



God's Wrath Against Mankind

Review by Lloyd Tiegs (November-December, 1999)

Siegbert W. Becker in his book, *The Foolishness of God*, in which he looks at Lutherans' understanding of human reason states, "It is not Christianity that needs to be made reasonable. It is reason that needs to be made Christian."

Luther (page 33) states, "Human reason and wisdom by itself can come this far, that it concludes, although weakly, that there must be a single, eternal divine Being, which has created, preserves, and governs all things. When reason considers such beautiful exquisite creatures both in heaven and earth governed in such a wonderful orderly and sure way, it must deny the possibility that the origin and preservation of these things are accidental or spontaneous. There must be a Creator and Lord from whom all things came and by whom all are governed. And so reason must know God by his creatures, as St. Paul says in Romans 1."

Luther (page 34) speaks of Cicero and Aristotle, "You see that in some places the philosophers do not debate in an unskillful way about God and providence, by which God governs all things. To some their words seem to be so pious that they very nearly make prophets out of Socrates, Zenophon, and Plato....Although I hold that Aristotle was more gifted than Cicero, yet I see that Cicero has argued much more wisely about these things...For he leads the argument to a consideration of the created world, which in a way is subject to the judgment of reason. For he seeks the harmonious motions of the heavenly bodies, the regular succession of the seasons, the well-developed forms of the species, and he sees that man was created for this that he should understand and enjoy these things. From this he comes to the conclusion that God is eternal Mind, by whose providence all things are governed, and that the soul of man is immortal."



Becker (page 7) writes that Luther says "reason has its place in the area of natural science, and it can render a service even in theology, but it has absolutely no business to 'investigate the origin of the whole world, where it came from and where it is going, whether it has a beginning or existed from eternity, whether there is a supreme being over the world, who rules all things.' "

And (page 13) "Since the Fall, God is a hidden God. God is everywhere, Luther said, but is certainly not to be found in our speculations about him nor in the pictures that we form of his in our thoughts and senses. God is everywhere, but he permits men to grasp him nowhere."

Luther adds (page 15): "Nothing is more dangerous than to build one's own road to God and to climb up by our speculations,"

Also, (page 16): "A man hides what he is in order to deny it; God hides what he is in order to reveal it."

Becker writes (page 17): "Even though man cannot know God in his majesty, yet it is God's earnest desire that all men should know him. For this reason God disguises himself and puts on a mask, as it were. After man fell into sin God no longer appeared in his bare majesty to Adam, but made his presence known in the sound of the breeze blowing through the garden. The breeze thus becomes one of the 'masks of God.' "

Luther adds (page 17), “Afterwards, in the tabernacle God revealed himself at the mercy seat, and in the desert he showed himself in the cloud and in the fire. For that reason Moses called these things the ‘face’ of God...”

Luther (page 19) is also quoted as saying “No one can grasp or know God in his majesty. Therefore he came down in lowly form, became a man, yes, was made to be sin, and death, and weakness itself...”

Becker (page 20) goes on to write, “Luther saw the natural world also as one of the masks of God. Just as God hides himself in the means of grace, so he hides his invisible attributes in the whole world of nature. All the works of God are such masks behind which we see God at once hidden and revealed. If men could see correctly and clearly, they would see God in all of his creatures.”

And (page 26) Becker says, “Luther knew all too well that man ... is involved in a conflict of interest. The evidence that may convince the whole world that John Jones is a bank robber may not be sufficient to convince John Jones’ mother of the same fact. The evidence which may have ‘already convinced’ almost the whole world of the existence of God may not be sufficient to convince the man who has a personal stake in the non-existence of an almighty Judge of his every word and deed.” Finally, Becker adds (page 29), “...Luther says that here is a great difference between knowing that there is a God and knowing who or what God is. ‘The fire is known by nature and is written in all hearts,’ he says, ‘But the other is taught only by the Holy Ghost.’ ” In Luther’s commentary on Jonah he says that the sailors knew that God is a Being who can help in time of need.

Luther says the very essence of unbelief is that men say, “I do not know. I am not sure. No reason is so firm that it cannot again be overthrown by reason. There is no counsel, no matter how wise, no thing, no edifice, no matter how magnificent or strong, which cannot again be destroyed by human counsel, wisdom and strength. And this can be seen in all things. Only the Word of God remains to all eternity.” *LSI*

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