A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership
Volume 8 • Number 1 • WINTER 1999

In philosophy an error that is small at the beginning becomes very great in the end. So a small error in theology overturns the whole body of doctrine. Therefore one should make a very great difference between doctrine and life. The doctrine is not ours but God's; we are merely His called servants. This is why we may not surrender or change even an iota (*apiculum*) of doctrine.

—*What Luther Says*, 1365

The proper subject of theology is man, guilty of sin and lost, and God, who justifies and is the Savior of sinful man. Whatever in theology is sought or argued outside this subject is error and poison.

—*What Luther Says*, 1361

Luther's Doctrine of Predestination

James Edward McGoldrick

Although it has become almost customary to associate the doctrine of predestination with John Calvin (1509-64), even to the point that uninformed people regard him as the progenitor of that concept, the most vigorous assertion of predestination in the era of the Protestant Reformation came from Martin Luther (1483-1546). The Wittenberg theologian studied the works of early church fathers such as Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and medieval authors such as Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-74), in whose treatises he found extensive expositions of that doctrine, and Luther's own experience of the grace of God confirmed his belief in the sovereignty of God over salvation. In affirming his belief in predestination, that is, election to eternal life, Luther introduced no novelty but rather maintained a traditional but neglected teaching of the Bible.

Concern about predestination was for Luther, at one time, a spiritual problem which caused him deep anxiety about the prospect that he might not have been among the elect—those God had chosen for salvation. In the judgment of a modern biographer, Luther felt this dilemma more deeply "than any other theologian since the days of Augustine."[1] In the preface to a collection of his Latin writings, which appeared in 1545, Luther related his concern:

> Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I

> would not believe that He was placated by satisfaction. I did not love, yes I hated the righteous God who punished sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, . . . I was angry with God. . . . I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience.[2]

As a new professor at the University of Wittenberg, Luther lectured on the epistle to the Romans in 1515-16, and his intensive study of that Pauline treatise led him to new insights which enabled him eventually to rejoice in the "sweet comfort" of predestination.[3] In order to appreciate Luther's understanding of this doctrine, it is necessary to examine his treatment of it in several of his major writings—*Lectures on Romans*, *The Bondage of the Will*, *Table Talk*, and some items from his sermons and pastoral correspondence.

1. PREDESTINATION IN *LECTURES ON ROMANS*

Luther's exposition of Paul's masterpiece expresses the Reformer's view of sin and salvation clearly, especially as it relates to the condition of human nature since the Fall and the exercise of divine sovereignty on behalf of unworthy sinners. In these lectures Professor Luther exalted God's grace and denied that there could be any human contribution to salvation. The fervor with which he asserted his position becomes intelligible when considered against the background of the medieval conception of grace.

About 400, Pelagius (c. 354-c. 418), a monk from the British Isles, settled in Rome, where he soon became dismayed by the prevailing immoralities among professing Christians. He attributed this to what he construed to be the evil influence of the doctrine of original sin. He contended that the church was committing a grave error in teaching people that they were sinful by nature, for accepting that doctrine led people to behave sinfully. Pelagius argued that there has been no transmission of Adam's sin and guilt, so Christians have the ability to live righteously

by obeying God's law. He insisted upon full freedom of the will in moral and spiritual matters. Humans sin by following bad example, but they are not depraved by nature.

Opposition to Pelagius' teaching was especially stern in North Africa, where Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, became the spokesman for the Catholic position. The bishop taught, on a biblical basis, that Adam's sin implicated the whole race, since God imputed Adam's guilt to his posterity. This original sin has deprived mankind of true freedom to choose God and what is good. Human nature is sinful, and the will is corrupt, so man's freedom is limited to doing evil. Outward deeds which bring benefits to humanity do occur, but they do not originate from love for God. They are not truly good, nor do they demonstrate a genuinely free will. Augustine therefore maintained that sinners cannot merit salvation or contribute anything toward obtaining it. The faith by which the elect believe in Christ and receive forgiveness is entirely a gift from God.[4] In a powerful attack upon Pelagianism, Augustine taught that saving grace is predestinating—it proceeds from God's decree in eternity.[5] After much debate and vacillation, the church adopted Augustine's position officially and declared Pelagianism a heresy. Augustine's teaching did not, however, win universal acceptance in Christendom.

Soon a semi-Pelagian school of thought accused Augustine of having advocated fatalism. Semi-Pelagians maintained that God has imputed Adam's sin to his posterity, and grace is essential for salvation, but original sin did not deprive humans of free will. In the semi-Pelagian view there is a cooperation between grace and free will in salvation.

Although in 529 the Synod of Orange condemned semi-Pelagianism, it continued to gain adherents, so the controversy did not cease. Through the Middle Ages the concept of human merit as a factor in salvation gained acceptance and gradually eclipsed Augustinian theology. By

the sixteenth century semi-Pelagianism held a commanding position in the Roman Catholic Church, even though the church regarded Augustine as a saint and hailed him as its foremost theologian. Luther's discovery of salvation *sola gratia*—by grace alone—led to a confrontation between semi-Pelagianism and the revived Augustinianism for which the Wittenberg professor became the initial advocate.

As a monk, Martin Luther studied the semi-Pelagian writings of medieval theologians such as Gabriel Biel (d. 1495), a professor at the University of Tübingen, and William of Occam (d. 1349), an Oxford scholar. Early in his academic career, however, Luther found errors in their teaching about grace. By 1515 he had broken with the semi-Pelagians, as his expositions of Psalms and Romans attest. In his lectures on Romans Dr. Luther assumed the posture of a defender of the Catholic faith against semi-Pelagian deviants.

As he progressed through the book, Luther concluded that Romans 8:28 is a pivotal passage concerning predestination. There Paul wrote: "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." In this verse and its context the Reformer found a clear unequivocal affirmation of election-predestination to salvation. He wrote:

> this subject is not so unfathomable as one commonly believes; we should rather say that it is full of sweet comfort to the elect and all who have the spirit, but bitter and hard beyond measure to the prudence of the flesh. . . . If there were not the divine purpose, and our salvation rested upon our wills and our works, it would be based on chance.[6]

The idea of *chance* or *fortune* was, in Luther's opinion, a pagan belief, and he resolutely denied it could have anything to do with salvation, for "with God there . . . is no

contingency, . . . because not even a leaf or a tree falls to the ground without the will of the Father."[7] Such dogmatic pronouncements show that Luther's commentary on Romans is more than grammatical exegesis. It is a work of apologetics as well, one in which polemical elements are prominent. This is evident in the manner in which he rebutted objections to his doctrine. For example,

> there are many reasons that can be advanced against predestination, but they proceed from the "prudence of the flesh." Hence, whoever does not deny himself and has not learned to submerge his questions in the will of God and to subject them to it will always ask why God wills this or does that, and he will never find an answer, and rightly so. For this foolish prudence places itself above God and passes judgment on his will.[8]

A frequent objection against the doctrine of predestination is that it is unfair to those God rejects. Luther replied by calling attention to the condition of the sinner's will, and he cited the case of Pharaoh, of whom Romans 9:17-18 says that God hardened his heart so that he would not concur with the Hebrew's request for freedom from Egypt.

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Luther wanted to combat any notions of inherent righteousness, meritorious works, freedom of the will, and the role of chance in salvation. He did this because he was convinced that the honor and glory of God were at stake in this dispute. Critics of Luther, remote and recent, have often assailed him for this reason. Hartman Grisar, a Roman Catholic scholar in the early twentieth century, complained about Luther's "gloomy views regarding God and predestination," and he contended that Luther taught "undeserved damnation to hell,"[10] which is a caricature of the Reformer's position. Luther taught that all people are sinful and deserving of God's wrath, and in the context of Romans 9 that includes both Jacob and Esau. "Both were sons equal as far as merit was concerned, equally members of the same corrupt human race."[11] One Catholic scholar, although hostile to Luther, has summarized his doctrine well: "All men deserve Hell; . . . salvation by works is impossible; . . . the law promulgated by Moses is impossible to obey in practice, and . . . it is calculated only to plunge us into despair."[12]

Consistent with his unflattering appraisal of human depravity and impotence, Martin Luther, throughout his

lectures on Romans, argued that humanity's only hope for salvation is in God's predestination, which cannot fail to be realized. In all of this Luther seems "Calvinistic" to people who are unfamiliar with his theology, but he preceded Calvin in this teaching and defended it even more militantly than did the Reformer of Geneva.

2. PREDESTINATION IN *THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL*

What Luther affirmed as biblical truth in his commentary on Romans, he presented as a manifesto of faith in *De Servo Arbitrio, The Bondage of the Will,* in 1525. This was a reply to Desiderius Erasmus (1467-1536), who had attacked Luther the previous year in a work titled *De Libero Arbitrio, The Freedom of the Will.*

Erasmus had earlier commended Luther for exposing abuses and corruptions in the medieval church, and he was reluctant to oppose the Reformer on doctrinal matters. Catholic leaders realized, however, that the Prince of Humanists could be a valuable instrument to rebut the vociferous theologian from Wittenberg. By 1524 Erasmus could no longer resist the pressure to take a stand, so he attacked Luther's teaching about depravity and predestination to salvation. Contradictory treatises about sin and salvation then appeared within a year, and the most noteworthy debate of the Reformation was underway.

From the opening of his dispute with Luther, Erasmus seems to have underestimated the width of the breach between Wittenberg and Rome. Early in 1524 he had written *Inquisitio do Fide—Search for Faith,* in which he had claimed that the doctrine of justification through faith alone was the only real issue between evangelicals and Roman Catholics, one that a general council of the church could resolve.[13] Even when the debate became heated and intense, Erasmus did not appear to realize what was at stake as far as Luther was concerned.

In April 1524 Luther learned that Erasmus had decided to attack him in print, and he wrote to the humanist in an effort to prevent a published duel between them. In a conciliatory gesture Luther declared to Erasmus that a bitter controversy "would be a terrible catastrophe, since neither one of us really wishes to harm religion, and without judging each other, both may do good."[14]

Although reluctant to engage Erasmus, when the challenge came, Luther rose to the occasion. He had long desired an informed opponent with whom to discuss the real issues, which most emissaries of Rome had refused to do. To Luther, Erasmus represented the errors that lay at the heart of the papal church, since the famed humanist espoused a semi-Pelagian understanding of God, man, sin, and salvation.

In *De Libero Arbitrio* Erasmus presented a dispassionate defense of what he believed to be the Christian doctrine of human nature and the will as they relate to salvation and obedience to divine law. Erasmus declared that Scripture must be the final arbiter in this dispute, as Luther insisted, but the two scholars disagreed sharply about the interpretation of the authority which they both affirmed.

In any theological debate definition of terms is of paramount importance, and Erasmus was careful at the outset to explain what he meant by *free will*. "By free choice . . . we mean a power of human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation or turn away from them."[15]

In order to support this definition of free will Erasmus had to consider the matter of original sin and its effects upon the will since Adam's fall. The manner in which he did so is, in the words of a modern Roman Catholic scholar, "difficult to distinguish from Semipelagianism."[16] Erasmus' own account of his anthropology verifies this judgment clearly. It shows that the Prince of Humanists was at

odds with the Doctor of Grace, St. Augustine of Hippo. Writing against his opponents, Erasmus complained,

> they immeasurably exaggerate original sin, by which they would have even the most excellent powers of human nature to be so corrupt that they can do nothing of themselves except to be ignorant of God and to hate Him.[17]

Erasmus disliked the Augustinian doctrine because it "bestows salvation upon men without consideration of merit."[18] He refused to believe that the fall had destroyed free will, although he acknowledged that some impairment had occurred, so that grace is necessary as "the first impulse which stirs the soul."[19] He insisted, however, that the human will retains the ability to decide whether or not grace will convert the soul.

In his assault upon Luther, Erasmus contended that the role of the will in salvation is only one aspect of a much broader consideration. Much of *De Libero Arbitrio* deals with the sovereignty of God over all things, for Erasmus thought that Luther taught determinism. He, in fact, "supposed that his opponent made man into an automaton."[20] Erasmus reached this conclusion because he approached the matter with his rationalist-humanist presuppositions which subjected God to the canons of human reason and demanded that God act *reasonably*, as Erasmus defined reason. "Erasmus would rather give up God's absolute power than to make Him no longer amenable to . . . human reason."[21] He admitted God's foreknowledge of all things but denied predestination. In doing so he violated the very canon of reason on which he insisted, for "there can be sure foreknowledge only of that which is definitely fixed. . . . A single omnipotent and omniscient God can foreknow only what He has foreordained."[22]

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In their debate about predestination and free will Luther and Erasmus approached the subject with mutually exclusive presuppositions. While Erasmus would require God to act reasonably, Luther insisted that reason be subject to God's will. As early as 1519, in his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, Luther had set *anthropocentric* and *theocentric* views against each other in sharp contrast, when he concluded, "man by nature is unable to want God to be God. Indeed, he himself wants to be God and does not want God to be God."[23] Since man is a rebel against God, his "sole means of obtaining grace is the eternal election and predestination of God."[24] The argument that sinners could do something meritorious to put God in debt to them was, to Luther, absurd and impossible. His theocentric view of salvation left no place for human merit.

De Servo Arbitrio is strongly polemical. Luther made no attempt to answer Erasmus in the polite language with which the humanist had addressed him. Luther left no stone unturned in making his case for the sovereignty of

God over salvation, and the ultimate issue was the greatness and glory of God.[25] With his belief in divine sovereignty and human depravity as a foundation, Luther declared he would hurl a "bombshell" at free will.

"God foreknows nothing contingently, . . . He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His own immutable, eternal, and infallible will. This bombshell knocks *free will* flat and utterly destroys it."[26] On the specific matter of the will in salvation, Luther reaffirmed earlier pronouncements when he asserted that humanity's spiritual state is one of servitude to sin, plain and simple. "With regard to God and in all that bears on salvation, he [man] has no *free will* but is a captive, prisoner, and bondslave, either to the will of God or to the will of Satan."[27]

Luther made his position crystal clear when he dealt with Erasmus' appeal to Bible passages which appear to teach that God wills the salvation of all people. The Reformer proposed a dichotomy between God's secret will and His revealed will.

> God does many things which He does not, in his Word, show us, and He wills many things which He does not, in his Word, show us that He wills. Thus, He does not will the death of a sinner—that is, in His Word; but He wills it by His inscrutable will. At present, however, we must keep in view His Word and leave alone His inscrutable will; for it is by His Word and not by His inscrutable will that we must be guided.[28]

After copious citations from the letters of Paul and the gospel of John, Luther was satisfied that he had refuted Erasmus, so he declared boldly: "Let him who dares defend *free will* against these indictments, and I will gladly give way and recant and be a confessor . . . of *free will* myself."[29]

His exuberant confidence in God's total sovereignty impelled Luther to commit every challenge to his doctrine,

and *The Bondage of the Will* is an almost exhaustive treatment of the subject to refute his opponent point-by-point and to make his own position patently clear. For example, in replying to the criticism that his belief made human beings mere puppets, he wrote:

> a man . . . does not do evil against his will . . . as though he were taken by the scruff of the neck and dragged into it, . . . but he does it spontaneously and voluntarily, and this willingness . . . is something which he cannot, in his own strength, eliminate, restrain, or alter. He goes on willing and desiring to do evil; . . . the will cannot change itself.[30]

By setting in stark contrast the majesty, glory, and goodness of God on one hand and the depravity and perversity of sinners on the other hand, Luther brought upon himself the reproach of many of his contemporaries for whom Erasmus was the eloquent spokesman. Undeterred by their rejoinders, Luther charged that their objections were insults to God, because God's will alone is ultimate, and humans have no tight to demand explanations from their Creator.

In the centuries since the Luther-Erasmus contest, Protestant as well as Catholic writers have complained about Luther's vigorous assertion of absolute divine sovereignty, and a few of them have argued that the German Reformer was not so *Calvinistic* after all. In 1664 Sebastian Schmidt produced an annotated edition of *De Servo Arbitrio*, and in his notes he tried to dilute Luther's position so as to make it palatable for readers who did not share the Reformer's persuasion.[31] Such attempts have proven only the contrary. People may reject Luther's teaching on this subject, but the evidence for his position is clear and conclusive.

In the end, the disagreement between Luther and Erasmus illustrates a conflict between world views. Both men

were learned scholars and skillful linguists, and both employed the exegetical tools of Renaissance humanists, but they arrived at contradictory understandings of Scripture as it relates to matters of fundamental importance. This is because they began the task of exegesis with opposite presuppositions about the nature of God, and "it is the concept of God from which all differences between Erasmus and Luther are derived."[32] Erasmus wanted God to be *reasonable* and *good*, as the humanist defined those concepts. Luther, on the contrary, maintained that God alone is competent to define His attributes. While Erasmus sought to obligate God to man, Luther declared:

> I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened my by his gifts; sanctified and preserved me in the true faith; in like manner as He gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the true faith; in which Christian Church he daily forgives abundantly all my sins and the sins of all believers and will raise me up and all the dead at the last day, and will grant everlasting life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.[33]

3. PREDESTINATION IN *TABLE TALK*

Following his marriage to Katherine von Bora in 1525, Luther lived with his growing family in the Black Cloister, which the Prince of Saxony gave the Luthers as a wedding present. The homestead soon became a boardinghouse where students, associates, visiting preachers, professors, and refugees resided for varying lengths of time. The hotel-like arrangement strained Luther's meager resources, but it gave rise to an interesting body of material which sheds light on Luther's views about a broad spectrum of subjects.

The collection of this material became known as *Tischreden*, or *Table Talk*.

At mealtimes guests often questioned their revered host, and some of them took notes about Luther's remarks, including some about predestination. A few excerpts will illustrate this.[34]

> God gave to mankind a free will, but the question is whether this same freedom be in our own power and strength or not. We may very fitly call it a subverted, perverse, fickle, and wavering will, for it is only God that works in us, and we must be subject to His pleasure. When a potter out of his clay makes a pot or vessel as he wills, so it is for our free will to suffer and not to work. It stands not in our own strength; for we are not able to do anything that is good in divine matters.[35]

> He that will maintain [that] man's free will is able to do or work anything in spiritual cases . . . denies Christ. This I have always maintained in my writings, especially against Erasmus, one of the most learned men in the whole world, and there will I remain, for I know it to be truth, though all the world should be against it. Yes, the decree of Divine Majesty must stand fast against the gates of Hell.[36]

As he had done in other discourses, so in *Table Talk* Luther warned about the peril of perplexity concerning one's own election. On Christmas Day, 1537, one table guest recorded that Luther

> spoke at length about the idle people who occupy themselves with disputation about predestination beyond the limits of Scripture. It is the most ungodly and dangerous business to abandon the certain and revealed will of God in order to search into the hidden mysteries of God.[37]

Luther died in 1546, and soon thereafter some of his professed disciples claimed that, toward the end of his life, their mentor had modified his view of predestination.[38] This led Johann Aurifaber, an early compiler of *Table Talk*, writing in 1566, to state categorically: "It is a lie . . . that the dear man [Luther] of God modified in any way his opinion on free will, which they term hard because it is directly opposed to their heresy, and yet they boast of being Luther's disciples."[39]

The doctrine of predestination was not an obsession with Luther, but he defended it vigorously whenever anyone promoted a synergistic view of salvation, for he realized that such beliefs defame God by taking salvation out of His hands.

4. PREDESTINATION IN LUTHER'S PASTORAL WRITINGS

As a reformer-theologian, Martin Luther often engaged in controversy with defenders of traditional Catholicism. He, at times, confronted his opponents in an acidic, polemical manner, even taking pleasure in belittling them. Hostile interpreters have magnified this side of Luther's personality, and his writings have supplied much grist for the mills of the critics. Luther was sometimes intemperate in language, as when he referred to King Henry VIII as the plague of England, and when he charged that Johann Eck, his Roman Catholic opponent at the Leipzig Disputation in 1519, "stinks of his goat Aristotle." In contending with Eck, the Wittenberg theologian asserted crudely, "the statement that the will rules in the soul like a king in his kingdom really means like the landlady of a brothel in the brothel, . . . for the will alone is always a whore and has all the qualities of a whore."[40]

Despite his language and severe disdain for his adversaries, Luther was capable of compassion and tenderness,

for he was a pastor with a deep concern for souls. This is evident from the manner in which he dealt with predestination and election in his sermons, devotional writings, and correspondence. In such writings Luther sometimes acted as a counselor who ministered to troubled souls and sought to apply the balm of the gospel, in particular to people who were anxious about election.

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When he was a young monk, Martin Luther experienced soul-wrenching distresses over the prospect that he might not be among the elect. Johann Staupitz, his monastic superior, advised him to focus upon the crucified Christ and to believe that God's Son had died for him personally. After his discovery of justification *sola fide*—through faith alone—Luther realized the wisdom of Staupitz' advice, and as pastor, he offered the same counsel to others. In 1531 he wrote to Barbara Lisskirchen, who had expressed fears about this matter. After telling her "the Devil and not God

is the instigator of such perplexity," Luther pronounced this benediction upon her: "May our dear Lord Jesus Christ show you His hands and His side and gladden your heart with His love, and may you behold and hear Him only until you find your joy in Him. Amen."[41]

The contention that Satan prompts fear regarding election appears in some of Luther's sermons also. In May 1519, for example, he delivered a homily titled "Preparing to Die," and there he asserted:

> the evil spirit prods the soul so that it burdens itself with all kinds of useless presumptions, especially with the most dangerous undertaking of delving into the mystery of God's will to ascertain whether one is chosen or not. . . . In brief, the Devil is determined to blast God's love from a man's mind and to arouse thoughts of God's wrath.[42]

Pastor Luther encouraged victims of Satan's wrath to believe the gospel, for faith brings assurance of election. In the same sermon he admonished his hearers to

> gaze at the heavenly picture of Christ who descended into Hell for your sake and was forsaken by God as one eternally damned, when He spoke the words on the cross, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? In that picture your Hell is defeated and your uncertain election is made sure. If you concern yourself solely with that and believe that it was done for you, you will surely be preserved in this same faith. Never, therefore, let this be erased from your vision. Seek yourself only in Christ, and you will find yourself in Him eternally.[43]

Speaking in the first person, Luther related to Barbara Lisskirchen his own assurance of salvation:

> God promised, and in His sacraments He gave me a sure sign of His grace that Christ's life overcame my death, that His obedience blotted out my sin in His suffering, that His love destroyed my Hell in His forsakeness. This sign and the promise of my salvation will not lie to me or deceive me. It is God who has promised it, and He cannot lie either in words or in deeds.[44]

It is evident that Luther did not confine his teaching about predestination to academic circles. He, on the contrary, believed it to be a blessed doctrine full of "sweet Comfort"[45] for the people of God.

Interpreters of Martin Luther sometimes construe his assertions about divine sovereignty as expressions of a fatalist world view. The Wittenberg scholar encountered that criticism from Erasmus and others, but evidence shows conclusively that it is not a valid objection to his teaching. Luther was a theologian, not a philosopher, so constructing a philosophical system was never his goal. He was an expositor of the Bible and a writer who addressed doctrinal issues as they arose and became matters of contention. He was concerned to be biblical in all his beliefs, and if he did not address some of the implications of predestination that philosophers cited, that did not matter to him. He was not a fatalist, and he regarded fatalism as anti-Christian. When the Turks threatened to invade the Holy Roman Empire, Luther issued *An Appeal for Prayer Against the Turks*, in which he scorned resignation to *que sera, sera* and urged people to pray for divine intervention to repel the Muslim menace. He exclaimed:

> we have to do what we know to do according to God's Word and the light He has given us. That which God has decreed will come to pass without our doing. Why should we, in trying to find out what is predestined, become Epicureans and Turks, insolent, stupid fools or despairing wretched people? The Devil is in the saddle, making such people think they are clever and wise.[46]

Perhaps the most convincing rebuttal to the charge of fatalism is Luther's biography. It is the account of an energetic activist deeply conscious of his obligation to obey God's revealed will. Although continually afflicted with illnesses, he demonstrated an amazing capacity to work for Christ's kingdom, and he never tired of exhorting others to do the same. Fatalism had no place in Luther's worldview.

5. CONCLUSION

Although Martin Luther was firm and resolute in his belief in God's sovereignty over salvation, leaders of the church which came to bear his name sometimes departed from his teaching, and today relatively few Lutherans espouse their founder's doctrine of predestination. While he lived, Luther was the preeminent voice of the evangelical movement in Europe, but he was not the author of the formal confessions of faith which the Lutheran Church gradually adopted. Luther left the work of organizing systematic statements of belief to others, and perhaps that is why his doctrine of predestination did not receive the prominence in the confessions which it has in the Reformer's own writings. The first systematic theologian of the evangelical church was Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560), author of the *Augsburg Confession of Faith* (1530), a profound scholar and earnest Reformer, but one who did not agree exactly with some of Luther's beliefs. This became evident only gradually, and the strong bond of friendship and comradeship between Luther and him prevented any breach from occurring. After Luther died, Melanchthon assumed leadership of the Lutheran movement, and it became clear eventually that he did not endorse Luther's

position with regard to predestination and the bondage of the will in matters pertaining to salvation.

Melanchthon's lack of enthusiasm for Luther's strong doctrine about the will appears to have manifested itself even when he represented the evangelicals at the Imperial Diet of Augsburg, where he presented the Lutheran theology in a manner that emphasized areas in which Protestants and Catholics agreed. Although the confession he composed affirms the enslaving effects of original sin and insists upon the necessity for divine grace, it makes no mention of twofold predestination. It appears that Melanchthon tried to avoid raising an issue which Luther held was at the heart of his controversy with Rome. Melanchthon may have thought his procedure was appropriate, since Luther had not mentioned double predestination in his catechisms nor in the *Smalcald Articles* (1537), which were his only effort to compose a confession of faith for his movement. As long as Luther was alive, his doctrinal views prevailed among his followers, but after his death factions arose within Lutheran ranks and the subject of predestination became a divisive issue.

After a generation of strife, Lutherans agreed to seek unity, and the *Formula of Concord* (1577) was the product of their quest. This became the first Lutheran confession to include a separate article about "Eternal Foreknowledge and Election," but it does not affirm double predestination. While the *Formula* rejects Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism, it affirms election unto salvation but makes no reference to reprobation of the lost. This omission opened the way for a later revival of semi-Pelagianism in Protestant ranks, a development that came to maturity in Dutch Arminianism in the seventeenth century and in English Methodism in the eighteenth century.

In 1580 most Lutheran churches subscribed to the *Book of Concord*, a compilation of ancient creedal statements

together with Reformation documents, none of which expresses Luther's doctrine of predestination in its fullness. The rich theocentricity of Luther's theology did not remain the faith of the churches that were to bear his name, and today few of the most orthodox Lutherans give *De Servo Arbitrio* much attention. It exerts far more influence among Reformed believers than among those who bear the name of its author.

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Notes

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