

MARTIN LUTHER ON MAN (ANTHROPOLOGY)

THE DISPUTATION CONCERNING MAN (LW 34: 137-140)

The Theses

*Disputation of the Rev. Sir Dr. Martin Luther Concerning Man, in the
Year 1536*

1. Philosophy or human wisdom defines man as an animal having reason, sensation, and body.
2. It is not necessary at this time to debate whether man is properly or improperly called an animal.
- 10 3. But this must be known, that this definition describes man only as a mortal and in relation to this life.
4. And it is certainly true that reason is the most important and the highest in rank among all things and, in comparison with other things of this life, the best and something divine.
5. It is the inventor and mentor of all the arts, medicines, laws, and of whatever wisdom, power, virtue, and glory men possess in this life.
- 20 6. By virtue of this fact it ought to be named the essential difference by which man is distinguished from the animals and other things.
7. Holy Scripture also makes it lord over the earth, birds, fish, and cattle, saying, "Have dominion" [Gen. 1:28].
8. That is, that it is a sun and a kind of god appointed to administer these things in this life.
9. Nor did God after the fall of Adam take away this majesty of reason, but rather confirmed it.
10. In spite of the fact that it is of such majesty, it does not know itself a priori, but only a posteriori.
- 30 11. Therefore, if philosophy or reason itself is compared with theology, it will appear that we know almost nothing about man,
12. Inasmuch as we seem scarcely to perceive his material cause sufficiently.
13. For philosophy does not know the efficient cause for certain, nor likewise the final cause,
14. Because it posits no other final cause than the peace of this life, and does not know that the efficient cause is God the creator.
15. Indeed, concerning the formal cause which they call soul, there is not and never will be agreement among the philosophers.

16. For so far as Aristotle defines it as the first driving force of the body which has the power to live, he too wished to deceive readers and hearers.¹

17. Nor is there any hope that man in this principal part can himself know what he is until he sees himself in his origin which is God.

18. And what is deplorable is that he does not have full and unerring control over either his counsel or thought but is subject to error and deception therein.

10 19. But as this life is, such is the definition and knowledge of man, that is, fragmentary, fleeting, and exceedingly material.

20. Theology to be sure from the fulness of its wisdom defines man as whole and perfect:

21. Namely, that man is a creature of God consisting of body and a living soul, made in the beginning after the image of God, without sin, so that he should procreate and rule over the created things, and never die,

20 22. But after the fall of Adam, certainly, he was subject to the power of the devil, sin and death, a twofold evil for his powers, unconquerable and eternal.

23. He can be freed and given eternal life only through the Son of God, Jesus Christ (if he believes in him).

24. Since these things stand firm and that most beautiful and most excellent of all creatures, which reason is even after sin, remains under the power of the devil, it must still be concluded

25. That the whole man and every man, whether he be king, lord, servant, wise, just, and richly endowed with the good things of this life, nevertheless is and remains guilty of sin and death, under the power of Satan.

30 26. Therefore those who say that natural things have remained untainted after the fall philosophize impiously in opposition to theology.

27. The same is true of those who say that a man "in doing what is in him"² is able to merit the grace of God and life;

28. So also, of those who introduce Aristotle (who knows nothing of theological man) to witness that reason aspires to the best things;

29. Also, those who say that the light of God's countenance is in man, as an imprint on us, that is, free will which forms the precept right and the will good;

40 30. In like manner, that it rests with man to choose good and evil, or life and death, etc.

¹ Aristotle *On the Soul*, II, 4, "But the soul is the cause and first principle of the living body. The words 'cause' and 'first principle' are used in several separate senses. But the soul is equally the cause in each of the three senses to which we have referred; for it is the cause in the sense of being that from which motion is derived, in the sense of the purpose or final cause, and as being the substance of all bodies that have souls." W. S. Hett (trans.), *Aristotle's On the Soul* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1935), p. 87.

² For Luther's rejection of the scholastic doctrine implied in the phrase, "To do what is in one," cf. *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology* (1517). LW 31, 10; *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518). LW 31, 40; *Against Latomus* (1520). LW 32, 154 et al.

31. All such neither understand what man is nor do they know what they are talking about.

32. Paul in Romans 3[:28], "We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works," briefly sums up the definition of man, saying, "Man is justified by faith."

33. Certainly, whoever says that a man must be justified says that he is a transgressor and unjust and thus asserts that he is guilty before God, but must be saved by grace.

10 34. And he takes man in general, that is, universally, so that he consigned the whole world, or whatever is called man, to sin [Rom. 11:32].

35. Therefore, man in this life is the simple material of God for the form of his future life.

36. Just as the whole creation which is now subject to vanity [Rom. 8:20] is for God the material for its future glorious form.

37. And as earth and heaven were in the beginning for the form completed after six days, that is, its material,

38. So is man in this life for his future form, when the image of God has been remolded and perfected.

20 39. Meanwhile, man lives in sins and daily is either justified or becomes more polluted.

40. Hence, Paul does not even deign to call that realm of reason world, but rather calls it the form of the world [Gal. 4:3].

EXCERPT FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 51
MARTIN LUTHER
(LW 12:311-312)

Therefore our sin is that we are born and conceived in sin. This David learned from his own experience. He defines sin as the corruption of all powers, inward and outward. No member performs its function now as it did in Paradise before sin. We have turned away from God, full of an evil conscience and subject to illness and death, as the words of the punishment show (Gen. 2:17): "In the day that you eat of it you shall die." We learn this only from the Word. The Gentiles who are without the Word do not properly understand these evils even though they lie right in the middle of them. They suppose that death is some sort of natural necessity, not a punishment for sin. Thus they cannot properly evaluate any of human nature, because they do not know the source from which these calamities have come upon mankind. The psalm teaches this knowledge of sin and of all human nature. It does not only present an example—though we are grateful to the scholastics for at least leaving us that much—but includes the whole teaching of spiritual religion about the knowledge of God, the knowledge of our own nature, sin, grace, and the like. Therefore we believe that this psalm is a general instruction for all the people of God from the time it was composed until the present day. In it David, or rather the Holy Spirit in David, instructs us in the knowledge of God and of ourselves. He does both of these gloriously. First he clearly shows sin, then the knowledge of God, without which there is despair.

This knowledge of sin, moreover, is not some sort of speculation or an idea which the mind thinks up for itself. It is a true feeling, a true experience, and a very serious struggle of the heart, as he testifies when he says (v. 3), "I know (that is, I feel or experience) my transgressions." This is what the Hebrew word [עָרַף] really means. It does not mean, as the pope taught, to call to mind what one has done and what one has failed to do; but it means to feel and to experience the intolerable burden of the wrath of God. The knowledge of sin is itself the feeling of sin, and the sinful man is the one who is oppressed by his conscience and tossed to and fro, not knowing where to turn. Therefore we are not dealing here with the philosophical knowledge of man, which defines man as a rational animal and so forth. Such things are for science to discuss, not for theology. So a lawyer speaks of man as an owner and master of property, and a physician speaks of man as healthy or sick. But a theologian discusses man as a sinner. In theology, this is the essence of man. The theologian is concerned that man become aware of this nature [V 12, p 311](#) of his, corrupted by sins. When this happens, despair follows, casting him into hell. In the face of the righteous God, what shall a man do who knows that his whole nature has been crushed by sin and that there is nothing left on which he can rely, but that his righteousness has been reduced to exactly nothing? When

the mind has felt this much, the other part of this knowledge should follow. This is not a matter of speculation either, but completely of practice and feeling. A man hears and learns what grace and justification are, what God's plan is for the man who has fallen into hell, namely, that He has decided to restore man through Christ. Here the dejected mind cheers up, and on the basis of this teaching of grace it joyfully declares: "Though I am a sinner in myself, I am not a sinner in Christ, who has been made Righteousness for us (1 Cor. 1:30). I am righteous and justified through Christ, the Righteous and the Justifier, who is and is called the Justifier because He belongs to sinners and was sent for sinners."

This is the twofold theological knowledge which David teaches in this psalm, so that the content of the psalm is the theological knowledge of man and also the theological knowledge of God. Let no one, therefore, ponder the Divine Majesty, what God has done and how mighty He is; or think of man as the master of his property, the way the lawyer does; or of his health, the way the physician does. But let him think of man as sinner. The proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and Savior of man the sinner. Whatever is asked or discussed in theology outside this subject, is error and poison. All Scripture points to this, that God commends His kindness to us and in His Son restores to righteousness and life the nature that has fallen into sin and condemnation. The issue here is not this physical life—what we should eat, what work we should undertake, how we should rule our family, how we should till the soil. All these things were created before man in Paradise and were put into man's hands when God said (Gen. 1:28), "Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air." The issue here is the future and eternal life; the God who justifies, repairs, and makes alive; and man, who fell from righteousness and life into sin and eternal death. Whoever follows this aim in reading the Holy Scriptures will read holy things fruitfully.

Therefore this theological knowledge is necessary: A man should know himself, should know, feel, and experience that he is guilty of sin and subject to death; but he should also know the opposite, that God is the Justifier and Redeemer of a man who knows himself this way. The care of other men, who do not know their sins, let us leave to lawyers, physicians, and parents, who discuss man differently from the way a theologian does. Now I come to the psalm.

40

COMMENTARY ON GENESIS 1:26
MARTIN LUTHER
(LW 1:56ff)

Here again Moses employs a new expression. He does not say: "Let the sea be set in motion," "Let the earth bring forth herbs," or "Let it bring forth." He says: "Let Us make." Therefore he includes an obvious deliberation and plan; he did nothing similar in the case of the earlier creatures. There, without any deliberation and counsel, He said: "Let
10 the sea be put in motion," "Let the earth produce," etc. But here, when He wants to create man, God summons Himself to a council and announces some sort of deliberation.

Therefore, in the first place, there is indicated here an outstanding difference between man and all the other creatures. The beasts greatly resemble man. They dwell together; they are fed together; they eat together; they receive their nourishment from the same materials; they sleep and rest among us. Therefore if you take into account their way of life, their food, and their support, the similarity is great.

But here Moses points out an outstanding difference between
20 these living beings and man when he says that man was created by the special plan and providence of God. This indicates that man is a creature far superior to the rest of the living beings that live a physical life, especially since as yet his nature had not become depraved. Epicurus holds the opinion that man was created solely to eat and drink. But this is equivalent to making no difference between man and the rest of the beasts, which also have their desires and follow them. Here the text definitely sets man apart when it says that in a special deliberation God gave consideration to the creation of man, and not only that but also to making him in the image of God. This image is
30 something far different from the concern of the belly, namely, food and drink, things for which the beasts also have understanding and appreciation.

Moses, therefore, indicates to those who are spiritually minded that we were created for a better life in the future than this physical life would have been, even if our nature had remained unimpaired. Therefore the scholars put it well: "Even if Adam had not fallen through his sin, still, after the appointed number of saints had been attained, God would have translated them from this animal life to the spiritual life."⁸⁸ Adam was not to live without food, drink, and procreation. But
40 at a predetermined time, after the number of saints had become full, these physical activities would have come to an end; and Adam, together with his descendants, would have been translated to the eternal and spiritual life. Nevertheless, these activities of physical life—like eating, drinking, procreating, etc.—would have been a service pleasing to God; we could also have rendered this service to God without the defect of the lust which is there now after sin, without any sin, and without the fear of death. This would have surely been a pleasant and delightful life, a life about which we may indeed think but which we may not attain in this life. But this we have, that we believe

in a spiritual life after this life and a destination for this life in Paradise, which was devised and ordained by God, and that we confidently look for it through the merit of Christ:

Attention should, therefore, be given to the text before us, in which the Holy Spirit dignifies the nature of man in such a glorious manner and distinguishes it from all other creatures. His physical or animal life was, indeed, to be similar to that of the beasts. Just as the beasts have need of food, drink, and rest to refresh their bodies, so Adam, even in his innocence, would make use of them. But what is added—that man
10 was created for his physical life in such a way that he was nevertheless made according to the image and likeness of God—this is an indication of another and better life than the physical.

Thus Adam had a twofold life: a physical one and an immortal one, though this was not yet clearly revealed, but only in hope. Meanwhile he would have eaten, he would have drunk, he would have labored, he would have procreated, etc. In brief words I want to call attention to these facts concerning the difference which God makes through His counsel, by which He sets us apart from the rest of the animals with whom He lets us live. Below we shall deal again with these matters at
20 greater length.

ON GENESIS 2:21
(LW 1:122-129)

21. Then the Lord God sent a deep sleep upon Adam, and when he had fallen asleep, He took one of his ribs and closed the place with flesh.

Here, too, not only faith but also reason and the situation demand that the time of waking be taken as one time and the time of
30 sleeping as another. Both of these activities have their own allotted times. That Adam was created on the sixth day, that the animals were brought to him, that he heard the Lord giving him a command regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that the Lord sent a sleep upon him—all these facts clearly refer to time and physical life. Therefore it is necessary to understand these days as actual days, contrary to the opinion of the holy fathers. Whenever we see that the opinions of the fathers are not in agreement with
40 Scripture, we respectfully bear with them and acknowledge them as our forefathers; but we do not on their account give up the authority of Scripture. Aristotle's statement in the first book of his *Ethics* is well put and true: "Better it is to defend the truth than to be too much devoted to those who are our friends and relatives."⁵⁵ And this is, above all, the proper attitude for a philosopher. For although both; truth and friends, are dear to us, preference must be given to truth.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, ch. 6, Aristotle says: "While both are dear, piety requires us to honor truth above our friends."

⁵⁶ The statement of Aristotle quoted in note 55 had become a proverb in the form: "Plato is dear to me, but dearer still is truth."

If a pagan maintains that this must be the attitude in secular discourses, how much more must it be our attitude in those which involve the clear witness of Scripture that we dare not give preference to the authority of men over that of Scripture! Human beings can err, but the Word of God is the very wisdom of God and the absolutely infallible truth.

10 But so far as this account is concerned, what, I ask you, could sound more like a fairy tale if you were to follow your reason? Would anyone believe this account about the creation of Eve if it were not so clearly told? This is a reversal of the pattern of the entire creation. Whatever is born alive, is born of the male and the female in such a manner that it is brought forth into the world by the female. Here the woman herself is created from the man by a creation no less wonderful than that of Adam, who was made out of a clod of earth into a living soul. This is extravagant fiction and the silliest kind of nonsense if you set aside the authority of Scripture and follow the judgment of reason. Accordingly, Aristotle declares that neither a first nor a last man can be conceded.⁵⁷ Reason would compel us, too, to make the same statement if it did not have this text. If you should reach the conclusion that what the unvarying experience of all
20 creation proves is true, namely, that nothing comes into existence alive except from a male and a female, then no first human being can be conceded.

The same thing would also have to be stated about the world, which the philosophers have, therefore, asserted is eternal.⁵⁸ But reason with all its force inclines to this conviction even though proofs founded on reason are thought out by which it is demonstrated that the world is not eternal. How can it take its beginning from nothing? Moreover, if you should say that the world
30 had a beginning and there is a time when the world was not in existence, it immediately follows that there was nothing prior to the world. An endless series of other absurdities follows, and these induce philosophers to conclude that the world is eternal. But if you should say that the world is infinite, then immediately another new infinite will also appear, namely, the succession of human beings. But philosophy does not grant the existence of several infinities, and yet it is compelled to grant them because it knows of no beginning of the world and of men. These contradictions and the lack of clarity gave the Epicureans the opportunity to say that the world and man came
40 into existence without any reason and will also perish without any reason, just as cattle perish, which die as though they had never existed. This leads to another conclusion, namely, that God either plainly does not exist or does not concern Himself with human affairs. Into these perplexing mazes reason is misled when it is without the Word and follows its own judgment.

However, it is useful to realize how it comes about that our reason or wisdom is unable to make a greater advance in

⁵⁷ See p. 3, note 2.

⁵⁸ See p. 3, note 3.

understanding the creation. For what, I ask, does a philosopher know about heaven and the world if he does not even know whence it came and whither it tends? Indeed, what do we know about ourselves? We see that we are human beings. But that we have this man for a father and this woman for a mother—this must be believed; it can in no wise be known. Thus our entire knowledge or wisdom is based solely on the knowledge of the material and formal cause, although in these instances, too, we sometimes talk disgraceful nonsense.⁵⁹ The efficient and final cause we obviously cannot point out, especially—
10 and this is a wretched situation—when we must discourse or do some thinking about the world in which we exist and live, likewise about ourselves. Such pitiable and inadequate wisdom!

Aristotle declares: “Man and the sun bring mankind into existence.”⁶⁰ Well said. But follow this wisdom, and you will arrive at the point where you maintain that man and the sun are eternal and infinite. For you will never find a human being who is either the beginning or the end, just as I cannot find the beginning and the end of my person if I want to gain certain knowledge about this and am not willing to rely on belief. But what sort of wisdom and knowledge
20 is it that knows nothing about the final cause and the efficient cause? So far as our having a knowledge of the form is concerned, a cow likewise knows her abode and (as the German proverb has it) looks at and recognizes her door. This also makes clear how awful was the fall into original sin, through which we have lost this knowledge and have become incapable of seeing either the beginning or the end of ourselves.

Plato, Cicero, and other philosophers who belong to the better sort state in their discussions that man walks with his head erect, while the rest of the beings look at the earth with their heads bent
30 down. To man they attribute reason or the ability to understand; and later they reach the conclusion that man is an extraordinary animal created for immortality. But how tenuous and almost useless this is! All this is based on a knowledge of man’s form. But if you go on to give consideration to his substance, does not reason compel you to declare that this being must again be disintegrated and cannot be immortal?

Therefore let us learn that true wisdom is in Holy Scripture and in the Word of God. This gives information not only about the matter of the entire creation, not only about its form,⁶¹ but also about the
40 efficient and final cause, about the beginning and about the end of all things, about who did the creating and for what purpose He created. Without the knowledge of these two causes our wisdom does not differ much from that of the beasts, which also make use of their eyes

⁵⁹ The material cause is “that from which, as immanent material, a thing comes into being,” while the formal cause is “the form or pattern, i.e., the definition of the essence, and the classes which include this ... and the parts included in the definition.” Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V 2.

⁶⁰ See p. 58, note 91.

⁶¹ See p. 124, note 59.

and ears but are utterly without knowledge about their beginning and their end.

Therefore this is an outstanding text. The more it seems to conflict with all experience and reason, the more carefully must it be noted and the more surely believed. Here we are taught about the beginning of man that the first man did not come into existence by a process of generation, as reason has deceived Aristotle and the rest of the philosophers into imagining. The reproduction of his descendants takes place through procreation; but the first male was formed and created from a clod of the field, and the first female from the rib of the sleeping man. Here, therefore, we find the beginning which it is impossible to find through Aristotle's philosophy.

After this beginning was made, there then follows the no less wonderful propagation through the union of a male and female, whereby the entire human race is brought into being from a droplet of the human body. In a similar vein Paul, on the basis of this passage, has a clever discourse among the philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:25): "God Himself gives to all ζωὴν καὶ πνοήν, spirit and life everywhere, and from the blood of one man He makes the whole human race that it may dwell on the entire earth, that they may seek God, if perhaps they may feel Him or find Him, although He is not far from each one of us." Here Paul is speaking of the propagation brought about by the first man when he says "from the blood of one man." If, therefore, man is brought into existence from a droplet of blood, as the experience of all men on the entire earth bears witness, surely this is no less miraculous than that the first man was created from a clod, and the female from a rib of the man.

But why does the creation of Adam and Eve seem so unbelievable and miraculous, while man's propagation, which all men know and see, does not seem so miraculous? Undoubtedly because, as Augustine says, miracles become commonplace through their continuous recurrence.⁶² Thus we do not marvel at the wonderful light of the sun, because it is a daily phenomenon. We do not marvel at the countless other gifts of creation, for we have become deaf toward what Pythagoras aptly terms this wonderful and most lovely music coming from the harmony of the motions that are in the celestial spheres. But because men continually hear this music, they become deaf to it, just as the people who live at the cataracts of the Nile are not affected by the noise and roar of the water which they hear continually, although it is unbearable to others who are not accustomed to it. Without a doubt he took over this very statement from the teaching of the fathers, but they did not want to be understood as though sound were given off by the motion of the celestial bodies. What they wanted to say was that their nature was most lovely and altogether miraculous, but that we ungrateful and insensible people did not notice it or give due thanks to God for the miraculous establishment and preservation of His creation.

⁶² Augustine, *De utilitate credendi*, XVII, 35, is one such discussion.

Thus it is a great miracle that a small seed is planted and that out of it grows a very tall oak. But because these are daily occurrences, they have become of little importance, like the very process of our procreation. Surely it is most worthy of wonder that a woman receives semen, that this semen becomes thick and, as Job elegantly said (Job 10:10), is congealed and then is given shape and nourished until the fetus is ready for breathing air. When the fetus has been brought into the world by birth, no new nourishment appears, but a new way and method: from the two breasts, as from a fountain, there flows milk by which the baby is nourished. All these developments afford the fullest occasion for wonderment and are wholly beyond our understanding, but because of their continued recurrence they have come to be regarded as commonplace, and we have verily become deaf to this lovely music of nature.

But if we regarded these wonders in true faith and appraised them for what they actually are, they surely would not be inferior to what Moses says here: that a rib was taken from the side of Adam as he slept and that Eve was created from it. If it had pleased the Lord to create us by the same method by which Adam was created from the clay, by now this, too, would have ceased to hold the position of a miracle for us; we would marvel more at the method of procreation through the semen of a man. This crude doggerel is right, and there was certainly good reason for composing it: "Everything that is rare is appreciated, but what is an everyday occurrence comes to be regarded as commonplace."⁶³ If the stars did not rise during every single night or in all places, how great a gathering of people there would be for this spectacle! Now not one of us even opens a window because of it.

Therefore our lack of gratitude deserves to be reproved. If we believe that God is the efficient and the final cause, should we not wonder at His works, delight in them, and proclaim them always and everywhere? But how many are there who really do this from the heart? We hear that God took a clod and made a human being; we wonder at this, and because of our wonder we regard it as a fairy tale. But that He now takes a drop from the blood of the father and creates a human being, this we do not wonder at, because it happens every day, while the other thing was done only once; yet each of the two is brought about through the same skill and the same power and by the same Author. For He who formed man from a clod now creates men from the blood of their parents.

Aristotle, therefore, prates in vain that man and the sun bring man into existence. Although the heat of the sun warms our bodies, nevertheless the cause of their coming into existence is something far different, namely, the Word of God, who gives a command to this effect and says to the husband: "Now your blood shall become a male; now it shall become a female." Reason knows nothing about this Word. Therefore it cannot get away from its childish prattle about the causes of such important matters. Thus the physicians, who have

⁶³ The verse is: *Omne rarum carum.*

followed the philosophers, ascribe procreation to a matching mixture of qualities which are active in predisposed matter.⁶⁴ Although reason cannot disprove this (for it sees that dry and cold natures are unsuited for generating, while moist and fairly warm ones are better suited), still they have not arrived at the first cause. The Holy Spirit leads us to something higher than nature, higher than qualities and their proper mixture, when He puts before us the Word by which everything is created and preserved.

10 Therefore that a man is developed from a drop of blood, and not an ox or a donkey, happens through the potency of the Word which was uttered by God. And so, as Christ also teaches in the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9), we call God our Father and our Creator, as the Creed calls Him. When we look at this Cause, then with a chaste and pure heart and with gladness we can speak of those things which otherwise, if this Cause is disregarded, we could not mention without filthiness and indecency.

20 This discussion also shows how awful the fall into original sin was, since the entire human race knows nothing of its origin. Indeed, we see a man and a woman being joined; we see the woman made pregnant by a droplet of blood; and later, at a definitely fixed time, a baby is brought into the world. These are facts that lie before the eyes of all and are well known; and yet without the reminder and instruction of the Word you have no actual knowledge of the very activity which you are carrying on consciously and with open eyes. The discussions of the philosophers, with which we have already dealt, give sufficient evidence of this. Such horrible blindness and such a pitiful lack of knowledge!

30 Accordingly, if Adam had persevered in innocence, it would have been unnecessary to instruct his descendants about their origin, just as it was unnecessary to instruct Adam about the creation of his Eve, because the moment he saw her, he himself was aware that she was bone from his bones and flesh from his flesh. That kind of knowledge of themselves and of the remaining creatures would have remained also among the descendants of Adam. All would have become aware at once of the final and efficient cause about which we now have no more knowledge than cattle have.

40 For the ears of reason, consequently, this is a very beautiful and pleasing fairy tale, which the philosophers enjoyed ridiculing when they heard about it, as some of them did, especially those who had become acquainted with the science and wisdom of the Egyptians.⁶⁵ But it is incalculable wisdom for us to know what is taught by this foolish fairy tale, as the world calls it, namely, that the beginning of man's coming into existence was through the Word, inasmuch as God takes a clod and says: "Let Us make a man." Later He likewise takes a rib of Adam and says: "Let Us make a helper for man." Now, after discussing whatever was necessary about the content, let us give consideration to the words.

⁶⁴ Cf. p. 52, note 85.

⁶⁵ An allusion to Acts 7:22; see also the patristic theory mentioned p. 4, note 5.

COMMENTARY ON GENESIS 3:1
(LW 1:141-145)

1. *But the serpent was more clever than all the animals of the earth which God had made.*

IN the preceding chapter we heard how man was created on the sixth day according to the image and similitude of God, so that his will was good and sound; moreover, his reason or intellect was sound, so that whatever God wanted or said, man also wanted,
10 believed, and understood the same thing. The knowledge of all the other creatures necessarily followed this knowledge; for where the knowledge of God is perfect, there also the knowledge of the other things that are under God is necessarily perfect.

But these words show how horrible the fall of Adam and Eve was; for through it we have lost a most beautifully enlightened reason and a will in agreement with the Word and will of God. We have also lost the glory of our bodies, so that now it is a matter of the utmost disgrace to be seen naked, whereas at that time it was something
20 most beautiful and the unique prerogative of the human race over all the other animals. The most serious loss consists in this, that not only were those benefits lost, but man's will turned away from God. As a result, man wants and does none of the things God wants and commands. Likewise, we have no knowledge about what God is, what grace is, what righteousness is, and finally what sin itself is. These are really terrible faults, and those who do not realize and see them are blinder than a mole. Experience, of course, gives us information about these losses. Nevertheless, we do not fully appreciate their enormity unless we look back at that image of the state of
30 innocence—whatever its nature may have been—in which the will was upright, and the reason was sound. Furthermore, there was the greatest dignity of the human body. When, in contrast, we reflect on the deprivation or loss of these gifts, then, in some measure, we can appraise the evil of original sin.

Therefore it is a cause for great errors when some men minimize this evil and speak of our depraved nature in the manner of the philosophers, as if it were not depraved. Thus they state that the natural endowments have remained unimpaired¹ not only in the nature of man but also in the devil. But this is obviously false. What has remained, and how little, we see and experience in some
40 measure. But those who maintain that the natural endowments have remained unimpaired surely do not see how much we have lost. For the will that is good and righteous, that pleases God, obeys God, trusts in the Creator, and makes use of the creatures with an expression of thanks has been lost to such an extent that our will makes a devil out of God and shudders at the mention of His name,

¹ Cf. p. 166, note 19, and Luther's Works, 12, p. 308, note 3.

especially when it is troubled by God's judgment. Tell me, does this mean that the natural endowments are unimpaired?

But consider less important matters. The marriage of man and woman was divinely ordained. But how deformed it is now after sin! How our very flesh is kindled with passion! And so now, after sin, this union does not take place in public like a work of God; but respectable married people look for solitary places far away from the eyes of men. Thus we have a body, but what a wretched one and how damaged in various ways! We also have a will and a reason, but how depraved in many ways! Just as reason is overwhelmed by many kinds of ignorance, so the will has not only been confused but has been turned away from God and is an enemy of God. It enjoys rushing to evil, when the opposite should have happened. Therefore this manifold corruption of our nature should not be minimized; it should rather be emphasized. From the image of God, from the knowledge of God, from the knowledge of all the other creatures, and from a very honorable nakedness man has fallen into blasphemies, into hatred, into contempt of God, yes, what is even more, into enmity against God. I am now saying nothing about the tyranny of Satan, to whom this wretched nature has been subjected because of sin. This should be emphasized, I say, for the reason that unless the severity of the disease is correctly recognized, the cure is also not known or desired. The more you minimize sin, the more will grace decline in value.

Moreover, to this emphasis properly pertains what Moses said above: that though Adam and Eve were naked, they were not ashamed. That hideous lust was not aroused in them, but as the one looked at the other, they acknowledged God's goodness, rejoiced in God, and felt safe in God's goodness, while now we not only cannot refrain from sin but are even troubled by despair and by hatred of God. This awful contrast clearly shows that our natural endowments are not unimpaired.

But how much more impudent it is when the sophists assert this very thing about the devil, in whom there is even greater enmity against God, greater hatred and fury, than in man, in spite of the fact that he was not created evil but had a will in conformity with the will of God. This will he has lost; he has also lost his very beautiful and very excellent intellect and has been turned into an awful spirit which rages against his Creator. Is this not the utmost depravity, to change from a friend of God into the bitterest and most obdurate enemy of God?

But in opposition they quote Aristotle's statement: "Reason pleads for the best"; this they try to support also by certain sacred statements and by the opinion of the philosophers that sound reason is the cause of all virtues.² I do not deny that these statements are true when they are applied to matters that are subject to reason: to managing cattle, building a house, and sowing a field. But in higher matters they are not true. How can a reason which hates God be called sound? How can a will which resists God's will and refuses to

² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, chs. 4-5.

obey God be called good? Therefore when they say: "Reason pleads for the best," you should say: "For the best in a mundane sense, that is, in things about which reason can judge." There it directs and leads to what is honorable and useful in respect to the body or the flesh. As for the rest, since it is full of ignorance of God and detestation of the will of God, how can it be called good on this level? Moreover, it is a well-known fact that when the knowledge of God is preached and this subject is dealt with in order to restore reason, then those who are the ablest and, so to speak, are endowed with a better reason and will hate the Gospel all the more bitterly.

10 Therefore in theology let us maintain that reason in men is most hostile to God, and that the respectable will is most opposed to the will of God. From this source arise the hatred of the Word and the persecution of godly ministers. For this reason, as I said, let us not minimize this evil which human nature has contracted as a result of the sin of our first parents; rather let us emphasize it. Then we shall both regret deeply this state of ours and have a profound longing for Christ, our Physician, who was sent by the Father to heal those evils which Satan brought upon us through sin, and to restore us to the eternal glory which we had lost.

20 As for the historical event of which Moses gives us an account in this present chapter, I stated my opinion before, that this temptation appears to me to have taken place on the Sabbath; thus Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day, Adam earlier and Eve toward evening. Early on the following Sabbath Adam preached to Eve concerning God's will: that the most gracious Lord had created the entire Paradise for the use and enjoyment of people; that, also as a result of His extraordinary goodness, He had created the tree of life, through the use of which the powers of the body would be refreshed and perpetual youth would be maintained; that one tree—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, from which it was not permitted to eat—was forbidden; and that in this respect they should obey so gracious a Creator. Perhaps he led Eve about in Paradise and showed her the forbidden tree when he said this.

30 In this way Adam and Eve, resplendent with innocence and original righteousness, and abounding in peace of mind because of their trust in God, who was so kind, walked about naked while they discoursed on the Word and command of God and praised God, just as should be done on the Sabbath. But then, alas, Satan interfered and within a few hours ruined all this, as we shall hear.

40 Now here, too, a sea of questions arises. Inquisitive people ask why God permitted Satan to tempt Eve. Furthermore, why Satan waylaid Eve through the serpent rather than through a different animal. But who can supply the reason for the things that he sees the Divine Majesty has permitted to happen? Why do we not rather learn with Job that God cannot be called to account and cannot be compelled to give us the reason for everything He does or permits to happen? Why do we not likewise register a complaint with God because the earth does not produce plants and because the trees are not green throughout the year? I am fully convinced that in Paradise

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there would have been perpetual spring without any winter, without snow and frosts, such as we have today after sin. But these are all things under the divine power and will. To know this is enough. Besides, it is wicked curiosity to investigate these problems in greater detail. Therefore let us, who are clay in His hands, cease to discuss such questions. Let us not sit in judgment on our God; let us rather be judged by Him.

10 Hence the answer to all such inquiries must be only this: It pleased the Lord that Adam should be tempted and should test his powers. So it still is today. When we have been baptized and brought into the kingdom of Christ, God does not want us to be idle; He wants us to use His Word and gifts. For this reason He allows us weak beings to be sifted by Satan (Luke 22:31). Thus we see the church, which has been cleansed by the Word, still exposed to continual danger. The Sacramentarians rise up; so do the Anabaptists and other fanatical teachers, who greatly trouble the church with their various temptations. In addition, there are internal troubles. These God allows to happen this way, not because He has decided either to abandon the church or to want it to perish; but, as Wisdom says
20 (Wisd. 10:12), those conflicts befall the church and the godly that the church and the godly may prevail and learn by experience itself that wisdom is more powerful than everything else.

Here there is another question. Perhaps it can be discussed with less danger but with greater profit. It is: "Why does Scripture make this account so obscure? Why does it not rather state directly that the angel who had fallen entered the serpent, was speaking through the serpent, and deceived Eve?" But I answer: "This account is so obscure in order that all things might be held over for Christ and for His Spirit, who was to shed light throughout the entire world like the
30 midday sun and to open all the mysteries of Scripture." Because this Spirit of Christ was in the prophets (1 Peter 1:11), the holy prophets understood such mysteries of Scripture.