

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

24...it must still be concluded

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, in spite of the unanimity of our Confessions regarding

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Of course, it would be terribly anachronistic to speak of Calvinist *anything* in the 1520’s, and if indeed Melanchthon – and Luther too for that matter – sound like John Calvin, it is probably because they share a common source, viz., St. Augustine. This is not the time or place to go into Augustine’s doctrine of predestination<sup>46</sup> (or Calvin’s either for that matter<sup>47</sup>), but it is important to note that early Luther explicitly argued that he was following this church father when he articulated his doctrine of the “bondage of the will.” Indeed, the first theses of his “Disputation against Scholastic Theology” are a defense of Augustine’s authority in theology, on the basis of which Luther claimed, “It is *therefore* true [*veritas itaque est*] that man, being a bad tree, can only will and do evil” [emphasis mine]. Later in these theses, Luther introduced predestination “as the best and infallible preparation for grace and the sole means of obtaining grace,” but he did not directly blame predestination for the *bondage* of the will.<sup>48</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Endnotes

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

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup> Kolb, *Bound Choice*, 28.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>17</sup> LW 26:58. "Docemus enim omnes homines esse impios, Liberum arbitrium, vires humanas, sapientiam, iustitiam, omnem religionem voluntariam et quicquid est optimum in mundo, damnamus. Summa, nihil omnino in nobis esse dicimus, quod valeat ad promerendam gratiam ac remissionem peccatorum." WA 40<sup>l</sup>:121.17-21. Cf. also LW 26:26, 27, 41, 124, 323, 330.

<sup>18</sup> LW 34:139-139 (WA 39<sup>l</sup>:176.10-177.2).

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

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

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

<sup>22</sup> SA 3.1.4-5, 11 (Tappert, 302-303).

<sup>23</sup> SC 2.6 (Tappert, 345).

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

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

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

<sup>26</sup> FC SD 2.7 (Tappert, 521).

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

<sup>28</sup> Ap 2.47 (Tappert, 106).

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

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

<sup>31</sup> FC SD 2.5 (Tappert, 520-21).

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

<sup>33</sup> FC SD 1.27 (Tappert, 512).

<sup>34</sup> FC SD 1.10 (Tappert, 510). Cf. Ap 2.18-22.

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

<sup>36</sup> FC SD 1.9 (Tappert, 510).

<sup>37</sup> FC Ep 2.17 (Tappert, 472).

<sup>38</sup> FC SD 2.66 (Tappert, 534).

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

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

<sup>41</sup> FC SD 2.19, 24, 26 (Tappert 524, 526).

<sup>42</sup> LW 31:58. "Nam respectu aliorum suorum inferiorum non nego, quod sit, imo videatur sibi libera." WA 1:365.34-35.

<sup>43</sup> 1521 Loci, 26-27 (CR 21:col. 90).

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>49</sup> WA 7:146.5-6, 7-8.

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

<sup>51</sup> WA 7:146.6-7, 34-35.

<sup>52</sup> BW, 80 (WA 18:615.12-15).

<sup>53</sup> BW, 80 (WA 18:615.31-34).

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

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

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

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

<sup>58</sup> FC SD 2.53 (Tappert, 531).

<sup>59</sup> FC SD 2.74 (Tappert, 535).

<sup>60</sup> FC SD 2.44 (Tappert, 529).

<sup>61</sup> FC SD 2.44 (Tappert, 529).

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

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

<sup>63</sup> LW 5:42-50 (WA 43:457.32-463.17).

<sup>64</sup> LW 5:50 (WA 43:463.6).

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

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

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

<sup>67</sup> BW, 169 (WA 18:684.32-37).

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>73</sup> FC SD 11.52 (Tappert, 625).