THE THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION: CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

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Abstract

The medieval church displayed a theological pluralism unknown until the contemporary era. The polarised age of the reformation and post-reformation periods can be traced to the middle ages and earlier for many doctrines considered reformed were well defined in these times. Augustine’s fundamental argument against Pelagius provided Luther with his unilateral model of salvation: righteousness is not through deeds but, rather, through the transforming work of Christ. Anselm and Bernard of Clairvaux both prepared for future reformed doctrine: Anselm in his doctrine of atonement and Bernard in the priority given to Scripture. Duns Scotus and William of Ockham in different ways stress the sovereign freedom of God. Salvation is not dependent on human qualities but on God’s will. However, Luther’s inability to understand and appreciate Aquinas introduced an element of discontinuity in the medieval theological tradition. Aquinas highlights the positive world-affirming grace of God; Luther the restrictive belief that humanity in his/her natural state cannot love God.
1 INTRODUCTION

Is the theology of the early reformation, especially that of Martin Luther continuous with ancient and medieval Catholic traditions? Catholic scholarship has moved far from Johannes Cochlaeus’ Commentary on the Acts and Writings of Dr Martin Luther. The dangerously flawed moral character of Luther portrayed by Cochlaeus dominated Catholic discourse on the subject until the end of the nineteenth century. Not only did Catholic theologians see Luther as morally flawed but, even more importantly, they regarded Luther as a heretic whose teaching undermined ancient and medieval Catholic tradition. A real and critical Catholic assessment of Luther had to wait until the 20th century with the publication, in 1904, of Luther und Luthertum in der ersten Entwicklung (Luther and Lutheranism in its first development) by Heinrich Denifle. Other scholarly works followed: Hartmann Grisar (1911-12), Joseph Lortz (1939-40), Otto Pesch and others. More recently, discussion has shifted from Luther’s discontinuity with the past to Luther’s relationship to his Catholic and medieval past. The Protestant and Catholic controversy is then seen as a contest between two different and yet competing theological positions rather than as a clash between an old and new theology. Indeed, critical studies of the early church have forced scholars, both Catholic and Protestant, to acknowledge the complexity raised by the question of continuity and discontinuity with ancient Christianity. Furthermore, J David Lawrence notes that:

Most of the doctrines which are usually considered distinctly Reformed were well-defined in the medieval period. It is the continuity of theology that is impressive, not the discontinuity that is imagined. It only remained for Luther to add the one important piece that was certainly lacking, the doctrine of the forensic justification by faith, and for the prodigious
work of Calvin to gather all of it together in a summation.7

In the light of the above observations this paper will attempt to uncover the roots of later Reformed theology in the comparative theological pluralism of medieval discourse. Given that, no high medieval scholar totally disagreed with Augustine and his influence on Luther (which was extremely profound), our search will begin here. This paper will then discuss Anselm, with his definition of the atonement as satisfaction. Bernard of Clairvaux’s revival of biblical expository preaching will be regarded as preparing the ground for some later concerns of the reformers, especially Luther. Duns Scotus’s affirmation of divine sovereignty and Ockham’s and Scotus’s insistence that salvation depended on the trustworthiness of God’s Word more immediately influenced the reformers (especially Luther). The doctrine of divine sovereignty came to characterise Reformed thought hundreds of years later. Ockham rejected the view that salvation depended on qualities within the individual or on a metaphysical connection between God and the individual soul. Instead, salvation depended solely on God’s eternal decree. This view prepared the way for the certitude of salvation based on justification by faith. Finally, Luther’s rejection of Aristotle’s definitions as assimilated by Aquinas, as well as the cooperation model of salvation would define for the reformer, the real issue involved in sin and salvation. This issue was the helplessness of humanity in dealing with sin and the sovereignty of God’s grace. Indeed, Luther’s greatest concern in the early stages of the Reformation was to rid the church of the Aristotelian influence transmitted through Thomistic theology: “The whole of Aristotle is to theology as darkness to light.”8

2 AUGUSTINE
Luther’s rejection of Aristotle involves two differing models of the human will. In the model of Aristotle/Aquinas (which will be more thoroughly investigated in a later section of this paper) the will is self-moved and works most effectively apart from the influence of the affections. Indeed, Aquinas’s cooperation doctrine of salvation requires that the self-moved will is a necessary feature of salvation. In contrast, in Augustine’s model of the human will, the affective component of the will is primary: God draws to himself the saved apart from any initiative on their part. In other words, the love of God alone motivates salvation, since faulty human affections hold the unfree will in bondage.

Luther relied for his position on Augustine’s fundamental argument against Pelagius, that is, the human will defies God because it is enslaved by self-love. In his Treatise on Grace, Augustine states his position clearly:

> It is certain that it is we that act when we act; but it is He who makes us act, by applying efficacious powers to our will; ... [God is] He who prepares the will and perfects by His co-operation what He initiates by his operation.10

Augustine holds that the human soul is illuminated by God’s love which moves it out of its enslavement to self-love, thus enabling it (ie the soul) to love God. Augustine in his paraphrase of 1 John 4:19, states: “...we should not love God unless He first loved us”.11

The decision to love God, therefore, cannot be achieved by the self-moved will. The affection (love) of the will finds its source in the Spirit who motivates the response of the believer:

> For it would not be within us to whatever extent soever it is in us, if it were not diffused within our hearts
by the Holy Ghost who is given to us. Now ‘the love of God’ is said to be shed abroad in our hearts not because he loves us, but because He makes us lovers of Himself.\textsuperscript{12}

In both his \textit{Disputation against scholastic philosophy} and his \textit{Heidelberg disputation} Luther relied on Augustine’s basic argument against Pelagius outlined above: the enslavement by self-will of the will requires its liberation in the elect by the regenerating love of God. In the fourth and fifth thesis of his Disputation against Scholastic Philosophy Luther expressed his case.

4. It is therefore true that man being a bad tree, can only will and do evil. 5. It is false to state that man’s inclination is free to choose between either of two opposites. Indeed, the inclination is not free, but captive. This is said in opposition to common opinion.\textsuperscript{13}

Luther finds the reason for the unfree will in the will itself: “Nothing is so much in the power of the will as the will itself.”\textsuperscript{14} This means that the human being in his or her natural state cannot love God.

Man is by nature unable to want God to be God. Indeed he himself wants to be God, and does not want God to be God.\textsuperscript{15}

No act is done according to nature that is not an act of concupiscence against God.\textsuperscript{16}

Every act of concupiscence against God is evil and a fornication of the spirit.\textsuperscript{17}
It is clear that, for Luther and indeed for Augustine only God’s gracious initiative can accomplish the work of salvation. Righteousness is through the transforming work of the spirit rather than through righteous deeds. Augustine’s and Luther’s model of salvation was therefore clearly unilateral, and not cooperative (like Aquinas’s). It is evident that Luther based much of his foundational agenda on Augustine. Indeed, one could say that Augustine, especially in his Commentary on the Letter to the Galatians, is very close to Luther’s: *soli fide*. David Lawrence comments:

In this work he taught that faith is righteousness, though it must be activated by love. In his later years he began to suggest that faith alone was the means of justification while remaining somewhat ambiguous about the reality of a faith not accompanied by love. Even sacraments, according to Augustine, while always signs of salvation, are not effective without faith.18

3 ANSELM AND BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

Anselm and Bernard of Clairvaux, figures from the High Middle Ages, can be said to have foreshadowed future Reformed doctrine: Anselm in his doctrine of the atonement and in his foreshadowing of the later Reformed Doctrine of the covenant of works, and Bernard in his anticipation of the priority of scripture.

Anselm’s outline of the doctrine of the atonement occurs in his seminal work, *Cur Deus Homo?* Here Christ’s death is not a ransom paid to the devil. Rather, in reply to those who think that the devil
Should justly demand ... the punishment of sin, of man, before Christ suffered as a debt for the first sin to which he tempted man, so that in this way he seems to prove his right over man. I do not by any means think that it is to be so understood.  

Anselm denies that the devil has any claims over humans: he is under the control and sovereignty of God. If Christ’s death is not, then, a ransom paid to the devil for our souls, what is the atonement? It was a payment, a satisfaction for divine justice, made to the Father for the sins of his people. The Father requires the perfect obedience of His people, and humanity, because of the Fall, lacks the ability to satisfy that demand. As Anselm expresses it, “He who does not render this honour which is due to God robs God of His own and dishonors Him; and this is sin.” Sin must be requited: however, humanity could not survive the wrath of God and therefore God alone can offer a sufficient satisfaction. Anselm anticipates the reformers with their stress on the sovereign holiness of God, fallen humanity’s inability to come to God, the utter seriousness of sin and the necessity of divine intervention through God’s grace. As J David Lawrence notes,  

... he gave form to these suppositions by tying them together, leading to the ultimate conclusion that these circumstances necessitate the atoning sacrifice of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, to offer satisfaction for the sins of His people.  

It is to Bernard of Clairvaux that we turn next. In many different ways, Bernard anticipates some of the central concerns of the later reformers: criticism of the secular, criticism of materialism and criticism of excessive ceremonial practices. However, it is in his stress on scripture, biblical theology and expository preaching that he especially foreshadowed later Protestant concerns. So, more than any other clerical personality of the
High Middle Ages, Bernard gave a primary authority to scripture and through his expository preaching, equipped people to think in biblical categories. In his preaching he stayed close to the text of scripture and the essential truths of the gospel. In evangelistic fervour, he constantly exhorted his congregation to accept Christ. His oft-quoted favourite biblical text was Titus 3:4: “The goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared.” Indeed, as Franz Posset states: “Luther declared that he had learnt from St Bernard … to tune into the sounds of the Bible.” Possett, in his work Martin Luther and Bernard of Clairvaux, demonstrates very clearly the thesis of this paper that many themes and issues critical to Reformation thought were the legacy of medieval tradition rather than Luther’s creations. Luther found Bernard very sympathetic to his concerns. Thus Bernard gives a certain preference to the Letter to the Romans, with its emphasis on sin and justification. He quotes Galatians 5:17 no less than twenty-three times and highlights the discord between the law of sin and the law of the spirit.

Experience had played a significant role in Bernard’s thought. This might seem to run counter to Reformation concerns. However, deeper analysis will reveal how his treatment would allay the later concerns of the reformers. He lays out three stages of experience: the experience of sin where we are far from God, the experience of our insertion into Christ [the movement of redemption] and the experience of the Holy Spirit. Bernard, like Luther and Calvin, regarded sin with great seriousness. However, the experience of rupture in our relationship to God is never seen in isolation from the restoration of the image of God. Moreover, experience is never absolute: it never stands outside of faith. Experience, for Bernard, is always circumscribed by faith and scripture. It is never at the initiative or disposal of a believer. “By the light [the Spirit] gives us, by a sure experience day after day, we are convinced that our desires and groanings come from him and
go to God.” Thus Bernard challenges autonomous experience, uncircumscribed experience, experience apart from the norms of faith and scripture. Experience of God is a gift, never the result of one’s own initiative.

Thus, in the light of the above observations, the Reformers’ response to Bernard can be more clearly understood and appreciated.

4 DUNS SCOTUS AND WILLIAM OF OCKHAM

Duns Scotus and William of Ockham are more immediate forerunners of some of the central concerns of the later reformers. Both stress the sovereign freedom of God: salvation is never fully dependent on qualities within souls and God is never obliged to save those who simply try to do his will. These views ran counter to traditional theology, that is, that likeness to God predisposes one to salvation. Thus only a soul purified by love can become united with God. As Steven Osment notes,

For the medieval theologians the central religious concept was accordingly caritas – love – not faith. The way of salvation was fides caritate formata, faith formed by acts of love. Faith alone, by contrast, was only an initial intellectual assent made to the data of revelation by one who was still far from pure and godly ... Love, not faith, was the religious glue. Love bound together the persons of the Trinity, the soul with God, and man with his neighbour.

God and man must be like one another in order to be one with one another. Medieval theology postulated that the incarnation, God becoming man, would enable humanity to become godlike. Such thought was rejected by Scotus: the created and the finite could not determine in any way the
uncreated and the infinite. God could never be bound to accidental forms within souls. As Scotus wrote: “Nothing created must, for reasons intrinsic to it, be accepted by God” (nihil creatum formaliter est a deo acceptandum). This means that God’s relationships are always extrinsic to himself and always free, contingent, unconditional and never obligatory. Steven Osment has observed

For Scotus only God’s will, could be primary in the definition of a Christian. What God decreed in man’s regard was far more important than any quality of soul he might come to possess; people were saved only because God first willed it, never because they were intrinsically worthy of it.

Furthermore, Scotus’s theological position, which never lost sight of the great distance between God’s eternal will and its execution in finite time through the mediation of the created world, would see Aquinas’s system as binding God too closely to the ecclesial system of grace. In this system God was obliged to himself to carry through to a conclusion something he had freely set in motion. Scotus sharply distinguished between God’s will, that is, what he has chosen to do in eternity, and the execution of this will, that is, the methods he used to implement his decisions in time. Preparing the groundwork for the reformers Scotus’s position suggested that the choice of particular methods to execute the divine will is unrelated to any intrinsic value they may have. Their importance lies in the divine choice for, as Scotus states: “Love [caritas] is a true reason for divine acceptance, but it is the second, not the first reason, and it is contingent, not necessary.” For Scotus, acts of love merit salvation not because of their intrinsic goodness but because God has accepted them as such. God’s pleasure is prior: if God wills to save a person it will be done: how it is accomplished, however, is always secondary.
The theology of Ockham developed from Scotus’s principles, as outlined above, that is, salvation depended on God’s fidelity, the divine trustworthiness and not on qualities within individuals in spite of God saving people through infused habits of grace. However, Luther accused Ockham and indeed the whole of late medieval theology, of Pelagianism. Ockham desired to preserve human freedom even from a prevenient infusion of grace. The problem lay in man loving God only because God moved him by a special internal grace. Was humanity’s love for God free then? The Ockhamist believed that God’s natural gifts of reason and conscience were not eradicated by the Fall. If God rewards good works done in a state of grace with eternal life, therefore, surely the good work in a state of nature could be rewarded with the infusion of grace? Ockham and Biel stated the position clearly: in accordance with God’s gracious goodness (ex liberalitate Dei), he who does his best in the natural state receives grace as a fitting reward (meritum de congruo). The position could be expressed thus: salvation could at least be initiated within a state of nature as semi-merit and thereafter through moral effort as full merit but within the condition of grace.

Luther completely rejected this view because, as noted earlier, he held that man lacked the freedom of will to do the good. However, Ockham did not see a necessary relationship between salvation and acts of love induced by habits of grace. God was free and his will was paramount. Salvation, then, for Ockham did not depend on human activity but on the value that God gave to human effort. Indeed, Ockham places great stress on the contingency of God’s power, by which he meant what God had chosen to do in time and contrasted this with his absolute power, which involved the infinite possibilities open to God within the realm of eternity. However, Ockham’s theology did stress the sovereignty of God over his creation. Thus salvation depended on the
trustworthiness of God, his dependability, his faithfulness to his promises and most of all to his will, rather than his being. In placing stress on God’s goodness, rather than his existence, not on the rationality of faith, but on the ability to trust God, Ockham anticipated the same deep concerns of Luther, that is, the loving faithfulness of a saving God. In similar vein, Ockham minimised the claims of reason and speculative theology and widened the arc of faith.

Furthermore, in Ockham’s theology, the church’s mediatorial role was threatened. In a world marked by belief in universal relations between God and man, nature and grace, believer and community, citizen and common wealth had important claims for medieval man. Ockham’s epistemological revolution led him to insist that individual things could be known within their individuality and hence that direct unmediated knowledge of particulars was possible.37 Importantly, knowledge of reality did not depend, then, on universals subsisting in things, on common natures or even universals abstracted in the mind, but on the direct conscious experience of individual things. Such views had consequences for theology and for the church as institution as mentioned earlier. For Ockham the rational basis for belief of God’s existence was considerably weakened, as was the philosophical basis of theology. Moreover, the church’s unique position was the result of a special covenant and not because of its essential role in a great hierarchy of being standing between the divinity and humanity.

5 ARISTOTLE /AQUINAS

The Scholasticism of the Middle Ages involved a blending of Aristotelianism with Christian theology. The cooperative model of salvation to which reference was made earlier was set out in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean ethics*. A moral action, for Aristotle,
demands a freedom either to choose or refuse the good apart from any external constraint or compulsion. The cooperative model, as adopted by Aquinas, linked human responsibility with divine enablement. God provides an assisting grace that empowers, but does not compel the will to choose good.

Luther believed that Pelagius and Aristotle demonstrated an affinity of minds in their definitions of the will. The idea that nature, of its own accord, will love God above all else is for Luther pure fantasy. His opinion on these matters was set out in Section 2: Augustine. In the reformation attack on Aristotle and through him on Aquinas, there is of element on discontinuity with the immediate past, that is, on philosophical theology and scholasticsm. The problem lay in Aristotle’s vocabulary not being well-adapted for theological use. Steinmetz states:

Grace cannot be understood as habits and acts, and the Aristotelian notion that the repetition of good acts makes the man or woman that performs them righteous, turns St Paul on his head. Theology deals with God in God’s relationship of judgment and grace towards sinners and with sinners in their relationship of faith and faithlessness towards God. Therefore, the proper vocabulary of grace is relational rather than metaphysical.

Expressed differently, the vocabulary of philosophy or more precisely metaphysics is said to run counter to the intention of scripture. Here human beings are understood in terms of their loves, hopes and expectations and, for Christians in terms of their faith. The first generation of Reformers aimed to restate theology in biblical language and categories rather than in the definitions of Scholasticism.
I make bold to suggest that Luther failed to understand Aquinas’s synthesis: Aquinas was not a Christian Aristotle but an original, systematic theologian who, using the philosophical categories of Aristotle, helped the Christian message “address sympathetically new problems and thought-forms that were the result of new institutions (the universities, the friars) and a new science (Aristotelianism)”.

Indeed, it is unfair to accuse Aquinas of a semi-Pelagian position. Aristotelian terminology would call grace ‘a kind of quality’ or ‘a new created form’. However, these terms were intended to convey the idea of an additional and new life-principle (grace) given by God alone for only God can only cause grace. “For just as it is impossible for anything to make something fiery but fire alone, so it is necessary that God should make God-like by communicating a share in His divine nature.”

Yet, as has been noted earlier, the thought-forms of Aquinas differ markedly from those of Luther. Moreover, unlike the images of God emanating from Scotus and Ockham with their direct bearing on Luther of arbitrary will and omnipotent power, the image of God from Aquinas is that “of an infinite and wise Noah whose choices are fired by love”. This God operates through “… two intricate patterns, one of nature and one of grace. Both show His providence, His subtle empowerment of creatures despite the incompleteness of nature and the sinful opposition to grace”. It is, then, the potential of human existence coupled with God’s offer of a share in Trinitarian Life that gives Aquinas’s theology a perennial positive flavor for the human being on his or her journey to the eschaton. Even predestination means the establishment of the reign of God through wisdom and love and the offer of assistance to reach it. Luther’s inability to distinguish Aristotle and Aquinas is tragic. Aquinas is far more than Scholasticism. Indeed, Aquinas’s religious viewpoint opposes all that is restrictive and world-denying in holding the belief that human beings and cultures are sinful.
6 CONCLUSION

This paper concludes by noting that the question of continuity and discontinuity with the Christian past, is in the event known as the Reformation, far more complex than it appeared to be in the sixteenth century. Modern historiography sees the Reformation only as a part of a societal development that began in the fourteenth century and modified and changed the medieval synthesis. The Reformation was largely, then, not a revolutionary break with the past but the continuation of trends that reach back into the fifteenth century and, indeed, earlier and which find their culmination in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century. However, the notion of a radical innovation characterising the Reformation lies at the very core of a Protestant self-understanding. I have argued that the Reformation could in many senses be understood in terms of a continuity with the past. Reformation studies without Augustine are impossible. Anselm and Bernard of Clairvaux both anticipated some pivotal concerns of the later reformers, while Duns Scotus and Ockham with their doctrine of divine sovereignty and a more forensic understanding of justification and salvation, prepared the ground for a new theology that broke with the theological tradition of the Middle Ages. I have also argued that, in his attack on Aristotle and the Thomistic synthesis, Luther introduced an element of discontinuity: a move from the Catholic Substance to the Protestant Principle.

7 WORKS CONSULTED

Sources


**Monographs**


Journals


ENDNOTES

2 Heinrich Denifle, 1904, Luther und Luthertum in der ersten Entwicklung. Mainz: Kirchheim.
3 Hartmann Grisar, 1911, Luther (3 vols), Freiburg i.B: Herder. Grisar suggested that the Reformation originated in Luther’s disturbed psychological makeup and the doctrine of justification by faith alone was a mechanism for coping with his irrational hatred of good works.
4 Joseph Lortz, Die Reformation in Deutschland (2 vols) 1939-40, Freiburg i.B: Herder. Lortz assessed Luther positively: he debunked entirely the myth of Luther’s moral turpitude, found that Luther’s theology reflected profound insights into the gospel and found in Luther’s education at Erfurt in Ockhamism (rather than in Thomistic theology) and his subsequent rejection of the pelagianising tendencies of Ockham as a legitimate protest of what can be regarded as uncatholic theology.
5 Otto Hermann Pesch, 1967, Theologie der Reichtuertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin. Versuch eines systematisch-theologischen Dialogs. Mainz: Mutthias Grunewald. Pesch concluded that the doctrine of justification in Thomas Aquinas and in Luther differed more in their theological style rather than in the substance of their theology. He claims that Aquinas wrote sapiential theology and Luther existential. This paper does not support that position.
6 Reinould Weijenborg, “Miraculum a Martino Luthero confictum explicat ne eius reformationem?” Antonianum, 31(1956), 247-300. After Vatican II a series of monographs on Luther were written by scholars such as Peter Manns, Erwin Iserloh, Stephan Pfurtner, Harry McSorley and Jared Wicks. Catholic Luther research suggests that serious issues still remain, but Luther has now been taken seriously as a profound, and yet from a Catholic view, problematic theologian.
9 Augustine, Treatise on Grace 5.457 [32(16)].
10 Ibid, 5.458[33(17)].
11 Ibid, 5.459[38(18)].
12 Augustine, The Spirit and the letter 5.108 [56(32)].
17 Ibid, thesis 22.
18 J David Lawrence, ibid, 54.
21 J David Lawrence, ibid, 55.
22 Ibid.
We note that there are more than five hundred quotations from, and reference to, Bernard in Luther’s works. See: John R Sommerfeldt. “Peter Bernardus: Luther and Bernard of Clairvaux”. Cistercian Studies Quarterly, 38 (2003), 230.


Steven Osment, ibid, 242.


Steven Osment, ibid, 33.

Luther’s last work prior to the Ninety-Five Thesis was a very broad attack on the whole of late medieval theology: The Disputation against Scholastic Theology, (Sept 04, 1517). The work is regarded by scholars as providing an important gauge of Luther’s thought, especially on the nature of religious justification and the extent of man’s natural knowledge of God on the eve of the Reformation.

See Gabriel Biel, Canonis Missae Expositio, ed H A Oberman & W J Courtney (Mainz, 1965), Lect. LIX P. 2: 433. Steven Osment states the position well: “Absolutely considered it was not human activity either outside or within a state of grace, that determined man’s salvation; it was God’s effort to value human effort so highly. Ockhamist theologians remain convinced, however, that God meant people to acquire grace as semi-merit within a state of nature and to earn salvation as full merit within a state of grace by doing their moral best. All the subtle and important qualifications notwithstanding, this theology taught that people could at least initiate their salvation.” (Steven Osment, ibid, 234).

“..."In the course of establishing the primacy of the individual, Ockham makes knowledge of the material individual at once directly accessible to the intellect and more perfect than that of a universal concept or image itself derived from knowledge of individuals. He thereby reverses both the traditional Augustinian in the independent non-sensory origin of intelligible knowledge, as coming exclusively from the intellect, and the Christian Aristotelian predominantly Thomistic view of universal knowledge as the primary and proper object of the intellect. In each of these he was preceded by Duns Scotus; but surpasses Duns by making the individual alone real and always the first object known, regardless of whether or not distinctly known, and denying any role to species in its attainment"” (Gorden Leff, 1975, William of Ockham: The Metamorphosis of Scholastic Discourse. Manchester, 76-77.

Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 1a 2ae. 108.1, ad 3: “liber est qui sui causa est”. He cites Metaphysics 1:2 [282b26].

Section 2, 5-6.


The sustaining of God in the Kingdom of God is called predestination to grace. Predestination should not be a fearful term. It is providence for men and women in the order of grace ... God has predestined every human being to live in a higher order of life called ‘grace’ or ‘supernatural’. Yet this original predestination, antecedent to the course of each life in freedom, does permit human wills to turn against nature and grace, to choose to fall away from the journey to God (I, 23, 3). Predestination is neither an arbitrary choice of someone from heaven nor a force fixing freedom. For Aquinas predestination is a plan effecting an order of grace offered to all who in their lives affirm its gift. History is filled with suffering, but God is working to empower holiness and community in men and women living on earth.

This expression is used extensively by Paul Tillich especially in his Systematic Theology as stated by one of his critics: "He is at once thoroughly Protestant yet open to the appeal of Catholicism. For him neither the ‘sacramental’ principle of Catholicism nor the ‘single prophetic’ principle of Protestantism can stand on its own. For him ... they are complementary elements of the true ‘theonous’ Christianity” (Thomas J Heyworth, 1965, “Paul Tillich”. Makers of contemporary theology, Editors: D E Ninehans & E H Robertson. London: Lutterworth Press, 44).

The Catholic substance could be defined as the body of tradition, liturgy and dogma developed by the ancient church and the Protestant Principle as the criticism and reconstruction of the Catholic Substance which the Reformation carried out in the name of the Christian gospel and the authority of scripture.