

Birmingham Theological Seminary

THE HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE OF DOUBLE PREDESTINATION IN THE
THEOLOGIES OF GREGORY OF RIMINI,
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INTRODUCTION

The history of the Church's development of the understanding of election is a long one.

The Reformed understanding was formally defined in 1646 in chapter 3 of *The Westminster*

Confession of Faith which states:

1. God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: Yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.
2. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions; yet hath he not decreed any thing because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon certain conditions.¹

Frame, in *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, states "the doctrine of election is that, ultimately, it is God's choice that determines whether someone will be saved or lost."² The unpalatable part of that definition claims that God "determines whether someone will be ... lost." Yet, believing that God determines who will be saved mandates the truth that God must also determine who will be lost.

The doctrine of double predestination recognizes that God both elects to salvation and chooses that some will not believe. For "when God elects people to salvation, he decrees that they will be saved apart from their works. But when God reprobates, he decrees that they will be punished because of their works."³ For "if God does not reprobate, he does not elect to salvation

¹ G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962), 30.

² John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 177.

³ *Ibid.*, 181.

either. The alternative to election and reprobation is for us to save ourselves by our own resources"⁴ – an insurmountable challenge. Our God-given design prevents us from saving ourselves.

The understanding of God's eternal decree as contained in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* was a process in which many men of faith played a part over 1500 years. Augustine struggled with the subject in fourth century. A thousand years later, Gregory of Rimini further defined the concept of election. Then, in the sixteenth century, Peter Martyr Vermigli and Martin Luther continued to refine the doctrine of predestination.

GREGORY OF RIMINI

Biography

Gregory of Rimini was a cutting-edge thinker of the fourteenth century. Born about 1300, he joined the order of the Hermits of Saint Augustine. After completing his basic education, he studied theology in Paris for approximately six years beginning about 1322. He then taught theology at various locations: Bologna, Padua, and Perugia. Gregory returned to Paris in 1341, where he was assigned a teaching chair and lectured on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. In 1351, he returned to his hometown of Rimini and remained there for several years. In 1357, he was elected prior general of his order. He served in that position until his death in November 1358.^{5 6}

⁴ Frame, 180.

⁵ Gordon Leff, "Gregory of Rimini: a Fourteenth-Century Augustinian," *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes*, unknown translator, 7 (1961), 153 - 170. www.patristique.org/sites/patristique.org/IMG/pdf/61_vii_2_03.pdf (accessed March 7, 2014).

⁶ Christopher Schabel, "Gregory of Rimini," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2010 Edition), Edited by Edward N. Zalta. www.plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/gregory-rimini/ (accessed March 7, 2014).

Theology

Gregory's greatest work was considered to be his *Commentary on the Sentences*. This work, although a response to the work of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, served to summarize Gregory's understanding of Christian doctrine. The *Commentary*, a mature, large-scale work, addressed many questions raised in the *Sentences* and was probably published in 1344.⁷ In this work, "the burning issues of [Gregory's] own day are interpreted in the context of the past, especially the doctrines of St. Augustine."⁸

Gregory was a thorough reader of the works of St. Augustine, and, along with Scripture, those works formed the foundation of his theology. Therefore, it was no coincidence that "Gregory reasserted the strong and somber views of Augustine."⁹ In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, he restated Augustine in fourteenth century terms. A deep-thinker, Gregory thought more like St. Augustine rather than his own contemporaries. His work addressed the questions of his day in the language of the day "but in every case his conclusions [took] him back to St. Augustine, or at least away from the dominant attitude of doubt."¹⁰ Gregory merged the fourth century thought of Augustine with the fourteenth century thought of his day.

Gregory was committed to a traditional, orthodox understanding of St. Augustine. As such, he firmly believed that laws governing man's spiritual condition were just as immutable as laws of the physical world.¹¹ In a time when the most basic understanding of man and sin were in flux, Gregory held firmly to the historic position of Augustine. "He saw the fall as the watershed

⁷ Leff, 155.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ John Patrick Donnelly, S.J. *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's Doctrine of Man and Grace, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1976), 126.

¹⁰ Ibid., 156-157.

¹¹ Ibid., 165.

in man's development; from that time onwards a special grace in addition to habitual grace was necessary if he were to remain free from sin and obey God."¹² Gregory opposed any hint that man could achieve any merit from God by his own free will. He held that God's saving will rewarded whomever he desired but that God was not bound to reward anyone.¹³

Predestination Beliefs

Gregory's predestination beliefs were strictly Augustinian. In his *Commentary*, he pointed out the "inadequacy of any created form to act in lieu or independently of God's will: the final decision upon a man's eternal state must rest solely with the divine will. Consequently, Gregory concluded that no one, even though informed by habitual grace, could resist sin or overcome temptation unless he had an additional aid from God."¹⁴ Only by God's will could a man be determined to be just, and only by additional special aid can man do good.¹⁵

Gregory's position regarding predestination can be summarized as "the cause of predestination lay so entirely with God that no nuance could be discerned in His election of one and damnation of another save the fact that He willed it. God, far from loving all mankind and desiring the salvation of all individuals, deliberately discriminated between them, choosing to elect some and damn others."¹⁶ Gregory based his view not only on Augustine but on 1 Timothy 2:4 which reads, referring to God, as one "who desires all people to be saved."¹⁷ Gregory clearly interpreted the *all* in 1 Timothy 2:4 to refer to all individuals of different stations in life, not as each and every person. Therefore, in Gregory's understanding, not only did God predestine some

¹² Donnelly, 165.

¹³ Leff, 166.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the English Standard Version (ESV), (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008).

to glory, but he equally determined that some go to hell. Additionally, there was "no reason either for one person's salvation or for another person's damnation except the inscrutable will of God."¹⁸ Gregory separated himself from traditional Catholic teaching by defining that reprobation was the result of God's free refusal to give his mercy.¹⁹

Influence on Others

Gregory's definition of predestination, as quoted by Frank James, is as follows. "It [predestination] is the eternal purpose of God concerning the grace to be given and this grace, which Augustine tells us is the 'effect of predestination', is threefold: calling, justification, and glorification."²⁰ This definition, along with Gregory's other writings, were read by the generations of Augustinian monks to follow.

With his masterful work, *Commentary on the Sentences*, Gregory of Rimini showed himself to be a foremost thinker of the Catholic Church and of the Augustinian Order. "Gregory's brand of doctrinal Augustinianism...soon dominated the Augustinian Hermits' philosophy and theology."²¹ His writings joined those of Augustine as required reading for men like Peter Martyr Vermigli and Martin Luther who would join the Order in the future.

PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI

Biography

Peter Martyr Vermigli was born in Florence, Italy, on September 8, 1499, to educated parents. He joined the order of St. Augustine at age sixteen. After studying for several years, he moved to Padua and entered the Augustine monastery of St. John de Verdera. Vermigli was

¹⁸ Schabel, Section 4.

¹⁹ Leff, 168.

²⁰ Frank A. James, III, *Peter Martyr Vermigli and Predestination: The Augustinian Inheritance of an Italian Reformer* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1998), 134.

²¹ Schabel, Section 2.

ordained to the priesthood in 1525.²² In 1527, he graduated from the University of Padua with a doctorate of divinity degree.²³ His theology was strongly influenced by Paul, Augustine and Gregory of Rimini.²⁴ Several years later, while abbot of the monastery of St. Peter ad Aram in Naples, he discovered the writings of two reformers, Martin Bucer and Ulrich Zwingli. Exposure to these men caused Vermigli to read Scripture in a new light.

Origin of Theology

In the development of his theology, Vermigli primarily relied on the letters of Paul and the works of St. Augustine. An additional source prominent in his theological development was the writings of Gregory of Rimini. Gregory's definition of election clearly influenced theologians in the future like Peter Martyr Vermigli whose "definition is more detailed but follows precisely the same structure."²⁵ As a member of the St. Augustine order, Vermigli's required reading would have included the writings of Paul, Augustine, and Gregory. "Martyr's teaching keeps as close as possible to and seems to arise out of the text of scripture and appeals frequently to the Fathers, especially to Augustine."²⁶ These men strongly influenced his theology in the area of predestination.

Vermigli was probably introduced to the writings of Gregory of Rimini in the 1520s while a student at Padua. Gregory's *Commentary on the Sentences* was readily available in Italy

²² W. Robert Godfrey, *Reformation Sketches: Insights into Luther, Calvin, and the Confessions* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 110.

²³ Diana Kleyn, *Reformation Heroes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 114.

²⁴ Godfrey, 110.

²⁵ James, 134.

²⁶ Donnelly, 12.

and was often used as a textbook.²⁷ Thus, Gregory of Rimini would also have strongly influenced Vermigli's theology.

As his protestant theology developed, his preaching changed, and Vermigli faced opposition from other members of the Roman Catholic clergy. In 1542, Vermigli renounced the Roman Catholic Church and traveled to Strasbourg where he stayed for five years lecturing on the Old Testament and Paul's letter to the Romans.²⁸ During this time, he also worked with Martin Bucer, whose writings had first influenced his theology.²⁹ Vermigli then spent nine years in England, but left England when Mary Tudor, a Roman Catholic, came to the throne. He moved to Zurich where he resided until his death in November 1562.³⁰ Vermigli's work was integral in defining reformed doctrines, especially the doctrine of predestination.³¹

Predestination Beliefs

When Vermigli arrived in Strasbourg from Italy in late 1542, he was a mature theologian with a well-defined understanding of predestination as indicated by his lectures on Genesis which begin soon after his arrival. When Vermigli reached Genesis 25, the story of Jacob and Esau, he quickly relied upon Paul's explanation contained in Romans 9 to provide theological guidance in interpreting the story. Clearly, as early as 1543, Vermigli recognized a link between predestination and salvation.³² This understanding of "predestination in Genesis paralleled his later articulation of predestination in the Romans commentary."³³

²⁷ James, 126.

²⁸ Kleyn, 115.

²⁹ Godfrey, 113.

³⁰ Kleyn, 116-117.

³¹ Godfrey, 113.

³² James, 50-51.

³³ Ibid., 51.

Vermigli's doctrine of predestination underwent a moderate level of transformation between his early lectures in Strasbourg on Genesis in 1543 and his lectures on Romans from 1550 until 1552. If anything, Vermigli's position on predestination became only more absolute as he analyzed Romans. In fact, for his entire Protestant career, he linked predestination to Romans 9.³⁴ "For [Vermigli], predestination obviously is true. He argues that no Christian has ever openly denied the doctrine of predestination, although many have tried to strip it of meaning."³⁵

Vermigli possessed a mature understanding of predestination before leaving Italy in 1542. It is only in his commentary on Romans in which he had the opportunity to meticulously outline his theological beliefs on the subject. Yet, it is clear that both "his early and late understandings of predestination were one."³⁶

Understanding of Predestination and Reprobation

It was within Vermigli's commentary on Romans, published in 1558, that he penned his most precise definitions of predestination and reprobation. Vermigli's definition of predestination is as follows:

Predestination is the most wise purpose of God by which he has decreed firmly from before all eternity, to call those whom he has loved in Christ to the adoption of sons, to be justified by faith, and subsequently to glorify through good works, those who shall be conformed to the image of the Son of God, that in them the glory and mercy of the Creator might be declared.³⁷

Vermigli's definition of reprobation is as follows:

[Reprobation is] the most wise purpose of God, whereby he has before all eternity constantly decreed, without any injustice, not to have mercy on those whom he

³⁴ James, 69.

³⁵ Ibid., 66-67.

³⁶ Ibid., 89.

³⁷ Ibid., 69.

has not loved, but passes over, that by their just condemnation, he might declare his wrath toward sins and also declare his glory.³⁸

These mature, concise definitions of predestination and reprobation, expanding on the words of Gregory of Rimini, have served the reformed church in its understanding election across hundreds of years. Many of the reformers, including Martin Luther, in structuring their theologies, looked to the writings of Paul, Augustine, and Gregory of Rimini.

MARTIN LUTHER

Biography

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany, on November 10, 1483.³⁹ At the age of eighteen, Luther traveled to the University of Erfurt where he studied for seven years.⁴⁰ His original intention was to study law, but, becoming terrified in a violent storm, Luther promised St. Anne that if she saved his life he would become a priest. In July 1505, he entered the Augustinian Monastery which was "known for their intense, rigorous pursuit of spirituality."⁴¹ Luther was ordained a priest in May 1507 at twenty-three years of age. In 1508 Prince Frederick invited Luther to Wittenberg to become a professor.⁴² Like Vermigli and all the other monks of the Augustine order, Luther would have read both the works of Augustine and Gregory of Rimini.

³⁸ James, 78-79.

³⁹ Kleyn, 25.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁴¹ Brian G. Mattson, *Double Or Nothing: Martin Luther's Doctrine of Predestination* (1997) www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/double_luther.html (accessed on 3/25/14), 6.

⁴² Kleyn, 29.

Origin of Theology

While at Wittenberg from 1509-1518, Luther studied the Scriptures and the works of Augustine under his fellow Augustinian monk named Johann von Staupitz⁴³ who, himself, affirmed the doctrine of double predestination. Because of their close relationship, Staupitz's position on predestination would have influenced Luther. It was during 1510 that Luther traveled to Rome where he saw the blatant wickedness in the Roman Catholic Church which further prompted his work of reformation. Returning to Wittenberg, Luther continued his studies, becoming more steeped in the Scriptures and the writings of men like Augustine and Gregory of Rimini, and earned his doctoral degree in 1512.

Theology of Double Predestination in *Lectures on Romans*

As Luther lectured through Romans his doctrine of predestination solidified. For example, as Luther contemplated Romans 8:28, he wrote:

Therefore, he [Paul] says first: who are called according to His purposes. Thus it clearly follows that others are not called according to His purpose. For the term "purpose" in this passage means God's predestination, or free election and deliberation, or counsel. Blessed Augustine in Book 1 of his Confessions says: Thou are wonderful, O God; Thou changest Thy opinion, but Thou dost not change Thy counsel."⁴⁴

Luther also observed in Romans 9:15 that Paul, referring to Exodus 33:19, wrote when speaking of the elect "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy." Luther could find "nothing except election that distinguished the men [Jacob and Esau]."⁴⁵

Luther, when confronting the arguments against predestination, noted the following when lecturing on Romans.

⁴³ Mattson, 6.

⁴⁴ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Roman*, vol. 25 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 374.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

God condemns no one without sin, and he who is necessarily in sin is unjustly condemned. The answer: We are all of necessity in sin and damnation, but no one is in sin by force and against his will. For he who hates sin is already beyond sin and belongs to the elect. But those whom God hardens are those to whom He gives voluntarily to will to be and remain in sin and to love iniquity. Such people are necessarily in sin by the necessity of immutability, but not by force.⁴⁶

Around 1515, while still teaching at Wittenberg, in his *Commentary on Romans* (based on his lectures on Romans), Luther wrote, "All things whatever arise from, and depend on, the divine appointment; whereby it was foreordained who should receive the word of life, and who should disbelieve it; who should be delivered from their sins, and who should be hardened in them; and who should be justified and who should be condemned."⁴⁷

Although Luther quoted Augustine frequently throughout his *Commentary on Romans* as additional support for the doctrine of double predestination, it was Scripture which provided the inarguable truth of the doctrine for Luther.

Theology of Double Predestination in *The Bondage of the Will*

Luther's theology was also clearly contained in his 1525 work, *The Bondage of the Will*. In this work Luther addressed disagreements between Erasmus and himself, including the doctrine of predestination. Luther equated his position with that of Augustine. In this work, "Luther responded that the will of man is bound in sin, and therefore completely unable to cooperate with God. Therefore, the sovereign grace of God must be the sole determining factor in the salvation of men."⁴⁸ Also, in this work, Luther asserted "God's absolute control over man's salvation is through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. It is from the Sovereignty of God

⁴⁶ Luther, 376.

⁴⁷ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932), 15.

⁴⁸ Mattson, 9.

that he also argues for God's control over the reprobation of the wicked by means of sovereign control, working evil through them, and handing them over to their sins."⁴⁹

In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther used specific examples from Scripture including God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart, God's choice of Jacob over Esau, and the use of Judas in bringing about his ultimate redemptive plan with Christ.⁵⁰ Luther recognized, as Paul did in Ephesians 2:3, that we are all children of wrath. It is only by the mercy of God that he saves some from the just punishment of their sins. It is in this *not choosing* that God actively reprobates others. It is not up to his creatures to question God's equity but only to know that whatsoever He does is, by definition, right because He is God.⁵¹ Luther firmly believed that anything less than a position of double predestination robbed God of his sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

Luther, like Vermigli, as a member of the Order of St. Augustine, would have read the works of Augustine⁵² and the works of Gregory of Rimini. Luther's theology of predestination was primarily based on the Bible, and he found inarguable evidence in Paul's letter to the Romans. Luther, like Vermigli, pieced together the Bible (as the primary source) with the writings of the church fathers such as Augustine and Gregory of Rimini to come to a strong conviction of double predestination. "Luther's chief work, *The Bondage of the Will* showed that he went into the doctrine as heartily as did Calvin himself."⁵³ Luther and Vermigli, as contemporaries and without any significant influence on the other, seemed to have come to similar belief systems by common encounters with the Word, Augustine, and Gregory of Rimini.

⁴⁹ Mattson, 11.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁵¹ Ibid., 15.

⁵² Boettner, 4.

⁵³ Ibid., 1.

The doctrine of predestination was taught by "all the outstanding leaders in the Reformation,"⁵⁴ and although the Reformers disagreed about many issues, "they never had a public disagreement over their respective doctrines of predestination."⁵⁵

Augustine, who first wrestled with concepts such as predestination in the 400s, strongly influenced the theology of Gregory of Rimini in the 1300s. Although well-read in the works of the church fathers, the reformers of the 15th and 16th centuries, looked not to each other but primarily to the Word of God as the basis of their beliefs regarding election.

⁵⁴ Boettner, 1.

⁵⁵ Mattson, 19

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