



The
BONDAGE
of the **WILL**

MARTIN LUTHER

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“On the Enslaved Will”

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Cover Art: Cranach, Lucas the Elder (1472-1553). Portrait of the Young Martin Luther. Located in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, Germany.

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

Martin Luther

1483–1546

. . . And were this world all devils o'er,
And watching to devour us,
We lay it not to heart so sore;
Not they can overpower us.
And let the prince of ill
Look rim as e'er he will,
He harms us not a whit;
For why his doom is writ;
A word shall quickly slay him.

God's word, for all their craft and force,
One moment will not linger,
But, spite of hell, shall have its course;
'Tis written by His finger.
And, though they take our life,
Goods, honor, children, wife,
Yet is their profit small;
These things shall vanish all:
The city of God remaineth.

— “A Safe Stronghold Our God Is Still”

By Martin Luther, translated by Thomas Carlyle, 1795–1881

For the modern reader, the long version of Martin Luther's story relies on an unusual vocabulary. A bull? (An official, sealed document issued by the pope.) A diet? (An assembled court of law.) Worms? (A city in Germany.) The Diet of Worms? (Consider the possibilities.)

Martin Luther was born in eastern Germany in 1483. That's some forty years after the German Johann Gutenberg invented a printing press using movable metal type and nearly a decade before Columbus sailed the ocean blue. Having not inherited the family's farm, Luther's father turned to mining and founding metals. Being his father's hope for a son with a secure academic profession, Martin was educated in Latin and then attended the University of Erfurt, receiving a bachelor's and master's in law in 1505.

Martin was a particularly sensitive child, subject to mood swings—highs and lows. Influenced by his region's Germanic, peasantry brand of Christianity, he was haunted by fear—of demons and devils as well as of God the Judge, quick to condemn sinners to interminable punishment. Becoming a monk or priest was considered one sure way of gaining God's favor. For Martin, the decision to enter a monastery came in a July 1505 thunderstorm, when a bolt of lightning knocked him off his feet. On the brink of eternity, he cried out, imploring the aid of St. Anne: "Help me," and promised, "I will become a monk."

Ordained in an Augustinian order in 1507, he continued educational pursuits, eventually being assigned to the University of Wittenberg to teach moral theology. Young Martin was not a happy man. How could he love God the Judge who was appeased at such a high price? He felt the burden of perfection, including stringent fasting and deprivations that he hoped would "compensate for his sins," to quote Roland Bainton in his acclaimed 1950 biography *Here I Stand*. There was the burden of confession, for scrupulous Martin several hours a day, wracking his brain to find offenses that would potentially separate him from God. There was the financial or physical cost of indulgences; papal bulls decreed that people could buy a proportioned amount of the righteousness of Jesus or a saint and thereby decrease a predeceased loved one's time in purgatory; some bulls went further, offering forgiveness of sin to a living person. Some indulgences were accessible only at churches or shrines containing relics, such as bones of saints. During a 1510 trip to Rome, Martin crawled up the purported (and displaced) steps of Pilate's palace, hopefully praying his grandfather out of purgatory.

Luther's story isn't complete without an introduction of an older priest, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, Netherlands. Widely traveled, a friend of

Thomas More, he was known as his generation's premier scholar. A satirist, in 1509 he wrote *The Praise of Folly*, which lambasted both the church and the state. In 1516 he was the first to publish a Greek New Testament; it also included his own Latin translation, rather than the ancient Vulgate. Steeped in the Christian and secular classics and in Scripture, he was a Christian humanist, with a particular interest in humanity's role in the great scheme of things. Reformation history remembers Erasmus with the adage "Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched."

As a young man Martin Luther himself continued pursuing his academic pursuits. After earning a theological doctorate, he taught biblical studies at Wittenberg, lecturing principally on the Psalms and then Romans and Galatians. In the writings of Paul, he rediscovered some classical theology of Augustine. Roland Bainton describes what Luther saw in Romans: "It is not that the Son by His sacrifice has placated the irate Father. . . . It is that in some inexplicable way, in the utter desolation of the forsaken Christ, God was able to reconcile the world to Himself."

Luther's long-time arguments with, even animosity toward, God withered. He later explained that he had previously taken the phrase "the righteousness of God" to mean "that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous." But after much grappling, "I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, He justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before 'the righteousness of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love."

At first Martin thought that his new insight would change the emphasis of his preaching and classroom teaching. But things got complicated. The small university town of Wittenberg was becoming a known center for acclaimed relics and the selling of indulgences. In surrounding areas, some Dominicans were selling even more indulgences, with geographical and cultural implications; German money was being whisked away to Rome to pay for the greatest reliquary of all: St. Peter's Basilica. This political element helped to fuel the fire that resulted after Martin posted "Ninety-five Theses"—largely against the

indulgences industry—in Latin on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. If his intent was to engage academic debate, in actuality, he changed the course of the Western church and world.

Translated into German the document was reproduced by an enterprising printer and widely distributed, agitating local peasants. A copy went to Rome. Dominicans took sides against Augustinians. Luther dug in his heels, challenging the authority of the pope by appealing to the higher authority of Scripture. By the next summer, like the apostle Paul, Martin was subpoenaed, to appear in Rome, to answer charges of heresy and insubordination. But Luther's local political ruler, Frederick the Wise, had previously assured him that any trial would take place in Germany. A long, three-year tussle—including Luther's claim that the pope was the antichrist and a papal bull decreeing Luther's excommunication in 1520—resulted in Luther's secular trial, at the Diet of Worms in early 1521.

The Holy Roman emperor himself, Charles V, presided over the trial. First-hand reports quote Martin as holding his ground, refusing to recant, saying, "Here I stand. I can do no other." Found guilty by a depleted number of jurors, Luther might well have been martyred, if not for one friend on the court, Saxony's elector, Frederick the Wise, who organized an abduction, in which Luther was spirited away to a fortress, Wartburg Castle. For about a year in hiding, Luther translated the New Testament from Greek into German, intent on getting the Scriptures into the hands of his people, even though his translation was outlawed by Charles V.

Martin Luther's message spoke freedom for and empowered German's "common man." His early writings (1520) include an *Appeal to the German Ruling Class*, in which he rallied local rulers to reform the church and protect their people from its extortion and oppression. Here he laid out his understanding of the "priesthood of all believers," in contrast to the prevailing view of the clergy as a caste set apart with special access to God. Here he also proposed that priests be allowed to marry.

In *The Freedom of a Christian*, he explained the tenet of justification by grace through faith alone, not as a result of good works, which were the fruit rather than a contributing source of salvation.

The title and contents of another 1520 document fueled unrest: *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. In this publication he discounted five of seven church sacraments, claiming that only two, Eucharist and Baptism, were biblically instituted. In terms of Eucharist, he insisted that “the cup” be offered to all believers, not reserved for the clergy only, and he argued against the literalness of transubstantiation—that in the Mass the bread and wine in substance became flesh and blood. When Erasmus—a critic of the Roman Church who nevertheless did not break rank—read this document, he noted that “the breach is irreparable.”

The Diet of Worms decreed that these publications be burned. Many bonfires blazed, but the public had been churned up, and other academics, clerics, and some public officials caught Luther’s vision, which opened roads to political as well as spiritual freedom. Priests were marrying. Congregants were sipping Communion wine. The Mass was being said in German. Though it was not part of Martin’s “agenda,” pictures and statues of the saints were being desecrated. The Wittenberg community was ideologically split, to the point of violence, and in 1522 the city council boldly asked Martin to return to town, in Bainton’s view, “probably . . . to exert a moderating influence” in the fray.

Cautiously, courageously Martin returned to Wittenberg and indeed he preached “patience, charity, and consideration for the weak. . . . No one can be intimidated into belief.” Returning to Wittenberg, Luther was in effect its mayor and priest, leading the town to real reform. Another diet, at Nürnberg, in 1523 revisited charges made at Worms, but a juridical impasse allowed Luther to continue his work, writing, teaching, preaching, and leading in circles beyond Wittenberg.

Politics and religion. It’s hard for us to understand how intricately intertwined the two were in central Europe in Luther’s day. Two publications later that year reflect the scope of Luther’s influence. *On Civil Government* was followed by *On the Order of Worship*, an initial attempt at a revised Eucharistic liturgy in which he introduced the idea of congregational singing. In *Christian History* magazine Paul Grime notes, “Music in congregational worship remains one of Luther’s most enduring legacies.” To fill a gap he’d created, Martin accepted yet another task—that of writing hymns not in Latin but in German. With ramifications he didn’t even understand, Luther was empowering his

people. His appeal to all believers to take their stand as equal before God, even to rally in song, contributed to such unrest that by 1525 he was surrounded by a populist uprising known as the Peasants' War. Again he tried to serve as a mediator, writing an *Admonition to Peace*, exhorting the rulers to be less severe and the populace to honor secular authority. But when the rebellion didn't subside, Luther sided with the princes (*Against the Robbing and Murdering Horde of Peasants*), advocating a controversially harsh repression.

Into this whirlwind life, and despite some Pauline reservations ("my mind is averse to marriage because I daily expect the death decreed to the heretic"), he brought a bride. Katherina von Bora was a former nun fifteen years younger than he. Though he married feeling some obligation to provide a home for her, she became a steadying, still point in his life, prompting him eventually to say, "I would not give my Katie for France and Venice together." In red-haired, feisty Katie, Martin had met his match. While Martin was changing the landscape of Europe, Katie was reining him in at home. Some of Luther's best known writings are known as his *Table Talk*, more than 6,500 short discourses he gave to visitors, including disciples, around his dinner table.

One statement about his marriage sheds light back on Martin's public, spiritual persona. "In domestic affairs I defer to Katie. Otherwise, I am led by the Holy Ghost." Luther was sure he spoke for God, sometimes in exaggerated tones and, as with Erasmus, in extended debates. In 1524 Erasmus wrote *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive collatio*—sometimes known simply as *The Freedom of the Will*—using Scripture and reason to attack Luther's theological stance on the impotence of the human will or denial of so-called free will. The next year Luther responded with a point-by-point rebuttal of Erasmus, shooting holes in his premise, his definitions, his logic, and his interpretation of Old and then New Testament passages. This volume, *The Bondage of the Will*, became a classic explication of Luther's Augustinian and Reformation theology—that there is nothing humans can do to warrant or earn salvation.

Even though Luther thanked Erasmus for prompting him to articulate core issues, the publication of this response cut a permanent breach between the two scholars. Erasmus stayed in contact with other Reformers, but he and

Luther remained estranged. Hoping to reform the Catholic Church from within, Erasmus eventually alienated himself from Rome, which forbade his writings before his death in 1536.

As Luther aged, his rancor and anger at his enemies increased to disturbing levels. He wrote, for instance, “I cannot deny that I am more vehement than I should be. . . . But they assail me and God’s Word so atrociously and criminally that . . . these monsters are carrying me beyond the bounds of moderation.”

The word *Protestant* even then seemed an apt description for Luther. That word was first used at the 1529 Diet of Speyer, at which Emperor Charles V again attempted to enforce the Diet of Worms. *Protestant* stuck as a descriptor of the anti-Catholic group(s). Any number of theologians supported Luther in his stand against papal power and extrabiblical traditions and abuses. But as Rome itself headed toward a Counter-Reformation and lost some power in central Europe, Protestant reformers took issue with—even turned on—each other. Points of doctrine and worship, such as the predestination versus free will, the baptism of infants, the role of music and art, the exact role and meaning of the Lord’s Supper, caused rifts among groups of disciples, sometimes along regional lines, notably the Swiss and Dutch disagreeing with the Germans.

Though Luther was making enemies of reformers, he still was in conflict with the Holy Roman Empire. Again under virtual house arrest at a castle fortress, he could not attend a 1530 Diet of Augsburg, at which the Lutheran apologetic, coauthored by Luther and his colleague Philip Melancthon, was presented. Professor Eugene Klug of Concordia Theological Seminary notes that for Lutherans, this *Augsburg Confession* became a “standard” for theology, “a document with the weight of a Declaration of Independence.” In midlife Luther was juggling not only matters of state, but also the education of the common man, writing a long and a short version of a Catechism that in question-and-answer format laid out the basics of the faith. The *Small Catechism*, which has been called “the gem of the Reformation,” was taught in homes, generation after generation, instilling basic doctrines to the youngest children; it includes phrase-by-phrase explanations of the Ten Commandments, the

Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. In his spare time, he also continued translating the Old Testament from Hebrew, his complete German Bible being published in 1534.

In his lifetime Luther wrote some 60,000 pages of prose. He welcomed listeners and readers, and yet his deeper desire was that "the Holy Scriptures alone be read." The basics of Luther's theology have been reduced to four points: *sola Scripture* (Scripture alone being the authority, rather than extraneous tradition), *sola fide* (faith alone, not works, being the channel of our righteousness), *sola gratia* (grace alone—a gift of God—being the cause of our salvation)—all anchored in *solo Christo* (Christ alone). Dr. Timothy George notes that "each *sola* affirmed the centrality of Jesus Christ."

Martin Luther died in 1546, at age sixty-two, after years of continued productivity despite declining health. A year after his death, the emperor declared war on Protestants, set in motion at the Diet of Augsburg. The emperor initially defeated the Protestants, but the tide turned. The 1555 Peace of Augsburg allowed local princes to determine the religion of their districts. This legally recognized Protestantism, though Germany suffered sectarian violence, including the Thirty Years' War, for another century.

Historians feel that early-sixteenth-century Europe was ready for sweeping reform, seeded by John Wycliffe, John Huss, and Desiderius Erasmus, among others. If not Luther it would have been another cleric or academic bridging medieval and Renaissance culture. But it was Martin Luther, a powerful personality, a charismatic motivator, and systematic teacher who shook not just the church but the political world with a basic premise—that we cannot buy or work our way into the kingdom of God.

PREFACE BY THE TRANSLATOR

The translator has long had it in meditation, to present the British church with an English version of a choice selection from the works of that great reformer, Martin Luther, and in November last, he issued proposals for such a publication. He considers it however necessary to state, that this treatise on *The Bondage of the Will*, formed no part of his design when those proposals were sent forth. But receiving, subsequently, an application from several friends to undertake the present translation, he was induced not only to accede to their request, but also to acquiesce in the propriety of their suggestion, that this work should precede those mentioned in the proposals. The unqualified encomium bestowed upon it by a divine so eminent as the late Reverend Augustus Montague Toplady, who considered it a masterpiece of polemical composition, had justly impressed the minds of those friends with a correct idea of the value of the treatise; and it was their earnest desire that the plain sentiments and forcible arguments of Luther upon the important subject which it contained, should be presented to the church, unembellished by any superfluous ornament, and unaltered from the original, except as to their appearance in an English version. In short, they wished to see a correct and faithful translation of Luther on *The Bondage of the Will*—without note or comment! In this wish, the translator fully concurred, and having received and accepted the application, he sat down to the work immediately, which was, on Monday, December 23, 1822.

As it respects the character of the version itself—the translator, after much consideration of the eminence of his author as a standard authority in the church of God, and the importance of deviating from the original text in any shape whatever, at last decided upon translating according to the following principle; to which, it is his design strictly to adhere in every future translation with which he may present the public—to deliver faithfully the mind of Luther, retaining literally, as much of his own wording, phraseology, and expression, as could be admitted into the English version. With what degree of fidelity he has adhered to this principle in the present work, the public are left to decide.

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

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

2. The division heads of the treatise, which are not distinctively expressed in the original, are so expressed in the translation, to facilitate the reader's view of the whole work and all its parts. The heads are these—Introduction, Preface [comprising Erasmus' Skepticism; The Necessity of Knowing God and His Power; The Sovereignty of God], Exordium, Discussion (First Part, Second Part, and Third Part), and Conclusion.

3. The subdividing sections of the matter, which, in the original, are distinguished by a very large capital at the commencement, are, in the translation, for typographical reasons, distinguished by Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.

4. The quotations from the Diatribe, are, in the translation, preceded and followed by a dash and inverted commas, but with this distinction—where Erasmus' own words are quoted in the original the commas are double; but single, where the substance of his sentiments only is quoted. The reader will observe, however, that this distinction was not adopted till after the first three sheets were printed, which will account for all the quotations, in those sheets, being preceded and followed by double commas. Though it is presumed, there will be no difficulty in discovering which are Erasmus' own words, and which are his sentiments in substance only. [Editor's note: In this edition, Erasmus' own words appear in italics and surrounded by double quotation marks. What the translator regards as Erasmus' sentiments appear in Roman type, also surrounded by double quotation marks. Though there are occasions when other material (not Erasmus') is set apart by double quotations marks, the context should help the reader make the distinction between the two.]

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

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

HENRY COLE

London, March 1823

INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther, to the venerable D. Erasmus of Rotterdam, wishing grace and peace in Christ.

That I have been so long answering your *Diatribes on Free Will* [*De libero arbitrio Diatribes sive collatio* (1524)], venerable Erasmus, has happened contrary to the expectation of all, and contrary to my own custom also. For hitherto, I have not only appeared to embrace willingly opportunities of this kind for writing, but even to seek them of my own accord. Someone may, perhaps, wonder at this new and unusual thing, this forbearance or fear, in Luther, who could not be roused up by so many boasting taunts, and letters of adversaries, congratulating Erasmus on his victory and singing to him the song of Triumph—What that Maccabee, that obstinate assertor, then, has at last found an antagonist a match for him, against whom he dares not open his mouth!

But so far from accusing them, I myself openly concede that to you, which I never did to anyone before—that you not only by far surpass me in the powers of eloquence, and in genius (which we all concede to you as your desert, and the more so, as I am but a barbarian and do all things barbarously), but that you have damped my spirit and impetus, and rendered me languid before the battle; and that by two means. First, by art, because, that is, you conduct this discussion with a most specious and uniform modesty, by which you have met and prevented me from being incensed against you. And next, because, on so great a subject, you say nothing but what has been said before: therefore, you say less about, and attribute more unto, “free will,” than the Sophists have hitherto said and attributed (of which I shall speak more fully hereafter). So that it seems even superfluous to reply to these your arguments, which have been indeed often refuted by me; but trodden down, and trampled under foot, by the incontrovertible book of Philip Melancthon, *Concerning Theological Questions*, a book, in my judgment, worthy not only of being immortalized, but

of being included in the ecclesiastical canon. In comparison of which, your book is, in my estimation, so mean and vile, that I greatly feel for you for having defiled your most beautiful and ingenious language with such vile trash; and I feel an indignation against the matter also, that such unworthy stuff should be borne about in ornaments of eloquence so rare; which is as if rubbish, or dung, should be carried in vessels of gold and silver. And this you yourself seem to have felt, who were so unwilling to undertake this work of writing; because your conscience told you, that you would of necessity have to try the point with all the powers of eloquence; and that, after all, you would not be able so to blind me by your coloring, but that I should, having torn off the deceptions of language, discover the real dregs beneath. For, although I am rude in speech, yet, by the grace of God, I am not rude in understanding. And, with Paul, I dare arrogate to myself understanding and with confidence derogate it from you; although I willingly, and deservedly, arrogate eloquence and genius to you, and derogate it from myself.

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

Hence, it was not from a multitude of engagements, nor from the difficulty of the undertaking, nor from the greatness of your eloquence, nor from a fear of yourself, but from mere irksomeness, indignation, and contempt, or (so to speak) from my judgment of your Diatribe, that my impetus to answer

you was damped. Not to observe, in the meantime, that, being ever like yourself, you take the most diligent care to be on every occasion slippery and pliant of speech; and while you wish to appear to assert nothing, and yet, at the same time, to assert something, more cautious than Ulysses, you seem to be steering your course between Scylla and Charybdis. To meet men of such a sort, what, I would ask, can be brought forward or composed, unless anyone knew how to catch Proteus himself? But what I may be able to do in this matter, and what profit your art will be to you, I will, Christ cooperating with me, hereafter show.

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

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

And who knows but that God may even condescend to visit you, my friend Erasmus, by me His poor weak vessel; and that I may (which from my heart I desire of the Father of mercies through Jesus Christ our Lord) come unto you by this book in a happy hour, and gain over a dearest brother. For although you think and write wrong concerning free will, yet no small thanks are due unto you from me, in that you have rendered my own sentiments far more strongly confirmed, from my seeing the cause of free will handled by all the powers of such and so great talents, and so far from being bettered, left

worse than it was before, which leaves an evident proof, that free will is a downright lie; and that, like the woman in the gospel, the more it is taken in hand by physicians, the worse it is made. Therefore, the greater thanks will be rendered to you by me, if you by me gain more information, as I have gained by you more confirmation. But each is the gift of God, and not the work of our own endeavors. Wherefore, prayer must be made unto God, that He would open the mouth in me, and the heart in you and in all; that He would be the Teacher in the midst of us, who may in us speak and hear.

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

ERASMUS' PREFACE REVIEWED

Section 1

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

I consider (as in courtesy bound), that these things are asserted by you from a benevolent mind, as being a lover of peace. But if anyone else had asserted them, I should, perhaps, have attacked him in my accustomed manner. But, however, I must not even allow you, though so very good in your intentions, to err in this opinion. For not to delight in assertions, is not the character of the Christian mind: no, he must delight in assertions, or he is not a Christian. But (that we may not be mistaken in terms) by *assertion*, I mean a constant adhering, affirming, confessing, defending, and invincibly persevering. Nor do I believe the term signifies anything else, either among the Latins, or as it is used by us at this day. And moreover, I speak concerning the asserting of those things, which are delivered to us from above in the Holy Scriptures. Were it not so, we should want neither Erasmus nor any other instructor to teach us, that, in things doubtful, useless, or unnecessary; assertions, contentions, and strivings, would be not only absurd, but impious: and Paul condemns such in more places than one. Nor do you, I believe, speak of these things, unless, as a

ridiculous orator, you wish to take up one subject, and go on with another, as the Roman emperor did with his turbot; or, with the madness of a wicked writer, you wish to contend, that the article concerning free will is doubtful, or not necessary.

Be skeptics and academics far from us Christians; but be there with us assertors twofold more determined than the Stoics themselves. How often does the apostle Paul require that assurance of faith; that is, that most certain, and most firm assertion of conscience, calling it (Rom. 10:10), *confession*, “with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”? And Christ also says, “Whosoever confesseth Me before men, him will I confess before My Father” (Matt. 10:32). Peter commands us to “give a reason of the hope” that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15). But why should I dwell upon this; nothing is more known and more general among Christians than assertions. Take away assertions, and you take away Christianity. No, the Holy Spirit is given unto them from heaven, that He may glorify Christ, and confess Him even unto death; unless this be not to assert—to die for confession and assertion. In a word, the Spirit so asserts, that He comes upon the whole world and reproves them of sin (John 16:8), thus, as it were, provoking to battle. And Paul enjoins Timothy to reprove, and to be instant out of season (2 Tim. 4:2). But how ludicrous to me would be that reprover, who should neither really believe that himself, of which he reproveth, nor constantly assert it! Why, I would send him to Anticyra, to be cured.

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

But you would have it understood that you have said nothing here concerning confessing Christ, and His doctrines. I receive the admonition. And, in courtesy to you, I give up my right and custom, and refrain from judging of your heart, reserving that for another time, or for others. In the meantime, I admonish you to correct your tongue, and your pen, and to refrain henceforth from using such expressions. For, how upright and honest soever your heart

may be, your words, which are the index of the heart, are not so. For, if you think the matter of free will is not necessary to be known, nor at all concerned with Christ, you speak honestly, but think wickedly; but, if you think it is necessary, you speak wickedly, and think rightly. And if so, then there is no room for you to complain and exaggerate so much concerning useless assertions and contentions, for what have they to do with the nature of the cause?