

[Rudolph P. Boshoff](#)

South African Theological Seminary

Faculty Member

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A Review of Dr. Ken Wilson’s “the Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism” by Rudolph P Boshoff

Intro: Dr. Ken Wilson summarise his Doctoral thesis titled: “Augustine’s conversion from traditional free choice to ‘non-free Free Will’: A comprehensive methodology ” (Mohr Siebeck 2018) in an easily readable seven chapters. Wilson contends that the earliest Christian Fathers (95-400 CE) before St. Augustine of Hippo (386-411 CE) held to a “libertarian free will” and a free choice in salvation. Augustine later reverted to a then pagan, “non-free Free Will,” or, as Wilson calls it, “divine unilateral determinism of eternal destinies (pg.1).” Wilson concludes that Augustinian- Calvinism is not an essential Biblical deduction, but rather formulated by an influence of “pagan syncretism (pg.2).” Chapter 1: Wilson sets off by defining these influential philosophies as ‘Stoicism, Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, and Manicheanism’ that all gave life to Augustine’s later theology, coining what Wilson describes as “divine unilateral predetermination of individuals’ eternal destinies” or “DUPIED” (pg.5) in short. Wilson mentions that for the Stoics, there was assumed freedom that was ultimately “hidden within a mere façade of “free will (Pg.7)”. For Neoplatonists, a free choice meant that there is a need for the restoration “by divine infusion to restore the will (pg.9).” For Gnostics, “all works are predestined, discipline and abstinence effect nothing, and the elect are saved by knowing that they are saved (pg.12).” Lastly, for Manicheans, man’s “ ‘enslaved will’ cannot choose – it is damned until unilaterally released ” by God’s own initiative (pg.14). In summation, Wilson notes that all these philosophies “requires the divine being to unilaterally awaken a “dead soul” who then only can respond to the divine person (pg.16).” In conclusion, Wilson notes (pg.17-18) that all these philosophies: “require divine micromanagement,” “substitute the Jewish and Christian residual ‘imago Dei ’, “teach humanities ‘free will’ was destroyed or died,” “a unilateral infusion of grace, faith and/or love.” All these presuppositions “

micromanaging providence” merits those who are “elect and divine.” Chapter 2: Wilson holds that the earliest Christian Fathers (95-400 CE.) unanimously affirmed “relational divine eternal predetermination.” God chose or elected persons by His foreknowledge of their individual free choice. What is critical in Wilson’s definition is that he states that all the Christian Fathers before Augustine had this definition of ‘predestination’ (pg.19). Wilson then proceeds to give ample examples from the “Apostolic Fathers and Apologists (95-180 CE)” in the Epistle to Barnabas (100-120 CE), The Epistle of Diognetus (120-170 CE), Justin Martyr and Tatian (pg.21), Theophilus, Athenagoras, and Melito (pg.22) and “Christian Authors (180-250 CE)” like Irenaeus of Lyons (pg.24), Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian (pg.26), Origen of Alexandria (pg.27), and Cyprian and Novatian (pg.29). Some noteworthy Christian authors in a later dispensation (250-400 CE), Hillary of Poitiers (pg.30), the Cappadocian Fathers: Gregory Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nyssen (pg.31); as well as Methodius, Theodore, and Ambrose, all held to this definition of predestination. Wilson concludes that for hundreds of years before Augustine, “ the loving Christian God allowed humans to exercise their God-given free will (pg.35).” This is clearly not a new perspective Wilson is contending for and contemporary scholars have recognised these elements influencing the earliest Christian Fathers as well. Theologian, George Park Fisher wrote: “In harmony with the foregoing views as to human freedom and responsibility, conditional predestination is the doctrine inculcated by the Greek Fathers.” 1 1 History of Christian Doctrine. T&T Clark. Pg.165.

There is a general assumption by some Calvinist scholars that the t.u.l.i.p. system was evident in the earliest Christian dispensation 2 (90-400 CE) especially from notable scholar John Gill, but upon closer scrutiny of the use of some of these earlier fathers this assumption seems to falter. 3 Puritan scholar C. Matthew McMahon also gives an excellent account of Augustine’s ‘Calvinism’ in his own doctoral thesis 4 and a conversation with Wilson’s publication will definitely be a solemn endeavour if there was ever a possibility for conversation. In my own opinion I affirm what lay scholar Jacques More noted, when he assumes that the earliest Fathers did not emphatically explicate the five points of Calvinism and any such a notion is but a long shot. He writes: “I received a letter from a believer of unconditional predestination which stated: ‘Until Augustine, nobody doubted the Calvinistic view he propounded, so it was not until it was questioned did he have to write it down in detail, just as all the great creeds have been written down in defense of the faith when various heretics have come along thinking they know better.’ I

understand the strong feeling this Christian brother has in defending what he believes. It is sad, however, since to me this seems more out of a desire to believe it than out of a reading of the evidence, and the aim of this leaflet is to share some of the clear pointers that the early church did not have unconditional predestination as a creed.” 5 Chapter 3: In this chapter, Wilson attempts to show that Augustine's earlier traditional theology (386-411 CE) was aimed to refute any Manichean understanding of ‘ predestination and free will (pg.37).’ I think Wilson is right in that Augustine placed a high tax on free will, defending the understanding of God against any deterministic causal evident in both gnostic and Manichaeian philosophies (pg.39). When you read Augustine, I agree, none of Augustine’s later, “ gnostic-Manichaeian divine unilateral determinism,” could be found in the first 25 years (pg.43-44) except for two instances 2 https://www.apuritansmind.com/arminianism/calvinism-in-the-early-church-the-doctrines-of-grace-taught-by-the-early-church-fathers/?clid=IwAR3nZ6VWwoFueNQdD7hngKI_2_MGr0i_rQNgykvFYHjJ-unCe6uHGe21WSc 3 The scope of this article will not look at the merits of these supposed deduced concepts. 4 <https://www.puritanpublications.com/store/products/augustines-calvinism-the-doctrines-of-grace-in-augustines-writings-by-c-mahew-mcmahon/> 5 <http://jarom.net/greekdad.php>

What is clear from Muller’s thesis is that the pre-Augustinian Fathers believed that God predestined mankind informed by His foreknowledge of man’s free will. An Augustinian definition of ‘predestination’ introduced the fact that God elects some men based on His will. This is a crucial difference with numerous implications. Chapter 4: Wilson shows that Augustine reverted to his earlier “ non-free Free Will ” (pg.58) views in 412 CE because of his conflict with Pelagius (pg.57). When Pelagius challenged him because the Church baptizes infants, Augustine concluded that infants were baptized “because of their inherent guilt (reatus) from Adam’s first sin (pg. 58).” Augustine admittedly relied upon the Manichaeian concept of 'total inability' in infants because of their inherent guilt, needing God’s unilateral choice for true freedom of the will (pg.59). Wilson quotes Ballock (1998), remarking that “ Augustine admitted he had abandoned the centuries-old Christian doctrine of human free-choice ” 7 as do famous scholar Jaroslav Pelikan 8 (pg.60). Wilson concludes, “Augustine now teaches, “God foreordains human wills... God gives the gift of perseverance to only a few baptized infants (pg.63).” Wilson shows

that Augustine now holds that “only those elect who believed in Christ had their sins forgiven” and not that Christ had died for everyone, as he earlier held (pg.66).” Other scholars agree with Wilson and distinguished scholar Henry Chadwick (“The Early Christian Church”) observed that Augustine's contemporaries accused him of this Manichean influence: 6 Abraham’s Dice: Chance and providence in the monotheistic traditions. Pg.150. R.W. Muller’s article “Chance and providence in earliest Christianity.” 7 “Sin” in the Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity, New York, NY: Routledge, 1998). 8 The Christian Tradition: A History of the development of Doctrine, vol.1. University of Chicago Press. Pg.278- 280.

“Julian bishop of Eclanum expressed that Augustine was causing trouble because he 'brought his Manichee ways of thinking into the church... and was denying St Paul's clear teaching that God wills all men to be saved' 9 Chapter 5: Wilson goes on to illustrate how Augustine reverted to a Manichaeian interpretation of Scriptures showing that “personal faith was no longer required (pg.71)” and “every man is... spiritually dead and, guilty, and damned at birth (pg.74).” Wilson noted that Augustine drew upon limited scripture to validate his new doctrine of original sin [cf. John 3:5, Rom.5:12, 1 Tim.2:4, John 14:6 and 16:65, Ps.51:5, Eph.2:3,8-9]. On 1 Timothy 2:4 Augustine changes the words “God wills” to “provides an opportunity,” or as Wilson notes, God provides “different (unequal) opportunities (pg.75).” In John 14:6 & 6:65, Wilson shows that Augustine uses these passages using “the Manichaeian interpretations to prove his new total inability/incapability for human faith (pg.76). As for Psalm 51:5, Augustine and the earliest Church Fathers perception follows that “everyone born of a woman becomes a sinner in this world, without fail (pg.76).” But later (412 CE) Augustine used this passage to show that “babies are born damned from Adam’s Sin” (pg.76) and the same with Ephesians (2:3 and 2:8-9) where Augustine adds that babies are born “under wrath and damnation inherited from Adam’s sin with no ability to respond to God as grown adults (pg.77).” Wilson mentions in passing that Augustine also taught “proxy salvation” in that someone else’s faith can save you” (pg.78). Chapter 6: In Chapter 6, Wilson now shows the determinism and predestination Augustine taught and how it was “precisely the manner in which Stoics, Gnostics, and Manichaeians presented their versions of determinism (pg.82).” Wilson then shows the essential elements Stoicism in that “souls have neither free will ...” and “we are free to choose only what our corrupt will determines.” Further, for Platonists, “providence controls every minuscule cosmic detail;

nevertheless, the One (God) provides limited freedom for some events and persons.” Wilson laments, 9 The Early Christian Church, Pg.233.

“Augustine’s later theology incorporated all of these pagan ideas ” (pg.83-84). The early Church held to the idea that God was a relational entity, “ relational and responsive to human choices” (pg.86). The Church, therefore, rejected Stoic and Manichaeian ‘unilateral determinism’ (pg.87) because the Judeo-Christian God “chose persons for salvation based upon his foreknowledge of “future” human choices” (pg.88). Chapter 7: Wilson gets to the “when” and “why” of Augustine’s reversion to determinism and recognizes three separate stages describing the stages of salvation. □ Stage 1: (386-394 CE) Augustine’s acceptance of “ foreseen merit of works.” □ Stage 2: (395-411 CE) Augustine’s affirmation of “ no foreseen merit of works but only God’s foreknowledge of faith alone.” □ Stage 3: (412-430 CE) Augustine’s “ Divine unilateral predetermination of individual eternal destinies (pg.91).” Wilson tracks Augustine’s regress and communicates ten factors that influenced his final systematic theology (pg.95). Some of these points could be deemed speculative, but the fact of Augustine’s perceived change in his theology leaves me with little doubt as to his end destination. Wilson delimit the most prominent reasons for Augustine's modification of theology to ardent determinism, pointing to three key elements: “infant baptism, Stoicism, and Manicheanism (pg.97).” Serious scholars of Church History and Systematic theology cannot but recognize a definite progression (or regression for others) in the theology of Augustine over his lifetime that was seemingly influenced by his own given environment and contextual challenges. Conclusion: The idea that Augustine adopted ideas from various philosophies is nothing new. L.H. Hackstaff in his introduction to “Saint Augustine: On Free Choice of the Will” writes: “Indeed, it is not too great an exaggeration to say that Neo-Platonism provided Augustine and the Christian Platonists who followed him with the theoretical substructure on which their theology was built. It seems that Augustine never abandoned the Platonistic matrix of his Christian theology.”