

# Week 5: Soteriology II: God and Humanity

- **1. Faith and works**

- How are humans saved?
- Mk 16, 16: Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved.
- Rom. 3, 21-2: But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

# Faith and Works II

- James 2, 14-7: What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

# Faith and Works III

- From the beginning, there is no doubt that it is faith that saves.
- But what does that mean?
- Proclamation of Jesus demands a radical decision:
- Follow me! (e.g. Mk. 1, 17)
- There is no doubt that this involves fundamental life changes.
- Cf. Jesus and the rich young man (Mt 19, 16-22):
- Jesus says, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” (v. 21)

# Faith and Works IV

- Faith is faith in Jesus, a personal relationship of unconditional trust.
- Yet it also involves acceptance of a truth claim.
- Mt 16, 15-6: [Jesus] said to [the disciples], “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”
- Faith in Jesus involves the acceptance that he stands in a unique relationship with God.
- Later distinction: faith is ‘notitia, assensus, fiducia’ (awareness, acceptance, trust).

# Faith and Works V

- No dichotomy of faith vs. works in Jesus.
- In Paul the contrast applies to the 'works of the law'.
- At one level, this merely means that the ceremonial prescriptions of the Old Testament are no longer binding on Christians.
- Specifically, circumcision is not required of converts from paganism.
- Abraham became righteous 'before' his circumcision (Romans 4) because he believed (= trusted) God.

# Faith and Works VI

- But 'works of the law' cannot only be ritual and ceremonial duties.
- For Paul, the law is deeply problematic:
- It is not sin (Romans 7, 7), but it is interwoven with human sinfulness.
- Romans 7, 7: 'If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."'

# Faith and Works VII

- The logic of commandment and fulfilment is ultimately not conducive to human flourishing.
- This chimes with Jesus' conflict with the pharisees.
- While there is no reason why the law-abiding pharisees could not have faith in Jesus, it is no coincidence that 'faith' is usually encountered among a different kind of people.

# Faith and Works VIII

- There is then not a contradiction between faith and works but an unstable balance.
- 'Salvation through faith alone' and 'no faith without works' can go together.
- But this balance can be easily offset.
- Possible distortions:
  - (a) Faith is not enough; works are also needed.
  - (b) Works are unimportant.



## 2. Faith and Grace

- How are faith and works different?
- From one angle they are both human acts.
- In fact, faith can be seen as a 'work', something to be accomplished and to be proud of.
- If faith really *is* different, it must be aligned with the divine initiative in salvation.
- Luther: faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone.
- Not necessarily *the same* but closely related.

# Faith and Grace II

- From this perspective, humans who 'have' faith merely acknowledge God's saving activity as effective in them.
- At this point, we return to the question posed last week:
- What is the divine, what the human side of salvation?
- From the time of St Augustine's controversy with the Pelagians, this problem led in the West to a series of attempts to adjudicate the two.

# Faith and Grace III

- Augustine: God *alone* turns the sinful will into good will, but *together with us* he works on the will already transformed by grace:
- ‘He operates, therefore, without us, in order that we may will; but when we will, and so will that we may act, He co-operates with us. We can, however, ourselves do nothing to effect good works of piety without Him either working that we may will, or co-working when we will.’ (On Grace and Free Will 33 [XVII])
- Thomas Aquinas: Distinction of operating and cooperating grace (ST II/1, qu. 111, art. 2)

## Faith and Grace IV

- Similar is the distinction between prevenient and subsequent grace:
- Augustine (On nature and grace XXXI):
- ‘Grace is prevenient, inasmuch as it heals, and subsequent, inasmuch as, being healed, we are strengthened; it is prevenient, inasmuch as we are called, and subsequent, inasmuch as we are glorified.’
- Cf. Aquinas, ST II/1, qu. 111, art. 3)

# Faith and Grace V

- Two assumptions are generally shared (against 'Pelagians'):
- (a) Grace has to come first.
- (b) Grace never stops working.
- Yet there are differences between believers.
- Saints exist, but not everyone is a saint.
- Thus far, human effort must make a difference.

## Faith and Grace VI

- Against *this* logic, the Reformers emphasise salvation by grace alone.
- It is *initially* a protest against later medieval emphasis on merit.
- But ultimately it flattens the internal hierarchy of believers.
- Whatever their other differences, as Christians they are *the same*.
- Luther: The Christian is 'simultaneously justified and sinner' (*simul iustus et peccator*).

## Faith and Grace VII

- At any point in their lives, believers must totally rely on God's grace.
- This reliance is faith.
- Faith is thus passive; it is merely the human point of contact of divine activity.

### 3. Predestination and Election

- Faith alone thus merely acknowledges God's sole activity.
- This again raises the problem of God's involvement in the salvific process.
- How can it be explained that faith isn't universal?
- Does God preordain human beings to salvation and damnation?
- This is known as the problem of divine predestination.



# Predestination and Election II

- The NT often emphasises human agency in the faithful.
- But there are strongly predestinarian passages.
- Notorious is the ‘hardening of hearts’ that is ascribed to God in various places.
- Mk. 4, 11-2: [Jesus] said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that “they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.””

# Predestination and Election III

- Rom. 9, 16-8 (on Israel's election): 'So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses.'

# Predestination and Election IV

- Predestination was unequivocally defended by Augustine against the Pelagians.
- The entire mass, therefore, incurs penalty and if the deserved punishment of condemnation were rendered to all, it would without doubt be righteously rendered. They, therefore, who are delivered therefrom by grace are called, not vessels of their own merits, but “*vessels of mercy.*” (*On Nature and Grace* 5 (V))
- Both Luther and Calvin defend the principle, but it became associated particularly with Calvinism.

# Predestination and Election V

- Calvin on the 'horrible decree': 'Again I ask: whence does it happen that Adam's fall irremediably involved so many peoples, together with their infant offspring, in eternal death unless because it so pleased God? Here their tongues, otherwise so loquacious, must become mute. The decree is dreadful indeed, I confess. Yet no one can deny that God foreknew what end man was to have before he created him, and consequently foreknew because he so ordained by his decree. [...] And it ought not to seem absurd for me to say that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his descendants, but also meted it out in accordance with his own decision. For as it pertains to his wisdom to foreknow everything that is to happen, so it pertains to his might to rule and control everything by his hand.' *Institutes* III xxiii 7.

# Predestination and Election VI

- The Calvinist community broke apart over this article.
- Arminianism revived the idea of prevenient grace.
- John Milton, *Paradise Lost*:
- [Jesus speaks to the Father] Man shall find grace;
- And shall grace not find means, that finds her way,
- The speediest of thy winged messengers,
- To visit all thy creatures, and to all / Comes unprevented, unimplor'd,  
unsought,
- Happie for man, so coming; he her aide/ Can never seek, once dead in sins  
and lost. (III 227-33.)

# Predestination and Election V

- Grace is here understood as a universal offer to human beings enabling them to return to their original freedom.
- By contrast, Karl Barth affirmed Calvin's teaching.
- However, he criticised the application of reprobation and election to groups of people (CD II/2).
- Instead, he proposed a strictly Christological application.
- The humanity eternally condemned was the one assumed by Christ.
- By the same token, humanity as a whole was elected in Christ.
- Barth here comes close to a universalist position although he ultimately eschews it.

## 4. Cheap and costly grace

- Could 'grace alone' lead to indifference?
- Persistent problem in the Protestant tradition.
- Influential twentieth-century response:
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship* (1937)
- Bonhoeffer emphatically affirmed Reformation teaching on grace and faith.
- Problem: forgiveness already factored into our lives.
- What we do therefore doesn't matter.

# Cheap and costly grace II

- 'Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.'
- 'Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."'



# Cheap and costly grace III

- Primacy of faith is answer to the call into discipleship.
- Based on transformation of volition which can only be ascribed to God's will.
- Has to be active, life of obedience.
- Discipleship is lived in a world that is removed from God.
- Crucial is the question of 'who is Jesus Christ for us today'?