

THE LITTLE BOOK OF PROVIDENCE

by

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The Little Book of Providence

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INTRODUCTION

This little book anticipates what I am convinced would be the subject of “*The Little Book*” depicted in the tenth chapter of Revelation. That subject matter is divine providence and how since a Bible-based theology was first systematized in the Late Antiquity period its magnanimity has been diminished through some erroneous doctrines that were incorporated. This document is a condensed, depersonalized reworking of my previous book “*Fellowship of the Secret*” (2015), focussing on the essential doctrine and insights. In view of my spiritual experience during the writing and the fact that some of the more radical concepts were simply not in my head at its outset lead me to believe the work is prophetic. That will be for the reader to determine; what the book does provide is a coherent synopsis utilizing the testimony and biblical interpretations of pre-Augustinian Christian writers to demonstrate that the fruits of Christ’s Passion extend beyond Israel and the Church, resulting in a providence worthy of the Creator defined in Scripture as Love personified.

This first edition will predominantly be of interest to Bible believing Christians (including Catholic and Orthodox), being replete with scriptural citations. For reasons that will become evident I am not entirely happy with any particular version of the Bible, so unless otherwise stated the translations from the Greek New Testament together with any highlighting are my own. For serious study or critiquing some knowledge of biblical Greek would be helpful, but my translations should be capable of verification by most people with a basic grasp of English grammar utilizing a Greek interlinear translation such as that provided by Scripture4all [HERE](#). As for quotations from the “Early Fathers” and Church Catechisms, in nearly all cases these are directly linked to their source in the e-book version.

Richard L. Barker

January 2020

CHAPTER ONE

God's Secret Plan

Divine providence may be defined as God's foreseeing protection and care of His creatures, and in the case of those created in His own image, their anticipated *eternal* wellbeing. To begin to understand how and why the munificent nature of God's providence has long been obscured in traditional renderings of the gospel we need to examine more carefully what the apostle Paul wrote on the subject – daring to believe that he meant exactly what he wrote, including some seemingly extraordinary statements in Romans chapter eleven¹. The apostle makes a more cryptic reference to this mystery in the third chapter of Ephesians, translated in some versions as “the fellowship of the secret (or mystery)”. That happens to be the title of my previous book, for although Paul's revelation concerning God's salvific plan for the Gentile nations is by no means the only biblical doctrine that needs to be revisited, a coherent synopsis cannot be provided without it.

On a number of occasions Paul described his evangelistic message as “my gospel”². That was appropriate for it contained aspects that had not been revealed *to anyone* until his conversion:

*The mystery which has been hidden from ages and generations but has **now been revealed to His saints**, to whom God willed to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*³

The apostle was referring to a dispensation of heavenly grace that was to be made available to Jew and Gentile rather than exclusively to Israel, God's first-choice nation. It would be provided to those “*predestined to become conformed to the image of God's Son*”⁴. As Paul himself affirmed (but few appear to have grasped), such privileges were not envisaged for members of the Gentile nations in the current epoch and resulted from the disobedience of the Jewish nation:

*“What I am saying is this: Was this stumbling to lead to the Jews' final downfall? Out of the question! On the contrary, **their failure has brought salvation for the Gentiles**, in order to*

¹ Especially vv11,12,15 &30

² Greek: *to euaggelion mou* – Rom2:16; Rom16:25; 2Tim2:8

³ Col1:26,27

⁴ Rom8:29

stir them to envy. And if their downfall brings great riches⁵ to the world, and their loss has brought great riches to the Gentiles – how much more will their restoration bring!”⁶

And later in the same chapter:

*“For you (Gentiles) were once disobedient towards God but you have now obtained mercy **through (the Jew’s) disobedience**”¹⁷*

Paul is referring to the same mystery below, confirming that it was *new revelation*:

*“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you; that **by revelation there was made known to me the mystery**, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, **which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men**, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the **Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promises in Christ Jesus** through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to **bring to light the fellowship⁸ pertaining to the secret (plan) which for ages has been hidden in God** who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with His purpose for the ages which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him”⁹*

Saul of Tarsus - The thirteenth faithful apostle

Jesus had called twelve men to the apostolate, partly for symbolic reasons:

*And Jesus said to (His disciples), “Truly I say to you who have followed Me, in the Regeneration when the Son of Man will sit down on His glorious throne, you also shall **sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel**”¹⁰*

The symbolism pertained to the reconstitution of God’s chosen people: the twelve tribes, only two of which had survived at this point. Judas was replaced by Matthias who was

⁵ Greek: *ploutos*

⁶ Rom11:11-12

⁷ Rom11:30

⁸ Or “administration” (Greek: *oikonomia*) – textual variant utilized in some Bible versions

⁹ Eph3:1-12

¹⁰ Mt19:28

added to the eleven faithful apostles¹¹ to witness to Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Saul of Tarsus on the other hand was appointed out of due time¹² having been commissioned by the risen and ascended Christ as the thirteenth faithful apostle now that gospel salvation was to be made available to the Gentile nations. It becomes evident as one reads through Acts that in spite of the Great Commission to baptize and make disciples of all nations, it is not until events recorded in the eleventh chapter that any of the original twelve fully grasped that anyone who was not a Jew, Samaritan or proselyte could be granted the same gift of salvation as that intended for the Jews:

*I (Peter) realized **then** that God was giving (the Gentiles) the **identical gift** He gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; and who was I to stand in God's way? This account satisfied them, and they gave glory to God, saying "God has clearly granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that **leads to life**"¹³.*

It needs to be understood that references to "eternal life" or "life" in the New Testament relate to being re-united to God in Christ:

*And **this** is eternal life, that they might know You the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent¹⁴*

*And: "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood **has** (present tense) eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day"¹⁵*

*And: "No murderer has eternal life **abiding in him**"¹⁶*

Eternal life (literally age-life) is something to be experienced now; a higher form and quality of life than that which one can naturally know as fallen human beings. It should be noted that even the sinless Saviour asserted that He "**lived by the Father**"¹⁷ in the same way "*those who eat Me shall **live by Me***"¹⁸. It affirms that "life" as Jesus, Paul and others speak of it does not refer to avoiding perdition or "going to heaven when you die" for that was hardly an issue for Jesus, yet even He "*lived by the Father*". It relates rather to a present empowering relationship with the divine; "death" being the deprivation of such.

¹¹ Acts1:26

¹² 1Cor15:8

¹³ Acts11:17,18

¹⁴ Jn17:3

¹⁵ Jn6:54

¹⁶ 1Jn3:15

¹⁷ Jn6:57a

¹⁸ Jn6:57b

The mystery revealed to Paul was not apprehended even by Peter until he received a vision of the sheet of unclean animals that he was told to kill and eat¹⁹. Paul had to rebuke Peter for his reluctance to fellowship with Gentile Christians²⁰, again affirming that the mystery Paul was disclosing was not something that Jesus had made clear to the twelve.

Why Old Testament prophecy has been subverted

The subversion of Old Testament prophecy that is to be outlined in this chapter resulted from a two-stage rejection by the Jews of their Messiah, the first during His life, the second pertaining to their response to the apostles' teaching after Jesus had been resurrected and had ascended to heaven. The first rejection may be perceived in Jesus' lamenting of Jerusalem:

*"If you had known, even you, especially in this your day the things that **make for your peace!** But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you and your children with you, to the ground, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, **because you did not know the time of your visitation**"²¹*

Whilst many ordinary Jews would welcome Jesus to their city with palm leaves their leaders were indignant and already plotting His downfall. This was the first rejection culminating in the crucifixion and as Jesus stated it put paid to the hope that the coming of the Messiah would *bring an end to Israel's political and military problems*. The promise of peace and security for Jerusalem, evident in much prophecy including the recent angelic annunciations concerning the birth of John and Jesus, would not be secured by Jesus in His earthly lifetime, indeed worse was to come for Israel in about a generation's time as Jesus had warned in His Olivet sermon²². However, this is not what resulted in the rejection of the Jewish nation as *sole inheritors of the Kingdom* that Paul refers to in Romans 11 and Ephesians 3. Such is affirmed in Acts where the apostle indicates that even after Pentecost it was *still* the Jewish people's "day of visitation" and they were still not appreciating it. Paul had warned certain Jews at Antioch:

Be careful! – or what the prophets say will happen to you: "Cast your eyes around you mockers; be amazed and perish! For I am doing something in your own days that you would never believe if you were told of it"²³

¹⁹ Acts11:1-18

²⁰ Gal2:11-14

²¹ Lk19:42-44

²² Mt24

²³ Acts13:40-41

The warning was about what will or might happen to the Jewish nation, not what already had happened. Their day of visitation did not end when they crucified Christ: that event that Jesus referred to as His other baptism had been both divinely planned and prophesied²⁴; what was shortly to occur was undoubtedly planned or foreknown by God and also hinted at in some of Jesus' parables but it had not been foretold within the Old Testament. It concerned the establishment of an international messianic community, a plan hidden in God the Father²⁵ even from earlier prophets. For the Jewish leaders had refused to acknowledge that the resurrection and the miraculous signs were the vindication of Jesus' earlier claims. They still rejected His Messiahship even now that He had been raised to the highest heavens and empowered His disciples to work miracles in His name. The Jews had already forfeited the prospect of political peace and security through their rejection of Jesus in His lifetime, now something even more radical was at stake: *Kingdom inheritance*. The next Sabbath, these same leaders "filled with jealousy" towards the apostles, just as they had been toward Jesus used blasphemies to contradict everything Paul was telling them which prompted the apostle to add:

*We had to proclaim the word of God to you (Jews) first, but **since you have rejected it** since you do not think yourselves worthy of eternal life, **here and now we turn to the Gentiles**. For this is what the Lord commanded us to do when He said "I have made (Israel) a light to the nations, so that my salvation may reach the remotest parts of the world"²⁶.*

The prophecy from which Paul quotes (Is49) declares Israel to be God's servant, through whom He would manifest His glory and by whom He would bring saving enlightenment to the whole world. They as His chosen people, being the first fruits of His increase²⁷ and heirs of the world²⁸ would have come to know eternal life (as previously defined) through sanctification in Christ blood²⁹; but as the same prophet foretold this had been prophetically linked with the restoration and liberation of their nation and holy city through the direct intervention of a returning Messiah, who as well as residing with his people would act as judge and arbitrator with opposing nations³⁰. As a result of their rejection, the universal enlightenment would go ahead without them by means of a newly formed universal assembly founded by their Messiah and His apostles, none of whom would be drawn from

²⁴ Acts2:23; Is53:5

²⁵ Paul's references to "God" always refer to the Father. The economy of the Godhead is a mystery but the Father's monarchical status is a biblical reality that needs to be recognized in order to understand aspects of what is being presented in this document, in particular the fact that the *timing* of events is under the Father's authority (Mk13:32; Acts1:7; Eph3:9; Rev1:1)

²⁶ Acts13:46,47

²⁷ Jer2:3 cf. Jam1:18

²⁸ Rom4:13

²⁹ Zech13:1

³⁰ Is2:4; Mic4:3

the ranks of the Jewish sacral hierarchy. Although it is only briefly alluded to in Scripture, the longed-for national liberation and the re-instatement of Israel to “the Kingdom” would now have to wait³¹. Shortly afterwards at Corinth, preaching in the synagogue, more Jews turned against Paul and started to insult him. Paul took his cloak and shook it out in front of them, saying:

“Your blood be on your own heads; I am clean; from now on I will go to the Gentiles”³².

But why should Paul *not* be clean (or innocent) if he brought such a message of salvation to the Gentiles and the Jews had not rejected it? Was not such salvation envisaged for all? Clearly not: *“For as a result of the Jews’ rejection, salvation has come to the Gentiles to provoke them to jealousy”³³*. It was not a matter of protocol or order it was a transfer of privilege. This will make more sense once it is has been demonstrated that there is salvation and there is SALVATION. The latter was earmarked for the Jews alone in Old Testament prophecy but was to be made available to the nations through Paul’s revelation concerning the Gentile inheritance. “Salvation” as foretold for the Gentile nations meant one would be enlightened, pardoned in the name of Jesus if one acknowledged Him as Lord, leading to acceptance as a subject in God’s Kingdom, for all who call on the name of the Lord would be spared from perdition. SALVATION on the other hand was to be born again by water and Spirit, delivered from corruption by means of sanctification in the blood of sprinkling³⁴ resulting in eternal life, being an interior communion with Christ and the Spirit, participation in God’s royal priesthood and a joint inheritance with the Lord of Glory.

In the early chapters of Acts, everything appeared to be following prophetic expectations: Messiah had come, been rejected, executed, raised and ascended. The Spirit had been poured out upon Jews and proselytes on Pentecost, the dead were being raised; demons expelled, numerous miracles being performed, not just by apostles but deacons as well³⁵. Even items of the apostles’ clothing or handkerchiefs were taken to people and they were healed. Multitudes came to the apostles for healing, and again, all were healed. The Good News about Jesus was being preached as a result of which Jews, Samaritans and proselytes were receiving the gift of the Spirit, such that at that point Peter could say:

All the prophets that have ever spoken from Samuel onwards have predicted these days³⁶

³¹ Acts1:6

³² Acts18:6

³³ Rom11:11

³⁴ Heb12:24 cf. Heb10:29

³⁵ Acts6:8

³⁶ Acts3:24

But they had not predicted what was about to follow: Gentiles were to be granted “eternal life” and have equal status with elect Jews as joint heirs with Christ in His Kingdom.

The change of plan

There are plenty of examples in the Bible of God appearing to change His mind or plan in response to events or regretting decisions He had made. At least, that is the way it is presented in Scripture³⁷ even if from the theological standpoint God foreknew everything in detail. But since He never goes back on His unconditional promises of blessing, His assurances regarding places and people, even if re-ordered will be fulfilled. What for practical purposes might be referred to as Plan A (i.e. what the prophets foretold in the Old Testament) regarding the restoration of the world based on the Jews inheriting the Kingdom is set out most clearly in Isaiah:

*It will happen in the final days that the mountain of JHWE’s house will rise higher than the mountains and tower above the heights. Then all the nations will stream to it, many peoples will come to it and say, “Come let us go up to the mountain of JHWE, to the house of the God of Jacob that He may teach us his ways so that we might walk in his paths”. **For the Law will issue from Zion and the word of JHWE from Jerusalem. THEN He will judge between the nations and arbitrate between many peoples. They will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift sword against nation, **no longer will they learn how to make war.*****³⁸

God’s Plan according to the Old Testament was to establish a holy nation of kings and priests amongst whom He would personally reside, initially through His spiritual presence in the Ark, later through the physical presence of His Son Emmanuel (God with us). The nations who had oppressed His people were to be judged, but as outlined in Joel, the Spirit would be poured out and the Good News of the Kingdom proclaimed as a witness to all nations before the final judgement came. Many Gentiles *would come to Israel’s light and their kings to the brightness of her rising*³⁹. At such a time *“ten men from different nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’”*⁴⁰ In God’s plan as revealed in the Old Testament, the Jews were to be the world’s enlighteners whilst the holistic package we know of as gospel salvation was not intended for Gentile nations at all in the current age. As confirmed in the eleventh chapter of Paul’s letter

³⁷ E.g. Gen6:7; Gen18:21,26; Ex32:14; 1Sam15:11,35; Mt2:19-22

³⁸ Is2:1-4

³⁹ Is60:3

⁴⁰ Zech8:23

to the Roman Church it is only through the disobedience of the Jews that Gentiles have any immediate part in it⁴¹.

This is not so extraordinary as it may appear for internal sanctifying communion with Christ was not possible even to God's chosen people before the Saviour was incarnated, shed His blood, was resurrected and made way for the Holy Spirit. Whilst sin could be forgiven it could not yet be taken away⁴² for a fountain had yet to be opened for sin and uncleanness⁴³. Salvation in the gospel sense is healing of the soul⁴⁴ resulting in life of an eternal quality⁴⁵ even whilst the soul still resides within the "body of this death"⁴⁶ as the apostle aptly describes the earthen vessel inherited from our father's loins corrupted through "original sin". The purpose of this salvation is for a people to become "*holiness to the Lord and the first fruits of His increase*"⁴⁷: the people the Jewish nation were prophesied to become for the enlightenment and healing of the world. Then, in the age to come, having shared in His suffering, such would share in His glory⁴⁸, having been conformed to His image and likeness through spiritual gifts, cruciform service and personal discipleship.

The Jew's intended role as God's original choice to establish His Kingdom on earth should be equally clear concerning how Jesus regarded His own ministry:

And suddenly out came a Canaanite woman from the district and started shouting, "Lord, Son of David take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil". But He said not a word in answer to her. And His disciples went and pleaded with Him, saying "Give her what she wants, because she keeps shouting after us. He said in reply. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." But the woman had come up and was bowing low before Him. "Lord", she said, "Help me." He replied, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs"⁴⁹.

Jesus makes it clear that He had been sent to the Jews (the lost sheep of Israel) so that they might be fitted for the Kingdom role promised for them in Scripture; that is why He initially refused to heal this Gentile woman's daughter. What He had spoken He had spoken and confirmed it with His disciples: "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel*". Because of His great compassion He was prepared to help such Gentile folk who came to Him. But it is

⁴¹ Rom11:11-13,30

⁴² Heb10:4 Greek "*aphairein*"

⁴³ Zech13:1

⁴⁴ cf. 1Pet1:9

⁴⁵ Jn17:3

⁴⁶ Rom7:24

⁴⁷ Jer2:3

⁴⁸ Rom8:17 (cf. Greek); 1Pet5:10; 2Thes2:14

⁴⁹ Mt15:22-26

obvious if one reads carefully through the gospel narratives that John the Baptist, Jesus and initially His disciples ministered and preached almost exclusively to the Jews⁵⁰. Through their avoidable failure, the privileges they were to inherit are to be shared with elect individuals drawn from every nation through elective grace.

The Jewish religious elite had expected to be leading the work of God's coming Kingdom under their Messiah, but the Kingdom role was *taken from* them and given to a people "*who would produce its fruit*"⁵¹. The leadership would be handed over to His personally trained squad of twelve intimate followers. But these were still exclusively Jewish; it was the Jews who were the natural branches whereas elect Gentiles were later grafted in against nature⁵². Jesus had come "*as a minister of the circumcision for the truth to confirm the promises of the fathers and also that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy*"⁵³ The Gentiles being the "*and-also's*" were to be shown mercy under Christ's rule with His people and glorify God for it, but now they could be the equals with that same people and share the inheritance reserved for those who *were to be sanctified*⁵⁴. Once one grasps (i.e. takes literally) what Paul was saying in the eleventh chapter of Romans, particularly vv11, 15 and 30, it explains the opaque nature of our Lord's eschatological narrative (especially the Olivet discourse) in which He appeared to link the destruction of the temple within a generation to His second coming. For the expectation had been that having carried out retribution to Israel's enemies and destroyed the wicked, the Good News of Jesus Christ's kingship referred to as "this gospel of the Kingdom"⁵⁵ would be announced as a witness to the Gentile nations so that if they acknowledged Him, at His coming they could be shown mercy through His name and become citizens in His Kingdom. But that is not what we have come to understand as "gospel salvation". It is not a restoration of the soul for immediate intimate divine communion⁵⁶. It is not the *same gift* of eternal life⁵⁷. Although absent from Old Testament Scripture, such fulness of salvation *had* been anticipated for the Gentile nations in the parables of Jesus – God's vineyard taken from the Jews and given to another "nation"⁵⁸ and the wedding feast to which the intended guests failed to turn up⁵⁹. So whilst the Gentile nations' Kingdom inheritance had been foreordained by God before the

⁵⁰ cf. Mt10:5-6

⁵¹ Mt21:43

⁵² Rom11:24

⁵³ Rom15:8-9

⁵⁴ Acts26:18

⁵⁵ Mt24:14

⁵⁶ Col1:27

⁵⁷ Acts11:17-18

⁵⁸ Mt21:43

⁵⁹ Mt22:1-10

foundation of the world⁶⁰, both Jesus and Paul inferred that the only *historical* reason the Gentiles were to be offered eternal life and a role as priests and kings in God's Kingdom was because of the intended nation's unworthiness and unbelief. Such was God's secret plan, the profound *providential* implications of which may be beginning to filter into the reader's mind, in which case congratulations are in order for it had eluded the most influential formulator of Western biblical theology.

The Mystery of Augustine

For much of the Church's history the understanding has been that God's *benign* providence is restricted to faithful Jews and those subsequently elected to Christian salvation; the prospects for the rest of humanity being worse than oblivion. That is in stark contrast to what is being presented here, namely that God's elect people are, under Christ, the *agents* of restoring and reconciling the world back to God, not the sole beneficiaries. Humanly speaking it was the Roman African Aurelius Augustinus (AD354-430) and his especially forthright and uncompromising manner in defending the catholic faith against potential heresies together with the extraordinary regard with which he has been held in the Western Church that has resulted in doctrinal errors being incorporated in their understanding of God's intentions for wider creation and the nature of the human condition. Pelagius, a contemporary of Augustine, was understood to have taught⁶¹ that human nature had not been profoundly wounded by Adam's sin, so humans were able to fulfil the law without divine aid. Augustine, still more perversely came to affirm that fallen man could not so much as do, think or desire any good at all apart from the grace of the gospel. The heretic Manes had propounded a dualistic view of the cosmos impacting upon human anthropology, leading Augustine to insist that Paul could not possibly have been saying that human nature comprised opposing moral influences from flesh and spirit. The millenarians (chiliasts) of his day were carnally minded so the whole system should be repudiated and man's future destiny be understood as fulfilled within the spiritual sphere. Though sainted by the Roman Church, Augustine's insistence that God intended to damn the bulk of humanity was undermined fifty years ago by the Vatican Council's pronouncements on God's broader providence regarding His dealings with those outside the Church. Yet the foundational biblical theology underpinning the earlier narrower conceptions has largely remained intact. One has only to contrast Augustine's grim eschatological montage as depicted in his "City of God" with the relative inclusivity of Vatican II's "*Lumen Gentium*" to see how the Spirit has

⁶⁰ Eph1:4-5

⁶¹ Because Pelagius came to be denounced as a heretic little of his work remains. We are largely reliant on Augustine's account of his teaching and manner of life, the latter of which even Augustine acknowledged to be saintly. As Wikipedia affirms (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelagius>), more scholars are coming to the view that this British theologian had been more faithful to the teaching of the earliest fathers than had previously been asserted.

enlightened the Catholic Church through the centuries. But to attain coherence one cannot avoid revisiting many of the theological assumptions that led to Augustine's treatise, culminating as it does in a cosmic horror story of breath-taking proportions⁶², albeit one which many Evangelical Christians have come to take for granted.

Augustine placed fidelity to Scripture as he interpreted it above regard for the more philanthropic and open-minded reflections of earlier Fathers who had perceived more than a vestige of God's image being retained in fallen man's nature and perceived a role for natural law within a multifaceted economy of grace. "*Let us reflect how free from wrath God is toward all His creation... He **does good to all** but most abundantly to us who have fled for refuge to His compassions through Jesus Christ*". So wrote Clement⁶³, fellow worker with Paul; whilst his namesake Clement of Alexandria (2nd century) enquired "*What is loveable that is not loved by God; and man has been proved to be loveable, consequently man is loved by God*"⁶⁴. Justin Martyr (2nd century) spoke of God's benevolence towards those who walk uprightly and in accordance with right reason⁶⁵; a God who accepts those who imitate His own qualities of temperance, fairness and philanthropy and who exercise their free will in choosing what is pleasing to Him⁶⁶. Irenaeus, also 2nd century, recognized that God in His providence is present with all "who attend to moral discipline"⁶⁷ paying heed to the *natural precepts of the law* by which man can be justified⁶⁸. These sentiments might be expressed in more biblically recognizable terms as responding positively to the light of Christ in the conscience so as to be justified by faith through the merits of Christ's faithfulness⁶⁹, for such is the esoteric undercurrent to the teaching of Paul as will shortly be demonstrated.

Apart from being supported by the testimony of those who had been trained by the apostles or their immediate successors, such a benign outworking of divine providence is in accordance with God's Scripture-defined nature and intentions "*I act with faithful love, justice and uprightness on the earth, and **these (qualities) are the things that please Me***"⁷⁰. It affirms JHWE to be wonderfully kind; He is a philanthropist⁷¹ who loves fellow philanthropists as Justin Martyr observed. He delights in those who strive to lead a good life utilizing the light of Christ provided to everyman, especially through the faculty of conscience. The Bishop of Hippo on the other hand vehemently ruled out such a benevolent

⁶² *De Civitate Dei* (The City of God) Book XXI <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120121.htm>

⁶³ [Letter to Corinthians of Clement \(c. AD30-AD100\) chaps. 19 & 20](#)

⁶⁴ "[The Instructor](#)" Book 1 chap. 3

⁶⁵ [The first apology of Justin chaps. 43 & 46](#)

⁶⁶ [ibid. chap. 10](#)

⁶⁷ [Irenaeus against heresies Book III chap. 25 \(para 1\)](#)

⁶⁸ [Ibid. Book IV chap. 13 para 1](#)

⁶⁹ Greek: *ek pisteos christou*

⁷⁰ Jer9:24

⁷¹ Titus3:4 Greek "*philanthropia*"

view of the Creator or the idea that He had any positive regard for human integrity, perceiving all humanity to be a *"massa damnata"* (condemned crowd). Man, in his natural state, he believed, was instinctively opposed to what is good and never disposed to do what he knew to be right except for selfish reasons. By implication, man was neither capable of genuine compassionate love toward his fellow man⁷² nor was he in possession of any good unless he had or would be saved by "apprehending the grace of Christ". He understood that God's love (*agape*) in contrast to love as it is defined in Scripture⁷³ would not extend to making allowance for ignorance or human weakness and by implication that such intolerance would be reflected in the Son of Man's final judgements. He asserted that God's vengeance and hatred for Adam's offspring was such that He held each child personally accountable at birth for the disobedience of their first parents such that infants dying without baptism must endure an eternity of mild sensual pain⁷⁴ to pay for Adam's sin and their own innate depravity. Given humanity's utter dependency on celestial grace, God's reconciling purposes were confined to those destined to be saved through the sacraments of the Catholic Church. Yet such fortunate, undeserving folk would very much be in the minority: *"Many more are left under punishment than are delivered from it, in order that it may thus be shown what was due to all"*⁷⁵.

This was neither the Ancient Church's understanding nor that of his Church today:

"Divine providence (shall not) deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who without any fault of theirs have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life" (Vatican II – *Lumen Gentium* 16)

Augustine undoubtedly articulated plenty that was thoroughly orthodox and seemingly supremely spiritual, especially regarding the Christian's inner life of devotion to God and the sanctity of the Eucharist. He had also tirelessly defended the Catholic Church from fatal heresy. Yet he concluded from his interpretation of Scripture that Satan's Eden offensive had been such a triumph as to result in God punishing the beings He had wished to unite to Himself by leaving them devoid of any effectual faculties to know Him, seek Him or please Him. Likewise, the eschatology that resulted from it was the antithesis of *"euaggelion"* (Good News) apart from for the proportionately few favoured souls who were to be shown undeserved mercy and spared eternal misery. Ascribing such incomprehensible barbarity

⁷² Augustine interpreted 1Jn4:7 to mean that only a baptized Christian has the capacity to love since love is from God and no one outside the Catholic Church could be "born of God". Augustine's teaching that man is innately incapable of love also affirmed in Anti-Pelagian writings; ["On grace and free will" chap.37](#)

⁷³ 1Cor13:5

⁷⁴ Latin: *paena sensus* . (cf. New Advent: Catholic Encyclopaedia under headings "Unbaptised infants", "Limbo" and the "Teaching of St Augustine").

⁷⁵ [\(De Civitates Dei XXI chap. 12\)](#)

and unintelligible justice to the One whose kindness, philanthropy and compassionate nature Christian people are called to imitate⁷⁶ is a travesty, especially in light of what had been previously understood⁷⁷ and is being presented here. A diabolical origin for such teaching is suggested by the pleasure and satisfaction the prince of that realm is bound to draw from it, in particular the draconian way the Creator is portrayed with respect to His human creation, only a small proportion of whom are deemed to benefit from His Son's saving work - a package then presented to the world as "The Good News of God" and subsequently promoted by its most faithful adherents⁷⁸ as "biblical theology". This has further exacerbated divisions within the Church as many Christians come instinctively to reject such derisory depictions of God's providential care for humanity, trusting instead in their own or their particular tradition's sense of God's goodness and intelligible justice. What is invariably lacking on the part of more liberal Christians is a substantive delineation of their convictions *from Scripture*. Such is surely needed to provide at the personal level the peace and assurance that comes from a hope that is solidly grounded, and corporately the ability to present a clear and coherent Good News message to the world.

The problem has been that the black and white, binary theological system that Augustine constructed from his understanding of Scripture and his rejection of any positive role for natural law does not lend itself to tempering; it must either be taken as read or busted wide open. It shall be the latter, for it is flawed at its theological and anthropological foundation (next chapter). Nor can that Father's assertions concerning humanity's hatefulness and God's harshness towards the creatures created in His image be dismissed as the rhetoric of an earlier age, for as already indicated Augustine's predecessors did not speak in such a way. They had by no means affirmed that man by nature could do "*absolutely no good thing, whether in thought or will, affection or in action*"⁷⁹ except they "*had fled to the grace of Christ*". Likewise in his treatise "On Grace and Free Will" his opening phrase provides a false hope of orthodoxy which is soon dashed: "*We have now proved by our former testimonies from Holy Scripture that there is in man a **free determination of will** for living rightly and acting rightly; so now, let us see what are the divine testimonies concerning the grace of God **without which we are not able to do any good thing.***"⁸⁰ In other words he affirms as he always does that innately man has no *effectual* free will whatsoever, merely

⁷⁶ Eph5:1

⁷⁷ Writings of the 2nd and 3rd century Church Fathers alongside that of 4th/5th century Augustine's can be examined at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>.

⁷⁸ More especially Evangelical Calvinists. Today, watered down (moderated Calvinist and Arminian) versions of the "Good News" are more often presented, the problem being they move still further away from the biblical realities of predestination and the exclusive, privileged nature of those who shall become the corporate Bride of Christ.

⁷⁹ "[On Rebuke and Grace](#)" – chap. 3

⁸⁰ "[On Grace and Free Will](#)" Chap. 7

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