

Fulgentius of Ruspe

Heretofore, we have not reviewed Ph.D. dissertations in this journal. Gumerlock's¹ is the exception and that for two very important reasons. First, his work provides the current definitive review of the previously obscure life of Fulgentius (468-533), whose impact on the Semi-Pelagian debates of the 6th century is foundational. Second, the exegesis of Fulgentius with respect to the controverted texts (Ezk. 18: 4, 32; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9) is clearly presented as a post-Augustinian refining and precisionizing of the *loci classici*. We are in Gumerlock's debt for a thoroughly researched thesis. His bibliography and footnotes include references to English, German, Spanish, Italian and French resources. I do not believe he has left any stone unturned which may hide a reflection on his subject. And our thinking about the disputed biblical texts is considerably sharpened by this exercise in the history of interpretation. From our Reformed point of view, we put down Gumerlock's dissertation convinced once more of the Pauline, Augustinian and Reformed interpretation of the classic textual conundrums. In a clear and most helpful manner, Fulgentius informs our Calvinistic exegesis.

The dissertation consists of six chapters and several appendices. Chapter one positions Fulgentius in contemporary scholarly discussion and provides the most up-to-date biographical sketch of the subject in English (pp. 20-28). Chapter two outlines Fulgentius's early views (515-518) in which he endorses a universal will of God for the salvation of all mankind (as evidenced in his *Ad Monimum* and *De Trinitate*). Chapter three presents the critical catalyst that altered Fulgentius's previous opinion. The Semi-Pelagianism of Faustus of Riez (ca. 405-ca. 490) provoked a revision of Fulgentius's previous universalistic interpretation so that he now concluded (518/519) that "God was not willing that any of the predestined perish." Chapter four is the most adventurous; here Gumerlock advances an explanation for the further precision of Fulgentius's exegesis in response to a letter from a group of Scythian monks sojourning in Rome (519-520). Fulgentius is now indicating that "God wills all kinds of persons to be saved." Chapter five explains Fulgentius's most mature surviving work, *De veritate praedestinationis et gratiae* (523) ("Concerning the truth of predestination and grace"). There is a work in seven books against Faustus of Riez on the grace of God that unfortunately has been lost; however it is known from references in Isidore of Seville (p. 190) and others. By 523, Fulgentius has come a hundred and eighty degrees from his original position in *Ad Monimum* (chapter 2). He now affirms "God does not will all to be saved." Chapter 6 is a review of the matter of God's saving will in patristic interpretation and Fulgentius's contribution to the Semi-Pelagian controversy that arose with John Cassian (ca. 360-ca. 435) and others in southern France.²

The Appendices contain six documents never before translated into English:

Isidore of Seville, *On Illustrious Men* 14 (pp. 189-91); Fulgentius of Ruspe, *Fragments to Eugippus* (pp. 191-96); Faustus of Riez, *On Grace* 1.18 (pp. 196-99); John Maxentius, *Chapters* (pp. 199-202); John Maxentius, *Booklet on the Faith*, 15-18 (pp. 202-207); Caesarius of Arles, *On Grace* (pp. 207-14).

Inevitably, the reader, student, teacher, pastor of the Word of God comes across Ezk. 18, 1 Tim. 2 and 2 Pet. 3. How to understand these ostensibly universalistic expressions in the light of particularistic proof texts (e.g., Rom. 9:13, 18; John 17:12, etc.) is the resultant challenge. Does God reveal that he wills to save each and every man, woman and child born of ordinary generation since Adam and Eve? Does "all" in Timothy mean each and every person universally and absolutely? Fulgentius originally thought so; but like his great predecessor, Augustine (who modified his position from 'faith earns grace' to 'grace gratuitously grants faith'), Fulgentius was compelled by the whole counsel of God to reject the universal interpretation. The Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian discussions forced him to reconsider his interpretation so as to bring it into accord with the revealed will of God that some persons are not saved. Hence could not ever have been willed by God to be saved, else God's will fails of its omnipotent purpose. In the end, God's revealed will was the salvation of his elect people from all kinds of nations, walks of life, circumstances and conditions. Only that particular restriction was consonant with the particular restriction of the will of God to save some from all mankind rather than all from all mankind.

It is to be hoped that Gumerlock's dissertation will be published for wider distribution and edification. It deserves a place in every seminary library as well as a niche in every Calvinist's collection who wishes to own a concrete example of historical exegesis supportive of the Reformed interpretation of the classic texts.

James T. Dennison, Jr.

1 Francis X. Gumerlock, *Fulgentius of Ruspe on the Saving Will of God*. Ph.D. dissertation submitted to Saint Louis University, Saint Louis, MO (2004). Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services (phone: 1-800-521-3042), UMI Number 3154265. 244 pages. Loose leaf (\$38.00); soft cover (\$69.00); hard cover (\$85.00).

2 Cf. James T. Dennison, Jr. "Augustine on Grace." *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 18/3 (December 2003): 38-52 for a review of the controversy.