

# Samuel Rutherford's Supralapsarianism Revealed: A Key to the Lapsarian Position of the Westminster Confession of Faith?<sup>1</sup>

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The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were privy to their share of theological controversies. Among the least fundamental and disruptive of these was the somewhat esoteric supralapsarian-infralapsarian controversy of the seventeenth century, at the heart of which was a dispute over the proper objects of divine predestination. Did God elect from all eternity men and women whom he regarded as already created and fallen in sin (*homo creatus et lapsus*)? Or did he elect them before considering their creation and fall, in other words, as not yet created and fallen but creatable and liable to fall (*homo creabilis et labilis*)?<sup>2</sup>

Supralapsarians, whose name is derived from *supra lapsum*, meaning 'above or prior to the fall,' understood the object of predestination to be *homo creabilis et labilis*. They placed God's decree of predestination,

*sub specie aeternitatis*, before his decrees to create and permit the fall.<sup>3</sup> They regarded 'electio and reprobatio as positive, coordinate decrees of God by which God chooses those who will be saved and those who will be damned ... a fully double predestination, or *praedestinatio gemina*.'<sup>4</sup> The resulting order of the divine decrees for a supralapsarian looked something like this: 1) the decree to elect some and reject others; 2) the decree to create both; 3) the decree to permit both to fall into sin; and 4) the decree to provide salvation for the elect alone.

Infralapsarians, on the other hand, whose name comes from *infra lapsum*, which means 'below or subsequent to the fall,' favored *homo creatus et lapsus* as the object of divine predestination. They believed that God's election and reprobation occurred after the decrees of creation and the fall. Election alone, they said, was a positive decree, while reprobation was perceived as a 'negative act or passing over' of all who were not elected, 'leaving them in their sins to their ultimate *damnatio*.'<sup>5</sup> The order of the decrees for an infralapsarian was as follows: 1) the decree to create human beings; 2) the decree to permit them to fall into sin; 3) the decree to elect some and pass by others; and 4) the decree to provide salvation for the elect alone.

Even though infralapsarianism appears to have been the majority view,<sup>6</sup> many of the most prominent theologians of the day were members of the supralapsarian party. Among this latter group is the well-known Scottish theologian and commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661). His supralapsarianism has been well documented in the secondary literature and roundly criticized as 'breathtakingly stark' and 'stern and extreme.'<sup>7</sup> But it is not at all certain that these evaluations are accurate. There has been, on the whole, much misinformation in regard to this aspect of his theology. Rutherford has no dogmatic preoccupation

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1. This article was originally published under the same title in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59:1 (2006) 27–44.

2. Karl Barth's helpful discussion of the supralapsarian-infralapsarian controversy in his *Church Dogmatics* II/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957) 127–145, has served as a guide for the introduction to this essay.

3. Both supra- and infralapsarians placed predestination before the creation and the fall *sub specie temporis*, i.e., in the order the decrees were executed by God in time.

4. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985) 234–235, 292.

5. Muller, *Dictionary*, 155, 234–235.

6. Barth, *CD* II/2, 129.

7. David A.S. Fergusson, 'Predestination: A Scottish Perspective,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46 (1993) 465; M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and*

with supralapsarianism or with the decrees in general. Supralapsarianism is set forth only implicitly in the majority of his writings and, when it is set forth explicitly, it is surprisingly moderate. Rather than presenting a harsh supralapsarian scheme, as many like Kingsley Rendell have assumed,<sup>8</sup> Rutherford seems, instead, to frame his supralapsarianism in consistently infralapsarian terms. This essay will attempt to demonstrate this by exploring further Rutherford's supralapsarianism, his doctrines of election and reprobation, and the order of the decrees in his thinking. After doing so, it will examine whether this expression of predestinarianism is helpful in establishing the lapsarian position of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

#### RUTHERFORD'S SUPRALAPSARIANISM

The most explicit statement of Rutherford's supralapsarianism is found in an unpublished manuscript discourse on Ephesians 1:4, written in his own hand. In this discourse, Rutherford reveals his belief that election stands logically prior to every other divine decree: 'Some' believe 'our election to be both after the decrees of creating us and permitting us to fall into sin. [But] we prove that God's electing of us cannot be after the consideration of our creation and fall.'<sup>9</sup> What is most striking about this statement, and the whole of the discourse for that matter, is not what it says but what it leaves unsaid. It clearly mentions that election is prior to every other decree, an explicitly supralapsarian position, but says nothing about reprobation.<sup>10</sup>

In *Examen Arminianismi*, Rutherford again reveals his supralapsarianism by stating that 'the object of predestination is *homo creandus & nondum creatus*.' But, after doing so, he goes on to speak of predestination only in terms of establishing individuals 'for glory.' Once again, reprobation is not mentioned at all.<sup>11</sup> Rutherford acknowledges a double decree, whereby the 'potter' makes 'from the same clay, vessels for honor and vessels for dishonor [*ignominia*].'<sup>12</sup> But, as John Fesko says, although a double decree is necessary for supralapsarians, it is not exclusive to them; some infralapsarians believe in a *praedestinatio gemina*.<sup>13</sup> Rutherford, furthermore, uses nomenclature which is characteristic of infralapsarianism in speaking of *praedestinatio ad gratiam, ad adoptionem, ad obtinendam salutem*, and, perhaps most significantly, *ad vitam*, in addition to the more typical *praedestinatio ad gloriam* which one would expect from a supralapsarian.<sup>14</sup> Thus, although Rutherford clearly supports the supralapsarian position, he appears to state it only in the most moderate of terms.

He speaks explicitly of election as being the first of the divine decrees but does not treat the issue of reprobation to any real degree at all in connection with it.

#### ELECTION AND REPROBATION

When we look more closely at Rutherford's doctrines of election and reprobation, we see this same tendency toward a moderate supralapsarianism together with a use of terminology that is characteristically infralapsarian. 'Election,' for Rutherford, 'is a singular, indivisible act concerning the ordaining of a determined number of people to glory.' It is an 'act of divine love' that eternally, absolutely, immutably, and irrevocably 'separates' a certain people unto God to be his own.<sup>15</sup> By definition, it is particular or limited in its scope: 'if election is an election of all, it is not election.'<sup>16</sup> In opposition to the

*Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1985) 83; Kingsley Rendell, *Samuel Rutherford: A New Biography of the Man & his Ministry* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2003) 82. One is struck by the confidence with which the secondary literature declares Rutherford's supralapsarianism. Until John Coffey's seminal work, however, there was little, if any, reference made to the writings of Rutherford to substantiate these claims (*Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997], 127–128). This is because very few of the works of Rutherford actually deal with this issue to any degree. Passages that are usually cited from his writings give at best only vague reference to his lapsarian views. Bell's treatment of Rutherford is typical. In *Calvin and Scottish Theology*, 70–84, he claims that Rutherford was 'an extreme supralapsarian' but offers little, if any, proof to substantiate it.

8. Rendell says: 'Rutherford's doctrine of election may seem stern and extreme to all but ultra Calvinists, but it appears even sterner when we examine his view of reprobation.' *Samuel Rutherford*, 82.

9. Unpublished manuscript, University of Edinburgh Library, La.II.394, 5.

10. Rutherford's manuscript does mention reprobation on a few occasions. When it does so, however, it speaks in the most vague of terms or with infralapsarian language.

11. *Examen Arminianismi* (Utrecht, 1668) 272.

12. *Examen*, 257. On the double decree in Rutherford, see chapters three and four of *Examen*. Cf. idem, 'Ane Catachisme containing the Soume of Christian Religion,' *Catechisms of the Second Reformation*, ed. Alexander Mitchell (London: James Nisbet, 1886) 163.

13. *Diversity Within the Reformed Tradition: Supra- and Infralapsarianism in Calvin, Dort, and Westminster* (Greenville, S.C.: Reformed Academic Press, 2001) xxv.

14. See, for example, *Examen*, 250, 253, 264–265. John Fesko remarks that 'Infralapsarianism is often called *praedestinatio ad vitam*' ('The Westminster Confession and Lapsarianism: Calvin and the Divines,' *The Westminster Confession into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Essays in Remembrance of the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, vol. 2, ed. J. Ligon Duncan [Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2004] 481).

15. *Examen*, 238–42.

16. *Examen*, 279. The limited scope of election is also attested by 'the Scriptures ... [and] sane Reason.' *Examen*, 262–263.

Arminians, who believe that the decree is conditional upon the free wills of creatures, foreseen by divine *scientia media*,<sup>17</sup> Rutherford states that God's election is absolute, not in the sense that it does away with human free will, but in the sense that nothing outside of God determines or influences his decree. It is based solely on his own sovereign good pleasure (*benepiacitum*).<sup>18</sup> It is because election is absolute that it must logically take place before all other divine decrees. Placing it after the decree of the fall, the infralapsarian position, would make 'God look out of himself for determining his will' and thus make election conditional upon a foreseen fall, which is an error that concedes far too much to Arminianism and destroys the 'all sufficiency' of God by making him 'go forth of himself, seeking knowledge from things without him, as we [who are mere creatures] do.'<sup>19</sup>

When speaking of reprobation, Rutherford delineates a twofold process by distinguishing reprobation, in a broad sense, from *praeteritio*. He acknowledges that,

17. On the Arminian understanding of predestination, see *The Works of James Arminius*, 3 vols., trans. James Nichols and William Nichols (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991 reprint) II, 717–719; Richard Muller, 'God, Predestination, and the Integrity of the Created Order: A Note on Patterns in Arminius's Theology,' *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1994) 431–446. On *scientia media* and its relationship to predestination in the Arminians, see idem, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991) chapter 9.

18. *Examen*, 246–247.

19. Unpublished manuscript, La.II.394, 8.

20. *Examen*, 278–9. Rutherford is defending the distinction between preterition and reprobation against the Arminians who collapse these terms and allow for no difference between them.

21. Cf. Perkins, *A Christian and Plaine Treatise of the Manner and Order of Predestination, and of the Largeness of Gods Grace* (London, 1606) 25. Here Perkins says that reprobation has 'two actes. The first is the purpose to forsake some men, and to make known his justice in them.' And the second 'is the ordaining of them to punishment or due destruction.'

22. *Examen*, 278–279.

23. *Examen*, 278–279. On God's *ad extra* decrees, see the discussion under the order of the decrees below.

24. Rutherford presents an *ordo decretorum* of sorts in his discourse on Ephesians 1.4, but only spells out three decrees or 'intention[s]' and only in the broadest of terms. These three intentions appear to be subdivisions of the first decree. God will glorify himself (the first intention), Christ (the second), and creatures in Christ (the third), because their election is in Christ, who is, to borrow Barth's phrase, the 'electing and elected' God. See unpublished manuscript, La.II.394, 9; and Barth, *CD*, II/2, 94.

it should be distinguished between *praeteritio* [*praeteritio*] or non-election (by which God is able to deny his favor to an individual who is guilty of nothing evil, with his own Justice preserved) and *reprobation*, by which God has decreed from his own absolute good pleasure [*benepiacitum*] to create some and to deny efficacious grace to them in order to declare the glory of his Justice.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, for Rutherford as for William Perkins (1558–1602), reprobation consists in two acts.<sup>21</sup> There is, in the first place, an absolute act, which Rutherford calls preterition or 'non-election.' It refers to God's mere 'passing by' (*praeterit*) of some who are 'guilty of nothing evil.' It is the necessary antithesis to election, because election, by definition, cannot be universal: if 'God absolutely elects some unto eternal glory by his own free will, he necessarily (for if election is an election of all, it is not election) passes by all others and non-elects them unto glory.'<sup>22</sup> But it is not coordinate with election. Even though it is just as absolute, definite, immutable, and irrevocable as election is, it is not a positive decree of God. It is a negative decree in which God passes over those who are not elected.

The second act of reprobation that Rutherford alludes to is one that we will call 'preterition,'<sup>2</sup> because it too is a passing by or withholding. In this case, however, God is withholding 'efficacious grace' from a people he has decreed to create, which implies the need for such grace and, thus, assumes not just the decree of the fall, but also the decree of God's justice *ad extra*.<sup>23</sup> Here too this act of reprobation is negative. God passes by some and leaves them in their sins 'in order to declare the glory of his justice.' Together these two acts make up reprobation, in the broadest sense of the word.

#### THE ORDER OF THE DECREES

Before going any further, it would be helpful for us to pause and work through the order of the decrees in Rutherford's thinking. Doing so will help us to evaluate more accurately the place he affords to election, preterition, and reprobation, as well as the validity of some of the criticisms that have been levelled against his predestinarianism.

1. Election and Non-Election (or Preterition).<sup>24</sup> As we have just seen, Rutherford clearly places election and, thus, its corresponding antithesis, non-election, ahead of all other divine decrees. This is further confirmed by his definition of non-election as a denying

of divine favor to individuals who are 'guilty of nothing evil.' By defining it thus, he is suggesting that this passing over occurs before the decree of the fall. Otherwise, these individuals would be guilty of sin in the mind of God.

2. Creation. This is the first means by which God works out the ends of election and non-election.<sup>25</sup>

3. Fall. This decree is also a means to the ends of election and non-election. The divine decree to permit the fall is the 'intrinsic basis for the punishing and pardoning' of sin.<sup>26</sup>

4. 'Ad extra' Decrees. In a way reflective of the influence of medieval scholasticism, and in particular of the voluntarism of John Duns Scotus (c.1270–1308),<sup>27</sup> upon his thinking, Rutherford believes that God, although just, merciful, and good in and of himself (*ad intra*), is under no compulsion to be just, merciful, and good to his creatures (*ad extra*). But once he decrees to act *ad extra* in this, or in any, way, he is bound by his decree to do so.<sup>28</sup> According to Rutherford, this is just what God has done; he has decreed to be just, merciful, and good to his creatures. And because he has done so, he is bound to act accordingly *ad extra*.<sup>29</sup> This decree presupposes the creation of creatures to whom God will be just, merciful, and good, and also their fall into sin, because before God could decree 'to illustrate the glory of his punitive Justice and sparing Mercy, it was necessary, by hypothetical necessity, that sin should exist.'<sup>30</sup>

5. Salvation and Preterition.<sup>2</sup> It is only at this point that the second act of reprobation, what we are calling preterition,<sup>2</sup> comes into play in Rutherford's thinking. After the decree of the fall and the *ad extra* decrees, God now chooses to show mercy to the elect, applying to them the benefits of Christ's atonement, and to pass over the non-elect, leaving them to his justice for their sins.<sup>31</sup>

Rutherford's catechism further substantiates this interpretation of the decrees in general and, of reprobation in particular, and confirms his use of infralapsarian

by which he works out his decrees. It is further developed and given prominence in the voluntaristic systems of Duns Scotus and Ockham. The post-Reformation voluntarist William Twisse defines the difference between the *potentia absoluta* and the *potentia ordinata* in this way: 'Gods absolute power is one thing, his ordinate power is another thing, for this includes his will. God could have refused to make the world, when he did make it, & he made it freely [*potentia absoluta*]; but supposing Gods decree to make it, & to make it at that time it was impossible it should be otherwise [*potentia ordinata*], as it is impossible that Gods will should be changed.' See Twisse, *A Discovery of D. Jacksons Vanitie* (n.p., 1631) 5. Thus, according to this strain of thinking, the only thing that limits God's free will, whereby he does as he pleases *ad extra*, is his decree and divine immutability. For more on the 'power distinction' in the medieval scholastics, see Mary Anne Pernoud, 'The Theory of the *Potentia Dei* According to Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham,' *Antonianum* 47 (1972) 73–80; and Lawrence Moonan, *Divine Power: The Medieval Power Distinction up to its Adoption by Albert, Bonaventure, and Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994). For explicit statements in Rutherford about the *voluntas Dei ad intra et ad extra*, see *Examen*, 146; *The Covenant of Life Opened* (Edinburgh, 1655) 27–34; and *Disputatio scholastica de divina providentia* (Edinburgh, 1649) 342, 345.

29. This means that the atonement of Christ now becomes necessary, but only contingently necessary. It is only necessary because God has chosen to act in justice and mercy toward his creatures. Before deciding to do so, God could have (by his *potentia absoluta*) punished sin or not punished sin or could have forgiven sin in some other way. Before his *ad extra* decree, there was no necessity for the atonement of Christ. See Rutherford's *Fourteen Communion Sermons*, ed. Andrew Bonar (Glasgow: Charles Glass, 1877) 28, 30; *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself* (London, 1647) 7–9; and 'Ane Catachisme,' 187. John Owen misunderstands Rutherford's position on the non-necessity of the atonement in his *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 24 vols., ed. William Goold (London: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–55) 10:481–624, especially 608. Owen is unsure whether Rutherford embraces Twisse's view or that of the Socinians. His confusion is due to the fact that Rutherford does use poor language in describing his views. But it is clear – and Owen should have seen this – that Rutherford clearly sides with Twisse. See Rutherford, *Disputatio scholastica*, 342, 345; idem, *Examen*, 174–175; idem, *Exercitationes apologeticae pro divina gratia* (Amsterdam, 1636) 348–349, 356; and Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1998) 108 n21.

30. *Examen*, 284.

31. *Examen*, 283.

25. Rutherford, 'Ane Catachisme,' 163–4.

26. *Examen*, 283. When Rutherford speaks of the fall as being 'permitted,' he means that God decrees it *via* his *voluntas permittens*. This, in typical premissionist terms, means that God decrees the *physical* event of the fall but not the *morality* associated with that event. God is not the cause of the moral aspect of sin, but he is the cause of the sinful act. See also *Examen*, 184–185, 205–237. Cf. J.A. Van Ruler, 'New Philosophy to Old Standards: Voetius' Vindication of Divine Concurrence and Secondary Causality,' *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 71:1 (1991) 64–67.

27. Recently, Alexander Broadie has argued that Scotus is 'no Scotist,' in other words, that he is not the extreme voluntarist that scholars have thought him to be. Broadie points to a phrase in Scotus, 'pondus et inclinatio,' to show that the intellect provides not only the raw material from which the will selects but that it actually 'carr[ies] weight with will and incline[s] it.' Scotus' position, he says, is, therefore, something of a *via media* between intellectualism and voluntarism. See *The Shadow of Scotus: Philosophy and Faith in Pre-Reformation Scotland* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995) lecture 3.

28. Lurking behind this distinction between the *voluntas Dei ad intra et ad extra* is the dominant medieval idea of the *potentia Dei absoluta et ordinata*. This latter phrase is first used by Aquinas to differentiate between God's hypothetical power *per se* and the power

language. In his catechism, he states that there are two decrees of God concerning mankind: ‘the decrees of election and reprobation.’ Election is ‘the Lordis free appoyntment setting some men apairt for glorie (Eph. i.5, 6; Joh. xvii.6), and making them his sones in Christ (Ephes. i.5; 2 Thess. ii.13), for the praise of his glorie (Eph. i.6),’ whereas reprobation is ‘Godis free appoyntment q’by [whereby] he decreeth to pass by some and to leave them to the hardness of their owne heart.’ In this case, both election and reprobation could be understood in a broad sense, as encompassing not just the first decree but the fifth as well. Note that election includes not just ‘setting some men apairt for glorie,’ but also, ‘making them his sones in Christ,’ which seems to presuppose the fall and the application of salvation in Christ. But regardless of whether election consists in two acts, reprobation clearly does. It includes both the decree ‘to pass by some’ (non-election) and the decree ‘to leave them to the hardness of their owne heart’ (preterition).<sup>32</sup>

What is unavoidable, in Rutherford’s catechism, the *Examen*, and the discourse on Ephesians 1.4, is his use of infralapsarian language.<sup>33</sup> He plainly defines reprobation as a twofold ‘passing by.’ This ‘preteristic’ language is certainly atypical of supralapsarians, who normally define election and reprobation as ‘positive, coordinate decrees of God by which God chooses those who will be saved and those who will be damned.’ But Rutherford, at least on the surface, appears to express his understanding much more moderately. His supralapsarianism is defined in terms of election with little or no regard for reprobation; and he consistently uses infralapsarian language to refer to reprobation as a negative decree whereby God passes over some, rather than positively ordaining them to destruction. John Fesko has described infralapsarianism as,

32. ‘Ane Catachisme,’ 163. William Perkins, similarly, speaks of election and reprobation as each encompassing two acts. See his *A Christian and Plaine Treatise*, 6–8 and 24–27.

33. John Fesko also notes that ‘Rutherford defines reprobation [in his catechism] in terms of preterition, which is typical nomenclature for infra- rather than supralapsarians.’ *Diversity Within the Reformed Tradition*, 272.

34. ‘The Westminster Confession and Lapsarianism,’ 481.

35. *Samuel Rutherford*, 82.

36. W.G.T. Shedd, ‘The Meaning and Value of the Doctrine of Decrees,’ *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 1 (1890) 4; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1883) II, 317; A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expounding The Westminster Confession* (London: Banner of Truth, 1958) 70; John Fesko, ‘The Westminster Confession and Lapsarianism,’ 497; and John MacPherson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1881) 50.

*praedestinatio ad vitam*, or single-predestination, because there is only one decree of predestination: the decree of election. Those who are non-elect are simply passed by in the decree of election, or are not elect by default, and are left in their sin unto their ultimate damnation.<sup>34</sup>

This description is remarkably consistent with Rutherford’s expression of election and preterition, except for the fact that he believes in two decrees and two preteritions. Rutherford is clearly a supralapsarian but one who expresses his views in infralapsarian language.

After examining Rutherford’s supralapsarianism, his doctrines of election and reprobation, and the *ordo decretorum*, it should be evident that Rendell’s evaluation of his view of reprobation is incorrect or, at least, unfair. Rather than making his ‘stern’ view of predestination ‘even sterner,’ as Rendell claims, reprobation actually moderates it.<sup>35</sup> Most of the other critiques of Rutherford’s supralapsarianism also fall at this point along with Rendell’s. They overlook Rutherford’s tendency toward the use of infralapsarian language in regard to reprobation in particular. While Rutherford speaks about election in supralapsarian terms, he unmistakably speaks about reprobation more in line with an infralapsarian system. This is not to suggest, however, that Rutherford’s predestinarianism is beyond criticism. It is simply to acknowledge that many of the criticisms of his version of supralapsarianism have missed their intended target.

#### THE LAPSARIAN POSITION OF THE WESTMINSTER CONFESION

One question remains for us to explore: can Rutherford’s supralapsarianism, as just presented, help us in determining whether the Westminster Confession of Faith is an infra- or supralapsarian document? In what is left of this essay, it will be argued that the lapsarian views of Rutherford help to prove that the Confession is a consensus document which is inherently supralapsarian, in other words, that the Confession’s views are most consistent with Rutherford’s supralapsarianism, but they are phrased in such a way so as not to exclude infralapsarians.

#### IS THE CONFESION INFRALAPSARIAN?

Of the relatively few scholars who have written on the lapsarian position of the Confession, some have argued for an infralapsarian interpretation.<sup>36</sup> The reasons for

this vary. Some note that the preponderance of divines at Westminster were infralapsarian.<sup>37</sup> But there is no clear reason why this should sway us in our decision one way or the other. Just because a majority is present does not necessarily mean that that majority won out. Rutherford and William Twisse (1578–1646), both supralapsarians, may have been in the minority numerically but they were definitely among the majority in terms of the influence they exerted upon the Assembly.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, if the majority did win out and the Confession is in fact an infralapsarian document, then the problem arises of what to do with Rutherford and Twisse, the two most prominent supralapsarians at the Assembly. Rutherford at least (because Twisse died in 1646, before the end of the Assembly, and because the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland approved the Confession in 1647) would have had to subscribe to a document that was overtly infralapsarian. Would this not have been a rejection of his supralapsarian beliefs? Could he in good conscience have subscribed to such a document? While it is true that Rutherford's supralapsarianism is expressed moderately and with infralapsarian language, it is, nonetheless, highly unlikely that he would have acquiesced in this matter and tolerated a document that was acknowledged to be infralapsarian. Quite simply, Rutherford is not a man known for his tolerance of error. He is overtly and consistently dogmatic and uncompromising, even in matters that may seem most insignificant to us today. One need only point to the Protester-Resolutioner controversy to prove this.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, even though Rutherford does express his supralapsarianism moderately, he, nevertheless, unequivocally denounces infralapsarianism in his manuscript discourse on Ephesians 1.4. The reason he does so is because the infralapsarians locate reprobation after the decree of the fall, thereby admitting something akin to the Arminian notion of *scientia media*. God would have to look ahead and see that his free creatures would in fact fall into sin before choosing to elect or to reprobate them.<sup>40</sup> Infralapsarianism would, therefore, be seen by Rutherford as a capitulation to Arminianism.

In this light, it is hard to believe that Rutherford would have been willing to subscribe to a document that was explicitly advocating an infralapsarian viewpoint. His denunciation of Arminianism, and even of vaguely Arminian characteristics, was extreme and unrelenting in his own lifetime. He wrote three Latin treatises specifically aimed at refuting the perceived errors of the Arminians and devoted significant parts of two English treatises to the same cause.<sup>41</sup> While in

exile, he debated theological issues with several of the Aberdeen Doctors<sup>42</sup> and, after doing so, brought accusations of Arminianism against at least Robert Baron (c.1640) and James Sibbald (c.1640),<sup>43</sup> neither of whom was actually an Arminian. Both G.D. Henderson and

37. See, for example, Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 317; Fesko, 'The Westminster Confession and Lapsarianism,' 497.

38. Twisse's influence is evident in that he was named Prolocutor of the Assembly and served in that capacity until his death in 1646. Mitchell's minutes show that Twisse's writings were referred to with respect by several divines in the course of debating various other issues in addition to the lapsarian issue. Rutherford's influence is seen in the prominent position he assumed in the proceedings of the Assembly. Chad Van Dixhoorn, who is working to publish the full minutes of the Assembly, informed me in private conversations that Rutherford is among the most outspoken of the divines and commissioners in terms of the sheer quantity of speeches given before the Assembly. When Rutherford finally took his leave on November 9, 1647, the Assembly 'gave him thanks for the great assistance he ... afforded to [the] Assembly, in his constant attendance upon the debates of it.' See Alexander Mitchell, ed., *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood and Sons, 1874) 151, 487–488.

39. On the Protester-Resolutioner controversy in Scotland and Rutherford's part in it, see Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions*, 56–60. Coffey notes that in the course of this controversy, Rutherford absented himself in protest from the General Assembly of the church and never attended again for the last ten or so years of his life; he broke off intimate friendships with David Dickson and Robert Blair; he printed a scathing denunciation of his opponents in the preface to his *A Survey of the Survey of that Summe of Church Discipline penned by Mr. Thomas Hooker* (London, 1658); and he uncompromisingly persisted in verbally accosting James Wood, a colleague at 'New College' in St. Andrews, until Wood became 'wearie of his place exceedingly' and moved to St. Salvators in 1657.

40. See unpublished manuscript, La.II.394, 8, and the above discussion.

41. See *Exercitationes* (1636); *Disputatio scholastica* (1649); *Examen* (1668); *Christ Dying* (1647); and *A Free Disputation against Pretended Liberty of Conscience* (London, 1649).

42. The Aberdeen Doctors were a group of men steeped in piety and scholarship. Some were professors at the university and some ministers in the city. But they all opposed the National Covenant and signed the famous *Demands, Replies, and Duplies*. See *The Generall Demands, of the Reverend Doctors of Divinitie, and Ministers of the Gospell in Aberdeene, Concerning the Late Covenant, in Scotland. Together with the Answers, Replies, and Duplies that followed thereupon, in the Year, 1638* (Aberdeen: John Forbes, 1663). See also, Donald MacMillan, *The Aberdeen Doctors* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909).

43. Of Robert Baron, Rutherford says: 'I am here [in Aberdeen] troubled with the disputes of the great doctors (especially Dr. B[aron]) in Ceremonial and Arminian controversies, for all are corrupt here.' See *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, ed. Andrew Bonar (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1891) 275. Rutherford accused Sibbald of Arminianism at the General Assembly of 1640. This is noted in John Spalding, *The History of the Troubles and Memorable Transactions in Scotland from the Year 1624 to 1645* (Aberdeen: Evans, 1792) I, 245.

David Mullan confirm that Baron was in fact a Calvinist and that he sided with the Contra-Remonstrants during the controversy in the Netherlands.<sup>44</sup> Sibbald himself denied that he was an Arminian and stated that he would swear an oath to the canons of Dort to prove his own orthodoxy.<sup>45</sup> But Baron and Sibbald did have this in common: they believed election to be absolute but reprobation conditional upon God's foresight of sin.<sup>46</sup> And for this, Rutherford levelled charges of Arminianism at them. Granted, there were ecclesial motivations that added to his reaction, as Arminianism was entering Scotland conjoined with episcopacy from England. But, even so, it does seem fair to conclude from this that Rutherford would not have compromised his convictions and subscribed to an explicitly infralapsarian Confession. Such a position gave up too much ground to the Arminians by making reprobation conditional upon a foreseen fall.

Second, some scholars have cited theological and grammatical reasons for their claim that the Confession is infralapsarian. The arguments put forward here are mainly two. The first is that the Confession's use of 'predestination' and 'foreordination' in §3.3, indicates an infra- rather than supralapsarian position, because foreordination and reprobation belong to different categories. Whereas reprobation is a term within the narrower category of predestination, foreordination belongs to the 'overarching category of providence.' Thus, as the argument goes, in selecting the term 'foreordination' instead of 'reprobation,' the Westminster divines were deliberately moving away from the *praedestinatio gemina* of the Irish Articles—which uses 'predestination' and 'reprobation' instead—to the single predestination of infralapsarianism. This argument then continues by noting that in the Reformed Confessions generally, 'by

far the greatest attention is paid to the election of God' with correspondingly little attention given to reprobation. The conclusion: 'There is not a trace of possibility that here [in these Confessions] election and rejection are placed parallel to each other,' as a supralapsarian scheme would seem to require.<sup>47</sup>

What can be said in response to such arguments? In regard to the use of the term 'foreordination' instead of 'reprobation,' it must be said that this in no way necessitates a rejection of double predestination. William Twisse, a supralapsarian, plainly uses the terms 'foreordain' and 'decree' interchangeably in referring to both election and reprobation: 'Gods ordination or decree is an act eternall.' And he has no qualms about speaking of reprobation in more providential language, describing it as an act whereby 'God of his meer pleasure doth ordain men unto damnation.'<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, William Perkins, another supralapsarian—one whose scheme closely parallels Rutherford's—also acknowledges that reprobation falls under the broader category of divine providence: 'The decree of reprobation is a worke of Gods providence, whereby he hath decreed to passe by certaine men, in regard of supernaturall grace for the manifestation of his justice and wrath in their due destruction.'<sup>49</sup> Thus if supralapsarians like Twisse and Perkins, who both held to double predestination, can speak of reprobation in providential terms, there is no reason to conclude that just because the Westminster divines employ the term 'foreordination' instead of 'reprobation' that they are necessarily moving away from *praedestinatio gemina* and explicitly declaring infralapsarianism. In fact, as John Murray has remarked, no real significance ought to be attributed to the use of predestination and foreordination in the Confession: 'It cannot be said that any difference is intrinsic to the[se] terms ... and it cannot be that greater or less efficacy was intended to be expressed by the one term in distinction from the other.'<sup>50</sup>

In regard to the claim that the Reformed Confessions in general concentrate on election with little attention shown to reprobation and that this implies that election and reprobation cannot, therefore, be parallel decrees (i.e., no *praedestinatio gemina*), it must be said that Rutherford too concentrates very little attention, relatively speaking, on reprobation. His supralapsarianism, remember, is spelled out almost exclusively in reference to election alone. When Rutherford does speak of reprobation, it is usually in a negative manner, as a mere passing by. Just because the Confessions give little attention to reprobation does not mean that they are, therefore, deliberately favoring an infralapsarian scheme and excluding a supralapsarian one.

44. Henderson, *Religious Life in Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1937) 87; idem, 'Arminianism in Scotland,' *London Quarterly Review* (October 1932) 494; Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism, 1590–1638* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 225.

45. James Gordon, *History of Scots Affairs, from 1637 to 1641* (Aberdeen: Spalding Club, 1841) III, 274–82; MacMillan, *The Aberdeen Doctors*, 279–292.

46. MacMillan, *The Aberdeen Doctors*, 113–114, 288; Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism*, 224–5; Gordon, *Scots Affairs*, III, 280.

47. G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Eerdmans, 1960) 194; Fesko, 'The Westminster Confession and Lapsarianism,' 491–492.

48. *The Riches of Gods Love*, 7. Cf. Perkins, *A Christian and Plaine Treatise*, 6–7, 27.

49. *A Christian and Plaine Treatise*, 24–25.

50. 'Calvin, Dordt, and Westminster on Predestination – A Comparative Study,' *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982) 4:206.

The second theological or grammatical argument that might seem to favor an infralapsarian interpretation is the Confession's use of the phrase 'being fallen in Adam' in §3.6. This phrase could specify *homo creatus et lapsus* as the object of predestination and, thus, denote an infralapsarian interpretation. Such a claim, however, would not take the grammar of the Confession into consideration. As S.W. Carruthers has shown, the original edition of the Confession, and the majority of the later editions as well, place a comma before the phrase 'being fallen in Adam.' Only one of the early editions of the Confession omits this comma.<sup>51</sup> That one early omission might have been enough to cast a shadow of uncertainty upon our determining the proper punctuation of the Confession were it not for the comments of Edward Reynolds (1599–1667), recorded for us in Mitchell's minutes of the Assembly's debates over the divine decrees. Reynolds' comments clearly formed the basis for the phraseology that the divines would later adopt in the Confession, and, significantly, he too employs a comma to set off the phrase 'being fallen in Adam.'<sup>52</sup> With this punctuation in place, there is no reason why a supralapsarian like Rutherford could not subscribe to such language. He would simply be reading it according to the temporal *ordo salutis* rather than the order of the eternal decrees. Again, John Murray's comments are helpful: 'The words, "being fallen in Adam", do not imply that the elect when elected were contemplated as fallen in Adam. The words simply state an historical fact which explains the necessity of redemption by Christ and the other phases of salvation.'<sup>53</sup> There is, therefore, nothing in the Confession that requires an infralapsarian interpretation and many things that seem to rule out such an interpretation, not least Rutherford's own views of predestination and his reaction against Arminian tendencies.

#### IS THE CONFESSION SUPRALAPSARIAN?

But could the Confession be inherently supralapsarian? David Fergusson, for one, suggests that the 'fundamental theological framework' of the Confession 'is more patient of a reading committed to supralapsarianism' than to infralapsarianism.<sup>54</sup> And the evidence does seem to bear this out, especially if we look at the Confession through the interpretive lens of Samuel Rutherford. First, §3.2 of the Confession is more conducive to a supra- rather than an infralapsarian reading. This section states: 'Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath He not decreed anything because He foresaw it as

future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.'<sup>55</sup> If we read this statement through the eyes of Rutherford, it favors the supralapsarian viewpoint, because, according to Rutherford, the infralapsarians make 'God look out of himself for determining his will' to a foreseen fall.<sup>56</sup> Only the supralapsarian position can consistently and thoroughly satisfy the requirements of this section of the Confession.

Secondly, in §3.7 of the Confession, the phrase, 'to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath,' reflects two distinct acts of reprobation. The semi-colon that appears between the words 'to pass by' and the words 'and to ordain them' indicates that the divines meant to differentiate between the act of preterition (Rutherford's first decree), on the one hand, and the act of leaving men and women in their sins (Rutherford's fifth decree), on the other. S.W. Carruthers, in his notes on the critical text of the Confession, acknowledges this very fact: 'To the precise mentality of the divines, a semi-colon was needed to mark two distinct and different acts: – (1) the passing by "for the glory of His sovereign power," and (2) the ordaining to wrath for their sin "to the praise of his glorious justice."<sup>57</sup> Since this corresponds exactly with the way in which Rutherford speaks of reprobation, this section of the Confession also favors a supralapsarian interpretation.

Thirdly, although one should not place a great deal of credence in this fact by itself, the order of the chapters in the Confession does seem to favor a supralapsarian scheme. The chapters progress from the nature and attributes of God in chapter two, to his decree in chapter

51. *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Being an Account of the Preparation and Printing of its Seven Leading Editions* (Manchester: Aikman & Son, 1937) 95–96.

52. *Minutes*, 151–152.

53. 'Calvin, Dordt and Westminster on Predestination,' 4:209.

54. 'Predestination,' 465.

55. *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1995) 28, emphasis added.

56. Unpublished manuscript, La.II.394, 8.

57. Carruthers, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 96. According to Carruthers, all of the earliest editions of the Confession retain the semi-colon. [Ed. The semi-colon and the comma noted in footnote 51, are also in the Burges MS, proving this was not a punctuation determined by the first printers of the Confession. S. W. Carruthers, ed. *Tercentenary Edition. The Confession of Faith of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster* (Publishing Office of the Presbyterian Church of England: London, [1946]). For more on the prerogative of 17<sup>th</sup> century compositors to determine the incidentals of the text in printing, see Chris Coldwell, "Examining the Work of S. W. Carruthers: Justifying a Critical Approach to the Text of the Westminster Standards & Correcting the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Lineage of the Traditional Scottish Text," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 1 (2005) 43–64.]

three, and then to creation (chapter four), providence (chapter five), and the fall (chapter six). Obviously, such an order could stem from the temporal execution of the decrees rather than from the eternal ordering of them. But it is at least noteworthy that the Confession's order follows the same basic pattern that we see in Rutherford's catechism,<sup>58</sup> which scholars have used to show that Rutherford is in fact supralapsarian.<sup>59</sup>

Fourthly, even if the majority of divines at Westminster were infralapsarian, it is, nevertheless, true that many of the most eminent theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who would have exerted the greatest influence on the thinking of the divines, were supralapsarian. We have already commented upon the influence of Rutherford and Twisse in this regard. But there were also many others who would have influenced the thinking of the divines to one degree or another: Luther (1483–1546), Calvin (1509–1564), Zwingli (1484–1531),<sup>60</sup> Beza (1519–1605), Zanchi (1516–1590), Whitaker (1548–1595),<sup>61</sup> Polanus (1561–1610), Perkins, and Ames (1576–1633), not to mention the Dutch theologians Gomarus (1563–1641), Voetius (1589–1676), Nethenus (1618–1686), and Essenius (1618–1677); all were supralapsarian. This in and of itself means little. But it does bear mentioning that many of the most formidable theologians of this time period embraced supralapsarian predestinarianism. It at least suggests that the divines could have (and maybe should have) had a tolerant attitude toward supralapsarianism. Almost all of the theologians they would have looked up to embraced this position.

58. Rutherford, 'Ane Catechisme,' 163–171.

59. Fesko, for example, states that 'Rutherford's treatment [of predestination in his catechism] resonates with supralapsarianism.' See 'The Westminster Confession and Lapsarianism,' 499.

60. The lapsarian positions of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli have been much debated. Although they each make explicit statements that can be understood as supporting the supralapsarian position, it is, as Karl Barth says, 'difficult and even impossible to judge whether [they] had clearly in mind the alternatives as [they were] formulated in the later controversy' of the seventeenth century. Barth, however, goes on to make this conclusion: 'The probability of consequence supports the view that if they could have been questioned further on the matter [of lapsarianism] Zwingli and Calvin (but also the Luther of the *De servo arbitrio*) would have been found on the Supralapsarian side.' See Barth, *CD II/2*, 127–128.

61. Twisse, *The Riches of Gods Love*, 9, 13. Twisse mentions that Calvin, Beza, Zanchi, Piscator, Gomarus, and Whitaker all 'made *Humanum genus*, not *corruptum*, no nor *integrum*, but *nondum conditum* the object of reprobation.'

62. Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland, 1560–1750* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1982) 49; Macleod, *Scottish Theology: In Relation to Church History Since the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1943) 70.

63. 'Calvin, Dordt and Westminster on Predestination,' 4:209.

In a similar vein, James Walker and John Macleod have both remarked that supralapsarian Calvinism 'was widely held' in Scotland during Rutherford's lifetime. According to them, it was not relegated to isolated individuals or confined only to a minority within the church in Scotland.<sup>62</sup> It was, instead, the prevailing view during the time of the Assembly. In light of this, it is hard to believe that the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland would so readily and heartily embrace the Confession without a comment as to its lapsarian position if it was not fully in accord with their prevailing views.

Is the Confession then supralapsarian? It is clearly not exclusively so. But there do appear to be good reasons to say with Fergusson that the theology of the Confession is perhaps 'more patient' of a supralapsarian reading, especially if we understand it through the eyes of Rutherford. The major obstacle for this interpretation is the infralapsarian majority at the Assembly. How can a supralapsarian document be subscribed to by those who favor infralapsarianism? In answering this question, we must remember that only the Scottish church and parliament approved and ratified the Westminster Confession of Faith. The English divines would not have had to deal with the same conscience issues that ministers in the Scottish church did. There is no reason that the English divines could not have conceded enough to allow a Confession that was inherently supralapsarian but, yet, phrased in such a way that did not exclude infralapsarians. There are, however, clear reasons as to why Rutherford and the Scottish church could not have conceded to an infralapsarian Confession. Rutherford's intense abhorrence of the Arminian, and Jesuit, notion of *scientia media*, which he sees inherent in the infralapsarian position, and the fact that a majority within the Scottish church favored the supralapsarian view, together with the lack of theological proof to substantiate an infralapsarian interpretation, suggest that the Confession should be seen as a supralapsarian document. The Confession ought not to be understood as, to borrow John Murray's words, 'non-committal' on the lapsarian issue.<sup>63</sup> By using Rutherford as our key to interpreting the lapsarian position of the Confession, it appears that the Confession is best understood to be an inherently supralapsarian document. It is wholly consistent with Rutherford's supralapsarianism, but its language does not go so far as to exclude infralapsarians. So, while its theology fits best within a supralapsarian scheme, it is phrased in such a way as to make consensus possible.

*Continued on Page 310.*