

The Impact of Eschatology on Protology

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I want to pay tribute to those who have wrestled with the divine decrees to election and to reprobation, attempting to see justice in them. My remarks are not to denigrate these attempts. I am pleading, rather, for a rethinking of the issues in an expanded worldview. I will argue here for what I call a cosmic controversy biblical worldview. This worldview will bring us to these issues in a fresh way that penetrates beyond the Calvinist-Arminian debate. These cosmic dimensions will take us beyond the classic teaching of predestination to a new understanding.

Concerning protological questions, Randall G. Basinger notes, “These issues presuppose some of the most thorny and divisive metaphysical issues” and “the age-old faith/reason debate is never far below the surface.”¹

It is essential that a theology based on Scripture be internally consistent, and not appeal to some inscrutable hidden mystery in God’s eternal decrees that reprobates multitudes while at the same time speaking of God as love. Nor should a system true to the balance of Scripture be interested in focusing on the sovereign will of God to the exclusion of His other attributes as loving, merciful, good, and just. Nor should it accept the claim that the cause of human destiny in the eternal decrees is unfathomable because God’s ways are beyond human comprehension. For it is God who invites humans to “come now let us reason together” (Isa 1:18).

Evil and the Cosmic Controversy

Human protology begins with creation (Gen 1-2), when God created Adam and Eve in His image (Gen 1:26-27). In what way were they in His image? God’s image is seen in their freedom to choose, in their dominion to rule, and in their relationship. They could choose whether to obey or ignore God’s warning

¹Randall G. Basinger, “Exhaustive Divine Sovereignty: A Practical Critique,” in Clark H. Pinnock, ed, *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 192.

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about the forbidden tree (Gen 2:16-17). They were given dominion to rule over things in this world as God rules over the universe (Gen 1:26). In the relationship of two individuals who loved each other, they mirrored the relationship of love within the Trinity. Evidently, Satan and the angels who followed him in his rebellion in heaven prior to human creation had misused their freedom to choose—as humans would do

Eve's temptation was only a real temptation if she was free to choose. Two opposing claims met head on in her temptation. The crafty serpent (this is Satan; see Ezek 28:14-17; Rev 12:9; 20:2) said, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen 3:1-5). The serpent questioned God's word. He was saying, "God cannot be trusted. He is keeping something back from you which you could have if you eat. His forbidding is not in your best interests, Eve. Therefore God is unjust. Reject His claim and eat the fruit—you can become like God." A heady idea, indeed!

Think of it. Eve was confronted by two opposing claims. Only one could be true. Her preincarnate Creator Christ (John 1:1-3; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:1-2) had given her life, her husband, the world to have dominion over, and a beautiful garden. The crafty serpent had given her nothing except a claim contrary to Christ's claim, with his own "wisdom" as supporting evidence. Why would she believe the one who had given her nothing and turn from the One who had given her everything? Scripture says, "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it" (Gen 3:6). She saw the forbidden food would give wisdom. How? Logic suggests that the crafty serpent ate the fruit and claimed the eating of it had given him—a serpent—the ability to talk human language ("wisdom"). The apparent truth of this is what she saw. One can hear him say, "Eve, if I a snake can speak your human language after eating the fruit, think what you a human can become—like God. Look, I'm not dead, am I?"

What could have kept Eve true? Believing God's warning was from Someone who wished her nothing but good. Her choice was not predestined, but her own, even though illogical. God would not predestine such a choice against His warning. God would not predestine a decision to question His truthfulness and justice—in essence to act upon a belief that God is a liar. That's the enemy's offensive in the cosmic controversy. Any idea which calls into question God's justice—even though it is a theological idea hallowed by centuries of thought—should be evaluated in the light of Satan's charge against God (which is what we will attempt in this article).

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Was this the same approach Satan used in heaven when he launched the cosmic controversy? God says of Him, “You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High’” (Isa 14:13-14). In Eden Satan said, “you will be like God.” In heaven he wanted the same experience. He thought he could become God, sit on God’s throne, in spite of the fact that it was Christ who had created him (John 1:3) and given him everything, given him freedom of choice and a position as a guardian cherub at the throne (Ezek 28:14-15). In Eden the serpent was instilling in Eve a doubt and desire similar to the doubt and desire he nourished within himself in heaven. The fact that He wanted to become as God and suggested Eve could do the same indicates his belief that God was holding this possibility back from him, and to that extent was unjust. This is why questions about the justice of God are a part of the cosmic controversy and should be the larger biblical worldview within which questions of protology and eschatology must be evaluated.

The very fact of evil in God’s good universe suggests that beings created by God are in rebellion against Him. This is a cosmic controversy. The justice of God has been called in question by Satan, by his followers, and by every human being, both those in rebellion against God and those who, like Job, are reckoned “blameless” because they have submitted to God’s call. One cannot speak of God’s sovereign will decreeing who will be saved and who lost and hope to convince those investigating God’s justice. The opposite is true. Any decree that is arbitrary would be the greatest evidence that He is not just. It is not good enough for scholars to say God is just to send to hell people He has never chosen and never helped—because He is God. This merely assumes what needs to be revealed. And it fails to be convincing, anyway. What picture of God does this give unbelievers? Or believers? Would you want to spend eternity with this kind of God? How do we know He will not do the same again to the saved some day?

The issue before the universe is to decide, based on evidence, whether or not God is just and Satan wrong to accuse Him of injustice, then acknowledge Him as such. The universe must decide whether God is to be trusted, and so obeyed as One who always knows best. Questions of protology and eschatology—of God’s relationship to His created beings, of human freedom and destiny—are crucial information for making this decision. It should be remembered that all created beings, both the saved and the lost, must be convinced to bow their knees (Isa 45:23; Rom 14:11; Phil 21:10-11; Rev 5:13; 15:3; 19:1-6). So the stakes are high. It is not enough to have only the saved agree that God has judged righteously. They would find it easy to say He is just. The reprobate must also acquiesce. What evidence will convince them? It will have to be evidence beyond doubt. This is why it is essential that the cosmic issue be kept center stage in questions of protology and eschatology, for it is in this issue that they both meet. We need a protology informed by eschatology—the divine decrees

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must be seen in the light of the Final Judgment. For it is at the Final Judgment that all created beings will acknowledge the justice of their fate.

This is why we title the chapter, “the impact of eschatology on protology.” Much of the chapter will present thinkers who have called in question protological questions. Of those cited, only John Wesley questions protology in the light of the Final Judgment and thereby breaks through to new ground to examine protology in the light of that eschatological event. What remains to be done is to go further and examine all that is involved in the Final Judgment in the light of the issue in the cosmic controversy which will be resolved in that Judgment.

If a system is wrong in its protology it will be wrong in its eschatology. So it is necessary to carefully examine the protological issues to establish the biblical view. Calvinism and Arminianism have fought over these issues for centuries with little progress. It is time to transcend the debate and look at it from the vantage point of the cosmic controversy over the justice of God, particularly at Calvary, where the two sides met in the decisive battle of the war. As we will see later, the way humans respond to that decisive battle will have everything to do with their final destiny and will be the deciding factor in the Final Judgment.

Now we will turn to a Jesuit priest, three Protestant theologians, and a leading contemporary philosopher to study correctives to protological thinking. Then we will come to the book of Romans that launched the Reformation, the mission of Christ that inspired it, and the Final Judgment to see their contribution to looking at protology in a broader context.

Correctives to Protology

Protology that confines future events, including eschatology, to divine determinism, where foreknowledge is based upon eternal sovereign decrees, has dominated much of Christian thought since Augustine. “In the Middle Ages Anselm, Peter Lombard, and Thomas Aquinas followed the Augustinian view to a certain extent.” And later, “In pre-Reformation times Wycliffe and Huss set forth strict predestinarian views.”² We have seen how much Luther and Calvin contributed to this debate. It “became the official teaching of the Church of England as summarized in the Thirty-nine Articles.” Even some Catholics promoted predestination, such as some Dominican theologians and the Jansenists.³ Calvin’s view of predestination dominated the thinking of post-Reformation theology. “The Puritans of England and those who early settled in America, as well as the Covenanters in Scotland and the Huguenots in France, were thorough-going Calvinists.”⁴

²Lorraine Boettner, “Predestination,” *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, Everett H. Harrison, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 415.

³W. R. Godfrey, “Predestination,” *New Dictionary of Theology*, Sinclair B. Ferguson, ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 529.

⁴Lorraine Boettner, *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, 416.

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The formal corrective to these views on protology was made by Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), and is called Arminianism. It has had wide influence. We will note its advances over the Augustinian-Lutheran-Calvinistic predestination, but comment on some of its excesses. On balance it supports human freedom and the ability of the human will, which is necessary in the context of a cosmic controversy, where humans need to be free to decide on the justice of God. Although the portrayal of God is much better in Arminianism than in the other tradition, it fails to be a full corrective.

In presenting these correctives to protology, I have chosen to present each thinker very much as one would present witnesses in a trial. I will allow them to speak for themselves, then comment on any relevance to the issue of God's maligned justice when appropriate. As such, one runs the risk of some repetition. I am aware of this, but want each witness to take the stand and give his evidence. It will be seen that the combined witnesses present a powerful case for correcting the problems of protology.

Before looking at the theology of Arminius and Arminianism, we first note a Jesuit reaction to the Protestant views on Predestination.

1. Luis Molina, (1535-1600)

Luis Molina was a Spanish Jesuit who made his major theological contribution after the Protestant Reformation was well underway (1517 onwards) and after the Council of Trent (1545-1563). As Alfredo J. Freddoso points out, Molina was a central thinker in one of the most tumultuous doctrinal disputes in Catholic intellectual history.⁵ His *Concordia*, published in 1588, showed the compatibility of free choice with gifts of grace, divine foreknowledge, providence, predestination and reprobation.⁶ Here the newly formed Jesuits (1540) had a major work that challenged the established orders, particularly the Dominicans, who were loyal to the theology of Thomas Aquinas.

(a) Causal Determinism Called in Question

Aquinas, along with Aristotelian scholastics, focused on the eternity of God that makes all dimensions of time present to Him, just as His omnipresence makes all space present to Him. "Medieval philosophers often explicate this temporal omnipresence by analogy with God's spatial omnipresence."⁷ Hence the future is known to God simply because it is already present to Him. While

⁵Molina and Francisco Suarez (1548-1617) were Jesuits who supported human freedom, and opposed Mercederian Francisco Zumel (1540-1607) and the Dominican Domingo Banez (1528-1604) who supported the divine prerogative. Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*, trans. and Introduction by Alfred J. Freddoso (London, UK: Cornell Univ. Press), 1988, vii. Afterwards listed as *Concordia*.

⁶The full title was *Liberi Arbitrii cum Gratiae Donis, Divina Praescientia, Providentia, Praedestinatione et Reprobatione Concordia*.

⁷*Concordia*, Introduction, 31.

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accepting the omnitemporality of God, Molina denies that future things exist in eternity before they exist in time. Molina's major difference with Thomas Aquinas⁸ and Domingo Banez is his claim that God's foreknowledge "is prevolitional rather than the result of God's free act of will."⁹

Molina opposed causal determinism.¹⁰ This is crucial, because the perennial question before philosophers and theologians has been which comes first, God's foreknowledge of events so they are known, or God's willing of those events so they are known? Molina maintained that if God predetermined Peter's sin, for example (rather than permitting it), then He is to that extent responsible for it.¹¹ Molina opposed the idea that humans are mere puppets in God's hands.¹²

(b) Concomitant Theory Called in Question

Besides those who have placed divine will before divine foreknowledge, or divine foreknowledge before divine will, there are those who see them as simultaneous from eternity. This is called the Concomitant theory, which Norman Geisler espouses today. Geisler says "Whatever he forechooses cannot be *based on* what he foreknows. Nor can what he foreknows be based upon what he *forechose*. Both must be simultaneous and coordinate acts of God. Thus God knowingly determined and determinately knew from all eternity everything that would come to pass, including all free acts."¹³ Molina opposed this Concomitant theory.

Concomitant theorists do injustice to prophecy. For example, Jesus told Peter that he would deny Him three times (Luke 22:34). Yet they teach that Peter's sin was not a part of the divine plan until Peter actually denied Him. Then Christ's prophecy is also not a part of the divine plan argues Molina. This calls in question that prophecy.

(c) Importance of Human Will

Aquinas and the Reformers emphasized that God wills future events, so they are known. But this places future events as contingent upon God's will instead of upon creaturely will. Yet, creaturely will must have a part to play, or it is not truly free, and hence the resolution of the cosmic controversy over the justice of God is not served. For if humans are not free in their actions, their actions are predetermined, and to that extent God would be responsible for the sin-problem in the universe, and hence His justice could not be demonstrated to

⁸Aquinas believed that the future is present to God before its cause in time, an idea opposed by Molina. As a place is not present to God before it exists, so, said Molina, time is not present to God before it exists. *Concordia*, Introduction, 30-32.

⁹*Concordia*, Introduction, 34-35.

¹⁰*Concordia*, Introduction, 43.

¹¹*Concordia*, Introduction, 40.

¹²*Concordia*, Introduction, 41.

¹³David & Randall Basinger, *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 71.

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those in rebellion who claim He is unjust. Hence the cosmic controversy issue would remain insoluble.

The Reformers taught that sin brought total depravity which removed the possibility of human free will. Molina presented a doctrine of omniscience called *scientia media*, or middle knowledge. “By means of this doctrine, he proposed to avoid the Protestant error of denying genuine human freedom, yet without thereby sacrificing the sovereignty of God. It is a sad note of history that in Molina’s perception, the main point of the Protestant Reformation was that man lacks true freedom in virtue of God’s knowledge and sovereignty.”¹⁴ We will look at this middle knowledge later.

The Council of Trent taught that the process of justification by faith involves “God’s unmerited, prevenient grace, which stirs and solicits the will of man, but which may be either accepted or resisted by human will.” Molina accepted this and “opposed himself to what he perceived to be the central teaching of the Reformation: the denial of human freedom.” Molina, like the Council of Trent, looked at soteriology as a joint work between God and man,¹⁵ and to that extent missed the fact that the gospel is a free gift to be elected (chosen) or rejected, and only in the matter of response elicits human free will. There is no co-operative human works to accomplish salvation, but there is a necessary free choice if the gift is to be received.

Trent’s and Molina’s view of human free will was an opposite extreme to Protestant denial of human free will in the election/reprobation process. Both overlooked the function of human free will as a necessary response (and only that) to the gift of salvation, in either acceptance or rejection. Neither the Protestant nor Catholic views resolved the tension between divine sovereignty and human freedom, and yet that resolution is fundamental to a proper understanding of salvation and to the resolution of the issue in the cosmic controversy.

According to the Reformers, because of God’s foreknowledge (Luther) and providence (Calvin), everything that happens in human history does so necessarily. Even though they speak of freedom of choice, the will cannot choose other than it does. This posed serious problems to Molina, for how, on those terms, could humans be free moral agents, and who would be responsible for evil? How could prescience, providence, and predestination be seen as compatible? He believed *scientia media* (middle knowledge) was the solution.¹⁶

(d) Middle Knowledge

There are three moments in the knowledge of God. They are not temporally arranged, as if in a sequential order, but are logically arranged so that one aspect is prior to others, while simultaneous. They are: (1) Natural knowledge (2) Free

¹⁴William L. Craig, in Clark H. Pinnock ed., *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1989), 141.

¹⁵William L. Craig, in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, Ibid.

¹⁶William L. Craig in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 144.

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knowledge, and (3) Middle knowledge, the latter coming between the first two. Natural knowledge does not depend upon God's will, but upon His nature as God. He knows all possibilities. He knows all the possible persons He could create. Free knowledge is God's knowledge of the actual world He created, and foreknowledge of everything to take place in it.

Natural knowledge is before any determination of God's will, and free knowledge is after the decision of God's will to create the world. God's knowledge does not cause anything. Between natural and free knowledge comes middle knowledge. Middle knowledge comes before any determination of the divine will. It not only knows what a person could do but what the person will do if placed under certain circumstances. Though knowing this, it does not cause or control the person's willing and doing. As William L. Craig puts it, "Middle knowledge, like natural knowledge, thus is logically prior to the decision of the divine will to create a world."¹⁷ Or as Jerry L. Walls expressed it, "This means that God has no control over what he knows through middle knowledge. He is passive rather than active with respect to this kind of knowledge. What God knows depends on what choices free persons would make of their own accord."¹⁸

Middle knowledge means that God does not arbitrarily will, and thus violate human free will. It does not mean that predestination is the basis of foreknowledge. It simply means God knows how persons will exercise their free will without causing it to happen. Hence eternal destiny is not dependent upon God, but is up to the free will choice of humans. They can freely accept or reject salvation. How paradoxical that Molina, and the Jesuits who promoted this view, should grasp the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom in a way that escaped the Augustinian-Lutheran-Calvinistic predestination tradition. Their doctrine of divine predestination/providence was true to the gospel, as opposed to the Reformers' position, even though their soteriology was not true to the gospel (salvation by works).

It took the thinking of these Jesuits to break through to a proper balance between divine and human willing, a balance vital to appreciating the justice of God, at issue in the cosmic controversy before the universe. It was important that the Reformers break through to a new understanding of justification by faith, but if they could have grasped the middle knowledge of God in predestination/providence, they would have taken the freedom of the gospel to new heights and discovered the compatibility of divine will and human willing.

Commenting on Molina's Middle Knowledge, Robert M. Adams said, "Molina held that God, in His omniscience, knows with complete certainty what every possible free creature would freely do in every situation in which that

¹⁷This whole section is based upon William L. Craig's presentations in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 146-147, and *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 127-152. The quote is on 130.

¹⁸Jerry L. Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (MI: University of Notre Dame, 1992), 38.

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creature could possibly have occasion to act freely. The knowledge thus ascribed to God was called ‘middle knowledge’ (*scientia media*) by Molina, because it was seen as falling between his knowledge of the merely possible and His knowledge of the actual, and between His knowledge of the necessary truths and His knowledge of truths that He causes to be true.”¹⁹

John Feinberg says, “Middle knowledge is knowledge of counterfactuals; that is, knowledge of what would have happened if something else had occurred. Some claim God knows the future via middle knowledge. Consequently, we can have indeterministic freedom since God does not know what *will* happen, and God can be omniscient in the sense of knowing everything that could happen and knowing what would happen if other things occurred.”²⁰

The important contribution made by Molina was calling into question divine determinism that robbed humans of free will. Protestant predestination was called into question by contra-causal freedom. Whereas the Protestant Reformers presented the freedom of the gospel against human works to earn it (Catholic theology), the Catholic Molina grasped a deeper freedom of human willing that the Reformers failed to comprehend, for they did not penetrate to the place of human will in the freedom of the gospel. Saying salvation is unearned (versus human works) is not the same as saying salvation is predetermined (apart from human will). The deeper meaning of the freedom of the gospel includes the freedom of human willing as necessary to human destiny.

If this were not so, if destiny is predetermined by divine decrees (salvation and reprobation), then humans become mere puppets in the hands of God. This means their choosing or rejecting God would not be taken seriously, and hence the cosmic controversy would also be insignificant. For if creaturely rebellion is not rebellion, but merely the outworking of a divine plan, then how could those puppet-creatures question the justice of God or fight against Him in the cosmic controversy? Furthermore, how could any decision be made by those who have no freedom to decide? For even their decision would be predetermined. And if the consideration of God’s justice is before each created being, how could any response to the question have any value if such a response is predetermined by the very God who is the object of the question? This would be tantamount to God rigging His own case.

2. Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609)

Jacobus Arminius was a Dutch theologian, educated at Leiden, Basel, and Geneva, and became a professor at Leiden in 1603. He studied under Theodore

¹⁹James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, eds, *Alvin Plantinga* (Boston, MA: D. Reidel, 1985), 230.

²⁰John Feinberg in *Predestination and Free Will*, eds. David and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 33. In this definition of middle knowledge God’s absolute fore-knowledge of the future is called in question, and to that degree is somewhat analogous to Process Theology, neither of which do justice to divine omniscience.

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Beza (1519-1605), Calvin's son-in-law and successor, at Geneva. Beza continued the theology of Calvin, and it was this theology, with its divine decrees overriding human free will, that Arminius rejected. He "views Christian doctrine much as the pre-Augustinian fathers did and as did the later John Wesley."²¹

In *The Works of Arminius*, volume 2, we find important topics on predestination that discuss divine election and human free will. In volume 3 we find his analysis of Romans 9, a chapter often misused by exponents of Calvinistic determinism. In both he is opposed to God's irresistible grace that overrides human free will.²² Divine election is not solely based upon the electing God but upon human response. Throughout Arminius emphasizes that belief and unbelief are what decide human destiny, rather than an arbitrary decree of God irrespective of human response.²³

Whereas the Augustinian-Lutheran-Calvinistic predetermination looked to a *Deus Absconditus*, or hidden God, as the source of the divine decrees, Arminius looked to Christ as the "Foundation of this decree."²⁴ No longer was human destiny decided in the secret recesses of eternity; it was now decided in human response to Jesus Christ in human history. And this is the only way that the cosmic controversy issue before the universe will be decided—creaturely response to Jesus Christ (as we will see later). For Arminius predestination "is the Decree of the good pleasure of God in Christ." He quotes John 6:40, "This is the will of God, that every one who seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life."²⁵ This is a good biblical definition of the will of God. His will is not some arbitrary decree made in eternity, but is linked to Christ and His salvation work for all mankind.

The eternal dimension of this decree Arminius rightly finds in Ephesians 1:4, "He hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world."²⁶ As to reprobation, God "resolved from all eternity to condemn to eternal death unbelievers who, by their own fault and the just judgment of God, would not believe. . . ." ²⁷ Arminius believed God knows the future because He knows how people will freely choose. "For a thing does not come to pass because it has been foreknown or foretold; but it is foreknown and foretold because it is yet (*futura*) to come to pass."²⁸

In Romans 9, like so many others, Arminius misses the missiological meaning of Jacob and Esau. But he does distinguish between the children of the flesh and the children of faith in Christ. To the degree that these two groups are

²¹J. K. Grider, "Arminianism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 79.

²²*The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James and William Nicholls (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), vol. 2, 53; vol. 3, 516.

²³*The Work of James Arminius*, vol. 2, 53, 226, 698; vol. 3, 494-495, 497.

²⁴*The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 2, 227.

²⁵*The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 2, 226.

²⁶*The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 2, 227.

²⁷*The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 2, 228.

²⁸*The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 2, 368.

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distinguished he continues his focus on election involving human acceptance or non-acceptance of Christ. Election is not only God's willing in eternity, but human willing in time.²⁹

Arminius "attacked the speculative supralapsarianism of Beza on the grounds of its lack of Christocentricity." Secret eternal decrees were considered prior to the mission of Christ in Calvin's and Beza's theology. "For Arminius, election was subsequent to grace. God decrees to save all who repent, believe and persevere. Election is conditional on man's response, dependent on God's foreknowledge of his faith and perseverance." Whereas Calvin and Beza had God knowing the future because He predetermined it, Arminius had God knowing the future because of what humans would freely choose. Whereas Calvin and Beza confined foreknowledge to secret decrees in eternity, Arminius took history seriously. "Arminius was saying that God does not choose anyone but instead foresees that some will choose him."³⁰

The views of Arminius are presented in his commentary on Romans 9, *Examination of Perkins' Pamphlet*, and his *Declaration of Sentiments*. His view is called "conditional predestination." It was no longer arbitrary and rooted in a decree of God. It made evident that creaturely beings are responsible for evil in the universe and are responsible for their own destiny. His protology does not swallow up human actions and responsibility. He rejected the idea that grace is irresistible (Calvin), noting that believers can lose their salvation.

So in the theology of Arminius human free will is the determining factor for human destiny, rather than God's sovereign free will that does not take into consideration the free will of humans. Room for free human willing in salvation and reprobation makes possible human response to the justice of God in the cosmic controversy.

Although Arminius was right to be more Christocentric (than predestinarians) in his understanding of salvation/reprobation, so that Christ, rather than secret decrees of God, stands behind human destiny, he did not go on to develop a Christology that is true to Scripture. He was right that the mission of Christ radically calls in question the secret decrees of God, but he failed to follow through with the implications of this view. He ended up having a confined understanding of the atonement, just as Calvin had a confined understanding of the cause of human destiny.

In his Christology he says, "since Christ was held to have suffered for everyone he could not have paid the penalty for their sins, since all are not saved. His death simply permits the Father to forgive all who repent and believe. It makes salvation possible but does not intrinsically atone for anyone in particular. In fact, the atoning death of Christ was not essential for salvation by virtue

²⁹*The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 3, 485-519.

³⁰R. W. A. Letham, "Arminianism," *New Dictionary of Theology*, 45.

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of God's own nature as both loving and righteous but was rather the means God chose to save us for prudential administrative reasons."³¹

This was the view that Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) developed later (1617) in his Governmental Theory of the Atonement. In this theory God is sovereign, so that "God's pardon of sinners is within his absolute unfettered discretion, the death of Christ being accepted by him as ruler or governor, not as creditor or offended party. As ruler God's interest is in the good government of the world. The death of Christ illustrates the punishment which sin may attract and therefore serves good government by acting as a deterrent."³²

It is a curious paradox that Arminius rejected God's sovereign act (predestinating ruler) because of Christ's mission for humanity, and yet ended up limiting that mission because of God's sovereign act (forgiving ruler). He rightly rejected the eternal secret decrees of God as sovereign ruler because it did not take seriously the mission of Christ, yet he accepted the forgiving of God as sovereign ruler, even though it didn't take seriously the mission of Christ.

3. John Wesley, 1703-1791

In *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, there are two important sections on predestination. They constitute a powerful argument for free will, in opposition to divine determinism. Whereas Arminius blazed the trail in breaking away from the Reformer's focus on the divine decrees, John Wesley continued the battle, adding new insights and explaining it with clarity not found in the writings of Arminius. Wesley rejects "absolute predestination"³³ or "unconditional election,"³⁴ because they allege that God elects and damns individuals without them having any choice in the matter. It is God's will that is absolute. Human willing doesn't affect the outcome. There are no human conditions that affect human destiny, so the decrees are unconditional. This absolute and unconditional election is presented as an exercise of God's sovereignty. Freedom of choice to be among the saved or among the lost is disallowed, for the choice is not made at the human level in history, but at the divine level in eternity.

For Wesley election is conditional. "He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned."³⁵ Clearly, for Wesley, human destiny depends upon human response to God's desire to save all mankind. Wesley rejects the decree to reprobation. He asks, "How can you possibly reconcile reprobation with those scriptures that declare the justice of God?"³⁶ This is a crucial question. It impacts on the issue in the cosmic controversy, although Wesley never discusses it within that broader biblical worldview. The very fact of an uncondi-

³¹R. W. A. Letham, "Arminianism," *New Dictionary of Theology*, 46.

³²F. Lyall, "Grotius, Hugo," *New Dictionary of Theology*, 284.

³³John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), vol. 10, 258.

³⁴John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, 209.

³⁵John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, 210.

³⁶John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, 216.

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tional decree where large numbers of humans are thrown into hell without their having any say in their destiny would make impossible any free acknowledgement of the justice of God.

Wesley rejects the view that God is merciful to elect even the few. He says such mercy is called in question by the fact that God isn't merciful to the majority of mankind. Predestinarians claim that "God might justly have passed by all men." Wesley replies, "Are you sure he might? Where is it written? I cannot find it in the word of God. Therefore I reject it as a bold, precarious assertion, utterly unsupported by Holy Scripture."³⁷ Wesley points out that one attribute of God (justice) cannot be separated from His other attributes (e.g. love, mercy). Would it be loving or merciful to pass by all mankind? He rejects the use of divine sovereignty by itself. God is not just sovereign. He is a merciful, loving sovereign. "For the Scripture nowhere speaks of this single attribute, as separate from the rest. Much less does it anywhere speak of the sovereignty of God as singly disposing the eternal states of men. No, no; in this awful work, God proceeds according to the known rules of his justice and mercy; but never assigns his sovereignty as the cause why any man is punished with everlasting destruction."³⁸

The decree of reprobation, as taught by the Reformers, was God bypassing the mass of mankind just because He did not choose to elect them. They receive no help to live, and even if it were possible that they desired to live a better life, they could not change their destiny. That was unalterably fixed in eternity. They were born to eternal damnation, and can never choose otherwise. This is said in defense of divine sovereignty. In reply, Wesley says, "The sovereignty of God is then never to be brought to supersede justice. And this is the present objection against unconditional reprobation; (the plain consequence of unconditional election;) it flatly contradicts, indeed utterly overthrows, the Scripture account of the justice of God."³⁹

A major thesis of this chapter is the importance of thinking through issues of protology in the light of eschatology. The fact of a Final Judgment is an important eschatological event in Scripture, the Creeds, and in theological systems. The decree of reprobation has not been thought through in the light of this Final Judgment in any systems known to this author, nor in any of the Creeds. Yet this is precisely what must be done, and is what we will attempt later. But for now, it is important to note that John Wesley makes an important contribution to this question.

He asks, "How shall God in justice judge the world, if there be any decree of reprobation? On this supposition, what should those on the left hand be condemned for? For their having done evil? They could not help it. There never was a time when they could have helped it. God, you say, 'of old ordained them to

³⁷John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, 217.

³⁸John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, 220.

³⁹John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, 221.

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this condemnation.' . . . Shall he then condemn them for what they could not help? Shall the Just, the Holy One of Israel, adjudge millions of men to everlasting pain, because their blood moved in their veins? Nay, this they might have helped, by putting an end to their own lives. But could they even thus have escaped from sin? Not without that grace which you suppose God had absolutely determined never to give them. And yet you suppose him to send them into eternal fire, for not escaping from sin! That is, in plain terms, for not having that grace which God had decreed they should never have! O strange justice! What a picture do you draw of the Judge of all the earth!"⁴⁰

Strange justice indeed! Think of how these reprobate will feel just before being consigned to their punishment. Wesley imagines their conversation with God. "Righteous art thou, O Lord; yet let us plead with thee. O why doest thou condemn us for not doing good? Was it possible for us to do anything well? Did we ever abuse the power of doing good? We never received it, and that thou knowest. Wilt thou, the Holy One, the Just, condemn us for not doing what we never had the power to do? Wilt thou condemn us for not casting down the stars from heaven? For not holding the winds in our fist? Why, it was as possible for us to do this, as to do any work acceptable in thy sight! O Lord, correct us, but with judgment! And, before thou plungest us into everlasting fire, let us know how it was ever possible for us to escape the damnation of hell."⁴¹

If God has elected the few to be saved and the rest to be damned, then the judgment is already made. Why the need for the Final Judgment? Here an alleged protological judgment makes an eschatological judgment meaningless. Wesley grasps this significance, and is one rare thinker who considers protology in the light of eschatology. He says, "Justice can have no place in rewarding or punishing mere machines, driven to and fro by an external force. So that your supposition of God's ordaining from eternity whatsoever should be done to the end of the world; as well as that of God's acting irresistibly in the elect, and Satan's acting irresistibly in the reprobates; utterly overthrows the Scripture doctrine of rewards and punishment, as well as of a judgment to come."⁴²

Wesley presses the point, giving Scriptures that demonstrate "God's justice." He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23; 33:11). In fact His love is for all mankind. (1) He died for all (2 Cor 5:14), (2) "He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2) and (3) "He died for all, that they should not live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them" (2 Cor 5:15). He challenges anyone to find three Scripture passages that say the opposite. He then notes that the gospel commission is for all mankind, and asks, "how could God or Christ be sincere in sending them with this commission, to offer his grace to all men, if God has not provided such grace for all men. . . ?"⁴³

⁴⁰John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, Ibid.

⁴¹John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, 222.

⁴²John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, 224.

⁴³John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, 224-226.

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The justice of God is rightly important to Wesley. His justice involves God's love and mercy for all mankind, and the freedom of all mankind to either accept or reject the eternal salvation that God has made possible through the life and death of Christ. God has not arbitrarily pre-ordained through an absolute, unconditional decrees the destiny of a few to salvation and the destiny of the majority to damnation. In Christ He has made possible one destiny for all mankind. Whether that destiny is realized is up to human acceptance and belief.

By contrast, predestination gives humans no choice. Wesley returns to the Final Judgment, and says, "Justice cannot punish a stone for falling to the ground; nor, on your scheme, a man for falling into sin. For he can no more help it than the stone, if he be, in your sense, fore-ordained to this condemnation." How can God condemn a person for not doing what he could never do? You claim it is because of "the sovereign will of God." Then you have "found a new God, or made one!" Wesley says, "This is not the God of the Christians. Our God is just in all his ways. . . . The glory of his justice is this, to 'reward every man according to his works.'"⁴⁴

Predestination means destination decided before. It means, to predestinarians, that those destinies are fixed, and cannot be altered. Hence the elect will be saved, irrespective of what happens in human history, and the reprobate will be lost irrespective of what happens in human history. But Wesley rightly points out that God entered into covenant with Abraham and his descendants, and Scripture clearly states the conditionality of this agreement (Exod Gen 36:2; Exod 19:3; Lev 26:3). Furthermore, a believer can turn away and be lost (Ezek 18:24; Matt 5:13; 12:43-45; John 15:1; Acts 13:46; Rom 11:17; Gal 5:4; 1 Tim 1:18-19; 2 Pet 2:20; 3:17; Heb 3:14; 6:4-6; Rev 3:11). The just live by faith, not by election (Hab 2:4). Sanctification and holiness is essential for salvation. Far from being irresistible, the Holy Spirit can be resisted by humans (Acts 7:51). Christ died for all mankind, but it is only those who believe who will be saved. Conditions for salvation and for retribution deny the unconditional eternal decrees.⁴⁵

4. Karl Barth (1886-1968)

Karl Barth radically called in question the traditional doctrine of predestination, as we will see, but ends up with another kind of predestination that has as many different problems as the one he called in question. There are two stages to this process, first the work he did in his *Romans commentary*, (1918/1921) and the next the work he did in his *Church Dogmatics* (1932-1970).

(1) *Commentary on Romans*

⁴⁴John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, 234.

⁴⁵John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, 240-259.

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Karl Barth's Commentary on Romans (*Römerbrief*) was written against the background of Schleiermachian existentialism, where the subject of theology had become man (as seen in the *Glaubenslehre*), and one spoke about God by speaking about man in a loud voice. This immanentism was challenged by Barth with his call, "Let God be God."

In his preface to the second edition, Barth gives credit to Plato, Kant and Kierkegaard for their influence on his thinking.⁴⁶ Each of these philosophers posited a similar view of God. To Plato the gods were separated from mankind by a *chorizma*, or unbridgeable gulf; for Kant we can never know God as He is in Himself, and Kierkegaard said there is an infinite qualitative distinction between God and mankind. Each, in different ways, presented a distant god/God who was opposite to the god of immanentism. This "Wholly Other" (*Ganz Anderer*) God is the God of the early Barth, and continued to be right up to the second attempt at writing his system, when the more existential *Christian Dogmatics* vol 1 (1927) was replaced by the more objective *Church Dogmatics* vol 1 (1932).

In commenting on Romans 9, where God loves Jacob and hates Esau, Barth speaks of the "secret of eternal, twofold predestination" in a paradoxical way. "Now, this secret concerns not this or that man, but all men. By it men are not divided, but united. In its presence they all stand on one line—for Jacob is always Esau also, and in the eternal 'Moment' of revelation Esau is also Jacob."⁴⁷ The Church is both the observable Esau and the hidden Jacob, it is both rejected and elected. "For God is the God of Esau, BECAUSE He is the God of Jacob."⁴⁸ For "whilst He is, in every moment of time, the God of Esau, He is in eternity the God of Jacob."⁴⁹

Here is an incipient universalism—reprobate in time but elect in eternity. Behind this paradoxical statement stands Barth's undeveloped Christology. "The process of revelation in Christ is decisive. In Time, we are *vessels of wrath*; in Eternity, we are not merely something more, but something utterly different; we are—*vessels of mercy*."⁵⁰ "God is unknown, apart from the knowledge which He Himself—as the Unknown—gives to us in Christ."⁵¹

Barth's paradoxical language and philosophical insights clutter the developing Christology he is attempting to bring to protology. Unlike those before Him, he is attempting in *Romans* to look at election/reprobation from a new perspective in Christ. This is a welcome breakthrough, but it is woefully inadequate, for his Christ remains in eternity, and at best stands only tangentially on

⁴⁶Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1965), 4.

⁴⁷Karl Barth, *Romans*, 347.

⁴⁸Karl Barth, *Romans*, 350.

⁴⁹Karl Barth, *Romans*, 357.

⁵⁰Karl Barth, *Romans*, 360.

⁵¹Karl Barth, *Romans*, 361.

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the edge where time and eternity meet. There is no entrance of Christ into time, to make revelation within human history. There is only the ever repeated encounters of revelation as divine eternity impacts human time. On these terms Christ has not revealed the Father, and so He does not give historical evidence about God to mankind. Such a revelation is necessary to understand what God is like, whether He is just. Barth's incipient universalism is better than an arbitrary predetermination to damnation, but his argument is less than convincing.

Later Barth criticized his *Romans*. It failed to do justice to the incarnation⁵² and to the love of God.⁵³ He would have to wait until his *Church Dogmatics* to take the incarnation seriously and think through the eternal decrees from within the historical revelation of them in Jesus Christ. To this we now turn.

(2) Church Dogmatics

In his *Church Dogmatics* Barth rejected the secret decrees of the Father's election of a few, for the mission of universal salvation in which "the elect man Jesus Christ" is the true object of the divine predestination."⁵⁴ Rather than have the Father electing, it is now Christ who elects. But not only does He elect, He is the elected man, where man means mankind (*humanitas*) and not just one individual (*homo*). So the object of election is not some unknown, hidden secret in the will of an unknown God, but is the election of Christ for the world. This is a radical departure from the Augustinian-Lutheran-Calvinistic tradition. A more "Christian" version of predestination is offered. Its universal breadth replaces the choice of a few.

What does it mean that Jesus Christ is the electing God and the elected man? The electing God is good news because it is true to Scripture. It overcomes the dualism in the Godhead where the Father elects the few, and yet the Son comes for the world. It removes the secrecy of the decrees with the revelation of Christ's mission in history. No longer is the sovereign will of God the manifestation of His glory and the revelation of His mercy and justice. Now the will of God is revealed in the God-man. No longer is there an unknown God who stands before and behind Christ, hidden in His secret, inscrutable willing. For in Christ one has the exhaustive self-revelation of God, in which it is seen that, "The will of God is Jesus Christ."⁵⁵ "The substitution of the election of Jesus Christ for the *decretum absolutum* is, then, the decisive point in the amendment of the doctrine of predestination."⁵⁶

The double decrees (election/reprobation) are no longer two separate destinies. They are one in Christ. He is elected mankind and rejected God, for as the

⁵²Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, G. W. Bromiley, T. F. Torrance, eds. (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1963), 1/2, 50.

⁵³Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4/2, 798.

⁵⁴Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/2, 143.

⁵⁵Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/2, 157.

⁵⁶Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/2, 161.

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elected man He took the place of rejected mankind. Here all humans are objectively elected to salvation in Christ, which is the root of Barth's tendency to universalism. Hence "predestination is the non-rejection of man."⁵⁷ This is an attempt to look at predestination christologically. Judgment and mercy are given a corporate function in the election of the Community. Barth says, "This one Community of God in its form as Israel has to serve the representation of the divine judgment, in its form as the Church the representation of the divine mercy."⁵⁸ Here Barth confuses the category of election with that of mission, and makes the same mistake when commenting on Romans 9 when he calls Israel a vessel of dishonor and the Church a vessel of honor.⁵⁹

Concerning Judas, who betrayed Christ, Barth does not look at that as a personal act of rebellion, but "as one element of the divine will and work." He says, "In one sense Judas is the most important figure in the new Testament apart from Jesus. . . . If we consider the indispensability of Judas from the point of the view of the divine delivering-up of Jesus, we can almost understand for a moment what inspired the ancient sect which gave special veneration to this man. In itself, it is no more foolish than the considerations which at a very different point led to the veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus. At any rate, we have to say that the usual horror at this 'arch-villain' (as Abraham a Sta. Clara puts it) is quite unjustifiable in its over-simplification of Judas' actual function."⁶⁰ In other words, Judas was used by God to hand Jesus over so that He could become the Savior of all mankind, including Judas. He says, "the traitor Judas is the strange instrument of the will of God."⁶¹ So Barth can say that "the story of Judas is extraordinary calm."⁶² If that was true, why did Judas commit suicide? It seems Barth is focusing more on the will of God than the will of Judas.

Barth speaks of "the eschatological possibility," of "salvation on the day of the Lord" for the rejected.⁶³ In other words their rejection is only temporal, and not eternal. He claims we need "to accept the eschatological reality of the delivery of Jesus Christ in the place of sinners. And in view of the efficacy of this event, we must not lose sight of the hope of the future deliverance of the rejected at the very frontier of perdition."⁶⁴ Barth can say, "there is no good reason why we should forbid ourselves, or be forbidden, openness to the possibility that in the reality of God and man in Jesus Christ there is contained much more than we might expect and therefore the supremely unexpected withdrawal of that final

⁵⁷Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/2, 167.

⁵⁸Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/2, 195.

⁵⁹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/2, 224.

⁶⁰Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/2, 502.

⁶¹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3/2, 214.

⁶²Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/2, 460.

⁶³Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/2, 486-487.

⁶⁴Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/2, 497.

threat, i.e., that in the truth of this reality there might be contained the super-abundant promise of the final deliverance of all men.”⁶⁵

(3) Calvin and Barth Compared

The protology of Calvin and Barth are diametrically opposite. Whereas Calvin’s God is a hidden God, who made decrees in eternity that are secret, inscrutable, and past human comprehension, Barth rejected this view of predestination because it doesn’t take the reality of Jesus Christ seriously. Barth presents predestination of all mankind in Christ, the Electing God and the elected man. The reality of rejection and election is found in the life and work of Christ, in whom all humanity is found. So the election of everyone is wrapped up in the election of the man Jesus. Even those rejected were elected in His death for them. So much so that the eschatological possibility holds out the fact that all may be saved, whereas for Calvin only the few elect will be saved.

Admittedly these two views are radically diverse. But they share common ground in not allowing for the proper use of free human will in the process. Both are built on a selective use of Scripture, and both end up doing a disservice to the biblical revelation of human destiny. Because human will is not given its proper place, the “whosoever believeth will be saved” emphasis in Scripture is ignored. It is precisely this rejection of human free will which, if true, would be sufficient to call in question God’s justice. How would it be just to damn those who were not elected by Calvin’s God, and how would it be just for all to be saved according to the possibility of Barth’s God?

In Scripture eschatological rewards are never forced upon all indiscriminately. Even final destiny takes into consideration human preparation (Matt 6:33; Heb 11:6; Rev 22:14-15). The God who asks humans to come and reason (Isa 1:18) and allows them to reap what they sow (Gal 6:7), who made them in His image (Gen 1:17-18) with the ability to think and to decide, respects their freedom to choose sides in the cosmic controversy (Deut 30:19; Joshua 24:15) on the basis of the evidence provided in His Word. One day, in the eschatological judgment, all will have revealed to them the justice of God (Isa 45:23; Rom 14:10-11; Isa 45:23-24; Phil 2:10-11). It will be essential then that humans have freedom to respond to that revelation, for God does not want to dictate the conclusion. There is no judicial universalism here, flowing from the fact that all are predestined to say that God is just and the apostasy in unjust.

No! One day, in the final moments of eschatology, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (in the entire cosmos), and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10-1). All will see that God is just. This is not, as some have argued, a second opportunity to turn to God and receive salvation. The wicked will admit they have received the reward they have chosen for themselves, but

⁶⁵Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4/3, 477-478.

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they will not repent. The trust of the righteous in God's justice will be shown to be fully warranted. Before they have trusted, but now they see fully. Traditional predestination cannot be lived, for Christians know they are using their wills each day, willing to serve and share, and they know they choose Christ.

5. The Free Will Option

The greatest tragedy in the Augustinian-Lutheran-Calvinistic predestinarian tradition is the rejection of free will, but it is cherished by the "free will" churches. I do not speak of the use of free will for salvation in the Pelagian or Catholic sense. No one can earn salvation. It is a free gift. But it is only a free gift to "whosoever" will accept it (John 3:16-17). Human destiny is not inevitable. It is not preordained, or forced upon humans against their will. Humans must make a decision. Jesus said it right to Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). He did not say, "You don't have to worry Nicodemus, you are elected from eternity." The fact that the new birth, Holy Spirit indwelling and spiritual fruits, a changed life and fitness for heaven are pre-requisites for entrance must be taken seriously, for this is the biblical picture. God created humans with the ability to think, reason, and will because He did not want robots. He wanted to dwell with humans, and will do so in the new earth (Rev 21:3). Authentic relationship must be predicated upon a genuine interchange, even though it is between created beings and their Creator.

The Confession of the Free Will Baptists, (1834, 1868) declares, "God has endowed man with power of free choice and governs him by moral laws and motives; and this power of free choice is the exact measure of his responsibility. All events are present with God from everlasting to everlasting; but his knowledge of them does not in any sense cause them, nor does he decree all events which he knows will occur."⁶⁶

6. Christological Focus in the Creeds

As we will see in this section, Karl Barth was not the first to consider election in a Christological context. A number of creeds at least mention the connection. All but two of the creeds we cite never allow the "in Christ" view of election to call in question the secret decrees from a hidden God beyond Christ. They do not take seriously the fact that Christ came to save all mankind (John 3:16), and that human free will is involved in the "whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). The Formula of Concord (1576) says, "In Christ, therefore, is the eternal election of God the Father to be sought."⁶⁷ The Belgic Confession (1561) says that God, "in his eternal and un-

⁶⁶Confession of the Free-Will Baptists, Chapter 3, #1,2; Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), vol. 3, 749-750.

⁶⁷The Formula of Concord, Article XII. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 169. Even though the Formula says "Christ calls all sinners to him" (Art. VI), yet it denies human free-will (Art. 11).

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changeable counsel, of mere goodness hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works.”⁶⁸ The Scotch Confession of Faith (1560) says, “For that same eternal God and Father, who of mere grace elected us in *Christ Jesus* his Sonne, befor the foundation of the warld was laide. . . .” (Old Scottish spelling).⁶⁹

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1571) say, “Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from the curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation. . . .”⁷⁰ These creeds do not think through the implication of the “in Christ” focus. They merely quote a biblical idea without allowing that idea to materially affect the way they look at human destiny.

The next two creeds go further than the ones already cited and present the real meaning of “in Christ,” and in doing so, show that the mission of Christ was not a narrow election of the few, and that human free will is a necessary human response that negates any divine predetermination. The creeds also show the way that the debate could have gone if the Reformers had only allowed their understanding of justification by faith in Christ to have informed their understanding of predestination by faith in Christ.

The Confession of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (1829) incorporates some of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), but deletes the thorny Calvinistic Chapters II-VIII, replacing them with an excellent, well-thought out, Christ-centered interpretation of election. They suggest that Calvinists and Arminians had gone beyond proper limits in probing predestination. They suggest an “intermediate plan.” This plan suggests that “God is sovereign, having a right to work when, where, how, and on whom he pleases.” “Therefore God, as sovereign, may if he pleases, elect a nation, as the Jews, to preserve his worship free from idolatry. . . . Christendom, in which to spread his gospel. . . . Cyrus and others, to answer a particular purpose. . . . Luther and Calvin to promote the Reformation. But as it respects the salvation of the soul, God as sovereign can only elect or choose fallen man in Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. But it appears to us incontestible, from God’s Word, that God has reprobated *none* from eternity.”⁷¹

⁶⁸The Belgic Confession, Article XVI. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 401. Yet the Confession says there is no salvation outside the church (Art. XXVIII) and rejects human free-will (Art. XIV).

⁶⁹The Scotch Confession of Faith, Article VIII. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 444-45. Yet the Confession denies human free-will (Art. XIII).

⁷⁰The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, Article XVI. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 497. Yet the Confession denies human free-will (Art. X).

⁷¹See next footnote.

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“Reprobation is not what some have supposed it to be, viz., a sovereign determination of God to create millions of rational beings, and for his own glory damn them eternally in hell, without regard to moral rectitude or sin in the creature. This would tarnish the divine glory, and render the greatest, best, and most lovely of all beings most odious in view of all intelligence.” This is precisely the point. This would contribute to the doubt about His justice. This would fuel the cosmic controversy. It would be damaging evidence that Satan would gleefully disseminate.

The Confession continues, “When man sinned he was legally reprobated, but not damned: God offered, and does offer, the law-condemned sinner mercy in the gospel, he has from the foundation of the world so far chosen mankind in Christ as to justify that saying in 1 Tim. Iv. 10, ‘Who is the Savior of all men, especially of them that believe.’ This is a gracious act of God’s sovereign electing love, as extensive as the legal condemnation, or reprobation, in which all mankind are by nature. But, in a particular and saving sense, none can be properly called God’s elect till they be justified and united to Christ, the end of the law for righteousness (none are justified from eternity. . . .” Furthermore if anyone falls, “he was not *bound* by any revealed or *secret* decree of God to do so: it is his own fault. For God declares in his Word that Christ died for the *whole* world; that he offers pardon to all; that the Spirit operates on all; confirming by an oath that he has no pleasure in the death of sinners.”⁷²

This is a true understanding of predestination “in Christ.” Gone is an election from a God behind Christ, hidden in the eternal recesses in secret and hidden decrees with their arbitrary election of some and damning of most. In its place is a view of a loving Christ who comes to save all mankind, and therefore reprobating none, so that all humanity have necessary free will to accept or reject His saving mission for them. Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father (John 14:9). This is the revelation Christ made of His Father to intelligent creatures that shows Him to be a God of great love and compassion for everyone, and not merely for a select few. It is precisely such a manifestation that is vital for the resolution of the cosmic controversy. For Christ came to earth not merely to save mankind, but to manifest what God is like to the universe. We will take this up later when we look at the mission of Christ.

The Confession of the Evangelical Free Church of Geneva (1848) says, “the true believer having been elected in Christ before the foundation of the world, according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father, in the sanctification of the Holy Ghost. . . . We believe that God, who so loved the world that he gave his only Son, now order every man, in every place, to be converted; that every one is responsible for his sins and his unbelief; that Jesus repels none who go to him;

⁷²Confessions of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (Chapters III-VIII). Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 772-773.

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and that every sinner who sincerely appeals to him will be saved.”⁷³ Here the “in Christ” election is seen in the light of John 3:16, where universal salvation is based upon a human free will response to God’s gift. This is so much better than The Confession of the Waldenses (1655) which says, “That God so loved the world, that is to say, those whom he has chosen out of the world, that he gave his own Son to save us by his most perfect obedience (especially that obedience which he manifested in suffering the cursed death of the cross), and also by his victory over the devil, sin, and death.”⁷⁴

Here is one of the five traditional points of the Calvinistic view of salvation (known under the mnemonic abbreviation TULIP): Total depravity, Unconditional predestination, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. If humans are so depraved that they cannot choose Christ, and therefore election has nothing to do with their will, but solely with God’s will, so that Christ’s death was only for those whom God chose, and they alone can be saved because grace is irresistible to them, causing them to persevere—then there is no basis for intelligent beings to accept that God is just in the cosmic controversy and bow their knees. How can God choose some and reject the rest without facing the charge of having favorites, being arbitrary and unjust?

The “in Christ” focus recognizes the importance of human free will. The Reformed Episcopal Articles of Religion (1875) say, “While the Scriptures distinctly set forth the election, predestination, and calling of the people of God unto eternal life, as Christ saith; ‘All that the Father giveth me shall come to me;’ they no less positively affirm man’s free agency and responsibility, and that salvation is freely offered to all through Christ.”⁷⁵

The Creeds that really allowed the “in Christ” focus of election to be true to John 3:16 were true to human free will, and thus to a real choice for election or rejection. They see humans as responsible for that choice, even as God is responsible for salvation. In this balance, no human destiny can be seen as unjust, arbitrarily predetermined by a sovereign God whose mission is for His own pleasure or glory. Such a view is totally foreign to the God who gave His Son to save a world and invited all to accept salvation through belief in Christ. Only such a God will be seen as just in the final Judgment, when every intelligent being will have opportunity to respond to the revelation of God by acknowledging His righteousness.

7. Alvin Platinga

⁷³Confession of the Evangelical Free Church of Geneva, Articles X-X. Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 783-784.

⁷⁴The Confessions of the Waldenses, Article XIV. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 762.

⁷⁵Reformed Episcopal Articles of Religion, Article XVIII. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 820. Article XVI also says that salvation is only in Christ and to those who believe in Him.

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No contemporary philosopher has shed more light on the topic before us than Alvin Platinga. He does so through two major contributions: examining the problem of evil and presenting the Free Will Defense theory. We will take them up in that order.

(a) The Problem of Evil

Gottfried W. Leibnitz (1646-1716) considered that this world is the best of all possible worlds.⁷⁶ He further suggested that an omnipotent God could have created any possible world. Platinga calls this latter idea, “Leibniz’s Lapse,” and denied its validity.⁷⁷ For God “could not have actualized a world containing moral good but no moral evil.”⁷⁸ For humans to be free God could not have created a world in which all human actions result from external causation. There is no compatibility between divine causation and human freedom. Thus, says Platinga, “He (God) cannot cause it to be the case that I freely refrain from an action *A*; for if he does so, he causes it to be the case that I refrain from *A*, in which case I do not do so *freely*.”⁷⁹

Those believing in divine determinism, where everything created and their actions are predetermined by God, where non-causation is absent, where determinism and human freedom are considered compatible (compatibility theory)—must believe God ordained evil to exist, for nothing can exist (even evil) outside of His divine pre-ordination and providence. Such a view presents God as blameworthy for the existence of evil in His universe, and calls in question His omnipotence, and more importantly for our study, it calls in question His justice. For if God ordained the presence of evil, then to that extent at least, He is responsible for evil. If He is responsible for evil, then to that extent it is impossible to conclude that He is just in the eschatological Final Judgment.

Many philosophers claim “there is a contradiction involved in asserting, as the theist does, that God is perfectly good, omnipotent (i.e., all powerful), and omniscient (i.e., all-knowing) on the one hand, and, on the other, that there is evil.”⁸⁰ David Hume questioned, “Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”⁸¹ H. J. McCloskey says, “Evil is a problem for the theist in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil, on the one hand, and the belief in the omnipotence and perfection of God on the

⁷⁶It is important to grasp what John L. Pollock observed, “One of the principle analytical tools of contemporary philosophical logic is the concept of a possible world. It has become commonplace to identify necessary truth with truth in all possible worlds” (in *Alvin Platinga*, eds. James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, 121). That is, the truth in one world is possible in all worlds, so that evil in this world is possible in all worlds.

⁷⁷See his extended discussion in *The Nature of Necessity*, 168-195.

⁷⁸Alvin Platinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 172.

⁷⁹Alvin Platinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 171.

⁸⁰Alvin Platinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 11.

⁸¹Alvin Platinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 10.

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other.”⁸² J. L. Mackie says, “I think, however, that a more telling criticism can be made by way of the traditional problem of evil. Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another.”⁸³

Many philosophers, from Epicurus (342?-270 BC) to the present, “believe that the existence of evil constitutes a difficulty for the theist, and many believe that the existence of evil (or at least the amount and kinds of evil we actually find) makes belief in God unreasonable or rationally unacceptable.”⁸⁴ In reply Platinga gives a sustained logical, consistent, and careful analysis of these claims and demonstrates that the existence of God in view of evil is reasonable and rationally acceptable.

Platinga says that a theist may not be able to answer these questions, but that inability should not be the final word. “The fact that the theist doesn’t know why God permits evil is, perhaps, an interesting fact about the theist, but by itself it shows little or nothing relevant to the rationality of belief in God.”⁸⁵ Having said that much, he then sets out to successfully answer these questions. And his logic is a careful and consistent articulation of the Free Will Defense theory.

(b) Free Will Defense

As Thomas P. Flint rightly points out, “the ethological argument from evil can be successfully countered by a version of the Free Will Defense.” The Free Will Defense believes that “all evil might be the result of the free actions of God’s creatures.”⁸⁶ “It is noteworthy,” says Jerry L. Walls, “that Molinism has received renewed attention in contemporary philosophy, largely through Alvin Platinga’s free will defense.” This includes Platinga’s acceptance of Molina’s logic that God has “middle knowledge.”⁸⁷ Here God does not create evil, nor is He therefore responsible for evil, but He did create beings with the ability to choose good or evil, so that with the choosing came the responsibility for the choice. Humans, like many angels before them, chose evil, and hence are responsible for the existence of evil within the otherwise good creation of God.

⁸²H. J. McCloskey, “God and Evil,” *Philosophical Quarterly*, 10 (1960), 97.

⁸³J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” *Mind*, 64 (1955), 200.

⁸⁴Alvin Platinga in *Alvin Platinga*, eds James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, 37; Alvin Platinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 9.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁸⁶Thomas P. Flint, “The Problem of Divine Freedom,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 20 #3 (July 1893), 255.

⁸⁷Jerry L. Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*, 40.

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Platinga defines his Free Will Defense.⁸⁸ It is “A World containing creatures who are significantly free (freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can’t cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren’t significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can’t give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing do. As it turned out, sadly enough, some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God’s omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.”⁸⁹

Platinga rejects the idea that God could have created a world containing moral good but no moral evil. He rejects the compatibility of divine determinism and human freedom. His focus is therefore away from the divine determinism found in much theology. For him, human freedom is a necessary component of divine creation. One might add that humans are necessarily free because made in the image of a free God (Gen 1:26-27). The very presence of evil in God’s perfect universe must come from the misuse of creaturely freedom, because the only other cause for evil would be divine freedom, and God does not create evil. The very fact of evil is a powerful evidence for the use of creaturely free will. To suggest that God is somehow the cause of evil negates any chance of defending His justice, for evil would be the *prima facie* case for His injustice.

Atheologians might say that Adam would not have sinned if God had placed him on a different world from this one, and since God knew this, and did not do it, then He is to be blamed for evil. Platinga’s answer to this is his concept of “trans-world depravity.” Thomas P. Flint comments on Platinga’s view. He says, “If Adam is truly free, it might be the case that, no matter what God had done, Adam would (if created and left significantly free) have freely gone wrong with respect to some action. If this is so, Adam suffers from trans-world depravity, and God can create him and leave him significantly free only if he is willing to let him do evil. Platinga argues that it is possible that all of us suffer from trans-world depravity. If the atheologian then goes on to ask why God didn’t create other people, who didn’t suffer from trans-world depravity, Platinga can respond that God might not have had this option, for it is possible that

⁸⁸He differentiates a Free Will Defense from a Free Will Theodicy, for the former speaks of what God’s reason *might possibly be* compared to what God’s reason *is* in the latter. Alvin Platinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 28.

⁸⁹Alvin Platinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 30. cf. Alvin Platinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (London, UK: Oxford, 1978), 166-167.

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every creaturely essence (i.e., every ‘possible person’) suffers from trans-world depravity.”⁹⁰

“The essential point of the Free Will Defense,” says Platinga,” is that the creation of the world containing moral good is a co-operative venture; it requires the uncoerced concurrence of significantly free creatures. . . . Of course it is up to God whether to create free creatures at all; but if he aims to produce moral good, then he must create significantly free creatures upon whose co-operation he must depend. Thus is the power of an omnipotent God limited by the freedom he confers upon his creatures.”⁹¹ This makes far more sense, to me, than the eternal decrees that make all human action predetermined. The contribution that Alvin Platinga has made to the Free Will Defense is crucial to the thesis of our theological system.

For it is the Free Will Defense, Platinga argues so persuasively, that is the only explanation for evil that fits in with the biblical world view of the cosmic controversy as a rebellion of created beings against their Creator. For God could not will or decree such rebellion and cause His created beings to be at war with Him. He would be less than wise to do so. The very fact that the rebellion cost Him everything, including the life and death of His Son, is ample evidence against His causing the tragedy. Such a rebellion can only be the result of creaturely free will. Later, we will see that when this rebellion comes to a close in the eschatological Final Judgment, then God will be seen as just by all those who have exercised their free wills, whether saved or damned.

The possession of free will by humans is vital. Without such free will they would be mere automatons or puppets. Such lack of freedom would keep them from entering an intelligent relationship with their Creator, and thus they would fail to realize the purpose of their creation, which is to have a meaningful fellowship with God. This would not only affect human history on this planet now (cf. Ezek 37:23, 26; Jer 7:23; 30:22; 31:1; 32:38; Matt 1:28-30, John 15:1-5), but also affect human life in the eschatological new earth (Rev 21:3). Only as humans are truly free can they really have a relationship with God in the present and throughout eternity.

8. Four Views

Four views on divine sovereignty and human freedom are presented in a 1986 book titled *Predestination and Free will*.⁹² The four views are (1) God

⁹⁰Thomas P. Flint, “The Problem of Divine Freedom,” 256. The fact is two thirds of the angels did not sin, so trans-world depravity is not a fact for all created beings. Rather than speaking about trans-world depravity, it would be better to speak of all having free wills to use as they wish, and all humans having used it to do evil, whereas only some of the angels have used it in the same way. Behind the idea of trans-world depravity is Platinga’s freedom of will, and this concept is the only one that is possible in a universe in which evil exists and God remains just.

⁹¹Alvin Platinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 190.

⁹²*Predestination and Free Will*, eds. David and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986).

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ordains all things (John S. Feinberg), (2) God knows all things (Norman Geisler), (3) God limits His power (Bruce Reichenbach) and (4) God limits His knowledge (Clark Pinnock). A careful reading through this volume gives important insights, some of which we will consider. The importance of this work is the obvious difference that exists between the views, even though there are some areas of concurrence. Does God cause human acts or not? Are humans robots or not? Does God limit His power by making room for human freedom, or not? Does God know all the future or not? These are the major views debated.

John Feinberg and Norman Geisler's view of God could be characterized as a novelist who invents his/her characters and is in control of what they do in the story. The characters are not free. They are at the mercy of their creator/novelist. The picture of the Potter working over the clay in Romans 9:18-21 has been used this way by exponents of divine causation. But Bruce Reichenbach and Clark Pinnock do not subscribe to this model. To them humans have freedom to make their own decisions and to chose their own destiny.

Bruce Reichenbach says, "We must abandon the model which sees God as the cosmic novelist. . . ." ⁹³ He calls for a distinction between God as sovereign and God as novelist. ⁹⁴ The former is appropriate, the latter is not. He rightly states that "God cannot, without destroying our freedom, control us or compel us to choose to act in ways that accord with his will or plan. If God has created us free to choose to love and serve him, then God cannot cause us to do so. It is up to us to accept or reject the grace offered us through the redemptive act of Christ. We are not tools to be manipulated by God or other persons to achieve their end. Rather, we are conscious beings who should be persuaded to freely live according to God's will and commands." ⁹⁵

By contrast, Norman Geisler says, "I deny Reichenbach's view that God does not have as much control over his free subjects as a novelist has over his characters. From God's eternal standpoint, history is just as determined as the story in a novel. Yet the moral actions in history were all free." ⁹⁶ Obviously they cannot both be right. It is true that the plan of salvation was thought through before the foundation of the world, has been carried out according to schedule, and will accomplish its goal. Yet it is also true that each human will meet his/her own destiny through free will/choice. God is the author of the plan of salvation, but each person is free to relate to that plan as they choose, and so cannot relate to it as a novel character relates to a novelist.

If God is a novelist and humans are but actors in His hands, to do as He chooses, both now and in eternity, then there is no real human freedom, and so there is no way humans can comprehend if God is just or not, much less admit the fact in the Final Judgment. When we look at that Final Judgment, we will

⁹³Bruce Reichenbach in *Predestination and Free Will*, 55.

⁹⁴Bruce Reichenbach in *Predestination and Free Will*, 106.

⁹⁵Bruce Reichenbach in *Predestination and Free Will*, 108-109.

⁹⁶Norman Geisler in *Predestination and Free Will*, 131-13

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see that Scripture speaks of it as every knee bowing before God. They will do so in utter freedom. With that in mind, it is worth pondering these words from Reichenbach, “the sovereign cannot make the subjects freely acknowledge his sovereignty. The sovereign can compel his subjects to bow in his presence, but he cannot compel them to bow freely.”⁹⁷

James I. Packer calls for evangelicals to accept both divine sovereignty and human freedom, because the Bible teaches both.⁹⁸ Problems arise when one is stressed without giving proper place to the other. Much of theological thinking has stressed the sovereignty of God and neglected the importance of the freedom of humans. In defense of human freedom, Clark Pinnock observes that there are two central biblical assertions about humans. “(1) they are historical agents who can respond to God in love; and (2) they are sinners who have deliberately rejected God’s plan for them. Neither assertion would make sense unless we posit the gift of freedom in the strong sense.”⁹⁹

C. S. Lewis, in *The Screwtape Letters*, says, “the Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of His scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to override a human will . . . would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo.”¹⁰⁰ In *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis says, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’”¹⁰¹ Following God or losing eternal life are both a result of human will. Destiny is provided by God but chosen by humans, so that in destiny is found the union of divine sovereignty and human freedom. God invites all to eternal life, but will force none. He longs for none to be lost, so he forbids none. Humans are free to choose their destiny.

9. Book of Romans

Romans 9, with its alleged election of Jacob and reprobation of Esau; the hardening of Pharaoh, and the potter making vessels to honor and dishonor, seems to be the key passage for predestination promoted by the Augustinian-Lutheran-Calvinist tradition. The word “election” means mission in this passage (v. 12), and not decrees for election/reprobation. What we need to do now is to see that an exegesis of these verses in Romans 9, apart from their context in the Book of Romans, gives a distorted view of God. So in this section, we will go chronologically through Romans and provide this larger context. It is within this

⁹⁷Bruce Reichenbach in *Predestination and Free Will*, 105.

⁹⁸James I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1961), chap. 2 give pages.

⁹⁹Clark Pinnock in *Predestination and Free Will*, 147. On page 150 Pinnock writes, “genuine novelty can appear in history which cannot be predicted even by God,” thus showing a weak understanding of divine foreknowledge.

¹⁰⁰C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1961), 38.

¹⁰¹C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1945), 69.

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larger context that the larger biblical world view—beyond human salvation/loss of salvation—concerning the cosmic controversy issue over God’s justice, can be addressed.

Here is a list of the items in Romans that negate the confined election/reprobation secret decrees:

(1) Rom 1:16. Salvation is through human belief, not through divine selection.

(2) Rom 1:16. Salvation is for Jews (Jacob) and Gentiles (e.g. Esau). This negates the view that Romans 9:8-16 is election for Jacob and retribution for Esau.

(3) Rom 2:10-11. Salvation for Jews and Gentiles, for God is no respecter of persons. Choosing some to be saved and others to be lost is showing respect of persons.

(4) Rom 3:6. God to judge the world. This future event would be unnecessary if He has already determined their destiny through His eternal choice.

(5) Rom 3:9, 22-24. Jews and Gentiles have all sinned. Salvation comes not through some secret election, but through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. The difference between the elect and the reprobate is not some secret choice of God but a known (belief) choice of humans.

(6) Rom 3:28-30. Jews (Jacob) and Gentiles (e.g. Esau) are justified by faith, for God is the God of Jews and Gentiles.

(7) Rom 4:1-18. Abraham, grandfather of Jacob (Israel) and Esau was righteous through faith, and not through divine decrees. He is the spiritual father of all nations—of all who believe. This has to do with election to mission (not salvation). Mission, like salvation, is dependent upon human faith (will), and not upon divine decrees.

(8) Rom 5:9-10. Justification (salvation) comes through Jesus Christ, and not through divine decrees.

(9) Rom 5:12-19. Sin came into the world through Adam and salvation came into the world through Christ. Salvation is not through divine decrees, but through Christ. So belief and faith are understood as belief and faith in Christ and not in eternal decrees.

(10) Rom 8:32. Christ came for all mankind, and not just for an alleged elect.

(11) Rom 9:24, 30-33. Even in Romans 9, where the alleged election/reprobation ideas are found, Jews and Gentiles are both considered righteous by faith; and trust in Christ is the focus (v. 33). Clearly salvation is through faith in Christ, a human response to the Savior, a human choice made in history and not a divine choice made in eternity, a belief in a Savior revealed, and not a predestination by God in secret decrees. So in the very chapter where predestination is allegedly found, there is ample proof that this is the wrong exegesis of the texts.

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(12) Rom 10:9. “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” The act of free will is necessary for salvation.

(13) Rom 10:12. “For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him. For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” Here salvation is offered universally to all on the same basis of calling on Him. Such an offer is not possible if God only elects a few, and damns the rest.

(14) Rom 11:20-23. One can lose one’s salvation and regain it, which is different from deterministic, irrevocable decrees.

(15) Rom 11:32-33. The unsearchable ways of God are mentioned in the context of his mercy upon all. The hardening in Romans 9-10 should be understood in the context of salvation for all if they choose to believe, and hence the hardening is a result of not accepting that option. God allows them to go their own way into hardening, and is credited for that which He permits.

(16) Rom 12:2. It is possible to “test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” This is a long way from an inscrutable will, hidden in eternal secret decrees, past human understanding.

(17) Rom 13:8-10. Keeping the law is all summed up in loving one’s neighbor. If loving others is an evidence of salvation, then loving all mankind is an evidence of the Savior, too.

(18) Rom 14:10-12. When everyone bows before God in the eschatological judgment, each will give an account of himself/herself. There is no need to give an account if the decision for salvation/damnation depends upon divine will and not on human response. The fact of a judgment and the giving of rewards indicates that destiny is decided in human history, and not in some prior eternity.

(19) Rom 15:7-18. The Gentiles (e.g. Esau) have hope in Christ.

(20) Rom 16:25-26. There is a hidden mystery, but it is not secret decrees that remain inscrutable beyond human comprehension. Rather, “the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known” is that “all nations might believe and obey him,” which means all can be saved if they choose.

So throughout Romans salvation is based on faith, belief, choice—the use of human freedom to will, and not upon some divine will beyond human response.

10. The Mission of Jesus Christ

The mission of Jesus is encapsulated best in the favorite text for all Christians, “God so loved the world that He gave His Son” and “whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life.” Both parts are important (1) universal love from God, and (2) human response to this love for salvation. Those who confine the atonement to the elect do disservice to both parts of this text. For them it reads, “God so loved the elect, so the elect will be saved.” Let’s consider the system of Lewis Sperry Chafer, theologian for Dispensationalists.

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On this point he says, “God’s attitude toward the entire human family is one of infinite compassion and boundless sacrificial love. Though the two revealed facts—divine election and the universality of divine love—cannot be reconciled within the sphere of human understanding. . . .”¹⁰²

No wonder he says “divine election presents difficulties which are insoluble by the finite mind,”¹⁰³ speaks of the “complexity” of the doctrine, and says problems involved in the doctrine are “insuperable.”¹⁰⁴ No wonder Chafer says the invitation “‘Whosoever will may come’ . . . concerns those only who are regenerated and should never be presented to, or even discussed in the presence of the unsaved.”¹⁰⁵

There is a logical inconsistency, at this point, in Chafer’s system. He assumes that both universal love and particular election are revealed in Scripture, but then says this is beyond human comprehension. But is this the only intelligent option open to the biblical interpreter? How about taking John 3:16 at face value, as a divinely revealed definition of God’s universal mission in Christ, that He has given Christ for all mankind, but will not force His salvation on anyone, for He respects human free will, and so those who accept His salvation, and believe in Him, will be saved. If only Chafer, and other predestinarians, could accept the biblical revelation on the importance of human choice, that human free will is vital to the acceptance of divine salvation, then there would be no need to claim the doctrine as incomprehensible.

Look at what Chafer, rather than accepting human free will, says about God’s decree. “It is not a mere purpose to give salvation to those who may believe; it rather determines who will believe” (p. 172). This negates the “whosoever believeth in Him” of John 3:16. Thus, for Chafer, human destiny is “not only foreseen, but was divinely purposed” (p. 175). The emphasis here is upon the freedom of the divine free will which moves in upon human free will so that the human willing is swallowed up in the irresistible sovereign omnipotent will of God. Chafer also confuses election to mission with election to salvation,¹⁰⁶ so that the calling of Israel, Christ, and the Church are confused with the calling to salvation. He needed to think through election of the saved in the light of their crucial response to the universal love of God manifested in Christ’s life and death. He needed to realize that there are two equally necessary willings for human salvation: (1) divine will in providing the gift, and (2) human will in receiving the gift. It is not one without the other, as with Chafer, but both. Chafer’s appeal to the human incomprehensibility of the doctrine is shattered in the light of divine revelation through Christ’s mission.

¹⁰²Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1993), 165.

¹⁰³Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 168.

¹⁰⁵Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 172.

¹⁰⁶Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 167-168.

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Augustus Strong, in his *Systematic Theology*, claims that human free will is present in God's election, for "man influenced by divinely foreseen motives, may still be free, and the divine decrees, which simply render certain man's actions, may also be perfectly consistent with man's freedom."¹⁰⁷ However, the divine will and human will are related in such a way that the divine will swallows up the human will. Thus, predestination is defined as God's "purpose so to act that certain will believe and be saved," and is called election, and "his purpose so to act that certain will refuse to believe and be lost is called reprobation."¹⁰⁸ So God controls belief, and so genuine free will is scuttled. Thus, "No undecreed event can be foreseen," because "Only knowledge of that which is decreed is foreknowledge."¹⁰⁹ Thus, God's will has determined all future events, such as a believing response to His salvation or an unbelieving rejection of His salvation. Therefore, Strong jettisons the willing response of John 3:16.

Strong's system has a logical inconsistency in it, too. On the one hand he can speak of salvation of the elect "if he will only believe,"¹¹⁰ and rejection of "the sinner to his self-chosen rebellion,"¹¹¹ and "that freedom of will is necessary to virtue,"¹¹² and yet says "the initiative in human salvation" "belongs to God." "That any should be saved, is matter of pure grace, and those who are not included in this purpose of salvation suffer only the due reward of their deeds. There is, therefore, no injustice in God's election. We may better praise God that saves any, than charge him with injustice because he saves so few."¹¹³ This totally ignores John 3:16, with God's plan for universal salvation and its provision of human response to accept or reject.

In the traditionalist views on predestination Christ only died for the elect. This limited atonement view was the logical conclusion to God's alleged choosing of only the elect in eternity and rejecting the rest. Often the elect were understood as only few in number, while the majority of mankind were rejected. So it was for the few that He came to live and to die. Although the election and redemption, in these systems, was logically consistent in itself, it was premised on taking texts that spoke about mission (Romans 9) and applying them to election, and then in turn allowing election to confine Christ's mission. Thus Jacob is loved and Esau is hated (Rom 9:13) applies to Christ's relation to mankind, and the potter making vessels to honor and vessels to dishonor (Rom 9:21) applies to redemption.

This thinking moves from the unknown to the known, from the hidden God to God revealed in Christ, from secret decrees to a public mission of Christ,

¹⁰⁷Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Judson, 1949), 360.

¹⁰⁸Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 355.

¹⁰⁹Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 357.

¹¹⁰Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 789.

¹¹¹Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 790.

¹¹²Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 367.

¹¹³Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 785.

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from an incomprehensible purpose of a hidden God to a revelation of God among men in Christ. Since when has an epistemology (path of knowing) moved from the unknown to the known? Surely a reasonable epistemology will move in the opposite direction, from the known to the unknown. The doctrine of predestination, as classically taught, was thought out as if Christ had not come to reveal the Father's love for the world. Floundering on hidden decrees of an unknown God, beyond, above, and separate from Jesus Christ, has impacted adversely views of human destiny. Hence, if few are elected, then Christ not only lived and died for a few, but only a few will go to heaven. Because the majority were eternally rejected, then the majority lay outside Christ's life and death and will be forever outside His mercy in eternal hell. The utter awfulness of this eschatology demands a better epistemology, at least to see if Scripture supports a new approach.

Scripture is crystal clear that God the Father loves the world, and not just the elect, and that He sent His Son to be the redeemer of all mankind (John 3:16-17). We are not speaking here of a simplistic universalism that says all will be saved. There is no universalism when it comes to eschatological destiny. God's deference to creaturely freedom not only allowed the fall, but also allows the final rejection of salvation. But that does not negate the fact that the Trinity has love for all mankind. The mission of Christ was universal, even if the response to it has never been universal. It is important to keep these two in mind. The fact that Christ's mission was universal even though human response to the mission is not universal demonstrates that God does not predetermine humans against their will and indicates that humans use their free will to accept or reject God's universal mission.

Far from secret decrees in eternity to save a few and damn the rest, Christ's mission in human history is described as God "reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Cor 5:19), for "the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). Limited atonement is confined to secret decrees that never were made. Christ came to earth to manifest what the decrees really were. Christ came for a world, and not just for the elect. His atonement was unlimited. Thus, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2), that "he might taste death for everyone" (Heb 2:9). The hidden decrees are ripped open and found to be other than reported. Christ came to reveal what His Father is like (John 14:9). His love for the whole world is but the manifestation of the Father's love for the whole world. And that love has always been from eternity, and this is why Jesus is called the "Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev 13:8).

It is exceedingly important not to reject the first chapters of Genesis as a myth (Bultmann) or a saga (Barth). For in the fall of Adam and Eve (Gen 3) there is a vital contribution to this topic. Eve chose to side with the crafty serpent rather than with God. This open rebellion, thinking God was unjust because allegedly keeping something back from her, is not only an insight into the ques-

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tion about God before the universe, but the questioning itself was the result of human free will. Granted that Adam and Eve were without sin, and so had that capacity. But to take away the freedom to choose from sinners would be cause enough for them to say God is unjust—particularly since they have a predisposition to sin, and there is an enemy tempting them. More than ever they need the ability to choose. This does not suggest they can save themselves, or have merit through choosing aright, or can do the choosing without divine help. Christ's words are still true, "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). But it is also true that Christ is "the true light which enlightens every man coming into the world" (John 1:9).¹¹⁴

"Every man" (*panta anthropon*) is present for either translation of this verse. Either Christ comes as the Light (in His incarnation) for every man, or He comes as light, through the Spirit, to every man who comes into the world. C. H. Dodd believes both are intended.¹¹⁵ Leon Morris offers a perceptive insight, "It is common teaching of the New Testament writers that God has revealed something of Himself to all men (Rom. 1:20), sufficient at least for them to be blameworthy when they take the wrong way instead of the right way. John attributes this general illumination to the activity of the Word."¹¹⁶ As Christ draws people, illumines them, they have the ability to choose. The enlightening of humans rejects a confinement of this to the elect, and enlightening rejects irresistible grace, for not all respond positively to the enlightenment.

Here we have a radical difference from traditional predestinarian views. Rather than God being the one who elects or rejects, it is the human response to His universal enlightening that separates the elected and the rejected. This change is vital, for if God does all the electing and rejecting, then humans have no part in choosing and hence would be unable to admit, before the universe, that God is just in giving them the sentence they have chosen for themselves. So it is mandatory not merely for salvation, but also for the resolution of the cosmic controversy, that humans have the ability to choose. Humans must have free will to weigh the evidence in the cosmic controversy and admit that God is right and they are wrong.

¹¹⁴As Henry Alford says, "The construction of this verse has been much disputed" *The Greek Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1968), vol. 1, 683. For a summary of the debate see W. Robertson Nicholls, *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), vol. 1, 686-687. The grammatical construction allows either the verb to refer to Christ coming into the world, or to human coming into the world. The Vulgate and Authorized Versions follow the first, the Revised Version follows the second. Either way the universal focus is intact. Whether Christ comes for everyone who enters the world, or whether Christ comes to everyone who enters the world. I believe both are legitimate, for His coming as a light for everyone would be meaningless if He does not follow through, via the Holy Spirit, to come as the light to everyone coming into the world. So Christ is the universal light because He enlightens universally.

¹¹⁵C. H. Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (London, UK: Cambridge, 1953), 284.

¹¹⁶Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), *John*, 95.

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On the question of salvation being a choice that can be accepted or rejected by humans, we are faced with the other reason why human free will is vital. If human destiny is based upon God's electing and rejecting, then the whole interim of sin in the troubled universe is a waste of time and a horrible heartache, for if God arbitrarily chooses human destiny, then why did He not choose to disallow sin, so that human destiny could have been decided much earlier? Why come in later and do what could have been done when it really counted? The fact that He didn't would be cause enough to decide that God is unjust. Yet, because God does the electing and reprobating, humans would arbitrarily choose God as just because they would be predestined to make that choice. On this basis the whole long cosmic controversy would be pointless. It would be a sham, not really a battle between two sides claiming the choice of each human.

Rather than secret decrees, beyond human comprehension, of a hidden God beyond and behind Christ, Scripture speaks of "the mystery of godliness" as Christ who "appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (1 Tim 3:16). This "mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God," is "that all nations might believe and obey him" (Rom 16:25-26). It was precisely God's universal love, which Israel failed to understand, that Christ revealed. The secret is not predestination of the elect and damnation of the reprobate for God's glory. No. Paul says, "we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began" (1 Cor 2:7). Not His glory, but human glory—decreed in eternity—before time began. Paul said, "None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:8). They misunderstood because they failed to understand the mission of Christ. The Calvinistic limited atonement misunderstands His mission, too.

When we begin with Christ's mission on earth and see why He came and how extensive was His goal, then we can proceed on the basis of a safe revelation of the God who sent Him on that mission. "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16). That is clear. Not the elect, but the world. There is no limit to His love. So His love is universal. In coming, Jesus said, "I have come to do your will, O God" (Ps 40:6-8; Heb 10:7). Jesus came to manifest God's universal love. He also loved all mankind. So He could say, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). No hidden God here. Here is God revealed. Here is a known God—One who loved the world. This radically calls in question a hidden God, past understanding, who has secret decrees that elect a few. Such is a non-Christian view, because it looks behind Christ to some eternal hiddenness and mystery, rather than going to His own revelation of God in His mission for a world.

"Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The rest of the text shows that this universal love of God for man-

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kind is not predetermined on every human. The difference between the two destinies before mankind is not based on divine election/rejection, but on human choice. Human belief determines human destiny. Acceptance is necessary or the gift is never received. Christ's mission, therefore, was a calling of humans to Himself. "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt 11:28-29).

Jesus never talked about a predetermined elect that His Father had willed to save while passing by the rest. This was the error of Israel. They confused their call to mission with a confined election to salvation. They claimed their eternal destiny was based upon Abraham being their Father (Matt 3:7-12). "'If you were Abraham's children,' said Jesus, 'then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, and man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does'" (John 8:39-40). "Abraham believed God. And it was credited to him as righteousness" (Rom 4:3). As such, "he is the father of all who believe" (Rom 4:11). Abraham was chosen for mission, to become Israel through His grandson Jacob and be used as an avenue for God to reach the world. "Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations" (Rom 4:18).

"Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written, 'I have made you a father of many nations'" (Rom 4:16-17). In other words, connection with Abraham—the chosen one in mission—does not save. Belief in Christ alone saves, and that is open to anyone, irrespective of national origin. Destiny is not according to divine decrees. Christ's mission for a world indicates that God's will is to save everyone. But, because God creates humans to think, to will, and to choose, His mission in Christ was to make the call, for "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36).

There it is: belief or rejection—accepting Christ (electing Him as Savior) or rejecting Him as Savior. This opens up the fact that there is both an objective and a subjective side to a Christological way of looking at human destiny. Objectively Christ came for a world. He elected all and rejected none. Subjectively, humans elect Him as Savior or reject Him as Savior. As far as human destiny is concerned, there would be no future hope without the fact that God and Christ have elected all mankind, yet human destiny is also finally dependent upon the election/rejection of Jesus Christ by humans. God has elected Christ to save everyone. But humans elect or reject Christ, and so confine the realization of His atonement for mankind. Objectively the atonement is unlimited. Subjectively its realization in human history is limited. For human destiny is equally dependent on both God's choosing, and humans choice.

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Norman Geisler and Ron Brooks say, “Knowing what men *will* do with their freedom is not the same as ordaining what they *must* do against their free choice. God’s knowledge is not necessarily incompatible with free will. There is no problem in saying that God created men with free will so that they could return His love, even though He knows that some will not make that decision. God is responsible for the fact of freedom, but men are responsible for the acts of freedom. In His knowledge, God might even persuade men to make certain decisions, but there is no reason to suppose that He coerces any decision so as to destroy freedom. He works persuasively, but not coercively.”¹¹⁷

Questions about Justice

William G. MacDonald tells of a person who believes God’s will in predestination is inscrutable. His was the strangest statement I have ever heard on this subject. “‘I will love God always,’ he said, ‘even if it should turn out in the end that his eternal decree was to send me forever to hell.’”¹¹⁸ How could someone really love God if He has arbitrarily decreed that he be lost, not given him a chance for salvation, and rejected him merely on the whim of God’s own pleasure? How could undeserved torture ever call forth a loving response? Such a love of one’s enemy has only been seen in the way Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34) as He hung on Calvary amidst the jeers and taunts of those who were responsible for putting Him there. That kind of love is divine. But the fact that the person would be in hell would suggest that it is not that kind of love that possesses him. Such love would not be normal for a sinner condemned to eternal torment—unless God’s divine will controls his will. That would be the logical extreme of predestination.

1. Irresistible Grace

On the other hand, predestination says irresistible grace is what determines humans for heaven. Does irresistible grace and the will of God control human willing even in heaven? If human free will has not been given its proper place in human history, is it logical to assume that the same prevails in human destiny. On that basis, no one saved could freely respond to the question of God’s justice. If grace is irresistible, it could be argued that those irresistibly carried along by grace have no choice but to concur with God. If that were true, even though they say He is just, the process to get them to say this would be unjust.

If this is true about the elect, what about the reprobate? Augustine and Luther would agree with Calvin that in sin-history man’s “image of God” is “ef-

¹¹⁷Norman Geisler and Ron Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidences* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1989), 32.

¹¹⁸William G. MacDonald in Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 225.

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faced,” not just marred.¹¹⁹ This “total depravity” robs the reprobate of free will and denies them the ability to concur with God’s justice in the final eschatological judgment. It might be assumed easier for the elect to bow the knee, saying “God is just,” than for the reprobate. Yet the concurrence of the reprobate with God’s decisions must also take place, for the prophecy is that “every knee will bow” (Isa 45:23–24; cf. Ps 145:9–10; Rom 14:10; Rev 5:13; 15:3–4; 19:1–2), redeemed and reprobate. It will be unanimous. Neither can ignore the overwhelming manifestation of God’s justice. But if the reprobate have no free will, then the largest group of created beings cannot bow the knee before God’s justice, and hence the controversy remains unresolved.

2. The Divine Command Theory of Ethics

The Divine Command theory of ethics says that anything God commands is right because it is God who commands it. This means that a command is not right in itself, right because it is right, but only right because of who commands it. As Jerry L. Walls put it, “if God commanded us to do something that seemed to us clearly wrong, it would be wrong not to obey.”¹²⁰ This makes redundant human ability to choose between right and wrong, because right is right and wrong is wrong.

One can see the parallel between the Divine Command theory and the theory of predestination as usually taught. It is not good enough to assume that secretive decrees issued by an unknown God are right because He is alleged to be the one issuing them. Given a cosmic controversy, with God’s justice being questioned by nearly all who have fallen, this would be a very unwise approach for God to take. Even Luther admits that one day, “the ‘light of glory’ will dispel the seeming injustices of God’s predestination”¹²¹ Augustus Strong says, “only the higher knowledge of the future state will furnish the answers.”¹²² It is not good enough to appeal to some future understanding that causes present understanding to accept what obviously is unjust. A present injustice (like arbitrary secret decrees without reference to human free will) does not become just when we see the God who issued it, any more than a divine command to do what is wrong will somehow become right when we see the God who commanded it.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) says, “The decrees of God are his eternal purpose according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass.”¹²³ In the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) it says about the reprobate, “The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will,

¹¹⁹John Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 214 (2.1.5).

¹²⁰Jerry L. Walls, in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 261.

¹²¹Comment on Luther’s position by Jerry L. Walls in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 264.

¹²²Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 366.

¹²³Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 677.

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whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sins, to the praise of his glorious justice.”¹²⁴ When you put these two together, then “glorious justice” is defined by a personal glory decision. No person is glorified who withholds mercy when he could give it. Such is injustice, and not “glorious justice.”

Scripture gives a totally different picture. When facing death for all mankind, Jesus prayed “Father the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you” (John 17:1). It is at Calvary, within human history, that the “glorious justice” of God was revealed. For, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). It is here that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). He became the reprobate in order to save all reprobates who will accept. He took the place of every human, that “whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). This is His glorious mercy.

His glorious justice was paying the price for human sin, taking the punishment as He plunged into the Godforsakenness of the lost (Matt 27:46). “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each one of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:5-6). The idea of glorious justice being attached to not giving mercy, and so damning, is a view that is contrary to the cross. It is a view that does not allow what took place at Calvary to have interpretive value on matters of predestination. It is a sub-Christian view, because it fails to see the true “glorious justice” of God in His total self-giving for all mankind, rather than being locked into some selfish motive of good pleasure that refuses to be merciful. Justice and mercy met at Calvary: justice because Christ atoned for all mankind, mercy because this atonement was offered to whoever will accept it. Even at Calvary God does not force His will on the wills of humans. Even though the salvation of all may seem good, as universalists believe, yet to take those to heaven who never chose Christ would be to take people to an experience for which they are unfitted. To be forced into heaven against one’s will would in fact be hell to them.

In the relativism of postmodernity there are no absolutes. Something is not right because it is right in itself. It is only right in the eyes of the beholder, or the doer. “If it feels right do it!” If God issued secret, arbitrary decrees because they felt right—it was His good pleasure, for His own glory—then that is what people will see when they see Him. Such a God is not the Father who loved the world—for its sake, not His—and gave His only Son to come on a dangerous journey to redeem it at any cost to Himself. This totally unselfish outgoing of

¹²⁴Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 610 (3.7).

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the Godhead to save a rebel race has no connection to a God who merely issues decrees for His own good pleasure, irrespective of whether it is perceived just or not.

In commenting on the Divine Command Theory, Jerry Walls rightly said, “The theory of predestination espoused by Luther and Calvin has the same sort of problem. It requires us to believe God is right in unconditionally damning whomever he will, even though this deeply offends our sense of justice.”¹²⁵

3. God’s Justice Beyond Human Comprehension

The concept of God’s justice being on trial ever since Lucifer’s rebellion, of God’s maligned justice being the central issue in the cosmic controversy, never enters the debates on predestination. Yet it is the crucial biblical worldview that forms the broadest context within which predestination texts need to be interpreted correctly. So often in the debates God is incomprehensible, so that it is impossible to fathom Him, and hence, appeal is made to Him as One far beyond human comprehension. Once one accepts this view, then it is hopeless to argue that human beings can freely yield to His justice. It is assumed that the evidence for His justice is not revealed. As Jerry L. Walls says, commenting on Luther’s position, “Since God is inaccessible to human understanding, it is inevitable that his justice eludes our grasp.”¹²⁶

It is this elusive justice which nags at human reasoning. No wonder, in traditional predestinarian views, it is the damning of the reprobate that is dubbed as God’s justice, the very opposite of what normal human reasoning would conclude.

4. Problem of Evil

We have already noted how the famous philosopher Alvin Plantinga dealt with the problem of evil, believing that it is not inconsistent for an all loving, all powerful God to create a world with the potential of evil. In this section we will broaden the input by considering what others have said about this problem, and consider the eschatological implications.

Many atheists believe the problem of evil is the primary reason for unbelief in a God who is omnipotent and loving. If He allowed evil when He need not have done so, where is His love? If He couldn’t stop it, where is His power? In protology, we confine ourselves to the fact of evil and ask what the presence of evil says about the justice (not power or love) of God. If God permitted evil, is He just?

Supralapsarians place the divine decrees before creation of the good and the presence of evil, and God is said to ordain all things. So He ordained evil even as He ordained the good. So is He just? As noted above, Augustine speaks of

¹²⁵Jerry L. Walls, in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 265.

¹²⁶Jerry L. Walls, in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 263.

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evil as the *privatio boni*, or deprivation of the good. If God has omniscience and knows the future fully, then He knew that evil would come into the universe. If He still went ahead and created angels and humans, knowing they would sin, does He not have some responsibility for evil? John Hick said it is “hard to clear God from ultimate responsibility for the existence of sin, in view of the fact that He chose to create a being whom He foresaw would, if He created him, freely sin.”¹²⁷

Even though classical predestination has God ordaining evil in His eternal decrees, exponents separate the ordaining of evil from the personal responsibility of those who sin. It is a logical inconsistency in their systems, for God cannot be said to ordain that for which He is not responsible. Some writers have used the word “permit” rather than ordain, and I concur that God’s permissive will is involved in the presence of evil. But if evil is present due to God’s permissive will, then the sinner must have free will to choose evil. Again, the presence of divine permissive will and absence of human free will is not consistent. The free will to sin was exercised by angels when they sinned in heaven (Rev 12:7-8), and by Adam and Eve in their fall (Gen 3:1-19). Permissive divine will and angelic and human free will continue to be present throughout the history of sin.

For one day, all the lost—angels and humans—will see that their lives were a series of free will choices that locked them into their destiny. The fact of their being lost is no fault of God, but purely their own choice. That choice was not a singular choice made at the beginning of their journey, but a habit of choosing throughout life until they were unchangeable, and hence locked into their own future by their own choices. God merely permitted them the freedom to make these choices along the way. Only then, on that day, will they admit that God is just and that their awful destiny is their own responsibility, and theirs alone. William Craig is right that lost persons “cannot complain of injustice on God’s part.” For He provided salvation for all, and “the only reason they are not predestined is that they freely ignore or reject the divine helps that God provides. Their damnation is therefore entirely their own fault.”¹²⁸ God offers all mankind the same destiny. The fact that so many will not receive it is because they refused to receive it. They will know one day that they were the ones who turned it down, because they turned Christ down.

God would have it no other way, for He wants created beings to be free and to enjoy Him in perfect freedom. Free will is a component not lost through the fall. At the level of living, everyone knows they have the freedom to choose on a daily basis. For those who get to heaven, it is true that such choosing does not earn salvation or merit their entrance there, but it is indispensable in the process of preparation to receive the gift of eternal life. Only then will persons be free throughout eternity.

¹²⁷John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 69.

¹²⁸William L. Craig, in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 156.

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But why the presence of evil? Could God have made a different world with different people? The answer is yes. But in His infinite foreknowledge, He made the best of all possible worlds, a world where free choice is both a blessing, when used rightly, and a curse, when used wrongly. Evil was inevitable in such a world, but evil must not be considered merely according to its present contribution. In endless eternity, the presence of evil is just a blip on the screen, a small pause. We must look at the presence of evil within the context of eternity, not just in time. From the breadth of eternity it will be seen that the free will world, in spite of evil, was the best world, for even the entrance of evil has brought benefits.

Evil entered the universe as a tragic rebellion with widespread repercussions throughout the cosmos. Angels and humans entered into rebellion against their Creator. This is the original villain and hero story, Satan and Christ. Satan has brought unspeakable heartache into the universe. He did not do this by secret, hidden, and inscrutable decrees. He is a creature gone crazy, doing the unspeakable, rebelling against the One who gave him life, for all things were created by God the Father through His Son (John 1:1-2; Col 1:15-16; Heb 1:1-3). From the beginning of the rebellion he has appealed to the free will of angels and humans, and he continues to do so in his quest to take over as many as he can. Clearly Satan is responsible for evil, not God. God merely permitted evil. But why did He permit it? Thomas Aquinas says, “God allows evils to happen in order to bring a great good therefrom. . . .”¹²⁹ What a marvelous insight! Alvin Platinga speaks in a similar manner. “God permits evil because he can achieve a world he sees as better by permitting evil than by preventing it.”¹³⁰

Think of it. Evil was permitted, but salvation was planned. God was ready for the eventuality. He knew free will would be used wrongly and planned from eternity to save the free willers from the results of their free willing. As soon as there was sin, there was a Savior. God the Father “chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. . . .” (Eph 1:4-5). Hence redemption came through “the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world. . . .” (1 Pet 1:19-20). So Christ is spoken of as “the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world” (Rev 13:8). This is why in the eschatological separation of the saved from the lost at the second advent of Christ, He will say to the saved, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (Matt 25:34).

God was not caught by surprise. He planned for the terrible eventuality of evil. He laid the plan in eternity before the creation of the world. In this sense

¹²⁹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 4, 2023 (3.1.3).

¹³⁰Alvin Platinga in *Alvin Platinga*, eds. James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, 35.

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salvation's plan preceded creation in the mind of God. He planned to make rebels His sons and daughters. They would become what they had not been—evil. But they would also become what they had not been—sons and daughters of God. This is an incredible difference, from created beings to sons and daughters of their Creator and King! Here is the good that has come out of evil. This is what God knew about in His foreknowledge. This is why foreknowledge is so much more important in protology than preordination. He knew what would happen. He did not make it happen. He has a plan, but the plan does not violate creaturely free will.

The plan of redemption has been known from eternity. Then came the moment for Christ to enter planet earth, for the Creator to become a creature, for the eternal One to enter time, for God to become the God-man. "Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God'" (Heb 10:7). It was the Father's will to save, and it was Christ's will to be the Savior. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17). What an utterly remarkable response to human rebellion! God poured out all heaven in the gift of His Son. He could give nothing better or more. He gave everything. His will served His love in reaching out to save a world.

In the incarnation God took up humanity and assumed it within His very divine being through Mary. In joining a rebel race with the royal Creator, God and man were united in the person of the Son. In His very being the gulf gouged through human rebellion was bridged. In Him God and man were once more at-one-ment. This is one side of the enormous and expensive atonement plan for all mankind. The uniting of humanity to divinity has raised the human race far above the level of its pristine state before the fall. At that time they were merely created beings. Although perfect and loyal, they were still a great distance from their eternal Creator. Even before the fall there was an infinite qualitative distinction between God and man, to use the words of Soren Kierkegaard. The incarnation bridged that gulf and elevated the human race as nothing else could.

The redeemed will always worship God as Creator, Redeemer, and King, but always have the privilege of being sons and daughter in the Trinitarian family. This is why God will come to this world and make His dwelling place with mankind (Rev 21:1-3). Heaven will be depopulated as all come to the earth made new. Throughout eternity the closeness of the redeemed with their Redeemer will forever call forth gratitude and praise. As the Christ's condescension in becoming a man in sinful history and dying for rebels to give them redemption slowly sinks into their minds, the hearts of the redeemed will thrill with unspeakable amazement. This amazement will deepen as His love is experienced and understood.

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All will then see that the presence of evil in the universe has brought greater good than if sin had never entered. The fact that God was willing to become a human and to suffer so much in life and death to save humans will bring all created beings—fallen and unfallen—closer to God than their original state could have afforded. They will comprehend the depths of His love as only the incarnational life and death of Jesus Christ could reveal. In redemption they behold the heart of the Redeemer, and in the Redeemer they behold the love of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The eschatological implications have become obvious. Throughout eternity none of the redeemed will question why evil was permitted. They will realize that their lot is far better because it did exist. Their very existence is evidence that God is just.

The Most Important Attribute of God

It follows, from what we said above, that the supreme attribute that defines God is love. John saw it. “God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. . . . And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world . . . God is love” (1 John 4:8-9, 14,16). “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16), and “the fruit of the Spirit [of God] is love, joy , peace, patience, kindness, goodness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). The other attributes listed are what constitute love.

From the biblical data looked at in this chapter, it is clear that God loves the world, Christ came for the world, and the Holy Spirit brings the ascended Christ as the light to everyone coming into the world (John 1:9). It is God’s love that brought Him to Calvary. It is His love that woos human minds and brings them to decide to accept His salvation. It is this eternal love that should have had center place in discussing God’s relationship to a lost world. But, in its place, the will of God has held center place, and into that will has been read data taken from His choices for mission (Jacob, not Esau; vessels to honor and dishonor), as if they were choices for election/reprobation. It has been a sorry wrong road. It has radically called in question God’s unsurpassable love and made shipwreck of millions who could not comprehend such unbelievable child abuse—God withholding salvation from most of His children and then throwing them away to eternal hell!

It is time to go back to Calvary and see there revealed the incomprehensible love of God. It is the depths of that love that defy human understanding, and not some eternal predestination. For our destiny was not made in eternity but at Calvary. That was the unparalleled eschatological event that determines all human destiny. Calvary is a baring of God’s love that defies every lesser god, be it heathen or sovereign. The blazing revelation of God’s love at the cross shatters any idea of a hidden god, choosing a few and passing by most. Calvary shouts out loud and clear, “For God so loved the world!” Calvary is God’s statement

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about predestination. It will have no other rivals. Given a cosmic controversy, one expects many rivals, the worst of which attempt to change what took place there. To hide the greatest revelation and then appeal to a hidden God's decrees in eternity, cut off from any connection to Calvary, does despite to the cross. Has this not happened, even though unwittingly, and perhaps with the best of intentions? Calvary is no country club ticket for members only. Calvary impacts the world. Calvary impacts the universe. For Calvary says more about God than anything else, and so Calvary is the most important evidence about God in the cosmic controversy. No wonder Satan and his fiends strive to keep that vision away from human minds.

There "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). Here "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Cor 5:19). Even the Old Testament prophets understood. "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:4-6).

Calvary was an eschatological event. It was God's determinative victory over Satan and his rebels. It decided their destiny (Rev 12:9-1). Christ's victory at the cross was the completion of a life that revealed what God is really like (John 14:9). At Calvary the universe saw that God was willing to die for those who rebelled against Him. They gazed into the depths of His justice. He the Sinless One (cf. John 13:2) took the place of sinners. Satan's lie about God being unjust was exposed. By contrast they saw who worked behind the scenes to crucify Christ. Satan had dogged His footsteps throughout life to get Him to sin and come under his control. He fiendishly worked through Jewish leaders, Roman authority, and the rabble to crucify Him. On Calvary redemption and rebellion met head on. Christ died for sinners. Satan crucified the Sinless One. What a stark contrast. Calvary was the revelation of God and of Satan. Not God, but Satan was exposed as unjust at Calvary. The universe watched and understood. And in that double revelation at Calvary, Christ answered the charge in the cosmic controversy.

Calvary was also God's judgment of sin. There Christ tasted "death for everyone" (Heb 2:9). There He was judged for the sins of all in their place (cf. 2 Cor 5:21). Christ was the Substitute for mankind (John 3:16-17). There, "the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6). Belief in and acceptance of that sacrifice determines destiny. Calvary is the greatest revelation to the universe that God had one destiny in mind for all mankind. He died to save all. Calvary shatters the myth of a hidden eternal will of God that chooses only a few and passes by the rest. For what God is in His revelation at the cross He is antecedently from eternity. From eternity God loved the world. From eternity

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He willed to save the human race. Calvary is the ultimate manifestation of His eternal will and love for all mankind. The Augustinian-Lutheran-Calvinistic predestinarian views do not belong to the Christ who hangs on the cross.

The Final Judgment

Eschatology moves toward the Final Judgment (Rev 20:11-15) and the new creation (Rev 21-22). Why is there a need for a Final Judgment if God has predetermined human destiny? If He knows from eternity who are the elect and who the reprobate, and if He has known this through predetermining the outcome, and if this is a part of His incomprehensible plan that humans should not pry into, then why does He even bother with a Final Judgment?

Here is a logical inconsistency in predestinarian theology. For if one merely accepts that God is just, not questioning the fact, even calling reprobation to eternal hell torment just, as salvation is merciful, then on these grounds one would not expect or need a Final Judgment. For if one accepts what God does in hidden decrees of election/reprobation as appropriate because He is God and has a right to do what He pleases with His created beings, then that same logic should be appropriate for the final destiny of these two groups, without the need of a judgment.

On the other hand, if it is deemed necessary to have a Final Judgment (as Scripture teaches), then there must be more to the importance of human destiny than a mere faith in a predetermining God who is just. If it is necessary for God to allow all created beings to know something about their destiny, then it would appear that He is not above human questioning in this matter, so that all appeal to His inscrutable decrees being off limits to human understanding is inappropriate. For after all, it is these inscrutable decrees that will be actualized in the Final Judgment.

As Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest put it, "If God's will prevails in the world, how could a person justly be judged for his actions?"¹³¹ James D. G. Dunn observes, "The trouble with such a strong view of election and rejection without reference to subsequent deeds and misdeeds is that it makes God's judgments on these deeds and misdeeds seem unfair. 'If he hardens whom he will, why does he find fault? For who has resisted his will?' The two perspectives on human life from opposite ends of the time scale (election and judgment) seem to conflict."¹³²

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¹³¹Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), vol. 1, 293.

¹³²James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans 9-16* (Dallas, TX: Word, 198), vol. 38b, 564.

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