

“ἐλευθερία τῆς προαιρέσεως”: Freedom of choice in both the Theology of the New Testament and the Early Patristic Interpretation of the New Testament

Athanasios Despotis, University of Bonn

Introduction

The literary meaning of the term ἐλευθερία τῆς προαιρέσεως is freedom of choice. In the Greek Orthodox tradition this concept is a crucial theme and refers to the God-given ability of the person to choose between alternatives and to voluntarily perform God’s will. Beside ἐλευθερία τῆς προαιρέσεως the Greek Fathers use the terms αὐτεξούσιον (power of self-disposal)¹, αὐτοπροαίρετον (by own choice), τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν (what is in our power) or ἐλευθερία (freedom). These terms may not have an identical literary meaning but they form a common semantic field concerning the will of the human being. However, human προαίρεσις should not be understood in a modern sense, as a third power of the soul, which is in the middle between reason and emotion but rather as the will of the human being as a whole, i.e. as attitude and its relationship to divine agency.² The notion of freedom of choice or, more generally, of free will, its philosophical background and its development in the Greek patristic works have already been discussed in several studies.³ These studies approach the issue from a philosophical, systematic or historical point of view. Only rarely is it being analyzed how the Church Fathers as exegetes approach the concept of free will and use it in their interpretations of the New Testament.

The Non-biblical Background

The debate concerning προαίρεσις derives from ancient Greek philosophy. Aristotle was the first who systematically wrote about the issue of accountability of the human actions and their relation to the human character. In his third book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* he tried to criticize Socrates’ notion that nobody is voluntarily bad.⁴ Aristotle believed the opposite, namely that the character of the humans derives from decisions and actions, which are ascribed to them as individuals and not to external or natural powers. Aristotle considers προαίρεσις to be βουλευτική

¹ Especially αὐτεξούσιον can be understood as the prerequisite for the freedom of choice, while
² Perkams, 2010, 250.

³ The works of Müller (2010) and Frede (2011) are, according to my opinion, the most interesting and detailed studies among the most recent ones. Furthermore, Susanne Hausamman (2011) presents a comprehensive investigation of the concept of the freedom of decision in the eastern orthodox theological tradition.

⁴ *Ἠθικὰ Νικομάχεια*, III, 7, (ed. Bywater), OCT, 49¹⁴⁻¹⁷: Τὸ δὲ λέγειν ὡς οὐδεὶς ἐκῶν πονηρὸς οὐδ’ ἄκων μακάριος ἔοικε τὸ μὲν ψευδεῖ τὸ δ’ ἀληθεῖ· μακάριος μὲν γὰρ οὐδεὶς ἄκων, ἢ δὲ μοχθηρία ἐκούσιον.

ὄρεξις τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν⁵ i.e. *a deliberate pursuit of what is in our power*, which does not primarily refer to human freedom but to accountability of human action.

Furthermore, Epictetus accentuated more intensively the concept προαίρεσις at the end of the first or beginning of the second century.⁶ While Aristotle perceives προαίρεσις as a human faculty for choosing in a rational way, Epictetus understands προαίρεσις as the moral attitude of the human being as a whole⁷ and relates it to the Stoic conception of freedom.⁸ This freedom is characterized by an idealism.⁹ It characterizes only the Stoic sage,¹⁰ who remains uninfluenced by false ideas and knows exactly what is good. The Stoics represent the next stage in this philosophic debate. In the Stoic doctrine the notion of freedom of choice, free will appears for the first time. The term αὐτεξούσιον probably has stoic origin and refers to freedom of the person to act as it sees fit in pursuit of the good¹¹. Thus, according to the Stoics, only the wise man is really free because only he knows exactly what is good and has not enslaved himself to wrong beliefs. However, this notion of freedom should be understood in the context of the stoic theory of fate (εἴμαρμένη), which presupposes that fate's causal nexus (divine agency) determines all processes in the world.¹² Therefore, only the wise stoic has the capacity to obey to his fate's will dispassionately and willingly.¹³ This combination of the notions of freedom and fate

⁵ *Ἠθικά Νικομάχεια*, III, 3, (ed. Bywater), OCT, 48¹⁰⁻¹²: Ἡ προαίρεσις ἂν εἴη βουλευτική ὄρεξις τῶν ἐφ' ἡμῖν· ἐκ τοῦ βουλευέσασθαι γὰρ κρίναντες ὀρεγόμεθα κατὰ τὴν βούλευσιν.

⁶ Ἐπίκτητος, *Διατριβαί*, III,1,40, (ed. Schenkl), BT, 238¹³⁻¹⁴: Ὅτι οὐκ εἶ κρέας οὐδὲ τρίχες, ἀλλὰ προαίρεσις· ταύτην ἂν σχῆς καλήν, τότε ἔστι καλός.

⁷ Müller, 2010, 14. cf. Hofmeister-Pich, 2010, 105.

⁸ Ἐπίκτητος, *Διατριβαί*, I,12,10, (ed. Schenkl), BT, 51¹¹⁻¹²: Ἐλεύθερος γὰρ ἐστίν, ᾧ γίνεται πάντα κατὰ προαίρεσιν καὶ ὃν οὐδεὶς δύναται κωλύσαι. Epictetus, however, cannot be equated with the representatives of the Old and Middle Stoa, because he does not treat προαίρεσις before the strict deterministic background of his predecessors; cf. Dobbin, 1989, 33.

⁹ Ἐπίκτητος, *Διατριβαί*, III,5,7, (ed. Schenkl), 249³⁻⁵: Ἐμοὶ μὲν γὰρ καταληφθῆναι γένοιτο μηδενὸς ἄλλου ἐπιμελουμένῳ ἢ τῆς προαιρέσεως τῆς ἐμῆς, ἴν' ἀπαθῆς, ἴν' ἀκώλυτος, ἴν' ἀνανάγκαστος, ἴν' ἐλεύθερος.

¹⁰ Ὀριγένης, *Εἰς τὸ Κατὰ Ἰωάννην*, II,112, (ed. Blanc), Sc 120bis, 282¹⁻⁹: Ἔστι τινὰ δόγματα παρ' Ἑλλήσι καλούμενα παράδοξα, τῶν κατ' αὐτοὺς σοφῶν πλεῖστα ὅσα προσάπτοντα μετὰ τινοῦ ἀποδείξεως ἢ φαινομένης ἀποδείξεως, καθ' ἃ φασὶ μόνον καὶ πάντα τὸν σοφὸν εἶναι ἱερέα, τῶν μόνον καὶ πάντα τὸν σοφὸν ἐπιστήμην ἔχειν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ θεραπείας, καὶ μόνον καὶ πάντα τὸν σοφὸν εἶναι ἐλεύθερον, ἐξουσίαν αὐτοπραγίας ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ νόμου εἰληφότα· καὶ τὴν ἐξουσίαν δὲ ὀρίζονται νόμιμον ἐπιτροπήν.

¹¹ Frede, 2011, 75.

¹² Χρῦσιππος, *Fragmenta*, (ed. Arnim) Fragm 975: Καὶ αὐτοὶ δὲ (scil. Chrysippus et Zeno) τὸ καθ' εἴμαρμένην εἶναι πάντα διεβεβαιώσαντο παραδείγματι χρησάμενοι τοιούτῳ, ὅτι ὥσπερ ὀχήματος ἐὰν ἢ ἐξηρημένος κύων, ἐὰν μὲν βούληται ἔπεσθαι, καὶ ἔλκεται καὶ ἔπεται, ποιῶν καὶ τὸ αὐτεξούσιον μετὰ τῆς ἀνάγκης [οἷον τῆς εἴμαρμένης]· ἐὰν δὲ μὴ βούληται ἔπεσθαι, πάντως ἀναγκασθήσεται· τὸ αὐτὸ δὴπου καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων· καὶ μὴ βουλόμενοι γὰρ ἀκολουθεῖν ἀναγκασθήσονται πάντως εἰς τὸ πεπωμένον εἰσελθεῖν.

¹³ Dobbin, 1989, 16. Similarly, Ἐπίκτητος, *Ἐγχειρίδιον*, 8,1, (ed. Schenkl), BT, 432¹³⁻¹⁴ : Μὴ ζητεῖ τὰ γινόμενα γίνεσθαι ὡς θέλεις, ἀλλὰ θέλε τὰ γινόμενα ὡς γίνεται καὶ εὐροήσεις. The voluntary acceptance of fate's will makes human beings truly free, even if they like Epictetus lead a life as slaves

inspired the criticism addressed by the Peripatetics, who analyzed the concept of προαίρεσις on a more pragmatic basis. According to Alexander of Aphrodisias, one of the most well known of the Peripatetics, human beings are not determined by fate's casual nexus¹⁴ but instead have the capability to do something or its opposite through their προαίρεσις. The crucial point of human freedom is not the voluntary acceptance of a role assigned by fate¹⁵ but the careful deliberation and decision what to do.¹⁶ Alexander provides an understanding of προαίρεσις that is similar to that of the Greek Fathers and proves that the debate regarding human freedom and divine will was very popular in second century. The question is whether and how the New Testament authors refer to this debate.

The Biblical Background

The only case in the New Testament, where the concept προαίρεσις is used, and is contrasted with the notion of a forcible action is 2 Cor 9:7: ἕκαστος καθὼς προήρηται τῇ καρδίᾳ, μὴ ἐκ λύπης ἢ ἐξ ἀνάγκης. Προαιρέομαι τῇ καρδίᾳ in this context means choose freely and is opposed to the expression ἐξ ἀνάγκης (by constraint). Paul addresses a similar word to Philemon (14): ἵνα μὴ ὡς κατὰ ἀνάγκην τὸ ἀγαθὸν σου ἦ ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἐκούσιον. Indeed, these are some unsystematic statements, which do not refer to conceptions of human will and freedom but rather share the idea that one only voluntarily can do good and echo the language of the Septuagint.¹⁷

It is striking that neither a definition of the human will nor a fixed vocabulary concerning the human will and its relation to human actions occur in the Bible. Although both Testaments speak about divine agency and human will, their authors neither develop a theory nor use a constant term concerning human will. The reason for this is that, according to the Bible, God's will and commandments are not only performed or denied by the human intellect or an inner power of the soul but by the human being as a whole. The person as a whole is able to obey God or to turn away

or in other fateful circumstances. Though circumstances come from fate, they do not determine the human προαίρεσις, namely human attitude towards fate. Cf. Jedan, 2010, 43.

¹⁴ *Περὶ Εἰμαρμένης*, XXIII, (ed. Bruns), 193⁴⁻⁸: Τὸ γοῦν πρῶτον εἰρημένον ὡς πάντων τῶν ὄντων αἰτίων τινῶν γινομένων τῶν μετὰ ταῦτα καὶ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον ἐχομένων ἀλλήλων τῶν πραγμάτων τῷ δίκην ἀλύ σεως τοῖς πρώτοις συνηρητῆσθαι τὰ δεύτερα, ὃ ὡσπερ οὐσίαν τῆς εἰμαρμένης ὑποτίθενται, πῶς οὐ φανερώς ἀπάδει τῶν πραγμάτων;

¹⁵ Zierl, 1995, 13.

¹⁶ *Περὶ εἰμαρμένης*, VI, (ed. Bruns), 170¹²⁻¹⁹: Ὅρωμεν γοῦν ὅτι καὶ τὸ σῶμα τῷ τοῖον ἢ τοῖον εἶναι τὴν φύσιν καὶ ἐν νόσοις καὶ ἐν φθοραῖς ἀκολούθως τῇ φυσικῇ συστάσει γίνεται, οὐ μὴν ἐξ ἀνάγκης· ἱκαναὶ γὰρ ἐκκροῦσαι τὴν τοιάνδε τάξιν ἐπιμέλειαί τε καὶ ἀέρων ὑπαλλαγαὶ καὶ προστάξεις ἰατρῶν καὶ συμβουλαὶ θεῶν. Κατὰ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς ψυχῆς εὗροι τις ἂν παρὰ τὴν φυσικὴν κατασκευὴν διαφόρους γινομένας ἐκάστω τὰς τε προαιρέσεις καὶ τὰς πράξεις καὶ τοὺς βίους. ἦθος γὰρ ἀνθρώπων δαίμων κατὰ τὸν Ἡράκλειτον, τουτέστι φύσις.

¹⁷ Ecc 2:22; Jer 14:14; Lev 7:16.

from God's will, not just its cognitive, affective or other faculties¹⁸. Thus, the Hebrew term רַפֶּן (rafôn) has many connotations, which refer not only to a cognitive or mental aspect of the human being. Furthermore, the terms θέλειν, θέλημα and θέλησις in the Septuagint and the New Testament describe a morally ambivalent form of volition.¹⁹ They are not only for God's will, but also for human will. The quality of the human will depends on the manner in which it responds not to human reason, but to the Divine will.²⁰

Jesus prayer at Gethsemane (according to the Synoptics, Mk 14:36): ἀλλ' οὐ τί ἐγὼ θέλω ἀλλὰ τί σὺ provides an echo of this idea. Jesus expresses through this sentence his volitional obedience to His Father's will.²¹ Similarly, the fourth Gospel adopts the idea that humans can fulfill the divine will by their own will! Jn 7:17: Ἐάν τις θέλη τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ ποιεῖν, γνώσεται περὶ τῆς διδαχῆς πότερον ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστὶν ἢ ἐγὼ ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ λαλῶ. The value of the human person as a whole, namely as a thinking and acting subject, is being measured according to his willingness to perform the divine will. Therefore, the other relevant concept, that is, freedom, seen generally in the New Testament, does not refer to autonomy or independence of the human being from God but to a form of relationship to God.

The Main Theological Arguments of the Patristic Notion of Human Freedom of Choice

Even though no theory concerning the human will and human action can be found in New Testament, Justin the philosopher and martyr uses the terms ἐλευθέρα προαιρέσις and αὐτεξούσιον as fundamental theological concepts²². He is the first among the Greek Fathers who follows the aforementioned philosophical debate concerning προαιρέσις and introduces it in a new system, differentiated from that of the philosophical worldview. The Greek Fathers mentioned hereafter are primarily inspired by the biblical word and their own experiences in the Christian community. However, they use five arguments that have a remarkable philosophical background.

The first argument derives from Origen. In the third book of his work *περὶ ἀρχῶν* Origen presents systematic study regarding the term αὐτεξούσιον. His argument derives from the Aristotelian perspective of the accountability of human actions²³.

¹⁸ Dihle, 1982, 75: "Both complying with and opposing the intention of God result from the whole of human personality. It is therefore of little importance which faculty of the soul is chiefly responsible for the will of man, alone subject to moral judgment (Gen 2:21, 6:5)."

¹⁹ Limbeck, 1981, 338ff.

²⁰ Cf. Müller, 2010, 217.

²¹ Dihle, 1982, 79.

²² *Ἀπολογία*, (ed. Munier) 43, 3-4, Sc 507, 240¹⁰⁻¹⁴: Καὶ αὖ εἰ μὴ προαιρέσει ἐλευθέρα πρὸς τὸ φεύγειν τὰ αἰσχροῦ καὶ αἰρεῖσθαι τὰ καλὰ δύνανται ἔχει τὸ ἀνθρώπειον γένος, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἐλευθέρα προαιρέσει καὶ κατορθοῖ καὶ σφάλλεται, οὕτως ἀποδεικνυμένον». *Διάλογος Πρὸς Τρύφωνα*, (ed. Marcovich) 88, 5, PTS 47, 223²¹⁻²⁶: Βουλόμενος γὰρ τούτους ἐν ἐλευθέρα προαιρέσει καὶ αὐτεξουσίου γενομένους, τοὺς τε ἀγγέλους καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ὁ θεός ...

²³ *Ἠθικά Νικομάχεια*, III, 5, (ed. Bywater), OCT, 49³-50²⁶: Ὅντος δὴ βουλευτοῦ μὲν τοῦ τέλους, βουλευτῶν δὲ καὶ προαιρετῶν τῶν πρὸς τὸ τέλος, αἱ περὶ ταῦτα πράξεις κατὰ προαίρεσιν ἂν εἶεν

According to Origen, the accountability of human actions refers to the biblical idea of final judgment.²⁴ The fact that they are held accountable for their actions at the final judgment presupposes that human beings have *αὐτεξούσιον*.

A second argument is closely connected with this idea. It is about God's commandments in the Bible. The Epistle of Barnabas attests that the realization of God's commandments is *ἐφ' ἡμῖν*, meaning it is in our power. According to Irenaeus of Lyon²⁵ and other Greek Fathers this proves that human beings are not determined by fate.²⁶ God is omnipotent, God can act in history and God has foreknowledge of world events,²⁷ but this foreknowledge does not determine human life. In contrast, human beings are able to follow God's Law of their own volition.²⁸

A third argument is that neither God nor nature but human transgressions have caused evil in the world. Methodios of Olympe pleads for the *αὐτεξούσιον* and devotes an entire work to the issue, that evil does not come from God, but only from

καὶ ἐκούσιοι. Αἱ δὲ τῶν ἀρετῶν ἐνέργειαι περὶ ταῦτα ... τούτοις δ' ἔοικε μαρτυρεῖσθαι καὶ ἰδίᾳ ὑφ' ἐκάστων καὶ ὑπ' αὐτῶν τῶν νομοθετῶν· κολάζουσι γὰρ καὶ τιμωροῦνται τοὺς δρώντας μοχθηρά, ὅσοι μὴ βία ἢ δι' ἄγνοιαν ἢς μὴ αὐτοὶ αἰτίοι, τοὺς δὲ τὰ καλὰ πράττοντας τιμῶσιν, ὡς τοὺς μὲν προτρέφοντες τοὺς δὲ κωλύσοντες.

²⁴ Ὡριγέννης, *Περὶ Ἀρχῶν*, III,1,6, (ed. Görgemanns), 476⁹-477⁷: ... καὶ εὐλόγως ,ἐνόχων' ἡμῶν ,τῆ κρίσει' ἐσομένων, εἰ παραβαίνομεν αὐτά. Ὅθεν καὶ ,πᾶς' φησιν ,ὁ ἀκούων μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ ποιῶν αὐτοὺς ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ φρονίμῳ, ὅστις ᾠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν' καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς, ,ὁ δὲ ἀκούων καὶ μὴ ποιῶν ὁμοίος ἐστὶν ἀνδρὶ μωρῷ, ὅστις ᾠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν ἄμμον' καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς. Καὶ λέγων ,δὲ τοῖς ἐκ δεξιῶν· δεῦτε πρὸς με, οἱ εὐλογημένοι τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς, ἐπέειπασα γὰρ καὶ ἐδώκατέ μοι φαγεῖν, ἐδίψησα καὶ ἐποτίσατέ με' σφόδρα σαφῶς ὡς αἰτίοις οὖσι τοῦ ἐπαινεῖσθαι δίδωσι τὰς ἐπαγγελίας, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἐναντίου τοῖς ἐτέροις ὡς ψεκτοῖς παρ' αὐτοὺς λέγει τὸ ,πορεύεσθε οἱ κατηραμένοι εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον'.

²⁵ Ἐλεγχος, IV,37,3-4, (ed. Rousseau), Sc 100, 928¹⁷⁻²⁵: Ταῦτα γὰρ πάντα τὸ αὐτεξούσιον ἐπιδείκνυσι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τὸ συμβουλευτικὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀποτρέποντος μὲν τοῦ ἀπειθεῖν αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ μὴ βιαζομένου. Καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον εἰ μὴ βούλοιτό τις ἔπεσθαι, ἐξὸν μὲν αὐτῷ ἐστίν, ἀσύμφερον δέ· ἢ γὰρ παρακοὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἀποβολὴ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἐστὶν μὲν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, βλάβην δὲ καὶ ζημίαν οὐ τὴν τυχοῦσαν φέρει. Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὁ Παῦλός φησιν· Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν, ἀλλ' οὐ πάντα συμφέρει.

²⁶ Ὡριγέννης, *Περὶ Ἀρχῶν*, III,1,6, (ed. Görgemanns), 476⁴⁹: Καὶ ὁ σωτὴρ δὲ λέγων τὸ ,ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν μὴ ἀντιστήναι τῷ πονηρῷ' καὶ ,ὅτι ὅς ἂν ὀργισθῆ τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ, ἔνοχος ἐστὶ τῆ κρίσει' καὶ ,ὅς ἂν ἐμβλέψῃ γυναῖκα πρὸς τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι, ἤδη ἐμοίχευσεν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ', καὶ εἴ τινα ἄλλην δίδωσιν ἐντολήν, φησὶν ὡς ἐφ' ἡμῖν ὄντος τοῦ φυλάξαι τὰ προστεταγμένα». cf. Ἀλέξανδρος Ἀφροδισιεύς, XXXVI, *Περὶ εἰμαρμένης*, (ed. Bruns) 209⁸⁻¹⁰.

²⁷ cf. Ἰωάννης Δαμασκηνός, *Ἐκθεσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως*, 40, (ed. Kotter), PTS 12, 98¹⁷⁻¹⁸: Χρῆ δὲ γινώσκειν, ὡς ἢ μὲν αἴρεσις τῶν πρακτῶν αἰεὶ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἐστίν· ἢ δὲ πρᾶξις πολλακίς κωλύεται κατὰ τινα τρόπον τῆς προνοίας.

²⁸ The argument that the providence of God does not determine human action, and therefore human freedom is not canceled by divine agency, is mentioned by the platonic philosopher Carneades. See Bugár, 2009, 625.

our choices.²⁹ Evil results from the abuse of freedom, a freedom which rational beings, angels, and humans have obtained from God.³⁰

One can point to two further patristic arguments, which differ from the current philosophical positions. The fourth argument is, as Clement and Origen have pointed out, that the divine freedom is neither compatible with constraint nor with any form of violence.³¹ One can note a change of the image of God. God is viewed not only as the master of creation, but also as absolute freedom. God is uncreated freedom.³² According to John of Damascus human beings have the gift of freedom because they are a true image of God: Πᾶν γὰρ λογικὸν αὐτεξούσιον, καὶ τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ.³³ The freedom of choice is God's gift, which distinguishes humans from the rest of God's will-less creatures.

The fifth and last argument is even more exciting. It is a position particularly emphasized by John Chrysostom, who stresses it more than any other Greek exegete. According to this, human προαίρεσις has a position of primacy over the entire human nature. "I am not determined by my nature," observes Chrysostom, "but I am honored by God with the gift of the freedom of choice. It depends not on my nature but my choices if I will be a good or an evil person" (Οὐ γὰρ φύσει δέδεμαι, ἀλλ' ἐλευθερίᾳ προαιρέσεως τετίμημαι).³⁴ While the human nature has a fixed form and potential, one can develop his character through his own volitional choices and actions.³⁵

According to my point of view, these are the five most noteworthy arguments with which the Greek Fathers justify the notion of freedom of choice or free will on biblical and philosophical grounds. One wonders now why human agency has been a significant issue for them. Justin, the first who referred to αὐτεξούσιον and

²⁹ Kobusch, 2010, 284.

³⁰ Δαμασκηνός, Ἐκθεσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως, 21, (ed. Kotter), PTS 12, 59¹²³⁻¹³².

³¹ Kobusch, 2010, 293.

³² Ibid.

³³ Εἰσαγωγή δογμάτων, 10, (ed. Kotter), PTS 7, 26¹⁵⁻¹⁶. The Cappadocian Fathers also hold the opinion that human beings can reach through their προαίρεσις the likeness of God (τὸ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν). cf. Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, Περὶ κατασκευῆς ἀνθρώπου, I, (ed. Hörner), Gregorii Nysseni Opera Suppl., 29a⁵⁻¹⁶: Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ τὸ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν προσέθηκε, δεικνὺς ὅτι καὶ προαίρεσιν ἡμῖν αὐτεξουσίαν ἐμβαλεῖ τὴν δυναμένην ποιῆσαι ἡμᾶς ὁμοιωθῆναι θεῷ· καὶ οὖν καὶ τοιοῦτοι ἀπετελέσθημεν κατὰ τὴν πρόρρησιν τοῦ θεοῦ. Πολλοὶ γὰρ οἱ ὁμοιωθέντες αὐτῷ, πάντως δὲ καὶ οἱ ὁμοιωθησόμενοι, κἂν μὴ καὶ πάντες εἰς τοῦτο ἐπισπεύδοιμεν ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐναντίαν μάλλον ἀπὸ ἐθελοκακίας βαδίζοιμεν. Ἐν δὲ τῇ κατασκευῇ ὕστερον μόνον εἶπε τὸ Κατ' εἰκόνα ὡς καὶ μόνον τοῦτο ἐντελὲς καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει ἐγκατασκευάσας· τὸ δὲ γε καθ' ὁμοίωσιν, ἐπειδὴ δυνάμει τέως μόνον ἐγκατέσπειρε τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, οὐπω δὲ καὶ εἰς ἀποτέλεσμα ἐμπεφάνιστο ἀλλ' ἐδείτο ἔτι πρὸς ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς τοῦ λαβόντος τὴν προαίρεσιν πράξεως, εἰκότως ἀπεσιώπησεν.

³⁴ Εἰς τὸ ρητὸν τοῦ Ἀποστόλου: Περὶ δὲ τῶν κεκοιμημένων οὐ θέλω ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, ἵνα μὴ λυπησθε· καὶ εἰς τὸν Ἰώβ καὶ τὸν Ἀβραάμ, MPG 48, 1042¹⁷.

³⁵ Müller, 2010, 18.

ἐλευθέρᾳ προαίρεσις, as well as his pupil Tatian, who transformed this term into ἐλευθερία τῆς προαιρέσεως, applied these concepts against the vulgar belief in fate³⁶ and pagan superstitions such as astrology.³⁷ Nevertheless, Irenaeus of Lyon, along with Clement and Origen of Alexandria, have applied the concept of freedom of choice in their struggle against the strong dualism and determinism of the Gnostics. Among other things, the dispute of the Alexandrian theologians with the Gnostics focused on the concept πίστις (faith). While Clement and Origen understood faith as a voluntary and conscious acceptance of faith in God, Gnostics taught that faith derives from God or nature.³⁸

For the Greek Fathers, the encounter with Gnosticism carried with it the challenge of defending human freedom of decision not only in systematic treatises but also in biblical commentaries. This was necessary as the Gnostics misused the canonical texts in order to prove their deterministic and dualistic ideas.³⁹ In the following section, I will focus on three representative texts that played a crucial part in the debate between the Greek Fathers and the Gnostics.

John 6:44-45

A classical text, which is still regarded as one of the allegedly most important evidences for the claim that a predestinarian, or pre-gnostic pattern is present in the Fourth Gospel, is Jn 6:44-45. It is the passage of the dialogue between Jesus and the people of Galilea (6:28, 30f, 34) on the “bread of life.” Jesus responds to the “murmur” of the Jews who do not want to believe that He came down from Heaven that nobody can come to Him unless the Father draws him. The Isaiah quote from the Septuagint, which the evangelist cites in a modified form, refers to an eschatological event, namely the Jewish eschatological expectation of a time when Yahweh himself would teach his people the Torah.⁴⁰ That expectation is fulfilled in Christ on a universal level concerning all human beings:

³⁶ Cf. Klauck, 2003, 331ff.

³⁷ Iουστίνος, *Απολογία*, 43,1-2, (ed. Murnier), Sc 507, 240⁴⁻⁸: Ὅπως δὲ μή τινες ἐκ τῶν προλελεγμένων ὑφ’ ἡμῶν δοξάσωσι καθ’ εἰμαρμένης ἀνάγκην φάσκειν ἡμᾶς τὰ γινόμενα γίνεσθαι, ἐκ τοῦ προειπεῖν προεγνωσμένα, καὶ τοῦτο διαλύσομεν. Τὰς τιμωρίας καὶ τὰς κολάσεις καὶ τὰς ἀγαθὰς ἀμοιβὰς κατ’ ἀξίαν τῶν πράξεων ἐκάστου ἀποδίδοσθαι διὰ τῶν προφητῶν μαθόντες καὶ ἀληθὲς ἀποφαινόμεθα· ἐπεὶ εἰ μὴ τοῦτο ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ καθ’ εἰμαρμένην πάντα γίνεται, οὔτε τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἐστὶν ὄλωσ.

³⁸ Clemens of Alexandria summarizes in the fifth book of *Stromata* the understanding of faith according to the Gnostics Basilides, Valentin and Marcion (*Στρωματεῖς*, V,I, 3.2.1-4.4.5, GCS II [=15] 327¹⁹-328²⁰).

³⁹ Cf. Ωριγένης, *In Epistolam ad Romanos*, (ed. Bammel), Sc 532, 138⁴⁻¹⁰: ... alia quod quaestiones in ea plurimas mouet et eas praecipue quibus innitentes haeretici astruere solent quod uniuscuiusque gestorum causa non ad propositum debeat sed naturae diuersitatem referri, et ex paucis huius epistulae sermonibus totius scripturae sensum, qui arbitrii libertatem concessam a Deo homini docet, conantur evertere.

⁴⁰ So Bultmann, *Johannesevangelium*, KEKNT, 1986²¹, 172.

Α Οὐδείς δύναται ἐλθεῖν πρός με
 Β Ἐὰν μὴ ὁ πατήρ ὁ πέμψας με ἑλκύσῃ αὐτόν,
 καὶ γὰρ ἀναστήσω αὐτόν ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ.
 Ἔστιν γεγραμμένον ἐν τοῖς προφήταις· [Isa 54: 13] καὶ ἔσονται πάντες διδασκτοὶ θεοῦ·
 Β' πᾶς ὁ ἀκούσας παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μαθὼν
 Α' ἔρχεται πρὸς ἐμέ.

Verses 44–45 have a chiasmic structure which demonstrates, on the one hand, that the metaphor⁴¹ “to be drawn by the father” refers to “listening to the father,” and the “learning” of human beings. On the other hand, “coming” to Christ, i.e. believing in Christ,⁴² results from the combination of an action of the Father “drawing” human beings to Christ and a human action, i.e. the turning⁴³ towards Him (come, listen, learn) (cf. Jn 3:21). However, many scholars hold the view that this text is proof for the predestinarian intention of the Fourth Gospel,⁴⁴ or more intensively, that man is so strictly determined in the Fourth Gospel that there is no interest in his will.⁴⁵ The most famous commentator of the Fourth Gospel in the Greek East, Cyril of Alexandria, pleads for the freedom of decision and observes that the Evangelist emphasizes God’s initiative, but he does not negate the human αὐτοπροαίρετον:

[Εἰς τὸ Κατὰ Ἰωάννην, (ed. Pusey), I, 507¹⁶-508⁴]: «Ἀνωτέρω δὲ λέγων Οὐδείς δύναται ἐλθεῖν πρὸς μέ, ἐὰν μὴ ὁ Πατήρ ὁ πέμψας με ἑλκύσῃ αὐτόν, οὐκ ἀναγκαστικήν, οὐδὲ βιασιότατην οὖσαν ἐπιδεικνύει τὴν ἕλξιν προστιθείς· Πᾶς ὁ ἀκούσας παρὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς μου καὶ μαθὼν ἔρχεται πρὸς μέ. Ὅπου γὰρ ἀκοή καὶ μάθησις καὶ τὸ ἐκ παιδεύσεως ἀγαθόν, διὰ πειθοῦς δηλονότι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἢ πίστις· ἀντιληπτική δὲ μᾶλλον, ὡς ἐξ ἀγάπης τοῖς ἀξίοις ἢ ἐπὶ Χριστῷ σύνεσις χορηγεῖται παρὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἢ περ ἀναγκαστική· περισφύζεσθαι γὰρ ὁ δογματικὸς ἀναγκάζει λόγος τὸ αὐτεξούσιον καὶ αὐτοπροαίρετον τῆ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ψυχῆ, ἵνα δικαίους μὲν ἐπ' ἀγαθοῖς ἀπαιτῆ τοὺς μισθοὺς, σφαλλομένη δὲ τοῦ πρέποντος, καὶ τὸ τῷ νομοθέτῃ δοκοῦν ἐκ ῥαθυμίας ἐκβαίνουσα, τὴν ἐπὶ τῷ κολάζεσθαι δίκην καὶ εὐλογωτάτην ἀποκομίζοιτο».

[Transl. Pusey, (1885): But having said above, No man can come to Me, except the Father Which sent Me draw him, He shews that it is not a compulsory nor forcible drawing, adding, Every man that hath heard of My Father and hath learned, cometh unto Me. For where there is hearing and learning and the benefit of instruction, there is faith, to wit by persuasion and not of necessity: and the knowledge of Christ is given by the Father to them that are worthy, helpful as of love, rather than constraining. For the word of doctrine requires that free will and free choice be preserved to the soul of man, in order that it may ask the just rewards of its good deeds, and if it have fallen from right, and from heedlessness have transgressed the Will of the Lawgiver, it may receive the doom of its transgression and that most reasonable.]

⁴¹ The metaphor “to be drawn by” has a rich Jewish (Hos 11:1.4; Jer 38,3^{LXX} a.o.), as well as Greek background (Πλάτων, Ἰων, 536a a.o.). See in detail Theobald, 1996, 315-341.

⁴² Cf. Jn 7,37-38.

⁴³ Röhser, 1994, 220.

⁴⁴ Hofius, 1996, 28f. cf. Brown, *John, ABC*, 1996, 277: „Gott acts in their hearts ... this internal moving of the heart by the father will enable them to believe in the Son ...” (cf. Jer 31:33)

⁴⁵ Achnert, 2011, 38ff.

On the basis of this commentary we can see that Cyril compares the relevant parts of the chiasmic structure with each other and draws the conclusion that faith in Christ is not only a gift from God but also a consequence of human hearing and learning. Cyril goes back to the teaching of Clement and Origen and stresses that faith cannot be forcibly imposed. He expresses openly that this reading derives from the doctrine of the church (ὁ δογματικὸς ἀναγκάζει λόγος). Cyril explains ἀντεξούσιον and αὐτοπροαίρετον as a theological axiom and ascribes validity to it on the grounds of human accountability for action at the final judgment. From this point of view, προαίρεσις is a kind of intention, which results from the entire moral attitude of the human person⁴⁶ and makes it worthy of the faith in Christ. According to Cyril, divine agency does not abolish human προαίρεσις. God the Father gives insight to those counted worthy, an insight that is not forcibly imputed but rather helps to move humans towards faith (ἀντιληπτική ... σύνεσις ἐπὶ Χριστῷ ... ἡπερ ἀναγκαστική).

Finally, I would like to point out texts that demonstrate clearly⁴⁷ that, in the Fourth Gospel, human volition is a decisive factor regarding faith in Christ.

5:40: καὶ οὐ θέλετε ἐλθεῖν πρὸς μεῖν ἵνα ζωὴν ἔχητε (cf. Jn 5:35; Mt 23:37).

7:17: Ἐάν τις θέλῃ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ [i.e. τοῦ πατρὸς] ποιεῖν,

γνώσεται περὶ τῆς διδαχῆς πότερον ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστὶν ἢ ἐγὼ ἀπ' ἑμαυτοῦ λαλῶ.

I will now refer to another important text of the New Testament.

Romans 7

Rom 7:14-25 (cf. Gal 5:13ff.⁴⁸) is considered another *locus classicus* in the debate concerning human will in the New Testament. Paul seems to radically challenge human freedom in this text.⁴⁹ The interpretation of Romans 7 and especially the first person singular “I” is itself a broad topic and cannot be discussed extensively in this paper. However, one can accept the majority’s opinion that in Romans 7 Paul explains the situation of the unredeemed human being⁵⁰ on the basis of the of the “Fall of Man” narrative in Genesis 2 and 3.⁵¹ Neither his own personal story nor any anthropological problems⁵² are the subject of discussion here. Paul rather refers to the capture of pre-Christian human beings in a wrong system of values.⁵³ He does that in order to put the blame on sin and prove that salvation is possible only in Christ. Paul

⁴⁶ Müller, 2010, 10.

⁴⁷ So Brown (*John, AnBib*, 1966, 225) on Jn 5:40: “The refusal is deliberate”.

⁴⁸ Löhr (2007, 174ff.) undertakes an interesting investigation of the concept of human will in Romans 7 and Galatians 5.

⁴⁹ Müller, 2010, 244.

⁵⁰ Wolter, 2011, 371.

⁵¹ See Bendemann, 2004, 36.

⁵² Against Bendemann, 2004, 52. Paul’s intention here is not to focus upon an inner conflict of human beings, but rather to give reasons for his argument that, although the Mosaic Law is given by God, human beings cannot overcome the situation, which results from their *doing* the sin.

⁵³ Müller, 2009 II, 239.

does not claim that human nature is inherently sinful but he describes the situation of the unredeemed human being in contrast to Christ's saving action.⁵⁴

Paul raises the question why the pre-Christian human acted badly despite his knowledge of good and his hate of evil.⁵⁵ Paul recognizes retrospectively that the pre-Christian human being remains under the slavery of sin and lives according to the flesh *κατὰ σάρκα*. In this context, *σάρξ* is a symbol for everything that is contrary to the divine will.⁵⁶ By accusing sin, which has crept into the world as a kind of system, Paul defends the Mosaic Law and points out that the Torah is holy.⁵⁷

(In the following text, the statements regarding Law and sin are centered, the famous sentence concerning the will of good and the hate of evil (in its dual form 15.19) is written in bold fonts, and the verbs who are parallel or antithetically associated to *ἐθέλειν* are underlined.)

Οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ὁ νόμος πνευματικός ἐστίν,
ἐγὼ δὲ σάρκινός εἰμι πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν.

Ὅ γὰρ κατεργάζομαι οὐ γινώσκω·
οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω τούτο πράσσω,
ἀλλ' ὁ μισῶ τούτο ποιῶ.
Εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ θέλω τούτο ποιῶ,
σὺμφημι τῷ νόμῳ ὅτι καλός.
Νυνὶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ
ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία.
Οἶδα γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ οἰκεῖ ἐν ἐμοί, τοῦτ' ἐστίν ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου, ἀγαθόν·
τὸ γὰρ θέλειν παράκειται μοι, τὸ δὲ κατεργάζεσθαι τὸ καλὸν οὐ·
οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω ποιῶ ἀγαθόν,
ἀλλὰ ὁ οὐ θέλω κακὸν τούτο πράσσω.
Εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ θέλω [ἐγὼ] τούτο ποιῶ, οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ
ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία.
Εὐρίσκω ἄρα τὸν νόμον, τῷ θέλοντι ἐμοὶ ποιεῖν τὸ καλόν,
ὅτι ἐμοὶ τὸ κακὸν παράκειται·
συνήδομαι γὰρ τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον,
βλέπω δὲ ἕτερον νόμον ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου ἀντιστρατευόμενον τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ νοῦς μου
καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζοντά με ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τῆς ἁμαρτίας
τῷ ὄντι ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου.
Ταλαίπωρος ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος· τίς με ῥύσεται ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου; Χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ
διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν.
Ἄρα οὖν αὐτὸς ἐγὼ τῷ μὲν νοῖ δουλεύω νόμῳ θεοῦ
τῇ δὲ σαρκὶ νόμῳ ἁμαρτίας.

⁵⁴ Müller, 2009 II, 240.

⁵⁵ So Löhr, 2007, 176: "Das in den Texten [Galatians 5; Romans 7] aufgezeigte Dilemma des Menschen bezieht sich auf den Bereich des Handelns, sowohl positiv als auch negativ. Anders formuliert: Beide Textzusammenhänge ringen mit der Frage: Was soll bzw. kann ich *tun*?"

⁵⁶ Müller, 2009 II, 223.

⁵⁷Cf. Stendahl, 2001, 60. However, faith in Christ and Spirit now can release all human beings from this tragic situation. Cf. Romans 8. So Bendemann, 2004, 45: "Die heillose Situation des ‚Ich‘ in seinem Wissen und Wollen wird allererst begreiflich und überschaubar im Rückblick von dem kontingenten Eingriff her, der dann im folgenden Kapitel Röm mit der Rede vom ‚Geist‘ anvisiert wird (vgl Röm 7:6)."

Paul interprets an ancient common topos concerning the contradiction between *wanting* and *doing*⁵⁸ from a Christian perspective. New Testament Scholars mostly compare the parallelism in vv. 15 and 19 with the final monologue of Euripides' Medea, as well as the question of the weakness of the human will in ancient Greek literature and philosophy (ἀκρασία). Thus Paul observes that sin, not the Law, must be blamed for the tragic situation of human beings in the pre-Christian era, an approach that has no parallels in Greek or Latin literature. According to Paul, man came into this situation through an action attributed to him, as can be clearly seen in Rom 5:12-21. Sin came into the world through one man: δι' ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσηλθεν (5:15). In Romans 5, Paul addresses the transgression and disobedience of Adam, which caused humanity's enslavement to sin. Therefore, in Romans 7 it is sin that lives and acts in the "I" but the cause of this remains human action, as mentioned in Romans 5. Inevitably, the "I" has to experience the results of that action.⁵⁹ Paul applies this truth to himself by saying that death came to him just as it had come to Adam, namely, through sin. However, Paul does not speak about original sin in the Augustinian sense, i.e. that sin is being transmitted by concupiscence and enfeebles freedom of the will. Paul rather refers to the sin of every human being as can also be proved by evidence we find in parallel Jewish sources.⁶⁰ Not only disobedience (παράκοή), but also its opposite, obedience from the heart (ὑπακούειν ἐκ καρδίας⁶¹) is considered to be an action of the free human being (cf. Rom 6:17:

Χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ ὅτι ἦτε δούλοι τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὑπηκούσατε δὲ ἐκ καρδίας εἰς ὃν
παρεδόθητε τύπον διδαχῆς.

The heart is the center of human προαίρεσις (2 Cor 9:7), βουλή (1 Cor 4:5) and θέλημα (1 Cor 7:37). As a result, the obedience from the heart refers to a voluntary acceptance of the Gospel.⁶² Indeed, the acceptance of the Gospel and baptism must be followed by a faith corresponding life. The baptized is a debtor (ὀφειλέτης), namely he has to lead a life according to the Spirit (κατὰ πνεῦμα). Paul refers to this duty of the Christian believers and, like warning, reminds them the possibility of returning back to the pre-Christian situation.⁶³ This notion proves that the eschatological salvation results not only from a divine call but from human life as well. So Paul in Rom 8:12-13, where he considers salvation to be a consequence of a life according to Spirit⁶⁴:

⁵⁸ Lichtenberger, 2004, 185.

⁵⁹ Lichtenberger, *ibid.* Cf. Jn 8:34b: «πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν δούλος ἐστὶν τῆς ἁμαρτίας».

⁶⁰ Strack-Billerbeck, III, 228-229; 239.

⁶¹ Cf. 2 Cor 9:7.

⁶² Cf. Χρυσόστομος, *Εἰς τὴν Πρὸς Ρωμαίους*, MPG 60, 489³⁰⁻³²: «Ἡ μὲν γὰρ ὑπακοή ἢ ἐκ καρδίας τὸ αὐτεξούσιον δηλοῖ, τὸ δὲ παραδοθῆναι, τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ βοήθειαν αἰνίττεται».

⁶³ Löhr, 2007, 186.

⁶⁴ So Löhr, 2007, 185, on Rom 8:13: "In diesem Vers wie zuvor schon in V.6 wird den Angeredeten und ihrem Tun die Verantwortung über das eigene Leben bzw. den eigenen Tod mahnend vor Augen

Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ὀφείλεται ἐσμὲν οὐ τῆ σαρκὶ τοῦ κατὰ σάρκα ζῆν, εἰ γὰρ κατὰ σάρκα ζῆτε, μέλλετε ἀποθνήσκειν· εἰ δὲ πνεύματι τὰς πράξεις τοῦ σώματος θανατοῦτε, ζήσεσθε.

All above cited texts support the argument that Paul's intention in Romans 7 is not to question human freedom. Therefore, the Greek exegetes tried to defend human freedom of choice through the interpretation of Romans 7. This attempt is clear in the commentary of Chrysostom.

[*Εἰς τὴν Πρὸς Ῥωμαίους, MPG 60, 510¹¹⁻²⁹*]: «Τὸ γὰρ θέλειν παράκειται μοι, φησί, τὸ δὲ κατεργάζεσθαι τὸ καλὸν οὐχ εὐρίσκω. Ἐνταῦθα πάλιν εἰπὼν, Οὐχ εὐρίσκω, οὐκ ἄγνοιάν φησιν, οὐδὲ ἀπορίαν, ἀλλ' ἐπήρειάν τινα καὶ ἐπιβουλήν τῆς ἀμαρτίας· ὅπερ οὖν καὶ σαφέστερον δεικνὺς ἐπήγαγεν· Οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω, ποιῶ ἀγαθόν, ἀλλ' ὁ οὐ θέλω κακόν, τοῦτο πράσσω. Εἰ δὲ ὁ ἐγὼ οὐ θέλω, τοῦτο ποιῶ, οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτό, ἀλλ' ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἀμαρτία. Εἶδες πῶς καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν τῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν τῆς σαρκὸς ἀπαλλάξας ἐγκλήματος, τὸ πᾶν ἐπὶ τὴν πονηρὰν πράξιν μετέστησεν; Εἰ γὰρ οὐ θέλει τὸ κακόν, ἀπήλλακται ἡ ψυχὴ, καὶ εἰ αὐτὸς αὐτὸ μὴ κατεργάζεται, ἠλευθέρωται καὶ τὸ σῶμα, καὶ μόνῃς τῆς πονηρᾶς προαιρέσεώς ἐστι τὸ πᾶν. Οὐ γὰρ ταυτὸν ψυχῆς οὐσία καὶ σώματος καὶ προαιρέσεως, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ἐστὶν ἔργα Θεοῦ, τὸ δὲ ἐξ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν γινομένη κίνησις, πρὸς ὅπερ ἂν αὐτὴν βουληθῶμεν ἀγαγεῖν. Ἡ μὲν γὰρ βούλησις, ἔμφυτον καὶ παρὰ Θεοῦ· ἡ δὲ τοιάδε βούλησις, ἡμέτερον καὶ τῆς γνώμης ἡμῶν».

[Transl. Moris-Simcox (1851): "For to will," he says, "is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not." Here again in the words, "I find not," he does not speak of any ignorance or perplexity, but a kind of thwarting and crafty assault made by sin, which he therefore points more clearly out in the next words. Ver. 19, 20. "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me." Do you see, how he acquits the essence of the soul, as well as the essence of the flesh, from accusation, and removes it entirely to sinful actions? For if the soul willeth not the evil, it is cleared: and if he does not work it himself, the body too is set free, and the whole may be charged upon the evil moral choice. Now the essence of the soul and body and of that choice are not the same, for the two first are God's works, and the other is a motion from ourselves towards whatever we please to direct it. For willing is indeed natural (ἐμφυτον), and is from God: but willing on this wise is our own, and from our own mind.]

Chrysostom interprets Romans 7 in review of the upcoming chapters of the epistle and recognizes that Paul describes the situation of the pre-Christian man under sin. As the commentary of Chrysostom shows, the Antiochian exegete transfers the text's focus from the guilt of sin to the guilt of the human προαίρεσις. Chrysostom is based on the previously mentioned distinction between the nature φύσις and volition προαίρεσις. According to this view, it is not human nature but human volition that has to be understood as the origin of evil.⁶⁵ The unredeemed man is in a state he

gestellt, wobei Leben wie Tod als eschatologisch-endgültige Zustände des Menschen gemeint sind. Über die eigene Zukunft entscheidet insoweit die eigene tätige Existenz."

⁶⁵ Ἰωάννης Χρυσόστομος, *Εἰς τὴν Πρὸς Ῥωμαίους, MPG 60, 511⁴⁷ -512¹*: Πῶς οὖν ἀμφότερα τοῦ διαβόλου φασὶν εἶναι, ἐναντία ἀλλήλοις εἰσάγοντες; Ὁρᾶς ὅση μετὰ τῆς ἀσεβείας καὶ ἡ ἄνοια;

hates, but he gets in it through his evil volition.⁶⁶ Προαίρεσις is equated in this text with βούλησις (volition).⁶⁷ It is a goal-oriented endeavor, which is also related to reason and deliberation. The individual human being forms its character according to the side to which it turns its προαίρεσις as βούλησις. Here, Chrysostom sharpens the voluntaristic conception of evil in order to keep the Christian conceptions of God and human nature free from dualism and fatalism.

Matthew 13

One could certainly consider many additional biblical texts and patristic commentaries on this topic. However, that is an impossible task for a single essay. I can only briefly comment on a third crucial text before drawing my conclusions. Since the first centuries,⁶⁸ the debate regarding human agency revolved round Jesus' answer to the question why he spoke in parables. I focus on the Matthean version because the Greek Fathers refer to the Gospel of Matthew most frequently.

Ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς·
ὅτι ὑμῖν δέδοται γινῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν,
ἐκεῖνοις δὲ οὐ δέδοται.

Isolated from its proper context this phrase can surely give the impression⁶⁹ that human faith or unbelief derives from divine agency.⁷⁰ Its immediate context is the

Ἄλλ' οὐ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τὰ δόγματα τοιαῦτα, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν κατακρίνει μόνον, καὶ τὸν νόμον ἐκάτερον παρὰ Θεοῦ δεδομένον, καὶ τὸν τῆς φύσεως, καὶ τὸν τοῦ Μωϋσέως, ταύτη πολέμιον εἶναί φησιν, οὐ τῆ σαρκί· οὐδὲ γὰρ τὴν σάρκα ἁμαρτίαν εἶναι, ἀλλ' ἔργον Θεοῦ σφόδρα, καὶ πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἡμῖν ἐπιτήδειον, ἐὰν νηφώμεν. Ταλαίπωρος ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος· τίς με ῥύσεται ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου; Εἶδες πόση τῆς κακίας ἢ τυραννίς, ὅτι καὶ συνηδόμενον τῷ νόμῳ τὸν νοῦν νικᾷ; Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔχει τις εἰπεῖν, φησίν, ὅτι μισοῦντά με τὸν νόμον καὶ ἀποστρεφόμενον ἢ ἁμαρτία χειροῦται· συνηδόμεναι γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ σύμφημι, καὶ καταφεύγω πρὸς αὐτόν, ἀλλ' ὅμως ἐκεῖνος μὲν οὐδὲ φεύγοντα πρὸς αὐτόν ἴσχυσε σῶσαι, ὁ δὲ Χριστὸς καὶ φεύγοντα ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἔσωσεν.

⁶⁶ Ἰωάννης Χρυσόστομος, *Εἰς τὴν Πρὸς Ῥωμαίους*, MPG 60, 508⁶⁰-509²⁰: Οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω, τοῦτο πράσσω, ἀλλ' ὁ μισῶ, τοῦτο ποιῶ. Πῶς οὖν οὐ γινώσκεις, ὁ κατεργάζῃ; Εἰ γὰρ θέλεις τὸ καλόν, καὶ μισεῖς τὸ πονηρόν, γνώσεως τοῦτο ἀπηρτισμένης ἐστίν. Ὅθεν δῆλον, ὅτι καὶ τό, Ὁ οὐ θέλω, εἶρηκεν, οὐχὶ τὸ αὐτεξούσιον ἀναιρῶν, οὐδὲ ἀνάγκην τινὰ εἰσάγων βεβιασμένην. Εἰ γὰρ οὐχ ἐκόντες, ἀλλ' ἀναγκαζόμενοι ἁμαρ-τάνομεν, πάλιν τὰ τῶν κολάσεων τῶν ἔμπροσθεν γεγεννημένων οὐκ ἂν ἔχοι λόγον. Ἄλλ' ὥσπερ, Οὐ γινώσκω, λέγων, οὐκ ἄγνοϊαν ἐνέφηεν, ἀλλ' ἅπερ εἰρήκαμεν· οὕτω καὶ τό, Ὁ οὐ θέλω, προσθεῖς, οὐκ ἀνάγκην ἐδήλωσεν, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὴ ἐπαινεῖν τὰ γινόμενα· ἐπεὶ εἰ μὴ τοῦτο ἦν δηλώσας τῷ εἰπεῖν, Ὁ οὐ θέλω, τοῦτο πράσσω, πῶς οὐκ ἐπήγαγεν, Ἄλλ' ὁ ἀναγκαζομαι καὶ βιάζομαι, τοῦτο ποιῶ; Τοῦτο γὰρ τῷ θέλειν καὶ τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ ἀντίκειται. Νυνὶ δὲ οὐ τοῦτο εἶρηκεν, ἀλλ' ἀντὶ τούτου τό, Ὁ μισῶ, τέθεικεν, ἵνα μάθῃς ὡς καὶ ἐν τῷ εἰπεῖν, Ὁ οὐ θέλω, οὐ τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἀνείλε. Τί οὖν ἐστὶ τό, Ὁ οὐ θέλω; Ὁ μὴ ἐπαινῶ, ὁ μὴ ἀποδέχομαι, ὁ μὴ φιλῶ· οὗ πρὸς ἀντιδιαστολήν καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς ἐπήγαγεν εἰπών· Ἄλλ' ὁ μισῶ, τοῦτο ποιῶ.

⁶⁷ Kobusch, 2010, 287.

⁶⁸ Cf. Ωριγένης, *Περὶ Ἀρχῶν*, III,1,16, (ed. Gorgemanns), 518ff.

⁶⁹ So Turner, *Matthew*, BACNT, 2008, 339: "These solemn words confront Jesus' disciples with God's sovereign activity in graciously revealing himself to some and in justly withholding that revelation from others."

parable of the Sower. In this parable the sower sows seeds everywhere, whether now the seeds root and bear fruits is not pre-ordained by him, but it depends on the place where the seeds land.⁷¹ Namely God's saving action has two sides: one refers to God's initiative and the other presupposes the human cooperation.⁷² This also becomes evident through Matthew's following remark in Mt 13:12 (cf. Mt 21:43; 25:29; Mk 4:25; Lk 8:18):⁷³

ὅστις γὰρ ἔχει, δοθήσεται αὐτῷ καὶ περισσευθήσεται·
ὅστις δὲ οὐκ ἔχει, καὶ ὃ ἔχει ἀρθήσεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ.

It is striking in this logion that the initiative for salvation derives from God (cf. the forms in *Passivum divinum*: δοθήσεται, περισσευθήσεται, ἀρθήσεται). However, one must firstly have something⁷⁴ (ἔχει), in order to recognize the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. The verbs ἔχει / οὐκ ἔχει refer to the acceptance or denial of Jesus preaching, i.e. the Matthean community's teaching. Especially the second half of this logion prepares the reader for Jesus' word in Mt 21:43 that the kingdom of God will be taken from the Jews and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits.⁷⁵ Matthew considers the acceptance of the proclamation of the Gospel and living in the Christian community to be prerequisite for the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God.

This interpretation is also present in Chrysostom's commentary on the First Gospel:

[Εἰς τὸ Κατὰ Ματθαῖον, MPG 58, 471²⁹-472⁸]: Ὅτι ὑμῖν δέδοται, φησί, γινῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν· ἐκείνοις δὲ οὐ δέδοται. Τοῦτο δὲ εἶπεν, οὐκ ἀνάγκην εἰσάγων, οὐδὲ ἀποκλήρωσιν τινα ἀπλῶς καὶ ὡς ἔτυχε γινομένην· ἀλλὰ δεικνὺς αὐτοὺς ἀπάντων αἰτίους ὄντας τῶν κακῶν, καὶ παραστήσαι θέλων, ὅτι δωρεὰ τὸ προᾶγμά ἐστι, καὶ χάρις ἄνωθεν δεδομένη. Οὐ μὴν ἐπειδὴ δωρεά, διὰ τοῦτο τὸ αὐτεξούσιον ἀνήρηται· καὶ τοῦτο ἐκ τῶν ἐξῆς δηλον. Ὅρα γοῦν πῶς, ἵνα μήτε ἐκεῖνοι ἀπογνώσι, μήτε οὗτοι ῥαθυμήσωσι, ἀκούσαντες ὅτι δέδοται, δείκνυσι παρ' ἡμῖν τὴν ἀρχὴν οὔσαν. Ὅστις γὰρ ἔχει, δοθήσεται αὐτῷ, καὶ περισσευθήσεται· ὅστις δὲ οὐκ ἔχει, καὶ ὃ δοκεῖ ἔχειν [cf. Lk 8:18] ἀρθήσεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ. Καὶ πολλῆς μὲν ἀσαφείας γέμει τὸ εἰρημένον, ἀφατον δὲ δικαιοσύνην ἐνδείκνυται. Ὁ γὰρ λέγει, τοιοῦτόν

⁷⁰ Luz, *Matthäus*, EKK, 2007⁴, 311. Cf. Hagner, *Matthew*, WBC, 1993, 372: "The answer of Jesus indicates that understanding the truth he teaches depends on the determining grace of God."

⁷¹ Cowburn, 2008, 81.

⁷² So Grundmann, 1986⁶, 341: "Im Unterschied zu Markus fügt Matthäus nun einen Spruch ein, durch den das Mitwirken des Menschen an diesem Geschehen deutlich wird. Wer sich Erkenntnis erworben bzw. wer sie festgehalten hat, dem wird weiter gegeben ..."

⁷³ Some exegetes interpret the meaning of this verse inversely, as if ἔχειν means δίδοσθαι! So Luz, *Matthäus*, EKK, 2007⁴, 313: „Was ‚haben‘ die Jünger? Offenbar das, was ihnen nach V 11 ‚gegeben‘ ist“. This reading leads the author to the conclusion: "Selbstsicher und selbstzufrieden ist Matthäus nicht und sollen auch seine Leser/innen nicht sein."

⁷⁴ See similar texts from Jewish authors, who consider human attitude prerequisite for God's gifts in: Strack-Billerbeck, I, 661.

⁷⁵ Luz, EKK, 313.

ἐστιν· Ὅταν τις προθυμίαν ἔχη καὶ σπουδὴν, δοθήσεται αὐτῷ καὶ τὰ παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἅπαντα· ὅταν δὲ τούτων κενὸς ᾖ, καὶ τὰ παρ' ἑαυτοῦ μὴ εἰσφέρει, οὐδὲ τὰ παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ δίδονται. Καὶ γὰρ Ὁ δοκεῖ ἔχειν, φησὶν, ἀρθησεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ· οὐ τοῦ Θεοῦ αἶροντος, ἀλλὰ μὴ καταξιούντος αὐτὸν τῶν αὐτοῦ.

Transl. Prevost (1888): "Because it is given unto you," so He speaks, "to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given." But this He said, not bringing in necessity, or any allotment made causelessly and at random, but implying them to be the authors of all their own evils, and wishing to represent that the thing is a gift, and a grace bestowed from above. It by no means follows, however, because it is a gift, that therefore free will is taken away; and this is evident from what comes after. To this purpose, in order that neither the one sort may despair, nor the other grow careless, upon being told that "it is given," He signifies the beginning to be with ourselves. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away, even that which he seemeth to have." And although the saying be full of much obscurity, yet it indicates unspeakable justice. For what He saith is like this: When any one hath forwardness and zeal, there shall be given unto him all things on God's part also: but if he be void of these, and contribute not his own share, neither are God's gifts bestowed. For even "what he seemeth to have," so He saith, "shall be taken away from him;" God not so much taking it away, as counting him unworthy of His gifts. This we also do; when we see any one listening carelessly, and when with much entreaty we cannot persuade him to attend, it remains for us to be silent. For if we are still to go on, his carelessness is aggravated. But him that is striving to learn, we lead on, and pour in much.]

The Antiochian interpreter explains that although the Matthean texts point towards divine grace, this does not mean that human beings are randomly selected or forced by God. Such an approach would have fatal consequences for the addressees of the Gospel. They would despair or become lazy at the thought of God's predestination of all human beings. This is a logical consequence, which Chrysostom draws from his pastoral as well as ascetic experience. I should also mention that Chrysostom develops a conception of the human will, which is related to the human desire and zeal *προθυμία καὶ σπουδή*. Therefore, it refers to all psychic and mental powers. It is not only the freedom of choice, but the entire development of the inner world and moral attitude⁷⁶ of the human being which makes a man worthy of the revelation of the mysteries of the heaven. Again, one can notice a development of the text's meaning from the context of Matthew to the context of Chrysostom.

Conclusion

To summarize, it can be said that the Greek Fathers have a conception of the human will that differs from the modern one. In their view, it is not a third power that stands between reason and emotions. Human *προαίρεσις* refers to all three moments of the inner human attitude: deliberation, decision and pursuit. On the one hand, the *ἐλευθερία τῆς προαιρέσεως* is a crucial theme in the theology of the Greek East even though the writers of the New Testament do not know it as a doctrine. This is to be expected since the canonical texts are not systematic treatises. However, on the other hand, one cannot detect the intention to challenge human freedom of decision in the

⁷⁶ Perkams, 2010, 245.

previously discussed texts either. Divine agency and the human will can also be opposed to one other.⁷⁷

In my opinion, this is the paradox. We have the idea of two freedoms, that of God and that of human beings which do not abolish each other nor be explained from the perspective of each other. The Greek Fathers have justified this paradox with the argument that human freedom, which is not abolished by the freedom and the power of God, proves that human beings are a true image of a God, who is Himself the freedom.

Lastly, the Greek Fathers introduced this concept into New Testament exegesis in order to protect their addressees from the Gnostic dualistic and predestinarian misunderstandings. This kind of exegesis may be anachronistic for modern historical-critical exegesis. However, through it the Fathers managed to keep the biblical image of God free from deterministic and dualistic ideas, which can have fatal consequences for Christian theology and ethics. In my opinion, this is precisely that which makes the interpretation of the Greek Fathers interesting: They present us with hermeneutics that leave no gap between exegesis, theology, and ethics, that is, between the literary sense of the texts and its theological and ethical perspectives.

⁷⁷ Cf. Löhr, 2007, 170.