The Unfree Will: Sin, and Preaching to Bound Wills

Reference: AC IV and Apol. 17-19

I. AC IV accepts the truth of Luther's discovery, that there are only two parts to theology: the justifying God and I, the sinner. Both of these assertions come to the same point for today: the unfree (or bound) will that the letter kills and the Spirit then makes alive.

II. From the point of view of preaching if you begin with the assumption that you preach to *"free-wills,"* you end up trying to bind them. If you begin with the assumption that you preach to bound wills you end up freeing them. You can decide that preaching is getting people to like God (and good luck with that), or to run from the unpreached God to the preached God.

A. Luther's Bondage of the Will.

1. Do you believe in fate? What about destiny, like what happened to Oedipus Rex? Do you follow what Jean-Paul Sartre said that, *"We are condemned to freedom"* Or, perhaps, you think you need to make your mark so that you don't disappear into obscurity.

2. The answer of the Lutherans to all these questions is stunning. It depends on which relationship to God you are talking about. God preached or not preached?

B. At the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 Philip Melanchthon tried to avoid saying this straight on, since this is what really divides us from Rome (and Geneva and Zurich and Canterbury and finally the Puritans and American Frontier religions).

C. That is, what separates us from all of them (if we go all the way with Luther on his teaching about the will) is their belief in the myth of the continuously existing subject, who climbs the ladder of the law [*coram deo*] with the help of grace. In this way of thinking you think of yourself and God by singling out the law, by singing monotone. This screws up the matter of what sin is. It minimizes and muffles sin, and tries to contain it by two theories [No one believes in original sin, they must be taught it, Luther remarked]:

1. The first theory conceives of sin as a disease (substance), grace the medicine, salvation a patient restored to health [ala Augustine and the late medieval scholastics]. The problem with this is, what happens if you get a wife who kills her husband then spends

her days as an obsessive compulsive washing her hands saying, *"Out, out damn spot"*? Or, what do you do about those sinners with high rates of recidivism. *"Oops, I did it again!"* The other problem is, of course, that all patients die in the end.

2. The second theory conceives of sin as absence, a hole, a debt needing to be paid off [ala Anselm].

3. Either theory has two constants: the law and the sinner, who's trying to get better (so that sin is either psychologized or subjectivized). Either way it ruins Christ *for you*. He becomes payment, and the payment God demands must be pure, not sin, not curse, not dead [Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:21!]. If Christ does not become sin and curse, then we think in terms of the law and the history of salvation, or the law as penalty for not choosing well.

I. Example: The problem of inserting the sacraments into this system is that baptism becomes the removal of original sin, even though no one could agree on where it originated, but most decided it was passed by intercourse, specifically the male seed.

II. Lutherans say sin is all that and more. Sin is, *"we are born without fear, without trust, and with concupiscence."* (Latin (AC II; 2, 39)).

So what is sin?

A. Judging from Jesus, the only Begotten Son, on the cross cursed and damned, sin must be bad.

B. But here is the interesting thing. The depth of sin is not located where Western Christianity put it, in the groin and orifices. What was God's problem with people from Adam and Eve to the present? Bad choices of the free will? No one believes in original sin once you take that tack, because each must choose for himself how deep the will goes, and how profound is the power of sin to influence and urge us on.

1. Sin is lack of trust in the specific word God gives, which God counts as lack of trust in Him. Adam and Eve are told eat these, don't eat this, and what does the Devil do? *Did God say?* And what does Eve do? Maybe I can go higher. Here we have the upward fall, believing not these words which God speaks out publicly but secret ones that lie hidden, then we are led on the search for better words, and then what? Having no words you can trust you end up believing in your own power to believe. Faith becomes faith in my faith!

2. We call this the unfree will, that wills only what it wills, i.e., *what I choose is my choice,* or, *I want what I want when I want it*. This is our will, bound and determined to be more than a creature. It does not just want to have a God but be a god, and insists on having God outside of His word given and preached, so that he finds God in His own silent inner, mysterious self. No sacraments, no preacher, no words, no Christ, no Holy Spirit, and finally no God but myself, knowing good and evil.

III. The bound will is not a puppet, but a bull in a china shop, or an intrepid adventurer trying to find something of its own to believe in. The bound will is a Peeping Tom, a hide 'n' go seeker, a finger smeller. The bound will is beguiled and enraptured by the Devil, unable to tell the difference between Christ's voice and the Devil's, since the devil sounds so religious. We call this, without fear, without trust, concupiscent. It is an open rebellion against God preached and so it falls under the spell of the Devil who always says, *"Are you sure that is what God said, it can't be that easy. He must be hiding something from you."*

Looking then at the Apology, Articles 17-19 (in reverse):

A. Article 19 says that the cause of sin is the will, not choosing between good and evil while God waits, but actively doing exactly what it wants: to be its own God.

B. Article 18 says that the *"will has some freedom."* We are talking here about your relationship to God, not whether you can decide to drive downtown today or not. The world always inverts these. It thinks it has no freedom in things *beneath it*, as Luther referred to earthly things, but when it comes to God, *things above it*, it thinks it can choose, or not. Even here it is not quite so simple [I think of the alcoholic who sings, "Gin House Blues." *Stay away from me cause I'm in my sin; Don't try me nobody, cause you will never win; I'll fight eh army and navy, somebody give me my Gin*. And then there's *"falling"* in love, with it's talk of fate, kismet, the stars, *"finding Mr. Right,"* my soul mate, and so on.

C. Finally, Article 17 says that one will either end up putting one's trust in the Free Will or the Holy Spirit. These two don't share. Judgment by Christ on the final day is on the basis of where your trust lies, and since this is not a matter of you choosing between two options, then it depends upon the Holy Spirit using the words and sacraments delivered via the preaching office. Hence this is what you do to preach to bound wills. You elect them. You choose them while yet sinner, and this marks a death to the old Adam and his bound and determined will to believe in his own belief, and the resurrection in faith itself that clings to Christ's words alone as *a drop of water clings to a pitcher*.