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Predestination in the Century Before Gottschalk, Part 1

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I. Gottschalk: A Solitary Voice?

In the mid-ninth century, a wandering monk named Gottschalk of Orbais (d. 868) sparked a controversy over divine predestination that shook both church and state in central Europe. Gottschalk taught that the will of humans is bound and is freed only through grace, predestination, and particular redemption.¹ Victor Genke, co-author of a forthcoming book containing the translated works of Gottschalk on predestination, summarized his theology in these points:

1. God predestined both the elect to eternal life and the reprobate to eternal death. Accordingly, predestination is one, but twofold.
2. The predestination of the reprobate to eternal death is on the basis of God's foreknowledge of their evil merits.
3. God does not want to save all people.
4. Humankind is divided into two groups, the elect and the reprobate. The elect cannot be lost to God and become reprobate.
5. Christ redeemed only the elect.
6. Since the Fall humans can do only evil. It is only God's grace that enables them to do good.²

In the year 848 Gottschalk presented his views at a council presided over by Rabanus Maurus, his former abbot who had been elevated to the bishopric of Mainz. The council declared his views heretical, and sent Gottschalk under custody to Hincmar the bishop of Reims, in whose diocese Gottschalk had been ordained. In 849 the condemned monk was examined by Hincmar and a small council of bishops, where his views were again denounced as heretical. Gottschalk was whipped, defrocked, and forced to burn his writings (which he later rewrote in prison). Afterward, he was imprisoned in the monastery of Hautvillers until his death around 868.

Two of Gottschalk's writings, a short and a longer confession, were found and published in the seventeenth century. Many more were found and published in the

¹ Francis X. Gumerlock, "Gottschalk of Orbais: A Medieval Predestinarian," *Kerux* 22:3 (Dec 2007):17-34 at 20-25.

² Victor Genke and Francis X. Gumerlock, *Gottschalk of Orbais: Translated Texts from a Medieval Predestination Controversy*, 2007 manuscript awaiting final acceptance by a university press in the United States, pp. 89-98. Genke's introduction also summarized Gottschalk's predestinarian teaching as it related to the sacraments, that is, that baptism and the Eucharist are of no avail for the salvation of the reprobate.

twentieth century. In these, Gottschalk claimed that his view was representative of Christian orthodoxy. He supported his claims with statements on predestination from writers of late antiquity like Augustine (d. 430), Fulgentius (d. 533), Gregory the Great (d. 604), and Isidore of Seville (d. 636). Interestingly, Gottschalk rarely cited ‘authorities’ from the century immediately preceding him. According to some scholars, the reason for this may lie in what they believe about the theology of the centuries preceding Gottschalk, i.e. that it was dominated by a doctrine of salvation which depended upon the exercise of human free will and upon earning one’s salvation through works of merit.³ Related to this is a common belief among church historians that when Gottschalk taught predestination in the mid-ninth century, he essentially stood alone, propagating ideas that sounded strange in his time because they had not been heard in the church since the late patristic era.⁴ But did this view of salvation really permeate the landscape of Western Christendom in the century before Gottschalk, and was Gottschalk really a unique spokesperson for divine sovereignty in a world gone Semi-Pelagian?

Through examination of the theological literature written in the century before Gottschalk, this two-part series questions the accuracy of those claims. Using illustrations from texts written between 740 and 840, it will show that a theology of salvation dependent upon human free will did in fact exist, but that a very ‘Augustinian’ doctrine of grace also abounded in the century before Gottschalk.⁵ In fact, it will show that many influential bishops and theologians of the time affirmed the inability of the human will to do any good apart from Christ’s grace, declared God’s free predestination of the elect with no regard for their foreseen merits, and regularly interpreted ‘universalistic’ passages in Scripture in a ‘particularist’ manner through the lens of divine election.

³ Herman Hanko, “Rabanus and the Victory of Semi-Pelagianism (2),” *Standard Bearer* 76 (Feb 1, 2000), 206-8 at 208, speaking of the context in which Gottschalk preached, wrote, ‘I know that Rome taught a will made free by baptismal grace. That makes no difference. God frees every man’s will. The choice of salvation is now up to him. And so all the rest followed. A conditional predestination—not only conditional reprobation, but also conditional election. A universal will of God that all men be saved. A cross of Christ for all. Salvation dependent upon man’s will. Merit! Man merits salvation by a choice of his own.’ John Michael Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 365: ‘The orthodox Carolingian position was clear as inherited from Alcuin and taught by the pupils of the honoured master, Hraban Maur included. The newly-converted of the ninth century were thus taught to believe in the efficacy of faith through baptism, and in good works. This was clearly set out by the council of Paris in 829 and at other times. Faith without works was useless; you worked for your salvation and could attain it.’

⁴ D. Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 436, wrote that after the Council of Orange in 529, the ‘peace of the Gallic Church was not to be further disturbed by confrontation over these issues, until the middle of the 9th century with the case of the radical Augustinian Gottschalk of Aachen.’ Bengt Häggglund, *History of Theology*. Gene J. Lund, trans (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1968), 154, in a discussion of Carolingian theology, stated: ‘In an age when Gregory’s interpretation of Augustine, with its emphasis on freedom of the will and cooperation with grace, strongly influenced the theological climate, Gottschalk stood, for the most part, alone.’ Reginald Stewart Moxon, *The Doctrine of Sin* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1922), 143, wrote that the method in which the sixth century Council of Orange dealt with predestination ‘merely postponed the consideration and settlement of the question till a later date. In the ninth century the controversy broke out anew. Gottschalk, a Gallican monk who was a devoted student of Augustine’s works, was the first to bring this dark and difficult problem to the fore again...’

⁵ It was about 840 that Noting, the bishop of Verona, and Rabanus Maurus, the bishop of Mainz, began opposing Gottschalk’s teaching on predestination.

Part I of this series of articles will show that Pelagian, or what may be called Semi-Pelagian doctrine, did exist in the century before Gottschalk. But it will also provide translations of texts from that time which advanced the theology that the human will, bound in sin, is unable to do any good; and that process of salvation involves a special gift of grace freeing the bound will, making it willing to choose Christ. Part II of this series of articles will demonstrate that predestination was not a 'lost' doctrine in the century before Gottschalk, but was very much discussed and believed upon by many of the faithful. In conclusion Part II will then posit an alternative view of Gottschalk, that differs from the common portrayal of him as a solitary voice of one crying in the wilderness for the sovereignty of God.

II. Writings of Pelagius in Carolingian Theology

1. Background

In first few decades of the fifth century Pelagius and the teachings associated with him were condemned by influential theologians (e.g. Jerome and Augustine), local councils, popes, emperors, and even the ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431. Teachings associated with 'Pelagianism' that were condemned included the view that original sin of Adam had not been transmitted to children through human procreation, and that people were able to fulfill the commands of God without the help of grace.⁶ From the 430s to the end of the fifth century, several influential monks in Gaul (John Cassian, Vincent of Lerins, Faustus of Riez, Gennadius of Marsailles) rejected Augustine's predestinarian soteriology. Some of these churchmen, labeled now as 'Semi-Pelagians,' taught that God graciously calls all, but awaits a person's movement of free choice to God, after which God rewards that movement of the will with the grace of salvation. Many Christian leaders like Prosper of Aquitaine, Fulgentius of Ruspe, and Caesarius of Arles, who had been influenced by the theology of Augustine, opposed this doctrine, and taught that divine interior grace precedes a person's willingness to believe and follow Christ, freeing the will, bound in sin, to do so.⁷ To the question of why God chooses to

⁶ According to Augustine, when Pelagius affirmed grace, by it he meant the gift of free will, the teachings and commandments of Scripture, and the example of Christ, but denied the necessity of interior assistance by the Holy Spirit to do salutary deeds. This, however, may not be a comprehensive portrayal of Pelagius' theology of grace. On Pelagius' theology of grace, Carole C. Burnett, "God's Self-Revelation in the Theology of Pelagius," diss. (Catholic University of America, 1998), 125-86; Earl D. Lavender, "The Development of Pelagius' Thought Within a Late Fourth Century Ascetic Movement in Rome," diss. (Saint Louis University, 1991), 156; David W. Johnson, "Purging the Poison: The Revision of Pelagius' Pauline Commentaries by Cassiodorus and his Students," diss. (Princeton Theological Seminary, 1989), 225-6; B.R. Rees, *Pelagius: A Reluctant Heretic* (Rochester, NY: Boydell, 1988), 27-34, 92; John J. Dempsey, *Pelagius's Commentary on Saint Paul: A Theological Study* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1937), 65-80. On the distinction between the teaching of Pelagius himself and "Pelagianism," S.J. McKenna, "Pelagius and Pelagianism," *NCE*, 2nd ed, Vol. 11 (New York: Thomson Gale, 2003), 60-3; Pearce James Carefoote, "Augustine, the Pelagians and the Papacy. An Examination of the Political and Theological Implications of Papal Involvement in the Pelagian Controversy," diss. (University of Louvain, 1995), Ch. 2; Lavender, "Development of Pelagius' Thought," 6-7; Johnson, "Purging the Poison," 254; John Michael Lawrence, "Pelagius and Pelagianism," *ResQ* 20:2 (1977):93-101; Walter E. Kimbrough, "Pelagius and Pelagianism," *SwJT* 6:2 (1922):31-9.

⁷ Prosper of Aquitaine, *On Grace and Free Will Against Cassian the Lecturer*. In Prudentius De Letter, trans., *Prosper of Aquitaine: Defense of St. Augustine*. ACW 32 (New York: Newman Press, 1963), 70-138; Fulgentius of Ruspe, *Letter 17*, 34-60. In J. Fraipont, ed., *Sancti Fulgentii episcopi Ruspensis opera*. CCSL 91A (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1968), 563-615 at 589-610.

give this grace to some and not to others, they answered that it was a mystery.⁸ In the sixth century, the writings of John Cassian and Faustus of Riez were declared apocryphal in the pseudo-Gelasian index of books that should not be received by the faithful.⁹ The Council of Orange in 529 specifically countered Semi-Pelagian ideas on free will with statements declaring that God does not await our will but prepares our will to be cleansed from sin, that the beginning of faith is not from ourselves but from the grace of God, and that God's mercy is not bestowed upon us when we seek for it, but rather grace causes us to believe and seek for it.¹⁰

2. Freedom to Sin or Not to Sin

Notwithstanding the condemnation of Semi-Pelagianism at Orange, a view of salvation that portrayed the human will still free to accept or reject Christ found its way into Western Christendom in the early middle ages. One of the main ways this teaching gained entry was through the transmission and reproduction of Pelagius' works under pseudonyms.¹¹ For example, Pelagius' *Confession of Faith* to Pope Innocent, written about 417, in the early middle ages circulated under the title *Sermon of Augustine*.¹² On free will it reads:

Thus, we confess free will in such a way that we say that we are always in need of the help of God and that they err who say with Manicheus that a person is not able to avoid sin, as well as those who assert with Jovinian that a person is not able to

⁸ Prosper of Aquitaine, *Answers to the Extracts of the Genoese*, 6. ACW 32:58; Fulgentius, *Letter 17*, 55. CCSL 91A:606-7; Caesarius of Arles, *On Grace*. PL, Supplementum 4:528-32. Translated in my dissertation, "Fulgentius of Ruspe and the Saving Will of God," (Saint Louis University, 2004), 207-14.

⁹ pseudo-Gelasius, *Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis*. Latin editions: Ernst von Dobschütz. *Das decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis*. Texte und Untersuchungen, 3rd series, 38/4 (Leipzig, 1912); PL 59:157-61; J.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliarum nova et amplissima collection*, Vol. 8 (Florence and Venice, 1759-78; reprint Arnhem, Paris, and Leipzig: H. Welters, 1901-27), 151-4; Blanche B. Boyer and Richard McKeon, eds., *Peter Abailard. Sic et Non. A Critical Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 105-11; English: Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, Vol. 1. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., R. McL. Wilson, trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 46-52; Jerome Taylor, trans., *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 116-8; "Decretum Gelasianum (English translation)," www.tertullian.org/decretum_eng.htm.

¹⁰ Editions of the canons of the Council of Orange are in Jean Gaudemet and Brigitte Basdevant, eds., *Les Canons des conciles mérovingiens (vi-vii siècles)*. SC 353 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1989), 152-85; German Morin, ed., *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis opera varia*, Vol. 2 (Meretioli: 1942), 66-85; PL 45:1785-92. English translations are in John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches*, Rev. ed. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1977), 38-45; F. H. Woods, *Canons of the Second Council of Orange, A.D. 529: Text, with an Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Oxford: James Thornton, 1882).

¹¹ The use of Pelagius under pseudonyms continued during the Gottschalk controversy by Hincmar, who against Gottschalk cited Pelagius' *On the Hardening of the Heart of Pharaoh* thinking that he was quoting Jerome. See Hincmar's *Epistola Ad simplices suae dioceseos* in Wilhelm Gundlach, "Zwei Schriften des Erzbischofs Hinkmar von Reims," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 10 (1889):258-309 at 273-5. This work of Pelagius, which says that 'every vessel makes itself a vessel of honor or of shame by the freedom of the will in accordance with the reason with which we have been created,' is edited in PL, Supplementum 1: 1506-39.

¹² Otto W. Heick, *A History of Christian Thought*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 249.

sin. For, both destroy the freedom of the will. But, we say that a person is always able to sin or not to sin, so that we always confess that there is free will.¹³

Between 790 and 792, a scholar in the court of Charlemagne, for the purpose of proving orthodox doctrine incorporated this confession of faith into the famous *Libri Carolini* or *Caroline Books*.¹⁴ In addition the author of a pseudo-Alcuin confession of faith, written in the late eighth century, also unknowingly made this statement of Pelagius his own.¹⁵ Through these, some in late eighth century Latin Christendom were being taught the Pelagian view that a person's will was always able to sin or not to sin, to choose Christ or reject Him.

3. Predestination as Foreknowledge or Prescience

Through incorporation of comments on the Pauline epistles by Pelagius (c. 405) into Carolingian commentaries, a view of salvation that portrayed God as wanting the salvation of all humans but only giving it to people who are willing, enjoyed free reign. Through these, a view of predestination as mere foreknowledge or prescience of future human decisions was also transmitted. Since Pelagius' commentary circulated under the name of Jerome, there was little reason for eighth and ninth century commentators to be suspicious of its contents.¹⁶

In the 820s, Smaragdus, abbot of the monastery of Saint Mihiel, wrote explanations of the Gospels and epistles, some of which appear to have been preached as sermons.¹⁷ In a sermon on a feast related to the apostles, Smaragdus commented on the end of the eighth chapter of *Romans*, making Pelagius' comments his own. He wrote:

To those who are called saints according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28). That is, according to that which he purposed, to save those whom he had foreknown would believe, not through works of the law, nor legal sacrifices, but by faith alone and the shedding of his blood...For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined...For, those whom he foresaw would be conformed to Christ in life, he wishes and purposes that they be conformed in glory...And those he predestined he also called. Let us not think that predestination compels (vim faciat) the unwilling. Rather, by calling it collects the willing not the unwilling...He who also did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. He permits him to be handed over so that the free will of those handing him over

¹³ Pelagius, *Confessio seu libellus fidei*. PL 45:1716-8; and PL 48:488-91 at 491; Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 4: 355-8 at 357-8: *Liberum sic confitemur arbitrium, ut dicamus nos semper Dei indigere auxilio; et tam illos errare qui cum Manichaeis dicunt hominem peccatum vitare non posse, quam illos qui cum Joviniano asserunt hominem non posse peccare; uterque enim tollit libertatem arbitrii. Nos vero dicimus, hominem semper et peccare, et non peccare posse; ut semper nos liberi confiteamur esse arbitrii.*

¹⁴ On the *Libri Carolini*, "Caroline Books, the" *ODCC*, 3rd ed., 290; Matthew Bunson, "Libri Carolini," in his *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1995), 290.

¹⁵ pseudo-Alcuin, *Confessio fidei*, 3.31. PL 101:1027-98 at 1076-7.

¹⁶ Theodore DeBruyn, *Pelagius' Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 24-35. A version of Pelagius' commentary, revised by Cassiodorus (d. 580) and his students, circulated under the name of Primasius.

¹⁷ On the approximate date of Smaragdus' treatise, ranging from 820-825, Kenneth B. Steinhauser, "Bemerkungen zum pseudo-hieronymischen Commemoratorium in Apocalypsin," *FZPhTh* 26 (1979):220-42 at 234; P. C. Spicq, *Esquisse d'une histoire de l'exégèse latine au moyen age* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1944), 35; Alexander Souter, *The Earliest Latin Commentaries on the Epistles of St. Paul* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927), 212.

might remain, and so that he might put forth an example of patience for us through the Lord's.¹⁸

For Smaragdus, God's predestination was not a decree that guaranteed that grace would come to an unwilling person, and make that person willing. Rather, it consisted of divine prescience that certain people would willingly believe the Gospel.

Another commentator on Paul's epistles, Sedulius Scottus, writing shortly before the Gottschalk controversy, also interpreted predestination as simply God's foreknowledge or prescience of the future free choices of humans. On Romans 9:11-12, he wrote:

He [Paul] puts the prescience of God into these situations, because nothing other is able to happen than what God knows as future. By prescience he chooses one and scorns the other... For, by knowing what each one of them was going to be, he said: The one who will be younger will be worthy, and the one who will be older will be unworthy of salvation. This is as of one foreknowing, who is *not an acceptor of persons* (Rom. 2:11). For, he condemns no one before he sins and crowns no one before he conquers. For, it is by prescience of how the will (*voluntas*) of each one is going to be, in which he will remain, and through which he will be condemned or crowned, that a distinction is made.¹⁹

The idea of predestination as simply God's prescience is also apparent in the late eighth century *Irish Reference Bible*. On *those who are written in the Lamb's book of life* (Rev. 22:9), the anonymous author writes: 'That is, those whom Christ foreknew to have grace.'²⁰

Although this definition of predestination as foreknowledge (as opposed to predestination based on foreknowledge) is nearly an exact replica of Pelagius' view—'to predestine is the same as to foreknow'—it seems to have been perfectly allowable.²¹ Between the fifth and early ninth centuries, the churches of the West do not seem to have bound upon the faithful any particular view of predestination. Although, according to a letter of Pope Celestine (c 431), Augustine was held in high regard by the church at

¹⁸ Smaragdus of Saint Mihiel, *Collectiones in epistolas et evangelica or Expositio comitis*, In natali apostolorum. PL 102:526-8. Cf. DeBruyn, *Pelagius' Commentary on St Paul's Epistles to the Romans*, 112-3.

¹⁹ Hermann Josef Frede and Herbert Stanjek, eds., *Sedulii Scotti collectaneum in apostolum*, 1. In epistolam ad Romanos. *Vetus Latina 31* (Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 208: *Ut secundum electionem et reliqua usque maior serviet minori (9, 11-12). Praescientiam Dei flagitat in his causis, quia non aliud potest evenire quam novit Deus futurum. Unum elegit praescientia et alterum sprexit...Sciendo enim quid unusquisque illorum esset futurus dixit: Hic erit dignus, qui erit minor, et qui erit maior, erit indignus salute. Hoc quasi prescius, non personarum acceptor, nam neminem damnat, antequam peccet, et nullum coronat, antequam vincat. Prescientia enim est, quia diffinitum habet, quails uniuscuiusque future voluntas sit in qua mansurus est, per quam damnatur aut coronatur.* These comments are heavily dependent upon the fourth century commentary of Ambrosiaster written before the Pelagian controversy. Cf. Henry Josef Vogels, ed., *Ambrosiaster, Commentarius in epistulas Paulinas*. CSEL 81/1 (Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1969). In the early middle ages, Ambrosiaster's commentary circulated under the names of Ambrose and Hilary. See Souter, *Earliest Latin Commentaries*, 40-1.

²⁰ Roger Gryson, ed., *Commentaria minora in Apocalypsin Johannis*. CCSL 107 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 294-5.

²¹ DeBruyn, *Pelagius' Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 112. According to James C. Prichard (*The Life and Times of Hincmar, Archbishop of Reims* [Littlemore, UK: Alexander Ambrose Masson, 1849], 133-4), in the aftermath of the Council of Orange, it was sufficient that one held to 'certain undeniable truths' such as God's justice, love, and foreknowledge of all things.

Rome;²² and Pope Hormisdas (c. 520) said that on the issue of grace and free will the Roman church follows Augustine's writings, especially those addressed 'to Hilary and Prosper,' referring to Augustine's *On the Predestination of the Saints* and *On the Gift of Perseverance*,²³ for the most part predestination was considered one of those 'difficult points' of doctrine on which various opinions were permitted.²⁴ According to historical theologian Guido Stucco, in the aftermath of the Semi-Pelagian controversy a Catholic could choose from opinions ranging from the strict view of Augustine and Fulgentius, in which predestination is seen as an eternal decree irresistibly saving the elect, to the view held by Arnobius the Younger and Faustus of Riez, which emphasizes divine foreknowledge of human choices.²⁵ In the century before Gottschalk it is clear that there were some in the Latin West who held a version of predestination akin to the latter view.

4. *God wills the salvation of all and Christ died for all.*

Consistent with these views on free will and predestination is the interpretation of the scope of God's salvific will and death of Christ. On 1 Timothy 2:4, which says that God *wills all persons to be saved and to come to an acknowledgment of the truth*, Sedulius

²² Pope Celestine, *Letter 21 to the Bishops of Gaul*, 2. PL 45:1755-60 at 1756; PL 50:528-37 at 530: *Augustinum sanctae recordationis virum, pro vita sua atque meritis, in nostra communione semper habuimus, nec unquam hunc sinistrae suspicionis saltem rumor aspersit: quem tantae scinetiae olim fuisse meminimus, ut inter magistros optimos etiam a meis semper decessoribus haberetur.* 'We always have held Augustine of blessed memory in our communion for his life and merits, nor has any rumor of untoward suspicion ever tainted him. We remember him as one having such great knowledge that he was always held even by my predecessors to have been among the best teachers.'

²³ Pope Hormisdas, *Letter to Possessor*. CCSL 85A:115-21 at 120-1; CSEL 35/2:696-700; PL 45:1777-8; and PL 63:489-93: *De arbitrio tamen libero et gratia Dei, quid Romana, hoc est catholica sequatur et servet Ecclesia, licet et in variis libris beati Augustini, et maxime ad Hilarium et Prosperum abunde posit agnoscitur, tamen et in scrinibus ecclesiasticis expressa capitula continentur.* 'Nevertheless, what the Roman, that is, the Catholic, church follows and holds about free will and the grace of God, is able to be learned in the various books of blessed Augustine, and especially [those addressed] to Hilary and Prosper...'

²⁴ Prosper of Aquitaine, *Pronouncements of the Apostolic See on Divine Grace and Free Will*, 10: 'As to the more profound and more difficult points in the topical problems of our day which were treated at length by the opponents of the heretics, we neither mean to scorn them nor need we expound them here. For a profession of faith in the doctrine on the grace of God, from whose action and mercy nothing whatever may be withdrawn, we consider amply sufficient what the writings of the Apostolic See, as given above in these articles, have taught us.' ACW 32: 178-85 at 185. The only point that everyone seems to have been in agreement upon is that evil is not be assigned to the predestination of God. Cf. Prosper, *Answers to the Objections of the Gauls*, 1.1. ACW 32:140; Fulgentius, *To Monimus*, 1. In Robert B. Eno, trans. *Fulgentius: Selected Works*. FC 95 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 187-232; Canons of the Council of Orange II (529), Conclusion. In Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 44: 'We not only do not believe that any are foreordained to evil by the power of God, but even state with utter abhorrence that if there are those who want to believe so evil a thing, they are anathema.'; Pope Hadrian I, *Letter 95*. In G. Pertz et al., *Monumenta Germaniae historica*, Epistulae, Vol. 3 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877-1939), 642; and pseudo-Alcuin, *Confessio fidei*, 3.28. Perhaps Clemens the Scot was condemned at the Synod of Rome in 745 for teaching predestination to evil. About him Boniface wrote to Pope Zacharias ambiguously: 'And many other horrible things concerning God's predestination he [Clemens] sets forth contrary to the catholic faith.' In Ephraim Emerton, trans., *The Letters of Saint Boniface* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 102.

²⁵ Guido Stucco, *Not Without Us: A Brief History of the Forgotten Catholic Doctrine of Predestination During the Semipelagian Controversy* (Tucson, AZ: Fenestra Books, 2006), 160-1. The only extant English translation of Arnobius the Younger's *Praedestinatus* is contained in one of Stucco's appendices.

Scottus repeated Pelagius' comment which reads: 'Nevertheless, if they choose to consent to God calling them.'²⁶

On Romans 8:32—*He who even spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all.*—, Smaragdus wrote: 'Notice here, *but for us all*, which is not "for some" as the error of predestination thinks, *but he gave him up for all.*'²⁷

From these citations it has been demonstrated that a belief that the fulfillment of God's salvific will is in some sense dependent upon humans exercising their freedom, and that Christ died for all persons absolutely, was present in the century before Gottschalk.

5. *Pelagianism in Carolingian Theology?*

The question arises: Were there really full-blown Pelagians in the late eighth and early ninth century West? The answer is No. First, the aforementioned writers, unlike some Pelagians, believed that death came upon humans through the sin of Adam, that original sin was transmitted to children through the procreation of their parents, and that baptism took away original sin in infants. Secondly, a more comprehensive investigation of their theology of salvation reveals some 'Augustinian' tendencies. Often in the same treatise both Pelagian and Augustinian views are amalgamated.²⁸ Because of the admixture of Augustinianism, most people do not refer to this doctrine as Pelagianism, but rather Semi-Pelagianism or Semi-Augustinianism, depending upon whose theology carries more weight in the mix. Although terminology can sometimes troublesome,²⁹ it is clear

²⁶ Frede and Stanjek, *Sedulii Scotti*, 663: *Si ipsi tamen vocanti Deo consentire voluerint*. Cf. Alexander Souter, ed., *Pelagius's Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St. Paul*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 480.

²⁷ Smaragdus, *Collectiones*. In natali apostolorum. PL 102:528.

²⁸ In the pseudo-Alcuin confession, directly after stating that the human will is always free to sin or not to sin, the author writes: 'Nevertheless, in this [freedom] I believe God works in this manner—that holy thinking, pious counsel, and every movement of a good will is from him who is the highest good, without whom we are able to do nothing good. For, no one uses his free will well except through Christ.' PL 101:1077: *In quo tamen Deum ita operari credo, ut sancta cogitation, pium consilium, omnisque motus bonae voluntatis sit ex eo, qui summe bonus est, since quo nihil boni possumus. Nemo enim nisi per Christum libero bene arbitrio*. Similarly, when Sedulius Scottus was commenting on 'all persons' whom God wishes to be saved in 1 Tim 2:4, along with Pelagius' interpretation about humans choosing to consent to God's call, Sedulius also gave two very predestinarian-sounding options. He wrote: 'Or: *All persons*, that is, all predestined persons. Or: *All persons*, that is, persons of every gender, nation, condition, etc.' Frede and Stanjek, *Sedulii Scotti*, 663: *Aut: Omnes hominess, scilicet praedistinos [sic]. Sive: Omnes hominess, hoc est omnem sexum, gentem, conditionem et reliqua*. Smaragdus wrote likewise. In the sermon on Romans 8, in which he taught that predestination does not force the unwilling but gathers the willing, Smaragdus quoted from Augustine at least three times. Smaragdus, *Collectiones*, In natali apostolorum. PL 102:526-30.

²⁹ On the difficulties associated with using the term "Semi-Pelagianism," see my "Fulgentius of Ruspe on the Saving Will of God," 5-6; Conrad Leyser, "Semi-Pelagianism," in Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 761-6; Thomas A. Smith, *De gratia: Faustus of Riez's Treatise on Grace and Its Place in the History of Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 18-9; and M. Jacquin, "A quelle date apparaît le terme 'Semipelagien'?" *RSPT* 1 (1907):506-8. Jaroslav Pelikan (*The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol. 3: *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978], 80-95) showed that both sides of the predestination controversy used Augustine. About the Gottschalk controversy, he wrote: 'No one, of course, was denying the need for grace; but it does seem clear that Hincmar, even when extolling grace, stressed its auxiliary function in relation to the

that, in the century before Gottschalk, teaching existed which said that humans are free to choose or reject Christ, Jesus died for all, and God wills all to be saved but only gives salvation to those who freely choose him. Predestination was also expressed in terms of God's prescience of future human decisions.

III. Human Inability and Freedom Through Grace

Alongside the teaching expressed above, however, the same time period is replete with doctrine that the human will is bound in sin, humans are unable to do any good apart from God's enabling grace, and faith is a gift. Three examples of this include excerpts from the writings of Ambrose Autpert, Alcuin, and Agobard respectively from Italy, Britain, and France.

1. Ambrose Autpert

Ambrose Autpert (d. 781) was an abbot at Saint Vincent of Vulturne in Italy. About 778, he wrote about the role of divine grace necessary for human good works in his comments on Revelation 1:4: *Grace to you and peace from him who is, and who was, and who is to come*. He wrote:

And because the number of the saints is gathered by no preceding merits, as was said, but only by the gratuitous will of God concerning such, correctly John, about to write to the seven churches which are located in Asia, puts forth the heading of his greeting, saying: *Grace to you and peace from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ* (Rev. 1:4-5). For, grace is said to be something that has been given freely, not something paid as a reward, but something conferred freely through kindness. For, when this grace shined within us, we, from enemies were led back to friendship with our Creator, from ungodly were made godly, and from servants of sin were adopted as children of righteousness. Every day we are illuminated by this preceding grace so that we may be able to see where we should place our step regarding good work. We are guarded by subsequent grace so that in the end we are not bitten by a serpent in the heel. By this grace we are incited to good work, but having been incited, unless that grace supports what it has incited, we are unable to complete that same work. On this Paul says: *The will is present with me, but to do good I do not find* (Rom. 7:18). Accordingly, therefore, the will that is present with you, is only because you received it by grace, as you yourself said in another passage: *What do you have that you did not receive?* (1 Cor. 4:7) Therefore, just as the will was present with Paul because he received this very thing by grace, so he did not find it to do good unless that very grace, which gave him the will, supported it. Accordingly also, the same Apostle says again: *It is God who works in you both to will and to do his good pleasure* (Phil. 2:13). For, John, Peter, and Paul, when they were about to write to believers, put forth this grace in the heading of their greetings in their writings.³⁰

free will, and that the predestinarians stressed its primacy as the divine initiative for the beginning of faith and salvation.' (p.82)

³⁰ Ambrose Autpert, *Expositio in Apocalypsin*. On Rev 1:3-5. Robert Weber, ed. CCCM 27:38-9.

That, of course, sounds far from a doctrine of salvation through works of merit accomplished through free will. On the contrary, Autpert expounds a theology in which, from the start to the end, grace enables and supports human freedom. Therefore, against the prevailing scholarship on Gottschalk, this text of Autpert stands as a witness that the century before Gottschalk was not replete with Semi-Pelagianism, in which salvation is dependent upon the merit of using one's free will correctly.

Later in that same writing, commenting upon the passage—*And the one who thirsts, let him come, and the one who wills, let him receive the water of life freely* (Rev. 22:17)—Autpert goes into greater detail, explaining that divine grace is responsible for granting both the willingness and the act of coming to Christ. He does this by asking rhetorical questions, and then answering them.

How can the one who wills, receive the water of the blessed fountain, if it is only given to a person freely? And surely the Apostle says: *It is not of the one willing nor of the one running, but of God who shows mercy* (Rom. 9:16). How can one who wills receive, if he receives it freely, unless the grace of God is given for both—grace which makes a person willing from being unwilling, and then once willing, it gratuitously leads him to that which he desires?

It is as if the bountiful one should say of this same grace: Having been inspired gratuitously, he began to desire eternal things, and gratuitously he trusts that he is able to attain them. For, no one except one who wills, receives the water of life; and no one is led to eternal life freely except one who, having been first preceded by grace, begins to will. On this it is said in another passage through the excellent preacher: *For, it is God who works in us both to will and to do his good pleasure* (Phil. 2:13).

But the same Apostle seems to be contradictory to this opinion of his, when he says in another passage: *The will is present with me, but to do good I do not find* (Rom. 7:18). But it should be understood by us that he says the will is present with him, recognizing that he had divinely received this very willingness, because he also says, asking: *What do you have that you did not receive?* (1 Cor. 4:7). Of course, nothing whatsoever!

And so it should be said: *The one who thirsts, let him come*, as if it were saying: The one who, with grace preceding him, begins to desire eternal delights, should take hold of them with passionate love. *And the one who wills, let him receive the water of life freely*, you should understand as: The one who was made willing from being unwilling, through no preceding merits of good actions, but gratuitously by the will of God, should copiously drink the water of eternal delight from the invisible fountain.³¹

2. Alcuin of York

A second example of teaching that advocated the primacy of grace is in the literature of Alcuin (d. 804). Originally from York, England, Alcuin became a leading theologian in the court of Charlemagne. His soteriology is illustrated below with citations mainly from

³¹ Ambrose Autpert, *Expositio in Apocalypsin*. On Rev. 22:17. CCCM 27A:867.

his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, written about the year 800.³² On John 6:41-42, which says: *Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*, Alcuin wrote:

What is *No one is able to come to me* except that no one is able to believe in me *unless the Fathers who sent me draws him*? One comes, whom the grace of God goes ahead of. About this we must say with the prophet: *His mercy will come before me* (Ps. 59:11); and again: *His mercy will follow me* (Ps. 23:6). It will come before us so that we can choose, and follow us so that we can do (cf. Phil. 2:13).³³

On John 6:66—*For this reason I said to you that no one can come to me unless it has been given to him by my Father*—Alcuin testified again of his belief that trust in Christ is a gift of God, explaining: ‘For, faith will be given by the Father to believers, so that no one should boast in his own faith, which is not like something that comes from oneself, but something given by God, as by grace (cf. Eph. 2:8-9)’³⁴ And, on John 15:5—*I am the true vine, and you are the branches. The one who remains in me, and I in him, brings forth much fruit, because without me you can do nothing*—Alcuin comments: ‘He did not say, “You are able to do a little something good,” but absolutely nothing. For whether it is a little good or much good, it is not able to be done without him.’³⁵

In his treatise *On Faith in the Holy and Undivided Trinity* Alcuin elaborated on the bondage of the human will to sin, and its freedom for doing good only through the grace of God, while explaining the difference between how God resides in his saints and in sinners. In Book 2, Chapter 8, he clarified this for his readers saying:

Therefore, God is near the good by nature and by grace: by nature in that he makes them human; by grace in that he justifies those same sinners. By nature, through which he begat them from humans; by grace, through which *he gave them power to become children of God* (John 1:12). By nature, through which he causes them to live; by grace, through which he causes them *to live soberly, justly, and piously* (Titus 2:12). By nature, through which he causes them to remain in this world for a short time; by grace, through which he makes them to reign in heaven forever.

However, in the bad, there is only the natural immensity and omnipotence of God, through which he made them to exist, to live, to feel, to be reasonable, and also to have free choice of the will, but free not freed. For, free will remains even now in all humans through nature. What God wants in them, he deigns to free through grace lest they have a bad will. For, through that free will the first

³² On the date of Alcuin’s commentary on John’s Gospel, see David Ganz, “Theology and Organizational Thought,” chapter 28 in Rosamond McKitterick, ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 765.

³³ Alcuin of York, *Commentaria in sanctis Johannis evangelium*. On John 6:41-42. PL 100:832: *Quid est, Nemo potest venire ad me, nisi quia nemo potest credere in me, nisi Pater, qui misit me, attraxerit eum? Ille venit, quem gratia Dei praevenit, cui cum Propheta dicamus: Misericordia ejus praeveniet me (Psal. LVIII). Et iterum: misericordia ejus subsequetur me (Psal. XXII). Praeveniet velle, susequetur perficere.*

³⁴ Alcuin, *Commentaria in sanctis Johannis evangelium*. On John 6:66. PL 100:839: *Dabitur enim a Patre credentibus fides, ut nemo gloriatur in fide sua, quae a se non est quasi propria, sed a Deo data, quasi gratia.*

³⁵ Alcuin, *Commentaria in sanctis Johannis evangelium*. On John 15:5. PL 100:942: *Non dixit: Parvum aliquid boni potestis sine me facere, sed omnino nihil. Sive enim parvum bonum, sive multum, sine illo fieri non potest.*

man was sold under sin; therefore, the freedom of man began to be bad, because the goodness of the will was lost through free will itself. From then on, no one is able to have goodness of will from oneself unless he would have it by being helped by the grace of divine mercy. Without its help, free will is neither able to turn to God nor advance in God. We ought to believe in both the grace of God and the free will of man. For, if there is no grace of God, how can the world be saved? And if there is no free will, how will the world be judged?³⁶

According to Alcuin, who had no small impact in Latin Christendom in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, the human will is bound in sin, and can do no good without God. Humans are unable to turn toward God unless God goes before them with mercy and grace, granting them faith and enabling them to turn to God and choose the good. For this theology of salvation, Alcuin is very indebted to Augustine, whose thoughts at some points he reiterated verbatim. Therefore, Alcuin too stands as a witness that, contrary to the opinion of much of the scholarship, Western Christians in the century before Gottschalk did not universally hold that salvation was dependent upon the merit of free will.

3. Agobard of Lyons

Similarly, bishop Agobard of Lyons in France, preaching about the year 830 in a sermon entitled *On the Truth of the Faith*, exhorted believers that for salvation and perseverance they should rely entirely on Christ and not their own powers. He warns:

Let the believer beware that he not presume altogether or even in part on his own powers, but on God's help, to arrive at the culmination of goodness and to persevere in good works, as the Lord says, 'Apart from me you can do nothing.' The apostle also: 'It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to accomplish for good favor.' And again: 'By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves.' Still further: 'Not that we are able to consider anything by us as though from us, but our sufficiency is from God.' The Lord says, 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me shall draw him.'³⁷

A paragraph later, Agobard described this teaching as 'the faith and hope of the Catholic Church... predicted in the law and prophets... evangelized through the apostles, attested by the martyrs, and explained by the doctors.' He then condemned teachings contrary to it as 'doctrines of demons.'³⁸ Thus, Agobard stands as a third witness that the period was not dominated by Semi-Pelagian theology, in which salvation is dependent upon the merit of the proper exercise of one's own free will, as some think.

³⁶ Alcuin, *On Faith in the Holy and Undivided Trinity*, 2.8. PL 101:28. The last two sentences of the citation are quotations from Augustine's *Epistle 214*. *NPNF*, 1st series, 5:437-8. Far from advocating a view of salvation that teaches synergism between grace and free will, this principle was affirmed by Gottschalk's double predestinarian friend and mentor, Ratramnus of Corbie, in his treatise *De praedestinatione Dei*. PL 121:64.

³⁷ George E. McCracken, ed. and trans., *Early Medieval Theology*. LCC 9 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), 347.

³⁸ Agobard of Lyons, *De fidei veritate*, 14. L. Van Acker, ed., *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*. CCCM 52 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1981), 265: *Haec est fides et spes catholicae Ecclesiae, quae est columna et firmamentum veritatis, in lege et prophetis, psalmis et hymnis praedicata, per apostolos evangelizata, per martyres testificata, per doctores exposita. Quicquid huic fidei contrarium invenitur...doctrina demoniorum et Antichristorum...*

From these examples from influential writers from Italy, Britain, and France in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, it is clear that teaching which exalted free will at the expense of interior sovereign grace which enables one to choose Christ, did not go unchallenged. In the soteriology of Ambrose Autpert, Alcuin of York, and Agobard of Lyons, grace was primary. The human will, needing to be freed from its bondage to sin, is turned to God by grace; God's people advance through grace; and the saints persevere to the end through grace. Reliance on oneself or one's own powers for any good, including faith itself, is discouraged; while trust in God as the author and finisher of faith is encouraged.

It might be argued that these witnesses can be better characterized as Semi-Augustinian, because they do not reiterate the concepts of irresistible grace or the limiting of God's salvific will to the predestined, as Augustine did in his later writings and as some of his more radical followers did. Even if there were granted, Autpert, Alcuin, and Agobard still challenge the prevailing view that the period was dominated by a salvation 'dependent upon man's will' or by the concept of meriting 'salvation by a choice of his own.'³⁹ For, while the so-called Semi-Pelagians taught that God awaits human willingness, these influential Christian writers clearly put the horse of grace before the cart of free will. The second part of this series will show that the century before Gottschalk also had no shortage of Christians preaching a doctrine of predestination as a divine decree that prepares and secures the gift of salvation, rather than the Semi-Pelagian concept of predestination based upon foreknowledge of human choices.

Abstract

Scholarship often regards the predestinarian ninth-century monk, Gottschalk of Orbais, as one who stood virtually alone promoting the sovereignty of God in a time when Semi-pelagian soteriology ruled supreme. An investigation of eighth and early ninth-century literature challenges that view. Some writings in the century before Gottschalk do reveal an influence of Pelagian and Semi-pelagian theology of grace, but the era also abounds with theological literature proclaiming the inability of human freedom to make salvific decisions and the priority of grace over free will.

³⁹ Hanko, "Rabanus and the Victory of Semi-Pelagianism (2)," 208.