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An Introduction

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The Doctrines of Human Nature, Sin, and Grace

The previous chapter considered the foundations of the Christian doctrine of salvation, paying particular attention to the basis and nature of salvation. A series of issues relating to salvation remain to be addressed: what must human beings do in order to share in the salvation which is made known and made available through Christ's death upon the cross? The issues which this question raises are traditionally discussed under the general heading of "the doctrine of grace," which embraces an understanding of human nature and sin, as well as the role of God in salvation. There is the closest of connections within the Christian tradition between the doctrine of salvation on the one hand, and that of grace on the other. We have already explored some aspects of these doctrines in earlier discussions; it is now time to explore them at greater length individually.

The Place of Humanity Within Creation: Early Reflections

The Christian tradition, basing itself largely upon the accounts of creation found in the Book of Genesis, has insisted that humanity is

the height of God's creation, set over and above the animal kingdom. The theological justification of this rests largely upon the doctrine of creation in the image of God, to which we now turn.

The image of God

A text of central importance to a Christian understanding of human nature is Genesis 1:26-27, which speaks of humanity being made in God's image and likeness – an idea which is often expressed with reference to the Latin phrase *imago Dei*. What does this affirmation mean? Especially during the early patristic period, a distinction was drawn between the two phrases "image of God" and "likeness of God." For Tertullian, humanity retained the image of God after sinning; it could only be restored to the likeness of God through the renewing activity of the Holy Spirit:

[In Baptism] death is abolished by the washing away of sins; for the removal of guilt also removes the penalty. Thus humanity is restored to God into "his likeness," for he had originally been "in his image." The state of being "in the image of God" relates to his form; "in the likeness" refers to his eternity:

for humanity receives back that Spirit of God which at the beginning was received from God's inbreathing, but which was afterwards lost through falling away.

Origen adopted a related approach, arguing that the term "image of God" referred to humanity after the Fall, whereas the term "likeness of God" referred to human nature after its perfection at the final consummation.

And God said, "Let us make man in our image and likeness" (Genesis 1:26). He then adds: "In the image of God he made him" (Genesis 1:27), and is silent about the likeness. This indicates that to his first creation man received the dignity of the image of God, but the fulfillment of the likeness is reserved for the final consummation. [...] The possibility of perfection given to him at the beginning by the dignity of the image, and then in the end, through the fulfillment of his works, should bring to perfect consummation the likeness of God.

A second approach found during the patristic period interpreted "the image of God" in terms of human reason. The "image of God" is understood to be the human rational faculty, which here mirrors the wisdom of God. Augustine argues that it is this faculty which distinguishes humanity from the animal kingdom: "We ought therefore to cultivate in ourselves the faculty through which we are superior to the beasts, and to reshape it in some way. [...] So let us therefore use our intelligence [...] to judge our behavior." It should be emphasized that Augustine does not use this theological premise to justify the human exploitation of animals, as has sometimes been suggested. Augustine's point is that the central distinctive element of human nature is its God-given ability to relate to God. Although human reason has been corrupted by the Fall, it may be renewed by grace: "For after original sin,

humanity is renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of its creator."

The fact that humanity is created in the image of God is widely regarded as establishing the original uprightness and dignity of human nature. This idea was developed in a political direction by Lactantius. In his *Divine Institutions* (c.304-11) Lactantius argued that being created in the image of God established the common identity and dignity of all human beings, leading directly to a series of political doctrines concerning human rights and responsibilities.

I have spoken about what is due to God; now I shall speak about what is due to other people, although what is due to people still equally relates to God, since humanity is the image of God. [...] The strongest bond which unites us is humanity. Anyone who breaks it is a criminal and a parricide. Now it was from the one human being that God created us all, so that we are all of the same blood, with the result that the greatest crime is to hate humanity or do them harm. That is why we are forbidden to develop or to encourage hatred. So if we are the work of the same God, what else are we but brothers and sisters? The bond which unites our souls is therefore stronger than that which unites our bodies.

The doctrine of creation in the image of God was also seen as being directly related to the doctrine of redemption. Redemption involved bringing the image of God to its fulfillment, in a perfect relation with God, culminating in immortality. Earlier, we noted how both Tertullian and Origen saw an important link in this respect. Other Greek patristic writers emphasized the state of blessedness enjoyed by Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Athanasius taught that God created human beings in the "image of God," thus endowing humanity with a capacity which was granted to no other creature – that of being able to relate to

and partake in the life of God. This fellowship with the Logos is seen at its most perfect in Eden, when Adam enjoyed a perfect relation with God. However, things went wrong. Athanasius stresses that Adam and Eve could enjoy a perfect relationship with God as long as they were not distracted by the material world.

The concept of sin

For the Cappadocians, the fact that Adam was created in the image of God meant that he was free from all normal weaknesses and disabilities which subsequently afflicted human nature – such as death. Cyril of Jerusalem emphasizes that there was no need for Adam or Eve to fall from this state of grace. It took place as a result of their decision to turn away from God to the material world. As a result, the image of God in human nature has been defaced and disfigured. In that all of humanity traces its origins to Adam and Eve, he argued, it follows that all humanity shares in this defacement of the image of God.

It should, however, be noted that Greek patristic writers do not express this fall in terms of a doctrine of original sin, such as that which would later be associated with Augustine. Most Greek writers insisted that sin arises from an abuse of the human free will. Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa both taught that infants are born without sin, an idea which stands in contrast with Augustine's doctrine of the universal sinfulness of fallen humanity. Chrysostom, commenting on Paul's assertion that the many were made sinners through the disobedience of Adam (Romans 5: 19), interprets the passage to mean that all are made *liable* to punishment and death. The idea of transmitted *guilt*, a central feature of Augustine's later doctrine of original sin, is totally absent from the Greek patristic tradition.

Nevertheless, aspects of Augustine's notion of original sin can be discerned in the writings of the period. The Oxford patristic scholar J. N. D. Kelly identifies three areas in which a notion of "original sin" can be discerned in the Greek patristic tradition.

- 1 All humanity is understood to be involved, in some manner, in the disobedience of Adam. A strong sense of the mystical unity of all humanity with Adam can be discerned within the writings of this period. All of humanity is somehow wounded by Adam's disobedience.
- 2 The fall of Adam is understood to affect the human moral nature. All human moral weaknesses, including lust and greed, can be put down to Adam's sin.
- 3 Adam's sin is often represented as being transmitted, in some undefined manner, to his posterity. Gregory of Nyssa speaks of a predisposition to sin within human nature, which can be put down, at least in part, to the sin of Adam.

It is, however, during the Pelagian debate, to which we will now turn, that the issues of this chapter were first discussed at length during the patristic period.

Augustine of Hippo and the Pelagian Controversy

The Pelagian controversy, which erupted in the early fifth century, brought a cluster of questions concerning human nature, sin, and grace into sharp focus. Up to this point, there had been relatively little controversy within the church over human nature. The Pelagian controversy changed that, and ensured that the issues associated with human

nature were placed firmly on the agenda of the western church.

The controversy centered upon two individuals: Augustine of Hippo and Pelagius. The controversy is complex, at both the historical and the theological level, and, given its impact upon western Christian theology, needs to be discussed at some length. We shall summarize the main points of the controversy under four heads:

- 1 The understanding of the "freedom of the will."
- 2 The understanding of sin.
- 3 The understanding of grace.
- 4 The understanding of the basis of salvation.

The "freedom of the will"

For Augustine, the total sovereignty of God and genuine human responsibility and freedom must be upheld at one and the same time, if justice is to be done to the richness and complexity of the biblical statements on the matter. In Augustine's own lifetime, he was obliged to deal with two heresies which simplified and compromised the gospel in this way. Manichaeism was a form of fatalism (to which Augustine himself was initially attracted) which upheld the total sovereignty of God but denied human freedom, while Pelagianism upheld the total freedom of the human will while denying the sovereignty of God. Before developing these points, it is necessary to make some observations concerning the term "free will."

The term "free will" (translating the Latin term *liberum arbitrium*) is not biblical, but derives from Stoicism. It was introduced into western Christianity by the second-century theologian Tertullian. (We noted earlier Tertullian's gift for coining new theological terms: see p. 249.) Augustine retained the term, but attempted to restore a more Pauline meaning

to it by emphasizing the limitations placed upon the human free will by sin. Augustine's basic ideas can be summarized as follows. First, natural human freedom is affirmed; we do not do things as a matter of necessity, but as a matter of freedom. Second, human free will has been weakened and incapacitated – but not eliminated or destroyed – through sin. In order for that free will to be restored and healed, it requires the operation of divine grace. Free will really does exist; it is, however, distorted by sin.

In order to explain this point, Augustine deploys a significant analogy. Consider a pair of scales, with two balance pans. One balance pan represents good, and the other evil. If the pans were properly balanced, the arguments in favor of doing good or doing evil could be weighed, and a proper conclusion drawn. The parallel with the human free will is obvious: we weigh up the arguments in favor of doing good and evil, and act accordingly.

But what, asks Augustine, if the balance pans are loaded? What happens if someone puts several heavy weights in the balance pan on the side of evil? The scales will still work, but they are seriously biased toward making an evil decision. Augustine argues that this is exactly what has happened to humanity through sin. The human free will is biased toward evil. It really exists, and really can make decisions – just as the loaded scales still work. But instead of giving a balanced judgment, a serious bias exists toward evil. Using this and related analogies Augustine argues that the human free will really exists in sinners, but that it is compromised by sin.

For Pelagius and his followers (such as Julian of Eclanum), however, humanity possessed total freedom of the will, and was totally responsible for its own sins. Human nature was essentially free and well created, and was not compromised or incapacitated by some mysterious weakness. According to Pelagius,

any imperfection in humanity would reflect negatively upon the goodness of God. For God to intervene in any direct way to influence human decisions was equivalent to compromising human integrity. Going back to the analogy of the scales, the Pelagians argued that the human free will was like a pair of balance pans in perfect equilibrium, and not subject to any bias whatsoever. There was no need for divine grace in the sense understood by Augustine (although Pelagius did have a quite distinct concept of grace, as we shall see later).

In 413, Pelagius wrote a lengthy letter to Demetrius, who had recently decided to turn her back on wealth in order to become a nun. In this letter, Pelagius spelled out with remorseless logic the consequences of his views on human free will. God has made humanity, and knows precisely what it is capable of doing. Hence all the commands given to us are capable of being obeyed, and are meant to be obeyed. It is no excuse to argue that human frailty prevents these commands from being fulfilled. God has made human nature, and only demands of it what it can endure.

[Instead of regarding God's commands as a privilege ...] we cry out at God and say, "This is too hard! This is too difficult! We cannot do it! We are only human, and hindered by the weakness of the flesh!" What blind madness! What blatant presumption! By doing this, we accuse the God of knowledge of a twofold ignorance - ignorance of God's own creation and of God's own commands. It would be as if, forgetting the weakness of humanity - which, after all, is God's own creation! - God had laid upon us commands which we were unable to bear. And at the same time (may God forgive us!) we ascribe to the righteous One unrighteousness, and cruelty to the Holy One; first, by complaining that God has commanded the impossible, second, by imagining that some

will be condemned by God for what they could not help; so that - the blasphemy of it! - God is thought of as seeking our punishment rather than our salvation.

Pelagius thus makes the uncompromising assertion that "since perfection is possible for humanity, it is obligatory." The moral rigor of this position, and its unrealistic view of human nature, served only to strengthen Augustine's hand as he developed the rival understanding of a tender and kindly God attempting to heal and restore wounded human nature.

The nature of sin

For Augustine, humanity is universally affected by sin as a consequence of the Fall. The human mind has become darkened and weakened by sin. Sin makes it impossible for the sinner to think clearly, and especially to understand higher spiritual truths and ideas. Similarly, as we have seen, the human will has been weakened (but not eliminated) by sin. For Augustine, the simple fact that we are sinners means that we are in the position of being seriously ill, and unable to diagnose our own illness adequately, let alone cure it. It is through the grace of God alone that our illness is diagnosed (sin), and a cure made available (grace).

The essential point which Augustine makes is that we have no control over our sinfulness. It is something which contaminates our lives from birth, and dominates our lives thereafter. It is a state over which we have no decisive control. We could say that Augustine understands humanity to be born with a sinful disposition as part of human nature, with an inherent bias toward acts of sinning. In other words, sin causes sins: the state of sinfulness causes individual acts of sin. Augustine develops this point with reference

to three important analogies: original sin as a "disease," as a "power," and as "guilt."

- 1 The first analogy treats sin as a hereditary disease, which is passed down from one generation to another. As we saw above, this disease weakens humanity and cannot be cured by human agency. Christ is thus the divine physician, by whose "wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53: 5), and salvation is understood in essentially sanative or medical terms. We are healed by the grace of God, so that our minds may recognize God and our wills may respond to the divine offer of grace.
- 2 The second analogy treats sin as a power which holds us captive, and from whose grip we are unable to break free by ourselves. The human free will is captivated by the power of sin, and may only be liberated by grace. Christ is thus seen as our liberator, the source of the grace which breaks the power of sin.
- 3 The third analogy treats sin as an essentially judicial or forensic concept - guilt - which is passed down from one generation to another. In a society which placed a high value on law, such as the later Roman Empire in which Augustine lived and worked, this was regarded as a particularly helpful way of understanding sin. Christ thus comes to bring forgiveness and pardon.

For Pelagius, however, sin is to be understood in a very different light. The idea of a human disposition toward sin has no place in Pelagius's thought. For Pelagius, the human power of self-improvement could not be thought of as being compromised. It was always possible for humans to discharge their obligations toward God and their neighbors. Failure to do so could not be excused on any

grounds. Sin was to be understood as an act committed willfully against God.

Pelagianism thus seems at times to be a rather rigid form of moral authoritarianism - an insistence that humanity is under obligation to be sinless, and an absolute rejection of any excuse for failure. Humanity is born sinless, and sins only through deliberate actions. Pelagius insisted that many Old Testament figures actually remained sinless. Only those who were morally upright could be allowed to enter the church - whereas Augustine, with his concept of fallen human nature, was happy to regard the church as a hospital where fallen humanity could recover and grow gradually in holiness through grace (see pp. 394-6).

The nature of grace

One of Augustine's favorite biblical texts is John 15: 5: "apart from me you can do nothing." In Augustine's view, we are totally dependent upon God for our salvation, from the beginning to the end of our lives. Augustine draws a careful distinction between the natural human faculties - given to humanity as its natural endowment - and additional and special gifts of grace. God does not leave us where we are naturally, incapacitated by sin and unable to redeem ourselves, but gives us grace in order that we may be healed, forgiven, and restored.

Augustine's view of human nature is that it is frail, weak, and lost, and needs divine assistance and care if it is to be restored and renewed. Grace, according to Augustine, is God's generous and quite unmerited attention to humanity, by which this process of healing may begin. Human nature requires transformation through the grace of God, so generously given. The general features of Augustine's position can be seen in the following passage taken from the important anti-Pelagian writing *de natura et gratia* ("on nature and grace"), dating from 415:

Human nature was certainly originally created blameless and without any fault [*vitium*]; but the human nature by which each one of us is now born of Adam requires a physician, because it is not healthy. All the good things, which it has by its conception, life, senses, and mind, it has from God, its creator and maker. But the weakness which darkens and disables these good natural qualities, as a result of which that nature needs enlightenment and healing, did not come from the blameless maker but from original sin, which was committed by free will [*liberum arbitrium*]. For this reason, our guilty nature is liable to a just penalty. For if we are now a new creature in Christ, we were still children of wrath by nature, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, on account of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through our sins, raised us up to life with Christ, by whose grace we are saved. But this grace of Christ, without which neither infants nor grown persons can be saved, is not bestowed as a reward for merits, but is given freely [*gratis*], which is why it is called grace [*gratia*].

Note in particular the link Augustine establishes between the Latin terms *gratis* ("freely" or "without cost") and *gratia* ("grace").

Pelagius used the term "grace" but interpreted it in a very different way. First, grace is to be understood as the natural human faculties. For Pelagius, these are not corrupted or incapacitated or compromised in any way. They have been given to humanity by God, and they are meant to be used. When Pelagius asserted that humanity could, through grace, choose to be sinless, what he meant was that the natural human faculties of reason and will should enable humanity to choose to avoid sin. As Augustine was quick to point out, this is not what the New Testament understands by the term.

Second, Pelagius understood grace to be external enlightenment provided for humanity by God. Pelagius gave several examples of

such enlightenment – for example, the Ten Commandments, and the moral example of Jesus Christ. Grace informs us what our moral duties are (otherwise, we would not know what they were); it does not, however, assist us to perform them. We are enabled to avoid sin through the teaching and example of Christ. God does not just demand that human beings should be perfect; God provides certain specific guidance as to what form of perfection is required – such as keeping the Ten Commandments, and becoming like Christ.

Augustine argued that this was "to locate the grace of God in the law and in teaching." The New Testament, according to Augustine, envisaged grace as divine assistance to humanity, rather than just moral guidance. For Pelagius, grace was something external and passive, something outside us. Augustine understood grace as the real and redeeming presence of God in Christ within us, transforming us; something that was internal and active.

For Pelagius, then, God created humanity, and provided information concerning what is right and what is wrong – and then ceased to take any interest in humanity, apart from the final day of judgment. On that day, individuals will be judged according to whether they have fulfilled all their moral obligations in their totality. Failure to have done so will lead to eternal punishment. Pelagius's exhortations to moral perfection are characterized by their emphasis upon the dreadful fate of those who fail in this matter.

For Augustine, however, humanity was created good by God, and then fell away from him – and God, in an act of grace, came to rescue fallen humanity from its predicament. God assists us by healing us, enlightening us, strengthening us, and continually working within us in order to restore us. For Pelagius, humanity merely needed to be shown what to do, and could then be left to achieve it unaided; for Augustine, humanity needed to be shown

what to do, and then gently aided at every point, if this objective was even to be approached, let alone fulfilled.

The basis of salvation

For Augustine, humanity is justified as an act of grace: even human good works are the result of God working within fallen human nature. Everything leading up to salvation is the free and unmerited gift of God, given out of love for sinners. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is enabled to deal with fallen humanity in this remarkable and generous manner, giving us that which we do not deserve (salvation), and withholding from us that which we do deserve (condemnation).

Augustine's exposition of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20: 1–16) is of considerable importance in this respect. As we shall see, Pelagius argued that God rewarded each individual strictly on the basis of merit. Augustine, however, pointed out that this parable indicates that the basis of the reward given to the individual is the promise made to that individual. Augustine emphasized that the laborers did not work for equal periods in the vineyard, yet the same wage (a denarius) was given to each. The owner of the vineyard had promised to pay each individual a denarius, providing he worked from the time when he was employed to sundown – even though this meant that some worked all day, and others only for an hour.

Augustine thus drew the important conclusion that the basis of our justification is the divine promise of grace made to us. God is faithful to that promise, and thus justifies sinners. Just as the laborers who began work in the vineyard so late in the day had no claim to a full day's wages, except through the generous promise of the owner, so sinners have no claim to justification and eternal life, except through the gracious promises of God, received through faith.

For Pelagius, however, humanity is justified on the basis of its merits: human good works are the result of the exercise of the totally autonomous human free will. In fulfillment of an obligation laid down by God. A failure to meet this obligation opens the individual to the threat of eternal punishment. Jesus Christ is involved in salvation only to the extent that he reveals, by his actions and teaching, exactly what God requires of the individual. If Pelagius can speak of "salvation in Christ," it is only in the sense of "salvation through imitating the example of Christ."

It will thus be clear that Pelagianism and Augustinianism represent two radically different outlooks, with sharply divergent understandings of the manner in which God and humanity relate to one another. Augustinianism would eventually gain the upper hand within the western theological tradition; nevertheless, Pelagianism continued to exercise influence over many Christian writers down the ages, not least those who felt that an emphasis upon the doctrine of grace could too easily lead to a devaluation of human freedom and moral responsibility.

The Synod of Arles – a city in southern France – is an important witness to the early reaction to the Pelagian controversy. Although the date of this synod is unclear, it appears to have taken place around 470. The synod condemned a series of propositions which are clearly Pelagian in nature, while affirming others of a more generally Augustinian nature. Among those condemned were the following.

- 1 That after the fall of Adam, human free choice [*arbitrium voluntatis*] was extinguished;
- 2 That Christ, our Lord and Savior, did not die for the salvation of all people;
- 3 That the foreknowledge of God forces people violently towards death, or that those who perish, perish on account of the will of God.

In contrast, the following statements were affirmed:

- 1 Human effort and endeavor is to be united with the grace of God.
- 2 Human freedom of will [*libertas voluntatis*] is not extinct but attenuated and weakened [*non extinctam sed attenuatam et infirmatam esse*].
- 3 Those who are saved could still be lost, and those that have perished could have been saved.

The Pelagian controversy clearly raised the issue of the relation of grace and merit, which was discussed at some length in the Augustinian revival of the Middle Ages. In what follows, we shall examine some of the issues which arose.

The Medieval Synthesis of the Doctrine of Grace

The repercussions of the Pelagian controversy were considerable. It forced discussion of a number of issues upon the church, especially during the medieval period, in which Augustine's legacy was subjected to a process of evaluation and development. While the modern discussion of the meaning of both terms may be said to have been initiated by Augustine, in the course of the Pelagian controversy, the medieval period saw his ideas being developed and modified.

The Augustinian legacy

At its heart, the term "grace" (*gratia*) has a connection with the idea of "a gift." This idea is taken up by Augustine, who stresses that salvation is a gift from God, rather than a

reward. This immediately suggests a tension between the ideas of "grace" and "merit," the former referring to a gift and the latter to a reward. In fact, the question is considerably more complex than this, and merits – if the pun may be excused – careful discussion. In what follows, we shall consider the medieval debate over the meaning of the terms, to illustrate some of the issues at stake, and also as background material to the Reformation debates on the issues.

Augustine explored the nature of grace using several images, as noted earlier (pp. 365–7). Two may be noted once more in the present context.

First, grace is understood as a liberating force, which sets human nature free from its self-incurred bondage to sin. Augustine used the term "the captive free will" (*liberum arbitrium captivatum*) to describe the free will which is so heavily influenced by sin, and argued that grace is able to liberate the human free will from this bias, to give the "liberated free will" (*liberum arbitrium liberatum*). To go back to the scales analogy, grace removes the weights loading the scales toward evil and allows us to recognize the full weight of the case for choosing God. Thus Augustine was able to argue that grace, far from abolishing or compromising the human free will, actually establishes it.

Second, grace is understood as the healer of human nature. One of Augustine's favorite analogies for the church is that of a hospital, full of sick people. Christians are those who recognize that they are ill, and seek the assistance of a physician, in order that they may be healed. Thus Augustine appeals to the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10: 30–4), in suggesting that human nature is like the man who was left for dead by the roadside, until he was rescued and healed by the Samaritan (representing Christ as redeemer, according to Augustine). On the basis of illustrations such as

these, Augustine argues that the human free will is unhealthy, and needs healing.

In exploring the functions of grace, Augustine developed three main notions, which have had a major impact upon western theology. The three categories are as follows:

- 1 *Prevenient grace*: The Latin term *preveniens* literally means "going ahead." In speaking of "prevenient grace," Augustine is defending his characteristic position, that God's grace is active in human lives before conversion. Grace "goes ahead" of humanity, preparing the human will for conversion. Augustine stresses that grace does not become operational in a person's life only after conversion; the process leading up to that conversion is one of preparation, in which the prevenient grace of God is operative.
- 2 *Operative grace*: Augustine stresses that God effects the conversion of sinners without any assistance on their part. Conversion is a purely divine process, in which God operates upon the sinner. The term "operative grace" is used to refer to the manner in which prevenient grace does not rely upon human cooperation for its effects, in contrast with cooperative grace.
- 3 *Cooperative grace*: Having achieved the conversion of the sinner, God now collaborates with the renewed human will in achieving regeneration and growth in holiness. Having liberated the human will from its bondage to sin, God is now able to cooperate with that liberated will. Augustine uses the term "cooperative grace" to refer to the manner in which grace operates within human nature after conversion.

The medieval distinction between actual and habitual grace

The theologians of the early Middle Ages were generally content to regard "grace" as a short-

hand term for the graciousness or liberality of God. However, increasing pressure for systematization led to the development of an increasingly precise and meticulous vocabulary of grace. The most important statement of the medieval understanding of the nature and purpose of grace is that of Thomas Aquinas. Although Aquinas treats Augustine's analysis of grace with considerable respect, it is clear that he also has considerable misgivings concerning its viability. A fundamental distinction is drawn between two different types of grace, as follows.

- 1 *Actual grace* (often referred to by the Latin slogan *gratia gratis data*, or "grace which is freely given"). Aquinas understands this to mean a series of divine actions or influences upon human nature.
- 2 *Habitual grace* (often referred to by the Latin slogan *gratia gratis faciens*, or "grace which makes pleasing"). Aquinas understands this to mean a created habit of grace within the human soul. This notion is difficult and requires further explanation.

Aquinas argues that there is an enormous gulf between humanity and God. God cannot establish a direct presence within human nature. Instead, an intermediate stage is established, in which the human soul is made ready for the habitation of God. This permanent alteration to the human soul is termed "a habit of grace," where the term "habit" means "something which is permanent." Habitual grace is thus a substance, "something supernatural in the soul." This change in human nature is regarded by Aquinas as the basis of human justification. Something has happened to human nature which allows it to be acceptable to God. Whereas the reformers would locate the basis of justification in God's gracious favor, by which sinners are accepted in the sight of God, Aquinas argues for the need for

an intermediary in the process of being accepted by God – the habit of grace, or “habitual grace.”

Aquinas’s discussion of the nature of grace in the *Summa Theologiae* involves the exploration of the three senses in which the word grace is used in everyday life.

As used in everyday language, “grace” is commonly understood to mean three things. First, it can mean someone’s love, as when it is said that a soldier has the king’s favor – that is, that the king holds him in favor. Secondly, it can mean a gift which is freely given, as when it is said: “I do you this favor.” Thirdly, it can mean the response to a gift which is freely given, as when we are said to give thanks for benefits which we have received. Now the second of these depends upon the first, as someone freely bestows a gift on someone else on account of their love for them. And the third depends upon the second, since thankfulness is appropriate to gifts which are freely given. Now if “grace” is understood in either the second or third sense of the word, it will be clear that it leaves something in the one who receives it – whether it is the gift which is freely given, or the acknowledgement of that gift. [...] To say that someone has the grace of God is to say that there is something supernatural in the soul, coming forth from God.

Aquinas’s argument here is based on the recognition that every sense of the word “grace” is ultimately subordinate to the notion that anyone who is “favored” in this way is changed as a result. In other words, to “have the grace of God” is to possess the favor of God in such a manner that a supernatural change comes about, within the soul of the one who has thus found favor. This “change” is described using the imagery of a supernatural habit of grace – that is, a permanent change

in the recipient, rather than a series of transient gracious actions.

The late medieval critique of habitual grace

The idea of “habitual grace” became the subject of considerable criticism in the later Middle Ages. William of Ockham used his famous “razor” to eliminate unnecessary hypotheses from every area of theology. It seemed to him that a habit of grace was totally unnecessary. God was perfectly capable of accepting a sinner directly, without the need for any intermediate stage or intermediate entity. The principle “God can do directly what could otherwise be done through intermediate causes” led Ockham to question the need for habitual grace.

So persuasive was his argument that, by the end of the fifteenth century, the notion was widely regarded as discredited. Grace increasingly came to be understood as divine graciousness – that is, a divine attitude towards humanity, rather than a divine or quasi-divine substance within humanity. In many ways, this can be seen as laying the foundations for the Protestant Reformation’s insistence that grace was, at heart, nothing more and nothing less than the “gracious favor of God” (*favor Dei*).

The medieval debate over the nature and grounds of merit

The Pelagian controversy drew attention to the question of whether salvation was a reward for good behavior, or a free gift of God (see pp. 365–8). The debate indicated the importance of clarifying what the term “merit” actually meant. Once more, it was the medieval period which saw clarification of the term. By the time of Thomas Aquinas, the following points had been generally agreed.

- 1 There is no way in which human beings can claim salvation as a “reward,” on the basis of strict justice. Salvation is an act of God’s grace, in which sinners are enabled to gain something which would otherwise lie completely beyond them. Left to their own devices, human beings would be unable to achieve their own salvation. The view that humans could earn their salvation through their own achievements was rejected as Pelagianism.
- 2 Sinners cannot earn salvation, in that there is nothing which they can achieve or perform which obliges God to reward them with faith or justification. The beginning of the Christian life is a matter of grace alone. However, although the grace of God operates on sinners to achieve their conversion, it subsequently cooperates with them to bring about their growth in holiness. And this cooperation leads to merit, by which God rewards the moral actions of believers.
- 3 A distinction is drawn between two kinds of merit: *congruous* and *condign* merit. Condign merit is a merit which is justified on the basis of the moral actions of the individual in question; congruous merit is based upon the liberality of God.

Within the context of this general consensus over the nature of merit, a debate developed during the later Middle Ages over the ultimate ground of merit, with two rival positions being distinguishable. The debate illustrates the growing influence of voluntarism in the later Middle Ages. The older position, which can be described as *Intellectualist*, is represented by writers such as Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas argued for a direct proportional representation between the moral and the meritorious value of an action on the part of a believer. The divine intellect recognizes the inherent value of an action, and rewards it accordingly.

In contrast, the *voluntarist* approach, represented by William of Ockham, placed the emphasis upon the divine will. God determines the meritorious value of an action, by an act of divine will. For Ockham, the intellectualist approach compromised the freedom of God, in that God was placed under an obligation to reward a moral action with a meritorious response. In defending the divine freedom, Ockham argued that God had to be free to reward a human action in any way that seemed fit. There was thus no direct link between the moral and the meritorious value of a human action. To his critics, Ockham seemed to have snapped the connection between human and divine notions of justice and fairness – an issue to which we shall return when we consider the issue of predestination, which brings the role of the will of God into full focus.

Our attention now turns to the great controversy which engulfed the church at the time of the Reformation during the sixteenth century, centering upon the doctrine of justification by faith.

The Reformation Debates over the Doctrine of Grace

As we have seen, the idea that Christ’s work on the cross opens up a new way of existence for human beings is articulated in a number of metaphors or images, such as “salvation” and “redemption.” Initially in the writings of the New Testament (especially the Pauline letters; see p. 350) and subsequently in Christian theological reflection, based upon these texts. We now turn to consider a major new direction in Christian discussion of the doctrine of grace, which is associated with the Reformation.

From "salvation by grace" to
"justification by faith"

During the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, a fundamental shift in the vocabulary of salvation began to take place. Earlier Christian theologians – such as Augustine – had given priority to those New Testament texts which used the language of "salvation by grace" (e.g., Ephesians 2: 5). However, Martin Luther's wrestling with the issue of how God was able to accept sinners led him to focus on those passages in which Paul spoke primarily of "justification by faith" (e.g., Romans 5: 1–2).

Although it can be argued that the same fundamental point is being made in both contexts, the *language* used to express that point is different. One of the most important influences of the Reformation was the displacement of the language of "salvation by grace" by that of "justification by faith." It is not clear why this transition took place. The most likely explanation is through the personal influence of Martin Luther, for whom the idea of "justification by faith" took on an especially significant role during his formative years.

The doctrine of justification came to be seen as dealing with the question of what an individual had to do in order to be saved. As contemporary sources indicate, this question came to be asked with increasing frequency as the sixteenth century dawned. The rise of humanism brought with it a new emphasis upon individual consciousness, and a new awareness of human individuality. In the wake of this dawn of the individual consciousness came a new interest in the doctrine of justification – the question of how human beings, as *individuals*, could enter into a relationship with God. How could a sinner hope to do this? This question lay at the heart of the theological concerns of Martin Luther, and came to

dominate the early phase of the Reformation. In view of the importance of the doctrine to this period, we shall consider it in some detail, beginning with Luther's discussion of the doctrine.

Martin Luther's theological breakthrough

In 1545, the year before he died, Luther contributed a preface to the first volume of the complete edition of his Latin writings, in which he described how he came to break with the church of his day. The preface was clearly written with the aim of introducing Luther to a readership which might not know how he came to hold the radical reforming views linked with his name. In this "autobiographical fragment" (as it is usually known) Luther aimed to provide those readers with background information about the development of his vocation as a reformer. After dealing with some historical preliminaries, taking his narrative up to the year 1519, he turned to describe his personal difficulties with the problem of the "righteousness of God":

I had certainly wanted to understand Paul in his letter to the Romans. But what prevented me from doing so was not so much cold blood in my heart as that one phrase in the first chapter: "the righteousness of God is revealed in it" (Romans 1: 17). For I hated that phrase, "the righteousness of God," which I had been taught to understand as the righteousness by which God is righteous, and punishes unrighteous sinners. Although I lived a blameless life as a monk, I felt that I was a sinner with an uneasy conscience before God. I also could not believe that I had pleased him with my works. Far from loving that righteous God who punished sinners, I actually hated him. [...] I was in desperation to know what Paul meant in this passage. At last, as I meditated day and night on the relation of the words "the righteousness of God is revealed in it, as

it is written, the righteous person shall live by faith," I began to understand that "righteousness of God" as that by which the righteous person lives by the gift of God (faith); and this sentence, "the righteousness of God is revealed," to refer to a passive righteousness, by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "the righteous person lives by faith." This immediately made me feel as though I had been born again, and as though I had entered through open gates into paradise itself. From that moment, I saw the whole face of Scripture in a new light. [...] And now, where I had once hated the phrase, "the righteousness of God," I began to love and extol it as the sweetest of phrases, so that this passage in Paul became the very gate of paradise to me.

What is Luther talking about in this famous passage, which vibrates with the excitement of discovery? It is obvious that his understanding of the phrase "the righteousness of God" has changed radically. But what is the nature of this change?

The basic change is fundamental. Originally, Luther regarded the precondition for justification as a human work, something which the sinner had to perform, before he or she could be justified. Increasingly convinced, through his reading of Augustine, that this was an impossibility, Luther could only interpret the "righteousness of God" as a *punishing* righteousness. But in this passage, he narrates how he discovered a "new" meaning of the phrase – a righteousness which God *gives* to the sinner. In other words, God himself meets the precondition, graciously giving sinners what they require if they are to be justified. An analogy (not used by Luther) may help bring out the difference between these two approaches.

Let us suppose that you are in prison, and are offered your freedom on condition that you pay a heavy fine. The promise is real – so long

as you can meet the precondition, the promise will be fulfilled. As we noted earlier, Pelagius works on the presupposition, initially shared, at least in part, by Luther, that you have the necessary money stacked away somewhere. As your freedom is worth far more, you are being offered a bargain. So you pay the fine. This presents no difficulties, so long as you have the necessary resources.

Luther, however, increasingly came to share the view of Augustine – that sinful humanity simply does not possess the resources needed to meet this precondition. To go back to our analogy, Augustine and Luther work on the assumption that, as you don't have the necessary money, the promise of freedom has little relevance to your situation. For both Augustine and Luther, therefore, the good news of the gospel is that you have been *given* the necessary money with which to buy your freedom. In other words, the precondition has been met for you by someone else.

Luther's insight, which he describes in this autobiographical passage, is that the God of the Christian gospel is not a harsh judge who rewards individuals according to their merits, but a merciful and gracious God who bestows righteousness upon sinners as a gift. The general consensus among Luther scholars is that his theology of justification underwent a decisive alteration at some point in 1515.

Luther on justifying faith

Central to Luther's insights was the doctrine of "justification by faith alone." The idea of "justification" is already familiar. But what about the phrase "by faith alone"? What is the nature of justifying faith?

"The reason why some people do not understand why faith alone justifies is that they do not know what faith is." In writing these words, Luther draws our attention to the need to inquire more closely concerning that

deceptively simple word "faith." Three points relating to Luther's idea of faith may be singled out as having special importance to his doctrine of justification. Each of these points was taken up and developed by later writers, such as Calvin, indicating that Luther made a fundamental contribution to the development of Reformation thought at this point. These three points are:

- 1 Faith has a personal, rather than a purely historical, reference.
- 2 Faith concerns trust in the promises of God.
- 3 Faith unites the believer to Christ.

We shall consider each of these points individually.

- 1 First, faith is not simply historical knowledge. Luther argues that a faith which is content to believe in the historical reliability of the Gospels is not a faith which justifies. Sinners are perfectly capable of trusting in the historical details of the Gospels; but these facts of themselves are not adequate for true Christian faith. Saving faith involves believing and trusting that Christ was born *pro nobis* ("for us"), born for us personally, and has accomplished for us the work of salvation.
- 2 Second, faith is to be understood as "trust" (*fiducio*). The notion of trust is prominent in the Reformation conception of faith, as a nautical analogy used by Luther indicates. "Everything depends upon faith. The person who does not have faith is like someone who has to cross the sea, but is so frightened that he does not trust the ship. And so he stays where he is, and is never saved, because he will not get on board and cross over." Faith is not merely believing that something is true; it is being prepared to act upon that belief, and relying upon it. To use Luther's analogy: faith is not simply

about believing that a ship exists – it is about stepping into it, and entrusting ourselves to it.

- 3 In the third place, faith unites the believer with Christ. Luther stated this principle clearly in his 1520 work, *The Liberty of a Christian*, cited earlier in this connection (see p. 183). Faith is not assent to an abstract set of doctrines, but is a union between Christ and the believer. It is the response of the whole person of the believer to God, which leads in turn to the real and personal presence of Christ in the believer. "To know Christ is to know his benefits," wrote Philip Melancthon, Luther's colleague at Wittenberg. Faith makes both Christ and his benefits – such as forgiveness, justification, and hope – available to the believer.

The doctrine of "justification by faith" thus does not mean that the sinner is justified because he or she believes, on account of that faith. This would be to treat faith as a human action or work. Luther insists that God provides everything necessary for justification, so that all that the sinner needs to do is to receive it. God is active, and humans are passive, in justification. The phrase "justification by grace through faith" brings out the meaning of the doctrine more clearly: The justification of the sinner is based upon the grace of God, and is received through faith.

The doctrine of justification by faith alone is thus an affirmation that God does everything necessary for salvation. Even faith itself is a gift of God, rather than a human action. God himself meets the precondition for justification. Thus, as we saw, the "righteousness of God" is not a righteousness which judges whether or not we have met the precondition for justification, but the righteousness which is given to us so that we may meet that precondition.

The concept of forensic justification

One of the central insights of Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone is that the individual sinner is incapable of self-justification. It is God who takes the initiative in justification, providing all the resources necessary to justify that sinner. One of those resources is the "righteousness of God." In other words, the righteousness on the basis of which sinners are justified is not their own righteousness, but a righteousness which is given to them by God. Augustine had made this point earlier: Luther, however, gives it a subtle new twist which leads to the development of the concept of "forensic justification."

The point at issue is difficult to explain, and centers on the question of the location of justifying righteousness. Both Augustine and Luther are agreed that God graciously gives sinful humans a righteousness which justifies them. But where is that righteousness located? Augustine argued that it was to be found within believers; Luther insisted that it remained outside believers. For Augustine, the righteousness in question is internal; for Luther, it is external.

For Augustine, God bestows justifying righteousness upon the sinner, in such a way that it becomes part of his or her person. As a result this righteousness, although originating from *outside* the sinner, becomes part of his or her person. For Luther, the righteousness in question remains outside the sinner: it is an "alien righteousness" (*iustitia aliena*). God treats, or "reckons," this righteousness as if it were part of the sinner's person. In his Romans lectures of 1515–16, Luther developed the idea of the "alien righteousness of Christ" imputed – not imparted – to us by faith, as the grounds of justification. His comments on Romans 4: 7 are especially important:

Since the saints are always conscious of their sin, and seek righteousness from God in accordance with his mercy, they are always reckoned as righteous by God. Thus in their own eyes, and as a matter of fact, they are unrighteous. But God reckons them as righteous on account of their confession of their sin. In fact, they are sinners; however, they are righteous by the reckoning of a merciful God. Without knowing it they are righteous; knowing it they are unrighteous. They are sinners in fact but righteous in hope.

Believers are righteous on account of the alien righteousness of Christ which is imputed to them – that is, treated as if it were theirs through faith. Earlier, we noted that an essential element of Luther's concept of faith is that it unites the believer to Christ. Justifying faith thus allows the believer to link up with the righteousness of Christ and be justified on its basis. Christians are thus "righteous by the imputation of a merciful God."

Through faith, the believer is clothed with the righteousness of Christ in much the same way, Luther suggests, as Ezekiel 16: 8 speaks of God covering our nakedness with his garment. For Luther, faith is the right (or righteous) relationship to God. Sin and righteousness thus coexist; we remain sinners inwardly, but are righteous extrinsically, in the sight of God. By confessing our sins in faith, we stand in a right and righteous relationship with God. From our own perspective we are sinners; but in the perspective of God, we are righteous.

Luther does not necessarily imply that this coexistence of sin and righteousness is a permanent condition. The Christian life is not static, as if – to use a very loose way of speaking – the relative amounts of sin and righteousness remained constant throughout. Luther is perfectly aware that the Christian life is dynamic, in that the believer grows in righteousness. Rather, his point is that the existence of sin does not negate our status as Christians. God

shields our sin through his righteousness. This righteousness is like a protective covering, under which we may battle with our sin.

This approach accounts, in Luther's view, for the persistence of sin in believers, while at the same time accounting for the gradual transformation of the believer and the future elimination of that sin. But it is not necessary to be perfectly righteous to be a Christian. Sin does not point to unbelief, or a failure on the part of God; rather, it points to the continued need to entrust one's person to the gentle care of God. Luther thus declares, in a famous phrase, that a believer is "at one and the same time righteous and a sinner" (*simul iustus et peccator*); righteous in hope, but a sinner in fact; righteous in the sight and through the promise of God, yet a sinner in reality.

These ideas were subsequently developed by Luther's follower Philip Melancthon to give the doctrine now generally known as "forensic justification." Where Augustine taught that the sinner is *made righteous* in justification, Melancthon taught that the sinner is *counted as righteous* or *pronounced to be righteous*. For Augustine, "justifying righteousness" is *imparted*; for Melancthon, it is *imputed*. Melancthon drew a sharp distinction between the event of being *declared* righteous and the process of being *made* righteous, designating the former "justification" and the latter "sanctification" or "regeneration."

For Augustine, both were simply different aspects of the same thing. According to Melancthon, God pronounces the divine judgment – that the sinner is righteous – in the heavenly court (*in foro divino*). This legal approach to justification gives rise to the term "forensic justification," from the Latin word *forum* ("marketplace" or "courtyard") – the place traditionally associated with the dispensing of justice in classical Rome.

The importance of this development lies in the fact that it marks a complete break with the

teaching of the church up to that point. From the time of Augustine onward, justification had always been understood to refer to both the event of being declared righteous and the process of being made righteous. Melancthon's concept of forensic justification diverged radically from this. As it was taken up by virtually all the major reformers subsequently, it came to represent a standard difference between the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches from that point onward.

In addition to their differences on how the sinner was justified, there was now an additional disagreement on what the word "justification" designated in the first place. As we shall see, the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church's definitive response to the Protestant challenge, reaffirmed the views of Augustine on the nature of justification, and censured the views of Melancthon as woefully inadequate.

John Calvin on justification

The model of justification which would eventually gain the ascendancy in the later Reformation was formulated by Calvin in the 1540s and 1550s. Calvin defines justification as follows:

To be justified in God's sight is to be reckoned as righteous in God's judgment, and to be accepted on account of that righteousness. [...] The person who is justified by faith is someone who, apart from the righteousness of works, has taken hold of the righteousness of Christ through faith, and having been clothed with it, appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as a righteous person. Therefore justification is to be understood simply as the acceptance by which God receives us into his favor as righteous people. We say that it consists of the remission of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. [...] believers are not righteous in

themselves, but on account of the communication of the righteousness of Christ through imputation, something to be noted carefully. [...] Our righteousness is not in us, but in Christ. We possess it only because we participate in Christ; in fact, with him, we possess all his riches.

The basic elements of Calvin's approach can be summarized as follows. Faith unites the believer to Christ in a "mystic union." (Here, Calvin reclaims Luther's emphasis upon the real and personal presence of Christ within believers, established through faith.) This union with Christ has a twofold effect, which Calvin refers to as "a double grace." First, the believer's union with Christ leads directly to his or her *justification*. Through Christ, the believer is declared to be righteous in the sight of God. Second, on account of the believer's union with Christ – and *not* on account of his or her justification – the believer begins the process of being made like Christ through regeneration. Calvin asserts that both justification and regeneration are the results of the believer's union with Christ through faith.

The Council of Trent on justification

By 1540, Luther had become something of a household name throughout Europe. His writings were being read and digested, with various degrees of enthusiasm, even in the highest ecclesiastical circles in Italy. Something had to be done if the Catholic Church was to re-establish its credibility in relation to this matter. The Council of Trent, summoned in 1545, began the long process of formulating a comprehensive response to Luther. High on its agenda was the doctrine of justification.

The sixth session of the Council of Trent was brought to its close on January 13, 1547. The Tridentine Decree on justification sets out the Roman Catholic teaching on justification with

a considerable degree of clarity. ("Tridentine" is the adjective derived from "Trent.") Trent's critique of Luther's doctrine of justification can be broken down into four main sections:

- 1 The nature of justification.
- 2 The nature of justifying righteousness.
- 3 The nature of justifying faith.
- 4 The assurance of salvation.

We shall consider each of these four matters individually.

The nature of justification

In his earlier phase, around the years 1515–19, Luther tended to understand justification as a process of becoming, in which the sinner was gradually conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ through a process of internal renewal (see pp. 372–3). In his later writings, however, dating from the mid-1530s and beyond, perhaps under the influence of Melancthon's more forensic approach to justification (see p. 376), Luther tended to treat justification as a matter of being declared to be righteous, rather than a process of becoming righteous. Increasingly, he came to see justification as an event, which was complemented by the distinct process of regeneration and interior renewal through the action of the Holy Spirit. Justification alters the outer status of the sinner "in the sight of God" (*coram Deo*), while regeneration alters the sinner's inner nature.

Trent strongly opposed this view, and vigorously defended the idea, originally associated with Augustine, that justification is the process of regeneration and renewal within human nature, which brings about a change in both the outer status and the inner nature of the sinner. The fourth chapter of the Decree provides the following precise definition of justification:

The justification of the sinner may be briefly defined as a translation from that state in which a human being is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace and of the adoption of the sons of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ our Savior. According to the Gospel, this translation cannot come about except through the cleansing of regeneration, or a desire for this, as it is written, "Unless someone is born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he or she cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (John 3: 5).

Justification thus includes the idea of regeneration. This brief statement is amplified in the seventh chapter, which stresses that justification "is not only a remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inner person through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts by which an unrighteous person becomes a righteous person." This point was given further emphasis through canon 11, which condemned anyone who taught that justification takes place "either by the sole imputation of the righteousness of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of grace and charity [...] or that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God."

In brief, then, Trent maintained the medieval tradition, stretching back to Augustine, which saw justification as comprising both an event and a process – the event of being declared to be righteous through the work of Christ, and the process of being made righteous through the internal work of the Holy Spirit. Reformers such as Melancthon and Calvin distinguished these two matters, treating the word "justification" as referring only to the process of being declared to be righteous; the accompanying process of internal renewal, which they termed "sanctification" or "regeneration," they regarded as theologically distinct.

Serious confusion thus resulted: Roman Catholics and Protestants used the same word

"justification" to mean very different things. Trent used the term "justification" to mean what, to Protestants, was *both* justification and sanctification.

The nature of justifying righteousness

Luther placed emphasis upon the fact that sinners possessed no righteousness in themselves. They had nothing within them which could ever be regarded as the basis of God's gracious decision to justify them. Luther's doctrine of the "alien righteousness of Christ" (*iustitia Christi aliena*) made it clear that the righteousness which justified sinners was outside them. It was imputed, not imparted; external, not internal.

Early critics of the Reformation argued, following Augustine, that sinners were justified on the basis of an internal righteousness, graciously infused or implanted within their persons by God. This righteousness was itself given as an act of grace: it was not something merited. But, they argued, there had to be something within individuals which could allow God to justify them. Luther dismissed this idea. God can justify individuals directly, rather than through an intermediate gift of righteousness.

Trent strongly defended the Augustinian idea of justification on the basis of an internal righteousness. The seventh chapter makes this point perfectly clear:

The single formal cause [of justification] is the righteousness of God – not the righteousness by which he himself is righteous, but the righteousness by which he makes us righteous, so that, when we are endowed with it, we are "renewed in the spirit of our mind," and are not only counted as righteous, but are called, and are in reality, righteous. [...] Nobody can be righteous except God communicates the merits of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ to him or her, and this takes place in the justification of the sinner.

The phrase "single formal cause" needs explanation. A "formal" cause is the *direct*, or most immediate, cause of something. Trent is thus stating that the direct cause of justification is the righteousness which God graciously imparts to us – as opposed to more distant causes of justification, such as the "efficient cause" (God), or the "meritorious cause" (Jesus Christ).

But the use of the word "single" should also be noted. One proposal for reaching agreement between Roman Catholic and Protestant, which gained especial prominence at the Colloquy of Ratisbon in 1541, was that two causes of justification should be recognized – an external righteousness (the Protestant position) and an internal righteousness (the Roman Catholic position). This compromise seemed to hold some potential. Trent, however, had no time for it. The use of the word "single" was deliberate, intended to eliminate the idea that there could be more than one such cause. The *only* direct cause of justification was the interior gift of righteousness.

The nature of justifying faith

Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone came in for severe criticism. Canon 12 condemns a central aspect of Luther's notion of justifying faith, when it rejects the idea that "justifying faith is nothing other than confidence in the mercy of God, which remits sin for the sake of Christ." In part, this rejection of Luther's doctrine of justification reflects the ambiguity, noted above (pp. 377–8), concerning the meaning of the term "justification." Trent was alarmed that anyone should believe that they could be justified – in the Tridentine sense of the term – by faith, without any need for obedience or spiritual renewal. Trent, interpreting "justification" to mean *both* the beginning of the Christian life *and* its continuation and growth, believed that Luther was suggest-

ing that simply trusting in God (without any requirement that the sinner be changed and renewed by God) was the basis of the entire Christian life.

Luther, however, did not actually hold this position, although his occasionally rather strident manner of expressing himself could have allowed this misunderstanding to arise. Rather, he was affirming that the Christian life was begun through faith, and faith alone; good works followed justification, and did not cause that justification in the first place. Trent itself was perfectly prepared to concede that the Christian life was begun through faith, thus coming very close indeed to Luther's position. As chapter 8 of the Decree on Justification declares, "we are said to be justified by faith, because faith is the beginning of human salvation, the foundation and root of all justification, without which it is impossible to please God." This is perhaps a classic case of a theological misunderstanding, resting upon the disputed meaning of a major theological term.

The assurance of salvation

For Luther, as for the reformers in general, one could rest assured of one's salvation. Salvation was grounded upon the faithfulness of God to his promises of mercy; to fail to have confidence in salvation was, in effect, to doubt the reliability and trustworthiness of God. Yet this must not be seen as a supreme confidence in God, untroubled by doubt. Faith is not the same as certainty; although the theological foundation of Christian faith may be secure, the human perception of and commitment to this foundation may waver.

The Council of Trent regarded the reformers' doctrine of assurance with considerable skepticism. Chapter 9 of the Decree on Justification, entitled "Against the Vain Confidence of Heretics," criticized the "ungodly confidence" of

the reformers. While no one should doubt God's goodness and generosity, the reformers erred seriously when they taught that "nobody is absolved from sins and justified, unless they believe with certainty that they are absolved and justified, and that absolution and justification are effected by this faith alone." Trent insisted that "nobody can know with a certainty of faith which is not subject to error, whether they have obtained the grace of God."

Trent's point seems to be that the reformers were seen to be making human confidence or boldness the grounds of justification, so that justification rested upon a fallible human conviction, rather than upon the grace of God. The reformers, however, saw themselves as stressing that justification rested upon the promises of God; a failure to believe boldly in such promises was tantamount to calling the reliability of God into question.

The Doctrine of Predestination

In discussing the nature of grace earlier in this chapter, we noted the close relationship between "grace" and "graciousness." God is under no obligation to bestow grace upon anyone, as if it were a commodity which functioned as a reward for meritorious actions. Grace is a gift, as Augustine never tired of emphasizing. Yet this emphasis upon the gift-character of grace, as will become clear, leads directly to the doctrine of predestination, often regarded as one of the most enigmatic and puzzling aspects of Christian theology. To explore how this connection developed, we shall consider some aspects of the theology of Augustine, before moving on to deal with the definitive exposition of a doctrine of predestination in the Reformed theological tradition.

Augustine of Hippo

Grace is a gift, not a reward. This insight is fundamental to Augustine (see pp. 365-6). If grace were a reward, humans could purchase their salvation through good works. They could earn their redemption. Yet this, according to Augustine, was totally contrary to the New Testament proclamation of the doctrine of grace. Affirming the gift-character of grace was a bulwark against inadequate theories of salvation. We have already spent much time dealing with Augustine's understanding of grace, and need not develop this point further here.

Augustine's insight had much to commend it. However, on further inspection it proved to have its darker side. As the Pelagian controversy became increasingly hardened and bitter, the more negative implications of Augustine's doctrine of grace became clearer. In what follows, we shall explore those implications.

If grace is a gift, God must be free to offer it, or not to offer it, without any external consideration. If it is offered on the basis of any such consideration, it is no longer a gift – it is a reward for a specific action or attitude. Grace, according to Augustine, only remains gracious if it is nothing more and nothing less than a gift, reflecting the liberality of the one who gives. But the gift is not given to all. It is particular. Grace is only given to some. Augustine's defense of "the graciousness of God," which rests on his belief that God must be free to give or withhold grace, thus entails the recognition of the *particularity*, rather than the *universality*, of grace.

If this insight is linked with Augustine's doctrine of sin, its full implications become clear. All of humanity is contaminated by sin, and unable to break free from its grasp. Only grace can set humanity free. Yet

grace is not bestowed universally; it is only granted to some individuals. As a result, only some will be saved – those to whom grace is given. Predestination, for Augustine, involves the recognition that God withholds the means of salvation from those who are not elected.

This is the predestination of the saints, and nothing else: the foreknowledge and preparation of the benefits of God, whereby whoever are set free are most certainly set free. And where are the rest left by the just judgment of God, except in that mass of perdition, in which the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon were left? Now they would have believed, if they had seen the wonderful signs of Christ. However, because it was not given to them to believe, they were not given the means to believe. From this, it seems that certain people have naturally in their minds a divine gift of understanding, by which they may be moved to faith, if they hear the words or see the signs which are adapted to their minds. But if, by virtue of a divine judgment which lies beyond us, these people have not been predestined by grace and separated from the mass of perdition, then they are without contact with either these divine words or deeds which, if heard or seen by them, would have allowed them to believe.

It is important to note that Augustine emphasized that this did not mean that some were predestined to damnation. It meant that God had selected some from the mass of fallen humanity. The chosen few were indeed predestined for salvation. The remainder were not, according to Augustine, actively condemned to damnation; they were merely not elected to salvation.

Augustine tends (although he is not entirely consistent in this respect) to treat predestination as something which is *active* and *positive* – a deliberate decision to redeem on God's part. However, as his critics pointed out, this

decision to redeem some was equally a decision *not* to redeem others.

This question surfaced with new force during the great predestinarian controversy of the ninth century, in which the Benedictine monk Godescalc of Orbais (c.804–c.869, also known as Gottschalk) developed a doctrine of double predestination similar to that later to be associated with Calvin and his followers. Pursuing with relentless logic the implications of his assertion that God has predestined some to eternal damnation, Godescalc pointed out that it was thus quite improper to speak of Christ dying for such individuals; if he had, he would have died in vain, for their fate would be unaffected.

Hesitant over the implications of this assertion, Godescalc proposed that Christ died *only for the elect*. The scope of his redeeming work was restricted, limited only to those who were predestined to benefit from his death. Most ninth-century writers reacted to this assertion critically. It was, however, to resurface in later Calvinism.

John Calvin

Calvin is often regarded as making the doctrine of predestination the center of his theological system. A close reading of his *Institutes* does not, however, bear out this often-repeated judgment. Calvin adopts a distinctly low-key approach to the doctrine, devoting a mere four chapters to its exposition (book III, chapters 21–4). Predestination is defined as "the eternal decree of God, by which he determined what he wished to make of every person. For he does not create everyone in the same condition, but ordains eternal life for some and eternal damnation for others." In writing of predestination at one point, Calvin appears to speak of it as a "horrible decree": "The decree, I admit, is horrible." However, the Latin term *horribile* is better translated as "awesome"; Calvin's own

French translation of the passage (1560) reads: "I confess that this decree must frighten us" (*dott nous epouvanter*).

The very location of Calvin's discussion of predestination in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* is significant in itself. It follows his exposition of the doctrine of grace. It is only after the great themes of this doctrine – such as justification by faith – have been expounded that Calvin turns to consider the mysterious and perplexing subject of predestination. Logically, predestination ought to precede such an analysis; predestination, after all, establishes the grounds of an individual's election, and hence his or her subsequent justification and sanctification. Yet Calvin declines to be subservient to the canons of such logic. Why?

Calvin's analysis of predestination begins from observable facts. Some believe the gospel. Some do not. The primary function of the doctrine of predestination is to explain why some individuals respond to the gospel, and others do not. It is an attempt to explain the variety of human responses to grace. Calvin's predestinarianism is to be regarded as reflection upon the data of human experience, interpreted in the light of Scripture, rather than something which is deduced on the basis of preconceived ideas concerning divine omnipotence. Belief in predestination is not an article of faith in its own right, but is the final outcome of scripturally informed reflection on the effects of grace upon individuals in the light of the enigmas of experience.

Far from being a central premise of Calvin's thought, predestination is an ancillary doctrine, concerned with explaining a puzzling aspect of the consequences of the proclamation of the gospel of grace. Yet as Calvin's followers sought to develop and recast his thinking in the light of new intellectual developments, it was perhaps inevitable (if this lapse into a potentially predestinarian mode of speaking may be excused) that alterations to his

structuring of Christian theology might occur. In the section which follows, we shall explore the understandings of predestination which gained influence within Calvinism after Calvin's death.

Reformed orthodoxy

It is not correct to speak of Calvin developing a "system" in the strict sense of the term. Calvin's religious ideas, as presented in the 1559 *Institutes*, are systematically arranged on the basis of pedagogical considerations; they are not, however, systematically derived on the basis of a leading speculative principle. Calvin regarded biblical exposition and systematic theology as virtually identical, and refused to make the distinction between them which became commonplace after his death. However, as noted earlier, a new interest in the area of method developed after Calvin's death. The question of the proper starting point for theology became increasingly debated (see pp. 50–1).

It is this concern for establishing a logical starting point for theology which allows us to understand the new importance that came to be attached to the doctrine of predestination within Reformed orthodoxy. Calvin focused upon the specific historical event of Jesus Christ and then moved out to explore its implications (that is, to deploy the appropriate technical language, Calvin's approach is analytic and inductive). In contrast, Theodore Beza – a later follower of Calvin (see p. 51) – begins from general principles and proceeds to deduce their consequences for Christian theology (that is, his approach is deductive and synthetic).

So what general principles does Beza use as a logical starting point for his theological systematization? The answer is that he bases his system on the divine decrees of election – that is, the divine decision to elect certain people to salvation, and others to damnation. All the

remainder of theology is concerned with the exploration of the consequences of these decisions. The doctrine of predestination thus assumes the status of a controlling principle.

One major consequence of this development may be noted: the doctrine of "limited atonement" or "particular redemption." (The term "atonement" is often used to refer to "the benefits resulting from the death of Christ.") Consider the following question. For whom did Christ die? The traditional answer to this question took the following form: Christ died for everyone; yet although his death has the potential to redeem all, it is only effective for those who choose to allow it to have this effect. This doctrine was regarded with intense distaste by Arminianism, to which we shall presently turn.

Before doing so, the idea of "Five Point Calvinism" needs to be introduced and explained. This term refers to the five central principles of Reformed soteriology (that is, the understanding of redemption associated with Calvinist writers), as they were laid down definitively by the Synod of Dort (1618–19). The "Five Points" are often referred to using the mnemonic TULIP (highly appropriate, one would think, for a synod that took place in Holland, home of that famous bulb):

- T total depravity of sinful human nature;
- U unconditional election, in that humans are not predestined on the basis of any foreseen merit, quality, or achievement;
- L limited atonement, in that Christ died only for the elect;
- I irresistible grace, by which the elect are infallibly called and redeemed;
- P perseverance of the saints, in that those who are truly predestined by God cannot in any way defect from that calling.

An important controversy emerged within Calvinist circles in the early seventeenth

century concerning the logical ordering of the "decrees of election." Two classic positions may be discerned within this notoriously pedantic debate, which has often become a symbol of theological obscurantism.

- 1 The *infralapsarian* position, associated with François Turretini (1623–87), stated that election presupposes the fall of humanity. The decrees of election are thus oriented toward all of humanity as a "mass of sin" (*massa perditionis*). In other words, God's decision to predestine some to election and others to damnation is in response to the event of the Fall. The object of the decision is fallen human beings.
- 2 The alternative *supralapsarian* position, associated with Beza, regards election as prior to the Fall. Here, the object of the divine decree of predestination is seen as humanity prior to the Fall. The Fall is thus seen as a means of carrying out the decree of election.

A third position may also be noted, associated especially with Moses Amyraut (1596–1664) and the Calvinist Academy at Saumur, France. This position, often referred to as *hypothetical universalism*, has had relatively little impact within Calvinism.

Arminianism

Arminianism takes its name from Jakob Arminius (1560–1609), who reacted against the Reformed doctrine of particular redemption. For him, Christ had died for all, not merely for the elect. Such views were taken up within Dutch Reformed circles in the aftermath of the Synod of Dort, leading to the publication of the *Remonstrance* of 1610. This statement affirmed the universal character and scope of Christ's work:

God, by an eternal and unchangeable decree in Christ before the existence of the world, determined to elect from the fallen and sinful human race to everlasting life all those who, through God's grace, believe in Jesus Christ and persevere in faith and obedience. [...] Christ the Savior of the world died for all and every human being, so that he obtained, through his death on the cross, reconciliation and pardon for all, in such a way, however, that only the faithful actually enjoy the same.

The idea of predestination is thus maintained; however, its frame of reference is radically altered. Whereas the Synod of Dort understood predestination to be an individual matter, the Arminians understood it corporately: God has predestined that a specific group of people will be saved – namely, those who believe in Jesus Christ. By believing, individuals fulfilled the predestined condition of salvation.

Arminianism soon achieved a major presence within eighteenth-century evangelicalism. Despite the more Calvinist views of George Whitefield, Arminian ideas were forcefully stated within Methodism by Charles Wesley (1707–88). For example, his hymn “Would Jesus Have the Sinner Die?” states the doctrine of the universal redemption of humanity with considerable force (my italics):

O let thy love my heart constrain,
Thy love for every sinner free.
That every fallen soul of man,
May taste the grace that found out me;
That all mankind with me may prove
Thy sovereign, everlasting love.

The position also achieved considerable prominence in North America during the eighteenth century: Jonathan Edwards's writings make frequent reference to what he regarded as the inconsistencies and shortcomings of his Arminian opponents. It was clearly

a popular opinion, despite the misgivings regularly expressed by its critics.

Karl Barth

One of the most interesting features of Karl Barth's theology is the manner in which it interacts with the theology of the period of Reformed orthodoxy. It is in part the seriousness with which Barth takes the writings of this period that has given rise to the term “neo-orthodoxy” to refer to Barth's general approach (pp. 85–7). Barth's treatment of the Reformed doctrine of predestination is especially interesting, in that it demonstrates the manner in which he can take traditional terms, and give them a radically new meaning within the context of his theology. Barth's discussion of predestination (*Church Dogmatics*, volume 2, part 2) is based upon two central affirmations:

- 1 Jesus Christ is the electing God.
- 2 Jesus Christ is the elected human being.

This strongly Christological orientation of predestination is maintained throughout his analysis of the doctrine. “In its simplest and most comprehensive form, the doctrine of predestination consists of the assertion that the divine predestination is the election of Jesus Christ. But the concept of election has a double reference – to the elector and the elected.” So exactly what has God predestined? Barth's answer to this has several components, of which the following are especially important.

- 1 “God has chosen to be the friend and partner of humanity.” God has elected, in a free and sovereign decision, to enter into fellowship with humanity. Barth thus affirms God's commitment to humanity, despite its sin and fallenness.

- 2 God chose to demonstrate that commitment in giving Christ for the redemption of humanity. “According to the Bible, this was what took place in the incarnation of the Son of God, in his death and passion, and in his resurrection from the dead.” The very act of the redemption of humanity is the expression of God's self-election as redeemer of fallen humanity.
- 3 God elected to bear totally the pain and cost of redemption. God chose to accept the cross of Golgotha as a royal throne. God chose to accept the lot of fallen humanity, especially in suffering and death. God chose the path of self-humiliation and self-abasement in order to redeem humanity.
- 4 God elected to take from us the negative aspects of his judgment. God rejects Christ in order that we might not be rejected. The negative side of predestination, which ought Barth suggests, properly to have fallen upon sinful humanity, is instead directed toward Christ the electing God and elected human being. God willed to bear the “rejection and condemnation and death” which are the inevitable consequences of sin. Thus “rejection cannot again become the portion or affair of humanity.” Christ bore what sinful humanity ought to have borne, in order that they need never bear it again.

In so far as predestination contains a “No,” it is not a “No” spoken against humanity. In so far as it involves exclusion and rejection, it is not the exclusion and rejection of humanity. In so far as it is directed to perdition and death, it is not directed to the perdition and death of humanity.

Barth thus eliminates any notion of a “predestination to condemnation” on the part of humanity. The only one who is predestined to

condemnation is Jesus Christ who “from all eternity willed to suffer for us.”

The consequences of this approach are clear. Despite all appearances to the contrary, humanity cannot be condemned. In the end, grace will triumph, even over unbelief. Barth's doctrine of predestination eliminates the possibility of the rejection of humanity. In that Christ has borne the penalty and pain of rejection by God, this can never again become the portion of humanity. Taken together with his characteristic emphasis upon the “triumph of grace,” Barth's doctrine of predestination points to the universal restoration and salvation of humanity – a position which has occasioned a degree of criticism from others who would otherwise be sympathetic to his general position. Emil Brunner is an example of such a critic:

What does this statement, “that Jesus is the only really rejected person,” mean for the situation of humanity? Evidently this: That there is no possibility of condemnation. [...] The decision has already been made in Jesus Christ – for all of humanity. Whether they know it or not, believe it or not, is not so important. They are like people who seem to be perishing in a stormy sea. But in reality they are not in a sea in which one can drown, but in shallow waters, in which it is impossible to drown. Only they do not know it.

Predestination and economics: the Weber thesis

One of the most fascinating consequences of the Calvinist emphasis upon predestination is its impact upon the attitudes of those who held the belief. Of especial importance is the question of assurance: how may the believer know that he or she really is among the elect? Although Calvin stressed that works are not the grounds of salvation, he nevertheless allowed it to be

understood that they are, in some vague way, the grounds of *assurance*. Works may be regarded as "the testimonies of God dwelling and ruling within us." Believers are not saved by works; rather, their salvation is demonstrated by works. "The grace of good works [...] demonstrates that the spirit of adoption has been given to us." This tendency to regard works as evidence of election may be seen as the first stage in the articulation of a work ethic with significant pastoral overtones: it is by worldly activism that believers can assure their troubled conscience that they are among the elect.

Anxiety over this question of election was subsequently a pervasive feature of Calvinist spirituality, and was generally treated at some length by Calvinist preachers and spiritual writers. The basic answer given, however, remained substantially the same: the believer who performs good works has indeed been chosen. This idea was often stated in terms of the "practical syllogism," an argument constructed along the following lines:

All who are elected exhibit certain signs as a consequence of that election.
But I exhibit those signs.
Therefore I am among the elect.

This *sylogismus practicus* thus locates the grounds of certainty of election in the presence of "certain signs" in the life of the believer. There was thus a significant psychological pressure to demonstrate one's election to oneself and the world in general by exhibiting its signs – among which was the wholehearted commitment to serve and glorify God by laboring in the world. It is this pressure which, according to sociologist Max Weber, lies behind the emergence of capitalism within Calvinist societies.

The popular version of the Weber thesis declares that capitalism is a direct result of the

Protestant Reformation. This is historically untenable and, in any case, is not what Weber actually said. Weber stressed that he had

no intention whatsoever of maintaining such a foolish and doctrinaire thesis as that the spirit of capitalism [...] could only have arisen as a result of certain effects of the Reformation. In itself, the fact that certain important forms of capitalistic business organizations are known to be considerably older than the Reformation is a sufficient refutation of such a claim.

Rather, Weber argued that a new "spirit of capitalism" emerged in the sixteenth century. It is not so much *capitalism as a specific form of capitalism* which needs to be explained.

Protestantism, Weber argued, generated the psychological preconditions essential to the development of modern capitalism. Indeed, Weber located the fundamental contribution of Calvinism as lying in its generation of psychological impulses on account of its belief systems. Weber laid especial stress upon the notion of "calling," which he linked with the Calvinist idea of predestination. Calvinists, assured of their personal salvation, were enabled to engage in worldly activity without serious anxiety regarding their salvation as a consequence. The pressure to prove one's election led to the active pursuit of worldly success – a success which, as history indicates, was generally not slow in coming.

It is not our concern here to provide a critique of the Weber thesis. In some circles, it is regarded as utterly discredited; in others, it lives on. Our concern is simply to note that Weber rightly discerned that religious ideas could have a powerful economic and social impact upon early modern Europe. The very fact that Weber suggested that the religious thought of the Reformation was capable

of providing the stimulus needed for the development of modern capitalism itself is a powerful testimony to the need to study theology if human history is to be fully understood. It also indicates that apparently abstract ideas – such as predestination – can prove to have a very concrete impact upon history!

The Darwinian Controversy and the Nature of Humanity

One of the most vigorous debates within modern Christian thought concerns the implications of Darwinism for religious belief, above all the theological status of human nature. Traditional Christian theology regarded humanity as the height of God's creation, distinguished from the remainder of the created order by being created in the image of God. On this traditional reading of things, humanity is located within the created order as a whole, yet stands above it on account of its unique relationship to God, articulated in the notion of the *imago Dei*. Yet Darwin's *Origin of Species* posed an implicit, and *The Descent of Man* an explicit, challenge to this view. Humanity had emerged, over a vast period of time, from within the natural order.

If there was one aspect of his own theory of evolution which left Charles Darwin feeling unsettled, it was its implications for the status and identity of the human race. In every edition of the *Origin of Species*, Darwin consistently stated that his proposed mechanism of natural selection did not entail any fixed or universal law of progressive development. It was not an easy conclusion for Darwin, or for his age. The conclusion to the *Descent of Man* speaks of humanity in exalted terms, while insisting upon its "lowly" biological origins:

Man may be excused for feeling some pride at having risen, though not through his own exertions, to the very summit of the organic scale; and the fact of his having thus risen, instead of having been aboriginally placed there, may give him hope for a still higher destiny in the distant future. But we are not here concerned with hopes or fears, only with the truth as far as our reason permits us to discover it; and I have given the evidence to the best of my ability. We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities [...] still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.

Most Darwinists would insist that it is a corollary of an evolutionary worldview that we must recognize that we are animals, part of the evolutionary process. Darwinism thus critiques the absolutist assumptions concerning the place of humanity within nature that lies behind "speciesism" – a term introduced by Richard Ryder, and given wider currency by Peter Singer, currently of Princeton University. This has raised considerable difficulties beyond the realm of traditional religion, in that many political and ethical theories are predicated on the assumption of the privileged status of humanity within nature, whether this is justified on religious or secular grounds.

So what are the Christian responses to Darwinism? It is now a century and a half since the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. During that time, at least four categories of response have emerged, each of which will be considered briefly below.

Young earth creationism

This position represents the continuation of the "common reading" of Genesis, which was widely encountered in popular and at least some academic writing before 1800. On this view, the earth was created in its basic form

between 6,000 and 10,000 years ago. Young earth creationists generally read the first two chapters of the book of Genesis in a way that allows for no living creatures of any kind before Eden, and no death before the Fall. Most young earth creationists hold that all living things were created simultaneously, within the timeframe proposed by the Genesis creation accounts, with the Hebrew word *yom* ("day") meaning a period of 24 hours. The fossil records, which point to a much greater timescale and to the existence of extinct species, are often understood to date from the time of Noah's flood. This viewpoint is often, but not universally, stated in forms of a 144-hour creation and a universal flood. Representative young earth creationists include Henry Madison Morris (1918–2006) and Douglas F. Kelly.

Old earth creationism

This view has a long history, and is probably the majority viewpoint within conservative Protestant circles. It has no particular difficulty with the vast age of the world, and argues that the "young earth" approach requires modification in at least two respects. First, that the Hebrew word *yom* may need to be interpreted as an "indefinite time participle" (not unlike the English word "while"), signifying an indeterminate period of time which is given specificity by its context. In other words, the word "day" in the Genesis creation accounts is to be interpreted as a long period of time, not a specific period of 24 hours. Second, that there may be a large gap between Genesis 1.1 and Genesis 1.2. In other words, the narrative is not understood to be continuous, but to make way for the intervention of a substantial period of time between the primordial act of creation of the universe, and the emergence of life on earth. This viewpoint is advocated by the famous *Schofield Reference Bible*, first published in 1909, although the ideas can be traced back to

writers such as the earlier nineteenth-century Scottish divine Thomas Chalmers.

Intelligent design

This movement, which has gained considerable influence in the United States in recent years, argues that the biosphere is possessed of an "irreducible complexity" which makes it impossible to explain its origins and development in any other method other than positing intelligent design. Intelligent design does not deny biological evolution; its most fundamental criticism of Darwinism is teleological – that evolution has no goal. The Intelligent Design movement argues that standard Darwinism runs into significant explanatory difficulties, which can only be adequately resolved through the intentional creation of individual species. Its critics argue that these difficulties are overstated, or that they will in due course be resolved by future theoretical advances. Although the movement avoids direct identification of God with this intelligent designer (presumably for political reasons), it is clear that this assumption is intrinsic to its working methods. The movement is particularly associated with Michael Behe, author of *Darwin's Black Box* (1996), and William Dembski, author of *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (1999). Both Dembski and Behe are fellows of the Discovery Institute, a Seattle research institute.

Evolutionary theism

A final approach argues that evolution is to be understood as God's chosen method of bringing life into existence from inorganic materials, and creating complexity within life. Whereas Darwinism gives a significant place to random events in the evolutionary process, evolutionary theism sees the process as divinely directed. Some evolutionary theists propose that each

level of complexity is to be explained on the basis of "God working within the system," perhaps at the quantum level. Others, such as Howard van Till, adopt a "fully-gifted creation" perspective, arguing that God built in the potential for the emergence and complexity of life in the initial act of creation, so that further acts of divine intervention are not required. Van Till argues that the character of divine creative action is not best expressed in terms of "reference to occasional interventions in which a new form is imposed on raw materials that are incapable of attaining that form with their own capabilities," but rather by reference to "God's giving being to a creation fully equipped with the creaturely capabilities to organize and/or transform itself into a diversity of physical structures and life-forms." Variations on such approaches are found elsewhere, as in the writings of Arthur Peacocke (born 1924).

How should we evaluate these positions, and their underlying religious and scientific concerns? Perhaps the most important point to make is simply this: the natural sciences, including the various Darwinian paradigms, are patient of atheist, theist, and agnostic interpretations and accommodations – but demand and necessitate none of them. Darwinism can be "spun" in ways that are seemingly totally consistent and seemingly totally opposed to Christian belief. Both "Darwinism" and "Christianity" designate a spectrum of possibilities, making determining their conceptual overlaps and tensions problematic, and critically dependent on definitional issues. Perhaps one of the more interesting paradoxes of the contemporary religious scene is that, for precisely these reasons, Darwinism has been prematurely and unnecessarily branded as "atheist" on the left by writers such as Richard Dawkins, and on the right by various American creationist individuals and organizations.

As Benjamin B. Warfield uncontroversially pointed out, serious issues of biblical interpretation often underlie such controversies. Perhaps somewhat more controversially, but almost certainly correctly, Warfield also observed that scientific advance offered a means by which the church could "check out" its interpretation of the Bible, avoiding being locked into an arcane or archaic biblical interpretation which, by force of tradition, was assumed to be the self-evident meaning of the Bible itself. It is for this reason that Darwinism has proved to be especially controversial within the conservative American Protestant constituency, whose general approach to biblical interpretation is often based on the seemingly straightforward (but actually nuanced and complex) notion of the "plain sense of Scripture." (Similar issues arise within the Islamic constituency concerning the interpretation of the *Qur'an*). For precisely the same reason, Darwinism has proved much more acceptable to Roman Catholic writers, on account of the notion of the magisterial interpretation of an occasionally opaque Scripture.

Yet one point must be made in closing. When all is said and done, Darwinism is a scientific theory, provisional in its status and open to modification, correction, development, or even ultimate abandonment as the process of scientific advance continues. It may be the received scientific wisdom of our age; no study of the history of science would be unwise enough to suggest that it is necessarily, and possibly uniquely, immune to the process of radical theory change that has characterized scientific advance in the past. So what will this debate look like in a century? Will we have moved on, scientifically and theologically? I am no prophet, and have no answers on this. It would, however, be extremely unwise to suppose that the present age has settled, or even begun to settle, the question of the

relation of religious faith to the scientific exploration of the biological origins of life.

The present chapter has briefly surveyed a vast amount of material relating to the Christian understandings of human nature, sin, and grace. Only a fraction of the debates within the Christian tradition have been explored. Nevertheless, central landmarks have been identified, which remain of decisive importance to the continuing debates within Christianity on such issues.

QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 14

- 1 Give a concise summary of the main issues at stake in the Pelagian controversy.
- 2 Why did Augustine believe in original sin?

- 3 Imagine that you are explaining the idea of "grace" to a nontheologian with a limited attention span. What could you say about the idea in 200 words or less?
- 4 Martin Luther is associated with the doctrine of "justification by faith alone." What did he mean by this? And what were the alternatives he rejected?
- 5 "If you aren't predestined, then go and get yourself predestined." How does this Calvinist attitude relate to Weber's thesis concerning the origins of capitalism?
- 6 Why was Darwinism such a powerful challenge to traditional Christian belief? And how has Christian theology responded to this challenge?

The Doctrine of the Church

Biblical Models of the Church

The area of Christian theology which deals with the doctrine of the church is usually referred to as *ecclesiology* (Greek: *ekklesiā*, "church"), and is of major importance to anyone proposing to engage in pastoral ministry of any kind. Ecclesiological questions break into ministry at point after point. What sort of body is the church? How does this understanding of what the church is affect what the church is meant to do? Ecclesiology is that area of theology which seeks to give theoretical justification to an institution which has undergone development and change down the centuries, set against an altering social and political context.

Yet it is important to appreciate that the church existed as an institution, as a historical reality, before Christians began to reflect seriously and systematically about what kind of institution the church was meant to be. Theoretical reflection on the identity and calling of the church follow on from the existence of the church as a community of faith. To study Christian understandings of the church is to gain insights into the way in which institutions adapt in order to develop and to survive. The present chapter aims to explore some of the issues which arise from this remarkable history of development down the ages.

Any attempt to study the development of Christian theories of the church must begin with the origins of the community of faith, described in the Bible, as well as the emerging understandings of the nature and identity of that community. The church has always stressed its historical and theological continuity with the people of Israel; for this reason, we must begin our exploration with the Old Testament.

The Old Testament

How did Israel understand its identity, and how were these maintained by its institutions? The noted American Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann argues that three distinct phases can be seen in Israel's development of its sense of identity and purpose as a people. In an article titled "Rethinking Church Models Through Scripture," in *Theology Today* 48 (1991), Brueggemann distinguishes three phases in Israel's self-understanding, reflecting the different situations in which it found itself.

The first phase of its existence lasted until the founding of the monarchy under Saul