce him righteous." That is justification by faith...First God says, "You are righteous by faith, " then He gives you the Holy Spirit so you can live righteously. Once you have been born again, you live the righteous demands of the law by regeneration that turns a sinner into a saint, fit for God's kingdom.¹⁶

Notice that rebirth, that is, coming to faith, is a process, not a moment. As he continues, we see that this process is able to take place through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit:

First—repentance. Second—acknowledge that Jesus died on the cross to forgive you of sin. You take Him as your Savior to cleanse you from sin...as the substitute who paid the price due you for your sin. And third, you must ask Him to be Lord of your life, acknowledging openly and verbally

¹⁵ Lahaye, Tim. *How to be Happy though Married*. pp. 156-160.

¹⁶ Robertson, Pat. *Answers to 200 of Life's Most Probing Questions*, pp. 81-82.

that Jesus is not only your Savior but your Lord. The Bible says that as many as received Him were given the power to become the sons of God. So when you open your heart and receive Him, He comes into your heart, your inner person, through His Holy Spirit and begins to live His life in you.¹⁷

Perfectionism, the notion that a Christian can become sinless here on earth, has been a tenet of Methodism since the days of the Wesley brothers. It has produced bumper stickers which read, "I you're still sinning, you're not saved." A former Baptist, now a Lutheran, relates that sermons did little to strengthen faith, since they pointed to sin as evidence that one's decision for Christ lacked sincerity. Truly there is little comfort for the sinner whose hope for salvation rests on how thoroughly the indwelling Christ has changed his life, and not on the blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanses us from all sin.

A logical consequence of the emphasis on what man can do after what God has done is the elevation of prayer to a means of grace, and the denigration of the Sacraments to mere symbols. Previously we have seen man's "part," including the step of inviting Jesus into the heart as Savior. And in connection with Revelation 3:20, quoted earlier, the artist's conception of Jesus knocking at a door that can only be opened from the inside is often cited as picturing the need for man's decisive prayer. So in every tract which presents decision theology, the essential elements of these prayers can be found:

O God, I acknowledge that I have sinned against You. I am sorry for my sins. I am willing to turn away from my sins. I openly receive and acknowledge Jesus Christ as my Savior. I confess Him as Lord. From this moment on I want to live for Him and serve Him. In Jesus' name. Amen.¹⁸

Heavenly Father. I agree that I have sinned, and I want to have a new, clean life. I receive Jesus Christ, your gift of love, into my heart and life, as my Savior. Thank you, Father, that Jesus has come into my life.¹⁹

Dear Lord, I know I have done wrong and need forgiveness. Thank you for dying for my sins and for offering me eternal life. Please forgive my sins and help me to turn from them. I now confess you as my Lord and receive you as my Savior. Take control of my life and make it full and meaningful. In Jesus' name, Amen.²⁰

The last two "How to" tracts had the reminder after the prayer, "If you really mean it, Christ will come into your life." and "As you ask him, Jesus Christ will become your Lord and Savior and give you a full and meaningful life." While these prayers (of the unconverted) are said to have such great power, Graham seldom refers to Baptism in his writings and never in connection with conversion. Baptism is treated as a mere public testimony that a person has decided for Christ and been born again. The Lord's Supper points the communicant again to the indwelling Christ: "We have the bread in our hands, but Christ in our hearts."²¹ The sacraments, then, are actions to be carried out per Christ's command less the actual offering, giving, and sealing of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the various doctrinal tenets of the decision theologian, let's allow Rev. Graham to summarize his "Steps to Peace with God:"

Step 1: God's Purpose: Peace and Life. God loves you and wants you to experience peace and life--abundant and eternal.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

¹⁸ Graham, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

¹⁹ Campus Crusade for Christ, *Good News*, p. 16.

²⁰ *How to Have a Full and Meaningful Life*, pp. 12-13.

²¹ Graham, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

Step 2: Our Problem: Separation. God created us in His own image to have an abundant life. He did not make us robots to automatically love and obey Him, but gave us a will and freedom of choice. We chose to disobey God and go our own willful way. We still make this choice today. This results in separation from God.

Step 3: God's Remedy: The Cross. Jesus Christ is the answer to this problem. He died on the cross and rose from the grave, paying the penalty for our sin and bridging the gap from God to man.

Step 4: Our Response: Receive Christ. We must trust Jesus Christ and receive Him by personal invitation.

How to receive Christ:

1. Admit your need (I am a sinner).
2. Be willing to turn from your sins (repent).
3. Believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross and rose from the grave.
4. Through prayer, invite Jesus Christ to come in and control your life through the Holy Spirit (receive Him as Lord and Savior).

God's Assurance: His Word. If you prayed this prayer, the Bible says: "For whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Did you sincerely ask Jesus Christ to come into your life? Where is He right now? What has He given you? (Eph. 21:8-9. 1 John 5:12-13) Receiving Christ, we are born into God's family through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer ... this is called regeneration or the "new birth."²²

ANALYSIS OF DECISION THEOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE

A. IMAGE OF GOD

To understand the doctrines of the image of God and original sin, the historicity of Adam must be affirmed. By "Adam" Scripture clearly means the first man from whom all human beings descended, and not "mankind" in general, the allegorical interpretation. Adam and Eve were the only human beings created in the image of God. Their spiritual powers were such that they were able to not sin (*posse non peccare*). Their entire personality—intellect, emotion, and will—conformed to the will of God. It is safe to say that, had they not been tempted from without by Satan, they would have eventually been confirmed in their glory, even as the good angels. They had no temptations of the flesh. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was Adam's and Eve's altar, for by cheerfully abstaining from its fruit they worshipfully demonstrated their love for God and his will.

But when Satan lured Eve, and in turn Adam, to doubt God's love and honesty (Did God really say...? God knows you won't really die!), and so to sin, the human race lost the image of God. When Eve gave birth to Seth, we are told that Adam begat a son in his own image, that is, a sinful image. Cain demonstrated that man's image had changed, for he was motivated to murder by the jealousy arising in his own heart. Mankind was no longer able to keep from sinning (*non posse non peccare*). The image of God was lost by sin.

"But Christ the second Adam came to bear our sin and woe and shame ... so by one man, who took our place we all received the gift of grace ... we thank thee, Christ, new life is ours, new light, new hope, new strength, new powers (TLH 369:4,5,6)." The hymnist beautifully and poetically penned the manner in which our gracious God set out to restore His image in man. Jesus bore the world's sins in His body on the tree (I Peter 2:24); whoever by God's grace believes these words of promise has "new powers," namely, the ability to perform God-pleasing good works. The believer can take off the old self with its practices and "put on the new self," which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (Colossians 3:10)," and "Created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24)." The image of God, lost by the Fall into sin, has

²² Graham, Billy. *Steps to Peache with God*. pp. 1-13.

been partially restored, living in the new man of the Christian, to be perfectly restored in the sinless existence of heaven.

Two passages merit consideration at this point because they seem to indicate the perpetual creation of all human beings in the image of God even since the Fall. In James 3:9, we are admonished. "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness." Mindful that James wrote to believers (2:1--"My brothers, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ...") who, being sinners, needed the encouragement to express their faith in love (2:20--"Faith without deeds is dead"), let us consider 3:9's wording in the original ἐν αὐτῇ καταρώμεθα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς καθ' ὁμοίωσιν θεοῦ γεγονότας· which is, being literally translated, "With it we curse the men, those made according to God's likeness." A strong case could be made that James was shocked that the recipients of his epistle would curse their fellow believers. Taking into account the imprecatory Psalms, the list of curses to be pronounced from Mt. Ebal (Deuteronomy 27), and even Jesus' portrayal of the last judgment ("Depart from me, you who are cursed," (Matthew 25:41), it would be improper to say that unbelievers and idolaters' are not under a curse. How sinful it is, on the other hand, to curse those in whom the image of God has been restored by faith in Christ and who will on the last day hear, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"

The second passage is Genesis 9:6, where the apparent rationale for capital punishment in cases of murder is man's creation in God's image: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." Again to the original. The perfect tense of the Hebrew verb "to make (עָשָׂה)" is translated by the English "has made" in the NIV. But all the Hebrew perfect really indicates is completed action. There is no indication to translate any differently than "God made," referring to the creation of Adam and Eve. If it were still God's customary action to make all men in his image, the present participle (God is making) or imperfect (God makes) would make that clear. Noah and his sons were the new progenitors of the human race. They hear the same command to be fruitful and multiply as Adam and Eve heard. But it is precisely because they were fallen sinners that they needed to hear of the special value of human life, a pronouncement Adam and Eve did not receive. Genesis 9:6 is a testimonial to God's universal grace and human life as a time of grace. Taking a human life is to be considered so abominable because a murderer not only ends a person's physical life, he cuts off a soul's opportunity to come to faith, to have the image of God restored.

The decision theologian must attribute free will in spiritual matters even to natural man after the Fall. We will soon see how this leads to a denial of Scriptural teaching on original sin. The positively-stated corollary teaching on the image of God simply states that all men and women, like Adam and Eve, can use their free will (image of God) to decide to believe. But true Scriptural teaching reminds us that the image of God cannot be used to come to faith, since it is restored by God's grace when He works faith in the heart. The image of God, lost to the human race in the Fall, is restored partially in the new man of the Christian, and doesn't exist prior to conversion because of the total depravity we call:

ORIGINAL SIN

There is, perhaps, no sadder experience than the death of a child or infant. God is truly to be praised that in His mercy He has given us the sacrament of Holy Baptism through which the Holy Spirit bestows saving faith to an infant not yet in the possession of the command of spoken language. But quite commonly, an unborn and therefore unbaptized child may die, be it a miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, or stillbirth. We know what a Christian counselor must say. We point to the universality of God's grace: "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9);" "God our Savior ... wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4)." We say that in His wisdom God took the life of the baby before we could use the means He bound us to use; He Himself is not bound by baptism. In other words, the grieving parents are pointed to the grace of God, and not the sinlessness of the child or the faith of the parents. Those would be the answers of reason, of man's "feeling," and have created the non-scriptural teaching of the "age of accountability."

How difficult it is for man to accept that man is deserving of God's wrath and punishment by nature! Rome invented Limbo as an eternal resting place for the souls of unbaptized infants, unwilling to say that God would punish the poor innocent baby. The decision theologians declare that a person is without sin until he can make a conscious, willfully disobedient act at the age of accountability:

This natural rebellion stems from man's original sin. Instead of being morally free, man has a decided tendency toward sin—urged on toward evil by what is called "the world, the flesh, and the devil." Only those who come to Jesus can be rid of this tendency. That is the whole concept of being born again. We should keep in mind that original sin is a tendency to do evil, not an act of evil. Guilt comes when we commit acts of evil. There is no such thing as "original guilt." God does not punish people for tendencies, only for what they do in light of what they know. Therefore, little babies do not go to hell because of original sin, because babies have never committed any sinful acts.²³

Earlier we heard Mr. Graham say, "The Bible teaches that when we reach the age of accountability—usually somewhere around ten or eleven years of age—God looks upon us as full grown adults, making moral and spiritual choices for which we will be held accountable at the judgement." It's easy to imagine pressing the decision theologian for the proof passages for the so-called Bible teaching of the age of accountability, only to hear the self-righteous reply, "Well, if your God is one who enjoys burning little babies in hell, I don't want anything to do with Him!"

At what age is a person accountable to God? In Romans 3:19 Paul wrote, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God." The last phrase stands clear enough, to anyone who accepts God's Word as it stands and plainly teaches. Babies are part of the whole world, world being the predominant Scriptural term for the whole human race. They are therefore held accountable to God. When one reads Galatians 4:4 in connection with this verse, light is shed on when a person is "under law:" "When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law." At birth or life's beginning, everyone is under law and accountable to God. And when David confessed "Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me (Psalm 51:5)," he wasn't confessing a tendency to sin that God overlooks. The Hebrew words *pasha* (transgress) and *chata* (miss the mark) indicate a willful disobeyer and a sinner who is guilty before God of punishment, even before man's eyes witness sin! Such is the total corruption and guilt of original sin.

Original sin is universal, as Scripture declares, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:1." If death is the result of sin, isn't it the height of illogic to say that a baby who dies is sinless? Further in the same chapter the apostle says, "The result of the one trespass was condemnation for all men ...Through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners (Rom. 5:18-19)." All the while, the sinful nature protests at how unfair or God this is to place all men under condemnation because of Adam's Fall. Blaming God is in itself evidence a person is the sinful seed of Adam, who said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me to eat." By nature, everyone deserves God's wrath and punishment: "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath (Eph. 2:3)." Correctly, then, do the churches of the Augsburg Confession teach

that since the fall of Adam, all men begotten are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, and with concupiscence, and that this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Ghost.²⁴

The Lutherans who formulated and signed the Formula of Concord understood the seriousness of original sin:

²³ Robertson, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

²⁴ *Augsburg Confession*, Article II, 1-2.

It is true that Christians should regard and recognize as sin not only the actual transgression at God's commandments: but also that the horrible, dreadful, hereditary malady by which the whole nature is corrupted should above all things be regarded and recognized as sin indeed, yea, as the chief sin, which is a root and fountainhead of all actual sins.²⁵

A person must be aware of the serious nature and consequences of original sin, or the Gospel will be of little value. If original sin is considered not so severe, a person may not think he needs a Savior all that much.

Since man's nature is totally corrupted by original sin, he is left with absolutely no natural spiritual powers. His will is completely bound by sin, not "free" at all to make spiritual decisions. By nature we are spiritually blind: "You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts (Eph. 4:17-18)." Man's knowledge and wisdom may suit him well for wealth and fame in this life, but leave him blind to the Light of the world. By itself, reason is an enemy of faith: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (I Cor .2:14)." The way of salvation is hidden from the wise and learned, thinking they see so much, but are spiritually blind. Not only blind is man by nature, but spiritually dead: "You were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1)." "Dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature (Col. 2:13)." As little as a dead person can raise himself from death, so little natural man able to make himself spiritually alive by making a freewill decision to ask Jesus to be his Lord and Savior. Man contributes as little to his conversion as a block of stone does toward the making of a statue. But man's nature is far worse than a stone in that he is not only powerless to contribute to his conversion, being spiritually blind and dead, he resists it with all his might. We are also by nature enemies of God: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of evil behavior (Col. 1:21)." Did someone say man could at the age of accountability make spiritual choices pleasing to God, including inviting Jesus in as Savior? It wasn't Paul who wrote, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. (Rom. 8:7-8)." Yes, the verb "can" is the Greek "*dynamei*" (English cognate *dynamite*). The Gospel, God's Word tells us, is the *dynamis* of God for salvation: such *dynamis* to save is not, repeat *not*, found in man by nature.

Where does this leave free will? On the basis of these Scriptures, the Formula declared"

In spiritual and divine things the intellect, heart, and will of the unregenerate man are utterly unable, by their own natural powers, to understand, believe, accept, think, will, begin, effect, do, work or concur in working anything, but they are entirely dead to what is good, and corrupt, so that in man's nature since the Fall, before regeneration, there is not the least spark of spiritual power remaining, nor present, by which he can prepare himself for God's grace, or accept the offered grace, nor be capable of it for and of himself, or apply or accommodate himself thereto, or by his own powers be able of himself as of himself, to aid, do, work, or concur in working anything towards his conversion, either wholly, or half, or in any, even the least or most inconsiderable part; but that he is the servant of sin and a captive of the devil, by whom he is moved. Hence the natural free will according to its perverted disposition and nature is strong and active only with respect to what is displeasing and contrary to God.²⁶

²⁵ *Formula of Concord*, Thorough Declaration, p. 861.

²⁶ *Formula of Concord*, TD 11, 7, p. 883.

The Scriptures deny to the intellect heart and will of natural man all aptness, skill, capacity, and ability to think, to understand, to be able to do, to begin, to will, to undertake, to act, to work or to concur in working anything good and right in spiritual things as of himself.²⁷

In *De Servo Arbitrio* (The Bondage of the Will), Luther used the illustration that a log or a rack can roll down a hill on its own power, but you would not say it had free will to move uphill without the energy coming from elsewhere. So man's will can only by nature "go downhill"—oppose God--and takes the energy of the Word and Spirit to "go uphill"—repent and be converted.²⁸

"FREE" WILL

Since Scripture denies to man such free will in spiritual matters, the decision theologian's arguments for free will are not Scripturally founded, but are based on faulty reason, logic, and philosophy:

In many discussions on free will, after quoting and explaining a dozen or more verses, and after having met stubborn resistance to the Reformation doctrine, I have often said, "Well, then, you give me the verses on which you base your idea of free will." This challenge usually produces a blank stare. No verses are needed, they say, everybody knows he is free. In other words, these people who have studied no philosophy are unaware that they are repeating Descartes to the effect that it is impossible even to conceive of a more ample freedom than that of the will of man, and almost quoting his very words, "We have such a consciousness of the liberty and indifference which exists in ourselves that there is nothing we more clearly or perfectly comprehend." Thus they try to impose a secular philosophy on the Bible.²⁹

Let's hear some of the more common reasonings:

1) *The fact that God gave a command implies that man has the power to keep the command.*

A command makes sense only if the recipient is capable of doing either what is required or forbidden. In other words, only if he is a responsible being.³⁰

God never commands people to do that which is impossible or is not for their good.³¹

The reasoning is simple: If I give an employee a task, I expect that he can do it. God wouldn't have given man his commandments if man couldn't keep them. But Scripture speaks differently. God's law for us is a mirror to show us our sin and need for a Savior, as Paul wrote, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin (Rom. 3:20)." Even logic and Latin axioms side with Scripture here:

The case is satisfactorily covered by the Latin axiom: *A debito non valet consequentia ad posse*, which may be freely rendered: One may not draw a valid deduction as to what a man can do from what he ought to do.³²

2) *God respects the integrity of His creatures.*

Consider this tidbit from Kenneth Copeland:

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 885.

²⁸ Martin Luther quoted by Clark, Gordon H.. *Predestination*, p. 117.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

³⁰ Rice, Richard. *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will*, p. 88.

³¹ Lahaye, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

³² Plass, Ewald M.. *The Abiding Word Vol 2*. "Synergism." p. 308.

We have to make the decision ourselves and choose to think on good things. God will not force His thoughts on us. Why? Because it is not His brain. It is not His mind. He created man in the beginning with a capacity to think for himself and choose his own destiny. He has made available the mind of Christ and the knowledge of His will for our lives, but he will never force or impose them on us.³³

That is nothing but human arrogance and selfishness. To read the rest of this tract is interesting in its use of the name Jesus. To Copeland, the word "Jesus" stands for the moral life as opposed to sin. "I" am still the center, the origin of the decision.:

I made my quality decision. I chose the high life. I chose Jesus instead of candy. I chose Jesus instead of bread. I chose Jesus instead of cakes and pies. Now I have no more problem with food. I can watch someone eating cookies or pie and not be bothered in the least. Praise God, I am so glad to be free! Deliverance is a sweet thing.³⁴

If one believed in psychoanalysis, one might be tempted to think Copeland was still obsessed with sweet things and that the last statement was a Freudian slip. Another booklet whose title *Becoming a Christian*, belies the same step-following premise of *How to Be Born Again*, tells us: "He does not impose salvation on those who do not want it. He still respects his own gift of free will to mankind. He offers me salvation. He does not oblige me to accept it."³⁵ It is evident that the synergist believes man must be given the ultimate credit if he makes the decision to be saved: the following author seems to go beyond most decision theologians and make God ultimately responsible for man's condemnation, combining the worst of Arianism with the worst of Calvinism:

He will not force Himself upon us. He will not save us against our wills. The concept of hell as the permanent separation of evildoers has its basis in God's high regard for creaturely integrity. It represents the final manifestation of His willingness to permit His creatures to make decisions that He profoundly regrets.³⁶

Such idolatry and blasphemy it is for these masters of exegetical legerdemain to lay the blame for man's damnation at God's door and the glory for man's salvation to man's decision.

3) *The Revelation 3:20 Argument.*

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." Dr. Becker points out the powerful nature of Gospel commands, reiterates the grace of God, and points out that this verse is addressed to "the church"—always a designation for believers, not for the unconverted:

There are many who force these words to support a synergistic view of conversion. There is no question that we are here dealing with a gospel invitation. The Savior pleads with men to allow him to come into their lives and hearts so that he may share with them all the blessings of his love. His words are simply another way of expressing the same gospel invitation that is expressed in a multitude of ways throughout the Bible. Synergistic interpreters sometimes appeal to the classical artist's conception of this invitation and point out that the door in the picture has no knob on the outside, to indicate that it can be opened only from within.

³³ Copeland, Kenneth. *The Decision is Yours*. pp. 9-10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³⁵ Stott, John R. W. *Becoming a Christian*, p. 16.

³⁶ Rice, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

However, neither this passage nor any other gospel invitation implies that man by nature had the power to respond. The question of man's ability is settled by other statements of Scripture, which clearly teaches that man is by nature spiritually "dead" and therefore unable to accept God's offer of salvation. We are saved by grace alone.

It is, of course, true that some men do respond while others do not. Some men open the door and others keep it closed. But the power which makes the response possible lies not in the natural will of man but in the gospel invitation. The Savior whose knock on the door of our hearts summons us to open the door is the same almighty Lord who stood at the grave of Lazarus and called him forth. Likewise, we read that the Lord opened Lydia's heart (Acts 16:14). The gospel invitation is a word of God and therefore has the inherent power to open the heart for the Savior's entrance. That power alone causes man to respond positively

What we have said here should not be understood to mean that the Savior in this particular case is addressing a church composed of unbelievers. Millennialists teach that the letter to Philadelphia symbolizes the time of the rapture and look upon the church of Laodicea as a church in which there are no believers. They claim that the letter to Laodicea represents the church as it will exist during the seven years of the great tribulation. A church composed of unbelievers is a contradiction in terms...at least in the language of the Bible.³⁷

One who opens the door is a believer, one already converted.

4) *The argument from success—it works! Converts are gained!*

This present writer ... had a theology that he could preach, and preach with all his heart; and he always tried to arouse a feeling of responsibility in the sinner's mind, telling him that he could have salvation if he would, and that, if he did not, it would be his own fault. Whether this was the correct theology or not, it worked³⁸

Thousands respond to Graham's altar calls in crusade after crusade. If something is successful, it must be right, so goes the logic. But "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart (I Sam. 16:31)." How many of the so-called successful conversions, we must wonder, are really conversions and in how many cases is the "saved" person still relying on his works ("Jesus is my Lord" _ for salvation? Psychological manipulation never a conversion made, but only the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. :

"As the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)."

5) *The "Responsibility of Man" Argument: If Scripture teaches that man is responsible for his damnation, it follows that man is in some measure responsible for his salvation.*

Scripture does not teach that the fault of man's damnation lies with man. In Matthew 23:37, Jesus lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you. How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were

³⁷ Becker, Siegbert, *Revelation: The Distant Triumph Song*. pp. 79-80.

³⁸ Keyser, Leander, *Election and Conversion*. p. 104.

not willing." Through the prophet Hosea, God indicated the reason for punishment lay in Israel's impenitence: "Will they not return to Egypt, and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? (Hos. 11:6)." Stephen admonished the Sanhedrin, "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers! You always resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51)." But, logical though it be, it is not Scriptural to say that man is responsible in any measure for his salvation. John 1:12 is often cited by the synergist as proof that receiving Jesus comes first, then being born again. Seldom does the quotation include v.13 and the reason is apparent: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed on his name, he gave the right to become children of God, (13) children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." Are you born again? Thank God, not yourself, because "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created (James 1:18)." Is Jesus your Lord? Praise the Holy Spirit. and not your free will, because "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:3)." Which shall we follow, logic/reason/philosophy or the plain words of Scripture? We know what Luther would say:

According to reason we are as intelligent in these matters as a cow. And if intelligence counted for anything, I could probably construct a religion better than you. But here, we are not in a tavern. We are in a Christian church where we must believe not what reason thinks is right or what pleases me or you, but what the Scriptures tell us.³⁹

There are essentially two reasons why synergism is so prevalent. The first is that man's nature is not only thoroughly corrupt, but man's natural religion is work-righteousness, and man's natural god is himself. So says Plass:

The heresy of synergism may no doubt be found in every age of the Christian church. It is as old as sin itself. Its principle is the prolific mother of all sin: exaltation of man, his worth, and his capacities at the expense of God. The popularity of synergism, so to speak, and its constant recurrence within the Church are to be looked for in the appeal of this error in the vanity of man. Sin is essentially selfishness, and synergism is a form of selfishness, self-aggrandizement ... Synergism is so stubborn an error because it finds such ready response in the Pharisaism of natural man.⁴⁰

The *opinio legis* (attitude of the law) controls man's nature with the pervasive "What must I do, **do, DO** to be saved?" Do-do is about all our works accomplish towards our salvation, however.

Since Scripture nowhere answers the question. man sets out in quest of his own answer and. upon his return to Scripture, strives to bring his answer into harmony with the word. The sad result is that in his effort to find out more than God has revealed. man believes less than God has disclosed in His Word.⁴¹

Instead, we should reverently kneel before the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. whose judgments are unsearchable and whose paths beyond tracing out. Who has known the mind of the Lord. or who has been his counselor?

If the will of man is always totally in bondage, if there is the same will in all men, and if the same mercy and grace of God is preached to all men, we will never be able to say why in one case a man is converted and in another he is not converted. We know that if a man does not come to faith it is not due to any lack in God. The fault lies completely in man. Why does not God in his omnipotence and majesty

³⁹ Luther in Becker, Siegbert. *The Follishness of God*. p. 118.

⁴⁰ Plass, *op. cit.*, p. 305, 319.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

take away this fault in our will or change it in all men? We are not to ask. It is enough for us to know that there is in God the will to save all men and that God rebukes the obstacle in man that prevents this from happening. Yet Luther asks at another time, "If my salvation is the will of God, how does it make sense to say that I can prevent and hinder it?" He concludes the discussion of this question by saying that the Lord simply wants both truths to stand.⁴²

There are three ways of looking at the conversion of man, and only two are logical. There are three ways of considering why some are saved and not others, and only one is Scriptural and therefore correct. If the two that were logical were Scriptural, there would be no reason for this essay. Dr. Becker diagrams the three positions on conversion in this way:

The will of God which wills the conversion of man:

The will of man which resists the conversion:

Calvinism

A-----110----->
B-----90----->

<-----100-----A
<-----100-----B

A is saved, and **B** is lost, and it is easy to see why this should be. There is a difference in the will of God.

Arminianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Synergism

A-----100----->
B-----100----->

<-----110-----A
<-----90-----B

In this case, **A** is lost and **B** is saved, and it is easy to see why this should be. There is a difference in the will of man.

True Lutheranism

A-----100----->
B-----100----->

<-----100-----A
<-----100-----B

⁴² Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

All men are totally depraved and there is no difference in man. God is equally gracious to all and there is no difference in God's will. Yet **A** is lost and **B** is saved, and there is no conceivable reason why this should be so.⁴³

Perhaps the dogmatician on whom most orthodox Lutherans have been weaned offers the best release from the horns of this dilemma:

Dr. Pieper continues. "We should bear in mind that no mystery appears when each of the classes, those who are saved and those who are lost, are considered separately. In this separate view of the two classes everything is explained by the word of God."⁴⁴

True enough, the eternal life of the saved is a gift of God's grace alone; the eternal death of the damned is the just punishment on man's unbelief alone. Conversion, then, is brought about by the Word and the Spirit of God, and the will of man is not a partner in but the object of conversion, as the Formula confesses:

Then the new will of man is an instrument and organ of God the Holy Ghost, so that he not only accepts grace, but also cooperates with the Holy Ghost in the works which follow. Therefore, before the conversion of man there are only two efficient causes, namely the Holy Ghost and the Word of God, as the instrument of the Holy Ghost, by which he works conversion.⁴⁵

LIFE AFTER CONVERSION

By what some call a "happy inconsistency," it is still possible to have true saving faith in Jesus for salvation even within a synergistic church body. The good news that Jesus died on the cross and rose again as man's Savior is heard. We are confident that the Spirit does save many souls, if those souls possess the gift of childlike faith and are not convinced by their false teachers that they can take partial credit for their "decision to accept Christ." But the Christian life doesn't end at conversion; it begins. And when the Christian life of sanctification is confused with justification, souls are in peril. This may happen by placing sanctification ahead of justification or by making sanctification a condition of justification (Forgiveness is yours if you give up your sinful life or repent). Or it may happen if one calls conversion, whereby a person becomes a Christian, a gradual process that becomes more and more certain the more Jesus is submitted to as Lord (it's not enough to have Jesus as your Savior—you've got to make Him Lord!). And on any point the new convert within to the "Christ in us," instead of to the cross, the "Christ for us. (Jesus begins to live his life in you)." Confusing sanctification, the Christian life of good works with justification, God's gracious pronouncement of "not guilty for Jesus sake," inevitably creates a religion with Christian terms, but a religion of legalism and work-righteousness nonetheless.

Two of the leading proponents of free-will conversion are Thomas Aquinas and James Arminius. Aquinas' name is nearly synonymous with scholasticism in the Middle Ages' philosophy which set out to prove that "the truths of natural theology and the truths of Scripture would always coincide and agree."⁴⁶ Aquinas also discussed conversion in connection with justification, and it is evident that he believed conversion was gradual, not instantaneous, and that he condensed justification and sanctification:

When he addressed himself to the question of whether a movement of faith is required for the justification of the ungodly, he argued that such a movement is necessary, that man can act by free will, but that the conversion of the soul that makes possible this movement of faith is accomplished by God.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁴⁴ Keyser, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ *F. C.*, Ep. 11, 18-19, p. 791.

⁴⁶ Gerlach, Joel *Humanism: Its Origin, Nature, and Menacing Impact*, p. 189.

Thomas described man's first conversion as "imperfect." Only as the soul gradually increases in charity does conversion become perfect...For Thomas, then conversion is both an act and a process.⁴⁷

A person could not even be certain of his conversion unless he increased his acts of charity. A troubled sinner would be told to "shape up" instead of being comforted with the Gospel. Aquinas' theology thoroughly infected the Roman Catholic Church, and was one of the biggest reasons for Reformation.

James Arminius (1560-1609), was a professor in Leyden, Netherlands, who set out to oppose the Calvinistic doctrine of the election of the reprobate to damnation. We've seen how the Arminians answered the "*cur alii...*" question by pointing to a difference in man, who then is ultimately responsible for his salvation. Regarding the time frame of conversion, Arminius said:

This work of regeneration and illumination is not completed in one moment; but that it is advanced and promoted, from time to time, by daily increase.⁴⁸

Again, calling conversion a gradual process inevitably causes uncertainty of salvation and points a person to his own works for "reassurance" that he's really a saved Christian. Arminianism first dominated methodism, and is the core teaching of most Reformed church bodies today.

However, because we have seen that Scripture calls coming to faith by the terms "enlightenment," "quickenning," and "regeneration." A person is either blind spiritually or sighted with faith. He's either dead spiritually or made alive by the work of the Holy Spirit. And

Passages all indicate that Scripture calls coming to faith by the kindling of a new life which was not there before in any degree or measure and that in the same manner in which life is brought about in physical conception in the moment that conception takes place. One moment there is no life, the next moment life is there. This new life is there as soon as there is even a small spark of faith longing for the grace of God in Christ, just as life there as soon as conception has taken place.⁴⁹

So there is no "middle ground" between natural man and regenerate man: "*Es gibt keine Dammerung, keinen Mittelzustand zwischen Licht und Festernis,*" quoth A. Hoenecke. There is no twilight, no middle ground between light and darkness.⁵⁰ After hearing the Gospel, if the person exhibits a desire to learn more, or has a longing for forgiveness, or any number of such possible expressions, it means not that he's "almost there." He's a believer! So expressed the Formula:

To all godly Christians who feel and experience in their hearts a small spark or longing for divine grace and eternal salvation this precious passage is so comforting (Phil. 2:13), for they know that God has kindled in their hearts the beginning of true godliness, and that He will further strengthen them and help them in their great weakness to persevere in true faith until the end.⁵¹

Since conversion is instantaneous, taking place in a moment, the life that follows is not a condition of salvation, but the resulting fruit of faith flowing from forgiven sinners. A Christian performs acts of love toward God and love toward neighbor with the sole motivation of loving thanks, "for the love of Christ compels us (II Cor. 5:15)." Fear of punishment? Hope of reward? Praise of men? Prove to myself I'm saved? All works

⁴⁷ Harran, Marilyn J., *Luther on Conversion*, p. 46.

⁴⁸ Nichols, James, trans., *The Writings of James Arminius, Volume 1*, p. 529.

⁴⁹ Eckert, Otto J., *Quartalschrift*, Vol. 52 No. 1. "The Relation of Time to Eternity in God's Dealing with man as Concerning the Doctrine of Election," p. 17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵¹ *F.C.*, TD II, 14, p., 885.

prompted by such motives are excluded from the category of God-pleasing. Yet this is how a synergist destroys saving faith by not proclaiming the free and full forgiveness of sin, but perfectionism and work-righteousness:

WHAT A CHRISTIAN IS

(1) The first thing is the inward realization that Jesus is (not was) a living person.

(2) The second thing—in Paul's case, as in every true Christian life—is represented by one sentence, "What wilt thou have me to do, Lord?" We see here, then, that one thing is a clear evidence of a life truly acceptable to God; it is the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ.

(3) "Christ in you." The fact is that only Christ can really satisfy God; only Christ can do God's will and God's work. Only Christ can overcome the spiritual forces of evil. Yes, only Christ can really live the Christian life. Hence, the one great inclusive and crowning reality of a Christian is—Christ Himself WITHIN!

This becomes true by a definite act when we believe. The Holy Spirit takes possession of us in an inward way. This indwelling of Christ has never been known by any man in history until Christ had died and risen and been glorified, It is therefore the peculiar wonder and glory of the Christian. It is the very thing that explains the New Testament term—born anew." There was nothing like it before.⁵²

SUMMARY

Decision theology is not just a minor variation on the doctrine of conversion. It is a theology in the broadest sense of the term, covering every area of dogmatics. From the little bit of leaven, the lump of Biblical teaching of Law and Gospel is permeated with synergistic error.

1) In **THEOLOGY** (*The doctrine of God*): Certain *attributes* of God are called into question if man's "free will" is held to be invincible. They are God's immutability and His omniscience. The doctrine of creation is questionably taught if Genesis 1-3 is treated allegorically. The doctrine of Divine Providence is abandoned, since God's concurrence in good and permission of evil is superseded by the total responsibility of man.

2) In **ANTHROPOLOGY** (*The doctrine of Man*): No distinction is made between the spiritual condition of man *before* and *after* the *Fall*, leaving an erroneous teaching on the *image of God*: the seriousness of original sin as to guilt and absence of spiritual powers in natural man is categorically denied. *Actual sin* is said to have its source in free will, not in original sin.

3) In **CHRISTOLOGY** (*The doctrine of Christ*): the teaching on the *Person* of Christ is usually Biblical and correct. Graham *et.al.* are consistent in their insistence on the divinity of Jesus and the historical fact of the resurrection. The teaching on the *work* of Christ in His threefold office denies the *vicarious atonement* since man is still left with his part to perform.

4) In **SOTERIOLOGY** (*The doctrine of salvation*): the theology of synergism is totally corrupt. *Saving faith* is considered an ethical act of man, and not a God-given condition or the heart which saves because of the object of faith, Jesus Christ. *Conversion* is ultimately credited to something in man, especially his free-will decision, and not the act of Word and Spirit alone. *Justification* is not presented in a forensic sense, that is, God's courtroom declaration of "not guilty for Jesus' sake," but is conditional on man's "repentance" and willingness to make Jesus Lord. *Sanctification* is not the Christian's grateful life moved by the love of Christ, but held to be the proof that a person is becoming gradually converted and sinless. It becomes a person's hope for salvation when a person's avoidance of sin and righteous acts are presented as the condition for forgiveness, confusing justification and sanctification. *The Means of Grace*—the synergists deny the sole efficacy of the Gospel and deny that God does anything in the sacraments: instead, the centrality of man is again apparent, since free will and prayer become the means of conversion, and the sacraments become public testimony to what man has been good enough to do. The doctrine of The *Church* shows great liberality in the doctrine of fellowship. The *Election* or believers to salvation is, or necessity, presented as taking place *intuitu fidei* (God

⁵² Testimony Book Ministry, *What is a Christian?* pp. 7-12, *passim*.

chose some because He saw they'd believe: in view of faith) or as a denial of God's foreknowledge (God chose "the elect" but the individual members He did not know).

(5) In **ESCHATOLOGY** (*The doctrine of the Last Things*), it does not seem that the chiliastic error found in most synergistic church bodies is directly caused by the error of synergism in conversion. Occasionally it rears its ugly head (e.g.. only the *most sincere* Christians will be raptured), but it seems that the error of millennialism arose independently of synergism. Of course, the doctrine of *Heaven and hell* will be affected, since the teaching on how a person arrives at either location is corrupt.

In concluding this examination of decision theology in the light of Scripture, we could hardly accuse Dr. Mueller of exaggerating when he says:

Any teaching which makes of conversion a meritorious work. performed by man or the product of man's power, either in whole or in part destroys the Christian faith and frustrates the sinner's conversion and justification.⁵³

SYNERGISM—A PROBLEM FOR LUTHERANS OF EVERY AGE

Because Scholasticism prevailed in the Middle Ages. the Roman Catholic church of Luther's time was a hotbed of synergism worded something like this: Through the sacraments God infuses grace, enabling a person to do good and merit his salvation. Luther's "The Bondage of the Will" was written against the humanist scholar Erasmus, who in turn attacked Luther's position in the *Diatribes*. Luther compared Erasmus' attack on his work to be a deadly strike: "You have struck my jugular vein."⁵⁴ The chief difference Luther and Rome, and the root of the Reformation, was the question of man's will. If, as Luther and Scripture taught, man's will is totally bound by sin, he is saved by grace alone. If, as Erasmus and reason contended, man's will had some natural spiritual powers, he could be credited with contributing something toward his salvation. So "the humanism of Erasmus posed as great a threat to the Gospel as did the Pope. One represented a frontal attack on the gospel, the other a sneak attack."⁵⁵ Surely the Lutherans of the generation following Luther's death would see how central to the Reformation the denial of "Free Will" was, and would hold to the clear confession of the Apology, wouldn't they?

But if human nature has such strength as to be able of itself to love God above all things, as the scholastics confidently affirm, what will original sin be? For what will there be need of the grace of Christ if we can be justified by our own righteousness?⁵⁶

Philip Melancthon penned those words in 15.3'.1.

But the ink was hardly dry on the paper when Melancthon began rewriting and reworking the Augsburg Confession in order to make it less polemic and more palatable to Rome. Instead of making a clear confession. the Augustana with Variata strove for ambiguity, so that both sides would accept a wording according to their own understanding. Both in his Variata and his personal doctrinal theses called "Loci," Melancthon began asserting the natural will of man as a factor in conversion:

Melancthon could never completely put down the tendencies of his humanist background. Implicit in his thinking were the inherent capabilities of the human will and its freedom to act. Again and again he posited the non-resisting will of man as a factor in conversion. The later editions of his Loci as well as

⁵³ Mueller, John, *Christian Dogmatics*.

⁵⁴ Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

⁵⁵ Gerlach, Joel. *WLQ Vol. 73*, "Humanism: Its Origin, Nature, and Menacing Impact." p. 287.

⁵⁶ *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, II. 10, p. 107.

the Variata of 1540, show him stressing man's assenting will as a third cause, besides the Holy Spirit and the Word in conversion.⁵⁷

And after the firm hand of Luther (+1546) was gone from the scene, Melancthon's latent synergism became hidden no longer. In his Loci of 1548, Melancthon teaches

1. that in conversion man, too, can do, and really does, something by willingly confessing his fault, by sustaining himself with the Word, by praying that God would assist him, by wrestling with himself by striving against diffidence, etc.; **2.** that the nature of fallen man differs from that of the devils in this, that his free will is still able to apply itself to grace, endeavor to assent to it, etc.; **3.** that the dissimilar actions resulting from the different use of this natural ability accounts for the fact that some are saved while others are lost.⁵⁸

Melancthon's synergism threatened to break up the fledgling churches of the Augsburg Confession even before Rome began the counterattack of the Council of Trent (1545-1563, with the first 3-year session primarily an organizational one).

Another teaching on the doctrine of Justification also arose in the Lutheran church after Luther's death. The heresy of Andrew Osiander began to be publicly taught in 1549. The resemblance of Osiander's teaching on justification to that of the 20th Century decision theologian is remarkable:

Osiander had particularly drawn a bead on the Reformation's accent on the forensic sense of justification, the teaching that God for Christ's sake declares a sinner righteous. To him justification was not an act by which God declares a sinner righteous, but an act by which God gradually makes a man just by dwelling in him. He argued that Christ the man was righteous because of the indwelling divine nature; therefore we are justified by faith because faith unites us with the divine nature, and God's righteousness becomes ours in this way. We are not saved, said Osiander, by what Luther called alien, foreign, or imputed righteousness, the righteousness of Christ which is outside of us and imputed to us by faith; we are saved by the inward righteousness, the righteousness which is worked in us as when a medicine gradually works its healing or cleansing. Justification is a gradual process, a subjective change that goes on in us.⁵⁹

Perhaps if Osiander witnessed to potential converts., he'd encourage them to invite Jesus in and make Him Personal Savior and Lord. He'd deny, of course, that he taught salvation by anything man does, but proceed to contradict that with a work-righteous system of perfectionism:

Osiander's theologizing was intensely subjectivistic, mystical, metaphysical. personalistic. Though he denied that good works justified a man, he insisted that it was the indwelling, progressive righteousness, which came by faith and which became more and more perfect, that saved the sinner.⁶⁰

In Osiandrianism, a person's righteousness—the "Christ in us"—is the basis of peace with God and assurance of salvation:

The assurance that we are justified and accepted by God does not rest exclusively on the merits of Christ and the pardon offered in the Gospel, but must be based on the righteous quality inhering in us. Our assurance is conditioned not alone on what Christ has done outside of us and for us, but rather upon

⁵⁷ Klug, Eugene F., *Getting into the Formula of Concord*. pp. 30-31.

⁵⁸ Bente, F., *Historical Introduction to the Triglotta*, p. 130.

⁵⁹ Klug, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

what He is in us and produces in us ... Accordingly, in order to satisfy an alarmed sinner, it is not sufficient to proclaim the Gospel-promise of divine absolution. In addition, an investigation is required whether the righteousness and holiness at God is also really found dwelling in him.⁶¹

While the first three articles of the Formula of Concord (1580) were written to refute both Melanchthon's synergism and Osiander's enthusiasm and mysticism, perhaps a more memorable evaluation of Osiandrianism was tendered by Prof. Edwin Fredrich of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. When a student inquired of Prof. Fredrich in a symbolics class as to the eternal residence of Osiander, the instructor shared this bit of wisdom: "Osiander? He's in hell."

Only because, by God's grace, orthodox confessors took a bold stand against the heresies of Melanchthon and Osiander did the Lutheran churches maintain doctrinal purity. The Formula of Concord refuted synergism by clearly stating:

The Holy Scriptures ascribe conversion, faith in Christ, regeneration, renewal, and all that belongs to their highly efficacious beginning and completion, not to the human powers of the natural free will, neither entirely, nor half, nor in any way, even the least or most inconsiderable part, but *in solidum*, that is, entirely, solely, to the divine working and the Holy Ghost, as also the Apology teaches. Reason and free will are able to a certain extent to live an outwardly decent life, but to be born anew, and to obtain inwardly another heart, mind, and disposition, this only the Holy Ghost effects.⁶²

The Formula refuted Osiandrianism and "indwelling" justification by stating equally clearly:

We reject that believers are justified before God and saved jointly by the imputed righteousness of Christ and by the new obedience begun in them, or in part by the imputation of Christ's righteousness, but in part also by the new obedience begun in them.⁶³

Confessional Lutherans must continue to oppose synergism and enthusiasm as manifested by decision theology in all its forms.

Even among the Lutherans in North America, synergism has still been propounded and defended. Twice before in this essay, we have quoted Dr. Leander Keyser and seen his synergistic streak. Dr. Keyser was professor of systematic theology in Hamma Divinity School, Wittenberg College, Springfield, Ohio. When the Lutherans were bit by the bug of ecumenism near the turn of the century, Dr. Francis Pieper and the Synodical Conference refused to accept unity in a wording that would appease all viewpoints on conversion. The Synodical Conference insisted that true unity could only be effected on the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, which denied synergism totally and absolutely.

The type of synergism which the Ohio, Iowa, Augustana, and LCA synods espoused was, again, the result of man's unwillingness to accept that "*Cur alii prae aliis?*" cannot be answered. The difference in man which allegedly made one man a saved soul and another a condemned soul lay in the type of resistance offered when the Holy Ghost sought to work faith. If a man offered only "natural" resistance, he'd be converted. If he offered "willful resistance," he'd be condemned and responsible for his unbelief. So reported the *Kirchenzeitung* of the Ohio Synod in 1885:

After God has done all that is necessary for the conversion and salvation of all men, it depends to a great extent, yea we may boldly say, everything depends on the conduct of man over against the grace

⁶¹ Bente, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁶² *F. C.*, TD II, 25-26, p. 891.

⁶³ *F. C.*, Ep. III, 22, p. 797.

of God: whether he lets the grace operate on himself which he can do by the strength inherent in him or whether in spite of it he willfully thrusts it away.⁶⁴

That the "God's part—man's part" of *How to be Born Again* is echoed by these words is no coincidence. It's what synergism is all about. But when the Synodical Conference opposed such blatant synergism, Dr. Keyser sarcastically ridiculed the orthodox position:

We are persuaded that a union effected on the Missouri basis would not be lasting. The mistake would be soon detected, for you cannot keep men from thinking and investigating.⁶⁵

It would seem that our Lord was not so much afraid to mention the human will as some theologians are. Why? Because He was practical, took man as he is, and knew that it would detract nothing from God's honor and grace for Him to respect the will with its wonderful power of alternate choice.⁶⁶

Dr. Pieper will not have it that the Holy Spirit makes us able to believe; he contends that He does not confer the ability, but the actual belief itself. With all our respect for his acuteness and sincerity, this seems to us a marvelous psychological conception. Then the Holy Spirit must do our believing for us! Why not call it the Holy Spirit's faith, then, instead of ours?⁶⁷

Missouri teaches that, after conversion, the will is made free by divine grace. If so, according to her own logic, this will could choose only one way, because it is a will established by grace; yet Missouri teaches that those who have been converted can backslide. But how can a will established by God's grace ever decide against that grace? This would seem to be another "mystery," this time a psychological one. However, according to our view, that a good will is one that has the power of alternate choice, there is no difficulty.⁶⁸

With their strange, mechanical, and unpsychological ideas of free will, the Concordia dogmaticians cannot understand how one man can, by his own option, choose to let God save him, while another, also by his own option, rejects God's mercy. Hence they posit a mystery in God's eternal decree to explain the difference. With their mechanical and unethical views of faith, from which they excise every element of freedom, they do not see how one man can (though enabled by prevenient grace) freely and savingly believe on Christ, while another man, even though similarly called, refuses to believe.⁶⁹

And Dr. Keyser could surely join with the other decision theologians when he so exalts the sovereignty of the free will of man and its character of inviolability, inviolable even by the almighty God. Don't think that synergism is not part and parcel of the doctrine even today of the Evangelical "Lutheran" Church in America, either.

Only because, by God's grace, orthodox confessors took a bold stand against the heresy of synergism did the Synodical Conference and the Wisconsin Synod maintain doctrinal purity. The words of the Brief Statement of 1932 express this confessional Lutheranism and are still valid today:

We teach that conversion consists in this, that a man, having learned from the Law of God that he is a lost and condemned sinner, is **brought to faith** in the Gospel, which offers him forgiveness of sins and

⁶⁴ Adaschek, T., *The Doctrine of Conversion*, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Keyser, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

eternal salvation for the sake of Christ's vicarious satisfaction ... We reject every kind of synergism, that is, the doctrine that conversion is wrought not by the grace and power of God alone, but in part also by the cooperation of man himself, by man's right conduct, his right attitude, his right self-determination, his lesser guilt or less evil conduct as compared with others, his retraining from willful resistance, or anything else whereby man's conversion and salvation is taken out of the gracious hands of God and made to depend on what man does or leaves undone ... As to the question why not all men are converted and saved, seeing that God's grace is universal and all men are equally and utterly corrupt, we confess that we cannot answer it. From Scripture we know only this: A man owes his conversion to the grace of God. But any man's non-conversion is due to himself alone; it is the result of his obstinate resistance against the converting operation of the Holy Ghost.⁷⁰

When the LCMS made overtures to fellowship with the ALC in the 40's and 50's, bold confessors pointed out that leading theologians like Reu and Lenski

still speak of two different kinds of resistance and conduct in man. Dr. Reu speaks of "noble souls," namely such souls that are outside the kingdom of God but because of the absence of willful resistance are appreciably nearer to the kingdom at God. And Dr. Lenski repeatedly uses the expressions "natural and willful resistance." They teach that natural resistance is present with all men when the grace of God approaches, but this natural resistance can be overcome by the Holy Ghost. It is not an obstacle to conversion. But willful resistance which they define as a mysterious wickedness that goes beyond the natural depravity of man, the Holy Ghost cannot overcome.⁷¹

This showed that there could not be unity with the heterodox who still maintained the doctrine of synergism.

What about today? Only because, by God's grace, orthodox confessors will take a bold stand against any hint of synergism will the Wisconsin Synod maintain doctrinal purity. As Dr. Becker reminds us, "This doctrine has maintained itself only with difficulty in the Lutheran Church."⁷² We and the members of our flocks will encounter the philosophy behind synergism in the philosophy of the world, namely, secular humanism:

Of particular importance to our study is a consideration of the impact of the Italian humanism on philosophy and religion. While the humanists were disparate in many ways, they were "agreed in their belief in man's power of reason, freedom of choice, and innate ethical sense, but they recognized his fallibility and weakness, and the limitations imposed by life's uncertainties. Their aim was to reconcile those opposites to achieve a harmonious ordering at human life in all its manifestations." This is also an apt statement of the objectives of humanists today, especially if one adds to the last sentence the phrase "apart from God."⁷³

Pastor Gerlach's advice regarding humanism is both urgent and sound:

Every expression of humanism is an enemy of the truth as God has revealed it to us. Its philosophy, its ideals, and its ethics are those of unenlightened natural man, who is ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. If it is not opposed with every ounce of spiritual strength God's Spirit supplies to us, it will eat away like a cancer at the heart of God's new man in Christ.⁷⁴

The philosophy of humanism and free will is the doctrine of Scouting, Professor Lawrenz reminds us:

⁷⁰ Wicke, Harold, *A Catechism of Differences*, p. 18.

⁷¹ Adascheck, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁷² Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

⁷³ Gerlach, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

You have it in your power to make the right sort of track in your brain that will determine how you will act. Every boy can say to himself, "I will be what I want to be." Your actions follow your thoughts. You can control your thoughts. It comes down to a matter of right thinking, and building right habits." Though this particularly crass expression of blindness to man's natural depravity is not found in the latest Boy Scout Handbook, the blindness itself has not been deleted. It is so much part and parcel of the basic thinking of Scoutism that assertion upon assertion also in the most recent official handbook makes sense only when read in the light of Scouting's premise of not reckoning with the natural depravity of every boy. "A Scout is trustworthy...loyal ... helpful ... friendly ... courteous ... kind...obedient ... cheerful ... thrifty ... brave ... clean ... reverent." By doing your best to live up to the Scout Law, you are a Scout. If you should willfully break the Scout Law, you are not a Scout. It is as simple as that.⁷⁵

Do we really need to be ashamed at our stand against Scouting and for the Lord Jesus, who alone can change lives through His Word and Spirit? Absolutely not! And do our members express an interest in pop-psychology? Our church's library yielded the volume *I'm OK—You're OK*, which expressed the root idea of synergism quite well:

The goal of Transactional Analysis is to enable a person to have freedom of choice, the freedom to change at will, to change the responses to recurring and new stimuli ... Three things make a person want to change. One is that they hurt sufficiently ... Another thing that makes people want to change is a slow type of despair called *ennui*, or boredom ... A third thing that makes people want to change is the sudden discovery that they can.⁷⁶

Do they read newspapers and magazines? Conservative columnist Joseph Sobran wrote in a piece entitled "The Most Basic Freedom of All:"

Liberals have ridiculed the just-say-no approach as "simplistic." They've insisted that we must look for the "root causes" of social problems, which were supposedly economic and required government programs to solve them. The incantation that "poverty causes crime" has been repeated endlessly, and none dare call it simplistic. On the contrary, to parrot this cliché has been taken as a sign of sophistication. Conservatives, on the other hand, have insisted, correctly, that these so-called social problems are essentially matters of free will.⁷⁷

To avoid any contact with the free-will philosophy at the world, we'd have to withdraw from the world, and we can't do that. We have to stand, educate, and fight.

The modern religious world is no less corrupted by humanism. Modern liberal theologians propound a religion of existentialism, deceptively using Christian terms where synergism and self-righteousness is meant:

If man makes the decision (faith) in this encounter with God to be what he is meant to be (true existence, *Sein*) then God will lead him to make the cross of Christ his own ... Bultmann writes "Jesus' word invited man to decide for the reign of God breaking in ... Do men really want God's reign? Or is it the world they want? The decision they must make is a radical one...to abandon all earthly ties...to turn away from himself and place himself at the disposal of others" ...The devilish character of existential demythologizing can be seen from three characteristics: 1) Its philosophical nature makes it appeal to the human intellect. Salvation is not a matter of God's grace announced in simple words but it is a

⁷⁵ Lawrenz, Carl, *WLQ Vol. 69*, "Natural Law, Natural Knowledge of God, Civic Righteousness, and Their Application to the Boy Scout Question." pp. 70-71.

⁷⁶ Harris, Thomas, *I'm OK—You're OK*, p 82,85.

⁷⁷ Sobran, Joseph, *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, August 15, 1988.

matter at the human mind searching for man's true existence. 2) Its definition of true existence challenges man to rid himself of his materialistic and selfish desires for "things" and challenges him instead to adopt an unselfish life of service to his fellow man. Thus the radical position satisfies many people who feel that the only purpose which religion is to serve is the promotion of love among mankind. 3) At the same time, its use of all the Biblical terms deceives many into thinking that this is real Christianity. The pastor teaches that "salvation" is by "God's grace" through "faith" in "Christ" and that this "truth" is based on what the "whole Bible" teaches.⁷⁸

There is a great deal of discussion and "dialogue" on the doctrine of justification even between Catholic and Protestant scholars. Is it surprising that they might come to a compromise? Compromise is, after all, a chief tenet of humanism. And are Rome and synergists really that far apart on justification?

For Rome, Christ merited only this much—that God infuses righteousness into man that he might become righteous before God. The result of such preaching is fear, doubt, and confusion over one's eternal salvation. Calvinism limits the atonement. Arminianism makes obedience to Christ the essential factor of justifying faith and for the most part makes of Christ the way-shower, the perfect example. Enthusiasm stresses the "inner word" and the "Christ in us" and is little different from Osianism, which states that Christ "Justifies us by dwelling in us. Synergism may restrict man's efforts to the initial moment of conversion over against Rome, which teaches that man's efforts cover the entire period of Christian experience. But it still makes the transformation of man a factor in atonement. It echoes the voice of modern Protestantism for which God declares righteous only such as are righteous in themselves. Add to these the modernism of various stripes which demythologizes, socializes, and revolutionizes the gospel message.⁷⁹

Professor Fredrich wrote an article evaluating 20th century Reformed thinking, and said this about most Methodists and Baptists:

Ever since back in 1740 John Wesley correctly rejected George Whitefield's insistence that grace be limited, a la Calvin mode, most of Methodism has been Arminian rather than Calvinist. As such, this huge Reformed grouping has been susceptible to the conversion—cooperation error.

A similar situation prevails among the even larger grouping of Baptists. Their insistence on demeaning baptismal grace from an operative to a testimonial role obviously tends toward a magnification of the convert's role in his conversion.⁸⁰

Shall we heed his summary question in our practice?

This consideration of current Reformed thinking about the broad subject of salvation has revealed erroneous positions on the most basic issues of the Christian religion. The question, not just theoretical but also very practical, suggests itself: Are church bodies that embrace such wholesale and fundamental errors still to be regarded and treated as Christian churches? It merits the concern of all who bear responsibility for upholding a correct and consistent Lutheran practice.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Kuske, David, *WLQ, Vol. 81*, "An Analysis of Three Approaches of the Historical-Critical Method of Interpretation," p. 94, 188.

⁷⁹ Dobberstein, Leroy, *WLQ Vol. 84*, "The Doctrine of Justification in the Light of Present Problems," p. 50.

⁸⁰ Fredrich, E.W., *WLQ Vol. 72*, "Twentieth Century Reformed Thinking Analyzed and Evaluated," p. 49.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Should we rethink our *modus operandi* for canvassing and not exclude anyone from our prospect list, even those who are church-ed in church bodies that espouse synergism?

Browse through a Christian book store sometime and see how the Satanic error of synergism prevails. We have people who enjoy Mike Warnke, an ex-Satanist-turned-Christian-comedian, who wrote:

I grinned and pointed to the Bible. "I've been sitting up all night reading and trying to understand what you guys have been telling me. It finally got through to me and ... I took Jesus into my heart!"⁸²

You don't think he'll refer to his "being born again" in his act or on his recordings? It's central to it! Another example: In the "Show and Tell" Evangelism Sunday packet from our Synod Board for Evangelism, a suggested sermon illustration told the inspiring story of Joni Eareckson, a quadriplegic who draws pictures with a pen in her teeth yet shows her faith and Christian conviction. If our illustration inspired a member to read one of Joni's books, he might read:

You know, trusting is not necessarily having trustful feelings. It is an act of the will. We need to believe it: lay our sins and brokenness at his feet and receive spiritual healing that will start us on a great eternal journey.⁸³

Are they interested in knowing *How to Bring Your Children to Christ*? They might read, "Dear parents, God's highest gift to man was the freedom to choose the will of his God."⁸⁴ Is there a plaque or poster with the essay "Footprints" on it in your office or church. If so, you'll read the words, "LORD, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way."

But perhaps the issue that raised many questions and concerns at our 1988 District Convention was that of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM). Most CCM offers a conditional gospel:

Keith Green, the leading contemporary Christian music male vocalist until his untimely death in 1980, explains the conditional nature of forgiveness in his recorded "Altar Call:" "The Gospel is simply this, Jesus will forgive all your sins if you'll come to Him humbly, lay down at His feet and say, 'You're the Lord and I'll follow You the rest of my life on earth so that I can have the rest of eternity with You and the glory of Your Father.'⁸⁵

It is synergistic:

The help and encouragement of Jesus, according to contemporary Christian music, is futile if we fail to do our part by inviting Him into our lives or making a decision for Him. The decision doctrine is the central theme of contemporary Christian music and the article of faith which gives the whole system meaning.⁸⁶

It confuses justification with sanctification:

In "Fat Baby," Amy Grant pictures a man who is saved, baptized, sanctified, redeemed, and yet indifferent to God. She can talk this way because in contemporary Christian music's scheme of things

⁸² Warnke, Mike, *The Satan Seller*, p. 131.

⁸³ Tada, Joni Eareckson, *Choices, Changes*, p. 77.

⁸⁴ Murray, Andrew, *How to Bring Your Children to Christ*, p. 142.

⁸⁵ Preus, Klemet, *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 51, "Contemporary Christian Music: An evaluation," p. 5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

baptism, salvation, redemption, and often even sanctification are all first level experiences, while commitment belongs to the second level. Often contemporary Christian music will exhort the listener to make Jesus Lord since it is "not enough just to make Him Savior." Consequently, words are used to describe baptized and saved Christians which are usually reserved for unbelievers.⁸⁷

An orthodox confessional Lutheran takes the stand against synergism in the ear-pleasing form of music:

Perhaps contemporary Christian music is preferable to the satanic and sex-laden expressions of some pop-rock. Parents would rather have Petra in the house than Judas Priest. Amy is better than Ozzy. But teenagers today have more choices than either satanism or synergism. Christians do not make moral or theological choices by asking which of two evils is better. We do not smoke marijuana because it is better than alcoholism. False dichotomies should be exposed, not indulged. The only Lutheran response to contemporary Christian music is to inform people that it is predominantly Baptist theology which undermines the Gospel and does not glorify Christ. The arguments favoring its use do not stand.⁸⁸

Perhaps the music of Malachi will fill the needed role of hymns set to the music of the young. In Malachi's song "Faith," the group sings. "It's not a decision that I can make. It's one that requires a childlike faith, it's a gift from up above, it's a gift of God's love." But sometimes even the orthodox make ambiguous statements when songwriting and rhyme-creating. The same song says "Born again in spirit, by the Holy Spirit, Faith in Jesus Christ is the only price." The word "price" can be very misleading. And so can "Separation/ Restoration" 's malady: "We were created in the image of Him, separated because of sin, natural enemies of our God; we have life through Jesus Christ." Who are the "we" created in the image of God? The same "we" who have life through Jesus Christ, all believers: It's apparent that we still have to instruct the hearer that the "we" who were created in God's image were only Adam and Eve, thereby separating the whole human race from God because of sin.

It should be evident that we are surrounded on all fronts with the errors of synergism and decision theology, both in religion and in the world's philosophy of life. Instead of aiding and abetting confusion with a lukewarm attitude, Lutheran Christian leaders must continue to affirm salvation by grace alone.

CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of many a paper, the essayist places the Latin motto *SOLI DEO GLORIA*. It means "To God alone be the glory." bringing immediately to mind the apostle's encouragement. "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God (I Cor. 10:31)." *Soli Deo Gloria* will be an especially fitting close to our Scriptural analysis of "Decision Theology." When it comes to man's salvation, any teaching which credits man's natural powers is to be rejected as robbing *gloria a Deo*. We have been reborn of water and the Spirit, and we will live forever in heaven by God's grace alone:

SOLI DEO GLORIA!

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adascheck, T. R. *The Doctrine of Conversion*. Essay from 1951 WELS Synod Convention. Apology of the Augsburg Confession.
- Becker, Siegbert. *The Foolishness of God*, Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1982.
- Becker, Siegbert. *Revelation: The Distant Triumph Song*. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1985.
- Bente, F. *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1921
- Brenner, John M. *The Seminary's Unchanging Foundation in a Changing World: Sola Gratia*. Paper presented at the 125th anniversary of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, April 22 1986.
- Campus Crusade for Christ. *Good News*. San Bernardino, CA, 1970.
- Clark, Gordon H. *Predestination*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987.
- Copeland, Kenneth. *The Decision is Yours*. Fort Worth, TX: KCP Publications, 1983.
- Dobberstein, Leroy. *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Vol. 84 No. 1, 1967. "The Doctrine of Justification in the Light of Present Problems."
- Eckert, Otto J. *Quartalschrift*. Vol. 52 No. 1 (Jan. 1955). "The Relation of Time to Eternity in God's Dealing with Man as Concerning the Doctrine of Election."
- Formula of Concord.
- Fallwell, Jerry. *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981.
- Fredrich, E. C. *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Vol. 72 No. 1, 1975. "Twentieth Century Reformed Thinking Analyzed and Evaluated."
- Gerlach, Joel. *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Vol. 73. No. 3 & 4, 1976. "Humanism: Its Origin, Nature, and Menacing Impact."
- Gerstner, John H. *A Primer on Free Will*. Presbyterian and Reformed, 1982.
- Graham, Billy. *How to Be Born Again*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977.
- Graham, Billy. *Steps to Peace with God*. Minneapolis, MN: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.
- Gritsch, Eric W. *Born Againism: Perspectives on a Movement*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.
- Harran, Marilyn J. *Luther on Conversion: The Early Years*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Harris, Ralph W. *Now What? A Guidebook for New Christians*. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1964.

Harris, Thomas A., M. D. *I'm OK—You're Ok*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.

Keyser, Leander S., D. D. *Election and Conversion: A Frank Discussion of Dr. F. Pieper's Book on "Conversion and Election" with Some Suggestions for Lutheran Unity on Another Basis*. Burlington, Iowa: The German Literary Board, 1914.

Klug, Eugene F. and Stahlke, Otto F. *Getting Into the Formula of Concord*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1977.

Kuske, David. *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Vol. 81 No.2 (1984). "An Analysis of Three Approaches of the Historical Critical Method of Interpretation."

LaHaye, Tim. *How to be Happy Though Married*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1968.

Lawrenz, Carl. *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Vol. 69. No. 2. (1972). "Natural Law, Natural Knowledge of God. Civic Righteousness, and Their Application to the Boy Scout Question."

Mueller, John Theodore, Th. D. *Christian Dogmatics*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1955.

Murray, Andrew. *How to Bring Your Children to Christ*. Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1984.

Nichols, James. Translator. *The Works of James Arminius, Volume 1*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1956.

Pegis, Anton C., ed. *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*. New York: Random House, 1945.

Plass, Ewald M. *The Abiding Word*, Vol. 2. "Essay No: XII Synergism," St. Louis: Concordia, 1946.

Preus, Klemet. *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Jan. 1987). "Contemporary Christian Music: An Evaluation."

Rice, Richard. *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1980.

Robertson, Pat. *Answers to 200 of Life's Most Probing Questions*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984.

Schaller, John. *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 71. (1974). "The Hidden God."

Smith, Wilbur M. *Have You Considered Him?* Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1933.

Stott, John R. W. *Becoming a Christian*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1950.

Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. *How to Have a Full and Meaningful Life*. Nashville, TN, 1971.

Tada, Joni Eareckson. *Choices, Changes*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986.

Testimony Book Ministry. *What is a Christian?* Bethesda, MD.

Unaltered Augsburg Confession.

Warnke, Mike. *The Satan Seller*. South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1972.

Wicke, Harold. *A Catechism of Differences*. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1956.