

‘Semipelagianism’: The Origins of the Term and its Passage into the History of Heresy

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The term ‘Semipelagianism’ is usually taken to refer to fifth- and sixth-century teachings of Hadrumetum and Massilian monks. The term originated, however, with sixteenth-century Protestants who used it to describe a view of salvation by human effort in combination with grace. Theodore Beza invented the term in about 1556, applying it to the Roman Catholic view of grace and human will. The Lutheran Formula of Concord (1577) used it to designate Lutheran synergists. Initially, therefore, the term referred to contemporaneous teachings. Starting with Nicholas Sanders (1571), however, Roman Catholics introduced a shift of meaning, with fifth-century Massilians becoming the central connotation.

If a definition of the terms ‘Semipelagianism’ or ‘semipelagian’ is sought in a standard work of reference such as the *Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church*¹ we learn that it was the ‘name given to doctrines on human nature upheld in the fifth century by a group of theologians who, while not denying the necessity of grace for salvation maintained that the first steps towards Christian life were ordinarily taken by the human will and that grace supervened only later’. While this description of the content of ‘Semipelagian beliefs’ corresponds to what later generations of scholars took ‘Semipelagianism’ to mean, it does not actually describe the historical reality of the movement or movements. Following Robert Markus, Conrad Leyser and others we would like to show that the *ODCC* definition is

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¹ E. A. Livingstone (ed.), *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edn, Oxford 2003 (repr. of 1997 edn), 1481 *s.v.* ‘Semipelagianism’.

misleading as it seems to suggest not only that the name was contemporaneous with the doctrine but that the fifth-century 'semi-Pelagians' formed a coherent movement which identified their teaching to some extent with that of Pelagius himself.² The view which is reflected in the *ODCC* entry rests on the presupposition that a controversy arose in Gaul in the fifth century between those who espoused Augustine's teaching on grace and those who opposed it, prime representatives of the latter view being John Cassian and Faustus of Riez. The controversy is then thought to have lasted into the sixth century until its condemnation by the Council of Orange in 529. However, neither Augustine nor the *capitula* of the Council of Orange refer to the movement as 'semipelagian'. Furthermore, as Conrad Leyser notes,³ studies by scholars such as Thomas Smith, Robert Markus or Carlo Tibiletti in the 1980s and 1990s⁴ have shown that there was no sustained controversy over grace and predestination in fifth-century Gaul and that the appearance of a few tracts on the subject in 430, the work of Faustus of Riez around forty years later, and the condemnation of Faustus by the Council of Orange do not amount to a controversy. That being said, it is reasonable to assume that these sporadic disagreements show that the issue of grace continued to be debated at certain points in time throughout the fifth and sixth century, especially in a monastic context. Robert Markus in particular has also shown that neither Cassian nor Vincent of Lérins nor Faustus of Riez identified or even partly assimilated their position with that of Pelagius. Finally, it is important to remember that the Council of Orange does not name Faustus in its *capitula*.⁵ This provides a telling contrast with another 'semi'-heresy, Semi-Arianism, the partisans of which did form a coherent group and espoused the common doctrine of *homoiousios* which at least hinged on the issues that had been raised by Arius.

These hypotheses are borne out by recent studies on the localisation and the development of the controversies. Augustine's first treatises on the issue were *De gratia et libero arbitrio* and *De correptione et gratia*. These appear to have been written to reaffirm his basic position on the issue and to

² See Conrad Leyser, 'Semipelagianism', in Alan Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the ages*, Grand Rapids 2003, 761–5.

³ *Ibid.* 762.

⁴ See especially C. Tibiletti, 'Rassegna di studi e testi sui "semipelagiani"', *Augustinianum* xxv (1985), 507–22; R. A. Markus, 'The legacy of Pelagius: orthodoxy, heresy and conciliation', in R. D. Williams (ed.), *The making of orthodoxy: essays in honour of Henry Chadwick*, Cambridge 1989, 214–34; and T. A. Smith, 'Augustine in two Gallic controversies: use or abuse?', in Joseph T. Lienhard and others (eds), *Augustine: presbyter factus sum*, New York 1992, 43–55. The most recent author to voice this view is Donato Ogliari, who also argues (at p. 106) that although no causal link can be established between Pelagius and the Marseille monastic circles, it is not unlikely that the latter knew at least some works of Pelagius: *Gratia et certamen: the relationship between grace and free will in Augustine's discussions with the so-called 'Semipelagians'*, Leuven 2003.

⁵ See Markus, 'Legacy of Pelagius', 214–34.

reassure the monks of Hadrumetum that this in no way affected the value of their practices. Although some modern scholars are of the opinion that fears of renewal of Pelagianism may have prompted Augustine’s reaction, there is no proof that the Hadrumetum monks were directly influenced by Julian of Eclanum and his followers.⁶ However, when a similar controversy, the exact chronology of which is unclear, erupted in some monasteries in the region of Marseille, fears of Julian’s influence would have been better founded. Prosper’s letter (Augustine, *ep.* ccxxv.2), whose target may or may not have been John Cassian and/or Vincent of Lérins, notes that Marseille is the centre of these views and that at least one group of the Massilians or Marseille monks is close to the views of the Pelagians (*ep.* ccxxv.4).⁷ The letter of Prosper’s associate Hilary (Augustine, *ep.* ccxxvi.2) points out that these dangerous views have spread to monasteries beyond Marseille.⁸ Augustine reacted to these warnings with two further treatises, *De dono perseverantiae* and *De praedestinatione sanctorum*.

This brief summary of the latest state of knowledge on the subject shows that some problems over reconciling predestination and the monastic way of life were voiced at practically the same time in Hadrumetum and in the South of France and that Prosper of Aquitaine in particular linked these latter questions rightly or wrongly with a rebirth of Pelagianism, the main exponent of which was Julian of Eclanum. Whether either group of monks knew or identified with the writings of Pelagius is not known. However, it is known that Augustine himself, who reacted to Prosper’s letter in *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 1, 2, sharply distinguished the Massilians (*Massilienses*), as he called them, from the Pelagians, the chief difference between the two being that the Massilians believed in original sin and that they thought that men’s wills were actually anticipated by God’s grace. Moreover, in contrast with the Pelagians, the Massilians did not think that human will unaided by grace could do anything good.⁹ The expression ‘remnants of the Pelagians’ (*reliquiae Pelagianorum*) is Prosper’s not Augustine’s (Augustine, *ep.* ccxxv.7). The debates with the Massilians, it is

⁶ See Leyser, ‘Semipelagianism’, 762.

⁷ See Ogliaari, *Gratia et certamen*, 99.

⁸ See *ibid.* 98–105.

⁹ ‘Pervenerunt autem isti fratres nostri, pro quibus sollicita est pia caritas vestra, ut credant cum ecclesia Christi, peccato primi hominis obnoxium nasci genus humanum, nec ab isto malo nisi per iustitiam secundi hominis aliquem liberari. Pervenerunt etiam, ut praeveniri voluntates hominum Dei gratia fateantur, atque ad nullum opus bonum vel incipiendum vel perficiendum sibi quemquam sufficere posse consentiant. Retenta ergo ista in quae pervenerunt, plurimum eos a pelagianorum errore discernunt. Proinde, si in eis ambulent et orent eum qui dat intellectum, si quid de praedestinatione aliter sapiunt, ipse illis hoc quoque revelabit; tamen etiam nos impendamus eis dilectionis affectum ministeriumque sermonis, sicut donat ille quem rogavimus, ut in his litteris ea quae illis essent apta et utilia diceremus. Unde enim scimus ne forte Deus noster id per hanc nostram velit efficere servitutem, qua eis in Christi libera caritate servimus?’: Augustine, *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 1, 2.

important to note, focused on justification. The issue of original sin did not enter into them, in contrast with the Pelagian quarrel.

The appearance of the terms ‘Semipelagian’ and ‘Semipelagianism’ and the historical construction of the heresy

The aim of this article is to investigate the genesis of the terms ‘Semipelagian’ and ‘Semipelagianism’ and examine insofar as it is possible how they came to refer to the fifth- and sixth-century quarrels of the (Hadrumetum and) ‘Massilian’ monks, thus giving birth to the historical construction of ‘Semipelagianism’ as a fully-fledged heresy. The hypothesis is that the term ‘Semipelagianism’ originated in the mid-sixteenth century in the first instance as a concept of systematic or polemical theology used to designate teachings of contemporaries and that, subsequently, the term was given the historical connotation of a reference to fifth-century theories of grace. If the latter historical designation is, in the strict sense, anachronistic, the anachronism *per se* does not imply that the term is useless from a systematic viewpoint as a description of a certain view of grace that is neither fully Pelagian nor Augustinian.

Increasingly, the most recent works on the subject tend to grant that the term is an early modern coinage but all too often consider, mistakenly, that it first appeared in the Lutheran *Epitome* or *Formula of Concord* of 1577, whose article 2, paragraph 10 states that ‘We reject also the error of the Semi-Pelagians, who teach that man by his own powers can make a beginning of his conversion, but without the grace of the Holy Ghost cannot complete it.’¹⁰ This passage has been considered as being aimed at Roman Catholic teachings,¹¹ and perhaps these were also targeted by implication. The primary target, however, was within the Lutheran Church itself.¹² The

¹⁰ See David Lambert’s otherwise very accurate entry ‘Semipelagianism’, in Karla Pollmann and others (eds), *The Oxford guide to the historical reception of Augustine*, Oxford–New York 2013, and Uta Heil, ‘Die Auseinandersetzungen um Augustin im Gallien des 5. Jahrhunderts (bis 529)’, in Volker Henning Drecoll (ed.), *Augustin Handbuch*, Tübingen 2007, 558–64, esp. p. 558: ‘eine neuzeitliche Etikette . . . , erstmals in der *Epitome* der lutherischen Konkordienformel des 16. Jahrhunderts nachzulesen’. The *Formula of Concord* is also referred to by Christoph Marksches in ‘Pelagius/Pelagianer/Semipelagianer, II. Dogmatisch, 1. Zur Begrifflichkeit und ihrer nachantiken Geschichte’, in Hans Dieter Betz and others (eds), *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 4th edn, Tübingen 2003, vi. 1082–4 at p. 1083, and Gerhard Ludwig Müller, ‘Semipelagianismus’, in Walter Kasper and others (eds), *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 3rd edn, Freiburg 2000, ix. 451–3, esp. p. 452.

¹¹ ‘die ‘Papisten’ gemeint’: Heil, ‘Die Auseinandersetzungen’, 558.

¹² ‘Auch die Konkordienformel vertritt in ihrem zweiten Artikel wesentlich nur die von [Matthias] Flacius [Illyricus] im Gegensatz zu [Victorin] Strigel entwickelte Auffassung, daß der Wille des natürlichen Menschen zur Bekehrung völlig unkräftig sei’: Otto Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus*, Leipzig 1912, ii. 447–53 at p. 447.

'Semipelagians' referred to here are synergist theologians such as Johann Pfeffinger and his followers who opposed the Gnesio-Lutherans by asserting that man's free will was the primary agent in the act of conversion. This was the view of Philip Melanchthon whom Pfeffinger followed. It is significant that many scholars today consider Melanchthon's teaching to have 'many points in common with Semipelagianism'.¹³ This seems to be a case of a double anachronism, as the sixteenth-century neologism 'Semipelagianism' used to designate synergism in 1577 apparently gave rise to the view that synergism actually drew on the early heresy of 'Semipelagianism'. Preus, who also thought that Semipelagianism was an ancient doctrine, attributed its appearance in the *Epitome* to Martin Chemnitz but it could equally well be attributed to Jakob Andreae, the main author of the text.¹⁴ Pfeffinger's *Propositiones de libero arbitrio* appeared in 1555 but there is no trace of him ever being charged with Semipelagianism in those terms during the disputes that ensued between him and Amsdorf on the one hand and between Victorinus Strigel, a supporter of Pfeffinger, and Flacius on the other hand, although the term 'Pelagianism' did figure in the latter debate and in the Weimar disputation of 1560.¹⁵

Thus, as regards the Lutheran side of the question, it can be concluded that Jakob Andreae (or Martin Chemnitz) inserted the term into the 1577 *Epitome* or *Formula of Concord* and applied it to the Lutheran or Philippist synergists. The term was obviously in circulation before but on the evidence available had not appeared in any Lutheran public document.

More frequently, modern historians, including Conrad Leyser,¹⁶ tend to trace the origin of the term and its application to the 'Massilian' controversy

¹³ See, for example, *Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1568, s.v. 'Synergism'. For a brief presentation of the synergist quarrel see Friedrich Bente's introductory, *Historical introductions to symbolical books of the evangelical Lutheran Church*, Teddington 2008, 233–68. See also Eric Lund (ed.), *Documents from the history of Lutheranism, 1517–1750*, Augsburg 2002, esp. pp. 196–209. On the specific debate between Pfeffinger and Amsdorf see Robert Kolb, *Nikolaus von Amsdorf, 1483–1565: popular polemics in the preservation of Luther's legacy*, Nieuwkoop 1978. On Pfeffinger see the full biographical information in Gotthard Lechler, 'Pfeffinger, Johannes', in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Berlin 1887, xxv. 624–31.

¹⁴ See J. A. O. Preus, 'The use of the Church Fathers in the Formula of Concord', *Concordia Theological Quarterly* xlvi (1984), 101.

¹⁵ See Lund, *Documents*, 200–4.

¹⁶ 'it was the Dominican contention that Molina's doctrine of grace which looked to safeguard human free will that was a species of Pelagianism. Molina's opponents went on to identify a "semipelagian" tradition on which they perceived him to be drawing, naming its leading exponents as Cassian and Faustus': Leyser, 'Semipelagianism', 761–2. In several relatively recent lexicon entries the term is declared a seventeenth-century coinage: 'eine im Gnadenstreit seit Beginn des 17. Jh. v. den Banezianern ... polemisch gegen die Molinisten ... in Umlauf gebrachte Bez., mit der die Betonung des freien Willens u. die Berücksichtigung der verdienstl. Werke bei der

back to the Molinist quarrel of the 1590s. The first to do so was M. Jacquin in 1907¹⁷ whose investigation was prompted partly by the vagueness of Noris's attribution of the terms to *scolastici recentiores* and partly by the hypothesis voiced by Loofs in 1906.¹⁸ Basing his conclusions on Roman Catholic sources only, Jacquin affirms mistakenly that the terms were still unknown in 1580 when Michael Baius' stand in favour of predestination raised considerable unrest and controversy. However, the terms were obviously known prior to 1580 and this supports the hypothesis that they were not imported into Jesuit-Dominican controversies on grace until some time after being coined. The origin of the appellation 'semipelagian' is thus to be sought either in the intra-Lutheran world or, as we would like to argue, in Calvinist-Catholic controversy over free will in the Reformation period. Moreover, it would seem that this term was initially coined as an extension to 'Pelagianism', given that both the Lutheran synergists and the Roman Catholic Church of the pre-Tridentine and Tridentine periods espoused doctrines that granted a more active role to grace and its role in man's salvation than Pelagius.¹⁹ Read through the eyes of Augustine, Pelagius in his *Epistola ad Demetriadem* was understood to have viewed grace as a purely intellectual phenomenon, amounting to man's understanding of the law of God and acting virtuously in accordance with it.²⁰ This was not a view with which Roman Catholic theology of the period wanted to be linked, as is shown by Johann Eck's programmatic statement in his *Enchiridion locorum communium adversus Lutheranos et alios hostes ecclesiae*:

We state that all the good we receive comes from God but that He gives some things through the action of free will and other things independently of free will.

Vorherbestimmung z. Heil... bzw. der Nichtverdienste für die Nichterwählung... in die Nähe der Gnadenlehre der Massilianer gerückt werden sollte': Müller, 'Semipelagianismus', 452; 'A designation given in the seventeenth century': Rebecca H. Weaver, 'Semipelagianism', in Everett Ferguson and others (eds), *Encyclopedia of early Christianity*, 2nd edn, New York-London 1999, 1046-7 at p. 1046; 'the term "semipelagian" came into use at the start of the 17th c.': C. Tibiletti, 'Semipelagians', in Angelo di Berardino (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the early Church*, Cambridge 1992, ii. 767.

¹⁷ See M. Jacquin, 'À Quelle Date apparaît le terme Semipélagien?', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* i (1907), 506-8. On the Molinist controversy generally see, for example, Thomas Flint, *Divine providence: the Molinist account*, New York 2006.

¹⁸ See Jacquin, 'À Quelle Date', 506-7; Henry Noris, *Historia pelagiana et dissertatio de synodo v. Œcumenica: additis vindiciis Augustinianis pro libris a s. doctore contra Pelagianos ac Semipelagianos scriptis*, Padua 1673; and Friedrich Loofs, 'Semipelagianismus', in Albert Hauck (ed.), *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, Leipzig 1906, xviii. 192-203.

¹⁹ See, for example, Gerald Bonner, 'Pelagianism and Augustine', *Augustinian Studies* xxiii (1992), 33-51; xxiv (1993), 27-47.

²⁰ See Augustine, *De gratia Christi et peccato originali* 40.

We also state that our merits are gifts of God, and that he gives them in order to forestall, cooperate and ensure but this does not negate the active cooperation of the free will with these gifts.²¹

Needless to say, Eck in 1527 shows no awareness of accusations of Semipelagianism against Roman Catholicism, although he does defend his Church against Karlstadt’s accusation of ‘new Pelagianism’, which he counters by accusing the partisans of the Reformation of Stoicism and Manicheism.²²

Before dealing with the origins of the term, it must be stressed that its importance for modern theological views on the issues of free will and predestination cannot be overestimated especially given the quasi-simultaneity of its appearance, with a variety of applications, in all the major early modern confessions. Indeed, the still current designation of Semipelagianism has given rise to the commonly held view that varying positions within any of the major confessions can be designated as Pelagian, Semipelagian and Augustinian and that these tendencies are historically founded on one or other of the three early doctrinal tendencies. It is also still common to view Cassian as the founder of Semipelagianism even though an increasing number of historians grant that the actual name was coined later.²³ In an attempt to reconstruct the origins of the term itself and then of ‘Massilian’ thinking as its principal referent, the first point to be considered is the appearance of the term ‘Semipelagianism’ in and around John Calvin’s circles.

Calvin and Pighius

Calvin wrote his treatise against Albert Pighius in 1542 and had it published in 1543.²⁴ He does not use the term ‘semipelagian’ with

²¹ Johann Eck, *Enchiridion locorum communium adversus Lutheranos et alios hostes ecclesiae*, ed. Pierre Fraenkel, Münster 1979, cap. 31 (1527), 322.

²² *Ibid.* 320–1. Karlstadt refers specifically to the concept of *meritum ex congruo* (merit earned by those who are not yet justified but who cooperate with grace).

²³ See, for example, Joseph Pohle, ‘Semipelagianism’ in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, New York, xiii. 191, available online at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11604a.htm> (accessed 22 Apr. 2011). The otherwise highly reliable editorial notes to John Calvin, *Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de servitute et liberatione humani arbitrii*, ed. A. N. S. Lane and G. I. Davis, Geneva 2008, also rely on later terminology and so inevitably commit an anachronism when they refer (p. 270 n. 156) to Prosper’s account portraying ‘the semi-Pelagians as being considerably more Pelagian than Augustine himself admits’. Of course *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 1, 2 does show that Augustine distinguished sharply between Pelagius and the Massilians. ‘Semipelagianism’, however, is not a term that occurs there and the question of there being any such coherent movement is not broached.

²⁴ For further details and extensive critical apparatus see Calvin, *Defensio* (Lane-Davis edn). All references hereinafter cited are to this edition.

reference to either the Massilians or to any of his own contemporaries. However, he does focus on what became known as Augustine's writings in the 'Semipelagian controversy' when he refutes Pighius' defence of Roman Catholic orthodoxy on justification as being absurd and unfounded. Two points about Calvin's response are especially worth noting. First, when referring to the exchange between Prosper, Hilary and Augustine, he assimilates the Massilians to fully-blown Pelagians and does not use the appellation *Massilienses*. He seems to have made his own Prosper's contention that the group in question is a 'Pelagian remnant'. Secondly, Calvin is fully aware that Augustine distinguishes Massilian views on grace from those of Pelagius himself and does not question this distinction. In his view, Pighius is not just culpable of this 'soft' version of Pelagianism but of full-scale Pelagian heresy, which granted the human will full autonomy in the salvation process. He states:

Pighius vaunts himself so often of having nothing in common with Pelagians, but I fail to see which Pelagians he is imagining here. For he not only has a great deal in common with those whom Augustine describes [i.e. the Massilians] but is far worse than they. Prosper had warned Augustine that some men in Gaul disagreed with him who (so he attests), nonetheless managed 'to believe that the humans were born guilty of the original sin and were freed from guilt only by the justice of Christ.' These men also confessed that God's grace preceded human will, no man being capable of initiating or completing a good action by his own powers [*ep. ccxxv.3–6; De praedestinatione sanctorum* 1, 2]. When Augustine began to dispute with them, he did indeed distinguish them from Pelagius but was nonetheless not satisfied with the teaching they professed. But he [Pighius] clamours that no one can be aided by God's grace unless he has prepared himself by willing, hoping and praying beforehand. So where is this much vaunted disagreement of his with Pelagius?²⁵

Calvin is replying to Pighius' assertion in the fifth book of his *De libero hominis arbitrio*²⁶ that the Catholic teaching of his day is more orthodox than that of the *Massilienses* whom Augustine significantly thought not to deviate radically from the truth. In contrast to the Marseille communities, Pighius and other Catholic theologians believe that that no one can assert the salutary power of free will without first asserting prevenient grace. Therefore, argues Pighius, no one can believe that Catholic teaching on justification is anything like even the softest version of Pelagianism. In other words, Pighius substantially echoes Eck's position on free will and justification.²⁷ Calvin's sarcastic assertion that, all of Pighius' demurrers notwithstanding, he cannot but be a follower of Pelagius, given his belief in preparation for receiving grace, does not reproduce Pighius' sentiments exactly. The Louvain theologian does not say that preparation is

²⁵ Ibid. 269–70.

²⁶ This is reprinted in its entirety *ibid.* 331–450.

²⁷ Ibid. 418A.

indispensable, he says that man’s freely willed preparation by prayer is not an insult to God’s grace, especially as free will itself requires help from grace – a much weaker statement than Calvin leads his readers to believe.²⁸

Calvin is clearly aware that Augustine distinguishes the Massilians from fully-fledged Pelagians and that the Church Father does not consider their views heretical although he finds them unsatisfactory. Pighius’ error, in Calvin’s view, consists not just in espousing the Massilian views but in going beyond them to espouse the total heresy of Pelagianism. Although Calvin’s actual description of the Massilians would be eligible for the label of ‘Semipelagianism’, the term does not arise in the dispute between him and Pighius. Nor does it appear anywhere else in Calvin’s writings.²⁹ Did Calvin’s conception of the Massilian quarrel influence the coining of the term ‘Semipelagianism’ in Calvinist circles some fifteen years later? This is a problem that will now be addressed indirectly.

Georg Cassander and the Massilians

Before all else, a word needs to be said about the early modern scholar who first isolated the fifth-century controversy without having a polemical agenda. This was Georg Cassander, a partisan of confessional reconciliation, who has not been the object of many studies so far.³⁰ Like most sixteenth-century theologians and church historians, Cassander was interested in the Fathers generally and in Augustine particularly. Among his most noteworthy patristic editions are his *B. Vigiliū martyris et episcopi Tridentini [Vigilius of Thapse] Opera* (1555) and *Honorii Augustodunensis ecclesiae presbyteri de praedestinatione et libero arbitrio dialogus nunquam antehac typis expressus; Epistolae duae ad B. Augustinum. . . Sententiae ex libris B. August. De praedestinatione sanctorum et bono perseuerantiae* (1552) [*Dialogue by Honorius Augustodunensis on predestination and free will never published hitherto*;

²⁸ ‘Nulla fit itaque diuinae gratiae iniuria si ad eam ex sua ipsorum natura et liberi potestate arbitrii (quae et ipsa quicquid est, diuinae bonitatis et gratiae opus est) sese possint praeparare homines’: *ibid.* 423B.

²⁹ The Reformer, however, opposed what he called the ‘middle road’ of the Council of Trent: Markschies, ‘Pelagius/Pelagianer/Semipelagianer’, 1083; R. J. Mooi, *Het kerk-en dogmahistorisch element in de werken van Johannes Calvijn*, Wageningen 1965, 119–20.

³⁰ On Cassander see A. C. Th. Friedrich, *Georgii Cassandri vita et theologia: Commentatio*, Göttingen 1855; J. P. Dolan, *The influence of Erasmus, Witzel and Cassander in the church ordinances and reform proposals of the united duchies of Cleve during the middle decades of the 16th century*, Münster 1957; Michael Erbe, ‘François Bauduin und Georg Cassander: Dokumente einer Humanistenfreundschaft’, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* xl (1978), 537–60; and Irena Backus, ‘The early Church as model of religious unity in the sixteenth century: Georg Cassander and Georg Witzel’, in Howard Louthan and Randall Zachmann (eds), *Conciliation and confession: the struggle for unity in the age of Reform, 1415–1648*, Notre Dame, IN 2004, 106–33, and ‘Cassander’, in Pollmann, *Oxford guide*, s.v. Cass.

Two letters to St Augustine; Sayings by St Augustine from predestination of the saints and the virtue of persevering].³¹

Although he never left the Roman Catholic Church, Cassander disapproved of the papacy and its exaggerated claims to power just as much as he disapproved of Calvin's religious intolerance or of that of the Lutheran religious leaders. As result of his patristic studies, Cassander thought that the early Church offered the best guide to Christian unity. For him the Church of the first five or six centuries constituted the sole standard of orthodoxy to the extent of enabling Christians to take the Bible for granted. Indeed, the study of the Bible as such was of no interest to him and he did not produce any commentaries on it. Following implicitly Vincent of Lérins (*Commonitorium* 2. 1–5), he argued in *De officio pii viri* that two things were essential if we wanted to be protected against all heresies: the authority of the canon and the Catholic tradition, since he thought that the words of the Scripture tended only to become distorted if they were not interpreted through tradition. Like Erasmus, he was prepared to acknowledge that it was also possible for heretics to be pious and even partly right in their views and that differences between rites and ceremonies mattered little or not at all so long as the basic principle of charity was observed. True faith for Cassander rested not on Scripture or on its magisterial tradition as represented by the Roman Catholic Church, but on the consensus of written tradition on the essential points of doctrine.

Cassander had the highest respect for Augustine and his views on predestination and free will. He saw the Church Father as the consensual model of the correct position on the balance of grace and innate human capacities to do good. It is important to remember here that he received Augustine in the light of his own views on religious tolerance and reconciliation of confessional positions. His anthology of Augustine's texts therefore is intended to show that Augustine's treatises against the Massilians are not statements of total predestination, but a paradigm of an intermediate position between attributing too much to God (Protestants) and attributing too much to man (some Catholics and the Anabaptists). Together with the treatise by Honorius Augustodunensis, the anthology is dedicated to one of Cassander's staunch supporters, Hermann von Bauheim, the abbot of Brunnweiler. Cassander outlines in the preface the history of the

³¹ *Honorii Augustodunensis ecclesiae presbyteri de praedestinatione et libero arbitrio dialogus nunquam antehac typis expressus; Epistolae duae ad B. Augustinum altera Prosperi, altera Hilarii Arelatensis episcopi de reliquiis Pelagianae haereseos ad fidem vetusti exemplaris restitutae; Sententiae ex libris B. August. De praedestinatione sanctorum et bono perseuerantiae quibus ad superiores epistolas respondetur et tota haec controuersia explicatur*, Coloniae 1552. See also *Georgii Cassandri Opera... quae reperiri potuerunt omnia: epistolae cxvii et colloquia ii cum Anabaptistis nunc primum edita*, Paris 1616 (Cassander's epistle to Bauheim, Honorius' treatise, the two letters from Prosper and Hilary and extracts from Augustine at pp. 615–67).

controversy concerning the ‘reliquiae Pelagianorum’, the description first used by Prosper. At the same time he argues that Augustine was right to renounce his early position on free will and that the fact of assigning a more important role to grace than he did in his early works does not make him a determinist, as was adequately shown by Prosper and Fulgentius, his defenders at the time. Throughout the preface Cassander, like Calvin, shows himself fully aware of the difference between Pelagianism proper and the movement initiated by the monastic communities of Marseilles. He also draws the reader’s attention to the resurgence of Pelagianism in the Middle Ages under the influence of philosophy and lists Honorius Augustodunensis and Bernard of Clairvaux as well as Thomas Bradwardine and Gregory of Rimini as defenders of Augustine’s late ‘middle of the road’ view of predestination.

The anthology itself includes the two letters of Prosper and Hilary (*epp.* ccxxv–ccxxvi) informing Augustine of the new heresy, as well as excerpts from *De praedestinatione sanctorum* and *De dono perseuerantiae*. The excerpts are selected by Cassander so as to show clearly the nature of the debate and Augustine’s position. He omits many of the biblical quotations and any points that are subsidiary to the main arguments. Basically he wants to show that, according to Augustine, the grace of God precedes any work by a human, as faith is divinely imparted.

Thus by 1552 theologians, regardless of their confessional stance, were aware of the distinction between the Massilian doctrine and Pelagianism proper and tended to consider the former loosely as ‘the remnants of Pelagianism’ in a moderated form. However, the term ‘Semipelagian’ designating the Massilian (or indeed any other) movement had still not appeared.

Who were Theodore Beza’s ‘Semipelagians’?

The earliest use of the terms ‘Semipelagianism’ and ‘semipelagian’ can be traced back to Theodore Beza and his anti-Catholic polemics. Beza uses the terms without once adverting to their ‘Massilian’ fifth-century context, although it is quite clear that the terms are of interest to him as indication of a mitigated or subtle form of ‘Pelagianism’, itself a major and instantly recognisable heresy condemned by the Oecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431. Beza seems to be the inventor of the terms ‘Semipelagianism’ and ‘semipelagian’. His use of these terms, therefore, deserves attention.

Beza first uses the term ‘semipelagian’ in his 1556 annotations to the New Testament.³² He identifies the Semipelagians as those who think that

³² Theodore Beza, *Novum Jesu Christi D. N. testamentum latine iam olim a veteri interprete, nunc denuo a Theodoro Beza versum cum eiusdem annotationibus in quibus ratio interpretationis redditur*, [Geneva]; R. Estienne 1556.

human nature is prone to sin but not totally dependent on God's grace for its regeneration. The relevant passages are:

Finally as our Semipelagians seize on this passage to reconcile justification by good works with justification by faith (although the translator of the Vulgate practically states: 'we are not justified by works unless it is by faith,' that is, [we are not justified] by any good works but only by those which follow on from faith; in other words, not all good works merit salvation but only those which are the outcome of faith), – in order to stop them having something to snarl at, I shall begin by asking them what they take to be the works of the Law which they claim Paul to associate with faith? (Galatians ii. 16)³³

Therefore Paul leaves nothing whatsoever to man's nature, which is altogether dead through sin. I say dead, not half-dead as our semipelagian sophists would have it. (Ephesians ii. 3)³⁴

But the pronoun *autou* (his, of him) excludes all the others. This contradicts the Semipelagians, that is, those who imagine that the merely debilitated human nature, as they call it, is helped by grace. (Eph. ii. 10)³⁵

Those who assert this are either Pelagians if they make grace a natural thing or they are Semipelagians if they make nature to concur with a grace that does no more than help weak nature. (1 Timothy ii. 4)³⁶

For the rest, namely, we are brought headlong into evil, but with respect to the good we are not only slow and feeble (as the semipelagian sophists would have it) but we are entirely destitute even of every principle of a good will. (2 Peter i. 5)³⁷

Beza used the term 'Semipelagian' again in his attack in 1558 on Castello's Bible translation, *Ad Sebastiani Castellionis calumnias*, in reference to Castello's interpretation of Romans viii.10 ('And if Christ be in you, the

³³ 'Postremo quia Semipelagiani nostri hunc locum arripiunt ut iustitiam operum cum iustitia fidei concilient (quasi cum Vetere interprete dicendum sit nos non iustificari ex operibus nisi per fidem, id est non ex omnibus operibus sed ex operibus fidem consequentibus, sive non omnia opera salutem mereri, sed ea demum quae ex fide nascuntur) ne habeant isti quod obganniant, primum hoc quaero ex ipsis, quid per opera Legis intelligant quae hic volunt a Paulo coniungi cum fide': *ibid.* fo. 240r.

³⁴ 'Itaque nihil prorsus relinquit homini Paulus, quid non fit per peccatum, non dico semimortuum, ut tradunt sophistae nostri semipelagiani, sed prorsus mortuum, quod ad naturam attinet': *ibid.* fo. 249v.

³⁵ 'Sed et pronomine *autou* caeteri omnes prorsus excluduntur, aduersus Semipelagianos, id est aduersus eos qui naturam, ut aiunt, tantum debilitataem fingunt gratia adiuuari': *ibid.* fo. 250r.

³⁶ 'Hoc igitur qui constituunt, vel Pelagiani sunt, si naturalem faciant gratiam: vel Semipelagiani, si cum natura faciant concurrere gratiam, quae infirmam tantum naturam adiuuet': *ibid.* fo. 273r-v.

³⁷ 'Nam alioqui ad malum praecipites ferimur, ad bonum vero non modo tardi et imbecilli (ut tradunt sophistae Semipelagiani) sed omni etiam bonae voluntatis principio prorsus destituti sumus': *ibid.* fo. 310v.

body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness’). He accuses Castellio of espousing the papist, Semipelagian view of justification and, more important, of original sin, stating unequivocally that Castellio is deserting to the ‘papist semipelagian sophists’ (‘ad papisticos sophistas semipelagianos transfugies’).³⁸ In the 1560 *Confessio christianae fidei* ‘the Semipelagians’ are those who qualify the fallen state of humanity by saying that God needs to influence ‘our wounded and weak free choice’. Rather, the whole human being with all its faculties needs to be renewed.³⁹ In his letter to the pastors of Basle, which Beza appended as preface to his *Responsio ad defensiones et reprehensiones Sebastiani Castellionis*, printed in Geneva by Henri Estienne in 1563, Beza describes as Semipelagians those who deny the reality of the original sin:⁴⁰ ‘All devout people are aware of the importance of the strife on the original sin, which was once the object of dispute between the church and Pelagians and is now the object of contention between us and the Semipelagians.’⁴¹

In this book, Beza links Castellio with this Roman Catholic Semipelagianism, when he speaks about the ‘Semipelagianism of our time (if only our Castellio was not of their number)’.⁴² However, Beza goes even further than this. The body of his preface shows that, in his view,

³⁸ On Castellio generally see Hans Rudolf Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio (1515–1563): Humanist und Verteidiger der religiösen Toleranz*, Göttingen 1997, and Ferdinand Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion, sa vie et son œuvre*, Paris 1891, updated repr. Geneva 2010. For exact reference to the above citation see *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, ed. Hippolyte Aubert and others, iv, Geneva 1965, 191 n. 7.

³⁹ ‘Oportet igitur in primis et ante omnia, non ut Deus praeveniat nostrum liberum arbitrium debile et infirmum (sicut loquuntur Semipelagiani), sed ut nos totis viribus renitentes trahat, idest, quod ad qualitates facultatum nostrarum attinet, nos penitus novos homines reddat’: Theodore Beza, *Confessio christianae fidei, et eiusdem collatio cum papisticis haeresibus*, n.p. 1560, 57; cf. his *Tractationes theologicae*, [Geneva] 1582, i. 13–14.

⁴⁰ For the full text of this preface see *Correspondance de Bèze*, iv, no. 283, p. 184. Its editors note (p. 191 n. 7) that ‘it is remarkable to see this term [Semipelagianism] appear from the pen of Beza, whereas it is usually seen only in the debates that arose in the context of Molina’s doctrines. This at least is the view of E. Ammann’. This use of the term by Beza was first noted briefly by Aza Goudriaan in his ‘Seventeenth-century Arminians and the accusation of Pelagianism: some tactical approaches’, in I. Backus, P. Büttgen and B. Pouderon (eds), *L’Argument hérésiologique, l’Église ancienne et les Réformes, XVI–XVIIe siècles*, Paris 2012, 363–79 at p. 366 n. 14.

⁴¹ ‘Notum est piis omnibus quanti sit momentum certamen de originis peccato, de quo contendit olim ecclesia cum Pelagianis, nunc vero cum Semipelagianis certamus’: *Correspondance de Bèze*, iv, no. 283, p. 184; cf. Beza, *Tractationes theologicae*, i. 425.

⁴² ‘Quia nostrae aetatis Semipelagiani (ex quorum numero utinam ne sit Castellio noster) cupide arripiunt huiusmodi testimonia ut operum iustitiam stabiliant, quae ex diametro repugnat Dei gratiam, idcirco in meis annotationibus admonui, hoc in loco [Rom. 8,10] Apostolum non quaerere de mortis et vitae causis (quanvis peccatum omnibus modis sit mortis propria causa)’: Theodore Beza, *Responsiones ad defensiones et reprehensiones Sebastiani Castellionis, quibus suam Novi Testamenti interpretationem defendere adversus Bezam, et eius versionem vicissim reprehendere conatus est*, [Geneva] 1563, 11–12.

Castellio is none other than the contemporary equivalent of Julian of Eclanum, a wholehearted disciple of Pelagius. Significantly, Calvin's successor does not make any use of Augustine's anti-Massilian treatises in his text. He cites neither from *De dono perseverantiae* nor from *De praedestinatione sanctorum* nor from the letters of Prosper and Hilary. Instead Beza adduces extensive evidence drawn from Augustine's response to Julian of Eclanum's *Contra duas epistolas Pelagianorum*,⁴³ to show that Castellio, like Julian before him, argues that vicious instincts in man are a product of his free will and not of his condition as a creature whose nature is eternally stained by original sin and prone to giving it free rein unless he is prevented from doing so by God's prevenient grace.

Beza's identification of the Catholic theologians as 'Semipelagians' and his understanding of the term – coined by him independently of Augustine's writings on the teachings of the Massilians – appears particularly clearly in his *Lectures on Romans* of c. 1564–6 which are available to us thanks to the manuscript notes of a student, Markus Widler.⁴⁴ Markus Widler's notes are neither grammatical nor always very clear, but those on Romans v.2, which can be dated to 1564, are sufficiently coherent to allow us an understanding of what Beza actually said:

The papists teach that God was insulted by [original sin] and . . . the [human] will depraved so that it could not restore itself without the help of grace. Therefore they join together free will and grace and teach that baptism extinguishes original sin. Whence comes man's concupiscence then? Their reply is that, although baptism removes original sin, nonetheless a sentiment and a spark of it remains, enough to try us but not enough to destroy us. This is their opinion. They say nothing that differs substantially from what Pelagians say. Therefore they are Semipelagians.⁴⁵

This proves that Beza coined the term Semipelagianism by analogy with Pelagianism and used the term to denote the Roman Catholic conception

The passage between parentheses, which refers to Castellio, is omitted in Beza's edition of his *Tractationes theologicae*, i. 465.

⁴³ 'quae quum auditis, puto vos eius calumniae totidem pene verbis a Pelagianis adversus Augustinum . . . recordari. Respondeat igitur ille meo nomine, quandoquidem in Castellione revixit Julianus. Sic enim ille ad duas Pelagianorum epistolas respondens lib. 1, cap. 8, Pelagianos inducit de orthodoxis loquentes: "Apostolum etiam Paulum et omnes apostolos dicunt semper immoderata libidine esse pollutos": *Correspondance de Bèze*, iv, no. 283, p. 185.

⁴⁴ See *Théodore de Bèze: cours sur les Épîtres aux Romains et aux Hébreux, 1564–66, d'après les notes de Marcus Widler*, ed. Pierre Fraenkel and Luc Perrottet, Geneva 1988.

⁴⁵ 'Papistae: 1. docent laesam esse divinitatem, ut aiunt, – sit rebellio intra etc.; deprava [va]nt voluntatem, ut per se non posse [!] surgere sine gratia; itaque liberum arbitrium et gratiam coniungunt. Ex baptismo extingui peccatum originis. Unde concupiscentia? Responso: non haberi peccatum sed esse sensum et vomitem [!] peccati [!] ad nos exercendos, non delendos. Haec est illorum opinio. Nil aliud dicunt quam Pelagiani. Ergo sunt semi-Pelagiani': *Bèze: cours*, 68.

of original sin which, after baptism, leaves only a spark or an inclination to sin. Favouring, not surprisingly, the anti-Pelagian Augustine, he considered that Roman Catholic teaching was different, albeit not fundamentally so, from the Pelagian conception of original sin as not transmissible to Adam’s descendants.

In his *Quaestionum et responsionum christianarum libellus* Beza stated that the defence of a place for human merit in salvation was incompatible with grace. He rejected, therefore, the notion of the ‘semipelagian sophists’ that the first grace could not be effective unless humans co-operate.⁴⁶ Elsewhere in this work Beza emphasises that Jesus Christ is a real and complete Saviour. The idea that He is merely an ‘instrument’ enabling humans to justify themselves by their own righteousness is a ‘detestable error of semipelagian sophists’.⁴⁷ According to Beza the central tenet of Semipelagianism is that it attributes salvation partly to God’s grace, partly to human effort. Thus it is a Semipelagian idea to think that ‘faith is partly a gift of God, but it is partly brought forth by the choice of our will’.⁴⁸ In a letter of August 1588 Beza made it clear once more that Semipelagians were those of his contemporaries who defended the co-operation of merit and grace. He considered this ‘half pelagian’ fusion of human effort and divine grace to be just a milder version of what Pelagianism stood for: trust in the power of the human being that was epitomised in the notion of the *autexousion*.⁴⁹ For Beza, the Semipelagians were among his contemporaries. This is confirmed, again, in his response to Jakob Andreae, where Beza states that Augustine’s writings were an effective refutation of the Pelagians in the past (‘olim’) and still are effective against the Semipelagians in the present (‘nunc’).⁵⁰

⁴⁶ ‘Apagē Meriti nomen, quod gratiae repugnat ex diametro, quicquid Sophistae semipelagiani garriant. Gratiae primae nos *synergein* qui negat, primae gratiae efficacitatem negat’: idem, *Quaestionum et responsionum christianarum libellus*, in *Tractationes theologicae*, i. 666.

⁴⁷ ‘Nam si perfecta esset ista in nobis sanctificatio, perfecta etiam esset iustitia nostra, sive nobis inhaerens; ac proinde Christus non esset nobis in solidum et proprie servitor, sed duntaxat organum et instrumentum nobis sic disponendis, ut nos ipsos postea nostra iustitia iustificaremus, qui foedus est ac plane detestabilis Sophistarum Semipelagianorum error’: *ibid.* i. 672.

⁴⁸ ‘rursus consequetur fidem partim esse Dei donum, partim vero a nostrae voluntatis arbitrio proficisci, quod dogma semiPelagianum est’: idem, *De praedestinationis doctrina et vero usu tractatio absolutissima*, in *Tractationes theologicae*, iii. 421.

⁴⁹ ‘Unde Pelagianum illud *autexousion*, et gratiam cum Merito, id est, lucem cum tenebris copulans adversariorum nostrorum Semipelagianismus?’: Theodore Beza to Johann Casimir, 15/25 August 1588, in *Correspondance de Bèze*, xxix, Geneva 2007, 243–63 at p. 254.

⁵⁰ ‘Nos igitur et mille locis expressum Dei verbum, et ipsius rei naturam, et Augustini in primis disputationes eruditissimas, quibus olim Pelagiani sunt prostrati, et nunc Semipelagiani Sophistae iugulantur, ipsius denique Lutheri in lib. de servo arbitrio sententiam sequuti, ut Electionis sic Reprobationis quoque decretum aeternum, et

There is thus no doubt that Beza is consistent in his choosing the term ‘Semipelagian’ to describe those Roman Catholic theologians who defend the collaboration of grace and free will. He coined the term in order to differentiate between ‘a complete Pelagian and a Pelagian in some respects’ (‘prorsus vel aliquatenus Pelagianus’).⁵¹ This was not an entirely unique case of the use of the prefix ‘semi’ in Beza’s writings. He used it to distinguish *Brentiani* from *Semibrentiani* among the followers of the Lutheran theologian Johannes Brenz.⁵² Beza was not influenced by Calvin’s treatise against Pighius in his conception of Semipelagianism, given that Calvin actually relied on Augustine’s anti-Massilian tracts as Pighius had done, and as Beza clearly did not. Be that as it may, theologians of pro-Reformation persuasion in the mid- and late sixteenth century were quite clear about the difference between the Massilians and full-scale Pelagians. However, the term ‘Semipelagian’ was not applied to the Massilians. Beza, who coined it, viewed it as a polemical term to be used to designate Roman Catholic teachings on grace and free will.

The step to a new referent: the Massilians

Evidence from Lutheran and Calvinist sources dating from the period subsequent to 1556 shows clearly that the term ‘Semipelagianism’ was not used initially to refer to fifth-century doctrinal configurations but rather to sixteenth-century teachings.⁵³ There is further evidence. Lambert Daneau, who published in 1578 an edition of Augustine’s treatise *De haeresibus*, with commentary, used the term ‘Semipelagianismus’ as a description of the usual Roman Catholic teaching of his own day which evidenced the ineradicable ‘roots’ of the Pelagian heresy.⁵⁴ Hubert Sturm, the Reformed author of a book on predestination first published in 1583, wrote against the ‘Semipelagianism of the Papists’, obviously meaning his

quod ad eventum attinet, immutabile, id est, tam misericordiae, quam irae vasa statuimus’: Theodore Beza, *Ad putidas quasdam a Iacobo Andreae partim recenter conflictas partim aliunde repetitas calumnias responsio*, in *Tractationes theologicae*, iii. 125.

⁵¹ Idem, *De praedestinationis doctrina*, ibid. iii. 430.

⁵² Idem, *Ad Nicolaum Selneccerum Theodorae Bezae responsio prima*, ibid. ii. 240.

⁵³ Cf. Marksches, ‘Pelagius/Pelagianer/Semipelagianer’, 1083, who states that neither the *Formula of Concord* nor Calvin meant a historical fifth-century position, but rather ‘eine spätestens seit dem hoch-MA in diversen Varianten verbreitete Position, die das exakte Verhältnis von Gnade Gottes und Wirken des Menschen nach dem Paradigma des Gradualismus . . . beschreibt’.

⁵⁴ ‘Inde [haec haeresis, sc. Pelagianismus] in Angliam profectus, ubique veneni sui afflatum et semina maxima et nocentissima reliquit, quae brevi tempore ita pullularunt, ut totum Christianum orbem occuparent et inficerent misere. Denique tam alte huius erroris radices haeserunt, ut ne nunc quidem extirpari possint. Manent enim in Papatu ubi Semipelagianismus apertissime docetur’: Lambert Daneau, *D. Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis Episcopi liber De haeresibus ad Quodvultdeum*, Geneva 1578, fo. 214r.

contemporaries (his reference to Augustine and Thomas Aquinas for more ‘about these [Pelagians and Semipelagians]’ suggests, however, that in a more general way he was thinking of historical precedents as well).⁵⁵ Similarly, the Lutherans Jakob Andreae and Martin Chemnitz applied the term to Philippist synergists without any reference to the Massilian quarrel. In 1592 the Reformed theologian Jacobus Kimedoncius described the view of ‘some Semipelagian’ as saying that the human will, though weak, has an inclination to do what is good, and is aided by grace. Kimedoncius’ answer – that salvation is the work of God alone⁵⁶ – was based on Augustine, but there is no evidence that Kimedoncius was thinking of the Massilians in his opposition to Semipelagianism.

Early Roman Catholic catalogues of heresies of the Reformation period make no mention of Semipelagianism.⁵⁷ It would not be accurate to assume, however, that the Molinist controversy was the first occasion when the terms ‘semipelagian’ and ‘Semipelagianism’ were actually used to refer to the Massilian controversy after having initially been coined by Beza around 1556 to refer to the contemporary Roman Catholic view of grace and free will. Jacquin argued that the term ‘semipelagian’ was used for the first time to designate the Massilian dispute in the context of the Molinist quarrel, implying that the early heresy of ‘Semipelagianism’ was born in the 1590s. Relying very largely on J. H. Serry’s *Historia congregationum*

⁵⁵ ‘Semipelagianismus pontificiorum’: Hubert Sturm, *De aeterna et immutabili praedestinatione Dei, electione et reprobatione diatribe*, Leiden 1583, 15; cf. ‘Pelagiani et Semipelagiani partim praesentibus, partim praevisis meritis, electionem adscribunt: de quibus Augustinus, Epist. 89, 90, 92, 94, Thomas, p.p. q. 23, a. 3’ (pp. 45–6). On Hubert Sturm see Heinz Schmitt, ‘Sturm (Sturmius), Hubert’, *Biographisches-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexicon*, Nordhausen 2005, xxiv. 1430–5 (http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/s/s4/sturm_hu.shtml, accessed 14 June 2011). There were two later editions of Sturm’s book, in 1597 and 1604.

⁵⁶ ‘Nec est quod Semipelagianus aliquis dicat, voluntati ad bonum persequendum infirmae, ad id tamen propensae, gratiam opitulari: et propterea dictum *non volentis nec currentis, sed miserentis est Dei*, tanquam diceretur: Non sufficit sola voluntas hominis, si non sit etiam misericordia Dei. Etenim cum Augustino [margin: Enchirid. ad Laur. c. 32 et Ad Simpl., lib. 1] respondemus: si eo quod voluntas hominis sola non implet salutem, recte dictum est *non volentis est hominis, sed miserentis Dei*: etiam e converso, si misericordia Dei eam sola non implet, recte diceretur *non miserentis est Dei, sed volentis est homini*: quod piae aures non ferunt. Stat ergo propterea dici *non volentis nec currentis est hominis*, ut totum Deo detur, qui hominis voluntatem bonam et praeparat adiuvandam, et adiuvat praeparatam’: Jacobus Kimedoncius, *De redemptione generis humani libri tres*, Heidelberg 1592, 527–8.

On Kimedoncius’ book see Herman J. Selderhuis, ‘Das Recht Gottes: der Beitrag der Heidelberger Theologen zu der Debatte über die Prädestination’, in Christoph Strohm and others (eds), *Späthumanismus und reformierte Konfession: Theologie, Jurisprudenz und Philosophie in Heidelberg an der Wende zum 17. Jahrhundert*, Tübingen 2006, 227–53 at pp. 233–6.

⁵⁷ On these catalogues see Irena Backus, *Historical method and confessional identity in the era of the Reformation*, Leiden 2003, 382–3, 385–90.

De auxiliis divinae gratiae published in Vienna in 1740, Jacquin pointed to the censure of the Jesuits by the archbishop of Segovia dating from 1594 as the first recorded appearance of the term. He listed two more occurrences of the term in the same sense in two other official Roman Catholic documents dating respectively from 1597 and 1600.⁵⁸

In fact, the term ‘Semipelagian’ was applied to Massilian teaching at least two decades prior to its emergence during the Molinist controversy as witnessed by Nicholas Sander or Sanders (c. 1530–81), the Roman Catholic author of *De visibili monarchia ecclesiae*, which is modelled on Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*.⁵⁹

This work, published in Louvain in 1571 and republished several times, includes an extended passage in which the term ‘Semipelagianism’ is applied to views of the Massilians and other people in Gaul around 440. Sanders identifies several erroneous ideas under the heading ‘of certain questions on predestination which arose among Catholics at this time [c. 440]; many of which, if someone were to defend obstinately, that person would need to be considered a Semipelagian’.⁶⁰ Still, in Sanders’s view, the Massilians did not hold these ‘clearly erroneous’ views in an obstinate manner and thus they should not be considered heretics as far as he was concerned, since they ‘dissented from St Augustine in such a way that they referred to the statements that he had written before, and to other Catholic Fathers, and to the apostolic see’. For this reason, Sanders pointed out, the Massilians were not named in early catalogues of heresies.⁶¹

Sanders identified six errors that could have been imputed by Augustine’s supporters to the Massilians if the Massilians had defended them ‘obstinately’.⁶² The Massilians held that grace is given to the person

⁵⁸ For exact references to Serry see Jacquin, ‘À Quelle Date?’, 508.

⁵⁹ On Sander(s) see T. F. Mayer, ‘Sander [Sanders], Nicholas’, *ODNB* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24621>, accessed 9 May 2011), and Thomas McNevin Veech, *Dr Nicholas Sanders and the English Reformation, 1530–1581*, Louvain 1935.

⁶⁰ ‘De certis dubiis, quae inter Catholicos hoc tempore circa praedestinationem exorta sunt, quorum pleraque, si quis pertinaciter defenderet, Semipelagianus habendus esset’: Nicholas Sanders, *De visibili monarchia ecclesiae libri octo*, Louvain 1571, 387. The same statement is in later editions, for example Antwerp 1578 (p. 363), Paris 1580 (p. 363), Würzburg 1592 (p. 363).

⁶¹ ‘Praedictarum opinionum assertores, licet manifeste erraverint, tamen haeretici iure habendi non sunt, quia sic a S. Augustino dissenserunt, ut et ad ipsius dicta, quae ante scripsisset, et ad alios Catholicos Patres, et ad Sedem Apostolicam provocarent. Unde nec in eis pertinacia fuit, nec ullum nomen apud antiquos haeresium censores acceperunt’: *ibid.* 389.

⁶² ‘In urbe Massiliensi, et in reliqua Gallia viri quidam Ecclesiastici lectis D. Augustini opusculis, quae contra Pelagianos ediderat, Pelagianos quidem pro haereticis habuerunt: sed nonnulla in Augustini dictis, Patrum opinioni et Ecclesiastico sensui contraria putaverunt’: *ibid.* 387.

‘who has started to will’, but that this will itself is not given by God.⁶³ In the second place, they assumed that persons who have been predestined were able to ‘lose or preserve whatever has been given’ to them by God.⁶⁴ Moreover, the Massilians denied that there was a fixed number of both those who are God’s elect and of those who have been sentenced by God to damnation.⁶⁵ Their fourth error was related to baptism and the statement that some children die before baptism, others are baptised before they die. This distinction, the Massilians argued, was based upon God’s foreknowledge of how these children would live as adult persons.⁶⁶ In the fifth place, Sanders identified as erroneous the view that preaching about predestination produced ‘more desperation than exhortation’.⁶⁷ Finally, the Massilians believed ‘that God wills that all humans be saved, so that no-one is excepted but the propitiation in the sacrament of the blood of Christ is proffered to all humans universally, without exception’.⁶⁸ Sanders’s identification amounted to saying that even if some Roman Catholic theologians voiced views similar to those of the Massilians, they could not be considered heretics as theirs was not the sole opinion within Roman Catholicism and they did not defend it obstinately.

Sanders’s book *De visibili monarchia* enjoyed considerable success. It was republished several times and there is at least one indication that his categorisation of Semipelagian errors was taken notice of. Georg Eder, a Roman Catholic controversialist, acknowledged his indebtedness to Sanders when he copied the latter’s six-point account of the Massilians, including the term ‘semipelagian’, into his work *Mataeologia haereticorum*, published in Ingolstadt in 1581.⁶⁹ Eder’s main target was the Anabaptists.

Be that as it may, it was at this point at the latest that Massilian teachings and Semipelagianism made their way into a Roman Catholic work that

⁶³ ‘Existimabant (ut Hilarius in Epistola sua ad Augustinum refert) adiuvari gratia Dei eum, qui coepisset velle, non etiam donari, ut velit’: *ibid.*

⁶⁴ ‘Deinde quicquid donatum sit praedestinatis, id eos amittere posse, et retinere propria voluntate’: *ibid.*

⁶⁵ ‘Non esse definitum eligendorum rejiciendorum numerum’: *ibid.*

⁶⁶ ‘Ex parvulis tales baptizari antequam moriantur, talesque mori antequam baptizentur, quales futuros illos in annis maioribus, si ad activam servarentur aetatem, divina scientia praeviderit’: *ibid.*

⁶⁷ ‘Praedicatione praedestinationis audientibus plus desperationis, quam exhortationis afferri’: *ibid.* 389.

⁶⁸ ‘Arbitratur, velle Deum omnes homines salvos fieri, ut nullus habeatur exceptus, sed propitiationem quae est in Sacramento sanguinis Christi, universis hominibus sine exceptione esse propositam’: *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Georg Eder, *Mataeologia haereticorum sive summa haereticarum fabularum*, Ingolstadt 1581, 230–2. On Eder (1523–87) see C. Jellouschek, ‘Eder, Georg’, *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Freiburg 1959, iii. 657–8, and B. Heurterize, ‘Eder, Georges’, *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, Paris 1911, iv. 2101–2.

dealt specifically with early and later heresies. Roman Catholic scholastics writing at the end of the sixteenth century were therefore not without precedent when they applied the term ‘Semipelagianism’ to fifth-century Massilians. By the time that the Jesuit Gabriel Vazquez devoted ample space to a discussion of Semipelagian and Massilian viewpoints in his commentary on Aquinas, the term was well entrenched in its heretical connotations.⁷⁰ For Vazquez the Massilians were Semipelagians whose views on predestination were opposed by Augustine, Prosper and Hilary.⁷¹ Vazquez did not only write with an historical interest. As a systematic theologian in the context of the Molinist controversy he noted that many later scholastics had views similar to those defended by the Semipelagian Massilians.⁷²

The earliest sources in which the term ‘Semipelagianism’ is used are Protestant, starting with Theodore Beza, who used the term for contemporary Roman Catholic views of grace and not for fifth-century teachings. Is it a mere coincidence that the earliest sources in which the term Semipelagianism is applied specifically to fifth-century Massilians happen to be written by Roman Catholic authors? This question is difficult to answer but it should be remembered that the later sixteenth century was not only a period of diverging confessional positions but one when theologians tended to identify their confessional opponents with some form of early heresy. However, the defensive way in which Sanders identified Massilian views as non-heretical made them unsuitable, from his point of view, for such polemical use in the context of confessional controversies. Added to this was the fact that Catholics could hardly accuse their predestination-focused Protestant adversaries of Pelagianism or Semipelagianism. The example of Vazquez, however, shows that Roman Catholic authors were very well able to raise the question of the consonance between the ‘Semipelagian’ Massilians and aspects of later scholastic (especially Jesuit) opinion which went against Augustinian or Dominican views on predestination and grace. Protestant historical writers followed suit very soon and the identification of the Massilians as a historically-founded heterodox sect of Semipelagians became the normal and dominant practice. From the Protestant side this is evident from early

⁷⁰ Gabriel Vazquez, *Commentariorum ac disputationum in primam partem S. Thomae tomus primus*, Alcalá de Henares 1598, esp. pp. 783–91, 843–64 (*ad*: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 23, art. 4 and 5, respectively).

⁷¹ ‘Deinde disputabat Augustinus contra alium errorem, eorum scilicet, qui dicuntur a Prospero, et Hilario de reliquiis Pelagianorum, et vulgo Semipelagiani nuncupantur. Hi erant Massilienses, quorum caput et auctor doctrinae contra Aug. ex professo fuit Cassianus’: Vazquez, *Commentariorum*, 784–5. (This is quoted, from the second edition [1604], in Jacquín, ‘À Quelle Date’, 508 n. 6).

⁷² For example. Vazquez, *Commentariorum*, 832 (‘multi Scholastici cum eis conveniunt’).

seventeenth-century historical works by Johannes Latius (1617) and Gerardus Joannes Vossius (1618).⁷³

Of those authors who used the term ‘Semipelagianism’, no one is known to have credited anyone with having invented it. Theoretically, the possibility that the term had multiple inventors, independent of one another, cannot be ruled out entirely. In the realm of historical probability, however, a *Begriffsgeschichte* that starts with Beza has a high degree of plausibility. The first attestation has been found in Beza’s works. Beza’s influence as a writer, academic and diplomat explains how he could have been the source for subsequent uses of the term. Beza’s New Testament annotations in particular may have been significant in this regard. Moreover, Beza and Jakob Andreae had met personally more than once (in Göppingen in 1557; in Worms in 1557; and in Poissy in 1661)⁷⁴ before Andreae wrote the *Epitome* of the *Formula of Concord* in which the term was used. Likewise, even Sanders, who linked ‘Semipelagianism’ with the Massilians, may well have taken the term directly from Beza. He was apparently familiar with publications in which Beza used the term, as his quotations from the New Testament annotations and the Confession of Faith suggest.⁷⁵ Beza’s invention of the term did not imply, however, that its meaning was fixed from the outset. Most likely, different authors devised new uses for it, applying it to a variety of contemporary positions that postulated a greater or lesser degree of human free will in the process of salvation.

Henry (or Enrico) Noris, who gave the Semipelagian movement an extended treatment under the general heading of Pelagianism in the 1670s, attributed its invention to *scolastici recentiores*. By then the term had been already in general use for over a hundred years.⁷⁶ By the 1680s it had become common currency while its original sixteenth-century meanings and usages were completely forgotten.⁷⁷ No less an author than Leibniz believed in the existence of an early quasi-heresy of Semipelagianism,

⁷³ Ioannes Latius, *De Pelagianis et Semipelagianis commentariorum ex veterum patrum scriptis*, Harderwijk 1617; Gerardus Ioannes Vossius, *Historiae de controversiis quas Pelagius eiusque reliquiae moverunt libri septem*, 2nd edn, Amsterdam 1655.

⁷⁴ Paul F. Geisendorf, *Théodore de Bèze*, Geneva 1949, 84, 89; Henry Martyn Baird, *Theodore Beza: the counsellor of the French Reformation, 1519–1605*, New York–London 1899, 85, 90–1; Martin Brecht, ‘Andreae, Jakob (1528–1590)’, in Horst Robert Balz and others (eds), *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Berlin 1978, ii. 672–80 at p. 675.

⁷⁵ Sanders, *De visibili monarchia*, for example 5 (Beza’s *Confessio*), 367 (annotation at Luke xxii. 20), 679 and 681 (annotation at Luke. xxii. 20), 713 (cf. annotation *ad* Acts ii. 27), 740 (annotation *ad* 2 Thessalonians ii. 3), 745 (annotation at 2 Thess. ii. 3), 746 (*ibid.*), 752 (annotation *ad* 2 Thess. ii), 785 (*Confessio*), 810 (*Confessio*), 822 (annotation *ad* 2 Thess. ii. 3).

⁷⁶ Noris, *Historia pelagiana*, 158–338.

⁷⁷ For its use in the Arminian controversy see Goudriaan, ‘Seventeenth-century Arminians’. For extensive use of the term by G.W. Leibniz in the 1697–1704 negotiations for union between the Lutheran Church of Hanover and the Calvinist

which was condemned by the Council of Orange in 529 even though he granted that since then all ‘sorts of semi-Pelagians appeared in the church’ against whom, he believed, the Lutherans and the Calvinists formed a common front.⁷⁸ In short, ‘Semipelagianism’, a term invented by Theodore Beza to denote the Roman Catholic doctrine of grace and original sin, accumulated a range of meanings from 1556 onward. At least from 1571 the term came to be used in connection with fifth-century Massilian ideas, while still allowing for its more general connotation of any type of synergist teaching on salvation especially during the Molinist quarrel. The history of the term shows the elastic nature of heresy and the care that should be taken in identifying any form of it.

Church of Brandenburg see Irena Backus, ‘Leibniz et l’hérésie ancienne’, in Backus, Büttgen and Pouderon, *L’Argument hérésiologique*, 69–94.

⁷⁸ He states this in the *Unvorgreifliches Bedencken* of 1597–8, a document that he produced jointly with Gerhard Wolter Molanus and which aimed to reunite the Lutheran Church of Hanover and the Calvinist Church of Brandenburg: Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Gesammelte Schriften und Briefe*, Berlin 1980– at 4th ser. (*Politische Schriften*), vii. 220–1, and Backus, ‘Leibniz et l’hérésie ancienne’, 85–94.