

PLUCKING THE TULIP

An Eastern Orthodox Critique of the Reformed Doctrine of Predestination

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The doctrine of double predestination is the hallmark of John Calvin and Reformed theology.¹ It is the belief that just as God predestined his elect to eternal life in Christ, he likewise predestined (reprobated) the rest to hell. With blunt frankness Calvin wrote:

We call predestination God's eternal decree, which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others (*Institutes* 3.21.5; Calvin 1960:926).

Double predestination was one Calvin's more controversial teachings and he wrote extensively to defend this belief. In the final edition of his *Institutes*, Calvin devoted some eighty pages to defending this doctrine.² Despite its controversial nature, double predestination became the official position of the Reformed churches.

This paper will present an Orthodox critique of Reformed theology. More specifically, it will focus on the doctrinal formula TULIP, because TULIP provides a clear and concise summary of Reformed theology. The acronym is a catchy way of conveying the five major points of the *Canons of Dort*: **T** = total depravity, **U** = unconditional election; **L** = limited atonement, **I** = irresistible grace, and **P** = perseverance of the saints.

The *Canons of Dort* represent the Dutch Reformed Church's affirmation of predestination in the face of the Remonstrant movement (popularly known as Arminianism) which attempted in the early 1600s to temper the rigor of predestination by allowing for human free will in salvation.³ Although the *Canons of Dort* form the official confession of the Dutch Reformed Church, its affirmation of predestination parallels that found in other major confessions, e.g., the *Westminster Confession*, the *Second Belgic Confession*, and the *Heidelberg Catechism*.⁴

Calvinism and Eastern Orthodoxy represent two radically different theological traditions. Orthodoxy has its roots in the early Ecumenical Councils and the Church Fathers, whereas Calvinism emerged as a reaction to medieval Roman Catholicism. Aside from a brief encounter in the early seventeenth century, there has been very little interaction between the two traditions.⁵

¹ Although closely related, Calvin and Calvinism are not synonymous. The relationship between Calvin and Reformed theology is more complex than most people realize. As a matter of fact, Alister McGrath warns against equating the two (1987:7). Also, it should be noted that some would dispute the centrality of predestination for Calvin's theology. McGrath describes it as being an "ancillary doctrine, concerned with explaining a puzzling aspect of the consequence of the proclamation of the gospel of grace" (1990:169).

² See the edition by John T. McNeill (ed.) 3.21-25. For a discussion of the growing prominence of the doctrine in the successive editions of Calvin's *Institutes* see Pelikan 1984:217-220.

³ For a discussion of the theological issues at stake in the Remonstrant/Reformed controversy see Pelikan 1984:232-244.

⁴ Unlike Lutheranism with its *Formula of Concord*, the Reformed tradition has no confessional statement with a similar normative stature (Pelikan 1984:236).

⁵ In the early seventeenth century, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Cyril Lucaris, came under the influence of Reformed theology. In response to the challenge of Calvinism, the Orthodox Church responded by swiftly deposing

This is beginning to change with the growing interest among Evangelicals and mainstream Protestants in Orthodoxy.⁶ This lacuna has often presented a challenge for Protestants in the Reformed tradition exploring Orthodoxy and Orthodox Christians who want to reach out to their Reformed/Calvinist friends. This is why I created the blog **OrthodoxBridge.com** and why I am tackling such difficult issues like the doctrine of predestination in this paper.⁷

The Orthodox Critique of TULIP

This critique will consist of two parts: Part I will critique the five points of TULIP in its individual components and Part II will discuss Calvinism as an overall theological system. The critique will proceed along four lines of argument:

- (1) Calvinism relies on a faulty reading of Scripture;
- (2) Calvinism deviates from the historic Christian Faith as defined by the Ecumenical Councils and the Church Fathers;
- (3) Calvinism's understanding of God's sovereignty leads to the denial of the possibility of love, and
- (4) Calvinism leads to a defective Christology and a distorted understanding of the Trinity.

PART I.

A Point by Point Critique of TULIP

T - Total Depravity

Total depravity describes the effect of the Fall of Adam and Eve on humanity. It is an attempt to describe what is otherwise known as "original sin." Where some theologians believed that man retained some capacity to please God, the Calvinists believe that man was incapable of pleasing God due to the radical effect of the Fall on the totality of human nature. The *Scots Confession* took the extreme position that the Fall eradicated the divine image from human nature: "By this transgression, generally known as original sin, *the image of God was utterly defaced in man*, and he and his children became by nature hostile to God, slaves to Satan, and servants to sin." (*The Book of Confession* 3.03; italics added) The Swiss Reformer, Heinrich Bullinger, taught that the image of God in Adam was "extinguished" by the Fall (Pelikan 1984:227).

The *Canons of Dort* asserted the universality and the totality of the Fall; that is, all of humanity was affected by the Fall and every aspect of human existence was corrupted by the Fall.

Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto; and

Cyril, followed by convening a synodal gathering in Jerusalem. At that council, Calvinism was formally repudiated through *The Confession of Dositheus*, composed by the Patriarch of Jerusalem by that name (in Leith 1963:486-517). Thus, for Orthodoxy Calvinism is not a theological option.

⁶ See Bradley Nassif's, "Will the 21st be the Orthodox Century?" in *Christianity Today* (December 2006).

⁷ "Plucking the TULIP" was originally posted on the **OrthodoxBridge.com** in August and September of 2012.

without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation (Third and Fourth Head: Article 3).

The *Canons of Dort* (Third and Fourth Head: Paragraph 4) went so far as to reject the possibility the unregenerate can hunger and thirst after righteousness on their own initiative. It insists this spiritual hunger is indicative of spiritual regeneration and only those who have been predestined for salvation will show spiritual hunger.

In taking this stance, the *Canons of Dort* reflected faithfully Calvin and the other Reformers' understanding of the Fall. Calvin believed the Fall affected human nature to the point that man was even incapable of faith which is so necessary for salvation. He wrote:

Here I only want to suggest briefly that the whole man is overwhelmed—as by a deluge—from head to foot, so that no part is immune from sin and all that proceeds from him is to be imputed to sin (*Institutes* 2.1.9, Calvin 1960:253).

Martin Luther held to a similar radical understanding of original sin. At the Heidelberg Disputations, Luther asserted:

'Free will' after the fall is *nothing but a word*, and so long as it does what is within it, it is committing deadly sin (in Kittelson 1986:111; emphasis added).

The Reformed understanding of the Fall derives from Augustine's interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Augustine assumed that Adam and Eve were mature adults when they sinned. This assumption led to a more catastrophic understanding of the Fall. However, Augustine's understanding represented only one reading of Genesis and was not reflective of the patristic consensus. Another reading of Genesis can be found in Irenaeus of Lyons, widely regarded as the leading Church Father of the second century. Irenaeus believed Adam and Eve were not created as fully mature beings, but as infants or children who would grow into perfection (*Against the Heretics* 4.38.1-2; ANF Vol. I, p. 521). This foundational assumption leads to radically different theological paradigm. John Hick, in his comparison of Irenaeus' theodicy against that of Augustine, notes:

Instead of the fall of Adam being presented, as in the Augustinian tradition, as an utterly malignant and catastrophic event, completely disrupting God's plan, Irenaeus pictures it as something that occurred in the childhood of the race, an understandable lapse due to weakness and immaturity rather than an adult crime full of malice and pregnant with perpetual guilt. And instead of the Augustinian view of life's trials as a divine punishment for Adam's sin, Irenaeus sees our world of mingled good and evil as a divinely appointed environment for man's development towards perfection that represents the fulfilment of God's good purpose for him (1968:220-221).

Many Calvinists may find Irenaeus' understanding of the Fall bizarre. This is because Reformed theology, like much of Western Christianity, has become so dependent on Augustine that it has become provincial and isolated in its theology.

One of the key aspects of the doctrine of total depravity is the belief that the Fall deprived humanity of any capacity for free will rendering them incapable of desiring to do good or to believe in God. Yet a study of the early Church shows a broad theological consensus existed that affirmed belief in free will. J.N.D. Kelly in his *Early Christian Doctrine* notes that the second century Apologists unanimously believed in human free will (1960:166). Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) wrote:

For the coming into being at first was not in our own power; and in order that we may follow those things which please Him, choosing them by means of the rational faculties He has Himself endowed us with, He both persuades us and leads us to faith (*First Apology* 10; ANF Vol. I, p. 165).

Irenaeus of Lyons affirmed humanity's capacity for faith:

Now all such expressions demonstrate that man is in his own power with respect to faith (*Against the Heretics* 4.37.2; ANF Vol. I, p. 520).

Another significant witness to free will is Cyril of Jerusalem, Patriarch of Jerusalem in the fourth century. In his famous catechetical lectures, Cyril repeatedly affirmed human free-will (*Lectures* 2.1-2 and 4.18, 21; NPNF Second Series Vol. VII, pp. 8-9, 23-24). Likewise, Gregory of Nyssa, in his catechetical lectures, taught:

For He who holds sovereignty over the universe permitted something to be subject to our own control, over which each of us alone is master. Now this is the will: a thing that cannot be enslaved, being the power of self-determination (Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, MPG 47, 77A; in Gabriel 2000:27).

Another patristic witness against total depravity can be found in John of Damascus, an eighth century Church Father who wrote the closest thing to a systematic theology in the early Church, *Exposition of the Catholic Faith*. He explained that God made man a rational being endowed with free-will and as a result of the Fall man's free-will was corrupted (NPNF Second Series Vol. IX, p. 58-60). Saint John of the Ladder, a sixth century Desert Father, in his spiritual classic, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, wrote:

Of the rational beings created by Him and honoured with the dignity of free-will, some are His friends, others are His true servants, some are worthless, some are completely estranged from God, and others, though feeble creatures, are His opponents (1991:3).

Thus, Calvin's belief in total depravity was based upon a narrow theological perspective. His failure to draw upon the patristic consensus and his almost exclusive reliance on Augustine resulted in a soteriology peculiar to Protestantism. However great a theologian Augustine may have been, he was just one among many others.

An important aspect of Orthodox theology is the patristic consensus. Doing theology based upon the consensus of the Church Fathers and the seven Ecumenical Councils reflects the understanding among the early Christians that they shared a common corporate faith. This approach is best summed up by Vincent of Lerins: "Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always,

by all" (*A Commonitory* 2.6; NPNF Second Series Volume XI, p. 132). See also, Irenaeus of Lyons' boast to the Gnostics: "...the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered through the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it" (*Against the Heretics* 1.10.2; ANF Volume I, p. 331).

Thus, when the Orthodox Church confronted Calvinism in the 1600s, it already had a rich theological legacy to draw upon. Decree XIV of *Dositheus' Confession* rejects the Calvinist belief in total depravity, affirming the Fall and humanity's sinful nature, but stops short of total depravity.

We believe man in falling by the [original] transgression to have become comparable and like unto the beasts, that is, to have been utterly undone, and to have fallen from his perfection and impassibility, *yet not to have lost the nature and power which he had received from the supremely good God*. For otherwise he would not be rational, and consequently not man; but to have the same nature, in which he was created and the same power of his nature, that is free-will, living and operating (Leith 1963:496; emphasis added).

The Orthodox Memorial Service has a line that sums up the Orthodox Church's understanding of the Fall: "I am an image of Your indescribable glory, though I bear the scars of my sins" (Kezios 1993:46). In summary, the Orthodox Church's position is that human nature still retains some degree of free will even though subject to corruption by sin.

Biblical support for the Orthodox understanding of fallen human nature can be found in Paul's speech to the Athenians. He commends the Athenians for their piety, noting they even had an altar dedicated to an unknown deity. Although their fallen nature prevented them from making full contact with the one true God, they nonetheless retained a longing for communion with God. Paul takes note of the spiritual longing that underlay the Athenians' religiosity using it as a launching point for the proclamation of the Gospel:

From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would *seek him* and perhaps *reach out for him* and *find him*, though he is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26-27, NIV; emphasis added).

What Paul says here flies in the face of the *Canons of Dort's* assertion that the unregenerate were incapable of spiritual hunger. Peter took a similar approach in his speech to Cornelius the Gentile centurion notes:

I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who *fear him* and *do what is right* (Acts 10:34-5, NIV; emphasis added).

Peter and Paul's belief in God's love for the nations is not a new idea. The Gentiles' capacity to respond to God's grace is a recurring motif in the Old Testament. Alongside Israel's divine election was the theme of Yahweh as Lord of the nations in the Old Testament (see Verkuyl 1981:37 ff.)

It is important to keep in mind that the doctrine of election—the elect status of the Jewish people—is key to understanding Jesus' messianic mission and much of Paul's letters. Contrary to the expectations of many of the Jews of the time, Jesus' messianic calling involved his bringing the Gentiles into the kingdom of God. This was a revolutionary doctrine—that the Gentiles could become saved through faith in the Messiah apart from becoming Jewish. This precipitated a theological crisis over the doctrine of election that underlay Paul's reasoning in Romans and Galatians. In Romans 9-11, Paul had to explain and uphold God's calling of Israel in the face of the fact that Israel had rejected the promised Messiah. To read the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination of individuals into Romans 9 constitutes a colossal misreading of what Paul was attempting to do. Furthermore, it overlooks the great reversal of election that took place in the former Pharisee Paul's thinking: the non-elect—the Gentiles—receive the grace of God and the elect—the nation of Israel—are rejected (Romans 10:19-21).

U - Unconditional Election

Whereas the first article of TULIP describes our fallen state, the second article describes God, the author of our salvation. The emphasis here is on the transcendent sovereignty of God whose work of redemption is totally independent of human will.

That some receive the gift of faith from God, and other do not receive it, proceeds from God's eternal decree (*Canons of Dort* First Head: Article 6).

Calvin likewise affirms unconditional election through his rejection of the idea that our election is based on God's foreknowing our response. He writes:

We assert that, with respect to the elect, this plan was founded upon his freely given mercy, without regard to human worth; but by his just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment he has barred to door of life to those whom he has given over to damnation (*Institutes* 3.21.7, Calvin 1960:931; see also *Institutes* 3.22.1, Calvin 1960:932).

In another place, Calvin uses a medical analogy to describe double predestination:

Therefore, though all of us are by nature suffering from the same disease, only those whom it pleases the Lord to touch with his healing hand will get well. The others, whom he, in his righteous judgment, passes over, waste away in their own rottenness until they are consumed. There is no other reason why some persevere to the end, while others fall at the beginning of the course (*Institutes* 2.5.3; Calvin 1960:320).

Although the doctrine of total depravity is listed first, it is not the logical starting point of TULIP. The real starting point is in the second article, unconditional election. God's transcendent sovereignty is the true starting point of Calvin's soteriology. Karl Barth argued that it is Calvin's insistence on God's absolute sovereignty which characterizes Calvin's theology; double predestination is but a logical outworking of this fundamental premise (Barth 1922:117-118).

The Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election is at odds with the Church Fathers who taught that predestination is based upon God's foreknowledge. John of Damascus wrote:

We ought to understand that while God knows all things beforehand, yet He does not predetermine all things. For He knows beforehand those things that are in our power, but He does not predetermine them. For it is not His will that there should be wickedness nor does He choose to compel virtue. So that pre-determination is the work of the divine command based on fore-knowledge. But on the other hand God predetermines those things which are not within our power in accordance with His prescience (NPNF Second Series Vol. IX, p. 42).

Another Church Father, Gregory of Palamas, asserted the same principle:

Therefore, God does not decide what men's will shall be. It is not that He foreordains and thus foreknows, but that He foreknows and thus foreordains, and not by His will but by His knowledge of what we shall freely will or choose. Regarding the free choices of men, when we say God foreordains, it is only to signify that His foreknowledge is infallible. To our finite minds it is incomprehensible how God has foreknowledge of our choices and actions without willing or causing them. We make our choices in freedom which God does not violate. They are in His foreknowledge, but 'His foreknowledge differs from the divine will and indeed from the divine essence.' (Gregory of Palamas' *Natural, Theological, Moral and Practical Chapters*, MPG 150, 1192A; Gabriel 2000:27).

Supported by the patristic consensus, the Orthodox Church in the *Confession of Dositheus* in no uncertain terms condemns the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election.

But to say, as the most wicked heretics—and as is contained in the Chapter answering hereto—that God, in predestinating, or condemning, had in no wise regard to the works of those predestinated, or condemned, we know to be profane and impious (Decree III; Leith 1963:488).

L - Limited Atonement

One of the more controversial assertions in the *Canons of Dort* is the doctrine of limited atonement—that Christ died only for the elect, not for the whole world.

...it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and *those only*, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father (Second Head: Article 8; emphasis added).

Whereas the *Canons of Dort* is explicit in its affirmation of limited atonement, surprisingly a careful reading of Calvin's *Institutes* does not yield any explicit mention of limited atonement (see Roger Nicole's article).

There are a number of biblical passages that can be used to refute the doctrine of limited atonement. Biblical references commonly used to challenge the Calvinist position tend to be those that teach God's desire for all to be saved, e.g., John 3:16:

For God so loved *the world* that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (NIV, emphasis added).

Another important passage is I Timothy 2:3-6:

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants *all men* to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men.... (NIV, emphasis added)

Another significant passage that specifically challenges the notion of limited atonement is I John 2:2:

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of *the whole world* (NIV, emphasis added).

This passage is especially relevant for two reasons: (1) it specifically refers to Christ's atoning death on the Cross, and (2) it teaches that Christ died not just for the elect (us) but also for the non-elect (the whole world). Calvin cited I John 2:2 three times, but what is surprising is that nowhere in his *Institutes* did Calvin deal with the latter part of the verse.⁸

The real challenge for those who appeal to the above passages lies in the semantic tactics used by Calvinists in which they argue that "all" and "the world" are not to be taken literally but as referring to only those predestined for salvation.⁹ Zacharias Ursinus, the German Reformer, understood "all" to refer to "all classes" rather than to individuals (Pelikan 1984:237). Similarly, Theodore Beza, Calvin's colleague and successor, insisted that John 3:16 applied only to the elect. Roger Nicole's explanation describes well the Calvinist strategy for reading biblical texts:

For instance, "all" may vary considerably in extension: notably "all" may mean, all men, universally, perpetually and singly, as when we say "all are partakers of human nature"; or again it may have a broader or narrower reference depending upon the context in which it is used, as when we say "all reached the top of Everest," where the scope of the discourse makes it plain that we are talking about a group of people on which set out to ascend the mountain. *It is not always easy to determine with assurance what is the frame of reference in view:* hence controverted interpretations both of Scripture and of individual theologians (emphasis added).

This hermeneutical approach imparts a certain imperviousness to Reformed theology; one either accepts their semantic perspective or one does not. The inductive method will not work here. This means that effective refutation of Calvinism cannot be carried out solely on the grounds of biblical exegesis. This longstanding impasse in Protestantism is an example of *sola scriptura's* inability to create doctrinal unity on fundamental issues.

⁸ The Biblical Reference index in the back of the *Institutes* (McNeill, ed.) shows that I John 2:2 is cited three times: 2.17.2, 3.4.26, and 3.20.20.

⁹ Medieval Catholic theologians who sought to defend double predestination in the face of I Timothy 2:4 would employ a more philosophical line of defense. They drew upon the distinction between God's "antecedent will" and his "ordinate will" (Pelikan 1984:34).

This is where historical theology can help us assess the competing truth claims. The advantage of historical theology is two-fold: (1) it enables us to understand the historical and social forces that shaped Calvinists' exegesis and (2) it enables us to determine the extent to which Calvin's theology reflected the mainstream of historic Christianity or to what extent Calvin's theology became deviant and heretical.

Historical theology shows there existed a widespread belief among the Church Fathers in God's universal love for humanity. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote:

For it was not merely for those who believed on Him in the time of Tiberius Caesar that Christ came, nor did the Father exercise His providence for the men only who are now alive, but for all men altogether, who from the beginning, according to their capacity, in their generation have both feared and loved God, and practised justice and piety towards their neighbours, and have earnestly desired to see Christ and to hear his voice (*Against the Heretics* 4.22.2).

St. John of the Ladder wrote:

God belongs to all free beings. He is the life of all, the salvation of all—faithful and unfaithful, just and unjust, pious and impious, passionate and dispassionate, monks and laymen, wise and simple, healthy and sick, young and old—just as the effusion of light, the sight of the sun, and the changes of the seasons are for all alike; 'for there is no respect of persons with God' (1991:4).

The universality of Christ's redeeming death can be found in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, used on most Sundays in the Orthodox Church. During the words of institution over the bread and the wine, in one of the inaudible prayers, the Orthodox priest will pray a paraphrase of John 3:16:

You so loved Your world as to give Your only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. Having come and having fulfilled the divine plan for us, on the night when He was delivered up, or rather gave Himself *for the life of the world*.... (Kezios 1996:24; emphasis added)

Probably the most resounding affirmation of this can be found at the end of each Sunday Liturgy when the priest concludes: "...for He alone is good and He loveth mankind." (Kezios 1993:41)

I - Irresistible Grace

The fourth article attributes our faith in Christ to God's effectual calling. The *Canons of Dort* stresses that God "produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also" (Third and Fourth Head: Article 14; see also Article 10). Faith in Christ is not the result of our choosing or our initiative, but is solely from God.

And as God Himself is most wise, unchangeable, omniscient, and omnipotent, so the election made by Him can neither be interrupted nor changed, recalled, or annulled; neither can the elect be cast away, nor their number diminished (*Canons of Dort* First Head: Article 11).

Furthermore, the *Canons of Dort* reject the teaching that God's converting grace can be resisted. The Third and Fourth Head: Paragraph 8 condemns the following statement: "That God in the regeneration of man does not use such powers of His omnipotence as potently and infallibly bend man's will to faith and conversion...." Our free will has no bearing on our having faith in Christ. Faith in Christ is purely by the grace of God.

Although Calvin did not teach with the same starkness as the *Canons of Dort* the doctrine of irresistible grace, we find indications in his *Institutes* that he believed in the underlying idea. He wrote of God's election being "inviolable" (*Institutes* 3.21.6, Calvin 1960:929), God's unchangeable plan being "intrinsically effectual" for the salvation of the elect (*Institutes* 3.21.7; Calvin 1960:931); and God as the "intrinsic cause" of spiritual adoption (*Institutes* 3.21.7; Calvin 1960:941). Probably the closest we can find to an explicit endorsement of irresistible grace is Calvin's paraphrase of Augustine.

There Augustine first teaches: the human will does not obtain grace by freedom, but obtains freedom by grace; when the feeling of delight has been imparted through the same grace, the human will is formed to endure; it is strengthened with unconquerable fortitude; controlled by grace, it never will perish, but, if grace forsake it, it will straightway fall... (*Institutes* 2.4.14; Calvin 1960:308).

These passages lead to the conclusion that Calvin and the Synod of Dort shared the same belief in irresistible grace.

Orthodoxy rejects the doctrine of irresistible grace because this doctrine assumes the absence of human free will. The early Church Fathers—as noted in the section on total depravity—affirmed the role of free will in our salvation. One of the earliest pieces of Christian literature, the second century *Letter to Diognetus*, contains a clear affirmation of human free will and a rejection of salvation by compulsion. The author writes concerning the Incarnation:

He sent him as God; he sent him as man to men. He willed to save man by persuasion, not by compulsion, for compulsion is not God's way of working (*Letter to Diognetus* 7.4; Richardson 1970:219).

Ultimately, the underlying flaw of Reformed soteriology is the emphasis on God's sovereignty to the denial of love. The Calvinist insistence on God's sovereignty undercuts the ontological basis for the human person. Closer inspection of the doctrine of irresistible grace brings to light a certain internal contradiction in Reformed theology: God's free gift of grace is based on compulsion. Or to put it another way: How can a gift be free if there's no freedom of choice? Love that is not free cannot be love. Love must arise from free choice. Bishop Kallistos Ware wrote:

Where there is no freedom, there can be no love. Compulsion excludes love; as Paul Evdokimov used to say, God can do everything except compel us to love him (1986:76; emphasis in original).

Where there is no free will, there is no genuine love, nor can there be genuine faith. This in turn subverts and overthrows the fundamental Protestant dogma of *sola fide*. Ironically, Calvinism's crowning glory also happens to be its fatal flaw.

Another reason why Calvinism is incompatible with Orthodoxy is its implicit monotheletism. In the seventh century, there arose a controversy as to whether Christ had one will or two. Monotheletism asserted that Christ had only one will (the divine) and bithéletism affirmed that Christ had two wills (human and divine working in harmony). The Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople III) rejected monotheletism in favor of bithéletism.¹⁰

The Calvinists' denial of human free will and their insistence on the dominance of the divine will over human will parallels the heresy of monotheletism, which insisted that Christ did not have two wills: a human will and a divine will. This assertion is made on the basis that the doctrine of the Incarnation rests on what constitutes the divine nature and what constitutes human nature. A defective anthropology (e.g., the denial of free will or the importance of physical flesh) leads to a defective Christology. Thus, the Reformed tradition's implicit monotheletism points to a defective Christology and a significant departure from the historic Faith as defined by one of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.

P - Preservation of the Elect

Also known as the Perseverance of the Saints, the fifth article in TULIP addresses the troubling issue of Christians backsliding or falling into sin. Their failure to display the marks of election would seem to call into question the effectiveness of divine election. Again, we find the emphasis on God's sovereignty:

Thus it is not in consequence of their own merits or strength, but of God's free mercy, that they neither totally fall from faith and grace nor continue and perish finally in their backsliding; which, with respect to themselves is not only possible, but would undoubtedly happen; but with respect to God, it is utterly impossible, since His counsel cannot be changed nor His promise fail; neither can the call according to His purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession, and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated (*Canons of Dort* Fifth Head: Article 14).

Similarly, in response to questions about the status of the lapsed, Calvin's position was: the elect cannot fall from salvation, even after their conversion, they will inevitably be saved (*Institutes* 3.24.6-7, Calvin 1960:971-3). In another place Calvin writes:

For perseverance itself is indeed also a gift of God, which he does not bestow on all indiscriminately, but imparts to whom he pleases. If one seeks the reason for the difference—why some steadfastly persevered, and others fail out of instability—none occurs to us other than that *the Lord upholds* the former, strengthening them by his own power, that they may not perish; while to the latter, that they may be examples of inconstancy, *he does not impart the same power* (*Institutes* 2.5.3; Calvin 1960:320; emphasis added).

One could say crudely that the elect will be saved against their will, but the more nuanced approach is to say that the elect will inevitably choose to be saved because that desire has been implanted in them by God.

¹⁰ For an informed discussion of the theological debates surrounding the monotheletism heresy see Jaroslav Pelikan's *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom* Vol. 2 1974:68-75, 87-88.

In contrast to Calvinism, the Orthodox understanding of the perseverance of the saints is based upon synergy—our cooperation with God's grace, and deification—our becoming partakers in the divine nature. The *Confession of Dositheus* affirms the synergistic approach to salvation in contrast to the monergistic approach found in the Reformed confessions.

And we understand the use of free-will thus, that the Divine and illuminating grace, and which we call preventing grace, being, as a light to those in darkness, by the Divine goodness imparted to all, to those that are willing to obey this—for it is of use only to the willing, not to the unwilling—and *co-operate* with it, in what it requireth as necessary to salvation, there is consequently granted particular grace; which, *co-operating* with us, and enabling us, and making us perseverant in the love of God, that is to say, in performing those good things that God would have us to do, and which His preventing grace admonisheth us that we should do, justifieth us, and makes us predestinated (Leith 1963:487-8; emphasis added).

Irenaeus likewise teaches the perseverance of the saints, but from the perspective of theosis.

...but man making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One. Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see His Lord (*Against the Heretics* 4.38.3; ANF Vol. I, p. 522).

The Orthodox approach to salvation provides the basis for a relational approach to salvation as opposed to the more forensic and mechanistic approach found in Western theology. This provides the basis for salvation as union with Christ and salvation as life in the Trinity.

PART II.

Evaluating TULIP as a Theological System

In Part II, I will be critiquing TULIP as an overall theological system first by discussing how TULIP developed from Augustine's theology. Then, I will discuss how TULIP's denial of human free will is consequential for Christology and our understanding of the Trinity. I will also show how the Orthodox approach to the Trinity provides an understanding of salvation that allows for free will and genuine love.

Calvinism's Western Roots

Calvin's double predestination represents an outcome of the theological evolution in Western Christianity. Unlike Eastern Orthodoxy which draws on a wide range of Church Fathers, Western Christianity in both its Roman Catholic and Protestant forms depends heavily on Augustine of Hippo. Calvin was well aware that he was breaking with the patristic consensus and even then persisted in constructing his theology upon the Augustinian paradigm (*Institutes* 2.2.4, Calvin 1960:259). He cited Augustine more often than all the Greek and Latin Fathers combined (Schaff 1910:589).

While double predestination is closely associated with Calvin, it is not unique to him. It was also held by some medieval theologians. Gregory of Rimini (d. 1358) taught: "Just as God has predestinated from eternity those whom he willed to, not on account of any future merits, so also he has condemned from eternity those whom he will to, not on account of their future demerits" (in Pelikan 1984:31). Calvin stands out with respect to the clarity and rigor with which he described and applied the doctrine of double predestination (Pelikan 1984:222).

Likewise, the Calvinist vs. Arminian conflict that led to TULIP is not new. Similar tensions can be found in medieval theology. Medieval theologians like Thomas Bradwardine and Gregory of Rimini accepted the doctrine of absolute predestination, whereas Duns Scotus and William of Occam rejected it (Pelikan 1984:28-35; Oberman 1963:187; Barth 1922:52). What makes TULIP Protestant is the fact that it arises from the monergism underlying *sola fide* (justification by faith alone).

Monergism vs. Synergism

The driving force for Reformed theology is the passion to uphold God's sovereignty. Reformed Christians glory in God's sovereignty over all creation and especially with respect to our salvation. The *Canons of Dort* stresses that God "produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also" (Third and Fourth Head: Article 14; see also Article 10). They believe that any tempering of the divine sovereignty would detract from the glory of God. The German Reformed theologian, Philip Schaff notes:

Augustin and Calvin were intensely religious, controlled by a sense of absolute dependence on God, and wholly absorbed in the contemplation of his majesty and glory. To them God was everything; man a mere shadow (1910:539).

What we see here is what Robin Phillips calls a zero-sum theology. The term comes from game theory. In a zero-sum game there is a fixed amount of points which means that one player's gain can only come from the other player's loss. Similarly, in a zero-sum theology for any human to possess the capacity to freely love and have faith steals glory from God. Phillips wrote:

A zero-sum mentality towards grace assumes that God can only be properly honored at the expense of the creation, and where this orientation is operational it feels compelled to limit or deny altogether the important role of instrumental causation in the outworking of Providence. The zero-sum mentality is thus highly uncomfortable acknowledging that God's decrees are outworked through secondary means, and prefers to emphasize the type of "immediate dependence" upon God that bypasses as much human instrumentality as possible.

This belief can be seen in the *Canons of Dort's* rejection of errors in the Fifth Head Paragraph 2: "...which it would make men free, it make them robbers of God's honor." In this approach God's grace occupies a preeminent role in our salvation and our response a negligible role. Man becomes more an instrument of an omnipotent deity than a free agent cooperating with divine grace. Free will exists, but only for mundane matters, not in relation to spiritual matters (*Institutes* 2.5.19).

This makes Reformed theology fundamentally monergistic in its soteriology. Monergism is the belief that there is only one (monos) efficient cause (ergos) in our salvation: God and God alone.

The alternative approach is Orthodoxy's synergism, the belief that salvation is the result of human will cooperating or working with divine grace (syn = with, ergos = energy, effort, cause). Thus, where Orthodoxy's synergism allows for human free will or choice in salvation, Calvinism's monergism excludes it.

Synergism – Working Together With God

In contrast to the either-or approach of Western monergism is the both-and approach of the Eastern doctrine of synergism. Synergism is based on our cooperation with God's grace, that is, a response on our part to God's initiative. The Apostle James wrote:

Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were *working together*, and his faith was made complete by what he did. (James 2:21-22, NIV; emphasis added)

An anonymous monk described aptly how the Orthodox understanding of synergism maintains the sovereignty of God. Ware wrote in the *Orthodox Church*:

The incorporation of humans into Christ and our union with God requires the co-operation of *two unequal*, but *equally necessary* forces: divine grace and human will (1963:221-222; emphasis added).

Addressing the Western and especially the Calvinist concern that Orthodox synergism may attribute too much to human free will and too little to God, Ware wrote:

Yet in reality the Orthodox teaching is very straightforward. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in' (Revelation iii, 20). God knocks, but waits for us to open the door - He does not break it down. The grace of God invites all but compels none. (1963:222)

The Orthodox understanding upholds God's sovereignty in our salvation. Not only does God take the initiative in the salvation of Man and all Creation, He does the biggest and greatest part, the part man cannot do. This critical and absolutely necessary action of God, however, in no way precludes man's response. The Orthodox position on synergy is removed from the Pelagian heresy.¹¹

Two Approaches to the Trinity

The Reformed tradition's monergistic premise is consequential, not just for soteriology, but for its understanding of the Trinity. This is because theology (the nature of God) and economy (how God relates to creation) are integrally related. To separate the two would result in a defective theological system. A comparison between the Eastern and Western theological traditions demonstrates how different approaches to the Trinity led to different understandings of salvation.

¹¹ Pelagianism can be considered heretical in light of the teaching that human free will lacked the predisposition to sin nor was influenced by Adam's Original Sin (see Kelly 1960:358). This is not to say that Orthodoxy adopted the Augustinian understanding of salvation. For a discussion of the differences between the Western and Eastern soteriologies see Pelikan 1974:181-183.

In the early Christological debates Christians struggled to reconcile the theological concepts of monotheism and monarchy (LaCugna 1991:389; Kelly 1960:109-110). The Cappadocian Fathers—Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzen¹²—solved the problem by abandoning the principle of monarchy in favor of a trinitarian monotheism. They argued that the unity of the Godhead stems not from the Being (*Ousia*) of God but from the Person (*Hypostasis*) of the Father (Kelly 1960:264). Gregory of Nazianzen wrote:

The Three have one nature, viz. God, the ground of unity being the Father, out of Whom and towards Whom the subsequent Persons are reckoned (in Kelly 1960:265).

Zizioulas noted the emphasis on the hypostasis over the *ousia* has major implications for our understanding of the Trinity.

In a more analytical way this means that God, as Father and not as substance, perpetually confirms through "being" His *free* will to exist. And it is precisely His trinitarian existence that constitutes this confirmation: the Father out of love—that is, freely—begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit. If God exists, He exists because the Father exists, that is, He who out of love freely begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit (Zizioulas 1985:41; emphasis in original).

The Cappadocians grounding the doctrine of the Trinity in the Persons, not the Being, provides a solid basis for the statement in I John 4:16: "God is love." Love is not an attribute of God but what God is: the Trinity of Persons forever united in love. Thus, God is not an isolated Individual, a monad but a communion of Persons.

God exists as the mystery of persons in communion; God exists hypostatically in freedom and ecstasis. Only *in communion* can God be what God is, and only *as communion* can God be at all (LaCugna 1991:260; emphasis in original).

Augustine took a different approach from the Fathers in emphasizing the divine Essence (*Ousia*) in constructing his doctrine of the Trinity (LaCugna 1991:91; Kelly 1960:272). This theological move arose from his locating relationality within the divine Being. Zizioulas observed that this emphasis on the Godhead as a Trinity of coequal Persons tends to push the Essence (*Ousia*) to the forefront.

The subsequent developments of trinitarian theology, especially in the West with Augustine and the scholastics, have led us to see the term *ousia*, not *hypostasis*, as the expression of the ultimate character and the causal principle (*αρχή*) in God's being (Zizioulas 1985:88; emphasis in original).

Vladimir Lossky in *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* noted:

The Latins think of personality as a mode of nature; the Greeks think of nature as the content of the person (1976:58).

¹² Also known as Gregory the Theologian.

This monumental theological move by Augustine shaped the theological trajectory of Western Christianity for generations – extending even to the present day.

The result has been that in textbooks on dogmatics, the Trinity gets placed after the chapter on the One God (the unique *ousia*) with all the difficulties which we still meet when trying to accommodate the Trinity to our doctrine of God. By contrast, the Cappadocians' position—characteristic of all the Greek Fathers—lay, as Karl Rahner observes, in that the final assertion of ontology in God has to be attached not to the unique *ousia* of God but *to the Father*, that is to a *hypostasis* or person (Zizioulas 1985:88; emphasis in original).

Western Christianity's foregrounding of the *ousia* (being) of God has led to logical difficulties. It has resulted in theologians having to make statements that resemble Zen koans used by Buddhist monks. A common explanation often goes like this: the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; but the Son is not the Father, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit; but there is not three gods but only one God. Formulations like this often frustrate and bewilder many. It is radically different from the Eastern understanding of the Trinity as the communion of three Persons who share in the same Essence.

The most prominent manifestation of the Western Augustinian approach is the Filioque clause. As originally phrased the Nicene Creed implied that the Holy Spirit originated from the Person of the Father but the insertion of the Filioque implied the Holy Spirit originated from the Essence shared by the Father *and the Son* (Filioque). Lossky writes about the Filioque:

The Greeks saw in the formula of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son a tendency to stress the unity of nature at the expense of the real distinction between the persons. The relationships of origins which do not bring the Son and the Spirit back directly to the unique source, to the Father—the one as begotten, the other as proceeding—become a system of relationships within the one essence: something logically posterior to the essence (Lossky 1976:57).

Thus, the Filioque marks a theological watershed between Western Christianity (Roman Catholic and Protestant) and Eastern Orthodoxy. It can also be considered as the beginning of the West's innovative approach to doing theology.

A Theological Continental Divide

There is a place in the Continental Divide where a stream veers off in two directions. One branch ends up in the Pacific Ocean and the other the Atlantic Ocean. Similarly, with Augustine and the Cappadocian Fathers a theological equivalent of the Continental Divide emerged that would result in two quite different theological systems.

Augustine's focus on God's being as the starting point for theologizing has been consequential for the way salvation has been understood in the West (LaCugna 1991:97). One disturbing implication of Augustine's approach to the Trinity is the sense of God as impersonal inscrutable One.

If divine substance rather than the person of the Father is made the highest ontological principle—the substratum of divinity and the ultimate source of all that exists—then God and everything else is, finally, *impersonal* (LaCugna 1991:101; emphasis in original).

A theological system based on an impersonal and omnipotent deity leads to a monergistic soteriology and the subsequent denial of free will and love. The doctrines of Unconditional Election and Irresistible Grace assume an all powerful God who in his inscrutable wisdom unconditionally elects a few then inexorably effects their salvation. It is almost as if the Augustinian West might say of our election or reprobation: “It’s not personal, it’s just abstract ontology.”

The Protestant Reformers in their quest to uphold the dogma of *sola fide* with its implicit monergism had to choose between the God's abstract/impersonal sovereignty and God's personal and relational love. Calvin, with unflinching clarity, upheld the sovereignty of God and the principle of monergism with all its terrifying implications in his explication of double predestination. By leaving no room for free will, Calvin's theology led to a relapse to monarchical monotheism undermining the basis for trinitarian monotheism.

The Western Augustinian approach to the Trinity provides the basis for a forensic soteriology which views salvation in terms of legal righteousness and the transference of merit. The forensic approach contains two significant assumptions: (1) the relationship between God and mankind is understood in terms of an *impersonal* command-obedience and (2) rather than Man in the “image and likeness of God.” This assumes an ontological divide between humanity and God. The penal substitutionary atonement theory being based on the transfer of merit maintains the ontological gap between God and humanity. Notably, it does not require communion between God and the elect.

Where Western theology tends to maintain the ontological gap between God and humanity, Orthodoxy emphasizes the gap being bridged in the Incarnation. The gap being bridged here by Christ’s incarnation is ethical-relational, humanity being sullied by sin and in need of healing and reconciliation. There is also an ontological gap which is bridged by Christ who unites divinity and humanity in one Person. The Incarnation makes possible a personal encounter with God because the Son assumed human nature from the Virgin Mary. According to the Chalcedonian Formula, the human and divine natures are joined *in the Person* of Jesus Christ. The technical term for this is hypostatic union. The significance of the hypostatic union is that a person to person encounter such as that implied by faith in Christ is crucial to our salvation. The priority of the hypostasis means that a physical viewing of the Christ “according to the flesh” is not enough (cf. II Corinthians 5:16), a true encounter with Christ entails trust in Christ. The story of the woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5:24-34 shows that the woman's personal encounter with Christ was more important than physical contact with the hem of his clothes. The interconnection between being and person is crucial for our salvation in Christ which culminates in our deification—humanity “partaking of the divine nature” by grace what Christ is by nature (see II Peter 1:4).

The Cappadocian Fathers' stress on the hypostasis (person) leads to Orthodoxy understanding salvation as relational: with God and with others. Through faith in Christ we come to know the Father and receive the Holy Spirit; we are made members of the Church, the body of Christ.

What we do collectively as the Church takes precedence over what I do individually in private. Through the sacraments of baptism and chrismation the convert is reborn into the life of the Trinity. This is because the sacraments are covenantal actions based upon an interaction or exchange between persons. The Orthodox emphasis on the hypostasis means that every sacrament is a personal encounter with God.

Person and being are dynamically linked, what affects the one, affects the other. This interrelationship helps us to understand the Orthodox teaching of theosis—our ongoing transformation into the likeness of Christ and deification (sharing in the divine nature). Theosis assumes that through our union with Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, and our receiving the Holy Spirit we become "partakers of the divine nature" as taught by the Apostle Peter in II Peter 1:4. In theosis we remain human but we are transformed by divine grace. We are transformed much like the way the metal sword in the fiery furnace becomes hot and bright like the fire while still remaining metal. Where Western theology has a tendency to be mechanistic and deterministic in its soteriology, Eastern Orthodoxy has a more relational and dynamic approach.

Calvinism and the Western Tradition

There is no indication that the Reformers broke from the Western Augustinian tradition and followed instead the Eastern approach to the Trinity. Steven Wedgworth in his essay: "Is There a Calvinist Doctrine of the Trinity?" sought to rebut theologians who advanced the idea that Calvin broke from the Nicene trinitarian tradition and offered a modified trinitarian doctrine. Pastor Wedgworth argued that far from offering a new theological paradigm, Calvin remained faithful to the traditional Nicene trinitarian theology. However, Wedgworth failed to note that what Calvin advocated was the Western Augustinian understanding of the Trinity. Furthermore, he failed to note that there existed an alternative understanding of the Trinity, the Eastern Cappadocian approach. Wedgworth's failure to discuss the Cappadocian approach is disappointing especially because in end note 27 is a quote from Calvin which sounds very much like the Eastern Fathers. Calvin wrote of God the Father: "He is rightly deemed the beginning and fountainhead of the whole divinity" (*Institutes* 1.13.25). While this sentence could be interpreted to mean that Calvin had some sympathy for the Eastern approach, it needs to be reconciled with his acceptance of the Filioque.

This leads me to pose two questions for my Reformed friends: (1) Has the Reformed tradition critically assessed the Filioque clause in light of the Orthodox criticism?, and (2) Has any Reformed denomination ever considered repudiating the Filioque and returning to the original language of the Nicene Creed (381)?

Monergism and the Heresy of Monothelitism

Much of the Reformed tradition's Christology and Trinitarian theology came out of the ancient Ecumenical Councils. There were many local councils but the great councils made decisions that would ensure the wellbeing of the entire Church (hence the name "Ecumenical"). These gatherings followed the precedent by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and are the fulfillment of Christ's promise that the Holy Spirit would guide the Church into all truth (John 16:13). The early Church was challenged by heresies and it repudiated these heresies and defined right doctrine through gatherings of church leaders that represented the whole church, these came to be known as Ecumenical Councils. For example, the first Ecumenical Council (Nicea I in AD

325) repudiated the heresy that Christ was a created being and affirmed the divinity of Jesus Christ, the second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople I in AD 381) affirmed the divinity of the Holy Spirit, the third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus in AD 431) affirmed the two natures of Christ (see Ware 1963:20-35).

The sixth Ecumenical Council repudiated monotheletism, the heresy that Jesus Christ had only a divine will, and affirmed that Christ possessed both a divine and a human will. While many Protestants may not have heard of the heresy of monotheletism, the issue is crucial to having a healthy orthodox Christology. It is not an obscure minor theological issue but one of tremendous implications for proper Christology and one that required action by an ecumenical (universal) council. Protestantism's historical amnesia has often made it vulnerable to erroneous doctrines. I urge my Reformed friends to take seriously what I have to say about Reformed monergism and the heresy of monotheletism.

The Reformed insistence on the priority of the divine will over human will (monergism) parallels the heresy of monotheletism—the teaching that Christ did not have two wills, only a divine will. In repudiating monotheletism the Sixth Ecumenical Council affirmed that Christ's humanity possessed a free will that worked in harmony with the will of the divine Logos. This was not an arbitrary ruling but an outworking of the Chalcedonian Formula's teaching that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. Thus, to be human means having a body, a mind, a soul, *and a will*. To deny any of these leads to a defective and heretical Christology. This understanding of Christ's human nature having a fully human will like Adam's and our's leads to the affirmation that humans have a free will as well, albeit one injured by the Fall and in need of healing. By assuming the totality of human nature, Christ was able to bring about our salvation. Gregory of Nazianzen wrote:

For that which He [Christ] has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole (Ep. CI, *To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius*; NPNF Second Series Vol. VII, p. 440).

This is quite different from the Reformed understanding that the Fall result in our wills being totally depraved, "neither able nor willing to return to God" according to the Canons of Dort.

The Cappadocian Fathers assigning priority to the hypostases shaped not just Orthodoxy's understanding of the Trinity but also Maximus the Confessor's understanding of the Incarnation as instrumental for our salvation.¹³ Maximus wrote:

Because of this, the Creator of nature himself—who has ever heard of anything so truly awesome!—has clothed himself with our nature, without change uniting it hypostatically to himself, in order to check what has been borne away, and gather it to himself, so that, gathered to himself, our nature may no longer have any difference from in its inclination. (*Letter 2* in Louth 1996:91)

¹³ Readers who want to better understand the issues involved in the monotheletism controversy are advised to get *Maximus the Confessor* (1996) edited by Andrew Louth.

Orthodoxy's emphasis on the hypostasis influences its understanding of the Incarnation, the sacraments, and theosis.

Monergism vs. Free Will

The Western emphasis on Being leads to determinacy and to Calvin's insistence on God's absolute sovereignty. In his attempt to construct a logically coherent theology Calvin has created other problems. The doctrine of Irresistible Grace contains an internal contradiction: God's free gift of grace is based on compulsion. Bishop Kallistos Ware wrote:

Where there is no freedom, there can be no love. Compulsion excludes love; as Paul Evdokimov used to say, God can do everything except compel us to love him (1986:76; emphasis in original).

If there is no free will, then there is no genuine love, nor can there be genuine faith. In Calvinistic anthropology, humans do love God and one another freely but with the haunting *a priori* that their love is a mere consequence of God's ordained decree, not because of their free choice.

The Reformed tradition does affirm free will but qualifies it to the extent that one wonders whether free will is essential to human existence. Basically, the Reformed position on human free will can be summed up in the following *ordo salutis*:

- (1) Humanity possessed free will prior to the Fall;¹⁴
- (2) Humanity lost all capacity for free will after the Fall;¹⁵
- (3) Faith in Christ is the result of divine election and divine grace working on us;¹⁶
- (4) The perseverance (preservation) of the saints is due solely to divine grace;¹⁷ and
- (5) Free will is restored to humanity when they are in the "state of glory."¹⁸

The last statement doesn't make sense. Logically, it would mean the possibility of apostasy in the age to come. Thus, according to the Reformed theological system the only time humanity ever possessed the freedom with respect to their relationship with God was prior to the Fall but not after.

The Orthodox approach to free will is that humans possessed an undistorted free will prior to the Fall but after the Fall human free will became damaged or wounded. Christian conversion is understood as our free response to God's grace by trusting in Christ and our participation in the life of the Church, the Body of Christ. Orthodoxy's affirmation of free will after the Fall allows for the possibility of people falling away, but it also allows for the possibility of restoration. The

¹⁴ *Canons of Dort* Article 1 "The Effect of the Fall on Human Nature," *Westminster Confession* IX.2.

¹⁵ *Canons of Dort* Article 3 "Total Inability," *Westminster Confession* IX.3.

¹⁶ *Canons of Dort* Article 12 "Regeneration a Supernatural Work," *Westminster Confession* X.1-2.

¹⁷ *Canons of Dort* Article 8 "The Certainty of this Preservation," *Westminster Confession* XVII.2.

¹⁸ *Westminster Confession* IX.

Orthodox sacrament of confession is based on our turning back to God (repentance) and the mercies of God. God in his mercy will welcome us back but this is contingent on our choosing to come back home like the lost Prodigal Son (Luke 15). The father in Jesus' great parable waited, he did not compel. For this reason Orthodoxy insists that the eternal destiny of individuals is a mystery.

The ascetic disciplines prescribed by the Orthodox Church are based on prayer and the denying of the passions; through these spiritual exercises our wills along with our minds are sanctified and redeemed. The Orthodox approach to sanctification is therapeutic and progressive. As we grow in prayer and in our love for God and our neighbor our wills damaged by the Fall are restored to the health and integrity God intended for us. During Lent the Orthodox Church warns her members against legalism. This is in recognition that a legalistic approach to the Christian life being based on fear and compulsion is the opposite of a spiritual life based on contrition for sins and a yearning for God.

The Possibility of Free Will

Orthodoxy affirms free will because humanity being created in the divine image is foundational to its theology. Eastern Orthodoxy's anthropology being rooted in a trinitarian understanding of God leads us to a soteriology grounded in freedom as relationship, i.e., the freedom of love. Kallistos Ware wrote:

Without freedom there would be no sin. But without freedom man would not be in God's image; without freedom man would not be capable of entering into communion with God in a relationship of love (1986:76).

Being created in the image of the Triune God means not only rationality but also morality, that is, the freedom and ability to choose. The two together form the basis for our being able to love God and one another. Nor is there any notion here in Orthodox anthropology of free will stealing any of God's glory, frustrating God's purposes, or granting merit to man because of his choice. These are all problems stemming from Western theological categories.

There is a profound difference in the way the West and Orthodoxy understand freedom. In the West freedom is understood to arise from perfect self-possession, self-autonomy, and self-direction, but for the Orthodox freedom arises from ecstasis and self-transcendence, going beyond ourselves (LaCugna 1991:261). The freedom spoken of here is based on the communion of persons, not the fulfillment of autonomous individuals. Zizioulas draws the distinction between the individual and the person noting that the individual becomes a person by loving and being loved (Zizioulas 1985:48-49). True human freedom means going beyond our individual self and becoming open to others which finds its ultimate fulfillment in union with Christ and life in the Trinity.

Eastern Orthodoxy's emphasis on the person (hypostasis) leads to freedom and relationality.

The fact that God exists because of the Father shows that His existence, His being is the consequence of a free person; which means, in the in the last analysis, that not only communion but also *freedom*, the free person, constitutes true being. True being comes only from the free person, from the person who loves

freely—that is, who freely affirms his being, his identity, by means of an event of communion with other persons (Zizioulas 1985:18; emphasis in original).

This in turn opens the way for perichoresis, the idea that the three Persons of the Trinity mutually inhere in one another (LaCugna 1991:270 ff.). Perichoresis lays the foundation for the idea of persons in communion, both in terms of intradivine relations within the Trinity and our being invited (elected) into that interpersonal communion. (See John of Damascus' *De Fide Orthodoxa* Chapter VIII (NPNF Second Series Vol. II, page 11, Note 8).)

Salvation in Christ has an eschatological component. Justification, regeneration, and sanctification represent the beginning of our salvation in Christ. The ultimate goal of our salvation is theosis, becoming sharers in the divine nature and the kingdom of God (see II Peter 1:4). Kallistos Ware wrote:

The final end of the spiritual Way is that we humans should also become part of this Trinitarian coinherence or *perichoresis*, being wholly taken up into the circle of love that exists within God (1986:34; emphasis in original).

At the heart of Orthodoxy is the vision of life in Christ as communion with the Holy Trinity, the three divine Persons forever united in love. This interpersonal understanding of salvation can be found in John 17:21: "May they all be one: as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, so may they also be one in us." (KJV)

The Question of Universalism

One of the greatest challenges to Calvinism is the question: How can a loving God send people to hell? Calvin's answer is God's just and inscrutable sovereignty.

We assert that, with respect to the elect, this plan was founded upon his freely given mercy, without regard to human worth; but by his just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment he has barred the door of life to those whom he has given over to damnation (*Institutes* 3.21.7, Calvin 1960:931; italics added; see also *Institutes* 3.21.1, Calvin 1960:922-923).

Many people's reaction to predestination has been one of revulsion. Philip Schaff in his concluding remarks to his survey of Calvin notes:

Our best feelings, which God himself has planted in our hearts, instinctively revolt against the thought that a God of infinite love and justice should create millions of immortal beings in his own image—probably more than half of the human race—in order to hurry them from the womb to the tomb, and from the tomb to everlasting doom! And this not for any actual sin of their own, but simply for the transgression of Adam of which they never heard, and which God himself not only permitted, but somehow foreordained. This, if true, would indeed be a "decretum horribile" (Schaff 1910:559).

The underlying ethos of Calvinism is not the warm heart religion of popular Evangelicalism or the fervent emotionalism of Pentecostalism, but the more stern and demanding religion that calls for submission and domination. Karl Barth characterized the spirit of Calvinism:

Calvin is not what we usually imagine an apostle of love and peace to be.
 What we find is a hard and prickly skin. The blossom has gone, the fruit has not
 yet come. An iron age has come that calls for iron believers" (1922:117).

In reaction to the Calvinist double predestination liberal Protestantism propounded the doctrine of universalism: All are destined to go to heaven. However attractive such a doctrine may be, it suffers from a flaw similar to that found in Calvinism. Underlying Liberalism's sunny optimism is a blithe disregard towards human agency. A friend of mine who served on the pastoral staff of a large liberal mainline Protestant church once asked me what I thought about her colleague's teaching that everyone will be in heaven. I answered: "You mean everyone is going to end up in heaven, whether they want to be there or not?"

Ironically, Liberalism's universalism is a mirror image of Calvinism's double predestination. Where Calvinism believes in a God who arbitrarily selects some to be saved regardless of their choice), Protestant Liberalism believes in a God who indiscriminately selects all to be saved (regardless of their choice). Liberalism ultimately denies to all humanity the free choice of hell. Calvinism despite its talk of grace and mercy is determined to deny to all humanity the free choice of heaven.

The Orthodox response to this question is: "God doesn't send anyone to hell. People choose hell when they choose life apart from God." To put it another way, God "sends" only those who have freely chosen hell for themselves. Bishop Kallistos Ware wrote:

St Isaac the Syrian says, 'It is wrong to imagine that sinners in hell are cut off from the love of God.' Divine love is everywhere, and rejects no one. But we on our side are free to reject divine love: we cannot, however, do so without inflicting pain upon ourselves, and the more final our rejection the more bitter our suffering (1986:182).

Thus, the Orthodox understanding of hell is more just, compassionate, and tragic in comparison to the Reformed view. While Orthodoxy disallows universalism as a dogma, the question as to how many shall be ultimately saved is left open.¹⁹

Summary

TULIP forms a coherent theological system that explains the Reformed doctrine of predestination. When we consider TULIP as a whole, its underlying premises, and its consequences we find it incompatible with Orthodoxy and hopefully unacceptable to others as well. The doctrines of **T**otal Depravity and **I**rresistible Grace by denying the basis for human free will undermine the basis for faith and love. This denial of free will constitutes a denial of the core of human existence, the *imago dei*. This denial of human free will implies the heresy of monotheletism—the denial that Christ's human nature had a free will. The doctrine of **L**imited Atonement is alien to Orthodoxy for two reasons: (1) it is based upon the notion of quantifiable legal merit, and (2) it sets limits on God's infinite love. Where the initials **T** and **I** relate to the Reformed understanding of human nature, the initials **U** and **P** relate to their understanding of God. The doctrines of **U**nconditional Election and the **P**reservation of the Saints uphold God's

¹⁹ For a discussion of the complex nature of this question see Kallistos Ware's "Dare We Hope for the Salvation of All?" in *The Inner Kingdom* (2000:193-215).

absolute sovereignty in our salvation. This understanding of God as an arbitrary omnipotent Monarch can be traced to the Western Augustinian tradition which emphasizes the divine Essence as the basis for unity of the Trinity. This forms the basis for the forensic approach to salvation which emphasizes legal righteousness and the transference of legal merit. Orthodoxy following the Cappadocian Fathers locates the unity of the Godhead in the Person of the Father. This emphasis on the Person lays the basis for the understanding of God as eternal communion of Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It also leads to Chalcedonian Christology which teaches that Christ's two natures are united in one Person for our salvation. This emphasis on the Person informs the Orthodox approach to salvation: the need for personal faith in Christ, salvation as union with Christ and in the Church; theosis as personal union with Christ that transforms us, and eternal life as communion with the Triune God.

The Goal of Our Salvation: Life in the Trinity

When we read the famous opening lines of the Westminster Shorter Catechism—Q. What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever—we find missing any reference to the Trinity and any understanding of eternal life as communion with God. This is not surprising in light of the analysis we just did showing how the Western Augustinian approach to the Trinity tends to emphasize the Essence of the Godhead over the communion of Persons. Orthodoxy has a quite different vision of eternal life. It anticipates eternal life as living in communion with the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. St. Isaac the Syrian wrote:

Love is the kingdom which the Lord mystically promised to the disciples, when he said that they would eat in his kingdom: 'You shall eat and drink at my table in my kingdom' (Luke 22:30). What should they eat and drink, if not love?

When we have reached love, we have reached God and our journey is complete. We have crossed over to the island which lies beyond the world, where are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: to whom be glory and dominion. May God make us worthy to fear and love him. Amen. (in Ware 1986:51)

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MPG = Migne's *Patrologia Graecae*.

NPNF = *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*.

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