

December 2020

## Molinism: A Biblical Answer to the Inconsistent Views of Predestination

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### Recommended Citation

Yuzon, Matthew B. (2020) "Molinism: A Biblical Answer to the Inconsistent Views of Predestination," *Diligence: Journal of the Liberty University Online Religion Capstone in Research and Scholarship*: Vol. 7 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/djrc/vol7/iss1/3>

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Many different views and ideologies about the meaning of the Bible and its contents have always been prevalent in the academic circles, down to the common man. Given that it is the most popular book of all time, discussions about the Bible have evolved and those who discuss it have done the same as new ideas and theologies circulate quicker than ever before. Many theological topics that some scholars spend their lives studying are insignificant to the message of the gospel and serve no purpose in sharing the message of the gospel, thus being a waste of time (second tier issues). Important theological topics (first tier issues) are ones that can credit or discredit the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone (Rom. 5:1-2).

One who does not believe that Jesus was the son of God may understandably find many of the concepts in the Bible as difficult to grasp. Many people struggle with the problem of evil in the world, the possibility of the supernatural, and one of the most common reasons for rejecting the Bible: *predestination*. Properly researching and understanding how this commonly misunderstood facet of God's omnipotence actually affects mankind could change someone's life.

When speaking to both nonbelievers and layman alike, a conversation about predestination is usually followed by someone asking how God could send people to hell and still love them. When three different church attenders with varying years of salvation and dedication to Christianity were asked about the topic, they all gave one of two answers. The first attender had no idea what it meant and could not think of anywhere in the Bible where it could be found. The second and third attenders had a vague understanding of predestination and both treated the topic like a monster locked in their basement. They knew it was down there, but they were scared to open the door. They were afraid that the controversial nature of this topic would shake their faith if they could not defend God's goodness because they did not take any time to learn about it.

To be clear, there is no perfect view of predestination because the implications of it exceed that of what the human mind can comprehend and even fathom. But there are things that can be answered about it that completely align with the Bible. Most people hold to one of two views of predestination, Calvinism and Arminianism. As popular as they are, they both have glaring theological holes. This reasoning shows that when the less popular view of Molinism is inserted into the discussion of predestination, many of the theological inconsistencies left by Calvinism and Arminianism can be answered.

As a precursor to any sort of theological analysis, one must remember that any theory or view that diminishes the biblical concepts of the following cannot be considered as these are the foundational points of the Bible: God creating the universe; mankind being born with a sin nature due to the fall; Jesus coming to earth as a baby born of a virgin to live a perfect life; Jesus dying for the sins of mankind and resurrecting after three days; and that salvation is only achieved through faith in Jesus Christ as one's savior.

Predestination can be defined as, "... that God has a purpose that is determined long before it is brought to pass. It implies that God is infinitely capable of planning and

then bringing about what he has planned.”<sup>1</sup> Predestination (or predestine) comes from the Latin word *praedestino*, which is the word that Vulgate used to translate it from the Greek word, *prohorizō*.<sup>2</sup> The English word “horizon” is a derivative from this word because the Christian’s ultimate “destiny” or “horizon” has been fixed by God from all eternity.<sup>3</sup> Other words synonymous with predestination are found in the Bible and also used to describe those that are predestined, such as: the elect; chosen; foreordained.

The first example of any sort of reference to predestination in the Bible is found in Deuteronomy 4:2 *ESV* and talks about God’s love for his people, the Israelites and how because they were chosen by God, he had predestined them. “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”

Another popular reference to the subject is found in John 15:16, as Jesus speaks to the twelve disciples about loving one another. Jesus says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.” This is commonly referenced as an argument in support of predestination as many interpret this as Jesus saying that the disciples were chosen to be saved, which falls under the theological concept of irresistible grace.

The most popular references to predestination and the implications of it is found in Romans; specifically, Romans 8:28-30.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Though there is sufficient evidence for the concept of predestination and election found in the Bible, it is only one side of a coin. It is very clear that the Bible teaches that God predestines man and that fact alone is not where the conflict lies. The conflict lies within the questions of, “what and how much does God control?” This question arises when the other side of the coin flips over to show the conjoined twin of predestination, human free will.

Free will is inseparable from predestination because it is a unique characteristic that mankind is created with. It allows man to make meaningful moral decisions and is

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<sup>1</sup> Walter A. Elwell, “Predestination. *The Concept*” *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 628.

<sup>2</sup> Derek R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 951.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000), 365.

part of what separates man from the rest of creation.<sup>4</sup> the cause of sin in the world and the fall of man because it stems from human desire to sin and rebel against God, just as predestination and election are a result of God's perfect will.<sup>5</sup> Issues between the two arise because human free will can be observed and tested as anybody can walk into traffic at any moment, contrary to how predestination can only be observed over time by studying the Bible and requires faith.

Spanish Jesuit, Luis de Molina says, "The total effect of predestination . . . depends only on the free will of God."<sup>6</sup> One must not forget that though God's decisions, like mankind's, follow his nature, it is only by his free will that God is able to give man any sort of salvation.

As stated above, conflict arises with human free will and God's election of man because the line between the two is not very clear. They continue to push against one another as The Bible teaches that according to God's will, man has been predestined for adoption (Eph. 1:5). The Bible also clearly teaches the message of the individual having the ability to reject Jesus if they so choose (John. 12:48; Acts 4:11). Scripture does support the reasoning that God is not a sadistic puppet master and there is an aspect of control that God has over man. This disagreement turns into a first-tier issue when interpretations suggest that man's salvation is foreordained and decided by God, rather than it be an individual's decision.

Although there is an uncountable number of different views and theologies into this subject, the two most popular schools of thought are that of Calvinism and Arminianism. Each faction has those who hold to their respected ideologies at all different levels. Each side has a plethora of doctrine and their contents will be shaved down to cover predestination and pertinent information surrounding it.

John Calvin (1509-1564) was born in Noyon, Picardy, France, became the Reformer of Geneva, Switzerland, and is father of Calvinism. The beliefs of John Calvin and Calvinism in 2020 are not the same thing as Calvin's theology incorporated philosophy and human thought.<sup>7</sup> When writing about his views of predestination according the Bible, Calvin writes,

He moreover calls those " chosen " (or elected) who are engrafted by faith into the body of Christ; and that this blessing is by no means common to all men is openly manifest. The apostle, therefore, by the " chosen," evidently means those whom Christ condescends to call after they have been given to Him by the Father. But, to make faith

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<sup>4</sup> Elwell, "Will," *BTD* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 818.

<sup>5</sup> Carpenter and Wesley, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words*, 417.

<sup>6</sup> Luis De Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the "Concordia"* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 7.23.4/5.1.2.

<sup>7</sup> Norman L. Geisler, "Calvin, John" in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 111.

the cause of election is altogether absurd, and utterly at variance with the words of the apostle.<sup>8</sup>

Calvin here is explaining his thoughts on election and concludes his analysis as he reads over Romans and explains that the sequence of wording is very intentional as he justifies his view with 8:30 says, “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” Calvin held to the belief of *unconditional election*, which means that like the sequence in Romans 8:30, salvation can only be received if it was given to an “elect group” of humans. This view of unconditional election is contrary to conditional election and limits human free will as one can only be saved if they were chosen to be saved. Though Calvin’s view of unconditional election continues to upset many, he always shared the theological view with Augustine that man is saved by grace alone.<sup>9</sup>

This leads to Calvinists today making the point that if a call is mentioned in the epistles, it is only referring to believers and the elect.<sup>10</sup> Though, there is no definite answer to the majority of Calvinists today and their views of free will as many disagree whether or not man has any free will at all.<sup>11</sup>

The mustard to the ketchup of Calvinism, comes from Oudewater, Holland in 1559. Jacob Arminius studied at Calvin’s school, the Geneva Academy, under Calvin’s successor, Theodore Beza, as he began to question Calvin’s teaching in his early twenties. Where Calvin believed that election was the cause of faith, he believed that faith was the cause of election and stood firmly against Calvin and his teachings.<sup>12</sup>

Arminius stood against election and Calvin’s belief that Jesus only died for the elect. Arminius shows his contempt for this view as he writes his theology.

God by an eternal and immutable decree has predestinated, from among men, (whom he did not consider as being then created, much less as being fallen,) certain individuals to everlasting life, and others to eternal destruction, without any regard whatever to righteousness or sin, to obedience or disobedience, but purely of his own good pleasure, to demonstrate the glory of his justice and mercy; or, (as others assert,) to demonstrate his saving grace, wisdom and free uncontrollable power.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Cole, trans., *Calvin's Calvinism: Treatises on the Eternal Predestination of God the Secret Providence of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2006), 45.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>10</sup> F. Leroy Forlines and J. Matthew Pinson, *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2011), 147.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2000), 41.

<sup>13</sup> James Arminius, James Nichols and William Nichols, trans., *The Works of James Arminius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethreal Library, 2002), vol. 1, 118-119.

Arminius, as seen above, saw Calvin's view of predestination as God being no better than sadist who created, just to destroy. He goes on to state his views of predestination and explains that he does believe that God has decreed to save certain people, and have others condemned by his grace and mercy. He goes on later to say that he completely rejects the concept of predestination as he believed it compromises the message of salvation.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike Calvinism, this school of thought is not popular in the field of theology as a theologian has a much easier time defending unconditional election due to the supporting scriptures that specifically go through the steps of unconditional election (Rom. 8:30). Calvinists are more appealing because they have orderly sequences of theology, like the order of salvation, and that appeals to scholarly minds.<sup>15</sup>

One cannot clearly say who is right and who is not, only God can. Each side makes valid arguments for their view of predestination and election. Both can find their foundations in scripture, but they are not without flaw. Their flaws reside within their ignorance towards God's knowledge because God, is a God knowledge (1 Sam. 2:3).<sup>16</sup> It is a well-known concept by most that God is an all-knowing, or omniscient. Both Calvin and Arminius agree and recognize the omniscience of God and the fact that no matter their view of predestination, they both understand that God has knowledge of who will accept him, also known a foreknowledge. Though, Calvin's view of God's foreknowledge limits his knowledge as it is based on God's causation, rather than divine foreknowledge.<sup>17</sup>

Though less extensive than the thousands of books covering these two men, their cases are laid out and both have problems finding a middle ground between the two. Neither can seem to find a harmonious view of predestination and free will that include God's foreknowledge that fit the following criteria: does not contradict scripture, does not contradict God's nature, and it does not have to sacrifice any facets of predestination, free will, and God's foreknowledge.

Born in 1535, in New Castle, Spain, Luis de Molina had questions about salvation at the age of seventeen. Molina went against the Roman Catholic, law-keeping, path to salvation as he proposed that the Jesus was more concerned with one's commitment and surrender to his will than their works. Molina followed in the theological footsteps of

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<sup>14</sup> Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 1, 121-122.

<sup>15</sup> Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism* (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publications, 2002), 159.

<sup>16</sup>William Lane. Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 19.

<sup>17</sup> Forlines and Pinson, *Classical Arminianism*, 64.

adversity that Thomas Aquinas had and sought teach about a God that desired one's heart before their actions.<sup>18</sup>

Molina proposed a solution to this issue of predestination and salvation as he agreed with Calvin and Martin Luther that man is depraved, cannot do good, and would not be able to choose salvation if completely left to his own devices. Though Molina was on their side for this small portion, he disagreed with them that that salvation is offered to everyone, not an elected few.<sup>19</sup> With his newly earned doctorate of Philosophy, Molina was able to conceive an answer that neither Calvin or Arminius could to the problems every theologian had faced with election and free will. The connection between those two was the reconciliation of God's omniscience and human freedom that produces God's *Middle Knowledge*.<sup>20</sup>

This revolutionary concept came from Molina's philosophical background and immense respect for Thomas Aquinas. Molina's ideas deals with one of three types of knowledge God possesses simultaneously: natural knowledge, which deals with all necessary truths and logical facts in existence; free knowledge, which includes his foreknowledge and deals with all knowledge of the past and future; last is Molina's conception of Middle knowledge, which deals with God's counterfactual knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Molina's revolutionary idea proposed that God had knowledge of everything listed above, along with the knowledge of every outcome of every feasible hypothetical situation.<sup>22</sup> Molina confidence in God's middle knowledge led him say,

It would be insulting the depth and perfection of the divine knowledge – and indeed impious and not at all compatible with so great a comprehension of the free choice of each creature – to assert that God is ignorant of what I would have done by my freedom of choice if he had created me in some other order of things, or if, in this very order of things in which He has created me, He had decided to confer on me more or fewer aids than He in fact decided to give me.<sup>23</sup>

Examples of God's middle knowledge are found in scripture and can be seen when Saul is preparing to kill David in 1 Samuel 23:12-13 where it says, "Then David said, 'Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?' And the

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<sup>18</sup> Kirk R. MacGregor, *Luis De Molina: the Life and Theology of the Founder of Middle Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 46.

<sup>19</sup> MacGregor, *Luis De Molina*, 46.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>21</sup> Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 129.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> De Molina, *Concordia*, 4.14.15.49.11

Lord said, ‘They will surrender you.’ Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition”. God’s middle knowledge allowed him to give David definite answers to what Saul and the town would do in that particular situation. A second supporting passage is found in Matthew 11:20-24 that see Jesus tell his disciples that if he had performed miracles in certain cities, they would have repented. This is evidence of the divine foreknowledge possessed by God that allows for his counterfactual knowledge to be displayed. Molina even goes so far to say that God’s middle knowledge is indisputable.<sup>24</sup>

So how is Molinism the answer to the issues that Calvinism and Arminianism face with predestination? William Lane Craig, philosopher and theologian, actually refers to himself as an Arminian. He is able to take the less popular theological position because he is a firm believer in Molinism. He describes this concept as, “one of the most fruitful theological ideas ever conceived. For it would serve to explain not only God’s knowledge of the future, but divine providence and predestination as well.”<sup>25</sup> Molina explains that God’s middle knowledge is a result of his omniscience as he says, “not from the object, but from the acumen and absolute perfection of his intellect.”<sup>26</sup>

Craig explains that holding to this view allows for human free will, foreknowledge, and predestination to coherently operate with one another. This relationship of God’s sovereignty and human free will have always been theological oil and water. With God’s middle knowledge in play, he knows what any free-living thing would do in any given circumstance. This allows God’s grace to be even more prevalent as man willingly chooses sin over God, rather than man being predestined to do so without any divine interference.<sup>27</sup>

God is able to perfectly have complete control, but not sacrifice man’s free will as he only chooses the world to create, not predestine who gets saved. It is only due to God’s free will that man is able to have free will.<sup>28</sup>

If he knows this information, God can create an appropriate situation where his ends are met, and they will do so freely. Nothing is happening outside of God’s will and nobody’s will is being suppressed. Craig displays the biblical evidence for this conclusion as Joseph, after being sold into slavery by his brothers, told them that God meant that situation for his good, in order to bring about this outcome (Gen. 50:20).

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<sup>24</sup> De Molina, *Concordia*, 4.14.13.52.8.

<sup>25</sup> Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 127.

<sup>26</sup> De Molina, *Concordia*, 4.14.13.52.33.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.14.13.8.5; 1.14.13.22.4; 7.23.4/5.4.2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.23.4/5.1.2.



Finally, middle knowledge offers a digestible answer to predestination that will satisfy both Calvinists and Arminians, as well as answer the question of, “what happens to those who die before they ever heard the gospel?”

When addressing predestination, middle knowledge is supported by the very verse used as a pillar for Calvinism. Calvinists use Romans 8:30 to support their view but leave out the verse before. Romans 8:29–30 says, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” The order of foreknowledge preceding predestination supports God’s middle knowledge which then sets the scene for God knowing all possible outcomes and creating the appropriate outcome that best fits God’s will without infringing on free will. He clearly has counterfactual knowledge of salvation as he shows in John 15:22-24 as Jesus speaks of their guilt if they had not talked to him.<sup>29</sup> This realization also allows for an answer to those who did not hear the gospel before death because God knew that no matter what evidence was presented to them, they would never accept him.

Though even a revolutionary view that answers five-hundred-year-old theological problems five hundred years ago, Molinism is like every other human conception: imperfect. Though man is imperfect, God uses imperfect men with imperfect theology to reveal himself. Just like how without Calvinism, there would be no Arminianism. Without Arminianism, there would be no Molinism as it loses its feet to stand on. Mankind continues to attempt to describe perfection by using imperfect tools, but God uses this for his own purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Though many use these tools to divide one another and create animosity towards the side that does not agree, the only goal in theological studies should be to better understand the creator of the universe. Christians are called to be able to defend their faith with gentles and respect (1 Pet. 3:15), but too many defend their own views before God. The ultimate goal of this article is to display how getting closer to God through reason can be made significantly easier when both sides put their love for God before academic vanity. God revealed himself in the Bible and gave mankind the tools understand it. This is seen as looking into the Bible shows how Molinism is the best explanation to the holes that Calvinism and Arminianism leave in the discussion of God’s relation to predestination.

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<sup>29</sup> De Molina, Concordia, 1.14.13.7.4; 1.14.13.23.1.3.

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