

**ARBITRIUM HUMANUM: LIBERUM VEL LIBERANDUM?**

AN HISTORICAL-THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF  
JOHN CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF THE WILL

by

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A thesis submitted to  
the Faculty of McMaster Divinity College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Theology

McMaster Divinity College,  
Hamilton, Ontario  
2005

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE:                   Arbitrium Humanum: Liberum vel Liberandum?  
                          An Historical-Theological Study of John Calvin's Doctrine of  
                          the Will

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NUMBER OF PAGES:   146



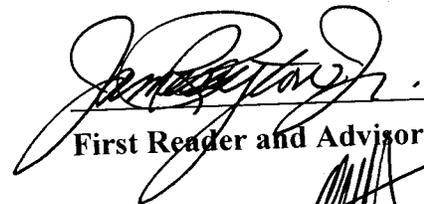
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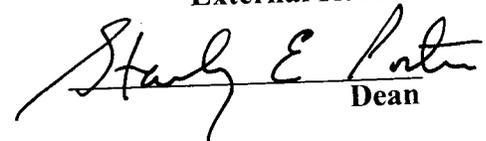
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**Master of Theology**

  
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**Date: March 8, 2005**

To my parents

Master of Theology, 2005

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## **Abstract**

John Calvin, the sixteenth-century reformer, taught that the fall into sin left the human will bound in a miserable slavery to depravity, unless it is liberated by Jesus Christ. Recently, Dewey J. Hoitenga Jr. has argued that Calvin retains so little of the will as it was created that he cannot adequately account for humanity's moral responsibility. However, a careful examination of Calvin's writings reveals that this reformer develops an understanding of the human will which is more nuanced than Hoitenga would lead one to believe. Like his mentor, Augustine, Calvin distinguishes between a will that is free from external coercion and a will that is equally free to choose either good or evil. In his debate with the Roman Catholic theologian, Albert Pighius, Calvin upholds the former while rejecting the latter. Furthermore, in this same debate, Geneva's reformer voices his agreement with the *libertas in externis* – the liberty of the will in earthly matters – as it is expressed, for instance, in the *Augsburg Confession*. Calvin also ardently avoids the kind of deterministic fatalism which some radical reformers, particularly the Libertines, adopted. At the same time, none of these distinctions and qualifications detract him from his fundamental conviction that the fallen human will, of itself, cannot even begin to take the first steps towards salvation. Redemption is not a co-operative venture between the will of God and the will of human beings. Rather, it includes a sovereign work of God's grace upon the human will. Hoitenga's critique raises important questions; however, it

fails to pay sufficient attention to the historical and polemical context in which Calvin develops his doctrine of the will. When that context is investigated, it becomes clear that Calvin teaches the depravity, not the destruction, of the human will. A depraved will cannot save itself, but it remains morally responsible for the actions it initiates.

## Acknowledgments

During the research and writing of this thesis various people have assisted me in various ways. In particular I would like to acknowledge the following: Dr. N.H. Gootjes and Dr. C. Van Dam, professors at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario, who encouraged me to pursue further studies after my Master of Divinity degree; Miss M. VanderVelde, the librarian of the aforementioned institution, who was always willing to help me locate the necessary bibliographic material; the Vineyard Canadian Reformed Church at Lincoln, which provided me with a summer study leave during which I could focus on writing this thesis; and Dr. J. R. Payton Jr., under whose tutelage this research was cultivated from initial curiosities into its final form. None of the above is in any way responsible for the shortcomings which the reader may as yet encounter in this work.

Special mention and sincere gratitude are also due to my wife, Janet, and our children, whose love, laughter, support and understanding have done much to help me see this project through to completion. The final word of thankfulness, though, is reserved for the LORD himself, for without his refreshing grace and providential guidance none of this would have been possible.

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## INTRODUCTION

Do human beings have a free will? If so, how can God still be in sovereign control over everything, including the choices they make? If not, how can God hold them morally responsible for their decisions and subsequent actions? Throughout the ages theologians and philosophers alike have pondered these intriguing and important questions.

In this regard the sixteenth century was no exception. In June of 1519 Johann von Eck and Andreas Karlstadt took up these questions at a public disputation in Leipzig.<sup>1</sup> Eck affirmed the free choice of fallen human beings; Karlstadt denied it. Then, from 1524 to 1527 Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther engaged in a spirited, literary duel over this doctrine.<sup>2</sup> This time Erasmus was the one who argued in favour of free choice, while Luther refuted it. Finally, to cite but one more instance, during the 1540s John Calvin and Albert Pighius exchanged books on this matter, each categorically disagreeing with the other.<sup>3</sup> These examples demonstrate that the freedom of the will was a pressing issue during the time of the Reformation.

In the midst of this spirited, theological debate, what did John Calvin teach? From the outset, it would seem manifestly clear that he denies the freedom of the fallen will. After all, this theologian of Geneva is widely recognized for his conviction that each person's

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt: The Development of His Thought* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 71-81.

<sup>2</sup> In 1524 Erasmus wrote his *Diatribes seu collatio de libero arbitrio*. Luther responded a year later with his *De Servo Arbitrio*. Gordon Rupp has provided an English translation of both (*Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*. London: SCM Press, 1969). Next, in 1526 and 1527 Erasmus answered Luther with two more lengthy volumes, the *Hyperaspistes*. Luther did not reply to the *Hyperaspistes*.

<sup>3</sup> Further information about this debate is included in chapter 4 of this study.

eternal destiny is determined by divine election and not by human choice. Furthermore, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin has a chapter entitled, “Man Has Now Been Deprived of Freedom of Choice and Bound Over to Miserable Servitude.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the case appears to be firmly closed. Do sinful human beings have a free will? John Calvin would answer that question with a resounding “No!”

Or would he? In recent years some Calvin scholars have revisited this question and put forth the surprising suggestion that, in his own way, John Calvin actually believed in the freedom of the human will. In 1981 A.N.S. Lane penned an article entitled, “Did Calvin Believe in Freewill?”<sup>5</sup> Lane convincingly demonstrates that Calvin’s teaching on the human will is far more nuanced than many realize. For instance, at one point in the *Institutes* Calvin even says, “If anyone, then, can use this word [freewill] without understanding it in a bad sense, I shall not trouble him on this account.”<sup>6</sup> Other scholars have followed Anthony Lane’s lead and come to similar conclusions. For instance, John P. Leith comments that, according to Calvin, “the fall did not destroy the will and hence its *voluntary* character.... The will is free in the sense that the origin of its actions is in itself.”<sup>7</sup> Along the same lines, in a study comparing Calvin of Geneva and Bernard of Clairvaux, Vincent Brümmer observes, “Although we cannot deny that [Calvin] sometimes defends an uncompromisingly deterministic doctrine of divine predestination,

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<sup>4</sup> This heading can be found in Book Two, Chapter 2 of John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960). All further citations of the *Institutes* will be from this edition and translation.

<sup>5</sup> A.N.S. Lane, “Did Calvin Believe in Freewill?” *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1981): 72-90.

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.8. See also Lane, “Calvin,” 79.

<sup>7</sup> John H. Leith, “The Doctrine of the Will in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” in *Reformatio Perennis: Essays on Calvin and the Reformation in Honour of Ford Lewis Battles*, ed. B.A. Gerrish and Robert Benedetto (Pittsburg: Pickwick Press, 1981), 54.

at other times he seems to adopt a less negative attitude toward the role of human free choice than this doctrine would lead one to expect.”<sup>8</sup>

Yet how do we explain this apparent oscillation in Calvin’s thinking as, on the one hand, he defends an uncompromising divine sovereignty while, on the other, he also allows for a certain freedom of the human will, so long as that freedom is properly defined? Mary Potter Engel has proposed that the oscillation can be explained by her perspectival approach to Calvin’s anthropology. She maintains that in the *Institutes* Calvin at times speaks from the absolute, divine perspective; however, at other times he speaks from the more relative, human perspective.<sup>9</sup> Following through with Engel’s thesis, we would say that whenever Calvin defends an uncompromisingly strong view of God’s sovereignty, then he is speaking from that absolute, divine perspective. However, whenever he allows for a properly defined notion of human freewill, then Calvin is looking at things from a relative, human perspective. Moreover, says Engel, Calvin is not contradicting himself; indeed the differences are not even paradoxical. According to her, it is simply a matter of which angle or perspective Calvin is using at any given moment to approach his topic.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike Mary Potter Engel, though, Dewey J. Hoitenga Jr. is not so optimistic about John Calvin’s success in setting forth a coherent teaching on the will. In his book, *John Calvin and the Will: A Critique and Corrective*, Hoitenga argues that Calvin is repeatedly inconsistent in what he says about the human will. Now, if it were only a matter of some minor inconsistencies, one might question how much effort should be expended in

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<sup>8</sup> Vincent Brümmer, “Calvin, Bernard and the Freedom of the Will,” *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): 437.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Potter Engel, *John Calvin’s Perspectival Anthropology* (Atlanta: Scholar’s Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Engel, *Perspectival Anthropology*, 140-44.

correcting those incongruities. After all, which mortal can claim perfect consistency in all his promulgations? Yet for Hoitenga the stakes are higher than that. He argues the following:

On Calvin's view, the fall not only corrupts the will, but nearly destroys it. And the result? The result is that Calvin retains in the fallen state so little of the will as it was created that he cannot explain adequately the moral character of human action in that state, when it still makes choices between good and evil.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Hoitenga maintains that if only Calvin had been more like Augustine in his treatment of the will, then he could have avoided some of the pitfalls into which he allegedly fell.<sup>12</sup>

If Hoitenga's contentions are correct, then Calvin's writings are defective not only in their anthropology but also in their theology. Concerning anthropology, if Hoitenga is correct, then Calvin's doctrine of the will essentially turns fallen humanity into a group of amoral automatons. Furthermore, those who are devoid of moral character can hardly be held responsible for their evil actions. This, in turn, has consequences for the doctrine of God, that is, theology in the strict sense of the word. For if Calvin's doctrine of the will does indeed nullify human responsibility for sin, then this also implies that God now is the Author of evil. These implications of Hoitenga's thesis make it worthwhile to test his conclusions against the contents of Calvin's own writings, particularly since Calvin himself avers that even after the fall into sin human beings are "endowed also with the will in order to choose and to desire."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dewey J. Hoitenga Jr., *John Calvin and the Will: A Critique and Corrective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 69-70.

<sup>12</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 108-109.

<sup>13</sup> This quotation comes from Calvin's "Treatise Against the Libertines" as translated in Allen Verhey, "Calvin's Treatise 'Against the Libertines,'" *Calvin Theological Journal* 15 (1980): 201.

In what follows, first of all, the central arguments of Hoitenga's book will be summarized and then provisionally tested by looking at Calvin's *Institutes*. Next, since Hoitenga finds that Calvin is insufficiently Augustinian concerning the human will, it will be necessary to determine just how much difference there really is between the reformer of Geneva and the bishop of Hippo on this point. That, in turn, will open the door to exploring other tracts and treatises which have come from Calvin's pen and which expound his view of the human will in even more detail than the *Institutes*. In this exploration of the primary sources, due attention will be given to the historical context of these writings. Calvin's era was marked by fiery polemics between Protestants and papists, on the one hand, as well as between magisterial and radical reformers, on the other. In the red-hot forge of these debates, using tools inherited from the Church Fathers, the blacksmith of the Reformed church shaped his doctrine of the human will upon the anvil of Scripture. Unless we understand this context, we will not correctly understand Calvin.

## CHAPTER ONE

### HOITENGA'S CRITIQUE OF CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF THE WILL

Dewey J. Hoitenga Jr. recently retired from teaching philosophy at the Grand Valley State University in Michigan, USA. Along with other philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, Hoitenga has been keen to develop a robust, Reformed epistemology. His study on John Calvin's doctrine of the will must be seen within the context of this epistemological enterprise, for Hoitenga mentions it in both the introduction and the epilogue of his book, *John Calvin and the Will: A Critique and Corrective*.<sup>1</sup>

Reason and will, *ratio et voluntas*, are never far apart in the human soul. In order to develop a Reformed epistemology Hoitenga wants to come to a Reformed understanding of the human will. Moreover, when it comes to Reformed theology, where better to start than with John Calvin himself? Thus it is that Hoitenga delves into the *Institutes* in order to learn what the father of Reformed theology has to say on the matter.

As becomes apparent in his book, though, the more he delves, the more disappointed he becomes. He is disappointed because he discovers what he perceives to be two main inconsistencies in Calvin's thinking. The first inconsistency pertains to the relationship between the intellect and the will within the human soul. The second inconsistency

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<sup>1</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 15-16, 129-32.

actually turns out to be more than an inconsistency. According to Hoitenga, Calvin makes a serious error in denigrating the human will *post lapsum* to such an extent that he cannot account for the moral responsibility of human beings. Each of these alleged inconsistencies will be examined separately.

### **The First Inconsistency:**

#### **Vacillation between Intellectualism and Voluntarism**

“The inconsistency in Calvin’s account of the human will as God created it is this: he claims that the intellect governs the will and yet clearly implies that it does not.”<sup>2</sup> This is how Hoitenga himself summarizes the first inconsistency that he finds within John Calvin’s teaching on the will. Later, he expands on this by stating that Calvin has an intellectualist view of mankind at creation, but then flips over to a voluntarist view of mankind after the fall into sin.<sup>3</sup>

In order to clarify his position Hoitenga provides his readers with a brief historical overview of the intellectualist and voluntarist positions. A philosopher like Plato adhered to a pure version of intellectualism. As Hoitenga explains, “On this version, freedom of the will does turn out to be something of an illusion.... Wherever we fail to do good, it will never be due to a failure of will, either in inclination or choice, but to ignorance, a failure of the intellect; for it is by knowledge alone that the will is led to make its choice.”<sup>4</sup> In short, Platonic intellectualism teaches that reason so dominates the human soul that the will becomes nothing more than an empty title with little to no substance or

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<sup>2</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 64-65.

<sup>4</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 28-29.

influence of its own. Aristotle and, to a greater extent, Aquinas modified Plato's position and attributed more significance to the role of the will in human action. Aquinas went so far as to conceive of the will "as a power distinct from the intellect."<sup>5</sup> This Hoitenga calls "modified intellectualism."

In parallel contrast to the two versions of intellectualism, there are also two voluntarist positions. Schoolmen such as Duns Scotus argued for a modified, or moderate, view of voluntarism. Voluntarists distinguish themselves from intellectualists in that they assert that the will is free to act and to influence *on its own* rather than being subservient to the governing powers of the intellect.<sup>6</sup> Yet how far does the will's freedom go? Does the intellect, then, no longer have any influence on the inclinations of the will? Modified voluntarists would not go that far. Hoitenga maintains, though, that a purer version of voluntarism, such as René Descartes promoted, would certainly lean in that direction.<sup>7</sup>

With this historical overview of the nomenclature in mind, Hoitenga comes to his first main difficulty with Calvin's teaching – namely, that he espouses an intellectualist view of human beings at creation but then changes to a voluntarist view after the fall into sin. Calvin's intellectualism is plainly evident in the following passages from the first book of the *Institutes*:

Let the office, moreover, of understanding be to distinguish between objects, as each seems worthy of approval or disapproval; while that of the

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<sup>5</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 34-35.

<sup>7</sup> Hoitenga uses the work of Anthony Kenny to conclude that Descartes "may be as much the father of pure voluntarism, represented in the last two centuries by such otherwise diverse thinkers as Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, William James, and Jean-Paul Sartre, as he is of the rationalism of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers who followed him" (pg. 44). According to Hoitenga, then, Descartes was simultaneously positing *cogito ergo sum* and *volo ergo sum*.

will, to choose and follow what the understanding pronounces good, but to reject and flee what it disapproves.... Let it be enough for us that the understanding is, as it were, the leader and governor of the soul; and that the will is always mindful of the bidding of the understanding, and in its own desires awaits the judgment of the understanding.

Man in his first condition excelled in these pre-eminent endowments, so that his reason, understanding, prudence, and judgment not only sufficed for the direction of his earthly life, but by them men mounted up even to God and eternal bliss. Then was choice added, to direct the appetites and control all the organic motions, and thus make the will completely amenable to the guidance of reason.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, Calvin leans heavily in the direction of intellectualism when he maintains that man's understanding is "the leader and governor of the soul."

Hoitenga goes on to affirm, though, that even within the section of the *Institutes* concerning man's created state, Calvin begins to speak the language of voluntarism. He finds Calvin's voluntaristic tendency in the following passage:

Adam could have stood if he wished, seeing that he fell solely by his own will. But it was because his will was capable of being bent to one side or another, and was not given the constancy to persevere, that he fell so easily. Yet his choice was free, and not that alone, but the highest rectitude was in his mind and will, and all the organic parts were rightly composed to obedience, until in destroying himself he corrupted his own blessings.<sup>9</sup>

Then Hoitenga adds, "Here Calvin clearly undermines the intellectualist account he has just given, in the very same section. For he attributes the fall not to a failure of the intellect, but to the free choice of the will."<sup>10</sup> Apparently, the reason for this vacillation between intellectualism and voluntarism is that Calvin wants to advocate a voluntaristic faith.<sup>11</sup> That is to say, Calvin does not promote a faith of merely intellectual assent:

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<sup>8</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.7 and 1.15.8. Cf. Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 46-47.

<sup>9</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.8; cf. Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 48.

<sup>10</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 48.

<sup>11</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 51-60.

“Simply agree with whatever the church teaches, and you will be saved.” According to his reformational thinking, such a merely intellectual faith is cut from a cloth with too many papist colours. On the contrary, Calvin emphasizes that saving faith is heartfelt faith. Moreover, since the will belongs to the heart, Hoitenga argues that Calvin adheres to a voluntaristic view of faith, or to use Richard Muller’s apt phrase, “soteriological voluntarism.”<sup>12</sup>

Hoitenga certainly concurs with Calvin that true faith is strongly voluntaristic. However, he is dismayed that Calvin is not more consistent. If a theologian is a voluntarist when it comes to the fall and salvation by faith, then that theologian also ought to be a voluntarist about the created state. This is where Calvin errs, according to Hoitenga. In fact, he is even so bold as to revamp part of the *Institutes*, amending what he calls the “clearly offending intellectualist passages.” Below is a sample portion of Hoitenga’s emendation:

As God created us, the office of reason is to distinguish between ends or objects, whether they are good or evil, as well as between the acts required to attain them, whether they are morally permitted or forbidden; and if they are permitted, how effective they are for the attainment. Reason has no power to move us to act, for that is the function of the will; but the will depends upon the reason as the leader and governor of the soul to propose a course of action to it. In moving us to act, the will by its created nature is inclined to goodness. However, the will is also created with an essential freedom, in virtue of which it can *refuse* to do the first bidding of reason, in favour of pursuing an inferior good the reason might propose. But reason proposes such inferior objects or ends, even perhaps immoral means, only when, in a given situation, the will itself, as it is free and able to do, turns the attention of the intellect *away* from its better knowledge to alternative, “vicious” judgments it is capable of making about ends or

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<sup>12</sup> Richard A. Muller, “*Fides and Cognitio* in Relation to the Problem of Intellect and Will in the Theology of John Calvin,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 25 (1990): 215.

means or both. It will do this whenever it is inclined to an inferior good even in the presence of a superior good.<sup>13</sup>

Whether or not Hoitenga's corrective is necessary remains to be seen in the course of this study.

### **The Second Inconsistency:**

#### **Devastation of Human Choice due to Evil Inclinations**

The second flaw which Hoitenga finds in Calvin's doctrine of the human will is the following:

Like his medieval predecessors, Calvin affirms that the will was created with two main components, inclination and choice. The second inconsistency in Calvin's account of the will is that he denies, for the most part, that the will as so created persists into the fallen state. "For the most part," I say; for as we shall see, of these two components, Calvin retains inclination; but it is no longer an inclination to goodness, only to evil. This reduced concept of the will, I argue, leaves Calvin with a will that is even less than a shadow of its created nature. On Calvin's view, the fall not only corrupts the will, but nearly destroys it. And the result? The result is that Calvin retains in the fallen state so little of the will as it was created that he cannot explain adequately the moral character of human action in that state, when it still makes choices between good and evil.<sup>14</sup>

In order to substantiate his case, Hoitenga points to the second book of the *Institutes* in which Calvin deals at length with the condition of the human will after the fall into sin. Calvin writes, "Similarly, the will, because it is inseparable from man's nature, did not perish, but was so bound to wicked desires that it cannot strive for what is right."<sup>15</sup> It is particularly to the last phrase of this quotation that Hoitenga objects. Although he

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<sup>13</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 65-66. Compare Hoitenga's emendation with Calvin's original in the *Institutes* 1.15.7 and 1.15.8, as quoted above on pp. 8f.

<sup>14</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 69-70.

<sup>15</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.12.

believes that the inclination of the will has been corrupted by the fall, Hoitenga questions whether the human will has lost all ability even to strive for what is right. Moreover, he disapproves of the titles that Calvin has given to chapters two and three of his second book – namely, “Man Has Now Been Deprived of Freedom of Choice and Bound over to Miserable Servitude” and “Only Damnable Things Come Forth from Man’s Corrupt Nature.”<sup>16</sup> To Hoitenga’s way of thinking, headings like those disparage human choice to the point where the will effectively ceases to be a will anymore. In short, Calvin turns the wilfully depraved human into a will-deprived automaton.

Of course, Hoitenga realizes that Calvin is constantly emphasizing the sovereignty of God’s grace and the bondage of the human will in order to refute the synergism of the papists.<sup>17</sup> He will even allow Calvin a good measure of rhetorical leeway in defending the Reformed faith against Romanism. But Hoitenga draws a line in the theological sand when, to his ears, Calvin starts to destroy the natural components of the will. He is especially disturbed by various statements that Calvin makes in the *Institutes* 2.3.2. As the theologian of Geneva is busy expounding the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 3, he writes:

Now his [Paul’s] intention in this passage is not simply to rebuke men that they may repent, but rather to teach them that they have all been overwhelmed by an unavoidable calamity from which only God’s mercy can deliver them. Because this could not be proved unless it rested upon the ruin and destruction of our nature, he put forward these testimonies which prove our nature is utterly lost.

Hoitenga understands Calvin to be saying that the created faculties of human beings, especially the faculty of the will, has been destroyed (i.e., obliterated) by the fall.

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<sup>16</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 81-85.

Here is the inconsistency which Hoitenga laments. If, according to Calvin's own words, the power of choice has been destroyed by the fall, then how can Calvin, at the same time, maintain that the Lord is not unjust by holding human beings morally accountable for their actions? For Hoitenga it is either one or the other. Either the human will is not destroyed, and then people are morally accountable, or the human will is destroyed, and people are free from all responsibility. However, an utterly ruined human will and a morally responsible human race are logically incompatible.

Therefore, just as he did with the first inconsistency, Hoitenga proposes a correction. This time he does not go so far as actually to emend the *Institutes*. Instead he petitions Reformed theologians and philosophers to bring their view of the human will "more consistently into line with the Augustinian principle than Calvin has managed to do."<sup>18</sup> The church father Augustine was wont to say, "The natural gifts were corrupted in man through sin, but his supernatural gifts were stripped from him."<sup>19</sup> Applying Augustine's principle to the human will, Hoitenga concludes that human beings retain a natural gift to freely choose between morally good and evil options, even after the fall into sin. Although there are certainly many evil inclinations within it, the will retains a natural propensity toward good.<sup>20</sup> For Hoitenga, this is the main burden of his grievances with Calvin.<sup>21</sup> He feels that whereas Calvin has well nigh destroyed the will after the fall, Augustine manages to retain enough of it to account for moral responsibility. For this reason, Hoitenga advocates Augustine's approach and dismisses Calvin's explanation.

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<sup>18</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 109; also see pp. 70-74.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the *Institutes* 2.2.12 where Calvin also refers to this principle of Augustine.

<sup>20</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 120.

<sup>21</sup> Hoitenga mentions the "Augustinian principle" repeatedly. See pp. 70, 74, 84, 85, 100, 103, 105, 108-109, 111-12, 118, 122-23, 126, 150.

At the same time Hoitenga is not suggesting that people can choose their own salvation. He wants to remain Reformed without welcoming synergism in through the back door.<sup>22</sup> What it does mean, though, is that just as Calvin himself conceded that the fallen intellect was still capable of accomplishing much that is socially and culturally good,<sup>23</sup> so now Hoitenga wants to maintain that also the fallen will is capable of desiring things that are socially and culturally laudable.<sup>24</sup> For instance, do altruism and philanthropy not give evidence that there is still some natural good left in the human will? This is the kind of query that causes Hoitenga to critique and correct Calvin's doctrine of the will. Now it is time to turn the tables and ask: is Hoitenga correct in his critique of Calvin? A provisional answer to that question can be found by examining Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

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<sup>22</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 109.

<sup>23</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.13-16.

<sup>24</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 119-20.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF THE WILL IN THE *INSTITUTES*

As noted in the previous chapter, Hoitenga studied John Calvin's doctrine of the will within the context of his desire to formulate a distinctly Reformed epistemology. This is not entirely inappropriate, since Calvin himself was keenly interested in the question of knowledge. In fact the *Institutes* begin with this very topic. The oft-quoted opening line of Calvin's magnum opus is: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."<sup>1</sup>

Yet however much Calvin and Hoitenga may share an epistemological interest, there remains a significant difference between their *modi operandi*. Hoitenga is a philosopher, and he approaches the doctrine of the human will in a philosophical manner. He is concerned about logical consistency;<sup>2</sup> he is also particular about the precise arrangement of the soul's faculties.<sup>3</sup> Although Calvin is certainly well-read in philosophical writings, both of the ancient Greeks and of medieval schoolmen, his primary interest is theological, not philosophical. Having said that, though, it should immediately be added that the borderline between theology and philosophy is often less than distinct, and dialogue between the two disciplines can certainly be helpful. Nevertheless, a theologian and a

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.1.1.

<sup>2</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 24.

philosopher are not one and the same. The one loves *sophia*; the other studies *Scriptura*. As a pastor and theologian, one of Calvin's primary goals with the *Institutes* was to provide his readers with a summary of biblical doctrine so that they might read the Scriptures themselves more profitably.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, as a Reformed pedagogue, Calvin regularly engaged in polemics against the papists on the one side and the radical reformers on the other. These pedagogical and polemical – rather than philosophical – concerns give colour and substance to Calvin's doctrine of the will. In this vein, John Leith is certainly correct when he states that “theology is historical and is formulated in terms of the issues, ethos, and the religious or spiritual forces of its time.”<sup>5</sup>

### **The Relationship between the Intellect and the Will**

#### *The State of Integrity*

God created human beings, male and female, in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). This is one of the first revealed facts about the nature of human beings. The *imago Dei* is also certainly one of the main doctrines upon which Calvin builds his anthropology in 1.15 of the *Institutes*. According to Calvin the proper seat of God's image is the human soul, and the soul can be divided into two faculties: the understanding and the will – or to put it in other terms, the mind and the heart.<sup>6</sup> It is interesting that when Calvin relates the intellect and the will to the image of God, he treats both equally. He maintains that “the

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<sup>4</sup> In the Preface to the 1559 edition of his *Institutes* Calvin writes, “Moreover, it has been my purpose in this labor to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine Word, in order that they may be able both to have easy access to it and to advance in it without stumbling.”

<sup>5</sup> Leith, “The Doctrine of the Will,” 62.

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.3 and 1.15.6.

primary seat of the divine image is the mind and heart.”<sup>7</sup> So far as the *imago Dei* is concerned, Calvin is neither an intellectualist nor a voluntarist.

As Calvin proceeds with his discussion of the created state, he speaks of the intellect as “the leader or governor of the soul” and the will as the faculty that is “always mindful of the bidding of the understanding.”<sup>8</sup> At first glance, this appears to be unqualified intellectualism. That is, to be sure, how Hoitenga reads Calvin. However, a careful, contextual reading of Calvin’s statements reveals that there is more nuance to his position than first meets the eye. To start with, Calvin is not rigid about how the soul’s faculties are divided. He knows, for instance, that some philosophers like to speak of an appetitive intellect while others refer to an intellectual appetite (or will). Concerning these different viewpoints Calvin says:

I shall not strongly oppose anyone who wants to classify the powers of the soul in some other way: to call one appetitive, which, enough though without reason, if directed elsewhere, yet obeys reason; to call the other intellectual, which is through itself participant in reason.<sup>9</sup>

Philosophers and theologians alike tend to divide up the soul into distinct faculties. Such divisions make the soul easier to explain and discuss. However, in created reality, the human soul is far more complex and far less tidy than these distinctions might suggest. Bearing this in mind, Calvin does not want to tie himself, or anyone else, too tightly to any one anatomical map of the soul. Does the intellect govern the soul entirely and exclusively? It cannot be denied that Calvin calls understanding “the governor of the soul.” At the same time, though, he will not oppose anyone who wants to speak of an

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<sup>7</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.3.

<sup>8</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.7.

<sup>9</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.6.

intellective will which can even participate in reason. Upon closer inspection, then, it appears that Calvin is not such a strident intellectualist about human beings at creation.

Yet is Calvin's openness to speak of an "intellective will" yet another instance of ambiguity on Calvin's part? If the constancy of a logician's scalpel is required, then perhaps Calvin is being ambiguous here. However, realistically speaking, can anyone use a scalpel on a soul? Calvin, for one, wants to be cautious on this point. The faculties of the soul interrelate and interact in a manner that often confounds, or perhaps transcends, human logic. This also means that Calvin should not be tied down too tightly to a rigid schema of intellectualism as opposed to voluntarism. Hoitenga's approach falters in this regard. He wants to place Calvin neatly inside a set of nomenclature cubby-holes, stating that Calvin is an intellectualist concerning the created state but that he is a voluntarist concerning the fallen state. However, Calvin resists exclusive placement in either category. It might be said that he is predominantly intellectualist about human beings in their created integrity, but he is also certainly open to the influence of the will upon intellect.<sup>10</sup>

### *The State of Corruption*

This leads to the question of how Calvin viewed the relationship of the intellect and the will *post lapsum*. Hoitenga feels that at this point – the fall into sin – Calvin changes colours like a chameleon, from a hue of intellectualism to a shade of voluntarism. He bases his opinion on the following line in 1.15.8 of the *Institutes*: "Therefore Adam could have stood if he wished, seeing that he fell solely by his own will." Hoitenga reads Calvin as saying that Adam fell solely by the will *rather than by the intellect*. Yet a close

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<sup>10</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.7.

reading of the *Institutes* indicates that this is not what Calvin is saying. Here is the context of the statement in question:

In this integrity man by free will had the power, if he so willed, to attain eternal life. Here it would be out of place to raise the question of God's secret predestination because our present subject is not what can happen or not, but what man's nature was like. Therefore Adam could have stood if he wished, seeing that he fell solely by his own will.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, in this passage Calvin is not contrasting the will with the intellect, but rather the will of human beings with the will of God, or God's secret predestination. His point is that human beings may not turn around and point an accusing finger at God, blaming him for their fall into sin. They only have themselves to blame, and this is why Calvin says, "he fell solely by his *own* will."<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, it would seem that this misreading of 1.15.8 gives Hoitenga a somewhat blurred perspective on Book Two of the *Institutes*. In the first part of his second book Calvin deals extensively with the effects of the fall on human nature.<sup>13</sup> Hoitenga is of the opinion that Calvin does not deal even-handedly with the two faculties of the soul after the fall. According to him, Calvin allows the intellect to come through the fall less scathed than the will. Here again Hoitenga wishes for more consistency on Calvin's part.

Yet is Calvin really as inconsistent as Hoitenga suggests? In the first chapter of Book Two, Calvin sets forth his main point concerning the fall into sin:

For this reason, I have said that *all parts of the soul were possessed by sin* after Adam deserted the fountain of righteousness. For not only did a

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<sup>11</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.8.

<sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.8; emphasis mine.

<sup>13</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.1-5.

lower appetite seduce him, but unspeakable impiety occupied the very citadel of his mind, and pride penetrated to the depths of his heart.<sup>14</sup>

Here the intellect and the will – the mind and the heart – are equally involved in, and affected by, the fall. Consequently, as Calvin develops his main thought he elaborates on how the fall has corrupted the mind,<sup>15</sup> and thereafter how original sin has infected the will.<sup>16</sup> Actually, if anyone wishes to look at it statistically, Calvin devotes more time to explaining the depravity of the intellect (14 paragraphs) than the wantonness of the will (2 paragraphs). In light of all this, Hoitenga should have been less hasty in charging the theologian of Geneva with inconsistencies. To repeat, Calvin’s main point is that “the whole man” – including both mind and heart – “is of himself nothing but concupiscence.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition, the historical context in which Calvin wrote on human nature should be taken into consideration. Chronologically speaking, the reformers were preceded by the scholastics, and even though the reformers disagreed with the scholastics on numerous points, there were lines of continuity between them as well.<sup>18</sup> Calvin did not always have a lot of patience for the more speculative philosophical intricacies of the scholastics;<sup>19</sup> however, he was sufficiently well-versed in their writings to interact with their theories when necessary. Richard Muller, then, rightly considers Calvin’s doctrine of the will

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<sup>14</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.1.9; emphasis mine.

<sup>15</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.12-25.

<sup>16</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.26-27.

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.1.8.

<sup>18</sup> Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 11-14.

<sup>19</sup> Witness, for instance, Calvin’s comment in 1.15.6 on the *Institutes*, “But I leave it to the philosophers to discuss these faculties in their subtle way. For the upbuilding of godliness a simple definition will be enough for us.”

against the backdrop of scholastic theology. Interestingly, he notes that Thomas Aquinas tended to subsume the will into the intellect.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the will becomes merely a subordinate function of the intellect. In this way Aquinas demonstrates his preference for intellectualism. By contrast, Duns Scotus elevated the status of the will within the human soul and gave it a distinct identity of its own.<sup>21</sup> This illustrates Scotus' voluntaristic leanings. So, when Calvin is placed within his own historical context, it becomes evident that he certainly has voluntaristic elements in his doctrine of the will.<sup>22</sup> For right from the beginning, Calvin maintains – in agreement with the voluntarist, Duns Scotus, and *contra* the intellectualist, Thomas Aquinas – that there are two distinct faculties in the soul, the understanding and the will.<sup>23</sup> As we consider the historical context of Calvin's theological labours, we are reminded once again that we cannot categorize Calvin as either a voluntarist or an intellectualist. Such a rigid either/or classification simply does not fit his writings.

At the same time, this does not mean that there are no problems whatsoever with Calvin's account of the human soul. As Hoitenga points out, Calvin plainly identifies the intellect as “the leader and governor of the soul.”<sup>24</sup> This designation derives from his somewhat uncritical adoption of Greek philosophical terminology – namely, that the understanding is τὸ ἡγεμονικόν of the soul.<sup>25</sup> Yet is the understanding truly the leader of the soul? At all times? Are there not circumstances where certain desires of the will

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<sup>20</sup> Muller, “*Fides and Cognition*,” 214.

<sup>21</sup> Muller, “*Fides and Cognition*,” 214.

<sup>22</sup> Muller, “*Fides and Cognition*,” 215.

<sup>23</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.7.

<sup>24</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.7.

<sup>25</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.8.

can even skew people's thinking in the direction of fantasy rather than reality?

Furthermore, it would seem that, at times, both the intellect and the will are exerting such equal influence on the human soul that to establish seniority and inferiority between the two is difficult, if not impossible. Calvin endeavoured to base his theology squarely and solely on the teachings of Scripture. For the most part, he was remarkably successful in that endeavour. However, concerning the relationship of the intellect and the will, it is true that Calvin allowed especially the terminology of Greek philosophers to exert too much influence on his theological formulations.<sup>26</sup> Attention will now be given to Hoitenga's second criticism – namely, that Calvin's doctrine of the will cannot account for moral responsibility.

### **The Condition of the Will after the Fall**

Hoitenga acknowledges that Calvin still speaks of the existence of the will after the fall into sin. However, his concern is that Calvin leaves so little of the will intact that, in effect, the will becomes extinct *post lapsum*. He phrases his concern as follows:

This reduced concept of the will, I argue, leaves Calvin with a will that is even less than a shadow of its created nature. On Calvin's view, the fall not only corrupts the will, but nearly destroys it. And the result? The result is that Calvin retains in the fallen state so little of the will as it was created that he cannot explain adequately the moral character of human action in that state, when it still makes choices between good and evil.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> On this point it is interesting to note that Gen. 6:5 speaks of the "inclination of the thoughts of his heart...." Thus, in Scripture the will ("inclination") and the intellect ("thoughts") are so seamlessly united that there is little indication as to which may be the leader and which the follower. See also 1 Chron. 28:9.

<sup>27</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 69-70.

How does this criticism square with Calvin's own writings? In the first place, Calvin clearly maintains that the human will itself was not annihilated by the fall into sin. In the *Institutes* 2.3.5 he writes:

For man, when he gave himself over to this necessity, was not deprived of will, but of soundness of will. Not inappropriately Bernard teaches that to will is in us all: but to will good is gain; to will evil, loss. Therefore simply to will is of man; to will ill, of a corrupt nature; to will well, of grace.

Thus, for Calvin, the will is still extant after the fall. The matter is not settled yet, though, because the key question is: does the will survive the fall in such a way that the moral responsibility of human beings can be accounted for?

Here we may return to the question raised by *inter alios* A.N.S. Lane and John P. Leith: does John Calvin believe in the freedom of the will? For if human beings are no longer free to make the choices that they make, instead being coerced by God into doing whatever they do, then it is hard to see how human beings remain morally responsible for their actions. So, what precisely does Calvin teach concerning the freedom of the will, or lack thereof? Interestingly, in the above-mentioned quotation from the *Institutes* 2.3.5, Calvin approvingly alludes to Bernard's teaching on the will. As it turns out, this proves to be a fruitful lead in coming to a clearer understanding of Calvin's position.

Bernard of Clairvaux drew distinctions among three different kinds of freedom. In his treatise *On Grace and Free Choice* he writes, "There are three forms of freedom, as they have occurred to us: freedom from sin, from sorrow and from necessity. The last belongs to our natural condition; to the first we are restored by grace; and the second is

reserved for us in our homeland.”<sup>28</sup> Vincent Brümmer elucidates Bernard’s teaching with the following explanation of each freedom:

[Bernard] defines *freedom from necessity* (or ‘freedom of choice’) as ‘voluntary consent [which] is a self-determining habit of the soul’ (*Treatise* 1.2). *Freedom from sin* (or ‘freedom of counsel’) is the kind of freedom referred to by St Paul in Romans 6:20-22 where he writes: ‘When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life.’ *Freedom from sorrow* (or ‘freedom of pleasure’) is the kind of freedom St Paul refers to in Romans 8:21 where he writes: ‘The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.’<sup>29</sup>

Since the freedom from necessity belongs to our natural condition, Bernard maintains that the human will, also after the fall into sin, is not under any external coercion to choose what it chooses. In other words, when the fallen will makes its choice it acts voluntarily; it is not acted upon violently. In order to express this succinctly, Bernard uses the term “self-determining.” “The soul is self-determining in the sense that its actions are freely initiated by the will and are not the effects of some necessitating cause outside the will.”<sup>30</sup> At the same time, since, outside of grace, the will itself is not free from sin, the choices which it makes are, by nature, inclined to be evil rather than good. Nevertheless, since the will is free from external necessity and, therefore, self-determining, moral agency remains intact. These helpful insights from Bernard of Clairvaux elucidate the teachings of Calvin of Geneva.

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<sup>28</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux. *Treatises III*. Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo, 1977, 3.7.

<sup>29</sup> Brümmer, “Calvin, Bernard,” 439.

<sup>30</sup> Brümmer, “Calvin, Bernard,” 440.

Not only does Calvin accept the three freedoms of Bernard, but he also agrees with the manner in which this scholarly monk worked with those distinctions. In fact, a passage in the *Institutes* 2.3.5 is a veritable echo of Bernard's statements:

Now in the schools three kinds of freedom are distinguished: first from necessity, second from sin, third from misery. The first of these so inheres in man by nature that it cannot possibly be taken away, but the others have been lost through sin. I willingly accept this distinction, except in so far as necessity is falsely confused with compulsion.

Like Bernard, Calvin also believes that no person is violently compelled by God to do whatever he does. Neither is anyone coerced by the force of fate. In this sense, and this sense only, Calvin believes in a free will: after the fall the will is still free of external coercion. As he says, "Man will then be spoken of as having this sort of free decision, not because he has free choice equally of good and evil, but because he acts wickedly by will, not by compulsion."<sup>31</sup> If Hoitenga had worked more extensively with these distinctions that both Bernard and Calvin make, then perhaps he would have given a more favourable judgment of Calvin's account of the will.

Hoitenga's main concern centres around moral responsibility. If, as Calvin teaches, the fallen human will is so corrupt that it necessarily inclines toward sin, how can God hold people accountable for their actions? Calvin begins to address that concern in his *Institutes* with the following dictum: "man, while he sins of necessity, yet sins no less voluntarily."<sup>32</sup> By this he means that people necessarily sin because they are by nature sinful. The effect of the fall is such that the inclination of their will is bent towards iniquity, not charity. Outside of grace this evil bent will not be altered. Thus people sin necessarily. However, it is, most assuredly, the person in question who sins. Sin does

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<sup>31</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.7. Cf. Lane, "Calvin," 78-80; Leith, "The Doctrine of the Will," 54-56.

<sup>32</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.4.1.

not originate in God. Neither may anyone assign the blame for his or her misdeeds to Satan. Rather, the origin of the evil rests squarely in the soul of the sinner. Concerning sins, Calvin says, “their cause is not be sought outside man’s will, from which the root of evil springs up, and on which rests the foundation of Satan’s kingdom, that is, sin.”<sup>33</sup> Thus it is that human beings sin voluntarily. Furthermore, since they commit evil of *their own will*, they are morally responsible for their actions.

### **Summary & Evaluation**

John Calvin and Dewey Hoitenga approach the doctrine of the will from different starting points. While Calvin wrote as a theologian for whom the truth of Scripture was paramount, Hoitenga works from within a philosophical framework which highly esteems rational consistency. When Hoitenga places Calvin’s teaching about the will upon the scales of logic, he finds it wanting.

In the first place, he charges him with the inconsistency of being an intellectualist about human beings in the created state but being a voluntarist concerning the fallen state. However, a closer look at the *Institutes* reveals that Calvin does not adhere to a rigidly intellectualist position on the human nature at creation. He is open to speaking about the influence of the will upon the intellect in Eden. Likewise, Calvin is not strictly voluntaristic about the condition of sinful human beings. Rather, he emphasizes that *the whole person*, including both the intellect and the will, has become corrupted by the fall. Thus, while Hoitenga charges Calvin with an inconsistency, he himself is incomplete in

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<sup>33</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.4.1.

bringing out the nuances of Calvin's position. Once those nuances are appreciated, the magnitude of Calvin's alleged inconsistency is substantially diminished.

Secondly, Hoitenga contends that Calvin speaks so disparagingly about the freedom of the human will after the fall into sin that there is not enough left of the will to account for moral responsibility. Calvin clearly maintains that the will still exists within the human soul after the fall. The difficulty arises in precisely how the "freedom" of that will is defined. Using distinctions that he borrowed from Bernard of Clairvaux, Calvin speaks of freedom from coercion, freedom from sin and freedom from misery. If freedom from coercion is meant, then Calvin wholeheartedly agrees: the will of fallen human beings remains naturally free. God does not coerce anyone into iniquity. Those who sin, sin voluntarily; therefore, they are also morally responsible for their evil deeds. At the same time, in his *Institutes* Calvin says that this uncoerced will is so utterly corrupt that it is necessarily inclined to sin, unless it is liberated from sin and misery by the grace of God.

This provisional comparison of Hoitenga's critique and Calvin's *Institutes* has revealed some weaknesses in the philosopher's reading of Geneva's reformer. At this point, though, Hoitenga's concerns have still not been completely and satisfactorily addressed. For if fallen human beings sin necessarily, does not the *inevitability* of their sinful actions, in the end, still nullify their moral responsibility? Moreover, if humans are not held responsible for their sins, does that not leave God open to the charge of authoring evil? Also, what should be said concerning altruism and philanthropy? Does the existence of these virtues in the hearts of sinners not indicate that fallen souls can still, of themselves, rise and aspire to morally lofty goals? To answer these questions we

must take time to explore the theological heritage that Calvin received from the Church Fathers, as well as the sixteenth century context in which he formulated his own teaching on the human will.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AUGUSTINE ON THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

John Calvin was an avid pupil of the Church Fathers.<sup>1</sup> Yet there was one Father whom he studied and cited more than any other – namely, Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430). In the *Institutes* alone Calvin quotes from Augustine’s writings over 475 times.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, concerning the bishop of Hippo he writes, “If I wanted to weave a whole volume from Augustine, I could readily show my readers that I need no other language than his.”<sup>3</sup> What is more, Calvin particularly expressed appreciation for Augustine’s treatment of the human will. Even though, generally speaking, Calvin holds the Church Fathers in high regard, when it comes to the doctrine of the human will he does not have much good to say about them. He says that they “so differ, waver, or speak confusedly on this subject, that almost nothing certain can be derived from their writings.”<sup>4</sup> There is only one exception, Augustine. “Perhaps I may seem to have brought a great prejudice upon myself when I confess that all ecclesiastical writers, except Augustine, have spoken so ambiguously or variously on this matter that nothing certain can be gained from their

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<sup>1</sup> On this topic see the worthwhile study of A.N.S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, 55-56.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.22.8.

<sup>4</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.4.

writings.”<sup>5</sup> Others may judge whether or not Calvin has indeed fallen prey to prejudice on this point. For our present purposes it is enough to state that if he found the teachings of Augustine so exclusively important for formulating the doctrine of the human will, then it will be worthwhile listening to Augustine in order to understand Calvin better. Furthermore, the writings of Augustine also figure prominently in the debate between John Calvin and Albert Pighius. In their respective treatises both men devote a separate chapter entirely to Augustine.<sup>6</sup>

Harking back to Hoitenga’s critique, one finds yet another motivation for delving into the thoughts of Augustine on this matter. Hoitenga claims that Calvin’s doctrine of the will goes askew precisely because he departs from the Augustinian principle – viz., that in the fallen state the natural gifts of human beings were corrupted but the supernatural were taken away.<sup>7</sup> In other words, Hoitenga is contending that, at least on this point, Calvin ought to have been more Augustinian. As mentioned above, Calvin held Augustine in very high esteem. Therefore, it is unusual and intriguing to hear him being accused of insufficient adherence to this Church Father. Is this accusation well-founded? What did Augustine actually teach about the human will? How much, and in what way, do his formulations differ from those of Calvin? A closer look at Augustine’s writings will provide the answers to these questions.

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<sup>5</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.9.

<sup>6</sup> See the section “Seeking the Support of the Fathers” starting on pp. 63ff below.

<sup>7</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 70-74, 108-11, 122-23.

## A Personal and Theological Pilgrimage

The writings of Augustine cannot be properly understood without appreciation for the spiritual journey which indelibly marked the life of this theologian.<sup>8</sup> Born in Tagaste, North Africa, his mother was a devout Christian but his father was a pagan. During his school days Augustine appears to have followed the example of his father rather than his mother and, by his own admission, lived a worldly and carnal life.<sup>9</sup> Trained in the art of discourse, he went on to teach rhetoric in North Africa while at the same time becoming a follower of Mani. After a while, though, he became disillusioned with Manichaeism and immersed himself instead in Neo-Platonism. During this time he also moved to Milan where he was exposed to the preaching of Ambrose, through whom he was eventually converted to the Christian faith. Subsequently he was ordained as a priest in Hippo and later appointed as that city's bishop. Thus the pilgrimage of Augustine's life took him all the way from being a bawdy youth to serving as a distinguished bishop.

Yet this pilgrimage did not end once Augustine donned his clerical vestments. He, like any other theologian, had to develop and refine his thinking on the various doctrines of the church. Augustine's teaching on the human will is a case in point. His first treatise on the will, *The Problem of Free Choice*,<sup>10</sup> was written over a span of seven years, beginning in the year 388. Remarkably, Augustine began writing this book only one year after he had been baptized by Ambrose. Some of his last comments on this

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<sup>8</sup> The key biographical details of Augustine's life can be found in Walter A. Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), s.v. "Augustine of Hippo," by N.L. Geisler.

<sup>9</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, The Fathers of the Church, no. 21, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953), 2.1.1.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *The Problem of Free Choice*, Ancient Christian Writers, no. 22, trans. Dom Mark Pontifex (New York: Newman Press, 1955).

doctrine are found, naturally, in his *Retractions* (426-427). Between those two literary bookends Augustine also wrote other volumes which give significant attention to this topic, including *On Nature and Grace* (415), *The Enchiridion* (421) and *On Grace and Free Will* (426). With each successive volume Augustine's formulations became noticeably more refined and comprehensive. The error of some, especially his Pelagian opponents, was to quote Augustine out of context and without regard for the line of development in his thought. In order to avoid the same pitfall, the above-mentioned writings of Augustine will be examined in historical order, only altering the chronology slightly in order to better categorize them.

### **An Anti-Manichaeian Writing: *The Problem of Free Choice***

As mentioned above, the *Problem of Free Choice* was written over a seven-year span, almost immediately after Augustine's conversion to the Christian faith. One of his first literary efforts as a Christian was to refute the teaching of Mani that evil is co-eternal with God. Mani taught a deterministic dualism which centered around two eternal principles, Light and Darkness. Light was the source of all that is good and orderly. In the realm of Light dwelt the Father of Greatness. Conversely, Darkness was the root of all evil and anarchy. Not surprisingly, the Prince of Darkness inhabited this dim domain.

In many ways Manichaeism was an attempt to explain the presence of evil in the world which God created. Where does evil come from? Mani's answer was: ultimately it originates from the principle of Darkness.<sup>11</sup> As becomes apparent from Augustine's *The Problem of Free Choice*, the followers of Mani were prone to use this teaching to

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<sup>11</sup> Walter A. Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), s.v. "Manichaeism," by W.A. Hoffecker.

shift the blame for their own sins onto this dark, co-eternal counterpart to God. As a former disciple of Mani himself, Augustine was well qualified to speak on the subject. He does so by recording a lengthy discussion he had with one of his friends, Evodius,<sup>12</sup> on this topic. Their discussion is divided over three chapters or books.

### *Book 1*

Right from the start Evodius poses the central question: “Is not God the cause of evil?”<sup>13</sup> Augustine’s answer is decidedly in the negative. At the same time, he admits that a problem remains: “if sins go back to souls created by God, and souls go back to God, how can we avoid before long tracing sin back to God?”<sup>14</sup> Augustine and Evodius seek to solve this problem by investigating more closely the origin of sin. They conclude that sin occurs when reason does not govern the soul as it should but lets the evil passions take control instead.<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, sin can enter a person’s life when he pursues a temporal, earthly good rather than the eternal, heavenly things.<sup>16</sup> In either case the motivating force for that sinful course of action is neither to be sought nor found in God or in some kind of dark, eternal principle. Sinners only have themselves to blame. Thus both Evodius and Augustine agree that people do wrong “voluntarily through the free

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<sup>12</sup> Evodius is not a fictional character created by Augustine. He was a real friend of his who came from Augustine’s hometown of Tagaste. He was in the special military service and, at one point in his life, like Augustine, he was converted and baptized. In time Evodius went to Africa with Augustine, and again similar to Augustine, became a priest and then the bishop of Uzala. For more details see Dom Mark Pontifex, “Introduction,” in *The Problem of Free Choice*, ed. Dom Mark Pontifex (New York: Newman Press, 1955), 15.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 1.1.1.

<sup>14</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 1.2.4.

<sup>15</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 1.8.18-1.9.19. Here Augustine reveals some of his own inclination towards an intellectualistic view of the soul.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 1.15.31-1.15.33.

choice of our will.”<sup>17</sup> Notably, Augustine also calls this free choice of man “his own good will.”<sup>18</sup>

## *Book 2*

The discussion does not end at this point, though, since Evodius has a further query. “Now explain to me,” he asks, “if you can, why God has given man free choice of will. For if man had not received this gift, he would not be capable of sin.” Augustine answers his friend by comparing the will of the soul to the eye of the body.<sup>19</sup> No one would deny that the eye is a good gift from God for the human body. The eye can be used every day for both utilitarian and artistic purposes. However, someone may also use that very same eye in a sinful way – for example, lustfully. Does that make the eye an evil gift? Is God, then, at fault for placing the eye in the body? Of course not! Likewise, Augustine argues, the will is a good gift from God, regardless of how a person may use that gift.<sup>20</sup> Should someone use his will for ill, it is clearly the creature, not the Creator, who is at fault. Next Augustine appends a significant point to their discussion when he adds, “But, though man fell through his own will, he cannot rise through his own will. Therefore let us believe firmly that God’s right hand, that is, Our Lord Jesus Christ, is extended out to us from on high; let us await this help with sure hope, and let us desire it with ardent charity.”<sup>21</sup> The stumble into sin is different than the salvation from sin. The former people can do all on their own; the latter they cannot.

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<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 1.16.35. Lat. *facimus ex libero voluntatis arbitrio*.

<sup>18</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 1.13.28.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 2.18.48.

<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 2.18.49-2.18.50.

<sup>21</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 2.20.54.

### Book 3

However, Evodius is still not completely satisfied. Granted, a person's own will causes him to sin. Nevertheless, Evodius continues, "I should like you to tell me what is the cause of that movement by which this will turns away from the unchangeable good which is common to all, and turns towards private goods...."<sup>22</sup> In short, what causes the will to incline towards sin? In response Augustine delineates the difference between a soul and a stone.<sup>23</sup> Once it is dropped, a stone naturally and inevitably falls to the ground. The stone is not culpable for its fall since it belongs to *the created nature* of stone that it will descend if dropped. However, a soul is different than a stone. The soul that sins is blameworthy, for it does *not* belong to the created nature of a soul to sin. The soul was created by God, and whatever God created was good. Therefore, whereas God did create the stone to fall, he certainly did not create the soul to fall.

As one might expect, at this juncture God's foreknowledge enters the discussion.<sup>24</sup> For if God knows in advance everything that happens, whether good or evil, then might it not be that God's foreknowledge causes the human will to turn toward sin? Augustine leads Evodius to the desired answer during the course of the following dialogue:

A. – If you foreknew someone would sin, would he be bound to sin?

E. – Yes, he would be bound to sin. I should not have foreknowledge, unless what I foreknew was certain.

A. – Then it is not because God foreknows it that what He foreknows is bound to happen, but only because it is foreknowledge. If what is foreknown is not certain, there is no foreknowledge.

E. – I agree. But what does this imply?

A. – It implies, unless I am mistaken, that you would not necessarily compel a man to sin by foreknowing his sin. Your foreknowledge would not be the cause of his sin, though undoubtedly he would sin; otherwise

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<sup>22</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 3.1.1.

<sup>23</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 3.1.2-3.1.3.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 3.2.4.

you would not foreknow that this would happen. Therefore these two are not contradictory, your foreknowledge and someone else's free act. So too God compels no one to sin, though He foresees those who will sin by their own will. Why, then, should not one who is just punish what he does not compel, though he foreknows it?<sup>25</sup>

However, Evodius returns to his original question, coming at it from a different angle this time. He observes that some creatures never sin (e.g., angels), while others persist in sin (e.g., demons) and still others repent from sin (e.g., believers).<sup>26</sup> His question remains: what causes one created will to incline differently than another? To this Augustine rejoins, "You ought not to look further than the root."<sup>27</sup> For, he says, "... if you look for the cause of this root, how can it be the root of all evil? Such cause would be the root cause, and if you found it, you will, as I said, look for a further cause, and the inquiry will be endless."<sup>28</sup> In other words, once the root of evil, which is the human soul, has been reached it serves no purpose to dig any deeper.

Before closing the discussion, though, Augustine brings forward one more significant point. People no longer have the free choice which they once had. They cannot simply choose for good or evil as they did in the pristine state of created integrity. It is worth listening to Augustine's own words on this point:

It is not surprising that man, through his ignorance, does not have free choice of will to determine what he ought to do; or that, through the

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<sup>25</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 3.4.10-3.4.11. What Augustine fails to address in this passage is that Scriptures speaks not only of God's *foreknowledge* but also his *foreordination* or eternal decree (cf. Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:11). For it is more challenging to explain how God's foreordination can co-exist with human responsibility than it is to explain how God's foreknowledge can do the same. Perhaps Augustine would have said that the compatibility of God's eternal decree and human responsibility is beyond our finite understanding. On this point also see John M. Rist, "Augustine on Free Will and Predestination," in *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. R.A. Markus (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1972), 240-41. Rist finds that Augustine too often "takes refuge behind the Pauline *O altitudo* and the other scriptural texts which indicate God's ways are past finding out" (240-41).

<sup>26</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 3.17.47.

<sup>27</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 3.17.48.

<sup>28</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 3.17.48.

resistance of carnal habits, which have become second nature as a result of the element of unrestraint handed on in human heredity, he sees what he ought to do and wills it, but cannot accomplish it. It is an absolutely just punishment for sin that a man should lose what he refuses to use rightly, when he could do so without any difficulty if he wished. Thus a man who knows what he ought to do and does not do it, loses the knowledge of what is right, and the man who has refused to act rightly when he could, loses the power when he wishes to have it. Indeed for every sinful soul there are the two punishments, ignorance and difficulty. As a result of ignorance error shames us, and as a result of difficulty pain torments us.<sup>29</sup>

Then, so that there might be no lingering confusion on this point, he adds, “When we speak of a will free to act rightly, we speak of the will with which man was created.”<sup>30</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that in his discussion with Evodius, Augustine repeatedly counsels his friend to maintain due reverence for God at all times.<sup>31</sup> Human beings are prone to question God with an accusatory attitude or murmur against his divine decrees, all the while trying to find some excuse for their own misdeeds. Time and again Augustine enjoins Evodius to remain humble and respect the Holy One. Apparently, concerning the doctrine of the will, attitude is as important as answers.

### **Anti-Pelagian Writings on the Will**

#### *On Nature and Grace*

By the time Augustine writes *On Nature and Grace* in AD 415, he is busy countering another heresy, Pelagianism. Dom Mark Pontifex has outlined a helpful summary of the Pelagian teachings which is quoted, in part, below:

(a) It rejected the doctrine that through grace we are predestined to be children of God, and maintained that without the help of grace man can

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<sup>29</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 3.18.52.

<sup>30</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 3.18.52.

<sup>31</sup> For example, *Free Choice*, 3.2.4-5; 3.9.24-25; 3.17.48-49.

fulfill all divine commands.

(b) Pelagius yielded so far as to say that grace was given, but explained that it was given only that man might do right more easily; in other words, he still maintained that man could do right without grace, but in that case with more difficulty than when grace was received.

(c) He still maintained that grace was nothing else than the free will which we have received from God. God helps us by His law and doctrine to learn our duty, but not to carry it out. Thus we receive knowledge from God, but not the charity whereby to live rightly.<sup>32</sup>

Augustine begins his refutation of Pelagianism by affirming what he had already set forth in *The Problem of Free Choice* – namely, that when people sin, it is their own free choice which leads them into evil. When Pelagius asks if a person’s sin is voluntary, Augustine responds, “Beyond all doubt it is his own.”<sup>33</sup> Yet whereas Augustine’s polemics with the Manichaeans focussed on theodicy, his debate with the Pelagians revolves around grace and the doctrine of redemption. He exhorts his readers not to become proud, “as if a man could be healed by the very same power by which he became corrupted.”<sup>34</sup> This is the crux of the matter. One might assume that if free choice brought human beings into sin, then that same free choice also ought to be able to extract them from sin. However, Augustine maintains that the cure is different than the disease.<sup>35</sup> To become infected all people needed was a human will, but in order to be healed they need divine grace.

At the same time, pointing out the necessity of God’s grace does not nullify the freedom of the human will. As Augustine goes on to explain:

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<sup>32</sup> Pontifex, “Introduction,” 10.

<sup>33</sup> Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, The Fathers of the Church, no. 86, trans. John A. Mourant and William J. Collinge (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 30.34.

<sup>34</sup> Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 30.34.

<sup>35</sup> See above in the section on Book 2 of *The Problem of Free Choice* where Augustine makes a similar point.

In recalling these words we do not take away the freedom of the will, but rather we preach the grace of God. For to whom are these words helpful, except to the one who uses his own will, but uses it humbly, not priding himself in the strength of his will, as if it alone were sufficient to achieve justice?<sup>36</sup>

At first glance it is not easy to fit the above statement into Augustine's train of thought. If the grace of God is responsible for curing human beings from the disease of sin, what place is there yet for the freedom of the will? Do the human will and divine grace somehow co-operate with each other in order to reach the end goal of redemption from sin? Elsewhere Augustine clearly rejects the notion that the fallen will itself can make any positive contribution towards the process of regeneration.<sup>37</sup> Yet what does he mean, then, when he says, "we do not take away freedom of will, but rather we preach the grace of God"? Recalling his discussion with Evodius about the difference between a soul and a stone, it becomes clear that Augustine's point is that God's grace does not act upon a person as if that human being were some kind of stone being inevitably compelled into salvation by the gravity of God's grace. On the contrary, sinful human beings are still souls, and as souls, they still have wills. In his grace God works on that human will itself so that it actually uses the good and redemptive gifts that God has supplied.

Admittedly, at this point, Augustine does not expound all of this with the degree of clarity which one might hope for. However, it must be borne in mind that he is busy developing his formulations in the midst of intense labours and fiery debates. The refining of doctrine, no less than that of metal, is a far from instantaneous process. Essentially, in *On Nature and Grace* Augustine wants to establish one fundamental point:

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<sup>36</sup> Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 32.36.

<sup>37</sup> See below in the section on Augustine's *Enchiridion*.

whereas the Pelagians taught that salvation could be accomplished with the innate powers of nature, Augustine affirms that it is completely impossible outside of God's grace.

### *On Grace and Free Will*

In the opening words of this treatise Augustine observes that some defend free will so as to deny God's grace, while others defend God's grace so as to deny free will.<sup>38</sup> Here, then, he picks up where he left off in *On Nature and Grace*, and he writes more about how God's grace and the free will of human beings are to be seen in relation to each other. The numerous commands with which the Lord addresses human beings in the Scriptures prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that people have a free will. Augustine phrases it in this way:

Now whenever there is the express statement not to do this or that, and whenever the performance of the will is required to do or refrain from some action, in keeping with God's commandments, that is sufficient proof of the free choice of the will. Let no man, therefore, blame God in his heart whenever he sins, but let him impute the sin to himself.<sup>39</sup>

It is crucial to note the context in which Augustine is speaking. The question at hand is: who is to blame for sin, God or human beings? In this context Augustine asserts, as it were, "Human beings, God has told you exactly what to do. Now, if you still decide to do otherwise, do not blame God. God did not compel you to sin. That was *your own* free choice."

Yet Augustine immediately cautions that this "free choice" must not be understood in such a way that it denies God's grace. For the same Scriptures which contain the divine commandments also contain the divine testimony "having to do with grace, without

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<sup>38</sup> Augustine, *Grace and Free Will*, The Fathers of the Church, no. 59, trans. Robert P. Russell (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 1.1.

<sup>39</sup> Augustine, *Grace and Free Will*, 2.4.

which we are incapable of doing good....”<sup>40</sup> Then, after discussing various aspects and implications of God’s grace, Augustine describes the manner in which the free will still remains in fallen human beings.

Free will is always present in us, but it is not always good. For it is either free of justice, while serving sin, and then it is evil; or it is free of sin, while serving justice, and then it is good. But the grace of God is always good and brings about a good will in a man who before was possessed of an evil will. It is by this grace, too, that this same good will, once it begins to exist, is expanded and made so strong that it is able to fulfill whatever of God’s commandments it wishes, whenever it does so with a strong and perfect will.<sup>41</sup>

Obviously Augustine employs the term “free will” in a markedly different manner than it is commonly used. Often this term is used to describe a will that is *free to either choose or reject God’s gift of salvation*. However, for Augustine the freedom of the fallen will consists in it being *free from righteousness*,<sup>42</sup> while the freedom of the redeemed will is that is *freed from sin*. Therefore, using Augustine’s own definitions for “free,” there is indeed no contradiction between God’s grace and the evil free will. On the contrary, God’s grace is precisely what the fallen (free-from-righteousness) will needs.

### **Other Important Documents on the Will**

#### *Enchiridion*

Published in AD 421, the *Enchiridion*, also known as *Faith, Hope and Charity*, is a manual of doctrine which serves a purpose similar to that of a catechism. It is

Augustine’s concise summary of the main points of the Christian faith. Concerning

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<sup>40</sup> Augustine, *Grace and Free Will*, 4.7.

<sup>41</sup> Augustine, *Grace and Free Will*, 15.31.

<sup>42</sup> The Latin term which Augustine uses, *iustitia*, can either be translated “justice,” as the translator in *The Fathers of the Church* series does, or “righteousness.” The latter is how the term is commonly used in the Vulgate, especially in the Pauline epistles. For this reason I use the word “righteousness” here.

human beings in their created state, Augustine teaches that God made Adam and Eve entirely good. However, he did not create humankind supremely and unchangeably good, like himself. God created human beings with the potential for their goodness to be increased or decreased.<sup>43</sup> When they fell they became “an evil good.”<sup>44</sup> This is not an oxymoron, but an insightful description of the corrupted state of the human race. As Augustine puts it: “we find it is not because he is a man that he is an evil nor because he is wicked that he is a good, but a good because he is a man and an evil because he is wicked.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, in this one, well-crafted phrase – “an evil good” – Augustine manages to refute both Manichaeism and Pelagianism.

Focussing in on the will in its fallen state, Augustine asks, “What good can a condemned man do except as he has been released from his condemnation? Can he by the free decision of his own will? [*sic*] Here again, God forbid. Man misusing his free will destroys both himself and it.”<sup>46</sup> Using his rhetorical skills, Augustine goes on to compare the demise of the will to a suicide: “A man who kills himself no longer lives and cannot restore himself to life. So also, when he has sinned through free will, sin is victorious and his free will is lost.”<sup>47</sup> The only One who can work a resurrection after this suicide is God who is both gracious and almighty. Is there, then, no sense in which the fallen human beings still have a free will? Yes, but it is a different definition of freedom than many might suppose: “for that service is liberty which freely does the will

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<sup>43</sup> Augustine, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, The Fathers of the Church, no. 2, trans. Bernard M. Peebles (New York: CIMA Publishing, 1947), 4.12.

<sup>44</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 4.13.

<sup>45</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 4.13.

<sup>46</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 9.30.

<sup>47</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 9.30.

of the master. Accordingly, he is *free to sin* who is the servant to sin.”<sup>48</sup> Needless to say, freely being in bondage to sin is not a laudable kind of freedom. Therefore, Augustine directs his readers to the words of Jesus Christ who says, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Further, should anyone be inclined to boast that the will, of its own accord, takes the initial step towards God’s grace, Augustine turns to the apostle Paul who writes, “It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Rom. 9:16). Now if someone interprets this passage to say that the human will is not sufficient unto salvation, but needs the assistance of God’s grace, then Augustine replies that conversely this same person must also maintain that God’s grace is not sufficient but needs the assistance of the human will. So, he concludes:

But if no Christian, for fear of openly contradicting the Apostles, will dare say, “There is question not of God showing mercy, but of man who wills,” it follows that the only proper interpretation of the verse, “There is question not of him who wills nor of him who runs, but of God showing mercy,” is to ascribe all to God, who both makes the good will of man ready to help and helps it when it has been made ready.<sup>49</sup>

### *Retractions*

Towards the end of his earthly pilgrimage, Augustine took the time to review his writings and meticulously retract or correct anything he had said which, in hindsight, he felt should not have been said. Remarkably, when he reassesses his writings on the freedom of the will, he does not retract or correct anything that he wrote, not even from his earliest writing, *The Problem of Free Choice*. Instead, he stands firmly behind his words, only

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<sup>48</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 9.30; emphasis mine.

<sup>49</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 9.32.

pausing here and there to correct his opponents who, according to him, had twisted what he wrote.

For instance, the Pelagians used his earliest treatise on the will to prove that Augustine contradicts himself. *Contra* the Pelagians, Augustine declared that the free will cannot do anything; in fact, it has been destroyed by the fall. However, *contra* the Manichaeans the same Augustine speaks highly and consistently of the free choice of human beings. Lest the Pelagians be permitted to pursue such accusations any further, Augustine points out in Book 1.9 of his *Retractions* that his opponents fail to discern the difference between his earlier and later writings. The discussion between Evodius and Augustine was aimed at tracing out the cause of evil. In order to protect God's holy righteousness against the charge of inciting evil, Augustine emphasized that human beings choose to sin voluntarily, that is, freely and of their own accord.<sup>50</sup>

However, he continues, "It is one thing to inquire into the source of evil and another to inquire how one can return to his original good or reach one that is greater."<sup>51</sup> The Pelagians defend free will, not in order to protect God's holiness, but in such a way that they diminish, or even deny, God's grace. This is what Augustine refutes in his later writings when he states that the free will is dead and cannot contribute anything towards a person's salvation. Moreover, Augustine is quick to point out that even when he was busy refuting the Manichaeans, he already disproved the Pelagians, as it were in advance, when he wrote, "When we speak, then, of a will to act rightly we are speaking, to be sure,

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<sup>50</sup> Augustine, *The Retractions*, The Fathers of the Church, no. 60, trans. Mary Inez Bogan (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 1.8.1.

<sup>51</sup> Augustine, *Retractions*, 1.8.2.

of that will with which man was created.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, at least in his own estimation, Augustine did not think that his teaching on the human will had changed over the years, nor that it needed to be changed.<sup>53</sup>

## Summary & Evaluation

### *Augustine’s Contribution to the Doctrine of the Will*

Augustine’s theological pilgrimage illustrates the need for vigilant attention to both the definitions of terms and the context of discussion. This is one of his foremost contributions to the development of the doctrine of the human will. A case in point is the all-important term “free” or “freedom.” Within the context of his polemics against the disciples of Mani, Augustine uses the term “free will” to indicate a will that is *free from external coercion*. From this perspective the “freedom of the will” essentially becomes synonymous with “within one’s own responsibility.”<sup>54</sup> Yet within the context of another debate, namely the one against the Pelagians, Augustine uses the term “free will” to mean *free from righteousness* regarding fallen humans or *free from sin* regarding redeemed humans.

Similarly, the word “nature” or “natural” can be used by different people to mean different things. What are the “natural” powers of human beings? The answer depends on whether the person is speaking about human nature as it was created in the beginning

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<sup>52</sup> Augustine, *Retractions*, 1.8.5.

<sup>53</sup> See also Marianne Djuth, “The Hermeneutics of *De Libero Arbitrio* III: Are There Two Augustines?” in *Studia Patristica Vol. 27*, ed. William S. Babcock (Louvain: Peeters, 1993). Djuth upholds Augustine’s self-evaluation and states, “for those who follow Augustine along his path, it is clear that there is but one Augustine, the Christian Augustine, whose advance in perfection requires a conception of human freedom that exhibits change in continuity” (289).

<sup>54</sup> See also Rist, “Augustine on Free Will and Predestination,” 224. “Hence it is more accurate to say that *liber* in the phrases *libera voluntas*, *liberum arbitrium* means ‘responsible’....”

or about human nature as it exists now after the fall into sin. Since so many writers fail to distinguish between these two definitions of “nature,” the discussion on the human will is often beset by a fog of confused terminology. For this reason Augustine makes a special point of defining his terms carefully.<sup>55</sup> As we shall see, these same issues of carefully understanding the context and precisely defining the terms will play major roles in Calvin’s development of this doctrine.<sup>56</sup>

Another significant contribution which Augustine makes is the manner in which he avoids going to erroneous extremes even as he vigorously refutes his opponents. He manages to sail his theological ship through straits of orthodoxy without running aground on either the Scylla of stoicism or the Charybdis of synergism. In his battle against the Manichaeans Augustine could have easily overstated human responsibility to the point of compromising the grace of God. However, as soon it might appear that he is veering off in that direction, Augustine reminds his readers that “though man fell through his own will, he cannot rise through his own will.”<sup>57</sup> Likewise, as he is busy countering the Pelagian optimism concerning human nature with the doctrine of total depravity, it would not have taken much for Augustine to deny the humanity of humans, leaving them as little more than passive pawns in the hands of the Omnipotent. However, before he swerves off in that direction, he brings forth that memorable description of people as “an evil good,” thereby upholding his own principle that human nature is corrupted by the fall but it is not taken away.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 3.19.54.

<sup>56</sup> See pp. 61f. below.

<sup>57</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 2.20.54.

<sup>58</sup> For a different opinion see James Wetzel, “Snares of Truth: Augustine on Free Will and Predestination,” in *Augustine and His Critics*, ed. James Wetzel (London: Routledge, 2000), 134. He

### *Augustine, Calvin and Hoitenga*

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Hoitenga has criticized John Calvin for departing from the Augustinian principle concerning the human will. This principle, cited favourably by Calvin on various occasions in his *Institutes*,<sup>59</sup> maintains that the natural gifts of human beings were corrupted but the supernatural were taken away. In Hoitenga's estimation "the *natural* functions of the will" are an "inclination to goodness and moral choice."<sup>60</sup> Based on that understanding, he is dismayed that Calvin goes on to say that the fall into sin resulted in the "ruin and destruction of the human nature"<sup>61</sup> and the utter inability of the will "to strive for what is right."<sup>62</sup> Following the Augustinian principle, Hoitenga would have expected Calvin to state that the "will should retain, for all its depravity, something of its created inclination to goodness besides its new inclination to evil...."<sup>63</sup> In order to correct what he considers to be an extreme and erroneous description of the fallen human nature, Hoitenga makes his so-called "Appeal to Augustine,"<sup>64</sup> hoping that a stronger injection of Augustinian influence into Calvin's statements will result in a slightly more optimistic view of the will's condition after the fall.

In response to Hoitenga's critique, two things must be said. In the first place, it appears that he has made his appeal to the wrong address. For in almost precisely the

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agrees with other critics of Augustine who say that this Church Father "has crossed the line" and so denigrated the fallen human nature that there is "no 'you' to enter into a relationship" with God.

<sup>59</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.4, 2.2.12, 2.2.16.

<sup>60</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 74; emphasis mine.

<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.2.

<sup>62</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.12.

<sup>63</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 73.

<sup>64</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 122-23.

same, stark language as Calvin uses, Augustine declares that by the evil use of his free will “man destroyed both it and himself”<sup>65</sup> and that the ability of the will to do rightly was only found in the created state, not the fallen one.<sup>66</sup> Secondly, Hoitenga appears to be working with a different definition of “natural gifts” than Augustine does. For Augustine, one of the natural gifts which God has given to human beings is their ability to make moral choices. A human being is not a stone, either before or after the fall.<sup>67</sup> Yet after the fall, there is no mixture of good and evil inclinations within the human heart, as Hoitenga suggests. Augustine clearly teaches that the freedom to choose either good or evil has been lost, and the only sense in which the freedom of the will continues to exist, after the fall, is that “he who is the servant of sin is *free to sin*.”<sup>68</sup>

Therefore, if Hoitenga still wishes to accuse Calvin of departing from the Augustinian principle, then he must also charge Augustine with departing from his own principle. The better route, though, is to pay close attention to the historical and literary context of these statements in an effort to understand what these theologians actually meant to say. This has now been done for Augustine. It is time to advance from the fifth century to the sixteenth century in order to discover what Calvin taught concerning the human will.

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<sup>65</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 9.30.

<sup>66</sup> Augustine, *Free Choice*, 3.19.52.

<sup>67</sup> See the section above on Augustine’s *The Problem of Free Choice*, pp. 35ff.

<sup>68</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, Chapter 30; emphasis mine.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CALVIN'S DEBATE WITH ALBERT PIGHIUS

In the early 1540s Albert Pighius of Kampen and John Calvin of Geneva engaged in polemics concerning the doctrine of the human will. Briefly put, the debate developed in the following manner. In 1539 Calvin published the second edition of his *Institutes*, in which he included significantly more material than the first edition of 1536. Part of the expansion was a new chapter entitled “The Knowledge of Humanity and Free Choice,” as well as a chapter on “The Predestination and Providence of God.” When Pighius’ attention fell upon this new edition of Calvin’s work, he found himself in sharp disagreement with some of the new additions. Consequently he wrote a lengthy manuscript criticizing Calvin’s doctrine of the human will as both absurd and unorthodox. This volume was published in August 1542 under the title, *Ten Books on Human Free Choice and Divine Grace*.<sup>1</sup>

Calvin did not wait long before bringing his response to the printer. Already by February of 1543 his *Defence of the Sound and Orthodox Doctrine of the Bondage and Liberation of Human Choice against the Misrepresentations of Albert Pighius of*

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<sup>1</sup> *De libero hominis arbitrio et divina gratia, Libri decem* (Cologne: Melchior Novesianus, 1542). On the translation, or lack thereof, of this work see n. 6 below. Hereafter Pighius’ book is simply referred to as *Free Choice*.

*Kampen*<sup>2</sup> was available for sale at the Frankfurt book fair. Due to time constraints, Calvin only covered the first six books of Pighius' *Free Choice*, which deal mainly with the freedom of the will. He fully intended to write the other part of his defence, concerning God's predestination, by the 1544 book fair. However, Pighius died on 29 December 1542, and Calvin deemed it best "not to insult a dead dog."<sup>3</sup> Some years later, though, in 1551, when Jerome Bolsec took issue with Calvin's doctrine of predestination, the theologian of Geneva had opportunity to complete his repudiation of Pighius' teachings when he published *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*.<sup>4</sup>

Since Calvin was a dominant figure in the Reformation of the sixteenth century, and since these polemics with Albert Pighius focus on central doctrines of the Christian faith, one might expect that over time theologians and historians would have paid a good amount of scholarly attention to this debate. This has not been the case, though. Indeed, it was not until quite recently, in 1996, that Calvin's *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* finally appeared in English translation for the first time.<sup>5</sup> Pighius' *Free Choice* still remains in its original Latin, not having been translated into any modern language.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de servitute & liberatione humani arbitrii, adversus calumnias Alberti Pighii Campensis* (Geneva: Jean Girard, 1543). See n. 5 below for details on the English translation. Hereafter Calvin's book is simply referred to as *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*.

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1961; reprint, Louisville: Westminster Press, 1997), 54.

<sup>4</sup> *De aeterna Praedestinatione Dei* (Geneva: John Crispin, 1552).

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice Against Pighius*, ed. A.N.S. Lane, trans. G.I. Davies (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Copies of the original Latin manuscript of Pighius' work are only found in a few libraries in North America, none of which, unfortunately, I had access to. Some select Latin citations from the *Free Choice*, however, have been included in the book of G. Melles, *Albertus Pighius en zijn Strijd met Calvijn over het Liberum Arbitrium* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1973). Melles also translates these quotations into the Dutch language. Thus, the Latin quotations from Pighius' *Free Choice*, found later on in this chapter, are taken from the footnotes of Melles' book.

Secondary literature on the Pighius-Calvin dispute has been similarly sparse.<sup>7</sup> Even Dewey Hoytenga's monograph, *John Calvin and the Will*, makes only a few, cursory references to Calvin's *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* and instead focuses almost entirely on his *Institutes*. Hoytenga justifies his approach with the following comment, "This treatise [*Bondage and Liberation of the Will*]... mainly reiterates Calvin's view on the will in the *Institutes*."<sup>8</sup> Although the *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* is certainly a reinforcement of what Calvin wrote in his *Institutes*, it is a misleading understatement to say that it is little more than a reiteration. Calvin's dispute with Pighius was a crucible in which his thinking on the human will was refined. His argumentation became more comprehensive as well as more nuanced, and sometimes the most subtle of nuances end up being the most doctrinally significant.

Calvin's debate with the papal theologian, Pighius, deserves more attention. Calvin and those who hold to his heritage are often criticized for so emphasizing the supreme, divine sovereignty that, in effect, human beings are reduced to mere chess pieces that God arbitrarily moves around on the cosmic playing board of history.<sup>9</sup> In his 1543 treatise Calvin exerts himself vigorously to argue that that is not the case. Before examining the issues that come to the fore in this debate, though, Pighius himself stands in need of some further introduction.

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<sup>7</sup> In addition to the book of Melles mentioned in the previous footnote, there is also L.F. Schulze, *Calvin's Reply to Pighius* (Potchefstroom: Pro Rege Press, 1971).

<sup>8</sup> Hoytenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 140, n. 1.

<sup>9</sup> For example, one author who expresses such a sentiment is D. Miall Edwards, as quoted in Charles Partee, "Calvin and Determinism," *Christian Scholar's Review* 5 (1975): 123.

## A Brief Biography of Albert Pighius

Albert Pighius (or Pigge) was born around 1490 in Kampen, the Netherlands.<sup>10</sup> In 1507 his schooling took him to France, where he studied philosophy and astronomy at the University of Louvain. This was followed by an additional course of studies in theology, during which one of his professors was Adrian Florent. Judging by his initial literary output, it would seem that Pighius' first academic love was astronomy and mathematics.<sup>11</sup> However, in 1522 the course of his life was dramatically altered by his former professor, Adrian Florent, who, by that time, had become Pope Adrian VI. This pope summoned Pighius to Rome where he served as the papal *cubicularius secretus*, not only for Adrian VI, but also for Clement VII and Paul III.

Pighius' summons to the Vatican also entailed him turning his attention away from the celestial bodies of the heavens and, instead, refocusing his mind upon the church on earth. His first major theological writing was *Adversus Graecorum errores* (1525), in which he made his case for the reunification of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. In his opinion such an effort was more worthwhile than trying to find common ground with the Lutherans who, at that time, had just recently broken away from the papacy. Pighius' condemnation of Luther, and of the Reformation in general, took on greater proportions over the course of the subsequent decade, culminating in his ardent

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<sup>10</sup> The biographical details including in this section were gleaned from the following sources: F.W. Grosheide and G.P. Van Itterzon, eds. *Christelijke Encyclopedie*. (Kampen: Kok, 1960), s.v. "Pighius, Albertus," by D. Nauta; Schulze, *Calvin's Reply*, 11-14; Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 2-11 and A.N.S. Lane, "Introduction," in *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, ed. A.N.S. Lane (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, 1996), xvi-xviii.

<sup>11</sup> *Adversus prognosticatorum vulgus* (1518), a defence of Ptolemaic astronomy; *De aequinoctiorum solsticiorumque inventione* (1516) and *De ratione paschalis celebrationis* (1520): two treatises on revising the calendar; *Adversus novam Marci Beneventani astronomiam* (1522); *Tractaat over de kalenderhervorming* (1525); *De progymnasmatibus geographicis* (no date). Further bibliographic details can be found in Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 7-9.

defence of papal supremacy and infallibility, which was published as *Hierarchiae ecclesiasticae assertio* (1538).

At some point in the 1530s Pighius returned to his homeland, where he was appointed as provost and archdeacon of St. John's Church in Utrecht. Despite his deep-seated ill-will towards the leaders of the Reformation, Pighius was one of the papal theologians assigned to take part in the interconfessional Colloquia of Worms (1540) and Regensburg (1541). It was at these conferences between papist and Protestant theologians that Pighius and Calvin first met. Apparently, their initial contact was already marked by enmity, for Calvin writes that at Worms he heard that "Albertus Pighius was now threatening me and announcing a fight, but that it was still far away."<sup>12</sup> Obviously Pighius was filled with a passion to refute what he regarded as a grave heresy that Calvin was promoting within the church – namely, the bondage of the human will.

In the early 1540s Pighius was already busy writing what was to be his magnum opus, the *Periarchon (First Principles)*.<sup>13</sup> However, the more Pighius learned about Calvin, the more convinced he became that his writing project should be targeted specifically against the Reformed theologian of Geneva. Thus it was that the *Periarchon* never saw the light of day; instead, Pighius metamorphosed parts of it into what is now known as the *Ten Books on Human Free Choice and Divine Grace (1542)*. A few short months after this book was printed, Pighius died, on 29 December 1542.

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<sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 7. For more information on the Colloquia of Worms and Regensburg see C. Augustijn, *De Godsdeinstgesprekken tussen Rooms-Katholieken en Protestanten van 1538 tot 1541* (Haarlem: Erven F. Bohn, 1967).

<sup>13</sup> Lane, "Introduction," xvii

## A Survey of the Debate

This summary will cover the highlights of the first six books of Pighius' *Free Choice*, as well as Calvin's response to those books in his *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*. The remaining four books of Pighius' work, although interesting in themselves, will not be part of this study. Calvin himself also regarded them as a distinct topic.<sup>14</sup>

One way to summarize the debate between Pighius and Calvin would be to work systemically through the six chapters of the *Free Choice* in sequence. The advantage of such an approach is that it would synchronize nicely with Calvin's rebuttal. The *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* carefully follows Pighius' writing, chapter by chapter and, at times, even paragraph by paragraph. However, the disadvantage of this approach is that both Pighius' book and Calvin's reply are lengthy, repetitive documents, and it is easy to lose sight of the forest for all the trees. What follows is a bird's eye view of the debate, looking at the material topic by topic rather than chapter by chapter.

### *The Underlying Question of Authority*

Ostensibly the dispute between Calvin and Pighius is about whether or not the human will, *post lapsum*, is free to choose either evil or good. Yet the debate is hardly underway when another fundamental issue rises to the surface – namely, what or who will have the final word of authority in this disputation. From the start Pighius declares that the knowledge of God and of ourselves is set forth in the divine scriptures.<sup>15</sup> At first sight,

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<sup>14</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 244.

<sup>15</sup> *Noticia Dei et nostri, quae nobis in divinis scripturis proponitur*. (Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 42, n. 5). For further information on the Latin text of Pighius' *Free Choice* see n. 6 above.

then, it might appear that at least here the two theologians are standing on common ground. After all, Calvin's rule of authority was *sola Scriptura*.

At the same time, Pighius wants to give due credit to the potential of human reason. He sharply criticizes Luther – and by implication also Calvin – for making reason a stumbling block in faith's way.<sup>16</sup> So far as Pighius is concerned, what is to be believed ought also to be comprehended, or at least comprehensible. Following through with that logic, Pighius' repeated charge against Luther and Calvin is that their teaching on the human will simply does not resound with common sense.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the entire fourth book of Pighius' *Free Choice* is taken up by his exposition of what he calls the four "absurdities" of Calvin's teaching on the human will.<sup>18</sup> In this way Pighius is requiring Calvin to demonstrate that his doctrine of the human will is not only Scriptural but also logical.<sup>19</sup>

For his part, Calvin refuses to meet that demand. In fact, he turns the tables on Pighius and accuses him of ignoring the inspired warning of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1-3 against relying on worldly wisdom.<sup>20</sup> He writes:

See how Paul declares that the first foundation of spiritual wisdom is to know that worldly wisdom is reduced to nothing. Now let Pighius spew out against [Paul] his bilious charge that he wants to pluck out the eyes of people's minds, to make them like brute beasts, to treat them worse than idiots!... For there is no kind of spell more dangerous in its ability to bewitch than confidence in one's own wisdom.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *ratio ad fidem semper sit obstaculo. Eam, solius Dei opus esse, rationem vero, ad ea quae fidei sunt, caecam, mortuam et velut stipitem.* (Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 44, n. 38).

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the rebuttal to these four absurdities in Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 137-70.

<sup>19</sup> This demand for logical cogency reminds one of Hoitenga's approach (see pp. 15ff. above).

<sup>20</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 24-25.

<sup>21</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 25.

Thus, there is a difference between Pighius and Calvin on the fundamental question of authority. The former gives significantly more authority to the deductions of human reason than the latter is willing to concede. Since they do not see eye-to-eye on the value of “worldly wisdom,” it is hardly surprising that they also do not agree on numerous aspects of the doctrine of the human will.

### *The Human Will: Extinct or Extant?*

As Pighius sees it, if Calvin’s statements are drawn through to their logical conclusion, human beings would be left without a will. According to him, Calvin turns liberty into necessity.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, there is nothing of value within the human spirit – no ability to love or to long for righteousness, nor any faculty with which to aspire to or prepare for God’s grace.<sup>23</sup> In short, Pighius feels that Calvin stresses the sovereignty of God to the point that the human will becomes an endangered, if not an extinct, species.

Calvin counters this accusation by making the three-fold distinction which he already included in his *Institutes*<sup>24</sup> and which he had borrowed from Bernard of Clairvaux. In his own words:

For in relation to the present issue, following Bernard I proposed three things for consideration: to will per se, that is, simply to will; then to will badly; and [to will] well.... Having defined these three things, I had taught that the will is perpetually resident in our nature, that the evil condition of the will results from the corruption of that nature, and that by the regeneration of the Spirit the evil condition is corrected and in that way the will is made good instead of evil.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *ex libertate fecisse necessitatem.* (Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 46, n. 58).

<sup>23</sup> *neque amorem, desyderium, aut stadium iustitiae, aut ullam facultatem aspirandi aut nos praeparandi ad divinam gratiam, nec eidem cooperandi aut collaborandi.* (Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 46, n. 59).

<sup>24</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.5. See also pp. 23ff. above.

<sup>25</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 209.

In order to further clarify his position, Calvin also makes use of the scholastic distinction between substance and habit. The Schoolmen taught, for instance, that someone may have a penchant for evil thoughts; nevertheless, that same person still possesses the faculty of thought as such. John Calvin makes the same point concerning the will. The faculty (substance) of willing has been retained, even after the fall. Therefore, it is extant. However, the quality (habit) of willing has been irreparably corrupted, unless the Holy Spirit graciously renews it.<sup>26</sup>

### *Libertas in Externis*

Closely related to the question of whether the will has survived the fall is the question of how the will functions in earthly, civil affairs, the so-called *libertas in externis*. This somewhat obscure doctrine does not figure prominently in the Pighius-Calvin debate;<sup>27</sup> however, it is still worth noting. The Lutherans had included the *libertas in externis* in their *Augsburg Confession* of 1530. The opening line of Article 18 reads, “Concerning free will they [the Lutherans] teach that the human will has some freedom for producing civil righteousness and for choosing things subject to reason.”<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, Calvin readily voices his assent to this Lutheran formulation.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, Pighius acknowledges that both Luther and Calvin allow for a freedom of the will concerning

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<sup>26</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 209-10.

<sup>27</sup> “What they [the natural powers of human beings] can do in public affairs and outward behaviour he [Melanchthon] did not want to discuss in too much detail, because it is not of great importance for faith.” Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 29.

<sup>28</sup> For the full text of this article of the *Augsburg Confession*, as well as further details on this doctrine, see Appendix 2, “*Libertas in Externis*” on pp. 126ff. below.

<sup>29</sup> “Even in those matters which I have declared to be not so necessary for faith there is no difference [among Calvin, Luther and Melanchthon], apart from the softening of the form of expression so as to remove anything displeasing.” Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 29.

external things, a position which he himself also holds.<sup>30</sup> Unlike the rest of the disputation, then, this is a rare – and not insignificant – point of agreement between Pighius and Calvin.

*The Human Will: Free, Bound, Self-determined or Coerced?*

It is clear where Pighius stands on the status of the human will after the fall into sin. For him it is free to aspire to either evil or good according to its own desires.<sup>31</sup> It is also obvious how Pighius understands his opponent's view of the will. He charges that Calvin, like Luther, teaches a will that is forcefully coerced by God's sovereignty into doing whatever it is that the will does.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, since the will does much that is evil, Pighius maintains that Luther and Calvin turn God into the Author of all evil.<sup>33</sup>

Calvin, however, denies that there are only two options, a free will or a coerced will. Instead he introduces two more options which fall between the extremes of freedom and coercion – a self-determined will and a bound will:

It is appropriate to note how the following four [claims] differ from one another: namely that the will is free, bound, self-determined, or coerced. People generally understand a free will to be one which has it in its power to choose good or evil, and Pighius also defines it in this way. There can be no such thing as a coerced will, since the two ideas are contradictory. But our responsibility as teachers requires that we say what it means, so that it may be understood what coercion is. Therefore we describe [as coerced] the will which does not incline this way or that of its own accord or by an internal movement of decision, but is forcibly driven by an external impulse. We say that it is self-determined when of itself it directs itself in the direction in which it is led, when it is not taken by force or

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<sup>30</sup> Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 22.

<sup>31</sup> *Posse nos velle bonum pro nostro arbitrio, posse et non velle, et a voluntate cessare. Posse nolle malum, posse etiam non nolle, et a nolendo cessare.* (Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 44, n. 37).

<sup>32</sup> Pighius' described the Protestant position as one that teaches an *inevitabilis necessitas* (an unavoidable necessity) of all things, including evil Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 24.

<sup>33</sup> *malorum omnium author, fons et scaturigo.* (Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 45, n. 46).

dragged unwillingly. A bound will, finally, is one which because of its corruptness is held captive under the authority of evil desires, so that it can choose nothing but evil, even if it does so of its own accord and gladly, without being driven by any external impulse.<sup>34</sup>

Statements such as these are of crucial importance for they illustrate that Calvin makes a clear distinction between necessity and coercion. Due to the extent of their corruption, fallen people sin necessarily but they are not coerced into sinning. Calvin elaborates on this when he adds:

For we do not say that man is dragged unwillingly into sinning, but that because his will is corrupt he is held captive under the yoke of sin and therefore of necessity wills in an evil way. For where there is bondage, there is necessity. But it makes a great difference whether the bondage is voluntary or coerced. We locate the necessity to sin precisely in corruption of the will, from which it follows that it is self-determined.<sup>35</sup>

Throughout his *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, Calvin reinforces this point again and again: the human will is not violently coerced by God against its own inclination; rather, it is bound to sin by its own self-imposed slavery.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, God is entirely exonerated. He is not the Author of human evil.

### *Original Sin*

Yet if Calvin teaches that the unregenerate will is bound to iniquity by a *self-imposed* slavery to sin, then it must also be asked: who precisely is this “self”? Is it each individual person or is it really Adam? For if all people are conceived and born in sin, as

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<sup>34</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 69-70.

<sup>36</sup> Further examples of acts which are both necessary and voluntarily include: 1) God acting necessarily good, but yet voluntarily; 2) the devil acting necessarily evil, but yet voluntarily. See Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 147-48.

Calvin already taught in his 1536 *Institutes*,<sup>37</sup> then how can it be said that everyone is *voluntarily* bound to sinful desires? Thus, here the doctrine of original sin comes to the fore.

Albert Pighius downplays the significance and severity of Adam and Eve's original sin. For example, he writes, "Even as God, in his probationary command, was content with a trifling obedience from the Paradise-man, so also the Paradise-sin is not the cause of the universal corruption of the human nature."<sup>38</sup> What, then, is the effect of Adam's sin, according to Pighius? He teaches that original sin has deprived all Adam's descendants of the supernatural gifts which would have made the human nature even better and more perfect than it was originally created. In particular it has deprived them of the gift of immortality.<sup>39</sup> However, in the opinion of Pighius, the sin in Paradise certainly did not take away the freedom of the human will.<sup>40</sup>

Calvin has a radically different conception of both the significance and the severity of original sin. Reducing it to its most concise form, Calvin declares: "I teach that the whole of human nature is corrupt."<sup>41</sup> However, with equal fervour he pronounces that it was not so at creation:

We hold that Adam was certainly created according to the image of God and adorned with remarkable gifts of righteousness, truth, and wisdom,

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<sup>37</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 Ed.*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 16.

<sup>38</sup> As quoted in Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 194; English translation mine. Unfortunately, Melles does not provide the original Latin of Pighius' statement. However, his Dutch translation reads: "Zoals God in het proefgebod tevreden was met een geringe gehoorzaamheid van de paradijs-men (*exiguum meritum*), zo is de paradijszonde nog geen oorzaak van algemeen bederf van de menselijke natuur."

<sup>39</sup> *non naturam, sed gratiam, aut donum supernaturale abstulit, quod meliorem perfectioremque quam in se fuerat, naturam fecerat: ex mortali immortalem....* (Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 47, n. 69).

<sup>40</sup> *tota natura hominis non adeo corrupta est, ut plane perierit nobis universa libertas arbitrii....* (Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 47, n. 69).

<sup>41</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 175.

with the added assurance that not only he but all his descendants would live in this state if he continued in the innocence which he had received. But he did not long remain in it, and so, because of his ingratitude, he was stripped of those gifts and thus was deprived of that likeness to God and put on a new image. Being made subject to ignorance, weakness, unrighteousness, and vanity, and having sunk into such wretchedness he also involved his offspring in it.<sup>42</sup>

In this way Calvin brings to the fore another important distinction – namely, that between the *natura in integritate* (the created nature) and the *natura in miseria* (the fallen nature).

In both states of nature the will exists. However, in the original state the will only desired good. Subsequently, in the fallen state, the will only desires evil, unless it is acted upon by the grace of the Holy Spirit. If only this fundamental distinction would be carefully observed, then it would bring so much more clarity into the discussion; alas, Calvin complains, both the Church Fathers<sup>43</sup> and Pighius<sup>44</sup> frequently confuse the two.

*The Grace of God: Sovereign and Efficacious or Co-operative and Contingent?*

Both Pighius and Calvin affirm the need for God's grace in order for sinners to be saved. The differences between the two lie in *to what extent* divine grace is required and *in what manner* it actually works. Pighius' starting point was the well-known scholastic dictum: *facienti quod in se est non denegat gratiam*, that is, God will not deny his grace to those who, from their side, do as much as they possibly can.<sup>45</sup> Thus, for Pighius God's grace and the human will are bound together in a co-operative venture.<sup>46</sup> In this divine-human

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<sup>42</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 46-47.

<sup>43</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 85-86.

<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 92-93.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 195.

<sup>46</sup> *nec gratiam sine voluntate, nec voluntatem sine gratia quicquam operari.* (Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 46, n. 85).

co-operation, God will supply whatever is lacking in the abilities of human beings.<sup>47</sup>

However, in the final analysis, the efficacy of God's grace depends upon the willingness of human beings to accept this divine kindness.<sup>48</sup> God offers mercy, but it is up to human beings whether or not they choose to make good use of that offer.

In stark contrast to Pighius' co-operative and contingent view of grace, Calvin insists that God's mercy is both sovereign and efficacious. Says Calvin, "I consider that God does not merely give man the option, so that he has the ability both to will and to act well if it pleases him. But [God] effectively arouses [man's] heart, so that he wills, and [God] so guides it in its entirety that it does and completes by the action what has been granted to it to will."<sup>49</sup> In fact, so efficacious is God's mercy that he will even accomplish his gracious purposes in those who, of themselves, are unwilling to draw near to him. This directly opposes Pighius' stance, and it may also seem to fly in the face of common sense. However, Calvin does not waver from his position because he is convinced it is Scriptural:

He [God] promises through Isaiah that he will be found by those who have not sought him, and that he will appear and show himself to those who were not concerned to know him [Isa. 65:1].... But if you would like to know still better how [God] does not wait until people come to him, but draws to himself those who are hostile and estranged... then let us bring forward what Paul reports about the Ephesians: God displayed his mercy towards them, not when they stretched out their arms to welcome him, but when, dead in sins and trespasses, they served in Satan's army.<sup>50</sup>

Yet at this point the spectre of coercion might easily return. Does Calvin mean to say that people are dragged against their will – "kicking and screaming," as it were – into the

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<sup>47</sup> *quod nostris viribus deest, sua gratia supplet.* (Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 48, n. 98).

<sup>48</sup> *nec adiuvari potest, nisi qui aliquid sponte conatur.* (Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 40, n. 100).

<sup>49</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 177.

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 192.

bliss of eternal salvation? Not at all. For it is precisely the will *of human beings* upon which God's grace works, turning the stony heart into a heart of flesh so that regenerate human beings themselves begin to will what they ought to will.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, God does not work the grace of conversion by some kind of oppressively brute force but through Spirit-empowered preaching of the gospel.<sup>52</sup>

### *Seeking the Support of the Fathers*

Both Pighius and Calvin are keen to claim support from the Church Fathers for their own position. Pighius' *Free Choice* and Calvin's *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* are both filled with a large and wide variety of patristic quotations. However, the chief point that Pighius wishes to make is that all of the Church Fathers – from Ireneaus to Augustine, including both Greek and Latin theologians – speak of the free will.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the theologian of Kampen finds it both absurd and arrogant that John Calvin chooses not to use this time-tested terminology but rather speaks of the enslaved will. Who does Calvin think he is to deny the nearly universal consensus of the early church?

Pighius also demonstrates that he does not hastily paint all the *patres* with the same brush. He is sensitive to the historical context in which they worked. Especially concerning Augustine, Pighius carefully distinguishes among three categories of his writings: 1) his early, anti-Manichaeian treatises; 2) his later, anti-Pelagian tracts; and 3) his final books, written after the fire of the Pelagian controversies had abated, towards the end of his life.<sup>54</sup> Pighius acknowledges that during the second period, in his doctrinal

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<sup>51</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 174.

<sup>52</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 163-64.

<sup>53</sup> Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 31.

<sup>54</sup> Pighius dedicates the entire third chapter of his *Free Choice* to the writings of Augustine.

battles against the Pelagians, Augustine stresses the grace of God with such overwhelming fervour that the human will appears to be diminished. However, he attributes this to a misguided rhetorical excess on Augustine's part. Pighius then goes on to suggest that in his later years, after the dust of the battle had settled, Augustine spoke with more caution and renewed favour concerning the freedom of the human will.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Pighius concludes that even though Augustine altered his opinion about the will during certain times in his life, in the end, the most prolific theologian of antiquity agreed with the patristic consensus and affirmed the freedom of the will.

Undaunted by the vast array of ancient authorities that Pighius marshals against him, Calvin not only stands his ground, but he endeavours to bring the majority of them over onto his side of the debate. Calvin works through the same list of Fathers that Pighius gave, and along the way he indicates that when many of them speak about the freedom of the will, they are actually speaking about the *natura in integritate*.<sup>56</sup> Of course, Calvin has no argument with that, for he, too, affirms that Adam and Eve were given a free will at creation.

Then, regarding the terminology, Calvin does indeed regret that the Church Fathers frequently use the term "free will." However, it is not the term so much as the meaning behind the term that counts for him:

Now as far as the term [free will] is concerned I still maintain what I declared in my *Institutes*, that I am not so excessively concerned about words as to want to start an argument for that cause, provided that a sound understanding of reality is retained. If freedom is opposed to coercion, I

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<sup>55</sup> Melles, *Albertus Pighius*, 31.

<sup>56</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 70-80.

both acknowledge and consistently maintain that choice is free, and I hold anyone who thinks otherwise to be a heretic.<sup>57</sup>

However, since so many people, when they hear the term “free will,” immediately think that, despite the fall into sin, it nevertheless remains in their own power to choose for eternal salvation, Calvin wishes not to use the term.<sup>58</sup>

When the discussion turns to Augustine, Calvin becomes more passionate about his favourite Father. He flatly denies that Pighius can claim Augustine for his side. He is willing to accept Pighius’ division of Augustine’s writings into three groups. Yet he is opposed to Pighius’ interpretation of the second group – namely, that Augustine lost sight of the orthodox understanding of the will due to the heat of his battle with the Pelagians. On the contrary, Calvin asserts that “after the end of the controversy he did not hold a different opinion from what he had held at the time of writing.”<sup>59</sup> Next, using a veritable litany of citations, Calvin sets forth his position that Augustine taught that the human will was free, but only in the sense that under the *natura in miseria* the will is free to do evil voluntarily – that is to say, the will is not externally coerced into sinning.<sup>60</sup> With this kind of definition of “free” Calvin himself has no quibble. In fact, he wholeheartedly agrees with it. Therefore, he concludes, “we cannot be deprived of the fact that Augustine is on our side.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 68.

<sup>58</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 68.

<sup>59</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 90. Like Pighius, the Pelagians had also accused Augustine of changing his opinion about the human will. However, see pp. 43f. above concerning the *Retractions* in which Augustine himself also maintains that his basic teachings on the human will did change throughout his life.

<sup>60</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 135.

<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 136.

Finally, Calvin adds one more weighty ancient authority to the list: the Council of Orange (529). The third canon of that council pronounces: “If anyone affirms that it is possible to think or choose by natural strength any good thing which has to do with eternal life, that is, to assent to the preaching [of the gospel] without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit who gives to all their delight in assenting and believing, then he is deceived by a heretical spirit.”<sup>62</sup> In addition to this, the next canon declares: “If anyone argues that God waits for our desire that we should be cleansed from sin, and does not acknowledge that it is by the work of the Holy Spirit in us that we are even caused to want cleansing, he resists the Holy Spirit as he speaks through Solomon: The will is prepared by the Lord.” Since Pighius promotes<sup>63</sup> precisely what Orange condemns, Calvin rhetorically asks, “Since he [Pighius] claims to give allegiance only to the church, what escape route will he find now, when he is declared an enemy of the Holy Spirit by an orthodox council?”<sup>64</sup> Here Calvin uses his familiarity with the ecclesiastical councils in order to land a significant blow against his opponent. He correctly points out that Pighius is standing, with both feet, outside the tradition of the church so long as he maintains that the will is able to prepare itself for grace.

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<sup>62</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 189.

<sup>63</sup> See p. 56 n. 23 above. Pighius laments the fact that Calvin’s doctrine of the will does not leave fallen human beings with any faculty with which to aspire to or prepare for God’s grace.

<sup>64</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 106.

## An Evaluation of the Debate

Having now completed a survey of the debate – what Pighius said and how Calvin responded – it is useful to offer an evaluation of the disputation. The same headings that were used in the summary above will be followed in the evaluation below.

### *The Underlying Question of Authority*

Pighius and Calvin both appeal to Scripture in order to prove their points. Both theologians also use logical reasoning to argue their cases. So, it would be simplistic to state that Pighius places all his confidence in human reason while Calvin relies solely on the divine Scriptures. The underlying question of authority must receive a more nuanced answer than that. To begin with, Pighius' own personal history should be considered. His undergraduate studies, as well as his early writings, focussed almost entirely on astronomical and mathematical topics.<sup>65</sup> It seems that Pighius had a keen analytical mind which he was fond of using to penetrate the celestial mysteries of the heavens.

Yet, and this is Calvin's point, whereas human logic may be able to solve many astronomical puzzles, it is unable to provide the knowledge needed for a correct doctrine of salvation, unless it is enlightened by divine revelation.<sup>66</sup> Calvin uses the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1-3 to caution Pighius against overestimating the ability of the human *ratio*. To be sure, theology uses reason in order to organize and advance its

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<sup>65</sup> See pp. 52f. above.

<sup>66</sup> See also Schulze, *Calvin's Reply*, 142-43. "Pighius was much more inclined towards a preconceived scheme. He logically deduced the existence of the free will from God's goodness and justice and from the presence of the law. Calvin rejected the rationalism of his opponent, which annihilates God's omnipotence and reduces him to a bare spectator of the world drama. Like Augustine he accepted the corrupted will of man as revealed in the Bible. The self-knowledge is a knowledge *coram Deo*, an anthropological revelation and not a rational theological deduction."

enterprise. Nevertheless, the initial wellspring and the final authority of theology are the divine Scriptures, not human reason. Pighius' oft-repeated criticism of Calvin's teaching on the will is that it is "absurd" or "illogical."<sup>67</sup> Such criticism misses the mark. If he wanted to criticize Calvin, what Pighius needed to demonstrate is where the Reformer's teaching became unscriptural.

To a certain degree, though, Calvin undermines his own exhortation about "worldly wisdom" when he leans on the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accident to explain how the human will is ruined but not exterminated by the fall into sin.<sup>68</sup> In fact, as A.N.S. Lane notes, Calvin ironically makes a greater than normal use of Greek philosophy in the *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* as compared to his other writings.<sup>69</sup> This does not mean, though, that in the end Calvin uses logical reasoning in much the same way that Pighius does. For Calvin the bottom line is always what is Scriptural, not what is logical.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, he would add, if it is not found in Scripture, then let mere mortals restrain their curiosity. For instance, at one point in the debate, Pighius insists that God must have some valid reason for granting his grace to one and not to the other. Calvin replies, "God does indeed have a definite, real reason for what he does, but it is too secret, sublime, and concealed for it to be grasped by the measure of our mind, which

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<sup>67</sup> Pighius' fourth book is mainly comprised of four major "absurdities" which he finds in Calvin's *Institutes*. See Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 142-65 for Calvin's response to each one.

<sup>68</sup> Calvin explains that the substance of the will was not eradicated by the fall, but the accident or quality of the will was certainly corrupted. See Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 46-47.

<sup>69</sup> Lane, "Introduction," xxiv-xxvi.

<sup>70</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 57-58.

is so narrow and mean.”<sup>71</sup> These words remind us of the counsel to remain humble which Augustine gave to Evodius some eleven centuries earlier.<sup>72</sup>

### *The Human Will: Extinct or Extant?*

Since the Protestants emphasized the complete sovereignty of God over everything, Pighius logically deduced from this that they also reduced human beings into little more than brute animals without a will. Pighius perceived the Protestant paradigm as follows: if God’s will necessarily controls everything, then the human will amounts to nothing. To his credit, it must be said that Pighius could find some justification for his perceptions in some of the more extreme statements that Luther had made concerning the will and necessity. The doctor of Wittenberg once averred that “free choice is something imaginary, a name without substance” and that “all things happen by absolute necessity.”<sup>73</sup> Especially the latter promulgation needs qualification lest it be understood as a Protestant endorsement of Stoic fatalism.

For his part Calvin is aware of the problems that might arise from some of Luther’s more extreme expressions.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, without in any way undermining the main thrust of Luther’s teaching on the will, Calvin seeks to refine his colleague’s presentation of this doctrine. In the *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, even more so than in his *Institutes*, the reformer of Geneva carefully maintains that, although all things happen under the

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<sup>71</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 191.

<sup>72</sup> See p. 37 above.

<sup>73</sup> Both Pighius and Calvin refer to these statements from Luther in their own debate. See *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 26.

<sup>74</sup> Calvin grants that Luther “exaggerates” when he used some of his more extreme expressions, but Calvin also explains that Luther’s strong language was fitting for the circumstances within the church at that time. False teachings had lulled the church into such a “deadly drowsiness” that only “a trumpet call, a peal of thunder and thunderbolts” would awaken it. See *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 26.

necessity of God's sovereignty, the Lord does not coerce anyone into wrongdoing. Moreover, in addition to the distinction between necessity and coercion, Calvin goes on to apply the subtle, but significant, nuances of Bernard's instruction on the will – namely, that to will is human, to will badly is of sin, and to will well is of grace. With these and various other qualifications, Calvin credibly explains that a will in bondage to sin is, nonetheless, still truly a human will. Perhaps Pighius' misunderstanding (or misrepresentation?) of Calvin's position is due, at least in part, to the fact that he tended to look at Calvin through the lens of Luther's writings. Although the two reformers did not disagree in the substance of their beliefs on the human will, it is also true that Calvin had the opportunity to refine some of the less nuanced statements of his older colleague in Germany.<sup>75</sup> In fact, Calvin freely admits that he is constantly striving to see how his own teaching on the human will can be improved, both in its faithfulness to Scripture and its comprehensibility for his readers.<sup>76</sup> Theology ought to progress, not petrify.

### *Libertas in Externis*

Although the *libertas in externis* receives no more than a fleeting reference in both Pighius' and Calvin's books, both theologians would have done well to dwell on it in more detail. In the first place, the very fact that both Luther and Calvin readily accepted

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<sup>75</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 28-29.

<sup>76</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 28-29. "But why could we [the Reformers] not be allowed something that has been common practice of everyone in every generation? This too I recognize without reluctance, that when our works are reprinted we improve what was rather coarse, we soften what was too harshly expressed, we clarify obscure points, we explain more fully and at greater length what was too compressed, we also strengthen our argument with new reasons, and finally, where we fear the danger of causing offence, we also tone down and soften our language. For what would be the point of living if neither age nor practice nor constant exercise nor reading nor meditation were of any benefit to us? And what would be the point of making progress if it did not result in some profit reaching others also? On the contrary, if Pighius does not know it, I should like it to be absolutely clear to him that we strive night and day to shape our faithfully transmitted teachings into a form which we also judge will be the best."

this doctrine clearly demonstrates that they did not annihilate the human will: according to the doctrine of *libertas in externis*, the will is most certainly alive and active in civil matters, also *post lapsum*. Secondly, this seemingly minor teaching has a major potential to take away some of the perceived absurdity of the Calvin's teaching concerning the bondage of the will. Calvin taught that human nature is *totally* corrupt. Upon hearing this, though, some people might react with a sense of astonishment. Do the innumerable instances of charity and philanthropy, even among self-professed pagans, not demonstrate that within the will of all human beings there resides at least some remnant that is good? Without the *libertas in externis* it is difficult to answer such a question. With this doctrine it is answered. As the Lutheran divines expressed it: "We confess that all human beings have a free will that possesses the judgment of reason. It does not enable them, without God, to begin – much less complete – anything that pertains to God, but only to perform the good or evil deeds of this life."<sup>77</sup> Although Calvin's teaching on the total corruption of the human nature is well-known, his acceptance of the *libertas in externis* is rarely, if ever, mentioned. It would be helpful if scholars paid more attention to the latter.

### *The Human Will: Free, Bound, Self-determined or Coerced?*

Proper definitions are practically indispensable. This applies in all forms of communication, and especially within the context of a debate. Many theologians speak of the "freedom of the will." However, the key question is, what is meant by that term? At times Pighius and Calvin are speaking past each other because mentally they are working with different definitions. When Pighius hears Calvin speak of the "enslaved

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<sup>77</sup> From Article 18 of the *Augsburg Confession*. See Appendix 2 on pp. 126ff. for the full text of this confession.

will,” he immediately thinks of human beings locked in the chains of some kind of deterministic coercion. Meanwhile, in Calvin’s mind he is speaking of the human heart being enslaved to its own evil passions. In this regard, Calvin advances the discussion in a helpful way when he succinctly defines the difference between free, bound, self-determined and coerced wills.<sup>78</sup>

### *Original Sin*

When it comes to the doctrine of original sin, Pighius wanders far away from the good pastures of sound doctrine. Such was the judgment even of his own Roman Catholic Church. Already the delegates at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) concluded that Pighius’ teaching on the sin of Adam was beyond the pale of orthodoxy. Some decades later, his writings on this subject were also placed on the Index of Prohibited Books (Lisbon, 1624).<sup>79</sup> Of course, this does not mean that the Roman Catholic Church would have agreed with everything that Calvin taught about original sin. Nevertheless, at least on this single issue Calvin’s opponents concurred with him: the fall into sin had more devastating effects on the human nature than Pighius was willing to admit.

### *The Grace of God: Sovereign and Efficacious or Co-operative and Contingent?*

Pighius wants to include both God and human beings in the program of salvation. Redemption must be, he insists, a matter of co-operation, otherwise God would be a callous and unjust deity who arbitrarily categorizes some unto eternal life and others unto

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<sup>78</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 69.

<sup>79</sup> Lane, “Introduction,” xvii.

eternal perdition.<sup>80</sup> Calvin also includes both God and human beings in the outworking of salvation; however, he will not abide any hint of co-operation between God and human beings. Redemption is all of God's grace and it is all unto God's glory.

As L.F. Schulze explains, the key to understanding all of this is learning to *distinguish* between the work of God and the work of human beings rather than *dividing* the work between them.<sup>81</sup> Pighius uses the principle of division. Human beings do their part by aspiring unto righteousness, and then God also does his part by filling in what people are unable to do. Yet if the principle of distinction, rather than division, is embraced, then the dilemma is mitigated, at least somewhat. A case in point is Calvin's explanation of Philippians 2:12, 13: "Therefore, my dear friends... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and act according to his good purpose." Pighius uses this passage – especially the command to "work out your salvation" – to undergird his opinion that the human will must contribute something in order to advance its own salvation. Calvin responds:

For the question is not whether the will acts – which is beyond doubt – but whether it acts of itself or according to the measure of God's action... For who is not aware that it is by means of the will that man wills? But Paul is affirming in that passage that the will is directed by the Spirit of God to turn to the good and seek after it, and so any good which we conceive in our minds is [God's] own doing.<sup>82</sup>

In this way Calvin carefully distinguishes between the action of the will itself and the gracious action of God upon the will as he directs it to seek that which is truly good.

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<sup>80</sup> Schulze, *Calvin's Reply*, 41-43.

<sup>81</sup> Schulze, *Calvin's Reply*, 59.

<sup>82</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 231.

### *Seeking the Support of the Fathers*

As Anthony Lane explains, Calvin's quotations of the Church Fathers are at times too hasty and unduly inaccurate.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, this can be partly excused by the circumstances under which Calvin was forced to work. Unlike Pighius, Calvin did not have the luxury of ample time and more than adequate library resources. On the contrary, Calvin wrote much of his material in a remarkably short span of time, quoting the Fathers, even at length, from memory.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, it must be conceded to Pighius that a cursory reading of the Church Fathers certainly leaves the impression that they heartily endorsed the freedom of the will, for they frequently and almost universally employ the term. At the same time, Calvin does well to ask the deeper question: "What did the Fathers actually mean with that term?" As many of the Fathers wrote, they were consciously countering some variety of Gnosticism or Manichaeism, both of which had deterministic tendencies. These heresies also left members of the church with the impression that evil has always been inherent in all people, even at creation. Within this context, numerous Church Fathers expounded the freedom of the will in order to teach people that they could not blame their sins on the Creator; rather, they were responsible for their own sins, for they had sinned freely, that is, voluntarily. Calvin strove to understand the Fathers within that context. Whatever mistakes he may have made in citations, it is being increasingly

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<sup>83</sup> Lane, "Introduction," xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>84</sup> Lane, "Introduction," xxi-xxiv.

acknowledged that concerning the human will he did understand the main thrust of the patristic teachings accurately, including those of his beloved mentor, Augustine.<sup>85</sup>

## Summary

### *The Significance of the Debate*

The fire of a controversy often purifies the expression of doctrine. Such was the case with the dispute between Albert Pighius and John Calvin. The *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, Calvin's contribution to this debate, provides additional explanations and valuable qualifications of the doctrine of the will which he had already expounded in his well-known *Institutes*.

One thing that comes into sharper focus is the urgent need for careful definition of theological terminology. What are the "natural" abilities of the human will? As Calvin constantly reiterates, the answer to that question depends on whether the "nature" being referred to is created or fallen or redeemed. Is the fallen will still "free" or "enslaved"? Again, the controversy with Pighius demonstrates that "freedom" can be either "freedom from coercion" or "freedom to choose for God's grace." Likewise, "enslaved" can denote "slavery to evil, inner passions" or "slavery to forceful, external compulsion." How these terms are defined has a determinative impact on how the whole doctrine of the human will is developed.

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<sup>85</sup> Lane, "Introduction," xxiv. "An influential essay by the Benedictine Odilo Rottmanner in the nineteenth century marked a new willingness by the Roman Catholics to admit that in the areas of grace and predestination the Reformers were largely justified in their appeal to Augustine. A few notes indicate areas where Calvin's interpretation of Augustine is open to question, but it is very widely conceded today that the main thrust is accurate."

In addition to this, the longer Pighius and Calvin spar over the doctrine of the will, the more other central doctrines are brought into the whole discussion. The condition of the human will cannot be accurately assessed without a proper understanding of original sin. Moreover, if the impact of the fall on the will is minimized, then the need for God's redemptive grace is also diminished. Furthermore, if the need for grace is reduced, so is the work of Christ. However, if the human will is annihilated – crushed by a deterministic explanation of God's providence – then the holiness of God is endangered by the implication that he is the source of evil. All of this indicates how vitally important a proper understanding of the human will is. Error concerning the doctrine of the will has ramifications for theology, hamartiology, Christology and soteriology.

An extensive debate can also force the opponents to explore subjects that otherwise would not likely receive attention. This is particularly true for the teaching of the *Augsburg Confession* on the *libertas in externis*. This is not a topic that Calvin gives much attention in the *Institutes*. For that matter, neither does he give it much of his time in the *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*. Yet in the heat of the debate it does come out, and its appearance is significant. The *libertas in externis* gives an adequate account of how unregenerate people can aspire to morally lofty goals. What is more, the doctrine accomplishes this without compromising the sovereignty and all-sufficiency of God's grace.

### *Another Look at Hoitenga*

This fine-tuning of Calvin's doctrine of the will, which took place during his polemics with Pighius, also provides an opportunity to give more refined responses to some of Hoitenga's critical remarks. As noted earlier, Hoitenga feels that Calvin does

not retain enough of the natural abilities of the will after the fall into sin.<sup>86</sup> Yet what precisely are these “natural” abilities? Here is where careful attention to terminology becomes crucial. Hoitenga argues that an “inclination to goodness” is a natural component of the will, even after the fall.<sup>87</sup> However, Calvin maintains that while the *ability to choose* belongs to the human nature both before and after the fall, the will’s inherent inclination toward goodness was natural in the created state, lost in the fallen state and is restored in the redeemed state. Thus Hoitenga and Calvin have different things in mind when they use the word “natural.”

A similar terminological issue arises concerning “freedom.” Hoitenga is disturbed by the title of the second chapter in the second book of the *Institutes* – namely, “Man Has Now Been Deprived of Freedom of Choice and Bound Over to Miserable Servitude.” Concerning this heading he protests, “Deprived of free choice? With no difference between a corrupted choice and no choice at all?”<sup>88</sup> Again, the dispute with Pighius brings into sharp focus the fact that Calvin did make distinctions among phrases such as “no freedom whatsoever,” “freedom from coercion” and “the freedom to choose for God’s grace.” Consequently, whereas Hoitenga draws rather rapid conclusions from the simple wording in one of Calvin’s titles, he should have spend more time delving into the nuances of the word “freedom” which Calvin expounds at greater length in his *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*.

Hoitenga also desires a doctrine of the will which can properly account for the moral struggle between good and evil in which all human beings have been engaged ever since

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<sup>86</sup> See p. 13 above.

<sup>87</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 73-74.

<sup>88</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 74.

the fall. In his estimation Calvin does not provide such an account. He writes, “But on his [Calvin’s] account of the fallen will, as I have detailed it so far, the entire human history of moral conflict between good and evil, let alone its vivid portrayal in literature and studious examination by pagan philosophers, is a chimera.”<sup>89</sup> However, in his refutation of Pighius, Calvin does not disparage the human moral struggle as a “chimera.” On the contrary, he affirms it and identifies it as part of the *libertas in externis*, which teaches that “the human will has some freedom for producing civil righteousness and for choosing things subject to reason.”<sup>90</sup> In other words, Calvin does in fact acknowledge the very thing that Hoitenga finds so utterly lacking in his treatment of the will. Granted, the *libertas in externis* is hard to find in Calvin’s writings. It is only mentioned briefly in both his *Institutes*<sup>91</sup> and the *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*. Therefore, it is not entirely surprising that Hoitenga overlooks it. Nevertheless, it is there, and since the crux of the sixteenth century debate was the freedom of the will *to choose for eternal salvation*, not the freedom of the will in earthly or external matters, it is also understandable that Calvin did not devote more time to it.

Finally, the polemics between Pighius and Calvin reveal that there is a more fundamental issue at stake in the debate over the human will – namely, the place of human reason in the development of the church’s doctrines. Logical analysis is a remarkable gift that humankind possesses. However, as Calvin insists and demonstrates, reason must be enlightened by, and submissive to, the divine revelation of Scripture if it is to be of any aid in theological pursuits. Perhaps this partially explains why Pighius, in

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<sup>89</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 90.

<sup>90</sup> This is how the doctrine is confessed in the eighteenth article of the *Augsburg Confession*. See Appendix 2, pp. 126ff below for more details.

<sup>91</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.5 where he speaks about the freedom of the will “for civil or external actions.”

his time, and Hoitenga, more recently, have difficulties with Calvin's position on the human will. Both of them exhibit a strong philosophical bent.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, since the Pighius-Hoitenga starting point is, for the most part, logical reasoning, while Calvin repeatedly begins with inspired revelation, they also end up with different conclusions concerning the human will. Until the starting points are aligned, there is little hope that the terminal points will coincide.

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<sup>92</sup> See p. 52 and p. 6 above, respectively.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CALVIN & THE RADICAL REFORMATION CONCERNING THE HUMAN WILL

In the preface to his first theological treatise, *Psychopannychia* (1534), John Calvin writes that it was the Anabaptists who were propagating the erroneous doctrine of soul sleep.<sup>1</sup> He condemns them with strong language, referring to them as a “nefarious herd... against whom nothing I have said equals their deserts.”<sup>2</sup> Two years later, when Calvin published the first edition of his *Institutes*, the Anabaptists are again mentioned by name in the dedicatory preface to King Francis I. Obviously, Calvin’s evaluation of this group had not softened in the interim, for he explains to the king that “[Satan] aroused disagreements and dogmatic contentions through his Catabaptists and other monstrous rascals in order to obscure and at last extinguish the truth.”<sup>3</sup> From the start, then, Calvin’s theology was shaped within the context of, and in conflict with, Anabaptist

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, however, that also Luther taught that the soul sleeps until God awakens it on the last day. On this topic see Timothy George, “Calvin’s *Psychopannychia*: Another Look,” in *Papers from the 1986 International Calvin Symposium*, ed. E.J. Furcha (Montreal: McGill University, 1987), 310-11.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, “Psychopannychia,” in *Tracts & Treatises of John Calvin*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 3:416. Calvin wrote the first edition of his *Psychopannychia* in 1534. This edition was never published. A second edition, written in Basel in 1536, may have been printed, but this is uncertain. The final edition was published in 1542 in Strasbourg and later again in Geneva in 1545. Cf. George H. Tavard, *The Starting Point of Calvin’s Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 12. “Catabaptists” is an epithet that Calvin and other reformers used in speaking about the Anabaptists. Whereas “ana-” (Gk. ἀνα; again) pertains to the practice of rebaptizing those who had already been baptized as infants, “cata-” (Gk. κατα; with acc. against) refers to Anabaptists’ rejection of infant baptism.

teachings. Therefore, A.A. Van Ruler poses the right question when he asks, “Is not the Anabaptist movement just as significant as our consideration of the teachings of Rome in our analysis of the Reformation?”<sup>4</sup> Also, we may hasten to add, the Anabaptist movement is just as significant as the teachings of Rome as we consider the theology of John Calvin.<sup>5</sup>

Having said that, though, a problem of identity and definition immediately arises. Who are these “Anabaptists”? The title itself suggests that their distinctive lies with their convictions concerning the sacrament of baptism. Thus, it is commonly said, Anabaptists are the ones who eschewed infant baptism and embraced believers’ baptism instead. However, such a definition of Anabaptism is a woefully inadequate and monolithic portrayal of the Radical Reformation in the sixteenth century. G.H. Williams sums it up well when he says, “This Radical Reformation was a loosely interrelated congeries of reformations and restitutions.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Donald Smeeton adds his perspective to the matter when he describes the term “Anabaptist” as “a stretch garment which covers a multitude of movements which were not evident descendants of Calvin or Luther.”<sup>7</sup> Some of the radicals withdrew from society and lived off by themselves in communes, while others remained part of the mainstream. Some were dedicated students of the Bible, but others preferred to rely on extra-scriptural, personal revelations from the Spirit. In short, it is not possible to pin down one specific set of beliefs and behaviours and to

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<sup>4</sup> As quoted in Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, trans. William J. Heynen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981), 9.

<sup>5</sup> In fact G.H. Tavard concludes that Calvin’s first polemical engagement with the Anabaptists, over the issue of soul sleep, set the course and tone of much of his later, more mature theology. Although he may be overstating his case to a degree, his main thesis is nonetheless credible. See Tavard, *The Starting Point*, 190-91.

<sup>6</sup> George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), xxiv.

<sup>7</sup> Donald D. Smeeton, “Calvin’s Conflict with the Anabaptists,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (1982): 46.

identify it as “Anabaptism.” Instead, beside what is often called “the Magisterial Reformation,” there was also a wide assortment of other ecclesiastical renovators and renovations which, for lack of a better term, are best collected under the heading of “the Radical Reformation.”

In an effort to establish some sense of order among the vast variety of radical reformers, G.H. Williams divides the movement into three main categories: the Anabaptists, the Spiritualists and the Evangelical Rationalists.<sup>8</sup> Strictly speaking, then, the Anabaptists are comprised of groups such as the Swiss Brethren and the Dutch Mennonites, who were led by the likes of Conrad Grebel and Menno Simons, respectively. The Spiritualists typically placed more emphasis on mystical meditations and personal revelations. The Loists of the Netherlands and the Libertines of France, to whom we shall return shortly, belong to this larger class of spiritualizers. Finally, the Rationalists, more so than other radicals, held human reason in high esteem, to the point that they began to doubt the admittedly inexplicable doctrine of the Trinity as the catholic church had confessed it already for centuries in the Nicene Creed. Perhaps the most famous, or infamous, of the Rationalists was Michael Servetus. However, there were more, many of whom traced their roots back to Italy, including Matthew Gribaldi and Laelius Socinus.

### **Calvin’s Understanding of the Radical Reformation**

How well did John Calvin understand and identify all these distinctions among the radical reformers? Williams himself is not impressed with Calvin’s diligence on this

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<sup>8</sup> Williams, *Radical Reformation*, xxiv.

point. “We have already noted,” he says, “that Calvin did not clearly distinguish among his opponents. The psychopannychists against whom he wrote in Orleans in 1534 were, in his mind, much the same as those whom he later called Libertines and Anabaptists.”<sup>9</sup>

F.H. Littell is even more pessimistic about Calvin’s knowledge of the radicals. He writes, “John Calvin (1509-1564) was also among those whose writings lent misunderstanding to the study of the Anabaptists. Among widely read authors, probably none understood less about them.”<sup>10</sup> At the opposite end of the spectrum, Lois Beachy, who is a Mennonite, offers the following evaluation:

In Calvin’s writings he deals with the Anabaptists in an exceptionally fair manner for his times. In the chief point of disagreement, the nature of the church, his criticisms go to the heart of the matter. So, though he certainly wastes no love on the Anabaptists, one must conclude that he is fair and adequate in his writings against them.<sup>11</sup>

What should be made of these widely divergent assessments? In the first place, it is true that when Calvin initially began writing against the Anabaptists in 1534 he had had very little personal contact with them. He also openly admits this in the preface to his *Psychopannychia*.<sup>12</sup> However, for this budding theologian the heterodox teaching of soul sleep was sufficiently serious to warrant picking up his pen, regardless of how much personal knowledge he had of his opponents.

As time went on, though, Calvin’s contact with Anabaptists increased considerably. During the first part of his ministry in Geneva (1536-1538) Calvin, along with his

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<sup>9</sup> Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 598.

<sup>10</sup> As quoted in Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 7; see n. 44.

<sup>11</sup> As quoted in Benjamin Wirt Farley, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 31.

<sup>12</sup> “They [the Anabaptists] are said to circulate their follies in a kind of Tracts, which I have never happened to see. I have only received some notes from a friend, who had taken down what he had cursorily heard from their lips, or collected by some other means.” Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 414.

colleague Farel, refuted Anabaptist preachers who came to the city from the Lowlands. For instance, on March 29, 1537, Calvin engaged in a public disputation with two Anabaptists from Liège, Jean Bomeromenus and Jean Stordeur.<sup>13</sup> Then, when he moved to Strasbourg, Calvin had even more interaction with a greater number of radical reformers. For the duration of his stay there, from 1538 to 1541, he was actively involved in converting various kinds of Anabaptists and bringing them into the Reformed congregations of that city.<sup>14</sup> In fact, Theodore Beza notes that Calvin was successful “in bringing back many Anabaptists to the right path.”<sup>15</sup> Finally, and perhaps most significantly, in August of 1540, John Calvin was wed to Idelette de Bure, who was herself formerly an Anabaptist.<sup>16</sup> Ironically, she was also the widow of Jean Stordeur, the Anabaptist with whom Calvin debated in Geneva and whom he later converted to the Reformed faith in Strasbourg. Therefore, seeing that Calvin was extensively involved in converting Anabaptists, and that he was even married to a converted Anabaptist, there is little evidence to support Littell’s claim that Calvin was gravely deficient in his understanding of the radical reformation. Rather, all indications point in the direction of Beachy’s assessment – namely, that Calvin was “fair and adequate in his writings against them.”

All of the above-mentioned contact between Calvin and the radical reformers took place before he wrote his two main treatises against them: *Brief Instruction for Arming*

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<sup>13</sup> Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 82-83.

<sup>14</sup> Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 128-33.

<sup>15</sup> Theodore Beza, “Life of John Calvin,” in *Calvin’s Tracts & Treatises*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 1:xxxvi.

<sup>16</sup> “The understanding of the Anabaptists that Calvin must have acquired through his marriage to Idelette de Bure, the widow of the Walloon Anabaptist, Jean Stordeur, was of considerable importance.” Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 133.

*All the Good Faithful Against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists*<sup>17</sup> and *Against the Fantastic and Furious Sect of the Libertines Who Are Called "Spirituals."*<sup>18</sup>

In the introduction to *Against the Anabaptists* Calvin demonstrates his nuanced knowledge of the radicals as he carefully distinguishes between their "two principal sects."<sup>19</sup> The first group may be full of "many perverse and pernicious errors,"<sup>20</sup> but they receive the Holy Scriptures as the inspired Word of God. Since this is the case, Calvin at least feels that there is a common basis upon which doctrine and piety can be debated and decided. This group corresponds to what G.H. Williams has identified as "the Anabaptist wing" of the radical reformation. However, the second faction does not even acknowledge the Scriptures as the only rule of authority, thereby leading itself astray, as Calvin says, into a labyrinth of absurd views.<sup>21</sup> Geneva's reformer calls them "the Libertines," and this group is subsumed within what Williams terms "the Spiritualizers."

It is with good reason that Calvin speaks about these groups in two separate treatises. Their doctrinal and ethical standpoints vary so greatly that individual attention is warranted for each one. The doctrine of the human will is one example of difference between them. Towards the end of his introduction to *Against the Anabaptists* Calvin writes, "Moreover, on several principal points of Christianity, they agree closely with the

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<sup>17</sup> *Brieve instruction pour armer tous bons fideles contre les erreurs de la secte commune des Anabaptistes* (Geneva: Jean Girard, 1544). Hereafter referred to simply as *Against the Anabaptists*. The English translation of this treatise is: John Calvin, *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, trans. Benjamin Wirt Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des Libertins que se nomment Spirituelz* (Geneva: Jean Girard, 1545). Hereafter referred to simply as *Against the Libertines*. The English translation of this treatise is: John Calvin, *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, trans. Benjamin Wirt Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> Calvin, *Against the Anabaptists*, 39.

<sup>20</sup> Calvin, *Against the Anabaptists*, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Calvin, *Against the Anabaptists*, 40.

papists, holding a view directly repugnant to all the holy Scripture – as with free will, predestination, and the cause of our salvation.”<sup>22</sup> Remarkably, though, whereas the Anabaptists affirmed the freedom of the will, the Libertines held to such a fatalistic view of God’s providence that Calvin feels compelled to confute them by strongly asserting the ongoing existence of the human will after the fall into sin. Consequently, on the one side Calvin is disproving the liberty of the will against radical reformers who are synergistic in their soteriology, but on the other side he is defending the reality of the will against other radicals who are deterministic in their theology. In order to further sharpen our understanding of Calvin’s doctrine of the will, we will follow his lead and look at each group separately.

### **Calvin and the Anabaptists**

The larger part of Calvin’s *Treatise against the Anabaptists* contains a denunciation of various articles of the Schleithem Confession of 1527.<sup>23</sup> Not surprisingly, the topics that arise are baptism, the ban, the magistrate and the oath, as well as supplementary sections on the incarnation of Christ and the state of souls after death. The freedom of the will is not included among the Schleithem articles of faith. Therefore, Calvin does not deal with this doctrine in his treatise, other than a passing reference in his introductory comments, as noted above. Since, in his estimation, the Anabaptists and the papists held the same position on the will, it can be surmised that Calvin would have argued against the Anabaptists along the same lines as he had already disputed with Albert Pighius in his

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<sup>22</sup> Calvin, *Against the Anabaptists*, 43.

<sup>23</sup> The Schleithem Confession is one of the few creedal statements coming from the hands of the Anabaptists who were typically far more interested in deed than creed. A modern translation of it is: John H. Yoder, *Schleithem Confession* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1977).

*Bondage and Liberation of the Will.*<sup>24</sup> However, even though Calvin is substantially correct when he says that Anabaptists and papists agree in their doctrine of the will, there are also certain noteworthy differences between the two. In order to discover those differences it is helpful to turn to one of the foremost Anabaptist theologians of the sixteenth century, Balthasar Hubmaier.

### *Hubmaier's Understanding of the Human Will*

There is no historical evidence that Balthasar Hubmaier and John Calvin ever encountered each other. Indeed, it would seem virtually certain that they did not meet, for Hubmaier died a martyr's death in 1527 at Vienna. At that time Calvin was only eighteen years of age and had not yet even finished his formal education in Paris. Later on, though, Calvin became aware of some of Hubmaier's writings. For instance in 1544 Farel gave him a translated copy of Hubmaier's *Von der christlichen Taufe der Gläubigen*.<sup>25</sup> However, there is likely no way of knowing whether or not Calvin ever read Hubmaier's books on the freedom of the human will.

In 1527 Balthasar Hubmaier published two treatises, both of which share the same title, *On the Freedom of the Will*. Hubmaier, a trained theologian, was a prominent leader within the Anabaptist movement. In fact, more than one author has designated him "the theologian of Anabaptism."<sup>26</sup> However, Hubmaier began his studies in Freiburg as a theological student within the Catholic Church. Under the sponsorship of Johann

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<sup>24</sup> See chapter 4 of this study.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 596.

<sup>26</sup> See the seminal work of Torsten Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Anabaptist Theologian and Martyr*, trans. W.R. Estep (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1978). Also see H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder's translation of Hubmaier's collected works, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989).

Eck, he received his Doctorate of Theology in 1512 from the University of Ingolstadt. This same university promptly appointed him as a Professor of Theology. For the next decade Hubmaier faithfully taught the doctrines of the church as they had been passed down to him by Eck. It was not until the spring of 1523 that Hubmaier began his reformatory work in Waldshut. Then, only four short years after this, the two treatises on the freedom of the will flowed forth from his pen. Considering this, it is hardly surprising that some streams from his Catholic education still swirled around in his thoughts. He may have been the theologian of Anabaptism, but he also firmly held on to some of his Catholic heritage.<sup>27</sup>

Right from the start of his first treatise, *On the Freedom of the Will*, Hubmaier sets forth his view that each person consists of three distinct parts. “The human being is a corporeal and rational creature, created by God as body, spirit and soul, Gen. 2:7.”<sup>28</sup> This trichotomous anthropology is also found at the beginning of his 1526 Catechism, which is set up as a dialogue between two Christian men, Leonhart and Hans. Leonhart asks, “What are you?” To which Hans replies, “A corporeal reasonable creature, in body, soul and spirit, created thus by God in his image.”<sup>29</sup> Each part of a human being also has its own will. For Hubmaier, humans possess “the will of the flesh, the will of the soul, and the will of the spirit.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For instance, until his death Hubmaier ardently held to the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. See his *Apologia* in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989), 537.

<sup>28</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, “Freedom of the Will, Part 1,” in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989), 429.

<sup>29</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, “A Christian Catechism,” in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989), 345.

<sup>30</sup> Hubmaier, *Freedom of the Will (I)*, 430.

At creation these three components of human beings, along with their respective wills, were very good and were “also wholly free to choose good or evil, life or death, heaven or hell.”<sup>31</sup> However, the fall into sin changed this dramatically. The flesh irretrievably lost both its goodness and its freedom. It became utterly incapable of doing anything good. The soul was wounded so severely that it could not refuse evil because, through the fall, it had lost its knowledge of good and evil. Moreover, the spirit became like a prisoner bound to the evil desires of the flesh. Nevertheless – and this is a crucial point for Hubmaier – “the spirit of the human being... has before, during, and after the Fall remained upright, whole, and good.”<sup>32</sup> Even as Eve was offering her husband the forbidden fruit, *the spirit* of Adam did not want to sin. Also in Adam’s descendants, the spirit gladly wants to will and to do what is right. Yet, it is hindered in its godly desires since it is imprisoned by the flesh. Hubmaier sums this up in his Catechism when Hans explains, “Goodness and freedom were through Adam’s disobedience taken captive in our spirit, wounded in our soul, and completely corrupted in our flesh; therefore we are all conceived and born in sin and are by nature the children of wrath.”<sup>33</sup>

Next, Hubmaier considers how the restoration by Christ affects the trichotomous human nature.<sup>34</sup> The work of Christ does not have any beneficial effect on the flesh: it remains as utterly and hopelessly corrupt as it was before. Neither does the work of Christ significantly alter the spirit itself. The spirit is still willing and ready to do all good. The greatest change, then, comes about in the soul. The gift of Christ to

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<sup>31</sup> Hubmaier, *Freedom of the Will (I)*, 432.

<sup>32</sup> Hubmaier, *Freedom of the Will (I)*, 434.

<sup>33</sup> Hubmaier, *A Christian Catechism*, 361.

<sup>34</sup> Hubmaier, *Freedom of the Will (I)*, 439-41.

humankind is that he restores souls to health and freedom. Furthermore, Hubmaier repeatedly emphasizes that this restoration happens *by means of the sent Word of Christ* – that is, the preaching of the gospel. It is through the sent Word that the soul is awakened once again with the knowledge of what is good and what is evil. After this restoration by Christ the soul stands at a crossroad between the flesh and the spirit. If the soul chooses to side with the spirit, it wills what is good and receives God’s blessing. However, if the soul chooses to follow the evil desires of the flesh, it will only and deservedly reap God’s wrath. Again, the catechetical instructor, Hans, provides us with a helpful summary: “Yes, to the present day, through the Word of God sent, our souls are just as free in themselves to will good and evil as was Adam’s soul in Paradise.”<sup>35</sup>

In his second treatise, *On the Freedom of the Will*, Hubmaier brings forward a long list of Scripture passages in order to substantiate his anthropological views.<sup>36</sup> He also takes the time to refute his opponents who had been coming to him on a daily basis with “many Scriptures by which they hope to eradicate completely the freedom of the will of the human being.”<sup>37</sup> The main thrust of his opponents’ argument was that Scripture clearly teaches that all of life is ruled by God’s providence. Therefore, no one can speak of a will that is truly free. Everything is ordained by God, and God will ensure that everything happens according to his eternal counsel. What, then, is left of free choice?

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<sup>35</sup> Hubmaier, *A Christian Catechism*, 361.

<sup>36</sup> More recently Eddie Mabry has weighed Hubmaier’s use of Scripture and found it wanting. His criticism does contain valid points. Eddie Mabry, *Balthasar Hubmaier’s Understanding of Faith* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1998), 60-63.

<sup>37</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, “Freedom of the Will, Part 2,” in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989), 471.

To this argument Hubmaier responds that his opponents fail to distinguish between the two wills of God.<sup>38</sup> On the one hand, there is God's hidden or omnipotent will. This is the will by which God has ordained all things. Human beings cannot know this divine will, nor do they need to concern themselves with it. On the other hand, there is God's revealed or ordered will. This revealed will certainly can be known since it is found in Scripture. Moreover, since it is through the sent Word of God that freedom is regained, Hubmaier maintains that once people have heard the gospel, they have a choice to make. They opt for either good or evil, life or death, heaven or hell.

### *A Comparison of Hubmaier and Pighius*

Balthasar Hubmaier and Albert Pighius both taught that the human will has not been totally corrupted by the fall into sin. For them something remains in the will which is inherently good. Using this remnant of goodness, all people can naturally aspire unto God and unto godliness if they so desire. Moreover, since they are *able* to turn their hearts towards the Lord, they are also *accountable* for the decisions they make. If they seek to serve God, they are praiseworthy; however, if they do not, they are condemnable. This is where the similarity between Hubmaier and Pighius ends and the difference begins.

One of the most remarkable elements of Hubmaier's instruction on the will is the way in which he interlinks it with his trichotomous anthropology.<sup>39</sup> Hubmaier distinguishes among the human body, soul and spirit, with each constitutive component having its own will. Thus, for him, everyone has three wills, whereas Pighius only ever speaks of one

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<sup>38</sup> Hubmaier, *Freedom of the Will (II)*, 472-74.

<sup>39</sup> Being aware of Hubmaier's trichotomous anthropology also aids in understanding the teachings of Anthony Pocquet, one of the Libertines. See pp. 101ff. below.

will. Furthermore, Hubmaier maintains that one of those three wills, the will of the spirit, came through the fall into sin *entirely unscathed*. Even Pighius, who was condemned by the Council of Trent for his insufficient view of original sin, did not go that far. He taught that the human will had certainly been hampered by the fall, but it also retained enough inherent goodness to seek after God and eternal righteousness. However, Hubmaier asserts that one of the human wills, the will of the spirit, did not lose any of its original qualities and purities. On this one point, then, Hubmaier has an even weaker view of the effects of original sin than Pighius did.

Another difference between Hubmaier and Pighius is their underlying motivation for teaching the freedom of the human will. As mentioned earlier,<sup>40</sup> Pighius espouses a doctrine of salvation in which God and human beings are partners working together in order to accomplish deliverance from the debilitating effects of sin. In this joint venture between the human and the divine, human beings must be able to contribute their own part, which Pighius identifies as the will's own desire to be saved. Hence, first and foremost, it is Pighius' synergistic soteriology which motivates him to advocate the freedom of the will.

By contrast, Hubmaier's adherence to the liberty of the will is shaped more by ethical concerns than by soteriological ones. The Anabaptist theologian makes his intention quite clear in the preface to his first treatise on the freedom of the will:

To the majestic, highborn prince and lord, Lord George, Margrave at Brandenburg.... Although for several years great earnestness and diligence has been expended so that the gospel was preached to all creatures, I, nevertheless, unfortunately, find many people who to this point have learned and grasped no more than two pieces from all the preaching. First, one says: "We believe; faith saves us." Second, "We can do nothing good.

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<sup>40</sup> See pp. 61ff above.

God works in us the desire and the doing. We have no free will.” Now, however, such remarks are only half-truths from which one can conclude no more than half-judgments. Indeed, under the cover of these aforementioned half-truths all kinds of evil, disloyalty, and unrighteousness have fully and totally gotten the upper hand.<sup>41</sup>

And a little further on he adds:

To uproot such tares, gracious Lord, I have written a small booklet for Your Princely Grace and summarized in short therein who and what is the human being in and outside of the grace of God, and what he is capable of. I will also as soon as possible make another book wherein I will testify incontrovertibly and still more powerfully with the Holy Scriptures to the freedom of the human being to do good and evil.<sup>42</sup>

So, according to his own testimony, it was a distressing pastoral situation which prompted Hubmaier to pick up his pen. Even after years of faithful, evangelical preaching, Christians were not living as Christ commanded. All manner of disloyalty and unrighteousness had taken the upper hand in the land. To make matters even worse, people were fashioning an excuse for their vices by weaving together two cardinal doctrines of the Reformation, the sovereignty of God and *sola fide*. In effect, they were saying, “If God is sovereign, then God is also sovereign over my sins. And, for that reason, there is nothing I can do about them. Besides that, why bother doing good works if we are saved by faith alone anyway?” Hubmaier was appalled at this attitude, and he was convinced that the way to rectify the situation was by impressing upon Christians that they did, in fact, have a free will. For those who have a free will must also take responsibility for their actions.

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<sup>41</sup> Hubmaier, *Freedom of the Will (I)*, 427.

<sup>42</sup> Hubmaier, *Freedom of the Will (I)*, 429.

*Calvin's Position on the Anabaptist View of the Human Will*

How might John Calvin have responded to the views brought forth by Balthasar Hubmaier? Of course, Calvin never actually wrote a treatise against Hubmaier's *Freedom of the Will*, so caution must be exercised at this point. Nonetheless, since Hubmaier's view on original sin is, in a certain sense, even weaker than that of Pighius, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the theologian of Geneva would have countered the theologian of Anabaptism with as much vigour as he challenged the papal theologian of Kampen. As with Pighius, so also with Hubmaier, Calvin would have rejected the assertion that after the fall something remains in the will which is sufficiently good to seek after God. Citing Romans 3:9-20, Calvin fervently maintains that, so far as natural abilities are concerned, there is no one who seeks after God.<sup>43</sup> Due to the fall into sin, all humans are totally corrupt and without hope, unless God intervenes in his grace.

Neither does Calvin share Hubmaier's trichotomous understanding of human nature. Although he does not discuss trichotomy per se, in his *Institutes* Calvin clearly holds to a dichotomous anthropology. He says, "Furthermore, that man consists of a soul and a body ought to be beyond controversy."<sup>44</sup> Then he goes on to explain that even though Scripture does at times speak of the soul and the spirit separately, this only describes more comprehensively the incorporeal part of the human being. It does not imply that "soul" and "spirit" are two distinct entities. Although the difference between dichotomy and trichotomy may seem inconsequential, some radical reformers used this tripartite

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<sup>43</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 172-74.

<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.2.

understanding of the human nature as a stepping stone to other more bizarre and unorthodox teachings.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, Calvin would have agreed wholeheartedly with Hubmaier's concern for the sanctification of God's people. His treatise, *Against the Libertines*, to which we will turn presently, demonstrates that Calvin will certainly not tolerate a laissez-faire attitude towards piety. Sinful ways must be clearly identified and consistently rejected. However, unlike Hubmaier, Calvin does not believe that it is necessary to advocate the freedom of the will in order to promote the holiness of lifestyle. For his part Hubmaier laments the fact that some people wiggle out of their ethical responsibilities by saying, "God is sovereign over everything; therefore, I am excused from my sins." According to Calvin, though, the problem is not that these people are forgetting the liberty of their will, but that they are misappropriating God's sovereign providence for their own sinful purposes.

### **Calvin and the Libertines**

One of the first French-speaking Libertines was a certain Flemish man named Coppin of Lille.<sup>46</sup> He began preaching in his locale sometime around 1525, but was soon overshadowed by Quintin of Hainaut, who by all accounts seems to have been a charismatic, if not flamboyant, leader. Not much is known about what Quintin and his followers did during the next decade. However, in 1534 they reappear on the map in Paris, where Calvin met them personally while he was staying with Stephen la Forge and

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<sup>45</sup> See pp. 101ff below.

<sup>46</sup> The main historical and biographical details concerning the Libertines can be found in Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 200-06. Some additional information can be gleaned from Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 598-602; Verhey, "Calvin's Treatise," 192-93 and Farley, "Introduction," 162-64.

working on his Seneca commentary. Eventually Quintin and two of his associates, Claude Perceval and Anthony Pocquet, found refuge in Marguerite of Angoulême's court. There Quintin served as *huissier* and Perceval as *valet de chambre*, while Pocquet became the court chaplain. Anthony Pocquet visited Geneva in 1542 trying to gather more followers and seeking to gain Calvin's approval of his teachings. The approval he sought was never given, though, and Pocquet was swiftly sent on his way through the city gates. He returned to the court of Marguerite, where his preaching garnered a more favourable response.

Yet, in spite of the fact that Anthony Pocquet was no longer living and preaching in Geneva, Calvin was still concerned about the widespread appeal that the Libertines had. He estimated that they had about "ten thousand souls"<sup>47</sup> in their following. The size of their influence, as well as their ongoing presence in the court of Marguerite, prompted Calvin to refute them in writing. The challenge in doing so, though, was that the Libertines did not often put their doctrines down on paper. The structure within their sect was such that only their truly committed disciples received instruction in the deeper mysteries of their doctrines. Moreover, this instruction was almost always given verbally and shrouded in a veil of secrecy.<sup>48</sup> For this reason, there is only one extant document from the Libertines – namely, the letter from Anthony Pocquet to his disciples, which is included in its entirety as an appendix to this study.<sup>49</sup>

Before we investigate the contents of that letter, one additional clarification is in order. The spiritual Libertines, led by Quintin and Pocquet, are not the same as the

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<sup>47</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 205.

<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 299-300.

<sup>49</sup> See Appendix 1 on pp. 122ff.

political Libertines who were active within the city council of Geneva in Calvin's days.<sup>50</sup>

The politically motivated Libertines, also known as the Perrinists, opposed many of the reformatory measures that Calvin was striving to bring to fruition within the city.

Although there may have been a measure of kindred spirit between the spiritual and political Libertines, there is no evidence of any personal or historical connection between the two. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between them.<sup>51</sup>

### *Anthony Pocquet's Letter to His Disciples*

Due to its brevity and lack of lucidity, the sole extant document of the Libertines is not easy to comprehend. Pocquet, a former priest, meanders from one matter to another, hastily inserting citations from Scripture as he goes. Calvin himself becomes frustrated with Pocquet's style and characterizes the letter as a "cock and bull story."<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, some of the main contours of the Libertine beliefs can be distilled from this document. Pocquet's teachings will be briefly outlined below under the traditional loci of theology, Christology and anthropology. Special attention will be given to the implications of Pocquet's teachings for the human will.

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<sup>50</sup> Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 604-05. Cf. Ross Williams Collins, *Calvin and the Libertines of Geneva* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1968).

<sup>51</sup> It appears that Donald Smeeton does indeed confuse the two groups. Smeeton, "Calvin's Conflict," 49.

<sup>52</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 299. The exact meaning of Calvin's metaphor is not entirely clear, but the context suggests that it is anything but complimentary.

## The Doctrine of God

One key statement that Anthony Pocquet makes in the latter half of his letter is this:

“Everything that is outside of God is nothing.”<sup>53</sup> At first glance it is a bizarre assertion, as it seems to imply that the heavens and the earth, and all that fill them, including human beings, simply do not exist. What is Pocquet trying to communicate with this statement? In other sections of his letter he states variously that the devil and the world have come to an end,<sup>54</sup> that sin is dead<sup>55</sup> and that death and hell are either an error or a vain thought.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, Pocquet seems to adhere to a dualistic ontology. On the one side of reality there is God and, to be sure, he is good.<sup>57</sup> On the other side of reality stands everything that is evil. Yet there is a difference between traditional dualism and Pocquet’s version of this philosophy. For this representative of the Libertines teaches that everything on the evil side of reality, in the end, really does not exist for those who are in Christ. For them it is nothing. This concept of the unreality of evil is part of the Libertine teaching of *cuidier*.

*Cuidier* is an old French word meaning “1) to have an opinion, 2) to consider, 3) to presume that something is so.”<sup>58</sup> It is particularly the third sense of this word that the Libertines are wont to use.<sup>59</sup> As Pocquet himself explains, “This was the world, *which*

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<sup>53</sup> This quotation comes from line 99 of Pocquet’s letter as it is printed in Appendix 1. All references to this letter below will also be by line number.

<sup>54</sup> Lines 23-24.

<sup>55</sup> Lines 137-138.

<sup>56</sup> Line 140.

<sup>57</sup> Lines 95-96.

<sup>58</sup> This definition can be found in the online version of Jean Nicot’s *Thresor de la langue française* (1606). Web address = [www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/ARTFL/projects/dicos](http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/ARTFL/projects/dicos).

<sup>59</sup> Calvin himself points to the centrality of *cuidier* within the scheme of Libertine thinking. See Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 234.

*has already ended*, not so entirely as not to be present, but *the world has ended for those who are in Christ* and who no longer live according to the flesh.”<sup>60</sup> Christians may still presume that this evil world, sin and the devil exist, and that they, therefore, should be afraid of hell. However, according to Pocquet, this is an instance of incorrect *cuides*, a moment of erroneous and vain thinking.<sup>61</sup>

Rather, what Christians ought to do is become increasingly renewed in their minds<sup>62</sup> so that they no longer see sin.<sup>63</sup> They have a different perspective on reality. They perceive that “sin is dead,”<sup>64</sup> and they “recognize the works of God everywhere and are astonished at nothing, benefiting from everything, realizing that everything is [caused by] the will and providence of God.”<sup>65</sup> As a result of the fact that the will and providence of God cause everything to happen, Pocquet goes on to affirm that “everything is pure to the pure.”<sup>66</sup> In effect, this means that Christians are free to do whatever they wish,<sup>67</sup> and everything they do ought to be considered good and pure, even as God himself is good and pure. God’s will and the wills of his people are practically merged into one. Indeed, Pocquet’s colleague, Quintin, is quoted as saying, “What you or I do is God’s doing! And whatever God does, we do; for God is in us!”<sup>68</sup> Thus the Libertine doctrine of God is a peculiar, sixteenth-century combination of dualism and pantheism which maintains

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<sup>60</sup> Pocquet, lines 30-32; emphasis mine.

<sup>61</sup> Line 140.

<sup>62</sup> Line 57.

<sup>63</sup> Lines 92-93.

<sup>64</sup> Lines 137-138.

<sup>65</sup> Lines 42-44.

<sup>66</sup> Line 45.

<sup>67</sup> Hence they have received the name “Libertines.”

<sup>68</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 239.

that the human will is absorbed into the divine will, at least for all those who are in Christ.

### **The Doctrine of Christ**

Closely tied in with the Libertines' panentheistic leanings is their teaching on the incarnation of Christ. Pocquet quotes the Lord Jesus as saying, "I have been made every man."<sup>69</sup> As Calvin correctly points out,<sup>70</sup> such a quotation is simply not found in any of the inspired gospels. While Pocquet's false citation clearly undercuts his whole Christology, for the sake of understanding the Libertines, this needs to be investigated further. Later on in his letter, Pocquet uses the metaphor of marriage to work out his belief that Christ has been made "every man." Drawing from the creation account of Genesis 2, the chaplain of Angoulême explains that the church is "the woman" who came from Adam's rib, and that just as the rib was originally part of Adam, so now the church is part of Christ. In fact, he goes so far as to say that on the cross the side of Christ's body was opened in order to put the previously removed rib back into its place, figuratively speaking.<sup>71</sup> As the church and Christ are now Bride and Groom, the Lover takes his Beloved back to the garden of paradise, "where it is forbidden to want to do anything but to let ourselves be led by the will of God."<sup>72</sup> Thus by virtue of the union with Christ, the wills of the members of the church are transformed back into their original created state of integrity. In that state the will is not only free from all sin, but it

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<sup>69</sup> Pocquet, line 33; cf. lines 83-84.

<sup>70</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 304.

<sup>71</sup> Lines 119-122.

<sup>72</sup> Lines 128-129.

does not even perceive or see sin.<sup>73</sup> Again, the practical result is that for those who are in Christ, sin is dead. Nothing is iniquitous anymore. Each person is free to do whatever he or she wishes.

### **The Doctrine of the Human Nature**

Nonetheless, some people may still have guilty consciences about certain things they have done which they cannot help but feel were wrong in the sight of God. To this Pocquet answers, “let us leave the old Adam, i.e., our living soul, and let us come to higher things, i.e., the spirit.”<sup>74</sup> The first Adam, the one who lived in the Garden of Eden, saw sin after his wife gave him the forbidden fruit.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, following the Libertine way of thinking, if people see sin in their deeds and feel guilty about this, they are living like the old Adam. However, the old Adam must be left behind – or better, below – and God’s people must ascend to a higher plateau, the spiritual plane on which sin is seen no more and guilty consciences are banished. Accordingly, if a person still had scruples about some iniquity, the Libertines were known to quip, “O Adam, are you still about? Hasn’t the old man been crucified in you yet? Still savouring the taste of the apple? Be careful that the morsel doesn’t strangle your throat!”<sup>76</sup>

By encouraging his disciples to leave the “living soul” and ascend to the “spirit,” Pocquet reveals his trichotomous understanding of the human nature. At least in this regard, then, there is similarity between his anthropology and that of Balthasar

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<sup>73</sup> Lines 138-140.

<sup>74</sup> Lines 135-136.

<sup>75</sup> Lines 128-131.

<sup>76</sup> As quoted in Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 263-64.

Hubmaier.<sup>77</sup> For Hubmaier, too, the spirit forms the purest substance in a person, certainly purer than the flesh but also a pious step above the soul. In fact, the spirit itself is entirely free from all taint of sin. Yet for the theologian of Anabaptism, the spirit is always hindered in its pious yearnings by its imprisonment in the body. The theologian of Libertinism was more optimistic than that. Pocquet confidently instilled in his followers the notion that they were able to step up from “soul” to “spirit,” at which point they were high enough to have risen above all sin and troubled consciences. In other words, the human will has the potential to become entirely perfect already in this present, earthly life.<sup>78</sup>

### **The Ethical Consequences of the Libertine Doctrines**

The various Libertine teachings culminate in what might be best described as a *laissez-faire*, panentheistic fatalism. An authentic incident, as recounted by Calvin, serves to illustrate this point:

This notorious swine Quintin once found himself in a street where a man had just been killed. By chance a faithful believer was also there who said, “Alas! Who has committed this wicked deed?” Immediately he replied in a jesting way, “Since you want to know, it was I.” The other being completely surprised said, “How can you be so flippant?” To which he replied, “It isn’t I, but God.” “Why,” asked the other, “must you attribute to God evils that He has commanded should be punished?” At which this swine disgorged even more forcefully his venom, saying, “Yes, it’s you, it’s I, it’s God! For whatever you or I do is God’s doing! And whatever God does, we do; for God is in us!”<sup>79</sup>

Putting to the side Calvin’s fervent disdain for his opponent and focussing instead on Quintin’s own statements, it is obvious that the Libertine doctrines have a drastic effect

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<sup>77</sup> See p. 88 above.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Pocquet, lines 108-109 where Christ is, again incorrectly, quoted as saying to his disciples, “you will be as incorruptible as I.”

<sup>79</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 238-39.

on ethics. Even murder can now be excused, or at least trifled with, under the notion that ultimately God has done it. The human is absorbed into the divine in such a way that also the actions of each are amalgamated. Looking at it from a different angle, the providential will of God dominates everything with such direct and coercive force that human beings are effectively absolved of all responsibility. People may well still have a will, but that will is no longer accountable to God. Without fear of reproof or retribution, each is free to do as each sees fit to do.

### *Calvin's Rejection of the Libertines' Teachings*

Anyone who is even vaguely familiar with Calvin's convictions will immediately conclude that the reformer of Geneva would have neither sympathy nor patience for the likes of Anthony Pocquet and his colleagues. The Anabaptists Calvin could at least respect for their desire to adhere to the Scriptures, but the Libertines lose themselves in such a labyrinth of strange views that "it is a marvel how creatures who bear the human figure can be so void of sense and reason as to be duped and fall victim to such brutish fantasies."<sup>80</sup>

Early on in his treatise of 1545, *Against the Libertines*, Calvin points out that even though the heterodox teachings of the Libertines may be novel to many of his readers, they are not without precedent in the history of the church. The Fathers of the early church also had to confront assorted varieties of dualistic fatalism, especially as this was espoused by the Gnostics and the Manichaeans.<sup>81</sup> The Manichaeans posited two souls in human beings, one which was good while the other was evil. The goal of their religion

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<sup>80</sup> Calvin, *Against the Anabaptists*, 40.

<sup>81</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 195-99. Augustine was one of the Church Fathers who exerted himself in refuting the Manichaeans. See pp. 32ff. above.

was to purify the good soul of whatever inferiorities still adhered to it and to gradually restore it to the pristine condition which that good soul enjoyed from the beginning.<sup>82</sup> However, as Calvin states, the Manichaean procedures for purifying the soul “amounted to wicked sorceries and damnable acts of shamefulness.”<sup>83</sup> In other words, the Manichaeans, not unlike the Libertines, had a way of making iniquity look innocuous.

In the course of his treatise against the Libertines, Calvin also corrects some of the Libertine notions concerning God’s providence. In doing so he also clarifies and crystallizes his understanding of how the human will relates to the will of God. Calvin begins the thirteenth chapter of his treatise by delineating the difference between God’s providence as he understands it and as teachers like Pocquet explain it. For them “everything in the world must be seen directly as His doing.”<sup>84</sup> The key word in that statement is “directly.” Calvin has a more nuanced view of God’s providence. God is indeed sovereign, but he works in a variety of manners and through a variety of means.

Before Calvin continues his explanation of God’s providence, though, he pauses to make the following statement which deserves careful attention: “In making this claim [that everything in the world must be seen directly as God’s doing] the Libertines attribute nothing to the will of man, no more than if he were a stone.”<sup>85</sup> The remarkable thing about this statement is not so much *what* is said but *who* is saying it. In the debate with Pighius, it was Pighius who accused Calvin of leaving nothing of worth within the human will;<sup>86</sup> however, now it is Calvin who takes the very same accusation and levels it

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<sup>82</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 197.

<sup>83</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 197.

<sup>84</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 238.

<sup>85</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 238.

<sup>86</sup> See pp. 56ff. above.

at the Libertines. In so doing, he demonstrates decisively that he does not teach a form of divine determinism that leaves no room for the human will. On the contrary, Calvin says, that is what the Libertines teach. Furthermore, should anyone wish to know precisely what he teaches, Calvin writes:

As for man, the Scripture clearly teaches us that from the time he turned away from God his soul has been full of ignorance and vanity, full of perversity and rebellion against God, given over to evil, oppressed and vanquished by weakness. Nevertheless it continues to call him a creature of God, possessing in himself those natural conditions which God placed in him, unless all of it is corrupted and depraved by sin. Consequently, according to Scripture, man's soul is a spiritual substance endowed with sense and reason, in order to understand and pass judgments, *and endowed also with will, in order to choose and desire those things that his life wants.*<sup>87</sup>

Thus in the face of Libertine fatalism, and without diminishing the doctrine of original sin, Calvin clearly affirms the genuine existence and activity of the human will *post lapsum*.

This raises the question, though, of how God can be in sovereign control of all things, many of which are infected with iniquity, and yet remain entirely untainted by evil himself. Calvin devotes his attention to this enigma in the fourteenth chapter of his treatise. God governs this world, he explains, in a threefold manner. First, there is a “universal operation by which he guides all creatures *according to the condition and propriety which He had given each when He made them.*”<sup>88</sup> Thus, to cite but two examples, God keeps every star moving in its celestial path and he also sustains the breath and life of all human beings. Yet as God governs he respects the created quality

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<sup>87</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 236-37; emphasis mine.

<sup>88</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 242-43; emphasis mine.

and nature of each different creature. God's providence treats humans differently than humus, for humans were created in his image whereas humus was not.

Secondly, God causes his creatures "to serve His goodness, righteousness, and judgment according to His present will to help His servants, to punish the wicked, and to test the patience of His faithful, or to chastise them in His fatherly kindness."<sup>89</sup> God can even use evil people or the devil to accomplish his righteous purposes. Here Calvin arrives at the crux of the matter. For, as he says, at this point the Libertines rush ahead and "without thinking... they conclude that creatures no longer act for themselves" – that is to say, they no longer have a will. However, the disciples of Pocquet fail to recognize two essential points:

The first is that Satan and evildoers are not so effectively the instruments of God that they do not also act in their own behalf. For we must not suppose that God works in an iniquitous man as if he were a stone or a piece of wood, but He uses him as a thinking creature, according to the quality of his nature which He has given him. Thus when we say that God works in evildoers, that does not prevent them from working also in their own behalf.<sup>90</sup>

The second exception for which these wretches have no regard is the enormous diversity between God's work and that of an evil man's when God makes use of it as an instrument. For the wicked man is motivated either by his avarice, or ambition, or envy, or cruelty to do what he does, and he disregards any other end.... But God's intention is completely different. For His aim is to exercise justice for the salvation and preservation of the good....<sup>91</sup>

Thus, for instance, when the Chaldean raiders stole all of Job's camels, that upright man rightly said, "the LORD has taken away" (Job 1:21). For that raid was not outside the will of God, and God's intentions were good. He planned to prove and purify the faith of

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<sup>89</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 243-44.

<sup>90</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 245.

<sup>91</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 246.

his servant. However, at the same time, this does mean not the Chaldean raiders did not want to do what they did. Their human wills were active and, in contrast to God's will, certainly evil.

The third form of God's work in this world "consists in the fact that He governs His faithful, living and reigning in them by His Holy Spirit."<sup>92</sup> In other contexts, this divine deed would be called "regeneration." Yet, again, as he explains this third aspect of God's providence, Calvin is careful to guard against any hint of coercion in the process of conversion:

Nevertheless, we must note the nature of our choice and will. For although they are both depraved by sin, our Lord reforms them and changes them from evil to good. Thus whatever we are able to discern, to will, and to do belongs to a natural gift. But whatever we cannot choose, desire, or but do wrong is the result of the corruption of sin. What we will to do well and have the power to effect comes from the supernatural grace of the Spirit, which regenerates us in a divine life.<sup>93</sup>

The noteworthy aspect of this passage is that Calvin speaks of "*our* choice and will."

Our choice and will have been corrupted by sin, but the sinful will still remains *ours*.

Our will is not somehow absorbed into God's will. Consequently, when *we* choose to do wrong, we are also accountable for that wrongdoing. In this way, Calvin rejects the laissez-faire fatalism of the Libertines and reaffirms both the almighty providence of God and the actual responsibility of human beings.

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<sup>92</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 247.

<sup>93</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 248.

## Summary & One More Look at Hoitenga

Calvin's polemics with the radical reformers are just as important for our understanding of his theology as his controversies with papal theologians. The radical reformation was comprised of many diverse teachings and teachers. Calvin was quite astute in discerning these differences – more so than he is often given credit for.<sup>94</sup> What follows is a summary of how the radical reformation served to refine Calvin's thinking on the doctrine of the human will.

### *The Influence of the Opponent*

In dealing with the radical reformers, Calvin was faced with two very different groups, the Anabaptists and the Libertines. Concerning the doctrine of the will the Anabaptists were, in many – but not all – respects similar to the Roman Catholics. Therefore, if Calvin had in fact responded directly to a man like Balthasar Hubmaier, then he would have denounced the freedom of the will, at least as the Anabaptists and the papists defined that freedom. Hubmaier described the freedom of the will as the freedom to choose life or death, heaven or hell. However, when Calvin deals with a different group, the Libertines, a different emphasis comes to the fore. Then Calvin does not spend time rejecting the freedom of the will, but rather exerts himself to defend the real and responsible existence of the will.

In this respect there is a remarkable similarity between Calvin and Augustine. Just as Augustine, in dealing with the Manichaeans, had to emphasize the ongoing existence of the will in order to counteract their fatalistic determinism, so also Calvin had to do the

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<sup>94</sup> See Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 598; Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 7.

same when he was faced with the panentheistic determinism of the Libertines. Moreover, just as Augustine, when dealing with Pelagius, had to highlight the corruption of the human will and bring to the fore God's grace, so also Calvin, in dealing with the Anabaptists and papists, had to do likewise. Thus, the adversary being refuted has much to do with the emphasis and content of the refutation.

This influence of the opponent needs to be borne in mind when reading the writings of John Calvin. For instance, Hoitenga is distressed by how much Calvin stresses the utter ruin into which the human will has fallen. In fact, he fears that Geneva's reformer has well nigh destroyed the humanity of humans by depriving them of their wills. What he fails to take into account sufficiently, though, is that in those passages of the *Institutes* to which he refers Calvin is busy countering the synergism of men like Albert Pighius and Balthasar Hubmaier. Had Hoitenga listened to Calvin's refutation of another opponent, such as Anthony Pocquet, he might not have been so disenchanted. For the polemics against the Libertines conclusively show that Calvin certainly did not deny the real existence of the human will.<sup>95</sup>

### *The Will & Ethics*

As mentioned above, the Anabaptist view of the freedom of the will was similar to that of the papal church. However, the distinctive emphasis of the Anabaptists was their ardent zeal for ethically upright lifestyles. They were disappointed that the reformation, in general, had not spurred the average member in the pew on to greater heights of sanctification. Moreover, Balthasar Hubmaier felt that this was because Protestant

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<sup>95</sup> This is also the conclusion of Allen Verhey in his article, "Calvin's Treatise 'Against the Libertines.'"

preachers, such as Luther and Zwingli, stressed the sovereignty of God so much that people felt they were no longer responsible for their own iniquities. “If God is truly sovereign, then *he* is also sovereignly responsible for my sins.” That was the mentality that was developing within Protestant congregations. In order to solve this pastoral and ethical problem, men like Hubmaier began emphasizing the free choice of the human will. However, as Calvin points out, in their effort to combat these fatalistic attitudes the Anabaptists began espousing a doctrine of the will which was in danger of returning to the synergism of Rome rather than advancing the cause of the Reformation.<sup>96</sup>

It may also be asked whether Hoitenga is not following a line of argumentation that is somewhat similar to Hubmaier. To be sure, Hoitenga uses the more philosophical language of moral accountability, while Hubmaier speaks more pastorally about a lack of sanctification. Yet, in the end, both concerns are ethical in nature. Moreover, just as Hubmaier gave more credit to the fallen will with a view to increasing the level of sanctification among his parishioners, Hoitenga argues for “the natural goodness and freedom”<sup>97</sup> of the fallen will so as to render intelligible the moral accountability of human beings. However, in doing so Hoitenga is inadvertently developing an anthropology that begins to look more papal than Protestant. Indeed, one might even wonder if Hoitenga is doing this inadvertently or intentionally. For in the epilogue of his book, he reveals that

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<sup>96</sup> The ethical bent of the Anabaptists also brings another potential theological pitfall into focus. Hubmaier advocated the free choice of the will, not so much because Scripture taught it, but more because he felt he needed it in order to raise the level of sanctification among church members. As pious as that approach may sound, it falters on a fundamental point: the source of doctrine ought to be the Holy Scriptures, not the holiness of saints.

<sup>97</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 126.

his ultimate goal is to unite Catholics and Calvinists “in a common Christian anthropology.”<sup>98</sup>

Upon closer examination, there is an additional similarity between Hoitenga’s and Hubmaier’s account of the fallen will. As a trichotomist, Hubmaier taught there are various wills at work in the human soul. The will of the flesh is incorrigibly wicked, the will of the spirit is inherently good and the will of the soul is caught in the moral crossfire between the two. Hoitenga is not a trichotomist; in fact, in his book, he simply does not venture into the dichotomy versus trichotomy debate. Nevertheless, he does speak of two opposed inclinations within the human will. He recommends that henceforth Reformed thinkers should “affirm that the fallen will still possesses by its nature the two components with which God created it, *an inclination to moral goodness* and the ability to choose between following this inclination and *the new inclinations to evil* that now corrupt its nature in the fallen state.”<sup>99</sup> This recommendation is not novel. In all of its essential parts, Hoitenga’s proposal was already made in the sixteenth century. Only, at that time, it was an Anabaptist theologian, not a Reformed philosopher, who set forth that particular point of view.

### *God's Providence*

Especially in his treatise, *Against the Libertines*, Calvin teaches that there is a distinct difference between the biblical revelation concerning God’s providence and the philosophical notion of determinism. Determinism quickly leads to fatalism. Fatalism can easily lead to a libertine view of ethics. On the contrary, divine providence does not

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<sup>98</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 128.

<sup>99</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 127; emphasis mine.

diminish nor eradicate the nature of human beings created in the image of God. Since God created human beings *with a will*, then God also works with, and works on, the wills of those creatures that came from his own hand. God's providence treats people *as human beings*, not as inanimate stones. Furthermore, since God respects the existence of the wills he has created, God also justly holds human beings accountable for their choices.

This crucial distinction between providence and determinism also allays another fear which Hoitenga has. He worries that the traditional Reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of God may leave disciples of Calvin open to the charge that they are advocating some variant of theological determinism. His proposed remedy runs as follows: "what Reformed epistemology requires, it seems, is a 'free-will defense' of Christian faith, to head off the theological determinism implicit in the claim that revealed beliefs are involuntary...."<sup>100</sup> It is hard to see, however, why such a "free-will defense" is needed when Calvin's own distinction between providence and fatalism is itself sufficiently robust to counter the charge that theological determinism is somehow being adopted.

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<sup>100</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 134-35.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Thus far this investigation of John Calvin's instruction on the will has proceeded from his well-known *Institutes* to his denunciation of a little-known preacher named Anthony Pocquet, with numerous stops along the way. Hoitenga's critique of Calvin in the twentieth century has also necessitated reaching back to Augustine's teachings on the will in the fifth century. What remains is to gather the discoveries together in a succinct manner.

#### A Critique of a Corrective

Since it was Hoitenga's book, *John Calvin and the Will: A Critique and Corrective*, which prompted this present re-examination of Calvin's teachings, it is only fitting to take one final look at his corrective and test its validity. Hoitenga first charges Calvin with being inconsistent in his treatment of the intellect and the will. Allegedly, Calvin is an intellectualist about human beings at creation but a voluntarist about fallen humanity. Hoitenga is correct that Calvin can speak in an intellectualist fashion, for he does refer to the mind as "the leader or governor of the soul."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Calvin inherited some of his intellectualistic leanings from his beloved mentor, Augustine, who spoke in a similar

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.7.

fashion.<sup>2</sup> However, Hoitenga's charge of inconsistency is somewhat contrived. Calvin is not rigid about the anatomy of, nor the hierarchy within, the human soul. Rather, his fundamental point is that the *whole* human being, including both the intellect and the will, was entirely upright at creation and that the *whole* human being became utterly corrupt after the fall. Hoitenga attempts to fit Calvin's teachings into a certain philosophical framework (intellectualism vs. voluntarism) which this theologian himself did not intend to use. This lack of accuracy in Hoitenga's criticism undermines its credibility.<sup>3</sup>

Hoitenga also contends that Calvin denigrates the human will so severely that he does not retain enough of it in the fallen state to account for the moral character and responsibility of human beings. In short, Hoitenga criticizes Calvin for turning people into amoral automatons.<sup>4</sup> This allegation is unsustainable. In the first place, both in his *Institutes*<sup>5</sup> and the *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*,<sup>6</sup> Calvin explicitly states that the fall into sin did not deprive human beings of a will, but that it deprived them of a *sound and upright* will. Secondly, in accepting the doctrine of the *libertas in externis*, Calvin agrees that, also after the fall, the human will is active and that it can even aspire to earthly and external good, although it is utterly incapable of seeking after God and eternal righteousness. Thirdly, in his treatise, *Against the Libertines*, Calvin ardently refutes those who "attribute nothing to the will of man, no more than if he were a stone."<sup>7</sup> These

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<sup>2</sup> See p. 33 n. 15 above.

<sup>3</sup> Since there is a significant amount of overlap between the activity of the mind and the will in Scripture (see p. 22 n. 26 above), it may be wiser to speak of the intellectual and volitional *aspects* of the soul rather than employing the *-isms* that Hoitenga has used.

<sup>4</sup> Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will*, 69-70.

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.7, 2.3.5. See further pp. 22ff above.

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 209. See further pp. 56ff above.

<sup>7</sup> Calvin, *Against the Libertines*, 238.

three facts give sufficient evidence that Calvin certainly affirms the real existence of the human will in the fallen state and, therefore, he can provide a reasonable account of man's morality and responsibility.

To his credit, though, Hoitenga's critique directs theologians toward an important, but underappreciated, aspect of Calvin's teaching. How does this reformer account for the fact that totally corrupt human beings can still desire, and even attain, morally lofty goals? The answer is the above-mentioned *libertas in externis*, which is articulated in the *Augsburg Confession*, but which was also accepted by Calvin. This teaching has the distinct benefit of safeguarding God's holiness and his grace, while accounting for both the philanthropy and the moral struggles that fallen humanity still exhibits. Since it clearly affirms the real existence of the human will, the *libertas in externis* also confirms the moral responsibility of the human being. Those who make their own moral decisions are morally accountable for the decisions they take. Moreover, no one may shift the blame for their own, willful iniquities onto God. By the same token, this teaching firmly denies that people can initiate their own salvation, let alone accomplish or complete it. Thus the cardinal doctrines of the Reformation – salvation by grace alone, in Christ alone and by faith alone – are not compromised, while the dangers of both synergism and stoicism are addressed in one, often overlooked, aspect of Calvin's doctrine of the will. The fact that little attention has been paid to Calvin's agreement with the *libertas in externis* is hardly surprising. Calvin himself does not devote much attention to it. This is a lacuna in his exposition of the human will which historical theologians today would do well to fill in.

In conclusion, Hoitenga's corrective is in need of some rectification of its own.

Others who have reviewed his book have come to similar conclusions.<sup>8</sup> However, the advantage of his study is that it probes deeply and systematically into Calvin's teaching on the will, highlighting areas that are worthy of further study.

### **A Restatement of John Calvin's Doctrine of the Will**

Having just criticised Hoitenga's corrective of Calvin's doctrine of the will, it might appear contradictory to proceed at this point to a restatement of Calvin's teaching on this particular teaching. However, this present restatement is not so much an attempt to emend this reformer's teaching, as it is an effort to appreciate what he said, also taking into consideration the historical and polemical circumstances in which he wrote. What follows, then, is an attempt to restate concisely what John Calvin taught about the human will, integrating the insights that have been gained in this study.

In the beginning God created human beings good and in his image. Inherent in this image were the gifts of intellect and will that the Creator gave specifically to his human creatures. Since they were created good, Adam's and Eve's minds were filled with true and wholesome knowledge and their wills possessed only pure and upright desires. Yet, although they were created good, they were not created with an unchangeable goodness,

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Pink, "Review of *John Calvin and the Will*," *Religious Studies* 34 (1998); Derek Jeffreys, "Review of *John Calvin and the Will: A Critique and Corrective*," *Journal of Religion* 79, no. 1 (1999); Mark Karlberg, "Review of *John Calvin and the Will: A Critique and Corrective*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42 (1999). Karlberg is especially critical of the natural-supernatural (or: nature-grace) dualism which pervades Hoitenga's approach, while Pink goes even farther and suggests that he is veering off in the direction of Pelagianism. Jeffreys is more appreciative of *John Calvin and the Will*; however, he questions whether the author has done full justice to the noetic effects of the fall into sin in the teaching of the Reformer.

such as God himself possesses.<sup>9</sup> In this way God still maintained a clear line of demarcation between himself and the human creatures made in his likeness. The Creator also granted Adam and Eve *free* wills – that is to say, they could choose either to obey God and remain in the bliss of Paradise or to disobey him and suffer the consequences.

Enticed by the devil, they chose the latter, rebellious option. The consequences of their choice were devastating, not only for themselves but also for their descendants. The human mind was infected with all manner of futile and false thoughts, while the human will was enslaved to its sinful and selfish passions. This corruption was not partial but pervasive, affecting every aspect and ability of the fallen human beings.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, human beings did not lose their humanity in the fall; they did not become brute beasts. Both the intellect and the will were totally corrupted, but neither was utterly annihilated.<sup>11</sup> The human mind still has the ability to construct clever and complicated plans; the human will can still aspire to lofty and laudable goals. Humankind's advances in art and engineering, as well as its actions in charity and philanthropy, give ample evidence of this. Yet whatever abilities still remain in the human soul, people do not even use them consistently and properly in civic and earthly pursuits, let alone in the spiritual and heavenly matters.<sup>12</sup> Thus, these vestiges of the

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<sup>9</sup> Augustine clearly taught this in the *Enchiridion* 4.12. However, Calvin, in his own way, emphasized that human beings, although created entirely good, did not originally possess the unalterable goodness which God himself has. He even speaks, surprisingly, of the “mediocre and even transitory will” of man at creation (*Institutes* 1.15.8). Calvin appears to be making essentially the same point as Augustine. The created goodness of the will was not unalterable, and for that reason, he describes it as “mediocre.”

<sup>10</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2-2.3.

<sup>11</sup> Again, see pp. 114f above for the three ways in which Calvin clearly maintains the existence of the will after the fall.

<sup>12</sup> This limitation of the fallen will is delineated in the doctrine of *libertas in externis*. See Appendix 2.

created state do not, and cannot, serve as some kind of stepping stone towards restored righteousness before God.

After the fall into sin, God punished human beings by taking away the *freedom* of their will. This punishment was just, for anyone who shamefully misuses a divine gift forfeits his right to hold onto that endowment.<sup>13</sup> Thus, of themselves, human beings cannot choose to be free of sin anymore; of themselves, they cannot even choose to initiate the salvation of their souls. Instead, their will is so depraved that it is bound to follow its own evil desires; in this sense it is rightly said that people sin necessarily. This necessity is not due to an external coercion but rather an internal corruption.<sup>14</sup> Fallen human beings sin necessarily but no less voluntarily and, therefore, also culpably. A similar, but opposite, truth is found in God. Of necessity God does what is good, but he still does it willingly. No one coerces him into benevolence, righteousness or holiness.

In his sovereign providence, God still upholds and governs all his creatures. Nothing happens outside of his divine will. At the same time, God deals with his creatures according to the distinct nature with which he originally made them. For this reason, God's providence acts differently upon a stone than upon a human being. Stones were not created to have either understanding or volition. Thus, if it is God's will that a certain stone falls he can simply "coerce" it downwards with the force of gravity. However, unlike stones, humans were created with intellects and wills. Therefore, also after the fall into sin, God governs over people in accordance with their humanity. In his sovereignty God may certainly *incline* the human heart in whichever direction he desires in order to

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<sup>13</sup> It was especially Augustine who brought this insight to the fore. Cf. p. 36 above.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin's debate with Pighius did much to bring this important distinction into focus. See Chapter 4 of this study.

accomplish his purposes. However, he does not *exterminate* the human will to reach his foreordained goals. Divine providence is not philosophical determinism.<sup>15</sup>

The only way that human beings can escape their self-imposed slavery to sinful desires is through the redemption worked graciously by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). Yet as with his providence, God also works his salvation in accordance with the humanity of those whom he rescues. When he redeems someone, God does not forcefully override that person’s will; instead, he mercifully renews the will, restoring once again the kind of pure and upright desires which the will possessed in its original state of integrity. However, just as conversion is not a coercive action of God upon human beings, it is also not a co-operative effort between God and human beings.<sup>16</sup> At the fall into sin, human beings committed the equivalent of spiritual suicide.<sup>17</sup> A dead person cannot perform self-resurrection – not even physical, much less spiritual, resurrection. Therefore, the spiritual restoration of the soul, including the will, is the gracious work of God from start to finish. He is the one who initially inclines the heart to desire liberation from the bondage of evil passions. He is the one who then sets that longing will free from its own iniquity. He is the one who also continues to preserve the liberated will in the redemption obtained for it in Christ. This ongoing protection by the Liberator is necessary, for evil and the Evil One relentlessly seek to re-enslave those who have been emancipated. Furthermore,

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<sup>15</sup> Calvin’s refutation of the Anabaptists and the Libertines afforded him opportunity to describe God’s sovereign providence in such a way as to clearly avoid the pitfalls of fatalism and Stoicism. See Chapter 5 of this study.

<sup>16</sup> The whole matter of efficacious versus co-operative grace was extensively covered in the debate between Pighius and Calvin. Cf. pp. 61ff above.

<sup>17</sup> Augustine uses this analogy in the *Enchiridion* 9.30.

although God liberates people from sin's mastery in this age, he has reserved release from sin's misery for the age to come.<sup>18</sup>

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*Arbitrium humanum: liberum vel liberandum?* The human will: free or in need of being freed?<sup>19</sup> This is the question which John Calvin sought to answer within the context of his polemical struggles. His answer can be captured in the following manner.

At creation the human will was *liberum*. It was free from any defect; it was also free to choose either good or evil, obedience to God or rebellion against God. Therefore, in the state of integrity the will had no need of being liberated.

After the fall into sin, the human will was no longer free to choose what is truly good in the sight of God. Instead, it became enslaved to its own evil desires. Thus, the will changed from *liberum* to *liberandum*. Yet, it must also be affirmed that the fallen will was still free from external coercion and, therefore, also "free" in the sense of doing voluntarily what it does. It also remained free to pursue goals that are good in an earthly and external way. Nevertheless, freedom *a coactu* and *in externis* does not imply freedom *ad salutem*. Concerning redemption the fallen will remains *liberandum*.

In the restoration by grace, the human will, which was *liberandum*, becomes *liberatum* through the work of Christ. The restored will is freed from bondage to sin's slavery, and it is free to serve its Liberator. However, it is not yet free from all the effects and miseries of the fall. The *liberati* will only enjoy *libertas in perfectio* when the

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<sup>18</sup> This especially came to the fore as Calvin refuted Pocquet, who taught that human beings could entirely escape the effects of sin, already in this present age. Cf. p. 102 above.

<sup>19</sup> The Latin gerundive *liberandum* expresses an "obligation or necessity." Cf. Frederic M. Wheelock, *Latin: An Introductory Course Based on Ancient Authors*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 112. In this context I use it with the sense of passive necessity: i.e., "needs to be liberated."

Liberator returns. Then, the *arbitrium humanum* will never be *liberandum* again, but entirely and eternally *liberum*.

## APPENDIX 1 – POCQUET’S LETTER TO HIS DISCIPLES<sup>1</sup>

God be praised that in these last days it has pleased Him to make known to me by His instrument the great error in which I stood, desiring to reprove and correct you, where it is written, “They shall all be taught by God” (Isa. 54:13; John 6:45).

5       And when I presume to understand, I understand nothing. For God is my understanding, my strength, and my salvation. Even if I should want to judge you or murmur against you, keeping a close lookout on my neighbour and not on myself, that is forbidden. For He has made the nations of the world capable of salvation.

10       In the first place I do not understand how we are created out of nothing and how our bodies will be reconstituted from extinguished ashes, while the spirit will be as clean air and dispersed as clouds, nor do I understand how I am [made] of an earthly species, that is to say, from him who was first of all made as a living soul (God does nothing without a purpose), and how we are born from the womb of our mother earth, where all is woe. For this reason Job said (5:18f.), “God wounds and then heals; He brings one to hell and then retrieves; He delivers from six tribulations and no evil will touch you on the seventh.”

15       For it was my living soul that so presumed to speak. But thanks to God, by this spirit of renewal I am raised from death and revived with Christ, and I am dead to the works of the law, and I am called with the angels and made a son of God and an inheritor of immortality and a member of Christ, and our bodies [are made] temples of the Holy Spirit, and our souls the images and secret dwelling places of divinity. And this horrible beast, the serpent, called the devil, to whom we were obligated and serfs and from whom it was impossible for us to free ourselves, this then was pride or avarice or the world, which has already come to an end by fire, as I shall explain more clearly.

20       This same is true of what is written about the transfiguration, where Jesus Christ was in the middle of Moses and Elijah. Moses was the ancient law, hard and unbearable. Jesus Christ was the law, gentle, gracious, tractable. Elijah was the last, meaning the end of the world, as he demonstrated by his departure in his fiery chariot, full of flames, called “double spirit,” and by which we are consummated outside of this earthly world. And nevertheless, as Jesus Christ said through Saint John, “I see a new heaven and a new earth.” This was the world, which has already ended, not so entirely as not to be present, but the world has ended for those who are in Christ and who no longer live according to the flesh. For the wisdom of the flesh is dead and full of death.

25       For it is written, “I have been made every man.” Since He has been made every man by taking on human nature and is dead, can He still die here below? It would be a grave mistake to believe so. For He is dead and raised, and it is necessary to believe that He has not left any of His members without being dead and also raised with Him. Thus for this reason it is written that “we are all members of Christ.”

30       It is also written, “Bear one another’s weaknesses.” For if we criticize each other, we will be siding with the serpent, called “the devil,” accusing believers by constantly assuming them to be acting in pride. But God elevates the small and the humble and

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<sup>1</sup> The only extant record of Pocquet’s letter is found in chapter 23 of Calvin’s *Against Libertines*. There Calvin inserts it, section by section, interspersed with his own commentary on the letter. In this appendix, in order to increase the readability, I have left out the commentary and simply reprinted the letter in its entirety. Line numbers have been added for ease of reference.

humbles the great and the proud. For this reason those who are in Christ, who have the wisdom of faith, recognize the works of God everywhere and are astonished at nothing, benefiting from everything, realizing that everything is [caused by] the will and providence of God.

45 For it is written, "Everything is pure to the pure" (Titus 1:15). And whoever is purified by faith is totally acceptable to God. But he must be careful not to be ruined by his weak brother. For this reason it is written, "Love your neighbour and be joined to him by faith, without wishing to be avenged." For whoever wants to be avenged will find the vengeance of the Lord who will remember his sins. For this reason it is said,  
50 "Forgive your neighbour who harms you. And when you pray, your sins will be forgiven you." For a man must not make his petition in anger. For whom can he ask for forgiveness if he has no mercy on men like himself, if he is still in the flesh, not yet having memory of the last days, for he would continue to be the enemy, i.e., the devil, not having memory of the new covenant that shows him how to abstain from quarrelling and  
55 contention, that abolishes all sin, and teaches him not to be concerned for his neighbor's ignorance? For the Lord has said, "I wound and heal; I put to death and make alive." Hence trust my words and be renewed in the renewal of your minds in order to understand the will of God, not returning evil for evil, but overcoming evil with good. For if you love your neighbour, you fulfill the law. The love of neighbour causes no evil.  
60 For it is the fulfilment of the law.

That is why it was written that there would come forth one who would deliver from the bondage of Jacob, saying, "I will give them a new covenant when I remove their sins" (Jer. 31:33). For it is written that "God has consigned all men to disobedience in order to be merciful to all" (Rom. 11:32). "For His judgments are unsearchable" [v. 33]. "For  
65 from Him and in Him and by Him are all things done" (Rom. 11:36).

Moses says (Exod. 33:19), "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." Consequently the Lord is merciful when it pleases Him and hardens when it pleases Him. Jesus also says, "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). "And no one can come to Me unless it is given to Him by my Father" (John 6:44).

70 Isn't this the infallible truth, seeing who has spoken it? Who, then, wants to contradict His Word? Is it not written that God knew, before He even created us, whether we would be bad or good? and knew everything present and to come?

It is written, "You shall not be adulterers of the Word, as some have." And such was I. But all is forgiven. For it is written, "Abstain from unchastity so that you might enjoy  
75 your vessel in holiness and honor" (1 Thess. 4:3f). For since we are dead to the law through the body of Christ in order that we might be[long] to another, who has been raised from the dead so that we might bear fruit to the living God (Rom. 7:4), you are hence no longer in the flesh. The wisdom of the flesh is God's enemy and does not know how to please God (Rom. 8:7f).

80 Now if the Spirit of Christ is not in you, how can you be in Him? But if He is, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit lives because of justification. That is to say, He has justified us since we are all of the same Spirit. Hence, the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus Christ from the dead lives in you. For He died for all and, as it is said, He became every man and "died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves but  
85 for Him who died for all and was raised for all" (II Cor. 5:15).

For this reason “we now no longer regard anyone according to the flesh, and even though we knew Christ according to the flesh, we now no longer regard Him thus, because we are reigning and have been made new creatures in Christ” (II Cor. 5:16f).

90 “Therefore the old and sterile have passed away, because all things have become renewed, and all these things are from God who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ. For God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their sin against them.” Thus it is written, “Whoever sees sin, sin remains in him, and the truth is not in him” (John 9:41). And a little farther over still again: “Whoever fails in one [point], fails in all [the law]” (James 2:10).

95 But when you behold God you no longer see all these things. For sin does not dwell in God, yet He makes all things and everything He makes is good, and man’s knowledge is folly to God. Will you thus behold in man, that is to say in the flesh, what is not in God? Indeed they are not [in God].

100 And because everything that is outside of God is nothing, the Scripture says that all that we do or know to do is vanity. Thus it is said, “Deny yourself, and take up My cross, and follow Me. Whoever walks with Me is not in darkness but walks in light” (John 8:12).

Remember the time that the disciple asked Elijah for a double [portion of] spirit. Such was the case when Jesus Christ said to His apostles, “I yet have something to give you, but now you are not able to bear it” (John 16:12). “But when the Spirit of truth comes, He will teach you the whole truth. For He will not speak of Himself but He will speak what He has heard and will declare to you the things that are to come; He will clarify Me. For He will take what is Mine and declare it to you, so that you will be as incorruptible as I. Moreover, I shall not speak again until that time comes.”

110 Behold how God planted the luxurious garden and then set man in the midst of it to cultivate and keep it. And when God had created him he fell asleep, and God took one of his ribs and created woman from it to accompany man, then He said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” That is the first law that God ordained, which was called “the law of nature.”

115 Now understand how Saint John shows us in his Apocalypse seven time periods, as in the seven candlesticks and seven stars [Rev. 1:12, 16,20], and how the fifth will plunge us into darkness, saying that the first was holy and the last of the same solemnity as the first.

120 Now we are in the last time, which is the true bond, made in the tree of the cross, which we call “marriage,” and which was accordingly asleep and whose side was opened in order to replace the rib, or the woman, that is, the church and the union of all human nature, and to be made all one member, of which Jesus Christ is the head.

For this reason let us leave to [the] mortal what is mortal and corruptible. For the kingdom and excellence of our soul does not lie here below unless soiled and tainted.

125 Let us consider then how the church was made and formed and that it was prefigured in Adam and Eve. Consequently Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom and we are the bride. As it is written in the Song of Songs, “Come my sister and my bride.”

130 But we continue in sin unless we enter the garden of paradise where it is still forbidden to want to do anything but to let ourselves be led by the will of God, otherwise we shall not be divested of that old serpent, which is our first father Adam, and we will see sin as he and his wife saw it, though they thought they were covering their nakedness.

They had not seen their sin, but when they saw sin, sin was necessarily imputed to them and everything was changed. For their happiness was changed into labor and misery, and the earth and all that it produces was cursed. Man was changed into vanity.

135 Consequently, let us leave the old Adam, i.e., our living soul, and let us come to higher things, i.e., the spirit. For it was said of Adam that he would die. And he is dead. Now we are vivified with the second Adam, who is Christ, no longer seeing sin, since it is dead. For grace was made from sin by our Father in Jesus Christ. Whence then comes this fear and terror of death and of being cast into hell? In reality one can set it aside as  
140 an error; one can make fun of it as a vain thought.

For when Jesus Christ descended from heaven into the earth – where for some He is still confined – He completely vanquished the devils, who were the world, and who were astonished that this King was so glorious, and sending His light into the darkness and its infernal jaws He said, “Lift up your heads, O gates! etc.” For as I have already said  
145 before, He takes us there and brings us back.

But He is always with us. Indeed we cannot be without Him, nor He without us. For as I have said, He married us on the cross and has been so attached that He neither can nor would want to separate Himself from us, because of the great love He has for us.

And this love profits in everything without seeking its profit, and it exists not for  
150 itself but for all; it prays for its enemies and even gives them what they lack and covers a multitude of sins without seeing sin. For it has destroyed everything by the highest commandment which Christ said and decreed, viz., “Love one another as I have love you. For I have not come for Myself but for all of you who believe in Me. And I will be in you and you in Me. As My Father and I are one, so shall you and I be one. You know  
155 that I have come from the Father and have come into the world. But I am leaving the world and am going to the Father again. Nevertheless I am not alone. For My Father is with me. I have said these things to you that you might have peace with one another, that is to say, in Me. In the world you have tribulation. Have confidence, I have overcome the world.” But those who are in the flesh cannot see God. For it is written, “Flesh and  
160 blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Then it is said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

## APPENDIX 2 – LIBERTAS IN EXTERNIS

I herewith reject and condemn as sheer error all doctrines which glorify our free will, as diametrically contrary to the help and grace of our Savior Jesus Christ. Outside of Christ death and sin are our masters and the devil is our god and lord, and there is no power or ability, no cleverness or reason, with which we can prepare ourselves for righteousness and life or seek after it. On the contrary, we must remain the dupes and captives of sin and the property of the devil to do and to think what pleases them and what is contrary to God and his commandments. *Luther's Confession Concerning Christ's Supper (1528)*<sup>1</sup>

Concerning free will they [the Lutheran churches] teach that the human will has some freedom for producing civil righteousness and for choosing things subject to reason. *Augsburg Confession (1530)*<sup>2</sup>

At first glance it appears that these two confessions – both from the Lutheran tradition – disagree with each other. In his own personal confession Martin Luther resolutely rejects any freedom of the will whatsoever, outside of the grace of Jesus Christ. However, in the *Augsburg Confession*, written by Philip Melanchthon, a small measure of freedom is granted to the will. There even appears to be a glimmer of optimism that if people use their free will well, they can produce a certain kind of righteousness. Was Melanchthon at variance with Luther on this point of doctrine? Or, considering that Melanchthon openly consulted with Luther as he wrote the *Augsburg Confession*, did Luther contradict himself within the span of two years?

Before pursuing these speculations any further, the larger context of these confessional statements should be examined.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Fischer and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds. *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), vol. 37, *Word and Sacrament*, by Luther, Martin, 362-63.

<sup>2</sup> As found in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds.), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 51.

is our god and lord, and there is no power or ability, no cleverness or reason, with which we can prepare ourselves for righteousness and life or seek after it. On the contrary, we must remain the dupes and captives of sin and the property of the devil to do and to think what pleases them and what is contrary to God and his commandments. Thus I condemn also both the new and the old Pelagians who will not admit original sin to be sin, but make it an infirmity or defect. But since death has passed to all men, original sin must be not merely an infirmity but enormous sin, as St. Paul says, “The wages of sin is death” [Rom. 6:23], and again, “Sin is the sting of death” [I Cor. 15:56]. So also David says in Psalm 51 [:5], “Behold, I was conceived in sin, and in sin did my mother bear me.” He does not say, “My mother conceived me with sin,” but, “I–I myself–I was conceived in sin, and in sin did my mother bear me,” i.e. in my mother’s womb I have grown from sinful seed, as the Hebrew text signifies.

*Luther’s Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*<sup>3</sup>

Concerning free will they teach that the human will has some freedom for producing civil righteousness and for choosing things subject to reason. However, it does not have the power to produce the righteousness of God or spiritual righteousness without the Holy Spirit, because “those who are natural do not receive the gifts of God’s Holy Spirit” [1 Cor. 2:14]. But this righteousness is worked in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word. In Book III of *Hypognosticon* Augustine says this in just so many words: “We confess that all human beings have a free will that possesses the judgment of reason. It does not enable them, without God, to begin – much less complete – anything that pertains to God, but only to perform the good or evil deeds of this life. By ‘good deeds’ I mean those that arise from the good in nature, that is, the will to labor in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to wear clothes, to build a house, to marry, to raise cattle, to learn various useful skills, or to do whatever good pertains to this life. None of these exists without divine direction; indeed, from him and through him they have come into being and exist. However, by ‘evil deeds’ I mean the will to worship an idol, to commit murder, etc.” They condemn the Pelagians and others who teach that without the Holy Spirit by the powers of nature alone, we are able to love God above all things and can also keep the commandments of God “according to the substance of the acts.” Although nature can in some measure produce external works – for it can keep the hands from committing theft or murder – nevertheless it cannot produce internal movements, such as fear of God, trust in God, patience, etc.

*Augsburg Confession, Article 18*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Fischer, *Luther’s Works Vol. 37*, 362-263.

<sup>4</sup> As found in *The Book of Concord*, 51,53.

What immediately comes to light is that both confessions take aim at exactly the same heresy: Pelagianism. Pelagius taught that fallen human beings have the freedom to choose either good or evil, and if they choose for the good, they can fulfill God's commandments and so live righteously before him. Using different expressions, but with equal conviction, both confessions reject this heresy. Moreover, concerning things pertaining to God and to eternal redemption, neither confession allows room for any positive contribution on the part of the human will. Salvation, from start to finish, is the gracious work of Christ through the Holy Spirit. On this fundamental truth of the gospel Melancthon and Luther are in complete agreement.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that in the *Augsburg Confession* Melancthon speaks of a liberty of the fallen will in external things, the *libertas in externis*, while Luther is silent on the matter. Of course, this does not mean *ipso facto* that Luther and Melancthon disagree, but it does raise the interesting question: why does Melancthon mention the *libertas in externis* when Luther does not? Wilhelm Maurer suggests that this should be attributed to Melancthon's relatively open attitude to philosophical inquiry.<sup>5</sup> Luther is well known for his blunt rejection of reason as "the devil's whore."<sup>6</sup> Comparatively speaking, Melancthon was more willing to listen to what human reason might discover. Maurer argues, therefore, that since philosophers are always interested in the human pursuit of moral goodness Melancthon includes the *libertas in externis* in the *Augsburg Confession*.

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<sup>5</sup> Wilhelm Maurer, *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 278.

<sup>6</sup> Concerning this blunt expression see Philip S. Watson, *An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther* (London: Epworth Press, 1947), 87-88.

Although Maurer may be partly correct in his observations, there is one flaw in his argument. What he fails to mention is the whole distinction between external and spiritual affairs is also affirmed by Luther in language not entirely dissimilar to the *Augsburg Confession*. In his comments on Psalm 90, Luther writes:

In temporal and external affairs, which concern nourishment and bodily needs, the human being is clever, intelligent, and up to a point industrious, but in spiritual and divine matters, which concern the soul's salvation, the human being is like a pillar of salt, like Lot's wife, indeed like a block of wood or a stone, like a lifeless statue, which needs neither eyes nor mouth, neither sense nor heart, inasmuch as this human being neither sees nor recognizes the dreadful, fierce wrath of God against sin and death but instead abides in a sense of security willingly and knowingly and as a result runs into a thousand dangers and finally into eternal death and damnation.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, also on the *libertas in externis*, there is no real disagreement between Melancthon and Luther. Rather, it is only that on certain occasions these reformers found it beneficial to broach the topic while at other times it did not serve their purposes.

This, in turn, prompts the question: when is it useful to employ the doctrine of the *libertas in externis*? The *Formula of Concord*, written a little less than fifty years after the *Augsburg Confession*, suggests at least one appropriate occasion. The following passage is taken from the second article of the Epitome:

Therefore, we reject and condemn all the following errors as contrary to the guiding principle of God's Word:  
1. The mad invention of the philosophers who are called Stoics, as well as the Manichaeans, who taught that everything that happens has to happen just so and could not happen in any other way, and that people do everything that they do, *even in external things*, under coercion and that they are coerced to do evil works and deeds, such as fornication, robbery, murder, thievery, and the like.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> As quoted in *The Book of Concord*, 548.

<sup>8</sup> As quoted in *The Book of Concord*, 492; emphasis mine.

In short, then, whenever a deterministic philosophy or theology rears its fatalistic head, the affirmation of the *libertas in externis* can be used to affirm that humans are still human, even after the fall. They have wills, and their wills can choose and desire. The fallen will can even choose and desire things that are externally and temporally good. The heathen may even, and often do, aspire to moral virtue and civil good.<sup>9</sup> They do so of their own will, that is to say, voluntarily. For as Luther aptly said, “If the will is forced, it is not a will [*voluntas*], but a nill [*noluntas*].”<sup>10</sup>

However, does the *libertas in externis* not open the door ever so slightly, albeit unwittingly, to synergism? For if, as the *Augsburg Confession* states, the fallen will can even produce “civil righteousness,”<sup>11</sup> might this civil righteousness not serve as a stepping stone to saving righteousness? Furthermore, if civil good can bring people closer to eternal bliss, does that not imply that both the human and the divine have a role to play in the work of salvation? The answer to all these questions must be a resounding “No!” Luther and Melancthon both set a deep, wide chasm between external good and eternal good. In fact, the chasm is so deep and so wide that even with a most valiant and virtuous exertion of the will, no human being can even begin to build a bridge across it. The *Augsburg Confession* declares: the *libertas in externis* “does not enable them, without God, to begin – much less complete – anything that pertains to God.”<sup>12</sup> If the gap is to be spanned between sinners and salvation, the bridge must be sought and found, only and entirely, in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>9</sup> This very thought can be found in the Augsburg Interim. See Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen, *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 149.

<sup>10</sup> As quoted in *Sources and Contexts*, 207.

<sup>11</sup> *The Book of Concord*, 51.

<sup>12</sup> *The Book of Concord*, 51.

This Lutheran formulation of the *libertas in externis* is similar to the Reformed confession of the light of nature, as it is found, for instance, in the *Canons of Dort*:

To be sure, there is left in man after the fall, some light of nature, whereby he retains some notions about God, about natural things, and about the difference between what is honourable and shameful, and show some regard for virtue and outward order. But so far is he from arriving at the saving knowledge of God and true conversion through this light of nature that he does not even use it properly in natural and civil matters. Rather, whatever this light may be, man wholly pollutes it in various ways and suppresses it by his wickedness. In doing so, he renders himself without excuse before God. *Chapter III/IV, Article 4*<sup>13</sup>

Like the *Augsburg Confession*, the *Canons of Dort* affirm that even after the fall, human beings are still human; they can even be humane. However, lest this be taken to “extol our free will” – to the use the words of Luther – the *Canons* immediately add that this light does not help people along the path to salvation. Rather, it only serves to render them inexcusable, since they even cast the dark shadow of their corruption over this last remaining light of nature.

One difference, of emphasis only, between the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Canons of Dort* is that while the latter focuses more on the intellect (“notions” and “saving knowledge”), the former pays particular attention to the will. Therefore, when dealing with the doctrine of the human will the *Augsburg Confession*’s article on the *libertas in externis* serves as a helpful complement to the *Canons of Dort*, which simply speak of “some regard for virtue and outward order.”

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<sup>13</sup> Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 50-51.

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