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Lucidus on Predestination:  
The Damnation of Augustine’s Predestinationism in the  
Synods of Arles (473) and Lyons (474)*

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About 473, Faustus, bishop of Riez, found out that Lucidus, a priest of his  
diocese, professed theories about grace and predestination that he considered  
heterodox. Faustus attempted to correct Lucidus in private conversations,¹ but  
he finally opted to denounce the teaching of this priest among his fellow bishops  
and the rest of the Catholic people of Southern Gaul.² As a result of Faustus’  
campaign, a council was convened to examine Lucidus’ orthodoxy and to  
decide what disciplinary measures should be taken in the event that Faustus’  
accusations were proved to be true. Before the council met, Faustus sent a  
letter to Lucidus – the first of his epistolary collection – in which the former tried  
to summarize the latter’s doctrinal errors in a series of anathemas that the priest  
should subscribe to avoid excommunication by conciliar decision.³ Despite the  
fact that Lucidus finally subscribed Faustus’ letter,⁴ the council assembled at

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¹ Faustus, Ep. 1 (CSEL 21, 161): Cum te prae sens multa et blanda et humili conlocutione  
umquam potuerim ad uiam ueritatis adtrahere?

² The so-called Sermo extrauagans ³ can be considered a testimony of Faustus’ accusation  
of Lucidus’ ideas before the Catholic people of Southern Gaul. This piece is part of the series  
of 9 homilies edited by François Glorie with the corpus of the so-called Ps.-Eusebius Gallicanus.  
On the attribution of this homily to Faustus and its context of preaching, see Clemens-M. Kasper,  
Theologie und Askese: Die Spiritualität des Inselmönchntums von Léris im 5. Jahrhundert  
(Münster, 1991), 384-85.

³ When Faustus wrote his letter to Lucidus, he knew that most of the bishops who were going  
to meet in the coming council agreed with him in rejecting Lucidus’ teaching and were in favour  
of excommunicating him if he did not retract his views. Faustus threatens Lucidus of excommunication  
in his letter, see Faustus, Ep. 1 (161): Grandis caritas est parum cauti fratris errorem  
per dei gratiam et adiutorium magis uelle curare, quam, sicut summis antestites meditantur, ab  
unitate suspendere. Before the council met, ten bishops who would later attend the synod had  
subscribed Faustus’ letter, as is shown by a manuscript preserving this document (see CChr.SL 148,  
159). If Lucidus did not subscribe the letter, Faustus would consider that he persevered in his  
errors and would claim for his excommunication by the synod (Faustus, Ep. 1 [164]).

⁴ A manuscript preserves his subscriptio following those of the ten bishops aforementioned  
(see previous note).

Studia Patristica XLV, 163-167.  
Arles under presidency of Leontius, the bishop of the city.⁵ During the sessions the letter of Faustus was probably read with general approval,⁶ as is shown by the fact that most of the anathemas it contained were included in a new list of theological errors denounced by the synod. Lucidus wrote a letter to the bishops assembled at Arles in which he expressed his approval of the council's decisions.⁷ At the request of Leontius, Faustus wrote a work to explain the issues discussed in the council and the decisions there taken. While Faustus was writing this treatise – *De gratia Dei et libero arbitrio* – another synod met at Lyons where the decisions of the council of Arles were probably confirmed and new theological issues about grace and predestination discussed. Faustus also dealt with all these matters in his *De gratia*.⁸

The documents we preserve about this case have been used by some scholars to describe Lucidus as the main spokesman of a sort of 'predestinationist extremism' which, in fact, would distort the real thought of Augustine on grace and predestination.⁹ However, this interpretation tends to ignore two important facts: first of all, we should take into account that all the available documents concerning Lucidus' affair only describe the priest's teaching from the point of view of his adversaries. As we have seen, they were written by Faustus – *Letter 1, De gratia, Sermo extrauagans 3* – or inspired by him.¹⁰ We should also consider

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⁵ The *directio* of the epistle sent by Lucidus to the council gives the names of the thirty bishops who convened at Arles (Lucidus, *Ep. ad syn. Arel.* [CSEL 21, 165]).

⁶ Faustus had already mentioned his intention to present the letter before the conciliar assembly (Faustus, *Ep. 1 [164]: Huius autem epistulae exemplar mecum reteneo in conventu sanctorum antestitum, si ita necesse fuerit, proferendum*).

⁷ Lucidus, *Ep. ad syn. Arel.* (165f.). Lucidus' letter is the only document that allows us to know the decisions taken at the synod of Arles for its acts are not preserved. From Lucidus' letter it can be inferred that not all matters discussed at the council related to the theology of grace. Lucidus, for example, expresses his agreement with the idea of eternal punishment of sinners as exposed in the synod (see *id.*, *Ep. ad syn. Arel.* [167]: *Profiteor etiam aeternos ignes et infernales flammis factis capitalibus praeparatas*). The council had condemned those who refused this dogma, probably south-Gallic followers of Origen who held his theory of apocatastasis.

⁸ See Faustus, *De gratia, profl.* (CSEL 21, 4).

⁹ In his *Historia Praedestinatiana* Jacques Sirmond asserted for the first time that Lucidus was a member of a 'predestinationist sect' which would have spread wrong views on grace and predestination in fifth-century Gaul (see Émile Amann, art. Lucidus: *DThC* 9 [Paris, 1926], 1020-4, 1020). Most recent scholars have insisted in depicting Lucidus as an extremist, whose views on predestination would distort the real thought of his master, Augustine. So, for instance, Rebecca Harden Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency: A Study of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy* (Macon, 1996), 163f., who speaks of 'the strongly predestinarian position of Lucidus' and points out that 'the Council of Arles in 473 was thus rejecting a manifestation of Augustinianism that was in some respects a significant departure from the teachings of both Augustine and Prosper.'

¹⁰ We refer to the letter of Lucidus to the synod of Arles, where he expressed his agreement with the decisions taken there. These decisions were inspired by Faustus, as is proved by the fact that most of the anathemas of his letter to Lucidus were also included in them. We should also remember that Faustus wrote his *De gratia* with the aim of explaining the discussions of Arles at the request of Leontius.
that these documents only present Lucidus’ views on grace and predestination under the form of short sentences extracted from the full context of the priest’s teaching. In fact these sentences offer a version of predestinationism which is exactly the same than that attributed to Augustine by some south-Gallic ecclesiastical and monastic circles since before Augustine’s death and shortly afterwards. This similarity becomes clear when comparing the documents on Lucidus affair with some anti-Augustinian writings circulating in Provence in those years.

The series of anathemas of the Letter 1 by Faustus reveal that he accused Lucidus of holding that baptism did not abolish the original sin in the case of men who died after a sinful life;11 the so-called Capitula Gallorum accused Augustine of holding the same view.12 The third anathema of Faustus’ epistle rejects the idea — attributed to Lucidus — that God predestines some men to sin and eternal death,13 which can be considered as the main accusation thrown against Augustine by his south-Gallic theologian opponents.14 The fourth anathema condemns those who taught that God did not grant to sinners the means to reach salvation,15 a theme in Augustinian doctrine on grace severely criticized by his south-Gallic opponents, as is shown by the letter of Hilarius of Marseilles to Augustine.16 Faustus also damned Lucidus’ predestinationist interpretation of Romans 9:20f.,17 and we should remember that Augustine’s critics rejected his exegesis of this Paulinian passage because they considered it depriving some men of hope of salvation and discouraging any effort to moral perfection.18 Finally, the sixth anathema of Faustus’ letter also anathematizes those who said that Christ did not die to save all men because he does not want all men to be saved against what Paul states in 1Tim 2:4.19 Augustine was

11 Faustus, Ep. 1 (162): Anathema illi, qui hominem cum fidei confessione solemniter baptizatum et adserentem cathelicam fidem et postmodum per diversa mundi huius oblectamenta et temptamenta prolapsum in Adam et originale peccatum perisse adseruerit.

12 See Prosper, Pro Augustino responsiones ad capitula obctionum Gallorum calumniantum 2 (PL 51, 157): Quod ab eis qui non sunt praestinati ad uitam, non auferat perpecta baptismi gratia originale peccatum.

13 Faustus, Ep. 1 (162): Anathema illi, qui per Dei praesicientiam hominem deprimi in mortem dixerit.

14 See Prosper, Resp. ad cap. Gall. 1 (157): Quod ex praedestatione Dei, uelut fatali necessitate, homines ad peccata compulsi cogantur in mortem. See also id., Resp. ad cap. Gall. 6 (160f.); id., Resp. ad cap. Gall. 11 (166); id., Resp. ad cap. Gall. 14 (169).

15 Faustus, Ep. 1 (162): Anathema illi, qui dixerit illum, qui perit, non accepisse ut saluus esse posset.

16 See Hilarius, Epistula ad Augustinum 2 (CSEL 57, 470): Nam illa testimonia, ut est illud: Sicut unicuique partitus est mensuram fidei et similia, ad id volunt ualere, ut iuuetur, qui cooperit uelle, non ut etiam doneut, ut uelit, reiectis ab hoc done alis pariter reis et qui possent similiter liberari, si ea, quae pariter indignis praeestatur, credendi voluntas etiam ipsis similiter praeestaretur.

17 See Faustus, Ep. 1 (162): Anathema illi, qui dixerit, quod uas in contumeliam non possit adsurgere, ut sit uas in honorum.

18 On this matter, see Prosper, Epistula ad Augustinum 3 (CSEL 57, 457f.).

19 Faustus, Ep. 1 (162): Anathema illi, qui dixerit, quod Christus non pro omnibus mortuas sit nec omnes homines saluos esse uelit.
also accused by his Gallic critics of refusing God's universal salvific will and of affirming that Christ did not die to redeem all the human race.  

As we have seen, the anathemas of the Letter 1 of Faustus summarize Lucidus' thought in a series of sentences also attributed to Augustine some years before. More textual parallels can be found in other documents. In his De gratia and in some homilies preached by him, for example, Faustus described Lucidus' predestinationist doctrine as a renewed version of old Pagan fatalism and linked it to the Gnostic belief in the division of humanity into classes predestined either to damnation or salvation.  

Augustinian predestinationism was also compared by his Provençal critics with Paganism and Gnosticism.  

For all these reasons, we think that we cannot achieve a good understanding of the Lucidus affaire without studying how Augustinian predestinationism was received and presented by his critics in Southern Gaul. Documents of the first phase of the so-called Semi-Pelagian controversy present a version of the Augustinian teaching which highlights the most negative points of this theory, such as his denial of God's universal salvific will, a view that could be rightly attributed to Augustine. But most of the sentences attributed to him in these opuscula would have been qualified or simply rejected by the bishop of Hippo. His critics, however, thought that those tenets were simply a logical consequence of Augustinian arguments. This is the case, for example, of the idea of praedestinatio ad mortem, the leitmotiv of the older anti-Augustinian writings. Years later, as we have seen, Lucidus was accused of holding this tenet, and based on this ground some scholars have qualified him as extremist. Yet it is true that Augustine had employed expressions such as praedestinati ad mortem and other similar ones in some of his works, he never asserted that God predestines some men to sin and eternal death in such a way that divine will was the efficient cause of the presence of sin in Mankind. God, Augustine remarks,

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20 See Prosper, Resp. ad cap. Gall. 8 (162): Quod non omnes homines uelit Deus saluos fieri, sed certum numerum praedestinatorum; id., Resp. ad cap. Gall. 9 (164): Quod non pro totius mundi redemptione Salvator sit crucifixus.

21 Faustus, De grat. 1.3 (17): Ita sub pietatis fronte gentilitatis malum et intra gratiae vocabulum absconditum erit fatale decretum; id., Sermo extragans 3.6 (CChr.SL 101B, 140): Ecce haereticus, dum unam uirtutem importunius asserit, utramque vacavit; et ideo, quia naturali uel fatai casu pertrahit ad peccandum hominem, sceleribus innocentiam dedit; et culpae causa, ac poenae, in auctorem retorsit ac judicem.

22 Prosper, Epistula ad Rufinum 3 (PL 51, 79): Scripta eius, quibus error Pelagianorum impugnatur, infamant, dicentes [...] sub gratiae nomine necessitatem praedicare fatalem. Adicientes etiam, duas illium humani generis massas, et duas credi uelle naturas; see also id., Ep. ad Aug. 3 (458).

23 As is well known, Augustine offered an exegesis of 1Tim. 2:4 in his later writings which aimed to accord this Pauline passage with his opinion that, in fact, God desires to save only a certus numerus of men - his electi -. On this exegesis see, for example, Augustinus, De correctione et gratia 14.44 (PL 44, 943): Ista dictum est: Omnes homines uult saluos fieri, ut intelligantur omnes praedestinati, quia omne genus hominum in eis est.

24 See, for example, Augustinus, De ciuitate Dei 22.24 (CChr.SL 48, 851f.).
predestines only *ad uitam* when he delivers some men from the *massa damnata* – that means all men without exception, who deserve punishment since the original sin – and bestows on them his salvific grace; the rest of Humanity is justly punished by God for their sins – for which only they are responsible –, a punishment that in fact all men would deserve. But the Provençal theologians rejected this subtle Augustinian distinction: according to them, not to predestine to salvation was equivalent to predestine to death, and that is how they presented Augustinian predestination in their writings.

The same applies to the question of baptism’s ineffectiveness in non-predestined men. In fact, Augustine did not deny that baptism abolished their original sin, but the first cause of the eternal punishment of these men – not separated by God from the *massa damnata* that Humanity is considered to be since Adam – was in fact the sin of the first man. That is why Provençal theologians could accuse Augustine of affirming implicitly that baptism did not cancel the original sin in non-predestined men. Some years later Lucidus, probably teaching what Augustine had taught, was accused of the same thing.

For these reasons we think that the depiction of Lucidus as a spokesman of an extreme form of predestinationism, a pupil who would have distorted the teachings of his master, should be reconsidered. If Lucidus really held the ideas that Faustus attributed to him in his writings, then the priest would have learnt his theories not from Augustine’s writings, but from certain *opuscula* written with the aim of discrediting Augustinian theology on grace and predestination. It seems to us that what Lucidus probably defended in his discussions with Faustus was, in fact, pure Augustinian thought. Then, Faustus and most of the Gallic episcopacy reacted in the same way that some of their compatriots had done years before, that is, spreading the most negative points of Augustine’s teaching and some aberrant thesis that might derive from it (predestination *ad mortem*, ineffectiveness of baptism in non-predestined men, fatalism, natural determinism to sin, etc.). Presented from this point of view, Augustinian predestinationism was condemned in the synods of Arles and Lyons. This fact confirms that most of the Gallic Church rejected Augustinian theology on grace and predestination in those times.

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25 On this point, see Donato Ogliari, Gratia et certamen. *The Relationship between Grace and Free Will in the Discussion of Augustine with the so-called Semipelagians* (Leuven, 2003), 366-76.