

Foreword

In this issue of the *Quarterly* we are pleased to share with our readers the 2008 annual Reformation Lectures, delivered on October 30–31, 2008, in Mankato, Minnesota. These lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. This was the forty-first in the series of annual Reformation Lectures which began in 1967.

This year there were three presenters. The first lecture was given by Dr. Cameron A. MacKenzie, who is the Ellis Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, and chairman of the department, serving since 1983. He has an S.T.M. in New Testament from Concordia Theological Seminary (Fort Wayne), and a Ph.D. in history from the University of Notre Dame. His dissertation was on the controversial literature surrounding the English Bible in Elizabethan England. At Concordia Seminary, Dr. MacKenzie regularly teaches courses in Reformation church history. He has published many articles in the field of church history, lectures frequently, and is the author of *The Battle for the Bible in England, 1557–1582*. Prior to coming to Concordia Seminary, Dr. MacKenzie was pastor for eight years of St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Detroit, Michigan. He has served the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as a member of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations and as chairman of the Doctrinal Review Commission, and is presently the book review editor of the *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*. He is married to Meg nee Martin and has four grown children.

The second presenter was Prof. James F. Korthals of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. In 1976 Prof. Korthals graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, and has served parishes in Michigan and Wisconsin. He was called to Northwestern College (NWC) in November, 1981, where he taught European history until May 1994. During his years at NWC he did graduate work in history at the University of Wisconsin—Oshkosh, graduating with an M.A. in History in 1989. In addition, he has done doctoral coursework at Marquette University in Milwaukee. In 1997, he was called to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to serve as Professor of Church History and Homiletics. He is married to Jean nee Kobleska and has three grown children.

The third presenter was Dr. John Maxfield, who graduated from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1989. Following seminary, he studied Early Modern West European History at Indiana University (Bloomington), receiving an M.A. degree in 1990. He was ordained in 1990 and served congregations in Pennsylvania and

New Jersey. In September 1999 Pastor Maxfield began full-time studies in Church History at Princeton Theological Seminary, with a concentration in Reformation and Luther Studies. His dissertation was on Martin Luther's lectures on Genesis. After spending his final year of studies in Germany, he received a Ph.D. degree in history in May 2004. From his dissertation he developed his first book, entitled *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity* (2008). Pastor Maxfield served part-time as Director of the Luther Academy from June 1999 through April 2005, and since January 2005 has served as Associate Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Saint Francis, Minnesota. He is married to Jennifer Louise nee Hadjin and has four children.

The theme of the lectures was "The Freedom of the Will in Three Reformations." The first lecture, presented by Dr. Cameron MacKenzie, was entitled "The Bondage of the Will in Lutheranism—Man's Sin or God's Will?" The second lecturer, Prof. James Korthals, presented "The Freedom of the Will in the Radical Reformation." The third lecture, given by Dr. John Maxfield, was entitled "The Freedom of the Will in Catholic Reform and Counter Reformation."

The Reformation Lectures centered on the doctrine of the freedom of choice in the Lutheran Reformation, the Radical Reformation and the Catholic Reformation. In his greatest work on the human will, *The Bondage of the Will* (*De Servo Arbitrio*), Martin Luther maintained that a rejection of the biblical doctrine of total depravity will always lead to synergism, work righteousness, and will ultimately destroy the chief doctrine of justification by faith alone. Luther praised Erasmus for criticizing his insistence on total depravity because it indicated that Erasmus understood the substance of Luther's teaching. He exclaimed, "You have seized me by the throat" ("*ipsum iugulum petisti*" [LW 33:294]). The teaching of freedom of choice on the part of Erasmus led to synergism and ripped the jugular out of the central article of the faith.

Rev. Paul G. Madson, who is known in our synod for his fine poetry, has composed two poems for this *Quarterly*. The first poem entitled, "Our Synod's Citadel," points out the importance of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary for our synod. The second composition, "Our 'Melchizedek,'" explains the relationship between Melchizedek in the Old Testament and our Savior, Christ Jesus. He was a type or a foreshadowing of Christ. Pastor Madson has served a number of parishes in our synod and at present is the synodical archivist in Mankato, Minnesota.

Also, this *Quarterly* includes a review of Andrew Louth's *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*.

– GRS

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The Bondage of the Will in Lutheranism – Man’s Sin or God’s Will?

by Cameron A. MacKenzie

Although Luther did not have many nice things to say about Erasmus in his *Bondage of the Will*, he did compliment the humanist reformer for choosing the right topic. In the conclusion to his treatise, Luther wrote:

I give you hearty praise and commendation on this further account – that you alone, in contrast with all others, have attacked the real thing, that is, the essential issue. You have not wearied me with those extraneous issues about the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences and such like – trifles, rather than issues...you, and you alone have seen the hinge on which all turns, and aimed for the vital spot.¹

Perhaps that strikes the contemporary Lutheran reader as a bit strange. After all, Luther is not talking about an attack upon justification by faith, the doctrine that the Reformer himself called “the first and chief article” in the Schmalkald Articles,² the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls. How then could Luther describe the “bondage of the will,” the subject of his great debate with Erasmus, as the “hinge on which all turns [*cardinem rerum*]”? Can both statements be true?

Indeed, yes, they can; and a moment’s reflection justifies Luther’s statement, because human incapacity is an essential presupposition for justification by faith alone. It is only because human beings can do nothing, absolutely nothing toward their salvation – in fact, cannot even want to do the truly God-pleasing thing – that God’s unconditional grace in Christ toward sinners is so important and comforting. If the human will were not so limited, bound to sin, incapable in any respect of doing God’s will for salvation, then we might very well have to do something ourselves, i.e., make some contribution of our own toward establishing a right relationship with God. But we cannot and so do not. Instead, God does it all in Christ and we receive it all by faith. Our weakness is the necessary complement of God’s grace. The two ideas go together. They are opposite sides of the same coin.

But if that is really true and Lutherans today still think that God's grace is important for preaching and believing, then, obviously, it still makes sense to treat the human side of things as well; and the purpose of this paper is to do just that – to consider “the bondage of the will” not just in Martin Luther's thought but in the broader context of Confessional Lutheranism and to highlight the rationale that Lutherans advanced for their position in the sixteenth century as they established guidelines for *both* the affirmation of free will in its proper sphere and its denial in spiritual things.

Now, if that sounds like the subject matter for a book rather than a paper, it is – maybe more than one – and there are plenty of them out there. But I would be remiss if I did not at the outset mention at least one; and even though I hope that my presentation today is something more than a book review, I still must acknowledge my indebtedness to Robert Kolb's work, *Bound Choice, Election, and Wittenberg Theological Method*, published in 2005 and subtitled, *From Martin Luther to the Formula of Concord*.³ It's a great work on the subject at hand and I recommend it heartily to anyone wishing to explore this subject in more detail than we can possibly present in this paper.

Now, as Kolb points out, the context for Luther's theology was his personal experience.⁴ Undoubtedly, this is true for all of us; but I suspect that very few of us have experienced the subject at hand, human incapacity for salvation, with quite the intensity of Martin Luther. So the first point to observe about Luther's rationale for his doctrine of the “bondage of the will” is the fact that in his own dealings with God, Luther felt deeply the inability of his own personal will to satisfy the divine demands. This occurred sometime after his entry into the Erfurt house of the Augustinian Hermits (1505), and we have probably all read or heard statements from Luther like the following that express his frustration regarding his inability to conquer sin:

I used to think when I was a monk that it was all over concerning my salvation whenever I felt the lust of the flesh, that is, a bad thought, sexual desire, anger, hatred, envy, etc. toward some brother. I tried many things, I used to confess daily, etc. but I accomplished nothing, because the lust of the flesh always returned. Therefore, I could find no peace, but I was constantly tortured by these thoughts: You have committed this and that sin. You are laboring under envy, impatience, etc. Uselessly, you have entered the holy order and all your good works are in vain.⁵

So the “bondage of the will,” understood as slavery to sin, was something that Luther *felt* acutely long before he defended it in his debate with Erasmus.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Luther also wrote about it long before Erasmus’s attack; and it appeared in his Reformation writings right from the beginning. In fact, we might even say *before* the beginning if we like to think of October 31, 1517, as the starting point, because Luther made the enslaved will the theme of theses that he prepared for a student of his to defend at Wittenberg already in September of that year. These theses, the “Disputation against Scholastic Theology,” include such statements as these: “It is true that man, being a bad tree, can only will and do evil”; “As a matter of fact, without the grace of God the will produces an act that is perverse and evil”; and “It is . . . innately and inevitably evil and corrupt.”⁶

Moreover, as the Reformation unfolded, Luther repeatedly made the same point: on its own, the human will *cannot* please God but instead invariably acts in ways that are hostile to Him. We see this, for example, very prominently in the Heidelberg Theses (1518): “Free will, after the fall,” Luther wrote, “exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin.”⁷ These theses do include a kind of clarification regarding his position that is important to note, for Luther distinguished between the active and passive capacity of man’s free will and affirmed that “free will, after the fall, has power to do good only in a passive capacity.” By this, however, Luther only meant that free will as created and before the fall into sin could choose the good but now on its own cannot.⁸

Subsequently, in the *Bondage of the Will*, Luther would also use the passivity of the will to explain that it remained a fit subject for the Holy Spirit to convert and make use of in bringing about man’s salvation. He wrote:

If we meant by “the power of free-will [*vim liberi arbitrii*]” the power which makes human beings fit subjects to be caught by the Spirit and touched by God’s grace, as creatures made for eternal life or eternal death, we should have a proper definition. And I certainly acknowledge the existence of *this* power, this fitness, or “dispositional quality” and “passive aptitude” (as the Sophists call it), which, as everyone knows, is not given to plants or animals. As the proverb says, God did not make heaven for geese!⁹

For Luther, then, it was never a question of what God could do with man’s will, but what man could do by himself. In conversion, God could

certainly redirect the sinner toward divine things; God could (and did) sanctify the will. But what about man on his own? What then? For that situation “bondage” or “slavery” was much the best term since, left to his own devices, man would always choose the wrong thing, sin. Man is not *forced* to sin but that is always what he *wants* to do. Luther wrote, “‘Free-will’ without God’s grace is not free at all, but is the permanent prisoner and bondslave of evil, since it cannot turn itself to good.”¹⁰

Thus, Luther’s position on the unaided power of the human will for salvation in the *Bondage of the Will* is the same as the one that he held in the *Heidelberg Theses*. The human will has no such power at all. It is radically dependent on grace.

Furthermore, Luther’s opponents early on recognized his position on the will and rejected it, most especially in the papal bull, *Exsurge, Domine* (1520), that condemned Luther’s theology and threatened him with excommunication unless he recanted. Among the statements gleaned from Luther’s works and presented as “pestilential poison [*virus pestiferum*]” was the following, “Free will, after the fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin,” an exact quotation from the *Heidelberg Theses*!¹¹

It is no wonder then that Luther reaffirmed the “bondage of the will” in those works that answered the papal condemnations. In his *Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis X. novissimam damnatorum* (1520), he wrote, “These are the two works of free will, namely, to sin and to persevere and increase in sins.”¹² And in a parallel work in German, he maintained,

Where is the free will here? It is the prisoner of the devil, not indeed, unable to act, but able to act only in conformity with the devil’s will. Is that freedom, to be a prisoner at the mercy of the devil? There is no help unless God grants repentance and improvement.¹³

Moreover, it was not only Luther who insisted on the enslaved will during the early years of the Reformation. So too did Philip Melanchthon. In the work that Luther claimed not only deserved “to live as long as books are read” but also should “take its place in the Church’s canon,”¹⁴ Melanchthon’s *Loci communes theologici*, the younger Reformer treated “the power of man, especially free will [*de libero arbitrio*]” before any other topic and at length. Like Martin Luther, Melanchthon also insisted in this work that “our will has no liberty [*nulla est voluntatis nostrae libertas*]” and concluded that “the Pharisaical Scholastics will preach the

power of free will [*liberi arbitrii vim*]. The Christian will acknowledge that nothing is less in his power than his heart.”¹⁵

Right from the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation, therefore, the founders of our Church taught clearly that man has no free will with respect to divine things. He simply cannot choose the God-pleasing way unless God first of all moves him to do so. Otherwise, he is damned.

Therefore, by the time that Erasmus wrote against Luther in 1524,¹⁶ the basic position of the Lutheran Church was already in place. Not only did Luther defend it in 1525 against his humanist opponent, he continued to maintain it through the rest of his career. It appears, for example, in his *Galatians Commentary* (1535):

We teach that all men are wicked; we condemn the free will of man, his natural powers, wisdom, righteousness, all self-invented religions, and whatever is best in the world...We say that there is nothing in us that can deserve grace and the forgiveness of sins.¹⁷

It is also a part of his *Disputation Concerning Man*, theses prepared for academic debate in 1536:

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

24...it must still be concluded

25. That the whole man and every man...is and remains guilty of sin and death, under the power of Satan [*Ut homo totus et omnis...sit et maneat peccati et mortis reus, sub diabolo oppressus*].

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

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

30. In like manner, that it rests with man to choose good and evil, or life and death, etc. [*eligere bonum et malum, seu vitam et mortem etc.*]

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

34. And he [Paul] takes man in general, that is, universally, so that he consigned the whole world, or whatever is called man, to sin [*sub peccato*].¹⁸

Moreover, in the Genesis lectures delivered at the end of his career, Luther used the example of Cain once more to reject free will. “These facts,” said Luther,

give us an insight into the cruel tyranny with which Satan oppresses our nature now that it has become entangled in sins.... When our nature is without the Holy Spirit, it is impelled by the same evil spirit by which Cain was impelled [*ab eodem malo Spiritu agitur, quo agitatus est impius Cain*]. But if any man ever possessed either adequate strength or a free will [*liberum arbitrium*] by which he could protect himself against the assaults of Satan, these gifts would surely have existed in Cain....But the state of all men is the same: If this nature is not assisted by God’s Holy Spirit, it cannot stand. Why, then, do we engage in unprofitable boasting about our free will?¹⁹

Given its pervasiveness in Luther, therefore, it would be strange indeed if the Lutheran Confessions omitted the bondage of the will, and, of course, they do not. While conceding that man possesses “some measure of freedom of the will [*etlichermass ein freien Willen*]” for an outwardly honorable life and for things that reason comprehends, the Augsburg Confession denies such freedom when it comes to man’s “making himself acceptable to God, of fearing God and believing in God with his whole heart, or of expelling inborn evil lusts from his heart.”²⁰ These things, the Augustana maintains, are accomplished only by the Holy Spirit who comes by the Word of God. In the Apology, Melancthon elaborated on this position. He again admitted that unregenerate man *can* achieve a certain kind of civil righteousness – obedience to rulers, refraining from murder, and the like. However, he again denied to free will “the spiritual capacity for true fear of God, true faith in God, true knowledge and trust that God considers, hears, and forgives us.” These “the human heart cannot perform without the Holy Ghost.”²¹

In the Schmalkald Articles, Luther mentioned “free will” briefly under the topic of sin when he specified the “error and stupidity” that the scholastic theologians taught concerning the consequences of man’s fall into sin:

1. That after the fall of Adam the natural powers of man have remained whole and uncorrupted, and that man by nature possesses a right understanding and a good will, as the philosophers teach.

2. Again, that man has a free will, either to do good and refrain from evil or to refrain from good and do evil [...*einen freien Willen, Guts zu tun und Boses zu lassen und wiederumb Guts zu lassen und Boses zu tun*].

Such statements, Luther wrote, “are thoroughly pagan doctrines [*rechte heidnische Lehre*], and we cannot tolerate them.”²²

The Catechisms also have some pertinent statements. Even though they do not mention “free will” in and of itself, they both deny to man’s natural abilities any capacity for salvation. In the familiar phrases of the Small Catechism, we confess, “I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Ghost has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith.”²³ The Large Catechism also contends that “neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit.” Furthermore, apart from the Holy Spirit, “we were *entirely of the devil*, knowing nothing of God and of Christ” [emphasis mine].²⁴ There certainly is not much room for free will in statements like these.

So too the Formula of Concord. By responding to a major controversy among the Luther’s heirs regarding the role of the will in conversion, the so-called Synergistic Controversy,²⁵ the Formula reiterates and then elaborates upon what the earlier Confessions teach about free will. In no uncertain terms, it nails down the doctrine of our church regarding free will once and for all:

We believe that in spiritual and divine things the intellect, heart, and will [*Verstand, Herz, und Wille*] of unregenerated man cannot by any native or natural powers in any way understand, believe, accept, imagine, will, begin, accomplish, do, effect, or cooperate, but that man is entirely and completely dead and corrupted as far as anything good is concerned [*ganz und gar zum Guten erstorben und verdorben*]....According to its perverse disposition and nature the natural free will [*der natürliche freie Wille*] is mighty and active only in the direction of that which is displeasing and contrary to God.²⁶

There simply is no room in Lutheranism for any human contribution to salvation. From first to last God does it all, and that includes conversion by the Holy Spirit alone by means of the Gospel.

However, in spite of the unanimity of our Confessions regarding

free will, there is an interesting development in Luther, Melanchthon, and the Confessions in the way this doctrine is presented and argued. In particular, in the early days of the Reformation, the bondage of the will was presented both as a consequence of the fall into sin *and* as a corollary to the sovereignty of God. But the latter proved an uncomfortable fit for a theology centered on God's grace, so it never quite made it into the mainstream of Lutheranism even if it remains a sub-current in our theology to the present day. So now let's return to the headwaters of Lutheranism and examine more closely the theological context in which the founders rejected free will.

First of all, recall again that statement from the Heidelberg Theses which the papal bull, *Exsurge Domine*, condemned: "Free will, after the fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin." "Free will, *after the fall* [*post peccatum*]." This is really an important qualifier – first of all, because it implies that before sin came, man had free will in matters relating to God; and secondly, that the bondage of the will is a consequence of the first sin and so is imparted to us all by way of original sin, our inheritance from Adam.²⁷

This is also the position of the Lutheran Confessions. For example, without using the term "enslaved will," the Apology implies as much when it maintains that one "penalty for original sin" is slavery to the devil, "Human nature is enslaved and held prisoner by the devil [*Est... natura humana in servitutem tradita, et captiva a diabolo tenetur*], who deludes it with wicked opinions and errors and incites it to all kinds of sins. Just as the devil cannot be conquered without Christ's help, so we cannot buy our way out of the slavery by ourselves [*propriis viribus*]."²⁸ Elsewhere, Melanchthon criticized his opponents' positive evaluation of "free will." While conceding that "civic righteousness" is "somewhat in our power," something that "free will" and human reason can achieve (but usually do not), Melanchthon "denied to man's natural powers the fear and trust of God," insisting instead that "original sin also involves such faults as ignorance of God, contempt of God, lack of fear of God and trust in him, inability to love him." So much for free will or any other human capacity to please God – original sin has wrecked it all.²⁹

The same position – that original sin explains the bondage of the will – is the position of the Formula of Concord that includes the most extensive discussion of free will in the Confessions. Interestingly, right at the outset of the second article in both the Epitome and the Solid Declaration (the article devoted to free will), the Formulators acknowledge a four-fold distinction in theological analysis of the topic in which the Fall into sin becomes a significant marker – free will before the Fall [*vor dem Fall*],



free will after the Fall [*nach dem Fall*] and before conversion, free will after regeneration, and free will after the resurrection of the body. Although they identify the chief issue in their treatment as relating to the second category only, viz., “what the unregenerated man’s intellect and will can do in his conversion and regeneration,” again the clear implication is that it is the Fall that accounts for man’s present predicament and the bondage of his will.³⁰

The Formula soon makes this explicit by answering the question regarding the will and intellect of unregenerate man this way:

The pure teachers of the Augsburg Confession have taught and argued that *through the fall of our first parents* [*durch den Fall unser ersten Eltern*] man is so corrupted that in divine things, concerning our conversion and salvation, he is by nature blind and does not and cannot understand the Word of God when it is preached, but considers it foolishness; nor does he of himself approach God, but he is and remains an enemy of God until by the power of the Holy Spirit...without any cooperation on his part, he is converted. [emphasis mine]³¹

Man’s current, desperate situation has arisen through the Fall into sin. If man cannot now exercise his will in a truly God-pleasing way, it is because of Adam and Eve’s first sin.

Throughout this article, the Formula frames its treatment of the bondage of the will by the Fall on one side and by conversion on the other: “We believe that after the Fall and prior to his conversion not a spark of spiritual powers has remained or exists in man.” This means, therefore, that man’s unregenerate will is totally corrupt: “According to its perverse disposition and nature the natural free will is mighty and active only in the direction of that which is displeasing and contrary to God.”³²

In Article 1, the Formula treats the doctrine of original sin. It explains that before the Fall into sin, man lived in a right relationship with God, “man’s nature was originally created pure, good, and holy.”³³ Following the Apology, the Formula uses the expression, “the image of God [*des Bildes Gottes*] according to which man was originally created in truth, holiness, and righteousness.”³⁴ That condition came to an end, however, with the Fall. The Formula explains, “The fact is, that Satan misled Adam and Eve through the Fall, and that by God’s judgment and verdict man lost the concreated righteousness as a punishment....All men...now inherit a nature with the same lack [of righteousness] and corruption [of human nature].”³⁵ Thus, a particular moment at the beginning of time is the basis





for unconverted humanity's present predicament: "This inherited damage is the reason why all of us, *because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve [von wegen des Ungehorsams Adam und Evä]*, are in God's disfavor and are children of wrath by nature" [emphasis mine].³⁶

The cause therefore of a will enslaved to sin and evil is that natural condition that we all inherit from our ancestors, original sin, against which our *only* hope is in God's grace in Christ.

Nonetheless, on the other side of conversion, man's will takes on a new reality and the Formula is quite clear that believers *want* to please God:

It is correct to say that in conversion, through the attraction of the Holy Spirit, God changes stubborn and unwilling people into willing people, and that after conversion, in the daily exercise of repentance, the reborn will of man [*des Menschen wiedergeborener Wille*] is not idle but cooperates in all the works which the Holy Spirit performs through us.³⁷

For the Formulators, the will is the subject of conversion, not a cause. But once converted it works with the Spirit instead of against even if, as the Formula also notes, it does so imperfectly on account of the flesh that continues to war against the Spirit on this side of eternity.

Thus, even after conversion, the converted will experiences temptation and struggles to live righteously. No longer absolutely captive to sin, it is nonetheless always dependent on the Spirit for remaining out from under Satan's sole direction. The Formula states, "The converted man does good, as much and as long as God rules him through his Holy Spirit, guides and leads him, but if God should withdraw his gracious hand man could not remain in obedience to God for one moment [*nicht ein Augenblick*]." He would fall right back into captivity. On his own, man's powers are still too weak to maintain a right relationship with the Almighty. He is always radically dependent on grace.³⁸

Now this teaching of the Formula is familiar to every Lutheran: as a consequence of the Fall into sin, man's unregenerate will is bound to evil and even after regeneration the Christian continues to experience sin and temptation. However, in spite of this clear commitment of our Church to what we can surely call the "total depravity" of human nature, there are limits to the captivity of the will. In particular, it applies only to "divine things," i.e., whatever affects our relationship with the Almighty. It does not apply to those things that God has placed under man's control and so made subject to human reason and will. With respect to these, man has free



will. This is also the consistent teaching of our foundational documents and is present in Luther and Melanchthon as well.

The Augsburg Confession begins its article on “freedom of the will” with this concession: “It is also taught among us that man possesses some measure of freedom of the will which enables him to live an outwardly honorable life and to make choices among the things that reason comprehends [*äusserlich ehrbar zu leben und zu wählen unter denen Dingen, so die Vernunft begreift*],” and includes a clarifying statement from what was thought to be a work by St. Augustine: “We concede that all men have a free will [*ein freier Will*], for all have a natural, innate understanding and reason. . . . It is only in the outward acts of this life [*allein äusserlichen Werken dieses Lebens*] that they have freedom to choose good or evil.” The quotation then goes on to give examples of what it means by outward acts that are good: “whether or not to labor in the fields, whether or not to eat or drink or visit a friend, whether to dress or undress, whether to build a house, take a wife, engage in a trade, or do whatever else may be good and profitable.” Interestingly, the quotation also includes evil outward acts such as worshipping idols and committing murder. But in either case, the important point is that in all such “outward acts” man has a choice. His will is not bound.³⁹

In the Apology, Melanchthon elaborated on the arena in which man can exercise freedom by discussing the nature and limits of “civil righteousness.” The Reformer conceded that it is possible (though not probable) for the human will to choose to do good works. “It can talk about God,” Melanchthon wrote, “and express its worship of him in outward works. It can obey rulers and parents. Externally, it can choose to keep the hands from murder, adultery, or theft.” Man’s reason *can* judge that such things are good; and man’s will *can* choose to do them.

But such choices do not constitute a righteousness that prevails before God. For that one needs a heart that fears, loves, and trusts in God above all things. And no one has that by nature, so free will falls far short of what is necessary for a right relationship with God.⁴⁰

The Formula of Concord recognizes the same distinction between civil and spiritual righteousness as do the Augustana and its Apology although the emphasis in the last confession is certainly upon the inability of the will to achieve a righteousness that pleases God. Nonetheless, it explicitly rejects the proposition “that man since the Fall is no longer a rational creature. . . . or that in outward or external secular things [*in äusserlichen, weltlichen Sachen*] he cannot have a conception of good or evil or freely choose to act or not to act.” Quite the contrary. The Formula affirms not only that “to some extent reason and free will are able to lead an outwardly



virtuous life [*etlichermassen äusserlich ehrbar zu leben*]” but even that a man “can hear the Gospel and meditate on it to a certain degree and can even talk about it [*das Evangelium hören und etlichermassen betrachten, auch davon reden kann*].” But before the reader can start feeling optimistic about man’s natural powers, the Formula offers as biblical confirmation of what it has just affirmed the example of Pharisees and hypocrites who, of course, embodied the antithesis of saving righteousness in their rejection of Jesus.⁴¹

The same distinction between freedom of the will in some matters but bondage in divine is present in some of the early writings of Luther and Melanchthon. In his “Explanation to Thesis 6” of the Heidelberg Theses (1518) which addresses the question of whether “the will of man outside the state of grace” is free or in bondage, Luther clarified his purpose: “We speak of the freedom of the will with respect to merit and lack of merit [before God]. With respect to other things inferior to these, I do not deny that the will is free, or indeed considers itself free.”⁴²

Melanchthon also embraced the distinction between freedom in outward matters and captivity in spiritual matters in his 1521 *Loci*:

If you think of the power of the human will as a capacity of nature, according to human reason it cannot be denied that there is in it a certain freedom in outward works [*Quod si voluntatis humanae vim pro naturae captu aestimes, negari non potest juxta rationem humanam, quin sit in ea libertas quaedam externorum operum*]. For instance, you have experienced that it is in your power to greet a man or not to greet him, to put on this coat or not to put it on, to eat meat or not to do so. The would-be followers who have attributed freedom to the will have fixed their eyes upon this contingency of external works. But Scripture tells nothing of that kind of freedom, since God looks not at external works but at the inner disposition of the heart.⁴³

But in summarizing his argument, Melanchthon used language that was quite guarded: “If you relate the will to external acts, according to natural judgment there seems to be a certain freedom.”⁴⁴

“There *seems* to be a certain freedom” in outward acts? Well, is there or isn’t there? Later Lutheranism says, Yes. But early Melanchthon’s answer is, Not really: “If you relate human will to predestination, there is freedom neither in external nor internal acts, but all things take place according to divine determination.”⁴⁵ John Calvin could not have said it better; and I am tempted to say that on in this question in the early days we could very



well speak of “Calvinistic” Lutheranism. True freedom of the will cannot coexist with the sovereignty of God.

Of course, it would be terribly anachronistic to speak of Calvinist *anything* in the 1520’s, and if indeed Melanchthon – and Luther too for that matter – sound like John Calvin, it is probably because they share a common source, viz., St. Augustine. This is not the time or place to go into Augustine’s doctrine of predestination⁴⁶ (or Calvin’s either for that matter⁴⁷), but it is important to note that early Luther explicitly argued that he was following this church father when he articulated his doctrine of the “bondage of the will.” Indeed, the first theses of his “Disputation against Scholastic Theology” are a defense of Augustine’s authority in theology, on the basis of which Luther claimed, “It is *therefore* true [*veritas itaque est*] that man, being a bad tree, can only will and do evil” [emphasis mine]. Later in these theses, Luther introduced predestination “as the best and infallible preparation for grace and the sole means of obtaining grace,” but he did not directly blame predestination for the *bondage* of the will.⁴⁸

Luther came close to doing this, however, in his *Assertio omnium articulorum* (the Latin treatise that he wrote to defend himself against the pope’s condemnations that we referred to earlier). Without mentioning predestination, the Reformer nonetheless took issue with “free will” by arguing from divine omnipotence. “Everything,” Luther wrote, “happens by absolute necessity [*omnia...de necessitate absoluta eveniunt*].” In fact, Luther argued that he been mistaken when he had made the statement for which the pope condemned him. “...That free will before grace exists in name only.’ I should have said simply,” Luther wrote, “that ‘free will is an imaginary thing or a word without a substance [*figmentum in rebus seu titulus sine re*].’”⁴⁹ Like Melanchthon in the *Loci*, Luther blamed the error of affirming free will on man’s limited point of view:

The inconstancy or contingency (as they call it) of human things deceives those wretched men, since they lower their own foolish eyes toward the things themselves or what the things produce and do not ever raise them toward the viewpoint of God in order that they might know in God the things above the things. For when we look at things below, they appear uncertain and accidental; but when we look at things above, all things are necessary. This is true because we live, do, experience all men and all things the way He wants it and not the way we do.⁵⁰

Of course, Luther’s main concern had to do with whether man’s free will could make any sort of contribution to his salvation; but his argument from the omnipotence of God applies to all things, including man’s choices

regarding temporal matters. They too are “necessary” and freedom in such matters also a chimera. Even so, however, Luther was reluctant to draw this conclusion. In the work at hand, he initially applied his statement regarding absolute necessity to man’s moral nature (“No one has it in his own power to contemplate evil or good”) and he contrasted God’s impassivity with human vagaries (“With Him [God], as James says, there is no change or shadow of turning; but *here all things are subject to change and variation [Hic vero omnia mutantur et variantur]*” [emphasis mine]. So maybe at the human level there is some room for deliberation and choice.⁵¹ Luther addressed this question directly in the *Bondage of the Will*.

Of course, one of the things that is so noteworthy about Luther’s defense of the enslaved will in his debate with Erasmus is precisely the argument from divine necessity. “This bombshell knocks ‘free-will’ flat,” wrote Luther; and which “bombshell” is that? “It is...fundamentally necessary and wholesome for Christians to know that God foreknows nothing contingently, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His own immutable, eternal and infallible will [*omnia incommutabili et aeterna infallibilique voluntate et praevidet et proponit et facit*].” Luther was ruthless in asserting the force of this argument. For God to be God, He must be in charge – of everything!⁵² “Do you suppose,” Luther asked Erasmus,

that He [God] does not will what He foreknows, or that He does not foreknow what He wills? If He wills what He foreknows, His will is eternal and changeless, because His nature is so. From which it follows, by resistless logic, that all we do, however it may appear to us to be done mutably and contingently, is in reality done necessarily and immutably in respect of God’s will [*omnia quae facimus, omnia quae fiunt, etsi nobis videntur mutabiliter et contingenter fieri, revera tamen fiunt necessario et immutabiliter, si Dei voluntatem spectes*]. For the will of God is effective and cannot be impeded, since power belongs to God’s nature.⁵³

Moreover, in asserting this position, Luther understood that it applied also to the choices humans make in temporal matters. Sometimes, it is true, Luther wrote as if men were actually free in such matters, and from their own perspective they are. But however *we* understand such freedom, it is still the case that human beings exercise this kind of freedom under the sovereignty of God. Luther wrote:

We may still in good faith teach people to use it [the term “free-will”] to credit man with “free-will” in respect, not of what is

above him, but of what is below him [*inferioris se rei*]. That is to say, man should realize that in regard to his money and possessions he has a right to use them, to do or to leave undone, according to his own “free will” – though that very “free-will” is overruled by the free-will of God alone, according to His own pleasure [*licet et idipsum regatur solius Dei libero arbitrio, quocunque illi placuerit*].⁵⁴

The logic of Luther’s position is irresistible: For God to be God He must be in charge of everything, including somehow the choices that we make regarding the things God has placed in our care.

But besides irresistible, this truth is also comforting, and Luther tied the Gospel directly to God’s sovereignty. He wrote:

For if you hesitate to believe, or are too proud to acknowledge, that God foreknows and wills all things, not contingently, but necessarily and immutably, how can you believe, trust and rely on His promises? When He makes promises, you ought to be out of doubt that He knows, and can and will perform what He promises. . . . And how can you be thus sure and certain, unless you know that certainly, infallibly, immutably, and necessarily, He knows, wills and will perform what He promises?⁵⁵

Thus, God’s power is the guarantee of the Gospel. He can – and will – deliver on what He has promised.

Given its significance for the Gospel, the sovereignty of God never disappears from Lutheranism; but it certainly takes a back seat in later treatments of free will. As we have already seen, in the Confessional documents it is almost entirely absent. But note the “almost,” since a careful reading of the Confessions can still find God’s sovereignty hovering in the background of the discussion of free will. Already in the Augsburg Confession, the Augustinian passage quoted earlier that affirms free will in temporal matters also includes the caveat, “None of these [outward acts of this life] is or exists without God, but all things are from him and through him.”⁵⁶ However, this is not the case in Melancthon’s follow up in the Apology. Man’s capacity for civil righteousness is affirmed, and no mention is made of God’s sovereignty, except *perhaps* for the little qualifier that Melancthon attached to man’s ability to achieve outward righteousness, “which,” wrote the Reformer, “we agree is subject to reason and *somewhat* [*aliquo modo*] in our power “[emphasis mine].⁵⁷ But what is the nature of this restriction, God’s power or man’s sin? The Apology does not say.

Probably the most interesting of the Confessional nods to divine sovereignty in the context of discussing the human will comes in the Formula of Concord, Article 2, where as we have already seen, a principal argument for the *enslaved* will is as a consequence of original sin. But what about the argument from the sovereignty of God? Again, it is almost invisible. Once more we read that in external matters, this time even including the ability to “hear and read this Word [of God] externally,” “man still has something [*etlichermassen* – there’s that qualifier again!] of a free will.”⁵⁸ The Formula also rejects “the absurdity of the Stoics and Manichaeans in holding that everything must happen as it does” without, however, explaining why this is absurd.⁵⁹

However, the Formula *does* recommend Luther’s *Bondage of the Will* and so, by that means, one can perhaps retrieve the argument from divine sovereignty. After citing the two catechisms, the Schmalkald Articles, the *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, and the Genesis commentary in addition to *Bondage*, the Formulators wrote, “We hereby appeal to these writings and refer others to them.” Oddly enough, however, they did not actually quote *Bondage* or the Genesis commentary although they quoted all of the others. Instead, they summarized the former quite simply, “He [Luther] writes concerning the enslaved will of man against Erasmus and in great detail presents and demonstrates his case.”⁶⁰

True enough, but it is the Genesis commentary (especially regarding chapter 26) that receives the epithet, “his splendid exposition [*in der herrlichen Auslegung*],” and, even so, the Formula does not say very much about the contents, “He [Luther] takes up several special disputed points which Erasmus raised (for example, the question of ‘absolute necessity’), indicates how he intended his statements to be understood, and defends them diligently and to the best of his ability against all misunderstanding and misinterpretation.”⁶¹ In this way, the main thrust of the Formula’s recommendation is that one should read *Bondage of the Will* in the light of the Genesis commentary – a more than reasonable position given what Luther himself said in the latter work.⁶²

For our purposes, however, it is important to note that divine sovereignty clearly survived in Luther’s thought although there is certainly an important shift in emphasis – if not in content – between the two works. For in a lengthy passage in the Genesis lectures,⁶³ Luther returned to the subject matter of the *Bondage of the Will*, particularly predestination, in order to set the record straight. Concerned that after his death people would corrupt his teachings (as they were already doing while he was still alive), Luther reaffirmed a central thesis of the earlier work, viz., divine sovereignty – “everything,” he wrote, “is absolute and unavoidable [*esse*

omnia absoluta et necessaria]”⁶⁴ – but he emphasized even more than in *Bondage*, not only the utter foolishness of trying to probe the hidden purposes of God but especially the *absolute reliability* of God’s promises in Christ. But Luther did not repeat his argument from divine sovereignty against free will.⁶⁵

So what happened? I would like to argue – very briefly – that Luther took his own advice by emphasizing the will of God revealed in the Gospel! As Luther recognized in the *Bondage of the Will*, employing divine sovereignty as an explanation for the slavery of man to sin inevitably confronts us with the “hidden will” of God, i.e., the question of why – why has God created a world like this? Why did He permit the fall of man into sin in the first place? Why does He refrain from liberating some from sin while at the same time converting others?

Questions like these really have no answer since God has not told us; and yet we can hardly refrain from asking them when we consider the omnipotence of God. Accordingly, they have a prominent place in Luther’s *Bondage of the Will*; and Luther confronted them head-on, for example, when discussing Ezekiel 18:23: “I desire not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live.” Luther called this passage, “the voice of the gospel, the sweetest consolation to miserable sinners.”⁶⁶ But in view of the divine sovereignty, he also wondered, “Why some are touched by the law and others not, so that some receive and others scorn the offer of grace”? At this point, Luther referred to “the dreadful hidden will of God [*occulta et metuenda voluntate Dei*], Who, according to His own counsel, ordains such persons *as He wills* [*velit*] to receive and partake of the mercy preached and offered” [emphasis mine].⁶⁷ So Luther acknowledged two wills in God – one revealed and one hidden: “God does many things which He does not show us in His Word, and He wills many things which He does not in His Word show us that He wills. Thus, He does not will the death of a sinner – that is, in His Word; but He wills it by His inscrutable will.”⁶⁸

Quite clearly, then, Luther was moving through some dangerous territory as he considered the ramifications of divine sovereignty; and he experienced them with real anxiety. At one point in *Bondage*, he wrote:

Doubtless it gives the greatest possible offence to common sense or natural reason, that God, Who is proclaimed as being full of mercy and goodness, and so on, should of His own mere will abandon, harden, and damn men, as though He delighted in the sins and great eternal torments of such poor wretches. It seems an iniquitous, cruel, intolerable thought to think of God.... And who would not stumble at it? I have stumbled at it myself more

than once, down to the deepest pit of despair, so that I wished I had never been born.⁶⁹

Needless to say, Luther spent a considerable amount of space in the *Bondage of the Will* showing that God did not act unjustly nor did He in fact compel men to sin. However, Luther never shied away from the necessity of all things based on the sovereignty of God or the awesome consequence that everything that happens happens according to the hidden will of God. No wonder then that Luther more than once experienced “the deepest pit of despair.”

But Luther also presented the answer to this experience in *Bondage* and even more powerfully in the Genesis lectures, viz., sole concentration upon the revealed will of God, i.e., the Gospel. Luther wrote in the former, “We must keep in view His Word and leave alone His inscrutable will; for it is by His Word, and not by His inscrutable will, that we must be guided.” Of course, that is pragmatically true. After all, Luther added, “Who can direct himself according to a will that is inscrutable and incomprehensible?”⁷⁰ But it is also true evangelically. The Gospel is God’s revealed will:

So it is right to say: ‘If God does not desire our death, it must be laid to the charge of our own will if we perish’; this, I repeat, is right if you spoke of God preached. For He desires that all men should be saved, in that He comes to all by the word of salvation, and the fault is in the will which does not receive Him.

But why doesn’t God change the will that rejects Him? That, Luther said, “It is not lawful to ask; and though you should ask much, you would never find out.”⁷¹

Similarly, in the Genesis lectures, Luther no sooner mentions the principle “that everything is absolute and unavoidable” than he continues “but at the same time I have added that one must look at the revealed God, as we sing in the hymn: *Er heist Jesu Christ, der HERR Zebaoth, und ist kein ander Gott*....One should not inquire into the predestination of the hidden God but should be satisfied with what is revealed....For then you can be sure about your faith and salvation.”⁷²

The remedy, therefore, for the problems raised by the sovereignty of God – intellectual and pastoral – was not to deny the doctrine but to return to the Gospel, God’s promise, that is absolutely reliable precisely on account of God’s sovereignty. But what God has *not* told us about how and why He does what He does is none of our business. This is exactly what Luther said in the Genesis commentary, and it is what the Formula of

Concord affirms also, especially in Article 11 regarding predestination. It says, for example, “We must...carefully distinguish between what God has expressly revealed in His Word and what he has not revealed....There are many points in this mystery about which God has remained silent....We are not to pry into these...but we are to adhere exclusively to the revealed Word.”⁷³

Unfortunately, to emphasize God’s sovereignty as the cause of man’s enslaved will – as we find it not only in the *Bondage of the Will* but in the 1521 *Loci* and elsewhere – brings along with it all these questions about God’s hidden will (as well as making it more challenging to affirm man’s responsibility for the things of this life). Accordingly, as we have seen in the Formula of Concord – and, I think, in subsequent Lutheranism as well – this argument does not play much of a role. Much more important has been the argument from man’s fall into sin. We sin constantly and willingly as a direct result of original sin, and therefore we cannot create our own right relationship with God. But He has already done so in Christ, and it is available to everyone through faith alone. That message is, of course, at the center of Lutheranism. We call it “the Gospel”!

Endnotes

¹ In this paper, English quotations from this work are from J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, trans., *Martin Luther on The Bondage of the Will* (n.p.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1957) and will be abbreviated BW. The quotation is from BW, 319. For the original language texts of Luther's works, see *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883-), hereafter cited as WA. The Latin original of this quotation is from WA 18:786.26-30.

² SA 2.1.1. In this paper, English quotations from the Lutheran Confessions are from Theodore G. Tappert, trans. and ed., *The Book of Concord* (Phil.: Fortress Press, 1959). This reference is from Tappert, 292. The original language versions are in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959).

³ Robert Kolb, *Bound Choice, Election, and Wittenberg Theological Method: From Martin Luther to the Formula of Concord* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). Other works that are very helpful in describing Luther's position regarding the enslaved will include: Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minn.: Fortress Press, 1999), 160-68; Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 259-85; Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 121-26; Walter von Loewenich, "Gott und Mensch in humanistischer und reformatorischer Schau: Eine Einführung in Luthers Schrift *De servo arbitrio*" in *Humanitas-Christianitas* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1948), 65-101; and Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career, 1521-1530* (Phil.: Fortress Press, 1983), 417-58. For comprehensive analyses, see Harry J. McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?* (New York: Newman Press, 1969) and Klaus Schwarzwäller, *Theologia Crucis: Luthers Lehre von Prädestination nach De servo arbitrio, 1525* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1970). Schwarzwäller has also written a monograph that reviews the interpretation of *The Bondage of the Will* in the second half of the 19th and the first part of the 20th centuries, *Sibboleth: Die Interpretation von Luthers Schrift De servo arbitrio seit Theodosius Harnack: Ein systematisch-kritischer Überblick* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1969).

For the historical background to the controversy between Luther and Erasmus, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 3 vols. (Minn.: Fortress Press, 1985, 1990, 1993), 2:213-38, and Léon-E. Halkin, *Erasmus: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 146-59. For a more detailed account, see Karl Zickendraht, *Der Streit zwischen Erasmus und Luther über die Willensfreiheit* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1909).

⁴ Kolb, *Bound Choice*, 28.

⁵ Otto Scheel, ed., *Dokumente zu Luthers Entwicklung (bis 1519)*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck]), 76 (#195). For Luther's *Anfechtungen* in the monastery, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther 1:76-82*; Heinrich Boehmer, *Martin Luther: Road to Reformation* (New York: Living Age Books, 1957), 87-113; and Walter von Loewenich, *Martin Luther: The Man and His Work*

(Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 72-82.

⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works*, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, and Phil.: Fortress Press, 1955-86) [hereafter LW], 31:9-10. "4. Veritas itaque est quod homo arbor mala factus non potest nisi malum velle et facere....7. Sed necessario [voluntas] elicit actum difformem et malum sine gratia dei....9. Est...naturaliter et inevitabiliter mala et viciata natura." WA 1:224.13-14, 19, 22. These theses mark an important step in Luther's break with the scholastic tradition in which he had been trained. In particular, Luther advanced an Augustinian view of grace against the more optimistic assessment of human powers promoted by Gabriel Biel and others. See Brecht, *Martin Luther* 1:172-73, and McSorley, 240-43.

⁷ LW 31:40. "13. Liberum arbitrium post peccatum res est de solo titulo, et dum facit quod in se est, peccat mortaliter." WA 1:354.5-6. For the Heidelberg Theses, see Brecht, *Martin Luther* 1:231-35, and McSorley, 243-46.

⁸ LW 31:40. "14. Liberum arbitrium post peccatum potest in bonum potentia subiectiva, in malum vero activa semper." WA 1:354.7-8. Luther compared free will to a dead man who "can do something toward life only in his original capacity," i.e., alive, but added, "Free will, however, is dead [*liberum autem arbitrium est mortuum*]." LW 31:49. Cf. also footnote 11 on the same page. WA 1:360.9.

⁹ BW, 104-105 (WA 18:636.16-20). Cf. Lohse, 256-57.

¹⁰ BW, 104. "Liberum arbitrium sine gratia Dei prorsus non liberum, sed immutabiliter captivum et servum esse mali, cum non possit vertere se solo ad bonum." WA 18:636.5-6. Man's inability to save himself is one of the main themes in Luther's work. See also BW, 100 (632.29-32), 102 (634.15-21), 113 (643.13-20), 147 (670.8-11), 168-69 (684.19-22), 179 (691.33-34), 198 (705.20), 205 (710.5-8), 241 (735.20-22), 256 (745.30-31), 263 (750.31-38), 265 (252.12-15), 278 (760.22-23), 286 (765.25-27), 288 (767.14-16), 290 (768.23-26), 292 (769.20-23), 296 (772.6-11), 310 (781.15-22), 311 (781.14-16).

¹¹ "(36) Liberum arbitrium post peccatum est res de solo titulo; et dum facit quod in se est, peccat mortaliter." B. J. Kidd, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 78. See also McSorley, 251-53, and Heinrich Roos, "Die Quellen der Bulle 'Exsurge Domine,'" in Johann Auer and Hermann Volk, eds., *Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Michael Schmaus zum sechzigsten Geburtstag* (München: Karl Zink Verlag, 1957), 909-26.

¹² "Haec sunt opera duo liberi arbitrii, scilicet peccare et perserverare augescereque in peccatis." WA 7:143.9-11 (translation is my own).

¹³ *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles* (1521), LW 32:92. "Wo ist hie der frey will, der des teuffels gefangener ist? nit das er nichts thu, sondernn das er allless nach des teuffels willen thue? ist das freiheit nach des teuffels willen gefangen sein, das kein hulff da ist, got gebe den yhn rew und pesserung." WA 7:447.12-15.

¹⁴ BW, 63 (WA 18:601.3). In a late "table talk," Luther also said of the *Loci*, "There's no book under the sun in which the whole of theology is so compactly presented as in the *Loci Communes*....No better book has been written after the

Holy Scriptures than Philip's." LW 54:440 (WATr 5:204.24-26, #5511).

¹⁵ Philip Melancthon, *Loci Communes Theologici* (1521) in Wilhelm Pauck, ed., *Melancthon and Bucer*, The Library of Christian Classics, Ichthus Ed. (Phil.: Westminster Press, 1969), 24, 30. Melancthon describes *voluntas* as "a faculty by which he either follows or flees the things he has come to know" and *arbitrium* as "the will (*voluntas*) joined with the knowledge or understanding of the intellect" (23-24). In either case, however, he denies this faculty any sort of "freedom" over one's internal affections or state of mind (27). For the original Latin, see Philipp Melancthon, *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Karl G. Bretschneider, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 28 vols. (Halis Saxonum: C. A. Schwetschke, 1834-60) 21:cols. 86-93. For Melancthon's views regarding the "bondage of the will" – not only in 1521 but also how he changed over the years – see Kolb, 70-102. Timothy Wengert also discusses Melancthon's position from the standpoint of his debate with Erasmus in the 1520's in *Human Freedom, Christian Righteousness: Philip Melancthon's Exegetical Dispute with Erasmus of Rotterdam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁶ I.e., his *Diatribē Concerning Free Will*. For a modern, critical edition, see Johannes von Walter, ed., *De Libero Arbitrio Diatribē Sive Collatio per Desiderium Erasmus Roterodamum* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1910). For English translation, see Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, in E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson, eds., *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, The Library of Christian Classics, Ichthus Ed. (Phil.: Westminster Press, 1969), 35-97.

¹⁷ LW 26:58. "Docemus enim omnes homines esse impios, Liberum arbitrium, vires humanas, sapientiam, iustitiam, omnem religionem voluntariam et quicquid est optimum in mundo, damnamus. Summa, nihil omnino in nobis esse dicimus, quod valeat ad promerendam gratiam ac remissionem peccatorum." WA 40¹:121.17-21. Cf. also LW 26:26, 27, 41, 124, 323, 330.

¹⁸ LW 34:139-139 (WA 39¹:176.10-177.2).

¹⁹ LW 1:273 (WA 42:201.37-202.7). Cf. LW 2:39-42, 121-22.

²⁰ "...ohn Gnad, Hilfe und Wirkung des heiligen Geists vermag der Mensch nicht Gott gefällig zu werden, Gott herzlich zu furchten, oder zu glauben oder die angeborene böse Lüste aus dem Herzen zu werfen." AC 18.1-2 (Tappert, 39). Unless otherwise noted, the quotations from the Augsburg Confession that appear in the text are from Tappert's translation of the German version.

²¹ "...non potest humanum cor efficere sine spiritu sancto." Ap 18.7 (Tappert, 225-26).

²² SA 3.1.4-5, 11 (Tappert, 302-303).

²³ SC 2.6 (Tappert, 345).

²⁴ "Denn vorhin, ehe wir dazu kommen sind, sind wir gar des Teufels gewesen, als die von Gott und von christo nichts gewusst haben." LC 2.38, 52 (Tappert, 415, 417).

²⁵ For a brief introduction to the controversy, see Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 4 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) s.v. "Synergistic Controversy." Kolb, 103-69, 248-58, treats the Synergistic Controversy very thoroughly and with sympathetic descriptions of the various

positions put forth. He also describes its resolution in the Formula of Concord.

²⁶ FC SD 2.7 (Tappert, 521).

²⁷ The phrase, “*post peccatum*” is repeated in the next thesis: “14. Free will, *after the fall*, has power to do good only in a passive capacity...” and suggested in the one after that: “Nor could free will remain in a state of innocence... [*Nec in statu innocentiae potuit stare...*]” All three theses thus indicate that it was the advent of sin that incapacitated “free will.” LW 31:40 (WA 1:354.5-6, 7-8, 9-10).

²⁸ Ap 2.47 (Tappert, 106).

²⁹ “Sed postquam scholastici admiscuerunt doctrinae christianae philosophiam de perfectione naturae, et plus, quam satis erat, libero arbitrio et actibus elicitis tribuerunt, et homines philosophica seu civili iustitia, quam et nos fatemur rationi subiectam esse et aliquo modo in potestate nostra esse, iustificari coram Deo, docuerunt...Hae fuerunt causae, cur in descriptione peccati originis et concupiscentiae mentionem fecimus, et detraximus naturalibus viribus hominis timorem et fiduciam erga Deum. Voluimus enim significare, quod peccatum originis hos quoque morbos contineat: ignorationem Dei, contemptum Dei, vacare metu Dei et fiducia erga Deum, non posse diligere Deum.” Ap 2.12, 14 (Tappert, 102).

³⁰ FC Ep 2.1, 3 (Tappert, 469-70); FC SD 2.2 (Tappert, 520).

³¹ FC SD 2.5 (Tappert, 520-21).

³² “...dass in des Menschen Natur, nach dem Fall, vor der Wiedergeburt, nicht ein Fünkeln der geistlichen Kräfte übrig geblieben noch vorhanden...Daher der natürliche freie Wille seiner verkehrten Art und Natur nach allein zu demjenigen, das Gott missfällig und zuwider ist, kräftig und tätig ist.” FC SD 2.7 (Tappert 521).

³³ FC SD 1.27 (Tappert, 512).

³⁴ FC SD 1.10 (Tappert, 510). Cf. Ap 2.18-22.

³⁵ “Sondern do aus Verleitung des Satans durch den Fall nach Gottes Gericht und Urteil der Mensch zur Straf die angeschaffene Erbgerechtigkeit verloren...dass mit demselben Mangel und Verderbung jetzunder die Natur allen Menschen, so natürlicherweise von Vater und Mutter empfangen und geboren werden, angeerbet wird.” FC SD 1.27 (Tappert, 512).

³⁶ FC SD 1.9 (Tappert, 510).

³⁷ FC Ep 2.17 (Tappert, 472).

³⁸ FC SD 2.66 (Tappert, 534).

³⁹ AC 18 (Tappert 39-40). The quotation is from *Hypomnesticon contra Pelagionos et Coelestinianos* 3.4.5 and is available in the standard collection of Latin works from the early church and Middle Ages, J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina*, 221 vols. (Paris & Turnout: Migne, 1859-1963) 45:1623.

⁴⁰ “[Humana voluntas] potest loqui de Deo, exhibere Deo certum cultum externo opere, obedire magistratibus, parentibus, in opera externo eligendo potest continere manus a caede, ab adulterio, a furto.” Ap 18.4 (Tappert, 225).

⁴¹ FC SD 2.19, 24, 26 (Tappert 524, 526).

⁴² LW 31:58. “Nam respectu aliorum suorum inferiorum non nego, quod sit, imo videatur sibi libera.” WA 1:365.34-35.

⁴³ 1521 Loci, 26-27 (CR 21:col. 90).

⁴⁴ 1521 Loci, 30. "Si ad opera externa referas voluntatem, quaedam videtur esse, iudicio naturae, libertas." CR 21:col. 93.

⁴⁵ 1521 Loci, 30. "Si ad praedestinationem referas humanam voluntatem, nec in externis nec in internis operibus ulla est libertas, sed eveniunt omnia iuxta destinationem divinam." CR 21:col. 93.

⁴⁶ Cf. J. B. Mozley, *A Treatise on the Augustinian Doctrine of Predestination*, 2nd ed., reprint ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, c. 1878).

⁴⁷ Cf. François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1987), 263-84.

⁴⁸ LW 31:9, 11 (WA 1:224.13-14, 225.27-28).

⁴⁹ WA 7:146.5-6, 7-8.

⁵⁰ "Fallit hos miseros homines rerum humanarum inconstantia seu (ut vocant) contingentia: oculos enim suos stultos mergunt in res ipsas operaque rerum, nec aliquando elevant in conspectum dei, ut res supra res in deo cognoscerent. Nobis enim ad inferna spectantibus res apparent arbitrariae et fortuitae, sed ad superna spectantibus omnia sunt necessaria, Quia non sicut nos, sed sicut ille vult, ita vivimus, facimus, patimur omnes et omnia." WA 7:146.27-32.

⁵¹ WA 7:146.6-7, 34-35.

⁵² BW, 80 (WA 18:615.12-15).

⁵³ BW, 80 (WA 18:615.31-34).

⁵⁴ BW, 107 (WA 18:5-9). See also BW, 150 (671.33-39), 256 (745.39-746.8), 257-58 (746.30-35), 265 (752.6-15), 309-10 (781.6-13).

⁵⁵ BW, 83-84. "Si enim dubitas aut contemnis nosse, quod Deus omnia non contingenter sed necessario et immutabiliter praesciat et velit quomodo poteris eius promissionibus credere, certo fidere et niti? Cum enim promittit, certum oportet te esse, quod sciat, possit et velit praestare, quod promittit. . . . At quo modo certus et securus eris? Nisi scieris illum, certo et infallibiliter et immutabiliter ac necessario scire et velle et facturum esse, quod promittit." WA 18:619.1-8. See also BW, 78-79 (614.16-26), 211 (714.18-23), 213 (716.5-9, 13-15), 271 (755.36-37).

⁵⁶ "Welches alles doch ohne Gott nicht ist noch bestehet, sonder alles aus ihme and durch ihne ist" (Latin: "Quae omnia non sine gubernaculo divino subsistent, immo ex ipso et per ipsum sunt et esse coeperunt"). AC 18.6 (Tappert, 40).

⁵⁷ Ap 2.12 (Tappert, 102). See also Ap 18.4 (Tappert, 225) where the same qualifier is used, "To some extent [*aliquo modo*] it [the human will] can achieve civil righteousness."

⁵⁸ FC SD 2.53 (Tappert, 531).

⁵⁹ FC SD 2.74 (Tappert, 535).

⁶⁰ FC SD 2.44 (Tappert, 529).

⁶¹ FC SD 2.44 (Tappert, 529).

⁶² "I have wanted to teach and transmit this in such a painstaking and accurate way because after my death many will publish my books and will prove from them errors of every kind and their own delusions. . . . They will pass over all these places and take only those that deal with the hidden God. Accordingly, you who are listening to me now should remember that I have taught that one should not inquire

into the predestination of the hidden God....” LW 5:50 (WA 43:463.3-5, 9-12).

⁶³ LW 5:42-50 (WA 43:457.32-463.17).

⁶⁴ LW 5:50 (WA 43:463.6).

⁶⁵ “...He has given you the strongest proofs of His trustworthiness and truth. He has given His Son into the flesh and into death, and He has instituted the sacraments, in order that you may know that He does not want to be deceitful, but that He wants to be truthful....Concerning God you must maintain with assurance and without any doubt that He is well disposed toward you on account of Christ and that you have been redeemed and sanctified through the precious blood of the Son of God. And in this way you will be sure of your predestination.” LW 5:49 (WA 43:462.16-18, 22-25).

Already in 1531, Luther counseled a woman who was in doubt regarding her predestination to the effect that not only was the devil tempting her to seek out what God had not commanded her to know but also that Jesus Christ “should be our excellent mirror wherein we behold how much God loves us...If such thoughts still come and bite like fiery serpents, pay no attention....Turn away from these notions and contemplate the brazen serpent, that is Christ given for us.” Similarly, in 1542, Caspar Heydenreich recorded a “table talk” in which Luther stated, “[God] wishes his predestination to be more surely grounded on many certain arguments. He sent his Son to become man, and he gave us the Sacraments and his Word, which cannot be doubted...Unless we flee to this Christ, we shall either despair of our salvation or become blasphemous epicureans who hide behind divine predestination as an excuse.” Both of these passages are from Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, The Library of Christian Classics, reprint ed. (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 116, 135 (WA Br 6:87.42-44, 50-53; and WA TR 5:295.37-38, 40 – 296.1 [#5658a]).

⁶⁶ BW, 167. “Vox Evangelica et dulcissimum solatium est miseris peccatoribus.” WA 18:683.11.

⁶⁷ BW, 169 (WA 18:684.32-37).

⁶⁸ BW, 170. “Multa facit Deus, quae verbo suo non ostendit nobis. Multa quoque vult, quae verbo suo non ostendit sese velle. Sic non vult mortem peccatoris, verbo scilicet, vult autem illam voluntate illa imperscrutabili.” WA 18:685.27-29.

⁶⁹ BW 217. “Scilicet hoc offendet quam maxime sensum illum communem seu rationem naturalem, quod Deus mera voluntate sua homines deserat, induret, damnet, quasi delectetur peccatis et cruciatibus miserorum tantis et aeternis, qui praedicatur tantae misericordiae et bonitatis, etc. Hoc iniquum, hoc crudele, hoc intolerabile visum est de Deo sentire....Et quis non offenderetur? Ego ipse non semel offensus sum usque ad profundum et abyssum desperationis, ut optarem nunquam esse me creatum hominem.” WA 18:719.4-11.

⁷⁰ BW, 171. “Nunc autem nobis spectandum est verbum relinquendaque illa voluntas imperscrutabilis. Verbo enim nos dirigi, non voluntate illa inscrutabili oportet. Atque adeo quis sese dirigere queat ad voluntatem prorsus imperscrutabilem et incognoscibilem?” WA 18:685.29-686.1.

⁷¹ BW 171. “Igitur recte dicitur: Si Deus non vult mortem, nostrae voluntati imputandum est, quod perimus. Recte, inquam, si de Deo praedicato dixeris. Nam

ille vult omnes homines salvos fieri, dum verbo salutis ad omnes venit, vitiumque est voluntatis, quae non admittit eum, ... Verum quare maiestas illa vitium hoc voluntatis nostrae non tollit aut mutat in omnibus, cum non sit in potestate hominis, aut cur illud ei imputet, cum non possit homo eo carere, quaerere non licet, ac si multum quaeras, nunquam tamen invenies.” WA 18:686.4-11.

⁷² LW 5:50 (WA 43:463.5-8, 11-12, 13).

⁷³ FC SD 11.52 (Tappert, 625).

The Freedom of the Will in the Radical Reformation

by James F. Korthals

In an attempt to classify developments in sixteenth-century Europe, historians have divided ecclesiastical history into a number of “reformations.” That such divisions are necessary is easily recognized, given the scope of the Reformation era. Yet disagreements quickly arise over what term should be used to modify the reformations as they are distinguished from each other. Some historians have opted to divide the reformations entirely on the basis of geography. They speak of the German Reformation, the Swiss Reformation, or the English Reformation. Unfortunately these broad designations may give the impression that all the Germans were alike or that all the Swiss had the same outlook. To say that everyone within a geographic area shared the same views would be a caricature of the truth.

Recognizing the difference within the larger areas, a few have tried to use specific state designations (e.g., Saxon, Hessian, etc.) in describing reformation activity. To use such an approach could prove to be burdensome when you consider the large number of German states in the sixteenth century. Therefore others have decided to limit the number of reformations and to replace the territorial designations with broad-stroke terms, such as “Protestant.” This term too carries some baggage with it. Although a majority of the signers of the *Protestatio*¹ were Lutheran, the term “Protestant” came to refer to both Lutherans and Reformed, and eventually to all non-Catholic Christians.

Another descriptive attached to the Reformation is “magisterial.” Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin are designated magisterial reformers because their reform movements were supported by magistrates or ruling authorities. Since the term “magister” means “teacher,” the Magisterial Reformation is also characterized by an emphasis on the authority of a teacher. One can certainly appreciate this terminology, since Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin were all prominent in their reform movements. As a result the reformations are also labeled at times with their names. The terms Lutheran, Zwinglian, and Calvinist are frequently used to designate the disciples and the descendants of the various reformations.

It is interesting that in spite of the different designations used in classifying these sixteenth-century reformations, one element is inevitably called *radical*. Whether you define the Reformation in terms of Protestant

and Catholic, or German and Swiss, or Lutheran and Reformed, there are always some individuals and groups who do not fit those standard designations. As a result the so-called *radicals* are added to the list of reformations and reformers. The Radical Reformation has become a standard depository for all those individuals and groups who left the Roman church but did not find a home in Wittenberg, Zurich, or Geneva. In fact, one of the things that sixteenth-century Catholics, Lutherans, and Reformed could agree on was that the radicals were unacceptable. Everyone ended up opposing the radicals and their attempts at reformation.

Although the Radical Reformation² is a recognized entity, it was by no means a unified one. George Huntston Williams, the great categorizer and chronicler of this movement, described it as “a loosely interrelated congeries³ of reformations and restitutions which, besides the Anabaptists of various types, included Spiritualists and spiritualizers of varying tendencies, and the Evangelical Rationalists, largely Italian in origin.”⁴ At first glance it would seem that the designation “Radical Reformation” is nothing more than a dumping ground for all those who defied classification in the standard categories. A closer inspection, however, shows there is a logical reason for this collection of people who separated themselves from the mainline reformations.

As Huntston indicated the term *radical* really has three subgroups: the rationalists, the spiritualists, and the Anabaptists. The rationalists rebelled against traditional Christian doctrine, especially the doctrine of the Trinity. Included in this group are Michael Servetus, Faustus Socinius, Juan de Valdés, and Sebastian Castellio. These men tend to be the least familiar of the radicals.

The spiritualists are somewhat better known since their number includes Thomas Müntzer and the Zwickau prophets: Nicholas Storch, Thomas Dreschel, and Mark Thomas Stübner. This group, however, tended to be more interested in social remodeling than in doctrine. When they did talk about doctrine, it was in an effort to legitimize the changes they wanted to make.

For many people the Saxon Thomas Müntzer⁵ is the best known of the Reformation radicals. When he looked at his world, Müntzer saw the ranks of the godless increasing while the members of the elect were diminishing. Over time he came to associate the materially disadvantaged with the poor in spirit, those capable of achieving true faith. Likewise he equated all government with the ungodly and sinful world. In his mind “faith” and “world” were contradictory terms. He could not longer conceive of the world as anything but evil and worthy of destruction.

For Müntzer the Bible was always a book of laws, a book which

most people did not know how to use properly. He believed that only the elect would be given true illumination through it. Müntzer promised his followers freedom, not the ultimate freedom given by God, but the freedom to take matters into their own hands.⁶

The Anabaptists were the most numerous of the radicals. They developed a theology and left behind a body of literature. For these two reasons, their majority status among the radicals and the availability of publications which record their teachings, the Anabaptists will be our main focus as we examine free will in the Radical Reformation.

The word “Anabaptist” is a Latin derivative of the Greek original, *anabaptismos*, “re-baptism.” The German form, *Wiedertaeufer*, means “one who re-baptizes.” Initially Lutherans and Zwinglians used the term to describe those individuals who separated themselves from the state churches, denied the validity of infant baptism, and demanded believer’s baptism.

These radicals, however, rejected the label “Anabaptist.” They insisted that infant baptism did not constitute true baptism, so they were not really re-baptizing anyone. The radicals wanted to be known only as “Brüder,” Brethren, or by some other nonsectarian name. The radicals would also point out that baptism was not their only concern. Baptism remained the focus of attention, however, for their opponents since it provided an easily discernible reason for their opposition.

In spite of their objections, “Anabaptist” remained a popular term for the authorities, both secular and ecclesiastical, for another reason. It gave them a reason to suppress the movement with force. The use of the term “Wiedertaeufer” or “Anabaptistici” exposed the radicals to the death penalty. Under the ancient Roman law against rebaptizers, originally aimed at the Donatists,⁷ those called “Anabaptists” could be suppressed with the sword. At the Imperial Diet of Speyer in 1529 the emperor ruled against the Anabaptists and persecutions ranging from fines to imprisonment to exile and death spread throughout the Holy Roman Empire.

In spite of its common usage, some might view “Anabaptist” as lacking the ability to fully define this element of the Reformation. It is a very general designation, embracing a large number of divergent groups. The Swiss Brethren, Hutterite Brethren, Mennonites, and a host of groups who followed little known leaders all fall under the Anabaptist umbrella.

To suggest that the term Anabaptist has no value, however, would be swinging the pendulum too far in the other direction. In spite of the different views within the movement, there were commonalities. They regularly disparaged the attention paid to well-known teachers. Because of their authority, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin were often criticized by

radical reformers as being too much like the Roman popes. The Anabaptists generally promoted a separation of their churches from the national or territorial state. The participants in this movement abandoned the idea of the “visible” church as being distinct from the “invisible” church. They tended to view the church only as the tiny community of believers, who accepted Jesus Christ and demonstrated this by adult baptism, called “believer’s baptism.”

In the beginning the Anabaptists did not have a clearly defined system of doctrine. Only later did a series of controversies force many of these radicals to distinguish themselves from the other reformation movements and from variations within their own ranks. Anabaptism then was an uncoordinated movement rather than a carefully systematized theological program.

Although Anabaptism has many branches, they all point back to the earliest Anabaptist group, the Swiss Brethren, from whom all the other branches received the practice of adult baptism. The founders of the Swiss Brethren were Conrad Grebel and Felix Mantz. Initially they were faithful followers of Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich. They were part of Zwingli’s inner circle who sought to live according to the Word of God and to dig more deeply into the Scriptures.

In September 1524 Conrad Grebel wrote a letter to Thomas Müntzer in which he sketched out the reasons for separating from Zwingli. Zwingli had encouraged them to read and to study the Bible. In reading the New Testament they had discovered a view of the church which was different from the one which Zwingli taught. They had come to the conclusion that this was not a church to which everyone belonged, rather a church of the few who truly believed and who lived properly. They wanted a free church, a church free from the guardianship of the state. Membership in this church would be voluntary, not a requirement of the state. This freedom was the real interest of the Anabaptists. Their view of baptism was an expression of that freedom. They refused to follow the mandates of a church in which their membership was forced.

In the early decades of the sixteenth-century students had flocked to Wittenberg and Zurich and Strassburg to sit at the feet of the reformers. Among their numbers were students who began to judge the weaknesses and apostasies of the established church. They used the standard of an earlier Christian church, the church before Constantine the Great made it a legal religion within the Roman Empire. The great reformers, however, were cautious and responsible men. They hesitated to immediately abandon the parish organization of the medieval church. The more radical proponents of reform demanded a purging of the church. These radicals

examined the New Testament and saw a pattern which they believed had to be implemented. They believed the Bible gave them a clear set of instructions for the organization of the True Church.⁸

Quickly the radicals became impatient with what they considered the slow pace of change. They described Luther and Zwingli as “half-way men.” They said of Luther that he “tore down the old house, but built no new one in its place” and of Zwingli that he “threw down all infirmities as with thunder strokes, but erected nothing better in its place.”⁹ The radicals turned against their former leaders, believing that these so-called “Christians,” who knew what Scripture taught, were worse than pagans who did not know any better.

For the radicals it was essential to have the freedom to associate with a group voluntarily and to organize according to this New Testament model. That concern for freedom also extended to the freedom of the will. In Anabaptism the question of the freedom of the will involved the relationship between God’s sovereignty and the exercise of will by the people. Of greatest concern was the question of whether or not mankind had sufficient freedom to affect the course of history or to do anything that would influence their ultimate salvation or damnation. This question was nothing new. It was simply a continuation of a fifth-century debate.

Some of the early apologists and church fathers, including Tertullian and Origen, had spoken about the freedom of man to choose good or evil. In the fifth century the British monk Pelagius went even further and denied the necessity of assisting grace from God for any true service on the part of man. He rejected the concept of original sin being passed from parents to children and insisted that grace was given to those who sought it. He even maintained that “man, if he pleases, can be perfectly free from sin.”¹⁰ Augustine led the church in opposing Pelagius.

The basic controversy was revived in the sixteenth century when the German and Swiss reformers sided with Augustine. The Anabaptists rejected the Augustinian position, but they did not go to the extreme of Pelagius who promoted complete human freedom. Yet in contrast to the mainline reformers, the Anabaptists were willing to allow man a certain measure of latitude in coming to salvation.

The demand for the freedom of the will is already evident in the basic Anabaptist requirement of believer’s baptism. The Swiss Brethren asserted that faith is an act of the human will. Conrad Grebel believed that “faith is demanded of all who are to be saved.”¹¹ He assumed that faith is a conscious choice, a choice which becomes visible in believer’s baptism. Grebel explained that the Brethren rejected infant baptism in “children who have not yet come to the discernment of the knowledge of

good and evil.” He denounced infant baptism as a “senseless, blasphemous abomination, contrary to all Scripture.”¹² The Brethren insisted that only those people who have faith and a mature understanding of the gospel were to be baptized.

The Anabaptists taught that God controlled the possibilities within which the events of history take place and the destination toward which history is moving. They believed that within limits God granted free will and that each person may at the very least accept or reject the divine grace which God offered to all. The radicals, however, did not agree among themselves on the degree of freedom which mankind enjoyed. Likewise they did not entirely agree with Desiderius Erasmus who championed a freedom of the will.

The Swiss Anabaptists before 1527 included a wide variety of views and doctrines. In a sense each one did what was right in his own eyes, often leading to further fragmentation within their already small groups. Although the Swiss Brethren were more concerned with practical Christianity than a systematized theology, the idea of free will appeared occasionally in their hymns in the *Ausbund*.¹³ This hymnody described rewards and punishments as real, the result of voluntary obedience or disobedience. The hymn “Merket auf ihr Menschenkinder” states that God has no pleasure in the destruction of sinners and that he desires repentance. Here too it is clear that in their view repentance was dependent on the human will.

It was only at Schleithem¹⁴ under Michael Sattler’s¹⁵ leadership that Swiss Anabaptism became somewhat organized. Sattler believed that man is free and must consent to God’s call and cooperate with the Spirit. In addition, he insisted there would be visible evidence of God’s grace and election, for the Spirit is a power which must produce Christ-like works. Although Sattler does not ignore grace, his primary concern was with a visible life of sanctification.¹⁶ This remained Sattler’s personal teaching, however, since the Schleithem Confession did not directly address the question of the freedom of the will.

The Anabaptists struggled with the question, “What is man?” Ever since Augustine theologians have taught that in Adam’s fall humanity became corrupt and that an inherited original sin was passed from parents to children. As a result we live in a state of total depravity and deserve nothing but hell. Therefore man has no freedom of will. Only through the redeeming death of Christ is man freed and given the hope of salvation. What is man? Man is a sinner. To that description of man the Anabaptists responded, “Were man’s plight so hopelessly fated as described, then all the endeavor of following Christ (discipleship) would be meaningless and

futile.”¹⁷

In contrast to the mainline Reformation the Anabaptists maintained that the fall primarily affects man’s body and that the spirit of man, though now imprisoned in a fallen body, retains some of its original goodness and freedom. Most Anabaptists held to the view that man has a partial freedom before regeneration, a freedom that enables him to say “yes” to the call of the Word of God, and then a full freedom after regeneration.

Among the earliest Anabaptists to deal more intensely with the question of free will was Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier.¹⁸ Hubmaier organized no church. No sect was named in his honor. Neither did he have an easily identifiable cadre of disciples. But his writings exerted a deep and lasting influence on the developing Anabaptist doctrine.

In writing on the freedom of the will, Hubmaier objected to what he was reading about the bondage of the will. He insisted that if we teach that we are saved by faith alone, and at the same time teach that we have no free will, this becomes nothing more than an excuse to continue in sinful living. He believed that the bondage of the will removed all incentives to improve one’s life and that it did more harm than good. While Hubmaier did not doubt that human will was fallen, he had a stronger belief in the power of regeneration than did other reformers. It was his belief that the freedom of the will was restored for the believing Christian. He insisted that a person became responsible for the decision to sin or not to sin. Hubmaier considered it blasphemy to place the responsibility for one’s sin back onto God under the guise of the bondage of the will.

Erasmus had broached this subject in his 1524 *De libero arbitrio*, and Luther had answered in 1525 with his *De servo arbitrio*. With the debate between Erasmus and Luther swirling around Europe, Hubmaier first dealt with the question of the freedom of the will in his *Christliche Lehrtafel*.¹⁹ He began his argument by stating, “The image of God is not altogether erased in us.”²⁰ As a result the very core of man remains uncorrupted and is able to grasp God’s grace and goodness. Under Hubmaier’s system total depravity is not possible. He ultimately came to the conclusion that “the fall of the soul is reparable and harmless on earth, while the fall of the flesh is irreparable and deadly.”²¹

At the end of the Preface to his *Christliche Lehrtafel*, Hubmaier indicated his desire to become further involved in the discussion on the freedom of the will.

To uproot such tares, gracious Lord, I have written a small booklet for Your Princely Grace and summarized in short therein who and what is the human being in and outside of the grace of

God, and what he is capable of. I will also as soon as possible make another book wherein I will testify incontrovertibly and still more powerfully with the Holy Scriptures to the freedom of the human being to do good and evil.²²

In addition to his *Christliche Lehrtafel* Hubmaier had already written one “small booklet” or pamphlet and was intending to produce another. With these two essays on the freedom of the human will, he pushed his way into one of the most hotly debated topics of the Reformation era.

In his first pamphlet, *Von der Freiheit des Willens*,²³ Hubmaier wasted no time in expressing his disagreement with Luther and Zwingli’s teaching concerning the bondage of the will. Although their positions had been based on Scripture, Hubmaier maintained that these men were not proclaiming the complete message of Scripture.

Although for some years now the gospel has been earnestly preached to all creatures, I find many people who have learned or grasped only two concepts from all the preaching. On the one hand it is said, “We believe. We are saved by faith.” On the other hand it is said, “We can do no good works. God must work in us the will and fulfillment. We have no free will.”

Now such ideas are only half truths. And from such half truths one only may come to incomplete conclusions. But when we take an incomplete conclusion as a final conclusion, ignoring those scriptures which counter it just as strongly, a half truth is actually more detrimental than a whole lie....

Under cover of such half truths, all kinds of evil, dishonesty and injustice have taken the upper hand. There wantonness and presumption have full sway. Dishonesty and falsehood sit on the throne, ruling and mightily exulting in all things. Christian works no longer shine forth from people.²⁴

Hubmaier’s argument continued, “People then push their guilt upon God as Adam did upon Eve, and she upon the serpent.”²⁵ With his little book he intended to present his contrary viewpoint, including what man is and what man can do with and without the grace of God. Hubmaier did not doubt that the human will is fallen. He saw, however, three different parts to a person: body, soul, and spirit. Therefore not one but three wills must be recognized, that of the flesh, that of the soul, and that of the spirit. Hubmaier believed that sin impacted each part differently. Before the fall there was complete freedom.

Before the transgression of Adam, the three of the human substances – flesh, soul and spirit – were good (Genesis 1)... The three substances were also wholly free to choose good or evil, life or death, heaven or hell. They were originally made by God good and free to recognize, will and act for good or evil.²⁶

But after the fall man lost this freedom.

The flesh entirely lost its goodness and freedom through Adam's fall and became totally worthless and without merit right up to the time of death. It can do nothing other than sin, strive against God and be at enmity against God's commandments.²⁷

Yet he did not believe that all was lost. In his threefold division²⁸ Hubmaier had the tool he needed to blame the soul for its corruption but to free the spirit from all blame. According to his interpretation of Scripture, the human spirit did not share in the corruption of the flesh.

The human spirit remained honest, whole and good before, during and after the fall. For the spirit was not in any way involved in the disobedience of the flesh in eating the forbidden fruit – neither in suggesting it be done nor in the act itself, neither in terms of will or deed. The spirit partook of the fruit only as a prisoner of the body. But the guilt of this act is not that of the spirit, but only of the body and the soul, which acted with the flesh.

The third part of the human being, the soul, was wounded as to its will through the disobedience of Adam. It has become deathly ill and on its own cannot choose to do good. Nor can it overcome evil, for it has lost knowledge of good and evil. It can do nothing other than sin and die. Indeed, in terms of accomplishing good, the soul has become totally powerless and ineffective. The flesh is the tool of the soul – only the flesh can act. Without it, the soul can do nothing. But because the tool can do nothing, how can anything good come from it, even if that were what the soul truly wanted and strived for? And yet the fall of the soul can be made good again through the word of God. This word of God teaches what it means to will good or evil. And after this life, through the resurrection of the flesh, the body will again become heavenly, eternal, glorious, and spiritual, able to act and bring to fulfillment.²⁹



In the second pamphlet, *Das andere Büchlein von der Freiwilligkeit des Menschen*³⁰ Hubmaier attempted to show that God through his Word gave men the power to become his children and committed to them the decision to will and to do good. Here he quoted Scripture to show that before the fall man had the grace to keep God's commands and be saved. He then followed with passages which he believed show that man has regained the freedom lost through Adam. Hubmaier concluded that the person who knows what the new birth is will not deny the freedom of the human will.³¹ He insisted that a person's eternal fate depended upon the choices that person makes in life.

If thou wilt enter the life, keep the commandments; if ye want to live according to the flesh, ye will die; if ye walk according to the spirit, ye shall live. Hence arose the proverb of the ancients: Man, help thyself, and then I will help thee. God speaks forth and gives strength through his Word.... Therefore it is said that God created you without your aid, but he will not save you without your aid.³²

Hubmaier argued that the soul of an individual who has heard and listened to the Scriptures has gained complete freedom: "So now, the soul, after restoration, is whole, through the sent Word, and is truly made free."³³ He emphasized the believer's ability to do good.

[The soul] can now freely and willingly be obedient to the spirit against the flesh and can will and choose the good, just as though it were in Paradise, and it can reject and flee from evil.³⁴

Hubmaier's position on free will is found nearly everywhere in Anabaptist writings. Whether it is Pilgram Marpeck, Jacob Hutter, or Menno Simons, they all believe that our inborn sinfulness is no unconquerable barrier. The Anabaptists contended there is always something in a person that remains unspoiled and good, and "the fall of the soul is remediable through the Word of God."³⁵

Hans Denck,³⁶ Hubmaier's contemporary, held a similar position. Denck believed that mankind was created primarily to fulfill God's desire for voluntary obedience as opposed to the blind obedience of a log or a stone. He believed that God forced no one to obey. Like Hubmaier, Denck believed that only the flesh was corrupted by Adam's fall and that the spirit was made a prisoner of the flesh. According to Denck, sin is a kind of sickness. If a man wanted to recover, he must surrender himself to God. Only then could the spirit within man dominate his unwilling flesh. Only



then is man able to keep the law of love in obedience to God. Denck found the highest fulfillment of human free will in self-surrender to God.³⁷

Hans Denck began as a “catholic humanist” and ended up a radical after sampling portions of the German and Swiss Reformations. He claimed to stand in the freedom of God’s spirit. In his confession before the city council of Nuremberg (January 1525), Denck stated:

When I seek to plumb the depth of Scripture on my own, I do not understand a thing. But when it [truth] drives me, I comprehend, not because of merit on account of grace. By nature I cannot believe in Scripture. But that which is within me – not my own, I say, but the force that drives me on without the aid of my will and doing – drives me to read Scripture for the sake of its testimony.³⁸

The preachers of Nuremberg, with Andreas Osiander serving as spokesman, responded to Denck’s confession. They conceded that most of what Denck has written was close enough to accepted Christian understanding that he might be tolerated. Yet these preachers maintained that Denck was not trustworthy – “he comes with cunning and discards Scripture as if it were of no use just because not everyone understands it.”³⁹ The preachers pointed to Denck’s unwillingness to quote clear Scripture on the grounds that Scripture contained contradictory statements which are not understood by everyone. Convinced that Denck could not be moved from his position, they left him to the secular authorities who forced him from the city.

By late 1525 Denck became involved in the debate between Erasmus and Luther concerning free will. As one would expect, Denck disagreed with Luther’s teaching concerning the bondage of the will. In 1526 he published a small booklet, “Whether God is the Cause of Evil,” to present his views on free will. Denck strongly opposed the idea that unbelievers refused to repent because God made them blind:

Those who are cunning in scripture speak ...about a stark blindness....This [blindness], according to them, is also without any distinction wrought by God, as though the godless also stood tranquil in God and not they but rather God sinned in them....Say it somebody. How could the devil have better messengers?⁴⁰

Denck suggested that God ordained sin, but only for a purpose. According to Denck, God used sin to display his glory by overcoming it with good:



For sin is over against God to be reckoned as nothing; and however great it might be, God can, will, and indeed already has, overcome it for himself to his own eternal praise without harm for any creatures.⁴¹

He insisted that God is exonerated from causing evil because, “He who ordains evil and yet can compensate with greater gain than the loss he cannot prevent is not to be blamed for evil.”⁴²

Strassburg reformer Wolfgang Capito in a letter to Zwingli dated August 18, 1527 indicated that Denck had debated the Strassburg preachers on topics which included the freedom of the will, the conversion and justification of sinners. Denck’s position was published in his *Divine Order of 1527*.

Anyone who says that he lacks grace from God to become righteous is a liar – like all of humankind. In fact, he testifies against God who pours out his mercy upon all of humankind, as he does his wrath even more plentifully. Otherwise, the godless would be without blame, as they like to claim. The truth, of course, does not sustain them.

A perverse person who seeks himself (and never wants to love himself) will not find himself in all eternity. He seeks to achieve and overcome something before he has suffered. He wants to believe before he knows what faith is. He wants to be saved, but knows nothing of damnation. He wants life, but does not know death. It is here that two contradictory views arise, with some saying that they have free will without having a particle even of that which pleases God. Some [others] say that they have none, because they can partly see that they cannot do anything right, though they freely suffer the work done by the world....

The first [claim] regarding free will is plain boasting and foolish security. It allows no room for the fear of God [timor dei], but presumes the right do as it pleases. The other [claim] is false humility and false wisdom. It pretends to honour God and to be nothing itself. Yet, it is unwilling to deny itself and increasingly seeks itself. This is utter folly and arrogance in the sight of God who probes the depth of the human heart and searches out subtle and open sins.⁴³

Denck arrived in Basel in October 1527. There he died in mid-November. During the last weeks of his life he wrote a pamphlet entitled



Recantation. Johannes Oecolampadius, the Basel reformer, apparently had urged him to write a clarification of his doctrinal positions. The title of the pamphlet is really a misnomer since Denck did not change his position. He did, however, believe that his work on behalf of the Anabaptist movement had been in vain. At the end he simply returned to his own religious individualism. In Article IV he dealt with the topic of free will.

One who knows the truth in Christ Jesus and is obedient to it in his heart, is free from sin, though not of temptation. He cannot run faster in the way of God than he has strength from God. Whoever runs faster or slower, lacks truth, obedience and freedom.

In sum, one who submits his will to God's is truly free and truly captive. One who does not submit [his will] is badly free and badly captive. Put together: each one is liberated for whatever service he is needed by the one whose servant he is. God does not compel anyone to remain in his service who is not compelled by love. And the devil cannot force anyone who has once known the truth to remain in his service. Thus there is no difference, whether you call it free or captive will, as long as you discern the difference on both sides. The name itself is not worth the argument.⁴⁴

The South German Anabaptist view of free will is probably best represented by Pilgram Marpeck.⁴⁵ Unlike Hubmaier and Denck, he accepted the Augustinian teaching of the total depravity of man. Therefore Marpeck stressed the atonement of Christ to a greater extent than Hubmaier did. At the same time he accepted Hubmaier's doctrine of God's attracting and repelling will. Marpeck's biblical literalism, however, would not permit him to ignore such passages as Romans 8 and 9.⁴⁶ He also pointed out that God's eternal condemnation must not be confused with outbreaks of his anger in this world, where the innocent and the guilty may suffer at the same time. Marpeck came to the conclusion that the ultimate destiny of each individual was still determined by his free choice, even though God may know the choice in advance.

The Dutch Anabaptist David Joris⁴⁷ attributed a greater importance to the freedom of the human will than did his German contemporaries. Joris recognized no independent existence to the freedom of the human will. He also recognized no independent existence of Satan. He insisted that the devil was simply sinful human flesh which, when it dominates the human will, introduces evil into the world. But God, through the example and power of Christ, has broken the power of the flesh. For salvation to be effective, however, man must take the initiative. He must first repent in

order to be renewed through God's grace.

Another Dutchman, Bernhard Rothermann of Münster, pictured the history of the world as a continual abuse of free will by humans. God created man for righteousness. God gave him knowledge of right and wrong, but man chooses whether or not he will obey. The way of obedience is open for all, for God wishes all people to be saved, but Rothermann insisted that in the final analysis each person chooses the way he will go.

The Anabaptist concern with the problem of free will appears to have been motivated by three considerations. First of all, God is righteous. Therefore he cannot be responsible for evil. Secondly, without free will there can be no real repentance, which to an Anabaptist was indispensable for entering the Christian life. Thirdly, without free will there could be no real commitment to discipleship.

The Anabaptist position at times bordered on Pelagianism, and they knew it. Yet at least some of the Anabaptists did not want their position on the freedom of the will to be connected with Pelagius. Hubmaier and others pointed out that this freedom was the freedom of the "reborn man." The Anabaptists' picture of man was hopeful and stayed clear of what they considered to be the pitfall of "cheap grace." They believed that if God commands, man must be able to obey such commandments after experiencing rebirth and the restoration of man's freedom in the image of God. Adam's fall brought "temporal" death to all people, the Anabaptists quickly pointed out. But this fall did not cause "eternal" death, as man has been restored through Christ's sacrifice on the cross and may now become master over temptation and sin.

Part of the problem is found in the Anabaptist tendency to disregard original sin. Sebastian Franck⁴⁸ observed,

Concerning original sin nearly all Anabaptists teach as follows: Just as the righteousness of Christ is of no avail to anyone unless he makes it part of his own being through fruits of faith, so also Adam's sin does not impair anybody except the one who makes it part of his own being and brings forth fruits of sin. For as foreign righteousness does not save anybody, so will foreign sin not condemn anybody either.⁴⁹

Franck saw the practical implications of the Anabaptist position.

Nearly all Anabaptists consider children to be pure and innocent blood and they do not consider original sin as a sin which of itself condemns both children and adults. They also claim that it does not make anyone unclean except the one who accepts this sin, makes it his own and is unwilling to part with it. For they

claim that foreign sin does not condemn anybody, and in this they refer back to the Eighteenth Chapter of Ezekiel.^{50 51}

Of the religious fellowships who trace their spiritual ancestors directly back to the sixteenth-century Anabaptists, the oldest is that of the Hutterites or Hutterian Brethren. Organized by Jacob Hutter,⁵² this community originated in Moravia. Due to persecution, frequent migration was a necessity. From 1770 to 1874 a small remnant found asylum in Ukraine. Then in the face of renewed difficulties, small Hutterite colonies were founded in the United States and Canada.

More important for the direct transmission of Anabaptist ideas to the present are the Mennonites. Twenty-five years after the disaster at Münster, Menno Simons⁵³ gathered the remnants of a once strong Anabaptist movement in the Low Countries. These churches returned to the practices of the Swiss Brethren. Menno and his followers continually stressed the responsibility which men and nations must bear for their own sins. Menno saw a struggle between Satan's attempts to lead astray and God's redeeming love and mercy. Yet he believed that each person could choose to follow Satan's temptations or to obey God's commands. According to Menno, the course of history is fixed, but the will of the individual is free.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Dutch Mennonites were numerous, spreading into Germany and Russia. At the end of the seventeenth century a Mennonite settlement was established in Pennsylvania. From this beginning a number of separate bodies with slight differences in doctrine and practice have grown up in America, largely the result of new groups migrating from Europe. Prohibitions against participation in warfare and in litigation, refusals to swear oaths, living a "simple" life, as well as a rejection of infant baptism continue to characterize Mennonite beliefs. In their practice they bear witness to their spiritual ancestors of the sixteenth century. The concept of the freedom of the will is still apparent in their view of the church. They insist that the church consists of those who have voluntarily turned from sin and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior.

In the sixteenth century continental Anabaptism also migrated to England. In 1536 English representatives attended an Anabaptist synod in Bockholt, Westphalia. How long there had been Anabaptists in England is unknown. We do know that already in March 1535 the English government considered Anabaptists to be a problem and issued a proclamation against foreign Anabaptists in England. This was the first of several proclamations against Anabaptists during the reign of Henry VIII. The 1535 proclamation said, "albeit they were baptized in their infancy ...have of their own

presumption and authority lately rebaptized themselves.”⁵⁴

One might suggest that Anabaptism in England was the result of a few foreign exiles, but the actions of the English authorities indicate otherwise. By 1549 books against Anabaptism by Calvin and Bullinger had been translated into English in an effort to undercut the movement. Several of the *Thirty-nine Articles on Religion*⁵⁵ were aimed directly at Anabaptist teachings, especially those dealing with baptism, civil magistrates, and oaths. By the reign of Queen Elizabeth I there were also thousands of Dutch refugees in England. Among their numbers were Anabaptists who continued their propagandizing and proselytizing.

The Anabaptist movement in England ushered in a free-church movement, churches not under government control. The earliest English Baptist churches maintained friendly contact with the Dutch Mennonites for decades. All the English free churches exhibited the basic features of Anabaptism. The Baptists promoted the doctrine of believers' baptism. They also taught a doctrine of the church as a fellowship of believers, free from the control of the state. They called for toleration and freedom of conscience. These points again lead us back to the Anabaptists.⁵⁶

Some of the teachings of the sixteenth-century radicals were also evident in the followers of Jacob Arminius (1560-1609),⁵⁷ the Dutch Reformed theologian. Arminius believed that God was gracious enough to offer salvation to all who believe and that one cannot be saved without that grace. But this grace, he said was a cooperative grace. Man in his fallen state must reach out and grasp this grace by an act of the will. Man was free to accept or reject this grace.⁵⁸ Arminius stated:

All unregenerate persons have freedom of will, and a capability of resisting the Holy Spirit, of rejecting the proffered grace of God, of despising the counsel of God against themselves, of refusing to accept the Gospel of grace, and of not opening to Him who knocks at the door of the heart; and these things they can actually do, without any difference of the Elect or of the Reprobate.⁵⁹

Luther and Calvin had stressed justification by faith alone, but Arminius had an important place for works as well. Arminius saw man as endowed with free will, capable of choice and morally responsible for his conduct. Therefore a man had first of all to choose to seek justification, to avail himself of God's grace, for it was not irresistible as the Calvinists held. If a man made this indispensable choice, he became justified, “reborn,” a “new man.” However, unlike Calvin's “elect,” Arminius believed that a justified

person might by evil conduct fall from grace.⁶⁰

John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of the Methodist movement, embraced Arminian theology and became its champion. Although Wesley was not a direct descendant of the continental Anabaptists, he lived in an era in which Anabaptist thought was still prevalent. Whether Wesley consciously made the connection or not, he shared a position on free will with the Anabaptists. This became apparent when Wesley wrote:

I believe that Adam, before his fall, had such freedom of will, that he might chose either good or evil; but that, since the fall, no child of man has a natural power to choose anything that is truly good. Yet I know (and who does not?) that man has still freedom of will in things of an indifferent nature.⁶¹

And although I have not an absolute power over my own mind, because of the corruption of my own nature; yet, through the grace of God assisting me, I have a power to choose and do good, as well as evil. I am free to choose whom I will serve; and if I choose the better part, to continue therein even unto death.⁶²

Wesley's gospel was a gospel of salvation by the free will of the sinner. Free will, for all his talk of God's grace, was the deciding factor in salvation. John Wesley did not believe that humanity was totally "depraved" but rather he believed God placed a little spark of divine grace within us which enables us to recognize and accept God's justifying grace. Preparing grace is "free in all for all," Wesley used to say.

With his faith in free will, Wesley found himself in opposition to Anglican Reformed theology. For Wesley the doctrines of total depravity, particular atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints had to go. His position was contrary to Articles 9, 15, and 17 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. At the 1770 Methodist Conference, Wesley's doctrine of justification by free will led him to the extreme position of justification by works. Although he quickly dropped the formula that the conference had approved, he reverted to that position when he printed a defense of the original position.⁶³

Wesley's free will theology also carried over into his view of the church. Though an ordained minister in the Church of England, he organized a connexion⁶⁴ of societies governed by his rules and regulations. Since he believed Methodist laymen were being used by God, Wesley in 1739 gave his permission for them to continue preaching, contrary to Articles 23 and 36 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. When a Methodist lay preacher administered communion in 1755, Charles Wesley stated, "John



was not greatly troubled,” even though the action contradicted Article 23 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. John Wesley believed “this was the logical conclusion of appointing lay people to preach: ‘We have in effect ordained already.’”⁶⁵

Although the direct descendants of sixteenth-century Anabaptism⁶⁶ have had a very limited impact on American Christianity, the kindred spirit exemplified by the Dutch Arminians and the English Methodists continued to color America. Throughout the nineteenth century, American Christianity was profoundly affected by the growing Methodist presence. Wesley’s emphasis on free will offered a distinctive contrast to the Calvinist theology that had dominated religious thinking in America before 1800. American Methodism produced a large body of Christians who became interested in personal holiness.⁶⁷

Methodism in the nineteenth century never lost a feeling for the necessity of initial conversion to Christ, but their great contribution to American theology lay in pointing [newly converted Christians] to the prospect of a perfect adulthood in the Holy Spirit. From this point on in American Evangelicalism, the theology of Christian life became almost as important as the theology of Christian conversion.⁶⁸



In Methodism repentance came to be seen as a precondition of faith rather than a result of faith. The American revivalist Charles Grandison Finney went so far as to say that “sinners are not converted by direct contact with the Holy Ghost” but “by the influence of truth, argument, and persuasion.” In this view “a change of heart is the sinner’s own act,” though he is urged on by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹

Polls taken by George Barna and George Gallup indicate that the spirit of the sixteenth-century Radical Reformation lives on in twenty-first century America.

A majority of professing evangelicals agree with the statement that human beings are basically good, a clear repudiation of the biblical view of human fallenness. The irony here is that while we decry the baleful influence of secular humanism on the culture, we are busy adopting secular humanism’s view of man. It is not so much that the secular culture has negotiated away the doctrine of original sin, as that the evangelical church has done so.⁷⁰

Scripture affirms the bondage of the will. After Adam and Eve’s fall into sin, man’s will is no longer directed toward God but away from God.



With his sinful nature, man is not only unwilling but also unable to do the good and choose salvation. The inability of the radicals to recognize that the believer is *simul iustus et peccator* led them in the wrong direction.

The sixteenth-century radicals sought to restore the church to an apostolic purity and simplicity. They demanded a Christianity based on individual responsibility. In their attempt to reform the church, they made a radical turn and shifted the attention from what God has done for us to what humanity must do for itself. Their view of the church required free will. Believing that they had the ability to choose good or evil not only placed the radicals outside the mainstream Reformation, it placed them outside the New Testament church which they had tried so hard to recreate. In the end this was not so much a radical reformation as it was a radical departure from God's Word.

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Endnotes

¹ The document was signed on 25 April 1529 by Elector John of Saxony, Margrave George of Brandenburg, Dukes Ernest and Francis of Braunschweig-Lüneburg, Landgrave Philip of Hesse, Prince Wolfgang of Anhalt, and the representatives of fourteen imperial cities, including Zwinglian leaning Strassburg and St. Gall. They protested against all those measures of the Diet which they saw as contrary to the Word of God, to their conscience, and to the decision of the Diet of 1526, and appealed from the decision of the majority to the Emperor, to a general, or German, council, and impartial Christian judges.

² This designation became a part of the Reformation vocabulary in the late 1950s and was popularized by the work of George Huntston Williams.

³ A collection. From the Latin *congerere*, to heap up.

⁴ George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd edition, (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 1992), xxix.

⁵ Thomas Müntzer (c. 1488 – 27 May 1525) was an early Reformation radical leader. In 1520 he became a pastor in Zwickau, Thuringia. There his differences with Luther became apparent. He developed an attitude of anti-intellectualism, rejected infant baptism, and viewed the elements of the Lord's Supper as mere symbols. In August 1524 Müntzer became one of the leaders of the Peasants' War.

⁶ Tom Scott, *Thomas Muentzer: Theology and Revolution in the German Reformation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 184.

⁷ Flourishing in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., the Donatists believed that the church must be a church of saints and that sacraments, such as baptism, administered by priests and bishops who had fallen away in a time of persecution (the "lapsi") were invalid. Those who had received such a baptism, according to the Donatists, would need to receive a valid baptism.

⁸ In the Anabaptist view of the church two points stand out from the rest: A. The church must be a voluntary association, taking its spirit and discipline from those who intentionally belong to the fellowship. B. The church must follow the guide lines of the New Testament as to confession of faith and organizational pattern.

The Anabaptists maintained that the New Testament was clear both as to the content of the Christian faith and the organizational procedures in the true Christian Community. Cf. Franklin Hamlin Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church*, 2nd edition, (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), 46.

⁹ Franklin H. Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1964), 2.

¹⁰ Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, volume 1: "God, Authority, and Salvation" (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1982), 99.

¹¹ Conrad Grebel, "Letter to Thomas Müntzer," *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, ed. George William Huntston and Angel M. Mergal. Library of Christian Classics, Volume XXV (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 81.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ The *Ausbund* is the oldest Anabaptist hymnal and is considered the oldest

Christian song book in continuous use. The core of the *Ausbund* is a collection of fifty-one songs written by Anabaptists from Passau. The hymns were composed in the dungeon of Passau Castle, where the Anabaptists were imprisoned between 1535 und 1540 because of their convictions. This collection was printed in 1564.

Another edition of the hymnal with eighty more songs appeared in 1583. Altogether there are eleven known European editions of the *Ausbund*. The first American *Ausbund* appeared in 1742. The *Ausbund* is now exclusively used in Amish worship, preserving the unique spirit of the seventeenth-century Anabaptists.

The oldest songs from the *Ausbund* are mainly about the suffering church in a hostile environment. At the center stand those serious Christians who are prepared to die for their faith. They reflect not only grief and despair, but also the assurance of God's presence. Among others, song number 131, *O Gott, Vater, wir loben dich und deine Güte preisen wir* (O God, Father, we praise you and your kindness we praise), today is sung at beginning of each Amish worship service.

¹⁴ A town in the Swiss canton of Schaffhausen. Here in February 1527 Seven Articles were written by Anabaptists with Michael Sattler serving as the chief author. These articles articulated certain distinctive teachings of the Swiss Anabaptists.

¹⁵ Michael Sattler (c. 1490 – 1527) was born at Stauffen in the Breisgau. He entered the Benedictine monastery of St. Peter's of the Black Forest, northeast of Freiburg. In the 1520s he left the monastery. He married and by 1525 had become a member of the Anabaptist movement at Zürich. In May 1527 he was arrested by Roman Catholic authorities and executed.

¹⁶ Arnold C. Snyder, *The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984), 177.

¹⁷ Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 58.

¹⁸ Balthasar Hubmaier (c. 1480 – March 10, 1528) was born in Friedberg, Bavaria (about 5 miles east of Augsburg). He studied theology under Johannes Eck at the University of Freiburg (1503-1506). After his ordination as a priest in 1510, Hubmaier continued his education at Ingolstadt, where he was awarded a doctorate in theology in September 1512. By 1522 Hubmaier began to show signs of accepting the theology of the Reformation, although he favored Zwingli over Luther. In 1522 he became acquainted with Erasmus in Basel. In 1523 he met Zwingli in Zurich. At this time Hubmaier became convinced that infant baptism was not scriptural. He accepted believer's baptism in 1525. In that same year Zwingli had him arrested. During a debate with Zwingli and again under torture, Hubmaier recanted his position on baptism. He later wrote an apology for this weakness. In 1527 he was arrested by Austrian authorities, and on March 10, 1528 Hubmaier was executed in Vienna, burned at the stake.

¹⁹ *A Christian Catechism which everyone should know before he is baptized in water*. Begun late in 1526, this catechism was printed early in the next year and dated April 1, 1527.

²⁰ Balthasar Hubmaier, *Schriften*, Torsten Bergsten and G. Westin, editors. 1962, 322. Quoted in Friedmann, 59.



²¹ Ibid., 28.

²² Balthasar Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier, theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1989), 429.

²³ The full title of this pamphlet was *On the Freedom of the Will which God through His Sent Word offers to all people and thereby gives them the power to become His Children and also the choice to will and to do good or else to let them remain Children of Wrath which they are by nature*. Hubmaier dedicated this little book to Margrave George of Brandenburg.

²⁴ Balthasar Hubmaier, “Concerning Freedom of the Will,” in *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*, Trans. and ed. Daniel Liechty (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 21-22.

²⁵ Johann Loserth, “Hubmaier, Balthasar,” in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, volume 2 (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1956), 831.

²⁶ Hubmaier, “Concerning Freedom of the Will,” 25.

²⁷ Ibid., 26.

²⁸ It is noteworthy that in the early Christian church the Alexandrian School, under the influence of Neo-Platonism, also taught a human trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit.

²⁹ Hubmaier, “Concerning Freedom of the Will,” 27-28.

³⁰ The full title of this pamphlet is *The Second Book On the Freedom of the Will Of the Human Being In Which it is Testified With Scriptures that God by Means of His Sent Word Gives Power to All People To Become His Children and Freely Entrusts to Them the Choice to Will and to Do Good. Also Thereby Are the Counter Scriptures Of the Opposition Dissolved*.

³¹ Loserth, 831.

³² Hubmaier, “On Free Will,” *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, 125.

³³ Ibid., 126.

³⁴ Hubmaier, quoted in Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 335.

³⁵ Hubmaier, *Schriften*, 387. Quoted in Friedmann, 60.

³⁶ Hans Denck (c. 1495 – November 1527) was born into a middle-class family from Upper Bavaria. After earning his baccalaureate at Ingolstadt, he moved into humanist circles in Augsburg (1520) and Basel (1522) where he maintained a relationship with Oecolampadius. In September 1523 he became principal of the St. Sebald Gymnasium in Nuremberg. Andreas Osiander viewed Denck as a threat to the Lutheran Reformation which had entered the city in 1523. As a result, Osiander forced Denck to leave Nuremberg in January 1525. Although Martin Bucer referred to him as the “pope” of the Anabaptists, Denck cannot be regarded as the spokesmen for them since he held to many of his own peculiar views.

³⁷ This “self-surrender” is called *Gelassenheit*, or the submission to the will of God. Denck and others developed this concept from Jesus’ words, “not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). According to *Gelassenheit* individuality, selfishness, and pride are all disgusting and detestable.

Today serving others and submitting to God permeates all aspects of Amish life. A person’s personality must be modest, reserved, calm, and quiet. The values



which must be apparent in a believer's actions are submission, obedience, humility and simplicity. *Gelassenheit* is to be the overriding aspect for every person within the Amish community, and it must be visible through an individual's actions and possessions.

³⁸ Hans Denck, *Selected Writings of Hans Denck, 1500-1527*, trans. and ed. E.J. Furcha, (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 3.

³⁹ E. J. Furcha, "Critical Evaluation of Denck's Confession by the Nuremberg Preachers, 1525," in Hans Denck, *Selected Writings of Hans Denck, 1500-1527*, 13.

⁴⁰ Hans Denck, "Whether God is the Cause of Evil" in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, ed. George Huntston Williams and Angel M. Mergal, (Westminster Press, 1957), 98.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴³ Hans Denck, "Divine Order," in *Selected Writings of Hans Denck, 1500-1527*, 257-258.

⁴⁴ Hans Denck, "Recantation," in *Selected Writings of Hans Denck, 1500-1527*, 289.

⁴⁵ Pilgram Marpeck (died 1556) was an author and leader of South German Anabaptism from 1530 – 1556. A native of the Tyrol, Austria, he was originally a mining engineer, a member of the miners' brotherhood, and served on both the inner and outer councils of Rattenberg on the Inn River. As a mining magistrate, he was required by Archduke Ferdinand to expose miners who sympathized with the Anabaptist movement. Leonhard Schiemer was executed by authorities two weeks before Marpeck left his mining position on January 28, 1528. It is generally believed that he lost his position because he refused to aid authorities in capturing the Anabaptists. Marpeck was quickly reduced from a prominent citizen of Rattenberg to a "wandering citizen of heaven." For the next 12 years, he traveled to Tyrol, Moravia, South Germany, and Alsace, establishing Anabaptist congregations in these areas.

In addition to his efforts as a pastor and church organizer, Marpeck also contributed to Anabaptism with his pen. His writings include the *Vermanung* (a revision of Rothmann's *Bekentnisse*), the *Verantwortung* (a reply to Kaspar Schwenkfeld), and the *Testamentserläuterung*. Marpeck believed that both the Old and New Testaments were the Word of God, but he distinguished the New Testament as the authoritative rule of faith and practice for Christian brethren.

⁴⁶ In Romans 8 Paul states for the believer there is no condemnation for sin because a force stronger than sin has appeared. Through Jesus Christ "the law of the Spirit of life" sets us free from "the law of sin and death." Nothing can separate the believer in Christ from God's love. In chapter 9 he deals with God's righteousness in dealing with Israel.

⁴⁷ David Joris (c. 1501 – 1556) was an Anabaptist leader in the Netherlands. In 1524 he took an interest in the Reformation of Martin Luther. In 1533 he accepted the ideas of the Anabaptists, and was baptized by Obbe Philips. He became an influential figure in Dutch Anabaptism after the fall of Münster in June 1535. On

the “mystic” edge of Anabaptism, he cited dreams, visions, and prophecies in teaching and in his writings which numbered over 200.

For a time he waged a running debate with Menno Simons. Menno considered Joris a compromiser. Joris thought Menno was excessively literal. In 1544 Joris moved to Basel and protected himself by living under an assumed name - Johann van Brugge. He joined the Reformed Church, but he continued his theological writings on behalf of Anabaptism.

Joris was posthumously convicted of heresy. His body was exhumed and burned on May 13, 1559.

⁴⁸ Sebastian Franck (1499 – c. 1543) was a German humanist and radical reformer. Originally ordained as a priest, in 1525 Franck joined the Reformed party at Nuremberg. In 1531 he published his most important work, the *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibel*, which was largely based on the Nuremberg Chronicle (1493). In this volume he attempted to deal with the social and religious questions connected to the Reformation. He exhibited a strong sympathy for the position of those who had been condemned as “heretics.” He believed everyone should have the freedom to express his thoughts as he saw fit. Franck wanted to present the teachings of others in an objective fashion. Instead of the restrictions he saw in the Lutheran, Zwinglian and Anabaptist churches, he envisioned an invisible spiritual church, universal in its scope. Luther did not appreciate Franck’s efforts to represent the sects fairly and called him the devil’s mouthpiece.

⁴⁹ Sebastian Franck, *Chronica, Zeytbuch und Geschichtsbibel* (first ed., 1531), 447. Quoted in Friedmann, 63.

⁵⁰ “The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.” (Ezekiel 18:20)

⁵¹ Franck, *Chronica*. Quoted in Friedmann, 63.

⁵² Jacob Hutter (?-1536) was a hat maker by trade. He joined an Anabaptist group in 1529. On November 29, 1535 he was betrayed at Klausen. Bound and gagged he was taken to Innsbruck. There he was tortured and interrogated. In February 1536 he was condemned and burned alive at the stake.

⁵³ Menno Simons (1496 – January 25, 1561) was a Dutch Anabaptist leader. His followers became known as Mennonites. Ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1515 or 1516, he began to seriously study the Scriptures around 1526 or 1527 when he was troubled by questions surrounding the doctrine of transubstantiation. In 1532 another study of Scripture led him to the conclusion that there was no biblical basis for infant baptism. He searched the Church Fathers, read the works of Martin Luther and Heinrich Bullinger, and finally came into contact with Anabaptism. Early in 1536 he accepted “believer’s baptism.” Menno Simons rejected the violence advocated by the Münster movement, believing it was not scriptural. His theology focused on separation from this world.

⁵⁴ Irvin Buckwalter Horst, *The Radical Brethren, Anabaptism and the English Reformation to 1558*, (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1972), 37.

⁵⁵ These are the historic confessional statements of Anglican doctrine. Established

by a Convocation of the Church in 1563, they pulled back from some of the more extreme Calvinist teachings and created the peculiar English reformed doctrine.

⁵⁶ Ernest A. Payne, "The Anabaptist Impact on Western Christendom," in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. Guy F. Hershberger, 305-316.

⁵⁷ Arminius served from 1603 as professor in theology at the University of Leiden. He wrote many books and treatises on theology and became prominent for his opposition to the five points of Calvinism.

⁵⁸ R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: the Controversy over Free Will* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 26.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁶⁰ Bernard Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 11.

⁶¹ Robert W. Burtner and Robert E. Chiles, ed., *John Wesley's Theology: A Collection from His Works*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992), 132.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 132-133.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 171-173.

⁶⁴ A *connexion* was a circuit of prayer groups. It employed travelling ministers alongside the regular ministers attached to each congregation.

⁶⁵ Tomkins, 82, 150.

⁶⁶ The Amish, Hutterites, Mennonites, Church of the Brethren, Brethren in Christ, and various German Baptist groups are today the most common bodies referred to as Anabaptist.

⁶⁷ Ronald H. Nash, *Evangelicals in America* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 52.

⁶⁸ John D. Woodbridge, Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, *The Gospel in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 37.

⁶⁹ Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, William C. McLoughlin, Jr., reprint editor. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), 53, 175, 280.

⁷⁰ Sproul, 20.

The Freedom of the Will in Catholic Reform and Counter Reformation

by John A. Maxfield

From the imperial city of Nuremberg in January of 1552, in the midst of life under the first offensive of the Counter Reformation in Germany, Philip Melanchthon wrote the Preface to the third volume of Martin Luther's Lectures on Genesis, which would appear in print later that year. In this Preface Melanchthon comments on the current struggles of the Reformation in the midst of the Interim law that Emperor Charles V was seeking to impose on the cities and states of Reformation Germany.¹ Melanchthon wrote prior to the renewal of war, and then the Peace of Passau, later that year, which was to reverse the military victory of imperial forces over the League of Smalcald, formed to defend the Reformation against the aggression of the emperor. The Lutherans themselves were still in the midst of the great struggle over the Interim law and Melanchthon's attempts to achieve a compromise that he believed would protect the Reformation in this new era of political submission to Emperor Charles V. And from the Council of Trent, from the late 1540s and in these early years of the 1550s, canons and decrees from the early sessions of the council that had been convened late in 1545 were slowly becoming public knowledge.

What Melanchthon writes about these decrees coming to the public from the Council of Trent illustrates how central the topic of the freedom of the will was in the Lutheran Reformation, and therefore also in Roman Catholic Reform and Counter Reformation. Melanchthon's Preface to this volume of Luther's Genesis Lectures was a carefully constructed instrument of propaganda from a master of the rhetorical art. I say "propaganda" not to impugn the truth of what Melanchthon writes but rather to emphasize that his words were intended to shape public opinion in a time of political and ecclesiastical crisis. Important for our topic today is that Melanchthon draws a sharp contrast between the gospel taught through the lives of the patriarchs in the Book of Genesis—which he describes as the doctrine held in consensus among these patriarchal "first teachers of the church"—with the different gospel now coming forth in Tridentine decrees, held up as the "catholic consensus" but which in fact is "another gospel," different from that revealed in Holy Scripture. Melanchthon aims to

combat “certain Tridentine decrees with the gospel and with these very sources of the sermons of Abraham, where it is said, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’” For while Scripture thus speaks of a righteousness received by faith, Melanchthon holds that “these...Tridentines audaciously obliterate this whole doctrine with contrary decrees, impious and cursed decrees. For they reckon that all people should remain in doubt. Thereby they destroy this entire section in the Symbol: I believe in the forgiveness of sins. Rather they say: I do not believe, but I doubt.”² For Philip Melanchthon, the consensus of teaching achieved in the Catholic Counter Reformation and formulated at Trent in its decree on justification is a denial of the gospel because it undermines confidence in the divine promise of the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake, and in fact requires that Christian believers remain throughout this life *uncertain* of their salvation.

Clearly, though not exclusive to other elements of the decree on justification, Melanchthon was reacting to the decree’s ninth chapter, entitled “Against the Vain Confidence of Heretics” (*Contra inanem haereticorum fiduciam*), which concludes:

For as no pious person ought to doubt the mercy of God, the merit of Christ and the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments, so each one, when he considers himself and his own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension concerning his own grace, since no one can know with the certainty of faith, which cannot be subjected to error, that he has obtained the grace of God.³

The Ninth Canon of the decree makes clear the relationship between the decree on justification and the topic of free will:

If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will [*et nulla ex parte necesse esse eum suae voluntatis motu praeparari atque disponi*], let him be anathema.⁴

What is the background of this striking anathema in the history of the medieval Catholic Church and in the movement of Catholic reform leading to and culminating in the Council of Trent?

Free Will and Justification in the Medieval Augustinian Synthesis

The growth and development of Western Catholic theology in the Middle Ages has been aptly termed “a series of ‘Augustinian syntheses.’”⁵ Central to this Augustinian theology passed down through the Middle Ages was the great conflict between Augustine and the British monk Pelagius, in which Pelagius had attacked Augustine’s doctrine of the bound will.⁶ Augustine taught that all humanity since the fall of Adam, because all humanity participated in Adam’s sin (Rom 5:12), is born with a human “free will” that has become enslaved by the fallen sinful nature. Pelagius responded that every human being is born with a will free to choose God’s grace in Christ or even by his natural human ability to obey the law of God fully and so to be saved. Augustine countered that humans are born under the judgment of God unto death. God’s totally unmerited and gratuitous grace, working through Holy Baptism, is alone what can free the dead sinner. For Augustine, baptism is an absolute necessity, so that even catechumens who are receiving instruction in the gospel in preparation for baptism, if they die before the sacrament is administered, are certainly damned.⁷ We see here also how Augustine’s understanding of the church and its sacraments as means of grace is inseparable from his understanding of grace and predestination to salvation or damnation.⁸ For Augustine, grace is *always and only* mediated through the sacraments administered within the unity of the Catholic Church.⁹

Medieval thought, as a series of Augustinian syntheses, did not receive this purely Augustinian soteriology of predestination, grace, and sacraments, but rather an Augustinian soteriology born of a compromise that emerged out of the attacks of the so-called Semi-Pelagians: John Cassian, Vincent of Lerins, and Faustus of Riez.¹⁰ A very different concept of the free will of man is found, for example, in Cassian’s description of the order of salvation: “As soon as he [God] sees in us the beginning of a good will, he illumines, stimulates, and urges it towards salvation, giving growth to that which he himself planted, or to that which he has seen spring out of our own effort.”¹¹ Rejecting both these attacks against Augustine’s view of the bound will on the one hand, and Augustine’s doctrine of predestination to damnation on the other, a compromise was developed in the canons of the Council of Orange in 529. Even though these canons were apparently not preserved in the medieval tradition, they represent the mitigated way that Augustine’s writings were understood throughout the Middle Ages.¹² In short, Augustine’s view of the bound will was not simply accepted but became embroiled in many debates about the process of salvation in

medieval scholastic theology as it developed and came to its height in the great systems of the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, throughout the Middle Ages, the authority of Augustine's view of nature and grace was so great, notes Jaroslav Pelikan, "that even those who relapsed into Pelagian forms of teaching had to do so in Augustine's terms."¹³

Medieval scholasticism wrestled in particular with the question of whether the human will must be given a role in seeking or at least freely receiving the grace of God that is necessary for the salvation of every descendant of Adam. The great Augustinian syntheses of the thirteenth century, for example those of the Dominicans St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas, were "sometimes mutually complementary and sometimes mutually exclusive," and in the fourteenth century there developed a struggle between the thought of these Dominican schoolmen and the scholars of the Franciscan order, especially John Duns Scotus.¹⁴ While all these systems of thought were deeply influenced by and involved in the rediscovery of the works of Aristotle in the West, it would be an error to view the intellectual divide as simply between "Aristotelians" versus "Augustinians"—for, as Daniel Callus notes, "St. Augustine was the recognized Master of all, not of the so-called Augustinians alone."¹⁵ Nevertheless, in particular within the Augustinian order of friars there was by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries "a vigorous effort to go beyond—or behind—the Augustinian syntheses of the earlier period, including the Thomistic version, to Augustine himself."¹⁶ Thomas Bradwardine and Gregory of Rimini, who has been called "the best Augustine scholar of the Middle Ages,"¹⁷ stand out in the first half of the fourteenth century as Augustinian friars who were at the same time "'Augustinians' in the special sense that they sought to reaffirm the distinctive teachings of the 'doctor of grace' against what they believed to be the virulent Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism of their own time."¹⁸

Who were the representatives of this "virulent Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism" in the early fourteenth century and beyond? Joseph Lortz and other Roman Catholic historians developed a new appreciation of the religious genius of Martin Luther partly through their conviction that Luther was reacting not against the great medieval Catholic syntheses of the thirteenth century—the greatest being the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas—but to the disintegration of this truly Catholic synthesis "beginning with Duns Scotus and culminating in nominalism—the work of [William of] Occam, [Gabriel] Biel, and their disciples."¹⁹ Luther was trained in this nominalist tradition, a dialectic theology that rejected the Neoplatonic realism that had reached its greatest achievement in Thomism. For our topic we need only to state that at the heart of the soteriology of



nominalism was the free will of man even in his fallen condition, and the necessity of its cooperation with divine grace in the process of the justification of sinners. In this view, God had made a covenant with lost humanity that He would provide the grace necessary for salvation to all who do their best, that is, who utilize the freedom inherent in their nature as human creatures to seek and respond positively to the grace of God. The critical phrase is “*facere quod in se est*”—that is, God promises the grace of justification leading to salvation to those who *do what is within them*. Heiko Oberman traces the origins of the phrase to the *Ambrosiaster*, a text that “interprets the justice of God as the merciful acceptance of those who seek their refuge with him: He would be unjust if he ignored them.” As Oberman explains the soteriology of the nominalist Gabriel Biel:

though the *facere quod in se est* means different things to different people [meaning: different people have different capacities within them], everyone is by nature in a position to discharge this first duty. For God, however, the *facere quod in se est* means only one thing: He is obliged, because he has placed the obligation on himself, to infuse his grace in everyone who has done his very best.²⁰



In this understanding, the first step toward salvation is left to the sinner, who though in need of God’s grace has within him the free will to choose to turn to God. When the sinner does so, God is obligated to save. Predestination is defined as God’s foreknowledge of those who will make this choice of striving for God’s grace out of a pure love for Him.²¹ One can immediately see the contrast between this view of the capacity of the human will and the Augustinian teaching of a will bound in sin and death. This assertion of the human capability to strive for God’s grace and the necessity of doing so also relates to the subject of the certainty of salvation. As Oberman explains:



But although a sinner may be certain of God’s mercy in granting his grace to those who do their very best, he has no certainty that he has in fact done his very best. The standard required is the love of God for God’s sake, that is, an undefiled love: *super omnia* [“above all things”]. It is this last condition in particular which makes it practically impossible to know with certainty that one has really reached the stage of the *facere quod in se est* [that is, the requirement that a man do what is within himself].²²

This nominalist tradition of scholasticism has been described as



“radically uncatholic” and part of a general disintegration and decay of scholastic theology in the later Middle Ages.²³ In his seminal study of late medieval nominalism, Oberman concludes that the nominalist understanding of justification was indeed Pelagian and therefore not fully “catholic.” Yet nominalist scholasticism was never officially condemned in the medieval church (though protests were certainly made by such Augustinians as Thomas Bradwardine and Gregory of Rimini); its system remained a valid option among competing schools of thought into the sixteenth century. Not even the Catholic reform and Counter Reformation of the sixteenth century can be viewed as a reaction against nominalism. Biel’s works were absent from the Trent Index of Forbidden Books; indeed Biel’s name appears in a 1569 edition of the Index under the heading “Most select list of authors from which a complete Catholic library can be properly constituted.” As Oberman notes, “Our conclusion that nominalism has not been able to avoid a Pelagian position should not obscure the fact that nominalism was fully involved in the ongoing medieval search for the proper *interpretation* of Augustine.”²⁴

Free Will and Justification in Roman Catholic Reform

Dr. MacKenzie has ably described how Martin Luther’s view of the bondage of the will was from its early development an attack against the Pelagianism of the scholasticism in which he had been trained, and was not merely the Reformer’s response to the assertion of free will contained in Erasmus’s diatribe against him in 1525. The response of papal theologians to Luther’s reform likewise from the very beginning included the rejection of Luther’s assertion that the human will is totally bound in sin and therefore can play no role in the justification of the sinner. To Luther’s rejection of the interplay or synergism between human effort and God’s grace in the scholastic understanding of the conversion and justification of the sinner, and therefore of the whole Catholic concept of penance, the official Catholic response was consistent in its assertion that human responsibility for sin is based on some natural capacity in man that would give man the ability to resist sin, and that both the grace of God and a cooperating will of man are required in the salvation of the sinner. Man is not saved by faith alone in Christ’s redeeming work for sinners but by a combination of faith and good works that merit salvation.

But the story of free will and justification in Roman Catholic reform cannot be reduced so simply to this official response to Luther in the period from 1518 to 1520, culminating in his excommunication. To understand the decisions made at the Council of Trent we need to grasp that present at the Council were many advocates of Catholic reform who were sympathetic

to several of Luther's basic concerns and fought vigorously at the Council for a hearing, even while they remained fully loyal to the papal church as members of its magisterium. Space does not allow even a summary recounting of the many and various reform movements within Catholicism that were active in the early sixteenth century, even should we limit our field of vision to those movements that bore resemblances to Luther's doctrine of salvation by faith. But a fast forward to the Council of Trent and its early sessions on dogma, specifically the decrees on original sin and on justification, allows us to focus on two important figures at the Council who were voices for an approach to justification that would not simply condemn the Lutheran understanding but would seek to draw the Lutherans back into the unity of the papal church by means of an appropriation of some of Luther's fundamental concerns into the official decrees of the Council on dogma. The story of Cardinals Girolamo Seripando and Reginald Pole at the Council of Trent and its aftermath, and their attempts to bring about a reform of Catholicism and reunion of the fractured church in their day, is at the same time the story of how Catholic reform in the sixteenth century was transformed into the Counter Reformation that so deeply shaped the history of early modern and modern Europe.²⁵

1. Catholic Voices of Doctrinal Reform in the Debates at Trent

Cardinal Seripando, the General of the Augustinian Order of Hermits (the same order in which Luther had been a friar), was a vigorous advocate at Trent for genuine reform of doctrine and for a posture toward Lutheranism that might lead toward reunion. As his biographer, Hubert Jedin (also the most renowned historian of the Council of Trent), notes, Seripando was at the height of his activity at the Council with the beginning of the dogmatic discussions. "His name is inseparable from the story of the decree on original sin and justification."²⁶ On 28 May 1546, after an introduction to the canons on original sin was read in the general congregation, Seripando wrote a treatise on original sin in which he arranged his views according to this introduction. In this treatise he upholds a Lutheran understanding in his view that original sin is remitted not solely by baptism but by baptism and faith.²⁷ He likewise demonstrated sympathy with the Lutheran understanding of original sin when he explored the concept of concupiscence, or the tendency to sin that remains in the baptized, and concluded—completely in agreement with St. Paul and St. Augustine, he believed—that this concupiscence is sin and that the command "Non concupisces" (the "Do not covet" of Romans 7:7 in English translations) cannot be fulfilled in this life and "that only in the state of perfect justice, that is, after concupiscence has been eliminated, can it be fulfilled."²⁸ In

other words, for the baptized Christian sin remains a reality and threat within his very nature, so that the Christian *cannot* fulfill the law of God. The contrary view would be Pelagianism.

Though Seripando carefully distinguished his own position from the condemned thesis of Luther that “to deny the sin remaining after baptism is to trample Paul and Christ under foot,” he was “unable to escape the accusation that he was supporting Luther’s teaching on concupiscence.”²⁹ The Council fathers argued about this and Seripando’s emphasis on the necessity of faith to remit original sin in baptism. On 7 June Seripando described concupiscence as the root of all actual sins and therefore “hated by God even in those who are baptized.”³⁰ This was rejected in the wording of the draft presented on 8 June, which stated that “Baptism takes away not only the guilt of original sin but likewise whatever is sin in the true and proper sense of the word,...so that nothing remains in the baptized that is hateful in God’s sight.”³¹ On 14 June, Seripando’s understanding of concupiscence was defended by Cardinal Reginald Pole. Jedin writes of Pole:

More determined than Seripando and the bishops of Cava and Bosa, Pole declared that personal experience was the key to an understanding of the doctrine of original sin. Every man’s inner experience is such a strong proof of the danger that concupiscence is for a moral life that the phrase [introduced in the revised decree] “God finds nothing hateful in those who are reborn” does not correctly describe the situation and it would encourage a dangerous kind of security in the just.³²

But the opposition to these Lutheran-sympathizing views at the Council prevailed. The Decree Concerning Original Sin, adopted in the fifth session of the Council on 17 June 1546, contains no trace of Seripando’s doctrine of the necessity of faith for baptism to remit original sin. Faith is rather defined as the *fides quae*, the content of the faith that the church believes, not trust in the promise of baptism.³³ Original sin is defined in the Augustinian and Pauline sense of the transgression of Adam propagated throughout the human race, thus requiring the baptism of infants for its remission, but this remission occurs through baptism alone, without faith. Concupiscence remains in the baptized, but “this concupiscence, which the Apostle [Paul] sometimes calls sin, the holy council declares the Catholic Church has never understood to be sin in the sense that it is truly and properly sin in those born again, but in the sense that it is of sin and inclines to sin.” All who hold the contrary opinion are declared “anathema” or eternally

condemned.³⁴

The relationship between these discussions and decisions regarding original sin and the understanding of free will in the Catholic Reformation is brought out more clearly in the debates about justification. Here we are at the center of the dogmatic problem posed by the Lutheran Reformation. The various scholastic syntheses of the Middle Ages were represented at the Council and likewise various advocates of serious doctrinal, and not just moral and structural, reform within the papal church. At stake was not only the unity of the church but also the dreams of Emperor Charles V for a reinvigorated and unified empire, not only in Europe but—in that age of exploration and conquistadors—throughout the world. Charles had struggled for the convening of a council for nearly two decades. The emperor and his representatives at the Council were so focused on the structural and moral reform of the church that they opposed the hearing of debates on doctrinal matters entirely—they did not want news of doctrinal decisions at the Council to provide ammunition for Protestant attacks against it as an instrument of reform. But the early decision of the Council was to deliberate on both reform and dogma simultaneously. The central topic of justification came up immediately after the decisions regarding original sin, beginning in mid-June of 1546.

Seripando was an advocate at the Council for the view of justification that had emerged out of Catholic and Lutheran discussions at the Colloquy of Ratisbon (or Regensburg, the German name of the city) in 1541. These discussions had not achieved any reunion—the agreement made at the Colloquy was subsequently rejected both by the Lutherans and by papal officials. Quite to the contrary, the Colloquy instead exposed the apparent insurmountability of the division between the Germans following Luther and the papal church. Nevertheless, among Catholic reformers like Seripando there remained the hope that a concept of justification similar to that discussed at Ratisbon, based on a twofold understanding of righteousness, might be the basis of a reunion as well as a faithful Augustinian reform of Catholic teaching.

Seven central questions regarding justification in the conflict between Luther and Rome illustrate how at the Council the question of free will was inseparable from the topic of the justification of the sinner. Hubert Jedin summarizes them from a “small book on justification, grace and merit published at Venice in May 1546 by the conciliar theologian Andreas de Vega, for which it may be safely claimed that it lay on the desks of many members of the Council at the time of the opening of the debate on justification.” Included among these seven groups of questions are:

1) “Is it possible for the sinner, by co-operating with the initial help of divine grace, to draw nigh to salvation and perhaps, though not in the proper sense of the word, to merit his justification (*meritum de congruo*) [that is, with an imperfect or partial merit, as opposed to a complete merit]?”

4) “Is the human will passive in the process of justification, or does it, on the contrary, actively concur with grace? If so, when? That is, at which stages of the process of justification?...On the answer to this question depends the answer to the next.”

5) “In what sense can the good works of the justified be described as ‘merit’? Merit presupposes man’s co-operation. But are not eternal life and everlasting glory free gifts of God?”³⁵

In his discussion of these questions relating to free will, Jedin notes that only four theologians involved in these discussions believed “that the relation of the human will to grace was a purely passive one. They were the two Hermits of St. Augustine, Gregory of Padua and Aurelius of Rocca Contracta, the Dominican Gregory of Siena and the Servite Lorenzo Mazochi.”³⁶ Yet those four voices for a strictly Augustinian view of a bound human will, totally incapable of any active role in the process of justification, illustrate the degree to which the central question of free will played a role in the formulation of Tridentine dogma regarding justification. Jedin notes that although the Council’s debate was preoccupied with the Protestant reformers’ theory of justification, nevertheless “the divergences between the theological schools” of scholasticism were not obliterated.³⁷ Indeed, Jedin raises the question whether “Luther’s teaching [succeeded] in penetrating the minds of the Tridentine conciliar theologians” and answers: “Appearances point that way.” Charges of crypto-Lutheranism voiced at the Council centered on the entire Order of Augustinians and its general, Cardinal Seripando.³⁸

Seripando developed his views on justification most clearly in a tractate drawn up in response to the debates and in which he asserts two premises: “The future decree on justification must dispense with scholastic terminology and speak a language that laymen can understand, if it is to become a rule of life and belief,” and “the decree must link up with religious experience—not indeed any chance or subjective experience, but with such typical examples of conversion as are found in Holy Scripture and Christian tradition, such as the conversion of David, St Paul, St Augustine.”³⁹ The Cardinal laid out “four factors that are simultaneously at work in the conversion of an adult unbeliever, 1) the grace of God freely accepted by man without any previous preparation due to his unaided natural powers [that is, free will]; 2) repentance, in co-operation with



grace; 3) God's justice [or righteousness]; 4) the appropriation through faith of that justice."⁴⁰

Seripando's views, especially his opposition to scholastic views that see free will as playing a role *preparing* for God's grace in the process of justification, together with his view that God's justice or righteousness is appropriated through faith rather than human merits (or even through sacraments apart from faith), illustrate the nature of the Catholic reform movement called Italian Evangelism (*Evangelismo*), a movement that had developed especially in Venice and Padua since the 1530s and whose adherents were deeply involved as advocates for reform and conciliation toward Lutheran views at Trent. Seripando represented a particularly strong theological tradition in the movement of Italian Evangelism, and he saw the possibility of reunion of Protestantism with Rome on the basis of a carefully constructed compromise. He struggled for a definition of justification along the lines of the colloquy at Ratisbon and its definition of a twofold righteousness, not identical to Luther's view of Christian and human righteousness carefully distinguished according to the Lutheran distinction of law and gospel, but nevertheless having a similar focus on man's initial passivity in receiving the grace of justification and the view that faith is the necessary means for appropriating the righteousness of God.

How did these views fare at the Council? Seripando's activity in the debates on justification and a series of preliminary drafts culminated finally in the "September draft," which he wrote anonymously.⁴¹ Jedin writes:

The whole draft breathed the spirit of the Bible and St Augustine and was formulated in their words. Not one specifically scholastic term was used, nor was any mention made of the doctrinal opinions on concupiscence and faith which were peculiar to Seripando; only the title of the eighth chapter "On a twofold justice," touched on a doctrine which the Augustinian general had at heart.⁴²

Yet when this draft was in turn superseded by the draft of 5 November, all traces of the twofold justice favored by Seripando were expunged.⁴³ "When, on 26 November, Seripando rose to deliver his great discourse, which was to continue into the congregation of 27 November, he was well aware that there was no prospect of the basic ideas of his doctrine of justification being embodied in the decree."⁴⁴ In December three conferences were devoted to give final form to chapter six of the decree on the manner of preparation for justification, and considerable discussion



was given also to chapter seven on the causes of justification, in particular to the question, “How are we to understand St Paul’s words that we are justified by faith?”⁴⁵ Writes Jedin: “The Bishop of Fana argued that St Paul was his own interpreter; the *sola fide* excluded the legal works of the Old Law, not the ensuing good works, but only by faith do we make justice our own....However, in the opinion of more than one Father...this kind of language came much too close to that of the Lutherans.”⁴⁶ I include this very skeletal outline of the debates only to emphasize that what came to be passed and what we read today as the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent had an evolution that proceeded from rigorous debate within the Council itself, even though the object of the Council was not to resurrect the various debates of the medieval scholastic schools but rather was to delineate the Catholic faith in contrast to that of Luther and the Protestants. In this evolution Seripando and others who favored a kind of approach that might lead to reunion with the Protestants were summarily defeated.

Another figure who favored a more conciliatory approach for the Council was Cardinal Reginald Pole, also identifiably part of the Italian reform movement called *Evangelismo*. Unlike the rigorous theologian Seripando, Pole represented a focus that was “concerned to see his spiritual experience ratified in the light of theology.”⁴⁷ Pole had written a treatise (*De Concilio liber* or Book on the Council) in March and April of 1545 in which he developed arguments by which he thought the Protestants might be persuaded to be reunited with Rome. He viewed the task of the approaching Council as devoted to recovering the Lutherans and reforming the whole church, and for him “this meant in effect something very close to an acceptance of Luther’s doctrine of salvation.”⁴⁸ At the Council itself, Pole drew up on behalf of the Legates the address that was read before the Council on 7 January. “In this address he emphasised two themes: the need for penance or self-accusation [on the part of the papal church], and the necessity to be impartial.” Penance was necessary because God’s judgment on the church was manifest in “the spread of heresy, the collapse of ecclesiastical discipline, the disobedience of Christians towards their pastors, the wars of European princes among themselves and with the Turks.” “Moreover, it was essential to eliminate all prejudice, and to remember, with Sallust, the necessity in matters of controversy for men to rid their minds of anger, hatred and friendship alike.” In conclusion Pole “admonished those bishops who came armed with mandates from their princes, to serve their princes in all fidelity and zeal, but in a manner fitting to bishops—as the servants therefore of God, and not of man.”⁴⁹ At the end of this reading, according to witnesses, the audience remained transfixed in silence for a few moments and then “rose to their feet and joined the

president, Del Monte, as he intoned the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*.⁵⁰

Pole attended the Council for only six months, from its beginning on 13 December until his departure in mid-May because of illness. By that time he had become so deeply disturbed by the direction taken in the Council prior to the discussions on original sin and justification that he experienced what Dermot Fenlon characterizes as “something like a nervous breakdown.”⁵¹ Pole’s involvement in Trent’s decisions would therefore come by way of his response to the developing and finalized decrees, and to his eventual struggle to accept authoritative decrees that had repudiated the understanding of salvation that he and others of the Italian Evangelism movement had held so deeply, even in their determination not to reject the papal church. Pole’s hopes for a council that would pave the way to a reunion of the Protestants with the Catholic Church had proved quite illusory. When the final decree on justification was passed in January 1547, the rabidly anti-Lutheran theologian Johann Cochlaeus wrote from Germany celebrating how the decree “had been kept intact from the ‘curious innovations’ desired by certain leading figures in the Church, and that the way had now been closed to their ‘new fantasies.’” As Jedin remarks he probably had Pole in mind.⁵²

2. *Defining Free Will and Justification at the Council of Trent*

The Sixth Session of the Council of Trent, celebrated on 13 January 1547, established the teaching regarding justification that was to be held in the Catholic Church, “strictly forbidding that anyone henceforth presume to believe, preach or teach otherwise than is defined and declared in the present decree.”⁵³ Unique among the decrees of Trent, the Decree Concerning Justification separated the canons listing condemned teaching from the chapters of the decree itself. Throughout the decree it is clear that justification as defined by Trent is a process involving a necessary synergism or cooperation between the free will in man that remains part of the nature of man after the fall of Adam, and thus a natural capacity in man even apart from God’s grace. While Canon 1 is clearly anti-Pelagian in its condemnation of those who hold “that man can be justified before God by his own works, whether done by his own natural powers or through the teaching of the law, without divine grace through Jesus Christ” (a view that was held by no party at the Council or in the Reformation, and probably not even by Pelagius himself),⁵⁴ Chapter 1 of the decree nevertheless states that “free will, weakened as it was in its powers and downward bent, was by no means extinguished” in the descendants of Adam, whether Jew or Gentile.⁵⁵ Like the medieval tradition generally, the Council had opted for what has been called a “Semi-Pelagian” or “Semi-Augustinian” view of

the human will in fallen man as a natural capacity that cooperates with divine grace in the conversion and justification of the sinner, thus rejecting Augustine's view, and that of Luther, that the human will after the fall is totally bound in sin and cannot prepare itself for the grace of God. Canon 2 on the other hand condemns the Pelagian view that "divine grace through Christ Jesus is given for this only, that man may be able more easily to live justly and to merit eternal life, as if by free will without grace he is able to do both, though with hardship and difficulty."⁵⁶

With Chapter V the Council fathers established the teaching that the human will must cooperate with divine grace in the process of the sinner's conversion and justification:

In adults the beginning of that justification must proceed from the predisposing grace of God through Jesus Christ,...whereby, without any merits on their part, they are called; that they who by sin had been cut off from God, may be disposed through His quickening and helping grace to convert themselves to their own justification by freely assenting to and cooperating with that grace; so that, while God touches the heart of man through the illumination of the Holy Ghost, man himself neither does absolutely nothing while receiving that inspiration, since he can also reject it, nor yet is he able by his own free will and without the grace of God to move himself to justice in His sight.⁵⁷

This teaching is upheld by Canon 4, which condemns the Lutheran view "that man's free will moved and aroused by God, by assenting to God's call and action, in no way cooperates toward disposing and preparing itself to obtain the grace of justification, that it cannot refuse its assent if it wishes, but that, as something inanimate, it does nothing whatever and is merely passive."⁵⁸ Canon 5 is likewise directed against Luther's teaching, namely "that after the sin of Adam man's free will was lost and destroyed, or that it is a thing only in name, indeed a name without a reality."⁵⁹ Clearly the import of these condemnations is to establish that free will has a necessary and active role in preparing for God's grace in the justification of the sinner. The manner of this preparation is described in Chapter VI, where adults are described as

disposed to that justice when, aroused and aided by divine grace, receiving faith by hearing, they are moved freely toward God, believing to be true what has been divinely revealed and promised, especially that the sinner is justified by God by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.⁶⁰

That this preparation for the divine grace of justification is not a matter of faith (as God's supernatural gift to the human being dead in sin) receiving the promise of God, as in the Reformation teaching of justification by faith, is made clear in the condemnation of Canon 9: "If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema."⁶¹ With this condemnation not only did the Council of Trent separate itself from Luther and the Protestants, but also from those of the Italian Evangelism movement who recognized in the teaching of justification by faith a needed corrective to the teaching of grace and the Catholic understanding of penance that had been passed down through the Middle Ages. As Heiko Oberman observes, the "middle way" of the Council of Trent's decisions was not a careful steering of the ship of the church between the Scylla of Lutheranism and the Charybdis of a nominalistic Pelagianism, but between a Pelagianism that held that justification is based on human merits and a Thomistic soteriology that holds that "no merits whatsoever precede the grace of God." The solution at Trent was in fact the nominalistic Semi-Pelagianism that held that while the human will could not *fully merit* [*promereri*] the grace of justification, it was a necessary preparation for justification that the human will "do what is within itself" and so cooperate with God in achieving the very beginning of justification, or preparing for the divine grace of justification.⁶² This "middle way" was enshrined in Chapter VIII of the decree: "We are said to be justified by faith because faith is the beginning of human salvation, the foundation and root of all justification,...and we are therefore said to be justified gratuitously, because none of the acts that precede justification, whether faith or works, *fully merits* [*promeretur*] the grace of justification."⁶³

Free Will in Man or Certainty in Christ: The Problem of Catholicism

I began this paper by noting the reaction of Philip Melancthon to the decrees of Trent and Melancthon's focus on the problem of certainty. By rejecting not only the teaching of Luther but also the proposals of advocates for reform within the Catholic Church such as those of the Italian Evangelism movement, Trent opted for a "middle way" that placed the burden of receiving the grace of God in Christ on the natural capacity of man's free will. Rather than looking to the promises of God in Christ and receiving them by faith alone, giving all glory to God for the justification of the sinner, Trent teaches the sinner to look within himself and "to do what

is within him” that he might merit—even if he cannot merit fully—God’s grace and justification. This undermines confidence in God, however, as Trent itself noted by describing certainty regarding one’s salvation as “vain confidence” and by condemning the view “that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in God’s mercy, which remits sins for Christ’s sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us” (Canon 12).⁶⁴ Melanchthon, though he himself struggled with the absolutely monergistic application of grace in Luther’s teaching and eventually led the Lutheran Reformation into a major controversy over synergism, recognized that Trent’s teaching could only undermine the confidence in God’s promise of gratuitous forgiveness that is at the heart of the faith through which a sinner is justified before God.

It appears from the history of Christianity, I believe, that this problem of certainty generally arises when the capacity of free choice is attributed to the human will in fallen man. To focus on the capacity of the sinner to choose or prepare for God’s grace in Christ is to turn our focus in on the self rather than to turn our focus on God and His grace in Jesus Christ. As Trent itself noted in Chapter IX in the decree on justification: “For as no pious person ought to doubt the mercy of God, the merit of Christ and the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments, so each one, when he considers himself and his own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension concerning his own grace, since no one can know with the certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God.”⁶⁵

I have not allowed myself the space to address the question of where the Roman Catholic Church stands today on the question of free will. Even an outline of the issues in the diverse theological world of contemporary Roman Catholicism would require a paper in itself. More fruitful for our reflection would be instead to inquire briefly into what happened with Catholic reformers like Cardinals Seripando and Pole when their attempts to bring about a different response to Lutheranism and the Reformation at the Council of Trent failed. Both cardinals clearly were disappointed in the outcome of the Council regarding the teaching of justification by faith. Pole wrote against the decree on justification and is described as highly ambivalent regarding its teaching, although “his objections were impermanent, and by 1554 he had adopted the Tridentine doctrine of salvation.”⁶⁶ Unlike others within the movement of Italian Evangelism—some of whom fled from Italy into exile, others met execution by the Roman Inquisition—neither Seripando nor Pole would repudiate the officially adopted teaching of the papal church. Whereas the Lutherans may have been right about justification, in the view of these loyal Catholics

the Lutherans could never be excused in breaking from the unity of the Catholic Church. The degree to which this understanding of the true church determined Pole's faith and life can be seen in the events of his life from 1554 onwards, when he was the papal legate in his homeland of England during the reign of Queen Mary.⁶⁷ There he acted as an enforcer of the Counter Reformation, presiding over the persecution that brought many Protestants to their martyrdom for their break with the papal church and their assertion that faith alone in Christ's redeeming work, and not participation in the unity of the Catholic Church and its sacraments, was the basis for the Christian's certainty of salvation.

Endnotes

¹ The Interim law was intended by Charles V to regulate religious affairs in areas that had adopted the Reformation in Germany during the time between his reassertion of imperial authority and the papal church's decision regarding the Reformation through a general council. On the Interim and the controversy that erupted over it in Saxony, see Franz Lau and Ernst Bizer, *A History of the Reformation in Germany to 1555*, trans. Brian A. Hardy (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1969), 201-23; Horst Rabe, *Reichsbund und Interim. Die Verfassungs- und Religionspolitik Karls V und der Reichstag von Augsburg 1547/1548* (Cologne & Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1971); Andreas Pius Luttenberger, *Glaubenseinheit und Reichsfriede. Konzeptionen und Wege Konfessionsneutraler Reichspolitik 1530-1552* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982); Oliver K. Olson, *Matthias Flacius and the Survival of Luther's Reform* (Wolfenbütteler Abhandlungen zur Renaissanceforschung, 20. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002); and Heinz Scheible, *Melanchthon: Eine Biographie* (München: C. H. Beck, 1997), 170-91.

² *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. J. F. K. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-1986), 44:xxviii.

³ *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent. Original Text with English Translation*, trans. H. J. Schroeder, O.P. (St. Louis; London: B. Herder Book Co, 1941), 35; Latin text, 314.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 43; Latin, 321.

⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Vol. 4: *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 13-22, quotation at 13; and Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Vol. 3: *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 50-52 et passim.

⁶ On the development of Augustine's mature teaching regarding the human will see Gerald Bonner, *Freedom and Necessity: St. Augustine's Teaching on Divine Power and Human Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

⁷ On this see the example of Augustine's sermon in the context of a catechumen who had died prior to baptism, in John G. Nordling, "The Preaching of Augustine," in *The Pieper Lectures*. Vol. 8: *Preaching Through the Ages*, ed. John A. Maxfield (St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute and the Luther Academy, 2004), 46-47 and 59nn131-32; and Bonner, *Freedom and Necessity*, 6 (where the exception of the martyrs is noted) and passim.

⁸ For a brief treatment of the differences between Augustine's predestinarianism and that of John Calvin and the later Calvinists, see Bonner, *Freedom and Necessity*, 46-48.

⁹ Benjamin Warfield aptly described the Reformation of the sixteenth century as "the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the church," in particular his view of the visible unity of the church. See Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*. Vol. 4: *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 9, where



he quotes Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. Samuel G. Craig, with a foreword by J. Marcellus Kik (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1956), 322.

¹⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Vol. 1: *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 318-31; and Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought*. Vol. 2: *From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 54-61.

¹¹ Cassion Coll. 3.8, quoted in González, *A History of Christian Thought* 2:56.

¹² *Ibid.*, 60.

¹³ Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*. Vol. 1: *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 331.

¹⁴ Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*. Vol. 4: *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 13.

¹⁵ Quoted *ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Damasus Trapp, “Augustinian Theology of the 14th Century,” *Augustiniana* 6 (1956): 181, quoted in Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation. Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 67-68.

¹⁸ Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*. Vol. 4: *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 17-18. For more on medieval Augustinianism, see also Oberman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, esp. 1-125 and 204-33.

¹⁹ Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 1 et passim. Lortz offers his judgment regarding the nominalist scholasticism that originated with William of Occam and his narrative of Luther’s development into heresy in Joseph Lortz, *The Reformation in Germany*, trans. Ronald Walls (London: Darton, Longman & Todd; New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 167-218.

²⁰ Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 132.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

²² *Ibid.*, 133; see also 217-20, where Oberman discusses the certainty of grace and salvation and notes that “for Biel certainty of salvation is not a virtue but a liability” (quote at 218).

²³ Lortz, *Reformation in Germany*, 196.

²⁴ Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 423-27, quotations at 427.

²⁵ On nomenclature for the concepts of “Catholic Reformation” and “Counter Reformation” see especially Hubert Jedin, “Catholic Reformation or Counter-Reformation,” in *The Counter-Reformation: The Essential Readings*, ed. David M. Luebke (Malden, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999), 19-45.

²⁶ Hubert Jedin, *Papal Legate at the Council of Trent: Cardinal Seripando*, trans. Frederic C. Eckhoff (St. Louis; London: B. Herder Book Co., 1947), 314.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 315.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 317-18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 318-19. Luther’s thesis here is given according to my translation of the Latin text in Jedin’s book: “. . . post baptismum negare remanens peccatum, est



Paulum et Christum conculcare.”

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 322-23.

³¹ Quoted in Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent. Vol 2: The First Sessions at Trent, 1545-47*, trans. Dom Ernest Graf O. S. B. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1961), 150-51. I am indebted throughout this paper to Jedin’s masterful account of the Council of Trent and its prehistory.

³² Jedin, *Papal Legate at the Council of Trent*, 323.

³³ “That our Catholic faith, without which it is impossible to please God, may, after the destruction of errors, remain integral and spotless in its purity, and that the Christian people may not be carried about with every wind of doctrine” *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 21; Latin, 300.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 23; Latin, 302.

³⁵ Jedin, *History of the Council of Trent 2:170-71*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 180. Jedin’s view that nominalism was the only medieval school *not* represented at the Council has been ably refuted by Oberman’s demonstration that the Franciscan nominalists played a significant role. See “Duns Scotus, Nominalism, and the Council of Trent,” in Oberman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, 204-33.

³⁸ Jedin, *History of the Council of Trent 2:180-81*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 187-88.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 241.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 286-87.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁴⁷ Dermot Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy: Cardinal Pole and the Counter Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 130.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 103-4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 119-20.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 120, citing *Concilium Tridentinum: Diariorum, Actorum, Epistolarum, Tractatum Nova Collectio IV:553*.

⁵¹ Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, 135.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 195, citing Jedin, *History of the Council of Trent*, 2:312.

⁵³ *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 29; Latin, 308.

⁵⁴ Oberman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, 230: “The first three canons condemn a type of Pelagianism never taught by the Franciscan School, whether Nominalist or Scotist. Actually it condemns a Pelagianism never taught by *any* of the medieval doctors, including Pelagius himself.”

⁵⁵ *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 30; Latin, 309.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 42; Latin, 321.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 31-32; Latin, 310.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 42-43; Latin, 321.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 43; Latin, 321.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 32; Latin, 311.

⁶¹ Ibid., 43; Latin, 321.

⁶² See Oberman, “Duns Scotus, Nominalism, and the Council of Trent,” in Oberman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, 204-33, esp. 218-29.

⁶³ *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 34-35; Latin, 313, with the translation corrected according to Oberman, “Duns Scotus, Nominalism, and the Council of Trent,” 218.

⁶⁴ *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 43; Latin, 322.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 35; Latin, 314.

⁶⁶ See Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, 161-208, quote at 200.

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, 251-85.

Our Synod's Citadel

by Paul G. Madson

Like Jesus' "City on a hill,"
There stands our synod's citadel.
School of the prophets, men of God,
Prepared to spread His Word abroad.

A citadel it is, we say,
For standing firm 'gainst error's way.
A citadel of Godly fear
Amid the babel sounds we hear,

Here tested truths of God are taught,
Here wonders through the Word are wrought,
As ready minds with humble awe
From Holy Scripture treasures draw.

No fortress in the usual sense,
Here unique weapons are dispensed.
Their armor is the Word of God,
With Gospel peace their feet are shod.

These sacred walls weak mortals hold
Who are for God made strong and bold.
Raw recruits from the realm of men –
The vain world's loss, the Church's gain.

This school provides the church at large
Preachers and teachers with the charge:
"Begrudge not others' wealth and fame
When Christ's your honor to proclaim."

As graduates our pulpits fill
And with the Spirit's help instill
God's Law and Gospel, one can tell
They're products of the citadel.

The truth thus filters down to pew -
Not only what to say and do,
But chief of all the truths to see
“What great things God has done for me.”

A synod’s character and strength
Lies in its teaching, which at length
Will, with the Savior’s blessing giv’n,
Save countless souls for life in heaven.

God bless the future of “the Sem”
And all the efforts of its men
To teach the Word, and do it well.
Long live our Synod’s Citadel!

Our “Melchizedek”

by Paul G. Madson

Just how he came and how he went
 No history doth record,
 But in the annals Moses kept
 Appears this wondrous word
 Of him whom Abram one day met
 As, battle weary, home he went -
 Four kings felled by his sword.

This personage of noble mien,
 Good Abram well could see,
 Had royal blood within his veins
 And priestly caste had he.
 Then strangely did this stranger set
 Before the patriarch wine and bread,
 Who bowed on bended knee.

From Salem it is said he came,
 When Abram’s enemies lay in wreck,
 To bless the patriarch in God’s name.
 His name? – “Melchizedek.”
 Strangest of all the kings and priests
 We find on Scripture’s sacred page –
 This “king of righteousness.”

No father, mother, family tree –
 Not born, nor did he die.
 He represents in prophecy
 The Son of God most high.
 T’was such a Priest and King God sent,
 Through miracle of virgin birth,
 For us to live and die.

For this “Melchizedek,” God’s Son,
 Though “born,” has ever been;
 And will be ever, though He died,
 For He now lives again.

But ere He broke the bonds of death
He suffered all, that sinners might
The hope of Life regain.

From Levi's tribe all priests did come –
Yet not this One so fair.

From line of Judah forth He came,
A royal Priest most rare.

For what all priests before had done,
Could not God's perfect Law fulfill,
Nor man's sore lot repair.

What by the Law could not be done
When it through flesh was weak,
"Melchizedek," the righteous King,
And Priest, did for our sake.

He entered once the holy place,
Where by His blood on altar shed
Did our redemption make.

So now a better hope is ours
Than thousand priests could give.
We have the Father's "guarantee"
That we in Him shall live.

He now to uttermost can save
All those who come to God by Him,
Our own "Melchizedek."

Book Review: St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology

by Gaylin R. Schmeling

Louth, Andrew. *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 327 pages. \$49.95.

The present book by Andrew Louth is one of the few books produced in recent years offering a summary of the teachings of St. John of Damascus. The Damascene seems quite irrelevant to many Lutheran pastors today. After all, what does an individual living in the 7th century have to do with 21st-century Lutherans? This evaluation, however, is a bit naïve. If one looks at *The Two Natures in Christ* by Martin Chemnitz and his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, he will find many references to St. John of Damascus.¹ The same is true of the Christological presentations of Adolf Hoenecke² and Franz Pieper.³

Yuhannah ibn Sarjun ibn Mansur, better known as John of Damascus or John Damascene (665–749), the glory of the Arab Christians, was born around the year 665 in Damascus. His grandfather, Mansur, was an official for the caliph after Damascus fell to the Arabs in 635. John received a classical education probably through Cosmas, a learned Byzantine Sicilian monk, whom his father had ransomed from slavery. He followed his grandfather and father in a hereditary position in the caliph's administration which it seems was the position of treasurer or collector of taxes. All such positions requiring some technical skill were usually held by Christians under the rule of the Umayyads. Around the year 715 he entered the monastery of Mar Saba near Jerusalem and was ordained a priest. He spent the rest of his life at or near this monastery preaching and writing in defense of the faith. He died in 749 on the traditionally accepted date of December 4.

In 726, when the Byzantine emperor Leo III, issued his ban on the veneration of icons, John, who was entirely out of the punitive reach of the emperor living in Arab land, came to prominence with his writings against the Iconoclasts. John responded to the Iconoclasts on the basis of the incarnation. If the divine Logos assumed a total and complete human nature, the human nature could surely be represented in picture form. To deny that Christ could be portrayed in an icon was to deny that Christ

was true man, a part of history. The iconographers made no pretense of representing the divinity in Christ, but they did picture the divine Logos in His assumed flesh. The Iconoclasts allowed the Holy Sacrament of Christ's body and blood and such symbols as the cross. If, as John argued, you adore the cross, why can you not adore the figure of Him who hung on the cross? The Iconoclastic view revealed a notion of deification of the humanity of Christ which suppressed the reality of the human nature and tended toward Monophysitism or Nestorianism. The Council of Nicea in 787 upheld John's teaching concerning images and declared that the veneration of pictures and images of divine realities was legitimate.

John of Damascus was the most comprehensive and gifted systematic theologian the East produced since Origen. He was the last Christian writer of the Greek patristic age, and one of the first Christian schoolmen. His most important work, *The Fount of Knowledge*, is a summary of the teachings of the Eastern Church. It is filled with quotations from the Greek fathers, but it also includes considerable original thought. *The Fount of Knowledge* is divided into three parts: *The Philosophical Chapters (Dialectica)*, *The Treatise on Heresies (De haeresibus)*, and *The Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (Usually referred to as *The Orthodox Faith [De fide orthodoxa]*). *The Orthodox Faith* is a summary of Christian doctrine.⁴ The works of the Damascene were in many ways the capstone of Eastern dogma and theology.

After Louth discusses the life and times of the Damascene, in the **fourth chapter** he summarizes the *Dialectica* of John. This first portion of *The Fount of Knowledge* deals primarily with terms, philosophy and logic. Its purpose was to prepare the reader for a better understanding of the rest of the book.

Chapter five of Louth's book is a summary of the second part of *The Fount of Knowledge*, *The Treatise on Heresies*. The Damascene seems to be basing this part of his work on the *Medicine Chest*, or *Panarion*, of Epiphanius of Salamis (315–403) with his own additions.⁵ Among other errors, he speaks against Manichaeism, Messalianism, and Islam. His purpose here is to mark off the boundaries between error and Orthodox Christianity.⁶ It is interesting to note that he classifies Islam as a Christian heresy.

Louth's **sixth chapter** is the largest and most important chapter in this book. Here he summarizes *The Orthodox Faith*. John of Damascus begins this dogmatic text with the doctrine of God and the Trinity. He makes use of the distinction between essence and energy which later would become even more predominant in Palamas (1296–1359). We are not able to know God in His being or essence, but we can know His activity or

energy.⁷ Following the teachings of Dionysius the Areopagite, he makes use of apophatic (negative) and kataphatic (affirmative) terminology in theology.⁸

The Damascene reiterates and explains the main Trinitarian terminology of the fathers. He makes the distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis* in line with the important contribution of the three Cappadocian fathers. There are three modes of existence in the Godhead, identified with unbegottenness in the case of the Father, being begotten in the case of the Son, and proceeding in the case of the Spirit, while all three *hypostaseis* shared in the same being, or *ousia*.⁹ He uses an analogy to explain the Trinity that originated with the Cappadocians. As a human being speaks and breaths, so God (Father) is never without His speech (Word) and breath (Spirit).¹⁰ The difference of emphasis between the East and West in relation to the doctrine of the *filioque* is critiqued. The East maintained the single procession of the Spirit while the West defended a double procession of the Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son. John of Damascus uses the Baptism of the Lord to explain the procession of the Spirit. As the Spirit was sent by the Father at Christ's Baptism and rested on Him, so the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and rests upon the Son.¹¹ He uses this point concerning the economic Trinity to explain the ontological Trinity.¹²

The Damascene spends a considerable amount of time discussing Christology. This is to be expected since the whole Christian world had been embroiled in the Christological controversies for nearly three hundred years before his time and four ecumenical councils faced these issues.¹³ The relationship between the terminology in the Trinitarian controversy and the Christological controversy is acknowledged in his writing. There is a tendency to transfer terms from the doctrine of the Trinity to the doctrine of Christ.¹⁴

The Damascene confesses with all the fathers that Christ is not only totally and completely God, but also totally and completely man in one person. He has two natures, human and divine, in one person. He reminds his readers of the dictum of Gregory Nazianzus: "What is not assumed is not healed; what is united to God, that is also saved."¹⁵ Christ had to be man in all points as we are so that He could be our substitute.

The interpenetration or *perichoresis* (περιχώρησις) terminology seems to have been introduced in Christology by John of Damascus. To explain that there is a true personal union in Christ he emphasizes the *perichoresis* between the two natures without any mixture or confusion.¹⁶ This word becomes a watchword in all later dogmatic texts as we can see in Chmenitz' *Two Natures*¹⁷ and Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*.¹⁸



In his discussion of those who deviate from orthodoxy, he is usually very gentle with the Monophysites, those who held that Christ had only one nature, possibly still hoping for their return to orthodoxy. He spends a considerable amount of time discussing the Monothelite controversy which was the most recent Christological debate. The Monothelites maintained that there was only one will in Christ, hoping to reunite with the Monophysites.

As he explicates the Damascene's doctrine of the person of Christ, Louth speaks of his teaching as an asymmetrical Christology:

A further feature of John's preliminary Christological affirmations, is what Fr. Georges Florovsky called an "asymmetrical Christology", in that the Christological affirmations do not manifest the symmetry between divinity and humanity which the Chalcedonian Definition seems at pains to make clear; rather, it is asserted that the union takes place from the side of the divine Word, which exists eternally and assumes humanity in the Incarnation.¹⁹

The subject of the incarnation always remains the divine Logos. The two natures are not simply glued together like two boards. As Cyril of Alexandria (378–444) before him, John sees the divine Logos as the subject of the personal union and the source of it. In the incarnation the divine Logos so assumed a perfect human nature that never subsisted alone into His divine person so that the natures are so intimately united as to form one undivided, indivisible person in Christ. The Damascene reminds us that orthodox Christology is Cyrillian Christology.

In his teaching concerning the personal union, St. John of Damascus maintains a true communication of attributes. While he does not specifically enunciate the three genera, he implies them in his writings. Referring to the *genus maiestaticum*²⁰ he writes,

Incarnation is to partake in flesh and what belongs to the flesh. The real *hypostasis* of God the Word, that is, God the Word, was made flesh and assumed density and became *hypostasis* to the flesh, and first being God later became flesh or human, and is called one composite *hypostasis* of two natures, and in it the two natures of divinity and humanity are united through the incarnation and coinhere in each other. The coinherence (*perichoresis*) comes about from the divinity; for it bestows on the flesh its own glory and radiance, and does not partake of the passions of the flesh. Therefore the nature of the flesh is deified,



but the nature of the Word is not incarnate; for the worse derives advantage from the better. The better is not damaged by the worse. (*Jacob. 52. 29–41*)²¹

Louth summarizes the Damascene's view of the *genus apotelesmaticum*:²²

The two natures, divine and human, come together in a genuine union, in which they work together, as John expresses it in a paraphrase of Dionysios's fourth letter: For he did not do divine deeds divinely—for he did not work miracles as naked God but through touch and stretching out his hands—nor did he work human deeds humanly—for it was not as a mere human being that he endured the passion that saved the world—. But being God and having become human he manifested a certain new and strange thandric activity, divine but working through the human, human but assisted by the divine, and showing the signs of the divinity coexistent with it. (*Volunt. 42. 37–33*)²³

According to Louth, in John's writings he is more concerned about the person of Christ than His work: "To use the later Protestant distinction; it is the person that determines the work, rather than vice versa."²⁴ John observes the intimate connection between salvation and the incarnation.

For the Incarnation of God the Word took place for this reason, that that very nature, sinning and falling and being subject to corruption, might conquer the deceiving tyrant and thus be set free from corruption, as the divine Apostle said, "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:12). If the former truly, then also the latter. (*Expos. 56.15–19*)²⁵

Louth maintains that the Damascene does not make a considerable use of the term "deification," and when he uses it, it is usually to speak of the deified flesh of Christ as a result of the personal union. This is not to say that John never uses deification language in the realm of salvation. He regards the deification of human kind as the ultimate mystery (*Expos. 26. 34–6*).²⁶ John makes clear that the incarnation opens the way for human beings to gain the splendor of divinity.²⁷

Following the study of the person of Christ and salvation in *The Orthodox Faith*, the final nineteen chapters touch a variety of topics, including faith, baptism, the cross, East-facing worship, the Eucharist,



relics, icons, Scripture, the Antichrist, and resurrection.²⁸ The only uniting principle in these chapters appears to be how the Christians differ from the other religions in the Middle East. The Damascene asserts that Christianity is the middle way between monotheism and polytheism. Likewise in the presentation of his Christology, John often presents orthodox Christianity as the royal middle way between Monophysitism and Nestorianism (*Jacob.* 3.4; *Fides* 1.10–11).²⁹

In the chapter on Baptism, the Damascene notes the relationship between Baptism and the Trinity. One is baptized in the name of the Triune God. When St. John the Divine speaks of being born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5), the Damascene understands the water here as signifying the cleansing from sin in Baptism and he understands the Spirit as the pledge of life given in the Sacrament.³⁰ He produces a list of at least eight different types of Baptism:

The Flood, “through the sea and the cloud” (Exodus and the wilderness), the cleansings of the Law, the baptism of John, Christ’s (which is ours), through repentance and tears, the martyr’s baptism “through blood and bearing witness”, and the final baptism, in which sin is destroyed in eternal punishment, “which is not saving” (*Expos.* 82.67–92).³¹



He maintains that oil is to be used in the Sacrament, as well as water, to show that we are anointed and made Christs or Christians.³²

A chapter on East-facing worship may seem rather odd to us. But the direction adopted for worship was one of the clearest marks distinguishing Christians from Jews, Jews from Muslims, and Muslims from Christians in the Damascene’s time. Jews faced Jerusalem in worship, Muslims faced Mecca and Christians turned toward the East.³³ The mandate for East-facing worship, the Damascene bases on Scripture.

Christ is called the “sun of justice” (Mal. 4:2) and the “East” (Zach. 3:8, LXX): both of which suggest the appropriateness of facing East to pray to him. Similarly, paradise is towards the East (Gen. 2:8); so it is looking towards our “ancient fatherland”, to use Basil the Great’s phrase, that we pray.³⁴

Interestingly enough, he does not use the eschatological proof for east-facing worship based on Matthew 24:27 as is used by Pope Benedict XVI. The so-called *ad orientem* posture of worship, he contends, has from early church history contained a cosmological and eschatological significance that should not be abandoned. “As far back as the apostolic age, Christians believed that



Christ would return ‘from the east’ (Matt 24:27), so they constructed places of worship to accommodate an eastward facing position of prayer for both minister and worshipping assembly.”³⁵ Christians face the East in the divine service anticipating our Lord’s second coming, crying, Maranatha, “Lord, come quickly.” The Lord then comes to His people and gives Himself to them in the means of grace as a foretaste of the feast of the Lamb in heaven which will be theirs at the second coming.

In *The Orthodox Faith*, the Damascene brings the teaching of his predecessors concerning the Eucharist into an orderly and harmonious synthesis. In this statement John is not aiming at originality, but fidelity to tradition. Central to the exposition is the magnificent parallel between the incarnation and the Eucharist. John begins by explaining the need for the incarnation: “For since He imparted to us His own image and His own Spirit, and we did not keep them safe, He Himself took a share in our poor, weak nature, in order that He might cleanse us and make us incorruptible, and establish us once more as partakers in His divinity.”³⁶ The treasure of deification accomplished in our Lord’s humanity through His incarnation, passion, and resurrection is offered to all through the rebirth of Baptism and the spiritual food of the Eucharist.

In **chapter seven**, Louth gives a detailed summary of the iconoclastic controversy in which John of Damascus played a very important part. This controversy was concluded in the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 when the veneration of icons was again permitted in the East. By venerating the icon, one venerated the one depicted in the icon. Therefore one prayed through the icons, not to them. They functioned in many ways like the means of grace. The veneration (προσκυνέω) of icons was permitted (not statues in the East) but only God could receive worship or adoration (λατρεία). The final defeat of iconoclasm was heralded as the Triumph of Orthodoxy and was celebrated by a public ceremony held the first Sunday of Lent in 843. The festival is still celebrated in the Eastern church.³⁷

Louth portrays John of Damascus as a preacher in **chapter eight**. He bears the title John Chrysorrhōas (χρυσορροάς, “flowing with gold”),³⁸ much as another John bears the title “Chrysostom.” In this chapter there are excerpts from sermons on the dormition of the mother of God and the transfiguration. It is interesting to note that the feast of the transfiguration plays a much greater role in the Eastern church than it does in the Western church.

In his final chapter, **chapter nine**, Louth considers John as a poet. The Damascene was a famous preacher in his own lifetime, and his fame as a theologian was felt throughout the Middle Ages, both in the East and in the West. But in the Byzantine world all this was secondary to his fame

as a liturgical poet.³⁹ Much of his poetry entered the liturgical life of the Eastern Church. Most hymnals today know John's great Easter canon, Ἀναστάσεως ἡμέρα, "The Day of Resurrection," sung at midnight as part of the Easter vigil. This text is found in translation in the Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary.⁴⁰

The day of resurrection, Earth, tell it out abroad,
The Passover of gladness, The Passover of God.
From death to life eternal, From this world to the sky,
Our Christ hath brought us over With hymns of
victory.

His other notable hymn translated into English is, Αἴσωμεν, πάντες λαοί, "Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain."⁴¹

Come, ye faithful, raise the strain Of triumphant
gladness!
God hath brought His Israel Into joy from sadness.
Loosed from Pharaoh's bitter yoke Jacob's sons and
daughters,
Led them with un-moistened foot Through the Red
Sea waters.

This fine book by Andrew Louth is an excellent summary of the life and work of St. John of Damascus. He was the most comprehensive and gifted systematic theologian the East produced since Origen. He was the last Christian writer of the Greek patristic age, and one of the first Christian schoolmen. His most important work, *The Fount of Knowledge*, is a summary of the teachings of the Eastern Church. The works of the Damascene were in many ways the capstone of Eastern dogma and theology. While important men like Palamas followed him, he is to the East as Thomas Aquinas is to the West.

Endnotes

- ¹ For example, the index of *The Two Natures in Christ* of Chemnitz offers nearly an entire page of references to the Damascene's writings (517–518).
- ² Adolf Hoenecke, *Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik, Registerband* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1917), 34.
- ³ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *Index*, ed. Walter Albrecht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), 945.
- ⁴ Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 31.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 107–109.
- ¹² The ontological Trinity refers to God as God-is-unto-Himself (*opera divina ad intra*). The economic Trinity refers to God as God-is-toward-and-for-us (*opera divina ad extra*).
- ¹³ Councils 431, 451, 553, 680.
- ¹⁴ Louth, 111.
- ¹⁵ Louth, 148. *Letter to Cledonius*. 101.5 (101.32): τὸ γὰρ ἀπρόσληπτον, ἀθεράπευτον· ὃ δὲ ἦνωται τῷ θεῷ, τοῦτο καὶ σώζεται (as found in John Behr, *Formation of Christian Theology*, vol. 2, *The Nicene Faith*, part 2, *One of the Holy Trinity* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004], 405).
- ¹⁶ Louth, 112.
- ¹⁷ Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, trans. J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 98.
- ¹⁸ Pieper, 123.
- ¹⁹ Louth, 157.
- ²⁰ Divine attributes are communicated to the human nature with no reciprocity.
- ²¹ Louth, 162.
- ²² All official acts as prophet, priest, and king for our salvation He performs according to both natures by each doing what is proper to it not by itself and apart from the other, but in constant communion with the other, in one undivided theanthropic action.
- ²³ Louth, 171–172.
- ²⁴ Louth, 178.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 179–180.

³⁰ Ibid., 80–81.

³¹ Ibid., 181.

³² Ibid.

³³ Louth, 182.

³⁴ Ibid. 182–183.

³⁵ James Massa, “The Gift We Cannot Give Ourselves: The Eucharist in the Theology of Pope Benedict XVI,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (April 2008): 165.

³⁶ John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith* 4, 13; D. Sheerin, *The Eucharist*, (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc, 1986), 167.

³⁷ Louth, 194.

³⁸ Louth, 224.

³⁹ Ibid., 252.

⁴⁰ ELH 356; CW 166; TLH 205; LHy 327.

⁴¹ ELH 347; CW 142; TLH 204; LHy 328.