

The Antecedent and Consequent Will of God:  
Is This a Valid and Useful Distinction?

By

Andrew Hussman

Prof. Brug

Dogmatics

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## **Introduction**

*Cur alii prae aliis?* “Why are some saved and not others?” This is one of the most daunting questions for any Christian to try to answer, and yet that has not stopped many throughout the church’s history from attempting to tackle this question. How successful have they been? The only way that can be gauged is by placing every interpretation against the measuring rod of God’s Word. As we narrow in on one of the more common ways of addressing this issue, *antecedens et consequens voluntas Dei*, God’s antecedent and consequent will, we will always want to keep this measuring rod close by. We will want to use it as we consider: 1) Is this distinction a valid, scriptural distinction? 2) If this is the case, then is it a useful distinction, i.e., does it help or hinder us in explaining the saving truths of Scripture? First of all we will focus on those passages in Scripture that may support this distinction. Then we will examine and evaluate the usage of these terms in church history. Finally, we will consider how it may or may not be used in the church today and if there is a better alternative.

## **The Teaching of Scripture—God’s Gracious Will and Individual Responsibility**

Scripture teaches that God has a universal, gracious, saving will. This means that God sincerely wants all people to be saved. The clearest evidence of this comes from 1 Timothy 2:4, “[God our Savior] who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (ὁς πάντας ἀνθρώπους θέλει σωθῆναι καὶ εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας ἐλθεῖν). This tells us in no uncertain terms that no one is excluded from God’s universal, gracious, saving will. God wants all people to be saved without exception. The passive σωθῆναι is also significant, because this underscores man’s role in salvation and guards against an interpretation that would attribute to man any power to save himself.

Furthermore, God shows how earnest and serious his will is in this matter by proclaiming through the Apostle Paul in v. 6 the wonderful news that Christ gave himself as a ransom for all (ἀντίλυτρον ὑπὲρ πάντων). God not only wills that all come to salvation, but he provided the necessary means for receiving salvation—the means of grace. Christ sent the disciples into all the world to proclaim this saving message (Matthew 28:19-20), and through hearing that word we receive faith (Romans 10:17) that gives us God’s own righteousness (Romans 1:16-17). The universal grace of God is found throughout the Bible, e.g. John 3:17, 2 Peter 3:9. When we

define God's antecedent will in keeping with Scripture, as his earnest will that no one should perish, we are expressing scriptural truth.

Yet Scripture also reveals the dismal reality that ultimately not all are saved. Many reject this saving message and die in unbelief (Matthew 23:37). One of the more helpful illustrations of this is in Ezekiel 18, where we see the antecedent and consequent will of God set side by side (cf. 2 Peter 3:9 for a similar juxtaposition in the New Testament). Here God shows us his universal love in that he takes no pleasure in the death of anyone (18:23; cf. also Ezekiel 33:11). In the next verse, however we have the example of a man who does evil and will die בְּחַטָּאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר־חָטָא, "because of the sin he committed."

This whole chapter teaches individual responsibility for sin. We cannot blame our sins on anyone else, not even God, because when we say that to God, he answers us as he answered Israel, "Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust?" (Ezekiel 18:25).<sup>1</sup> However, we want to be careful not to apply to faith this notion that we have a choice—the passive verb mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:4 is just one of many examples in Scripture that man has no ability to come to faith and obtain salvation for himself (cf. also Matthew 19:26).

With God's consequent will, then, as it is defined in Scripture, we see God not as self-contradictory, willing one thing but doing another, but as completely faithful to himself. God does want all people to be saved, but he also is an absolutely just God who cannot and does not tolerate sin. "The soul who sins is the one who will die," Ezekiel tells us (18:4). God declares his righteous will in response to sinful man's rejection of the saving truth. If we keep this in mind when discussing God's consequent will, we will be using it correctly. To summarize the distinction and purpose of these terms, Pieper offers a helpful insight into explaining these terms scripturally: simply follow the progression of thought in John 3:17-18.<sup>2</sup>

## Pre-Reformation

Now that we have examined how these terms can be used according to Scripture, a close look at how this distinction has been used in the church's history can provide valuable insights.

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<sup>1</sup> As Hummel points out, this individual accountability is found throughout the Bible: in Adam and Eve's individual creation and individual punishment, and in "the frequent legal constructions with אִישׁ אִישׁ ("each person," e.g., Lev 15:2; 17:3; 20:2)," just to name two. Horace Hummel, *Concordia Commentary: Ezekiel 1-20* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 553.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics, vol II* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 38.

As we look at its usage in history we of course will always want to remember what God's Word has to say, but there is more to be said at the outset about the logical consistency that is intended with these terms. By "antecedent" is meant God's will before taking into consideration anything in man—in this sense it is very similar to God willing absolutely. And by "consequent" is meant God's will after taking into consideration an action of man. This will can be called "conditioned" only in the sense that it depends on a condition in man, not on some variable in God.

It is generally accepted that the earliest known occurrence of this distinction is in *Homilies on Ephesians* by John Chrysostom (347-407), though being a Greek speaker he does not use the same terminology. Commenting on 1:5, Chrysostom distinguishes between a προηγούμενον or πρώτον θέλημα, and a δεύτερον θέλημα:

For the word "good pleasure" every where means the precedent will, for there is also another will. As for example, the first will is that sinners should not perish; the second will is, that, if men become wicked, they shall perish. For surely it is not by necessity that He punishes them, but because He wills it... By "good pleasure" then he means the first will, the earnest will, the will accompanied with earnest desire, as in case of us... What he means to say then is this, God earnestly aims at, earnestly desires, our salvation.<sup>3</sup>

Pieper notes that already in Chrysostom's day this distinction was being misapplied in a synergistic sense.<sup>4</sup>

John of Damascus (675-479) is the next church father attributed with making use of this distinction, and he is credited with the terms we now have today (though we should not overlook Chrysostom's contribution several centuries earlier). In discussing God's providence he comments that "the ways of God's providence...cannot be explained in words nor conceived by the mind," but goes on to say

Also one must bear in mind that God's original wish was that all should be saved and come to His Kingdom. For it was not for punishment that He formed us but to share in His goodness, inasmuch as He is a good God. But inasmuch as He is a just God, His will is that sinners should suffer punishment. The first then is called God's antecedent will and pleasure, and springs from Himself, while the second is called God's consequent will and permission, and has its origin in us. And the latter is twofold; one part dealing with matters of guidance and training, and having in view our salvation, and the other being

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<sup>3</sup> John Chrysostom, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, vol XIII*, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1969), 52.

<sup>4</sup> Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics II*, 454-455.

hopeless and leading to our utter punishment, as we said above. And this is the case with actions that are not left in our hands.<sup>5</sup>

Overall he appears to remain close to the scriptural usage, but one might wonder in what sense he means a “twofold” consequent will that deals with “matters of guidance and training and having in view our salvation.” What is clear, however, is that already in the young Christian church’s history God’s universal, gracious will was being applied to God’s antecedent will and his justice to his consequent will.

Thomas Aquinas was one of the first to go into an in-depth, systematic discussion of God’s antecedent and consequent will,<sup>6</sup> even asking the question we are dealing with now, whether we can even make this distinction in the divine will at all.<sup>7</sup> Aquinas favors it and compares it to speaking of “a justice that *antecedently* wishes every man to live, but *consequently* pronounces the capital sentence.”<sup>8</sup> He also contributes a useful distinction that is accepted by all theologians in this matter when he says “This distinction concerns things willed, not divine willing itself, where there is no before or after.”<sup>9</sup>

Somewhat confusing, however, is the comment of an Aquinas editor, Thomas Gilby, who states that “Antecedent and consequent willing are sometimes rendered as *voluntas conditionata* and *voluntas absoluta*,”<sup>10</sup> which, if we are to take these respectively, would seem to be the reverse of the logical sense. Yet there may be something to this editor’s comment, since Jaroslav Pelikan also notes that Augustine wrestled with 1 Timothy 2:4 and understood this “according to ‘his antecedent will,’ by which he willed things relatively, depending on how men responded, rather than according to ‘his consequent will, which is to will absolutely.’”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, for consistency’s sake, it still makes most sense to think of the antecedent will as absolute and the consequent as conditional.

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<sup>5</sup> John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* ([http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0675-0749\\_Ioannes\\_Damascenus\\_De\\_Fide\\_Orthodoxa\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0675-0749_Ioannes_Damascenus_De_Fide_Orthodoxa_EN.pdf)), Internet 28 Oct. 2012, 118.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (London: Blackfriars, 1967), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/QDdeVer23.htm#2>.

<sup>8</sup> Aquinas, *Summa*, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 28n.

<sup>11</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, vol III* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 277.

## Reformation to the Present

At the time of the Reformation it is easy to see the multitude of blessings that sprang from Luther's rediscovery of the gospel and other reforms. It is just as easy, however, to perceive the negative effects of reformers like Calvin who allowed reason to play too large a role in their theology. The consequences of this will become apparent when we consider how the antecedent/consequent distinction of God's will has been used and abused from the time of the Reformation down to the present.

### *Reformed Views*

The Reformed have had to do double duty in their struggle with the Lutherans and Arminians regarding the will of God, since they both accept this distinction of the God's antecedent and consequent will.<sup>12</sup> Marcus Friedrich Wendlin took this commonality as grounds for saying that both were teaching synergism.<sup>13</sup> Though some of the Reformed admit a sense in which they could accept this distinction as supporting and correlating to their distinction between *voluntas beneplaciti* and *voluntas signi*,<sup>14</sup> they by and large reject it as denying the freedom of God's will.<sup>15</sup> John Owen called the antecedent/consequent distinction "a gross Anthropomorphism" that described God with fluctuating passions,<sup>16</sup> while Francis Turretin called it an "ulcerous" distinction.<sup>17</sup>

Turretin also calls the antecedent will "not so much a will as a velleity, an empty and void desire incapable of accomplishment which cannot apply to God (the most wise and powerful)."<sup>18</sup> In like manner Leonardus Rijssen considered the antecedent will to be more a wish than a will and questioned whether God could truly will something he knew would never happen.<sup>19</sup> Charles Hodge makes a similar argument when he says, "It cannot be supposed that God intends what is never accomplished...If all men are not saved, God never purposed their

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<sup>12</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol III* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 466.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 465.

<sup>15</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 332.

<sup>16</sup> Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 465.

<sup>17</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), 226.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>19</sup> Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 467.

salvation and never devised and put into operation means to accomplish that end. We must assume that the result is the interpretation of the purposes of God.”<sup>20</sup>

Those who deny that God’s will can be thwarted have to bend over backwards to make sense of scriptural passages which plainly teach that God’s will can be resisted (John 3:17-18, Matthew 23:27). One of their favorite passages to abuse is 1 Timothy 2:4, which we briefly looked at above. They say Paul means “all kinds of people” and not every person individually. By denying the universality of this passage, William Hendriksen continues to rob the universal beauty from such passages as 1 Timothy 2:4, Romans 5:18 and Titus 2:11. He concedes that salvation is universal, but in the sense that “it is not limited to any *one* group.”<sup>21</sup>

This interpretation is hard to reconcile with the broader context of Scripture, where, e.g. 2 Peter 3:9, the sense plainly indicates that God never desires the death of anyone. Hoenecke calls this Calvinistic error “atrocious exegesis.”<sup>22</sup> Note how the denial of universal grace leads to statements such as this by Friedrich Spanheim, “This is the sum of our opinion: Neither can a will to have compassion on all and everyone for salvation be ascribed to God, nor a will to have all and everyone redeemed by Christ, nor a will of calling all and everyone through Christ; therefore universal grace must not be taught nor defended.”<sup>23</sup> Or consider this appalling statement of Calvin’s: “For they are not all created with a similar destiny; but eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say, he is predestinated either to life or to death.”<sup>24</sup> The Bible’s abundant references to God’s saving, universal grace oppose any such unscriptural opinions (1 John 2:2, Titus 2:11).

By putting man’s salvation and damnation both into the category of God’s antecedent will, the Reformed are trying to preserve God’s absolute freedom to do whatever he wills, even if the logical conclusion of this must be that God elects some to damnation.<sup>25</sup> The Reformed in

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1940), 323. To this Pieper briefly replies: “That is human philosophy concerning the will of God; it is not the teaching of Scripture.” *Christian Dogmatics II*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> William Hendriksen, *NTC Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1957), 95.

<sup>22</sup> Adolph Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics, vol III* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 11.

<sup>23</sup> Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics II*, 25n50.

<sup>24</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, vol. II* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), Bk III, ch. XXI, V, pg.176.

<sup>25</sup> Siegbert Becker, “Observing the Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel in the Preaching and Teaching Ministry,” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, Internet 10.28.12), 3.

general are looking to preserve God's sovereign power and depend on reason rather than on God's universal love as taught in Scripture. Consider how a current Calvinist theologian, Wayne Grudem, clings to human reason even when it flies in the face of Scripture: "When we understand election as God's sovereign choice of some persons to be saved, then there is necessarily another aspect of that choice, namely, God's sovereign decision to pass over others and not to save them."<sup>26</sup> He even admits soon afterwards that this is one of the "most difficult teachings of Scripture for us to think about and accept" because of the horrible, eternal consequences it entails, and yet he still maintains that it is clearly taught in Scripture.<sup>27</sup>

Though this has been somewhat of a "digression" into the problems with the Calvinistic teaching of double predestination, it serves to help us evaluate the usefulness of this distinction. Unfortunately, as we will soon see, Lutherans have not been immune to the pitfalls resulting from this distinction either.

### ***Lutheran Views***

In contrast to the Reformed view, the Lutheran dogmaticians made use of the antecedent and consequent distinction of God's will. They were also sure to mention, however, that they were not ascribing two wills to God, which God's immutability and simplicity would not permit. Johann Gerhard makes a point of balancing both sides by stating that "in the eternal and most simple will there is no succession of the acts of the will,"<sup>28</sup> while at the same time continuing with this distinction, as he says "However, none of us has established a change of the will in God, but we say that the consequent will is subordinate to the antecedent."<sup>29</sup> Hoenecke cites Bretschneider as saying almost the exact same thing, yet he comes to the opposite conclusion that this is reason enough not to use this distinction. Hoenecke points out that "either kind of will so distinguished is equally eternal."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 685.

<sup>27</sup> Grudem goes so far as to say that in 1 Peter 2:8, since ἐπέθησαν requires a plural subject, God not only destined the stumbling of those who would disobey, but the very people who would stumble. Yet there is no exegetical reason to say that a plural verb in a relative clause such as this would demand that the destining must be referring to the subject of the plural participle. The key is the εἰς ὃ phrase, which connects the predestining to the whole thought of stumbling as a result of disobedience rather than to just the disobedience itself. Grudem, *TNTC 1 Peter*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1988), 108.

<sup>28</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici, Tom. I* (Berlin: Ed. Preuss, ed., 1863), Locus II, §283. All subsequent quotations by Orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians, except for Meisner, are my own translation.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, §271.

<sup>30</sup> Hoenecke, *Ev. Luth. Dogmatics II*, 139.



Gerhard provides several illuminating pictures to illustrate this distinction: the father who equally loves all his children and wants them all to receive their inheritance, but has to resolutely exclude from inheritance those who are insolent; the physician who gives precious medicine to those afflicted with disease, but has to bury those who stubbornly refuse to take it; ministers of the word who seek the salvation of all who hear them, yet must hand over to Satan those who obstinately persist in their sins, just to name a few of them.<sup>31</sup>

For Gerhard, some of the various distinctions of God's will do not present a problem, for he sees them in the same light as he sees God's mercy and justice:

The Calvinists accuse us of a contradiction with this distinction, but just as mercy and righteousness in God by no means fight with each other, so also the absolute and conditioned will, the antecedent and consequent will, the first and second will, the will of mercy and the will of righteousness bring no change in God.<sup>32</sup>

Johann Conrad Dannhauer also approves of this distinction and provides a helpful perspective in saying that "In the matter of our salvation in general there is a twin will in God, the one antecedent, the other consequent; I say "twin" not in reality or essence, but by the order of our way of thinking, conceiving one action before another."<sup>33</sup> Balthasar Meisner considers this distinction to be very useful in bringing together the passages of Scripture which appear to be contradictory. He is similar to Pieper<sup>34</sup> in considering this distinction to have value against the Calvinists, because with it, as Meisner says, "many arguments for the absolute decree can be silenced with the appearance of fighting for the right and successfully."<sup>35</sup>

Abraham Calov's contribution to this discussion comes in his clear presentation of the biblical truth of God's universal love for man set side by side with man's ability to disturb God's will. For Calov, God is absolutely serious in what he wills and how he reveals that will to us, especially in matters pertaining to our salvation.<sup>36</sup> Calov affirms this in his interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:4, where he uses the phrase *θέλημα προηγούμενον*: "That this statement clearly should

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<sup>31</sup> Gerhard, *Loci I*, §271.

<sup>32</sup> Gerhard, *Commentarius Super Posteriores D. Petri Epistolam*, (Hamburg and Leipzig: Zacharias Hertellius, 1709), 392.

<sup>33</sup> Johann Conrad Dannhauer, *Hodosophia Christiana, seu Theologia Positiva* (Strassbourg and Leipzig: Friderich Groschuffius, 1713), 274.

<sup>34</sup> Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics I*, 454-455.

<sup>35</sup> Hoenecke, *Ev. Luth. Dogmatics III*, 8-9.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism, vol II* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 98-99.

be taken universally is apparent from the equally negative statement of 2 Peter 3:9, *μὴ βουλόμενός τις ἀπολέσθαι*. This is the *θέλημα προηγούμενον*. Add to this John 3:16.<sup>37</sup> Calov sees in passages such as Isaiah 5:1,2, Psalm 81:13-16, and Acts 7:51 the “frustration of the counsel of God.”<sup>38</sup> Robert Preus concisely and accurately sums up the Lutheran position when he says, “It is the emphatic and consistent teaching of Lutheran theology that man has the frightening capacity to resist God’s will...If this cannot be harmonized with the single and immutable nature of God’s will, Lutheran theology can only let the matter rest and remain silent before this mystery.”<sup>39</sup>

With Johann Andreas Quenstedt there is general conformity with the rest of the Lutheran dogmaticians as to how he explains these distinctions.

There is a distinction between God’s antecedent and consequent will, or between his mercy and justice, as Anselm calls it: When God is said to will that all men be saved, it is an expression concerned with the antecedent will, not with the consequent, or judicial will, according to which he wills that unbelievers are condemned.<sup>40</sup>

Quenstedt also comments on how there are some Calvinists who concede an antecedent will in God that wants all people to be saved, but they say it belongs to God’s *voluntas signi* and deny that “God ever intended for all men (even the reprobate) to be brought to faith and repentance through the means of salvation.”<sup>41</sup>

However, Quenstedt does make an interesting comment regarding the relationship between the doctrine of election and this distinction: “Election does not pertain to the antecedent, but to the consequent will.”<sup>42</sup> That Quenstedt would apply the consequent will to the area of salvation seems contrary to the way Scripture speaks, but a closer look at one possible influence on Quenstedt may help us understand why he says this. We can trace a connection between election and the consequent will back to the Lutheran theologian, Aegidius Hunnius.<sup>43</sup>

Hunnus, who predates most of the early Lutheran dogmaticians, takes up the matter of God’s antecedent and consequent will in a treatise on predestination and God’s eternal

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<sup>37</sup> Abraham Calov, *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata* (Dresden and Leipzig, 1719), 943.

<sup>38</sup> Preus, *Post-Reformation Lutheranism II*, 99.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica* (Leipzig: Thomas Fritsch, 1715), part III, chap. I, sect. II, qu. I, ec. II, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Quenstedt, *ibid.*, ec. VII, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> Quenstedt, *ibid.*, chap. II, sect. II, qu. VI, font. X, p. 73.

<sup>43</sup> Preus, *Post-Reformation Lutheranism II*, 98.

providence. What is most interesting to note for the discussion here is his explanation for placing the doctrine of election in the consequent will:

This is the reason why we think election, or predestination, to salvation should be placed not in the bare, antecedent will of God, but in the consequent will: all of Scripture proclaims that they alone are elected, predestined, and ordained for eternal life who, by an act (*actu*), were going to believe in the name of the one and only Son of God. Not all of those whom God indeed wants to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth are saved, but some, by an act (*actu*), do not come to the knowledge of the truth and thus are not saved.<sup>44</sup>

Hunnius knows that those who in the end have faith obtain salvation and those who persist in unbelief to the end suffer condemnation, so he tries to make a connection between those receiving this gift of salvation and the gift of salvation itself. But the danger here is unquestionable—putting man’s election and salvation into the consequent will of God means that it is conditioned with respect to man in some way, and it is not too far a leap for some to say that they somehow can contribute to their election and salvation. Hoenecke shows the connection between misusing this distinction and correlative errors in the Lutheran dogmaticians’ doctrine of election.<sup>45</sup> Once you try to explain the mystery of election as conditioned by man’s reaction to faith in any way, you run the risk of falling into synergistic error. Even Preus, who attempts to defend Hunnius’ reasons for speaking this way,<sup>46</sup> concludes

It is a mistake practically to equate, as they [the dogmaticians] do, predestination with the consequent will of God to save believers...They are closer to the Calvinists than they think when they say that election is God’s act of saving all of whom He foresaw that they would believe and reprobation is God’s act of damning all of whom He foresaw that they would disbelieve.<sup>47</sup>

Since Hunnius was a well-respected and influential theologian who is frequently cited by later Lutheran dogmaticians,<sup>48</sup> it is not a huge surprise to see his influence reflected in others like

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<sup>44</sup> Aegidius Hunnius, “Articulus de Providentia Dei et Aeterna Praedestinatione seu Electione Filiorum Dei ad salute,” In *Tomus Primus Operum Latinorum D. Aegidii Hunnii* (Wittenberg: M. George Muller, 1607), 655.

<sup>45</sup> Hoenecke, *Ev. Luth. Dogmatics II*, 139.

<sup>46</sup> Preus, “The Doctrine of Election as Taught by the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians,” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File), 9.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Preus, *Post-Reformation Lutheranism I*, 51.

Quenstedt, Hutter, and Hollaz,<sup>49</sup> as it concerns the distinction between God’s antecedent and consequent will. This view of the antecedent/consequent distinction contributed to Hunnius’ use of a phrase, *intuitu fidei*, that would cause great controversy and division in American Lutheranism centuries later.<sup>50</sup> This struggle centered around the teaching held by some that God determined whom to elect *intuitu fidei*, in view of faith. Those who defended this teaching were in effect making faith the cause of election and fell into a snare similar to the Arminians when they too consider election to be under God’s antecedent will.

It comes as no surprise that Hoenecke, who was deeply involved in the Election Controversy in American Lutheranism, would have an averse reaction to this distinction between antecedent and consequent wills. He calls it “totally worthless”, accomplishes nothing at all toward clarifying certain difficult dogmatic points,” and says that “Only in a synergistic sense does this distinction accomplish something for the formation of doctrine, but then only for the formation of incorrect doctrine.”<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, it also comes as no surprise that someone like Heinrich Schmid, following the dogmatists whose work he compiled, would say that “the accomplishment of this gracious will is conditioned by the conduct of man towards the offered grace,” or define the consequent will as “*particular*, because it refers not to all men, but only to those of whom God foreknows that they will properly treat the offered grace.”<sup>52</sup>

## Present Day

With such a history of negativity leading up to the *intuitu fidei* controversy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is interesting to note that a modern theologian, Ken Keathley has come to the defense of the distinction between God’s antecedent and consequent will.<sup>53</sup> In fact, Keathley argues that this distinction is the best we have. After comparing those who ascribe one will to God and those who ascribe two wills to him, Keathley summarizes his view on the singular will of God: “either he desires the salvation of all or he does not. As we have seen, starting with the premise of a

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1899), 270-292.

<sup>50</sup> John M. Brenner, “The Election Controversy among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century: An Examination of the Underlying Problems.” (Diss. Marquette University, 2012), 40,42.

<sup>51</sup> Hoenecke, *Ev. Luth. Dogmatics II*, 139-140.

<sup>52</sup> Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, 272, 273.

<sup>53</sup> Ken Keathley, “Salvation and the Sovereignty of God: The Great Commission as the Expression of the Divine Will.” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Spring 2006).

universal salvific will can launch one into the fantasy of universalism. Positing a denial of any type of universal salvific will can lead one into the slough of reprobation.”<sup>54</sup>

Instead of viewing God’s will in a singular, simple way, Keathley favors the complexity of God’s will and prefers the antecedent/consequent paradigm over the hidden/revealed viewpoint. He criticizes the teaching of God’s hidden will because he feels it only serves to conceal the answer to the question of why some are saved and others are not.<sup>55</sup> The merits he sees in the antecedent/consequent terminology is that it seems to be the most true to Scripture, and we can understand this to a certain extent since we have seen how this distinction can be used according to Scripture.

While Keathley does make some logical arguments, that is also his main weakness. He tends to support his argument more through reason than through Scripture. “Christ died for the sins of the world,” he says, and “Universal love logically requires unlimited atonement.”<sup>56</sup> But where is the reference to 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, John 3:16, or the like? We can make logical connections all we want, but without a scriptural foundation we are on shifting sand and liable to error and to contradicting scriptural truth.

The other area where Keathley could do better is to balance the simplicity of God with his complexity. He seems to view it as an either/or, and thus he quite simply sets aside the singular will of God for a twofold will, as we mentioned above. Asserting the complexity of God’s will over his simplicity and depending on human reason in the process can lead one into an error like Grudem’s when he says that “God is infinitely greater and wiser than we are. Certainly it is possible for him to will that his creatures do something that in the short term displeases him in order that in the long term he would receive greater glory.”<sup>57</sup>

### **Conclusion—An Alternative Approach**

The God of Scripture is a God who is absolutely one (Deuteronomy 6:4), and yet can still say of himself that his ways are unsearchable (Romans 11:33). In trying to defend that there are multiple wills in God it is very difficult, no matter what distinctions we make, not to expose ourselves in some way to the error that God is a contradiction. Gerhard is right when he says

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>57</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 332.

“Those who attribute contrary wills to God weaken the simplicity of the divine essence, for where there are contradictions in the wills, there is no room for the highest and most perfect simplicity.”<sup>58</sup>

We have seen, by looking at Scripture and the historical context of these terms, that the antecedent and consequent will of God can be understood in a proper, biblical sense, and that is how they are often used even today.<sup>59</sup> But the words are not themselves found in Scripture, and from our examination of them in church history, they have their drawbacks. An additional disadvantage not yet mentioned is that these terms can be improperly used to assist in the notion that God in some way has had to change his plan to accommodate the fact that not all are saved. This is how Robert Mellert portrays Aquinas’ use of “antecedent” and “consequent”: “Thomas’ distinction was based upon the necessity for God to restructure the divine plan in the aftermath of man’s sin.”<sup>60</sup> Yes, it is true that God is taking into consideration the acts of man, but we do not have a reactionary God who has to continually readjust for the contingent possibilities in this world. God is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Every technical term is susceptible to misunderstanding, especially those not found in Scripture. While we of course have to make distinctions in order to have intelligible conversations, we should pause to consider whether we should continue to use terms that may be more trouble than they are worth, especially if there are better alternatives. If we are among like-minded individuals who are on the same page with these terms, then the danger of miscommunication is less.

But we may be able to do better still. Perhaps St. Anselm was on the right track when he classified the scriptural concepts under discussion here not as *antecedens et consequens*, but as *misericaordiae et iustitiae*.<sup>61</sup> This comes close to another distinction of God’s will, *legalis et evangelicus*. Law and gospel are found on every page of Scripture. As Lutherans we cherish the opportunity to rightly divide them, and there is no greater need to do so than when we consider God’s plan of salvation. This is looking at the question of why some are saved and not others from a slightly different angle, but it still hits the nail on the head in dealing with it as two questions, as Hoenecke treats it. In the matter of our damnation, sin, and refusal to repent, we

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<sup>58</sup> Gerhard, *Loci I*, §131.

<sup>59</sup> Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics I*, 455.

<sup>60</sup> Robert B. Mellert. *What is Process Theology?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 44.

<sup>61</sup> Quenstedt, *Theologia*, part III, chap. I, sect. II, qu. I, ec. II, p. 9.

alone are responsible and take the blame—but when we are converted and obtain salvation, this is all God’s doing, and we can claim none of the credit. This law/gospel distinction is what Jacob Heerbrand uses in discussing the will of God,<sup>62</sup> and Siegbert Becker asserts that this distinction between the antecedent and consequent will of God “is really the distinction between law and Gospel expressed in different terms.”<sup>63</sup>

Of course, no terminology can substitute for using the very words of Scripture themselves, but with *legalis et evangelicus*, law and gospel, we are on more solid footing and can still explain the same truths of Scripture that we attempt to explain with *antecedens et consequens*. With any and all of these distinctions we make in God’s will, we will always come up short in encompassing the whole counsel of God in any set of terms. We cannot fully comprehend why or how God has chosen to deal with us in the way that he does, as the Formula of Concord says: “there are many points about which God has remained silent and which he has not revealed but has kept reserved solely to his own wisdom and knowledge.”<sup>64</sup> That gives us all the more reason to place our trust in God because he has promised us that the gospel he has given us has the power to save us and bring us to everlasting life (Romans 1:16).

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<sup>62</sup> Jacob Heerbrand, *Compendium Theologiae* (Tuebingen: George Gruppenbach, 1575), 44-46.

<sup>63</sup> Becker, “Proper Distinction,” 3.

<sup>64</sup> Theodore Tappert, ed., *Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Fortress Press, 1959), 625. Cf. John Schaller, “The Hidden God,” *Our Great Heritage, vol I*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 450-452, for an application of the hidden God to the doctrine of election.

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