

Predestination and Salvific Assurance in Early Modern Thought and Life

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Although frequently vilified by non-Calvinists as a repugnant doctrine, few even within the Reformed tradition are aware that Calvin's doctrine of predestination was originally intended as a doctrine of comfort. Thus the import of predestination for the citizens of Geneva during Calvin's oversight and for the Huguenots suffering persecution in France proved far different than its import in seventeenth-century Protestant Scholasticism, especially following the 1618–19 Synod of Dort where it amounted to a rejection of Arminianism and a test of Calvinist orthodoxy. It is my position that Calvin's original intent for predestination must be reclaimed in order to remain historically faithful both to Calvin and to the New Testament documents from which the doctrine springs. Significantly, this reclamation is open to all Christians who believe the Bible teaches sovereign individual predestination, regardless of whether they hold compatibilist or libertarian views with regard to human free will. In other words, the assurance of eternal salvation which logically stems from sovereign individual predestination is logically independent of the doctrine of total depravity and its claim that hereditary corruption extends to every facet of human nature, including free will. Thus the findings of this article are ecumenical in scope and can be profitably maintained by Reformed Christians, who are compatibilists, as well as adherents of the anthropologies maintained by radical evangelical theologian Balthasar Hubmaier (1480–1528) and neo-Scholastic Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535–1600), libertarians who, contra Jacob Arminius (1560–1609), also affirmed sovereign individual predestination. The method we shall take is complementary in nature, weaving together the interdependent strands of theological development and social history into a complete and unified account. Thus we shall first demonstrate from Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and other related documents the inextricable logical ties between sovereign individual predestination and an unimpeachable salvific assurance supplied by the Holy Spirit. We shall then explore how this theory reached concrete application by translating into an unshakable certitude of future glorification among Genevan and French Protestants amidst their sixteenth-century historical circumstances.

[A] Calvin and the Role of Predestination in Practical Theology

Certainly the point on which Calvin has been most frequently maligned from the sixteenth century onward is his doctrine of predestination, an unfair criticism because, as chapter 7 indicates, this doctrine received formulation neither in whole nor in part by Calvin but rather eleven centuries earlier by the late-Augustine. Nonetheless, the reason why Calvin, unlike Aquinas, Luther, Zwingli, and other previous exponents of predestination, has suffered blame is because he both spelled out the logical implications of the doctrine and insisted that the laity understand those logical implications. While Aquinas, Luther, and Zwingli recognized that late-Augustinian predestination logically demanded that if God has selected certain persons to be saved, then God has in the same way selected certain persons to be damned, this proved a conclusion too emotionally devastating for such doctors of the church to draw. Thus, pre-Calvinist adherents of late-Augustinian predestination gladly declared that God unconditionally elected some, they drew back from its logical equivalent that God unconditionally damned some. Instead, they appealed to divine ineffability (*i.e.* the view that God is fundamentally beyond rational categories and thus beyond words), arguing that the non-election of the damned comprised a mystery wherein human understanding of God proved futile. But due precisely to

his honesty and logical integrity, Calvin refused to “punt” to ineffability; realizing that God is the supremely rational mind in whose essence are housed the laws of logic, Calvin maintained that God cannot transcend the laws of logic without violating his own nature. Hence Calvin demanded that, whether people like it or not, we must not shrink back from asserting that God has unconditionally selected certain persons to be damned. Interestingly enough, many of Calvin’s Reformed colleagues agreed with this tenet in principle but not in practice, insisting that predestination must only be preached to those who could handle this “solid food” but withheld from “babes in Christ.” In other words, the full scope of predestination should be revealed to the *illuminati* or “luminaries of erudition” (*i.e.* theologians and pastors) but hidden from “ordinary Christians,” who were bound to misunderstand it. Calvin rejected this solution as dissimulation on two grounds, the second of which the Genevan reformer ranked as more important than the first. First, owing to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, Calvin exclaimed that the idea of a doctrine appropriately preached only to the sophisticated but not to the unsophisticated was a violation of the nature of the Gospel. Rather, all persons must know predestination alongside its logical implications, let the proverbial chips fall where they may. Indeed, where the chips fell themselves furnished indirect identification of the elect and the reprobate. As Calvin explains in his commentary on 2 Corinthians 2:14–16, the full disclosure of predestination is “a fragrance from life to life” to “those who are being saved” but “a fragrance from death to death” to “those who are perishing.” Consequently, persons who took offense to the predestinary “aroma of Christ to God” marked themselves out as reprobate, while those who received it gladly showed themselves to be elect.

Second and more importantly, Calvin demanded that the doctrine of predestination be preached to all because of its profound practical use. At this juncture it must be emphasized that the practical use of predestination constitutes the underlying subtext which constantly resurfaces throughout all Calvin’s writings on this topic. Had predestination seemed to Calvin a speculative abstraction, he would have cared less about its discussion in seminaries (the Reformed Academies), much less in churches. But since predestination, for Calvin, was the aroma of Christ—the birthright of all adopted children of God—how dare the pastor, whose job it is to stir up this aroma, deprive his flock this life-giving nourishment? For Calvin, the Pauline aroma of Christ metaphorically depicted a full disclosure of predestination since it, first and foremost, was the doctrine of comfort *par excellence* for the individual believer.

[EXT]We may add, that in the very obscurity which deters them, we may see not only the utility of this doctrine, but also its most pleasant fruits. We shall never feel persuaded as we ought that our salvation flows from the free mercy of God as its fountain, until we are made acquainted with his eternal election, the grace of God being illustrated by the contrast – viz. that he does not adopt promiscuously to the hope of salvation, but gives to some what he denies to others. It is plain how greatly ignorance of this principle detracts from the glory of God, and impairs true humility.¹[/EXT]

From these remarks it follows that if predestination is false, then salvation is ultimately not dependent upon God but upon individual believers. This deduction is quite agonizing, for relying on ourselves for final glorification amounts, in Luther’s axiom, to relying on a “broken reed,”

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 3.21.1.

and does not allow anyone to repose confidence in their salvation.² For all who subscribe to sovereign individual predestination, regardless of the ground of predestination (*e.g.* the divine creative decree, *scientia media*, and so forth) or the ground of human freedom (*e.g.* compatibilist or libertarian), it is philosophically evident that Calvin is correct. This is because, putting aside anthropological debates over why the following occurs, individualized divine grace is illustrated by the fact that God could have created each elect person in situations where, instead of choosing to appropriate salvation, the person would choose to reject it. Likewise, for each reprobate person, God could have created that person in situations where, instead of choosing to reject salvation, they choose to appropriate it. Furthermore, no other reason can be gleaned for these predestinary choices except for God's sovereignty – that is to say, if God chooses to create a world at all, then it is logically necessary for him to make such choices. Therefore, those who gainsay God's predestinary choices cut off the branch on which their survival depends, since their dislike of God's choices entails their wish that the world, and derivatively they themselves, would not exist. Through a skillful exegesis of the Greek text, Calvin makes this point very well while commenting on Romans 9:18–21. Here Calvin notes the often overlooked syntactical point that in the rhetorical question, “Or has not the potter the right over the clay, out of the same lump to make *on the one hand this* (o} men) vessel for honor and *on the other hand that* (o} de) for dishonor,” the pairing of o}men and o}de; constitute, in the terms of contemporary grammarians, a correlative clause. Since the two clauses are logically tied, Calvin reads Paul as asserting that if the lump of clay is used at all, it is by the nature of the case impossible for either all the vessels to be used for honor or for all the vessels to be used for dishonor. Instead, any usage of the lump (*i.e.* creating of any actual world) logically entails the production of some noble vessels and some common vessels. Thus for Calvin, a predestination-free world is not a world. Accordingly, all human criticism of God's predestinary choices unwittingly gainsays the potter's doing anything with the lump of clay.

[A] Corollaries for Daily Life

Calvin's result carries with it a number of ramifications directly affecting the day-to-day psychology and lifestyle of all believers. To begin, the wellspring of biblical humility lies in the recognition that none of us could save ourselves; if we think we could, then we are full of ourselves and guilty of *hubris*. In philosophical terms, humility dictates that transworld salvation, the notion that some individuals are so virtuous that they would have been saved in any world God could have chosen to create, is a contradiction in terms; on biblical grounds, Calvin also opposed transworld damnation, the notion that some individuals are so duplicitous that they would have been lost in any world God could have chosen to create. Believers will never be so indebted to, or reliant upon, God until they realize that God could have chosen multiple worlds in which they go to hell, and that God could have chosen multiple worlds in which persons lost in the actual world would be saved.

[EXT]If to make it appear that our salvation flows entirely from the good mercy of God, we must be carried back to the origin of election, then those who would extinguish it, wickedly do as much as in them lies to obscure what the ought most loudly to extol, and pluck up humility by the very roots. Paul clearly declares that it is only when the

² Martin Luther, “Letter to Elector John: Wittenberg, June 16, 1531,” in *Luther's Works*, 55 vols., trans. Jaroslav Pelikan *et al.* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 50:46.

salvation of a remnant is ascribed to gratuitous election, we arrive at the knowledge that God saves whom he wills of his mere good pleasure....Those who preclude access, and would not have any one to obtain a taste of this doctrine, are equally unjust to God and men, there being no other means of humbling us as we ought, or making us feel how much we are bound to him.³[/EXT]

Once individuals realize that they are genuinely saved at some point in time, it follows that they are among God's elect, which furnishes them with complete and supreme salvific assurance.

But, we may ask, how do individuals glean this knowledge of genuine salvation? Calvin supplies two answers: one intangible and one tangible. The intangible way is through the *sensus divinitatis*, the self-authenticating (or, in modern philosophical parlance, properly basic) witness of the Holy Spirit, who resides within the soul of the elect and confirms the elect's predestinary status. According to Calvin's commentary on John 14:16–26, it is the indwelling Spirit who affords believers certainty that they are forever united with Christ, in whom they were predestined before the foundation of the world (*cf.* Eph 1:11). The tangible way of acquiring salvific certainty, as Robert M. Kingdon, Raymond A. Mentzer, and the present author have elsewhere argued, comes through an antithetical relationship between the Eucharist and church discipline.⁴ In this relationship, reception of the Eucharist supplied the recipient with unshakable certainty of election.

[EXT]Pious souls can derive great confidence and delight from this sacrament, as being a testimony that they form one body with Christ, so that everything which is his they may call their own. Hence it follows, that we can confidently assure ourselves, that eternal life, of which he himself is the heir, is ours, and that the kingdom of heaven, into which he has entered, can no more be taken from us than from him; on the other hand, that we cannot be condemned for our sins, from the guilt of which he absolves us, seeing he has been pleased that these should be imputed to himself as if they were his own. This is the wondrous exchange made by his boundless goodness. Having become with us the Son of Man, he has made us with himself sons of God.⁵[/EXT]

The philosophy behind this system, institutionalized in Geneva and elsewhere as the Consistory, was to admit to the Lord's Table those whose lives were filled with the fruit of the Spirit, and to deny admission to those whose lives were not. The Genevan Consistory, made up of all the elders and city pastors with one syndic (who was also an elder) as its presiding officer, acted as a morals court which met every Thursday. At this time the twelve elders, each representing one of the city's twelve districts, would report to the consistory names of residents who did not behave properly, a high percentage of which misbehavior entailed domestic quarrels and sexual promiscuity. The consistory analyzed each case. On the one hand, if the sin was minor and the miscreant contrite, she or he might be dismissed with a scolding. On the other hand, if the sin was major and the miscreant unrepentant, she or he could be barred from the Lord's Supper.

³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.21.1.

⁴ Robert M. Kingdon, "The Control of Morals in Calvin's Geneva," in *The Social History of the Reformation*, eds. Lawrence P. Buck and Jonathan W. Zophy (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), 3–16; Raymond A. Mentzer, ed. and contr., *Sin and the Calvinists: Morals Control and the Consistory in the Reformed Tradition* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), vii–ix, 97–128; Kirk R. MacGregor, *A Central European Synthesis of Radical and Magisterial Reform* (Lanham, MD: UPA, 2006), 212–22.

⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.2.

Once barred, measures were taken by the Consistory to ensure that, before readmission to the Eucharist, the miscreants had remedied their relevant faults to an adequate degree. Although surprising to us, the Genevan faithful viewed this system as a heartening thing, for the Eucharist comprised the visible mark of the saints by which they could recognize each other and find objective assurance that they themselves were among the redeemed. Exegetically, Calvin indissolubly tied eternal security to the Lord's Supper via John 6:48–58, which he, unlike Luther, perceived as pregnant with Eucharistic meaning. Since Jesus claimed straightforwardly that “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he *will* (not “might”) live forever” (v. 51) and that “whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood *has* (not “will have”) eternal life, and I *will* (not “might”) raise him up on the last day” (v. 54), Calvin emphasized that the aim of the Supper is to confirm Christ's promise of salvation for the faithful:

[EXT][T]he chief, and almost the whole energy of the sacrament. . . . [is] to seal and confirm that promise by which he testifies that his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed, nourishing us unto life eternal, and by which he affirms that he is the bread of life, of which, whosoever shall eat, shall live for ever—I say, to seal and confirm that promise.⁶[/EXT]

Another key function of predestination is to relieve believers of the anxiety to be good enough to keep the salvation they currently possess. Thus, predestination ensures not only that one has been forgiven of all past sin, but also that one's final beatitude is providentially protected by God despite any future shortcomings. Alister E. McGrath explains this point quite well:

[EXT]One of the central functions of the doctrine is to emphasize the graciousness of God. For Luther, God's graciousness is reflected in the fact that he justifies sinners, men and women who are totally unworthy of such a privilege. For Calvin, God's graciousness is demonstrated in his decision to redeem individuals irrespective of their merits: the decision to redeem an individual is made without reference to how that individual might be. For Luther, God's graciousness is demonstrated in that he saves sinners *despite* their demerits; for Calvin, that graciousness is demonstrated in that he saves individuals *irrespective* of their merits.⁷[/EXT]

According to Calvin, this fact sustains believers during times of weakness. The Genevan reformer was certainly not so naïve as to think that the elect will be “good-doing machines” throughout the course of their lives; rather, all believers personally struggle with sin and need to know, at the very most in those moments, that their final salvation stands secure no matter what. Contra the “boisterous,” “tyrannical,” and “high-minded” view of Calvin echoing down the centuries since popularized by Catholic controversialist Albert Pighius (1490–1542), no one was more aware of these struggles than Calvin himself. Writing quite poignantly about his own periods of moral and spiritual weakness, Calvin forthrightly admits:

[EXT]Thus I see myself perpetually tossed about, so that there is not a moment when I do not seem to be sinking. Nevertheless, as God sustains His elect to prevent them drowning, I am confident of standing against these innumerable storms. If Pighius asks

⁶ Ibid., 4.17.3–4.

⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 137.

how I know I am elect, I answer that Christ is more than a thousand testimonies to me. For when we find ourselves in His body, our salvation rests in a secure and tranquil place, as though already located in heaven.⁸[/EXT]

Employing the Pauline analogy of the salvific race, predestination guarantees the unconditional presence of God's *gratia cooperans*, or cooperating grace, necessary for crossing the finish line. Thus, all the elect may rest assured that God has bequeathed them unlimited access to his infinite storehouse of grace, whose treasures will never be withheld or exhausted because of previous mistakes. Owing to their possession of the mind of Christ on this score (1 Cor 2:12–16), believers need never fear scenarios such as the following: “I know I possessed salvation at past time t_1 , but during the following time period t_2 I didn't make good use of the cooperating grace I was given. May God, so to speak, lay me to waste at current time t_3 by refusing to give me the grace I need to reach beatitude?” This is because a necessary attribute of *gratia cooperans*, regardless of whether it cooperates with compatibilist or libertarian free will, is its indefatigable character, such that although persons can defy it temporarily, they cannot defy it permanently (with the “cannot” here taken *in sensu diviso* on compatibilism and *in sensu composito* on libertarianism).⁹ For this doctrine of grace Calvin cites Philippians 2:13 as his *locus classicus*:

[EXT][W]e must not suppose that subsequent grace is paid to him as a reward, as though by using the earlier well he has merited it. . . . And [I say] that God unceasingly so accomplishes his work in them that whatever he bestows on them right to the end is freely given. . . . All of this, if I have any understanding, is comprehended by Paul in a single statement when he teaches that there is one God who effects in us both to will and to do according to his good pleasure. He speaks not of a single day, but of a continuing course of action, whose sole cause he defines as God's good pleasure, that is, his gracious kindness which pays no attention to any merit.¹⁰[/EXT]

Consequently, the grace, and not its recipient, keeps working until it achieves its desired effect.

When challenged by Pighius that such an understanding of grace could not be biblically tied to eternal security, Calvin was not content to merely proof-text explicit passages like John 10:26–29¹¹ and Ephesians 1:13–14,¹² but argues that the invincible power of *gratia cooperans* to bring believers to salvation constitutes the implicit logic of Romans 8:

⁸ John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 130.

⁹ This distinction is expounded in Kirk R. MacGregor, *A Molinist-Anabaptist Systematic Theology* (Lanham, MD: UPA, 2007), 40–41, 79.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius*, ed. A. N. S. Lane and trans. G. I. Davies (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 175.

¹¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.21.1: “Nor, indeed, have we elsewhere any sure ground of confidence. This we say on the authority of Christ, who, to deliver us from all fear, and render us invincible amid our many dangers, snares, and mortal conflicts, promises safety to all that the Father hath taken under his protection (John x. 26). From this we infer, that all who know not that they are the peculiar people of God, must be wretched from perpetual trepidation, and that those, therefore, who, by overlooking the three advantages which we have noted, would destroy the very foundation of our safety, consult ill for themselves and for all the faithful. What? Do we not here find the very origin of the Church, which, as Bernard rightly teaches (Serm. In Cantic.), could not be found or recognised among the creatures, because it lies hid (in both cases wondrously) within the lap of blessed predestination, and the mass of wretched condemnation?”

[EXT]But when [Pighius] dares to allege that it is not to be found in Scripture, this is a gross falsehood easily disproved. For Paul teaches that those who were elected are called and justified, so as to attain at length to the bliss of immortality; and then, as if fortified on all sides by a powerful defence, he triumphantly exults: Who shall stand against the elect of God?...he applies it for the use of each believer. I am persuaded, he says, that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present or future will separate us from the love of God which is in Christ. So the confidence of eternal salvation, which Pighius wants to break up into single moments, Paul extends to future time beyond the limits of this present life, and shows that it emanates from nowhere but the election of God, while Pighius represents it so that a conflict between the two results.¹³[/EXT]

Drawing together the exegetical threads of the past (election), present (justification), and future (sanctification) salvific assurance afforded by predestination, Calvin summarizes:

[EXT]Paul is witness that none are led by that Spirit except the sons of God, whom he also pronounces to be heirs of eternal life (Rom 8.14). Otherwise what he writes elsewhere would not stand: We have the Spirit from heaven, so that we know what things are given us by God, and thus have the mind of Christ (I Cor 2.12, 16); and in vain would he also call that Spirit with which the faithful are sealed the earnest of future redemption (Eph 1.14). But that the known election of God may strengthen the faith of perseverance, that one prayer of Christ should suffice for proof, where He commends all the elect to the Father, specifically separating them from the world, so that, even if it perish, they may remain safe and intact.¹⁴[/EXT]

In short, theological and philosophical grounds indicate that no other doctrine except sovereign individual predestination can produce the thoroughgoing and timeless eternal security held out by the New Testament as the anchor of all believers.

[A] Case Study: The Huguenots amidst French Governmental Persecution (1557–98)

In the sixteenth century, the divine assurance imparted by predestination was not an abstract theory to which believers gave intellectual assent and nothing else; rather, it was the foremost matter of practice which supplied the lifeblood for Reformed existence. Nowhere was such daily life application better exemplified than among the Huguenots, or community of Reformed Christians in France, who suffered tremendously during the state-sponsored program of Protestant persecution known as the Wars of Religion (1557–98). Due to their unicovenantal theology, wherein Hebrew Biblical and New Testament believers belonged to the same family,

¹² Calvin, *Bondage and Liberation*, 243: “Perseverance [is] also God’s gift, not given according to our merits...whatever grace is bestowed on us to the very end of our lives is freely bestowed on us, not repaid for our gratitude, as though by using earlier favours well we merit this of ourselves....I have shown quite clearly that the grace to begin and to persevere to the end is not given according to our merits, but is granted according to his own most secret and at the same time most just, most kind, and most wise will, since those whom he has predestined he also has called.”

¹³ Calvin, *Predestination*, 131.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

the Huguenots, following Calvin's lead, used the language of the Psalms to express their confidence in ultimate salvific protection. Famously in Geneva, Calvin transformed the Psalms into a veritable hallmark of the Reformed tradition, setting many of Clément Marot's French versifications of the Psalms to music and commissioning his assistant Theodore Beza to versify in French and set to music the remaining Psalms. By 1562, the Marot-Beza Psalter emerged as the most popular Reformed book in Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands.¹⁵ Throughout his written correspondence to the Paris church in the late 1550s, Calvin continually employed direct and indirect quotations from the Psalms to fortify its members in bearing the yoke of persecution as Christ bore his cross. For example, in his March 1557 letter to the Paris church, the exhortation to find refuge "in the shadow of the wings of God" derives from Psalm 57;¹⁶ likewise, in his letter written the following September, the assurance that God treasures the sufferings of the elect – "If God sometimes allows the blood of his faithful to be spilled, he nevertheless carefully collects their precious tears" – is substantiated via citation of Psalm 56.¹⁷ Employing the literary technique of metalepsis (*i.e.* alluding to a Scriptural text for the purpose not simply of appropriating that particular text but also of conjuring up in the audience's minds the entire passage to which the text belongs as well as the historical context surrounding that entire passage),¹⁸ Calvin's words recalled not only the direct reference in verse 8 ("You put my tears into your bottle; are they not in your book?") but also the following verses, wherein David articulates his confidence in divine protection, places his full trust in divine providence, and prays for strength to endure. The goal of Calvin's Psalmic references was to evoke in the Huguenots a full and uncompromising attitude of trusting acceptance both in and of God amidst suffering.¹⁹ Calvin's utilization of the Psalter both to exhort and to comfort is also evident in his letter of February 1559 smuggled into the prisoners jailed in Paris on account of their Reformed convictions. Recollecting the verses from Psalm 119 that "the chains if the wicked have robbed me, but I have not forgotten your law," Calvin implicitly summons the many other verses of this longest psalm, thereby making it into a meditation on the way of righteousness, a prayer for strength in persecution, and a celebration of the present joy and the unimpeachable promise of future bliss possessed by persons faithful to the divine law. As a result, the Huguenots appropriated the Psalms, in the summation of Barbara B. Diefendorf, "to express their confidence in divine protection, their conviction of being a chosen people, and their sense of sin."²⁰ Thus Merlin de l'Espérandière described the situation of the Paris church in 1567 with the same reference to being sheltered "under the wings of God" that Calvin used in 1557 and with the same intent that a providential protection would see the church safely to final beatitude through the refiner's fire of persecution.²¹ That the Psalms were so internalized by the Huguenots as to govern personal conscience is seen in the writings of Anthoine du Croy, the prince of the Porcein region, whose consciousness of wrongdoing stemmed from the Psalmic

¹⁵ Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 132–33, 136–37.

¹⁶ Jean Calvin, "A l'église de Paris" (15 March 1557), in *Lettres de Jean Calvin: Lettres françaises* (Vol. 2), ed. Jules Bonnet (Paris, 1854), 122–26.

¹⁷ Jean Calvin, "A l'église de Paris" (16 September 1557), in *Lettres françaises*, 140–41.

¹⁸ This device is explained thoroughly by Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 2–3.

¹⁹ Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 138.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Merlin de l'Espérandière, "To Beza, from Longueville (Paris)" (10 January 1567), in Theodore Beza, *Correspondance*, ed. Hippolyte Aubert, Henri Meylan, Alain Dufour, et al., 14 vols. (Geneva, 1960–90), 8:29.

depiction (Ps 51:2–3) of “my sin and my iniquity, which are, as David says, always before me.”²²

The Huguenots interpreted the Psalms with a tripartite hermeneutic of historical, prophetic, and immediate meanings. Historically, the Psalms reflect the Hebrew Biblical context of David’s own sufferings and eventual victory over his enemies. Prophetically, the Psalms reflect the sufferings and triumph of Christ. Immediately, the Psalms were viewed as reflecting the Huguenots’ own current suffering and final triumph guaranteed by their election, where their contemporary significance in terms of political and social ramifications were directly set out in the prefatory caption attached to each psalm. To make the application to the current situation still more explicit, some editions of the Huguenot psalter included a list directing the reader to the most appropriate psalm for each occasion or state of mind. Psalms to use as prayers for a church that was afflicted or enfeebled, oppressed by combat, or held captive by its foes were prominent on the list. Some editions also included a prayer after each psalm.²³ The most popular set of prayers was composed by Augustin Marlorat, briefly a minister in Paris but more closely associated with the church of Rouen, in which city he was martyred in 1562. Many of Marlorat’s prayers make direct reference to the enemies that were persecuting the faithful, but they always refer at the same time to the covenant that God made with his chosen people and to his promise never to abandon them.²⁴ Therefore, the Psalms taught French Protestants to view persecution as a trial imposed by God and a special mark of the covenant guaranteeing their predestination before the foundation of the world. Huguenot pastors successfully used texts like Psalm 119:79, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes,” to urge their congregations not to flee but to accept persecution, even to the point of death.²⁵ In this way, the Psalms furnished a framework for reinterpreting persecution as a criterion of authenticity, such that, paradoxically, the faithful community could point to its persecution as a sign of its past election and secure future redemption. Since the Huguenots felt that all who genuinely lived the Christian life would be persecuted,²⁶ those so-called Christian groups facing no persecution or, even worse, engineering persecution against others were perceived as, by definition, among the reprobate and so eternally doomed to destruction.

Instances of these themes abound in Huguenot literature from the 1560s to the close of the sixteenth century. Published at Lyons in 1563, Antoine de la Roche Chandieu wrote in the preface to his *Histoire des persecutions et martyrs de l’Eglise de Paris* that “the afflictions that God has sent us are so many marks and signs of his good will toward us and his adoption.”²⁷ Two years later at Lyons, Jean de L’Espine published his *Traitté consolatoire*, which used the glue of suffering to bind Calvin’s New Testament foundations for eternal security with the fruits of that security poetically expressed in the Psalter. Based on the epigraph Romans 8:17, “If we

²² Anthoine du Croy, prince de Porcein, “Testament,” in *Archives nationales, Minutier central* (Paris, 28 April 1567), 8:95.

²³ Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 138–39.

²⁴ Augustin Marlorat, in *Les pseumes de David, mis en rime françoise. Avec une oraison à la fin d’un chacun pseume faite par M. Augustin Marlorat*, by Clément Marot and Theodore Beza (Paris: pour Antoine Vincent, 1566), 39, 149.

²⁵ Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 140.

²⁶ Thus Jean de L’Espine reminded his flock that “persecutions are inevitable to all who wish dutifully to follow Jesus Christ...to be disciples and students of Jesus Christ, we must take his cross on our shoulders and follow him” (*Traitté consolatoire et fort utile contre toutes afflictions qui adviennent ordinairement aux fideles Chrestiens* [Lyons: Jean Saugrain, 1565], 6–7).

²⁷ Antoine de la Roche Chandieu, *Histoire des persecutions et martyrs de l’eglise de Paris* (Lyon, 1563), viii.

are children, then we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings so that we may also share in his glory,” de L’Espine admonished his audience to neither flee nor try to escape affliction.²⁸ But in order to lighten the yoke of these tribulations, de L’Espine charged his audience to glory in them and to remember that “our king,” whom it is our honor to follow in all things, always accompanies us into battle.

[EXT]If it is an honor to a captain to abandon his life sooner to violate the faith he has pledged his prince, so is it to a Christian man to keep to the very end that [faith] that he has sworn to Jesus Christ and to die rather than to commit or to suffer anything that impairs it.²⁹[/EXT]

Such insights were carried beyond mere duty into the realm of joy by Daniel Toussain, who expressed in a devotional on Psalm 124 that “affliction, among other uses, bring the faithful man a special zeal to trust uniquely in him, and so to experience the effects of his divine force.”³⁰ With the certainty that although “the church since its earliest days has suffered greatly...nothing can destroy it,” Toussain offered to God the following prayer:

[EXT]Your poor church is in this world like a lamb in the midst of wolves, like a rose among the thorns. But at the same time, O great God, we are so happy when he who created heaven and earth shows himself to be on our side. And we see that you are with us when miraculously you deliver us, when daily you uphold us.³¹[/EXT]

Based on his experience of the *sensus divinitatis*, Toussain conveyed his tremendous personal confidence in final salvific deliverance amidst persecution and commended this same confidence to all who apprehend the Holy Spirit in a properly basic way.

[EXT]O, happy is the man who . . . not seeing any help in the world, looks at God and is assured of being seen by him! The mother often looks at her child with pity, because she cannot help him. But your look, Lord, is efficacious for your children; it is medicine for their ills.³²[/EXT]

The Huguenot writings provide a potent counterexample to the anti-Calvinist notion that the “capricious election” of God provokes introspective anxiety in his followers, as the French Protestants displayed no trace of this fear. On the contrary, as de L’Espine boldly declared, while the elect are not all given the same measure of faith, this is irrelevant in the final analysis since “we are assured of eternal life as long as there is a single spark of faith in our heart.”³³ De L’Espine beautifully encapsulated the Huguenot concept of God as a powerful Father whose degree of power is directly proportionate to his level of being “clement, mild, and full of grace

²⁸ De L’Espine, *Traicté consolatoire*, 6–7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10–12.

³⁰ Daniel Toussain, *Prieres et consolations prises de plusieurs passages de l’Ecriture, & des livres des anciens. Le tout accommodé à l’usage des vrai Chrestiens, & au temps auquel nous sommes* (Geneva: pour la veuve de Jean Durant, 1566), dedicatory epistle.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Jean de L’Espine, *Traicté des tentations et moyens d’y resister. Composé par un docte et excellent personnage de ce temps* (Lyon: Jean Saugrain, 1566), 56–57.

[*doux, benin et gracieux*]. Do we need to fear his judgment? On the contrary, we hope to judge the world with him.”³⁴ Founded on the solid rock of predestination, Huguenot spirituality therefore insisted that God’s diverse promises all lead to the same end—to show believers the love God bears for them and the care he has for their salvation—which generated a confident, outgoing, and joyous witness to Christ despite the external pressures threatening to hamper it.

[A] Closing Reflections

The theory of Calvin and the praxis of the Huguenots disclose the pluriform positive consequences of sovereign individual predestination for Christian thought and life of every era. As spiritual descendants of the Reformation, contemporary Christians would do well to lay aside rhetoric stemming from divisions over whether or not sovereign individual predestination contradicts libertarian human freedom, as solid cases can be made on both sides. For behind these secondary divisions lie primary agreements that not only initial salvation but also final salvation are dependent solely on God and constitute free gifts without regard to merit. Oftentimes believers feel that while their regeneration is a free gift of Christ, they must work to sustain that spiritual state. But a biblical conception of predestination shows this to be profoundly not the case. On the contrary, as “good trees” (Matt 7:17–18) regenerated persons, by definition, will naturally open up their souls to God just as naturally as they breathe and so allow God’s transforming love to flow through them to others, being carried along by God in the same way the biblical writers were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21). Here the words of Luther are *à propos*:

[EXT]Believers are a new creature, a new tree. Therefore all those modes of speech, which are customary in the law, do not belong here, such as, “A believer is bound to do good works,” in the same way that it is not proper to say, “The sun is bound to shine,” since it does this of itself, unbidden, as it is made for this. So a good tree of itself brings forth good fruits; three and seven are ten already, they are not first bound to be ten. To say of a sun that it ought to shine, or of a believer that he must do good, is ridiculous.³⁵[/EXT]

Hence there is no need to fear that one will fail to be good enough to keep salvation. This fact yields tremendous certitude and confidence, especially in the midst of tragedy and temptation when it is so easy to act in ways contrary to one’s ultimate convictions. It is a paradox of human psychology that people often place extra pressure on themselves to live out their convictions during times of trial, which pressure makes them much more likely to fail. Fortunately, salvific assurance based on predestination lifts this pressure and enables believers to live out the tenets of their faith in seasons of contentment and persecution alike. In these ways, predestination yields a happy and vibrant faith that shares in the power of Christ’s resurrection by rising above all human obstacles, as it empowers believers to set their minds on things above (Col 3:1–2) and to rest assured that they will ultimately find themselves in the beatific position where their pre-promised treasure is currently stored (Matt 6:21).

³⁴ Jean de L’Espine, *Excellens discourse de J. de l’Espine, angevin, touchant le repos & contentement de L’esprit* (Basel, 1587), 632.

³⁵ Martin Luther, *Works* (Halle, 1883), 22:717.