The Concept of Grace in Christian Thought

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THE CONCEPT OF GRACE and its relation to individual salvation is probably the most debated issue in the history of Christian thought. The list of combatants is virtually a *Who's Who* in Christian thought: Augustine versus Pelagius, Banez versus Molina, Luther versus Erasmus, Calvin versus Pighius, and Whitefield versus Whitely. These debates have always centered on the same issue: whether God's saving grace is compatible with human freedom. Discussions of grace in Mormon thought are too often carried out in almost complete ignorance of the evolution of Christian thought on this topic.

Both Mormon and non-Mormon interpreters of Mormonism frequently assume that, at least so far as modern Christianity is concerned, Mormonism is alone in emphasizing free will and works over salvation by grace alone. For example, Rev. William Taylor described the Mormon position as a denial that grace has any role in salvation: "Mormons deny grace, except as a way of saying that Jesus' atoning sacrifice won resurrection and immortality for all men, regardless of their worth." Catholics, he says, in contrast, "emphasize that this 'new creation' is something we can never earn; it is God's gift, given out of love, in Grace" (Taylor 1980, 44). We can hardly blame the good Reverend for adopting this view of Mormon belief, for he quotes Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* which says that Mormons believe that persons must achieve salvation by good works and that God's grace consists in universal resurrection. Such a view misunderstands both Mormon and traditional Christian thought.

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I suspect that the Mormon emphasis on good works to the almost total exclusion of grace in the process of salvation evolved in reaction against the more radical fundamentalist Christian notions of salvation by grace alone. Yet have we overreacted? Which doctrines of grace should we guard against in Mormon thought, if any? Are some notions of grace congruent with the Mormon view of salvation? Mormons have often overlooked the fact that there has been at least a significant, even if a minority, view within traditional Christianity which has emphasized free will and works in conjunction with notions of grace. Moreover, Mormons have often oversimplified the notion of grace as if it were a simple, unitary concept, namely that God arbitrarily confers saving grace on those he wishes to save and that once grace is accepted, one is saved regardless of what one does. God arbitrarily damns everyone else, not for any act of theirs, but by his "good pleasure." Grace signifies the acceptance of the believer into the class of saved persons independently of the human will or deeds. Yet this reductive understanding misconstrues virtually every thinker in the history of traditional Christian thought. In partial defense of these Mormon misunderstandings, it may be noted that Christians from the fundamentalist camp are often no more aware of the history and nuances of the idea of grace than most Latter-day Saints. Indeed, most of them would probably be surprised to learn that, historically, Baptists have emphasized free will and human endeavor in conjunction with divine grace.

We Latter-day Saints have much to learn from those who preceded us in attempting to understand the message and meaning of Jesus of Nazareth. My purpose here is to explore the history of notions of grace promulgated by the seminal thinkers in Christian history and thus provide a *prolegomena* to further discussion of grace in my own tradition. Some of the world's brightest and kindest thinkers have devoted their best efforts to elucidating the relationship of grace to works, and of both to salvation. We ought to take advantage of their efforts and learn from them. At the very least, such a study will increase our awareness of the complex and interesting tensions inherent in the concept of grace as it relates to other Christian beliefs such as free will, deification, and salvation.

THE HISTORICAL PROBLEMATIC

Paul and Pauline Thought

A review of the Apostle Paul's thought is necessary both to put the later debate over grace and free will into proper context and because

his writings and those attributed to him are a part of the Mormon canon. Paul's notion of justification by grace therefore forms a part of the Mormon concept of grace.

The primary problem Paul confronted was that some Christians who had been (and in many ways still were) Jews believed that observing the Law of Moses was necessary for Christian salvation (Gal. 2; Acts 15). (For a general discussion of the debate, see Brown and Meier 1982, 111-27). Paul's discussions of grace and works were set forth almost exclusively in Galatians and Romans where Paul addressed issues raised by the "Judaizers," those claiming that the Law of Moses must be observed (Brown and Meier 1982, 118-20). In Romans and Galatians, Paul argued that observance of the Law of Moses was not necessary because Christians have transferred from serving the Law to serving Christ Jesus. Paul argued that the transfer from the Law of Moses to the gospel of Jesus Christ came only through faith in Christ, not through any observances. In this context, Paul often spoke of freedom (Gal. 5:1, 13). However, Paul did not mean that the individual will was free; Paul never explicitly addressed the issue of the role of the free will in salvation nor whether the will is free as opposed to being in bondage to sin. Paul spoke only of "freedom from" the requirements of the Law of Moses—a freedom that should not lead to self-indulgence (Gal. 5:14). Freedom of will should not be confused with "freedom from" the requirements of the Law of Moses. As Krister Stendahl, the present chaplain and former dean of the Harvard Divinity School, has convincingly argued, Paul was not preoccupied with his bondage to sin as were Augustine and Luther who erroneously interpreted Paul's letters as addressing the subject of original sin (1976, 78-96). As Morna Hooker put it, "We see Paul through the eyes of Augustine or Luther or Wesley when we see him as a man struggling—and failing—to keep the Law and so convicted of sin" (1980, 40).

Paul adopted several key terms difficult to translate into English because of their cultural richness. He taught that individuals have been "washed clean . . . have been sanctified . . . have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 6:11).[1] Every term in this phrase is pregnant with meaning peculiar to Paul. While "to justify" (*dikaioō* or *dikaiosynē*) in Greek meant literally to "declare innocent" or "acquit" in the sense of a jury verdict of "not guilty" (Thayer 1979, 150), in Galatians and Romans, "to justify" or "justification" almost always referred to entering into a proper relationship with God the

[1] All references to biblical quotations are from the New Jerusalem Bible, 1986 edition.

Father through the saving action of Christ Jesus (Goppelt 1976, 137–41). Just as Israel had been elected to the covenant relationship with God without regard to whether Israel deserved such a relationship, so the covenant relationship was now offered to Christians without any conditions (Romans 11:1–6; Sanders 1977, 470–72). The central notion is a loving relationship which is unconditional. The covenant relationship was therefore a grace that was not and could not be earned by any works. The only condition to *entering* the relationship was faith in Jesus (Romans 5:1–2; 11:6). The relationship could not be earned by obeying the Law of Moses; in fact, trying to earn the relationship through such works only showed that one had betrayed Christ and transferred back to the regime of the Law of Moses (Gal. 5:2–5).[2]

Augustine, Luther, and Calvin interpreted Paul as placing a wedge between Christian grace and moral works, between law and faith. They, together with almost all Protestants (with the exception of some recent Protestant scholars), understood Paul to denigrate *all* works and to teach that salvation comes through grace alone—*sola gratiae*. However, this view does not do justice to the richness of Paul's thought. It is clearly true that Paul disapproved of reliance on works (*ergon*) of the Law (*nomos*) of Moses. However, Paul did not denigrate *all* works or all laws (Sanders 1983, 32–34). In fact, Paul taught that there are conditions to *remaining in* the covenant relationship with Christ Jesus (Romans 11:22). The conditions were observance of the "law (*nomos*) of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:2); or "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2); or "Christ's law (*nomos*)" (1 Cor. 9:21), or "the law (*nomos*) of faith" (Romans 3:27 KJV). The only faith that justified was "faith which worketh (*energoumenē*) by love" (Gal. 5:6; 13. See Gal. 6:4; 1 Cor. 13:2; 2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 4:17; and Col. 3:5–7). The law of Moses had been replaced by the law of love which summarized the Torah in a single command. Whenever Paul used the terms "works" or "law" in a sense disapproved, he referred to them in connection with the Law of Moses. However, Paul also used the terms "law" and "works" in a sense approved—in connection with the law of Christ and works of love.

It is important not to read into Paul's view the contradiction between works and grace seen by Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. As E. P. Sanders concludes, Paul did not perceive a tension between being saved by grace and being judged by works (1977, 516–18). In particular, Paul recognized that persons could "fall from grace" if they rejected Christ by failing to trust in him *or* by conduct inconsistent with the law of love—conduct injurious to the covenant relationship—such as

[2] Unless otherwise indicated, chapter and verse designations are identical to the KJV.

murder, fornication, or sodomy (Gal. 5:5–6; 19–21). Though the covenant relationship is entered (i.e., persons are justified) by grace through faith in Christ, all persons will be judged according to their own works (1 Cor. 3:12–15; 11:29–32; 2 Cor. 5:8–10; Romans 2:6–7). According to Paul, only those who endure "in grace," or "in the Spirit," or "in Christ"—that is, only those who belong to Christ on the Day of the Lord (i.e., the day of judgment)—will be saved (1 Thess. 5:23; 1 Cor. 1:8; 7:34; 15:58; 16:13; 2 Cor. 4:16; 11:3; Phil. 1:27; 2:15; Gal. 6:9).

Many earlier interpretations of Paul have failed to understand that Paul's teachings about salvation by grace did not differ significantly from Judaic teachings. Both viewed salvation by grace as consistent with judgment by works (Sanders 1977 and 1983). Numerous documents present the Jewish view of grace, including the Old Testament, the Jewish pseudepigrapha, Rabbinic literature (the Mishna, Tosefta, Sifra, Palestinian Talmud, Babylonian Talmud, and the Midrash Rabbah), and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Nevertheless, studies of Paul have suffered from the misconception that Christianity was a religion of grace while Judaism was a religion of works. This view of Judaism is simply wrong. For Jews, the Law itself was a grace which justified persons. For example, no group was more strict or more adamant than the Qumran Covenantors in their observance of the Law of Moses. Yet, the initiates at Qumran would sing:

> As for me,
> if I stumble, the mercies of God
> shall be my eternal salvation.
> If I stagger because of the sin of flesh,
> my justification shall be
> by the righteousness of God
> which endures forever.
> When my distress is unleashed
> He will deliver my soul from the Pit
> and will direct my steps in the way.
> He will draw me near by His grace,
> and by His grace will he bring my justification.
> He will judge me in the righteousness of his truth
> and in the greatness of His goodness
> He will pardon all my sins.
> Through His righteousness He will cleanse me
> of the uncleanness of man. (Vermes 1968, 93–94)

The Jews at Qumran were convinced that they would be justified through God's grace and righteousness. Nevertheless, God required them to obey the Law of Moses. For the author of the Qumran hymn, God's grace was offered within the system of the Law of Moses. Though the covenant relationship was offered as a grace, God demanded obe-

dience to the Law. Those who breached the covenant by disobeying the law of Moses would be cut off from the covenant relationship (1QS 2.2-8 1QH in Vermes 1968, 153-54). Both the Qumran covenantors and most Jews in Paul's day did not perceive justification by grace as opposed to works of the Law. Similarly, they did not perceive obedience to the Law as somehow nullifying grace. Only through grace—through the election of Israel—could they enter the divine-human relationship, but disobedience could sever that relationship. There is no notion in Judaism or in Paul's teachings that God's love is earned or merited, for no one could do enough to merit God's election and freely offered covenant relationship; but once entered, one had to be faithful to the demands of the divine relationship.

Paul's view of grace differed only in one particular, that persons were justified—that is, entered into a covenant relationship with God—through the saving action of Christ Jesus, not through works of the Law of Moses. Paul's notion of grace in no way implied that persons were free to do whatever they pleased—and it is unlikely that those who understood Paul to teach libertinism were Jewish Christians since they would have understood that the covenant relationship offered by grace required conduct in conformance with the terms of the covenant, namely those requirements stipulated by the new law of love delivered by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Piper 1979, 100-33). Paul taught that one's covenant relationship to God was not offered on conditions—it has always been offered in unconditional love or by grace. Nevertheless, one had to observe the terms of the covenant relationship once entered (Hooker 1980, 38-40).

Paul and James

Because the letters of Paul and James apparently contradict each other, they have exerted a tremendous influence on later discussions of grace and works. James's letter may have been a direct response to Paul, though if so, he did not understand Paul's teachings, for he alters the meaning of every key term used by Paul. However, it is more likely, though not entirely certain, that James was responding to persons who misunderstood Paul's teachings. The latter interpretation is more probable because Paul himself noted that what he said had sometimes been misconstrued to mean that "we are free from sin now that we are not under the Law but under grace" (Rom. 6:20). Paul retorts, "What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid" (KJV Rom. 6:15). And elsewhere Paul complained, "Some persons are spreading slanderous

reports that we teach that one should do evil that good may come from it. In fact such persons are justly condemned" (Rom. 3:7–8). The antinomians (those who taught that freedom from law meant freedom to sin) appear to have derived their (mis)understandings from the writings of Paul, for they adopted Pauline slogans; but they distorted them in a way that Paul would have rejected. (See Davids 1982, 47–51).

James appears to be combatting the same distortion of Paul's teachings (Reicke 1974, 34–35). James's opponents argued: "You say you have good deeds, but we have faith" (see James 2:14). They argued also that persons are "justified by faith alone" (*pistis monon*). In Romans and elsewhere Paul asserted that "a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28 [KJV]; 9:32; Gal. 2:16). Compare James's position: "You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith alone" (James 2:24 [KJV]). Yet James is responding not to Paul, but merely to a slogan derived from Paul (Jeremias 1954–55, 368–71). The key to understanding James is that he vigorously rejects the notion of faith *alone* (Davids 1982, 50). He insists that "faith works together with (*synergei*) deeds . . . works perfect and fulfill faith (*pistis synergei tois ergois . . . ton ergon he pistis eteleiothe kai eplerothe*)" (James 2:22). The term used here by James, *synergei*, became the catchword for the later position known as "synergism," roughly the notion that God's grace and human works are both necessary for salvation. However, James uses the term not to refer to the subject of this later debate (the role of human free will and works in salvation), but only to clarify the necessary connection between faith and works in the Christian life.

Both James and Paul approved of "law" in the sense of the law of liberty, or the royal law, as James terms it (2:8, 12). For James, the law binding on Christians was the law of love taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, which fulfilled the law of Moses because it summed up the Law in a single commandment (James 2:8; Davids 1982, 16, 114–16). Paul, as we have seen, condemns the term *law* when used in the sense of the law of Moses, but approves law in the sense of the "law of Christ" or "law of grace" or "law of life in Christ Jesus" (Luck 1971, 161–79).

James argued that God will justify (*dikaioutai*) or declare one righteous by virtue of his works (*ex ergon*). As Davids points out, James did not use the term "justified" in the forensic sense of justification of *sinners* as Paul did (1982, 51). Paul referred primarily to present justification—the transfer from the regime of the law of Moses to the lordship of Christ Jesus (Hooker 1980, 32–33)—whereas James referred

to God's act in the final judgment of declaring a person righteous. James spoke solely of eschatological justification. Though there is a sense in Paul in which justification is already accomplished in Christ, presently available to Christians and yet to be accomplished through participation in Christ's glory with the Father, judgment by works is always in the future. Whenever Paul did speak of judgment, he also spoke of judgment according to Christian "works" or deeds, as did James (Gal. 6:7-10; Rom. 14:11-12; Sanders 1977, 515-18).

When James condemns the notion of "faith alone," he is targeting a mere intellectual assent to proper doctrine. He approves profession of faith only when it produces deeds of love. Faith alone will not do. James was emphatic that faith does not really exist without deeds of love. It is inaccurate to interpret James to say that if one has faith, then works will naturally follow; rather, faith and works are two aspects of the same act of accepting Jesus's law of love. Faith neither follows from nor precedes works because, for James, faith apart from works is a false dichotomy—like a body without a spirit. Paul would agree totally with James that faith must be manifest in works. Paul would not argue that faith could exist apart from works in the sense of deeds of love; rather, he would ask if faith not manifest in deeds of love were faith in any genuine sense (cf., Gal. 5:6; 6:4; 1 Cor. 13:2; 2 Cor. 9:8). The diatribe against a mere profession of faith in James finds its closest New Testament parallel in Matthew: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of the Father" (Matt. 7:21).

Finally, it must be noted that James did not deny that faith has a role in justification; it was simply that faith that justifies is consummated in brotherly love, not mere profession (James 2:14, 17-22, 26). Paul and James both addressed a distortion of Paul's teachings, and they both agreed that justifying faith entails a life which manifests deeds of love. Neither accepted the slogan that man is justified by faith alone (Schillebeeckx 1983, 161-64).

In summary, Paul's condemnation of works referred to ceremonial works of the law of Moses; whereas James referred to works only in the sense of works of love. James's condemnation of faith referred to mere intellectual assent that was not manifest in works of love; whereas Paul referred to faith in the sense of faith manifest in love. Moreover, James did not deny faith a role in justification, but found a synergy between faith and works which justifies a person (James 2:22). However, James used "justified" to mean "is finally judged righteous" (Goppelt 1976, 208-11). Paul did not use "justification" in this sense (Reicke 1974, 34). Nevertheless, Paul would agree that judgment is

"according to deeds" (Rom. 2:6; 4:10; 1 Cor. 3:12–17; 9:23–27;2 Cor. 5:10; 6:1; Phil. 2:12; 3:8, 14).[3]

The following chart shows approved and disapproved senses of key terms for James (J) and Paul (P):

Term	Sense Approved	Sense Disapproved
works *(ergon)*	(J) works of love	
	(P) works of love	works of the law of Moses
law *(nomos)*	(J) royal law	
	(P) law of Christ, law of Moses	
faith *(pistis)*	(J) faith manifest in love	mere intellectual assent
	(P) faith manifest in love	
justified *(dikaiusyne)*	(J) by faith and works of love	through mere profession
	(P) by faith/by grace	through the law of Moses
final judgment *(krisis)*	(J) by deeds	
(reward)	(P) by deeds	

Christian Thought Before Augustine

After Paul and before Augustine, Paulinism had little influence on Christian thought outside the canon. As Elaine Pagels has shown, mainstream Christians from Justin Martyr and Ireneaus through Tertullian, Clement, and the brilliant teacher Origen "regarded the proclamation of moral freedom, grounded in Genesis 1-3, as effectively synonymous with 'the gospel' " (1989, 79). These same church leaders unanimously denounced the gnostics for denying what the orthodox considered to be humanity's essential God-given attribute—free will. For Justin Martyr (ca. 165 C.E.), free will was a fundamental tenent of Christianity:

> Unless the human race have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions, of whatever kind they be. But that it is by free choice they both walk uprightly and stumble, we thus

[3] Yet Paul and James certainly understood the example of Abraham in Genesis 15:6 differently. James and Paul both accept Genesis 15:6 as establishing justification by faith, but James sees such an interpretation as a distortion unless it is put in the context of Abraham's deeds of obedience in the arrested sacrifice of Isaac.

> demonstrate. We see the same man making a transition to opposite things. . . . But this we assert is inevitable fate, that they who choose the good have worthy rewards, and they who choose the opposite have their merited rewards. (*Apologia pro Christianis* Bk. 1, Ch. 43, in Roberts and Donaldson 1977, 1:177)[4]

For Irenaeus (ca. 200 C.E.), the story of Adam and Eve proclaimed "the ancient law of liberty because God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own power . . . to obey the commands of God voluntarily and not by compulsion of God" (*Adversus Haereses* Bk. 4, Ch. 37, 1 in Migne). Irenaeus thought of humankind as originally immature and requiring mortal experience to grow. As Irenaeus explained:

> It was possible for God Himself to have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this [perfection], being as yet an infant. . . . Man has received the knowledge of good and evil. . . . [S]ince God, therefore, gave [to man] such mental powers man knew both the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience, that the eye of the mind, receiving experience of both, may with judgment make choice of the better things . . . learning by experience that it is an evil thing which deprives him of life. . . . Wherefore he has also had a twofold experience, possessing knowledge of both kinds, that with discipline he may make a choice of the better things. But how, if he had no knowledge of the contrary, could he have had instruction in what is good? (*Adversus Haereses*, Bk. 4, Ch. 38–39)

According to Irenaeus, humans, as originally created by God, did not have either an evil or a good nature, but were capable of both: "Since all men are of the same nature, able both to hold fast and to do good; and, on the other hand, having power to cast it from them and not do it—some do justly receive praise even among men who are under the control of good laws" (*Adversus Haereses*, Bk. 4, Ch. 37, 2). As for Adam and Eve, in his Proof of the Apostolic Preaching (ch. 16), Irenaeus pictured them in the Garden of Eden as innocent children not yet fully aware of evil. Their transgression did not call for divine judgment, but rather for God's compassion on account of their weakness and innocence. Irenaeus thus viewed our present life as an opportunity for spiritual growth, with human deification as the ultimate goal:[5]

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[4] Tatian (ca. 175 A.D.) taught that God did not make humans already good, but made them free to become good aor evil according to free choice (*Oratio* 7, in Migne 1877, 90, 6). Theophilus (ca. 175 A.D.) also regarded Adam and Eve as children, placed in mortality so that they might mature and become perfect ultimately through sharing in God's divinity through free will (*Ad Autolycus* 2, 24–25 in Migne 1877–90, 7).

[5] By "deification" Irenaeus meant that humans shared fully as heirs in the divine gift and immortality and *not* that humans were uncreated like God.

> By this arrangement, therefore, and these harmonies, and a sequence of this nature, man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God—the Father planning everything well and giving his commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made], but man making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated one. . . . Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the effects of Adam's sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and having been glorified, should see his Lord. (*Adverses Haereses*, Bk. 4, Ch. 38, 3)

Irenaeus saw the true meaning of human life revealed in what Jesus became and what humans may become as a result: "It was for this reason that the Son of God, although He was perfect, passed through the state of infancy in common with the rest of mankind, partaking of the infantile stage of man's existence, in order that man might be able to receive him" (*Adversus Haereses*, Bk. 4, Ch. 38, 2). We therefore cannot blame God for not making us perfect, because we are yet in an immature stage of existence and need to experience both good and evil: "For we cast blame upon Him, because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods" (p. 4).

Ultimately we will be deified if we properly use our freedom according to Irenaeus: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through his transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself" (Bk. 5, preface). Irenaeus's doctrine of deification was a development on Paul's concept that persons become reconciled to God by sharing in what Christ did and ultimately become what Christ is: "He was rich, but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty" (2 Cor. 8:9); "For your sake God made the sinless one to enter sin, so that in him we might become the goodness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). Indeed, Morna Hooker has stated that Irenaeus's notion of deification is "the neatest summary" available of Paul's thought (1980, 46).

Virtually all mainstream Christians until Augustine believed that persons are morally responsible because they have a choice between good and evil (Kelly 1978, 348–52). As J. N. D. Kelly noted:

> A point on which [the Greek Fathers] were all agreed was that man's will remains free; we are responsible for our acts. . . . Augustine's starting point was not theirs. . . . The orbit within which they worked was quite different, being marked out by the ideas of participation in the divine nature, rebirth through the power of the Spirit, adoption as sons, new creation through Christ—all leading to the concept of deification (theopoiesis). Their attitude is illustrated by the statement attributed to Athanasius, "The Son of God became son of man so that the

> sons of men, that is, of Adam, might become sons of God . . . partakers of the life of God. . . . Thus He is Son of God by nature and we by grace." Cyril of Alexandria made the same point: "We are made partakers of the divine nature and are said to be sons of God, nay, we are actually called divine, not only because we are exalted by grace to supernatural glory, but also because we have God dwelling in us." *Grace thus conceived is a state of communion with God, and if a man must use his free will to attain it, there can be no question but that the blessedness in which it consists is wholly the gift of God.* (Kelly 1978, 352; emphasis added)

Augustine and Pelagius

Aurelius Augustine (354–430), bishop of Hippo, fundamentally altered the Christian understanding of grace. Augustine read the story of Adam and Eve very differently from the Greek fathers. Instead of viewing them as imperfect, immature creatures who were to undergo moral development and growth and finally be brought to the perfection planned by God, Augustine held that the man Adam was created finitely perfect and then incomprehensibly destroyed that perfection through the sin of pride.[6] Instead of viewing Adam's action as something in accordance with God's plan which occurred during the immature stage of the race and an understandable choice due to human weakness, Augustine viewed Adam's action as a "Fall"—an utterly sinful and malignant act which completely disrupted God's plan due to a moral crime. Instead of seeing our world as a divinely appointed period of probation, mingling good and evil and allowing human development towards divine perfection, Augustine maintained that human trials are a divine punishment. Most important, instead of regarding humankind as confirmed in free will (as a necessary condition to moral responsibility and growth), Augustine emphasized that the human will had been fatally injured and, as a result, humans could will only evil in accordance with their depraved nature (see especially Hick 1978, 214–15). Furthermore, Augustine transported these ideas into Paul's letters, including Augustine's own teaching of the human will's moral impotence and his sexualized interpretation of sin (see Pagels 1989, xxv).

Augustine unfortunately developed his doctrine of the Fall from a faulty text of Romans 5:12. In the Greek, Paul's text reads: "so death passed to all men *in that* (*heth ho*) all sinned." However, the old Latin

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[6] I will follow Augustine in using the terms "man" and "Adam" without reference to Eve. Augustine was not a modern feminist and did not speak of both Adam and Eve, but only of Adam, when describing the defection of the human will from its original goodness as a result of pride. Though less sensitive to issues of gender, his writings nevertheless clearly relate to women.

version used by Augustine read "*in whom* (*in quo*) all sinned." The notion of original sin derives all too easily from this faulty text. (It is of singular importance to understand that Augustine's dramatic break with Greek Christianity resulted in part from his poor understanding of Greek.) The term "original sin" was first used by Augustine in his early work, *De deversis quaestionibus ad siplicianum* (Williams 1927, 327). Augustine held that all persons were seminally present ("in whom all sinned") and actually participated in the sin of Adam—a position known as traducianism. Therefore, Augustine reasoned that after the Fall all descendants of Adam and Eve were captives of an evil nature through genetic inheritance *and* by actually being present with Adam when he sinned.

As a corollary to his view of original sin, Augustine asserted that God created humankind with the power both to sin and to refrain from sinning. Thus, *before* the Fall Adam was in a state of moral freedom (*posse non peccare*). *After* the Fall, however, all persons were unable to avoid sin (*non posse non peccare*). Augustine reasoned that persons were nevertheless free even if they could not choose good because they could do precisely as they desired—they could act evilly in accordance with their depraved nature. This notion of free will modified the commonly held view that free will required choices among genuine alternatives of good and evil. All Christian writers prior to Augustine who addressed the issue maintained that a person could not be truly free unless the person was able to also refrain from sinning. In contrast, Augustine taught that persons are "free" to choose to sin but not free to choose not to sin. Further, any escape from sin is wholly dependent on God. Augustine's theory of grace was, then, entirely monergistic—in other words, salvation was ultimately up to God alone (in *Enchiridion*, 104; see Dodds 1871–76).

Augustine also held that grace was bestowed in several stages which marked the transition of the human will from total servitude to sin and depravity to blessedness. The first stage was *prevenient grace* (*gratia praeveniens*). The Holy Spirit was the efficient cause which brought the human soul to a sense of sin and moved it to faith. In other words, God, not the believer, was responsible for initiating redeeming faith in Christ. Augustine called the second stage *operative grace* (*gratia operans*). Another mode of grace was extended from God who justified and restored to the human will the power to do good. The regenerated will was not, however, restored to freedom wherein one might will to choose good or evil (*libero arbitrio*), but to liberty (*libertas*), by which the human will was made unable to sin (*non posse peccare*).

Clearly not all persons received operative grace. However, since the depraved soul is incapable even of choosing to accept grace,

Augustine reasoned that the difference between those who accept grace and are saved and those who reject grace must be determined solely by God. Hence, Augustine held that some, but not all were predestined by God's absolute decree (*decretum absolutum*). God decided to save some (but not all) from the fallen mass of humankind (*massa perditionis*). The divine decision was not made on the basis of foreseen faith or human works, but simply by "God's good pleasure." Augustine stated that "predestination is the preparation for grace, but grace is the gift itself. . . . God elected us in Christ before the foundation of the world, predestinating us to the adoption of sons, not because he saw that we should become holy and sinless of ourselves, but he elected and predestinated us that we might become so. But he did this according to the good pleasure of his will; that man might not glory in his own will, but in the will of God towards him" (*De Predestinatione*, 100.18). Thus, God arbitrarily chose to save some and to leave others to damnation.

Those who actually accepted operative grace did so because of "irresistible grace" (*gratia irresistibilis*) by which God is able to overcome the resistance of even the most obstinate sinner so that the regenerated sinner willingly (and thus voluntarily in Augustine's thought) accepted divine grace. "It is not to be doubted," said Augustine, "that the human will cannot resist the will of God" (*De Corroptione et Gratia*, 14; *Enchiridion*, 100.2). Thus Augustine hypothesized a double predestination: God decreed the sinful soul's salvation both by preparing the will to receive grace and by ultimately moving the human will to "voluntarily" accept the grace offered. God decided to leave the rest of humankind to flounder in its naturally evil state and sink to ultimate damnation.

Augustine defended what may seem inequitable treatment. There is nothing wrong in God's damning some people, he argued, because *all* persons deserve to be damned as a result of their sinful nature inherited from Adam; but God in his "mercy" has predestined some to be saved from their just deserts. Augustine viewed infant baptism as necessary to regenerate depraved human nature. Unbaptized infants were lost according to Augustine (*De Civitate Dei* Bk. 5, Chs. 21, 13); *Contra Julianum* Bk. 4, Ch. 3). His position on infant baptism followed directly from his views of original sin and depraved human nature (Cooper 1984, 93-113).

Finally, Augustine altered the notion of human deification, though not even Augustine fully rejected the notion because it was simply too well established in Christian thought. Augustine held that persons are deified through adoption, not through a process of maturing from childhood to fully mature humanity as Irenaeus had taught. In his commentary on Psalm 49, Augustine quoted: " 'I have said, Ye are gods;

and ye are the children of the Highest. But ye shall die like men: and fall like one of the princes' "; then explained, "It is clear that He calls men *Gods* through their being deified by His grace and not born of His substance. . . . Now he who justifies, Himself deifies, because by justifying He makes [them] sons of God. 'For them gave he power to become the Sons of God.' If we are made *sons of God*, we are also made gods; but this is done by grace of adoption, and not by generation" (Enar. in Ps. 49.i.2.).

In essence, Augustine asserted that human deification was identical to being adopted as sons and daughters of God rather than full participation in God's nature through a long process of growth in grace as Irenaeus had maintained. As Gerald Bonner noted: "It must be kept in mind that, for Augustine, deification is the privilege of the elect, a small minority, while the great majority of the human race pertains to the *massa damnata*" (1986, 385).

Augustine's redefinition of Christian doctrine scandalized the British monk Pelagius. Pelagius was concerned primarily with the corrupt Roman society which he had experienced while visiting Rome and felt that Augustine's theology of grace without responsibility would make matters worse. In contrast, his theological starting point was the traditional affirmation of free will and moral responsibility. God set before Adam and Eve a choice which he also posed to all persons: a choice between "life and death, and good and evil" (Deut. 30:15 [KJV]). He then commanded them to choose life (Deut. 30:19). The final decision, however, was up to Adam and Eve's free will, for Pelagius maintained that the possibility of freely choosing the good entails the possibility of choosing evil (1877–90, 30:16f).

Pelagius maintained that when God created human beings, he bestowed upon them, by grace, the power (*posse*) to not sin (*posse non peccare*). Though the *power* derived from God, the will (*velle*) and actualization of decisions (*esse*) derived solely from the human soul. Further, God had implanted in the hearts of all persons the natural law, or knowledge of right and wrong. Thus, human beings, who enjoy freedom of alternative choices as a result of God's grace, are nevertheless ultimately responsible for their free choices. Further, Pelagius rejected the Augustinian view that "sin" is an inherited state of being and held that sins arise only from specific acts which violate God's law.

Pelagius rejected the notions of original sin and the view that persons are captives of depraved nature because he held that the Fall did not affect the human will. Instead, God created each soul immediately at birth, so the soul could not inherit Adam's original sin. Only Adam could be guilty of Adam's sin. Pelagius pointed out that if the offspring of Adam and Eve inherited original sin, then the offspring of sanctified

parents ought to inherit their sanctification. Of course, proponents of original sin could not adopt this view—though it seemed to follow from their position. Adam's transgression of God's law had introduced death and spiritual alienation from God into the world. However, Pelagius clarifies, an individual's spiritual death results from individual actions and not from an evil nature: "Before willing there is only in man what God has created" (*In Romanos* 5, 16; *ad Demetrius* 8, 17). Little children therefore do not need baptism, for they are just as God created them prior to any free decisions.

Pelagius also rejected Augustine's notion of double predestination, believing that God, no respecter of persons, offers his grace equally to all, leaving all thus to share equally in moral responsibility (*De Castigiis*, 13). Pelagius held that God predestines, but he does so based upon the works he foresees that persons will perform and they are therefore saved on the basis of merit (*In Romanos* 9,10; Augustine, *De gestis Contra Pelagii* 16). Finally, Pelagius argued that persons could, in theory, live a sinless life. However, Pelagius did not envision perfection obtained in a single moment, but rather through continued efforts of free will throughout life (*Ad Demetrius* 30, 42).

Some of Pelagius's disciples, such as Coelestius, sharpened Pelagius's arguments against Augustine. The more general tendency, however, was to moderate both the positions of Pelagius and Augustine into a view which came to be known as semi-Pelagianism. The essence of this view was that salvation is effected by a combination of two efficient agencies, both human will and divine grace. Semi-Pelagians held that the Fall had not obliterated free will but had only weakened it. They tended to contrast the Augustinian view that the will had been "mortally wounded" with the position that the "will is only injured." The role of grace is essentially to strengthen the human will. Grace of itself is not sufficient because it cannot force the human will; but the human will of itself is also insufficient because it is unable, unaided, to exercise grace-accepting faith. Though semi-Pelagianism was a good attempt to reconcile the opposing positions of Augustine and Pelagius, it lacked the theological rigor of either position.

In later discourse, positions maintaining that the decision whether to accept grace is ultimately solely up to God have been called "monergism." Positions which hold that divine grace and human will must both cooperate have been called "synergism." The view that humans can save themselves without divine grace has been viewed as "heterodox" or improper thinking (though not even Pelagius ever adopted such a position).

Medieval Positions

I find the notion of middle knowledge developed by the sixteenth-century Jesuit Luis de Molina to be one of the most sophisticated and powerful theological notions in Christian thought. It also provides a strong basis for the notion of a type of predestination consistent with human freedom. Conceptually, middle knowledge fits between *natural knowledge* and *free knowledge*. Molina affirmed that God has *natural knowledge*, which is knowledge of all necessary and possible truths, as in assertions such as "all red apples are red" or "mermaids possibly exist." Such truths are *prevolitional* or true prior to God's providential activity. That is, God does not bring such truths and possibilities into existence; rather, they are true independently of God's volitional creative activity because they are true in all possible worlds that God could create.

In contrast, God knows which of these truths will obtain in the *actual world* because God has determined by his *free knowledge* which of these logically possible worlds he will bring about. Thus, by his natural knowledge, God knows that a world with cows and with mermaids is logically possible. By his free knowledge, he knows that the actual world will include cows but not mermaids because he has chosen to create cows but not mermaids. Moreover, God's free knowledge is *postvolitional* or a result of God's sovereign will. God can thus determine which world is actual by knowing which world he will cause to exist.

Neither natural nor free knowledge, however, extends to free human acts. God cannot know free acts by his natural knowledge because, given free will, each of the following types of worlds is logically possible:

> (A) If Molina is created in circumstances C, then he will freely accept the grace offered by God.
>
> (B) If Molina is created in circumstances C, then he will freely refrain from accepting the grace offered by God.

Let's call a possible world in which (A) occurs an "A-world" and a world in which (B) occurs a "B-world." Now, by his natural knowledge God knows that both A-world and B-world are logically possible, but God does not know which world is actual because such truths are contingent on human freedom; that is, it is logically possible for each proposition to be either true or false. Or, to put it another way, God could know by his free knowledge that "Molina will accept his grace when offered" in the world he creates, but he can't know whether Molina will *freely* accept God's grace, for a free act is one that is not caused by antecedent events or circumstances. So not even God can *cause* free

human acts consistently by allowing human freedom, according to Molina. Thus, God cannot know whether he has created an A-world or B-world unless he also knows the truth of conditional propositions ("if . . . then" statements) such as whether (A) is true and (B) is false.

Molina claimed that God knows the truth of conditional propositions like (A) and (B) by his *middle knowledge*, or knowledge in between natural and free knowledge. That is, God knows by his middle knowledge what any free, possible person X would do in any possible circumstance if God chooses to create X. An interesting fact emerges, however, when such truths are held to obtain *prior* to God's creative activity, namely, that whether or not such a proposition is true is *not* up to God. Like natural knowledge and unlike free knowledge, middle knowledge precedes God's creative activity. Like free knowledge, however, middle knowledge is of contingent truths—truths which might or might not happen. Moreover, if (B) is true, then God cannot create an A-world because Molina will freely reject God's grace if circumstances C are created. If B is true, then God cannot bring about an A-world without coercing Molina to accept his grace. And Molina held that such coercion is not consistent with free will. Thus, God discovers, so to speak, when he reviews all of the possible worlds, that he cannot create some possible worlds which contain free beings. God could create a different possible world which does not contain circumstance C but instead includes a situation S in which Molina will freely accept God's grace if it is offered, but situation S is different from circumstance C which exists in an A-world. Let us call those worlds which contain free creatures that God can create, *feasible worlds*.

It follows that it is not entirely up to God whether Molina accepts God's grace when it is offered because Molina is free; it is only up to God to offer his grace. Nevertheless, because any given person's salvation depends on which among all feasible worlds God has chosen to create, God in effect chooses to save some and not others. For example, if God chooses to create an S-world (the world in which Molina will be in situation S), then Molina is predestined to be saved. If, on the other hand, B is true and God decides to create a world in which Molina will be in circumstance C, then Molina is predestined to not be saved. Thus, Molina's salvation depends, in this sense, entirely on God's decision. God ultimately controls who will and who will not be saved because he knows what any given person would do if placed in any given situation. Thus, we can schematize God's providential act of salvation as follows:

God finds himself in a creation situation consisting of:

1. Natural Knowledge	God knows all logically necessary truths and all logical possibilities

2. Middle Knowledge	God knows that if Molina were created in C, then Molina will reject grace; and if Molina is created in S, then Molina will accept grace when it is offered.

God views feasible worlds and decides to create C-world

3. Free Knowledge	God knows which propositions about free human acts are true—God knows that Molina will reject grace when it is offered because Molina is in circumstance C.

Yet Molina held also that whether persons are saved or not depends on their free choice to accept or reject God's grace even though God foresees via his middle knowledge which they will do; but God does not offer his grace or choose to create any given world *because* he foresees that persons will accept or reject the grace when offered. God may have chosen to create a given possible world because it contained the greatest balance of good in relation to evil, but God cannot eliminate all evil because every feasible world which includes significantly free creatures may also contain some evil. Remember, whether *feasible* worlds contain evil is not within God's control; rather, it is a fact dependent upon which conditional propositions are true prior to God's decision to create.

Molina thus maintained that God is not responsible if some persons are not saved, even if God is ultimately responsible for which feasible world he creates and thus which persons are in fact saved. Molina could hold this view because he also maintained that God offers *actual* grace to all persons, or grace which provides the supernatural assistance needed to perform those acts that God has ordained will allow persons to merit eternal life. Actual grace is divided into *prevenient* (or *antecedent*) grace, which precedes the human will and prepares it to freely accept God's grace when offered, and *cooperating* (or *consequent*) grace by which the human will concurs with God's actual grace.

Luis de Molina also emphasized that God desired all persons to be saved. It follows that God offers sufficient cooperating grace to all persons to merit salvation. That is, everyone receives sufficient grace, or the grace which empowers one to perform saving acts. Molina was, of course, aware that some persons do not accept cooperating grace. When persons do accept cooperating grace, it is called *efficacious* grace. For Molina, efficacious grace is, so far as God's offer of grace is concerned, identical to sufficient grace—it is merely termed efficacious grace when it is actually accepted. The key point is that whether or not God's grace becomes efficacious depends on us relative to the world God has chosen to create, not on God. Further, it may be that no matter what

possible world God creates, Molina will refuse God's saving grace. If Molina is incorrigible in all circumstances, in all feasible worlds, then God cannot save him unless God can coerce salvation. Since salvation requires a *free* response to God's offer of grace, however, there may be persons whom God simply cannot save. Molina believed that he had developed a system which accounts for both human freedom, *and* a strong notion of predestination, *and* salvation by grace. Indeed, one cannot help but be struck by the sheer genius and theological power of Molina's vision.

Thomas Aquinas, who predates Molina by over 300 years (1225-1274), had argued that God's foreknowledge arises from his all-encompassing causal activity. The Thomist God is pure actuality (*actus purus*) who knowingly causes, directly or indirectly, all that occurs (Aquinas, *Questiones disputate de veritate*, Qu.5, Art. 1). In contrast to Molina, Aquinas had maintained free will is possible even if God moves the will to accept grace. He also maintained that if God did not move the will, then grace would not be accepted. According to Thomists, God gives to some *efficacious grace*, or grace which moves their will to "freely" accept God's operative grace to salvation. Aquinas admitted that "God does reprobate some persons. . . . [A]s predestination includes the will to confer grace and glory, so also reprobation includes the will to permit a person to fall into sin, and to impose the punishment of damnation because of that sin" (*Summa Theologica* Pt. 1, Qu. 23, Art. 3).

Molinists quizzed Thomists as to why God did not grant *efficacious grace* to all, because he could have saved all persons without violating the Thomist notion of free will. Thomists responded in essentially the same way that Augustine had: all persons deserve by nature to be damned, and God is not required to save all since salvation is an act of unmerited grace. Moreover, it is better that not all are saved, according to Aquinas; thereby not only God's grace and mercy are made manifest in the elect whom he saves, but also his justice, both vindictive and retributive, is manifest by permitting some to remain in sin and subsequently punishing them with damnation (*Summa Theologica*, Pt.1, Qu.23, Art.5).

Finally, the Thomists argued that God in fact has bestowed *sufficient grace* on all persons, though he has not bestowed efficacious grace on all. However, God's goodness is not impugned, Thomists claimed, because the rejection of sufficient grace by reprobates was up to them, just as the Molinists themselves claimed. Some Thomists (like some Calvinists) have conceded that God's salvific action displays an apparent harshness and arbitrariness. Aquinas himself stated: "Yet why He chooses some for glory, and reprobates others, has no

reason, except the divine will" (*Summa Theologica* Pt.1, Qu.23, Art.5, Reply 3).

Calvinism and Arminianism

Martin Luther (1483–1535) and John Calvin (1509–64) essentially adopted the Augustinian notion of regenerative grace. Both accepted the Augustinian view that, due to human depravity, persons are not free to do good. In his 1551 treatise entitled *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, Calvin attempted to salvage a notion of human free will at least in name (1961, 53–56). Luther, on the other hand, made no pretense to preserve the notion of free will (Urban 1971, 113–39). He freely admitted in his *De Servo Arbitrio*, published in 1524, that persons are not free unless their wills, which have been destroyed as a result of original sin, are regenerated and enabled to choose to accept God's grace. In the absence of regenerating grace, persons are in servitude to sin because they are capable only of choosing evil but not good. "This bombshell knocks 'free-will' flat, and utterly shatters it . . . that all we do, however it may appear to us to be done mutably and contingently, is in reality done necessarily and immutably in respect of God's will" (1957, 615).

Luther's pivotal contribution was to transform the medieval view that God's righteousness consisted in retributive justice to the notion that God's righteousness consisted in his mercy. The crucial question for Luther was how sinful humanity could stand before the holy God. Though Luther's early view was that grace combined with their good works to render some believers sufficiently righteous to stand before God, his later view was that God's grace *alone* is decisive. Luther maintained that God's grace—his righteousness—consists of treating humanity as righteous no matter what they do as long as they accept Christ. Luther declared that God's righteousness is imputed to humanity. In other words, saved persons are not judged according to their own deeds, but according to Christ's merits alone. Though works follow naturally from faith in Christ, according to Luther, works—in the sense of moral conduct—have no place in securing salvation. Luther essentially replaced the notion that all persons will be judged according to their own works with the view that the elect are judged on the basis of Christ's merits.

Luther's view of original sin was reflected in the Augusburg confession: "The hereditary evil is guilt (*culpa*) and crime (*reatus*); whence it results that all men, on account of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, are odious in the sight of God, and are by nature children of wrath. Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin

and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit" (in Leith 1963, 68; Latin text in Beute 1955). Given Luther's conviction that all persons are loathsome creatures, it followed that persons could be saved only if God ignored their unrighteousness and replaced it with his righteousness: "The elect who fear God will be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The rest will perish unregenerated. . . . For if it is not we ourselves, but God only, who works salvation in us, it follows that nothing we do before his working in us avails unto salvation. . . . Hence it follows that free will without the grace of God is not free will at all, but is the permanent bond-slave and servant to evil, since it cannot turn itself to good" (*De Servo Abitrio* 1542, 632, 634, 636). The most renowned Catholic thinker contemporary with Luther, Erasmus, argued that Luther's scheme made God unjust: "By the light of grace, it is inexplicable how God can damn him whom by his own strength can do nothing but sin and become guilty. . . . [T]he fault lies not in the wretchedness of man, but in the injustice of God" (*Diatribe seu collatio de libero arbitrio*, 19).

In a desire to show unity, both Lutherans and Calvinists agreed with Augustine that the Fall had dealt a mortal blow to human will: "Before man is illuminated, converted, regenerated, and drawn by the Holy Spirit, he can no more operate, co-operate, or even make a beginning towards his conversion or regeneration, with his own natural powers, than can a stone, a tree, or a piece of clay" (*Formula Concordiae* in Hall 1877, 389–90). The *First Helvetic Confession*, adopted by conventional Calvinists in 1536, established a similar formula:

> We attribute free will to man in this sense, viz: that when in the use of our faculties of understanding and will we attempt to perform good and evil actions, we are able to perform the evil of our own accord and by our own power; but to embrace and follow out the good, we are not able, unless illuminated by the grace of Christ and compelled by the Spirit. For it is God who works in us to will and to do, according to his good pleasure; and from God is salvation, from ourselves perdition. (Latin text in Niemayer 1870, 281–82)

The *Second Helvetic Confession*, drawn up by Heinrich Bullinger in 1561 and widely espoused thereafter by reformed churches, was even more explicit with respect to the status of free will in three states: before the fall and after the fall, unregenerate and regenerate:

> Man *before the fall* was righteous (rectus) and free; he was able to remain holy or to become evil. Man gave in to evil, and involved in sin and death both himself and the whole race of man.
>
> Next we consider the condition of men *after the Fall*. The intellect of man was not taken away by the Fall, neither was he robbed of his will . . . but his intellect and will were so changed and weakened (imminuta), that they cannot any longer

> perform what they could before the Fall. The intellect is darkened and the will has been changed from a free to an enslaved faculty. For it is the servant of sin. . . . Wherefore there is no free will to good in an unrenewed man; no strength for acting holy.

The confession went on to specify, however, that after regeneration the will is strengthened and free from its numbing bondage to sin:

> In the third place, we are to consider *whether the regenerate have free will and how far* [*an regenerati sint liberi arbitrii, et quatenus*]. In regeneration, the intellect is enlightened . . . and the will is not only changed by the Spirit, but is strengthened in its abilities so that it spontaneously wills and performs the good. . . . [T]he will of the regenerate in choosing to do what is good, not only is acted upon but also acts itself [*regeneratos in boni electiones et operatione, no tantum agere passive, sed active*]. For they are acted upon by God, so that they can act for themselves [*aguntur enim a Deo, ut agant ipsi, quod agant*] . . . but no one can be helped unless his own will becomes active [*neiquit antem adjuvarsi, hisi is, qui alquid agit*]. (in Cochrane 1966, 291-92; Latin text in Niesel 1893, 1521)

The sole dissenter from the Augustinian doctrine of original sin among the Protestant Reformation leaders was Zwingli, who stated his views at Augusburg in 1530. Zwingli's *Fidei Ratio* argued that Adam and Eve could not truly sin because the sin was not against law: "I think this regarding original sin—that is properly sin only that which is a transgression of the law; for where there is no law there is no transgression, and where there is no transgression there is no sin properly so called. . . . Hence, whether we will or no, we are compelled to admit that original sin, as it is in the posterity of Adam, is not truly sin, in the sense spoken of, for it is not a crime against law" (1953, 221; see also Locher 1965, 10–12).

Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609), the seventeenth-century Dutch reformer, rejected the Calvinist views of original sin and human will. Arminius modified the doctrines of original sin and grace in the direction of the Greek fathers and Semi-Pelagians, though he diverged from them in some respects. Arminians agreed that Adam's act resulted in physical and spiritual death but held that "there is no ground for . . . imputing Adam's sin to his posterity in the sense that God actually judged the posterity of Adam to be guilty of, and chargeable with, the same fault which Adam had committed. . . . God threatened punishment to Adam alone, and inflicted it upon Adam *alone*" (*Apologia pro Confessione Remonstrantium*, Cap. VII, in Schaff 1887, 3:508–9). Arminians viewed the Fall as a misfortune and not a fault. In particular, Adam and Eve's sin was not passed on to their descendants nor did it merit eternal reprobation so that God could justly damn the human race for inheriting an evil nature. The key argument adopted by Arminians was that, whatever consequences Adam's sin entailed, Christ has

since redeemed humankind, so "the doctrine must be held that the most benevolent God has provided for all a remedy for that general evil which was derived by us from Adam, free and gratuitous in his beloved Son Jesus Christ . . . so that the hurtful error of those [misguided theologians] is plainly apparent, who are accustomed to found upon that [original] sin the decree of absolute reprobation, invented by themselves" (*Confessio Remonstratium*, Cap. VII). Thus, as for the status of infants, Arminians held that "God neither will nor can justly destine to eternal torment any infants who die without actual and individual sins" (Arminius, *Opera: Delcaratio Sentimentii*, in Darby and Auburn 1956, 2:374). Further, Arminians maintained that even non-Christians were granted a common grace sufficient to save them.

Arminians adopted a two-stage theology of grace. In the first stage, God grants grace that is efficacious to restore persons to the pre-Fall ability to choose between good and evil. In other words, God restored all persons to free will at birth automatically. The popular nineteenth-century Arminian theologian, Nathan Banks, argued: "Those gentlemen who urge the doctrine of total depravity against the truth of [man's free will] seem to forget one very important trait in the Gospel system, viz., the atonement of Christ, and the benefits which universally flow from it to mankind, by which they are graciously restored to the power of action" (1815, vii).

The second stage of grace involved God's granting *sufficient grace* to all persons, who are then free to accept or reject it. The Arminian Declaration stated: "Sufficient grace for faith and conversion is allotted not only to those who believe and are converted, but also to those who do not actually believe and are not in fact converted . . . so that there is no decree of absolute reprobation" (*Confessio sive Declaratio*, Cap. XVII). This view of grace was clearly synergistic. Every person who hears the gospel receives a degree of grace sufficient for conversion. If a person is not converted, it must be for the want of some human agency to cooperate with the Divine Grace; and therefore the differences between the saved and the damned are ultimately referable to the individual human free will. The Calvinistic view, in contrast, was monergistic. For Calvinists, no person received grace that was sufficient for regeneration who did not also receive such divine influence as overcomes the hostile will. In this way, divine regeneration was not conditioned on any human agency, but due only to irresistible divine grace. For Calvinists, if a person is not saved it is because God did not will to save that person.

Arminians also taught that God's election of some to salvation is conditional—the election is conditioned on human faith foreseen by God. Arminius claimed that God's election "has its foundation in the

foreknowledge of God, by which he foreknew from all eternity those individuals who would believe through his *preventing grace* (i.e., grace which prevents persons from falling from grace), and through his subsequent grace would persevere . . . and he likewise foreknew those who would not believe and persevere" (*Opera: Declaratio Sentimentii*, 247). Later Arminians rejected even the notions of preventing grace and persevering grace on the ground that if persons were unable to reject Christ, they are not free. They argued that there is nothing praiseworthy in a person's enduring in Christ if he or she is not free to do otherwise.

The Calvinists were not slow in responding to the Arminian arguments. Jonathan Edwards, the great eighteenth-century Calvinist theologian, argued that if free will is understood as the ability to do what one pleases without external constraint, then "a universal determining Providence . . . is not at all repugnant to moral agency" (1754, 351). Free will could be squared even with divine coercion on this view because if a person desired to do what God coerced that person to desire, that person was still free! Such a view of free will does not require a choice between good and evil as the Arminians claimed. However, such a view seems quite inadequate and does not capture the ability to avoid sin, which the Arminians insisted on. Edwards acknowledged that Calvinism was losing ground to Arminian theology and sought to buttress the austere doctrine of the Reformers. Edwards deftly argued that he had defeated the entire catalogue of Arminian objections against Calvinism:

> It is easy to see, how the decision of most points in controversy, between *Calvinists* and *Arminians*, depends on the determination of . . . *Freedom of the Will requisite to moral agency*; and that by clearing and establishing the *Calvinistic* doctrine in this point, the chief [Arminian] arguments are obviated [including] . . . objections of *Arminians* against the *Calvinistic* doctrine of the *total depravity and corruption of man's nature*, whereby his heart is wholly under the power of sin, and he is utterly unable, without the interposition of sovereign grace, savingly to love God, believe in Christ, or do anything that is truly good and acceptable in God's sight. (*Freedom of the Will*, Pt. 4, Section 14 [emphasis in original])

Edwards unleashed two salvos against Arminians. He argued that the Arminian notion of free will conceived as indifference and self-determining power was incoherent. Arminians believed that the will could be free only if it was equally inclined or "indifferent" to good and evil. His second argument was that God's infallible foreknowledge rendered human acts necessary in precisely the same way the Calvinist notion of necessity of the will did; Arminians would therefore have to accept the Calvinist notion of free will as absence of external

coercion or else reject their own notion of God's foreknowledge. Recent reexaminations in the philosophy of religion have sustained Edwards' arguments for the incompatibility of foreknowledge and free will.[7] Yet the Arminians regarded the Calvinist notion of free will as inadequate—for how could a will that has no choice but to be evil truly be free? Arminians could not accept such an obviously inadequate notion of free will and Calvinists could not square a stronger notion of free will with grace.

CONCLUSION

The concept of grace is a rich and multifaceted notion arising out of the most profound of religious experiences. The apostle Paul adopted the term grace (*charis*) to describe this experience—being declared not guilty even when one is aware of profound imperfection. Grace is in essence an experience of acceptance by unconditional and unfathomable love from the being who knows us better even than we know ourselves. Grace is an undeserved gift. It is acceptance into God's covenant-love even before we have chosen to obey the covenant.

Grace also describes much more—it describes the decisive redemptive activity of God on our behalf and what we must do in response to God's offer of salvation. The debate over grace has clearly divided those who emphasize God's omnipotence and sovereignty at the expense of human freedom (such as Augustine, Luther, and Calvin) from those who emphasize human freedom and moral responsibility despite God's knowledge and power (such as Pelagius, Luis de Molina, and Arminius).

The system of salvation by grace alone promulgated by Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Luther, and modern fundamentalist Christians, even if not univocal and monolithic, has had tremendous appeal throughout Christian history. This system of grace expresses well the experiences of those who, like Augustine, feel that they are incapable of freely choosing to accept God on their own; rather, an inexplicable change

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[7] The argument for the incompatibility of foreknowledge and free will from the necessity of the past has been supported by Nelson Pike, in "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action" (1965, 27-46); by John Martin Fisher in "Freedom and Foreknowledge" (1983, 67-69), and "Ockamism" (1985, 80-100); and by William Hasker in "Foreknowledge and Necessity" (1985, 121-157).

The argument for the incoherence of freedom of indifference is discussed by Anthony Kenny in *The God of the Philosophers* (1979, 51-71) and in *Freewill and Responsibility* (1978, 30-33). I have tried to respond to arguments similar to those raised by Edwards by modifying both divine omniscience and the notion of human freedom. See "The Mormon Concept of God," DIALOGUE 17:2 (Summer 1984, 65-93).

of heart and movement of the human will seems to be controlled totally by God's mysterious good pleasure. Just as a baby undergoing birth, such persons do not contribute anything of their own to the labor of being "born again." Either God chooses them or they are lost. Either God accomplishes their salvation or they are damned. Converts like Augustine experienced salvation despite the opposition of their naturally evil will. Such persons feel as if they are the beneficiaries of God's relentless pursuit and irresistible grace which overcomes their obstinacy. Surely there is room in Mormonism for such experiences—so long as God is not made into an arbitrary tyrant in the process.

The theocentricity of this view is appealing; its simplicity and explanatory power are impressive. Every event in human history comes down to just one thing: God's will. Moreover, this position provides considerable comfort. The most trivial event is weighted with divine significance, for each event is an expression of the divine will. Also an advantage, the perils of contingency are eliminated in such a system. Augustine felt that salvation left up to humans even in the least degree would be in peril. If God's salvation depends in any way on us, how can we be certain that God's plan for us will be fulfilled? Any view of salvation which is premised on any exercise of free will admits a weak link in the chain of divine assistance—a chain which is sure to fail if we are left to our evil nature apart from God. The absolute assurance of salvation can be found only in a God who has assumed complete responsibility for the entire process of our salvation. Perhaps the question that "born again" Christians who ask, "Have you been saved?" actually mean us to consider is, "How can you be sure of your salvation if it depends in any way on you?"

Yet thinkers from Pelagius to Luis de Molina, from Erasmus to Arminius and Whitely, have been unsatisfied with a God who is able to save all persons but who chooses not to do so. They reject notions of grace which eviscerate any notion of free will toward salvation in the sense of freedom to do otherwise or to refrain in the circumstances. These persons were morally outraged by a God who would damn persons from all eternity whether by permission or specific divine decree and double predestination. Compounding the offense was the equally outrageous view that persons suffer from an evil nature not because of themselves, but as a result of forces outside their control. How can a loving Father damn persons for evil acts resulting from circumstances outside their control? Erasmus was quite correct to point out that the problem of sin is not with those reprobated from all eternity, but with God. The God of those who adopt such views is impaled on the problem of evil—an evil which God specifically created for his mysterious purposes.

But do those who reject the strong notion of divine predestination and salvation by grace alone have anything acceptable to put in its place? I think that they do. I prefer the Arminian notion that free will is not obliterated by God's grace; rather, free will is made possible only through Christ's gracious atonement. In this way, grace becomes the foundation for human free will and moral responsibility rather than the ultimate negation of any meaning to human choices. I like the notion of divine concurrence and cooperating grace suggested by Luis de Molina. God desires to save all persons and gives sufficient grace to all to accomplish their salvation—but whether God's loving offer of relationship will be accepted is ultimately up to human free response. I think this notion is particularly appropriate if God's grace is understood as an unconditional offer to enter into a loving relationship committed to the growth and happiness of those involved. It seems that any *genuine* relationship must be entered freely. Moreover, in what else could God's offer of grace consist if not in a loving relationship of mutual commitment to happiness of the other? This view of grace is more consonant with the ancient revelation that proclaimed God as love. I think that Molina's system of grace premised on middle knowledge is especially worthy of consideration—though I believe that it too is ultimately incompatible with genuine free will.

My heart lies with those who have seen God as committed inexorably to the salvation of all persons. I cannot worship a God who is able but chooses not to bring all persons into a loving and saving relationship. I cherish the view that sees humans as cooperating in salvation with God. My predilection is that there is much greater room in Mormon thought for a notion or notions of grace consistent with its commitment to human free will. Finally, my admiration, respect, and deep gratitude go to Aquinas as well as Molina, to Luther as well as Erasmus, in other words to all those who have attempted to explicate God's grace in a way faithful with their most profound religious experiences.

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