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“MECHANICAL INSPIRATION” THE STUMBLING-BLOCK OF MODERN THEOLOGY.

Again and again voices are raised in our day in protest against the old teaching of the Protestant churches in the age of the Reformation, that the human authors of the various books of the Bible composed their writings under a divine influence which made them “the penmen of the Holy Ghost,” and their products “a divine dictation.” Men profess themselves shocked at the statement that “God directed the hand of the sacred writers;” they are scandalized by hearing the prophets and apostles compared to strings of a harp or reeds of an organ from which the Spirit drew various notes at His will. Statements like these, which the older dogmaticians, both in the Lutheran and the Reformed churches, have made *secundum quid*, and for the sake of illustrating a mysterious fact, are taken up with avidity in our day, and pilloried as extreme literalism, bibliolatry, superstition, or as necessitarian fatalism and rationalism. • It is claimed that no person can read his Bible with profit to himself, nor convey its teachings intelligently to others, while holding the “mechanical inspiration”-theory.

1.

In order to understand, in a measure, the reason for this antagonism to the verbal, or plenary, inspiration of the Scriptures,—for it is really this that is being attacked,—it is necessary to observe the manner in which the antagonists char-

THE PROOF TEXTS OF THE CATECHISM WITH A PRACTICAL COMMENTARY.

THE THIRD ARTICLE.

(Continued.)

Attention is called to the admirable climactic arrangement of the proof-texts. 1 Cor. 2, 14 proves that man by nature is *blind* spiritually; Eph. 2, 1 that he is spiritually *dead*; Rom. 8, 7 that he is an *enemy* of God. His conversion, therefore, is solely the work of God the Holy Ghost, 1 Cor. 12, 3.

1 Cor. 2, 14: *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

Throughout this second chapter the apostle contrasts the wisdom of God manifested in the Gospel, and the wisdom of man that cannot apprehend the wisdom of God. Furthermore, there is a contrast between the spiritual and the natural man. The spiritual man has saving knowledge, the natural man has not. In the course of the development of this thought the apostle says: "*The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*" To grasp the meaning easily let us clear up an expression or two.

1. Whom does the apostle designate by "*the natural man*"? The "*natural man*," ψυχικός άνθρωπος, is contrasted with the "*spiritual*," πνευματικός, v. 15. The "*spiritual man*" is one who has received the Holy Spirit. "We have received the Spirit—so that we might know the things," etc., v. 12. So only the "*spiritual man*" can know these things; only he can judge of these things, v. 15. The spiritual man is one who is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, one who is converted. The "*natural man*," on the other hand, is man as he is by nature, "*unspiritual*," as the Greek word may be rendered, not having received the Spirit, not yet born again, converted, not enlightened by the Spirit, or, as Jude 19 puts it: ψυχικοί, πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες, literally: "*psychical, not having the Spirit.*" Hence Luther says: "The natural man is man as he is *apart from grace*, albeit decked out as bravely as may be with all the reason, skill, sense, and faculty in the world."

2. The expression: "*The things of the Spirit of God*" taken out of its environment may seem difficult of understanding at first sight, but when viewed in the connection in which it stands, it becomes perfectly simple. I quote from the chapter. The apostle says: "We speak—not the wisdom of this world, but the wisdom of God"—"the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory." What is that? *The plan of*

salvation through Jesus Christ, the Gospel. Again he says: "As it is written: Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the hearts of man the things which God prepared for them that love Him"—again, this is the plan of our redemption, *the Gospel of Jesus Christ.* How did we learn of these things? "God hath revealed them to us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth the deep things of God. Now we have received the Spirit that we might know the things,"—the Gospel tidings of Jesus Christ,—“which things we also speak in words which the Holy Ghost teacheth.” “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” Now, plainly, what are “*the things of the Spirit of God*”? Primarily, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now we are ready to see what the text says: “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God” = *The natural man receiveth not the Gospel.* Natural man, man as he is by nature, *receives not, i. e.,* he cannot apprehend, cannot understand the Gospel. First and foremost the apostle speaks of natural man’s *intellect* here. He says: “he *receives not,*” *ὁ δέχεται,* “*er vernimmt nichts,*” as Luther has so aptly translated; he cannot “*know,*” he cannot “*discern,*” *i. e.,* judge spiritual things. Paul speaks of natural man’s receptive, knowing, judging faculties—of his reason, his intellect. Natural man’s intellect is *blind* in spiritual matters. However keen his mind may be in matters mundane, however great things he may accomplish in the various branches of knowledge and science,—marvelous to behold,—still of the Gospel, though it be preached to him ever so plainly, he understands—nothing. And this the apostle predicates of *every* natural man. However powerful, moral, intelligent, learned man may be, if he is still in his natural condition, he understands just as little about spiritual things as the illiterate ditch-digger who is still unconverted. The learned has no advantage over the unlearned; the one understands just as much about it as the other, namely—nothing. That is what the apostle says: “*The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.*” He does not say:

Natural man's intellect is *weak* in spiritual matters; he says, he *receives nothing*; his intellect is blind. There are blind minds as well as blind eyes.

The second statement is even stronger. The text says with emphasis: *καὶ οὐ δύναται γινῶναι* = "and *not can* he know them." It is utterly impossible for him to understand spiritual things; he has absolutely *no capacity* for them. To illustrate: Given the best teacher, the most approved methods, and yet Darwin's most highly developed ape cannot grasp a mathematical problem, say that of Pythagoras. While following the demonstration on the blackboard, the ape may put on a wise face, but he is a brute, and a brute has no capacity for mathematics. He cannot understand it. So with natural man in spiritual matters—he has no capacity for them. Why this utter inability? "*For they are spiritually discerned.*" Natural man is unspiritual, the things are spiritual. A blind man can know nothing of colors; a deaf man can know nothing of music; an unspiritual man can know nothing of spiritual things. Natural man is not like another Hercules at the parting of the ways; he is not a free agency here so that he could either accept or reject the Gospel. He can do but one thing: reject it. Natural man's condition is deplorable indeed. Note what the apostle furthermore says. When the Gospel is preached to natural man, he not only does not receive it, does not understand it, but—how great is that blindness!—does not even recognize the fact that these things are too deep for him, beyond his comprehension, and hence does not say: "I don't understand them; they may be true, but I can't judge of them." No, he acts as though he were perfectly competent to sit in judgment on divine matters. What is his judgment? "*Foolishness!*" "*They are foolishness unto him.*" When a philosopher discourses on the system of his philosophy, let us say, to a body of wise doctors of medicine, the doctors will say as rational men, "Mr. Philosopher, your talk was very interesting, but beyond our grasp. What you said may be true, we shall not contradict you, but it was beyond our ken.

Medicine is our sphere of knowledge; philosophy is yours.' The next day the philosopher takes sick; he goes to the doctor, saying, "I understand philosophy, but not medicine. What ails me? Prescribe for me!" Each is wise enough to remain in his own distinct sphere of knowledge.—Again, you hold up a color-plate to a blind man and say, "Describe the colors!" "How absurd," says he; "I cannot; I am blind!"—But here is a blind man—natural man—who has not even sense enough to know that he is blind in spiritual matters. Here is a man—natural man—who has absolutely no knowledge of, and no capacity for, spiritual things, and still he dares sit in judgment on divine things and pronounce them foolishness! How forcibly are we not here reminded of that deep saying of our Lord, Matt. 6, 23: "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" The sweet Gospel of Christ is preached, and natural man says, "Foolishness!" He is told, Christ is both God and man in one person, and he says, "Foolishness!" He is told this God-man would be your Savior also, and he says, "Foolishness!" He is told, Accept the Gospel and be eternally happy! "Accept the Gospel," says he, "accept foolishness! No, I reject it, I spurn it, I ridicule it—away with it!" Such is the attitude of natural man towards the only hope of his salvation. The wisdom of God he adjudges foolishness. His *intellect* is blind; he cannot know spiritual things. He accounts them "foolishness!" hence he *will* not have them. His *will* is entirely perverted. "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block and unto the Greeks foolishness," 1 Cor. 1, 23.

The chief purpose of this text, 1 Cor. 2, 14, in the Catechism is to prove that man by nature is spiritually blind. The text furthermore makes it very plain: 1. that it is absurd to ascribe spiritual powers to natural man; 2. that man cannot cooperate towards his conversion; 3. that reason has absolutely no authority in spiritual matters, and when it does essay to speak of them, it talks about things of which it knows nothing.

The *Formula of Concord* says: "In the first place, although human reason, or the natural understanding of man, may have a feeble spark of the knowledge of the existence of God, and also of the Law, Rom. 1, 19; 2, 15; still, it is so ignorant, blind, and perverted, that, *even when the most ingenious and learned persons on earth read or hear the Gospel concerning the Son of God and the promise of everlasting salvation, they are nevertheless unable by their own powers to perceive, or to comprehend, or to understand, or to believe these things, and to hold them as truth, but rather, the greater diligence and assiduity they employ in this respect to comprehend these spiritual things with their reason, the less they understand or believe; and they regard all as mere foolishness or fables before they are illuminated and taught by the Holy Spirit.* 1 Cor. 2, 14: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God," etc." (*Sol. Decl., Art. II, Of Free Will, p. 611. Newmarket Ed.*)

Eph. 2, 1: *Ye were dead in trespasses and sins.*

Man by nature is not only spiritually blind, he is also spiritually *dead*. "*Ye were dead in trespasses and sins,*" St. Paul writes to the Ephesian Christians. The meaning of "*dead*" is clear from the text. The apostle writes in the past tense: "*Ye were dead,*" *i. e.*, now you are dead no longer, you are spiritually alive; but formerly you were spiritually dead. In v. 5 the apostle repeats the same idea emphatically: "But God . . . even when we *were dead in sins*, hath quickened us together with Christ." Formerly, before their conversion, they were dead, not physically, but morally, spiritually; now, they are quickened, alive with Christ. — Before conversion man is dead, spiritually dead. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour cometh, and now is, when the *dead* shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall *live,*" John 5, 25. Hence the apostle admonishes the Christians: "Neither present your members unto sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves unto God, as *alive from the dead*, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God," Rom. 6, 13. — "*Dead*" — that word adequately describes the lamentable condition of man as he is by nature: he is *dead*, there is no spiritual life in him, not a spark of it. — "*Ye were dead in trespasses and sins.*" This life "in trespasses and sins"

resulted from their spiritual condition. The sphere in which they lived and moved in the sight of God was "trespasses and sins." Nothing that they did or could do was pleasing to God; they were "*by nature the children of wrath.*" Such was natural man then, such he is now. How is this dead man to come to life? By his own powers? Absurd question; he is dead; he has no powers. Can natural man cooperate towards his conversion? Absurd question again: *he is dead!*

"Now, as a man who is physically dead cannot by his own powers fit or prepare himself so as to obtain temporal life again, so a man who is spiritually dead in sins cannot by his own powers adapt or prepare himself for the attainment of spiritual and heavenly righteousness and life, if he be not made free from the death of sin and made alive by the Son of God." (*Formula of Concord*, p. 611.) Again: "In spiritual and divine things, the understanding, the heart, and the will of unregenerate man are unable, by their own natural powers, to understand, to believe, to accept, to think, to will, to begin, to accomplish, to do, to perform, or to cooperate in anything whatever, but are wholly and entirely corrupted, and dead to everything good, so that in the nature of man, since the fall, and prior to his regeneration, *not a spark of spiritual power remains or exists* by which he can prepare himself for the grace of God, or accept the offered grace, or be capable thereof, or apply himself, or accommodate himself to it, of and by himself. Nor is he able by his own powers to help, to do, to perform, or to cooperate in anything towards his conversion, either as to the whole of it or any part, *even in the least or most insignificant part*; but he is the servant of sin, John 8, 34, and the captive of Satan, by whom he is led, Eph. 2, 2; 2 Tim. 2, 26. Hence the natural free will, according to its perverted nature and character, is efficient and active in that alone which displeases God and is opposed to Him." (*Formula of Concord*, p. 610.)

Rom. 8, 7: *The carnal mind is enmity against God.*

The paragraph, vv. 5—11, contrasts the carnally minded and the spiritually minded. The former are "*they that are after the flesh,*" v. 5, governed by the flesh; the latter, "*they that are after the Spirit,*" born again by the Spirit, hence governed by the Spirit, the spiritual, John 3, 6. The former "*mind the things of the flesh;*" their thoughts, desires, pursuits are centered on things of the flesh; on these their hearts

are set, to these their lives are devoted. These "things of the flesh" are the "works of the flesh," as enumerated, *e. g.*, Gal. 5, 19. The latter "*mind the things of the Spirit,*" *i. e.*, the works, the fruits of the Spirit," Gal. 5, 22. This sinful, carnal state of mind of the former class is death. The apostle says: "*For to be carnally minded is death.*" The English translation "to be carnally minded" covers the idea expressed in the Greek. "To be carnally minded" expresses the *state of being*, not so much the acts flowing from that state. This being carnally minded, this carnal state of man is death. Of course, this state manifests itself in acts. As the spring, so the water. But that is not the point here. The point is that man who is in this state is dead, spiritually dead. Says Hodge: "The phrase *φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός* (the mind of the flesh) is substantially of the same import with *φρονεῖν τὰ τῆς σαρκός*, the minding of the things of the flesh. It is thus active in its signification. It is, however, more in accordance with the proper signification of the word to understand it as expressing a state of mind. This is implied in the English version, *to be carnally minded*. The idea is not merely that the actual seeking the things of the flesh leads to death, but that a carnal state of mind, which reveals itself in the desire and pursuit of carnal objects, is death. And by death is, of course, meant spiritual death, the absence and the opposite of spiritual life. It includes alienation from God, unholiness, and misery. On the other hand, the *φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος* (the mind of the Spirit) is that state of mind which is produced by the Spirit, and which reveals itself in the desire and pursuit of the things of the Spirit. This state of mind is life and peace. Therein consists the true life and blessedness of the soul." (*On Romans*, p. 402.)

And why is to be carnally minded death? *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God.*" In its very nature it is opposed to God, inimical to God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God, *for* it is not subject to the Law of God." The Law of God is the revelation of His will. Whosoever

opposes this holy Law is an enemy of God. Man by nature is not only not subject to the Law of God, but “he *cannot be*,” v. 7. He has no ability to change himself, he lies in spiritual *death*. “It is precisely because of this utter impotency of the carnal mind, or unrenewed heart, to change its own nature, that it involves the hopelessness which the word *death* implies.” (Hodge.)

Natural man, who is spiritually *blind* and spiritually *dead*, in another sense is very much alive, active; alive in his *enmity* and *hatred* against God. His *will* is opposed to the will of God. There is nothing but malice and hatred in his heart against God. When the Law of God is preached to natural man, he cannot but acquiesce that the demands made therein are right and just, for the Law is inscribed in his heart. But he hates God for having given the Ten Commandments, and to God’s “Thou shalt!” he opposes his “I will not!” Hence Scripture says: “The Law worketh wrath,” Rom. 4, 15. And when the Gospel is preached to him, his enmity oftentimes knows no bounds. St. Paul was stoned for preaching Christ crucified. Thus the enmity of the carnal mind manifested itself then. To-day the enmity is just as great, though it dare not manifest itself so violently. To be saved by Christ, by a foreign righteousness—never! Natural man will be his own Savior; he will be able to answer God on Judgment Day, so he imagines. Having lost the image of God, fallen away from original righteousness, man by nature is now wholly defiled in all the faculties of both body and soul. His life is a life of opposition and rebellion against God.

“This verse,” says Philippi, “is a strong argument against the doctrine of the so-called *liberum arbitrium* of the natural man. For this carnal state of mind, which cannot subject itself to the will of God, is not produced by any act of man’s will, nor can it be removed by any such act; it constitutes, according to the apostle’s doctrine, the original nature of man in its present or fallen state.”

“In the second place, the Word of God testifies that in divine things the understanding, heart, and will of the unregenerate man are not only wholly alienated from God, but adverse to Him, inclined to all evil, and perverted. Again, man is not only weak, impotent, without ability; and dead to that which is good, but so miserably perverted, poisoned, and corrupted by original sin that by nature and character *he is altogether evil, stubborn, and inimical to God, actively, eagerly, and energetically engaged in doing everything that is displeasing and opposed to God.* Gen. 8, 21: ‘The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth,’ etc.” (*Formula of Concord, S. D., Art. II, p. 613.*)

1 Cor. 12, 3: *No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.*

Here we have the answer to the questions, How is this dead man—man as he is by nature—to be brought to life? How are his blind eyes to be opened? This is solely the work of the Holy Ghost; for “*no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.*” Of course, this does not mean that no one can utter these words, “Jesus is the Lord,” except under special divine influence, but rather that no one can *believe* in Jesus as his Savior unless he is enlightened by the Spirit. For what does that mean: *Jesus is the Lord?* “Jesus” designates the Savior after His human nature; “Jesus” is the name of Mary’s son—true man. “*The Lord*” designates the Savior after His divine nature—true God. So to say that “Jesus is the Lord” is to say that Mary’s son, this true man, is at the same time the Lord, the very God; it is to confess that Christ is both true man and true God in one person; it is to confess the mystery of mysteries: “God is manifest in the flesh;” it is to confess that Jesus is He at whose name “every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,” Phil. 2, 10. 11. And he who says, confesses, that at the same time believes that Jesus is his Lord who has purchased and won him by His bitter sufferings and death from the power of sin, death, and the devil. And this confession, this faith, is possible only by

the power of the Holy Spirit. What did the Lord Himself say when Peter confessed Him to be the Son of God? "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjoña; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven," Matt. 16, 17. — Hence we confess with Luther: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, *but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel.*"

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(To be continued.)