

# ***Considering a Few Who Have *Shaped* the Church's *Thought****



- ▶ **Selected Book Summaries from the  
*PATRISTIC & MEDIEVAL PERIOD***
- ▶ **Selected Book Summaries from the  
*REFORMATION & MODERN PERIOD***

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## Introduction

The writer to the Hebrews wrote: “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith” Hebrews 13:7. Too often Christians find themselves imitating the faith of those who actually do not speak the word of God to them in truth. Instead, they listen to teachers who proclaim what their itching ears want to hear to their utter destruction. One way to guard against that is to consider how believers through the centuries understood the Gospel, and treasured Christ as they lived out its implications.

There are two cautions, two extremes, I think are critical to consider if we are to love God with our minds and hearts. First, we must guard against thinking that because something is old (pick a number) it’s irrelevant in the present and for our future. Second, we must guard against thinking that because something is new it’s relevant for the present and future. Both extremes are foolish, irrational, clothed in hubris and blind us from discovering objective truth in order to live it out presently and in the future.

The following summaries are provided to encourage, challenge, comfort and invigorate the follower of Christ to consider how in the last two millennia followers of Christ understood and lived out the implications of their faith. It’s to consider how these believers spent their energies for the glory of God and the cause of the kingdom, and to see where their example is worthy to be emulated.

Some things will seem odd, some things odious, some things onerous, and some things endearing. I trust in no way you will be bored. These summaries are but a taste of their substance that I’ve attempted to capture so that you, the reader will take up and read at the source.

(Soli Deo Gloria)

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## *The Patristic & Medieval Period*



### **Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans*<sup>1</sup>**

In his letter to the Romans, Ignatius addresses *the issue of his death*. As a prisoner, Ignatius first encourages the Romans to pray not for his deliverance, but for his death. Secondly, he desires a martyr’s death to prove the genuineness of his faith. Third, martyrdom is to be via the wild beasts. Fourth, Ignatius desires death to rid himself from his persecutors. If the wild beasts don’t want him, he will entice them to rip him to shreds. For his goal is to attain to Jesus.

Fifth, only by death could Ignatius attain to the true life. He desires neither the pleasures of this world nor it’s kingdoms, but rather the pleasures of God and His kingdom. Only through death can he attain to this true life. Sixth, he exhorts the Romans to demonstrate their fidelity to Christ by imitating him. Seventh, Ignatius affirms that

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<sup>1</sup> Ignatius, “Epistle to the Romans,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume I, 73, (T & T Clark Edinburgh, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Reprinted in 1996).

what he has written to the Romans is in accordance with Gods will. Hence, to prevent Ignatius from martyrdom is equivalent to the Romans hating him. Finally, he encourages the Romans to pray for the Syrian church, who only have Jesus Christ as the overseer.

If Christ is not risen from the dead, then Ignatius was a fool. But if Christ is risen from the dead according to eyewitness accounts (The Gospels, Acts, 1 Corinthians 15, etc.) then Ignatius understood true treasure and was thus willing to lay down his life for the Master.

As a young man, in 1984 I attended a lecture where Richard Wurmbrand, the Lutheran pastor tortured for Christ, imprisoned in a communist prison for over 14 years, spoke of his experiences. It was humbling for I was in the presence of one who loved Jesus in word and deed. While not all believers are chosen by God to journey that road of suffering, all believers are called by Christ do die to self. This is why Jesus made it clear that in order to follow him, we must deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow Him. The road is hard, for some more than others, but the rewards far outweigh the temporary hardships. What say you friend?

## **Ignatius, *Epistle to Polycarp*<sup>2</sup>**

Ignatius like Polycarp comprised part of the band of disciples after the apostles. They are known as the “Apostolic Fathers” the bishop of Smyrna, a disciple of the apostle John

While Ignatius highly esteems Polycarp and feels privileged to behold him, nevertheless *he commends and exhorts the bishop of Smyrna for many things*. Polycarp is commended for his steadfastness in the faith and is exhorted to be constant in evangelism, diligent in intercessions, focused on church unity, winsome in his speech, sober as God’s athlete who awaits his eternal reward. Moreover, Polycarp is exhorted to consider the times and zealously contend for the faith, which is being challenged with false doctrine.

Polycarp now focuses on household codes. Concerning widows, they are to be nurtured, protected and befriended. Concerning slaves, both male and female are to be treated with dignity. If marriage is to honor God, it must be patterned after Christ’s relationship with his church, and the husband/wife union must have the bishop’s approval. To heed the bishop results in God heeding the flock, the goal of which is the unity of the body. Finally, Polycarp is exhorted to appoint a Messenger in Antioch for the work of the gospel.

This is definitely not business as usual. Note the preoccupation Ignatius reveals with eternal issues in correspondence to the Great Commission (MT. 28:18-20):

*“<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

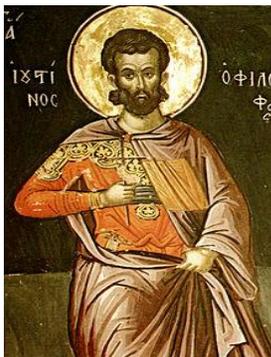
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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.93

To accomplish Christ's command, Ignatius understood the urgent need for Polycarp to practice the things exhorted (i.e., evangelism, intercessions, church unity, gracious speech, etc.)

It's uncanny how relevant this letter was then and is so today. These exhortations are pointed, concise, and conspicuously God centered. Christians would do well to pattern their discipleship according to this brief powerful letter.

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### **Justin Martyr, *First Apology*<sup>3</sup>**

In his first Apology, *Justin addresses the Roman Emperor*; Pius Augustus Caesar, his sons Versimmus and Lucius, both of which are philosophers, the Senate and all of the Roman people. Martyr's chief concern is regarding the injustice Christians are suffering at the hands of Roman authorities. The Christian worldview is being egregiously misrepresented, and as such, Justin challenges these "lovers of truth" (the philosophers) to listen to reason, and to investigate to see whether or not the allegations raised against believers are warranted.

First, *Christians are being condemned for simply bearing the name*. Justin points out that a mere name does not constitute whether one is evil or good, but rather the actions one does or does not commit should condemn or acquit them.

Second, *Christians are charged of being atheists* and Justin points out that they are atheists of a certain kind. This atheism is not equivalent to our modern usage of the word. Instead, it concerns the refusal of Christians to worship the pantheon of Roman gods, which Justin rightly labels as "demons", which are not gods at all. Instead Christians acknowledge only Jesus Christ as God, the only one worthy to be worshipped.

Third, Justin accentuates *the need for Christians individually to be tried to see if they actually are evildoers*, and if found guilty, they ought to be punished. But to merely condemn one for bearing the name "Christian" lacks reason, and it is a travesty of justice.

Fourth, Justin points out *the foolishness of idol worship and demonstrates how God is to be served*. Idols are nothing but soulless dead representations of contingent beings (creatures) and as such, to worship them is not only senseless but an offense to God (creator). Since God is the only necessary being, he is the source of all things, and as such, the service that God accepts, must conform to the excellencies that reside in Him. Moreover, Justin points out that the Christians worship is rational and is based on Christ's teaching, who among other things, calls all men to repentance from dead works to serve the living God.

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<sup>3</sup> Martyr, Justin, "The First Apology of Justin," *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume I, pp.163-187,) T & T Clark Edinburgh, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Reprinted in 1996).

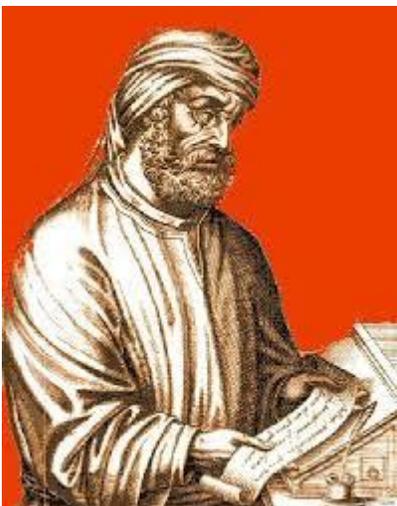
Fifth, Justin continues with *a litany of Christ's teaching found in the Gospels*. Concerning truth telling, the believer is to let "your yes be yes, and your no, no". Regarding civil obedience, give to Caesar what belongs to him, and to God what belongs to Him. Here, Justin distinguishes the proper relationship the Christian is to have with the state and with God.

Sixth, Justin *answers the heathen analogies to Christian doctrine*, to the history of Christ and to his Sonship and points out that although there are similarities, truth and redemption are only found in Christ Jesus the Lord. Since the aforementioned obtains, Christians have abandoned the worship of false gods, the practice of sorcery, and promiscuous behavior.

Seventh, Martyr points out that *the life and works of Christ are predicted in the Hebrew prophets*, and as such uses fulfilled prophecy to argue for the veracity of Christian doctrine. He starts off with Moses describing the time of Jesus' coming and his passion. Then Isaiah (the most quoted prophet) describes the predicted virgin birth, reign, and crucifixion of Christ, while Micah describes Bethlehem as the place of his birth. Furthermore, the Psalmist predicts his incarnation, crucifixion, and ascension. Justin also points out that Judea's desolation, Christ's healing ministry, and rejection by the Jews are also foretold. Hence, if what was foretold has already been fulfilled, for Justin, it stands to reason that the predictions not yet fulfilled, will be. And are thus worthy to be believed.

Eighth, Justin explains that even though demons have instituted the rite of baptism in their temples, *true baptism is reserved only for those who are born again*. He continues to explain that partaking of the Eucharist is reserved only for those who have been regenerated and baptized. He finally explains the reason they worship on Sunday and explains their liturgy.

Justin concludes his letter in the manner in which he started, *he appeals to reason and justice*. He challenges his audience, if the material presented is reasonable and true, and then they should honor it and not decree the innocent to be killed. If it is nonsensical, they should totally disregard it. He then warns them that they will not escape the coming judgment of God if they do not stop their injustice.



## **Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*<sup>4</sup>**

In his letter *Against Praxeas*, Tertullian defends the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. He acknowledges that the heresy to be refuted is caused by Satan himself. The heresy of Praxeas, “He says that the Father Himself came down into the virgin, was Himself born of her. Himself suffered, indeed was himself Jesus Christ”. These “tares” of Praxeas, force Tertullian to both explain the church’s position on the doctrine, and secondly move him to deal with the misapprehensions of the opposing view.

### ***The Church’s Position***

First, there is *The Church’s Position*. There is only one God, but in the *economy* (i.e., the distinct roles each member of the triune Godhead fulfills) of the Godhead is the Son who proceeds from the Father, who created all things, who was sent into the virgin by the Father, and from the Father through the Son the Holy Spirit is sent. Tertullian asserts that this rule of faith is not new, but rather has been handed down to the church from its inception. The *unity* is one of substance (i.e., of nature—divine,), and the three-ness constitutes the *persons* Father, Son, and Spirit (i.e., one of identity—distinctions).

### ***Objection Raised***

Second, there is *Praxeas’ Objection*. Although the following objection did not originate with Praxeas, the allegation raised against the church’s view of the Trinity, is that it leads people to either bi-theism (i.e., two Gods) or tri-theism (i.e., three Gods), whereas their view of God leads them to the true worship of the one God. Moreover, they assert that their view maintains the sole monarchy of God, whereas the church’s view destroys it. Tertullians’ essential response is that the unity of the monarchy is not destroyed, but rather it is preserved, if the Son and the Spirit are indeed sharers of the one monarchy.

### ***Varied Responses to Heresy***

Third, there is *Tertullians’ Varied Responses to the Heresy*. One response to the heresy is that the unity of the Godhead and the supremacy and sole government of the divine being are not impaired according to Catholic doctrine. Tertullian argues that since the Son is derived from the substance of the Father, does only the will of the Father, and is given all power from the Father, then the Monarchy is not destroyed from the faith. Moreover, since the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, the monarchy ends up not being destroyed, but rather, it is preserved. Furthermore, the fact that the Son will restore the monarchy back to the Father, demonstrates the clear distinction of persons within the Godhead. Henceforth, those who are claiming to preserve the sole monarchy are actually destroying it, because they are overthrowing the very arrangement and dispensation employed by God.

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<sup>4</sup> Tertullian, “Against Praxeas,” *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume III, Pp.597-627, (T & T Clark Edinburgh, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Reprinted in 1997)

### ***Clarification of the Trinity***

Fourth, Tertullian clarifies the Catholic rule of faith concerning the Trinity. He argues that the Father, Son, and Spirit are a unity of substance, but are three distinct persons. The Father is seen as the entire substance, the Son and the Spirit are derivations of that whole. The distinction of persons can be seen in that the Father begets, and the Son is begotten, and the Son sends another *Paraclete*. The distinction of persons is further seen in the *names of Father, Son, and Spirit*.

### ***Monarchian Position not Coherent***

Fifth, he shows the incoherence of the Monarchian position that maintains the Father is the Son and vice versa. He does this by distinguishing *being* from *having*. Tertullian argues that in order for a father to *be* one, he must first *have* a son. Likewise, in order for a son to *be* one, he must first *have* a father. Moreover, how can I be my own son, or be my own father? The logic is faulty, and yet the Monarchian responds with “nothing is impossible with God!” Tertullian’s challenge is to consider *whether or not God has really done it*. For he reasons that God really could have made man with wings to fly, but reality does not bear it out, nor does the Monarchian argument for that matter.

### ***Scripture Must Ground Our Positions***

Sixth, Tertullian then challenges Praxeas to biblically ground his position. He then distorts a passage to make his point concerning the distinction between the Father and Son, “The Lord said unto Himself, I am my own son, today I have begotten myself“. If this is the case, then God is a deceiver, an imposter, and a tamperer with His word. But since the contrary obtains, the position asserted by Praxeas is egregiously false.

### ***Textual Evidence for Plurality of Persons***

Seventh, he then demonstrates the scriptural basis for the plurality of persons (Gen.1: 3, 26-27; 3:22; Jn.1: 1, 3, 9), and the unity of substance within the Godhead as a remedy to combat polytheism (Ps.45: 6-7; Isa.45: 14-15; Jn. 1:1; etc.), and then chastises Praxeas for not accepting the clear declarations of scripture.

### ***Further Evidence From Both OT and NT***

Eighth, Tertullian continues with scripture passages in the OT (Gen. 32:30; Ex. 33:13, 11; Num. 12:6-8; 1 Cor.13: 12; Mk. 9:4; Mt. 17:3; etc.) and in the NT (Jn.1: 1-2, 18; 4:12; 1 Cor.9: 1; 1 Tim. 4:16; etc.) demonstrating the Fathers’ invisibility and the Sons’ visibility. Moreover, he deals with OT manifestations of Christ, with titles that both the Son and the Father share depicting their deity, and he abundantly shows how in John’s Gospel, the distinction of persons between the Father and Son obtain.

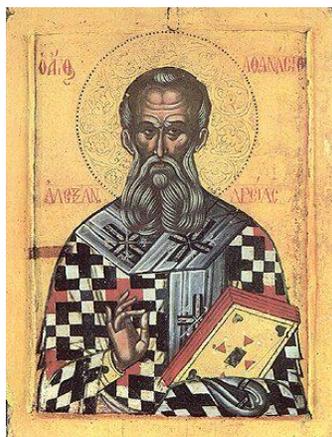
Tertullian not only sees that the doctrine of the Trinity is the great divide between Christianity and Judaism, but he also sees the Monarchian doctrine as blasphemous, and as such, damnable.

Many well-meaning professing believers today fall under the error of Praxeas punting to “nothing is impossible with God” God is “mysterious” and a host of other responses that undermine the clarity of Scripture concerning God’s nature and the

distinction of persons within the Trinity. While mystery obtains (e.g., Christ's incarnation) it's the duty of disciples to not take the Name of the LORD our God in vain (i.e., misrepresenting His Character or Being).

The doctrine of the Trinity is in fact one of the pillars of Christendom distinguishing it from all other beliefs, and it is foundational to understanding so much of Scripture.

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## Athanasius, *On The Incarnation*<sup>5</sup>

### *The Universe's Creation*

In his letter *On The Incarnation*, Athanasius first grounds his apologetic of the incarnation on the universe's creation. He does this by addressing fallacious views of creation, the first of which is *Epicureanism (fortuitous generation)*. They contend that everything is its own cause and is independent of any purpose, but Athanasius argues that the diversity of bodies and parts actually supports an intelligent, creating designer. Then there are the *Platonists (pre-existent matter)*. They purport that God created the world with the matter that already existed; in other words, God is seen as a mechanic using available material to construct the universe. Athanasius contends that this view weakens God, for he could not create the material needed to construct the universe. But He could not in any sense be called Creator unless He is Creator of the material with which all things have been made. Moreover he accentuates that the world as well as humans were made *ex-nihilo* and that Scripture attests to this. But when Adam disobeyed, the promise of death had to be met out. Yet, in keeping with God's goodness, He could not allow his creation, especially his image bearers, his rational creatures to continue in a corrupt state. Thus, he sent the incorporeal immaterial One who has always been, and through the incarnation takes a body of our *nature*, and reveals Himself, in order to conquer death and restore life back to us.

### *The Reason for the Incarnation*

Second, Athanasius asserts that the reason for the incarnation was to give man the knowledge of Himself. For, to be destitute of the knowledge of God is equivalent to a purposeless existence. Hence, in the incarnation man can get a "front row seat" and somewhat understand the Father and their Maker, and as a result have a happy and blessed life. But man rejected the knowledge of God (which is the equivalent of irrationality for Athanasius) and replaced it with idolatry, witchcraft, and astrology, even though the creation along with the Law and Prophets gave further attestation to the Creator. Such darkness prevented man from understanding the knowledge of God, and as such, only the Lord Jesus Christ could bring about such knowledge to man. In His mercy, he condescended to man to save the lost.

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<sup>5</sup> Athanasius, "On The Incarnation of The Word," *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume IV*, p.36 (T & T Clark Edinburgh, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Reprinted in 1996).

### ***God's Ubiquity Not Affected by the Incarnation***

Third, the incarnation affected not his ubiquity, for even though he was in a body, he never ceased being the sustainer of all things. He maintained the same nature (separate from the creation). Moreover, his miraculous acts (healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead) his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead, testified to his dominion over creation and as such, to his deity. His public death among other things did not show weakness, but rather it demonstrated strength. It was the means by which he would destroy death, while simultaneously through the resurrection manifest the monument of victory over death. His public death was also necessary for the doctrine of the resurrection to be believed as a historical event, rather than a mere fable, both by his disciples and those who would later believe. Christ's death on the cross, demonstrated his bearing the curse on our stead, for "Cursed is he that hangs on a tree." This death and resurrection secures for the believer the joy of life, rather than the torment of death. For, just as Christ is the first fruits of life, through the resurrection, believers will follow in like manner. Hence the fear of death to man is overthrown. Death is swallowed up in victory!

### ***Proofs for the Resurrection***

Fourth, the resurrection has many proofs to its veracity. First of all, the fact that men from all cultures are turning to faith in Christ points to him being alive, not dead. Second, being the source of life, it was impossible for him not to bring his body back to life. Third, even if God is invisible, the fact that his works of casting out demons and overcoming idolatry through his people is manifest are proof of the resurrection. For, demons would scarcely obey in the name of a dead man, but rather in the name of the One risen.

### ***Responding to the Jews Concerning Christ's Person from the Old and New Testaments***

Fifth, Athanasius answers the unbelieving Jews by using the Scriptures to argue for the incarnation with many references. He starts with the virgin birth (Mt.1: 23, cf; Is. 7:14), and moves on to Moses' prediction (Num.14: 5-17; Is. 8:4), his living place (Hos. 9:1), his death (Is. 53:3), his birth and death on the cross (Jer.9: 19; Ps.22: 16; Is.9: 10), his miracles (Is.65: 1-2, Rom.10: 20; Is.35: 3) and more scripture. He then argues from the withdrawal of prophecy and the destruction of Jerusalem (Mt.11: 13; Lk.16: 16), and points to the fact that it was the Lord himself that would save us (Is.63: 9).

### ***Unbelief of the Greeks Addressed***

Sixth, Athanasius addresses the unbelief of the Greeks concerning the absurdity of the incarnation and he points out that it is no problem for Christ to manifest in a body if in fact the Logos Manifests Himself in creation. Moreover, his manifestation in a body is grounded on his relation to Creation as a whole. Hence, because he wanted to reveal himself to man, he became man. Another line of argument concerns the reason for the incarnation. Since man is the only creature that sinned, he would not see or recognize the Creator through his works, so through the incarnation he manifested his works among them. He continues with many other proofs to counter their scoffing, but ends his letter with an exhortation for those who love knowledge to find it where it only resides: in

Christ, where it's attained through virtuous living that's grounded in loving the Logos who is blessed forever more.

## **Athanasius *Defense of the Nicene Definition*<sup>6</sup>**

In his letter defending the Nicene Definition, Athanasius concerns himself with several charges laid against the Nicene Council.

### ***Defining Begotten***

The term *begotten* is the springboard from which the Arians viewed Christ not as the Creator, but rather as a creature of the Father. The first *begotten* Son, after being created, became the means by which the Father created all other things. Hence, this creature cannot be the same essence as the Father, and as such is not True God. Athanasius responds with several arguments. Two considerations follow.

### ***Man's Contingency & God's Necessity***

First, he considers man's contingency and God's necessity and relates it to our natures. He points out that in order for man to create there must already exist material, whereas for God to create, he only has to speak the word *ex-nihilo*. He continues and points out that man's generation is in one way, and the Son's from the Father is another. Man's offspring by nature is compounded in begetting children, but God who by nature is uncompounded, is Father of the One Only Son. That is to say, that the Son is eternally generated from the Father, for in that God ever is, He is ever the Father of the Son. Athanasius follows this argument and supports it with Scriptures (Mt.9: 27; Heb.1: 3; Ps.36: 9; Jn.14: 9).

### ***Confronting the Arian's Misinterpretation of Scripture***

Second, Athanasius is aware of how the Arians misinterpret Scripture. They argue for the creation of Christ from Proverbs 8:22 "The Lord created me a beginning of His ways unto His works" and his response is that it does refer to the Son in his *humanity*, for creation belongs to man. Moreover, just as we do not lose our proper substance when we receive the Spirit, so Christ did not lose his substance of deity when he became man, but rather he deified and rendered it immortal. Athanasius then continues explaining the Catholic sense of the word *Son*, and asserts that his name implies eternal.

### ***The Phrases "From the Essence" and "One in Essence."***

The Arian's complain that the terms, "Of the essence" and "One in essence" is not Scriptural. Athanasius quickly exposes their hypocrisy by asking "why do they [Arians] use phrases like 'He was not before His generation,' and 'once he was not,' and 'out of nothing,' and 'pre-existence,' which are clearly not Scriptural." He then indicts them of making up fables and mocking the Lord. He then explains the reason for the usage of these phrases and their meaning.

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<sup>6</sup> Athanasius, "Defense of the Nicene Definition," *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume IV*, Pp.150-172, (T & T Clark Edinburgh, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Reprinted in 1996)

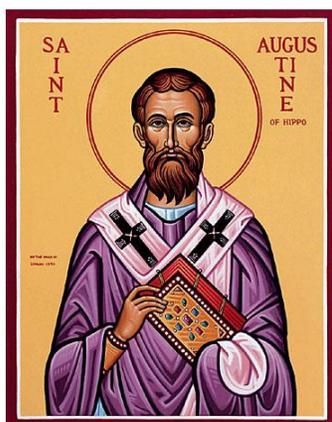
### **“From God”**

The phrase ‘from God’ was understood by the Arians to mean that Christ, like men, is the offspring of God. To combat the heterodoxy, they chose the phrase ‘*from the essence of God*’ so that the Son would not be seen as a creature, but rather as the Word, which is from the Father, who is the originator of all things, truly from God. This phrase was installed to prevent any deception from the Arians.

### **“One in Essence”**

The phrase ‘*one in essence*’ describes the indivisibility of the Father and the Son, and it was written by the Council to defeat the twisted heretics, and to show that the Word is not a mutable creature, but rather the Creator of all creatures, of all things. Moreover, the Council anathematized the Arian doctrine, and Athanasius then challenges the Arians to refute the Council’s position. If they can, then “anathematize” the anathema of the Council. If there are those who think the phrase is strange, Athanasius affirms that this is so because they are not understood with the intended meaning of the Council. Hence, Athanasius is essentially telling the Arians to “put up or shut up.”

Athanasius continues and sites several authorities that agree with the Council on the phraseology, and finishes the letter by grappling with the unscriptural term *unoriginate* that the Arian’s borrowed from the Greeks.



### **Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will*<sup>7</sup>**

In his treatise on *Grace and Free Will*, Augustine writes to Valentinus and the Monks of Adrumetum concerning the Pelagian notion of free will and grace. He warns that ***we must not deny free will when defending grace, nor deny grace while defending free will.*** Yet, we must be grateful for what we do know, prayerful for what we do not understand, and charitable with each other in the learning process.

#### ***Free Will Grounded on God’s Commands***

First, Augustine points out that free will exists by virtue of God’s commands. That is, free choice of will is implied, for reward and punishment are grounded on the ability to choose righteousness or wickedness (Jn.15: 22). Moreover, since God has revealed to man His righteousness, those claiming ignorance concerning His precepts have no excuse (Rom.1: 18-20). Both Old and New Testament Scriptures illustrate our free will (Prov.1: 8; Ps.32: 9; Mt.6: 19; 10:28; 16:24). Furthermore, those desiring to blame God for their sin are found wanting, for God tempts

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<sup>7</sup> Augustin, Aurelius, Bishop of Hippo, “On Grace and Free Will,” *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series Volume V, Pp. 443-465, (T & T Clark Edinburgh, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Reprinted in 1997)

no man to do evil, but man is tempted to do evil from his own hearts desire (Jam.1: 13-15).

### ***Pelagian View of Man's Sufficiency to do Good Works***

Second, Pelagius held that man is sufficient of himself to do good works. Augustine responds by claiming that such a view is grounded on mans pride (Jer.17: 5), and prevents him from humbly asking for Gods help (Ps.27: 9). He then maintains that in order for man to lead a good life, both grace and free will are necessary. Augustine grounds this assertion by demonstrating that faithfulness in marriage and in celibacy are gifts from God (Mt.19: 10; 1 Tim.5: 22; 1 Cor.7: 7, 36-37;). Moreover, another proof of grace and free will is seen in prayer as it relates to temptation. For when Jesus says, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation" Augustine maintains that both the *will* (pray) and *God's grace* (that you enter not into temptation) are simultaneously at work. Thus showing man's insufficiency to do good works, by virtue of the need to pray for assistance.

### ***Pelagius Held That God's Grace Is Given Due to Man's Merit***

Third, Pelagius held that God's grace was given to us by our own merits. For example he quoted, "Turn unto me, and I will turn to you" (Zech.1: 3), to support his position. However, Augustine points out that even our turning to God, is itself His gift, not our merit (Ps.80: 7; 85:4, 6-7;) and reminds us of what Jesus said, "No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him by my Father" (Jn.6: 65). Moreover, Augustine argues that grace is not a result of our merits as revealed by the Apostle Paul's life. His evil deeds of persecuting the church did not result in condemnation, but rather in mercy (1 Cor.15: 9), and said mercy, or grace, was not in vain, but it was demonstrated by his works, the source of which was God's grace (1 Cor.15: 10). In other words, God's grace and Paul's free will are seen working together.

### ***Pelagius' View of Forgiveness & Eternal Life***

Fourth, Pelagius also maintained that the only grace that is not given according to our merits is the forgiveness of sins, but that eternal life is rendered by our merits. Augustine responds by reminding Pelagius that every gift he has is from God, not himself, and that thinking the converse is the womb for pride. Moreover, the fight and the race Paul the apostle engaged could only be realized through God's grace and mercy, rather through his own sufficiency (2 Tim.4: 7; 2 Cor.3: 5). Furthermore, Augustine points out that Paul's faithfulness resulted from first receiving God's mercy, "I obtained mercy that I might be faithful" (1Cor.7: 25), not by first showing himself faithful. Again, the fact that mercy is shown does not negate the need for good works. For it is impossible to sever faith from the fruit of good works (Eph.2: 8-10). But good works precede from faith, not he converse. And as for those who would argue that all we need is to believe, Augustine responds that even the demons believe in God and tremble (Jam.2: 19).

### *Pelagius' View of the Law*

Fifth, Pelagius maintains that the Law is the grace of God that helps us not to sin. Augustine argues that the Apostle Paul sees it differently. Although the commandment is just, holy and good, sin receives its strength through the law against man, for that which is good produces death in man. The only deliverance from such a death comes from the Spirit's life (2Cor.3: 6), which helps us mortify the deeds of the flesh, and shows that we are sons of God (Rom8: 14). The point is not that the law is evil, but that it is good. However, the law does not aid us to keep the commandments, only grace does this, it alone helps us be doers of the law, not merely its hearers.

### *Pelagius' View of Grace Concerning Past and Future Sins*

Sixth, Pelagius also believes that grace only avails for the remission of past sins, not to aid in avoiding future sins. Augustine reminds him that in the Lord's Prayer, believers are to ask for pardon from past sins, as to petition for protection from future transgression. If one could perform the latter without God's help, then Jesus commanding us to pray in this manner would be empty, and misguided.

Augustine uses other examples of our need for God's grace: to convert our hard hearts; to deliver our nature's from the bondage of sin; to aid us in choosing righteousness; etc. He continues his treatise by reminding us that we love God because He first loved us, that we chose God, because He first chose us, that our wills are also affected by God, that He operates even in wicked men's hearts as He wills, and finally that the reason God works grace in one man's heart and not in another man's heart lie in His secret judgments. Therefore, understanding and wisdom must be sought in God.

## **Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*<sup>8</sup>**

Augustine's treatise *On Nature and Grace* was a response to the pernicious views of Pelagius' concerning the grace of Christ. He addresses the letter to Timasius and Jacobus, whom he calls '*my beloved sons*'. Augustine's manner in confronting the heresy is done graciously, not vehemently, for he does not judge the motives of his zealous rival, but rather his writings.

### *God's Righteousness through Christ Alone*

He begins by speaking of God's righteousness, which comes not through the law, but only through Christ Jesus. This righteousness makes one a Christian, that is, if he needs it. But if one, by virtue of his own righteousness, needs not Christ's righteousness, then the death of Jesus was in vain. But if Christ's death is not in vain then human nature cannot of its own merit, escape the wrath of God. Said escape can only be realized by faith in Christ.

### *Our Corrupted Natures*

Although our nature was created whole and sound, it was corrupted by original sin, which was committed by free will, and now requires Divine rescue from its fallen

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<sup>8</sup> Augustin, Aurelius, Bishop of Hippo, "Treatise on Nature and Grace: Against Pelagius," *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Volume V, Pp.121-151, (T & T Clark Edinburgh: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Reprinted in 1997)

state. This rescue is *gratis*, not merited, it's a justification freely given by God through Christ's sacrifice. For because of original sin, all mankind is justly under God's wrath, and as such needs a Savior, so that they can be 'vessels of mercy.'

#### ***Pelagius' View of Man's Ability to not Sin***

Pelagius advanced the argument that *actually* all men sin, but its *possible* that they can abstain from it. Augustine responds that just because something is *possible*, it does not follow that it can *actually* happen. Moreover, one is not *unrighteous* because of his own choice [Pelagius], but rather because of his inability to choose to *be righteous*. To affirm the former, rather than the latter, would make the cross of Christ of none effect and prove one to be a liar (1 Jn.1:8). Pelagius corrupts (Jam.3:8) to support the above notion by making an interrogative note: "Can no man, then, tame the tongue?" as opposed to "No *man* can tame the tongue." James wrote this of the tongue, emphatically, not interrogatively, so that we would petition God for his mercy and grace. Augustine rightly points to (Jam.3: 10) to support his conclusion of our need for God's grace to tame our tongue. Furthermore, Augustine points out that in the Lord's Prayer, we are commanded to ask for pardon from past sins, and to be kept from future transgression. But, if we do not need divine assistance in the matter, why then are we commanded to ask for help? It seems foolish therefore, to ask for something we have.

#### ***Pelagius' View Concerning Our Corrupt Human Nature***

Pelagius denies that human nature has been corrupted by sin, for if sin is not a *substance*, then how can it corrupt human nature? Augustine responds by first pointing out, that such a view opposes the Jesus who said, "they that are whole, need no physician, but they that are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mt.9: 12-13) Second, even though sin is not a substance, it does not prevent our nature from becoming corrupt. Augustine continues and explains that we humans are sufficient of ourselves to commit sins, but insufficient of ourselves to be healed from it. For the penalty of sin is death, and as such we need to choose to stop sinning, but we need to be revived from the grave, before being able to do that. We need a Vivifier! Until our souls are revived by Christ's grace, we are unable to respond to God in righteousness. To think we need no such assistance reveals our pride and restricts the humble petition for divine grace from being offered.

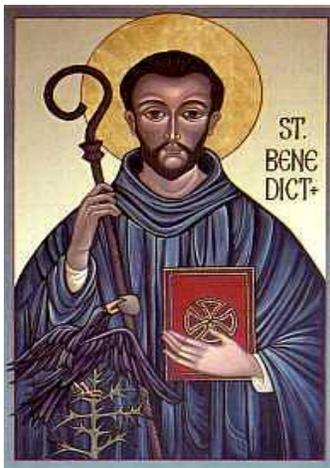
#### ***Augustin's God-Centeredness for Man's Healing***

Augustine further points out that although God's purpose in acting is to heal all things, He does not follow the sick patients prescription for its accomplishment. For in His purpose to endow the Apostle Paul with power, God made sure that Paul was weak because "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor.12: 7-8). In fact Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' was given to keep him humble because of the multitude of revelations that God gave him, so that he would not be prideful, and that in the 'right' thing. By doing this to Paul, God is preventing the apostle from boasting in gifts he has received, not earned, and as such, he is being protected from eternal peril. Now, God in a certain sense forsakes the proud, so that such a one may learn that he has a Master, and thus learns to renounce the pride.

### *Pelagius' View of Man's Equality to God*

Pelagius also equals man's sinless to be equal to God, but Augustine responds by noting that the creature can never in substance become equal to God. Moreover, Pelagius honors God as Creator but dishonors him as Savior when he holds that Jesus heals us of our past sins, but not the future ones. Unwittingly, Pelagius is not encouraging that believers be watchful and pray, "lead us not into temptation"; instead he is advancing an independent attitude between the creature and the Creator. Another argument Pelagius raises is that Abel was sinless on the heels of asserting that not all people's sins in the Bible were recorded. Augustine responds, by noting that Adam, Eve, and Cain's sin are recorded, but to conclude and even 'add' that Abel did not sin because it's not in the text, is a wicked act for the text also is silent on that.

Augustine addresses many other issues concerning how only by God's grace one can be sinless, that what He commands is not impossible but in no wise removes the need for petitioning his divine help. He also tackles the issue of free will and its ramifications to the believer's life. Toward the end of the letter, Augustine uses other authorities to combat Pelagius' views, he demonstrates how to exhort men to godly living, and ends the treatise by accentuating the need for the Holy Spirit to help believers walk holiness.



### **St. Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*<sup>9</sup>**

#### *The Centrality of Prayer*

In his *Rule*, St. Benedict starts off the prologue by placing fervent prayer as the pre-eminent act before starting any good work so that it may be brought to perfection. He then admonishes his disciples to not harden their hearts as the Israelites did when they heard God's voice, to learn the fear of the Lord, and to work while it is still day. Yet, like Paul the apostle (1 Cor.15: 10) as they see the progress and fruit of their work, they are not to boast of themselves, but are rather to give thanks to God for supplying the grace needed to accomplish their tasks. Since disciples are in a battle, critical to holy obedience is the preparation of both heart and body.

And that which is impossible by nature, the disciple is to ask the Lord for his grace to help. The purpose of the regulations is not intended to be harsh, nor burdensome, but where strictness obtains, it is to safeguard love and amend faults.

#### *The Rule's Impact*

Benedict calls it a *rule* because it regulates the lives of those who obey it. He starts off the rule by explaining the four different kinds of monks that exist and that his order (the cenobites) live in a monastery and serve under a rule and an abbot. The Abbot must exemplify the character of Christ and make Jesus' teaching the anchor of all that's instructed to the disciples, understanding that God's stricter judgment awaits those who teach. The primary manner in which the Abbot is to teach is not by mere words, but

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<sup>9</sup> *The Rule of St. Benedict In English*; Editor Timothy Fry, O.S.B., (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1981 by the Order of St. Benedict).

rather through example. Furthermore, the Abbot is to show no favoritism and when teaching, he must use *argument* with the undisciplined, he must use *appeal* with the docile and obedient, and with the negligent and disdainful he must use *reproof and rebuke*. Above all else, the Abbot must not treat lightly his duties by being distracted with the temporary things of the world.

### ***Tools for Good Works Grounded in One's Love for God***

Concerning the tools for good works, Benedict points out that the great commandment on which all good deeds are grounded: Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. The restraint of speech is especially cherished so that sin is avoided (Prov.10: 19) and vulgar speech is abated. Moreover, the *twelve steps to humility* first begin with the fear of the Lord. One is to constantly remember that God sees their deeds and motives. The second step is for a man to not delight in his desires or will, but rather to make God's will his desire (Jn.6: 38). The third step requires one to submit to his superiors in all things for the love of God, while the fourth step admonishes the disciple to submit even though being unjustly treated, for it is the one who endures to the end that will be saved.

Again, whether verbal, mental, or actual' all sins must be confessed to the Abbot, the disciple must be grateful for the lowest tasks and see himself as a poor and worthless workman. Furthermore, this workman must realize and confess that he is inferior to all and of less value than they. The eighth step to humility is that the monk is only to do what the common rule of the monastery endorses and the example set by his superiors. Again, a monk must control his tongue and remain silent unless spoken to. He must not speak loudly with laughter or raise his voice, but instead he is to speak gently, seriously, and with becoming modesty. Finally, the monk is to walk about with his head down at all times judging himself as a sinner who desperately needs Gods mercy to save him. All these steps can only be realized through the power of the Holy Spirit's grace being imparted to one.

### ***The Reading of Scripture***

Among other things the rule emphasizes the way, manner, and the days in which one is to read the scriptures and the catholic fathers. Much attention is given to the Psalms and text memorization. There is a specific procedure for the evening, morning and midday prayers, for the singing of the psalms, and for how one is to do their work. Moreover, how to deal with the poor and excommunicated brothers is also addressed, as well as the proper and improper way for monks to interact with each other in the monastery. Benedict ends his rule by reminding the monks that the *rule* is only the beginning of perfection, but by displaying the virtues in the rule, one displays that he has the beginnings of the monastic life.



## ***Reformation & Modern Period***

### **Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*<sup>10</sup>**

In Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, he divides the work into two short books. The first book contains objections raised by unbelievers because of their view that the faith is unreasonable, and responses by Anselm to their objections. The second book contains the purpose for which man was created and accentuates that its

realization can only be obtained in the God/Man.

#### **Responding To the Contemporary Critics: "It's Dishonoring to God"**

*Book One: Responding to the Objections Raised by Infidels.* This work begins with *Boso* (the one asking the questions) raising the objection that "we do injustice and bring dishonor to God..." when we claim that Jesus was born of a virgin, needed the nourishment of men to grow, grew tired and fatigued, and last of which was crucified among thieves.

**Anselm's response:** we neither dishonor nor bring upon God any injustice by those things we claim, but instead we do praise and proclaim the inexpressible height of his mercy. Through the incarnation, God does more deeply demonstrate his mercy and love toward us, for, as by one man's disobedience death reigns, so also by one man's obedience life should be restored. Moreover, as sin had its cause in woman, so also it was fitting that through woman the author of righteousness be born from her, and in the same way the devil conquered the first Adam by the eating of the tree, so also the last Adam vanquished Satan by his suffering on the tree. Again, Anselm explains that redemption could not have been realized through any other being other than God (whether angelic or human) because if any other being should rescue man from eternal death, man would rightly have to be that redeemer's servant. The problem however is that both angels and man were designed to serve only God through eternity.

#### **"The Incarnation Seems Inconsistent with Reason"**

Another objection raised against the incarnation by *Boso* is that it seems inconsistent with reason for the Almighty to "stoop to things so lowly, that the Almighty should do a thing with such toil".

**Anselm responds** by accentuating that God's will ought to be sufficient reason for whatever he does because his will is never irrational, regardless of our inability to understand. Furthermore, to think that it is unreasonable for the Almighty to stoop so low and embrace so much toil is to misunderstand our faith. For we assert that the Divine nature is indubitably impassible, He cannot be un-exalted, nor does he toil in anything He desires to effect. Moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ is very God and very man, one person

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<sup>10</sup> St. Anselm, "Cur Deus Homo," *Basic Writings*, (Translated by S. N. Deane, Pp.191-302, © 1962 by Open Court Publishing Company, 2001 Printing).

who has two natures. Hence, when we speak of God enduring humiliation or suffering, it *only* refers to the feeble human constitution, which Jesus assumed. In the incarnation, there is no debasing of the Deity, but rather there is the exaltation of man's nature.

***“Why Should the Most Just Man be Punished for the Guilty?”***

Something that also seems unjust and lacking wisdom for *Boso* is that the most *just* man should be punished for the guilty. Not only does God deserve condemnation for such an act, but this also argues against his omnipotence and justice.

***Anselm*** responds by asserting that God neither put the innocent to death for the guilty, nor impelled Jesus to die and suffer against his own will for man's salvation. Instead, Jesus willingly laid down his life.

*Boso* objects by citing many texts that demonstrate Jesus' submission to the will of the Father, and as such, that this act was one of obedience to the *Father's* will, not *Jesus* own free will. *Anselm* clarifies the misunderstanding between doing something at the demand of obedience as opposed to what he suffered because of his perfect obedience. For every rational being owes the demanded obedience to God and the Father claimed it from Jesus (in his humanity).

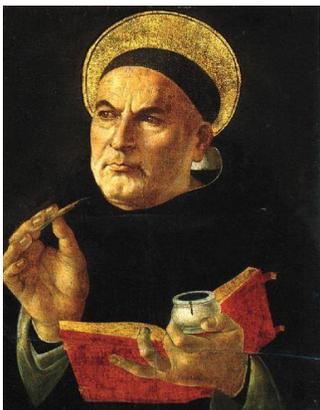
It would be unjust for God to demand death of a sinless man for whom God created to be happy in Him. Furthermore, it would not be right for God to make miserable by death a creature who is without fault, for that is not the goal of his creation. Rather than being compelled by God to die, Christ suffered death of his own accord, and by yielding up his life, Jesus is not offering an act of obedience, but rather on account of obedience in maintaining his holiness, he met death.

And when a scripture like “God did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all”, it simply means that God did not rescue him, not that he sent him to die.

***“Sin's Meaning & It's Relatedness to Satisfaction”***

Now concerning the meaning of sin and how satisfaction for sin is realized, *Anselm* first explains that sin is not rendering to God his due. The debt man owes to God is to be subject to His will. By neglecting the aforesaid, man robs God and dishonors Him, thus sinning. To make satisfaction for the offence and be cleared of fault, a repayment of honor to God must be made in return. This is a debt every sinner must settle, yet is unable to repay on his own. *Anselm* continues the theme by pointing out that God would be unjust not to punish the unjust for their sin. For by not executing his justice, God would then not differentiate between the guilty and the innocent, and this is unbecoming of Him.

*Anselm* also deals with how God's honor exists in the punishment of the wicked, how man cannot be redeemed without satisfaction for his sins being made, and how Jesus the God/Man necessarily realized the rescue for mankind. Moreover, how it's impossible for the devil to be saved and how great God's compassion really is.



## **Aquinas: *Summa Theologica* 1.1. The Nature and Extent of Sacred Doctrine<sup>11</sup>**

### ***“Science: The Only Means of Knowledge”***

In Aquinas’ *The Nature and Extent of Sacred Doctrine*, he deals with ten points of inquiry. First, he answers the view that philosophical science is the only means we need to get at knowledge, because to seek anything above reason is prohibited (Ecclus.3: 22). Moreover, knowledge is grounded in ontology, even the knowledge of God. Aquinas points out that inspired Scripture (2 Tim.3: 16) instructs us in the knowledge of God, the grounds of which is not human reason, but divine revelation. It is specifically sacred doctrine that is necessary for salvation. Again, Aquinas understands that natural and sacred theology, have their respective means of discovery and their epistemic complementary value.

### ***“Sacred Doctrine Cannot Be Science”***

Second, there is the objection that sacred doctrine cannot be science for all sciences come from self-evident principles, whereas sacred doctrine proceeds from articles of faith, which are not self-evident nor do all men accept them (2 Thes.3: 2). Furthermore, science deals with facts and does not concern itself with personal biography, as does sacred doctrine. Aquinas references Augustine and asserts that sacred doctrine is the only science that begets saving faith. It not only nourishes and protects said faith, but it also strengthens it. We must also remember that two kinds of science obtain; the science that is known through the natural light of intelligence (i.e., arithmetic or geometry), and that which proceeds from the higher light of science (i.e., the science of God). Moreover, the principles of any science are self-evident or can be reduced to the conclusions of higher science. Again, the principal reason individual facts are treated in sacred doctrine, are for moral exhortation, so that the authority of the men handing down divine revelation may be established.

### ***“Sacred Doctrine Cannot Be One Science”***

Third, there is also the view that sacred doctrine cannot be one science, because science treats only one class of subjects, whereas sacred doctrine considers both creator and creature. Hence it cannot be one science. However, Aquinas asserts that sacred doctrine primarily focuses on God, and on his creatures secondarily, so far as to accentuate God as their originator and sustainer. Aquinas appears to have a more integrative approach to science.

Other issues Aquinas tackles considers whether or not sacred doctrine is speculative or practical, whether it is the same as wisdom, whether it is a matter of argument, how it is compared with other sciences, etc.

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<sup>11</sup> *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Summa Theologica*, Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (Benzinger Bros. Edition, 1947).

## **Aquinas: *Summa Theologica* 1.2. The Existence of God<sup>12</sup>**

In his *Existence of God* argument, Aquinas considers whether the proposition of God's existence is self-evident, demonstrable, and if God actually exists.

### ***“Is God's Existence Self-Evident?”***

It is held that God's existence is self-evident because it is first naturally implanted in all as regards to first principles. Moreover, since the word “God” exists in the mind, it then follows that He actually exists. Furthermore, it is self-evident that truth exists, for if one affirms or denies the existence of truth, they are in fact supporting the propositional statement of truth by definition. Since God is truth itself (Jn.14: 6), it then follows that truth is self-evident, hence God is self-evident. *Aquinas* points out that God's existence is not self-evident for the following reasons.

First, if God were self-evident, then the fool could not say in his heart “there is no God” (Ps.52: 1).

Second, to know God exists in a general and confused way is implanted by nature, but it does not let us know that he absolutely exists. This is much like knowing someone is approaching us, but not knowing *who* it is. Third, even if the term “God” is understood to be something than which nothing can be thought, does not support God's *actual* existence, it only grounds his *mental* existence. Lastly, the existence of general truth is self-evident, but not Primal Truth, of which God is.

### ***“Can God's Existence Be Demonstrated?”***

It is held that God's existence cannot be demonstrated because this is the realm where science operates, whereas faith deals with things unseen (Heb.11: 1). Moreover, God's existence cannot be demonstrated because he is the *cause* of the *effect*. We know that the effects are finite, whereas He is infinite, hence in proportion to the effect, we cannot demonstrate the *cause*.

*Aquinas* responds first by affirming “the invisible things of Him are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made (Rom.1: 20). Second, demonstration of God's existence is known through the cause “*a priori*” the effect “*a posteriori*”. When an effect is better known to us than the cause, we proceed to the knowledge of the cause. Third, since faith presupposes natural knowledge, the truth of God's existence is a preamble to the articles of faith, not the converse. Fourth, though we may not be able to know perfectly God's essence through his effects, we nevertheless can demonstrate clearly through them the existence of the cause.

### ***“Does God Exist?”***

God's existence is denied through two views: the problem of evil and the reduction of all things to the principle of nature. Hence, there's no need to suppose God exists.

*Aquinas* responds by stating God said, “I am Who I am” (Ex.3: 14). He then proceeds to give five proofs for God's existence. First there is motion or change, which presupposes an original mover. Second, there's cause and effect where there must be a

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

first cause. Third, there's contingent and necessary beings, which points to the fact that the conditional demands that which is absolute. Fourth, there's gradation of judgments from "better" to best. Hence, we understand relative goodness from the fact that absolute goodness exists. Fifth, we have order in nature that demonstrates purpose. This comes from God.



### **Luther, *On Christian Liberty*<sup>13</sup>**

In his letter *On Christian Liberty*, Luther addresses Pope Leo X and affirms that he has never thought any evil concerning his person, but regards him highly and his dispute is not over morals, but over the word of truth. The Church of Rome "Babylon" doesn't want reform, and the pope is as Daniel in that Satanically ruled city, the "seat of all pestilence". He views Luther's chief nemesis, John Eccius, as the enemy of peace, evidenced by their exaltation of the Pope (i.e., only via his authority one can be saved, and he alone has the right to interpret Scripture). Instead of trusting those who exalt him, Luther implores the Pope to trust the ones who humble him.

#### ***The Christian is the Freest Lord of All***

For Luther, the Christian is the freest lord of all, and subject to none, but is also the most dutiful servant of all and subject to all (Paul's example used: 1 Cor.9: 19; Rom.13:8). He argues that mere outward pious acts do not make one justified or liberate the soul, but rather the risen Christ and his word (Jn.11: 25; Mt.4: 4). The soul can do without everything but the word of God. Through the word salvation is realized (Rom.1; 10:9; 10:4; 1:17) and the sinner liberated (Rom.3: 23). This justification is by faith alone, hence, the Christian's primary concern must be to grow, not in reliance on works, but in strengthening one's faith. Luther cites Jesus when confronted by the Jews what the work of God was, "to believe on Him whom He hath sent..." (Jn.6: 27-29).

#### ***Commands Teach Us What is Good, But They Do Not Help Us Obey***

Precepts (commands) teach us what is good "thou shall not..." but it does not empower us to obey. Once one understands the aforementioned, that person is ready to believe the promises of God, which by faith aids the obeying of commands, "the promises of God give that which the precepts exact" p.11 (see; 1 Tim.1: 9). To disbelieve God's promises is the highest form of insult toward Him, while the converse is the greatest honor toward the Almighty (1 Sam. 2:30). Among other things Luther makes a case for the priesthood of all believers and sees the system that separates "laity" from "priest", "clergy" etc., as bad because the notion is not biblical.

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<sup>13</sup> *Concerning Christian Liberty*: by Martin Luther 1520, "The Harvard Classics", Volume 36 (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1910, Pages 353-397)

### ***Why Are Good Works Commanded?***

To the objection: “if faith is everything, and by itself suffices for justification, why then are good works commanded? Are we then to take our ease and do no works, content with faith?” Luther affirms no! Pertaining to his freedom, man is justified (inwardly) subject to none, but concerning his works (outwardly) he is subject to all and the servant of all. For Luther, those who belong to Christ crucify the flesh (Gal. 5:24), in his words: “Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works” p.18 (Mt.7: 18).

He continues and asserts that good works prior to justification profit the non-believer nothing concerning salvation. But Luther wholeheartedly embraced the doing and teaching of good works to the highest degree, especially directed toward others (Phil.2: 1-4) as imitators of Christ (Phil.2: 5-8). The works, which overflow from the joy of being justified, the believer is not concerned with recognition or recompense from friend or foe. Luther then uses the Virgin Mary, and St. Paul as examples of the aforesaid life.

### ***Justification is the Grounds for Love***

For Luther, the man justified by faith in Christ is the one who serves his neighbor by love. The liberty of the justified is a freedom from all sins, laws, and commandments (1 Tim.1: 9), and a liberty from believing that good works makes one right before God.

## ***Luther, Table Talk on Justification*<sup>14</sup>**

In Luther’s *Table Talk on Justification*, he begins by asserting that it is impossible for the papist to understand this article. One remains a child of God even though periodically he sin or be tempted, for he is the Shepherds lamb. Christians make the best use of natural wisdom and understanding because through faith, their reason furthers their understanding of things divine, not so with the unregenerate. Their understanding is darkened because it strives against faith.

For Luther, the workmen who continuously is improving his craft, is like the righteous who constantly strive to increase their faith. Faith and Hope are distinguishable in that, among other things, the former; it looks to the word and promise of truth, whereas the latter; looks to that which the Word promises (i.e., the good or benefit). Again, faith is necessary for salvation because man is justified by it before God through Christ the Lord.

Justification is the key doctrine for all theological disputation; one cannot merit it, it is an inheritance from the Father, it bears the fruit of generosity toward neighbor, it produces virtues (the greatest being patience) and good works in the believer. Luther understands that a believer’s good works are incompletely good, because they proceed from a weak obedience.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

## **Luther, *Table Talk on the Church Fathers*<sup>15</sup>**

In Luther's *Table Talk on the church Fathers*, he does not want to be too critical of the Fathers. He considers Chrysostom a rhetorician whose exegesis goes awry concerning the message of the text. On the one hand, Luther's disgust with the following fathers are because justification is nowhere to be found: St. Jerome; for his writings are cold, Ambrose; for his books are poor, Augustine; for his inattention to faith in Galatians or Romans and his apparent siding with the Church's authority. On the other hand, Luther appreciates the writings of Epiphanius; who compiled a church history, and Prudentius; who is the best of Christian poets.

The Fathers must be read with caution. Luther asserts this because: First, their exegetical methods draw attention away from the Gospel of Christ. Second, their writings are used in a way that undervalues the teaching of Christ's apostles. Third, Augustine noted; the laws of the Jews brought less trouble to the church than the ordinances and traditions of the bishops. For Luther, faithful Christians must heed the words of Christ and those who stray from them in their teaching, should be shunned.

## **Luther, *Table Talk on the Scriptures*<sup>16</sup>**

In Luther's *Table Talk on the Scriptures*, he views the Bible as the highest and best of all books. He understands that rulers have tried to destroy the Bible, and its survival is seen as an act of God alone. Luther compares it to the writings of Homer, Virgil, and the like, and concludes that there is no comparison, regardless of how fine and noble these antiquated books may be. He is thankful that finally, the Bible is written in the German language for all to read and understand.

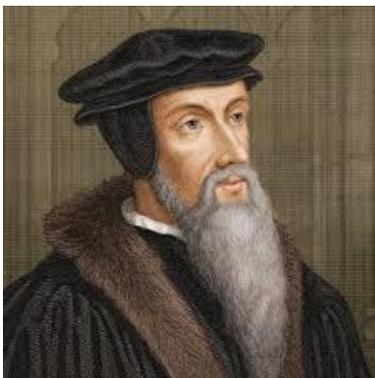
Part of the reason Luther sees the Bible as superior to the rest is because of its divine content of virtues and gifts. The Scriptures abound in comfort for those undergoing trials and tribulations. They should be studied and judged not by mere reason alone, but in humility bathed with prayer. Moreover, for Luther, the one who has mastered the principles of the text will not err in its interpretation, but will rather silence his adversaries. He also affirms that the Bible is to trump the authority of the fathers, regardless of their value. Again, Luther sees that the knowledge of God in Scripture supercedes any of the other sciences whether philosophers, or jurists for the effect it has on our eternal destiny.

Luther understands that there is no harder discipline of knowledge to master than that of divinity, even though worldly wisdom would hold the contrary position. He sees the worse thing that could possibly happen to Christians is for the Word of God to be taken from them or falsified. Among other things, Luther continues lauding the Scripture's magnificence and comments on the many books of the Bible with the respective authors intended message (Judges, Proverbs, John, Paul, etc.), and the is a discussion on the different genres (example: Gospel parables). For Luther, the ablest teacher of the Word is the one who so familiarizes with its every text, that the context, verse, and meaning of the passage are known.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



## Calvin *On Predestination (Institutes)*<sup>17</sup>

### *The Doctrine of Election*

In Calvin's treatise *On Predestination*, he first addresses the doctrine of eternal election, where some are predestined to salvation and others to destruction. He begins by affirming that neglecting this doctrine essentially impairs God's glory and produces pride in the individual. He admonishes both the inquirers and those shunning the doctrine of predestination, to stay within the bounds of scripture, rather than venture into what God has concealed, for everything we need to know is contained therein. When God ceases revealing, we cease wanting to be wise. Calvin understood that profane men would scoff and cavil this doctrine, but it is not to deter one from its inquiry. For scoffers will always find something to poke fun at.

### *Predestination is the Eternal Decree of God*

For Calvin, predestination is "the eternal decree of God by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man," God testifying his election of Israel in (Dt.32: 8, 9; 4: 37; 7: 7, 8; 10: 14, 15; Ps.47: 4; 33: 12; 1 Sam. 12:22; Is. 41:9 etc.). God also shows His rejection of Ishmael, Esau, Saul, and Ephraim (Ps. 78: 67, 68; 147: 20; Mal.1: 2, 3; Rom. 9:8; Gal. 3:16; etc.). Though in the line of Abraham, they were rotten, not the remnant. Hence, in God's eternal and immutable council some were elected for salvation, and others to perdition.

*Calvin makes a case for election from Scripture contra those who interpret election, as those who God foreknew would not be worthy of his grace.* His election is certainly not based on man's inherent worth, for it precedes works. As Paul declares God's choosing us (i.e., believers) before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4, 5; Col. 1:12; cf., 1 Tim. 2:9). Jesus himself explicitly demonstrates God choosing us not based on past merits, but on God's mercy (John. 15:16). Again, Paul shows that the origin and cause of election proceed not from works of merit, but from God's good pleasure (Rom. 9:11). Calvin disagrees with those that assign election to past or future works, for he understands that God finds nothing in man to show him kindness (Rom. 9:15).

Moreover, *Peter accentuates God accomplishing the believer's salvation by his own determinate foreknowledge in Christ's death* (Acts 2:23). Election is further supported by the Father's donation to Jesus, "All that the Father gives me shall come to me" (John 6: 37, 39, 44, 45; 17:9; 12; 13:18;). These texts demonstrate God's gratuitous adoption of those whom according to his good pleasure, he wishes to be his sons, because God is contented with his secret pleasure. Calvin then considers the church fathers on this issue (Ambrose, Origin, Jerome, Augustine, and Aquinas) understanding that Augustine got the doctrine correctly in his later years and continues dealing with objections to his position.

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<sup>17</sup> *Calvin's Institutes: Chapters 21-24*, (This document is from the [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#) at Calvin College. Last updated on May 27, 1999. [Contacting the CCEL](#)).

### *Responding to Objections*

Calvin deals with several objections to his view and responds accordingly. He first addresses *those who object that God makes anyone reprobate*, and reminds his dissenters that Paul does not try to defend God, but simply reminds us that it is unlawful for the creature to argue with the Creator. Calvin further shows that the reprobate, are those trees not planted by the Father who are doomed to destruction (Mt. 15:13).

A second objection is that it *seems unjust and capricious for God to doom some to destruction before they have committed any wrongs*. Calvin's response is that because of God's ontological status (being righteous), he does not commit any lawlessness, and by the mere fact of his willing (in election), is necessarily right.

A further objection is that God seems to be a cruel judge by preordaining the reprobate's sin. But, Calvin defends the justice of God with Paul's words, "...O man, who are thou that replies against God..." (Rom. 9:20-21). This passage couches God's infinite mind, to man's finitude. The last objection we will consider is the charge that Scripture nowhere declares that God decreed Adam's fall. Calvin responds that Scripture proclaims all mankind was in Adam, made liable to eternal death. The decree is dreadful, but it is impossible to deny that God foreknew man's end before being created. To do so, is rash and not advised.

### *Election Confirmed by God's Calling*

Calvin deals with election confirmed by God's calling and the reprobate bring upon themselves the righteous destruction to which they are doomed. Calvin admits that election is God's secret, but is manifest in his effectual calling. He then deals with the metaphysics of said calling and concludes that it is founded on God's free mercy. He then illustrates aforementioned and understands that this calling is grounded on Christ. He further considers objections to his position that the elect sometimes fall away and responds accordingly (e.g., the son of perdition passage, many are called but few are chosen, etc.)



### **Trent, On Justification (Discussion)<sup>18</sup>**

Pope Paul the III presided over the Council of Trent, which focused on clarifying the significance of Justification. They understand that man in his state of original sin is incapable of self-rescue. Said rescue can only be realized through faith in Christ's propitiatory sacrifice as one appropriates the benefit of his death personally. This justification is derived from God's prevenient

grace, which one can reject.

The justification of the impious has God as the final cause, God's mercy as the efficient cause, Jesus Christ as the meritorious cause, the sacrament of baptism is the instrumental cause, and Gods justice as the formal cause. We are freely justified by faith.

<sup>18</sup> Document retrieved through [Hanover College, History Department](http://Hanover College, History Department), Comments to: [luttmer@hanover.edu](mailto:luttmer@hanover.edu)

It's the genesis of human salvation. However, if one demonstrates confidence in that their sins are forgiven, they are not. For nobody can have such certainty of faith or of perseverance.

Moreover, justification is realized not forensically, but dualistically as faith and good works manifest in a believer. Furthermore, it is necessary and possible to keep the commandments, for works of righteousness are the means to realize final salvation. If one falls away from justification, he can again be justified through the Sacraments of penance, confession of sins, sacerdotal absolution, fasts, alms, etc. And finally, the ultimate fruit of justification is merited eternal life.

### **Trent, *On Justification (Canons)*<sup>19</sup>**

The Canons lay out a plethora of anathemas to those in disagreement with Trent's views. Such anathemas include those holding: that man's image in Adam's was erased, rather than effaced; that God is the cause of evil in man; that justification is by faith alone; that men are just without Christ's righteousness; that by faith alone absolution and justification are realized; that perseverance is certain, unless divinely revealed; that Jesus is the Savior but does not need to be obeyed; that one cannot lose their salvation; seeing good works as fruit of being justified, rather than the grounds thereof, etc.



### ***Arminius Declaration of Sentiments*<sup>20</sup>**

In his *Declaration of Sentiments*, Arminius deals with the doctrine's of predestination, Divine Providence, the freedom of the will, God's grace, Christ's deity, and man's justification before God.

#### ***Many Facets to Predestination Obtain***

The bulk of his treatise deals with the many facets of predestination, holding that Calvin's view on many points is false and impertinent. Arminius rejects the notions that the decree of God is the foundation of Christianity, salvation, and one's certainty. For predestination is not the foundation of the Gospel, Christ is through whom believers are built up into Him. It's neither the grounds for salvation, nor it's certainty, for only those who believe shall be saved. Arminius sees that the Gospel of Christ and of the Apostles after the ascension is one of repentance and belief, followed by a promise to forgive sins and realizing eternal life. But predestination belongs to neither of these injunctions and is not necessary for a doctrine of salvation; as an object of knowledge, belief, hope, or performance.

#### ***The Councils and Divines of the Church Never Held This Predestination View***

Arminius continues and points to the early Councils<sup>21</sup> and to the Divines/Doctors of the church, while holding orthodox views, and defending God's grace against

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Arminius, *Declaration of Sentiments*, Dr. Alan Gomes, Spring 2002 Biola University, Reformation & Modern Theology Selected Readings, CD ROM Pp. 1-36).

Pelagius, never brought this doctrine forward or approved it. Moreover, this doctrine is not found in the volume of Geneva<sup>22</sup> and is debatable in others.<sup>23</sup> And as such, more tolerance of those opposing Calvin's view should obtain.

### ***Calvin's Predestination View is Repugnant in View of God's Nature***

Arminius found the doctrine repugnant in view of God's nature. It is repugnant concerning God's wisdom seeing Him decreeing something that is not good nor can be. Concerning His justice it counts against God loving righteousness and hating evil. And concerning His goodness, it's repugnant showing God to will the greatest evil.

Again, Arminius understands this doctrine to be contrary to man's nature, for being created in God's image with free will, certain commands to obedience cannot be excited in man if he can choose no other alternative (Rom. 10: 5; Gen. 2: 17). Along the same lines, Arminius sees that determining man's actions is inconsistent with creation by preventing the free exercise of liberty.

This predestination is totally opposed to the Act of Creation, for that which is by nature good, turns out to be a the determined perdition of the creature. Reprobation is an act of hatred (Mt.26: 24) creation is the converse. Creation is a perfect act of God whereby His goodness, wisdom and omnipotence are manifest.

### ***Calvin's Predestination View is Hostile to the Nature of Eternal Life***

This predestination is both hostile to the nature of eternal life (Mt. 5:12; Tit. 3:7; Jn. 1:12), and to the nature of eternal death (Rom. 6:23). It's further inconsistent with the nature of Divine Grace because it denies that: grace can be resisted (Acts 7:51); that man can receive or reject it; and that man cannot freely exercise his will.

There are many more disagreements to Calvin's views that Arminius expresses such as; this doctrine is hurtful to man's salvation, it's dishonorable to Jesus Christ, it's openly hostile to the Gospel's ministry, it's subversive to Christianity in particular (dealing with supralapsarianism), etc. Arminius then deals with a second and third kind of predestination and then positively affirms his position on the doctrine.

### ***God's Providence Generally and Specifically***

He then deals with God's Providence seeing in it the general care of God for the whole world and particular care for His intelligent creatures and of those who should be heirs of salvation. For Arminius, his view of providence does not attribute see God as the cause of sin. Concerning man's free will, only the regenerate can perform what is truly good since they are delivered from sin's power. Concerning God's grace, Arminius held men could reject it.

Concerning the perseverance of the saints, they can resist Satan and persevere to the end only through the Holy Spirit's power. However, certain passages seem to say that one can fall away from the faith, but many other passages buttress the contrary. Concerning the assurance of salvation, Arminius holds that one can know with certainty that they are saved, but not with the same certainty that we know God exists.

Arminius then concludes with the believer's perfection, Christ's divinity, man's justification before God and ends his treatise with a plea for toleration from those

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<sup>21</sup> The first six centuries after Christ.

<sup>22</sup> Which is done in the name of the Protestant and Reformed Churches

<sup>23</sup> The Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism

differing with him, for Christianity has had enough schisms. Said schisms should be diminished and their influence ought to be destroyed.



## ***Bunyan: Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners***<sup>24</sup>

In *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, during his incarceration, Bunyan writes a spiritual autobiography, where his conversion to Christ is contrasted from his former idolatry. The son of a traveling blacksmith, Bunyan in 1653 was incarcerated for 11 years because he refused to refrain from preaching.

He starts his autobiography by explaining the former darkness that bound him (Eph. 2: 2, 3) such that a sinful lifestyle became second nature to him. Yet, thoughts of coming judgment and hell tormented Bunyan around nine or ten years of age. However, until he married, all manner of vice drowned out the aforesaid fears as he gave himself over to satisfy his every lust.

### ***Experiencing Guilt Yet Not Converted***

Bunyan was much vexed with guilt after hearing a sermon on keeping the Sabbath, and in a mystical experience, he heard a voice (supposedly from Christ) challenging him to leave sin for heaven or embrace hell for sin, despair gripped Bunyan, believing that he was beyond Christ's forgiveness. After this experience, Bunyan noticed that his speech went from swearing to leaving that pleasantly behind (this happened before he knew Christ). Yet, while experiencing some outward manifestations of reform, Bunyan was not converted.

He had religion, but without Christ, he was outwardly righteous, but inwardly wicked. He was pleased with his own righteousness, while ignorant of Christ's righteousness. That is, until it was initially revealed to him through women conversing about the new birth and as Bunyan read the Scriptures, his thirst to truly know God grew.

### ***The Gift of Faith***

As Bunyan read (1 Cor. 12: 8, 9) regarding the gift of faith, he wondered if he could receive it, moreover, if he actually had it, but simultaneously was puzzled as how to verify whether or not he had faith. He then wondered how he could know if he was elect which tormented Bunyan, for he understood Romans 9: 16 to say that one's election is grounded not on one's desires, nor on one's willingness, but on God's mercy.

Hence, unless God elected him, he knew that hell awaited. The Tempter tormented Bunyan much with this issue, discouraging his soul deeply, but eventually God's sweet mercy and calling became real to him (Mk. 3:13). In his soul, Bunyan understood Romans 8:39 and assured him of God's love for him.

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<sup>24</sup> Bunyan, *Graces Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Dr. Alan Gomes, Spring 2002 Biola University, Reformation & Modern Theology Selected Readings, CD ROM Pp. 1-58).

### ***Struggling with Christ's Exclusivity***

He then had to deal with doubts about Jesus being the only Savior, for the Turks also have their scriptures and their savior is Mahomet. Yet, something within his spirit allowed Bunyan not to doubt Jesus and the Scriptures he had. But he still had many bouts with doubt, which caused Bunyan much unrest. Yet scriptures such as (2 Cor. 5:21; John 14:19; Rom. 8:31; Heb. 2: 14-15) comforted him regarding salvation and the rescue from death, all of which are grounded on God's goodness toward his creatures.

### ***Called to Ministry***

Now concerning his call to ministry, Bunyan offers a brief account explaining among other things how his peers recognized God's hand on him and gladly desired to hear him preach. After fasting and prayer, he was appointed to a more ordinary and public ministry of preaching. Bunyan understood that God desired men with gifts to use them for the Masters glory, rather than bury them. The following Scriptures encouraged him to labor diligently in the ministry of the word (Acts 8: 4; 18:24-25; 1 Pet. 4:10; Rom. 12:6) and also those of church history (Foxes Acts and Mounments).

### ***Moved for the People***

When he preached, Bunyan was moved for the people, as they were confronted with the gravity of their sin before a holy God. In touch with his own wretchedness, Bunyan was amazed and humbled that the people loved him, and that God was using him for preaching the word.

### ***Mode of Preaching***

His mode of preaching focused first on the problem of sin in mans' hearts, and the terror that awaits the ungodly. Having been under the torment of such a reality himself, Bunyan understood his duty to warn people of God's coming judgment and Christ's rescue. While he received opposition from the doctors and the priests, Bunyan did not shrink back from proclaiming the gospel. He was not a polemical preacher, but focused primarily on the redemption that is only found in Christ.

Bunyan sensed God's leading before he embarked going to any particular place. Moreover, he also understood that where God lead him, the Devil would meet him trying to oppose the work of the gospel. He desired to go into the darkest places spiritually speaking and preach the gospel among those who had not heard it, interceding much for them.



### ***Wesley: Christian Perfection<sup>25</sup>***

In his *Christian Perfection*, Wesley distinguishes between how Christians *are* and *are not* perfect.

#### ***How Are Christians Not Perfect?***

Both from experience and the Scriptures it is clear Christians are not perfect in *knowledge* e.g., our ignorance in God's workings in

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<sup>25</sup> John Wesley, Sermon Forty, *Christian Perfection*, Edited by Dave Sparks, (1999 by the Wesley Center for Applied Theology, web site: [webadmin@wesley.nnu.edu](mailto:webadmin@wesley.nnu.edu) for permission or to report errors)

different dispensations. Christians are not perfect in their *mistakes* (e.g., “we know in part” 1 Cor. 13:12) at handling the Scriptures. Christians are not free from *infirmities* (e.g., physical ailments or moral failures). Moreover, Christians are not free from *temptation*, such freedom lies ahead in the next life. Christian perfection is another term for holiness. Hence, to be perfect one must be holy and the converse obtains.

### *How Are Christians Perfect?*

First, developmentally babes and mature Christians are in different stages, yet perfection applies to both. Scripture clearly says that those who are justified (be it babe or mature) “do not continue in sin” (Rom. 6:1, 5-7, 14, 18) i.e., all real Christians are free from external sin (1 Pet. 4:1-2; 1 Jn. 3:8-9; 5:18). Wesley then argues for misinterpreted counter examples from the lives of David, Abraham, even the Proverbs. Wesley concludes with those opposing the “plain” reading of NT texts, that they need to buttress their arguments and give proofs from the NT clear teaching, rather than an OT vague passage.

Wesley understands that to use arguments that a Christian *must* sin is unacceptable, for no necessity of sinning obtains for the Christian. The same grace that was sufficient for Paul is also at our disposal. Hence, although temptation comes, one is not required to yield to it (1 Cor. 10:13). Moreover, Wesley addresses the misuse of passages (2 Cor. 12:7-10) that are often used to buttress the above contention that we *must* sin and challenges such notions with James understanding of faith and works (Jam. 3:2).



### *The Augsburg Confession<sup>26</sup>*

*The Augsburg Confession* is a confession of faith presented to the emperor Charles V., Caesar Augustus at the Diet of Augsburg A.D. 1530. The confession is divided into two parts. Part one is the chief articles of faith, while part two recounts the abuses that have been corrected.

Part One. The first article (§)<sup>27</sup> affirms *God’s unity in the divine essence* with the distinction of the three persons; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Among the condemned are the Manichees,

Valentinians, Arians, and Mohammedans. The second (§) affirms that after Adam’s fall, all men are born of a sin nature. The third (§) affirms Christ’s Virgin Birth, his two natures (true God/man), his death, burial, resurrection and ascension.

The fourth (§) affirms man’s justification by faith in Christ (Rom.3, 4), the sixth (§) asserts the new obedience as a result of justification, (§) seven teaches the unity of the

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Alan Gomes, Spring 2002 Biola University, Reformation & Modern Theology Selected Readings, CD ROM.

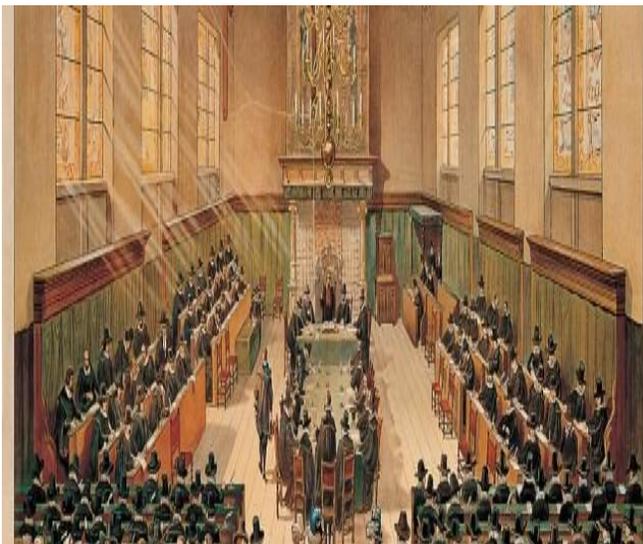
<sup>27</sup> This sign will be used hereafter in the remainder of the document

Church forever, it is the assembly of the saints and true believers. (§) Nine affirms the necessity of baptism for salvation, including infant baptism, while condemning the Anabaptists for prohibiting the baptism of infants. The Lord's Supper in (§) 10 affirms the true body and blood of Christ as actually present. Confession in (§) 11 is to be retained although confession of minutia is not necessary. Repentance consists of contrition; through the acknowledgment of sin and it comprises faith; conceived of absolutism which bears righteous fruit.

Articles 13-16 deal with the sacraments, civil affairs, ecclesiastical rites and orders. Moreover, articles 17-19 deal with Christ's judgment, our free will and sin's cause. Concerning good works (§) 20 affirms that good works are not a ground for justification, but are necessary because God commands them. Concerning the saints, (§) 21 affirms following their example in love and good deeds, but they are never to be invoked, instead, Christ is to be implored.

**Part Two. Concerning the Lord's Supper,** (§) 1 affirms that not just the priests are to receive the elements including the cup, but so is the laity to receive it. Concerning the Marriage of Priests, (§) 2 Affirms that the marriage of priests is lawful. First, it's in order to avoid fornication (1 Cor.7: 2,9). Second, Christ himself understood that all men were not called to celibacy (Mt.14: 11). Third, the primitive church had married priests (1 Tim.3: 2). Fourth, Paul called the forbidding of marriage a doctrine of devils (1 Tim.4: 1, 3).

**Concerning the Mass,** (§) 3 Discloses that Masses were often used for lucre, not for noble purposes. We remember Christ through the Mass, but we are not justified in partaking of it, but rather by faith. Other articles deal with the issues of distinctions of meats and tradition, Confession, Monastic vows, and Ecclesiastical power.



## **The Canons of The Synod of Dort<sup>28</sup>**

**The *Canons of the Synod of Dort*** consists of five heads of doctrine.

### ***Divine Predestination***

God is not obligated to save anyone, nor would it be unjust for Him to let man perish. Yet because of His kindness, God's mercy is manifest in the Son (Jn. 4:9). While the God's wrath abides on the unbeliever, the guilt of unbelief is caused not by God, but by man.

One's reception or rejection of the

gift of faith and election is not grounded on any foreseen faith or any good quality

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<sup>28</sup> Dr. Alan Gomes, Spring 2002 Biola University, Reformation & Modern Theology Selected Readings, CD ROM.

intrinsic to man. Instead, it is grounded on God's single decree, which is according to His good pleasure (Eph. 1:4-6). The assurance of election one attains comes through observing one's disposition to fear and love God as revealed in sacred Scripture. This assurance extends to the elects children who are also elect to salvation in their infancy by virtue of the covenant of grace.

#### ***The Death of Christ and the Redemption of Men***

The death of Christ-because of his essence fully God/Man-alone is the perfect satisfaction for man's sin. Man does not perish because the sacrifice of Christ is insufficient, but contrarily, it is due to their unbelief. Thus, the elect are justified by faith and infallibly saved by Christ's work on the Cross.

#### ***The Corruption of Man***

Man was perfectly created in God's image, but his rebellion resulted in the fall of all. Moreover, all men are conceived in sin, and while God's image in man was not erased, it was effaced. Thus, while man retains some knowledge of God through natural revelation, it is only through special revelation that the knowledge of salvation is obtained.

#### ***Mans Conversion to God and the Manner Thereof***

Man's conversion is not the result of freewill, but of God's effectual call in time whereby one is regenerated to newness of life. Although this work of God is not fully comprehended by believers in this life, they can rest assured in God's grace toward them. Hence, faith is a gift of God that is given not obligatorily, but it is freely offered to man.

#### ***The Perseverance of the Saints***

The converted solely persevere because of God's strength. While saints sin (e.g., David, Peter, etc.), God mercifully pardons his own, and while they struggle with doubts, God does not allow them to be tempted beyond what is bearable. This work of perseverance, while ridiculed by unbelievers and abhorred by Satan, is preserved in believers by the preaching and reading of the Word, its promises and admonitions, and the Sacraments.

## **Westminster Confession of Faith<sup>29</sup>**

An assembly of divines under Parliaments authority drew up the Westminster Confession of Faith.



***Concerning Holy Scripture***, it's seen as God's final revelation to mankind (39 OT & 27 NT books are the same as in our contemporary protestant versions, apocrypha not divinely inspired). Scripture is the final authority, whereby neither new revelations nor traditions of men trump it. While not all contained therein is perspicuous, Scripture nonetheless infallibly interprets itself and is the final court of

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

arbitration in religious controversies.

**Regarding God and His Tri-unity**, He's understood as the only necessary being with all of His attributes, which alone is to be adored and obeyed by His creatures. In its unity, the Godhead obtains three persons of one substance, eternity, and power: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; and the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. Moreover, by His decree, he ordains everything that comes to be; yet simultaneously God is not the author of sin. Hence, by this decree and the manifestation of His glory, God foreordains some to eternal life i.e., election, and others to eternal death (both men and angels).

**Pertaining to the Creation of all things and His Providence**, for God's glory all things were made, and in accordance to His foreknowledge and decree, according to second causes God ordered the fall of man. Hence, Adam's corruption of sin is imputed to the whole of mankind. Said corruption, hampered man from obeying the covenant of works, thus the covenant of grace is offered for sinners via the God/Man Christ Jesus. It is Christ's perfect obedience and sacrifice, which satisfied God's justice, whose righteousness is imputed to the regenerated, and via the Spirit effectually persuades them to believe and obey God.

**Concerning Free-will**, man forfeited it at the Fall, such that any inclinations to convert himself without God's help are impossible. Even the converted soul, while free to obey God, cannot perfectly do it. For only in the glorified state, can man perfectly and immutably do what is good. By Gods decree believers are *justified* by faith alone, through Christ alone, are adopted into Gods family, manifesting the sanctifying work of Christ in their lives, through good works of faith. Among other things, the confession further deals with the perseverance of the saints, the assurance of salvation, God's law, Christian liberty, household duty codes, and the sacraments.

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## **Writings After the Reformation**



### **Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening***

#### **Introduction<sup>30</sup>**

The Book was written in a very short time between March and May of 1848. This contemplative work is viewed as the consummation of Kierkegaard's "anthropological contemplation" with despair as the central clue to said view of

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<sup>30</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening*, Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong, (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980 by Howard V. Hong).

man.

The *Sickness Unto Death* explicates the concept of man as an infinite/finite and temporal/eternal synthesis. Anxiety is the “dizziness of freedom” which obtains when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis.... *The Sickness Unto Death* presupposes anxiety but excludes it from consideration because despair is a more advanced stage of anxiety.

### ***Despair is The Sickness Unto Death***

For Kierkegaard, despair is a sickness of the spirit, of the self, and as such can take on three forms: In despair not to be conscious of a having a self, in despair not to will to be oneself, or in despair to will to be oneself. Kierkegaard holds that despair is both an excellence and a defect. It’s an excellence that demonstrates man’s superiority over animals, and the Christian’s over the natural man [p.14-15], and depending on the end, despair can lead to greatness or utter ruination.

Despair comes from the creature not being in proper relation to the Creator (i.e., man living “autonomously” from God). We despair over *something*, and despairing is the reality that we can’t rid ourselves of ourselves in that moment (i.e., despair is not being able to consume ourselves) OR (deploring who we are and the inability for the self to escape itself) [Pp.19-20]

### ***The Universality of This Sickness (Despair)***

No human has ever lived whether in Christendom or out of it, that has not experienced despair. And while that is the plight of all people, some not being in touch with said reality, does not minimize in anyway the fact of our plight. For one can say they are not sick, but the physician knows well that the converse obtains. Hence, because one *says* they are not sick, it does not necessitate its truthfulness. [Pp.22-23]

Part of this despair is revealed in the person who believes that only matter obtains, not also spirit. For Kierkegaard, this also is despair: to not know the truth of one’s constitution, it is a sickness of the spirit. [Pp.24-25] Thus, for one to think that despair is rare, rather than universal, is despair. Now concerning the life of one whether it is wasted or not, Kierkegaard considers:

There is so much talk about wasting a life, but only that person’s life was wasted who went on living so deceived by life’s joys or its sorrows that he never became decisively and eternally conscious as spirit, as self, or, what amounts to the same thing, never became aware and in the deepest sense never gained the impression that there is a God and that “he,” he himself, his self, exists before this God—an infinite benefaction that is never gained except through despair. [Pp.26-27]

### ***The Forms of This Sickness (Despair)***

The self is composed of finitude and infinitude—it’s a synthesis? Unclear for me, it nonetheless obtains that despair takes on its form when one wants to be something one is not. [P.30] Another form of despair is the acquisition of knowledge. To know oneself and increase in said knowledge is good, but if one increases in knowledge but not of itself, this person squanders their “self.”

Again, one’s consciousness of despair intensifies or de-intensifies said despair. That is, one’s intensity of despair is proportionate to the degree of being conscious of said despair. The more conscious one is of despair, the more the intensity [P.42].

The most common despair is that which despairs over the earthly or over something earthly with immediacy being the key perpetrator of said despair.

*Despair is Sin*

Sin is the intensification of despair. And the opposite of sin is faith, not virtue (Rom.14:23). One form of sin demonstrating itself in despair is manifest in *unhappy admiration*—envy. Envy is secret admiration that is unhappy. [P.86] Kierkegaard held that despairing over one's sin is:

An effort to survive by sinking even deeper. Just as a ballonist ascends by throwing off weights, so the person in despair sinks by more and more determinedly throwing off all the good (for the weight of the good is elevating); he sinks, privately thinking, or course, that he is ascending—and he indeed is growing lighter. [P.110]