

Luther: Right or Wrong: An Ecumenical-Theological study of Luther's Major Work, The Bondage of the Will. Harry J. McSorley. New York: Newman Press, 1969.

Preface [by Heinrich Fries]

Two things to be avoided in ecumenical theology:

1. Polemics;
2. Glossing over differences.

The duty of being true to oneself is linked with the task of presenting Catholic belief more profoundly and precisely in such a way and in such a language that our separated brethren can also really understand it.

Part of this involves attention to the notion of a "hierarchy of truths" within Catholic doctrine, posited by Vatican II.

Ecumenical theology regards the factual situation of division as a scandal and a challenge.

Ecumenical theology tries to see not only the separating factors in the other confessions but also that which unites them and discovers in that process that that which is common is proportionately greater than that which separates: differences can thus be evaluated on the horizon of the elements which are held in common.

Ecumenical theology is a theology:

- Of understanding;
- Of origins and sources; and
- Of the whole.

The decisive elements of an ecumenical theology:

- The search for causes;
- The consideration of the total problem;
- The common origins;
- The sources; and
- The use of theological research as a cooperative venture in the discovery of truth.

Introduction

Many contemporary ecumenical problems were not central concerns of Luther. Rather, the central issue in Luther's mind was the doctrine of the freedom of the will. Luther asserts this in *De servo arbitrio* (1525), and Melancthon insists that all of Luther's theological views were essentially related to the question of free will.

This teaching is essentially related to Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone. Luther viewed Paul's teaching on justification/grace in Romans to be an assault on the doctrine of free will.

Luther's entire theological structure depends on his doctrine of unfree will.

McSorley identifies three broad categories on interpretation of *De servo arbitrio*:

1. Those who emphasize Luther's treatment of the biblical doctrine of bondage to sin, which allows for free will in "natural things;" these interpreters downplay Luther's contention that all things happen by absolute necessity.
2. Those who try to read certain modern philosophical and theological categories into the work.
3. Those who see the affirmation of universal necessity to have deterministic overtones which exclude any activity of free will and deprive faith of its decision-character.

The basic ecumenical problem posed by the work is this: Is Luther's doctrine of unfree will a doctrine that in the dimension of its deepest intention separates Catholics and Christians of the Reformation tradition?

McSorley seeks to engage in an attempt to understand Luther's intention and basic concern.

Given John XXIII's distinction between revealed truth and its formulation, the question arises as to the possibility of having a unity of faith and dogmatic truth without a uniformity of dogmatic formulations.

Granted this basic concern, the formulations themselves must be taken seriously for it was because of them that Luther was condemned by Leo X (*Exsurge Domine*).

In order to understand Luther's intention, the work must be viewed in historical perspective.

Thus, Erasmus's *De libero arbitrio* forms the immediate background.

Highly complex terminological difficulties must be grappled with. Thus, McSorley attempts a general clarification of concepts and an examination of the relevant biblical material, and then proceeds to sketch the development of the Catholic tradition of free will through Augustine up to the late Scholastic period in which Luther was formed.

An important question becomes: Was the theological formation which Luther received concerning the role of free will in man's salvation in conformity with the Catholic tradition?

Finally, examination of Luther's teaching itself indicates that it involves two distinct concepts of unfree will:

1. God's infallible foreknowledge imposes an absolute necessity on all things. This argument is based on speculative reasoning, without biblical support.

This teaching (with the exclusion of man's cooperation in saving faith) was not taken up in the Lutheran confessional statements.

2. Defense of the biblical truth that the sinner can in no way break through the bonds of guilt and condemnation by any effort of his own.

This biblical understanding is both Evangelical and Catholic.

PART ONE: THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

ONE: Preliminary Clarification of Concepts

Distinctions in the notion of freedom (M. Adler):

1. "natural": ability to decide for or against a course of action, to choose between alternatives;
2. "circumstantial": ability to realize one's desires or act as he wishes;
3. "acquired": freedom to live as one ought, to do the morally good.

A lack of conceptual clarity and an inadequate definition of terms by both Erasmus and Luther caused such confusion in their debate that true meeting of minds rarely took place.

TWO: The Biblical Understanding of Freedom and Bondage

The Bible recognizes all three types of freedom, but limits use of the words freedom/free to socio-political freedom (circumstantial) and to Christian freedom from law/sin/death/slavery (acquired).

1. Natural freedom is presupposed in Scripture even though never referred to as 'freedom.'

The flesh-spirit (*basar-ruah* / *sarx-pneuma*) structure is characteristic of biblical anthropology; and the heart (*leb-kardia*) is the seat of thought/understanding/decision/volition as well as affectivity and the physical life.

In this anthropological framework, there is no vocabulary of "free 'will'." The reality of natural freedom, however, is affirmed.

The words used to describe God's free action are also predicated of Man:

- *Eudokeo*:
 - o God's choice of good pleasure (Ps 49.14; Mt 3.17; Mat 17.5 Gal 1.15);
 - o Man's preference and choice (Jgs 17.11; Jgs 20.13; 1 Thes 3.1; Rm 15.26f).
- *Haireoma*:
 - o God's election of the Christian community (Phil 1.22; Heb 11.25);
 - o Man's preferential option between two possibilities (cf. TDNT).
- *Eklegomai*:
 - o Jesus's choice and God's election (Jn 6.70; Mk 13.20; AA 13.17; AA 15.7; 1 Cor 1.27f; Eph 1.4);

- o Human choice (Lk 10.42; Lk 14.7).
- *Bahar*:
 - o The election of Israel by Yahweh (Dt 7.6f; 10.15; 14.2);
 - o Psalmist choosing Lord's precepts (Ps 119.173).

Thus, as God's action of election is eminently free, this is a philological argument that man is able to will or not will, choose or not choose that which he in fact wills or chooses.

1 Cor 7.37 is the most direct Scriptural testimony to natural freedom. Cf. also Sir 15.14ff and Jer 21.8f.

Numerous biblical commands, threats, callings, prohibitions, invitations, and exhortations are testimony to the existence of natural freedom: if one is commanded/exhorted/invited to do something, the assumption is that he can at least will to do so.

Cf. Dt 30.19: Moses exhorts the Israelites to choose (*bahar-eklexai*) life/good instead of death/evil.

Cf. Mt 22.3: In the parable of the wedding feast, the clear assumption is that those who have been invited can accept or refuse the invitation.

The law presupposes the natural freedom of the will to obey or disobey.

In the Bible one simply finds the assumed fact of man's freedom to will or not will compliance with the law juxtaposed to the doctrine of man's helplessness without God. Scripture sometimes speaks as if man does all and sometimes as if God does all.

Likewise, the Bible teaches that there is a divine foreknowledge (*proginosko*, *prognosis*), providence (*pronoia*, *Pronoia*), and predestination (*progrizo*), but does not attempt to explain how these truths can be reconciled with man's free will.

What is clear is that the Bible never invokes these truths to deny that man has free will or to teach that he acts out of necessity.

There is a constant biblical assumption that man is responsible for his actions and that sin is to be attributed to man, not God.

Mt 23.37, e.g., points to the essence of sin, viz., opposition to the will of God arising from man's will. (Cf. also Gn 3 and Rm 5.)

Even after Adam's fall, the sins which men commit never lose their decision character.

Contra Babylonian/Zoroastrian/Marcionite theodicy, man's responsibility for sin – based on the control he has over his actions – is never questioned.

This remains true, despite the strong biblical emphasis on fallen man's inclination to sin. To say that man has a tendency to sin is not the same as to say that he sins out of an irresistible necessity. (Cf. Dubarle, 16-20; Schoonenberg, 16-20).

1 Cor 10.13: God permits no one to be tempted beyond his strength.

Biblical reference to (a) hardening of man's heart by God, must be read in the light of parallel texts of (b) man's hardening his own heart.

- a. Ex 7.13,22; 8.15,25; 9.27,34; 13.15; 1 Sam 6.6; Ps 94.8; Heb 3.7f, 15 ; 4.7 ; Prov 28.14; Zach 7.11ff.
- b. Ex 7.3; 9.12; 10.20,27; 11.10; 14.2,8; Dt 2.30; Is 63.7.

The Israelites were keenly aware of two things: (1) God is at work in all human events/actions; (2) man is responsible for his actions and he alone – not God – bears the guilt of sin.

The authors express God's omnipotence by saying that God hardens men's hearts; they recognize man's moral responsibility (thus, 'natural freedom') by saying that man hardens his own heart. Their approach is simply that of *juxtaposition*.

- 2. "Circumstantial freedom" is designated by the name "freedom" in the Bible (Ex 21.2; Dt 15.12; Jer 34.9,14,15,17; Ex 14; 20.2; Dt 5.6; Is 61.1).

This has, however, little relevance for the matter at hand.

- 3. "Acquired freedom:" Christian freedom is acquired by receiving it as a *gift* from God through Jesus Christ; it is a being freed, a liberation (cf. Rom 6.18,22; Gal 5.1).

One can be naturally/circumstantially free and yet not have the "freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8.21), if he does not know the truth revealed by Jesus Christ (Jn 8.32) and unless he is freed from sin by Jesus Christ (Jn 8.34,36).

One lacking circumstantial freedom can be free in Christ (1 Cor 7.22).

Christian freedom is found in those who live according to the law of the Spirit (Rm 8.2; 2 Cor 3.17); and the gift of the freedom-inspiring Spirit comes to the believer in baptism. Thus, it is through faith and baptism that we die to sin and are thereby freed from sin (Rm 6.2-6).

The key question is: *Does the faith in Christ which frees us from sin involve a free decision on the part of man?*

All Catholic theologians and most Protestant exegetes will respond affirmatively.

The decision of faith is fundamentally an act of obedience which in the NT (*hypakoe*) is a free act (cf. TDNT, 224f). Paul's expression – "yield" or "offer" yourselves (*paristanein*) – in Rm 6.13,16,19 makes it seem even more evident that will-decision is involved.

There are other biblical indications that man's salutary acts involve free decision on the part of man:

- The initial act of liberating faith (Jos24.15,22,24; Heb 11.24ff);
- Acts of loving service to God and neighbor (Ps 119.173; Sir 31.10b; Phil 1.22f).

Man truly makes a free decision, but this is not a “natural decision,” since it is not possible for men to make such a decision of faith simply in view of the fact that they are men. This free decision is itself a free gift of God. It is grace, not nature. Nevertheless, there is something which the graced decision of faith has in common with natural freedom: both involve a free decision by man.

But what does the Bible mean when it speaks of *slavery to sin*?

The essence of the biblical doctrine of human bondage to sin: Man is bound/enslaved to sin and he cannot free himself from this slavery. He is *not free* to leave this prison or to set aside his condition as a slave. This liberation takes place through faith in Jesus Christ and in no other way.

Paul personifies sin and speaks of it as an active power which dominates, enslaves, dwells in and imprisons the sinner (Rm 7.23); man lives in the “power of darkness” (Col 1.13) and the “power of Satan” (2 Tm 2.26).

Being born into slavery and imprisonment to sin, man cannot alter his condition unless he is “bought with a price” (1 Cor 6.20; 7.23) or freed from this slavery by a liberator/Redeemer, whose own life is the price of redemption (Mt 20.28; Jn 8.36; Gal 5.1; Tit 2.14; 1 Peter 1.18f).

Man’s slavery to sin is an inability to “act as one ought”, i.e., it is a lack of acquired freedom (and not of natural freedom).

The scriptural doctrine is the bondage of man, not the bondage of the will.

What does Scripture say about the actions of man while they are enslaved to sin?

One not yet liberated by the saving power of Christ’s death is a dead man because of his sins (Rm 6.16; Eph 2.1,5; Col 2.13; cf. Rm 11.15) and is only resurrected from this death and brought back to life by a gracious/loving God (Eph 2.4f).

Thus, one enjoying physical/biological life is said to be ‘dead’ in the fullest sense of the word.

In trying to understand whether a man can do anything good as long as he is still dead in his sins, it is essential to note Paul’s distinction between the *justice of God* (of faith) and the *justice of men* (of works of the law).

One who is a slave to sin can do something which is ‘in a certain sense’ good/righteous (Phil 3.6; Tit 3.5); but this personally acquired justice is not true justice which alone pleases God (Rm 8.8; Heb 11.6).

The justice/goodness that come through keeping the precepts of the Mosaic law or of the law written in the heart, cannot be justice/goodness in the full sense (cf. Phil 3.7f; Rm 4.2).

Even the slave to sin is capable of deciding for or against works of human justice, for or against an ethical virtue or good deed. In neither case, however,

according to the NT, is he any closer to liberation from sin or any better disposed to justification, for this liberation and the bestowal of *true* justice is a pure gift of God, not the result of any ethical excellence of purely human moral righteousness (Eph 2.8; Phil 2.12f; Jn 6.66; 8.36).

He retains the ability to make free decision (natural freedom), but he is powerless to will true justice and liberty.

Summary:

1. The Bible recognizes the three types of freedom.
2. Absolute necessitarianism has no biblical foundation.
3. The Bible recognizes socio-political slavery, and a spiritual slavery to sin.
4. Slavery to sin does not mean that man has lost the power of free choice-decision, but that man cannot free himself from his enslaved condition. Slavery to sin means that the enslaved man is not free to be or to become what he ought to be: a slave to God and the justice of God by the obedience of faith which alone makes him truly free.
5. Captivity to Satan does not remove man's responsibility for his sins. Man finds himself in the power of Satan and under the law of sin from birth without willing it; yet man's own sins are to be distinguished from his sinful condition of estrangement from God.
6. The legally righteous acts of the man still enslaved to sin are not pleasing to God.
7. The slave to sin is truly liberated only by faith in Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit who comes to him in baptism.
8. To posit any kind of necessitarianism that excludes natural freedom is seriously to misunderstand the biblical anthropology as well as the biblical doctrines of faith and justification.

THREE: Freedom of the Will in the Pre-Augustinian Fathers

In the early Fathers, the concept of "free will" was firmly emphasized and constantly defended.

Despite this emphasis, however, the concepts of grace and historic redemption through Christ were never fully absent.

The early Fathers were not fighting primarily against Jewish-Christian legalism and justification by works (as was Paul – especially in Romans and Galatians); their main efforts, rather, were directed against the more fundamental efforts concerning God, creation and sin that were being propagated, especially by the Gnostics. These opponents proposed that man is inexorably controlled by fate, and that evil is to identified with material substance. Thus, it is understandable that the patristic concern was to defend man's natural freedom.

Unmistakable throughout the pre-Augustinian period of doctrinal development is the patristic affirmation of the divine foreknowledge, providence and a predestination (however one understood its relationship to the foreseen merits of man), the necessity of grace for all salutary acts and the natural freedom of man's will, even after the Fall.

Contra Stoic determinism (and astrology) the Fathers taught a doctrine of providence/predestination that respected man's natural freedom.

The early Church had to struggle against pagan dualism to uphold monotheism and the holiness of God. To the fathers this meant that sin could not be attributed to any personal principle of evil coexisting with the good God, or to the material creation of a creator-God (Marcion). It meant further that man could not have been created naturally evil by the good God and that the good God was in no way responsible for sin. Sin had to originate from some change in man for which man himself was responsible, a change that he freely willed.

The patristic teaching on free will was an assertion of the justice and holiness of the one God, the recognition of the original goodness of his creation and a confession of the biblical faith in the coming judgment of our works by God.

FOUR: Free Will and the Unfree Will in Augustine

Augustine does use the term *servum arbitrium* once (in his controversy with the Pelagian Julian of Eclanum). But whatever terminological ambiguity there may be, it is clear that Augustine always held to the *natural freedom of the will even in fallen man*.

In the Pelagian controversy, however, Augustine *emphasized* the radical impotence of man's will apart from divine grace even to will to do something truly good. Thus, as a consequence of Adam's sin, the human race has lost its true liberty (acquired freedom) but never its natural freedom.

Augustine's teaching has nothing to do with universal determinism. Thus, he consistently opposed the Manichaean doctrine whereby evil was attributed to material nature rather than to the fallible will of man.

De libero arbitrio (388-395):

1. God is not the author of moral evil.
2. The first cause of evil is not nature, but the free will of man.
3. God gave man free will – not for sinning, but in order that he be able to do good and live justly. Without free will man cannot live justly.
4. If man lacked free will it would be unjust to punish/reward him.
5. Free will – as gift of God – is good, but can be put to bad use.
6. Sin – the turning of the will from God to creatures – happens voluntarily not by natural necessity (as the fall of a stone).
7. Sin is a defect, not something positive; it is not the work of God but is, rather, a voluntary defect caused by man's will.
8. If an action cannot be avoided there can be no sin.
9. God's foreknowledge of our sins does not mean that he causes them.
10. Fallen man does not have the free will to choose a truly just way of living.
11. One can speak of "sins" that result from ignorance/weakness, insofar as they result from original sin, which was caused by free will.
12. True liberty is the liberty of the blessed and of those who keep the eternal law.
13. One is never guilty of sin unless he is obliged to do or avoid something. But there can be no obligation unless we have free will and fully sufficient power of acting.

[Augustine never states flatly that non-Christians are lost. His position is rather: *If they are saved they are saved by the grace of Christ.*]

De diversis quaestionibus VII ad Simplicianum (396/7) :

It can be said that the early Augustine (pre 393) held a Semipelagian position that he was later to combat, viz., he attributed the beginning of salvation (*initium salutis [fidei]*) to man's free will.

Augustine later acknowledged this (*De praedestinatione sanctorum*, 4.8, 428/0) and pointed to the present work (*De div. quaes.*) as the locus where his change of opinion is expressed.

Augustine's thinking on the relationship between (a) man's merit/guilt and (b) the operation of grace within the doctrine of predestination remains "paradoxical" (G. Nygren).

McSorley comments that "the concept of created freedom itself brings us face to face with the mysterious relationship between creation and its creator. . . . (it) is not easy to see. . . how God, who creates and conserves in existence all finite being and action, can create some beings who are not moved solely by natural necessity of animal spontaneity, but who so resemble the creator that they are not only able to make free choices in relatively unimportant matters, but are also given the opportunity and the command to make the ultimate fundamental decision for or against the creator himself: the decision of saving faith or sinful unbelief."

Cf. K. Rahner: "In our case we must realize that the incomprehensible coexistence of God's absolute sovereignty with man's genuine freedom is only the most extreme instance of the incomprehensible coexistence of God's absolute being with the genuine being of creatures: the incomprehensibility *must* be permanent is God is to be God. . . . Utterances of God concerning himself and man (and likewise experiences) that seem to contradict each other are best left side by side as an expression of the plenitude of reality which man can never master." (*Theological Dictionary*, 197.)

Thus, there is a dialectical polarity between (a) predestination and grace, and (b) free will and human responsibility; any orthodox theology must uphold both truths.

Even in systematizations, if they are orthodox, the two truths will remain in dialectical juxtaposition.

De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum (412):

This is Augustine's first explicit argument against Pelagianism. He maintains that the Pelagians attach so much importance to man's free will that they deny that man needs divine help in order to keep from sinning.

Augustine presents three theses:

1. We do not need God's help in order to sin.
2. We cannot act justly or fulfill completely the commandment of justice unless we are aided by God (II.5.5).

3. He states that he does not want to defend grace in such a way that he seems to deny free will, nor does he want to assert free will in such a way that he would appear proud and ungrateful for the grace of God (II.18.28).

He cites 1 Cor 4.7 (which becomes an important text for him): "What was not given to you?" Thus, God has given us not only free will, but also the 'good will' which is able to perform truly good acts.

De spiritu littera (412):

1. Augustine insists that those who assert that the human will can progress toward justice without God's aid are to be vigorously opposed (2.4).
2. He insists on the need for a divine assistance above and beyond free will and the revealed doctrine of how man ought to live (3.5).
3. That the way of truth might be loved, the charity of God is poured forth into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (3.5).
4. When the Holy Spirit does not help by inspiring good desires in us in place of evil ones, then the law increases evil desires in us by its prohibitions (3.6).
5. Without free will there can be neither good nor bad living (5.7).
6. We shall be judged according as we have used our free will for good or evil (33.58).
7. Grace does not make free will void, but establishes it (30.52).
8. There is no reason for boasting about free will either before or after being liberated from sin (30.52).
9. Rm 3.20-24 means that we are not justified by the law nor by our own will, but freely by grace. But this does not mean that we are justified without our free will (9.15).
10. Concerning faith: even though the very will to believe is given by God to man, the consent-to/dissent-from God's call to faith is an act of one's own will (34.60).

De natura et gratia (415):

1. The nature of man after Adam's fall requires a doctor. Augustine seeks to defend grace not 'against' nature, but as the liberator of nature (3.3).
2. He insists that he is not taking away man's free will when he preaches grace; he simply wishes to destroy any pride that would arise from believing the power of one's own will to be sufficient for achieving justice (32.36).
3. From the law we learn what we are to do in easy matters and what we should ask for in difficult matters (69.83, 42.50).

De gestis Pelagii (417) and De gratia Christi (418):

Augustine endorses the condemnation by the Synod of Diospolis of the proposition: "There is no free will if the help of God is necessary; for everyone finds in his own will the power to do or not do something."

Yet he also expresses awareness of the difficulty of retaining the dialectic of grace and free will. (Cf. *De gratia Christi* 1.47, 52).

Contra duas Epistolas Pelagianorum (420):

Augustine asserts that "freedom" was lost by Adam's sin, but not free will.

“No one can have a just will unless he has received – without any preceding merits – true, that is, gratuitous grace from above” (1.3,6f).

As Augustine’s thought developed in his controversy with the Pelagians, he more and more emphasized the lack of true freedom in sinners.

He speaks of the “captive free will” becoming “liberated free will” only when it is divinely aided/liberated.

He used progressively more radical language to indicate the powerlessness of the *liberum arbitrium* to will that which is truly good and just: *servum arbitrium*.

But for Augustine, this does not imply a loss of the natural freedom to choose between alternatives. It means that a sinner cannot choose what is truly good/just.

Thus: sinful man retains the ‘freedom’ to sin with his own will.

De gratia et libero arbitrio (427/7):

Because of Augustine’s strong insistence on the powerlessness of the sinner’s will and because of his lack of consistent terminology, his teaching was easily misunderstood; late in life, Augustine wrote this work to ‘set the record straight.’ He insists that an ‘either-or’ solution is erroneous (1.1).

Augustine asserts that the reality of free will is clearly attested in Scripture (2.2-4). But he also cites the equally clear scriptural doctrine of the necessity of God’s grace for all good living/action (4.6).

Augustine agrees with Pelagius that the free will is taught by many passages of Scripture, but he disagrees absolutely with Pelagius that the free will is sufficient for truly good living; rather, the grace of God must precede and accompany the good action of the free will.

Augustine’s unyielding retention of both poles of the biblical dialectic is undoubtedly one of the main reasons why the Church has recognized him as her pre-eminent “doctor of grace.”

Augustine proposes (4.7-8) monastic continence as an example: it is a gift (Mt 19.11), and it is impossible to follow this counsel without grace; yet Paul speaks of continence as a matter of free will (1 Tm 5.22; 1 Cor 7.37).

Two types of biblical texts are constantly cited by Augustine: those showing free will and those showing the need for helping grace.

Augustine maintains that the Pelagian concept of merit is erroneous not because it teaches that man merits, but because it forgets that man’s merits themselves are gifts of God.

Jn 15.5: “Cut off from me you can do nothing.”

Concerning Phil 2.13, Augustine insists that one must not think that free will is taken away because God is said to work in us both to will and to accomplish. Otherwise, Paul could not have said in the previous verse: “Work for your salvation in fear and trembling.” (9.21).

Points from *De gratia et libero arbitrio* of relevance to a study of Luther:

1. Even though the law provides “knowledge of sin” (Rm 3.20) it is good; this knowledge is only disastrous if grace does not aid man to avoid the sin which he knows (10.22).
2. We always have free will, but it is not always good (15.31).
3. Augustine cites two types of biblical texts to affirm the paradox of God’s commands and gifts: one commanding man to do something, the other saying that God will give the very thing commanded. (Cf. Ez 18.31a and Rm 4.5; Ex 18.31b and 36.26.)
4. God does not command the impossible. But Augustine adds, “[God] commands some things which we are unable to do so that we may know what we ought to ask from him” (156.32).
5. Augustine makes a famous distinction between two moments/types of grace: *Gratia operans* through which the good will itself is given (Phil 2.13), and *Gratia cooperans* through which God cooperates with our free will in the actual performance of the good act (Rm 8.28). The experiential basis for this distinction is that one can want to fulfill a command of God (good will), yet not be able.
6. Augustine stresses here the positive working of God in hardening the hearts of men (21.42). Yet he also insists that Pharaoh hardened his heart by his own free will (23.45).

Barth: “The entire action is the action of man. And the entire action of man is the action of God.”

The essence of Semi-Pelagianism was the idea that it belongs to the natural power of the free will to initiate belief and salvation, to accept the gift of faith once it was offered by God.

De praedestinatione sanctorum and *De dono perseverantiae* (428/9):

Concerning Jn 15.16, Augustine contends that the Apostles did not choose Christ in order that he might choose them, but he chose them in order that they might choose him.

A disputed point in interpreting Augustine is whether his doctrine of all-powerful, efficacious grace and predestination in fact leave any room for natural/psychological freedom of the will.

It must be remembered that Augustine’s intention was to uphold the dialectic of grace and free will in the face of Pelagian and Manichaean opponents. The systematic concerns of a later scholasticism were not his.

Summary:

1. Augustine recognized two types of freedom relevant to this study: (i) the natural freedom to act or not to act, the ability to choose; and (ii) the (acquired) freedom of those who have been liberated from the bondage of sin by the grace of God.
2. God’s foreknowledge does not exclude man’s free will.
3. The face of personal sin and the biblical commands/prohibitions are seen by Augustine as the chief biblical arguments for *liberum arbitrium*.
4. Although pre-Fall Adam was free also to will and to do that which is truly good, he and his descendants have lost this freedom as a result of original sin.
5. The loss of the Adamic freedom does not mean the *liberum arbitrium* has been lost, that that *liberum arbitrium* cannot will to do that which is truly good.

6. Even though Augustine once writes of *servum arbitrium*, the whole context of his writings makes clear his position that fallen man has free will (and can choose even ethically good acts), but that he is not free to do that which is truly good, i.e., a good which has value for salvation, unless he is liberated by faith in Christ.
7. God's grace takes the initiative in preparing the will of man for faith and justification, but never excludes the operation of free will.
8. Justification involves a *consensus* by man's will.
9. Whereas Scripture emphasizes that the unjustified *man* is a slave to sin/Satan, Augustine – in his fight against the Pelagian exaggeration of free will – says that the will itself is in captivity to sin.
10. Augustine means by *servum arbitrium* nothing more than that the free will of fallen man is a slave to sin and can be liberated from this condition of bondage only by the grace of God; it is a doctrine of grace *and* free will.

FIVE: Early Conciliar and Papal Teaching of Free Will and Unfree Will

In the central doctrines of faith concerning grace and free will, Augustine is the Church's authentic witness against Pelagianism and Manichaeism. But in the more subtle questions concerning the mode of action of grace on the free will, the precise explanation of predestination, etc., the Church has left the field open to development by later theologians.

(1) Conciliar Decision During Augustine's lifetime:

The main lines of Augustine's doctrine on grace and free will are reflected in the various conciliar pronouncements of his time (Synod of Jerusalem, 415; provincial council of Diospolis, 415; Council of Carthage, 418).

Canon 5 of Carthage states clearly that the divine commands are addressed to man's free will, but they cannot be fulfilled unless the grace of God is given.

Shortly after Augustine's death, the Council of Ephesus (431) condemned the thought of Caelestius, the most outspoken of Pelagius' early colleagues.

(2) The *Indiculus de gratia Dei* (collection of anti-Pelagian theses):

- i. Presents itself as pronouncements of the See of Peter and of the African councils.
- ii. Cites Innocent I as affirming the Augustinian concept of the bondage of the will, asserting that free will apart from grace cannot liberate man from the misery of his fallen condition.
- iii. God's assistance is necessary for persevering in the good life even for the baptized.
- iv. No one uses his free will well except through Christ.
- v. No one can please God except by means of that which God himself has given.
- vi. "Through God we can do good; without him we can do nothing."
- vii. Reaffirmation of the canons of Carthage.
- viii. Summary of preceding chapters.

An argument *lex orandi, lex credendi* is proposed: the Church prays (e.g., Good Friday liturgy) for infidels/idolators/Jews/*lapsi*, asking God to move their hearts to conversion.

(3) The Condemnation of *Predestinarianism* in the Fifth Century:

The Council of Arles (473/5) condemned the following propositions (which Lucidus, their proponent, retracted): (i) after the fall of Adam free will was totally extinct; (ii) Christ did not die for all men; (iii) those who are lost are lost by God's will.

(4) The Condemnation of Semipelagianism at the 2nd Council of Orange:

Bishop Faustus was commissioned at Arles to write the indictments of the "exaggerated Augustinianism" (McSorley) of Lucidus; in his defense of free will, however, he fell into a kind of 'synergism' that was quite foreign to the Augustinian concept of cooperation which accorded a clear sovereignty/primacy to the action of grace. Fulgentius (a devoted follower of Augustine) attacked Faustus' teaching, but it kept recurring – especially in Gaul. Thus, Semipelagianism came to be officially condemned at the Second Council of Orange (529). The conciliar canons affirm the following:

- i. It is contrary to Scripture to say that "liberty of the soul" remains intact after Adam's sin.
- ii. Our very desire to be cleansed from sin comes from God.
- iii. The very beginning of faith is a gift of God.
- iv. Grace is necessary for every salutary act.
- v. The *liberum arbitrium* of Adam's descendants is wounded/weakened/diminished, but its existence is not denied.
- vi. God and man cooperate in good works. For as often as we do good, God acts in us and with us in order that we might act.
- vii. A reward is due to good works if they are performed; but grace, to which we have no claim, precedes these works in order that they might be performed.
- viii. Man of himself has nothing but sin and error.

A conciliar profession of faith affirms the following:

- i. Post-lapsarian man's *liberum arbitrium* has been so weakened that no one can ever love God except by grace.
- ii. The faith of even the saints was bestowed through grace.
- iii. All baptized persons, if they wish to labor faithfully can and ought, with the aid and cooperation of Christ, to do those things which pertain to salvation.
- iv. They are anathema who believe that some are predestined to evil by God's power.
- v. Prior to all merit on our part, God himself inspires in us both faith and love for him.

Until the eighth century, the decrees of Orange enjoyed considerable authority; but theologians from the tenth to the middle of the sixteenth century seem to have been completely unaware of their existence. Only at Trent were they recovered and reaffirmed.

(5) The Condemnation of Predestinationism in the Ninth Century:

The exact nature of the opinions held by Gottschalk of Orbais and others is not clear; further, the formulations of provincial councils were obscure; finally, the discussion departed from biblical/Augustinian categories with the neo-Platonism of John Scotus Eriugena. Yet the following affirmations did clearly result:

- i. God wills all men without exception to be saved, even though all in fact are not saved.

- ii. That certain persons are saved is a gift of him who saves; that some are lost is the fault of those who are lost.
- iii. God's foreknowledge and predestination impose on man no necessity of doing evil in such a way that he could do nothing else than he is.
- iv. There is a predestination of some to eternal life through mercy and grace.
- v. God's foreknowledge of sin is the basis of predestination of the wicked to damnation.
- vi. Free will is weakened by the sin of Adam but is restored and healed by the grace of the Lord Jesus in his faithful.

(Semi-)Pelagianism or Predestinarianism result when the dialectical tension of the mysterious relationship between the all-embracing activity of God and the free will of the creature is destroyed.

(6) The Defense of Grace and Free Will in the Magisterial Decisions of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries:

Pope Leo IX (1053): "I believe that God predestines only good things, but that he has foreseen both good things and bad. I believe and profess that the grace of God precedes (*praevenire*) and follows man, in such a way, however, that I do not deny that a rational creature has free will."

Peter Abelard (1079-1142) posited a number of propositions which were condemned as Semipelagian; he retracted them before his death.

(7) The "lex orandi":

Prayers from the *Missale Romanum* teach:

- i. That the beginning of conversion and of good will as well as the perseverance in the Christian life is to be attributed to the grace of Christ;
- ii. Man's powerlessness and inability to do good apart from God's help;
- iii. That grace works internally by illuminating our minds, exciting our hearts/wills and directing our actions;
- iv. That it is God who converts and liberates us from bondage to sin and to Satan.

SIX: Free Will and Bondage to Sin in Early Scholasticism and Thomas Aquinas

I. From Augustine to Bonaventure:

Anselm sought a definition of "free will" applicable (analogically) to God and man; free will is the power of preserving the rectitude of the will. This power was natural to Adam, and was not lost in the fall; however, no created power is sufficient to act by itself. All of man's powers must be 'actualized' ultimately and immediately either by God's general concursus or by his special concursus (grace).

Thus, neither grace alone nor free will alone effect the salvation of man, but both do it together, even though primacy belongs to grace, which precedes and follows the action of the free will.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1050-1153) makes the important clarification that grace and free will are not related as partial causes, but as total causes of the act of justification, each on its own proper plane.

Natural freedom enables us to will, but not to will what is good; it is grace alone that gives us good will.

Peter Lombard (1095-1160) summarized the Augustinian tradition and provided clear terminology for the various kinds of freedom (*Sentences* 25):

- a. Free will is always free in every person; however, it is not free in the same way in good persons and bad. It is more free in good men, where it has been liberated.
- b. Unless the free will is liberated and aided by grace it cannot do good.
- c. Freedom from sin and misery comes through grace; freedom from necessity comes from nature.

Bonaventure (1217-1274) also teaches that will is free, but not always good. He held that external necessity is incompatible with free will. However, he held that will is not called 'free' because it is able to will the opposite of what it actually wills, but because it desires everything that it wills according to its own command; thus, in the act of willing it moves itself and masters itself.

II. Thomas Aquinas:

A. Natural Freedom

Though he uses various terms for it, Thomas posits the power of the will to choose between objects which are related as means to an end; this freedom belongs to all men and is not lost even by Adam's fall.

Thomas insists that only when acts proceed from deliberate willing are they properly human acts.

Having apprehended the end, and deliberating on the end and the means proportionate to it, the free person can either be moved toward the end or not moved toward it – according as he chooses.

Thomas does not teach that the will is free in every respect. E.g., man's ultimate end (beatitude) is not subject to man's free choice; the will naturally/necessarily tends toward beatitude.

Thomas cites Augustine to the effect that the will necessarily wills beatitude and that this necessity neither excludes the liberty of the will nor prevents this not-willing from being voluntary.

1. Free will, Necessity and God's Foreknowledge:

Thomas insists that while God knows all futures this does not prevent some things from happening contingently: *"It cannot be concluded from God's foreknowledge that our acts are performed out of absolute necessity, which is called necessity of the thing consequent, but out of conditional necessity, which is called necessity of consequence..."*

- i. For Thomas, the contingent is that which is not necessary or is subject to free will.
- ii. Thomas explicitly insists that man can resist God's grace (*Quodl.* I, p. 4, a. 2, ad 2).
- iii. "The effects are foreseen by God, as they are freely produced by us." (SCG III, ch. 94, par. 15).

2. Free Will, Necessity, and God's Will:

- a. God does not will by absolute necessity whatever he wills (I, 1. 19, a. 3).
- b. God has *liberum arbitrium* concerning the things other than his own goodness (I, q. 19, 1. 10).
- c. God's will is always fulfilled (I, q. 19, a. 3 and a. 7).
- d. God's will is not mutable; however, his immutable will wills mutability in creatures (I, q. 19, a.7, ad 3).
- e. God's immutable will does not impose absolute necessity on all the things he wills. Since his will is most powerful, it not only follows that those things happen which God wills to happen, but that they happen in the way in which he wills them to happen, i.e., either necessarily or contingently/freely (I, p. 19, a. 8c).

3. Free Will, Necessity and Divine Providence: "That takes place infallibly and necessarily which divine providence disposes to take place infallibly and necessarily. And that happens contingently which divine providence ordains to happen contingently." (I, q. 22, a. 4c, ad 1).

4. Free Will, Necessity and Predestination:

Thomas defines predestination as the leading of rational creatures to that goal – eternal life – which exceeds the proportion and power of their created natures (I, q. 23, a. 1).

Because God knows and wills that someone attain such a goal, predestination is certain. But because God wills that he be directed to such a goal according to free will, this certitude does

not impose necessity on the one predestined" (*Quodl.* XI, q. 3, a. un).

God predestines men to salvation solely because of his merciful goodness, by grace alone, and not because of any good merits, such as the good use of grace, which he foresees in the creature (I, q. 23, a. 5c, and ad 1).

5. Free Will, Necessity and Reprobation:

Thomas understands reprobation to mean that God permits some men to fail to reach eternal life (I, q. 23, a. 3).

He explicitly denies that there is a parallel in the causality involved in reprobation and predestination.

Positive reprobation is the actual damnation imposed as punishment for the sin freely committed. God indeed is the cause of the punishment of eternal damnation, but he is in no way the cause of the sin for which the punishment is justly imposed.

6. The Created Free Will: Totally Dependent on God for Existence and Operation.

The free will is the cause of its own motion, but it is not the *first* cause. God is the cause of the very movements of the will (I-II, q. 9, a. 6).

This is the paradox of the dependence of created freedom on uncreated freedom.

B. Acquired Freedom

Thomas interprets Augustine to the effect that "by sinning man is said to have lost his *liberum arbitrium* not in the sense of natural freedom from coercion but in the sense of freedom from guilt and from misery" (I, q. 83, a. 2, ad 3).

I.e., even sinful man has natural liberty, but this is not true freedom (from sin and unhappiness). Thomas will even refer to man's "perverse freedom" (*In Joann.*, Cap. 8, lect. 4, n. 1209).

1. Slavery-to-Sin:

- a. Wherever the sinner goes, he has sin within him and thus cannot flee from his slavery (*In Joann.*, Cap. 8, lect. 4, n. 1204).
- b. The sinner is truly a slave because a slave does not act according to his own principle of activity, i.e., according to his own free will, but according to the will of another. The free man, on the other hand, acts of himself and is not acted upon or driven by another. (*In Rom.*, cap. 7, lect. 3, n. 569).
- c. The slave to sin is subject to the devil (III, q. 48, aa. 2 and 5).
- d. He is inclined always toward further sins (*De Ver.*, q. 24, a. 1, ad 7).

- e. He has no natural power to free himself from the sin to which he has subjected himself (I-II, q. 24, a. 1, ad 7).
- f. By his own natural powers, without the aid of grace, the slave-to-sin is unable: (a) to avoid sin; (b) to fulfill all the precepts of the natural law; (c) to love God above all things even with a natural love; or (d) to do anything that is perfectly good.
- g. The slave-to-sin, by his own natural powers, without the help of grace, can in no way dispose or prepare himself for liberation from sin (justification).

For Thomas, the existence of the free will and the powers of free will are two different matters.

Thomas recognizes that God commands some things that are impossible for man's purely natural powers, without the aid of grace (II-II, q. 2, a. 5, ad 1; I-II, q. 109, a. 4, ad 2, and a. *, ad 2).

The necessity of grace does not mean that free will is excluded, nor does the fact that free will is involved in man's response to the commandments imply that the will is sufficient without grace.

[There is no question that Thomas had a greater interest than Augustine in speculating on the ability of man, both in the state of integral and corrupt nature, to perform good acts proportionate to his nature (I-II, q. 109, aa. 2ff).]

Thomas did clearly assert that the "beginning of salvation" comes from God (I-II, q. 114, a. 5, ad 1).

In the axiom – "God does not deny grace to one who does what is in him" (*faciendi quod in se est*) – this is understood to mean 'to do what one is able to do when aroused and moved by grace.' (Cf. especially *In Rom.*, cap. 10, lect. 3, n. 849; also I-II, q. 109, a.6, *sed contra*; *In Hebr.*, cap. 12, lect. 3, nn. 688f).

[There was actually no controversy at Trent about the belief that the beginning of justification takes place by the prevenient grace of God through Jesus Christ, regardless of whether one held that the preparation initiated by grace could be considered *de congruo*.]

2. Christian Freedom and Free Will:

Christian freedom is a gift of Christ the Liberator, not a freedom which we naturally possess or attain by any natural efforts of our own.

Negatively: Christian freedom is *from* sin, death, error, and the law (i.e., from fulfilling the law out of compulsion, shame or fear of punishment).

Positively: Christian freedom is freedom *for* fulfilling the evangelical law of the Spirit, which not only teaches us what is to be done, but also helps us to fulfill it. It is the Holy Spirit himself, dwelling in us, who inclines us to right action so that we freely and lovingly serve God.

But Thomas is convinced that man's free will is active even when he is acted upon or led by the Holy Spirit, who causes the very motion of the free will within man.

It is always possible for the Christian man to abuse his Christian freedom by a misuse of free will, i.e., by sinning.

SEVEN: Free Will, Unfree Will and Neo-Semipelagianism in Late Scholasticism

I. Preliminary Observations on Late Scholasticism:

There are extremely diverse tendencies in this period, and generalizations tend to be highly misleading.

F. Clark contends that there were at least four 'schools' of Nominalism. In addition, he sees the following schools/movements: Thomism, Scotism, Augustinianism, Albertism, medieval mysticism, and a group of influential theologians not committed to any one school.

Grisar distinguishes a positive and negative influence of Nominalism on Luther, but it is difficult to discern what positive influence there may have been.

What Luther most centrally reacted *against* was the Ockham-Biel doctrine that fallen man, by his natural powers of reason and free will, without the aid of any divine help other than God's general concursus, can prepare or dispose himself for justification. By doing what he is capable of doing by his own natural, fallen powers, without any special preparation of will or illumination of mind by the Holy Spirit, a sinner can merit the grace of justification by a *meritus de congruo*.

In Luther's eyes, it was this teaching that was the element in the Catholic Church of his time which was most contrary to the Gospel.

McSorley argues that a lack of vigilance by the Church's teaching authority concerning the sound preaching and teaching of the doctrine that we are "justified freely by grace" was the greatest abuse in late medieval Catholicism.

II. Neo-Semipelagianism in Late Scholasticism:

A. Anti-Pelagian Protests in Late Scholasticism:

1. Thomas Bradwardine (d. 1349):

Bradwardine protested opinions which he heard while a student at Oxford (where Ockham taught). The central opinion to which he objected was that "men fittingly (*de congruo*) merit the grace of God by their powers; but they do not merit grace strictly (*de condigno*)." This implied that fallen man is *naturally able* (without the gift of grace) to initiate the event that results in justifying faith and grace.

There is considerable uncertainty as to Bradwardine's position on predestination. He posits an "antecedent natural necessity" but what he meant is unclear. McSorley

argues that he simply rejected a notion of contingency as “chance, fate or fortune, apart from God’s providential direction.”

2. Gregory of Rimini (d. 1358):

Gregory contends that “many moderns” held that by naturally good acts a sinner can merit the first grace *de congruo*. Gregory rejects this categorically.

Gregory affirms the reality of *liberum arbitrium*, but holds it to be powerless without God’s grace to do anything truly good.

He held that the ultimate basis of election/reprobation is to be found solely in the free will of God.

B. Neo-Semipelagianism in William of Ockham and Gabriel Biel:

Biel was the most important German (Tübingen) theologian on the eve of the Reformation; Luther had studied his writings.

Biel held that man’s free will – unaided by grace – takes the first step toward justification.

Summary of Biel’s teaching:

1. Fallen man is said to ‘do what is in himself’ when he ceases to consent to sin, and, on the basis of his natural knowledge of God’s existence, moves toward God or seeks refuge in him. This good movement toward God is the work of fallen man’s free will unaided by special grace.
2. When a fallen man thus does what is in himself, he merits the grace of forgiveness and justification *de congruo*.
3. God does not give his grace unless the sinner does what is in himself.
4. We know that this is God’s plan of salvation because he has revealed it to us (e.g., Zach 1.3; Jas 4.8; Rev 3.20).
5. The sinner merits the first grace *de congruo* and not *de condigno* since there is no debt in justice; there can be no such debt because the sinner lacks the necessary dignity. It is purely because of God’s liberality that man is permitted to merit the first grace.
6. Because God in his liberality has so decreed to reward the efforts of the sinner with grace when the sinner does what he can and because God’s decrees are immutable, it is proper to say that the grace which the sinner merits *de congruo* is conferred necessarily, by a necessity of immutability.
7. Although it is through the natural power of man’s free will that grace is merited *de congruo*, the “general influence of God” is always presupposed.

McSorley concludes confidently that Biel held a Semipelagian position, in that he allowed a positive disposition toward justification without the aid of grace: fallen man can elicit a good movement toward God by the power of free will.

McSorley (*contra* Oberman) also insists that Biel’s teaching is incompatible with the teaching of Trent.

TRENT (*contra* Biel):

1. The beginning (exordium) of justification is from God's prevenient grace inspiring and awakening him.
2. Man is called by God without reference to any of his merits.
3. The sinner is disposed for justification by grace which arouses and aids him, and not by his own natural powers.

The biblical evidence cited by Biel for his position is essentially that used by the Semipelagians: both exaggerate one pole of the biblical dialectic.

Cf. Thomas, e.g., who also cites Zach 1.3 as demonstration of free will, but also cites Jer 31.18 and Lam 5.21 to show that the free will cannot turn to God unless God turns man's will to himself (I-II, q. 109, a. 6c, obj. 1 and ad 1; cf. also SCG III, 149; and I-II, q. 112, a. 3).

Other biblical texts frequently cited by Augustine and Thomas to show that God takes the initiative in saving us include: Prv 8.35; Pss 79.8; 84.5-7, and Jn 6.65.

For Biel, it is not the Holy Spirit or prevenient grace which illumines the mind and moves the will, but knowledge itself. Thus, natural knowledge about God is sufficient for the unbeliever to begin the process of his conversion.

He also holds that if the sinner is to merit grace *de congruo*, it is impossible that he be moved infallibly/immutably by God's grace or even by God's general influence. He asserts that God's omnipotence does not extend to moving man's will by a necessity of immutability/infallibility – a conclusion foreign to Augustine and Thomas (as well as to Luther).

Lack of awareness of the condemnation of Semipelagianism at the Second Council of Orange is an important element in the emergence in late scholasticism (Bouillard).

Bouillard also contends that it was Thomas' discovery of the late works of Augustine that caused a marked difference of expression between Thomas' early (*Sentences*' commentary) and later (SCG, ST) statements on the necessity of grace in the preparation for justification.

McSorley contends that the Neo-Semipelagian tendencies of Ockham and Biel were the principal negative influences of late scholasticism on Luther. He also argues that it has not been demonstrated that this tendency was dominant in Catholic theology at the turn of the sixteenth century; it certainly was not supported by the authoritative doctrinal pronouncements of the Church.

EIGHT: Early Reaction: From *Liberum arbitrium* to *Servum arbitrium*

- I. The Neo-Semipelagian Understanding of Free Will in Luther, the Commentator on the *Sentences* and Expositor of the Psalms:
 - A. Luther's *Marginal Notes* in the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (1509-1910):

At this point, Luther is clearly influenced by Ockham-Biel; however, he also criticizes aspects of their thought.

He holds to the natural freedom of the will, to concept of *meritum de congruo*, and also that even the man who is a slave of sin naturally wills the good insofar as he has a will, but not insofar as it is vitiated.

B. *Dictata super Psalterium* (1513-1515):

In lecturing on Psalm 113, Luther asserts that man can “prepare himself for grace *de congruo*.” Thus, even though he was certainly moving to a new viewpoint, he was not yet able to see all the consequences of this change.

II. Luther's Break with Neo-Semipelagianism in the *Marginal Notes* to Gabriel Biel's *Collectorium*, the *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans*, and the *Disputationes*.

A. *Marginal Notes* to Gabriel Biel (1515):

In Luther's comments, it is obvious that he is rejecting Biel's position on the natural power of the will to initiate the response of faith; Luther is 'returning' to the tradition according to which fallen man's nature is corrupted, enslaved, and prone to evil until it is healed and liberated by grace.

B. *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans* (1515-1516):

1. Luther energetically denounces Biel's doctrine of 'doing what is in one,' and maintains that nearly the whole Church has fallen into this error.

A central point is his insistence that no naturally good acts/virtues have any value for salvation.

In trying to understand the intensity of Luther's campaign against justification by works, it is important to recall that this amounts to a campaign against his own previous thinking.

2. For the first time, Luther explicitly speaks of *servum arbitrium*. In citing this phrase from Augustine, Luther's main concern is to emphasize that the sinner is captive to his sins, i.e., not able to choose what is truly good. It is by grace alone that we are made free in the proper sense, i.e., for salvation. But there is no hint here of any determinism which excludes man's natural freedom: a sinner sins willingly.
3. Luther does depart from the scholastic understanding of “necessity” and “contingency,” which introduces unclarity/confusion into this thought.

Failing to use the scholastic distinction between absolute and contingent necessity, Luther concludes that the elect are not saved contingently, but absolutely. He thus departs from the manner in which the scholastic tradition had been able to posit a necessity which does not exclude free will; Luther, rather, sees an opposition between (a) God's certain, predestining will, and (b) man's works and free will.

Thomas' thinking is more subtle/paradoxical than Luther's, but at the same time does greater justice to the divine-human dialectic than does Luther's either/or.

McSorley contends that Luther failed to understand the nature of the scholastic distinction between necessity of 'thing consequent' and 'necessity of consequence.'

Luther, McSorley argues, is combating a concept of free will which is not found in Augustine or Aquinas, a free will which is removed from God's providential direction.

Because Luther rejects the distinction he is not only unable to say that salvation involves a free decision by man, but he also makes us wonder if he is really consistent in holding that man has free will in mundane affairs.

The scholastic distinction does not explain the mystery of the relation between divine and human activity. Rather, it enables us to state the mystery correctly and to retain it by affirming both God's transcendent, unfailing working and man's free will.

Luther seems to be reacting against his own previous semipelagian position; in order to destroy the error he moves toward a complete denial of the role of free will in salvation.

4. But in his comment on Rom 9.16, Luther still asserts that free will – when empowered by God's grace – does take part in the work of salvation.
5. Luther emphasizes that sin paralyzes the human will in such a way that, even though man does outwardly what the law commands, there is no cheerful and spontaneous quality to this fulfillment.
6. Luther speaks of 'circumstantial' and 'acquired' freedom, but not 'natural' freedom.
7. Luther views man's role in justification as passive: "there is no action on our part, but only a keeping still."

But the precise meaning of "passivity" is not clear here, and it cannot certainly be held to be inconsistent with, e.g., Thomas and Trent.

C. The Disputation Theses for Bartholmaus Bernhardi (September, 1516):

1. Apart from grace man can never prepare himself for grace.
2. God only punishes the person who deserves it, but he shows mercy only to the person who is undeserving.
3. The will of man without grace is not free; it is a slave; but it is not so unwillingly.
4. When a man 'does what he is able to do,' he sins.

D. Theses for Franz Gunther (September 4, 1517); Luther is reacting against Biel's theology:

1. Luther insists on the total inability of the unjustified man to will or do anything but evil; thus, there can be no disposition for grace by man's own unaided efforts.
2. He posits the scholastic distinction between *necessitas consequentiae* and *necessitas consequentis* as empty.

3. Luther asserts that one joins the Pelagians if he says of such texts as Zach 1.3; Jas 4.8; Lk 11.9; Jer 29.13 that “one refers to nature, the other to grace.” Luther may be opposing Biel’s semi-pelagian interpretation of these texts; but Augustine and Thomas had interpreted them in an orthodox fashion without denying man’s free will (which Luther, in effect, does).

E. *Disputatio Heidelbergae: Habita* (April 26, 1518):

Thesis 13 (condemned by Leo X in *Exsurge Domine*): “Free will after the fall exists in name only and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin.”

The terminology of this thesis is novel and appears radical; yet Luther’s meaning seems to be in continuity with Augustine, orange II, and Thomas in their insistence on the inability of the will – without grace – to avoid sin.

III. Luther and Eck on Free Will in 1519:

Luther does not clearly distinguish ‘acquired freedom’ and ‘natural freedom.’ He says that man’s will is called free only because it was once free and because, through grace, it can again become free.

Eck’s position is in large continuity to Augustine and Thomas; however, he posits a doctrine of predestination based on foreseen merits. But he also clearly insists that the free will’s real activity in any good work comes from God’s grace; he wanted only to exclude the idea that grace was the only operative factor in a good act.

Unlike the entire Catholic dogmatic tradition, Luther is no longer willing to say that man “is indeed always free naturally” (as he had said in his *Lectures on Romans*).

But despite this terminology, Luther’s intention seems not to have been any determinism/necessitarianism; he is not so much questioning the existence of naturally free will, as its power/value as far as salvation and Christian freedom.

IV. The Bull *Exsurge Domine* (June 15, 1520) and Luther’s Reply: *Assertio Omnium Articulorum* (December, 1520):

Forty-one propositions were censured in the following terms: “All and each of the above-mentioned articles or errors. . . . we condemn, disapprove and completely reject as respectively heretical, or scandalous, or false, or offensive to pious ears, of seductive of simple minds, and as opposed to Catholic truth.”

There is no indication as to *which* of these censures applies to *which* proposition.

Proposition 36: “Free will after sin is an empty word; and when a man does what is in him, he sins mortally.”

This was probably censured for terminological unclarity (“... offensive to pious ears, or seductive o simple minds”).

Luther's intention seems to have been to emphasize how inconsequential any natural freedom of the sinner is in comparison to the freedom unto which Christ liberates us.

In his Latin response to *Exsurge Domine*, Luther leaves himself clearly open to the charge of necessitarianism or theological determinism. He does not limit himself to biblical arguments (regarding man's slavery to sin); he also argues that the will is not free because all things happen by absolute necessity.

The fact that Luther cites Vergil (*Aeneid* 2.324 – "all things are determined by a fixed law") is indicative of the fact that this is not a biblical argument (though he adds two rather specious biblical citations).

This is not a break from his previous position according to which man has free will in mundane matters.

Luther appears to posit an absolute necessity that excludes man's free will – thus dissociating himself from the doctrine of providence taught by Thomas and Augustine, and finding himself in the company of the fatalists.

Luther accepts the necessitarian conclusion that if man has no power of true choice, then God works even the evil done by sinful men (citing Eph 1.11).

The Catholic tradition had always admitted that God permits sin, and that even sin can be used by God for good purposes, but it had also always denied that the Holy God causes/works sin in the sinner.

But the precise meaning of Luther's assertion in this matter is not clear; perhaps he meant no more than what the scholastics meant in their assertion that 'God is the cause of the sinful acts of sinners, and not of the sin itself.'

To properly interpret Luther's response, his underlying purpose must be kept in mind: refutation of Neo-Semipelagian tendencies.

Luther's judgment that the pope was Antichrist was based on two convictions related to this purpose:

- i. That the pope himself teaches Biel's effort;
- ii. That such an erroneous doctrine has prevailed in the Church to the detriment of many people, especially the unlearned.

The first charge is simply not true; the second may well have possessed a good deal of truth.

The doctrine concerning free will (and negligence in the papal/Episcopal teaching office concerning it) was the heart of Luther's concern.

It does seem that in at least the part of the Church that Luther knew, there was a serious misunderstanding of the Gospel, not simply among

certain theologians, but among wide sectors of the common people Luther undoubtedly had encountered.

Luther rejected the Bielian (not Augustinian or Thomist) understanding of the axiom '*faciendi quod in se est*' in order to uphold the grace of God.

Luther's German response is less divisive and less radical in its formulation; there is, e.g., no hint of absolute necessitarianism. He presents a completely biblical argument which does not prove that the sinner lacks *liberum arbitrium*, but simply that the sinner without grace and faith can do nothing but sin.

Here, it seems evident that he is not so much interested in denying man's power to choose, as he is in denying that this should be called 'freedom.'

He states his central contention as follows: "It is a profound, blind error to teach that the naturally free will can turn itself to the Spirit apart from grace."

It is, however, clear that Luther wants a reformation of theological language in view of the fact that the term "free will" is not biblical and since it has led many into serious error.

His concern is primarily pastoral: people are misled by this terminology into thinking that man's conversion depends primarily not on the grace and mercy of God but on the good use a man makes of his free will.

Is this not, McSorley asks, a widespread problem even today? Popular understanding of grace often forgets the fact that our very free acceptance of grace and our good resolutions themselves are the work of grace.

In refusing Luther's proposed terminological revision, Church authorities probably feared that abandoning the terms "free will" would endanger the carefully balanced dialectic of grace and free will.

In Luther's legitimate concern for defending the absolute necessity of God's grace for even the beginning of salvation, he seems to have ignored the possibility of such errors as fatalism/necessitarianism/quietism.

The Catholic-Evangelical preacher should try to correct the Pelagian tendency in all of us not by denying that man has free will or by saying that political freedom is not worthy to be called 'freedom.' He should rather proclaim constantly that *genuine* freedom belongs only to the sons of God. Even though natural freedom and political freedom are good gifts of God for which we should be continually grateful, we should strive for and pray for the greatest gift of freedom, the freedom by which the Son of God makes us free.

Luther's transformation from a reformer-within-the-Roman-Catholic-Church to a reformer-outside-the-Roman-Catholic-Church was largely occasioned by the condemnation of much of his teaching in *Exsurge*

Domine. The tragedy of this transformation from Catholic to Protestant reformer lies to a great extent in the fact that there was no true dialogue or meeting of minds between the Church and Luther prior to his separation from the Church. There was mostly simply a mutual rejection of formulas, with little understanding of the intention and concern of the other.

The commission which drew up the bull threatening excommunication made no real effort to come to grips with the meaning of Luther's propositions *as he explained them*.

There was little/no consciousness of the distinction between the truth contained in a doctrine and the formulation of that truth.

Luther also presupposed that *Exsurge Domine* represented a Bielian position without really trying to understand what was *meant*.

PART TWO – ERASMUS: DE LIBERO ARBITRIO

NINE : The Erasmian Doctrine of Free Will as Set Forth in *De Libero Arbitrio* (1524) and Clarified in *Hyperaspistes Liber I* (1526) and *Liber II* (1527)

I. The Introduction to *De libero arbitrio*:

Instead of coming to grips with the true meaning of Luther's thesis of the unfree will – namely, that the will of fallen man apart from grace is totally incapable of doing anything for salvation – Erasmus concentrates on Luther's argument from the absolute necessity of all events.

Erasmus' intention is clear: to uphold the justice and mercy of God by affirming from human responsibility – "The merciful God cannot punish where only necessity holds and where there is no freedom."

Erasmus, however, seems to have minimized the absolute necessity of grace for every salutary act.

II. Erasmus' definition of *liberum arbitrium*: "The power of the human will by which man can apply himself toward or turn himself away from the things which lead to eternal salvation."

Erasmus makes no explicit reference to man's enslavement to sin, until he is liberated by grace; it, thus, does not come to grips with Luther's thesis which regards the question of what fallen man can do without grace.

Instead of making it clear that man's will accepts grace only because of a previous grace enabling the will to do so, the definition implies that the efficacy of God's grace depends on man's will.

It would be difficult to find a previous author, who, like Erasmus, defines man's natural freedom in terms of a *supernatural* goal – eternal salvation – without mentioning grace!

Elsewhere in the work, however, Erasmus grants that man's intellect has been darkened but not destroyed by sin and that the will, by means of which we choose or avoid, has been corrupted to the extent that it cannot be healed by its own natural powers. In this, he acknowledges that man's will after the fall is *not free* to improve itself and that it must serve sin unless grace liberates; his *definition*, however, does not take account of this.

Luther points out that Erasmus' definition is contradicted by his own many admissions that the will without grace is not free for truly good acts, but that with grace it can do all things.

Luther: "The free will which you define is one thing; that which you defend is another."

But Luther's accusations against Erasmus as "Pelagian" are unfair in that he does not give sufficient recognition to Erasmus' statements on the need for grace; Luther judges Erasmus to be an exponent of "works-piety" almost exclusively on the basis of the definition.

The still widespread view of Erasmus as a mere moralist can be traced back to Luther's one-sided judgment of him.

III. Erasmus Between Neo-Semipelagianism and Augustine:

Widespread unclarity in late medieval theology is posited by some as one of the basic conditions without which the Reformation would have been unthinkable. Erasmus is an example of such unclarity precisely concerning the question that for Luther was the very heart of his reformation: What can the sinner do for salvation without the help of grace?

Erasmus listed the Neo-Semipelagian view as one that could be held by Catholics, even though he knew that it was not the probable opinion. Erasmus himself adopts the Augustinian-Thomist position.

Erasmus' orthodoxy is evident in his conclusion to *Hyperaspistes*: "... whatever has been discussed by us I submit to the Catholic Church, prepared to correct anything that has departed from the truth."

But Erasmus clearly failed to grasp the seriousness of the Church's early struggle against Semipelagianism; he is unable to see much difference between Semipelagianism and the Catholic doctrine defended by Augustine and defined by Orange II.

He held that the difference between Augustine and Julian of Eclanum was more verbal than substantive.

The uncertainty surrounding this decisive Reformation issue, an uncertainty to which Erasmus gives abundant testimony, was only to be overcome through the rediscovery of the canons of the Second Council of Orange during the fourth decade of the sixteenth century and through the reaffirmation of this ancient Catholic teaching by the Council of Trent.

Until this clarification took place, Martin Luther was one of the few theologians in Germany who unhesitatingly defended the biblical and Catholic teaching on man's homage to sin.

PART THREE - LUTHER: *DE SERVO ARBITRIO*

TEN: Luther's Doctrine of Unfree Will according to His Main Work, *De Servo Arbitrio*, with Reference to His Later Teaching and to the Development of Lutheran Theology

I. Background and Structure of *De Servo Arbitrio* (1925):

Luther did not reply to Erasmus for over a year; thus, he did not reply in polemical haste and had much time for reflection in preparation for the actual composition of *DSA*. This book is the fullest statement of Luther's central reformation concern.

II. Luther's concern in *DSA*:

Frequently, Reformation theology/vocabulary and Scholastic theology/vocabulary coexist even in Luther's mature writings; it is important to remember that a statement written by Luther does not necessarily have the same meaning that the same statement would have were it written by a scholastic theologian. One must try to get the 'feel' of the whole of Luther's thought before making judgments about individual statements.

Thus, it is important to ask what Luther's concern was when, in *DSA*, he wrote that "free will is nothing."

McSorley insists that Luther's concern was upholding the absolute necessity of God's grace for every human act that has any relevance for salvation and to strike down every doctrine which places the beginning of salvation or the effectiveness of God's grace in the power of fallen man's free will.

The central concern is not the existence or non-existence of free will, but rather the absolute dependence of the free will on God's grace for every salutary act. In this, Luther's concern is traditionally Catholic. However, it must be acknowledged that there is much more in *DSA* than this central concern – especially his contention that, from the standpoint of God's will, everything we do "happens by necessity."

In his necessitarian argument, Luther uses an argument which has nothing whatever to do with the fact that man is a sinner.

Luther argues that everything we do, everything that happens, however they may appear to us to be done mutably and contingently, in reality happen necessarily and immutably "if you consider the will of God." Here Luther is clearly not arguing for the unfree will because of man's sinfulness, but because of his creatureliness.

According to this argument, it is actually immaterial whether a man has been justified or not. In either case he would have no free will because in either case God foresees all that he does.

III. Luther's Necessitarian Concept of Unfree Will:

In responding to Erasmus, Luther not only repeated his necessitarian thesis, but also reaffirmed it more vigorously and expounded it at greater length.

A. The Structure of Luther's Necessitarian Argument: A Statement of Theological Reflection in the Structure of Description, As Well As a Confession of Divine Providence:

God foresees nothing contingently. He foresees, designs and does everything with an immutable, eternal and infallible will. Therefore, free will is 'entirely destroyed.'

Luther's major premise – that God foreknows all things – is biblical; but he also regards it as a truth which can be attained even by the natural reason of non-believers (e.g., pagan poets).

The implicit minor premise, however, is not from revelation: whatever God foresees/foreknows must happen necessarily; otherwise God could be mistaken.

This is a philosophical, metaphysical thesis.

McSorley argues, however, that Luther is not motivated by a desire to defend a doctrine of cosmic necessity. His statements – however ambiguous – are to be understood first of all as expressions of Luther's firm Catholic belief in the biblical doctrine of divine providence.

B. The Meaning of Luther's Necessitarian Argument for *Servum Arbitrium*: A Denial of Natural Freedom of the Will or an Affirmation of God's Providence?

For several reasons, McSorley maintains that it is incorrect to interpret Luther's necessitarian argument for *servum arbitrium* as a denial of the existence of man's natural freedom.

1. Luther explicitly says that free will is "trampled underfoot," not that it does not exist.

The meaning is: Because God infallibly foresees and ordains all things, any concept of the free will as a proud, independent power existing apart from God's providential will is shattered; even the free will must be seen as humbly subject to God's power.

2. Even though Luther rejects the scholastic distinction of two types of necessity as irrelevant, his meaning here seems consistent with scholastic usage. He does not speak of "absolute necessity," but of a necessity which arises as a result of God's willing and knowing.

What he is saying is very similar to what Thomas says concerning *necessitas consequentiae*. Thomas, however, explicitly says that this necessity does not exclude free will and contingency; Luther does not explicitly affirm this, nor does he deny it.

Erasmus, for example, had written of the free action of Judas in betraying Jesus; commenting on this, Luther interestingly remarks: "... after the time had been predetermined by God, it infallibly had to happen that Judas should **willingly** betray Christ."

Whereas the Catholic tradition affirms that human acts, even though they are immutably decreed and infallibly foreknown by God, happen freely because they proceed from a free will, this is something Luther is very reluctant to say.

McSorley again argues that Luther did not understand the significance of the scholastic distinction of "necessities."

A Thomist, e.g., could say: "God infallibly foresees that Judas will freely choose to betray Christ."

The following conclusions can be drawn from Luther's reflections on the Judas betrayal:

- a. Luther's main purpose here is to insist vigorously that all things happen by what the scholastic tradition calls necessity of consequence; he thus wishes to make it absolutely clear that God infallibly foreknows all events.
- b. Luther fails to see that there can be another kind of necessity besides violent necessity (coercion) and necessity of consequence (or immutability, infallibility), namely, a necessity of the thing consequent or absolute necessity – not of being, but of becoming – which excludes contingent becoming and therefore free will.
- c. But Luther says it makes no difference if we say man's actions are contingent, as long as we recognize God's infallible foreknowledge; thus, Luther's concern is more with upholding the doctrine of God's providence than in denying the scholastic notion of contingent will.

Luther's question points out that any Catholic theologian is confronted with the *mystery* that God is able to move man's free will infallibly but freely.

God's creative power must be considered as it truly is: transcendent, able to effect even the free choices of men.

3. In saying that "free will" applies properly only to the divine majesty, Luther is denying any concept of an absolutely autonomous, all-powerful free will in creatures.
4. McSorley argues that the contingency which Luther rejects is not the same as the contingency which Scholastic theologians (e.g., Thomas) attributed to certain actions of man.

Luther identifies contingency with (and thus rejects what Augustine and Thomas called chance/fortune (*casus/fortuna*)).

Thomas asserts that God has a contingent/free will "with respect to those things which he does not will of necessity," i.e., his own goodness (I, q. 19, aa. 3 and 10).

But when Luther denies that God has a contingent will he understands 'contingent' to mean 'chance' and 'without forethought.'

Luther praises the work of Laurentius Valla (1407-1457) in which the traditional Catholic sense of man's natural freedom of will is defended; this is another indication that this thesis of *servum arbitrium* is not directed against the *liberum arbitrium* upheld by the authentic Catholic tradition.

Valla had admitted that man acts *voluntarily*, but denies that he acts *contingently*; but in this, Valla did not affirm necessity in the way Luther did.

Valla is certain both of man's free will and God's foreknowledge. But how they are to be reconciled, he says, cannot be known by reason – only by faith.

5. Luther continues to repeatedly affirm that man has *liberum arbitrium* “in the realm of the things below him;” but man does not have *liberum arbitrium* “toward God.”

This indicates to McSorley that Luther’s argument is to be understood primarily as an affirmation of the infallibility of God’s foreknowledge and the universality of his providence. It is not a rejection of *liberum arbitrium* in the Catholic sense, but of a pagan concept of *liberum arbitrium* which would somehow be independent of God’s sovereign and universal rule of his creatures.

C. Criticism of Luther’s Necessitarian Argument:

Though McSorley holds that Luther’s necessitarian argument does not *contradict* the Catholic teaching on the existence of natural freedom, he does criticize that argument:

1. Luther’s use of overly simple, absolute expressions renders his argument unclear and misleading.
2. Luther misunderstands the important scholastic distinction of forms of ‘necessity.’
3. Luther’s failure to consistently distinguish different meanings/types of ‘freedom’ makes it difficult (impossible?) for him to assert that man is simultaneously ‘slave’ and ‘free’ – even though this is clearly a biblical assertion, and one adopted by Augustine, Thomas (and even Wyclif!). Augustine and Peter Lombard had spoken of ‘captivated free will’ and ‘liberated free will’ – a superb phrase which expresses the reality of man’s free will and his slavery to sin in a way that Luther’s either/or thinking would not.
4. Luther is so carried away by his legitimate desire to refute a Neo-Semipelagian concept of autonomous free will and to affirm the unfreedom of the sinner to do anything truly good that he in one place eliminates all free decision from man not only in man’s justification by faith but also in the sins man commits. This is a serious doctrinal deficiency in Luther’s teaching on the unfree will. Luther’s over-extended concept of *servum arbitrium* excludes personal free decision of faith.

Luther seems to ‘overlook’ two biblical teachings:

- a. There is no liberation from the power of Satan without man’s free decision;
- b. Slavery-to-sin essentially involves our ‘obedience,’ an attitude of man which always involves a free decision.

Luther: “So man’s will is like a beast standing between two riders. If God rides, it wills and goes where God wills: as the psalm (73.22-23) says, ‘I am become as a beast before thee, and I am ever with thee.’ If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run, or which it will seek; but the riders themselves fight to decide who shall have and hold it.”

He seems to be saying that even under the action of God man’s will is not free; he overlooks the biblical teaching that man’s liberation from Satan’s captivity

involves man's decision of faith and obedience, never forgetting that this decision is itself absolutely dependent upon the liberating grace of Christ.

Note the position of Thomas: "(Satan is strong); he is made stronger by consent, for he who consents gives up power over himself" (*Super Matt.*, cap. 12, n. 1018).

5. This concept of unfree will makes it impossible for Luther to give a satisfactory explanation for man's responsibility for sin. In Augustine and earlier fathers, it was argued conclusively that personal sin always involves misuse of man's free will; in contrast to this conviction that there is no responsibility for sin without the cooperation of man's free will, Luther developed a concept of responsibility without freedom.

The context for his explanation of this is commentary on the hardening of Pharaoh's heart: when God works in and by evil men, evil deeds result.

- a. Luther bypasses the question of how Satan and Adam fell. Traditionally, they were held to have fallen by free will; Luther's necessitarian argument cannot posit this. Rather than deal with the question, he simply begins with sin as an acknowledged fact, without explaining its origin.
- b. To posit "'responsibility' without freedom" is to give responsibility a radically new meaning.
- c. By failing to discuss the origin of sin and through his emphasis on the all-embracing activity of God, Luther seems to make God the actual originator of sin. He is led to affirm the justice of God while at the same time affirming that God condemns those who are unfree and who therefore are not deserving of condemnation.

In light of Rm 11.33 (which Luther cites), theologians traditionally granted that God's wisdom/justice infinitely *transcends* man's judgments, but none had said that God's judgments *contradicted* man's judgments.

The 'early Luther' had held that God only damns those who are deserving of damnation; but in *DSA*, he does not say this. Rather: "God damns those who do not deserve or cannot avoid deserving damnation." He argues that God is just regardless of what he does and that therefore there is really nothing that could conceivably be unjust for him; McSorley calls this a "separation of the divine will from the divine intellect."

If there is no analogy between God's justice and ours, why give it the same name?

Luther seems to be allowing himself to be driven to conclusions for the sake of consistency.

6. Luther contends (*contra* Augustine, Thomas, *et al.*) that biblical commands/prohibitions do not imply free will because: (a) it is a principle of logic that conditional/imperative statements assert nothing indicatively; and (b) it is a principle of Pauline theology that by law God is bringing us to a knowledge of our own impotence – God commands us to do what is impossible in order to show us how incapable we are of doing any of the things he commands.

Augustine had argued that free will alone – without grace – cannot fulfill any of the commandments. It is regrettable that Luther did not combat the Pelagianism of his day as Augustine had done: not by denying the natural free will, but by affirming clearly both the existence of natural free will and the necessity of grace.

Ironically, Luther and Pelagius shared a presupposition, even though their solutions were contradictory: If man has need of the grace of God, then the will is not free.

IV. Luther's Biblical and Catholic Concept of *Servum Arbitrium*:

Luther's strictly biblical concept of man's enslavement by sin is fully in conformity with the Catholic tradition of Augustine, Anselm, Peter Lombard, Thomas, *et al.*

The final section of *DSA* masterfully presents the Pauline/Johannine doctrine of man's bondage to sin. Here, Luther's deepest concern finds expression: the assertion of the absolute necessity of the grace of Christ against all Pelagian efforts of man to free himself from a slavery to sin/death/Satan simply by the power of free will.

M. Doerne: "Man as he is today stands before God in guilty bondage. He is absolutely unable to overcome by himself the mortal threat to his very being which arises from his sin and guilt."

In this section, there is no denial of the existence of free will, and no assertion of universal necessity. In fact, he asserts that man has a *liberum arbitrium*, but that this is totally unable to do anything good/righteous before God.

V. The Doctrine of *Servum Arbitrium* in the Later Luther: A Retraction?

Pannenberg sees in *DSA* a dualistic tension between the hidden God and the revealed God, coupled with a deterministic concept of predestination that allows no place for a decision of faith. He further argues that – later in life – Luther recognized that his necessitarian determinism robbed our encounter with Christ of its decision-character, and ceased to defend any necessitarianism.

Luther began teaching that faith involves decision (thus implicitly abandoning his deterministic views of predestination).

McSorley, however, does not find Pannenberg to have demonstrated this thesis:

- i. He points to no clear text in which Luther later taught that man's encounter with Christ in faith involves a free decision;

- ii. He takes no account of later texts in which Luther simply reaffirms the totally passive role of man in faith;
- iii. Most scholars examining later texts (especially *Lectures on Genesis*) find fundamental continuity).

VI. Luther's Doctrine of *Servum Arbitrium* and the Lutheran Confessions:

In the Lutheran Confessional Writings there is no necessitarian concept of unfree will; in fact, the *Augsburg Confession* condemned (Stoic-Manichean) determinism.

The *Confessions* further make it clear that the cause of sin is the perverted will of the devil and of man.

In the *Formula of Concord*, the condemnation of the unrighteous is not attributed to any absolute predestination of reprobation decree of God, but to the active rejection of the word of salvation by the unbeliever: "The only cause of man's damnation is sin. . . . They alone are damned who have resisted the Spirit."

Despite uncertain terminology, the *Formula of Concord* (II, 18) makes it clear (in context) that free will, illuminated and ruled by the Holy Spirit can cooperate in man's conversion, justice, and salvation.

VII. The Doctrine of the Unfree Will and Modern Protestantism:

Modern Protestant theology understands the doctrine of the unfree will almost without exception not in the necessitarian concept of DSA, but solely in the sense of the biblical-Catholic concept of man's slavery to sin.

H.J. Iwanr holds that, in this regard, "modern Protestantism, with its doctrine of the self-movement of the human will, stands closer to Thomism than to the Reformation."

Melanchthon himself had rejected Luther's necessitarian concept of unfree will; the mainstream of Lutheran theology has followed Melanchthon in this.

In contrast to DSA, modern Protestant theology affirms almost unanimously that man's free will is involved not only in the sins which he commits but also in the faith in Christ through which he is liberated from his sins.

Faith and Order Conference (Edinburgh, 1937): "It is the will of God that his grace should be actively appropriated by man's own will and that for such decision man remains responsible."

It is clear that the doctrine of the Council of Trent on free will need not be seen as a factor which separated the Catholic Church from the other Christian confessions.

Schlink: "The Protestant *servum arbitrium*. . . was. . . primarily. . . the confession of the sinner that he cannot break through the spell of guilt and forlornness by any act of his own."

CONCLUSIONS:

1. In the Bible, the term “freedom” is limited to that which we have called circumstantial freedom and acquired freedom. Nevertheless, man’s ability to make decisions and to choose (natural freedom – *liberum arbitrium*) is clearly implied.
2. Scripture offers testimony concerning the foreknowledge, predestination and providence of God, but it never implies that any kind of necessity is imposed upon man which excludes free choice.
3. In the New Testament the sinner is characterized as a slave of sin. Only through faith in Jesus Christ, a faith which involves obedience and, therefore, free surrender, can the sinner be liberated from his bondage.
4. Although the Bible never questions the holiness and the sinlessness of God, it does not treat the problem of the ultimate origin of sin. By this we mean that Scripture does not explicitly concern itself with the problem of the relationship between God’s omnipotence and man’s freedom.
5. The pre-Augustinian Fathers emphasized *liberum arbitrium*. This stress was not motivated by humanistic tendencies or by any undervaluation of the necessity of grace, but by the intention to make man alone – and not God – responsible for sin.
6. In his defense of the necessity of the grace of Christ for every salutary act – even for the beginning of salvation – against the (Semi-)Pelagians, Augustine never denied man’s natural freedom. It is true that man lost the *libertas* from sin through the fall of Adam and therefore needs grace to free him once more. Liberating grace does not, however, exclude *liberum arbitrium*, as Augustine emphasizes in *De gratia et libero arbitrio*.
7. “Voluntary” (*voluntarie, volens*) was almost always identified with “free” (*libere*) by Augustine and the theological tradition which followed him. Thomas Aquinas is one of the exceptions.
8. Augustine’s concept of *servum arbitrium* represents a faithful interpretation of the biblical truth which we have formulated above in conclusion 3.
9. The basic elements of Augustine’s doctrine of *servum arbitrium* were accepted by the Second Synod of Orange (529 A.D.) and, through the approbation of various popes and the Council of Trent, were elevated to the status of dogmas of the Church. Through circumstances still not yet explained, the canons of the Second Synod of Orange were unknown during the Middle Ages from the 10th until the 16th century.
10. The early Scholastics were, in general, faithful to the heritage of Augustine. This faithfulness was reflected also in their fundamental acceptance of Augustine’s doctrine of grace and free will.
11. Thomas Aquinas, at the outset of his theological career, was not aware of the Augustinian doctrine of grace in its mature form. As soon as he became aware of it, however, he embraced it in its entirety, making only minor modifications.
12. Influential late-Scholastics of the Ockham-Biel school had little appreciation of Augustine’s radical biblical doctrine of grace. Some of these theologians taught a doctrine of preparation for justification by man’s purely natural powers of reason and free will apart from the illuminating and liberating grace of Christ, a doctrine which one can designate as Neo-Semipelagianism. In fairness to

these theologians, it must be pointed out that they were unaware that their teaching in this respect had previously been condemned by Church synods. See conclusion 9.

13. It was in the Ockham-Biel school that Luther received his theological formation. L The young Luther was, like Gabriel Biel, a theologian whose works he certainly read, a Neo-Semipelagian. Through his deep study of Scripture and the works of Augustine, Luther came to recognize that his own position was heretical. He therefore began to combat the false theology which he had learned from his "Catholic" teachers.
14. Luther's first reaction against Neo-Semipelagianism was as energetic as it was justified. It is quite correct to designate his basic Reformation transformation as a movement from an un-Catholic outlook to a Catholic one. Despite some ambiguities, Luther's early attacks on free will should be interpreted as a defense of the Augustinian doctrine of the powerlessness of free will without grace in matters of salvation.
15. In the *Assertio omnium articulorum* (1520) Luther, who began his campaign against free will on biblical grounds, began to rely also on a necessitarian argument.
16. In his rejection of Luther's doctrine of "mere necessity" in his works, *De libero arbitrio* and *Hyperaspistes*, Erasmus did not do justice to the traditional Catholic doctrine. Even though he recognized both free will and the necessity of grace, he was nevertheless unable to understand why Augustine opposed so vigorously the thesis that the beginning of salvation could be attributed to fallen man's free will. Moreover, he was not aware of the fact that he was not dealing simply with an opinion of Augustine, but with the authentic teaching of the Church. Cf. conclusion 9.
17. In his answer to Erasmus, *De servo arbitrio*, in which Luther enunciated what was for him "the essential issue," the Reformer employed two basic arguments: one necessitarian, the other biblical.
18. A careful analysis of the necessitarian argument, which is made more complicated by Luther's peculiar understanding of the distinction between necessity of consequence and necessity of the thing consequent, shows that Luther's assertion of the necessity of all events need not be understood deterministically, to the exclusion of *liberum arbitrium*, but ought to be understood as the expression of Luther's belief in God's providence. The necessitarian argument, however, leads Luther into a theological predicament, since it makes it impossible for him to explain in a convincing way that man alone – and not God – is the cause of sin. It furthermore leaves no place in his theology for a personal decision of faith.
19. In Luther's biblical argument one sees the realization and the expression of his central Reformation concern. In contrast to his necessitarian argument, this one is fully Catholic and fully Evangelical.
20. The biblical concept of man's slavery to sin, as found in Luther's main work, has been accepted by the Lutheran confessional writings as well as by most contemporary Protestant theologians, to the exclusion of the necessitarian argument. Between *this* concept of *servum arbitrium* and the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church there is no difference which is capable of justifying the separation of the Churches.

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