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Peter Martyr Vermigli on Grace and Free Choice: Thomist and Augustinian Perspectives

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Abstract

Within contemporary scholarship there has been considerable debate over the character and scope of Peter Martyr Vermigli's scholasticism, which has sought to locate his thought between the two poles of the 'via Thomae' and the 'via Gregorii'. This paper traces the Augustinian-Thomist polarity throughout Vermigli's doctrine of grace and free choice. In particular it seeks to discover Gregorian distinctives in his thought – in this case doctrinal points shared by Vermigli and Rimini, representing a development of Augustine and a departure from Aquinas. Without denying the important Thomist and Aristotelian elements of his thought this paper concludes that renewed attention now needs to be paid to his profound debt to Augustinian scholasticism and its global impact on his theology.

Keywords: Peter Martyr Vermigli, Thomas Aquinas, Gregory of Rimini, grace, free choice, *auxilium speciale Dei*

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Introduction

Within contemporary scholarship there has been much debate, reflecting wider tendencies in the field, over the character and scope of Peter Martyr Vermigli's (1499-1562) scholasticism. From Philip McNair's painstaking work of reconstruction we have a clear understanding of the formative scholastic training that Vermigli received at Padua in the 'via antiqua' and predominantly in the Thomist school.² From a further biographical clue we know of his early enthusiasm for the Dominican Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and the Augustinian Eremite Gregory of Rimini (d. 1358).³ Following these leads, scholars have sought to locate Vermigli's thought between the two poles of the 'via Thomae' and the 'via Gregorii'. This has led both to a series of studies highlighting the importance of Aquinas and Rimini for our understanding of Vermigli and to an ongoing, somewhat intractable, dispute over their comparative influence.⁴ Luca Baschera has recently sought to resolve this by emphasising the eclectic nature of Vermigli's scholasticism. Yet while helpful as a general heuristic, this in itself provides little guidance in gauging either the detailed structure of his thought or the rationale underlying particular theological moves that he makes.⁵ For this reason, as Joseph McLelland has urged, there remains a pressing need to trace the Augustinian-Thomist 'polarity' throughout Vermigli's theology.⁶

This paper seeks to trace this polarity throughout Vermigli's developed account of grace and free choice. Previous studies have tended to emphasise the Thomist and Aristotelian character of Vermigli's account of free choice.⁷ Moreover, while acknowledging the general Augustinian provenance of his doctrine of grace, they have not sought to evaluate the possibility of any connection with Gregory of Rimini—despite John Donnelly's tantalising suggestion that Rimini represents the most likely source for Vermigli's theory of freedom.⁸ By contrast I will suggest that while Aquinas remains important for Vermigli's exposition of this locus, he is ultimately much more indebted to the Augustinian scholasticism of Gregory of Rimini. Through a detailed reading of Vermigli's principal discussions of free choice—contained especially in his posthumous *Loci Communes* and his

² Philip McNair, *Peter Martyr in Italy: An Anatomy of Apostasy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 86-116.

³ Josias Simler, *Oratio de Vita et Obitu Viri Optimi Praestantissimi Theologi D. Petri Martyris Vermiglii* (Zürich: C. Froschauer, 1563), 4.

⁴ For the principal discussion of Vermigli's relation to Aquinas see John Patrick Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's Doctrine of Man and Grace*, *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1976); 'Calvinist Thomism', *Viator* 7 (1976): 441-55, and 'Italian Influences on the Development of Calvinist Scholasticism', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 7 (1976): 81-101. For Vermigli's relation to late medieval Augustinianism see Frank James III, *Peter Martyr Vermigli and Predestination: The Augustinian Heritage of an Italian Reformer*, *Oxford Theological Monographs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 106-50.

⁵ Luca Baschera, 'Aristotle and Scholasticism', in *A Companion to Peter Martyr Vermigli*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, 16, ed. Torrance Kirby, Emidio Campi and Frank James III (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 153, 159.

⁶ Joseph McLelland, 'Italy: Religious and Intellectual Ferment', in *A Companion to Peter Martyr Vermigli*, 26-7.

⁷ Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism*, 85-90, 140-5; Luca Baschera, 'Peter Martyr Vermigli on Free Will: The Aristotelian Heritage of Reformed Theology', *Calvin Theological Journal* 42 (2007): 325-40.

⁸ Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism*, 143, n. 45.

Commentary on 1 Corinthians—I will seek to isolate Gregorian distinctives in his thought.⁹ In doing so, I hope to separate out the influence of Rimini not only from the direct influence of Augustine of Hippo (354-430) himself, but from other medieval as well as Reformation sources. Where possible I will also try to indicate the ways in which Vermigli’s appropriation of Rimini impacted his reading of Augustine. Yet, as Emidio Campi has recently suggested, a proper evaluation of Vermigli’s Augustinianism—and hence of his relation to the late medieval Augustinian tradition—awaits a much larger study.¹⁰ Precisely the same may be said of a detailed comparison of the Augustinian and scholastic contours of Vermigli’s doctrine of grace with the doctrine of his fellow Protestant Reformers, which will remain largely outside the scope of this article.¹¹

The Aristotelian and Augustinian Framework of Free Choice

In his 1560 lecture on free choice Vermigli follows a venerable scholastic tradition, reaching back at least as far as the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (d. 1160), in distinguishing between a philosophical and theological definition of freedom.¹² Vermigli’s philosophical definition, echoing Lombard himself, recognises in free choice (*‘liberum arbitrium’*) a dynamic interaction of the faculties of intellect and will.¹³ As Baschera and Donnelly have cogently argued, he develops this philosophical understanding along both Aristotelian and Thomist lines. In these terms he understands the will as an intellectual appetite oriented towards the good and existing within a dynamically shifting framework of ends and means. While necessarily bound to will its ultimate end – happiness – its freedom resides in its choice of means and subordinate ends. This freedom is rooted in the intellect and characterised by spontaneity, such that a free act is understood as one that comes forth spontaneously from the agent’s own internal principles in the absence of external coercion.¹⁴

⁹ I shall not draw on the controverted texts in Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Loci Communes* (= *LC*) (London: T. Vautrollier, 1583), 989-95. For discussion of the issue surrounding these see Joseph McLelland, ‘About the Translations’, in Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Philosophical Works: On the Relation of Philosophy to Theology*, Peter Martyr Library, 4, ed. Joseph McLelland (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1996), 268-70.

¹⁰ Emidio Campi, ‘Vermigli, Peter Martyr’, in *Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed. Willemien Otten and Karla Pollmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2013). I am grateful to Professor Campi for advanced sight of this entry. Arnoud Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation: The Flexibility of Intellectual Authority in Europe, 1500-1620*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 110-11, suggests that Vermigli read Augustine through a Thomist and late medieval Augustinian grid.

¹¹ A good starting point would be a comparison of Vermigli’s account of free will with Martin Bucer’s earlier discussion in his 1536 *Commentary on Romans*. See *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics, 4, trans. and ed. David Wright (Appleford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 143-57. For in attempting to harmonize Thomist and Augustinian sources Vermigli shows a marked resemblance with Bucer, including a textual parallel between *Common Places*, 150-1 and Vermigli’s *In Selectissimam D. Pauli Priorem ad Corinthios* (Zürich: C. Froschauer, 1572), 29^r.

¹² See Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae* (Grottaferrata: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1981), 2 d. 24.3; 25.1; cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas*, ed. J. Patout Burns (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 11-12.

¹³ Lombard, *Sententiae*, 2 d. 25.1.

¹⁴ Peter Martyr Vermigli, *In Primum, Secundum et Tertium Libri Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum* (Zurich: C. Froschauer, 1563), 395-435; *Corinthios*, 27^v-28^r; *LC*, 971; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (= *STh*),

However, to characterize Vermigli's philosophical understanding of free choice only in Aristotelian terms is misleading. For this definition of the voluntary as internal, spontaneous, and unforced is by no means unique to Aristotle, but is also found prominently in Augustine.¹⁵ Moreover, while Baschera is right to argue that this Aristotelian conception of the voluntary was crucial to Vermigli's reconciliation of divine foreknowledge, predestination, and freedom, it is, notably, Augustine upon whom he primarily draws to demonstrate that an act of the will can be necessary and determined and yet remain free as moved spontaneously from its own internal principles.¹⁶

Moving from the philosophical domain to the theological it becomes apparent that we must further qualify Vermigli's debt to Aristotle. For while the philosophical (Aristotelian) understanding of freedom undoubtedly contained latent within it the seeds of its own theological transformation, by itself it was by no means unproblematic. In particular, as the Reformers recognized, there was a great danger of reading Aristotelian freedom from constraint as Pelagian freedom of autonomy.¹⁷ For this reason Vermigli was always very careful to enclose his dual Aristotelian-Augustinian notion of freedom as spontaneity within an overarching Augustinian framework—hence the importance to him of Lombard's alternative, theological, definition of freedom: 'free choice is a faculty of reason and will by which the good is chosen with God's grace assisting, or evil when his grace is absent'.¹⁸ For in this a metaphysical understanding is fused with a historical consciousness and drawn into the great Christian narrative of fall and recovery, thereby opening up human free will to the transcendent working of grace.

In these Augustinian terms true freedom, sometimes called the freedom of excellence, is freedom from sin. Other states of freedom, which include the possibility of sinning, must therefore be recognised as defective.¹⁹ Significantly, Vermigli follows Augustine in correlating freedom to salvation history, yielding three different basic states of freedom: to be able not to sin ('posse non peccare'), corresponding to the state of original nature and humanity as redeemed by grace; to be unable not to sin ('non posse non peccare'), corresponding to unredeemed humanity; and to be unable

1a 82-3; 1a2ae 13.1-3; 17.1 ad. 2. For further discussion see Baschera, 'Vermigli on Free Will', 325-40 and Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism*, 85-90, 140-5.

¹⁵ See, for example, Augustine, *De Epistola I Petri*, in *De Scriptura Sacra Speculum*, in Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (= *MPL*), 34.1031; *De Diversis Quaestionibus LXXXIII*, q. 8 (*MPL*, 40.13); *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 70 (*MPL*, 36.876). Vermigli, *LC*, 155-6, makes the Augustinian context of Vermigli's understanding of freedom and spontaneity entirely explicit.

¹⁶ Peter Martyr Vermigli, *In Epistolam S. Pauli ad Romanos Commentarii Doctissimi* (Basel: P. Perna, 1558), 439-40; cf. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 5.10 (*MPL*, 41.152-3).

¹⁷ See, for example, Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), 2.2.2-4; Martin Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, III, in *D. Martin Luther Werke* (= *WA*), 18.661-76.

¹⁸ Vermigli, *LC*, 971; cf. Lombard, *Sententiae*, 2 d. 24.3.

¹⁹ Peter Martyr Vermigli, *In Duos Libros Samuelis Prophetiae Commentarii Doctissimi* (Zurich: C. Froschauer, 1564), 284^r-284^v; *LC*, 989.

to sin ('non posse peccare') corresponding to God and the blessed in heaven.²⁰ Unlike Aquinas and Rimini, Vermigli does not offer much discussion of human free will as originally created or in heaven. We shall therefore follow him by keeping our discussion between the poles of sin and grace and within the bounds of this present life.

The Unregenerate Will – The Need for Grace

Vermigli's entire discussion of fallen human free choice is framed in the context of a twofold distinction between natural and supernatural objects of the will – that is, between those things subject to sense and reason and those which exceed our natural capacity and require a 'supernatural light'.²¹ Such a division was commonplace among the Protestant Reformers, used as a way of sharply distinguishing two different domains: one in which human will was considered to have limited but considerable freedom, and one in which it was held to be in bondage to sin.²² In Vermigli precisely the same broad division applies, yet when we turn to the details of his discussion it is striking how many affinities can be found between his mature Protestant thought and Augustinian scholasticism.

With regard to the natural objects of the will Vermigli is clear that without grace humans possess 'not a little freedom'. Nevertheless, he is also plain that such freedom is only partial. For passions and emotions can have such force as to interfere with reason and hinder free choice.²³ In this he makes a typically Aristotelian point;²⁴ elsewhere, however, he places reason's loss of control in a definite Augustinian and theological context. For he regards this rebellion of the senses against reason as symptomatic of concupiscence—the lust which blights even the higher powers of intellect and will.²⁵ Like Aquinas and Rimini, Vermigli viewed concupiscence as an essential aspect of original sin, characterising it as an inborn habit or disposition towards evil transmitted from parents to children.²⁶ Due to this inherited disruption of concupiscence he held that human freedom even in the natural sphere is affected. Indeed, this is what happens when the intellect is dragged away by the will, causing us daily to echo the famous sentiment of Medea: 'I see the better but I choose the worse'.²⁷

However, as serious a problem as concupiscence may be to human natural freedom it is as nothing to its catastrophic effect on supernatural freedom. In particular we may identify three interconnected negative consequences: 1) without grace humans are not able to fulfil the law; 2)

²⁰ Vermigli, *Samuelis*, 284^f; *LC*, 974. Vermigli derives these both from Bernard of Clairvaux, *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, III (*MPL* 182.1004-5) and from Augustine himself. They appear prominently in Lombard, *Sententiae*, 2 d. 25.6.

²¹ Vermigli, *LC*, 971.

²² See, for example, Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.13.

²³ Vermigli, *LC*, 972.

²⁴ See further Vermigli, *Ethicorum*, 417-26.

²⁵ Vermigli, *LC*, 126-7.

²⁶ Vermigli, *LC*, 128-31; cf. *STh*, 1a2ae 82.1, 3, 4 ad. 3 and Gregory of Rimini, *Lectura super Primum et Secundum Sententiarium*, ed. Damasus Trapp and Venicio Marcolino, 7 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 2 d. 30-3 q. 1 art. 2 (VI.183, 185). Vermigli seems closer to Rimini on the characterization of original sin but to Aquinas on the cause of its transmission.

²⁷ Vermigli, *Corinthios*, 29^f.

without grace humans are not able to perform any moral good or to avoid sin; and 3) without grace humans are not able to have any true virtues. Together these serve Vermigli to delineate fallen humanity's total incapacity for good and to highlight their desperate need for grace.

The heart of Vermigli's position is that without love, faith, and the aid of grace it is impossible for humans to refer all their actions to God and thus to do anything of moral value. In this sense the gulf between (fallen) reason and faith comes to be as much a moral as an epistemological divide. Pivotal for Vermigli is the question of whether humans are able to fulfil God's law by their natural powers alone, for if they cannot it follows that all their acts must be sinful. In his lecture on free choice he answers this question with a typical scholastic distinction. While fallen humanity can keep the law according to externals they are not able to do so with the 'good inward motives' that the law truly requires, chief among which being that 'we should love God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength'. This precept he regards as the 'soul and spirit of all the others, so that whoever would obey other commands must do so with all the heart, all the soul, and all the strength with which he follows God'. What this means, as he clarifies, is that without this wholehearted love of God humans cannot fulfil any precept of the law.²⁸ Like his fellow Protestants Vermigli held this to be totally beyond the unaided powers of fallen humanity.²⁹

Vermigli was also emphatic that without faith one cannot fulfil the law.³⁰ His argument was twofold. Firstly, without faith we cannot have proper knowledge either of what to do or especially of the end for the sake of which we ought to do it. Following Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14 he argues that the 'animal man'—the person who relies only on his natural reason and not on faith³¹—can understand nothing of the works which please God.³² Thus even where reason commends the same things as God commands in Scripture it does so for very different reasons. For the one who performs the right act from natural reason alone, puts his faith not in God but in his own abilities, and is motivated not by his love of God but by pride and self-love. Thus even when the faithful and unfaithful do exactly the same deed, the former is said to fulfil the law but the latter falls short and his actions are even considered damnable. Without faith it is therefore impossible to refer every action sincerely to God.³³ Secondly, Vermigli is clear that without faith there can be no love of God. For it is only when the truth about God is known and believed that the will can move towards him in love.³⁴ Faith and love are therefore inseparable, and following Augustine he argues that the law can only be fulfilled by faith working through love.³⁵

²⁸ Vermigli, *LC*, 265, 972-3.

²⁹ Vermigli, *LC*, 971-2; cf. Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism*, 114. Vermigli hints here that it was possible for humanity in a state of perfect nature.

³⁰ Vermigli, *LC*, 972; *Corinthios*, 28^r.

³¹ Vermigli, *Corinthios*, 26^v.

³² Vermigli, *Corinthios*, 28^r.

³³ Vermigli, *Ethicorum*, 9, 334.

³⁴ Vermigli, *LC*, 488-9.

³⁵ Vermigli, *Ethicorum*, 31-2.

Finally, Vermigli is also clear that humanity cannot fulfil the law without the grace of God. Of course the fact that he views faith and love as gifts of God already entails this, but, as we shall see, this claim has much deeper implications. In his lecture on free choice Vermigli contends with the recurring argument that God cannot command the impossible and that therefore those things which he commands in the law must be possible by our natural powers alone. Following Augustine his answer is that God indeed commands what is impossible for corrupt nature but not what is impossible for nature renewed by grace.³⁶ Echoing the famous sentiment of Augustine's *Confessions* 'give what you command and command what you will'—the line which apparently so infuriated Pelagius—Vermigli argues that the law is intended to drive us to our knees in prayer. For without prayer we cannot possibly attain the divine aid necessary to fulfil the law.³⁷ In particular, we cannot receive the necessary illumination of the intellect or reorientation of the will—the double remedy against concupiscence—to enable us to relate to God in faith and love and to refer all our actions to him as our end. The need for prayer is a constant undercurrent in Vermigli's theology of grace, and significantly he highlights it as one of Augustine's principal arguments against the Pelagians.³⁸

When applied to the entirety of the moral sphere Vermigli's biblically-rooted theology of prayer gives rise to an important radicalising of grace.³⁹ This he presents most explicitly in his *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, significantly for us linking his claim to a definite, albeit anonymous, medieval precedent:

Among the scholastics who turned to the truth more appropriately, they teach that without the special and particular help of God ('sine peculiari ac praecipuo Dei auxilio'), we are not able to begin, nor progress, nor perfect something of good. So that whatever we begin, do or accomplish which is laudable, it is necessary that it be supported by the singular grace of God ('gratiae Dei singulari').⁴⁰

Vermigli highlights here a scholastic position that every single good work requires God's 'special and particular' aid. In other words he is not talking about the need only for a so-called habit or disposition of grace, but for a definite and particular motion of grace initiating, directing and accomplishing every good act. For as he makes plain this 'special help' relates not only to salvific or moral actions but to 'anything of good'. Citing his fellow Reformer Johann Oecolampadius (1482-1531), Vermigli argues that 'not the slightest thought or endeavour in goodness comes from any other than God'.⁴¹ Indeed, he is adamant that without the grace of God it is impossible to have any good desire, let alone to be able

³⁶ Vermigli, *LC*, 972; *Corinthios*, 28^r.

³⁷ Vermigli, *Corinthios*, 28^v; *LC*, 975.

³⁸ Vermigli, *LC*, 978.

³⁹ For discussion of Vermigli's theology of prayer see Emidio Campi, 'The *Preces Sacrae* of Peter Martyr Vermigli', in *Peter Martyr Vermigli and the European Reformations: Semper Reformanda*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, 115, ed. Frank A. James III (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 251-66.

⁴⁰ Vermigli, *Corinthios*, 29^r-29^v.

⁴¹ Vermigli, *LC*, 975; cf. Johann Oecolampadius, *In Iesaiam Prophetam* (Basel: A. Cratander, 1525), 1:19.

to desire God or heavenly things.⁴² In arguing this, as we shall see below, Vermigli connects himself to a definite late medieval Augustinian trajectory.

The fact that humans cannot fulfil the law without faith, love and the help of grace entails that they are unable to perform any morally good deeds or to avoid sin. With the Apostle Paul Vermigli therefore claims that ‘whatsoever is not of faith is sin’, and with Augustine that ‘all the works of the unfaithful are sins’.⁴³ In part Vermigli’s reasoning is clearly the same as before: all actions of the unbeliever must be considered sinful as without faith they cannot refer all things to God, which is to love him above all. Yet this is clearly intertwined with a different trajectory of argument relating to acceptance. God’s wrath remains on those who do not believe in Christ and so ‘they cannot do anything good that may please God, because he has regard to men rather than their gifts’.⁴⁴

For both reasons humans fall under a necessity of sin, a claim which Vermigli maintains with a battery of Augustinian quotations.⁴⁵ While the fallen will is not necessitated to any particular sin, it cannot escape the fact that whichever action it does will be sinful. Citing Martin Luther (1483-1546), he argues that the will is therefore captive to sin and spoiled by its ‘multiple bondage’. Nevertheless, while unable to be called free in the truest sense—the freedom of excellence—Vermigli is clear that its intrinsic freedom remains uncompromised. For such is its corruption that it delights in evil and moves voluntarily and spontaneously towards it.⁴⁶

In evaluating Vermigli’s position it is important to realise what he is *not* claiming. Although adamant that every act of fallen humans without grace must be considered sinful, he does not deny that such acts can be generically good, that is, good in themselves. He is therefore perfectly clear that friendship and parents’ affection for their children are good things. What spoils them and renders them sinful is the evil intention by which they are referred to other ends than God the supreme good.⁴⁷ This goes some way towards explaining how Vermigli can maintain that humans cannot acquire true virtue by their natural powers alone, a thesis which flies in the face of his Aristotelian heritage. For while he insists that the acquired virtues have an important role in ordering the lives of individuals and communities within the horizon of earthly happiness, he is clear that alone they cannot orient humanity either to God or to true happiness.⁴⁸ With Augustine he holds that pagan virtues are counterfeit.⁴⁹ For it is because of them that men ‘are accustomed to become proud, to rely on themselves and judge themselves to have no need of the covenant, grace or help (‘auxilium’) of

⁴² Vermigli, *LC*, 974, 976.

⁴³ Vermigli, *LC*, 499; *Romanos*, 542-3; cf. Augustine, *Contra Julianum*, 4.3.32 (*MPL*, 44.755).

⁴⁴ Vermigli, *LC*, 973.

⁴⁵ Vermigli, *LC*, 973-4; cf. Augustine, *De Natura et Gratia*, 66.79 (*MPL*, 44.286); *De Spiritu et Littera*, 33.58 (*MPL*, 44.258).

⁴⁶ Vermigli, *LC*, 974.

⁴⁷ Vermigli, *Corinthios*, 14^r, 29^v; *LC*, 973.

⁴⁸ Vermigli, *Ethicorum*, 21-2.

⁴⁹ Vermigli, *Romanos*, 542-3; cf. Augustine, *Contra Julianum*, 4.3.25-6, 32 (*MPL*, 44.750-1, 755); *Ad Simplicianum*, 1.2 (*MPL*, 40.126); *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 30 (*MPL*, 36.226).

God'.⁵⁰ Ultimately, such acquired virtues are therefore poisoned by original sin and are themselves sins.⁵¹ While within the structures of natural and social interaction ordained by God the acquired virtues may be said to merit a reward, in God's sight they are not more preparatory for salvation than damnation.⁵²

While there are definite similarities between Vermigli's discussion of man's unregenerate will and that of Aquinas, there are also marked differences, many of which can be traced to a subtly different conception of the teleology of the moral life. For, unlike Vermigli, Aquinas often treats natural moral endeavour as an intermediate space between the poles of sin and grace.⁵³ Thus he holds that for a human action or virtue to be considered morally good it only needs to be oriented towards a proximate end compatible with man's final goal of union with God, and not explicitly towards God himself. Against the extreme implications of the Augustinian doctrine of splendid vices he argues that the non-Christian is able to do morally good acts and achieve genuine, if imperfect, virtues.⁵⁴ While unable to fulfil the whole law, which Aquinas holds requires the virtue of charity, he is able to fulfil some of its individual precepts.⁵⁵ Moreover, without faith and charity he is also able to avoid individual sins, including the majority of mortal sins against his neighbour, even if he is unable to ultimately avoid sinning mortally against God.⁵⁶

Aquinas' thought also seems to reflect a much more optimistic view of man's fallen capacities than that of Vermigli. For while he affirms that grace is required for salvation, his explicit statement that humanity can do good and avoid evil without grace would seem to represent a definite softening of the Augustinian paradigm.⁵⁷ Here, however, there is a complication. For some commentators on Aquinas, including Johannes Capreolus (c. 1380-1444) and Rimini himself, denied that he held humans could achieve morally good works without grace.⁵⁸ The issue turns on an ambiguity over the divine help ('auxilium') that Aquinas suggests is necessary for moral action—whether this is the divine help which all acts require or an extra help of grace.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, we cannot explore this further here, but Aquinas seems to leave himself open to both interpretations—the more Aristotelian and the more Augustinian.⁶⁰ Suffice it only to say that while the Augustinian

⁵⁰ Vermigli, *Corinthios*, 30^v.

⁵¹ Vermigli, *Ethicorum*, 21-2, 334.

⁵² Vermigli, *Corinthios*, 30r-30^v.

⁵³ This is a point made by Brian Shanley, 'Aquinas on Pagan Virtue', *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 572-7.

⁵⁴ *STh*, 1a2ae 65.2; 2a2ae 23.7. For detailed discussion of this see Shanley, 'Aquinas on Pagan Virtue', 553-77; Jennifer Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 72-97; and T. H. Irwin, 'Splendid Vices? Augustine for and against Pagan Virtues', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999): 119-27.

⁵⁵ *STh*, 1a2ae 109.4; 100.10.

⁵⁶ *STh*, 1a2ae 63.2 ad. 2; 109.8; cf. Shanley, 'Aquinas on Pagan Virtue': 558.

⁵⁷ *STh*, 1a2ae 63.2 ad. 2; 2a2ae 10.4.

⁵⁸ Johannes Capreolus, *Defensiones Theologiae*, ed. C. Paban and T. Pègues (Tours, 1900-7), 4.317ff.; Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 29 q. 1 art. 2 (VI.170-1). See further Denis Janz, *Luther and Late Medieval Thomism: A Study in Theological Anthropology* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1983), 60-91.

⁵⁹ Compare *STh*, 1a2ae 109.1 and 2.

⁶⁰ For discussion of this see Janz, *Luther*, 45-8.

interpretation would bring him considerably closer to Vermigli and Rimini, it would still leave in place important structural differences.

By contrast with Aquinas, Rimini redefines morality exclusively as action for the sake of the love of God. Employing an Augustinian distinction, mirroring that used by Vermigli, he argues that while the non-Christian may be able to fulfil the office of the law—the thing that ought to be done—he cannot fulfil its end—that for the sake of which it ought to be done.⁶¹ This is because he lacks not only charity but faith, which provides true knowledge of the law and especially of its underlying teleological framework.⁶² For a similar reason he holds that every action of the non-Christian must be considered sinful. Although such acts may be considered good in themselves they become compromised when placed within the field of fallen human intention.⁶³ Moreover, like Vermigli, he is clear that without faith it is impossible to please God.⁶⁴ It follows for Rimini that all pagan virtues must be considered counterfeit. Since they come about without reliance on God, they serve only to puff men up in pride.⁶⁵ Employing the same Augustinian texts as Vermigli he argues that any reward they receive is both illusory and transitory.⁶⁶ Rimini is also clear that virtues cannot be ordered to any intermediate end, however good, but must be ordered mediately or immediately to God himself as ultimate end.⁶⁷ Although he never attacks Aquinas, whom he reveres, he does attack two Dominican masters on precisely this point.⁶⁸

Rimini also seeks to transpose morality entirely into the sphere of grace. Complementing his Augustinian teleology he is clear that without the special help ('auxilium speciale') of grace humans cannot fulfil the law, avoid any sin, or achieve any genuine virtue.⁶⁹ Indeed, this doctrine was recognised at the time—as it still is today—as a hallmark of the late medieval Augustinian school.⁷⁰ In his *Lectura* Rimini employs it as his own distinctive weapon against the Pelagianism which he saw infecting contemporary doctrine. For him it entailed the understanding that for every good action, whether construed positively as seeking virtue or negatively as shunning vice, God must move the will immediately.⁷¹ Moreover—and this marks an important similarity with Vermigli—it is clear from the *Lectura* that Rimini's Augustinian theology of prayer was the underpinning of his doctrine of special grace.⁷²

⁶¹ Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 26-8 q. 1 a. 1 (VI.24, 29, 30, 49).

⁶² Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 26-8 q. 2 a. 2; 29 q. 1 a. 2 (VI.109-10, 135-41).

⁶³ Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 38-41 (VI.281-315).

⁶⁴ Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 29 q. 1 a. 2 (VI.160).

⁶⁵ Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 26-8 q. 1 a. 3 (VI.74, 85).

⁶⁶ Rimini, *Lectura*, 1 d. 1 q. 3 a. 2; 2 d. 26-8 q. 1 a. 3 (I.263-5; VI.75); Vermigli, *Corinthios*, 30^f.

⁶⁷ Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 29 q. 1 a. 2 (VI.144).

⁶⁸ Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 29 q. 1 a. 2; d. 38-41 q. 1 a. 1 (VI.142, 144, 283-91).

⁶⁹ This is the principal theme of Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 26-8 (VI.17-112).

⁷⁰ Heiko Oberman, 'Vorwort', in Rimini, *Lectura*, Tome VI.v; Adolar Zumkeller, *Erbsünde, Gnade, Rechtfertigung und Verdienst nach der Lehre der Erfurter Augustinertheologen des Spätmittelalters*, Cassiciacum, 35 (Würzburg: Cassiciacum, 1983), 6.

⁷¹ Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 26-8 q. 1 a. 1; d. 34-7 q. 1 a. 3 (VI.26, 54, 275); cf. Manuel Santos Noya, *Die Sünden- und Gnadenlehre des Gregor von Rimini* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990), 67-89.

⁷² Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 26-8 q. 1 a. 1; q. 2 a. 1; a. 2; d. 29 q. 1 a. 2 (VI.25, 33-4, 52, 55, 89, 97, 101-2, 148).

While in the key passage of his *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* Vermigli does not use Rimini's term 'auxilium speciale Dei', we do find him using this elsewhere.⁷³ Moreover, his own phrase 'peculiaris et praecipuus Dei auxilio' clearly conveys this sense, as does his insistence that this refers to the *singular* grace of God.⁷⁴ Elsewhere in the *Commentary* we also find him asserting that unless the singular help of grace is given humanity can never attain to the theological virtues, fulfil the commands of the law or attain true virtue.⁷⁵ Finally, in another important passage he makes clear his understanding of this special help of grace as a 'particular motion' and 'divine inoperation' needed to perform everything rightly, once again confirming his affinity with Rimini.⁷⁶ This connection will become even clearer below in our discussion of divine concurrence.

The Will in Regeneration – The Operation of Grace

At first sight Vermigli's understanding of grace seems thoroughly inimical to a medieval paradigm. For in his *Loci Communes* he follows his fellow Reformers in vigorously attacking the scholastic doctrine of habitual grace.⁷⁷ Singling out the Thomist understanding for critique he describes this as unscriptural and representing a dubious adaptation of Aristotle. He holds that no created qualities can render a person pleasing to God. Rather, grace is primarily to be understood as God's gracious will towards the elect and only secondarily as the gifts that he freely gives.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, it is notable that despite his strong critique of the soteriological function of habitual grace, Vermigli never attacks an understanding of habitual grace per se. In his treatment of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity Vermigli has no qualms about admitting their nature as habitual virtues infused directly by God, and it is clear that his basic understanding of them parallels precisely the classic account found in Aquinas' *Summa*.⁷⁹ Moreover, like Aquinas, Vermigli even admits the existence of infused virtues other than the theological virtues.⁸⁰

It would therefore be better to say that Vermigli reconfigures habitual grace rather than rejecting it outright. In this he shows important affinities with late medieval scholasticism, and especially its Augustinian stream. For Rimini too is clear that there can be no proportion between divine acceptance and any created quality in the soul and so roots acceptance entirely in the divine will.⁸¹ Like Vermigli, he also places final acceptance not only in the divine will itself, but specifically

⁷³ Vermigli, *LC*, 989.

⁷⁴ Vermigli, *Corinthios*, 29^r-29^v.

⁷⁵ Vermigli, *Corinthios*, 28^v, 29^v, 85^v.

⁷⁶ Vermigli, *Corinthios*, 173^r. This dimension of 'auxilium' is emphasised by Santos Noya, *Gnadenlehre*, 77-81.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, in *Luther's Works: American Edition* (= *LW*), 26.124-9.

⁷⁸ Vermigli, *LC*, 479-80; cf. *STh*, 1a2ae 110.1-4; 111.2.

⁷⁹ Vermigli, *Ethicorum*, 22, 352-3, 367-8; cf. *STh*, 1a2ae 61.1.

⁸⁰ *STh*, 1a2ae 63.3.

⁸¹ Rimini, *Lectura*, 1 d. 17 q. 1 a. 2 (II.220 ff.). This is often thought of as a Scotist tendency but Zumkeller, *Erbsünde*, 2-3, notes its Augustinian roots.

in unconditional divine election.⁸² Finally, following a common late medieval tendency Rimini conflates the habit of grace with the infusion of charity, leading him to emphasise the Christian's direct, unmediated participation in the uncreated grace of the Holy Spirit in a manner anticipating Vermigli's own Reformation stance.⁸³

What we see in Rimini therefore is a qualified endorsement of habitual grace coupled with an emphasis on both the divine will of election and the working of the Holy Spirit, something which closely parallels Vermigli. Moreover—and here we can only touch upon this—Vermigli's own twofold understanding of justification as involving both the imputed righteousness of Christ and the imparted righteousness of the theological virtues inspired by the Holy Spirit has important affinities with the mutual relationship between acceptance and habitual grace elaborated in Rimini's *Lectura*.⁸⁴

In order to properly grasp Vermigli's understanding of the operation of grace it is essential that we have a clear understanding of his doctrine of the general concourse between the divine and human wills. This, it is clear from his writings, he frames in the Aristotelian context of motion. Like Aquinas his position is that any motion, or change, in the creaturely sphere is to be traced back to the highest motion of God the Unmoved Mover.⁸⁵ Yet this is not to say that the divine motion is entirely determinative of every aspect of creaturely action. Rather, in a passage closely echoing Aquinas' *De Malo* 3.2, he makes clear that 'inferior things receive the impulse of the first cause according to their own nature'. Any defect in an action is therefore not to be blamed on the divine motion but on the defective way in which this is received.⁸⁶ To explain this Vermigli takes his lead from Augustine's position in *City of God* 7.30 that 'God governs his creatures so as to permit them to exercise and work with him their own proper motions', expounding as follows:

When we say that the act itself, which later through our own fault is evil, is produced by the supreme cause, that is, God, and by us, that is, our will, how should we understand it? Is it completely through God, or through ourselves? Is it partly from him and partly from us? Just now we will limit this work to our will's act itself. We answer: if the consideration of the whole is referred to the cause we must speak in one way, if to the effect in another. If we refer the whole to the cause so that we understand our will to be the entire cause of the action, that it is able by itself to work without God, it is not true. For unless God gives assent it cannot

⁸² Rimini, *Lectura*, 1 d. 17 q. 1 a. 2 (II.221).

⁸³ Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 26-8 q. 1 a. 3 (VI.75-7). For Gregory's distinction between uncreated and created grace see also Rimini, *Lectura*, 1 d. 17 q. 1 a. 2 (II.220).

⁸⁴ Vermigli, *LC*, 500. The probability of a connection between Vermigli's doctrine of justification by faith and that of Rimini is highlighted in Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism*, 36, n. 79. For extensive discussion of Vermigli's doctrine of inherent righteousness see Luca Baschera, *Tugend und Rechtfertigung: Peter Martyr Vermigli's Kommentar zur Nikomachischen Ethik im Spannungsfeld von Philosophie und Theologie* (Zürich: TVZ, 2008), 143-200.

⁸⁵ Vermigli, *Samuelis*, 280^r.

⁸⁶ Vermigli, *Samuelis*, 280^v; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, 3.2, in *On Evil*, trans. Richard Regan and ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 146-8. The Augustinian example of a limping leg that Vermigli uses to illustrate this point is found also in Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 34-7 q. 1 a. 1 (VI.226) and Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, IV (*WA*, 18.709).

produce action. So although by God's absolute power he could perform the work itself, yet as the course of things stands he will not act alone, but will have creatures work with him ('creaturam coagentem habere'). By this covenant ('hoc pacto') neither the will nor even God is said to be the whole cause. If it is referred to the effect, God and the will are the full cause. For God and the will constitute the entire effect, although joined together in action. I will show this by an example. To produce an action we have the will and understanding, and our will makes it complete. But one is near, the other more remote. So it is concerning the will and God: our will does all, and God does all: but one is the first cause and the other secondary.⁸⁷

Here Vermigli is clearly using Augustine to argue for a partial, co-operative model of causation. In this he follows Rimini who notably sources his own understanding of partial causation in precisely this passage of Augustine.⁸⁸ Even more significantly, this passage from Vermigli has a striking parallel in Rimini's *Lectura*, confirming beyond reasonable doubt the late medieval Augustinian provenance of his doctrine of concurrence.⁸⁹

Following an Augustinian trajectory Vermigli was insistent that grace acted to determine both intellect and will, but in a manner entirely consistent with freedom of choice. In this he distinguished two stages, reflecting the important scholastic and Augustinian distinction between operative and cooperative grace: the first in which God operates on the human soul alone and the second in which the soul cooperates with God's motion.⁹⁰ Elaborating on this he described the first as a conversion of healing and the second as a conversion of faith. In the first stage, with which the will only concurs passively, the mind hostile to God is healed by grace. In the second stage, with which the will concurs actively, the converted mind assents by faith and is turned in confidence and love towards God. As Vermigli summarises, 'there is no synergy in the first, but in the other there is cooperation'. At the completion of these two stages the soul is said to be both justified and regenerate.⁹¹

Significantly, Vermigli discusses the conversion of healing in terms strongly reminiscent of the scholastic understanding of habitual grace.⁹² Indeed, Vermigli explicitly refers to this healing as a 'kind of disposition'—a technical term indicating a type of habit or proto-habit. Confirmation that he is thinking along these lines is seen in his explanation of the way divine operation retains the integrity of the will's freedom. For employing the Aristotelian analogy of matter and form, also used by

⁸⁷ Vermigli, *Samuelis*, 280^v. Translation adapted from Joseph McLelland in Vermigli, *Philosophical Works*, 240.

⁸⁸ Rimini, *Lectura*, 1 d. 45 q. 1; 2 d. 34-7 q. 1 a. 3 (III.491; VI.270). This theory is usually traced to Scotus (cf. William Frank, 'Duns Scotus on Autonomous Freedom and Divine Co-Causality', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 2 [1992]: 142-64).

⁸⁹ Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 34-7 q. 1 art. 3 (VI.277). James, *Vermigli and Predestination*, 144-5, notes the conceptual but not the textual parallel.

⁹⁰ Vermigli, *LC*, 988 citing from Augustine, *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, 17.33 (*MPL*, 44.901). Vermigli's use of the distinction between operative and cooperative grace is also clear from *LC*, 481.

⁹¹ Vermigli, *LC*, 976-8, 980-1.

⁹² Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 46-55.

Aquinas and Albert the Great (d. 1280), he explains that grace informs the will and gives it a new principle of working.⁹³ This he says may properly be called an obediencial potency ('potentia obediencialis')—a notion prominent in Aquinas' theology of grace—for by grace the will is elevated to a new mode of working unattainable without it.⁹⁴ Moreover, in informing and enabling the intellect and will, and elevating them as obediencial potencies, grace naturally draws out the cooperation of man's will. He is therefore moved infallibly, yet freely and by his own desire, to the assent of faith. With this the supernatural virtues of faith, hope and charity are poured into him, confirming the disposition which was already within him.⁹⁵

From this point onwards the soul operates by faith working through love. It is therefore able to fulfil the law, work good deeds, acquire true virtues and even arouse in itself the 'gift and grace of God'. Yet it cannot do so alone. For as Vermigli says 'the regenerate come to be called perfect, prepared for every good work, but still have need of the 'special help' of God in everything that is to be done well'.⁹⁶ In his *Commentary on I Corinthians* he confirms this, teaching that without the particular motion and operation of God even his gifts are not sufficient to do rightly.⁹⁷ For Vermigli, like Aquinas and Rimini, actual grace—characterised by him as special help—always goes before habitual grace and is always required beyond it. Grace principally must be understood as the application of the divine will and cannot therefore be exhausted in any created gifts or qualities, however exalted.

We are now in a position to definitively relate Vermigli's account of special help to that of Rimini. We have already seen that both maintain the need for the special help of grace for every moral act and for avoiding every sin. It has now become clear that both also insist on the need for the special help of grace even in a regenerate state. As Rimini characterises it this special help is to be understood not only in terms of God concurring with the action of the will but in terms of him moving it and determining it freely towards the good.⁹⁸ Here we find a direct parallel with Vermigli. For in the sphere of special grace the divine and human will can no longer be viewed as independent or semi-independent partial causes, but rather the divine will itself moves the human will to the good and effects its operation. Yet in doing so the human will retains its freedom and has conferred on it the dignity of becoming a co-worker with God. While it has not yet attained the freedom of excellence it is liberated from the necessity of sinning and finally able to do well.

⁹³ *STh*, 110.1 ad. 2; Albert the Great, *Commentarium in II Sententiarium*, in *Opera*, ed. E. Borgnet (Paris: Vives, 1894), 27.455; cf. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 27.

⁹⁴ Vermigli, *LC*, 984; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De Virtutibus*, in *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, ed. E. M. Atkins and Thomas Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 69; *STh*, 3a 11.1.

⁹⁵ Vermigli, *LC*, 495-7.

⁹⁶ Vermigli, *LC*, 989.

⁹⁷ Vermigli, *Corinthios*, 173^r.

⁹⁸ Rimini, *Lectura*, 2 d. 26-8 q. 1 a. 3 (VI.77).

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