

The Place Of Reason In Lutheran Theology

[A lecture delivered to the student body of Concordia Senior College, Fort Wayne, Indiana, when the author was still a member of the Lutheran Church —Missouri Synod.]

by Siegbert W. Becker

INTRODUCTION

The modern trend in theology has often been described as a “flight from reason” or as a “revolt against reason.” This characterization has much to commend it. The theologians of the Darwinian era, the spiritual children of Hegel, believed that the course of history must inevitably and consistently be onward and upward, and they were firmly convinced that the human race, by applying its intelligence to the situation confronting it, could, and eventually would, solve every problem and overcome every difficulty. This form of theology is as out of style as a double breasted suit, and the old optimism has been replaced by a despairing pessimism and the hopelessness of existentialism with its distrust of human reason and all its works.

At first glance it may appear that the Lutheran theologian would rejoice at this development, and many Lutherans, in a superficial evaluation of this movement, have hailed it as a return to orthodoxy. For it is certainly true that one of the basic attitudes of orthodox Lutheranism is a deep-seated suspicion of human reason. I suppose that many of us can remember how in our confirmation instruction we were warned again and again by our pastors to be wary of the suggestions of reason. In these cautionings the Lutheran Church echoes the word of the great man whose name she bears and who said in the last sermon he preached in Wittenberg, “Every one must also take care that his own reason may not lead him astray.... Reason mocks and affronts God in spiritual things and has in it more hideous harlotry than any harlot.” Such remarks are commonplace in Luther.

LUTHERAN RESPECT FOR REASON AS A PRECIOUS GIFT OF GOD

However, a more careful investigation will demonstrate that the suspicion with which much of modern theology views human reason and the warnings against reason which we find in the writings of Martin Luther have very little in common. Neo-orthodoxy despairs from ever being able to express the truth of God in rational, intellectual propositions. Instead it affects a false modesty and a manufactured humility and says, “The truth of God is so high and so holy that can never be set down in propositions which can be apprehended by the weak reason of man.” In their false pride in their imagined humility they are a fulfillment of the words of the apostle which he spoke of those who are ever learning and never able to come to knowledge of the truth. This is not Lutheranism, but a revived Zwinglianism, mouthing once more the old axiom which will finally destroy all of Christian theology. What they are saying in effect is *Finitum non est capax infiniti* (the finite is not able to contain the finite). Such a distrust of reason, which is itself diabolically rationalistic, one will not find in Lutheranism, neither in Luther nor the Lutheran confessions.

In fact, the very existence of the Lutheran confessions speaks out against such a view of reason. The confessors of the sixteenth century believed that it was possible to set down the truth of God in intellectual propositions, a procedure which certainly makes use of many the processes of human reason. And because they were convinced that what they were doing was solidly based on the Word of God, they were so sure that what they said was right and true and final, that it was the immutable truth of the unchangeable God, that when they put their signatures to the Book of Concord in 1582 they declared, “We have determined not to depart even a finger’s

breadth here from the subjects themselves, or from the phrases found in them (*vel a rebus vel a phrasibus*).”

Beside the testimony which is there for all to see in the very instance of confessions, the confessions themselves say that man a subject for conversion is not a stone or a block of wood, but a rational creature, a being with reason and understanding. His blind son and his darkened understanding must be enlightened indeed, to both before and after conversion man is and remains a rational nature. For this reason also Dr. Luther says that faith is in the intellect. To him faith was above all things an intellectual process, was an activity in the reason and understanding of man, although well understood much better than the disciples of the old faculty psychology that the reason and understanding of man cannot be artificially separated from the heart and the will. Some of this attitude toward reason we find also in the oft-repeated statement of the dogmatists that man is capable of conversion. What they meant to say by this was that man has a mind that can be changed, that he has a heart that can be moved, that he has a will that can be turned.

Thus it happens that in the writings of Luther one finds not only uncompromising denunciations of reason, but also unstinting praise of this highest of all human faculties. The wrong picture of Luther's so-called “irrationalism” which we find in the theological world of our time must be laid to the blame of those Luther scholars who have emphasized the former at the expense of the latter. It is true that Luther called reason “the devil's harlot,” but it is also true that he said that reason is the most beautiful harlot the devil has. It is true that he said that reason is blind, but he also said that reason is a great light. It is true that he said that reason is a big red murderess, but he also said that reason is a very great gift of God whose value cannot be estimated. He said that reason is an enemy of faith, the greatest and most invincible enemy of God, and yet he also said that reason is a most useful servant to theology.

It is significant also that, for all his hatred of Aristotle, whom he called *der vordampfer*, *hochmutiger*, *schalckhafftiger heiden* he insisted in his call for reformation of the German universities that the study of Aristotle's *Logic* be retained in the curriculum. He wanted to drop what we would call the Aristotelian content courses, his *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *Ethics*, but the Aristotelian methods courses, *Logic*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetry*, were to be kept. Almost in the same breath, he called for a new emphasis on the study of the languages. This call is highly significant for an understanding of Luther's estimate of reason. Casserley has quite correctly pointed out that those who take an antirational position in theology always take the risk of destroying the foundation on which the whole structure of language and human communication are built, for this is basically a rational process. While this is a real danger in the antirationalism which we find in neo-orthodoxy, the warning would not have been necessary for the founder of Lutheranism, for this type of anti-rationalism one does not find in the writings of Luther. He believed that the truth of God, the Gospel, is mediated to us through the rational processes of writing and reading, of speaking and hearing. The languages, he said, are the jewel box in which the treasures of the Word of God are carried.

And when it came to the interpretation of Scripture, Luther insisted on what might in one sense be called a rational approach. He did not believe that the revelation was somehow hidden behind the plain words of the Bible, in a new dimension of meaning, as we so often hear in our time. Luther did not believe that the Bible was to be read in a cabalistic way or that a man had to have some special gift to understand what the Bible wanted to say to him. It was for this reason that he rejected the accepted allegorical method of Scripture interpretation, and in this day when the allegorical method is being revived by those who would impose on us or at least make

possible a mythico-poetical interpretation of historical portions of Scripture, we would do well to remember that Luther always demanded that the simple, historical, natural meaning of the text should be received as the truth of God. The clear, bare words of Scripture every man, believer and unbeliever alike, can understand and grasp.

Not only does the revelation of God come to us in terms of reason, but faith itself, which accepts this revelation, is to Luther a rational process. In his commentary on the letter to the Galatians he defined faith as “right thinking of the heart about God.” And lest someone, under the influence of faculty psychology, should imagine that right thinking of the heart is somehow different than right thinking of the head, we might point out that earlier in the same work he had written that “Christ is apprehended by reason or the intellect, illumined by faith.” “Faith is in the intellect,” he wrote. As our confessions remind us, man is a rational creature and he remains a rational creature also after his conversion to the Christian faith. His rationality acquires a new attitude and a new direction in conversion, but essentially it remains unchanged. The laws of logic are the same for the believer and the unbeliever, but in conversion reason acquires a new base of operations, so to speak, and thus it becomes an excellent instrument for apprehending the intellectual propositions in which the revelation of God comes to man, for understanding the words of Scripture, for determining its meaning, and for communicating its message to others.

We must here be on our guard against two dangers. On the one hand, we will do a great disservice to theology and to the world and the church, if we adopt the methods of neo-orthodoxy, in which words have, in many cases, lost all concrete meaning and all objective references in a so-called “new dimension” of language, and theology itself has become what might best be described as a form of impressionistic art. In this sense, Lutheran theology can never be anti-rationalistic and remain Lutheran.

On the other hand, however, it is just as un-Lutheran to disparage scholarship and learning. Luther himself was a university professor with a passion for scholarship, deeply concerned with the education of the masses and intent upon building up a trained and competent ministry. While it is true that much of modern scholarship has been placed into the service of the devil, yet this must not be permitted to persuade us to leave scholarship in the hands of those whose minds have not been enlightened by the converting Spirit of God. Surely a consistent Lutheran will never say what has been said: “The study of logic is a curse to students of the holy ministry.” Scholarship can indeed be diabolically and deceptively perverse and the more intellectually competent and communicative a man is, the greater potential danger he may be to the church. But this fact ought never to drive us to the conclusion that there is no room in the Lutheran church for the highest scholarship and the most competent intellect. A bare acquaintance with the rules of logic will keep us from making such a mistake.

THE ANTI-RATIONALISM OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which it can quite correctly be said that Lutheran theology is thoroughly and consistently anti-rationalistic. Bainton quite rightly speaks of Luther’s “stupefying irrationalities,” and places in which Luther speaks disparagingly of reason can quickly be found by a cursory examination of his works. This ambivalence in Luther’s attitude toward reason is well illustrated in the Small Catechism. In his explanation of the first article he lists reason and all the senses as precious gifts of God for which we are to praise and thank the Lord, but in the explanation of the third article he confesses, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord.”

Luther consistently holds that it is the very nature of faith to base itself wholly on the bare words and promises of God and not to consider the testimony of the senses nor to listen to

the arguments of reason. Luther was an eloquent foe of what might be called empirical theology. He took quite literally and quite seriously the words of Scripture, "Faith is the evidence of things not seen." He held that what we today call the scientific method has no place in theology. There is no room for it in the realm of faith. We do not, for example, believe that God answers prayer because we can point to a thousand cases in which that for which men prayed came to pass; we believe it rather because we have a promise from God, and we will continue to believe it even if men cite a thousand cases in which it seems that all prayer was spoken in vain. This is one of the most important lessons for budding preachers to learn. The bare words of Holy Writ must count for more than your feelings, your eyes, your senses, and your heart. Only in this way can the children of God learn to know that God is nearest when He seems to be farthest away. It was this attitude that enabled Luther to write that at the time when God seems most angry, His children know Him best as a merciful Savior, and when they feel the terrors of sin and death most deeply, then they understand best that they have eternal righteousness. They know that they are lords of all things just when they are of all men most miserable. In other words, our faith must never be based on the evidence we gather by the senses and arrange and systematize and interpret by the capacities of reason.

Because this is the nature of faith, therefore reason dare never be permitted to sit in judgment on what God says in His holy word. We need to be forewarned and we need to caution others that what the Bible tells us about sin and salvation is diametrically opposed to everything that man thinks about those subjects apart from the revelation of God. In every human court, for example, the innocent man goes free and the guilty man is condemned, but in Christian theology we hold that it is perfectly plausible and divinely correct that the innocent One should go to the cross and that the manifestly and admittedly guilty should be declared free from all blame. Or take another example. Whether we consciously admit it or not, the concept of hereditary guilt is an offense to our sense of justice, and our own reason agrees with the justice of the complaint of the Jews, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." If the fathers want to eat sour grapes, it is their teeth that ought to be set on edge and not those of their children.

We may become so used to these ways of God that we no longer see their incompatibility with the reason of men, but a little sober reflection will help us to see why men look upon the message of Christianity as folly, and this recognition in turn should make it possible for us to approach the unbeliever with a great deal of sympathetic understanding. Our own sense of justice protests against the idea that the whole human race should be sentenced to die for the sin of one man, and it is only by the grace of God that we are able to overcome those rebellious thoughts through the faith which accepts the corollary of this truth, which is equally as revolting to human reason, but which assures us that we shall have life through the obedience of another. The man who rejects the concept of hereditary guilt on the basis of the juridical principle that one man ought not to be condemned for the crime of another must also, if he is consistent, reject the doctrine of the vicarious atonement, and church history will demonstrate how quickly the second denial follows the first.

Other examples of Scripture doctrine which are offensive to reason could be multiplied without effort, even though at times it may appear that certain conclusions of science and philosophy manifest a superficial resemblance to the truths of revelation. The doctrine of original sin, in its aspect of hereditary depravity, is a case in point. While many have seen in the Freudian "discovery" of the "id" a verification of the Christian doctrine of original depravity, yet the Freudian concept of the corruption of man is so far removed from the Christian doctrine of total

depravity that the Lutheran confessions are still correct when they say that this hereditary sin is such a deep, evil corruption of the nature of man that reason can never know it, but it must simply be believed on the basis of the revelation which we have in the Holy Scripture.

Another example is the Lutheran and Biblical doctrine of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Reformed theologians are fond of seeing in our doctrine of the real presence a bit of the leaven of Romanism of which Luther failed to purge the church. In reality, however, the Roman doctrine of trans-substantiation and the Reformed view of the Holy Supper are cut from the same cloth, for they are both based on rationalistic considerations. The dogma of transubstantiation was constructed in order to come to terms with the rational axiom that two substances cannot simultaneously occupy the same place, while the Reformed view is based on the equally rationalistic principle that the same body cannot be in two places at the same time. Reformed theology, like Arianism, seeks to avoid the difficulty by removing the infinite element from the sacrament. Roman theology, like Docetism, attempts to resolve the difficulty by abstracting the finite element. Here Rome and Geneva are brothers under the skin and only Lutheranism insists upon letting the words of Scripture stand inviolate and sings,

"Human reason, though it ponder,
Cannot fathom this great wonder."

Not only does the Bible, however, set forth doctrines which are repulsive to reason, but there are times when the teachings of Scripture seem to be totally incompatible with each other. Here, too, we have become so familiar with the highest and holiest mysteries that we are often completely unconscious of the antirational character of some of our beliefs. But I can remember how in the years of my childhood I struggled in my own mind with the Lenten hymn, "O grosze Not, Gott selbst ist tot," and I was reminded of these struggles of mine own a few years ago by one of my sons. One of his playmates was a Jehovah's Witness and they must have discussed the question of the deity of Christ one day, for my youngster burst into the bathroom where I was shaving and the conversation went something like this: "Jesus is God, isn't He, Daddy?" "Yes, Jesus is God." "But He is also a man, isn't He?" "Yes, He is also a man." "If He is God, He knows everything doesn't He?" "Yes, He knows everything."

"But if He is man, there are some things He doesn't know, aren't there?"

"Yes, there were some things He did not know when He was here on earth." "If He is God, He can't die, can He?" "No, God cannot die." "But if He is a man, He can die, can't He?" "Yes, He died for us." "But Jesus is just one person, isn't He?" "Yes, He is just one person." "Boy, that is a problem."

Of late years it has become theologically fashionable to speak of this as the paradox of the incarnation. I am not sure whether I like this terminology or not. To many a paradox is only an attention getting device which is not intended to be taken at full face value. De Wolf, for example, in his book, *The Religious Revolt against Reason*, says, "The paradox is useful for communication only so far as it arouses the reason of the hearer to harmonize the seeming contradiction.... Paradoxes, in short, are useful so long as we look for the truth, not in them, but in a new rational synthesis beyond them." But precisely this is what the Christian faith refuses to do when it confesses that Christ is "one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person."

We assert without apology that Jesus Christ is man in the fullest sense of that term, and that He is therefore conceived, born, weak, helpless, dependent, subject to all the limitations of space and time as all other men, and at the same time we proclaim that He is God in the fullest

sense of that term, and that He is therefore eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, the Lord of all creation. If He is God, He is the Creator. If He is truly man, He is a creature. All things were made by Him and yet He Himself is made of a woman. If He is God, He is a Spirit. If He is man, He has flesh and blood. If He is God, He knows all things. If He is man, He grows in knowledge and there are some thing which He does not know. If He is God, He never slumbers nor sleeps. If He is man, He sleeps in exhaustion. He carries the government of the whole world upon His shoulder and yet He must be carried in the arms of His mother because He cannot walk by Himself. And so we could go on and on, apparently piling contradiction upon contradiction.

But there we let it stand. Lutheranism, where it is true to the Holy Scriptures and its own confessions, wants absolutely nothing to do with the attempts which have been made in the church to find a doctrine of the person of Christ which is compatible with reason. This attempt is at the root of the heresies which have plagued the church in this doctrine, Arianism, Docetism, Nestorianism, and even the allooesis of Zwingli. With Luther we know that the doctrine of the person of Christ is not philosophically defensible. The theology of Luther's day sought to justify the incarnation from a philosophical point of view on the premise that God is omnipotent and therefore can perform such a miracle. Although Luther himself often appealed to the omnipotence of God as justification for a miracle, yet he refused to admit this argumentation here, for he said that as soon as philosophy admits that God is omnipotent it can no longer concede that He is a man, for if He has infinite power, He Himself is infinite, and if He is infinite, He cannot be a man, for man is finite. Not for one moment, however, is Luther willing to let this argument stand in the way of faith, for faith, he says, is not limited by, nor subject to, the rules and words of philosophy, but it is free. Since the Bible asserts both truths with equal clarity, the child of God will simply believe both statements even if he cannot see how they can be made rationally compatible.

Such paradoxes are not uncommon in Scripture, but the greatest and most persistent apparent contradiction found in the Bible is the difference between Law and Gospel. Luther said at one time that Law and Gospel are more contradictory than contradictions, and even Dr. Walther, who said that there are no contradictions in the Bible (*Law and Gospel*, p. 7), told his students: "Turning the leaves of the Holy Scriptures while still ignorant of the distinction between Law and Gospel, a person receives the impression that a great number of contradictions are contained in the Scriptures; in fact, the entire Scriptures seem to be made up of contradictions, worse than the Koran of the Turks" (p. 61).

The Law tells us that we are unjust, sinful, and hated by God. The Gospel tells us that we are just, sinless, and loved by God. The Law says that sinners must be punished, and that they are the objects of God's wrath. The Gospel tells us that sinners have been saved and that they are the objects of God's grace and favor. The Law tells us that it is the will of God that all men should be damned. The Gospel tells us that it is the will of God that all men should be saved. The Law tells us that God will not acquit the guilty sinner and the Gospel tells us that God has already acquitted the whole of sinful mankind. To discover that these things at least appear to be contradictory does not require great intellectual acumen, in fact, to say that they only appear to be contradictory will seem rather ridiculous to the unconverted man.

Many attempts have been made in the church to resolve this conflict. Rome has long since adopted a thoroughgoing legalism in which any proclamation of Gospel becomes a happy accident. By this expedient the Gordian knot is simply cut. Calvinism makes a half-hearted attempt at a solution by making a part of mankind the objects of God's wrath and hatred and another part the recipients of God's favor and love. In our own time the religious evolutionist

sees in the message of Law and Gospel only a record of the progressive “revelation,” so-called, in which primitive man saw God as a bloody tyrant whereas we have learned to see Him as a kind and merciful friend, so that even leaders in the church can write such tripe as “In the books which precede the prophets there is pictured a God so revolting as to be comparable only to Hitler.”

While the personal union of the two natures in the one person of Christ will always, at least in this life, remain a great mystery for us, God has revealed to us at least a part of the solution to the apparent contradiction between Law and Gospel. When we stand at the cross of our Lord and recognize His suffering and death as the vicarious payment for our sin, we see in one and the same event the awful wrath of God and His matchless grace. We see here a graphic demonstration of God’s refusal to allow sin to go unpunished, and at the same time we are assured here of His resolve to forgive the sins of the whole world. Here at the cross every sinner dies and in the same act He is offered the free gift of everlasting life. But it must be kept in mind that the solution was not found where De Wolf would have us find it, in a new rational synthesis beyond the paradox, but rather in a complete fulfillment of both Law and Gospel in the vicarious atonement, a doctrine which is itself an offense to human reason and to our natural sense of justice but which we apprehend by faith. Thus it is that Christ not only mediates between God and man, but also, as Luther, says, between Law and Gospel.

Another aspect of the solution of the apparent contradiction between Law and Gospel is to be found in the contradictory nature of man. Because the Christian is both saint and sinner, not alternately, but at the same time, because the old man and the new man both live in his heart, he needs both Law and Gospel. He needs the Law to hold the old man in check; he needs the Gospel to encourage and comfort the new man. He needs the Law to keep him mindful of his great need; he needs the Gospel to keep him from despair. These things may appear to be contradictory to reason, but for the man who understands the message of Scripture as it applies to him and believes what it says, the paradox is resolved in what might be called, with apologies and reservations, the existential situation.

AN ANTI-RATIONAL THEOLOGIAN IN A RATIONALISTIC WORLD

All of this should be of extreme practical value for young men who are preparing themselves for the high office of the holy ministry. Because the Gospel message is an offense to human reason, or, as St. Paul puts it, because the things revealed in the Holy Scriptures are foolishness to the unconverted man, therefore one of the greatest mistakes a Christian theologian can make is to attempt to make the Gospel so reasonable that men will be persuaded by logical argument to accept the Christian faith. This was the mistake of Thomas Aquinas and scholastic theology, and it is the mistake of many a pseudo-intellectual theologian in our own time. While we are worried about the lunatic fringe on the left and on the right, whoever they may be, we might spare a little of our worrying time in being a little concerned about what I would call the lunatic fringe at the top. This is made up of well-meaning men who believe that the way to bring the world to Christ is by making the Gospel so sweetly reasonable that sensible men cannot resist it or by making it so intellectually palatable that the world will swallow it with gusto.

But the only way that the Gospel can be made appealing to the natural reason of man is either by modifying it so that it is no longer the Gospel but only a reasonable facsimile thereof, or by hiding its message under involved terminology and sesquipedalian vocabulary, which may appeal to the world because it gives the appearance of deep learning, and furthermore enables men by its very obscurity to read their own meanings into the message. To win men for such a Gospel is not to win them for Christ. To persuade them under such conditions to speak favorably

of the church and its theology is not to teach them to praise the Lord. We must recognize that conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit and that it is not the message of Scripture that needs modification or adornment but the heart of man that is in need of a radical change.

There is a peculiar danger here that threatens especially us of the academic world. We are often tempted to hide our beliefs because we know that much of what we accept as divine and eternal truth is most unpopular in the scholarly world of our time. And so we become what Paul Claudel called “trembling apologists” for the Christian faith. In order to keep the admiration of the world, we try to construct a theology which the world will recognize as an acceptable system of thought. Therefore we set out on the wild goose chase of trying to restate our theology in terms which will make the world admire us as intelligent people whose faith is rationally defensible and intellectually respectable. There are only two possible outcomes to this process. Either we will be so recondite and abstruse in our presentation that the world will not understand us and will mistake our polysyllabic prolixity for philosophical profundity and will read its own perverted opinions into our ambiguous phraseology and our semantic exercises, or else we will have constructed a theology which is no longer the Christian faith. As soon as you have a system of religious thought which appeals to the unconverted, natural man and still leaves him unchanged, you can no longer have the truth as it is revealed by God, for the things of the Spirit are always foolishness to the natural man. And the greatest fool in Christendom is the man who believes that it is possible to confess the Christian faith clearly and unequivocally and escape the contempt of the wise men of this world. This does not mean, of course, that a Christian cannot be admired for his academic competence and his mental capacity, but it does mean that when we reach the area of religion the proponents will either speak past each other or else controversy will result, a controversy which can be resolved only by the converting power of the Spirit of God.

When we therefore approach men with the proclamation of the plain and simple truths revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures and see them react against it, this ought not to be for us a signal to retreat in order to regroup our forces and to try new tactics which have a greater promise of success. We must never forget that the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. When men say that the message of the Gospel is foolishness, that no reasonable, intelligent man would believe such things, this ought not to cause us to doubt its power or to feel that it is out of date and in need of restatement in the thought-forms of modern philosophy in order that it may recover its effectiveness in the hearts of men and its relevance to the human situation. No, rather such a reaction to the Gospel ought to convince us that the Gospel has not lost its power, and this very rejection is a proof of the truth of the Gospel, for the Bible tells us that the things of the Spirit are foolishness to the natural man, and the man who denounces the Gospel as foolishness is a living testimonial to the truth of the Holy Scriptures.

This means too that in our defense of the Gospel we ought not to make the mistake of meeting the world on its own ground, for even if we are able to demonstrate our intellectual superiority over some of the opponents of the Gospel because their attacks on the Gospel are based on ignorance, which is sometimes the case, we will still not have brought these people to the foot of the cross. Our defense of the Gospel must never become an academic exercise designed to demonstrate our theological acumen, but it must always be aimed at bringing men to a knowledge of their sin and to a realization of the love of God and His gracious forgiveness in Christ. At best, the most that we can hope for in a debate on the battlefield of reason is that we may be able to convince men of their fallibility, but by this process we can never hope to make

more of them than agnostics, for as Kant demonstrated and Luther already asserted, every argument from reason can be overthrown by another argument from reason. Personally, I am convinced that the only philosophical position which is tenable on the ground of reason is that of agnosticism and skepticism, and this accounts for the fact that those whose theology rests on a philosophical foundation rather than on an infallible and inerrant revelation are forever doomed to live in the realm of relativism and tentativity, where there are no certain and eternal verities.

To defend the Christian faith, therefore, by rational argument is foreign to the guiding spirit of Lutheranism. Here and there it may be that one may find that some of the truths of Christianity lend themselves to this treatment, but still one would never expect a Lutheran to write a book entitled "The Reasonableness of Christianity," or "The Logic of Belief." Perhaps the farthest a Lutheran theologian should be willing to go would be to write a book, or perhaps only an essay, on the unreasonableness of unbelief. In assuming this stance, the Lutheran scholar is following in the footsteps of Dr. Luther, who said that to defend Scripture with reason is to defend your helmet with the bare head and your sword with the bare hand and to illumine the sun with an unlit lantern. It is not Christianity that needs to be made reasonable, rather, it is reason that needs to be made Christian. Luther said that if men will not accept the doctrines of the Christian faith on the authority of Scripture we ought not even to desire their assent on other grounds. And the advice which he gave to his students in Wittenberg is still valid today. Let this be the primary concern of a theologian, that he knows the texts well, as they say, and let him hold this as his first principle, that in holy things one must not dispute nor philosophize. For if this were to be done with rational arguments which have the appearance of truth, I could find fault with all the articles of the faith. But in theology one must listen and believe and in the heart be firmly convinced that God is true, however absurd the things which He says in His Word may appear to reason. To do what Luther enjoins upon us here is to fulfill the directive given to us by the apostle Paul, who long ago called upon the children of God to take into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Reason is a great gift of God, and, like every creature of God, is to be received with thanksgiving, but like every other gift of God it should be laid on the altar of the Lord and dedicated wholly to His service and to His glory. Only in this way will we learn to bring the true sacrifice of the intellect.