



Joshua Schooping

On the Fall, Free Will, Good Works, and Grace: Carthage, Jeremiah, Dositheus, and St. Ignatius Brianchaninov on Man's Free Will

Abstract

In seeing that the Orthodox Church rightly affirms the freedom of man's will, a common misunderstanding arises that assumes this means that fallen man's freedom is equally poised between good and evil, and that obeying God is reducible to a matter of fallen man's natural, unregenerate will choosing what is spiritually good through the exercise of said unregenerate natural will. This false, Pelagian conception of free will fails to take seriously the impact of the fall on man's nature, his inability to choose apart from grace that which is spiritually salutary, and



Father Joshua Schooping is a Russian Orthodox Priest (ROCOR) serving at Saint Sophia's in Kissimmee, Florida. He graduated from Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary with Masters Degrees in both Divinity and Theology.

so is a doctrine that implicitly undermines the Incarnation and destroys the necessity and value of Christ's atoning sacrifice. For this reason it is important to clarify the necessary dependence of man upon grace both to will and to work that which is spiritually good, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). In order to show this, the following study will look at four sources, the canonical tradition of the Church, Patriarch Jeremiah's responses to the Lutherans, the Confession of Patriarch Dositheus, and the teaching of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov as found in his essay, *Salvation and Christian Perfection*..

Keywords

Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople, The Confession of Dositheus, Carthaginian Canons, Ignatius Brianchaninov, Free Will

1 Introduction

In seeing that the Orthodox Church rightly affirms the freedom of man's will, a common misunderstanding arises that assumes this means that fallen man's freedom is equally poised between good and evil, and that obeying God is reducible to a matter of fallen man's natural, unregenerate will choosing what is spiritually good through the exercise of said unregenerate natural will. This false, Pelagian conception of free will fails to take seriously the impact of the fall on man's nature, his inability to choose apart from grace that which is spiritually salutary, and so is a doctrine that implicitly undermines the Incarnation and destroys the necessity and value of Christ's atoning sacrifice. For this reason it is important to clarify the necessary dependence of man upon grace both to will and to work that which is spiritually good, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). In order

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2 The Canons of Carthage

On the Orthodox rejection and condemnation of Pelagianism, it will be helpful first to look at the formal condemnations which attend this doctrine. This happened through a series of connected events, immortalized when the Seventh Ecumenical Council ratified the Canons of Trullo, for Trullo itself had received the Canons of the African Code, which themselves include the Carthaginian condemnations of the Pelagian heresy.¹ Since it deals specifically with the question of the relation between works and grace, with obvious bearing on the nature and limits of fallen man's free will to work spiritual good, it will be instructive to review the conciliar decisions which rejected this pernicious heresy.

The relevant canons under review here, from the portion of the African Code *contra* Pelagianism, begin with Canon 110, which states:

Canon 110: Likewise it seemed good that whosoever denies that infants newly from their mother's wombs should be baptized, or says that baptism is for remission of sins, but that they derive from Adam no original sin, which needs to be removed by the laver of regeneration, from whence the conclusion fol-

¹ Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 14, The Seven Ecumenical Councils, Excursus on Pelagianism, pp. 229-30, cf. 556. The quotations of the Carthaginian canons below come from this same volume.

lows, that in them the form of baptism for the remission of sins, is to be understood as false and not true, let him be anathema. For no otherwise can be understood what the Apostle says, *By one man sin has come into the world, and death through sin, and so death passed upon all men in that all have sinned* (Romans 5:12), than the catholic Church everywhere diffused has always understood it. For on account of this rule of faith (*regula fidei*) even infants, who could have committed as yet no sin themselves, therefore are truly baptized for the remission of sins, in order that what in them is the result of generation may be cleansed by regeneration.

Although the foregoing speaks especially of the necessity of baptism, it lays the foundation for what follows by affirming the radical corruption which attends man's nature even at the first moments of his life. For even prior to any willful sin, the human person - age is really a secondary consideration - is under the curse and condemnation of Adam's sin, thus having the constitutional position of "sinner."² If this were not so, then there would be no need to baptize an infant, for although they have committed no personal acts of sin, they are yet the inheritors of the reality of the Ancestral Sin.

Canon 111: Likewise it seemed good, that whoever should say that the grace of God, by which a man is justified through Jesus Christ our Lord, avails only for the remission of past sins, and not for assistance against committing sins in the future, let him be anathema.

² Many reverse this and declare that the label sinner is only attached *ex post facto* some act of sin. The reverse is true; man sins because he is a sinner. This, however, does *not* imply that his nature is itself evil, or in any way impugn free will.

This canon clarifies the issue of the will by declaring that grace, the grace which justifies, does not only deal with past sins, but this same justifying grace is necessary for assistance against future sins. In other words, the natural, unaided human will is insufficient for the avoidance of sin. Although the will is free, this freedom of will requires an absolute necessity the grace of God in order to accomplish spiritual good.

Canon 112: Also, whoever shall say that the same grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord helps us only in not sinning by revealing to us and opening to our understanding the commandments, so that we may know what to seek, what we ought to avoid, and also that we should love to do so, but that through it we are not helped so that we are able to do what we know we should do, let him be anathema. For when the Apostle says: *Wisdom puffs up, but love edifies* (1 Corinthians 8:1), it were truly infamous were we to believe that we have the grace of Christ for that which puffs us up, but have it not for that which edifies, since in each case it is the gift of God, both to know what we ought to do, and to love to do it; so that wisdom cannot puff us up while love is edifying us. For as of God it is written, *Who teaches man knowledge* (Psalm 94:10), so also it is written, *Love is of God* (1 John 4:7).

This canon shows the even more radical necessity of grace, for it is not merely a matter of God's opening the eyes of fallen man's heart, or simply showing him the way he should go, or but working a holy influence into his heart; it is also that the very ability to accomplish spiritual good must be supplied by God. God's grace is absolutely necessary to enable man to accomplish what is more than merely naturally good.³

³ Where in Dositheus' Confession he affirms that man is able to accomplish through free will simple or natural moral good, he yet

Canon 113: It seemed good that whosoever should say that the grace of justification was given to us only that we might be able more readily by grace to perform what we were ordered to do through our free will; as if though grace was not given, although not easily, yet nevertheless we could even without grace fulfil the divine commandments, let him be anathema. For the Lord spoke concerning the fruits of the commandments, when he said: Without me you can do nothing, and not without me you could do it but with difficulty.

This canon denies the view that God is but the supporting partner in man's personal spiritual accomplishments. God not only opens the eyes of man's heart, shows him the way in which he should go, works in his heart a holy influence, enables him to do spiritual good, but he also carries man in the power of divine grace such that man's spiritual good is only accomplished *in* Jesus Christ (*ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ*; cf. Ephesians 1) and *through* Jesus Christ (*διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*; cf. Romans 5:21). Man is not given in Christ a deposit of grace that he then must convert into salvation through the use of his unaided will.⁴ Grace is the constantly necessary companion, the very presence of God in the soul unto salvation, and without it man is hopelessly unable to work spiritual good.

Having now reviewed the canonical condemnation of Pelagianism, it is clear that man's exercise of his unaided free will is insufficient for salvation. What, then, does this mean for the

maintains this anti-Pelagian position regarding spiritual good requiring grace. See Decree 14.

⁴ In more colloquial terms, Christ is not a "personal trainer" who shows man which exercises to do, spots him on the heavy lifting, and cheerleads him in his accomplishing of his goal to "get to heaven." Rather, the Spirit of Christ works in and through a person, and within the metanoetic boundaries of their free co-operation, such that one begins and ends in and through grace.

free will? It means that within its sphere it is able to choose without any coercion, but that this sphere of free choice does not include willing spiritual actions, for man is born spiritually dead and requires regeneration. Man is certainly not an automaton; he is free, but the sphere of his freedom is narrow. In relation to spiritual good, man's will is in a position of total inability.

Before moving forward, it is worth noting that (1) God is necessarily and absolutely free, (2) man's created freedom is an image of God's uncreated freedom, and so (3) God's freedom is paradigmatic for man. Moreover, God is necessarily and absolutely good, holy, and free of any evil. God's freedom and goodness, therefore, do not and cannot be opposed to each other. This is to say that God's freedom is not a hypothetical neutral space somewhere between good and evil, but is wholly centered in goodness. In God, goodness and freedom are a unity. Therefore, as an image of God, man's freedom of will cannot be rightly conceived as some neutral space between good and evil for, paradigmatically, true freedom only exists as true freedom when in total conformity with the good. In short, man's freedom is constituted of goodness, not of neutrality.

The problem with Pelagianism, or what is called libertarian free will by some, is that its very notion of freedom is false. In reducing the idea of freedom to mere rational self-determination, or "the ability to do otherwise," it divorces the will, i.e. freedom, from goodness, and so conceives man as a radically autonomous and morally neutral choosing agent, someone poised equally between good and evil. But since God is not evil, and yet He is free, His freedom cannot be framed merely as "the ability to do otherwise," for He cannot do otherwise than good. And since man's freedom is an image or reflection of God, then neither can his freedom be framed simply as "an ability to do otherwise." Free acts of God are those which conform to His good

nature, and so His freedom is one with His goodness, which is to say an unrestrained freedom to do good. Likewise, man's true freedom must be understood not merely as the ability to do otherwise, but as the ability to do good, freely and without constraint. It can even be said that evil is intrinsically opposed to freedom, and so the idea of "freedom to do evil" approaches the absurd, for evil has no being and so has no freedom, is even the antithesis of freedom, is bondage itself. What is at least certain is that the reductionist framing of freedom merely as the ability to "do otherwise" is inadequate.

Since man apart from grace is bound by his fallen nature, his freedom to enact spiritual good is therefore nullified. He is free to choose it, and he retains freedom of choice as an anthropological fact of his nature, but the freedom to accomplish is now tragically restricted within the boundaries of merely natural moral good, not spiritual good, as Dositheus affirms in his Confession (Decree 14). Of course, it is not the case that just because man cannot accomplish spiritual good without grace that he is pre-condemned to commit evil. He is able to work natural good, which is neither salvific nor condemnatory, and is at not point compelled to any evil.

Opposed to the idea of Pelagian free will is what might be called theological free will. This is the idea that man's free will must be understood in the context of Christian revelation, which is to say, first, God's creation of man, then man's fall, then God's solution in Christ in the Atonement, followed by fallen man's regeneration and transformation into a temple of the Holy Spirit by grace, received through faith working in love. This is the view expressed by Patriarch Jeremiah II, Dositheus, and, with still great clarity, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, and to these this study will now turn.

3 Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople

When looking at Patriarch Jeremiah II's theological exchange with the 16th Century Lutherans, one is confronted in the sections on free will with the Lutheran idea of the "bondage of the will." In the exchange, Patriarch Jeremiah was careful to insist that man's will must at all places be affirmed as free, and as freely able to choose that which is good. It is precisely this freedom that renders man culpable of his sin. In the Lutheran position he sensed that they were painting man's fallen will in such terms that man's culpability for sin was being compromised. He states:

What then is evil? It is an innate disposition of the indolent soul having the tendency to oppose virtue and to fall away from the good. Therefore, do not examine evil externally, nor imagine some pristine nature of wickedness, but rather let everyone reckon himself the leader of iniquity in himself.⁵

In other words, although it is described as an innate disposition, reifying evil as if it were some "pristine nature," and then stating that this evil nature was born into man, would submit man to evil in such a way that he would be compelled to commit evil as per a demand of his own nature. Since the good is that which conforms to or fulfills a nature, then in the case of fallen man evil would become a kind of good. Not only is this absurd, it would destroy man's responsibility for choosing evil since he would only be acting according to his nature. God would thus be unjust in condemning man for acting evilly if that evil is only man's conforming to his evil nature.

Rather, God created man good, and evil is a deviation from his created nature, and so evil must be centered in the personal

⁵ *Augsburg and Constantinople*, Third Exchange, paragraph 365, p. 303.

human will as activity contrary to design. The Fall then cannot be understood as a change of nature from good to evil, but a distortion or corruption of a good nature. And so, what Patriarch Jeremiah was keen to maintain is that if man's will, beyond mere inclination, is so bound to evil that it cannot but do otherwise than to choose evil by nature, then the will is not free and God is unjust to judge him:

Wherefore, do not search elsewhere for the origins of those which you are master of. But know that the main evil has received its origin from voluntary feelings.⁶

In this light, if one were to rightly understand the concept of the "bondage of the will," then it must be seen as not having reference to an external bondage or to a fundamentally evil nature. Man's slavery to evil must be seen as self-slavery, an *autodoulia*. Man chooses evil freely, and could have freely "done otherwise," and this is the tragedy of sin, for man self-elects to turn over his free will to the devil, unable to forsake this free will, but unable to forsake the devil's mastery over him, either. Man's will is free by nature, and good, but he requires a Redeemer to liberate him from his *autodoulia* to the devil.

Man, according to Patriarch Jeremiah, even after the Fall has the power to choose the good, but not the power to achieve it. He writes: "That man had the power after the Fall to choose the good, shall be made evident."⁷ He goes on to cite Scripture in support of his case. And yet, despite having the power to choose, he qualifies this by stating, "We need but one thing, that is, the help from God so that we may achieve the good and be saved."⁸ In other words, the power to choose and the power to achieve are distinct, and although we may be able to choose the

⁶ Idem, paragraph 365, p. 303.

⁷ Idem, paragraph 367, p. 304.

⁸ Idem, paragraph 368, p. 305.

good, we are yet impotent, for “without this [divine power to achieve the good and be saved] we can accomplish nothing.”⁹

This brings us to a great mystery. But a principle discussed above bears repeating: The concept of the bondage of the will is not a reference to an external bondage but to the realm of possible actions. The human will is free, and cannot fail to be free, but that freedom can operate within narrower or wider ranges of possibility. Man is created with a free will and, made in God’s image, this freedom of will is always an inextricable part of his metaphysical make-up and inexcisably part of his ontological fabric. Let it be said again: Man’s will, *whether fallen or regenerated*, is free. So, what is the problem?

The problem is that man’s metaphysically free will is bound. And so the question arises: *How* is man’s free will bound? What binds it? And to what is it bound? It is self-bound in *autodoulia* to the passions. Man is free to choose the good, but apart from God and enslaved to Satan man *freely rejects the good*. Even if man were to choose the good, he cannot achieve anything truly good apart from God, and so a man apart from God is doomed to achieve only evil, and despite his freedom of will. The fall of man, and the sin into which he is born a slave, is thus not understood such that he is forced, compelled, or coerced to commit evil, but that he is a willing subject, a freely willing slave and so culpable for his sin. The will therefore is free, but it is *disturbed*:

Man’s disobedience to the divine commandments was not in itself desirable to him; for he could not be disobedient without the presupposition of a disturbed will.¹⁰

Thus it is that man’s will is said to be disturbed, and it is to this disturbance which the will is understood to be in bondage. Man

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Idem, paragraph 225, p. 175.

freely chooses, but apart from grace this free choice passes through the gravity well of man's fallen nature, together with its passions and interests, and is correspondingly inclined towards evil. And so, quoting St. Basil regarding those regenerated and alive in Christ, the Patriarch writes:

Everything is by grace in so far as it comes from grace; for without grace we can do nothing whatsoever. Therefore, on the one hand, it is said that grace comes first because of the weakness inherent in the creature; on the other hand, it is said that our choice is to follow, while grace leads, not in order to force choice, but to help us use our free will just like one who holds a light for those who wish to see it.¹¹

Clearly, the Patriarch is not simply asserting libertarian free will or Pelagianism. Prior to the fall, man's freedom was, metaphysically, no different than after the Fall. But, due to the wound on human nature made by sin, the disturbed will requires grace in order to liberate it and so achieve the good, which is the freedom of uninhibited communion with Christ. Apart from grace all is darkness, for "before all else we need divine help and grace,"¹² but the metaphysical freedom that is part and parcel of man's nature is retained either way: "Indeed, everything depends on God, but not so that our free will is violated."¹³ One is free to choose the good, but due to the darkness of the passions one will either (1) not recognize the good so as to freely choose it, or (2) freely refuse to choose the recognized good because of the gravity well of the passions through which the choice perilously passed, or (3) choose it in such an impotent way, i.e. defiled by an admixture of sin, that no spiritual good is achieved. Freedom of the fallen will is, therefore, an *autodoulia* to evil, a communion with the devil whose power

¹¹ Idem, paragraph 225, p. 175.

¹² Idem, paragraph 113, p. 78.

¹³ Idem, quoting Chrysostom, paragraph 114, p. 78.

holds fallen and unregenerate man in thrall. Apart from Christ, the will is both free and bound, like a ship set sail at sea with a strong wind under a cloudy sky and no lodestone; it can go wherever it wills, this way or that, and freely, but without the light of Christ it is simply lost.

To recapitulate, anthropologically, as a brute fact of his created nature, man is free, whether fallen or regenerated, but due to the metaphysical wounding by the sin which caused the Fall, man's free will is preserved such that it is warped and so freely chooses and enslaves itself to evil rather than good. Man is commanded to choose the good, and he is completely free and able to do so, but the entire problem hinges on the tragic fact that man *will* not. Man freely refuses. In other words, apart from Christ man will not choose the good, not because he cannot, but because he will not. The natural man despises the Cross, for it is an offense to him (Galatians 5:11; cf. Romans 9:32-33; 1 Corinthians 1:18-23; 1 Peter 2:7-8). Man's free will is thus self-inclined towards sin and so chooses it freely and culpably.

4 St. Ignatius Brianchaninov and Dositheus of Jerusalem

Man's fallen nature, having been wounded in the Fall, makes it appear as if there is a force acting on the will from outside, coercing it, and that man's free choice is in itself cancelled, but this would be to misinterpret the Fall. The bondage of the will does not negate its freedom, and this is key. For it is not that man is in bondage without free will, but that he is bound to his free will that is fallen. Therefore, although metaphysically man retains his free will, and so is in one sense free, in another sense man has completely lost his freedom. St. Ignatius Brianchaninov discusses this at length, and so it is worth looking into his

teaching on the matter in order to get a fuller picture of the Orthodox teaching on the freedom of the will. He states:

The entire race of man is lost, in a fallen state. We were deprived of communion with God in our very root and source - in our forefathers, thanks to their willing sin.¹⁴

This clearly establishes the nature and extent of the Fall. Communion is ruptured, radically, at the root and source. The consequence for mankind is that:

Having willingly rejected submission to God, having willfully submitted themselves to the devil, they lost their communion with God, their freedom and dignity, having abandoned themselves to submission and slavery to the devil.¹⁵

In other words, the radical deprivation of communion with God and willing submission and slavery to the devil has deprived man of his connection with the source of his freedom in God, and so his freedom has in this sense been lost. The image of God in man has been defiled and the likeness destroyed.¹⁶ The natural good deeds and virtues that man performs are not denied, but they

are defiled by the contamination of evil, and so are unworthy of God and actually hinder communion with Him. Thus, they counteract our salvation.¹⁷

In other words, man's fall has so degraded him that he is unable to perform any deed that is not contaminated by evil, and so even the natural virtue that is freely willed is corrupt. This denies libertarian free will any access or claim to true virtue, for the rupture with God renders the unregenerate free acts of fall-

¹⁴ St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Refuge: Anchoring the Soul in God*, The Collected Works, Vol. 2, tr. Nicholas Kotar, (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Publications, 2019), p. 274.

¹⁵ Idem, p. 274.

¹⁶ Idem, p. 275.

¹⁷ Idem, p. 276.

en man damnable. In short, fallen man's virtue is sinful insofar as it is always contaminated by sin. Therefore, "all the virtues of a Christian must flow from Christ, from the human nature renewed by Him, not from our fallen nature."¹⁸ Of these natural virtues, St. Ignatius states: "Let us, therefore, reject this so-called good or, better yet, this great evil!"¹⁹

In light of the foregoing, to talk about freedom of the will in the context of man's fall is thus of an entirely different order than merely affirming man's mere ability to choose otherwise. Man is radically corrupt. The freedom retained by man to choose good or evil is not absolute, for his good is always tainted with evil. In his freedom, fallen man runs with evil even when he runs with virtue. If Christ is not the source, and faith is not the foundation, then the good deed freely chosen is still only a "great evil," one which will actually "counteract our salvation." The problem with Pelegian free will is that it is only fit to refute fatalism, but the doctrine of theological free will does not require such a libertarian free will in order to refute fatalism.

Man's freedom is retained in the Fall, but is so radically corrupted that the freedom is rather used in such a way as to become a source of judgment. Natural or carnal freedom does not carry with it a possibility of pardon. Man's unregenerate free will ends only in death. The striving towards true virtue can, at best, only prepare for or render one capable of receiving salvation, but it does not ensure it.²⁰ Only faith in Christ gives salvation. Of natural virtue, St. Ignatius continues:

Such virtue only has worth when it brings one to Christ. When it is content with itself and leads a person away from Christ, then it becomes the worst evil, depriving us of the

¹⁸ *Idem*, p. 276.

¹⁹ *Idem*, p. 276.

²⁰ *Idem*, p. 277.

salvation given by Christ (for it cannot give salvation by itself).²¹

How many think that a virtuous lifestyle takes one to heaven! "He was a good man," they say. But was he a man of faith? "He did good deeds," they say. But was he a man of faith? If one is not brought to Christ, and if one's virtue does not flow from Christ, then one is lost and one's virtue is of no avail. It can even serve to lull a person into the false security of complacency or, worse, presumption, which are both opposed to the assurance of faith. The Pelagian position, which is essentially will-worship, makes virtue to flow from fallen man's free will, and establishes virtue there on man's bare and fallen freedom, but the Gospel wants virtue to flow from Christ, and to be established on Him. St. Ignatius warns:

Equally soul-destroying is the sin of those who, blinded by their pride and self-conceit, ascribe unnecessary importance to their own good deeds, the deeds of their fallen nature.²²

These are the ones who establish virtue in man's personal, autonomous freedom, not recognizing the depths to which the Fall has brought mankind. Not trusting in Christ as their Savior, they seek rather to establish a man-centered righteousness, even if it is ostensibly in the name of Christ, not realizing that virtue's value is not merely in that it proceed from a free will, but from Christ indwelling. This throws into high relief the supernatural element essential to Christianity.

A virtuous act must certainly be uncoerced and so free, but such freedom is insufficient as regards its value in the eyes of God. If virtue is merely a matter of natural free will, then such a free act of virtue ought to be accounted as truly righteous, but it is not. It must be energized by Christ. Both virtue and vice are

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Idem*, p. 278.

sinful outside of Christ, even though the virtue is not in itself sin, nor per se condemnatory. As such, it is in this way that man's free will is in bondage for, no matter what it freely chooses while outside of Christ, it is still sinful because the man outside of Christ is still in sin. After quoting the Scriptures and multiple Church Fathers in this regard, St. Ignatius states:

There is nothing pure left in our nature, nothing left undamaged, nothing uninfected by sin. We can do nothing of ourselves without the contamination of evil. When water mixes with wine or vinegar, every drop ceases to taste like water. So also our nature, being infected by evil, contains impurity in every manifestation of its activity. All our inheritance, all our dignity, resides exclusively in the Redeemer.²³

Man is thus, according to St. Ignatius, thoroughly pervaded by the stain of sin. Even if it is but one drop of vinegar that fell into the waters of the soul, the entirety of it is yet stained. And since sin is not sin apart from man's will, it would be utter foolishness to try to assert that fallen man's free will and uncoerced virtue are somehow preserved from evil. As shown above, its freedom to "do otherwise" is preserved as regards the choosing of this or that particular act, and so there is no question of coercion. But its freedom is yet not free from sin, and so to assert with the Neo-Pelagian libertarian that righteousness can be had on the basis of fallen man's free will is tantamount to rejecting Christ:

Striving to preserve for yourself the righteousness of the fallen nature, corrupted by sin, is an active rejection of the Redeemer.²⁴

St. Ignatius presses this striking point further:

A frame of mind that admits the worth of personal human righteousness before God after the coming of Christ is a

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem.

form of blasphemy that perverts such a frame of mind entirely. Such a frame of mind does not consider Christ as necessary for salvation; it is no different than a complete rejection of Christ.²⁵

It would be hard to find a clearer indictment against the Neo-Pelagian view of man's free will, not the denial of the existence of free will but of its "bondage to sin."²⁶ Fallen man's will is uncoerced by any extrinsic evil, but his free will is yet in bondage to his own evil, the evil that is bound up with his fallen soul, the evil that is "overwhelming all its powers."²⁷ No one forces his hand to sin; he cannot say that the devil made him do it; but nor can he free himself by virtue of his native freedom, either. Thus

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Blessed Augustine states in his *Reconsiderations*: "Unless the will is liberated by grace from its bondage to sin and is helped to overcome its vices, mortals cannot lead pious and righteous lives. And unless the divine grace by which the will is freed preceded the act of will, it would not be grace at all. It would be given in accordance with the will's merits, whereas grace is given freely" (*On Free Choice of the Will*, tr. Thomas Williams, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1993, para 4, p. 127).

²⁷ Idem, p. 278. St. Ignatius says similarly in his essay on *The Various States of Human Nature in Relation to Good and Evil*, that "man's natural goodness can never act without contamination of evil" (*The Refuge*, p. 306). He even states that, "To separate the contamination of evil from the natural good in man has become impossible through man's own exertion. Evil has pierced to the very principle of humanity" (idem, p. 307). It is pervasive that, "From the moment of birth man cannot engage in a single thought, word, or emotion, not even for the shortest of minutes, without there being at least a small amount of evil intermingled with the good" (ibidem). Echoing Blessed Augustine, St. Ignatius states that man absolutely requires the Holy Spirit to free him from his "slavery to sin" (idem, 308), for without the Holy Spirit dwelling in him that man, in "the state produced by the Fall, a state in which man, forced by the evil living within him, cannot help but do evil, even if he wants to do good" (idem, p. 308).

free will and moral responsibility are preserved, but he is nonetheless unable to rid himself of his own sinful self.

Fallen man is born clutching to the seeds of pride, lust, and anger, and as his free will develops with age he finds that, although he is able to “do otherwise,” he is unwilling to drop them. By the force of his own will his sin clings to him, and as a consequence his slavery to the devil is established even in his fallen exercise of virtue. The argument, then, that seeks to preserve for man a libertarian free will, a will not radically twisted by sin, a will neatly poised between good and evil, is thus the rejection of Christ.

Libertarianism, which is to say Neo-Pelagianism, may find need to repent of poor choices, but it cannot repent of itself, of its own inner corruption. For it sees no radical flaw and so concludes there is no absolute need for repentance, and so excludes *metanoia* and, consequently, all possibility of salvation, hence the Church’s severe condemnation of this doctrine. For the Neo-Pelagian it is simply a matter of mystical training, and hence proceeds a corrupt form of asceticism and will-worship, inverting the very nature of the Church’s disciplines. Libertarianism would not even know what to repent of, except to regret the past and try to do better in the future, or perhaps retreat into a false sacramentalism. St. Ignatius, noting the sad consequence of the Neo-Pelagian inability to repent:

This means that those who do not admit their sins to be sins, or their righteousness to be merely useless rags, defiled and ripped apart because of communion with sin and Satan, are strangers of the Redeemer. Perhaps they confess Him with their lips, but with their actions, and in their spirit, they reject Him.²⁸

²⁸ *Idem*, pp. 278-79.

St. Ignatius is merciless towards the hidden refuge of fallen autonomy's Pelagian pride, for even in the context of a Christian confession it can lurk as a refusal to utterly disown one's self. We are Christ's or we are Satan's, and we are not our own, and there is no middle ground, no neutral and uncontested space. Repentance must be total and thorough, a radical denial of the autonomous will and all of its schemes at reasserting self as a source of personal justification or goodness. There is no holy ground other than a holy dependence on Christ:

For there is no possibility of approaching Christ and becoming assimilated to Him without first sincerely admitting yourself to be a sinner, a lost sinner, having no personal justification, no personal dignity.²⁹

This radical confession must go to the core of one's being. There is no personal ground of justification, which is to say self-justification: "Self-justification... is an acknowledgment that our actions according to our own will are fair or even righteous."³⁰ In this a person, even if attempting to get to heaven, instead of looking to Christ ends up looking to themselves and the measure of their good works. Such self-justification is condemned, for Christ is the only ground of justification. Faith in Christ is the only ground of justification and salvation. Moreover, faith in Christ alone is the only ground of works.

Works cannot be established on their own foundation, much less on self. They must be founded on faith in Christ, they must "flow from Christ," and not self. The Confession of Dositheus affirms this understanding when it states that not only is "no one to be saved without faith," but that this faith must be

²⁹ *Idem*, p. 279.

³⁰ *Idem*, p. 299.

“working by love.”³¹ The Confession is even clearer when it states that “a man is not simply justified through faith alone,” which is to say a bare, notional assent, “but through faith which worketh through love.”³² Notice that it is the faith which is working; it is not some second thing, not a working that stands aloof from a believing that has to somehow be coordinated, but precisely the faith which is itself working. And it is this working faith that is indicated by the phrase, “faith and works.”³³ Works, moreover, are not merely a witness, a tacked on carnal effort to prove faith, but are “fruits in themselves” of the root which is faith.³⁴

Not bare faith, it is faith *through* works, otherwise works are just mere will-worship. This is why St. Ignatius states:

According to the immutable law of asceticism, an abundant acknowledgement and perception of one’s sinfulness, given by the grace of God, comes before all other gifts of grace.”³⁵

Without this grace-given perception, ascetical efforts, good works, and virtuous acts will always be attempted on the false foundation of self. “What belongs to us?” asks St. Tikhon in a quote by St. Ignatius, “Only weakness, corruption, darkness, evil, sins.”³⁶ If one cannot admit to the depravity of one’s soul, including the free will, thoughts, and affections, then one will have rejected Christ:

³¹ Decree 9, *Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Jerusalem (1672)*, tr. J.N.W.B. Robertson, London: Thomas Baker, 1899.

³² Decree 13.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Refuge: Anchoring the Soul in God*, p. 279.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

Let us beware of this death-bearing delusion! Let us fear to reject Christ! Let us fear the definite loss of salvation for assimilating such false thoughts, so hostile to faith!³⁷

According to St. Ignatius it is precisely in this age in which this doctrine must be emphasized, when “the preaching of the exaltation of the virtues and success of fallen mankind is spreading with especial insistence.”³⁸ This attracts

all to the doing of such virtues and such successes. Mocking the all-holy goodness of Christianity, this preaching tries to inspire disdain and hatred for Christianity.³⁹

The stakes could not be higher, and this age only places more and more confidence in man's native abilities. Fallen man's natural free will, however, is insufficient as a ground for righteousness, only to condemnation, and so it is only in a clear vision of one's personal sinfulness, not just one's particular sins, that repentance is possible. Dositheus echoes this in that portion of the Confession which deals with Original Sin, when he affirms that man has been “utterly undone.”⁴⁰

Obviously, the good that man does by nature, his natural virtue, is not in itself sin, but the good that man does is neither purely good nor saving, and thus natural man is condemned apart from Christ, for “it contributes not unto salvation thus alone without faith.”⁴¹ It is only in the regenerated that:

What is wrought by grace, and with grace, maketh the doer perfect, and rendereth him worthy of salvation. ... for the works of the believer being contributory to salvation and wrought by supernatural grace are properly called spiritual.⁴²

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ Decree 14.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Ibidem.

Man apart from grace is thus dead in sin, and:

He is not able of himself to do any work worthy of Christian life, although he hath it in his own power to will, or not to will, to co-operate with grace.⁴³

The supernatural element cannot be minimized or sid-lined, but must be held as central, for only the grace of God offered to man in the power of the Gospel enables him to co-operate with God. And thus from beginning to end it is the grace of God that supernaturally works in and with the regenerate. God's grace does not meet man as an equal, but meets him as a sinner in need of grace. The man thus contributes nothing natural to his salvation, and certainly contributes nothing in the sense of adding to Christ's accomplishment on the Cross, but in the sense of faithfully cooperating with God's proffered grace, receiving it freely and obediently, and working out that faith in love. This is what Dositheus means when he states that grace renders a man "worthy of salvation," not that man perfects himself according to natural ability, but that he becomes entirely responsive to God's grace. The operation of grace renders a regenerate man perfect in his cooperation with said grace, not the working of the fallen free will empowered by a covering of grace.

The active, conscientious, and total dependence on God's grace is the *sine qua non* of spiritual life and theosis. It is not enough simply to have lip-faith plus some good works, for this is but a white-washed tomb. Penetrating vision into one's utter helplessness is therefore a precondition of authentic repentance, and must be had so that no confidence will be placed on natural virtue, and so that virtue and good works will be rooted supernaturally in God's grace alone and in a total faith in Christ alone:

The works of salvation are the works of faith, the works of the New Testament. These deeds are performed not by

⁴³ Ibidem.

human knowledge, not by human will, but by the will of the all-holy God, revealed to us in the commandments of the Gospel.⁴⁴

In other words, the works of faith are not the works of natural human willing. They are not the product of a libertarian free will. Not two, it is not faith plus works, it is works of faith: one thing. By dividing off faith from works the fallen human will sets itself to accomplish all that it naturally can, unto damnation. Faith and works must be so united that it is the faith that is working itself out in love, where the works are the loving operation of faith only. Faith cannot be without works, and works cannot be without faith. Works, however, must be “the result of faith,”⁴⁵ which is to say faith's own outworking. The works of faith, moreover, must be the result of the grace of the indwelling Christ, in union with Him, and not an appendage tacked on by fallen man's self-efforts. For “Christian perfection is a gift of God, not the fruit of human labor.”⁴⁶ Otherwise, the eye of man will be riveted to himself and his own “spiritual” efforts, and not to God. In this light, St. Ignatius asks:

What does it mean to love your life? It means to love fallen nature, its characteristics, defiled by the Fall, its falsely named wisdom, its desires and enticements, its “truth.” What does it mean to save your life in this world? It means to develop the characteristics of fallen nature, to follow your own reason and your own will, to create your own righteousness from the so-called good deeds of fallen nature.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Refuge: Anchoring the Soul in God*, pp. 279-80.

⁴⁵ Patriarch Jeremiah, p. 46; cf. pp. 37-38, 42, 88, 95, 180, 182-83.

⁴⁶ St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Refuge: Anchoring the Soul in God*, p. 287.

⁴⁷ Idem, p. 298.

When fallen man hears the idea of “good works,” he almost involuntarily thinks in terms of personal effort, of action performed according to fallen reason and will, and of personal righteousness. What does it mean, then, to preach to fallen man the independence of good works? He will only condemn himself. Without repentance, and not understood as the outworking of faith, good works are a snare. The Neo-Pelagian, however, insists on the intrinsic ability of fallen man to produce righteous, God-pleasing action. St. Ignatius, however, refutes this in the continuation of his questioning:

What does it mean to lose your life for the sake of Christ and the Gospel? What does it mean to hate your life? It means to admit and know the Fall and the disorder of your nature by sin. It means to hate the state produced in us by the Fall and to mortify it by rejecting all actions stemming from our own reason, our own will, our own desires. It means to forcibly assimilate the reason and will of the nature renewed by Christ.⁴⁸

5 Conclusions

To summarily conclude, having reviewed the Carthaginian Canons and the related works of Patriarch Jeremiah, Dositheus, and St. Ignatius Brianchaninov on the subject of free will, good works, and the necessity of grace, although Orthodox theology necessarily affirms the free will of man, it does not thereby ascribe to fallen man’s disordered, sinful nature a virtuous and spiritually capable free will. Orthodoxy teaches that “fallen nature is hostile to God,”⁴⁹ and that as a result man’s fallen free will is “distrubed,” bound to sin even though in relation to any particular act of sin it can “do otherwise.” Man’s disturbed will

⁴⁸ *Idem*, p. 299.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

is by no means coerced or compelled to sin by any external force, and so he is completely responsible for his actions. Man's free will is thus preserved, and his responsibility maintained, for the disorder of man's fallen nature, his inborn sinfulness, does not destroy his free will; it just sets him inexorably on the free choosing of sin unto just condemnation. Even though he knows better, he freely refuses, and because of the pervasive contamination of sin even his virtues are "a striving toward sure, eternal damnation."⁵⁰ Those who do "good deeds" in the power of fallen nature, no matter how "exalted, blameless, holy" they may seem, they "are always mixed with evil," for they are "the defiled virtues, from which the Lord turns away His all-holy gaze as from a Satanic abomination."⁵¹ It is thus not that fallen man cannot but sin, but that he will not but sin. His constitutional position is disturbed, but retaining his free will he stands justly condemned. Man's willing communion with evil thus places him under the power of the devil, in communion with evil, and he cannot naturally escape. Nor can he extricate himself from his fallen nature. Try as he might, he cannot purify his deeds or justify himself through natural willpower or moral perfection. Man requires Christ to free him from his will's free bondage to sin, his autodoulia (i.e. self-enslavement) to Satan, for at all times the evil one presses his advantage over man's fallen nature. Fallen man thus requires a power greater than his personal freedom and resolve to overcome his thralldom; he requires the energy of God's grace working in him to lead him in free submission to God's will into true freedom in Christ.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem.*

⁵¹ *Idem*, pp. 299-300.