

John Calvin

The Bondage and Liberation of the Will

A Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine
of Human Choice against Pighius

Edited by A. N. S. Lane
Translated by G. I. Davies

Texts & Studies



*in Reformation
& Post-Reformation
Thought*

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**The Bondage
and Liberation
of the Will**

Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought

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**To
Maggie
and Nicola**

Series Preface

The heritage of the Reformation is of profound importance to the church in the present day. Yet there remain many significant gaps in our knowledge of the intellectual development of Protestantism in the sixteenth century, and there are not a few myths about the theology of the Protestant orthodox writers of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These gaps and myths, frequently caused by ignorance of the scope of a particular thinker's work, by negative theological judgments passed on the theology of the Reformers or their successors by later generations, or by an intellectual imperialism of the present that singles out some thinkers and ignores others regardless of their relative significance to their own times, stand in the way of a substantive encounter with this important period in our history. Understanding and appropriation of that heritage can occur only through the publication of significant works—monographs and sound, scholarly translations—that present the breadth and detail of the thought of the Reformers and their successors.

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Richard A. Muller

Preface

As regards the division of labour, the translation is the work of G. I. Davies, with some input from A. N. S. Lane, especially regarding theological terminology and the correlation with the French translation and the text of Augustine. The editing of the Latin text, the introduction, and the notes are the work of Lane, with some input from Davies, especially regarding the editing of the Latin text.

Two other people deserve especial mention. David Wright has been unstinting both in offering advice and in pursuing enquiries. The tying up of many of the loose ends, especially in the notes, is due to his generous assistance. Those familiar with the magisterial work of Luchsius Smits on Calvin's Augustine citations will be aware of the extent to which he has broken the ground. His work has immeasurably eased the task of tracing Calvin's citations and lightened the load of the editor. His work has, however, been treated only as a starting point. The conclusions reached in the notes vary from his in a number of minor points and in a smaller number of major points. The editor has, of course, had the luxury of confining his attention to only one of Calvin's works, where Smits sought to cover them all.

In addition, others have helped with individual points. Allan Fitzgerald of Villanova University kindly provided from his Augustine Index the material consulted for book 6, note 9. Christoph Burger of the Free University of Amsterdam located a quotation from Luther. Irena Backus and Peter Fraenkel of Geneva offered helpful assistance. Douglas de Lacey enquired on the Internet about an elusive quotation, and G. W. Pigman III provided the source. The editor's colleagues Peter Hicks, Ian Macnair, David Payne, and especially Steve Motyer have offered valuable assistance in classical matters, as has Jean-Marc Heimerdinger with some obscurer points of sixteenth-century French.



Introduction

John Calvin's *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* is undoubtedly the most significant of his works hitherto not translated into English. This is in striking contrast with Martin Luther's study on the same topic, his *Bondage of the Will*, which is one of his best-known publications. While Calvin's work may not be of such crucial significance as Luther's, it is still his fullest treatment of the relation between grace and free will, and contains important material which is not found elsewhere in his writings. It also contains far more discussion of the early church fathers than does any other of Calvin's works, apart from the *Institutes*, and is important for appreciating his use of the Fathers. It is high time that this major work be made available to those whose knowledge of Calvin is confined to English translations.

1. The Debate with Pighius

The first edition of Calvin's *Institutes* was published in 1536.¹ Four of its six chapters covered the same material as did traditional catechisms: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper). The other two chapters discuss the five remaining Roman Catholic sacraments and the issues of Christian freedom, ecclesiastical power, and political administration.

The second edition of the *Institutes*, which appeared in 1539, was nearly three times as long, the six chapters having become seventeen.² Two of these concern us here: chapter 2 on "The Knowledge of Hu-

1. F. L. Battles has produced an English translation of the 1536 edition, entitled *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536 Edition*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Meeter Center/Eerdmans, 1986).

2. The text (with concordance) of this edition has been edited by R. F. Wevers (Grand Rapids: Meeter Center, 1988). Considerable use has been made of both text and concordance in the preparation of this volume. There is no English translation of the 1539 edition, but almost all of the text survives in the 1559 edition. The English translation by F. L. Battles & J. T. McNeill (LCC 20–21) indicates the edition (1539, 1559, etc.) in which each portion of text first appeared.

the printer by the time Calvin was replying to Pighius,¹² so any influence on that edition is unlikely. The 1550 revision was minor, and the new material did not deal with the present topic. It is in the definitive 1559 edition that any influence of the debate with Pighius is to be sought.¹³

2. Albert Pighius

Albert Pighius was born at Kampen, in Holland, around 1490.¹⁴ In 1507 he went to study philosophy and theology at Louvain, where he remained until 1517, after which he spent some time in Paris. At this stage he was very much an Erasmian humanist, and his early writings were all in the area of astronomy. But the direction of Pighius's life changed in 1522 when one of his teachers at Louvain, Adrian Florents of Utrecht, became Pope Adrian VI. He called Pighius to join him at Rome, where he turned his attention from science to theology. There he stayed after his master's early death, and continued to serve the following two popes.

At some stage in the early 1530s Pighius returned to the Netherlands, and in 1535 he became provost and archdeacon of St. John's Church at Utrecht, a post he continued to hold until his death at the end of 1542. During these years he rose to prominence as one of the most influential Roman Catholic polemicists against Protestantism. In 1540 and 1541 he was appointed to the Roman Catholic delegations to the interconfessional colloquies at Worms and Regensburg. But his unremittently hostile attitude towards Protestantism did not fit him well for such a role, and his Catholic colleagues took care to marginalise him. Indeed it has been suggested that Pighius was appointed in order to act as a dampener upon the proceedings. Calvin was also at Worms and Regensburg, where he presumably met Pighius.

Pighius was the author of a number of works, both scientific and theological.¹⁵ Perhaps the best known is his *Defence of the Ecclesiasti-*

12. OS 3:xix–xx.

13. See LCC 20:302 n. 23 & 21:926 n. 15, both with reference to 1559 material. For Pighius's influence upon the 1559 edition see A. N. S. Lane, "Did Calvin Believe in Freewill?" *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1981): 81–83; idem, "The Influence upon Calvin of His Debate with Pighius," in *Auctoritas Patrum II: New Contributions on the Reception of the Church Fathers in the 15th and 16th Century*, ed. L. Grane, A. Schindler, and M. Wriedt (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, forthcoming).

14. Not much has been written in English on Pighius (whose name in the vernacular was Pigge). For two extremely succinct accounts of his life see H. de Vocht, *Litterae virorum eruditorum ad Franciscum Craneveldium 1522–1528* (Louvain: Librairie Universitaire, 1928), 256–60; idem, *History of the Foundation and Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense, 1517–1550*, vol. 4 (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1955), 197–200.

15. For a brief account of some of Pighius's works see Schulze, *Calvin's Reply to Pighius*, 14–18. For a full account see Jedin, *Studien*, 7–47.

cal Hierarchy,¹⁶ in which he argued vigorously for papal infallibility. He regarded the pronouncements of the apostolic see as the third principle of faith, alongside Scripture and tradition. In particular, he denied that a pope could become a heretic, despite the condemnation of Pope Honorius I at the Third Council of Constantinople. In the sixth book he anticipated the decisions of Vatican I by arguing for the primacy of the pope over general councils.

Pighius's magnum opus was to have been a three-volume work entitled *First Principles*, a response to the 1537 Danish Church Order drawn up with the help of the Lutheran Reformer Johannes Bugenhagen. The Lutheran Augsburg Confession was also singled out for attention. The first volume, *The Mystery of Our Salvation and Redemption*, was complete by March 1540 and survives in manuscript, but Pighius decided to revise it to include a response to Calvin's 1539 *Institutes*. It was then incorporated into Pighius's modestly entitled *Diligent and Lucid Exposition of the Controversies by Which the Faith and Religion of Christ Are Being Disturbed*,¹⁷ which also took up the issues debated at the Regensburg colloquy. The second volume of the *First Principles* was to have covered free choice, nature, grace, and sin, as well as divine foreknowledge and predestination. This saw the light as Pighius's *Free Choice*, to which Calvin responded.

Two doctrines found in the *Controversies* were especially controversial. In expounding the first controversy Pighius posited a novel theory of original sin according to which the only effects of the fall of Adam were the introduction of death and the imputation of the guilt of Adam's sin to all humanity. There was no talk of the corruption of human nature as a result of the fall. The lust that human beings experience derives from nature as created and was experienced by Adam before the fall. This issue resurfaces in the debate with Calvin over free choice, where Calvin points out that Pighius is heretical by the criteria of Roman Catholic orthodoxy. The same conclusion was reached by the delegates at the Council of Trent,¹⁸ and Pighius's material on the first controversy was placed on the Index of Prohibited Books (Lisbon, 1624).¹⁹

Pighius's doctrine of justification, expounded in the second controversy, likewise provoked criticism. He put forward a doctrine of "double justification" which was also discussed at Trent. In the last hundred

16. *Hierarchiae ecclesiasticae assertio* (Cologne: Melchior Novesianus, 1538).

17. *Controversiarum, quibus nunc exagitur Christi fides et religio[,] diligens et luculenta explicatio*, first published in 1541 in two parts and often reprinted with slightly different titles (hereafter referred to simply as the *Controversies*). Most of the earlier material was incorporated into the second controversy, which was on justification.

18. H. Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, vol. 2 (London: T. Nelson, 1961), 145, 153, 162.

19. See n. 9.

years or so there has been prolonged debate over the exact nature of Pighius's doctrine, which need not detain us here. Calvin complained that Pighius in his second controversy had plagiarised the *Institutes* to the extent of copying whole passages.²⁰ Already in 1565 a colleague of Pighius was complaining that in regard to the doctrine of justification Pighius had been bewitched by error and seduced by the reading of Calvin's *Institutes*.²¹

3. Synopsis of Contents

The structure of the first six books of Pighius's work can be seen from his own summary, which we reproduce here.²² (A summary of Calvin's argument can be found in the margins of the translation.)

Book 1: Pighius begins by showing that knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves are closely interrelated and interdependent. He then describes an opinion which completely contradicts the goodness of God. Some people, denying free human choice entirely, state that all things happen to us by an inevitable and absolute necessity arising from the will of God. Others concede something to human choice in matters which do not relate to salvation, but in matters which do they concede nothing to human choice but clearly consider it a slave.

Book 2: Pighius refutes these opinions about the inevitable necessity of those things which happen to us and about the bondage of human choice. He shows how much these views contradict the goodness of God and what monstrous blasphemies they imply. Then he clearly demonstrates that the faith, tradition, and definition of the Catholic church of Christ as well as the consensus of all the holy and orthodox fathers from the beginning affirm the freedom of human choice.

Book 3: Augustine in places appears even to the most orthodox to be hostile to the idea of freedom of choice. Indeed, those who see the will as being in bondage cite him as the one ancient father who makes definite assertions on the dispute and agrees with their opinion. But Pighius demonstrates copiously that all the works of Augustine have a certain and clear opinion on this matter, and that throughout he is consistent both with himself and with all the other fathers.

Book 4: Pighius lucidly demonstrates how miserably those who deny freedom of choice and assert the bondage of the will labour to distort those Scriptures which are manifestly opposed to their opinion.

Book 5: Pighius demonstrates the orthodox and catholic truth which walks the regal middle path between the irreverence of the her-

20. BLW 1.246 (at n. 58).

21. Jedin, *Studien*, 115–17.

22. *Free Choice* * * 1a–b. The value judgments expressed are, of course, all Pighius's.

etics who, on the one side, deny freedom of choice and, on the other side, deny the need for divine grace. This truth affirms the need to combine grace and free choice.

Book 6: Pighius examines very accurately the opinion of the self-designated “evangelical” sect concerning divine grace and the way in which it works in us. He manifestly exposes the falsity of the sect’s reasons and arguments.

4. The Theological Issues

The structure of Calvin’s *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* is not primarily related to the theological issues. Calvin mainly follows Pighius’s order,²³ which was itself related to the structure of Calvin’s 1539 *Institutes*. Also, wherever the text spends considerable time debating the views of the Fathers, it often moves from author to author, and from book to book, with the theological issues emerging wherever they happen to be discussed. It might help, therefore, to have an overview of the issues which arise and an indication of at least the major places where they are discussed.

The central issue is, of course, the freedom/bondage of the human will and human choice.²⁴ Almost all of the other topics are introduced as they bear on this issue. Considerable space is devoted to discussing the views of the early fathers in general²⁵ and of Augustine in particular.²⁶ Unfortunately, the issue was obscured by the fact that Calvin, unlike Augustine, chose to reject the term “free choice.” Pighius seizes on this, assuming that because Augustine and the Fathers affirmed free choice while Calvin rejects it, Calvin is opposed to the Fathers. Calvin responds by saying that while he accepts free choice as Augustine defined it, he thinks that the term is best dropped because of possible misunderstanding. But he is willing to affirm that the will is free in the sense that we have wills which are not coerced but self-determined, choosing voluntarily, of their own accord.²⁷

In an important passage²⁸ Calvin clearly defines his terms. The will is not free in the sense that Pighius understands it to be free, namely having the power to choose good or evil. Neither is it coerced in the sense of being forcibly driven by an external impulse. Instead it is self-

23. See *BLW* 1.237.

24. In this section, the word “will” is used more often than “choice” (see §10 on these two words). This is primarily for stylistic reasons, that is, to avoid repeated references to “the choice and the will.” In most instances the word “choice” can be substituted.

25. *BLW* 2.278–92.

26. *BLW* 3.

27. *BLW* 2.279–80; 3.293–94, 302–3, 310–13, 315–19; 4.329, 340; 5.357–58.

28. *BLW* 2.279–80.

determined in that we will voluntarily, of our own accord. Yet because of the corruption of the will it is in bondage and subject to a necessity of sinning. Much of Calvin's work is devoted to explaining and defending these statements.

Underlying the bondage of the will is the doctrine of original sin, which surfaces a number of times in the debate. Calvin repeatedly criticises Pighius's understanding of the effects of Adam's fall, accusing him of Pelagianism.²⁹ Roman Catholics also had reservations about Pighius on this point.³⁰ Calvin, by contrast, held that the fall affected every aspect of human nature.³¹ Fallen human beings are in bondage to sin. Before the operation of God's grace there is no good at all in the human will.³²

Because of this view Calvin was accused of Manichaeism, of teaching that God's original creation was evil. He responded with one of the most important distinctions of the whole work, that between human nature as created and as fallen.³³ Human nature was good as originally created, but has become corrupted as a result of Adam's fall. This distinction Calvin also uses as a tool to interpret the Fathers³⁴ and the early writings of Augustine.³⁵ He develops it in detail, distinguishing between natural human feelings as given by God's original creation and the way in which sin has turned these feelings into lusts.³⁶

Because of the bondage of the will, there is no way in which people can prepare themselves to receive God's grace. This point surfaces repeatedly in the debate.³⁷ The corollary is that grace is prevenient—that God's grace precedes any human good will.³⁸ But Calvin wishes to say more than this. Prevenient grace does not simply make it possible for people to respond. Grace is efficacious and effects conversion.³⁹ This is true not just of the beginning of the Christian life. Grace is needed at every stage and, in particular, for final perseverance. This is a gift of God, not something that is merited by previous obedience.⁴⁰

Other doctrines enter the debate as they relate to free choice and grace. A recurring issue is whether it is possible to obey the law. Calvin

29. *BLW* 3.303–5, 310; 4.332; 5.359–61.

30. See §2, esp. the text at nn. 18–19.

31. *BLW* 3.306; 5.350–54; 6.381.

32. *BLW* 3.304, 311, 313, 320–21, 322, 325.

33. *BLW* 2.259, 262–64; 3.308–9; 4.334; 5.350–51; 6.378–79, 381.

34. *BLW* 2.281–86, 290–91; 4.339.

35. *BLW* 3.294–301.

36. *BLW* 5.361–62.

37. *BLW* 1.248; 3.308, 312, 316, 325; 4.329; 5.352, 354, 362–67, 370; 6.383, 387–90, 393–94.

38. *BLW* 2.288–89; 3.304–11, 314, 316, 319, 321; 5.366; 6.382–91.

39. *BLW* 3.310–11, 313–17, 321–26; 5.352–55, 368–69; 6.374–75, 379–80.

40. *BLW* 3.311, 322–25; 5.353, 355–56; 6.397, 400–401.