

**Excerpts From**  
**God's Strategy In**  
**Human History**  
**Dealing with man's**  
**Free-will**

**Roger T. Forster**  
**And**  
**V. Paul Marston**

## **Note:**

The two parts below came from the book -- God's Strategy In Human History by Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston. The book was printed by Send the Light Trust, Bromley, England, 1973. ISBN 0 903843 00 5

These two sections (actually one chapter [6] and the appendix to this chapter) deal with the concept of freewill and predestination. There is an in depth review of the teaching of the church fathers that were pre-Augustine. The writers then, in the appendix, give a rather thorough critic of Augustine and his theology.

Having been unable to find but one used copy of this book (and that in England) I wanted to make these sections available for study. My intent is to point people to this book and the conclusions of its writers. If it were to be republished it would be a service to students studying this issue. The rest of the book deals with what we have called 'the scheme of redemption'. It tries to logically present the how and why of God's dealings with the human race.

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## (6) FIGHT OR FAKE?

This section may, to some people, seem a parenthesis, but the issue it deals with is one which is vital to the meaning of this whole book. The problem arises because there are Christians whose views amount to a belief that everything which happens is God's direct will and the whole conflict is therefore a fake.<sup>1</sup> Their views may be expressed in various ways, but the basic idea is the same. They may, for example, say that men are *responsible* for breaking God's commandments but that nevertheless whatever men do is His *will* being enacted. They may say that Satan's revolt and the ensuing 'conflict' are part of God's will and design. Some would even go as far as to say that God deliberately ordains all the suffering and sorrow in the world. They would reject the point made so well by C. S. Lewis: that suffering is the price which had to be paid for freedom and love to exist at all.<sup>2</sup>

Were we to find any support in Scripture for such teachings on God's 'sovereign will' then what is said in this book would have to be considerably modified. It is necessary, therefore, to examine what exactly the Bible says on these matters. Is God's will always done?

In the New Testament there are only two Greek roots from which come the words for God's *will* and God's *plan*. One root is *thelo*, which means wish, will or desire; the second root is *boulomai* from which come such words as *councillor* (*bouleutes*; Mark 15.43; Luke 23.50); *taking advice* (*bouleuomai*; Luke 14.31); and *plan* or *wish* or *would* (*boule* and *boulema*; Luke 23.51; Acts 5.38; 27.42-3;

17.20 etc.). The Bible makes it abundantly clear that both God's *will* and God's *plan* can be opposed and rejected by men. Let us take the words in turn and examine Scriptural use of them.

### GOD'S PLAN REJECTED (Greek root: *boulomai*)

We discover that an individual can reject God's plan for him:

Luke 7.30: But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel (*boule*) of God, being not baptised of him.

Mere human beings, of course, could not thwart God's ultimate plan for the world, but they both can and do thwart His plan that they, as individuals, should have a part in it. The Pharisees could not prevent God's ultimate plan achieving its end. The New Heaven and New Earth will come, whether they want it or not. In this sense we may well cry 'Hallelujah, the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth.'<sup>3</sup> But what they *can* do is to personally opt out of the new creation to come. God ordains that the new heaven and earth will come, He does not ordain which particular individuals will accept His plan for them to have a part in it.

How, then, are we to take verses like: 'My counsel shall stand, I will do my good pleasure'?<sup>4</sup> If we were to take them to mean that every detail of God's plan was always enacted then they would flatly contradict Luke 7.30. We must, therefore, take them to refer to the broad outlines of what will be accomplished - not to details about what part each individual will play in it. There

seems to be no other way to interpret Scripture consistently.

We must now look briefly at a passage containing the root *boulomai*, over which there has sometimes been misunderstanding. It is Ephesians 1.9-12:... having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth; in him, I say, in whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel (*boulen*) of his will (*thelematos*) to the end that we should be...

This has sometimes been thought to be saying that absolutely all events are directly determined by God's will. We must, therefore, examine it carefully.

Let us look first at the word in this passage rendered as 'works' in the R.V. It comes from the root *energeo*, which we may keep in mind by representing it with the little used English word 'energize'. Its general sense may be illustrated by James 5.16: 'The *energizing* prayer of a righteous man avails much.' It does not convey an impression of irresistible directive power, but rather one of stimulation. There is, in fact, more than one source of such *energizing*; compare the following:

- (i) 'I also labour, struggling according to the *energizing* of Him who *energizes* in me in power . . .' (Paul in Colossians 1.29)
- (ii) 'The lawless one . . . whose coming is according to the *energizing* of Satan, with all power . . .' (2 Thessalonians 2.9; see also 2.7).

The same teaching is found in Ephesians:

- (i) '. . . the purpose of the One who *energizes* all things after the counsel of His will . . . and what the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the *energizing* of the strength of His might, which He *energized* in Christ . . . I was made a minister, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the *energizing* of His power according to the power that *energizes* in us . . .' (Ephesians 1.11, 19-20; 3.7,20)
- (ii) '. . . sins; in which in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit who now *energizes* in the sons of disobedience; .' Ephesians 2.1-2).

Both God and Satan are *energizing*, and Christians must turn on to the right *energy*. Thus Paul says: 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for God is *energizing* in you both to will and to *energize* for His good pleasure.'<sup>5</sup> God *energizes* in us, but we ourselves must plug in to the *energy* in order to work out our own salvaging process.

The connotations of '*energizing*' in Ephesians 1.11 are not, perhaps, adequately conveyed to us by translations like the R.S.V.:

'who *accomplishes* all things according to the counsel of his will'. We must, therefore, bear this in mind as we think further about the verse.

The second thing we must consider in Ephesians 1.11 is what the phrase 'all things' refers to. In verse 10 Paul refers to the 'all things' (*ta panta*) which are to be headed up in Christ. He next clarifies what these things are (things in the heavens and on the earth). He then refers (in verse 11) to God *energizing* in the 'all things' (*ta panta*). Surely we must suppose that the 'all things' God energizes are the same as the 'all things' to be headed up in Christ? It does not mean 'all events' or 'all that happens' but 'all creation'. The thought is similar to that in Colossians 1.16-20 where we find that the 'all things' were created and consist in Christ, that Christ will have preeminence in them, and that all things will be reconciled in Him. Eventually the 'all things' will be reconciled and headed up in Christ, but in the meantime God *energizes* them according to His plan - presumably moving them in this direction. This is what Ephesians 1.11 seems to mean. There is certainly no reference to God determining all events, and no indication that everyone acts according to His plans.<sup>6</sup>

There is, then, no inconsistency between Ephesians 1.11 and the clear teaching of Luke 7.30 that an individual may reject God's plan for him. While God's plans for the universe will certainly succeed, an individual may none the less reject God's plans for the part he himself will play in this.

An individual can reject God's good plans for him; but does God ever deliberately plan that a person should be lost? We know, of course, that Christ is the propitiation not only for our sins, but for those of the whole world.<sup>7</sup> We know that God does not delight in the death of the wicked but would rather he repented.<sup>8</sup> It will not surprise us therefore, to find Peter saying of God's plan: The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is long-suffering to you-ward, not wishing (*boulomai*) that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.<sup>9</sup>

God's plan does not specify that particular individuals should perish; if a man perishes it will be because he has rejected God's plan for him.

#### GOD'S WILL DEFIED (Greek root: *thelo*)

We also find that God's *will* can be, and is, defied by man. Thus we read

- (a) Matthew 23.37; Luke 13.34: How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings and you would not!
- (b) Matthew 12.50; Mark 3.35: For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.
- (c) Matthew 7.21: Not everyone that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven.

- (d) John 7.17: If any man wills to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from myself.
- (e) 1 John 2.17: And the world passes away, and the lust thereof; but he that does the will of God abides for ever.

From these verses we can see that not all men do God's will. If everyone were acting according to God's will then presumably they would all live for ever and enter God's kingdom; this would amount to universalism which we know to be unscriptural. Thus we must conclude that men can and do refuse to do God's will.

Not only unbelievers but also Christians may, on occasion, reject the will of God as well as His commandments:

- (f) 1 Thessalonians 4.3: For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you abstain from fornication. (see also 1 Peter 2.15; Hebrews 10.36).
- (g) 1 Thessalonians 5.17-19: pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus to you-ward. Quench not the spirit...

Christians do sometimes quench the Spirit. Some men actually *fight* against the Spirit. God, who wills that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth,<sup>10</sup> sends His Spirit to convict their hearts,<sup>11</sup> but they *reject* His plan for them,<sup>12</sup> and *resist* the Spirit's urgings to repent. Scripture says of them:

- (h) Acts 7.51: You stiffnecked people and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do you.

But can they continue to resist the Spirit, or does there come a time when they have no choice but to repent? Let us note that those accused here by Stephen of 'resisting the Holy Spirit', although 'cut to the heart', promptly murdered him. History shows, moreover, that many of this council stayed unrepentant all their lives. Their resistance to the Holy Spirit and rejection of God's plan for themselves was a permanent thing.

It is clear, therefore, that whichever word for 'will' or 'plan' we consider, there are Scriptures showing that God's will can be, and is, defied by man.<sup>13</sup> There is nothing in Scripture to suggest that there is some kind of 'will' or 'plan' of God which is inviolable.

Some Christian writers seem to have been unable to accept this, and have therefore found themselves facing a difficult problem. If, as they believe, everything which happens is God's will, then the unrepentance and perishing of the wicked must also be God's will. Yet God Himself says it is *not* His will - so how can they reconcile this? 14 The most obvious approach is for them to try to distinguish the two different senses of the word 'will'. Consider the following passage from a well known commentary on Romans:

It is true. God would not men should perish as touching His *signified will*, for He offered

unto man a law, promises, threatenings, and counsels, which things, if he had embraced, he had surely lived. But, if we have respect unto that mighty and effectual will, doubtless we cannot deny, but God would have men to perish.'

The phrase 'signified will' presumably means here '*will-as-revealed-to-man*', and the phrase 'effectual will' means '*will-as-carried-into-effect*'. The argument in this passage, therefore, is that verses like 'God is not willing that any should perish' show us God's '*will-as-revealed-to-man*' but the fact that many *do* perish shows us God's '*will-as-carried-into-effect*'. We are thus presented with a supposed 'signified will' which is the complete opposite of His supposed 'effectual will'. His 'signified will' is that He 'would not men should perish'; His 'effectual will' is that He 'would have men to perish'. Now as far as we can see there would be only two possibilities if this view were correct. One would be that God is lying, and He tells us (or 'signifies') that He wants to save everyone but in fact has no such wish. The other would be that God really does at the same time actively want to save them and not to save them. In short, either God would be a deceiver or He would be a God of contradiction and chaos. Neither of these conclusions would be acceptable to any Christian, but there would seem to be no other possibilities if the commentary we quoted were correct. But is there, in fact, the slightest basis in Scriptural language for distinguishing in this manner between a 'signified' and an 'effectual' will? We can discover nothing in Scripture which shows that God has an 'effectual' or any other kind of will that men should stay unrepentant and so perish. If one is prepared to abandon any presupposition that God's will is always done, and accept the simple Bible teaching that a man perishes because he rejects God's plan for him and does not do the Father's will, then the whole elaborate apparatus of 'signified' and 'effectual' wills<sup>15</sup> becomes unnecessary.

At this point it might be helpful to mention a rather different distinction of two types or aspects of the will of God. This is that which distinguishes His 'permissive will' and His 'active will'. It is often said, for example, that it is only God's 'permissive will' that people should suffer. Could this distinction be applied to the present problem? Could we say that it is only God's permissive will that men should perish, but His active will to save them? It is difficult to comment on this suggestion, for it is not clear exactly what it means. If we speak of God's permissive will then He is presumably permitting something. What exactly is it? Is it that He permits men to continue on the road to hell when He could transfer them to the road to life? Is it rather that He permits them to choose which road they want, and permits that choice to stand? Or is it that He permits the world to carry on when He could annihilate it? The first of these interpretations would again be contradicted by God's repeated statements that He does not want people to perish. One of the other two versions might be better, but one could wish for a clearer statement of what exactly is meant.

Let us, therefore, consider whether the Scriptures themselves give a hint of two aspects to God's will - and if so what they are. We know that one clear aspect of God's will is His unwillingness that any should perish and desire that all men everywhere should repent and come to a knowledge of the truth. Is there another aspect? A good clue may be found in the moving words of Psalm 32. David begins by saying: Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered ...I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and you forgave the iniquity of my sin . . . The Lord replies in verse 8: I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go: I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be you not as the horse, or as the mule, which

have no understanding: whose trappings must be bit and bridle to hold them in, Else they will not come near unto you.

Why did God allow David to sin and then forgive him when he confessed it? Why not simply stop David from sinning in the first place? Was is God's permissive will to allow him to sin? Well, in a sense, yes. But the reason was that God does not want mule-like servants who have to be forced to obey Him all the time. He wants those who will freely<sup>16</sup> accept His instruction and counsel. He wants relationships of mutual affection and love, not those based on some kind of force. God *could* bridle the unbelievers, tinker with their wills and hearts and turn them into automata (or mules) so that they have to do what He says. But if He did this it would still not achieve His purpose of developing free relationships such as He desired with David. We could then, set out two aspects of His will as:

- (a) He wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth
- (b) He doesn't want a set of bridled mules; He wants, therefore, to leave them free to accept or refuse His plan to give them the free gift of salvation.

This, however, might still be misleading. These two 'aspects' are really part of the same will. God wants all men to repent and enter a free love-relationship with Himself. But, if He 'forced' men to repent, then their allegiance would not be freely given -and they would no longer be truly *men* but mules. He would not have 'saved' *men*, but made mules out of them. God created man in His own image, and desires men to be conformed to the image of His son.<sup>17</sup> This Divine wish will be unfulfilled in those who perish through unrepentance - but it would be no better fulfilled in them if they were transformed into mules. There is a sense in which transformation into mules is just another way of perishing. God prefers to endure with much longsuffering those fit only for destruction, for at least there is then the opportunity for some to respond to His call to receive mercy and enter a love-relationship with Him.<sup>18</sup> Thus the fact that some perish is quite consistent with God's desire that all should be saved - they are complementary expressions of a single will to save *men*.

The reason, we discover, for God not saving all men is not that He doesn't really want to, it is not a great mystery, it is not part of His 'inscrutable will'. It is simply that if He were to force them then they would no longer be men and He would have failed to achieve anything of His purpose. There is no contradiction, nor even paradox, between the perishing of men and God's desire to save them. They are both necessary expressions of one and the same will to form relationships of love, sharing, and understanding with *men*.

This is the only conclusion we can see which reconciles Scriptures. In any event, there are Scriptures which make it clear that both God's 'will' and His 'plan' can be defied by individuals. Yet, because of various influences, these Scriptures sometimes get neglected. What are these influences? This we may now consider.

One may be the emotional appeal: 'Surely God would not be sovereign if everything were not directly determined by Him?' Yet we must be careful of such appeals, for this word 'sovereign', which is used so prolifically by some Christians, is not used once in the entire Authorised



Version of the Bible. This is not to deny that the Lord is indeed King of kings, but it may help us to remember that the reign of God (and of the Lamb) is one which neither makes humans into automata, nor the battle a fake in which God directs both sides. Other versions than the A.V. (e.g. the N.E.B.) do sometimes use the word 'sovereign'. In the Old Testament, however, there seems to be *no* Hebrew word which might be strictly translated 'all-mighty' or 'omni-potent'; the nearest are perhaps *Yahweh Sabaoth* (Lord of Hosts) and *El Gibbor* (Mighty God). Only in the New Testament is there a word *panto-krator* which might be strictly translated as *all-powerful*. Even this word is used only a total of ten times-nine of which come in that book of battles, the Revelation!

But how may we understand this 'all-powerfulness' of God? For a concept like the *love* of God the Bible itself gives us human analogies (for example the human father-son relationship). For a concept like *almightiness* we can have nothing comparable in the human realm. Care is needed, therefore, in surmising its meaning, and we must certainly take into account the implications of other statements made in the Bible. Whatever our conclusions about the meaning of *almightiness*, it clearly cannot mean that God's will or plan is irresistible, since the Bible says that they are not.

Further light on the word *pantokrator* or *almighty* may be shed by Hebrews 2.14. There the 'power' (*kratos*) of death is said to have been in the possession of the Devil. It was, it implies, a central part of the great war that Christ Himself had to die on the cross to wrest it from Satan's grip. Whatever we understand, therefore, by 'all-powerful', it cannot be undiscerningly taken to imply that there are *no* powers but God in His universe. God's rightful dominion<sup>19</sup> is obviously the whole universe, but parts of it are, in practice, usurped by other agents to whom He has given some independence of will and delegated authority.

It is with such background in mind that we must approach such a difficult and little used word like 'all-powerful', and it would be unwise to build any key doctrines on this word alone. Yet an appeal to God's 'sovereignty' seems to have exerted a great influence on some people.

A different appeal seems to be influencing those who say that they would 'have nothing left' were God not sovereign in the totalitarian way they imagine: they must believe that God is willing everything. Surely though, if God really is determining everything, and yet children are starving and being bombed with napalm, then all that we have learned from Jesus about God's love for the world is pious delusion. For example, it would then be indeed the Father's will that many of these little ones should perish.<sup>20</sup> We must admit that we find it strange that anyone should be unhappy that God does *not* act in this way, we should expect them rather to be unhappy in believing that He did.

A third influence is the appeal that God's *glory* would be denied if it were possible for something to happen contrary to His will. Yet, as we have already seen, Christ taught us that the glory of God does not consist in lording it over people, but in His own sacrifice.<sup>21</sup> If we really grasped Christ's revelation that God's glory is the cross, and ourselves learned to glory in it,<sup>22</sup> then the 'glory of God' could never again be confused with the 'glory' sought by the natural minds of the rulers of the Gentiles, or, indeed, by the 'world ruler' himself.

A fourth influence may be the often made accusation that those who do not believe God's 'sovereignty' to be of this absolute form are teaching that salvation is 'of works'. But if a man owes a million pounds and someone offers to pay it for him, who has saved him if he accepts? Well, in one sense he has 'saved himself' (and in this sense Peter urges sinners to 'save themselves' in Acts 2.40). But one would obviously be more likely to say he was 'saved' by his benefactor. He has in no way 'worked for' or 'earned' his salvation simply by accepting a free offer. How, then, may one regard the claim that if we are free to reject or accept God's free offer of salvation then we 'earn' it by accepting? It is surely not a 'work' to accept a free offer (either of salvation or of a million pounds), and a person who accepts a free gift has not 'earned' it. As C. H. Spurgeon wrote: .... faith excludes all boasting. The hand which receives charity does not say "I am to be thanked for accepting the gift"; that would be absurd.' When Paul talks of this he says: 'Now to him that works, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt.'<sup>23</sup> The suggestion that it is 'works' to freely accept an undeserved offer must surely be rejected.

A more subtle form of this argument is the appeal to the Christian's own practice. The question may be asked: 'To whom do you give the credit for your conversion - yourself or God?' But again, to use our analogy, it would be a foolish man who would strut about patting himself on the back simply for accepting an offer to pay his debt. His attention would surely not be focused on his acceptance of the offer, but on the offer itself and on the love which leads the offeror to fulfil it if he accepts. We, of course, thank and praise God for His Love, for His offer, and for His fulfilment of that offer to us. The fact that others have refused similar offers does not make our own the less precious. Moreover, all this talk of 'credit' is not Christ-like. A shepherd girl offered the heart and love of Solomon would be too taken up with wonder and love to think of 'credit'. The heavenly bride will be gazing on Christ, not wondering if she ought to receive 'credit' for accepting His amazing offer of Love. A concern with 'credit' would only be the concern of such as those 'rulers of the gentiles' of which Christ spoke. It may, all too sadly, remind us of that Pharisee who was careful to ascribe all the credit to God: 'God *I thank thee* that I am not as other men'.

Christ's kingdom of love is one in which the greatest is the servant of all - it is founded through and through on love and not on flattery or desire for 'credit'. Yet an appeal to such things has sometimes influenced the thinking of even the most spiritual of men. How careful we must be to leave aside emotional questions and look to the Bible for teaching on God's sovereignty.

The last influence we might mention is another appeal to the Christian's own practice: 'Don't you pray that people will be converted? This means that you recognise in your heart that they will be converted only if God wills it.' This is very subtle, but not convincing. We pray that the Holy Spirit will powerfully convict people of their own need, of God's love and judgement. We do not pray that He will override their own decision processes and force them to believe. Obviously Christians believe that other people's decisions may be *affected* by our own actions - otherwise why should we preach? No man lives in a vacuum, and this is true both in the physical and in the spiritual and psychic realms.<sup>24</sup> As we pray we ask the Holy Spirit to utilise and interpret our prayers,<sup>25</sup> and thus we join the battle against the principalities and powers in the fight to influence men. God's conviction of a man's heart can powerfully stimulate him to a decision for repentance-but the Bible nowhere indicates that God negates a man's own choice.<sup>28</sup> On the contrary, God is prepared to say: When I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not

hear; but you did that which was evil in my eyes, and chose that wherein I delighted not.<sup>27</sup> God leaves man with a free choice, and does not 'force' repentance on a man who chooses a path which does not delight Him.<sup>28</sup> If it has indeed been our practice to pray that God will do the latter, then it is our practice which should change and not our theology. Our theology should be the same on our knees as when we are in a Bible study.

These, then, may be some of the appeals which can influence us, but we should be careful not to let them prevent us from accepting the teaching of Scripture that God's will can be and is defied by men. There is a resistance movement against God in His world. Only when we see this can we begin to discover how God wants us to partake in His battle strategy.

## NOTES

- 1 Some would go as far as to state specifically that there is no real conflict between God and Satan. Thus Calvin: 'Satan also, himself . . . is so completely the servant of the Most High as to act only by His command.' (Commentary on Romans)
- 2 See *The Problem of Pain and Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis, and also section 14 of our own book *Yes, but* .
- 3 Revelation 19.6
- 4 Isaiah 46.10, LXX uses *boule* and *bouleuomai*
- 5 Philippians 2.13; the RV reads: 'for it is God which works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure'.
- 6 The 'all things' of verse 11 cannot refer either to 'all events' or to 'all people'. If it referred to 'all events' then verse 10 would be saying that all events will be 'headed up' (or 'united' as RSV) in Christ - which means nothing. If it referred to 'all people' then we must suppose from verse 10 that the lost and even Satan himself will be united in Christ - which is unbiblical. We must therefore conclude that 'all things' in verse 11 refers to 'all creation' - which is to be headed up in Christ.
- 7 I John 2.2; John could hardly have put this more plainly; see also John 1.29; 3.16; Titus 2.11
- 8 Ezekiel 18.23
- 9 2 Peter 3.9
- 10 1 Timothy 2.4
- 11 John 16.8

- 12 Luke 7.30
- 13 The Bible clearly says that God's will is not always done by men, and those who have denied this have faced considerable difficulties in 'interpreting' the verses which show it. The first Christian leader to teach that God's will is always done and is never impeded by the will of any creature seems to have been Augustine. The difficulties be faced in interpreting some of the verses we have quoted are illustrated in our appendix.
- 14 Some, of course, do not even try to reconcile the two, but simply say that there are 'two sides to the truth'. 'On the one hand,' they say, 'man is responsible, but on the other hand God is sovereign and determines everything that happens.'

We must be careful here. First let us note in what form the contrast is usually stated. Alongside God's supposed determination of all events is set 'man's responsibility', or perhaps 'man's own view of his conversion' Now the Bible undoubtedly does imply man's responsibility, but it is not the prime difficulty here. The point is that God Himself says that man *can* (permanently) reject His will and plan for him, and refuse to follow it. God does not say merely that man *thinks he can* do this, but that *he can and does* do so. Thus if we are to set up 'two sides to the truth' then the real antithesis must be:

- (a) Man can and does reject God's will and plan for him
- (b) God determines all events and His will is always done

This is plain contradiction, and if we are to allow such contradictions in our thinking then almost any doctrine can be read into the Bible on the basis of isolated verses - being heralded as a new 'side to the truth'.

In a recent IVP book *Arguing With God*, Hugh Silvester well says:

'Once the Christian admits that there is a real and complete contradiction in his thinking he can give up his claim to talk sense and may logically make any statement he chooses, however outrageous.' (p.47). Yet, in spite of the many useful features of his book, it is not clear that Mr. Silvester himself escapes the criticism. Later on he tells us that: A thorough examination of the Bible usually finishes up with two apparently irreconcilable statements:

1. Man is responsible for his actions
2. God orders or ordains all things' Op.71)

Even if this is not contradiction (which is debatable), statement 2 is certainly in plain contradiction to God's own assertion in the Scriptures that man can and does defy His will and plan. For Mr. Silvester to go on to tell us that 'On a practical level there is no difficulty' leaves as much contradiction as ever.

The choice, in fact, is simple. We must either give up any form of reason and accept plain

contradictions as 'sides to truth', or else we must abandon statement 2 (or b) as being (as it stands at least) inconsistent with Scripture.

- 15 This 'apparatus' not only includes the supposition of two diametrically opposite 'wills' of God. It must also suppose an 'effectual calling' and a non-effectual one, an 'unconditional election' and one which we need to 'make sure' (2 Peter 1.10), and so on.
- 16 It is, of course, nonsense to say that God could create men who were free, but force them to do His will. It is no use us having recourse to Jesus saying: 'All things are possible to God', for He said this in the context of rich men entering the Kingdom of Heaven. God can perform miracles and do what is impossible to man; but the words 'force a man to freely do God's will' do not state an impossibility. They do not, in fact, state anything at all, for they are a meaningless word series, and the addition of 'God can' in front of them does not remove their meaninglessness. Hugh Silvester well says: 'God is all powerful but that does not mean that he can do anything. He cannot make  $2 + 2 = 5$  and He cannot make it raining and not raining in the same moment at the same place . . . When we say God is all-powerful we mean He can do all things that can be done which doubtless includes many things that are impossible to man. But we do not mean that He can give a hydrogen atom and a helium atom the same atomic structure. Even God could not create free men without at the same time creating men who were able to rebel.' (*Arguing With God* p.60-1)

See also section 18 which contains further comment on this.

- 17 Romans 8.29
- 18 Compare Romans 9.22
- 19 The word *kratos* in the New Testament seems to imply 'dominion in a majority of references, e.g. 1 Peter 4.11; 5.11; Jude 25; Revelation 1.6. Dominion is ascribed to Christ and God whose right it is to rule.
- 20 Matthew 18.14
- 21 See above p.18-19, and Matthew 20.25-28; Mark 10.42-45; Luke 22.24-27; John 13.12
- 22 Galatians 6.14
- 23 Romans 4.4; see also section 20 which shows the importance of understanding the rabbinical ideas which Paul is here attacking.
- 24 see also Stafford Wright in *What is Mon*
- 25 Romans 8.26
- 26 Even in revivals one hears of many who are convicted and smitten by God's Spirit, but

later lapse back in unbelief.

27 Isaiah 65.12

28 The early church leaders and teachers coined the term 'free-will' to represent the Bible's teaching that God allows man a choice of whether or not to obey Him~ In an appendix we have shown the apparently unanimous teaching among early church leaders for the first 300 years that man had been given this 'free-will'. It is important to note that the arguments which we have presented in this section are by no means novel or new, but coincide with some of the earliest Christian arguments against heretics of those days. Irenaeus (c 130-200 A.D.), for example, cited Matthew 23.37 just as we have done, to demonstrate to his contemporaries that God has given man 'power of choice'.

## Appendix

### EARLY TEACHING ON GOD'S AND MAN'S WILL

The earlier studies in this book deal with various topics of Bible background and language, and are intended to aid our understanding of the Bible. The present study has been appended to the book with a rather different aim-to help us to understand *ourselves* as we approach the Bible.

In section (6) we remarked on the clear teaching of the Bible that men can and do reject God's will and plan for them, and on the various influences which may lead us to overlook such teachings. The present study aims to examine the earliest Christian teaching available on this subject, and to see if it is possible to find some clue as to how these influences might have arisen. As Christians we stand, either consciously or unconsciously, in a long Christian tradition, and are influenced by its thinking. We may well find it useful to see the origins of some of our own ideas and presuppositions about Bible teaching.

The early church had the task of interpreting and elucidating the New Testament writings. What was implied often had to be made explicit. Sometimes new words - like 'trinity' - were coined. One of the earliest of these words was 'free-will'. The early church noted the Scriptures (such as Matthew 23.37) which indicated that man sometimes defied and disobeyed God's will. They may also have noted verses (e.g. John 7.17) which indicate that man's will is not automatically forced to be what God wants it to be. They therefore coined the phrase 'free-will' to describe the will of man. This was to emphasize the Bible's teaching that man's will was free to choose not to do the will of God. We may not like the term 'free-will' for it is not used in the Bible, and was later misused by the Pelagians; but we must see it in a similar light to terms like 'trinity' - it was part of the early Christians' attempt to define apostolic teaching more clearly.

The doctrine of 'free-will' seems to have been universally accepted in the early church. There does not seem to have been a single church figure in the first 300 years who rejected the doctrine, and most of them stated it clearly in works which we still have. We find it taught by great leaders in places as different as Alexandria, Antioch, Athens, Carthage, Jerusalem, Lycia, Nyssa, Rome and Sicca. We find it taught by the leaders of all the main theological schools.<sup>1</sup> The only ones to reject it were heretics like the Gnostics, Marcion, Valentinus, Manes (and the Manichees) etc. In fact, the early Fathers often state their beliefs on 'free-will' in works attacking heretics. There seem to be three recurrent ideas in their teaching

1. The rejection of free-will is the view of heretics.
2. Free-will is a gift given to man by God - for nothing can ultimately be independent of God.
3. Man possesses free-will because he is made in God's image, and God has free-will.

We have, below, set out some passages from writings of leading early church figures. Each is accompanied by a very brief explanation of who the writer was, but for further explanation the reader should see any standard work.<sup>2</sup> One word of prior explanation (given by Smith) may be

useful: 'The writers who tried to put the Christian case are often called the 'Apologists', from the Greek *apologia*, a speech for the defence. In English this is a misleading term, because it implies that they were apologising for something. They were not. Some of their work was more of a frontal attack on contemporary paganism; much of it was an explanation of what Christians were and why they were innocent of the charges laid against them.'<sup>3</sup>

(i) **JUSTIN MARTYR** (c. 100-165 AD.)

Renwick calls Justin: 'The greatest of the early apologists, a most earnest Christian and a true lover of learning'. Quasten calls him: 'The most important of the Greek apologists of the second century and one of the noblest personalities of early Christian literature'<sup>4</sup>

As a philosopher, Justin had sought the truth in various schools but remained unsatisfied. Then, in Ephesus, he met an old man who talked to him about the Lord, and he says that 'it seemed as if a fire was kindled in him'. Still wearing his philosopher's cloak, but now on fire for the Lord, he won many with his testimony. Finally, a rival (anti-Christian) philosopher accused him to the city Prefect of being a Christian. The Prefect threatened Justin with flogging and execution, and jeeringly asked him if he thought he would ascend to heaven. Justin replied: 'I don't *think* so, I know and am fully persuaded of it.' Thus he received martyrdom.

The 'soundness' of Justin's teaching is examined later in this section. He mentions 'free-will' in several works, e.g. in *The Sovereignty of God*, but here we will quote only one instance:

*Dialogue CXLI*: 'God, wishing men and angels to follow His will, resolved to create them free to do righteousness. But if the word of God foretells that some angels and men shall certainly be punished, it did so because it foreknew that they would be unchangeably (wicked), but not because God created them so. So that if they repent all who wish for it can obtain' mercy from God'.

(ii) **IRENÆUS OF GAUL** (c. 130-200)

Irenaeus was the first of the great Fathers of the period 180-250. He was a disciple of Polycarp of Smyrna who was, in turn, a disciple of St. John. The importance of his work *Against Heresies* in saving the church from the doctrines of the Gnostics cannot be exaggerated.<sup>5</sup>

*Against Heresies' XXXVII*: 'I) This expression "How often would I have gathered thy children together, and thou wouldst not," set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free (agent) from the beginning, possessing his own soul to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will (toward us) is present with Him continually. And therefore does He give good counsel to all. And in man as well as in' angels, He has placed the power of choice (for angels are rational beings), so that those who had yielded obedience might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God, but preserved by themselves .

4) If then it were not in our power to do or not to do these things, what reason had the apostle, and much more the Lord Himself, to give us counsel to do some things and to abstain



from others? But because man is possessed of free-will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free-will in whose likeness man was created, advice is always given to him to keep fast the good, which thing is done by means of obedience to God.'

(iii) **ATHENAGORAS OF ATHENS** (2nd century)

An Athenian philosopher who became a Christian. He was by far the most elegant, and certainly at the same time one of the ablest of the early Christian Apologists.<sup>6</sup> The *Embassy* was written in about 177 A.D.

*Embassy for Christians XXIV*: 'Just as with men who have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice (for you would not either honour the good or punish the bad; unless vice and virtue were in their own power, and some are diligent in the matters entrusted to them, and others faithless), so is it among the angels.

(iv) **THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH** (2nd Century)

Became Bishop of the important town of Antioch about 169 A.D. and wrote an apology for Christianity, which he addressed to Autolytus. He seems to have been the first writer to have used the term 'trinity' of the Godhead. 'His works were highly thought of and before long were studied in the West. Ireneus and Hippolytus made use of them before Tertullian.'<sup>7</sup>

*To Autolytus xxvii*: 'For God made man free, and with power over himself . . . now God vouchsafes to him as a gift through His own philanthropy and pity, when men obey Him. For as man, disobeying, drew death on himself; so, obeying the will of God, he who desires is able to procure for himself life everlasting

(v) **TATIAN OF SYRIA** (flourished late 2nd Century)

Tatian was at first Justin's pupil. Soon, however, he became independent, and this is seen in that, unlike Justin, he condemned all pagan philosophy as totally evil. He returned to Syria as a missionary, and composed the *Diatessaron* - a harmony of the gospels. This work, and his influence, were of great importance in the early Syriac Christianity. His followers followed a very strict rule of life and soon split off from the Greek church. Smith says: 'Perhaps one of his (Tatian's) converts was Bardaisan who was born in Edessa and was converted about 179. Bardaisan was strongly against the determinism of much Greek philosophy, and he strongly attacked Marcion. He is also the first known Syrian hymn writer. Like Tatian he was an enthusiastic missionary, and the Syriac churches probably owed much of their strength to leaders like these. Despite the fact that they came under the suspicion of Greek Christian writers, these men were probably mainly orthodox Christians with a number of odd ideas.'<sup>8</sup>

*Address, xi*: 'Why are you 'fated' to grasp at things often, and often to die? Die to the world, repudiating the madness that is in it. Live to God, and by apprehending Him lay aside your old nature. We were not created to die, but we die by our own fault. Our free-will has destroyed us; we who were free have become slaves; we have been sold through

sin Nothing evil has been created by God; we ourselves have manifested wickedness; but we, who have manifested it, are able again' to reject it'

(vi) BARDAISAN OF SYRIA (C 154-222)

As already mentioned, Bardaisan was probably mainly orthodox, but was not accepted by Greek writers. Eusebius says 'Bardaisan, a most able man and highly skilled disputant in the Syriac language, composed dialogues against the followers of Marcion . . . At an earlier stage he had belonged to the school of Valentinus, but later he condemned it and refuted many of its fanciful ideas . . . For all that the taint of the old heresy stuck to him to the end.'

*Fragments:*'' "How is it that God did not so make us that we should not sin and incur condemnation?" - if man had been made so, he would not have belonged to himself but would have been the instrument of him that moved him; . . . And how, in that case, would a man differ from a harp, on which another plays; or from a ship, which another guides: where the praise and the blame reside in the hand of the performer or the steersman . . . they being only instruments made for the use of him in whom is the skill? But God, in His benignity, chose not so to make man; hut by freedom He exalted him above many of His creatures.'

(vii) CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (c 150 - 215)

A presbyter of tremendous learning, both of the Bible and of secular literature. He was for some time head of the Alexandrian school of Christian scholars, and is one of the most famous of early Christian writers.<sup>9</sup> He has sometimes been accused of placing too much stress on the intellect<sup>10</sup> but we find this criticism hard to accept. For one thing, most Christian theologians and apologists place an emphasis on right belief - especially in arguing against heresies. For another, Clement repeatedly makes it clear that faith is a moral issue, and a matter of decision for Christ. In *Stromata* Bk ii ch 2, for example, he argues strongly that 'faith is not established by demonstration'. Faith involves a choice and 'choice is the beginning of action'. Shortly after we read:

*Stromata, Bk ii ch. 4:* 'But we, who have heard by the Scriptures that self-determining choice and refusal have been given by the Lord to men, rest in the infallible criterion of faith, manifesting a willing spirit, since we have chosen life and believe God through His voice.'

*Stromata, Bk iv ch. 12:* 'But nothing is without the will of the Lord of the universe. It remains to say that such things happen without the prevention of God; for this a'.one saves both the providence and the goodness of God. We must not therefore think that He actively produces afflictions (far be it that we should think this!); but we must be persuaded that He does not prevent those that cause them, but overrules for goad the crimes of His enemies.'

(viii) TERTULLIAN OF CARTHAGE (c. 155 - 225)

The first great Latin theologian, and one of the greatest of the early Christian writers of the West. He later tended towards the 'rigorist' views of the Montanists, though his Montanism did not prevent him from remaining dogmatically orthodox in most respects. His apology is one of the ablest ever written.<sup>11</sup> He was strikingly different from Clement,<sup>12</sup> and emphasised man's inherited sinfulness.<sup>13</sup>

*Against Marcion, Book I ch. 5:* 'I find, then, that man was by God constituted free, master of his own will and power; indicating the presence of God's image and likeness in him by nothing so well as by this constitution of his nature.'

- you will find that when He sets before man good and evil, life and death, that the entire course of discipline is arranged in precepts by God's calling men from sin, and threatening and exhorting them; and this on no other ground than that man is free, with a will either for obedience or resistance.

. . . Since, therefore, both the goodness and purpose of God are discovered in the gift to man of freedom in his will

(ix) **NOVATIAN OF ROME** (c.200-258)

The first Roman theologian to write in Latin. Smith says 'Novatian was brilliant. He was a competent theologian, and a work on the doctrine of the Trinity survives to give an idea of his prowess. Even his enemies had to admit that he was blameless in his life, and had been a zealous worker'.<sup>14</sup> Novatian lost the election for the bishopric of Rome, and separated from the 'official' group on the issue of whether lapsed believers might be received back into fellowship. His followers, called 'Puritans', were excommunicated by the Catholic church.<sup>15</sup> Bruce says: 'In doctrine they were strictly orthodox; Novatian himself, indeed, was one of the chief exponents of pure trinitarian theology in the third century.'<sup>16</sup>

*On the Trinity, ch. 1:* 'He also placed man at the head of the world, and man, too, made in the image of God, to whom He imparted mind, and reason, and foresight, that he might imitate God; and although the first elements of his body were earthly, yet the substance was inspired by a heavenly and divine breathing. And when He had given him all things for his service, He willed that he alone should be free. And lest, again, an unbounded freedom should fall into peril, He laid down a command, in which man was taught that there was no evil in the fruit of the tree; but he was forewarned that evil would arise if perchance he should exercise his freewill in the contempt of the law that was given.'

(x) **ORIGEN** (c.185-254)

Renwick calls him: 'one of the most brilliant teachers and writers ever known in the Christian Church. The son of a martyr, and reared in a fine spiritual atmosphere, he became head of the catechetical school at the age of 18 and raised it to its highest fame in spite of persecution. He loved the Scriptures and showed remarkable ability in interpreting them.'<sup>17</sup> Bruce says: 'greater still than Tertullian and Novatian was the Alexandrian theologian Origen, the greatest scholar and thinker of the church in the first three centuries.'<sup>18</sup>

Origen sometimes gave expression to some wild speculations, which later brought criticism on

him. He did, however, distinguish clearly between his speculations and his teaching of established doctrines. Renwick says: 'He claimed that he was loyal to the rule of faith adopted by the Church, while exercising ample liberty of expression on matters not covered by the accepted creed.' **19** Let us, therefore, note carefully his words:

*De Principis Preface:* 'Now it ought to be known that the holy apostles, in preaching the faith of Christ, delivered themselves with the utmost clearness on certain points which they believed to be necessary to everyone . . . This also is *clearly defined in the teaching of the church* that every rational soul is possessed of free-will and violation.'

*De Principis, Bk 3 ch. 1:* 'There are, indeed, innumerable passages in the Scriptures which establish with exceeding clearness the existence of freedom of will.'<sup>20</sup>

(xi) **METHIDIUS OF OLYMPUS** (c. 260 - martyred 311)

He was a bishop in Lycia, Asia Minor, and is known chiefly as an antagonist of Origen.<sup>21</sup> But, although he attacked Origen's speculations, there was one point on which he (like all early Christians) agreed:

*The Banquet of the Ten Virgins xvi:* 'Now those who decide that man is not possessed of free-will, and affirm that he is governed by the unavoidable necessities of fate . . . are guilty of impiety towards God Him-self, making Him out to be the cause and author of human evils.'

*Concer'ing Free-will:* 'I say that man was made with free-will, not as if there were already existing some evil, which he had the power of choosing if he wished, but that the power of obeying and disobeying God is the only cause.'

(xii) **ARCHELAUS**

Cyril, Epiphanius and Jerome record a disputation (in 277) between the heretic Manes (founder of Manichaeism) and the orthodox Archelaus. The dialogue, as we have it, was probably set down by a later writer, but does show us differences between orthodoxy and heresy at that time.

*The Disputation with Manes:* 'For all creatures that God made, He made very good, and He gave to every individual the sense of free-will in accordance with which standard He also instituted the law of judgement. To sin is ours, and that we sin not is God's gift, as our will is constituted to choose either to sin or not to sin.'

(xiii) **ARNOBIUS OF SICCA** (c. 253 - 327)

He wrote a brilliant Christian apology about 300 **A.D.22**

*Against the Heathen:* '64. I reply: does not He free all alike who invites all alike? or does He thrust back or repel any one from the kindness of the Supreme who gives to all alike the power of coming to Him -? To all, He says, the fountain of life is open, and no one is

hindered or kept back from drinking...

65. Nay, my opponent says, if God is powerful, merciful, willing to save us, let Him change our dispositions, and compel us to trust in His promises. This then, is violence, not kindness nor the bounty of the Supreme God, but a childish and vain strife in seeking to get the mastery. For what is so unjust as to force men who are reluctant and unworthy, to reverse their inclinations; to impress forcibly on their minds what they are unwilling to receive, and shrink from . . .’

(xiv) **CYRIL OF JERUSALEM** (c. 312 - 386)

A Bishop of Jerusalem with little claim to fame - but showing us what the ordinary churchman believed:

*Lecture lv 18:* 'Know also that thou hast a soul self governed, the noblest work of God, made after the image of its Creator, immortal because of God that gives it immortality, a living being rational, imperishable, because of Him that bestowed these gifts: having free power to do what it willeth.

20. There is not a class of souls sinning by nature and a class of souls practicing righteousness by nature; but both act from choice, the substance of their souls being of one kind only and alike in all.

21. The soul is self-governed: and though the Devil can suggest, he has not the power to compel against the will. He pictures to thee the thought of fornication: if thou wilt, thou rejectest. For if thou wert a fornicator of necessity then for what cause did God prepare hell? If thou wert a doer of righteousness by nature and not by will, wherefore did god prepare crowns of ineffable glory? The sheep is gentle, but never was it crowned for its gentleness; since its gentle quality belongs to it not from choice but by nature.

(xv) **GREGORY OF NYSSA** (c. 335 – 395)

He was one of the acutest intellects of the fourth century, having great influence in the Eastern churches. He was at the council of Constantinople (381) and was nominated by Theodosius I as a norm of orthodoxy.<sup>23</sup>

*On Virginity* (368) ch. XII: ‘Being the image and the likeness . . . of the Power which rules all things, man kept also in the matter of a free-will this likeness to Him whose will is over all.

(xvi) **JEROME** (c. 347 – 420)

Jerome was one of the four great doctors of the Western church and the most learned of the Latin Fathers.<sup>24</sup> He was an expert on Hebrew and Greek and his Latin translation of the Bible (the Vulgate) was far better than other Latin versions of the time. His attitude to ‘free-will’ is important for three main reasons. First, he stands – like Augustine – in the Latin tradition; and was a strong critic of Origen and the Alexandrian heritage. Secondly, as a Bible translator he had a deep and first hand knowledge of the New Testament writings. Thirdly, he wrote against the Pelagians, whose teachings had brought disrepute on the word ‘free-will’. The orthodox

Christian view of the first three centuries had been that God gave man a 'free-will' to obey or to disobey God's commands to trust Him, to accept or reject grace. Some Pelagians seem to have taken 'free-will' to imply that man could (of his own will) decide to live a moral life. There is a world of difference between these two ideas, and it is a pity that this is not always realized. The early church view was that man had 'free-will' to accept or reject God's offer of free pardon and grace to live a holy life. It was always understood that conversion was a spiritual rebirth accomplished by God's power, and that a man could live a holy life only in Christ. The Pelagians replaced regeneration with self-effort, and their view was rightly condemned.

Jerome strongly attacked the Pelagians, but wanted to distinguish the Pelagian concept of free-will from the orthodox and Biblical one:

*Letters CXXXIII:* 'It is in vain that you misrepresent me and try to convince the ignorant that I condemn free-will. Let him who condemns it be himself condemned. We have been created endowed with free-will; still it is not this which distinguishes us from the brutes. For human free-will, as I said, depends upon the help of God and needs His aid moment by moment, a thing which you and yours do not choose to admit. Your position is that once a man has free-will he no longer needs the help of God. It is true that freedom of the will brings with it freedom of decision. Still man does not act immediately on his free-will but requires God's aid who Himself needs no aid.'

*Against the Pelagians, Book III, 10:* 'But when we are concerned with grace and mercy, free-will is in part void; in part, I say, for so much depends upon it, that we wish and desire, and give assent to the course we choose. But it depends on God whether we have the power in His strength and with His help to perform what we desire, and to bring to effect our toil and effort.'

#### **(xvii) JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (347 - 407)**

Bruce writes: 'In the east there is none to match John of Constantinople.' Renwick calls him: 'a saintly man, an outstanding scholar, and one of the greatest orators of all time . . . His faithfulness in preaching repentance offended the empress Eudoxia and he . . . died through ill-treatment on his way as a prisoner to Pityus.'<sup>25</sup> He is eloquently clear on the topic of 'free-will':

*On Hebrews, Homily 12:* 'All is in God's power, but so that our free-will is not lost . . . It depends therefore on us and on Him. We must first choose the good, and then He adds what belongs to Him. He does not precede our willing, that our free-will may not suffer. But when we have chosen, then He affords us much help . . . It is ours to choose beforehand and to will, but God's to perfect and bring to the end.'

Thus we find a striking agreement amongst early church leaders over the issue of 'free-will'. The same teaching was held by mainstream and fringe groups, by scholars and ordinary ministers, by the Greek, Latin and even Syrian traditions - by everyone, in short, except total heretics. We may not like the phrase 'free-will', which today has connotations of Pelagianism, but as used by true early Christians it expressed their universally held belief that God made man free to accept or reject His offer of free pardon and grace. As we have seen in section 6, many verses in the Bible seem to imply this, and early church teaching was simply a clarification of it, just as their

teaching on the 'trinity' helped to clarify that issue.

## THE NEW THEOLOGY

It may seem surprising that after such early universal agreement among Christians there should be a change. Nevertheless there was, and it is interesting for us to see how this came about.

What was the exact point of the change - insofar as one may be identified? Some words of a great Reformation scholar are relevant here: 'But Ambrose, Origen and Jerome were of the opinion that God dispenses His grace among men according to the use which He foresees that each will make of it. It may be added that Augustine was for some time also of this opinion; but after he had made some progress in knowledge of Scripture he not only retracted it as evidently false, but powerfully confuted it.'<sup>26</sup>

Augustine himself wrote: 'I laboured indeed on behalf of the free choice of the human will, but God's grace overcame, and I could only reach that point where the apostle is perceived to have said with the most evident truth, "for who makes you to differ? and what do you have that you have not received? Now if you have received it why do you glory as if you **received** it not?" And the martyr Cyprian was also desirous of setting forth . . . Faith then, as well in its beginning as in its completion, is God's gift; and let no one have any doubt whatever, unless he desires to resist the plainest Scriptures, that this gift is given to some, while to some it is not given.'<sup>27</sup>

We should note three things from this passage. First, Augustine notes his change of view; the view for which he formerly laboured was the orthodox early Christian view - but he was 'overcome' with these new ideas.

Secondly, Augustine does not himself seem entirely aware of his break with the early Christian view. He here cites Cyprian, but although Cyprian was probably the least clear on the issue of all the leading early Christians, we can find no statement by him that faith is an irresistible gift. In the passage Augustine cites, Cyprian is speaking in as general a sense as Paul himself, and does not state Augustine's view. Yet Augustine may have believed Cyprian really held such views, and he himself seems to have known little about early Christian writings.<sup>28</sup> Thus he may not have realised the extent of his novelty.

Thirdly, it is important to note that the issue is *not* one of whether salvation is of 'works' or of 'faith'; it is one of whether faith itself is an irresistible gift. This is important, for the two issues are frequently con-fused. Most Christians have never read a word of Augustine's writings, but their views are generally affected by the ideas of Christian scholars. Among many of the latter there is an unfortunate tradition to think in terms of the early church having a 'poor understanding' of Pauline doctrines, which were restored' by Augustine. The spell of this idea is so strong that it produces statements like the following comment in a recent (and generally good) book on church history. It refers to the letter from the church at Rome to the church at Corinth, written about 96 A.D. and generally ascribed to Clement. The comment is: 'Salvation is seen to be based on faith and works; for example Rahab is said to have been saved by "faith and hospitality". Perhaps the particular situation called for emphasis on faith being accompanied by suitable actions, but it does seem that Paul's doctrine of salvation through the grace of God alone

was not well understood.' Now Paul wrote to the Roman church in about the year 58 A.D., and Clement's epistle was sent from Rome in about 96 A.D. It would seem almost certain that some of the original recipients of the epistle to the Romans would still have been in that church. Are we seriously to believe that they failed to understand the central teaching of the epistle Paul wrote them? When, moreover, we look at the first epistle of Clement, our amazement at the allegation increases. In I Clement 4.5-6 we read: 'Let us look steadfastly to the blood of Christ, and see how precious His blood is in the sight of God: which being shed for our salvation, has obtained the grace of repentance for all the world. Let us search into all the ages that have gone before us; and let us learn that in every one of them our Lord has still given place for repentance to all such as would turn to Him.' In I Clement 14.20-1 we read: 'And we also being called by the same will in Christ Jesus, are not justified through ourselves, neither by our own wisdom, or knowledge, or piety, or the works which we have done in the holiness of our hearts: But by that faith by which God Almighty has justified all men from the beginning; to whom be glory for ever and ever, amen.' Could Paul's doctrine be more firmly or clearly stated? Even in the passage which refers to Rahab we later read that the spies: 'gave her, moreover, a sign: that she should hang out of her house a scarlet rope; shewing thereby, that by the blood of our Lord, there should be redemption to all that believe and hope in God.' We might, even, compare the clarity of this emphasis on the efficacy of faith through Christ's blood, with the analyses in some of the books in the New Testament itself. Clement refers to Rahab being saved by 'faith and hospitality'; James mentions neither faith nor grace but simply says: was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works, in that she received the messengers and sent them out another way?<sup>29</sup> If we are to view Clement as one who 'did not well understand' Paul's doctrine of grace, then surely James must be classed as one who did not understand it at all?<sup>30</sup> Even worse, on this basis the parable of the sheep and the goats<sup>31</sup> must surely be classed as heresy? Unthinkable as such ideas are to the Christian, they are no more indefensible than the accusations made against Clement and the early church. Yet such accusations are made on the basis of passages in early Christian writings for which there are parallel (or 'worse') passages in the Bible itself. The accusations are perhaps the worst when directed against writers like Justin Martyr. Through reading some commentators one might almost get the impression that Justin was a 'liberal' theologian, only just Christian. Nothing could be further from the truth. Justin's writings are intensely Biblical (He shows good knowledge of both the Septuagint and the Hebrew Old Testament, as well as the New). His love for Christ shows through in every paragraph, and he is quite clear on the necessity of Christ for salvation. He shows a deep understanding of Paul's ideas, and his defence of Christ's Divinity from the Old Testament is outstanding. Christians sometimes criticise him for his quotation of pre-Christian philosophers, but in doing so they seem to forget to whom he addressed himself. Justin addressed the intelligent pagan-unlike the apostles whose recorded words were mainly to Jews or Christians and so needed no such quotations. Acts 17 is perhaps the only passage in the New Testament in which the intelligent pagan is addressed-and in this very passage Paul himself quotes with approval two pre-Christian philosophers on the nature of God. If we are to frown on Justin for such activities then shall we frown also on Paul? Justin, like Paul, is often misunderstood. Take, for example, his teaching on the 'Word'. John I verse 9 was taken seriously by Justin (compare Augustine -- whose rather bizarre interpretation is given on p.218 below). Thus Justin says: 'We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we had declared above that *He is the Word* of whom every' race of men were partakers; and those who lived *reasonably* are Christians . . . as, among the Greeks Socrates . . . and among the barbarians Abraham . . .<sup>32</sup>. At first sight it would seem that Justin is suggesting salvation through our own reason, but this is not



so. The common rendering 'reasonable' should strictly read 'with the Word' (*meta logou*), i.e. with Christ as the pre-existent Word of God. Justin is saying that Socrates, like Abraham, was justified through his association with a Saviour whom he never knew by name. Whether or not we personally agree with him on this, it has been the belief of many orthodox Christians and we can hardly fault him for it.<sup>33</sup>

Let us now, then, look at some of Justin's words in his dialogue with Trypho, who was a Jew and possibly a rabbi. We may compare them with the apostolic teaching, especially with that of Paul; Justin says:

(i) 'I purpose to quote you Scriptures, not that I am anxious to make merely an artful display of words; for I possess no such faculty, but God's grace alone has been granted to me to the understanding of His Scriptures, of which grace I exhort all to become partakers . . .' (Dial lviii)

(ii) 'And you deceive yourselves while you fancy that, because you are the seed of Abraham after the flesh, therefore you will inherit the good things announced by God to be bestowed through Christ. For no one, has any thing to look for, but only those who in mind are assimilated to the faith of Abraham.' (xlvi compare Romans 4.12)

(iii) 'But though a man be a Scythian or a Persian, if he has knowledge of God and of His Christ, and keeps the everlasting righteous decrees, he is circumcised with the good and useful circumcision, and he is a friend of God . . . And we, who have approached God through Him, have received not a carnal but a spiritual circumcision, which Enoch and those like him observed. And we have received it through baptism, since we were sinners, by God's mercy; and all men may equally obtain it.' (xxviii and xliii compare Romans 2 etc) 'What need, then, have I of circumcision, who have been witnessed to by God?' (xxix compare Galatians 4.9) Justin, however, like Paul, does not object to Jewish Christians keeping the Law, provided that they neither seek salvation through it nor compel Gentiles to keep it. (xlvii)

(iv) 'For Isaiah did not send you to a bath, there to wash away murder and other sins, which not all the water of the sea were sufficient to purge; but as might have been expected, this was that saving 'bath' of olden time which followed (was for) those who repented, and who no longer were purified by the blood of goats and of sheep. . . but by faith, through the blood of Christ, and through His death who died for this very reason, as Isaiah himself said, when he spake thus: "The Lord shall make bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the nations and the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God".' (xii; Justin continues with a moving quotation of Isaiah 53). What firmer statement of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith could there be? He later adds: 'as Isaiah cries, we have believed, and testify that the very baptism which he pronounces is alone able to purify those who have repented; and this is the water of life. But the cisterns which you have dug for yourselves are broken and profitless to you. For what is the use of that baptism which cleanses the flesh and body alone?' (xiv). Compare this with 1 Peter 3.21: 'Baptism now saves you, not as the removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.' One may

compare Justin's clear fidelity to New Testament baptism, with the view of Augustine (see below) that babies are saved against their will by baptising them. Justin also mentions the Isaiah passage again to Trypho: 'that you had crucified Him, the only blameless Man, through whose stripes those who approach the Father by Him are healed. . .' (xvii)

(v) 'For the whole human race will be found to be under a curse. For it is written in the Law of Moses, "Cursed is everyone who continues not in all things that are written in the book of the Law to do them." And no one has completely done all, nor will you venture to deny this. . . If, then, the Father of all wished His Christ for the whole human family to take upon Him the curses of all, knowing that, after He had been crucified and was dead, He would raise Him up, why do you argue about Him who submitted to suffer these things according to the Father's will, as if He were accursed, and do not rather bewail yourselves?' (xcv)

(vi) 'And you yourselves. . . must acknowledge that we, who have been called by God through the despised and shameful mystery of the cross. . . and endure all torments rather than deny Christ even by word, through whom we are called to the salvation prepared beforehand by the Father, are more faithful to God than you. . .' (cxxxix) ' . . . you hate and murder us who have believed through Him in the God and Father of all, as often as you can. And you curse Him without ceasing, as well as those who side with Him; while all of us pray for you, and for all men, as our Christ and Lord taught us to do, when He enjoined us to pray even for our enemies, and to love them that hate us, and to bless them that curse us.' (cxxxiii) This was no idle boast from one who was later flogged and martyred.

Jesus told us to recognise His true followers by their fruit, and these passages from Justin help us to see both his personal character and his strict acceptance of Pauline teachings. His *Dialogue* continually refers to the cross as God's method of dealing with sin<sup>34</sup>, to the spiritual circumcision of heart which Christ gives to those who believe in Him<sup>35</sup>, to faith<sup>36</sup>, to repentance<sup>37</sup>, to forgiveness of sins through being washed in His blood<sup>38</sup>, to the healing through Christ's stripes<sup>39</sup> and so on. Above all he urges Trypho and his fellow-Jews to repent<sup>40</sup> and to 'become acquainted with Christ' their Messiah.<sup>41</sup> Yet, in the recent book already mentioned we read this of Justin: 'To Justin, conversion was mainly an ethical and rational thing, concerned with a change of attitude and behaviour.' What basis is there for this remark? There seems little basis in the *Dialogue*, for Justin's plea to Trypho is for repentance, not for a change of ethical code. Could it be his use of rational argument? But then we read time and time again in Acts that the apostles argued and disputed with the Jews.<sup>42</sup> Could it be that he quotes pre-Christian philosophers? But so does the apostle Paul when he addresses the type of person for whom Justin wrote in his *Apology*.<sup>43</sup> Could it be his belief that the Christian does not find God's commandments a burden? But the apostle John says almost this very thing.<sup>44</sup> Surely to Justin, no less than to the New Testament writers, conversion was a *moral* and *spiritual* thing, involving repentance, divinely wrought regeneration, forgiveness on the basis of the blood of Christ, and a new relationship with the only One through whom men could come to God? Early church figures like Clement and Justin, fully accepted the doctrine of salvation by faith.

What, therefore, was the real issue between Augustine and the early church? The latter did *not* believe that man had a 'free-will' to keep the Law and so earn salvation by works,<sup>45</sup> and their beliefs were far removed from the rabbinical ideas which Paul meant by 'works'. In Augustine's day there were some Pelagians who held views not unlike the rabbis, but their views were not those of the early church. It may, therefore, be useful to summarise the *three* alternative views:

- (a) *Works*. The 'Pelagian' view, which Augustine stated thus: the law being given, the will is of its own strength sufficient to fulfill that law, though not assisted by any grace imparted by the Holy Spirit in addition to instruction in the Law.<sup>46</sup> He also stated it as: 'the grace of God is bestowed in proportion to our own deserts.'<sup>47</sup>
- (b) *Faith*. The early church view, and Augustine's own earlier view. He stated it as: 'For it is ours to believe and to will, but it is His to give to those who believe and will the power of doing good works through the Holy Spirit.'<sup>48</sup>
- (c) *Irresistible gift of faith*. Augustine's later view (which triumphed in the church) was that faith itself was an irresistible gift given by God to a few people whom He had selected on some basis known only to Himself.<sup>49</sup> God could have given it to others had He so chosen<sup>50</sup> for it is 'rejected by no hard heart'<sup>51</sup> Without it no man could perform any good, whether in thought, will, affection or action.<sup>52</sup>

Views (a) and (b) are seldom properly distinguished in Augustine's writings. This may have been partly due to the unfortunate practice in his day of referring to the 'merit of faith' and the 'merit of conversion'.<sup>53</sup> This led or enabled Augustine to regard faith as a form of 'work'; he says: 'The apostle, therefore, distinguishes faith from works, just as Judah is distinguished from Israel . . . though Judah is Israel itself.'<sup>54</sup> This is a totally un-Pauline idea, and it fails to understand the Hebrew background to Paul's writings. Paul always sets faith and works in antithesis, and he makes it clear that if salvation is of works then it is earned, but if of faith then it is unearned: Now to him that works, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt. But to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness.<sup>55</sup> Paul does not say that unless the faith itself were irresistible it would be works! The words: 'to him that *works not* but *has faith*. . .' would be sheer nonsense if faith itself were a work. Paul simply assumes that faith is not a 'work of the Law', it earns nothing, it merits nothing. God would be quite just to damn anyone who has faith-it is of His own free grace that He declares them righteous. The reward for works is a payment of a debt, but for faith there is no such debt for God 'reckons it as righteousness'. This is always the case in Pauline terms. He contrasts 'grace' and 'works', or 'faith' and 'works', but never 'faith' and 'grace', for faith is never a work..

Augustine could find nothing at all in Paul to support a claim that faith could be a work, and the best he could do was Jesus' words: **This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent.**<sup>56</sup> This parallel is very unconvincing. Christians today talk of doing 'the Lord's work' without in the least implying that they expect to earn salvation by doing it. The question to Jesus does not concern 'works of the Law' (as a way to salvation) but the 'works of God'. When Paul used the term 'works' he always used it technically to mean 'works of the Law'-i.e., in an entirely different context. In any case, the reply Jesus gave is intentionally cryptic (like others we may

think of) and turns the questioner back to the true priority-before doing the Lord's work we must be right with the Lord!

The conclusion must be that in Pauline terminology 'faith' could never be classed as a 'work', and the practice in Augustine's day of thinking of it as such was quite misleading. Thus the early church view (b) has to be clearly distinguished from the Pelagian view (a). The latter amounted to saying that salvation was of works, while the former did not. Paul clearly rejected views like the Pelagian one, but they were no less clearly rejected by Justin, Clement of Rome, and other early church figures. Thus, though we may rule out the Pelagian view, we still have to decide whether Augustine or the early church represent the true Pauline doctrines.

We must, therefore, see what Scriptures Augustine advanced to demonstrate his assertion that faith is an irresistible gift. First, however, we might clarify a few points about his approach.

Of Hebrew, he told Memorius in a letter, he knew nothing, and relied either on the LXX or the Latin. He also wrote, in his *Confessions*, of his early dislike for Greek which prevented him from developing overmuch in it. He had, furthermore, little concern to ensure the accuracy of translations used. In about 394 A.D. he wrote to Jerome begging him not to waste his time in translating the Hebrew; for, if the Hebrew was obscure then no one had any hope of understanding it, if it was plain then surely the LXX translators must be right? Jerome was a first-rank, internationally famous scholar, and his somewhat withering counter to this attack on his life's work brought Augustine to modify his views. Nonetheless, Augustine's underlying attitude seems to show in his frequent use of translations without reference to the original-even where the latter does not support his argument at all.

Augustine also accepted as inspired what we today call the 'Apocrypha', and so uses verses from Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, etc. to support important doctrines.

Lastly, he is apt to repeatedly quote a verse to 'prove' his case without being careful as to the original context. Thus, for example, he repeatedly quotes Jesus' words 'You have not chosen me. . .' in a passage dealing with the election of believers-without apparently seeing that the words are addressed to the apostles (see section 1 S).

## **VERSES QUOTED BY AUGUSTINE**

### **(a) I Corinthians 4.7: What have you that you did not receive?**

This is the verse which he says brought him to believe his new doctrine that faith itself is a gift, and he cites it many times. The problem is that Paul nowhere specifically applies it to the commencement of faith. One cannot, of course, take Paul's words crassly literally-for if they have *nothing* which they have not received from God then presumably their party spirit and proneness to boast are also gifts of God. Even if we were to apply it to faith, Paul does not say that they had to receive it whether they wanted to or not. But the context of Paul's words is one of forbidding party spirit, and was surely not intended to be applied to basic repentance. Would Paul really have concealed such an important teaching as faith being an irresistible gift, in such a general statement against party spirit?

(b) Ephesians 2.8-9: **for by grace have you been saved through faith; and *that* not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, that no man should glory.**

Augustine cites this and adds: 'that is to say, And in saying "through faith," (I meant) even faith itself is not of yourselves, but is God's gift.'<sup>57</sup> Augustine's idea is that the word '*that*' (italicised above) refers back to the word 'faith' in the previous phrase, meaning that faith itself is 'not of yourselves'. This sounds plausible, but there are a major and a minor reason why anyone reading Greek could not accept it. The minor reason is that if it were true then the words following: 'not of works lest any man should glory' would also refer to 'faith'. But Paul always set works and faith in antithesis, and for him to say 'faith is not of works' would be very strange.<sup>58</sup> The major reason is that the Greek precludes the interpretation. The words 'faith' and 'grace' are both feminine in gender, but the word '*that*' (italicised above) is neuter. If the latter had been intended as a simple reference back either to 'faith' or to 'grace' then Paul would certainly not have used the neuter form (*touto*) but the feminine form (*haute*) which is quite different. The best interpretation which the Greek would seem to allow is for the phrase in verse 8: 'for by grace have you been saved through faith', to be regarded as a similar type of parenthesis to that in verse 5: 'by grace have you been saved' - which many versions<sup>59</sup> put in brackets. This would imply that the word '*that*' refers back to the whole process described in verses 4-7 of God quickening us, and raising us together with Christ to show His grace to us in the heavenly places. None of this, Paul says, is through works, but is a gift of God. Whether or not this is his precise meaning, certainly no one who read the *Greek* could see any suggestion in this passage that the beginning of faith is an irresistible gift.<sup>60</sup>

(c) Other verses are few, and are mainly from the LXX where its translation is unsupported by the Hebrew. Thus e.g.: Esther 5.1<sup>61</sup>; Job 14.4-5<sup>62</sup>; Proverbs 8.35<sup>63</sup>; and Proverbs 21.1<sup>64</sup>, are cited.

Augustine himself realised the inconclusiveness of the 'proof-texts' he cited, and appealed rather to his whole system than to specific verses to support his case. Before looking at his system we might ponder one question. In Paul's writings there are doubtless 'some things hard to be understood'. Yet, when an idea is simple to state, it is found stated most clearly. That salvation is not earned but is a gift is stated most clearly by Paul. But the idea that faith is itself an irresistible gift is also very simple to state -- why (if he really believed it) did Paul not state it with equal clarity? Augustine thought he saw such a clear statement in Ephesians 2.8, but the early church read the original Greek in which Augustine's interpretation was impossible - and so saw no such thing. Why then was Paul so vague on this question if he really believed what Augustine taught?

Augustine's main (and repeated) line of argument from his system may be briefly summarised as follows: All Christians agree that babies are baptised to regenerate them into Christ's body (the Catholic church). This shows firstly that they are born under the guilt of sin committed in Adam. It shows secondly that the determination of who should be regenerated does not depend on the will of those selected. What is true of babies is true also of adults. God selects some to be regenerated on some basis known only to Him and not dependent on their own wills.

Let us now look in more detail at some of the aspects of this system.

## ORIGINAL SIN

Augustine's distinctive views on original sin form a useful starting point for considering his system. The early church never doubted the seriousness of the fall or of Adam's sin, but Augustine gave an entirely different interpretation to it. He taught that when Adam sinned all his descendants sinned *in him*, and so shared in the guilt of the act. The main support which Augustine found for this was in the Latin version of Romans 5.12, which reads: 'By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for *in him* all men sinned.'<sup>65</sup> Augustine repeatedly referred to this verse and thought it 'plain' and 'unambiguous'. The problem with it is that the Latin translation renders the Greek phrase *eph' ho* as 'in him', which is an impossible rendering. Sanday and Headlam, one of the great modern textual authorities on Romans, wrote: 'Though this expression (*eph' ho*) has been much fought over, there can now be little doubt that the true rendering is "because"'. They will allow no other reading, and note that in classical writers the phrase means 'on condition that'. They also consider the suggestion that the apostle meant to imply 'because all sinned in Adam'. But they rightly object to this: 'The objection is that the words supplied are far too important to be left to be understood. If St Paul had meant this, why did he not say so? The insertion of *en Adam* would have removed all ambiguity.'<sup>66</sup>

Romans 5.12 neither says nor implies that all sinned in Adam. The verse appears to support Augustine only if taken in his Latin mistranslation. When we look further on to Romans 5.18 we do indeed find the words: 'as through one trespass the judgement came to *all men* to condemnation.' Augustine often cited this, but it surely cannot mean that condemnation spread automatically to all men irrespective of their own acceptance of the sin principle which Adam released in the world. If we took it thus, then how could we interpret the words which immediately follow: '*even so* through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto *all men* to justification of life'? Paul deliberately parallels the two clauses by saying: 'as even so. . .' If the first meant automatic condemnation then surely the second must have meant automatic salvation for all men? Augustine's explanation that: 'as the one embraces *all men* whatever, so the other includes *all* righteous men'<sup>67</sup> is simply a forcing of the apostle's words. Clearly both condemnation and justification came unto all men, and the sense of 'came unto' must be conditional rather than as something automatic.

Augustine's other main proof texts for his view of original sin were the apocryphal Wisdom 12.10-11<sup>68</sup> and Ecclesiasticus 40.1<sup>69</sup> the Septuagint (but not the Hebrew) of Job 14.40-5<sup>70</sup>; and Psalm 51.5<sup>71</sup>. The last stated is the most plausible, but we should remember that it was written by David after Nathan had touched his shepherd-heart, and then pronounced 'You are the man!' <sup>72</sup> Psalm 51 is the bitter cry of a man crushed with guilt and anguish, and with those words 'You are the man!' ringing in his ears. Are we to take his words as though they were sober theological pronouncements? Does verse 4 literally mean that David had not wronged Uriah but only God? Should we therefore use it to build up, say, a doctrine that we cannot sin against man but only against God? The answer to this may be obvious, but we should surely be no less unwilling to use verse 5 to defend an Augustinian theological doctrine of original sin. In any case, whatever it might be taken to imply about his parents, David says nothing of inheriting any guilt, and nothing about sinning 'in Adam'. We might, incidentally, note that Augustine nowhere seems to face the difficulty of Romans 9.11 which says that before birth Jacob and Esau had done 'neither

good nor bad'.<sup>73</sup>

Not only did Augustine have difficulty in finding supporting verses, but he also faced a crushing difficulty. He said that for Christians the guilt of sinning in Adam had been removed in baptism. Surely, therefore, a child born of two Christian parents had been forgiven 'in them' just as he had sinned 'in Adam'? Augustine's answer was twofold. First: 'it is quite possible for parents to transmit to their children that which they possess not themselves.'<sup>74</sup> Secondly, children are born in Satan's power because: 'they are born of the union of the sexes which cannot even accomplish its own honourable function without the incidence of shameful lust.'<sup>75</sup> Augustine taught that sexual intercourse from any motive other than procreation was a venial sin<sup>76</sup> and the act was *always* shameful since always tinged with passion.<sup>77</sup> Thus only Christ (he said) was born pure, since only He was conceived without sexual intercourse.<sup>78</sup>

## INFANT BAPTISM

Augustine taught that in baptism a baby was forgiven the guilt of original sin. He said: 'as nothing else is done for children in baptism but their being incorporated into the church, that is, connected with the body and members of Christ, it follows that when this is not done for them they belong to perdition.'<sup>79</sup> A baptised baby would (he said) go to heaven if he died, but an unbaptised one to hell. Whatever Christians today believe about infant baptism, most of us surely reject this particular idea of baptismal regeneration.<sup>80</sup>

Before considering Augustine's arguments for the doctrine, we may note how important a keystone it was in his system which came to dominate Western Christianity. Although it may be logically more obvious to begin from original sin and argue to this idea of baptism, Augustine's actual practice was to begin from infant baptism and argue to original sin. Thus he based two important ideas on infant baptismal regeneration:

- (a) that since baptism has this effect it must remove guilt, so in the case of infants it must be the guilt of Adam's sin.<sup>81</sup>
- (b) that this gives an irrefutable example of regeneration being independent of anything in the person's own will.<sup>82</sup>

The first of these points has already been discussed. The second is important, for one of Augustine's *main* defences of his doctrine that faith is an irresistible gift was the idea that babies were (involuntarily) saved at baptism. Thus he says: 'Let them think what they like respecting the case of adults, in the case of infants, at any rate, the Pelagians find no means of answering the difficulty. Infants in receiving grace possess no will, from the influence of which they can pretend to any precedence of merit.'<sup>83</sup>

This was a repeated argument in Augustine's later works, a mainstay of his new doctrines, yet it forced him into an unfortunate position over the status of baptised infants. As we consider this let us bear in mind his common acclamation as the restorer of simple Pauline faith.

The actual practice of infant baptism was universal in the Catholic church at the time, and

Augustine brought no Scriptures to defend it. What he had to show was that it made the difference (if the baby died) of heaven and hell, and for this he cited Mark 16.16: **He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that disbelieves shall be condemned.** Of this verse he says: 'Now who can be unaware that in the case of infants, being baptised is to believe, and not being baptised is not to believe?'<sup>84</sup> Yet, as he wrote to Jerome in 415 A.D., infants being baptised have no faith of their own. Thus we find the following comment, also on Mark 16.16: 'For which reason in the church of the Saviour infants believe by means of other people, even as they have derived those sins which are remitted them in baptism from other people.'<sup>85</sup> Baptised babies, he said, 'are rightly called believers because they in a certain sense profess faith by the words of those who bring them to baptism.'<sup>86</sup> This much he stated clearly, but we also find him commenting thus: 'Therefore an infant, although he is not yet a believer in the sense of having that faith which includes the consenting will of those who exercise it, nevertheless becomes a believer through the sacrament of that faith.'<sup>87</sup> Augustine seems to use this idea of a 'sacrament of faith' as a kind of halfway measure - enough to save the infant if he died young but not if he later disbelieved. Quite how he derived it from Scripture, and quite how it fits in with his other statements, is not clear. Whatever he meant by it, he certainly implied elsewhere that infant baptism involved regeneration to life.

This brought him great difficulties. He had strongly argued that baptism was as valid if administered by a drunkard or a heretic as if by an apostle.<sup>88</sup> He had also argued that: 'their regeneration is not prevented by the fact that this blessing has no place in the intention of those by whom they are presented for baptism.'<sup>89</sup> Well, we may ask, if salvation is 'by faith', then whose faith is it in such cases? Augustine would reply: 'The presentation of the little ones . . . is not so much of those by whose hands they are borne up . . . as of the whole society of saints and believers.'<sup>90</sup> The implication, therefore, is that a baby baptized by a drunken heretic is saved by the faith of the Catholic church who may know nothing of the event. This is part of Augustine's 'restoration' of the simple doctrine of salvation by faith!

A further complication comes from Augustine's insistence that 'the Catholic church alone is the body of Christ, of which He is the head and saviour of His body. Outside this body the Holy Spirit gives life to no one.'<sup>91</sup> The Donatists held 'entirely the same beliefs' theologically as the Catholics - but Augustine thought them damned for not accepting the authority of the Catholic church. He repeatedly defended this view using I Corinthians 13 - claiming that anyone separated from the Catholic fellowship did not have love.<sup>92</sup> Believing this, he had then to explain how it was that baptism by heretics wrought regeneration. One answer he gave was that: 'their sins, which in that moment had been dispelled by the holiness of baptism, return immediately upon them, as though it were the darkness returning which the light has dispelled while they were passing through it.'<sup>93</sup> How he would apply this to baby Donatists is not clear but he accepted in general that a man could have genuine regeneration, genuine piety, and even genuine faith, but, without membership of the Catholic church, it could avail him nothing and he would go to hell. On this basis, of course, Augustine would have condemned two of his most famous followers - Calvin and Luther - for his arguments for the authority of the Catholic church were as valid in their times as in his.

Augustine even went so far as to state that a man could have the genuine 'faith which works by love', could have a genuine and not a feigned 'righteousness', but then fall away and go to hell.<sup>94</sup>



Perseverance, he taught, depended on whether or not God had chosen and predestined a man.<sup>95</sup> However much faith we have, however well we know that God has regenerated and justified us, until the day of our death (he implied) we do not know whether He has mercifully predestined us to heaven or has justly predestined us to hell. This is Augustine's teaching.

We now see how Augustine's main defence for his picture of faith as an irresistible gift is bound up in his whole system: original sin, infant baptismal regeneration, predestination, etc. To us today the most influential of his ideas, even with those who have never read any of his works, may be those on predestination and election. Briefly, he viewed 'election' as God's choice of who should be believers,<sup>96</sup> and he said: 'predestination is a preparation for grace, while grace is the actual endowment.'<sup>97</sup> Thus 'election' is God's selection of some (with no reference to their own wills) to be given final salvation; predestination is God's preparation for giving them an irresistible gift of faith and final perseverance. God could have chosen and predestined others also, but for undisclosed reasons has not done so. This is Augustine's teaching.

It is unfortunate that such interpretations of 'election' and 'predestination' are often accepted today (even by those who know nothing of Augustine) as the true Biblical ones. Instead of taking care to see whether the ideas are truly Biblical, people often merely soften their implications by saying that, of course, such doctrines are only 'one side to the truth'. This is highly unsatisfactory, for it is far from obvious that Augustine's interpretations of these concepts are Biblical. We have seen in section 15 how our election is 'in Christ' since He is the elect One, but how<sup>98</sup> Augustine effectively ignores the phrase 'in Him' in Ephesians chapter 1. We also saw the confusion caused by applying to believers' election, words Jesus used of His choice of apostles. Augustine's view of predestination is no less dubious, for the Bible never applies the word to the initial reception of grace. In Scripture, 'predestination' is a 'setting out of a horizon' for *believers*, not a decree as to who should believe. Neither the Biblical teaching on election of believers, nor that on predestination, lends any support to Augustine's allegation that faith itself is an irresistible gift. We may only decide whether he or the early church was right by considering his system as a whole and deciding whether or not it is Biblical.

Underlying the whole system of Augustine is a basic assumption that God's will is always and inevitably done, and that man can never resist it. We see this clearly if we consider some passages in a basic handbook of the Christian faith which Augustine wrote after reaching maturity, the *Enchiridion*. This passage begins with the assertion that although it may seem unloving for God to take up and save one baby, and let another go to hell, yet all will be revealed to us in heaven:

*Enchiridion xxiv*: 'Then, in the clearest light of wisdom, will be seen what now the pious hold by faith, not yet grasping it in clear understanding - how certain, immutable, and effectual is the will of God, how there are things he can do but does not will to do, yet wills nothing he cannot do, and how true is what is sung in the Psalm: "But our God is above in heaven; in heaven and on earth he has done all things whatsoever that he would." This obviously is not true if there is anything that he willed to do and did not do, or, what were worse, if he did not do something because man's will prevented him, the Omnipotent, from doing what he willed. Nothing, therefore, happens unless the Omnipotent wills it to happen. He either allows it to happen or he actually causes it to happen .

. . Unless we believe this, the very beginning of our confession of faith is imperiled - the sentence in which we profess to believe in God the Father Almighty. For he is called Almighty for no other reason than that he can do whatsoever he wills, and be-cause the efficacy of his omnipotent will is not impeded by the will of any creature.'

One may note two things in particular about this:

- (i) Augustine's use of the type of emotional argument we considered in section 6: 'Surely God would not be Almighty if anything could happen against His will?'
- (ii) He further supported his argument with reference to a Psalm - but in fact this seems to be a mixed quotation from Psalm 115.3 and Psalm 135.6. The context of either of these is a comparison of our God as One who hears, feels and acts, with other gods who have neither consciousness nor power. The Psalmist's mind was far from dealing with the question of whether God allows men a freedom to accept or reject His offer of free salvation. But this is how Augustine intends to apply it, thus:

*Enchiridion xxv*: 'Furthermore who will be so foolish and blasphemous as to say that God cannot change the evil wills of men, whichever, whenever and wheresoever he chooses, and direct them to what is good?'<sup>99</sup>

He had, of course, to try to deal with Bible passages (such as those cited in section 6) which flatly contradict this notion. It is interesting to see how Augustine, although a great thinker, entangled himself as he tried to explain these away.

*Enchiridion xxiv*: 'But the Lord's language is clearer when, in the Gospel, he proves the unrighteous city: How often" he says 'would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks, and you would not." This sounds as if God's will had been overcome by human wills and as if the weakest by not willing, impeded the Most Powerful so that he could not do what he willed. And where is that omnipotence by which "whatsoever he willed on heaven and on earth, he has done," if he willed to gather the children of Jerusalem together, and did not do so? Or, is it not rather the case that, although Jerusalem did not will that her children be gathered together by him, yet, despite her unwillingness, God did indeed gather together those children of hers whom he would? It is not that "in heaven and on earth" he has willed and done some things, and willed other things and not done them, "all things whatsoever he willed, he has done".

One can only be amazed at his argument, which is:

- (i) Jesus' words admittedly make it look as though God willed something but did not do it.
- (ii) But the words of Psalm 135 (115?) imply that if God wanted to gather them then He did so.
- (iii) Therefore Jesus' words must be 'interpreted' to mean this - whatever they might appear to

mean!

This seems to be rather a bad example of 'inverse' exposition - starting with conclusions to be read into a text. Yet what else, given his presuppositions, *could* Augustine have made of this verse?

*Enchiridion xxiv & xxvii:* 'Accordingly we must now enquire about the meaning of what was said most truly by the apostle concerning God, "Who wills that all men should be saved." For since not all - not even a majority - *are* saved, it would indeed appear that the fact that what God wills to happen does not happen is due to an embargo on God's will by the human will. Now, when we ask for the reason why not all are saved, the customary answer is: "Because they themselves have not willed it" But this cannot be said of infants, who have not yet come to the power of willing or not willing. For, if we could attribute to their wills the infant squirmings they make at baptism, when they resist as hard as they can, we would then have to say that they were saved against their will . . . Accordingly, when we hear and read in Sacred Scripture that God "wills that all men should be saved," although we know well enough that not all men are saved, we are not on that account to underrate the fully omnipotent will of God. Rather, we must understand the Scripture, "Who will have all men to be saved", as meaning that no man is saved unless God wills his salvation: not that there is no man whose salvation he does not will, but that no one is saved unless he will it. . . Thus also are we to understand what is written in the Gospel about him' "who enlightens every man.' This means that there is no man who is enlightened except by God.'

Again we are amazed by his argument; which is:

- (i) It looks as though God's will that all shall be saved is not done.
- (ii) But babies are saved at baptism against their will.
- (iii) And the 'fully omnipotent will of God' must not be 'underrated'.
- (iv) Therefore the words 'God wills that all men should be saved' must really mean 'Any men that God wills shall be saved, will be'.

We note again two emotional arguments - one from contemporary Christian practice, and the other the appeal to God's almightiness. We also note that this is another use of 'inverse exposition'. In this case, however, he afterwards threw in an alternative suggestion. He suggested that perhaps 'all men' really meant 'all types of men'. Such a meaning for the word 'all' is, to say the least, rare; but Augustine picked Out the most likely looking illustration (Luke 11.42) out of over 1100 verses where the word is used - apparently not noticing that the Greek in Luke is singular but in 1 Timothy 2.4 is plural. But, in fact, Augustine did not much mind how we interpret the latter verse, as long as we do not allow it to contradict his basic presupposition; he added: 'We could interpret it in any other fashion, as long as we are not compelled to believe that the Omnipotent has willed anything to be done which was not done.'

The last section we might look at is:

*Enchiridion xxvi*: "These are "the great works of the Lord, will considered in all his acts of will" - and so wisely well-considered that when his angelic and human creations sinned (that is, did not do what he willed, but what it willed) he could still accomplish what he himself had 'willed and this through the same creaturely will by which the first act contrary to the Creator's will had been done. As the supreme Good, he made good use of evil deeds, for the damnation of those whom he had justly predestined to punishment and for the salvation of those whom he had mercifully predestined to grace. For as far as relates to themselves, these creatures did what God wished not to be done; but in view of God's omnipotence, they could in no wise effect their purpose. For in the very fact that they acted in opposition to his will, his will concerning them was fulfilled. And hence it is said that "the works of the Lord are great, well considered in all his acts of will~, because in a way unspeakably strange and wonderful, even what is done in opposition to his will Is not done without his will. For it would not be done did he not permit it (and, of course, his permission is not unwilling but willing)".

What is Augustine saying here? He is not merely saying that God permits man to disobey His will, but then seeks to bring good out of this. Clement of Alexandria could well say something of this kind as we have already seen, but such an idea would hardly fit in with Augustine's theology. What he is saying is that God's will for sinners is accomplished in their disobedience of His will. It is, perhaps, in anticipation of our complete puzzlement at this that Augustine calls it 'strange and wonderful'. But is this really a restoration of Pauline doctrine, or is there rather some connection with the rigid determinism which had always fascinated Augustine?<sup>100</sup>

The examples of inverse exposition which have been quoted from *Enchiridion* are, unfortunately, far from rare in Augustine. Another example, picked at random, comes from a letter to Boniface: 'for the apostle says: "Quench not the Spirit"; not that he can be quenched but that those who so act as if they wished to have him quenched are deservedly spoken of as quenchers of the Spirit.'

We may also note his loose quotation from the Scriptures, from the Latin version without reference to the original language. We have already remarked on his attitude in this respect, but it is in marked contrast to men like Origen who conducted painstaking labours in the original language,<sup>101</sup> or Justin Martyr who stood closest to New Testament Greek and also did research into Hebrew.<sup>102</sup> It is also in contrast to Augustine's contemporary Jerome, whose scholarship was outstanding.

Compared with Jerome, Augustine's approach to Scripture was casual and unlearned. Yet, though Jerome's translation was adopted by the Catholic church, it was Augustine's new and distinctive theology which triumphed in Catholicism and thus in Western Christendom. Why was this? What was it in his ideas which made them so acceptable to the Catholicism of his day and of succeeding generations? We can hardly hope, in such a general book as this, to answer this question over which so many volumes have been written. There is, however, one major factor which it may be interesting to consider.

After the conversion and triumph of Constantine in 312 A.D. there was an increasing persecution

not only of pagans, but also of non-Catholic Christians. There were, indeed, some temporary lulls, but the general development of the use of force to compel 'heretics' to become Catholics is well shown by Verduin<sup>103</sup> whose research into this was carried out under the auspices of the Calvin Foundation. The slide into persecution was not, of course, without some protest from leading Catholics. Hilary of Poitiers protested poignantly against it, and when (in 385 A.D.) Priscillian and his followers were executed on the orders of a synod, leading Catholics like Ambrose were horrified and totally dissociated themselves from the guilty ones.

When, therefore, Augustine came onto the scene there was conflicting opinion over the use of persecution though no leading church figure seems to have approved of it or defended it. In the year 396 Augustine himself wrote: 'I would have no man brought into the Catholic Communion against his will'. Yet, as he later changed his ideas about the grace of God, so he changed also his ideas on the use of force. As he came to believe that God effects conversion against men's wills, and that God uses force Himself in changing their wills from evil to good, so also he came to believe that it was right for God's servants to use force as well. By 408 A.D. he could write to a non-conformist who advocated freedom of conscience:

'You are of the opinion that no one should be compelled to follow righteousness; and yet you read that the householder said to his servants, "Whomsoever you shall find, compel them to come in." You also read how he who was at first Saul, afterwards Paul, was compelled by the great violence with which Christ coerced him, to know and embrace the truth; for you cannot but think that the light which your eyes enjoy is more precious to men than money or any other possession. This light, lost suddenly by him when he was cast to the ground by the heavenly voice, he did not recover until he became a member of the Holy Church. You are also of opinion that no coercion is to be used with any man in order to his deliverance from the fatal consequences of error; and yet you see that, in examples which cannot be disputed, this is done by God, who loves us with more real regard for our profit than any other can; and you hear Christ saying, "No man can come to me except the Father draw him,"<sup>104</sup>

Augustine here makes very clear the connection between the two major changes in his thinking between about 395 and 408 A.D. He often repeats this argument that in persecuting non-conformists the Catholics are but following the example of their Lord,<sup>105</sup> and it is based, of course, on his new ideas about God's sovereign will. Having once come to this conclusion, Augustine was quite resolute in his advocacy of persecution, of confiscation of possessions, and of 'fear of punishment or pain'. To the Tribune Boniface he wrote: 'Is it not part of the care of the shepherd when any sheep have left the flock . . . to bring them back to the fold of his master when he has found them, by the fear or even the pain of the whip, if they show symptoms of resistance?'<sup>106</sup> Many destitute and persecuted Donatists, understandably desperate, committed suicide by setting light to themselves. A Donatist minister named Gaudentius, under persecution and threat of death, said he would sooner burn down his church with himself and his flock in it than become Catholic. Threatened again with death he said that he did not seek martyrdom but was prepared for it - 'only the hireling flees when he sees the wolf coming!' Augustine wrote to him explaining that this suicide impulse must be from the Devil.<sup>107</sup> Then he said: 'If you suppose that we ought to be moved because so many thousands die in this way, how much more consolation do you think we ought to have because far and incomparably more thousands are freed from the great madness of the Donatist party..<sup>108</sup>

It is true that it was the practical success of fear and pain, rather than any theological or Biblical argument, which first led him to support persecution.<sup>109</sup> But, whatever caused the actual change in his view, without his new theological system it would have been very hard to justify it.

In the mature Augustine, therefore, the state church found not only the first Christian leader of importance to advocate the use of persecution against non-conformists, but they found the only Christian theologian of significance whose theological system would justify such persecution. It is therefore not really surprising that his new ideas made a rapid advance within the state church, that by 424 they dominated the Latin sector of it, and that by 431 they were adopted for Western Christendom at the third Ephesian council.<sup>110</sup>

Verduin and others have shown how the arguments Augustine used to support persecution have been repeated throughout history by many of those who adopted other features of his system. They were used by the early Catholic church, by Luther and the Reformers, by Calvin and his associates at Geneva, and by the later Catholics to defend persecution of groups like the Huguenots. Farrar rightly comments: 'Augustine must bear the fatal charge of being the first as well as one of the ablest defenders of the frightful cause of persecution and intolerance. He was the first to misuse the words, "Compel them to come in," of the parable - a fragmentary phrase wholly unsuited to bear the weight of horror for which it was made responsible. He was the first and ablest asserter of the principle which led to the Albigensian crusades, Spanish armadas, Netherlands' butcheries, St Bartholomew massacres, the accursed infamies of the Inquisition, the vile espionage, the hideous balefires of Seville and Smithfield, the racks, the gibbets, the thumbscrews, the subterranean torture-chambers used by churchly torturers who assumed "the garb and language of priests with the trade and temper of executioners," to sicken, crush, and horrify the revolted conscience of mankind . . . It is mainly because of his later intolerance that the influence of Augustine falls like a dark shadow across the centuries. It is thus that an Arnold of Citeaux, a Torquemada, a Sprenger, an Alva, a Philip the Second, a Mary Tudor, a Charles ix and a Louis xiv can look up to him as an authoriser of their enormities, and quote his sentences to defend some of the vilest crimes which ever caused men to look with horror on the religion of Christ and the Church of God.'<sup>111</sup> Augustine himself may not have advocated using torture, but once the use of fear and pain were accepted it was a natural extension for his later followers to make.

There is, in fact, some parallel between the pagan Emperors' treatment of Christians and the Christian Emperor Honorius' treatment of non-conformists (on Augustine's advice). The severity and barbarism of the tortures were, of course, incomparably greater under the pagans, but some principles are the same. Under the pagan Emperors the Christians were accused of all kinds of immorality and crime Augustine likewise accused groups like the Donatists of crimes - and insisted on identifying the whole movement with an extremist nationalist fringe group,<sup>112</sup> rejected by many Donatists. But totalitarian states from Nero to the present day have made such accusations against Christian minority groups, and they are seldom very accurate.

But the main point is that Augustine, like the pagans, was not suggesting that they should be tried for *specific* crimes, nor even for some vague charge such as 'incitement to sedition', he was advocating their persecution *simply because they were not Catholics*. Like Christians in the

pagan era, they were persecuted for religious non-conformity, not tried for specific civil offences. Moreover, Augustine's repeated plea that the Donatists had appealed to Constantine to depose a Bishop, hardly excuses his active persecution of a group who in his own time (and nearly a century later than Constantine) advocated freedom of conscience.

We should be clear, here, exactly what Augustine was advocating. Verduin explains how objection to the use of force in 'converting' had been one of the main reasons for the Donatists splitting off from the Catholics.<sup>113</sup> In theology they were orthodox. Augustine himself says: 'the greater part of them declare that they hold entirely the same belief regarding the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost as is held by the Catholic church. Nor is this the actual question in dispute with them; but they carry on their unhappy strife solely on the question of communion.'<sup>114</sup> 'The issue between us and the Donatists is about the question where this body is to be located, that is, what and where is the Church?'<sup>115</sup> The people he sought to persecute would have been regarded by us as ordinary Christians - and they were persecuted solely because they rejected the authority of the Catholic church. They were never convicted of any civil crime, their sole 'crime' was to reject this authority. We may, indeed, remember Jesus' words: **Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungered, and you gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink: I was a stranger and you took me not in; naked and you clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and you visited me not . . . Inasmuch as you did it not unto one of these least, you did it not unto me.**<sup>116</sup> Through the influence and advocacy of Augustine thousands of simple brethren of Christ were actually caused to be hungry, exiled strangers, homeless, in prison or in pain. How then may we reconcile the words of Jesus with Renwick's description of Augustine as 'the greatest Christian of his age'? How may we even understand Souter's description of him as 'the greatest Christian since New Testament times'? Even one of our leading evangelists, a man very widely used of God, seems to have been affected by the common exaltation of Augustine; he recently wrote: 'Augustine was one of the greatest theologians of all time He became one of the great saints of all time.' On what are we to base our standards of greatness?

Can Augustine be excused on the grounds that 'he was only a child of his times'? It is difficult to do this, for leaders among his predecessors and contemporaries were outspoken against violence. Tertullian declared: 'God has not hangmen for priests. Christ teaches us to bear wrong, not to revenge it'. Lactantius wrote that religion could not be enforced, and words should be used rather than blows. The great Athanasius commented on Song of Solomon 5.2: 'Satan, because there is no truth in him, breaks in with axe and sword. But the Saviour is gentle, and forces no one to whom He comes, but knocks and speaks to the soul, "Open to me my sister."' Martin of Tours and Augustine's own revered teacher Ambrose both reacted strongly against those who had executed the Priscillianists. Augustine's great contemporary Chrysostom said: 'Christians are not to destroy error by force and violence, but should work the salvation of men by persuasion, instruction and love.' In short, Augustine's whole background had been one of tolerance, and he himself was a champion of tolerance early in his Christian life. He abandoned this earlier tolerance to become himself the first great Christian thinker to advocate violence, fear and pain to spread the gospel. Surely Augustine moulded the times rather than the times Augustine.

The appeal to the 'times' is little more convincing when applied to Augustine's later followers. Take, for example, Calvin. Verduin says that when Calvin had Servetus burnt over green wood

(so that it took him three hours to be pronounced dead), 'a cry of outrage resounded over most of Europe'.<sup>117</sup> A pamphlet was written asking if Christ had now become Moloch to demand human sacrifice, or if we could picture Christ as one of the constables lighting the fire . . .<sup>118</sup> To this, Calvin's close associate Beza could only reply: 'Of all the blasphemous and impudent gabs!'<sup>119</sup> An appeal to 'the times' is not convincing.<sup>120</sup> It becomes the less convincing when we are told, often by the same apologists, that those like Calvin and Augustine were the most competent Bible scholars in history. Surely if Calvin could write a work hailed as the most systematic treatise on the Christian faith ever written, it is an insult to suggest that his moral teaching was not an integral part of his system but was based on some opinions of contemporary men? Surely if Augustine had the greatness of mind and strength of character to overturn all the Christian teaching of the first 300 years then it is absurd to excuse his advocacy of persecution on the grounds of a spirit in him of conformity? The tragic fact is surely that those who deny any power but God's, and hence reduce everyone including Satan to servants of God, may (if times are ripe) finish by using Satan's own weapons of fear and force, pain and persecution. Although Augustine initially adopted persecution because of its practical success (and it was indeed practically successful), he himself directly linked it with his theological system.<sup>121</sup>

We have, in summary, to recognise the effect of Augustine's teaching on our whole thinking even today. Yet we must decide whether his teachings are truly a 'restoration' of the apostle Paul. As we have seen, his difference from the early church was not a simple one of 'faith' versus 'works'. The early Christian teachers were no less clear than Augustine that salvation was a free gift. His point of departure from them was in saying that faith itself was an irresistible gift. We must decide for ourselves whether we believe that Augustine, or the Christians of the first three centuries, had the true Pauline doctrine. Our decision on this issue is going to affect our whole attitude to God and His conflict with evil. Is the conflict a real one? Are we really 'wrestling', in Christ, against powers of evil? If we are using the weapons of Christ then what methods does *He* use for warfare and touching men's souls? These are not merely academic questions, but will have a practical effect on the methods we adopt, and on the urgency with which we obey Paul's command to fight the good fight.

#### WORKS OF AUGUSTINE REFERRED TO OR QUOTED

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Title and Approximate Date</i>
Confessions	Confessions (400)
On Bap.	On Baptism, Against the Donatists (400)
On Gen. to <i>Let.</i>	On Genesis to the Letter (401-415)
Cath. Ep.	Catholic Epistle Against the Donatists (402)
For. Sins	On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins (412)
Corr. Don.	On the Correction of the Donatists (417)
On the Gr. of Chr.	On the Grace of Christ (418)
On Orig. Sin	On Original Sin (418)
Marr. and Conc.	Marriage and Concupiscence (419)
Ag. Gaud.	Against Gaudentius (420)
Ag. Pel.	Against Two Letters of the Pelagians (420)
Enchr.	Enchiridion (i.e. 'Handbook') (424-426)
Gr. and Freewill	Grace and Freewill (426-7)



Reb. and Gr.	Rebuke and Grace (426-7)
Pred. Saints.	The Predestination of the Saints (428-429)
Gift Pers.	On the Gift of Perseverance (428-429)

## NOTES

- 1 Gwatkin gives various possible divisions-and in all of these the parties on both sides taught 'free-will'. Perhaps the most obvious breakdown is into language/culture:  
 Greek: Justin, Athenagoras, Clement, Origen  
 Latin: Tertullian, Jerome  
 Syriac: Tatian, Bardaisan

- 2 Standard works we have used include:

F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*  
 H. M. Gwatkin, *Early Church History to A.D. 313*  
 L. Duchesne, *Early History of the Church*  
 J. Quasten, *Pairology* (vols. i and ii)

We have also quoted from the two Inter Varsity Fellowship books:

A. M. Renwick, *The Story of the Church*  
 M. A. Smith, *From Christ to Constantine*

The second of these was only recently published, is attractively produced, and could serve as an introduction to the subject for readers who may know little of it.

Lastly, mention should be made of a classic history of the early church, written in the early fourth century but still well worth reading (!):

Eusebius, *The History of the Church*

- 3 Smith p.78
- 4 Renwick p.29; Quasten vol. i p.196
- 5 This whole description is a semi-quotation from Renwick.
- 6 See the introduction in the Anti-Nicene Library, Ouasten vol. i p.229. and Chambers Encyclopaedia.
- 7 Duchesne, see also Chambers.
- 8 Smith p.56. It is fair to say, however, that others have been more critical of Bardaisan,

and we would by no means place as much weight on his views as on mainstream writers. We have included Syrian Christian writers to show that even 'fringe' groups taught free-will. Only total heretics like Marcion and Manes rejected it.

- 9 Duchesne p.245
- 10 e.g. Duchesne
- 11 See Renwick, Bruce and Chambers and Britannica Encyclopaedia.
- 12 See e.g. Gwatlcin p.202
- 13 Renwick p.41
- 14 Smith p.134
- 15 Eusebius 42.5
- 16 Bruce p.213
- 17 Renwick p.45
- 18 Bruce *p.259*. Professor Bruce also defends Origen against a charge sometimes made of non-orthodoxy on the Trinity. Origen lived before the controversy on this came to a head, but was fundamentally different from Anus.
- 19 Renwick p.47
- 20 We have excluded from the list that great Christian, Gregory the Wonderworker, who was a great admirer of Origen and was as clear as Origen on the 'free-will' of man.
- 21 See Duchesne p.360 and Chambers
- 22 Britannica
- 23 Britannica
- 24 Britannica
- 25 Bruce p.329; Renwick *p.58*
- 26 Calvin: *Institutes* Bk. 3 ch. xxii sec.8.
- 27 Pred. Saints 8 & 16.
- 28 In about A.D. 395 Augustine confessed in a letter to Jerome his ignorance of the teaching

of even so great a figure as Origen, a confession implicit also in another letter two years later. Neither does Augustine seem very familiar with the Latin Fathers, excepting Cyprian and Ambrose whom he often quotes. Cyprian (c 200 - 258 A.D.) is probably the only major church figure of the first 3 centuries who does not state the doctrine of 'free-will' clearly. But, nevertheless, in spite of his strong emphasis on divine grace, he nowhere stated Augustine's doctrines either. He did not say that faith was an irresistible gift, and his statements on the importance of grace are in general terms.

29 James 2.25

30 No Christian, of course, could quite put it like that. But to circles who are prone to reject the early church position, James' emphasis on conduct is something of an embarrassment. Calvin rather woefully remarked that: 'he seems more sparing in proclaiming the grace of Christ than it behoved an apostle to be.' Luther stated his position thus: 'Doctrine and life are to be distinguished the one from the other. With us conduct is as bad as it is with the Papists. We don't oppose them on account of conduct. Hus and Wyclif who made an issue of conduct, were not aware of this. . . but to treat of doctrine, that is really to come to grips with things.' Verduin, who cites this in *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*, shows how a truly Christ-like life was the mark of an Anabaptist. It is no wonder that Luther made his famous remark about James epistle being an 'epistle of straw'. Yet surely this shows some lack of understanding of Paul in that great Reformer, rather than in the apostle James and the early church?

31 Matthew 25.31-46

32 *Apology* lxlvi

33 Not all Christians would agree with Justin that some may be saved through Christ but without hearing about Him. But the view has been held by many 'orthodox' Christians, such as Campbell Morgan and J. N. D. Anderson in our own times (see also section 20 of our book *Yes, but. . .*) Augustine himself seems to accept such a view in *Pred. Saints* 17 and a letter to Deogratias of 409 A.D.

As to Justin's choice of Socrates: from Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, we see in Socrates about the best instance in antiquity of a 'natural theology' of the one true God who deserves worship and service.

34 *Dialogue* 40,86,90,91,97, 111, 131.

35 *Dialogue* 15, 16, 18, 24, 28,43, 114, 137.

36 *Dialogue* 13, 24, 139.

37 *Dialogue* 26, 35,40, 83, 95, 100, 109,117, 133, 141.

38 *Dialogue* 13, 44, 54, 112.

- 39 *Dialogue* 12, 47, 95, 137.
- 40 *Dialogue* 117.
- 41 *Dialogue* 8, 44.
- 42 *See Acts* 6.9-10; 9.29; 17.2, 17; 18.4.19; 19.8, 9; 24.25
- 43 Acts 17.28; the apostle quotes Epimenides (on whom see *Yes, but* section 20) and also Aratus. The quotation from Aratus is very similar to a phrase in Cleanthes famous hymn to Zeus.
- 44 1 John 5.3
- 45 We have shown this for Clement of Rome and Justin, but it is equally of other early Fathers; see e.g. Irenaeus *Ag Heresies* 3.19; 4.29; Origen *De Frincipis* 3.2.

It is not only early church figures who are misrepresented in such ways. A similar process may be observed in connection with that great and gentle Reformation scholar, Erasmus. The revival of interest in the Greek New Testament was largely due to this remarkable man, and this in turn stimulated the many vernacular versions. Consistent with his work in this field, was his anxiety to see the Scriptures in the hands of the common people, a rejection of the vagaries of scholastic philosophy as worthless to God, and an emphasis on simple inner piety. Yet, because, perhaps, of his emphasis on the Christ-like spirit, the quality of inner spiritual life and the fruit of the Spirit, he is often thought of as one who was unconcerned with precision of doctrine or perhaps even unmindful of the necessity of grace. A much more realistic picture seems to be given by Professor Roland H. Bainton in *Erasmus of Christendom*. Bainton formulates a set of beliefs which Erasmus would have considered essential in a Christian: 'the incarnation, the pledge of Christ's authority; the passion, the seal of our redemption; the resurrection, the token of our immortality; justification by faith, the ground of our hope; and the imitation of Christ, our obligation.' (p.227). Erasmus, like the early church, was quite clear that man could not earn his salvation, and that the free grace of God was essential; but, also like the early church, he found in Scripture the teaching that man must respond by accepting God's proffered gift.

- 46 Letter to Anastasius c 412 A.D.
- 47 *Grace and Freewill* 10
- 48 *Pred. Saints* 7
- 49 *Reb. and Gr* 10-16; *Pred. Saints* 7-16; etc.
- 50 *On Gen. to Let.* 11.10; *Enchr.* 98.

- 51 *Pred. Saints* 13
- 52 *Reb. and Gr.* 3
- 53 e.g. *Gr. and Freewill* 10; *Pred. Saints* 7
- 54 *Fred. Saints* 12
- 55 Romans 4.4-5
- 56 John 6.29
- 57 *Fred. Saints* 12
- 58 see section 19
- 59 Some form of parenthesis -- dashes or brackets -- are used by A.V.; R.V.; R.S.V.; J.B. and Phillips.
- 60 We do not, of course, in these present remarks, mean to deny that there is a sense in which Jesus came "to give repentance to Israel" (Acts 5.31) and that repentance was also 'granted' to the Gentiles (Acts 11.18). In *All O/ Grace*, C. H. Spurgeon wrote: 'Repentance, as a natural feeling, is a common duty deserving no great praise. . . Jesus is exalted on high, that through the virtue of His intercession repentance may have a place before God. In this respect He gives us repentance, because He puts repentance into a position of acceptance, which otherwise it could never have occupied.' It is undeniably true that unless God has given through Jesus the opportunity for repentance it would be useless if not impossible for anyone to repent. But Peter does not say that the gift is given to a select few, he says 'to Israel', and his hearers would clearly have understood him to mean the nation as a whole. It is obvious, however, that it was not an *irresistible* gift, for not all of Israel accepted it. Likewise repentance is granted not merely to '*some* Gentiles' (as Augustine would have us believe) but to '*the Gentiles*' though some did not accept the proffered gift (see also sec. 20 note 20)
- Needless to say, the 'gift of faith' mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12.9 is a gift of a special kind of faith to some believers; it is not at all connected with Augustine's doctrines.
- 61 *Gr. and Freewill* 42; *On the Gr. of Chr.* 1.25; *For Sins* 1.34
- 62 *On Orig. Sin* 2.37; *Marr. and Conc.* 2.50
- 63 *Enchir.* 9.32
- 64 *On the Gr. of Chr.* 1.24

- 65 He quoted this many times, e.g.: *For. Sins* 1.11; *Orig. Sin* 2.29; *Marr. and Conc.* 1.1; 2.8, 15, 24; *Ag. Pel.* 8
- 66 Sanday and Headlam, *Commentary on Romans* p.133-4
- 67 *For. Sins* 1.19
- 68 *Marr. and Conc.* 2.20; the reference in Wisdom, however, is not to man-kind but to the Canaanites, and it says nothing whatever about sinning 'in Adam'.
- 69 *Enchir.* 17; this reference is again far from clear.
- 70 *On Orig. Sin* 2.37; *Marr. and Conc.* 2.50; *For. Sins* 1.34; the Hebrew of this verse (Job 14A-5) gives little support to Augustine.
- 71 *Enchir.* 46; *Marr. and Conc.* 2.50; *P.r Sins* 1.34
- 72 The story behind Psalm 51 is found in 2 Samuel 12
- 73 In *On Orig. Sin* 2.36 Augustine referred to Romans ~1 I: 'Paul says most plainly that before they were born they did neither good nor evil.' In this we agree. Yet Augustine elsewhere stated his theory most clearly, and it is precisely that babies *did* do evil before they were born, in sinning *in Adam*, and it is their personal participation in this sin which leads to their guilt. The extreme difficulty this presents is obvious, but Augustine simply avoided facing it by following his reference to Romans 9.11 with vague phrases like 'the bond of ancient debt' (of Adam's sin). This is highly unsatisfactory-but what else could he do?
- 74 *For. Sins* 3.17
- 75 *Marr. and Conc.* 2.15
- 76 *Marr. and Conc.* 1.9, 16, 17
- 77 *Marr. and Conc.* 1,5; 2.37; *On Orig. Sin* 2A2
- 78 *Marr. and Conc.* 1.24
- 79 *For. Sins* 3.7
- 80 Those in the Church of England, for example, practise infant baptism, but the 39 Articles of the Church of England pointedly exclude any reference to infant baptismal regeneration.
- 81 Augustine's customary argument (e.g. in *Marr. and Con c.* 1.24) ~as that baptism and exorcism of infants was to deliver them from Satan and free them from sin. Since they

- had no sin of their own (11e argued) it must be from original sin.
- 82 e.g. *Pred. Saints* 23; *Gr. and Freewill* 44; *Marr. and Conc.* 2.47
- 83 *Gr. and Freewill* 44. Note that the issue is phrased in terms of preceding *merit* (as was customary in Augustine) which entirely begs the question of whether faith is a 'merit' or not.
- 84 *For. Sins* 1.40. Augustine specifically denied any 'middle place' for babies who die unbaptised (*For. Sins* 1.55), saying that someone 'can only be with the Devil who is not with Christ'. He used such descriptions of babies without baptism as 'in darkness' (1.35, from John 12.46); 'destined to perish' (1.62, from John 3.16); and 'condemned' (1.62, from John 3.18). It seems hard, therefore, to take him other than to mean that they go to hell.
- 85 *Ag. PeL* 40
- 86 *For. Sins* 1.25; see also *Marr. and Cone.* 1.22
- 87 This is in a letter to Boniface, A.D. 408, section 10.
- 88 In a letter to Vincentius, 48
- 89 To Boniface, 5
- 90 To Boniface, 5.
- 91 *Corr. Don.* 50
- 92 A letter to Donatus 416 AD., to Theodorus 401 AD.; *On Bap.* 1.9; 4.17; *Corr. Don.* 50, etc.
- 93 *On Bap.* 1.19; also 3.18
- 94 *Pred. Saints* 26; *Gilt Pers.* 1; *Reb. and Gr.* 10
- 95 *Reb. and Gr.* 14
- 96 *Pred. Saints* 34
- 97 *Pred. Saints* 19; see also *For. Sins* 2.43
- 98 see section 15 note 3.
- 99 The same entanglements are reflected in that great Reformation figure, Luther. Luther was one of the greatest minds of his age, but his adoption of Augustine's philosophical

ideas about God's sovereignty led him to the following position: 'Common sense and natural reason are highly offended that God by His mere will deserts, hardens and damns, as if He delighted in sins and in such eternal torments, He who is said to be of such mercy and goodness. Such a concept of God appears 'wicked, cruel and intolerable, and by it many have been revolted in all ages. I myself have more than once been offended to the very depth of the abyss of desperation, so that I wished I had never been created.

There is no use trying to get away from this by ingenious distinctions. Natural reason, however much it is offended, must admit the consequences of the omniscience and omnipotence of God.' Part of the consequences are that when these philosophical concepts are placed side by side with the Scriptural teaching on God's mercy and desire that the wicked should repent rather than be destroyed, the result is plain contradiction (though it may be called 'paradox'). Luther draws the only possible conclusion: 'If it is difficult to believe in God's mercy and goodness when He damns those who do not deserve it, we must recall that if God's justice could be recognised as just by human comprehension, it would not be divine. Since God is true and one, He is utterly incomprehensible and inaccessible to human reason. Therefore His justice also must be incomprehensible.'

If this position were taken seriously the results could be catastrophic. The surest test of whether an interpretation of a Scripture passage is correct, is to see whether it is consistent with other parts of Scripture. But if we were to accept that there is a fundamental inconsistency (whatever form of words we cloak this in) in God's revelation of Himself to us in Scripture, then this test would be quite improper. Any teaching would have to stand or fall on its own, without having to be consistent with any other teaching. Such a 'relativistic' position would seem strange for anyone who fully accepts the authority of the Bible, and would be impossible to reconcile with the writings of Paul. Paul continually uses reasoning throughout the arguments in his epistles, scattering them with words like 'hence', 'therefore', 'since', and so on. Would he have bothered to argue so logically if, in fact, his whole doctrines were fundamentally inconsistent?

Augustine was fond of quoting Romans 11.33: **how unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past tracing out: For who has known the mind of the Lord?** This was Augustine's stock citation when he asked himself why God should damn those He could have saved, or why He should allow truly righteous men to fall from grace and go to hell. The citation is, unfortunately, a misleading one. The implication in this passage of Paul is not that God is always incomprehensible, but that no one can advise God or guess His plans before He reveals them. It is just such a revelation that Paul has outlined in the previous chapters (9-11) of Romans. When we consider 1 Corinthians 2, we find a similar question in verse 16: **who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him?** But now Paul specifically replies: But we have the mind of Christ. The whole point is that God *has* revealed the deep things by His Spirit (1 Corinthians 2.10). It is true that the *natural* man cannot understand them (v.14), but the man willing to be taught by the Spirit *does* understand God's revelation. In the mind of Christ we *do* understand God's mind-it is not some enigma to be revealed in heaven. Indeed, as spiritual men, we 'compare spiritual things with spiritual' (v13). The language resembles I Corinthians



- 14.29, we are to 'weigh up' different revelations - for anything which is of God is consistent with all His other revelation. Paul is saying that natural reasoning is inadequate, we must strive for spiritual understanding; but spiritual understanding is certainly not the same as total incomprehension.
- 100 Smith says: 'The rigid fatalistic determination of Manichaeism was to appeal to the young Augustine.' (p.158) This idea of God's will always being done was very strong indeed also in Roman Stoicism - the philosophy which had a great appeal to the 'Roman' mind.
- 101 Origen's thoroughness is shown in a letter to Africanus -- even though we may disagree with him on the particular issue.
- 102 We see in the *Dialogue* that Justin had compared LXX with the Hebrew.
- 103 Verduin: *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Paternoster). Another interesting book on this subject is Broadbent's *The Pilgrim Church* (P. & I.).
- 104 Letter to Vincentius, 2.5
- 105 e.g. *Corr. Don.* 21, 23; letter to Vincentius 5 (A.D. 408); letter to Donatus 3 (A.D. 416).
- 106 *Corr. Don.* 23.
- 107 Augustine cited Matthew 17.15
- 108 *Ag. Gaud.* 1.29; see also the letter to Boniface.
- 109 He wrote to Vincentius that his former opinion 'that no one should be coerced into the unity of Christ' was overcome 'not by the words of those who controverted it, but by the inconclusive instances to which they could point.'
- 110 It has sometimes been suggested that Augustine's emphasis on baptism and grace rather than responsibility appealed to times in which the unruly 'mob' had become Christian. This may be unfair to Augustine, who certainly insisted that Christianity involved some standards of behaviour. Nevertheless his strong insistence that 'tares' and 'wheat' should be left together in the church did make it simpler for state churches to operate. It also meant that he was afraid of his own flock (see letters to Aurelius A.D. 392, Albina A.D. 411). In a letter to Albina in 411 he described an incredible incident of unruly behaviour of his flock, in which he himself had played a dubious role and for which he showed no apparent surprise or remorse.
- 111 Farrar: *Lives of the Fathers* p.536
- 112 Augustine himself belies this accusation in his letters to leading Donatists. See e.g. letters to: Maximin (392 A.D.); Emeritus (405 A.D.); a debate with Fortunius (recorded in a letter of 398 A.D.; *Corr. Don* 4.16; and his letter to the Rotagist Vincentius.

- 113 Verduin *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* ch. 1
- 114 *Corr. Don.* 1
- 115 *Cath. Ep.* 2.2
- 116 Matthew 25.41-5
- 117 Verduin p.55
- 118 Verduin p.55
- 119 Verduin p.5<sup>5</sup>
- 120 An example of inconsistency in such an appeal is found in the book *The Man God Mastered* by Cadier (I.V.P.) This first tells us: 'For Calvin, the death penalty could be the only possible one for a zealous denier of fundamental doctrines such as the Trinity and *infant baptism.*' Cadier then tells us that Calvin wanted Servetus executed rather than burned-though he omits to tell us that the reason for this was that execution would have made it appear that Servetus was killed on a civil charge rather than a religious one (see Verduin p.52). In excuse for Calvin we are told: 'it was the opinion of all the men of the times apart from Castellion' that such extreme heresy as that of Servetus was more deserving of severe punishment than any civil crime p153). Yet later we are told: 'protests arose on all sides' p162). Who made these protests if it was nearly everyone's opinion that such punishment was justified?
- 121 The tendency of Augustine's theology to coincide with persecution of dissenters is reflected in other ages also. An outstanding example in the time of the Reformation is seen in the difference between Erasmus and Luther. Their main point of difference was precisely over the correct meaning of predestination, election, etc, and on this issue the early church view was represented by Erasmus (who quoted them in this respect), and the view of Augustine was adopted by Luther (who copied many of Augustine's proof-texts and arguments). Yet, again, while the Lutherans persecuted the non-conformists, Erasmus eloquently pleaded for tolerance, and said that the weapons of Christ should be gentle reproof and verbal demonstrations of error. While Luther denounced all popes as anti-Christ, Erasmus tried to act as a mediating influence between warring parties of Christians, accepting as true believers those in any denomination with genuine spiritual experience. Erasmus might accept much of Luther, and said: 'I have said that our salvation depends not on our desert, but on God's grace. I highly approve of Luther when he calls us away from frail confidence in ourselves. . . Our hope is in the mercy of God and the merits of Christ.' Erasmus, like the early church, believed that salvation was a gift-but he rejected the Augustinian doctrines both of faith as an irresistible gift, and of the use of force in persecution as simply following God's example. (see also note 45, and Bainton's book on Erasmus).

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