

## **Draft**

Human Response to the Divine Initiative  
Bibl 6262 Symposium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture  
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One could argue that the Bible is an account divine/human interactions. Some of these interactions are filled with awe and joy on the part of the human participants; others with fear, anger, and hopelessness. Through the story of Israel and the church humans demonstrated remarkable faith and rather depressing fecklessness. The divine partner exhorts, encourages, reproves and loves. God also rages, warns and turns away in sorrow. At the heart of the Bible is an agreement between God and the people of Israel, a Covenant that sets the terms of their relationship. God's people are to obey God's commands, God's *torah* set forth at Sinai. Obedience brings blessings; disobedience brings cursing. The Covenant itself is a gracious gift of God offered to the people to guarantee his blessings and presence among them. God clearly initiates the relationship and just as clearly expects the people to hold up their end of the bargain by freely obeying his commands. The rest of the Hebrew Bible appears to demonstrate that God cannot (or at least does not) coerce his people into obedience. He can warn them through his prophets, judge them through their enemies, and punish them in a variety of ways. But they are evidently perfectly free to obey or disobey. Or are they?

Throughout the long story of Israel and the church both Jews and Christians have struggled with the question of where God's initiative stops and human initiative begins. Are people really free to obey or disobey? Is faith a gift or a human accomplishment? Are human beings truly accountable for their actions? Is God really in control of the universe? Paul expressed the frustrations of many in Romans 7 when, whether speaking of himself or not, he speaks of the frustration of knowing the good, but not doing it. We have all perhaps sensed our powerlessness and our need for deliverance. At the same time Paul insists of the human capacity to obey God and even asserts (brags?): "with respect to righteousness under the Law, I'm blameless" (Phil. 3:6b). This has been seen as a conflict between "nature and grace", "law and grace", "free will" and "predestination", and "faith" and "works". It has engaged some of the greatest (and not so great) minds of Jewish and Christian history. Through your own reading, the Lund Lectures, the Symposium papers, and our class conversations you will explore these questions from a variety of angles and perspectives. Not only is this a perennial theological question, you will find or have already found that this is a perennial pastoral problem as well. One goal of this class is to enable you to address the issue pastorally as well as academically and theologically.

### **Course Objectives**

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Articulate the major theological and theoretical issues regarding the human response to the divine initiative.
2. Engage and reflect upon key biblical texts addressing the issue.
3. Engage and reflect on the pastoral and spiritual challenges raised by the issue.
4. Engage and reflect on the key figures and response to this issue throughout church history.
5. Articulate their own understanding of the nature of the human response to the divine initiative.

### **Expectations:**

1. To attend the Lund Lectures and all the sessions of the symposium, interacting with the speakers and other participants and *asking at least one question during a question and answer period.*
2. To read the book *Divine and Human Agency in Paul*, Simon J. Gathercole *before the Symposium.*
3. To do additional reading as directed. This will be supplied with the final syllabus.
4. To do a series of five page papers (double spaced, 12 point type):
  - a. A paper on a figure of Christian history and how they approached the question of the human response to the divine initiative: Augustine, Pelagius, John Scotus Eriugena, Luther, Calvin, John Wesley. If the student wishes to study another figure she/he may ask the teacher for permission.
  - b. A paper that engages with and critiques one of the papers from the conference or from the essays in Gathercole.
  - c. A paper that explores one of the following passages with reference to the human response to God: Deuteronomy 30:6-20; Psalm 73; Isaiah 6; Matthew 7:7-27; John 6:42-66; Romans 8: 26-39; Philippians 2:1-18; James 2:14-26/Galatians 3:6-18. The student may also request another passage.
  - d. A paper that explains and defends the student's own theological and pastoral response to the question of the human response to God.
5. To meet together as a class at a time to be determined for a three hour period before the symposium and another three hour period soon after the symposium to reflect and debrief. Somewhat later in the semester we will meet for a third time for each of you to share your findings on the Bible passages you studied and the figure from church history you studied.

### **Grading**

1. Each paper counts for 20% of the grade.
2. Participation in symposium and class: 20%.

## **Bibliography**

### *Older Writers*

Augustine

*On Nature and Grace*

*On the Proceedings of Pelagius*

*On the Predestination of the Saints*

Pelagius

*Letter to Demetrias*

*On the Divine Law*

John Scotus Eriugena

*On Divine Predestination*

Martin Luther

*Two Kinds of Righteousness, Sermon 1519*

*The Freedom of the Christian*

John Calvin

*The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*

John Wesley

*A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*

*Modern Writers* [to be added in final form of syllabus]