

Security and Assurance in Calvinism and Arminianism

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Introduction

This paper will explore several key figures and movements in the historical development of Calvinist and Arminian soteriology. In particular, it will examine how the doctrines of eternal security (or perseverance) and assurance of salvation fit into the various theological positions under investigation.¹ As a result of this historical study, we will understand more clearly how Calvinism and Arminianism have come to hold their respective soteriological positions. We will also see more clearly how the doctrines of security and assurance fit into the overall soteriological schemes of important theologians and movements in the history of the church.

Augustine

It may seem anachronistic to begin a historical overview of Calvinism with a man who preceded Calvin by more than a thousand years. However, Augustine's contribution to Calvin's soteriology cannot be underestimated.² In fact, it is the two figures of Calvin and Augustine which stand out in bold relief as the church of Jesus Christ views the panorama of her history.³

In pinpointing Augustine's chief contribution to the church, Benjamin Warfield targets the very heart of Christianity: salvation by grace through faith. First and forcefully among the Fathers, Augustine championed the religion of faith over the religion of works.⁴

Divine grace is also central in Augustine's theology.⁵ Salvation is by faith and not works because it is a free gift which "is not rendered for any merits, but is given *gratis*, on account of which it is also called *grace*."⁶ Thus, at the heart of Augustinian soteriology is the doctrine of grace: salvation is a free gift of God.

¹I am using the terms perseverance and eternal security as synonyms in this paper. Eternal security describes the fact that God keeps the believer secure in his salvation. Perseverance describes the result of this: the believer perseveres in his salvation until the end of his life because God keeps him. This is an objective reality. Assurance of salvation is the believer's subjective realization and enjoyment of the objective reality of his eternal security.

²Calvin claimed that, had he wished, he could have penned an entire book out of Augustine alone in order to support his own theology (Bonner, "Augustine, the Bible and the Pelagians," 239).

³Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, v.

⁴*Ibid.*, 319–20.

⁵"The very title accorded to him, 'the Doctor of Grace,' proclaims it" (Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, 312).

⁶Augustine, "On Nature and Grace," 122.

Augustine held to the indispensability of grace because he was convinced of the utter sinfulness of the human soul. Adam's Fall caused spiritual and physical death.⁷ This resulted in a weakening of *all* human faculties. The body is susceptible to disease and is uncontrollable; but worse, the mind is darkened and weakened by sin.⁸ Thus, Augustine's doctrine of grace rests on the idea that "sinful man depends, for his recovery to good and to God, entirely on the free grace of God."⁹

For Augustine, the magnitude of divine grace is such that it stretches back into eternity past, having as its beginning God's sovereign selection of those He would save. Thus, the Augustinian doctrines of predestination and grace are closely linked.¹⁰ In predestination, God chooses freely, solely on the basis of His grace, and not according to human merit.¹¹ Furthermore, predestination entails active choice rather than passive foreknowledge.¹² God did not choose those whom He *knew* would believe, but rather He chose certain ones *to* believe. Augustine explains:

The Lord Himself also sufficiently explains this calling when He says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you [John 15:16]." For if they had been elected because they had believed, they themselves would certainly have first chosen Him by believing in Him, so that they should deserve to be elected. But he takes away this supposition altogether when he says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you...." Whence it is not for any other reason that He says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," than because they did not choose Him that He should choose them, but He chose them that they might choose Him; because His mercy preceded them according to grace, not according to debt.... This is the changeless truth concerning predestination and grace.¹³

It is clear, then, that for Augustine God *must* initiate salvation by His free and sovereign choice in predestination; otherwise, grace is not the giving of a gift but the paying of a debt.¹⁴

Just as surely as Augustine perceives the divine initiative in the preparation for grace, he sees it also in the granting of grace in salvation. This is expressed first in Augustine's understanding of

⁷Augustine, "On Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism," 16.

⁸Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, 370. Human nature, utterly corrupted by sin, "has too little determination of will to avoid sin, unless assisted and healed by God's grace through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Augustine, "On Man's Perfection in Righteousness," 160).

⁹Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 322.

¹⁰Predestination is the "preparation for grace," while grace is "the donation itself" (Augustine, "On the Predestination of the Saints," 507).

¹¹*Ibid.*, 512.

¹²While linked, they are distinct: foreknowledge may exist without predestination, but predestination cannot exist without foreknowledge (Augustine, "Predestination," 507).

¹³*Ibid.*, 515.

¹⁴It is important to note that for Augustine predestination only relates to salvation. God predestinates out of the *massa damnata*. Any actions of God related to sinful humanity "are posterior to a condition which He permitted but did not cause to exist, namely the condition of a sinful humanity deriving from Adam" (Vanderschaaf, "Predestination and Certainty of Salvation in Augustine and Calvin," 3).

the call to salvation. There is a general call of God to all people that can be, and is, rejected by many. However, there is another “certain sure calling of those who are called according to God’s purpose,” which is not “any sort of calling whatever,” but “that calling wherewith a man is made a believer.”¹⁵ This calling is sure because it is grounded in election. Believers

were elected before the foundation of the world with that predestination in which God foreknew what He Himself would do; but they were elected out of the world with that calling whereby God fulfilled that which He predestinated. For whom He predestinated, them He also called, with that calling, to wit, which is according to the purpose.¹⁶

God’s initiative in granting grace is clear in Augustine’s understanding of faith. Faith—“this turning of ours to God”—is also God’s gift.¹⁷ Thus, the very beginning of our faith is itself the gift of God.¹⁸ God is the source of our faith.¹⁹ When God calls the elect to Himself, “the sense of the hearer is opened so that he may believe.”²⁰

But this raises an important question: if the ability to believe is God’s gift, does this not eliminate human will entirely? Augustine answers No. First, the Scriptures clearly teach that “there exists in man the free choice of the will.”²¹ This holds us responsible for our sins. We cannot blame God when we sin.²² When asked how he reconciles this human responsibility with divine foreknowledge, Augustine draws a distinction between foreknowledge, which allows for the will, and necessity, which eliminates it. “[T]hough God foreknows what we are going to will in the future, it does not thereby follow that we are not willing something freely.”²³

Accordingly, we do not deny God’s foreknowledge of all things future, and yet we do will what we will. Since God has foreknowledge of our will, its future will be such as He foreknows it. It will be a will precisely because He foreknows it as a will, and it could not be a will if it were not in our power. Hence God also has foreknowledge of our power over it. The power, then, is not taken from me because of His foreknowledge, since this power will be mine all the more certainly because of the infallible foreknowledge of His who foreknew that I would have it.²⁴

Hence, God’s foreknowledge does not eliminate free will and responsibility, but rather is compatible with it. But what of God’s predestination of the elect to salvation, and His even

¹⁵Augustine, “Predestination,” 513.

¹⁶Ibid., 515.

¹⁷Augustine, “Grace and Free Will,” 262. Augustine embraces *gratia praeveniens*, “grace which comes first” and “precedes all human decision and endeavor” (Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, “Grace,” in *EDT*, 480).

¹⁸Augustine, “Predestination,” 517.

¹⁹Augustine, “Grace and Free Will,” 269.

²⁰Augustine, “Predestination,” 517.

²¹Augustine, “Grace and Free Will,” 251.

²²Ibid., 255.

²³Augustine, “The Free Choice of the Will,” 172.

²⁴Ibid., 173.

granting them the grace necessary for belief? Does not this eliminate the individual's free will in the matter of salvation? Again, Augustine answers No. "The will is not destroyed by grace, but is *changed from a bad to a good will*, and is aided by grace once it becomes good."²⁵ Again, "Certainly, in willing anything, it is we who will, but it is He who enables us to will what is good."²⁶ Finally, "In doing anything, it is certainly we who act, but it is God's act that enables us to act by His bestowal of efficacious power upon our will."²⁷

How does Augustine view sanctification after salvation? In salvation, grace changes a bad will into a good will, enabling it to believe in Christ for salvation. Once salvation has taken place, God continues to aid the good will with sustaining grace. Now it is God's grace plus the believer's good will working together to accomplish God's will. Thus, when the apostle Paul labored for the Lord as a believer, "it was neither grace alone nor he himself alone, but the grace of God and himself together."²⁸

The last aspects of Augustine's soteriology that we must examine are his doctrines of perseverance and assurance. Augustine is certain that perseverance too is a gift of God's grace.²⁹ Just as God works to bring us to Himself, so too He works that we not depart from Him.³⁰

However, while perseverance is the gift of God, it is not possessed until the end. "Let not men say, then, that perseverance is given to any one to the end, except when the end itself has come, and he to whom it has been given has been found to have persevered unto the end."³¹

Furthermore, along the way, some "who appear good believers" do not persevere and are lost. They have been called, justified, and "renewed by the laver of regeneration" like the others, and yet they do not persevere. What is the answer? For Augustine, it is simple: they have not been predestinated. They are not of the elect. They are those of whom John spoke, "They went out from us, but there were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained

²⁵Augustine, "Grace and Free Will," 297, emphasis added.

²⁶Ibid., 287.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., 264. In contrasting Augustine's soteriology with Calvin's, Stephen Strehle claims that the former "exchanged the irresistible grace of God by which one was first regenerated for a *gratia cooperans* which worked with man to complete his salvation." Calvin, on the other hand, "extended the doctrine and proclaimed salvation *in toto* to be solely the work of divine grace" ("Calvinism, Augustinianism, and the Will of God," *TZ* 48:2 [1992]: 234–35). I do not believe this accurately captures the difference between Augustine and Calvin. First, Augustine does teach that salvation is "solely the work of divine grace" from start to finish. Second, while Augustine sees the believer's will cooperating with divine grace in carrying out God's will, human will is not the deciding factor in salvation's outcome. God's grace is. As Paul Lehmann reads Augustine, "[I]t is not we who by virtue of the freedom of our wills co-operate with God, but God who by virtue of the gift of grace *co-operates* with us" ("The Anti-Pelagian Writings," 224, emphasis original). Final salvation hinges not on human cooperation, but on whether God grants the believer the gift of perseverance (see below).

²⁹Augustine, "On the Gift of Perseverance," 526.

³⁰Ibid., 530.

³¹Ibid., 529.

with us [1 John 2:19].”³² Why would God give one believer the gift of perseverance and not another? The answer must remain with God, whose judgments are unsearchable.³³

The fact that this fate may befall any believer gives all cause to fear. No believer can be certain he or she is elect and will receive the gift of perseverance.³⁴ Likewise, eternal life cannot be the present possession of the believer, but only the future result of perseverance.³⁵ No one can be sure of life eternal “unless that life of his, which is a state of trial upon the earth, is completed.”³⁶

It is ironic that Augustine held such a strong view of sovereign grace, and yet rejected security and assurance for the believer. There is theoretical certainty, but only in the mind of God, who alone knows the elect. For believers there is only uncertainty, both theoretical and existential—the former because God may not grant them the gift of perseverance and they may fall away; the latter because, as a result, they have no assurance in this life.³⁷

It is ironic indeed, then, that divine sovereignty was the very doctrine Augustine used to eliminate security and assurance. God sovereignly grants *or withholds* perseverance from the believer. God is sovereign, but arbitrarily so; His sovereignty offers no comfort to the believer. “The Christian is left in a position of prayer for the gift of persevering grace, hoping with fear and trembling that he is one of God’s elect.”³⁸

³²Ibid., 532. Here it is difficult to understand Augustine. On the one hand, on the basis of Rom 8:29–30 he argues that the elect are predestined, called, justified, and glorified “assuredly to that end which has no end” (“Predestination,” 515). But on the other hand, it is possible for one justified to fail to persevere. Is this, then, a *true* believer falling away, or only an *apparent* saint’s demise? Augustine’s reference to those who “*appear* good believers” seems to support the latter. However, when he speaks of the fall of one justified, the former seems inescapable. John Jefferson Davis concurs, understanding Augustine’s position in terms of a sacramental theology of grace and baptismal regeneration (“laver of regeneration”). Thus, for Augustine, “It is possible to experience the renewal of baptismal regeneration, and the justifying grace of God, and yet not persevere to the end” (“The Perseverance of the Saints: A History of the Doctrine,” *JETS* 34 [June 1991]: 214). John H. Gerstner makes a similar observation: “We admit the indisputable fact that Augustine allows a later fall from grace into apostasy” (“Augustine on Irresistible Grace,” 156, n.56).

³³Augustine, “Perseverance,” 532. Augustine insists, however, that the person who deserts the faith bears responsibility. Perseverance is the gift of God, since the believer must pray for it. But failure to persevere is the believer’s fault, who has neglected to entreat the Lord (“Perseverance,” 544). Gerstner notes here in Augustine an exception to an otherwise irresistible grace: “However irresistible grace may be at this point [of salvation], it is not irresistible forever, we grant” (“Augustine,” 156, n.56).

³⁴Augustine, “Perseverance,” 526.

³⁵Ibid., 529.

³⁶Ibid., 550.

³⁷The terms *theoretical / existential certainty / uncertainty* are Davis’s, used in relation to Luther’s position on perseverance as discussed below (“Perseverance,” 216).

³⁸Vanderschaaf, “Predestination,” 5. Larry D. Sharp, however, sees a weak doctrine of assurance in Augustine, who taught that as long as a believer is living in faithful obedience, he or she can assume to be of the elect. Thus, Augustine’s is “a kind of assurance mixed with trembling, but it at least intends to rid the faithful of despair and hopelessness” (“The Doctrines of Grace in Calvin and Augustine,” 92).

Pelagius

“Pelagius remains, after all our seeking, a somewhat shadowy figure.”³⁹ Pelagianism began as a lay movement among the Roman aristocracy emphasizing asceticism and moralism, rather than as a theological movement among the clergy.⁴⁰ But soon seeds of heresy were sown within the movement by Rufinus the Syrian, whose main contribution to Pelagianism was his denial of original sin.⁴¹

At this point Pelagius enters the picture. He found in Rufinian anti-traducianism a useful weapon in his effort to “provide a theological basis to defend Christian asceticism against any charge of Manichaeism and to justify the assurance that a virtuous life is possible for the Christian if he will only try.”⁴² This reflects the theme of Pelagius’s thought: the nature and obligation of mankind.⁴³ Furthermore, Pelagius preferred to explore the problem of human sinfulness “in terms of the natural potentialities of man’s God-given nature considered in the abstract than to consider the modifications produced in that nature by the actual circumstances of human life after the Fall.”⁴⁴

This perspective drew Pelagius into conflict with Augustine who, grappling with the dilemma of temptation in his *Confessions*, three times asked God to “grant what you command, and command what you will.”⁴⁵ Pelagius reacted strongly, bothered by this seeming “languid piety”

³⁹Bonner, *Augustine and Modern Research on Pelagianism*, 31. For background information regarding Pelagius, see G. de Plinval, *Pélagie: ses écrits, sa vie, et sa réforme* (Lausanne, 1943).

⁴⁰Because the movement was ascetic and moralistic rather than theological, Pelagianism collapsed after the condemnation of Pelagius and his allies. “Pelagian theology as such meant very little to the rank and file of the movement. The ascetic life could be lived within the framework of Augustinian theology; the theological issues of Grace, Free Will and Original Sin were not, for most people, sufficiently important to justify leaving the communion of the Catholic Church” (Bonner, *Augustine*, 13–15).

⁴¹Rufinus attacked Origen’s theory of the preexistence of human souls, also rejecting traducianism (the soul originates, and sin is transmitted, through human procreation) in favor of creationism (God creates each soul directly). Cælestius, another key player in the movement, followed Rufinus and was condemned for it (Bonner, *Augustine*, 24).

⁴²This constitutes the core of Pelagius’s contribution to Pelagianism (Bonner, *Augustine*, 34; see also Evans, *Pelagius*, 92). Manichaeism was a third century dualistic religion which taught that physical existence is evil and salvation comes through knowledge attained by ascetic practices (W. Andrew Hoffecker, “Manichaeism,” in *EDT*, 683).

⁴³Evans, *Pelagius*, 92.

⁴⁴Bonner, *Augustine*, 35. Pelagius preferred adults to babies as objects of theological reflection. Pelagians generally were “contemptuous of babies” (Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 352). Augustine, on the other hand, saw in babies the helpless state of sinful humanity and their utter dependency upon the mercy and grace of God. However, Augustine’s “brepology” led him to two unacceptable doctrines: baptismal regeneration of infants; and damnation of unbaptized infants (see Bonner, *Augustine*, 54).

⁴⁵Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 202, 206, 214.

which in his mind fostered a toleration of sin as “only too human.”⁴⁶ Pelagius responded by writing *On Nature*, “an angry and outspoken pamphlet” in which he clarified his views.⁴⁷

First and foremost, Pelagius defends the “natural goodness” of human beings, their rational capacity to exercise their will in choosing good or evil.⁴⁸ Pelagian free will, then, is this “capacity for either direction” which makes decisions the fruit of autonomous choice. For Pelagius, this capacity is God’s gift to rational creatures, and “the condition of any meaningful talk about human virtue.”⁴⁹

In defense of free will thus defined, Pelagius rejects original sin—that is, traducianism.⁵⁰ For Pelagius, sin by definition is the act of an individual; thus, one can bear guilt only for his or her own deeds. Further, if sin is transmitted through procreation, it is made a *necessary* component of human existence, which for Pelagius smacks of Manichaeism and dualism.⁵¹

But if the will is unconditionally free to choose good, then why does humanity almost always choose sin? The answer for Pelagius is “habit” and “example.” People grow up with sinners and follow their bad example. Over time they develop the habit themselves, which when engrained is very difficult to break.⁵² Adam is the chief culprit because he set the prime bad example. Ultimately, we imitate him when we sin.

Pelagius’s view of unconditional free will led him to reject original sin.⁵³ It also led him to defend the possibility of sinlessness.⁵⁴ Regarding mankind in general, “if men ‘cannot’ be without sin, then it is impossible to attach guilt to them.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, if believers cannot be holy, perfect, and without spot or blemish, then why has Christ commanded them to be so?⁵⁶ For

⁴⁶Brown, *Augustine*, 343; cf. Augustine, “Perseverance,” 547.

⁴⁷Brown, *Augustine*, 343. When Augustine wrote *On Nature and Grace* in response to Pelagius’s *On Nature*, the Pelagian controversy became a controversy over Pelagius (Evans, *Pelagius*, 70).

⁴⁸“The soul of the Pelagian system is human freedom” (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, 787).

⁴⁹Evans, *Pelagius*, 93.

⁵⁰Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 164.

⁵¹Evans, *Pelagius*, 97. Original sin is a central issue for Pelagius and Augustine. Augustine names its denial as one of three points of the Pelagian heresy (Evans, *Pelagius*, 83), the other two being grace according to merit and sinless perfection (Augustine, “Perseverance,” 527).

⁵²Evans, *Pelagius*, 100–101.

⁵³“The keystone of Pelagianism is the idea of man’s unconditional free will and his moral responsibility” (Bruce L. Shelley, “Pelagius, Pelagianism,” in *EDT*, 834).

⁵⁴The two are connected, for as Pelagius saw it, if sin is “natural” rather than “voluntary,” then it could “survive the geological fault” between a person’s past and present and make sin inevitable and inescapable for the Christian (Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine*, 197).

⁵⁵Evans, *Pelagius*, 103.

⁵⁶“We contradict the Lord to his face when we say: ‘It is hard, it is difficult; we cannot, we are men; we are encompassed with fragile flesh.’ O blind madness! O unholy audacity! We charge the God of all knowledge with a two-fold ignorance, that He does not seem to know what He has made nor what He has commanded, as though, forgetting the human weakness of which He is Himself the author, He imposed laws upon man which he cannot endure” (Pelagius, *Epistula ad Demetriaden*, cited in Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 167).

Pelagius, then, God has planted within each person a genuine possibility of sinlessness as a “natural” capacity.⁵⁷

Pelagian free will *vis-à-vis* sin raises the crucial question of grace.⁵⁸ If by sheer will alone one can avoid sin and follow God’s will, what need remains for the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ?⁵⁹ Pelagian theology was not devoid of grace; the trouble was in its definition.⁶⁰

Pelagian grace means the following: (1) God’s original endowment of humanity with rational will by which people have the capacity to be without sin; (2) the law of Moses; (3) forgiveness of sins through the redemptive death of Christ; (4) the example of Christ; and (5) the teachings of Christ as specific “law” and general “teaching.”⁶¹

But Pelagius emphasized the first and last two meanings to the practical exclusion of the third.⁶² Grace is either external, the knowledge God gives through law and teaching, or if it is internal, it is that which mankind already possesses “by nature.”⁶³ Pelagius could not accept Augustinian prevenient grace as an irresistible power, independent of the human will, which exerted influence over the will.⁶⁴

Finally, what did Pelagius believe regarding the security of the believer’s salvation? While he taught that justification is by faith alone, faith is only the beginning. Full justification is by faith

⁵⁷Evans, *Pelagius*, 95.

⁵⁸According to Ferguson, grace was the “fulcrum upon which the controversy with Pelagius turned” (*Pelagius*, 172). For Schaff, “The Pelagian controversy turns upon the mighty antithesis of sin and grace” (*History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, 787).

⁵⁹According to Augustine, Pelagius’s treatment of grace in *On Nature* was a “poisonous perversion of the truth” that was “hostile to salvation by Christ” (“On the Proceedings of Pelagius,” 203).

⁶⁰Pelagius did not choose between human will and divine grace; rather, he redefined “how the free will of man and the activity of God are related” (Lehmann, “The Anti-Pelagian Writings,” 209).

⁶¹Evans, *Pelagius*, 111.

⁶²By placing grace exclusively “either in nature and free will, or else in the gift of the law and teaching,” Pelagius rules out the need for “additional assistance” from God so that a person may accomplish God’s will (Augustine, “On the Grace of Christ,” 218). Conversely, Augustine “sets the free grace of God in Christ in direct relation to the impotence—not the capacity—of the human will” (Lehmann, “Writings,” 217).

⁶³“Pelagius considers grace purely an external aid provided by God. He leaves no room for any special interior action of God upon the soul” (Shelley, “Pelagius,” 834). Ferguson speaks of Pelagius’s “general” grace *contra* Augustine’s “special” grace. The latter comes through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the former “in the endowment of human nature” (*Pelagius*, 172).

⁶⁴Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 174.

followed by works of righteousness.⁶⁵ Since faith is free choice,⁶⁶ one who initially exercises faith could later fail to perform works of righteousness and thus miss the kingdom of heaven.⁶⁷

On the basis of his understanding of unconditional free will, Pelagius rejected the doctrine of original sin, held to the possibility of human sinlessness, and embraced a general concept of grace which emphasized natural ability and divine teaching—both external gifts of God offered indiscriminately to all of humanity. For Pelagius, a virtuous life was truly possible for anyone who would only try.⁶⁸

Semi-Pelagianism and Semi-Augustianism

In fifth-century Southern France a movement arose among a group of monks who rejected the extreme views of both Pelagius and Augustine regarding the priority of divine grace and human will in salvation.⁶⁹ The monks rejected Pelagius's overly-optimistic view of the inherent goodness of human nature, as well as his inadequate concept of grace as a "mere external auxiliary."⁷⁰ They also objected to Augustine's position on the total bondage of the human will, his insistence upon the priority and irresistibility of grace, and his rigid doctrine of predestination.⁷¹ The resultant synthesis stressed the following three points. First, while the human will is "sick" and "diseased," having been "crippled" by sin, it is nevertheless still free enough to take the initial step toward God. Furthermore, divine grace does operate internally, but in *cooperation* with the human will in effecting salvation.⁷² Finally, God's will to save is universal and predestination is "merely God's foreknowledge of what a person has freely decided."⁷³

Semi-Pelagianism prevailed in France for a time, even gaining approval in two regional synods. However, at the synod of Orange in 529 the church condemned the system (not its adherents) and reaffirmed the Augustinian doctrines of sin and grace, with one exception: Augustine's

⁶⁵Evans, *Pelagius*, 116.

⁶⁶Pelagius held to election by foreknowledge: God makes His grace available to those He knows will come to him in faith (Evans, *Pelagius*, 117). According to Pelagius, God "foreknew who would be holy and immaculate by the choice of free will, and on that account elected them before the foundation of the world.... Certainly He did not make them so; nor did He foresee that He would make them so, but that they would be so" (Augustine, "Predestination," 515–16).

⁶⁷Evans, *Pelagius*, 116.

⁶⁸Bonner, *Augustine*, 34. "This rosy view of human nature and inadequate understanding of divine grace was finally condemned in 431 at the Council of Ephesus" (Shelley, "Pelagius," 834).

⁶⁹The name "Semi-Pelagian," a relatively modern designation, "apparently appears first in the Lutheran *Formula of Concord* (1577), and became associated with the theology of the Jesuit Luis Molina (1535–1600)" (Richard Kyle, "Semi-Pelagianism," in *EDT*, 1000).

⁷⁰Schaff, *History*, vol. 3, 858.

⁷¹Kyle, "Semi-Pelagianism," 1000.

⁷²While Pelagius and Augustine both embraced monergism, albeit in opposite forms—Pelagius's a human monergism and Augustine's a divine monergism—the Semi-Pelagian position was synergism, the cooperation of human will and divine grace in the work of conversion (Schaff, *History*, vol. 3, 786).

⁷³Kyle, "Semi-Pelagianism," 1001.

absolute view of predestination was left out.⁷⁴ Schaff provides an apt summary and transition to the next key figure:

At the close of this period Gregory the Great represents the moderated Augustinian system, with the *gratia praeveniens*, but without the *gratia irresistibilis* and without a particularistic *decretum absolutum*. Through him this milder Augustinianism exerted great influence upon the mediæval theology. Yet the strict Augustinianism always had its adherents ... and in the Reformation of the sixteenth century, it gained a massive acknowledgment and an independent development in Calvinism, which, in fact, partially recast it, and gave it its most consistent form.⁷⁵

Luther

Martin Luther is forever the Father of the Protestant Reformation, the champion of justification by grace in Christ alone by faith alone.⁷⁶ His *The Bondage of the Will* has been called “the greatest piece of theological writing that ever came from Luther’s pen.”⁷⁷ It was prompted by a “little book on free-will” by Erasmus entitled *Diatribes seu collatio de libero arbitrio* (*Discussion, or Collation, Concerning Free-Will*). Erasmus felt that the issue of free will is not significant one way or the other, and that Luther is out of balance in assigning so much weight to such an unimportant and obscure subject.

Luther leaped at the chance to respond, thanking Erasmus for giving him the opportunity to discuss what in his mind was the very heart of the gospel.⁷⁸ Thus, *The Bondage of the Will* is a deep well of information for our understanding not only of Luther on free will, but Luther on salvation.

For Luther, any discussion of human will must start with God, who “foreknows nothing contingently, but ... foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His own immutable, eternal and infallible will.”⁷⁹ As a result, all that we do “is in reality done necessarily and

⁷⁴The result was a moderate or semi-Augustinian position (Schaff, *History*, vol. 3, 866).

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 870.

⁷⁶David F. Wright, “Reformation, Protestant,” in *EDT*, 920.

⁷⁷“Historical and Theological Introduction,” in Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 40.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 42–43.

⁷⁹This one “bombshell knocks ‘free-will’ flat, and utterly shatters it” (Luther, *Bondage*, 80). God’s immutable will is seen clearly in election: God freely elects some for salvation and withholds the same from others. “Salvation and destruction thus result from God’s previous decision and his corresponding twofold activity. God’s choice is not based on the individual’s condition; it establishes this condition. This means an unconditional, eternal predestination both to salvation and to damnation” (Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 274–75). “The double predestination of the German Reformer puts human decision in the perspective of eternity” (John H. Gerstner, “Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Edwards on the Bondage of the Will,” in *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will*, vol. 2, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995]: 282).

immutably in respect to God's will."⁸⁰ God's will alone is free; therefore, we ought only to speak of "free-will" in relation to Him.⁸¹

How, then, should we define human will in its present state? According to Erasmus, free will is the power to apply oneself either to good or evil.⁸² This Luther cannot accept, for he sees in Scripture that the will "has lost its freedom, and is bound in the service of sin, and can will no good." As a result, "free-will" for humans "is an empty term whose reality is lost."⁸³ If this is true, then what does it mean to will? Put simply, it means to desire. The will does what it wants or pleases.⁸⁴ Even the sinner who sins of necessity, according to Luther, does not do so against his or her will, but "spontaneously and voluntarily."⁸⁵

So at the core of Luther's argument against Erasmus, and at the very center of his soteriology, is the doctrine of the utter bondage of the human soul to sin. The sinful will "is not free at all, but is the permanent prisoner and bondslave of evil, since it cannot turn itself to good."⁸⁶ Furthermore, if people have lost their freedom, and must serve sin, and cannot will the good, what conclusion is left than that they sin *necessarily*?⁸⁷

But if sinners do so necessarily, how can they be held accountable? The answer again lies in the nature of willing. Willing by definition is doing what one wants; it just so happens that all the sinner wants to do is sin.⁸⁸ But necessity is not compulsion. "The will ... does what it does ... under no compulsion, but just as it wants or pleases."⁸⁹ As a result, the lost sinner is in an utterly hopeless state, seeing that his or her will "cannot change itself, nor give itself another bent."⁹⁰

⁸⁰Luther, *Bondage*, 80. But how can God will the sinful deeds of wicked people and remain blameless? According to Luther, because God is omnipotent He cannot but control all His creatures and use them for His purposes. As a rational being, the human instrument is "not allowed to be idle, but wills, desires and acts according to his nature." Thus, God will use His instruments, whether they be good or evil, for He is sovereign. When God uses the evil person, evil deeds result; yet God Himself, being good, does not perform the evil. He does, however, use evil instruments for His own purpose (*Bondage*, 204).

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 105.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 137.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 148.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 81.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 102.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 104. The human will is "a beast standing between two riders. If God rides, it wills and goes where God wills.... If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run, or which it will seek; but the riders themselves fight to decide who shall have and hold it" (Luther, *Bondage*, 103–4).

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 149.

⁸⁸"Though human beings are not free to *decide* and to *choose* by themselves, they still are *willing* to do what they do" (Otto Hermann Pesch, "Free By Faith: Luther's Contribution to a Theological Anthropology," in *Martin Luther and the Modern Mind*, 35, emphasis original).

⁸⁹Luther, *Bondage*, 81. "That is to say: a man without the Spirit of God does not do evil against his will, under pressure, as though he were taken by the scruff of the neck and dragged into it ... but he does it spontaneously and voluntarily" (Luther, *Bondage*, 102).

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 103.

Without God's grace the human will "is the permanent prisoner and bonds slave of evil, since it cannot turn itself to good."⁹¹

Because of his view of total depravity, Luther is convinced that salvation must of necessity be in its entirety the free gift of God's grace.⁹² Since the sinful will "cannot change itself, nor give itself another bent," God himself must transform the evil will to a good one. This occurs at salvation, when by a work of God "the will is changed under the sweet influence of the Spirit of God."⁹³

Luther takes Erasmus to Rom 3:21–26, where "Paul utters very thunderbolts against 'free-will.'" Since God's righteousness is manifest "without the deeds of the law" (v. 28), the believer does nothing to attain God's righteousness. Furthermore, by using the word *without* Paul does away with morally good works, moral righteousness, and preparations for grace. Thus, God's righteousness can *only* come by grace through faith (vv. 22, 24).⁹⁴ Luther concludes, "From all this it is very plain that the endeavour and effort of 'free-will' are simply null; for if the righteousness of God exists without the law, and without the works of the law, how shall it not much more exist without 'free-will'?"⁹⁵

Finally, we must explore Luther's position on security and assurance of salvation. On the one hand, Luther taught that assurance is foundational to the Christian life. In response to proper preaching, the believer ought to be able to say: "I know that I have a gracious God and that my works, performed in this faith and according to His Word, are good fruits and are pleasing to Him." This kind of preaching, which "assures hearts of how they stand with God," is "true and presents the pure Word of Christ."⁹⁶ In similar vein, Luther said,

If you want to preach to a person in a comforting way, then do it so that he who hears you is certain that he is in God's favor, or be silent altogether.... For all preachers who make their hearers doubt are good for nothing. For in the kingdom of God we must be sure that we have a gracious God, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life.⁹⁷

⁹¹Ibid., 104.

⁹²Luther acknowledged his debt to Augustine as the "interpreter *par excellence*" of salvation by grace alone (Wilson-Kastner, "On Partaking of the Divine Nature: Luther's Dependence on Augustine," 118).

⁹³Luther, *Bondage*, 103. For Luther, "Faith is the work and gift of God. God justifies a man by giving him faith" (Althaus, *Theology*, 231).

⁹⁴Luther's translation of Rom 3:28 gave rise to the Reformation slogan *sola fide*. Luther added the word "alone," translating the verse "So halten wir es non, daß der Mensch gerecht werde ... *allein* durch den Glauben." The Council of Trent strongly condemned Luther's translation and all it stood for when it declared, "If anyone saith that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified, let him be anathema" (Frederick R. Harm, "Solafidianism," in *EDT*, 1032).

⁹⁵Luther, *Bondage*, 289. Luther sides with Augustine's theology of grace. "Only an intervention from God can save; only faith given by God can bind God and humanity" (Wilson-Kastner, "Partaking," 123).

⁹⁶Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther's Works*, vol. 24 (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1961), 218.

⁹⁷Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, vol. 3, 1116.

On the other hand, however, Luther embraced baptismal regeneration, which could be reversed through apostasy. “We are baptized and regenerated through Baptism. But all of us do not remain with our Baptism. Many fall away from Christ and become false Christians.”⁹⁸ Commenting on 2 Pet 2:20, Luther writes of apostates, “Through Baptism these people threw out unbelief, had their unclean way of life washed away, and entered into a pure life of faith and love. Now they fall away into unbelief and their own works, and they soil themselves again in filth.”⁹⁹

Even the one who has been justified by faith can lose that justification. Commenting on Gal 5:4, Luther writes, “Indeed, even the righteous man, if he presumes to be justified by those works, loses the righteousness he has and falls from the grace by which he had been justified, since he has been removed from a good land to one that is barren.”¹⁰⁰

It is clear, then, that Luther “shared with the Roman Catholic Church of his day the belief that the grace of baptismal regeneration and justification could be lost.”¹⁰¹ On this he agreed with Augustine. However, Luther stood apart from Augustine in holding that “the believer could enjoy great certitude of his present state of grace.”¹⁰² Luther’s view of security is therefore an interesting combination of certainty and uncertainty: theoretical uncertainty because salvation can be lost; but existential certainty because believers can nevertheless enjoy the assurance of their salvation.

Calvin

Luther remains the Father of the Reformation and champion of justification by faith; but it is the name of John Calvin which is borne by the system of soteriology under examination in this paper. Why? What is Calvinism that it bears the name of Calvin? According to Warfield, the fundamental principle of Calvinism “lies in a profound apprehension of God in His majesty, with the inevitably accompanying poignant realization of the exact nature of the relation sustained to Him by the creature as such, and particularly by the sinful creature.”¹⁰³ Such was the center of Calvin’s teaching. “Foremost in Calvin’s system was his emphasis on the great thought of God.

⁹⁸Ibid., vol. 1, 280.

⁹⁹Pelikan, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 30 (1967), 190.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., vol. 27 (1964), 331.

¹⁰¹Davis, “Perseverance,” 216.

¹⁰²Ibid. At one point, Luther’s assurance sounds very much like eternal security: “But now that God has taken my salvation out of the control of my own will, and put it under the control of His, and promised to save me, not according to my working or running, but according to His own grace and mercy, I have the comfortable certainty that He is faithful and will not lie to me, and that He is also great and powerful, so that no devils or opposition can break Him or pluck me from Him.... Furthermore, I have the comfortable certainty that I please God, not by reason of the merit of my works, but by reason of His merciful favour promised to me; so that, if I work too little, or badly, He does not impute it to me, but with fatherly compassion pardons me and makes me better. This is the glorying of all the saints in their God” (*Bondage*, 314).

¹⁰³Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 288.

His sovereignty extends over all persons and events from eternity to eternity. His will is the ground of all that exists. His glory is the object of all the created universe.”¹⁰⁴

Calvinist soteriology flows from this fundamental principle of divine majesty and sovereignty. God is Sovereign Initiator both in original creation and in new creation in Christ. Thus, “In everything which enters into the process of redemption [Calvinism] is impelled by the force of its first principle to place the initiative in God.”¹⁰⁵ As Calvin himself puts it, the very movement of the sinful will toward goodness “is the first step in that conversion to God, which in Scripture is entirely ascribed to divine grace.”¹⁰⁶

To understand Calvin’s soteriology is to understand his *Institutes*, for they offer a complete account of Christian teaching, presenting a synthesis of Calvin’s thought that is sufficient in itself.¹⁰⁷

In the *Institutes*, Calvin treats two subjects: the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves. Concerning God, Calvin understands Him to have absolute control over His creation. By “providence” we must not picture God as sitting idly by, watching events unfold, but rather as One who “holds the helm, and overrules all events.”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, this sovereign control is unmitigated even by human will. God’s providence not only assures the desired outcome of events, but also directs the wills of people in the process. Human choice is therefore subordinate to divine providence.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴Williston Walker, *John Calvin*, 409–10. According to Wilhelm Niesel, “Calvin’s theology is a system of thoughts about God and man proceeding from the one thought of the utter dependence of man on God” (*The Theology of Calvin*, 159–60).

¹⁰⁵Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 293.

¹⁰⁶John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), Book I, 253.

¹⁰⁷François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, 111.

¹⁰⁸The French adds, “Cest à dire, que non seulement il voit, mais aussi ordonne ce qu’il veut estre fait” (“That is to say, not only does he see, but also ordains that which he wills to be done,” *Institutes*, I, 175, n.2). For a further discussion of Calvin’s view of providence, see Charles B. Partee, “Calvin on Universal and Particular Providence,” in *Readings in Calvin’s Theology*, 69–88.

¹⁰⁹*Institutes*, I, 269. Calvin explains this subordination further. God “so turns and bends the wills of men, that whatever the freedom of their choice may be, it is still subject to the disposal of God.” One of Calvin’s prime texts is Prov 21:1, where the king’s heart is held and turned by the hand of God’s will. If the heart of a king, who out of humanity is most “free from subjection ... ours surely cannot be exempt from it” (*Institutes*, I, 270). But how does God orchestrate the *wicked* acts of people without Himself being tainted by their sin? For Calvin, the solution is not to distinguish between divine *doing* and *permitting*, for God does it all (*Institutes*, I, 199). Rather, we must understand how God uses the evil deeds of the reprobate to accomplish His will. For Calvin, the *locus classicus* is Job’s trial: Satan instigated it, the Chaldeans carried it out, and yet it was the work of God. Calvin asks, “How can we attribute the same work to God, to Satan, and to man, without either excusing Satan by the interference of God, or making God the author of the crime?” The answer is recognizing that God’s purpose in the act and His mode of acting are vastly different from those of Satan’s and the Chaldeans’. God’s purpose was to test Job’s patience, and His mode of acting was to permit Satan to afflict him. Satan’s goal was to drive Job to despair, and the Chaldeans simply wanted plunder. “We thus see that there is no inconsistency in attributing the same act to God, to Satan, and to man, while from the difference in the end and mode of action, the spotless righteousness of God shines forth at the same time that the iniquity of Satan and of man is manifested in all its deformity” (*Institutes*, I, 266–67).

But if God's sovereign control over the hearts of people is so complete, how may we define free will? Calvin refuses to define it as "a free choice of good and evil."¹¹⁰ Adam possessed such freedom, but lost it for himself and all his posterity.¹¹¹ The will, then, is now "free" only in the sense that it "acts voluntarily, and not by compulsion."¹¹²

If the human will is not then free from sin, what state is left for it than utter bondage to sin? As Calvin points out, "freedom and bondage are mutually contradictory, so that he who affirms the one denies the other."¹¹³ Like Luther, however, Calvin distinguishes necessity from coercion:

Man, since he was corrupted by the fall, sins not forced or unwilling, but voluntarily, by a most forward bias of the mind; not by violent compulsion, or external force, but by the movement of his own passion; and yet such is the depravity of his nature, that he cannot move and act except in the direction of evil.¹¹⁴

Therefore, the absolute bondage of the human will to sin necessitates the operation of divine grace for the redemption of the human soul.¹¹⁵ Calvin echoes Augustine in declaring that salvation is entirely the work of God. God does not aid an ailing will, but rather revives a dead one:

If it is like turning stone into flesh when God turns us to the study of rectitude, everything proper to our own will is abolished, and that which succeeds in its place is wholly of God. I say the will is abolished, but not in so far as it is will, for in conversion everything essential to our original nature remains: I also say, that it is created anew, not because the will then begins to exist, but because it is turned from evil to good. This, I maintain, is wholly the work of God ... everything good in the will is entirely the result of grace.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰Ibid., I, 228.

¹¹¹Those who "still seek for free-will in man, notwithstanding of his being lost and drowned in spiritual destruction, labour under manifold delusion" (Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 169). With Luther, Calvin rejected the term "free-will." It robs God of His honor in redemption (Larry D. Sharp, "The Doctrines of Grace in Calvin and Augustine," 91).

¹¹²"An admirable freedom! That man is not forced to be the servant of sin, while he is, however, ἑθελουλος (a voluntary slave); his will being bound by the fetters of sin" (*Institutes*, I, 229). For further elaboration by Calvin, see *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 68–69.

¹¹³Calvin, *Bondage*, 68.

¹¹⁴Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 254; cf. Calvin, *Bondage*, 69. Regarding original sin, Calvin stands with Augustine against Pelagius in that we all "bring an innate corruption from the very womb.... All of us, therefore, descending from an impure seed, come into the world tainted with the contagion of sin.... We thus see that the impurity of parents is transmitted to their children, so that all, without exception, are originally depraved." We need not puzzle over the soul's transmission. It is enough "to know that Adam was made the depository of the endowments which God was pleased to bestow on human nature, and that, therefore, when he lost what he had received, he lost not only for himself but for us all" (Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 214–16).

¹¹⁵"Calvin followed Luther in attributing grace primarily if not exclusively to the character of God whereby he works through Jesus Christ to save sinners. It is not a healing power infused in believers, but is the benevolent and merciful nature of God revealed in Christ" (Sharp, "Grace," 86).

¹¹⁶Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 255–56. Dewey J. Hoitenga Jr. suggests that Calvin's word choice here, which has led to much discussion, could have been improved. It would have been less confusing if Calvin had spoken, not of God's *abolishing* and then *creating* the will at conversion, but rather of God's *enabling* the will once again to exercise the

Like Augustine, Calvin attributes human faith to divine grace. It follows that if God's grace is responsible for a right will, and if faith is the beginning of right will and action, then faith too must be viewed as the free gift of God.¹¹⁷ In salvation, it is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes the work of faith in the heart of the believer.¹¹⁸ As the originator of faith, the Spirit illuminates and purifies the human mind so that it may relish divine truth. Then, as the increaser of faith, the Spirit establishes the truth down deep in the heart of the believer, until by that faith "he conducts us into the heavenly kingdom."¹¹⁹ From faith and repentance comes regeneration, new life in Christ, which delivers the child of God from the bondage of sin.¹²⁰

Calvin turns next to justification by faith:

[A] man will be *justified by faith* when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous. Thus we simply interpret justification, as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favour as if we were righteous; and we say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.¹²¹

Justification is clearly forensic, the divine imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the unrighteous.¹²²

Calvin moves on to election,¹²³ for the fact that some obtain the grace of Christ while others do not "is without doubt subordinate to God's purpose of eternal election."¹²⁴ Calvin points to

"supernatural gifts" of faith and love toward God, or of God's *restoring* to the will these specific *exercises* of the will enjoyed before the Fall (*John Calvin and the Will*, 118–19). This would be more in line with what we saw in Augustine.

¹¹⁷Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 257.

¹¹⁸One of Calvin's most significant contributions was that he "was the first to offer a unified account of the work of the Holy Spirit" (J. I. Packer, "Calvin the Theologian," in *John Calvin*, 168).

¹¹⁹Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 499. Victor A. Shepherd notes that for Calvin, "faith is not merely the 'principle' work of the Holy Spirit, or the 'peculiar' work but the *entire* work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has no other function than to beget faith; that is, the Holy Spirit does not grant anything from himself: his whole purpose is applying Christ-with-his-benefits to men. He is the power in which Christ confers his benefits upon men—which is to say that he creates faith. Faith is *the* gift of God" (*The Nature and Function of Faith in the Theology of John Calvin*, 23, emphasis original).

¹²⁰Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 516.

¹²¹Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 38, emphasis original.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 58. Here Calvin departs from Augustine, who viewed justification as the gift of infused righteousness, thereby making justification essentially the same work as sanctification (Sharp, "Grace," 87–88).

¹²³See also John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1961). It is clear that Calvin taught double predestination, the *decretum horribile* (the adjective means "awesome" not "repulsive" [Packer, "Calvin," 171]): "All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death" (*Institutes*, II, 206). This marks a departure from Augustine, "for whom the elect alone are the object of a special decision which withdraws them from the *massa perditionis*, while the reprobate are simply abandoned by God to the ruin that they have incurred by their sins" (Wendel, "Justification and Predestination in Calvin," in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, 174). Thus, Augustine is an

Paul's description of the election of grace not according to works (Rom 11:6) to stress the completely gratuitous nature of divine election, whereby "God saves whom he wills of his mere good pleasure, and does not pay a debt, a debt which never can be due."¹²⁵

This is why, like Augustine before him, Calvin rejects election based on foreseen faith.¹²⁶ Those who hold this view interpose foreknowledge as a veil, which not only obscures election, but seeks to give it a different origin.¹²⁷ Calvin argues on the basis of Scripture that because election is according to grace, "what can God find in us to induce him to elect us?"¹²⁸ Calvin's conclusion is that in election "men are altogether indebted to the preventing goodness of God, there being nothing in them, either past or future, to conciliate his favour."¹²⁹

Finally, election guarantees that God will keep the elect secure to the end. The gift of perseverance is "applicable to all the elect."¹³⁰ Those who are in Christ cannot fall away. Christ Himself prays that their faith will not fail (Luke 22:32), thus insuring that "whenever we are his our eternal salvation is secure."¹³¹

infralapsarian (Vanderschaaf, "Predestination," 3). Returning to Calvin, if people are "predestinated by the ordination of God to that corruption which is now held forth as the cause of condemnation," is not God "unjust in thus cruelly mocking his creatures?" Calvin has two answers. First, Rom 9:20: "Who are you, O man, who answers back to God?" (*Institutes*, II, 228). Second, "How could he who is the Judge of the world commit any unrighteousness?" For the "will of God is the supreme rule of righteousness, so that everything which he wills must be held to be righteous by the mere fact of his willing it" (*Institutes*, II, 227). This smacks of Theonomy (see John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 26–34). In the end, "the procedure of divine justice is too high to be scanned by human measure, or comprehended by the feebleness of human intellect" (*Institutes*, II, 229).

¹²⁴Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 202.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, 203.

¹²⁶"Augustine is right when he writes: Men are elected to be God's children in order that they might believe, not because He foresaw that they would believe" (Calvin, *Predestination*, 145).

¹²⁷Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 212.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 214.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 215. In defending this view of election, Calvin sought particularly to refute the views of Albert Pighius, "Calvin's 'Pelagian' opponent" (Vanderschaaf, "Predestination," 6), who like Pelagius viewed free will as the power to refrain from evil and do good (Calvin, *Bondage*, 24), and embraced election on the basis of foreseen faith (Calvin, *Predestination*, 114–15). It is significant that Calvin treats election in the context of the benefits of the grace of Christ, for here "it bears a much more concrete, experiential, confirmational character. It is designed to reassure believers that their salvation is not an accidental circumstance or a capricious turn of events. Rather, from beginning to end it was and is and ever will be in 'good hands'" (Gordon J. Spykman, "A New Look at Election and Reprobation," in *Life is Religion*, 175). Charles Partee concurs: by placing predestination under salvation, Calvin presents the doctrine as "an explication of the union with Christ, effected by the Holy Spirit, through faith rather than a rational deduction from the sovereignty of God" ("Calvin and Determinism," 126). This clearly sets Calvin's doctrine of election apart from Augustine's.

¹³⁰Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 246; cf. I, 261. God's persevering grace is indispensable for the believer, "since even a good will is still weighed down by the burden of the flesh, and prevented from rising, it is added, that to meet the difficulties of the context, God supplies the persevering effort until the effect it [sic] obtained" (Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 259).

¹³¹*Ibid.*, II, 246.

Up to this point, Calvin agrees with Augustine: the elect will surely persevere. However, because he grounds election in the grace of God in Christ, Calvin parts ways with Augustine with regard to assurance of salvation. According to Calvin, it is an error to state that we may be conscious of our calling, but uncertain of our election. This makes election dependent upon the merit of works rather than anchoring the believer's confidence in God's goodness.¹³²

This, then, is a major difference between Augustine and Calvin.¹³³ Augustine roots election in the inscrutable, seemingly arbitrary, will of God. God's purpose in election is hidden even from believers; thus, there is no assurance of salvation. Calvin, however, grounds election in the will of God revealed in Christ and witnessed in the heart of the believer by the Holy Spirit.¹³⁴ For Calvin, then, there is not only theoretical certainty for believers—they cannot lose their salvation—but there is also existential certainty—they can enjoy assurance of salvation as they rest in the goodness of a God who has been fully gracious in Christ.¹³⁵

Arminius

James Arminius studied in Geneva under Theodore Beza, successor of Calvin and “aged and honored patriarch of the Reformed churches.”¹³⁶ There Arminius learned Beza's view of predestination, which was based upon but advanced beyond that of Calvin. An order of the decrees is not explicitly clear in Calvin. Beza, however, on the basis of Rom 9:21, argued that from the lump of humanity *not yet created*, much less fallen, God predestined part to salvation and part to damnation. This is clearly supralapsarianism.¹³⁷

¹³²Ibid., 248–49.

¹³³Vanderschaaf concludes that “although Calvin's doctrine of predestination certainly has Augustinian elements within it, his use of the doctrine is distinctly a work of Reformed theology (“Predestination,” 6).

¹³⁴For Calvin, “the doctrine of predestination does not frighten the Christian but rather assures him of his election” (Vanderschaaf, “Predestination,” 6).

¹³⁵However, Calvin leaves no room for complacency. In view of the warning of Heb 12:15, Calvin agrees that it is easy for the believer to fall away for a time from the grace of God, “and that constant attention is needed in this regard.... In short there is need for exertion and vigilance if we want to persevere in the grace of God” (Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and The First and Second Epistles of St. Peter*, 195–96). “Calvin thus balances his theological certitudes with pastoral warnings ... The believer must continually exercise faith and obedience to make ‘his calling and election sure’” (Davis, “Perseverance,” 218). With reference to Calvin's discussions of temporary faith, David Foxgrover notes that “Calvin never intended that the certainty of salvation would free the believer from all anxiety and struggle.... Indeed, an examination of the context of the descriptions of temporary faith shows that Calvin usually uses the examples of temporary faith as a means of urging the believer to perseverance” (“‘Temporary Faith’ and the Certainty of Salvation,” 231–32).

¹³⁶Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, 66.

¹³⁷Ibid., 66–67. As we saw, Augustine was an infralapsarian, holding from Rom 9:21 that it was “out of the mass of perdition” (*massa perditionis*) that God chose to make some vessels of honor and others of dishonor (Augustine, “Grace and Free Will,” 437). While the term *supralapsarianism* does not appear before the Synod of Dort in 1618–19 (Bang, *Arminius*, 67), the position was Calvin's. True, he does not, like Beza, use Rom 9:21 to argue that God predestinated from the lump of uncreated and unfallen humanity a portion to salvation and a portion to destruction. However, as we saw, he does say that some were *created* for eternal life, and others *created* for eternal damnation (*Institutes*, III, 206). He also describes reprobation as *abandonment*, using the angels for support: if those that maintained their integrity are called *elect*, does it not follow that those who revolted were *abandoned*? (*Institutes*,

Arminius drew criticism from the Reformed Church when he opposed Beza on predestination in Romans 9.¹³⁸ He thought that Beza and others have missed Paul's point. They think the question Paul raises is, "Would not the word of God be vain, if most of the Jews are rejected?" The answer they think Paul gives is, "God indeed, in the word of promise, invited all the Jews and called them to a participation of the covenant, but yet, by His eternal decree and purpose, He determined in fact to make only some of the Jews partakers, passing by the rest, and leaving them in their former state."¹³⁹

But Arminius sees Paul addressing a different question altogether, yielding a very different answer. The question is, "Would not the word of God fail if those of the Jews, who seek righteousness, not of faith, but of the law, are rejected by God?" This yields the following answer, "God, in His word, and in the declaration of His promise, signified that He considered, in the relation of children, only, those of the Jews, who should seek righteousness and salvation by faith, but in the relation of foreigners, those who should seek the same by the law."¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, Ishmael and Esau are types of those who seek justification by law. Thus, Paul speaks of election in relation to two groups, "children of the flesh" and "those of the promise," the latter typified by Isaac and Jacob, rather than in relation to the individuals themselves.¹⁴¹ God finds fault with one group and not the other because of their sins. Sin is "transgression of a law," and in order to be just a law must be "enacted for him who has the power or rather ability to obey, not only *δυναμιν* but *ενεργειαν*, that is, has ability of such a character as is hindered by no intervening decree, from doing that which he can do."¹⁴²

Concerning divine hardening, "sinners, persevering in their sins against the long suffering of God ... are those whom God wills to harden."¹⁴³ Arminius sides with Augustine against Beza in viewing the lump (Rom 9:21) as sinful humanity. "First, it is necessary that a man should exist, and be a *vessel*. Secondly, it is necessary that before he can be a vessel of wrath or of mercy, he should be a vessel of sin, that is, a sinner. Thirdly, that he should be a vessel of wrath or of mercy."¹⁴⁴

In summary, "God makes man a vessel; Man makes himself an evil vessel, or a sinner; God determines to make man, according to conditions, satisfactory to himself, a vessel of wrath or of

III, 229. The French reads, "ils n'ont pas été retenus, mais plustost delaissez"—"they were not restrained, but rather abandoned").

¹³⁸Bangs, *Arminius*, 193.

¹³⁹James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, vol. III, 530.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 530–31.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 539. In essence, Arminius is saying that the "predestination of *classes* has priority over (or takes the place of) the predestination of individuals" (Bangs, *Arminius*, 196, emphasis original).

¹⁴²Arminius, *Writings*, vol. III, 547–48.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 550.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 555, emphasis original.

mercy, and this He in fact does, when the condition is either fulfilled, or perseveringly neglected.”¹⁴⁵

For Arminius, then, the message of Romans 9 is justification by faith, and the doctrine of predestination is upheld. However, “God has predestined to salvation all who believe in Christ.... It is faith in Christ alone that places a sinner in the company of the elect.”¹⁴⁶

The main tenets of Arminius’s soteriology are clearly seen in his treatment of Romans 9. All of humanity is lost in sin. Original sin is the “absence of original righteousness only,” suffered by Adam and passed on to all his posterity.¹⁴⁷ Free will in relation to fallen mankind must be understood as “freedom from necessity” which “exists naturally in the will, as its proper attribute, so that there cannot be any will if it be not free.”¹⁴⁸ But against Pelagius, Arminius does not equate freedom from necessity with freedom from sin:

In this state, the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost. And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such as are excited by Divine grace. For Christ has said, “Without me ye can do nothing.”¹⁴⁹

Salvation is from start to finish a work of God’s grace; thus, Arminius does not think he does grace injustice by attributing too much to free will. The only point of disputation is whether grace is irresistible. This he rejects, since in his view “many persons resist the Holy Spirit and reject the grace that is offered.”¹⁵⁰

This raises the issue of faith: what is it and what is its source? In other words, is salvation monergistic, a divine operation upon the sinful will, whereby it is enabled to believe? Or is it synergistic, a “co-operation of divine grace and the human will”?¹⁵¹ To start with, Arminius does call faith “a gracious and gratuitous gift of God.”¹⁵² Furthermore, he defines saving faith as “an *assent* of the mind, produced by the Holy Spirit, through the gospel, in sinners, who ...

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 558.

¹⁴⁶Bangs, *Arminius*, 198.

¹⁴⁷Arminius, *Writings*, II, 79. *Contra Pelagius*, Arminius holds that “acts of sin are not mere free choices in imitation of bad example but the result of the predicament of man in the fall” (Bangs, *Arminius*, 340).

¹⁴⁸Arminius, *Writings*, I, 524.

¹⁴⁹Arminius, *Writings*, I, 526. The mind of fallen humanity “is dark, destitute of the saving knowledge of God ... incapable of those things which belong to the Spirit of God.... To the darkness of the mind succeeds *the perverseness of the affections and of the heart*” and “the *utter weakness of all the powers* to perform that which is truly good.” Fallen humanity is, in short, “altogether dead in sin” (Arminius, *Writings*, I, 526–28, emphasis original).

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 253–54.

¹⁵¹H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, II, 355.

¹⁵²Arminius, *Writings*, II, 500.

believe in [Christ].”¹⁵³ Faith is not a merit by which we earn justification,¹⁵⁴ but rather “the instrumental cause, or act, by which we apprehend Christ.”¹⁵⁵

Arminius denies ever having said that faith is not the pure gift of God, that it depends partly on the grace of God and partly on the power of free will. He responds, “For the proper explanation of this matter, a discussion *on the concurrence and agreement of Divine grace and of free will, or of the human will*, would be required; but because this would be a labor much too prolix, I shall not now make the attempt.”¹⁵⁶

Arminius’s postponement is our great loss, for herein lies the crux of the matter! Because of this failure to explain how “concurrence and agreement of divine grace and free will” works, it is difficult *with certainty* to declare his position synergistic at this point.¹⁵⁷ There are, however, two issues which have already been raised which seem to lead in that direction. As already stated, for Arminius grace is resistible. The implication is that without human cooperation grace is of no effect. According to monergism, precisely because regeneration “is *God’s work*, [it] can no more be resisted than it can come to nothing.”¹⁵⁸

We also saw that Arminius defines faith first and foremost in terms of intellectual assent. Muller has shown how Arminius’s understanding of the interaction between intellect and will is quite different from Calvin’s. While in Calvin’s view the sinful will rules the sinner, Arminius holds that the intellect in its natural functioning can move the will of the sinner.¹⁵⁹ Arminius states that

¹⁵³Ibid., 109–10, emphasis added.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 119.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 117.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., I, 365, emphasis original. Arminius opts instead to employ a simile, likening faith to a beggar who extends his hand to receive alms. Arminius asks, “[Do the alms] cease to be a pure gift, because the beggar extends his hand to receive it?” (*Writings*, I, 366).

¹⁵⁷According to Bangs, Arminius is a monergist because he “affirmed grace to be essential for the beginning, continuation, and consummation of faith” (*Arminius*, 342–43). Richard A. Muller, however, points out that this “is not the determiner of monergism unless the necessary grace is the sole ‘mover’ or ‘worker’ in the initiation of salvation” (“Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice: Arminius’s Gambit and the Reformed Response,” in *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will*, vol. 2, 260, n.35). Donald M. Lake acknowledges the weakness of Arminius’s position: Arminius does not explain why, although everyone shares equally God’s prevenient grace, some come to saving faith and others do not. Lake feels Arminius could have drawn from his interpretation of Romans 7 for help. The unsaved subject of the chapter is in a *State of Conviction*, lying between the *State of Bondage* and the *State of Grace and Redemption*. In this unique state, the unbeliever is able, by virtue of creative will which remains as the essential nature of the *imago Dei*, creatively to respond to the offer of divine grace (“Jacob Arminius’s Contribution to a Theology of Grace,” in *Grace Unlimited*, 238, emphasis original). In response, this view rests on a tenuous interpretation of Romans 7. Further, this view does not remove completely the charge of Semi-Pelagianism, for there still resides in fallen humanity a natural moral ability (creative will) that is capable of cooperating with divine grace in salvation.

¹⁵⁸Hughes, “Grace,” 481, emphasis original.

¹⁵⁹Richard A. Muller, “The Priority of Intellect in the Soteriology of Jacob Arminius,” 67.

in conversion the principle role of grace is to persuade the human will “that it may be inclined to yield assent to those truths which are preached.”¹⁶⁰ According to Muller, then,

Arminius ... seems to allow a role for the intellect in the salvation of the individual, the intellect directing the will toward the known good in cooperation with the divine grace of illumination, with the result that both grace and the normal arbitrating function of the intellect at the root of willing bring about the renovation of the will.¹⁶¹

The next element of Arminius’s soteriology concerns sanctification. Here Arminius speaks clearly of divine-human cooperation, but after conversion. The Holy Spirit so works in the life of the converted sinner that he or she now “loves and embraces that which is good, just and holy; and that, being made capable in Christ, co-operating now with God, he prosecutes the good which he knows and loves, and he begins himself to perform it in deed.”¹⁶² This cooperation is not the means to renewal, but rather its result.¹⁶³

Now we come to perseverance. Can the divine-human cooperation so break down that the believer fails to persevere in salvation? On the one hand, the believer does possess through the Spirit sufficient powers to fight against the world, flesh, and devil. Satan cannot drag the believer out of the hand of Christ. However, *believer* is the operative word for Arminius, for believers persevere only as long as they stand firm in the battle, implore the help of Christ, and are not found “wanting to themselves.”¹⁶⁴

Explaining further, Arminius makes two distinctions. He distinguishes between the believer and the elect. Since election encompasses both faith and perseverance, the elect persevere. However, a believer can make shipwreck concerning faith and not persevere.¹⁶⁵ Arminius also distinguishes between faith and salvation. A believer can fall away from the former, but not the latter. How can a believer lose salvation, which is the believer’s possession?¹⁶⁶

Related to perseverance is assurance. On the one hand, it is impossible for a believer to doubt his or her salvation.¹⁶⁷ This certainty is “wrought in the mind” by the Holy Spirit who testifies

¹⁶⁰Arminius, *Writings*, I, 301. For Arminius, original sin is the “absence of original righteousness only,” a negative *deprivation* as opposed to a positive *depravation* of the will (Bangs, *Arminius*, 339–40).

¹⁶¹Muller, “Priority,” 70. But is this synergism? Muller detects in Arminius “the smallest possible opening for human initiative in the work of salvation—so small that it is difficult to label it synergism in the sense of an equal cooperation between the divine and human wills in the movement of the individual toward grace” (“Priority,” 69–70).

¹⁶²Arminius, *Writings*, I, 529.

¹⁶³Bangs, *Arminius*, 341. “Subsequent or *following* grace does indeed assist the good purpose of man; but this good purpose would have no existence unless through preceding or *preventing* grace” (Arminius, *Writings*, I, 530, emphasis original).

¹⁶⁴Arminius, *Writings*, I, 254. Rem. Augustine: believers pray for perseverance because it is God’s gift; but they can fail to persevere if they stop praying for it.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 385.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 384–85.

“together with his conscience.”¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, no believer can be certain that he or she “will not decline or fall away from the faith.”¹⁶⁹ “In other words, there is no *present* assurance of *final* salvation.”¹⁷⁰

I finish with Arminius’s view of predestination.¹⁷¹ He rejects three views: (1) supralapsarianism (decree to predestinate some to salvation and the rest to destruction placed *before* the decree to create); 2) modified supralapsarianism (decree to predestinate some to salvation and abandon the rest to destruction placed *after* the decree to create but *before* the decree to allow the fall); and (3) infralapsarianism (decree to predestinate some to salvation and abandon the rest to destruction placed *after* the decree to allow the fall).¹⁷²

Arminius sees four decrees in predestination; however, only the fourth treats the election of individuals to salvation or damnation. He describes it this way:

God decreed to save and damn certain particular persons. This decree has its foundation in the foreknowledge of God, by which he knew from all eternity those individuals who *would*, through his preventing grace, *believe*, and, through his subsequent grace *would persevere*, according to the before described administration of those means which are suitable and proper for conversion and faith; and, by which foreknowledge, he likewise knew those who *would not believe and persevere*.¹⁷³

For Arminius, then, election to salvation and damnation is on the basis of foreknown belief and unbelief. This human choice to believe is situated *between* God’s antecedent will to save generally and His consequent will to save particular individuals.¹⁷⁴ Granting this, “what remained for Arminius was the definition or redefinition of divine knowing in such a way as to rest the consequent will of God on foreknown human action while at the same time relieving that action of dependence on the divine will.”¹⁷⁵

Arminius acknowledges with medieval and Reformed orthodoxy the two traditional categories of divine knowing: God’s *natural* knowledge of all possibilities; and His *free* knowledge of all

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 255.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., II, 503. Here Arminius is not far from Luther: theoretical uncertainty (believer can stop believing and lose salvation) but existential certainty (believer has *present* assurance by virtue of *present* faith).

¹⁷⁰Bangs, *Arminius*, 348, emphasis original.

¹⁷¹This doctrine was most controversial and taxing for Arminius. Once his views surfaced, he spent the remainder of his life debating them (Muller, “Grace,” 256).

¹⁷²Arminius, *Writings*, I, 211–47. Nichols, Arminius’s translator, calls view (3) *sublapsarianism*. However, this name is best reserved for yet another view which places the decree to elect some to salvation after the decrees to create, to permit the fall, *and* to provide salvation sufficient for all (Erickson, *Theology*, 930). Commonly associated with Four-Point Calvinism, this view holds to unconditional election while embracing universal atonement (Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 778; see his analysis of Calvin’s commentary on 1 John 2:2 in support of universal atonement).

¹⁷³Arminius, *Writings*, I, 248, emphasis added.

¹⁷⁴Muller, “Grace,” 259.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., 263.

things He chooses to actualize. However, he adds a third category, located between the other two, “by which God knows any thing if it be or exist.”¹⁷⁶ This “middle or intermediate knowledge [*scientia media*] ought to intervene in things which depend on the liberty of created choice or pleasure.”¹⁷⁷ Muller explains the implications of this view:

Arminius seems to be saying that, according to the *scientia media*, God has a conditional knowledge of future contingents. God does not, in other words, know a future contingent absolutely as something that will happen. Rather, God knows the future contingent relatively or hypothetically as a potential result of a prior creaturely act. The *scientia media*, in other words, seems to introduce into the divine mind an element of potency or knowledge of possibility that is actualized by something *external to God*.¹⁷⁸

Remonstrance and Dort

Was Calvin was a “Calvinist” and Arminius an “Arminian”? As individual theologians, they were not as far apart as many think.¹⁷⁹ However, developments in the Reformed Church after the death of Arminius led to the clearly defined, firmly entrenched, and widely divergent camps of Arminianism and Calvinism.

After the death of Arminius, a group of Reformed ministers sympathetic to the views of Arminius drew up the “Remonstrance to the States of Holland.”¹⁸⁰ It contained five articles: (1) election and reprobation are on the basis of foreseen faith or unbelief, not on the basis of

¹⁷⁶Arminius, *Writings*, II, 37–38.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 39; cf. I, 448–49. Thus, Arminius employs middle knowledge, located between the other two categories of divine knowledge, to explain foreknown human faith, which is similarly located between God’s antecedent will to save generally and His consequent will to save those who believe (Muller, “Grace,” 265).

¹⁷⁸Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius*, 164, emphasis added. The *scientia media* view arose out of Roman Catholic debate, particularly in the discussions of the Spanish Jesuits Molina and Suárez (Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 156–66; cf. Muller, “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice,” 265; Barry E. Bryant, “Molina, Arminius, Plaifere, Goad, and Wesley on Human Free-Will, Divine Omniscience, and Middle Knowledge,” 93–103. For an analysis of Molina’s view, see J. A. Crabtree, “Does Middle Knowledge Solve the Problem of Divine Sovereignty?” in *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will*, vol. 2, 429–47). William L. Craig has proposed middle knowledge as possible middle ground between Calvinists and Arminians (“Middle Knowledge, A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 141–64). However, according to Muller, “the idea of ... middle knowledge is the heart and soul of the original Arminian position. Middle knowledge is not a middle ground.” What is more, it “undermines the divine sovereignty, assaults the doctrine of salvation by grace, and in addition proposes an ontological absurdity” (“Grace,” 265–66). For Arminian criticisms of middle knowledge, see Robert E. Picirilli, “Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future,” 269–70, and David Basinger, “Divine Control and Human Freedom: Is Middle Knowledge the Answer?” 55–64.

¹⁷⁹Arminius held Calvin in high esteem, recommending his students read the *Institutes* and *Commentaries*, albeit “with discrimination, as the writings of all men ought to be read” (F. Stuart Clarke, “Arminius’s Understanding of Calvin,” 27). According to Lake, Arminius was “in most points a mild Calvinist” (“Contribution,” 232). The main exception was predestination, where Arminius clearly took his stand against Calvin. Even so, “Arminius would presumably have been astonished if he had known that his name was soon to become, and to remain, synonymous with opposition to Calvinism in general” (Clarke, “Understanding,” 26).

¹⁸⁰“Remonstrants” became the name for the followers of Arminius (Gerrit Jan Hoenderdaal, “The Life and Struggle of Arminius in the Dutch Republic,” in *Man’s Faith and Freedom*, 16). Their Calvinist opponents were known as “Contra-Remonstrants” (Bangs, *Arminius*, 356).

unconditional predestination; (2) Christ died for all, although only believers benefit; (3) Saving faith comes not by strength of human free will, but rather by God's grace in Christ; (4) while grace is essential to the beginning, continuation, and end of salvation, it is not irresistible; and (5) while divine grace is sufficient for perseverance, a true believer may fall away from God and be lost.¹⁸¹

The Remonstrants hoped to promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence within the Reformed Church;¹⁸² instead, their articles were rejected and they themselves condemned at the Synod of Dort. In response, the Reformed Church issued the Canons of Dort: (1) unconditional election and faith are both the gift of God; (2) Christ's death is sufficient for all but efficient only for the elect; (3) all are utterly corrupt in sin and cannot effect their salvation; (4) in sovereign grace God calls and regenerates the elect; (5) those thus saved are preserved to the end; hence there is assurance of salvation.¹⁸³

Amyraldianism

An important modification of the so-called Five-Point Calvinism established by Dort was developed by the French Reformed theologian Moise Amyraut. He urged Calvinists to return to the theology of their namesake, particularly regarding predestination and the atonement. Amyraut felt that Reformed theology, unlike Calvin, had over-emphasized predestination, improperly treating it under theology proper rather than soteriology. Furthermore,

Amyraut propounded a view of hypothetical universal predestination, whereby God was said to will the salvation of all people on the condition that they believe. Thus ideally Christ's atonement was sufficient for all, but because of universal human depravity, in practice it was efficient only for the elect.¹⁸⁴

Edwards

Jonathan Edwards, "produced one of the most thorough and compelling bodies of theological writing in the history of America."¹⁸⁵ One of his finest works is *Freedom of the Will*, which according to Paul Ramsey, "alone is sufficient to establish its author as the greatest philosopher-

¹⁸¹A. W. Harrison, *Arminianism*, 48–50.

¹⁸²*Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁸³Dort retained the Augustinian view of sin, grace, and election, and served as a model for the Westminster Assembly held in Britain a generation later (M. Eugene Osterhaven, "Dort, Synod of," in *EDT*, 332).

¹⁸⁴Bruce A. Demarest, "Amyraldianism," in *EDT*, 42). This is why Four-Point Calvinists who hold to universal atonement are sometimes called Amyraldians (Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 318).

¹⁸⁵Mark A. Noll, "Edwards, Jonathan," in *EDT*, 343. Regarding his theology, Edwards said, "I should not take it at all amiss, to be called a Calvinist, for distinction's sake: though I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin, or believing the doctrines which I hold, because he believed and taught them; and cannot justly be charged with believing in everything just as he taught" (Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985], 131).

theologian yet to grace the American scene.”¹⁸⁶ Edwards’s major theme in *Freedom of the Will* is apparent in the following:

‘Tis easy to see how the decision of most of the points in the controversy, between Calvinists and Arminians, depends on the determination of this grand article concerning *the freedom of the will requisite to moral agency*; and that by clearing and establishing the Calvinistic doctrine in this point, the chief arguments are obviated, by which Arminian doctrines in general are supported, and the contrary doctrines demonstratively confirmed.¹⁸⁷

Edwards argues further that his view of moral responsibility is consistent with the Calvinist doctrines of: (1) universal, determining providence; (2) total depravity and corruption of human nature; (3) efficacious and irresistible grace; (4) the universal, absolute decree of God and absolute, eternal, personal election; (5) particular redemption; and (6) the perseverance of saints.¹⁸⁸

Edwards’s view of free will rests on three pillars: (1) the definition of liberty; (2) the nature of an act of volition; and (3) the agent’s responsibility for an act.¹⁸⁹ In the first pillar, Edwards defines liberty as “power, opportunity, or advantage, that anyone has, to do as he pleases. In other words, his being free from hindrance or impediment in the way of doing, or conducting in any respect, as he wills.”¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, the definition of freedom itself has nothing to do with

the cause or original of that choice; or at all considering how the person came to have such a volition.... Let the person come by his volition or choice how he will, yet, if he is able, and there is nothing in the way to hinder his pursuing and executing his will, the man is fully and perfectly free, according to the primary and common notion of freedom.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶Edwards, *Freedom*, 2.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., 431, emphasis added. Thus, the treatise “deals fundamentally with the issue of moral responsibility. The thrust of his argumentation is a denial and refutation of the Arminian notion as to what constitutes responsibility, or that upon which it rests” (C. Samuel Storms, “Jonathan Edwards on the Freedom of the Will,” 132).

¹⁸⁸Edwards, *Freedom*, 431–36. Edwards follows Luther who, as we saw, views free will as “the very heart of the gospel” (Luther, *Bondage*, 41). With his argument of free will, Edwards “hoped to give incontrovertible refutation of self-determinism and also at the same time to command the very citadel of other issues” (Edwards, *Freedom*, 32).

¹⁸⁹Edwards, *Freedom*, 24.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., 163.

¹⁹¹Ibid., 164; cf. 453–54. This point is crucial in the Calvinist-Arminian debate over free will. As John Feinberg points out, Arminian indeterminists define an act as free only if it is not causally determined. Then they proceed as if “no other definition of freedom other than their own is possible. That commits the logical error known as begging the question or arguing in a circle” (“God Ordains All Things,” in *Predestination and Free Will*, 24). This is exactly the error of James D. Strauss in his critique of Edwards. First, Strauss offers Arminius’s own definition of indeterministic freedom as a person’s “ability at any given moment to choose to sin or not to sin.” Second, Strauss examines Edwards’s view that divine foreknowledge renders events certain. Finally, Strauss predictably rejects Edwards’s account of divine sovereignty and human freedom on the basis of his *own* definitions of sovereignty and freedom rather than Edwards’s (“A Puritan in a Post-Puritan World—Jonathan Edwards,” in *Grace Unlimited*, 245–53). Regarding divine foreknowledge and the certainty of events, Strauss makes this astonishing statement: “[I]t does not follow that God’s knowledge, which is his basis of predicting future events, makes future events inevitable. Scientifically, knowledge is imperative for predictive power, but no one surely would say that the knowledge, which

Edwards's second pillar is the nature of an act of volition. "If a man does something voluntarily, or as the effect of his choice, then in the most proper sense, and as the word is most originally and commonly used, he is said to act."¹⁹² Put simply, a person "has power to will, as he does will; because what he wills, he wills; and therefore has power to will what he has power to will."¹⁹³

Conversely, Arminians hold that a person "has power to will as he pleases or chooses to will: that is, he has power by one act of choice, to choose another; by an antecedent act of will to choose a consequent act; and therein to execute his own choice."¹⁹⁴ If this be so,

wherein lies man's liberty in that antecedent act of will which chose the consequent act? The answer according to the same principles must be, that his liberty in this also lies in his willing as he would, or as he chose, or agreeable to another act of choice preceding that. And so the question returns *in infinitum*, and the like answer must be made *in infinitum*: in order to support their opinion, there must be no beginning, but free acts of will must have been chosen by foregoing free acts of will, in the soul of every man, without beginning; and so before he had a being, from all eternity.¹⁹⁵

The third pillar is an agent's responsibility for an act. According to Edwards, "When a thing is *from* a man, in that sense, that it is from his will or choice, he is to blame for it, because his will is *in it*: so far as the will is *in it*, blame is *in it*, and no further."¹⁹⁶ Arminians, however, hold that responsibility for an act is only appropriate if the will is "altogether indifferent." According to this view, the will "has its choice to make between two or more things, that are perfectly equal in the view of the mind ... the will can instantly determine itself to one, by a sovereign power which it has over itself, without being moved by any preponderating inducement."¹⁹⁷ But is this possible? Edwards answers,

The very putting of the question is sufficient to show the absurdity of the affirmative answer: for how ridiculous would it be for anybody to insist, that the soul chooses one thing before another, when at the very same instant it is perfectly indifferent with respect to each! This is

enables scientists to predict future events, 'causes' future events" ("Puritan," 256). True, if God only has as much control over future events as human scientists do, then Edwards is defeated. But what a price to pay for victory!

¹⁹²Edwards, *Freedom*, 347.

¹⁹³*Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 193–94. In other words, "[I]f the will chooses its choice (i.e., determines its own acts), it must be supposed to choose to choose this choice, and before that it would have to choose to choose to choose this choice, and so on *ad infinitum*. Therefore, the Arminian notion of freedom as self-determination either contradicts itself by positing an unchosen choice, or shuts itself wholly out of the world by an infinite regress" (Storms, "Edwards," 149). "For Edwards as a theologian the issue is a simple one: either contingency and the liberty of self-determination must be run out of this world, or God will be shut out" (Edwards, *Freedom*, 9).

¹⁹⁶Edwards, *Freedom*, 427, emphasis original. Thus, "Edwards's understanding of free volition is wholly consistent with moral praise or blame. A person may be praised or blamed insofar as he had voluntary *engagedness* in the action" (Edwards, *Freedom*, 21, emphasis original).

¹⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 195.

the same thing as to say, the soul prefers one thing to another, at the very same time that it has no preference ... choice may be immediately after a state of indifference, but has no coexistence with it: even the very beginning of it is not in a state of indifference. And therefore if this be liberty, no act of the will, in any degree, is ever performed in a state of liberty, or in the time of liberty.¹⁹⁸

By thus defining liberty, volitional acts, and responsibility for acts, Edwards argues for a Calvinist understanding of free will necessary for moral agency.

As stated, Edwards believes his position on free will also upholds the Calvinist doctrines of universal providence, total depravity, irresistible grace, unconditional election, particular redemption, and perseverance. I turn now to a brief presentation of Edwards's views on these doctrines.

Regarding divine providence, Edwards defines God's sovereignty as "his ability and authority to do whatever pleases him"¹⁹⁹ This entails: (1) supreme power whereby God is able to do what pleases Him; (2) supreme authority to do what He wills; (3) supreme, underived, and independent will; and (4) supreme wisdom that determines His will. "There is no other divine sovereignty but this: and this is properly *absolute sovereignty*: no other is desirable; nor would any other be honorable, or happy: and indeed there is no other conceivable or possible."²⁰⁰

If we are to understand God's sovereignty as a "universal, determining providence" which "infers some kind of necessity of all events,"²⁰¹ how can we be moral agents? The answer lies in the difference between natural and moral necessity. Natural necessity is what occurs apart from or against the will; thus, "natural necessity is wholly inconsistent with just praise or blame."²⁰² Moral necessity, on the other hand, "is a certainty of the inclination and will itself."²⁰³ Ramsey points out the importance of this distinction:

[I]t is a cardinal point insisted on by contemporary determinists under the heading of the difference they point out between "determinism" and "compulsion" ... Free acts are uncompelled acts, not uncaused or undetermined acts. Edwards associates himself with this distinction—in fact he was among the first to formulate fully and adequately this distinction—between determinism and compulsion.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 207.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 378.

²⁰⁰Ibid., 378–80, emphasis original. Also, "God does decisively, in his providence, order all the volitions of moral agents, either by positive influence or permission" (Edwards, *Freedom*, 433).

²⁰¹Ibid., 431.

²⁰²Ibid., 350.

²⁰³Ibid., 159.

²⁰⁴Ibid., 37. We met this distinction in Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. "In fact, no theologian of any stature who believed in divine determinism, or in *any degree* of efficacy in the operation of divine grace upon the soul, has ever failed to distinguish such determinism or efficacy from compulsion" (Edwards, *Freedom*, 42, emphasis original). Cf. J. Feinberg: "According to determinists such as myself, an action is free even if causally determined so long as the causes are *nonconstraining*" ("God Ordains," 24, emphasis added).

Total depravity for Edwards means that the sinner's "heart is wholly under the power of sin, and he is utterly unable, without the interposition of sovereign grace, savingly to love God, believe in Christ, or do anything that is truly good and acceptable in God's sight."²⁰⁵ It is objected that such necessity excuses sin, but as Edwards has already shown, moral necessity in no way excuses sin.²⁰⁶

Irresistible grace means that "God gives virtue, holiness and conversion to sinners, by an influence which determines the effect, in such a manner, that the effect will infallibly follow by a moral necessity."²⁰⁷ The Arminian objection is that this violates free will—but again, this begs the question. The objection is valid only if Arminian indeterminist free will is the only possible view.²⁰⁸

Absolute election is based on God's universal providence: "God orders all events, and the volitions of moral agents amongst others, by such a decisive disposal, that the events are infallibly connected with his disposal."²⁰⁹ Election also follows from efficacious grace,

For if men are made true saints, no otherwise than as God makes 'em so, and distinguishes 'em from others, by an efficacious power and influence of his, that decides and fixes the event; and God thus makes some saints, and not others, on design or purpose ... it follows, that God thus distinguished from others, all that ever become true saints, by his eternal design or decree.²¹⁰

Regarding particular redemption, "however Christ in some sense may be said to *die for all*, and to redeem all visible Christians, yea, the whole world by his death; yet there must be something *particular* in the design of his death, with respect to such as he intended should actually be saved thereby."²¹¹ This follows from Edwards's view of divine foreknowledge, whereby it is "impossible, in strictness of speech, that God should prosecute a design or aim at a thing, which he at the same time most perfectly knows will not be accomplished."²¹²

Finally, regarding perseverance, Arminians reject the doctrine because it is "repugnant to the freedom of the will," which demands that as one "*first becomes* virtuous and holy" by one's

²⁰⁵Edwards, *Freedom*, 432; cf. Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin*, 120–27. Edwards's definition here includes both total depravity and total inability.

²⁰⁶Neither does moral inability. "Naturally one asks at this point, 'But Mr. Edwards, suppose this person was created this way.' Edwards, of course, does not believe he was created this way and he is not thinking of that possibility. He believes that God is a moral God who would never make a person wicked and then blame him for being wicked. Nevertheless, he does not spell that out at this point and we have to assume that it is in his mind when he says that moral inability never excuses" (Gerstner, "Augustine," 293–94).

²⁰⁷Edwards, *Freedom*, 434; cf. Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, 25.

²⁰⁸Edwards, *Freedom*, 433.

²⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 434.

²¹⁰*Ibid.*, 435.

²¹¹*Ibid.*, emphasis original.

²¹²*Ibid.*

“own self-determining power,” so also the question of whether one “will *persevere* in virtue and holiness” must be left up to that “same freedom of will.”²¹³ In response, Edwards believes that perseverance is the inevitable result of efficacious grace: “If the beginning of true faith and holiness, and a man’s becoming a true saint at first, don’t depend on the self-determining power of the will, but on the determining efficacious grace of God; it may well be argued, that it is so also with respect to men’s being continued saints, or persevering in faith and holiness.”²¹⁴

Along with affirming perseverance, Edwards supports assurance of salvation. He has been accused basing assurance “fundamentally and entirely on rational arguments based on personal observation of one’s behavior.”²¹⁵ However, according to Edwards, “Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination as by action. The apostle Paul sought assurance chiefly this way ... He obtained assurance of winning the prize, more by running, than by considering.”²¹⁶ Edwards does not deny the direct witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the saint for the benefit of assurance; rather, he insists that when the Spirit works on the heart He also works on the will. “Therefore the witness of the Spirit with man’s spirit becomes ‘conspicuous’ when man wrestles to perform Christian practice amidst the struggles and trials of life.”²¹⁷

Wesley

“John Wesley’s eminence,” writes Outler, “is secure—as evangelist, reformer, practical genius. Few men in the eighteenth century have left a mark so clear and ineffaceable.”²¹⁸ Wesley’s theology is “practical and occasional rather than theoretical and systematic,”²¹⁹ but this does not mean he was not a systematic theologian. On the contrary, “behind Wesley’s practice of ministry is a very clearly identifiable whole system of Christian theology.”²²⁰

If Wesley’s theology was “hammered out on the anvil of evangelistic experience,”²²¹ it was also refined through the fires of Calvinist controversies.²²² It is in this light that we now examine Wesley’s doctrine of salvation.

²¹³Ibid., 436, emphasis original.

²¹⁴Edwards also roots perseverance in absolute election, “From all which it follows, that it is absolutely fixed in God’s decree, that all true saints shall persevere to actual eternal salvation” (*Freedom*, 436). For a discussion of Edwards’s view of assurance from an Arminian perspective, see William J. Abraham, “Predestination and Assurance,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 231–42.

²¹⁵Abraham, “Predestination,” 237.

²¹⁶Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 195–96.

²¹⁷Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 145; cf. Edwards, *Affections*, 454.

²¹⁸Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley*, vii.

²¹⁹Arthur Skevington Wood, “The Contribution of John Wesley to the Theology of Grace,” In *Grace Unlimited*, 210.

²²⁰Allan Coppedge, “How Wesleyans Do Theology,” in *Doing Theology in Today’s World*, 268.

²²¹Wood, “Contribution,” 210.

Wesley believes God is sovereign in “every thing short of eternity.” Regarding His creation, God is sovereign as Maker and Sustainer of His world, and as Arranger of all the outward circumstances, natural abilities, and temporal aspects of human life. As for His church, God sovereignly set the way of salvation through faith, and gifts all believers for edification. “But in disposing the eternal states of men ... it is clear that not sovereignty alone, but justice, mercy and truth hold the reigns.”²²³ As a result, God “will punish no man for doing anything he could not possibly avoid; neither for omitting anything which he could not possibly do.”²²⁴ God gives all an equal opportunity to be saved.²²⁵

Wesley also acknowledges total depravity: “Our nature is altogether corrupt, in every power and faculty. And our will, depraved equally with the rest, is wholly bent to indulge our natural corruption.”²²⁶ Adam, who represented all his descendents, sinned; as a result, all people “are from their birth ‘children of wrath,’ void of all righteousness, and propense to sin of all sorts.”²²⁷

While somewhat close to Calvinism on depravity,²²⁸ Wesley parts company on grace. On the one hand, Wesley and Calvinists agree on free grace in the sense that salvation is all of God.²²⁹ “Whatsoever good is in man, or is done by man, God is the author and doer of it.”²³⁰ But on the other hand, Wesley holds to free grace as preventing (prior) or prevenient grace, which refers to “all the ‘drawings of the Father’” and “all the ‘convictions’ which his Spirit, from time to time, works in every child of man,” and which, “if we yield to them, increase more and more” unto

²²²According to Thomas J. Nettles, conflict with Calvinists is one of the “enduring characteristics of Wesley” (“John Wesley’s Contention with Calvinism: Interactions Then and Now,” in *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will*, vol. 2, 301).

²²³Outler, *Wesley*, 453.

²²⁴Cited in Wood, “Contribution,” 211.

²²⁵“It is a mistake, however,” says Thomas R. Schreiner, “to say that God’s love and mercy will provide every person an equal chance to believe. God would be just in sending all to hell since all have sinned. The love and mercy extended to the elect is undeserved. God is obligated to save no one, but out of a heart of mercy he saves some” (“Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?” In *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will*, vol. 2, 381).

²²⁶Cited in Allan Coppedge, *John Wesley in Theological Debate*, 135.

²²⁷John Wesley, *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, 214.

²²⁸However, as Coppedge acknowledges, with the help of prevenient grace all sinners have the ability to respond to God’s offer of salvation (*Wesley*, 136). Also, while Wesley’s prevenient grace is similar to Calvinist common grace, it differs in that it may lead a person to salvation (Schreiner, “Prevenient Grace,” 371).

²²⁹“Wesley claimed that, with respect to the central Protestant doctrine of justification, he concurred entirely with the teaching of Calvin, and did not differ from him even by a hair’s breadth” (Wood, “Contribution,” 219). Regarding Wesley’s views on Christian perfection and entire sanctification, see Coppedge, *Wesley*, 160–68, Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification*, 126–60, Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., *John Wesley: His Life and Theology*, 337–45, and Melvin E. Dieter, “The Wesleyan Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 15–21.

²³⁰Herbert Welch, ed., *Selections From the Writings of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, 30.

salvation.²³¹ Wesley's prevenient grace is given to all so that all may believe; however, it may be resisted.²³²

Closely connected to prevenient grace is free will.²³³ Through prevenient grace "there is a measure of free-will *supernaturally* restored to every man, together with that supernatural light which 'enlightens every man that cometh into the world.'"²³⁴

By standing for prevenient grace and free will, Wesley could stand against Calvinist unconditional election and reprobation.²³⁵ By election Wesley means "a divine appointment of some men to eternal happiness. But I believe this election to be conditional, as well as the reprobation opposite thereto. I believe the eternal decree concerning both is expressed in those words: 'He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.'"²³⁶

Wesley bases this election on a particular view of divine foreknowledge, whereby God, "to whom all things are present at once, who sees all eternity at one view," is able to call "true believers 'elect from the foundation of the world,' although they were not actually elect, or believers, til many ages after."²³⁷

Last, what are Wesley's views of security and assurance? Starting with the latter, he like Arminius believes assurance of salvation is actual, coming directly to the believer from the Spirit Himself: "by 'the testimony of the Spirit' I mean an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God; that 'Jesus Christ hath loved me and given himself for me'; that all my sins are blotted out and I, even I, am reconciled to God."²³⁸

²³¹Outler, *Wesley*, 273.

²³²Schreiner, "Prevenient Grace," 372. However, "God *may* possibly, at *some times*, work irresistibly in *some souls*. I believe he *does*. But can you infer from hence that he *always* works thus in all that are saved?" (Outler, *Wesley*, 468, emphasis original).

²³³"It has been claimed that Wesley's conception of grace is basic to his idea of free will. It might also be argued that his conception of free will underlies his idea of grace" (Wood, "Contribution," 214).

²³⁴Outler, *Wesley*, 447, emphasis original. Wesley's doctrine of free grace for all is grounded in the doctrine of unlimited atonement (Wood, "Contribution," 216).

²³⁵For Wesley, unconditional reprobation is the "millstone which hangs about the neck" of the whole Calvinist system (Outler, *Wesley*, 469). It eliminates moral responsibility and renders impossible God's just condemnation of sinners. In the words of Wesley's mother Susanna, "the doctrine of predestination, as maintained by the rigid Calvinists is very shocking, and ought utterly to be abhorred" (cited in Nettles, "Contention," 314).

²³⁶Outler, *Wesley*, 433.

²³⁷Outler, *Wesley*, 433. It was the realization that "exhaustive foreknowledge was tantamount to predestination" which led Pinnock to eliminate future free human choices from God's omniscience (Nettles, "Contention," 320; see Clark Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 25).

²³⁸Outler, *Wesley*, 211.

However, as for security, “Whatever assurance God may give to particular souls, I find no general promise in Holy Writ ‘that none who once believes shall finally fall’”²³⁹ On the contrary, Wesley believes on the basis of Scripture that “one who is a true believer, or, in other words, one who is holy and righteous in the judgment of God himself, may nevertheless finally fall from grace.”²⁴⁰ Thus, like Arminius and Luther before him, Wesley believes in theoretical uncertainty (faith and salvation may be lost) and existential certainty (present assurance is possible for present faith).

Finney

Charles Finney is known as the “Father of Modern Revivalism.” It is his theology, however, called by one writer “arminianized Calvinism,”²⁴¹ which interests us here. Of particular importance is his view on perseverance.²⁴²

Within Finney’s soteriology is moral depravity, “the depravity of free will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law.... Moral depravity is depravity of choice.”²⁴³ Being related exclusively to free choice, moral depravity “does not consist in, nor imply a sinful nature.... It is not a constitutional sinfulness.”²⁴⁴ Moral depravity is “sin itself and not the cause of sin. It is not something prior to sin ... but it is the essence and the whole of sin.”²⁴⁵ Finney’s limiting sin to individual willful acts was the position of Pelagius. It is not surprising, then, that like Pelagius Finney denies original sin.²⁴⁶ Adam’s influence on his posterity is only indirect: “his sin ... exposed his posterity to aggravated temptation. Not only the physical constitution of all men, but all the influences under which they first form their moral character, are widely different from what they would have been, if sin had never been

²³⁹Ibid., 458.

²⁴⁰Ibid.

²⁴¹John D. Woodbridge, ed., *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, 319.

²⁴²I will use Charles Finney, *Finney’s Systematic Theology*, new expanded edition, ed. Dennis Carroll, Bill Nicely, and L. G. Parkhurst, Jr. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1994), which is based on the 1878 edition. I recommend this over the abridged edition (Charles Finney, *Finney’s Systematic Theology*, abridged, ed. J. H. Fairchild [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976]), since the latter excludes Finney’s lectures on perseverance (over 100 pages!). Jay E. Smith uses the abridged edition in his otherwise very fine article (“The Theology of Charles Finney: A System of Self-Reformation,” *TrinJ* 13 [1992]: 61–93), missing the opportunity to evaluate this element of Finney’s theology found in earlier editions. I cannot help wondering with David L. Turner “why this entire section has been deleted from the abridged edition” (“A Critique of Charles G. Finney’s Theology, 1977,” TMs [photocopy], 160, n.2).

²⁴³Finney, *Theology*, 243.

²⁴⁴Ibid., 245.

²⁴⁵Ibid., 249.

²⁴⁶Ibid., 262. The influence of New England divine Nathaniel Taylor appears to be more direct, as Smith explains, “While rejecting the concept of original sin, Taylor argued that moral depravity consisted in a person’s free, voluntary choices. Therefore, sin consisted in voluntary sinning with no real or symbolic connection to Adam. Taylor also taught a governmental theory of the atonement, free will, real human ability, that humans effected their own regeneration, and that conversion was a result of education” (“Theology,” 67).

introduced.”²⁴⁷ In other words, “Adam is responsible for the physical depravity of his posterity but not the moral depravity, which Finney insists must be a free, voluntary choice.”²⁴⁸

Finney defines regeneration as a “change in the attitude of the will,” a “change in its ultimate choice ... from a state of entire consecration to self-interest ... to a state of entire consecration to God.”²⁴⁹ It is a cooperative effort—the Spirit persuades, the will turns—but the human side is key: “God [cannot] regenerate him, if he will not turn. If he will not change his choice, it is impossible that it should be changed.”²⁵⁰

Finney teaches “the plenary ability of humanity,”²⁵¹ defined as “the liberty of the human will, and the natural ability of men to obey God.”²⁵² This excludes any notion of God-given “gracious ability” other than “the power which men at present possess to obey the commands of God.”²⁵³ Finney repudiates both Calvinist irresistible grace granted to the elect, and Arminian prevenient grace given to all of humanity.²⁵⁴ Once again, Finney returns to Pelagius.

Finney redefines faith as a virtue which “implies a state of present sinlessness,” and is “synonymous with entire present sanctification.”²⁵⁵ In line with his governmental atonement view, Finney sees justification as a “governmental decree of pardon or amnesty.”²⁵⁶ It is not forensic, but “spiritual renewal or moral transformation.”²⁵⁷

The result of justification and regeneration is sanctification, “a state of obedience, or conformity to the law of God.” Sanctification may be entire in the sense of “present, full obedience, or entire consecration” or “continued abiding consecration or obedience to God.”²⁵⁸ In this state the believer “does not, and will not sin.”²⁵⁹ Finally, this “state of entire sanctification is attainable in this life, on the ground of natural ability.”²⁶⁰ On the possibility of unaided sinless perfection, then, Finney once again echoes the ancient doctrine of Pelagius.

²⁴⁷Finney, *Theology*, 266.

²⁴⁸Smith, “Theology,” 77, n.113. Nevertheless, Adam’s influence is universal: “every moral agent of our race is ... morally depraved” (Finney, *Theology*, 247).

²⁴⁹Finney, *Theology*, 273.

²⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 276. Thus, “the real agent behind regeneration is the individual” (Smith, “Theology,” 80).

²⁵¹Smith, “Theology,” 82.

²⁵²Finney, *Theology*, 307.

²⁵³*Ibid.*, 322.

²⁵⁴Smith, “Theology,” 83.

²⁵⁵Finney, *Theology*, 355.

²⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 361.

²⁵⁷This is essentially Tridentine justification (Smith “Theology,” 85–86).

²⁵⁸Finney, *Theology*, 380.

²⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 381.

²⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 382.

Finney's doctrine of election may indeed be labeled "arminianized Calvinism."²⁶¹ God elects on the basis of "foreseen repentance, faith and perseverance," the Arminian view.²⁶² However, three sentences later election is "upon condition that God foresaw that *He could secure* their repentance, faith, and final perseverance."²⁶³ This sounds Calvinist, especially when Finney adds that God has "*certain* knowledge that *He shall* secure their salvation."²⁶⁴

This intriguing Pelagian-Arminian-Calvinist mix is most evident in Finney's doctrine of perseverance. Finney clearly affirms the doctrine: "all who are at any time true saints of God, are preserved by His grace and Spirit through faith ... and that being thus kept, they will certainly be saved with an everlasting salvation."²⁶⁵

However, this perseverance is not due to a constitutional change in the believer wrought by God in regeneration or justification.²⁶⁶ Rather, "The saints keep themselves, in the sense, that all obedience is their own; all their piety consists in their own voluntary obedience."²⁶⁷ As a result, there is always the possibility that a saint could "fall from grace, and be finally lost."²⁶⁸

Finally, present assurance is possible based on holy living. "Those of the elect that are already converted, are known by their character and conduct. They have evidence of their election in their obedience to God."²⁶⁹

²⁶¹Finney's lecture on election has likewise been excised from the abridged edition.

²⁶²Finney's understanding of divine sovereignty is also Arminian: God's infinite knowledge enabled Him to foresee the actions of free moral agents and "[lay] His plan accordingly" (*Theology*, 479).

²⁶³*Ibid.*, 449, emphasis added.

²⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 451, emphasis added.

²⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 510. It through James Oliver Buswell that I first learned that "Finney was not typically Arminian in his views, for he vigorously defended the doctrine of 'the perseverance of the saints'" (*A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, 95, n.40).

²⁶⁶In the original 1851 edition, Finney states, "The saints persevere, not by virtue of a constitutional change, but alone by virtue, or as a result of the abiding and indwelling influence of the Holy Spirit" (*Lectures on Systematic Theology*, ed. George Redford [London: William Tegg and Co., 1851], 845). In the 1878 edition, however, this has been changed to read, "The saints persevere, not by virtue of a constitutional change, but as a result of the abiding and indwelling influence of the Holy Spirit" (*Lectures on Systematic Theology*, ed. J. H. Fairchild [New York: George H. Doran, 1878], 555). The 1994 Bethany House new expanded edition, as stated, follows the 1878 edition.

²⁶⁷The Holy Spirit does persuade, enlighten, and draw believers, thereby securing their voluntary obedience, but by external influence only; ultimately, perseverance depends upon the individual (Finney, *Theology*, 514; Turner, "Critique," 162). "Finney so completely rules God out of the believer's perseverance that he posits the possibility of saints in heaven as backsliding" (Turner, "Critique," 162; see Finney, *Theology*, 508).

²⁶⁸For Finney, a free act of a moral agent is a "moral certainty," defined as "a mere certainty, or a voluntary certainty, a free certainty, a certainty that might, by natural possibility in every case, be no certainty at all" (*Theology*, 505). Finney appears to break the law of non-contradiction, for how can the same event be both certain and uncertain in the same moment? Picirilli, I believe, falls into a similar logical trap when he distinguishes certainty from necessity. ("Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future," 262–64). How can the same event be absolutely certain, but not necessarily so? It is Finney's illogical reasoning that makes his doctrine of perseverance incoherent: Salvation is both theoretically certain (the elect never fall) and uncertain (the elect may fall), and existentially certain (present assurance is possible).

²⁶⁹Finney, *Theology*, 459.

To conclude, Finney's theology is not "arminianized Calvinism," or even "calvinized Arminianism," but rather *calvinized Pelagianism*—Calvinist on election and perseverance (albeit incoherently), but Pelagian on anthropology, truly "a theology of self-reformation."²⁷⁰

Conclusion

This paper examined eight key theologians as well as several corollary movements, all of which have made significant contributions to present forms of Calvinism and Arminianism. From this study we may draw several conclusions. First, the divine sovereignty / human responsibility tension of Scripture is very much at the center of these competing soteriological systems. Which side of this tension gets priority determines whether one's system is Calvinist or Arminian. Second and more particularly, how one *defines* divine sovereignty, human depravity, and free will decisively influences one's soteriological positions. Third, positions on eternal security and assurance of salvation result from more basic theological commitments in both Calvinism and Arminianism. The Calvinist's commitment to God's sovereign superintendence of salvation leads him to affirm security and assurance. The Arminian's commitment to indeterminism or libertarian free will leads him to see security as conditioned upon continued faith, assurance of salvation for present belief, but no assurance of future faith or final salvation.

Finally, while security and assurance are clearly related, they are discrete doctrines which can be treated separately within one's soteriology. For this reason, individuals within the same broad theological camp may hold conflicting views on these two doctrines. For example, we think of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Edwards as all being on the Calvinist side of the ledger, yet only Calvin and Edwards held to both eternal security and assurance of salvation for the believer. On the other hand, while Finney generally falls on the Arminian side, he affirmed the eternal security of the believer. Be that as it may, the individuals and movements examined in this paper continue to exert great influence as believers today on both sides of the Calvinist and Arminian divide grapple with Scripture and seek to affirm a soteriology which faithfully reflects it.

²⁷⁰Smith, "Theology," 89.