

GOD'S GRACE IN REDEMPTION IS LIMITED AND CONDITIONAL

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OUTLINE

Thesis: The Grace of God in Redemption must be limited and conditional, since this best fits with theological and Scriptural evidence.

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I. The Unorthodoxy of Unlimited/Unconditional Redemptive Grace

At face value, “unlimited and unconditional” grace sounds appealing. Aesthetically, these words are appealing to Western “freedom-worshipping” culture, and are commonly used to describe attributes of God – especially His love, His presence, and His knowledge.¹ Upon a closer examination, however, the idea of a God who offers an unconditional redemption outside of any limitations is so far removed from Christianity that it is, in fact, not Christianity at all!

Even secular sources recognize that God’s redemptive grace is not unlimitedly poured out on everyone, without conditions. Webster’s New World Dictionary defines a Christian as, “a person professing belief in Jesus as the Christ, or in the religion based on the teachings of Jesus.”² At the very least, then, Christianity must be limited to holding some form of belief in the central tenets of Christianity, and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. However unpopular it may be, Christianity is, at its core, an exclusive religion. The idea of Christ being the ‘narrow gate’ (Matt 7:13-14) which is the sole means (John 14:6) of accessing God’s redemption is the essence of the Gospel – if anyone strays from this, “let him be anathema!” (Gal 1:8)

There is really no discussion among evangelicals³ on the unorthodoxy of unlimited/unconditional grace.⁴ There has been a significant amount of discussion, however, between two opposing camps – those that believe in limited/unconditional grace (usually called the “Calvinist” camp), and those who believe in unlimited/conditional grace (the “Armenian” camp). The answer to this debate probably lies in the direction of a mediating position – limited/conditional grace (the Molinist camp).

¹ Although there are some who would place limits on this, as will be seen.

² Ed. Victoria Neufeldt, David B. Guralnik, Webster’s New World college dictionary, (New York, NY; Macmillan General Reference), 249.

³ I recognize some circularity of thought in this statement; to believe that redemption is unlimited and unconditional is really stepping outside of evangelicalism. Therefore, there could never be discussion among evangelicals on this issue, since anyone who disagrees would not be, in the technical sense, an evangelical!

⁴ For the purposes of this essay, let “grace”, unless otherwise noted, be understood as pertaining primarily to redemption.

II. “Calvinism” – Limited/Unconditional Redemptive Grace

A. Augustinianism (Limited “Places”; Contingent on Grace and Works)

The teaching of Augustine, which is still held to be the belief of the Catholic church,⁵ is that God’s grace is limited to, “those who are *predestinated* to the kingdom of God.”⁶ Augustine explains that after the fall of some of the angels, a void was left in heaven, which God decided to fill with regenerated humans. He writes that, “although [mankind] had perished as a whole through sins and punishments...God had determined that a portion of it would be restored and would fill up the loss which that diabolical disaster had caused in the angelic society.”⁷ In one book, (possibly earlier in his career) Augustine seems hopeful that the number of elect would suffice for – *if not exceed* – the number of fallen angels.⁸ Elsewhere, however, he writes that this number, “is so certain that one can neither be added to them nor taken from them.”⁹ For Augustine, then, grace is limited to a select few; does that mean that it must also be unconditional?

This question is more complex than immediately apparent. For many, Augustine’s *magnum opus* was a polemic against Pelagius,¹⁰ in which he soundly condemns the notion that grace is based on some work or attribute of the free-will, since grace, “is absolutely no grace if it is given according to our merits.”¹¹ He even seems to imply that grace is given without free-will at all, since, “they [the elect] are elected because they were called according to the purpose—the

⁵ Although some developments have occurred. See Molinism, explored below.

⁶ St. Aurelius Augustinus, *Retractations, Book II. Chapter 39 [XIII.]—The Number of the Predestinated is Certain and Defined*, [document on-line]; available from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1513.htm>; Internet; accessed 29 February 2007. *Italics added.*

⁷ St. Aurelius Augustinus, *The Replacement of the Fallen Angels by Elect Men*, [document on-line]; available from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1513.htm>; Internet; accessed 2 March 2007.

⁸ “Thus the heavenly Jerusalem, our mother and the commonwealth of God, shall not be defrauded of her full quota of citizens, but perhaps will rule over an even larger number.” *Ibid.*

⁹ St. Aurelius Augustinus, *Retractations, Book II. Chapter 39 [XIII.]—The Number of the Predestinated is Certain and Defined*.

¹⁰ The heretic that taught that original sin left only a bad example for humanity, allowing man to reach God unaided.

¹¹ St. Aurelius Augustinus, *On the Predestination of the Saints, Book I. Chapter 1*. [document on-line]; available from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1513.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 March 2007.

purpose, however, *not their own, but God's.*”¹² Even more revealing, Augustine writes, “Let us, then, understand the calling whereby they become elected – not those who are elected because they have believed, but who are elected that they may believe.”¹³ For Luther, Calvin, and other Calvinists, Augustine’s writing against Pelagius conclusively proved that his grace was unconditional. For this reason, Augustine has often been called the fore-runner of Calvinism.¹⁴

All of Augustine’s writings were not against Pelagius, however. Critics of Calvinism would be encouraged to read Augustine’s exhortations against fatalism and antinomianism. He writes strongly against the idea that baptism, church attendance, etc. are sufficient to admit an unrepentant sinner into heaven, after being “punished by fire, prolonged in proportion to their sins, but still not eternal,”¹⁵ (a.k.a, after a time in Purgatory). Rather, since, “if faith works evil and not good, then without doubt, according to the apostle James ‘it is dead in itself.’”¹⁶ Saving faith, then, must be followed by good works.

Augustine goes farther than this, however. Further to proving that saving faith was genuine, continuing faithfulness also seems to ensure salvation. Augustine writes that it is possible to be genuinely converted, and then fall away completely, so as to miss entirely the blessings of the elect; “For they may be said to be called but not chosen, because they are not called according to the purpose.”¹⁷ Although Augustine was emphatic that it was only by God’s grace that one could do so, he strongly exhorted the believer to busy themselves with good works, and especially mercy, since, “in those in whom are found the good works of mercy, judgment shall be executed with mercy; and thus even that mercy itself shall be returned *to the merits of*

¹² Ibid., *Italics added.*

¹³ Augustine, *The Enchiridion*, in Augustine, *Basic Writings*, 1:677 (chap. 32), in R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe*.

¹⁴ R.C. Sproul, for example, sees Calvinism almost as a restatement of Augustinianism (Sproul, 105).

¹⁵ St. Aurelius Augustinus, *Chapter 18, Faith and Works*, [document on-line]; available from <http://www.godrules.net/library/augustine/280augustine18.htm>; Internet; accessed 3 March 2007.

¹⁶ St. Aurelius Augustinus, *Chapter 18, Faith and Works*.

¹⁷ St. Aurelius Augustinus, *Retractions, Book II. Chapter 39 [XIII.]—The Number of the Predestinated is Certain and Defined.*

good works.”¹⁸ Augustine writes from Revelations 3:11 (“I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown”) that believers should keep in mind the limitations of heaven, and work hard at their salvation, since they may lose their place to another believer!¹⁹

It is clear that Augustine’s grace is limited to the elect, but whether it is unconditional or conditional is another question. Paradoxically, it almost seems that it is both. It is impossible to reach to God except by means of His calling – but one may resist or cooperate with this calling.

B. Calvinism (Limited “Persons”, Unconditionally Elected)

Writing over a millennia after Augustine, Calvin wrote probably the most important systematic theology of the Reformation, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Although Calvin became known as the founder of “limited, unconditional grace,” some of the final work on this position seems to have been done by his successor, Theodore Beza. According to Dr. Vic Reasoner, Beza, “made the Calvinistic position more rigid and . . . taught supralapsarianism - that the decrees of election and damnation came prior to the decree to create man.”²⁰ Building on Beza, Calvinism was eventually enunciated (in reaction against Arminianism, explored below) in the “Five Points of Calvinism.”

These points state that; the post-fall man is (1) totally depraved, and unable to reach God on his own. Thus it is only by God’s divine intervention that certain people are selected before time, in (2) unconditional election to be drawn up to Him (in a process as completely passive as death, or birth²¹), and others are left to die in their sins. This leads to (3) limited atonement, the process whereby the sins of only the elect – not of all mankind – are taken away. The entire

¹⁸ St. Aurelius Augustinus, *Even in Judgment God’s Mercy will be Necessary for Us, Chapter 41* . [document on-line]; available from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1513.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 March 2007. *Italics added.*

¹⁹ St. Aurelius Augustinus, *Retractions, Book II. Chapter 39 [XIII.]—The Number of the Predestinated is Certain and Defined.*

²⁰ Dr. Vic Reasoner, *Arminius: The Scapegoat of Calvinism*, [document on-line]; Available from <http://www.imarc.cc/esecurity/arminius.html>; Internet; Accessed 5 March, 2007.

²¹ See Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved By Grace*, (Grand Rapids, MI: 1989), 91.

process is overshadowed by the principle of (4) irresistible grace, which asserts that God's sovereignty will eventually over-rule the sinful will of the elect, to make them turn to Him. Finally, the doctrine of (5) the perseverance of the saints teaches that all who are truly saved will maintain their faith into eternity; those who fall away were never truly saved, "for if they had been...they would have remained." (1Jn 2:19)

Here, Calvinism shows some clear dependence on Augustine in some places, but makes some significant breaks in others. Total depravity, for example, is essential for Augustine's theology. That God's grace is essential for man to do any good work is also Augustinian, but here Calvinism makes a significant addition (which many feel is implied in Augustine) that this calling is unconditional, and God's grace is irresistible. In his final point, Calvin has made a clear break with Augustine, since Augustine wrote that if a man has lost his salvation through blatant sin, "he cannot say, 'I have not received,' because of his own free choice to evil he has lost the grace of God, *that he had received*."²² Calvin would disagree on this point, since he teaches that a person who has lost his salvation never really had it.

III. "Arminianism" – Unlimited/Conditional Redemptive Grace

A. Arminius (Unlimited Grace, Conditional on Foreknowledge of Decision)

Four years before the death of Calvin, James Arminius was born. Educated under Theodore Beza, Arminius became a well-known pastor, then a teacher at the University of Leiden. He always held Augustine and Calvin in high regards, saying once that the latter, "possessed above most others, or rather above all other men, what may be called an eminent spirit

²² St. Aurelius Augustinus, *On Rebuke and Grace*, [document on-line]; Available from <http://cantuar.blogspot.com/2006/02/st-augustine-in-context.html>; Internet; Accessed 3 March, 2007.

in prophecy.”²³ He also wrote that, “Next to the study of the Scriptures...I exhort my pupils to peruse Calvin’s *Commentaries*.”²⁴

Arminius was completely orthodox in his teaching on the fallenness of man.²⁵ On this subject, he taught that, “The Mind of man, in this state, is dark, destitute of the saving knowledge of God, and, according the Apostle, incapable of those things which belong to the Spirit of God.”²⁶ Thus, man is doomed to die apart for God, except that a regeneration be, “effected in the present life by the Spirit of Christ.”²⁷ In this, Arminius concurs with the first point of Calvinism verbatim, and partially agrees with the fourth – but with a very significant difference. Whereas Calvinism states that regeneration is an instantaneous, monergistic event, Arminius writes that, “regeneration is *not perfected in a moment*, but by certain steps and intervals,”²⁸ which continue after salvation in the form of sanctification. Although prevenient grace is absolutely necessary for salvation, it does not rule-out free will. Rather, “as soon as ever it is perfected according to its essence, that is, through the renovation of the mind and affections, it renders the man spiritual, and *capable of* [freely] *resisting* sin through the assisting grace of God.”²⁹ Here, then, Arminius has returned to an Augustinian conception of cooperation between man and God – where God supplies grace, and man cooperates by not resisting.

²³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, rev. Cyril C. Richardson, Wilhelm Pauck, and Robert T. Handy (New York: Scribner’s 1959), p 399, Quoted in R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe*, 134.

²⁴ Dr. Vic Reasoner, *Arminius: The Scapegoat of Calvinism*, [document on-line]; Available from <http://www.imarc.cc/eseconomy/arminius.html>; Internet; Accessed 5 March, 2007.

²⁵ Reasoner complains against the Synod of Dort that the Calvinistic acronym “LILAC” misrepresents Arminianism. R.C. Sproul agrees that “In the perennial debate between so-called Calvinism and Arminianism, the estranged parties have frequently misrepresented each other.” (Sproul, 125), and in particular, asserts that Arminius agreed with Calvin and Augustine – and against Pelagius – on the fallenness of man, and the role of grace in redemption.

²⁶ James Arminius, *The Public Disputations of James Arminius, D.D.*, in James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius: The London Edition*, trans James and William Nichols, 3 vols. (1825-75; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 2:192-193 (11.8) quoted in R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe*.

²⁷ James Arminius, *Works of Arminius, On Regeneration and the Regenerate, XX*, [document on-line]; Available from <http://www.godrules.net/library/arminius/arminius162.htm>; Internet; Accessed 5 March 2007.

²⁸ James Arminius, *Works of Arminius, On Regeneration and the Regenerate, XX. Italics added.*

²⁹ James Arminius, *Works of Arminius, On Regeneration and the Regenerate, XX. Italics added.*

Arminius opposes the second and third points of Calvinism indirectly by proposing a differing view on predestination. While Calvin asserted that the elect were chosen by processes within the “inextricable labyrinth” of “divine wisdom” which “the Lord has been pleased to conceal within himself,”³⁰ Arminius held that the elect were selected by the entirely predictable process of foreknowledge. As he writes, “Election to salvation, is according to *foreknowledge of future faith*, which God has determined to bestow of His own grace upon them by the ordinary means ordained by Himself.”³¹ Arminius was not Pelagian even in this assertion, however, since he agreed with Augustine that grace is absolutely necessary for salvation, and that God dealt differently with the Elect, so as to help them towards salvation, and pass by the others.³²

B. Neo-Calvinism (Unlimited Grace, Conditional on Acceptance)

Although remaining popular among protestants, the position of Calvinism has suffered some significant blows in recent centuries. As Western thought became increasingly uncomfortable with the “Greek-influenced”³³ tenets of Calvinism, some alternatives were explored. Arminianism was purified³⁴ and given a second chance under the Wesley’s, and it became vogue to hold to some of the tenets of Calvinism – especially perseverance of the saints – while dropping the more difficult points of Calvinism, like limited atonement. A major

³⁰ John Calvin, *Of Eternal Election, by Which God Has Predestined Some to Destruction, and Some to Salvation*, Chapter 21. [document on-line] Available from http://www.godrules.net/library/calvin/calvin_iv_iii_xxii.htm; Internet; Accessed 5 March 2007.

³¹ James Arminius, *Works of Arminius, Part 2, An Examination of the Treatise of William Perkins Concerning the Order and Mode of Predestination*, [document on-line]; Available from <http://www.godrules.net/library/arminius/arminius201.htm>; Internet; Accessed 28 February 2007. *Italics added.*

³² It should be noted that for Arminius, the fact that Predestination is based on Foreknowledge does not mean (as Calvinists often state) that Predestination did not exist for Arminius. Although circular in reasoning, Arminius taught that God predestined those whom He foreknew, and helped them towards salvation.

³³ In *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, (Intervarsity Press, Downer’s Grove, IL: 1986), 143-162, Pinnock takes issue with Calvinism on the grounds that it is Greek influenced. S. M. Baugh writes in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge and Grace*, “The Meaning of Foreknowledge,” (Grand Rapids, IL: Baker Books, 1995), 186-187, acknowledges this fact, but argues that God developed secular Greek thought so that it would better shape theologians. Both arguments are weak, however, since culture cannot be the final word on theological issues. They do point out, however, that a changing culture is likely to adhere to differing theological systems.

³⁴ Of Pelagian and Unitarian heresies, which had crept in over the years. Dr. Vic Reasoner, *Arminius: The Scapegoat of Calvinists*.

contributor to this movement (which could be called “neo-Calvinism”, since it really requires a renovation of Calvinistic theology, rather than a variation) was Lewis Sperry Chafer, who produced the system of theology currently known as "Dispensationalism," which, according to Sproul, "is probably the dominant theology in the American evangelicalism today, and it has a massive influence internationally as well."³⁵ In the experience of the author, this is the median position especially among Baptists and Pentecostals in the West.

Although Dispensationalism is itself in flux, and is thus hard to define, Sproul notes that “Dispensationalists frequently claim they are ‘four-point Calvinists,’ affirming total depravity, unconditional election, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints, but rejecting limited atonement.”³⁶ Although apparently simple, this one small difference really makes such a break with Calvinism that really becomes more Arminian in the Classical sense.

Whereas Calvinism is built on Augustine’s construction that Christians, “are elected that *they may believe*,”³⁷ which, to the Calvinist, leads necessarily to limited/unconditional grace, Chafer sees salvation beginning on the exact opposite side of the spectrum. Chafer writes that, “God’s *answer* to an individual’s *faith* in Christ is such that by the power of God he is born of God and thus becomes an actual son of His.”³⁸ Later, he writes that, “On the human side, regeneration is conditioned simply on faith.”³⁹

Chafer agrees, then, with Calvinism and classical Arminianism that man is completely fallen. He then sides with Classical Arminianism, however, in stating that God’s grace is really dependent on man’s consent, and that predestination must then be based on foreknowledge.

³⁵ Sproul, 189.

³⁶ Sproul, 190.

³⁷ Augustine, *The Enchiridion*, in Augustine, *Basic Writings*, 1:677 (chap. 32), in R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe*. *Italics added*.

³⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (1888-94; Nashville: Nelson, 1980), 6:113) Quoted in R.C. Sproul, 194. *Italics added*.

³⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (1888-94; Nashville: Nelson, 1980), 2:765) Quoted in R.C. Sproul, 194.

Really, the only difference between Neo-Calvinism and Classical Arminianism is that, while neither affirm the salvation of the “backslider,” Neo-Calvinism would state (with Calvin) that the backslider was never justified, while the Classical Armenian sides with Augustine in saying that the backslider *was indeed* justified, but lost his salvation. Although this difference has become significantly divisive, it cannot be denied that Neo-Calvinism really sides with Arminianism, in stating that grace is unlimited, and conditional.

IV. “Molinism” – Limited/Conditional Grace

A. Molinism

At the same time as the Calvinist/Armenian debate was raging among protestants, the same debate (sovereignty vs. free-will) was raging among Catholics as well. Writing at approximately the same time as Arminius, Ludovici de Molina, a Jesuit scholar, proposed a much different solution to this question, although it was neither simpler nor less controversial than the one proposed by Arminius.

The gist of Molina’s long and obtuse *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiæ donis, divina præscientia, providentia, prædestinatione et reprobatione*,⁴⁰ (or “the Concordia”), is that there are three types of knowledge which God possesses. “Natural knowledge,” the first type of knowledge which Molina attributes to God, is that knowledge by which God knows all of the scientific, mathematical, biological, (etc.) laws of the universe. This knowledge is said to be inherent within Himself, although not created by Him. By means of this knowledge, God knows all of the aspects of each *potential* universe, or world. “Free knowledge,” is the third type of knowledge which Molina attributes to God. By means of this knowledge, God knows every

⁴⁰ Ludovici de Molina, *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiæ donis, divina præscientia, providentia, prædestinatione et reprobatione* (Lisbon, 1588.)

aspect of *this* world, which God has “instantiated”⁴¹ into being. Although this knowledge does not reside within God, and, in a sense, postdates his decision to instantiate one world over another, it is known completely by Him instantly. Thus, Molina prefers to speak of a logical priority, rather than a temporal priority of these two types of knowledge to each other.

Fitting between these two knowledges is what Molina termed, “middle knowledge.” This is the knowledge by which, “in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each free will, He saw in his own essence what each such will would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things – even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite...”⁴² Thus, for example, God would have known that in every conceivable world He would have been stubbornly rejected (by multiple actions of the free-will) by Pharaoh. Thus, God was able to place Pharaoh in a specific place in history, in such a way as would serve His grand designs, while still holding Pharaoh accountable for his free actions. By means of these three types of knowledge, God is able to be the completely sovereign and omnipotent ruler of creation, while still allowing free-will. In so doing, Molina is able to create a plausible defense for a grace which is both limited and conditional.

B. Neo-Molinism

1. “Super-Temporal” and “Omni-Temporal” Paradigms of Eternity

In reading Molina, it is immediately evident that he holds a different view of God’s eternal nature than others before him. For the purpose of this essay, Molina’s conception could be called “omni-temporal,” while others worked towards developing a “super-temporal” framework of God. The latter position would hold that God operates within time just as any

⁴¹ Molina finds “instantiate” a better word than “create,” since it better conveys the instantaneous nature of creation, which was performed by a God outside of time.

⁴² Ludovici Molina, *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiæ donis, divina præscientia, providentia, prædestinatione et reprobatione*, 4.52.9, quoted in William L. Craig, “Middle Knowledge a Calvinist-Armenian Rapprochement?” in ed. Clark Pinnock, *The Grace of God, The Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 147.

temporal creature, (meaning that He has a real past, which He cannot change, a present where He works, and a future where He is not yet present) but without beginning or end, and with complete foreknowledge. Molina's position would hold that God is "above" time, so to speak, and is thus equally present in all of history.

C.S. Lewis is extremely helpful in explaining omni-temporality.⁴³ He envisions God as being outside of time in the same way that the author of a story is outside of the timeline of the story itself; the author could stop writing, for example, and sit and think about one character for as long a time as he liked – or, for that matter, flip backwards or forwards in the story line, to think about each character, or possible developments of plot, etc. – without any time passing in the imaginary world which he is writing. The exception is that Lewis' God is not in another time line, but outside of it altogether.⁴⁴ In this way, God could interact with reality, while still knowing completely all events, past and present.

2. Some Objections Answered

Pinnock has rejected "omni-temporality" as an attribute of God on the basis that it is "meaningless" and "destroys the message of the Bible."⁴⁵ In defense of Pinnock, it should be noted that the Bible does indeed depict God as "characterized by flexibility and dynamism."⁴⁶ Specifically, we can see that God changes His mind,⁴⁷ that He learns new things about men,⁴⁸ He answers prayers,⁴⁹ and allows His plans to be worked out through the free-agencies of man.⁵⁰

⁴³ Although Lewis was not trying to present a new idea, but merely explain the basic – or "Mere" – Christian doctrines. Pinnock notes some dependence on Thomas Aquinas on this point.

⁴⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, "Time and Beyond Time", (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1972) 166-171.

⁴⁵ Pinnock, *God Limits His Knowledge*, 156.

⁴⁶ Pinnock, *God Limits His Knowledge*, 158.

⁴⁷ As in the destruction of Israel (Dt 9:41), or Jerusalem, by plague (2 Sam 24:16), or Nineveh (Jonah 3:10), etc.

⁴⁸ God said of Sodom and Gomorrah, "I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know." After Abraham's test with Ishmael, God said, "Now I know that you fear God" (Gen 22:12).

⁴⁹ Matt 7:7-11, 17:20, Luke 18:2-8, John 14:14, 16:23, etc.

⁵⁰ Such as the Great Commission (Mat 28:19-20), and especially proselytizing new Christians (Rom 10:14).

Pinnock argues that if God operates omni-temporally, and thus foresees the future perfectly, then this dynamic idea of God must really be a myth. Certainly, this point cannot be overlooked; but neither should it be taken to the extremes which Pinnock takes it, so as to destroy the eternal nature of God.

As John Feinberg points out in probably a sound refutation of Pinnock, the God who operates exclusively within time, “can neither guarantee that his specific plans nor his general plans will be accomplished.”⁵¹ This is not only profoundly unsettling to the Christian’s faith, it also makes God a liar for naming Himself, “...the beginning and the end...” (Rev 21:6), and saying that He has declared, “the end from the beginning,” (Isa 46:10). Finally, God has repeatedly declared that He, not man, is the primary worker in history.⁵² How can the two rival conceptions of God – the one who operates temporally, and the one who is above time – be reconciled?

In the opinion of the author, “omni-temporality” is easier to defend than “super-temporality.” In super-temporality, fatalism is almost impossible to avoid; but it becomes meaningless in omni-temporality. As the reader is perusing this paper, for example, (s)he is operating on that razor-edged moment of the present, where real decisions can be made; (s)he may continue reading, or he may stop. These possibilities are known to God, and correspond to Molina’s “Natural Knowledge.” Probably all Christian authors would agree that God is somehow involved in the reader’s life in a real, static way, helping him/her to choose between the variety of *real possibilities* open to him/her in the present.

In the time which it took the reader to finish the paper to this point, however, the present has become the past. Some observations can be made at this point. First, these actions – which

⁵¹ John Feinberg, *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, “John Feinberg’s Response, (Intervarsity Press, Downer’s Grove, IL: 1986), 163-177,

⁵² Eccl 3:11, Isa 46:10b, Rom 9, etc.

were once static – have become concrete; there is nothing which can be done to change them. Further, there is at least one being (the reader) who knows conclusively that said concrete actions took place at a certain point in time. It is obvious, however, that neither of these observations negates the fact that the said actions were once static, and really open to possibility.

According to Molina, these actions have passed from “natural knowledge,” through “middle knowledge,” and into “free-knowledge.” In super-temporality, God knew all along which choice would be made, and fatalism is difficult to avoid. If, however, (as in Molina), God did not fore-know these actions, but really saw them being freely made “in the present,” from His omni-temporal vantage point, there need be no difficulties with fatalism.

3. God as an Omni-Temporal Lawmaker and Judge

A helpful metaphor which Scriptures offer is that of God operating as a Judge, since the courtroom is one place where sovereignty and free-will coexist perfectly.⁵³ A person sentenced to death dies in part because of his own free actions, and in part because the judge’s “sovereign” choice, to condemn him. The fact that the judge’s choice rested in the law does not really mean that he does not have a role to play in the case; he could have chosen to act unjustly, but he did not. In this way, God as the Judge could be seen as limiting grace to the elect, while still leaving room for free-will.

Taken a step further, a lawmaker *and* a judge would take on even more responsibility in the condemnation of a guilty man. We could think, for example, of a certain country where murder was perfectly acceptable until a certain lawmaker abolished it. Likely, this lawmaker had a hypothetical group of people in his mind while making this law – all those who would commit murder in that place in the future. In making this law, he condemned this group of people,

⁵³ Roger Nicole also identifies five other main metaphors which God uses to describe His workings in redemption; Roger Nicole, “The Nature of Redemption,” *Contemporary Evangelical Thought Journal*, 193-213.

probably before some of them were even born. In this way, the judge's sovereign will (to condemn said group of people) is extended even farther, without abolishing free-will of each individual (to enter the said group of people, or to remain outside of it). Before the criminal decided to commit murder, thus making himself a "murderer," he had already been condemned (in a hypothetical sense) as a murderer, since he would one day enter that group.

Taken to its final step, could this same lawmaker/judge be seen as being omni-temporal? In this case, the lawmaker/judge would be able to see not only that a hypothetical group of people may commit murder in the future, but specifically, that a certain man – "Ehud," for the purposes of this paper – would *indeed* commit murder.

If the lawmaker/judge was able to see Ehud (as well as certain other specific individuals) freely committing murder *before* abolishing this crime, could it not be said that it was really the lawmaker/judge who condemned Ehud, more than Ehud himself? In this case, then, Ehud's free-will and the judge's sovereign choice both work together to the same goal – but the judge's choice is considerably more important than that of Ehud. It may even be wondered whether this judge had some reason to hate Ehud, and desire his death!

In the opinion of the author, this explanation comes much closer than any other in describing the interplay of free-will and grace. God knew who would accept Him before the creation of the world, and loved them so much as to provide a way for them to receive regeneration. Since He knew they would chose to accept this plan, He was really saving them by instituting it. By making only one way of regeneration, He at the same time decided to "pass by" all of the others. In this way, then, the grace of God in redemption can be seen to be both limited and conditional, with no contradiction.

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