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  of justification, Luther's rediscovery of Pauline teaching on
  justification by faith, the relationship between grace, faith, and
  works, and the implications of Reformation soteriology for Christian
  theology. The study explores Luther's interpretation of key biblical
  passages, the doctrine of justification, the nature of human inability
  after the Fall, and the relationship between justification and
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by Boyan Mak
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Abstract: Boyan Mak Mihaylov, *The Fall and Salvation: A Theological-Historical Journey through Holy Scripture, the Church Fathers, and Reformation Thought*

. History of Christian Theology I, Dr. Sorin Badragan. Heiligenkreuz, Austria: TCM International Institute, 2019.

This article traces the theological development of the doctrines of the Fall and salvation across Scripture, the Eastern and Western Church Fathers, and Reformation thought. It argues that the Eastern patristic understanding of the Fall as corruption and illness, while emphasizing human freedom and synergy, remains incomplete when measured against the biblical motif of spiritual death requiring rebirth, as exemplified in the parable of the prodigal son and Christ's discourse

with Nicodemus. Conversely, the Reformation's insistence on sola gratia and sola fide is balanced by Eastern theology's affirmation of human participation in sanctification. The study contends that a coherent soteriological framework emerges when justification, sanctification, and glorification are distinguished yet integrated, and when Reformation principles are read through the lens of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. The article concludes by proposing a metaphorical architectural model—Scripture as foundation, dogma as walls, worldview as roof, and personal experience as the interior—as a synthesis that preserves both divine initiative and human response in the ordo salutis. Keywords: Fall, Salvation, Patristic theology, Reformation, Original sin, Free will, Synergy, Grace, Justification, Sanctification Original language: [Bulgarian](#)

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Even at the beginning of Holy Scripture, God tells Adam and Eve that if they eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they will die (Gen. 2:17). They did eat, yet they did not die physically immediately; instead, a gradual process of decay entered creation. Personally, I understand in the Hebrew expression “you shall die” both kinds of death—separation from God and return to dust.

The Eastern Fathers understand death in both a spiritual and physical sense as corruption. According to Irenaeus of Lyons (2nd century), Adam and Eve were in a state of innocence before the Fall, like children, with developmental potential. The Fall thus has an educational aspect ¹. Cyril of Alexandria (4th–5th century) states that after the Fall humanity “becomes sick with corruption” ². According to Theodore of Mopsuestia (4th–5th century), becoming mortal increases our inclination toward sin ³. John Chrysostom (4th–5th century) ⁴ interprets sinfulness as an inheritance of mortality.

The Western Fathers are less optimistic in comparison to the Eastern tradition. Tertullian (2nd–3rd century), influenced by Stoicism, holds that the soul is sinful because it is transmitted from parent to child ⁵. The same view is found in Cyprian (3rd century) and Ambrose of Milan (4th century) ⁶. Augustine of Hippo (4th–5th century) holds that the Fall produces a lasting modification in human nature ⁷.

The Apostle Paul (1st century), in Romans 8:21–22, writes that creation is enslaved to transience, groaning and suffering. Therefore, a more faithful reading of Scripture suggests a

change in the nature of creation itself—everything becomes subject to sin.

When Adam hears the voice of God in the garden after the Fall, shame arises within him and he seeks to hide (Gen. 3:10). There is alienation from God. I would describe this as “existential guilt”—not in a juridical sense of violating God’s honor, as Anselm of Canterbury holds [8](#), but as a personal sense of unworthiness and imperfection before God the Creator.

If we return to the Apostle Paul in Romans, we see the universality of divine wrath (Rom. 1:18–19), which, in my view, implies a universal guilt (“all have sinned,” Rom. 5:12). This idea would not be accepted by John Chrysostom and Maximus the Confessor [9](#), since they reject the imputation of guilt to Adam’s descendants and regard sin strictly as a personal act, making inherited guilt impossible

[10](#)

. The nature of the Fall is closely connected to the nature of guilt. The Eastern Fathers understand sin as illness and corruption rather than total separation from God (spiritual death), as in the Reformation tradition (Calvin, Luther). Between these two poles there is a path. The natural condition of humanity after the Fall is spiritual death. Yet the image of God in humanity is preserved so that human beings can return to communion with God through His grace.

The Lord Himself illustrates this in the parable of the prodigal son. The son was in a far country without relationship with the father, who says that the son “was dead” (Luke 15:32). The son is not a healed sick man but a resurrected dead one. He was a son who did not live as a son. Spiritual death requires spiritual rebirth: “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Birth is an act of the parent—the infant bears no responsibility. The Lord speaks to Nicodemus of spiritual rebirth, not healing. Therefore, I consider the Eastern patristic understanding of the Fall to be incomplete.

How is salvation, whose beginning is new birth, accomplished? The Apostle Paul clearly writes in Eph. 2:8–9: “...for by grace you have been saved through faith.” Extreme Calvinism (Beza) denies human participation in salvation; Martin Luther describes the human will as “enslaved,” while Jacob Arminius maintains that a person can consciously resist grace, a position later followed by John Wesley [11](#). Augustine of Hippo wrote an entire treatise, *On Grace and Free Will*, in which he defends both the freedom of the will and the necessity of divine grace for salvation [12](#). The Eastern Fathers believe that even the fallen human retains a certain freedom (the so-called “gnomic will,” according to Maximus the Confessor) and may choose either to follow or not follow God

[13](#)

. Eastern patristic thought serves as a useful corrective to some extreme Reformation positions.

The prodigal son did not lose the capacity to make decisions; he freely chooses to return to the father who longs for him. The resurrection of the son is the father's act grounded in the son's decision.

What is the relationship between faith and works in salvation? Augustine of Hippo believes that divine grace enables us to accumulate "good merits" [14](#). He debates Pelagius, who denies the necessity of divine grace for good works. In 428, monks in southern Gaul formulated a mediating position—Semi-Pelagianism [1](#)

[5](#)

. During this period, the Eastern Fathers speak of "theosis," in which the believer becomes a participant in God

[16](#)

. Gregory Palamas distinguishes between the divine essence and the divine energies in which we participate

[17](#)

. Thus Eastern theology speaks of synergy between God and humanity in salvation

[18](#)

. Reformation theology, by contrast, emphasizes works as the consequence of faith and the believer as recipient of grace. The tension is resolved by distinguishing justification from sanctification.

Salvation begins with new birth, continues with sanctification and spiritual growth, and is completed with the redemption of the body in the resurrection. This is also how the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed concludes [19](#). The Apostle Paul writes: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1–2) and "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..." (Phil. 2:12–13). Clearly, for Paul the term "salvation" appears in different contexts due to its comprehensive scope.

The Reformation returns us to the foundation of salvation (*sola gratia, sola fide* [20](#)), while the Eastern patristic tradition balances this by affirming human participation in spiritual growth. When Reformation thought is read in light of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, and when we remember the development of Christian theology between the 1st and 16th centuries, we can build a coherent "house": Scripture as foundation, dogma as walls, and a Christian worldview as roof protecting from "bad weather." The interior is personal experience of God.

The Apostle Peter concludes 2 Peter with the words: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." God has resolved the consequences of the Fall. He sent His Son to become incarnate and redeem humanity, so that we may be justified by faith and receive

salvation by grace. Being “in Christ,” we are now able to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Savior.

Notes:

1 Irenaeus. Against Heresies IV.38.1. Schaff, Philip. ANF01. The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. B: Christian Classic Ethereal Library, достъпно на: https://ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/against_heresies_iv/anf01.ix.vi.xxxix.html, accessed 23 June 2026.

2 Майендорф, Йоан. Византийско богословие. София, ГАЛ-ИКО, 1996, р. 185

3 Майендорф, р. 185

4 Майендорф, р. 185

5 Thieselton, Antony C. The Hermeneutics of Doctrine, 292 с., In: Google Книги, <https://books.google.bg/books?id=QKi0iSORfh0C&lpg=PA292&ots=qfkWJE6EV6&dq=quote%20tertullian%20traducianism&hl=bg&pg=PA292#v=onepage&q&f=false>, accessed 23 June 2026.

6 Cramer, Peter. Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, 118 с., In: Google Книги, <https://books.google.bg/books?id=AueTHQdX9ngC&lpg=PA118&ots=kJ5CwTsgqA&dq=traducianism%20tertullian%20ambrose%20cyprian&hl=bg&pg=PA118#v=onepage&q=traducianism%20tertullian%20ambrose%20cyprian&f=false>, accessed 23 June 2026.

7 Bonaiuti, Ernesto. La Piana, Giorgio. The Genesis of St. Augustine's Idea of Original Sin, Cambridge University Press. Harvard Divinity School, The Harvard Theological Review, Vol. 10, No. 2, 162 с., In: JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1507550.pdf>, accessed 23 June 2026.

[8](#) Лейн, Тони. Християнската мисъл през вековете, София, изд. „Нов човек“, 1999 г., стр. 114. Here Tony Lane shows that Anselm believes that there must be retribution for the trampled honor of God, which according to other authors suggests a legal concept of guilt in Anselm.

[9](#) Майендорф, р. 185

[10](#) Майендорф, р. 185

[11](#) Wesley, John. The Question, "What Is An Arminian?" Answered by a Lover of Free Grace, B: Jesus People Information Centre, <http://jesuspeopleinfo.org/articles/armwesley.pdf> , accessed 23 June 2026. In this pamphlet, John Wesley clearly shows the differences between the Arminian and Calvinist positions. In point 8, Wesley writes that Arminians believe that in certain cases a person can resist God's grace.

[12](#) Аврелий, Августин. За природата на доброто. За благодатта и свободата на волята. София, 1992 г., р. 45

[13](#) Майендорф, р. 182-183

[14](#) Аврелий, Августин, р. 45

[15](#) Semipelagianism, In: Catholic Encyclopedia, достъпно на: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13703a.htm> , accessed 23 June 2026.

[16](#) Майендорф, р. 202-209

[17](#) Майендорф, р. 233

[18](#) Klimenko, Victor E. (Deacon, Ph.D) The Orthodox Teaching of Personal Salvation, In: Православие.Ru, <https://pravoslavie.ru/46463.html> , accessed 23 June 2026. The article clearly shows the similarities and differences between the Evangelical-Protestant view and contemporary Eastern Orthodoxy, especially points 1.12 and 1.13.

[19](#) „Изповядвам едно кръщение за опрощаване на греховете. Чакам възкресение на мъртвите и живот в бъдещия век! Амин!“ Никео-Цариградски символ на вярата, In: Православие.БГ, достъпен на: <https://www.pravoslavie.bg/%D0%A1%D1%8A%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8/%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%BE-%D1%86%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%BB-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B2%D1%8F%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0/> , accessed 23 June 2026.

[20](#) These are two of the so-called solas of the Reformation: sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus, soli Deo Gloria. Reformation, In: Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Reformation> , accessed 23 June 2026.

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[voslavie.bg/%D0%A1%D1%8A%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8/%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%BE-%D1%86%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%BB-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B2%D1%8F%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0/](https://pravoslavie.bg/%D0%A1%D1%8A%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8/%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%BE-%D1%86%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%BB-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B2%D1%8F%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0/)

, последно посетено на 09.12.2019 г.

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5.Bonaiuti, Ernesto. La Piana, Giorgio. The Genesis of St. Augustine's Idea of Original Sin, Cambridge University Press. Harvard Divinity School, The Harvard Theological Review, Vol. 10, No. 2, B: JSTOR, достъпно на: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1507550.pdf> , accessed 24 June 2026.

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