Johann Gerhard edited by Benjamin T. G. Mayes and Heath R. Curtin

Theological Commonplaces: On Original Sin, On Actual Sins, On Free Choice. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014. Pp. xv + 367. Hb, \$59.99.

A good measure to comprehend the enormous impact of the anti-Protestant writings of the Jesuit Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) is to observe how much energy his confessional opponents poured into refuting his works. Concordia Publishing House's monumental project to translate Johann Gerhard (1583–1637)'s massive *Theological Commonplaces* (*Loci theologici*, 1610–25) into English provides a wealth of materials to all researchers interested in the inter-confessional polemics in Reformation Europe, as these volumes are the compendium of the Protestant refutations of the Roman Catholic doctrines composed by the best dogmatician of Lutheran Orthodoxy. This volume, originally published in 1611 (*Locorum theologicorum [...] tomus secundus*, Jena: Tobias Steinmann), covers the Commonplaces 12 to 14 of Gerhard's classic, focusing on the controversial issues of original and actual sins and free choice of humankind. From the very first chapter of this work, it becomes clear that the primary aim of the brilliant Jena theologian is to present a thorough counterattack to Bellarmine's doctrinal claims in his *Controversies* (1586–93) and to prove that his opponent's theological understandings show his Pelagian deviation.

The Commonplaces 12 discusses the cause, nature, and effects of Adam's fall. Though he has critically quoted Bellarmine's words in earlier sections, Gerhard launches his first frontal attack on Bellarmine's thesis with the question "What was the first sin of the first human beings?" (15). The ensuing argument demonstrates the meticulous style of Gerhard's polemic. Faithful to Luther's tradition, Gerhard insists that defection from God's word was the first sin of humankind, and criticizes Bellarmine's view that pride was the first transgression. In order to prove his point, Gerhard argues that the scripture verses and the church fathers' statements quoted in Bellarmine's thesis are not contrary to the Lutheran stance (16–18). Then he turns to his opponent's rational arguments that "the end of man in evil acts is his own excellence, which is the object of pride and thus not of faithlessness." Claiming that "following the simplicity and perspicuity of Moses' text" he does not try to comprehend the true intent of Adam but to focus on its execution, Gerhard reiterates his view that "the first act of commission or of execution was faithlessness or departure from God's Word" (18). Picking up Bellarmine's counterarguments one by one, he adds refutations to each, buttressing his claims with quotations from Augustine, Tertullian, Irenaeus, and others. (The writings of the fathers always provide Gerhard with the most important weapons against his opponents.)

But these arguments on the first sin of humankind are a mere introduction to his chief agenda: to connect Bellarmine with Pelagianism.

Throughout the rest of the volume, Gerhard employs every opportunity to point out the unorthodox elements (or, more precisely, the elements which can be interpreted as unorthodox) in the Jesuit theologian's writing. For him, Bellarmine's view that Adam's sin was imputed by God to his descendants, and his definition of original sin as "a habitual aversion" to God show his "minimizing the hideousness of original sin in many ways" (55). Rejecting Bellarmine's emphasis of voluntary nature of actual sins (because it can be argued that infants are sinless as they cannot commit sin voluntarily), Gerhard presses his own definition of sin as "lawlessness" in *Commonplaces* 13, which examines the nature, category, and effects of actual sins. In this part, Gerhard presents lengthy arguments on the problem whether concupiscence in a believer is sin because it highlights the contradictions which can be observed in some of Bellarmine's own statements. The Jena professor triumphantly quotes his opponent's statement that the rebellion of the flesh should not be called sin, "but the punishments of sin and defects following from the material, just as rust is related to an iron knife," as a manifest sign that he fell into the Pelagian error (164–65).

In the third part of the volume, *Commonplace* 14, is on the freedom of choice remaining in humankind after the fall. Naturally, the main issue of the section is whether humankind can cooperate with God's grace in the process of conversion, and it gives Gerhard ample opportunities to denounce the position of the Jesuit (while rejecting the Calvinist idea of the absolute decree). Bellarmine's stance is summarized in his interesting parable of "a man sailing to the Orient"—the story appropriate for the age of overseas explorations: "Let there be a man who needs to sail to the Orient, and yet is unwilling to do this; then let someone come to him and finally persuade him with many proffered reasons and make a willing person out of an unwilling one. Then, when the second person perceives that the first is willing to sail, he gets him a ship, money, and the rest of the supplies necessary for those who sail" (259). This suggests that a person, responding to persuasion and inspiration of divine grace, can cooperate with God in the first act of conversion with his own natural powers. For Gerhard, in order to overcome the bondage of original sin, one needs new powers to will, given by Holy Spirit. "The will needs not just persuasion but also change, not just healing but also renewal, not an exterior beating but an interior drawing" (260). Thus the parable shows that "Bellarmine does not yet extricate himself from the nets of Pelagius" (261).

Gerhard rightly points out a number of inconsistencies in Bellarmine's work, but did he properly grasp the subtle arguments of the Jesuit theologian? Because he tried to point out all the problematic lines which appear in

Controversies, we receive an impression that “the church father of Lutheran Orthodoxy” often gets lost in the wood, as he is focusing too strongly on each tree. Nonetheless, his passion to pinpoint all the logical problems of the Jesuit polemist shows the threat he felt from his worthy opponent. Though his attack is relentless, we cannot miss that Gerhard tried to be fair to Bellarmine, often acknowledging that he can accept some of the claims which his enemy made. In one argument about free choice, Gerhard even expresses his frustration that “[t]his childish game of Bellarmine is unworthy of his intelligence” (262), which suggests his high regard of the capability of his opponent.

This precious volume allows readers an interesting glimpse into the dramatic world of confessional struggles, especially the profound sense of the crisis provoked by the Jesuit counterattack to the Lutheran Reformation. A glossary with forty theological words, a person index, a scripture index, and a bibliographical list of the works cited (including those used by Gerhard himself), also provide valuable help to researchers.

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DOI 10.1163/22141332-00302006-13