

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE, PREDESTINATION, AND PLAN IN LIGHT OF THE CROSS OF
CHRIST—AN EVALUTATION AND PROPOSAL REGARDING MODELS OF SALVATION AND
PROVIDENCE

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Method

by

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INTRODUCTION: THE STATE OF THE DEBATE

The doctrines of divine omniscience, providence, and predestination have been a matter of considerable discussion and debate ever since the earliest Christian times. In the past four decades, they have become important areas of disagreement in evangelicalism, partially by reason of the emergence of open theism¹ in the 1980s and 90s, the reemergence of Molinism² around the same time, and the growth in prominence of the determinist view of Calvinism—always a prominent stream in Evangelical systematic theology—a Reformed resurgence from (again) the 1980s till the present.³ As a result, the early twenty-first century has seen several major conversations among the leading proponents.⁴

In brief, the three views can be characterized as follows: According to the Calvinist view, God unilaterally decrees whatever comes to pass through His all-encompassing determination such that any kind of human freedom that exists is compatibilist⁵ in nature. God's foreknowledge is a direct result of His foreordination,⁶ and that alone.⁷ As a consonant consequence, Calvin conceived of all persons being unilaterally and

1. See Richard Rice, *The Openness of God: The Relationship of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will*, (Nashville: Review and Herald, 1980); David Basinger, William Hasker, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, and John Sanders, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994); John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998, 2007); Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000); William Hasker, *Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God* in Routledge, vol. 3 of *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

2. Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia* translated by Alfred J. Freddoso, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988); Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd, 1974), 34-44; Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 169-180; William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987); Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*, (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2010). Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

3. E.g. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); John Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001); John Frame, *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship*, (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002); Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 2011).

4. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views, with Contributions by Gregory A. Boyd, David Hunt, William Lane Craig, Paul Helm*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Stanley N. Gundry and Dennis W. Jowers, eds., *Four Views on Divine Providence: Paul Kjos Helseth, William Lane Craig, Ron Highfield, Gregory A. Boyd*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

5. Feinberg defines compatibilism (he uses also the alternative designation "soft determinism") in this way: "Soft determinism says that genuine human free action is compatible with causal conditions that decisively incline the will without constraining it. . . . The agent has mental and volitional ability to choose another option, but given the prevailing circumstances and causes, she will choose the option she does."

unconditionally determined by God to either damnation or election.⁸ Molinists, on the other hand, believe in libertarian freedom (agent causation and the capacity to do otherwise). They conceive of three aspects of divine knowledge logically prior to and including God's creative process: His natural knowledge—consisting of innate concepts such as logical and mathematical truths, as well as all of the possibilities available to Him through His own power, considered independently of creaturely free decisions; His middle knowledge, which consists of His conceptualized awareness of what all free creatures would freely choose to do in any given set of states of affairs, and His free knowledge—which consists of the knowledge God has as a result of His creative and providential decree(s)⁹ to actualize the states of affairs (both strongly and weakly)¹⁰ in the actual world.¹¹ According to open

6. Calvin wrote, "All events whatsoever are governed by the secret counsel of God." *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. Henry Beveridge, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1957), vol. 1, 173, (1.16.2). "Govern" could be taken to mean several differing concepts. With Calvin, it means exhaustive determinism: "We maintain that, by his providence, not heaven and earth and inanimate creatures only, but also the counsels and wills of men are so governed as to move exactly in the course which he has destined," *Ibid.*, 179 (1.16.2). God also causes and controls sin directly. "The devil, and the whole train of the ungodly, are, in all directions, held in by the hand of God as with a bridle, so that they can neither conceive any mischief, nor plan what they have conceived, nor how much soever they may have planned, move a single finger to perpetrate, unless in so far as he permits, nay, unless in so far as he commands; that they are not only bound by his fetters, but are even forced to do him service," *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 194 (1.22.11). Calvin did not use the word compatibilism, but he wrote thusly, "The will of God is necessity, and that everything is necessary which he has willed. . . . Though their perdition depends upon the predestination of God, the cause and matter of it is in themselves. . . . The first man fell because the Lord deemed it meet that he should. . . . Man's own wickedness corrupted the pure nature which he had received from God. . . . For though, by the eternal providence of God, man was formed for the calamity under which he lies, he took the matter of it from himself, not from God, since the only cause of his destruction was his degenerating from the purity of his creation into a state of vice and impurity." *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 233 (3.23.8, 9).

7. Calvin wrote that "God foreknew what the end of man would be before he made him, and foreknew because he had so ordained by his decree," *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 232 (3.23.7). "The predestination by which God adopts some to the hope of life, and adjudges others to eternal death, no man who would be thought pious ventures simply to deny; but it is greatly caviled at, especially by those who make prescience its cause. We, indeed, ascribe both prescience and predestination to God; but we say, that it is absurd to make the latter subordinate to the former (see chap. 22 sec. 1). When we attribute prescience to God, we mean that all things always were, and ever continue, under his eye; that to his knowledge there is no past or future, but all things are present, and indeed so present, that it is not merely the idea of them that is before him (as those objects are which we retain in our memory), but that he truly sees and contemplates them as actually under his immediate inspection. This prescience extends to the whole circuit of the world, and to all creatures. By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man," *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 206 (3.21.5).

8. Calvin wrote that "all are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death" *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 206, (3.21.5).

9. The nature and number of the decrees will be discussed in the final section of this paper.

10. The meaning of these terms will be explored in the final section of this paper.

11. Molina wrote, "Unless we want to wander about precariously in reconciling our freedom of choice and the contingency of things with divine foreknowledge, it is necessary for us to distinguish *three* types of knowledge in God. One type is purely *natural* knowledge, and accordingly could not have been any different in God. Through this type of knowledge, He knew all the things to which the divine power extended either immediately or by the mediation of secondary causes, including not only the natures of individuals and the necessary states of affairs composed of them but also the contingent states of affairs—through this knowledge He knew, to be sure, not that the latter were or were not going to obtain determinately, but rather that they were indifferently able to obtain or not obtain, a feature that belongs to them necessarily and thus also falls under God's natural knowledge.

theists, God has selective foreknowledge of only (a) what He will decree Himself to do or (b) what He can ascertain from current states of affairs (such as fixed character traits), or (c) what He will determine to do, or determine human beings to do. According to this conception, God does not know the future exhaustively, but only in selective circumstances.¹²

METHODOLOGY

The approach adopted here is a Christocentric one, in the sense of proposing that the starting point for evaluating the three models (as well as all other major doctrines) begins with an examination of how Scripture elucidates the person and work of Christ. More specifically, the approach here is that of crucicentricity—cross-centeredness—since this is the focal point of the work of Christ. Accordingly, Scripture passages related to the cross event and its ramifications will provide the prism through which the models are evaluated and examined. While this of necessity will not be an exhaustive canonical or philosophical exploration of divine foreknowledge, predestination, and providence, it will build a foundation with the cross of Christ as the most important point of access into these central elements of the God-world relationship.¹³

¹² “The second type is purely *free* knowledge, by which, after the free act of His will, God knew *absolutely* and *determinately*, *without any condition or hypothesis*, which ones from among all the contingent states of affairs were *in fact* going to obtain and, likewise, which ones were not going to obtain.

Finally, the third type is *middle* knowledge, by which, in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty of free choice, He saw in His own essence what each such faculty would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or in that or indeed, in infinitely many orders of things—even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite.” *Concordia*, 168.

12. Boyd writes, “The future must be described by what *might* and *might not* come to pass,” *Divine Providence*, 195. God is sometimes “surprised” by human behavior. *Divine Foreknowledge*, 24. “Yahweh is the sovereign Lord of history and He can predetermine and thus foreknow whatever he pleases,” but he does not “foreknow the whole of the future,” *Ibid.*, 20. Boyd also accepts compatibilistic freedom in certain circumstances, i.e. after a certain amount of time after character has been established. *Divine Providence*, 194. According to Richard Rice, “It may be true that God occasionally acts by fiat and directly causes something to happen,” *The Openness of God*, 56. Boyd writes of God “orchestrating events” such that Peter would inevitably deny Christ as determined by his character and the circumstances, “The Open-Theism View” in *Divine Foreknowledge*, 20.

13. Christopher Peppler (“The Christocentric Principle: A Jesus-Centered Hermeneutic,” *Conspectus*, 13 [2012], 117-135, 120) has noted two approaches to Christocentric hermeneutical methodologies: “1. Those who regard the life, teaching, and person of the Lord Jesus Christ as the locus of doctrinal formulation and proclamation, i.e. Barth and Chapell. 2. Those who hold that all of scripture must be read as revealing something about Jesus Christ and his saving work, i.e. Augustine and Goldsworthy.” Peppler adopts the former, but the approach adopted here is the latter, for the former limits the Christocentric prism to only the Gospels. This fails to account for not only the fact that the

There are several passages of Scripture that appear to point toward a Christocentric theological methodology. In John 5:39 Jesus states that the Scriptures testify of Him; the apostles appealed to the comprehensive witness of Scripture in their affirmation of Christ as the Messiah (Acts 17:2-3; 18:28; Rom. 1:2); and many New Testament passages affirm the role of Old Testament prophecies that referred to Christ (see esp. e.g. John 8:56; 12:41; Acts 2:30). More specific still are those passages that affirm that all portions of the Scriptures contain relevant references to Christ's life and work that transcend the original contexts of the writers (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; 2 Cor. 1:20). Narrowing the focus even further, there are passages which point toward a **crucicentric hermeneutic, in which everything, indeed the totality of the universe, revolves around significance of the cross event (e.g. 1 Cor. 2:2; Eph. 1; Col. 1:15-20).**

This paper will examine the subject of divine foreknowledge and predestination from the perspective of salient passages in the New Testament regarding the connection among these concepts, the cross event, and its implications. This crucicentric principle is not an imposed grid, but rather something that emerges from the groups of passages that employ the *pro* word group (Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29-30; 1 Cor. 2:7-8; Eph. 1:5, 11; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:2) as well as other groups which contain implied instances of divine prediction (e.g.

Gospels do not touch upon many of the issues found in the rest of the canon (see Kevin G. Smith's response to Pepler, "The Christocentric Principle: Promise, Pitfalls, and a Proposal," *Conspectus* 13, [2012], 157-170, 165-166), but even more significantly, this narrow, albeit important prism of the Gospels excludes the information regarding the person and work of Christ found in the Old Testament, as well as the other parts of the New Testament. The approach adopted here is consonant with that of Graeme Goldsworthy: "The hermeneutic centre of the Bible is therefore Jesus in his being and in his saving acts—the Jesus of the gospel." "While not all Scripture is the gospel, all Scripture is related to the gospel that is its centre." "The gospel becomes the norm by which the whole Old Testament and all the exhortations and other non-gospel aspects of the New Testament are to be understood." *Gospel-centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 62, 63. Kevin Vanhoozer writes, "An adequate doctrine of Scripture must locate the canon in the broader economy of the gospel. . . . The Bible—not only the Gospels but all of Scripture—is the (divinely) authorized version of the gospel, the necessary framework for understanding what God was doing in Jesus Christ. Scripture is the voice of God that articulates the Word of God: Jesus Christ." *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 45-46. As Alan Padgett observes, "Jesus as the Living Word constitutes the controlling center of any properly Christian biblical interpretation." "The Canonical Sense of Scripture: Trinitarian or Christocentric?" *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, 45, (2006), 36-43, 39.

Matt. 17:22-23; Mark 10:33-34) which are in fact centered around God's salvific work in Christ on the cross and its implications.

PURPOSE AND CONTENT OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this research is to examine the data of Scripture regarding the nature of divine foreknowledge, predestination, and plan through the crucicentric methodological prism, as noted above. This data reveals that God's foreknowledge is inclusive of middle knowledge and natural knowledge, and that He uses His middle knowledge for providential and salvific purposes. God predestined the cross of Christ first of all as a remedy for sin, and predestined those particular individuals to salvation (Rom. 8:28-30) whom He foreknew would respond to His invitation (Eph. 1:12; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:28-30; 2 Tim. 1:9) and remain in faith (Rom. 11:21-24; Heb. 3:12-14; 2 Pet. 1:9-10). God's providence is meticulous but not unilaterally determinative. By means of His middle knowledge, God can weakly actualize states of affairs in which His consequent will is accomplished, taking into account creaturely freedom. Every possible world is a confluence of both divine and creaturely co-creation, and as such involves innumerable decrees regarding divine-human interaction rather than only one which settles all states of affairs. The biblical data and its theological implications will be here explored for the purpose of evaluating each model; in addition, suggestions will be made for a model that will resemble the core elements of the Molinist and Arminian¹⁴ schemes, but not without suggestions for significant clarification and refinement of the former where they diverge.

14. As will be shown further below, there are significant differences between Arminius' and Molina's conception of certain aspects of soteriology. Arminius, significantly, however, like Molina, affirmed the existence of God's *scientia media*, His middle knowledge, by which He knew what events would occur if certain circumstances were to obtain, even if they never were to do so—counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. See James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 2, trans. James Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), "Disputation

THE PRE-CREATION PLAN OF THE CROSS, THE ORIGIN OF SIN, AND THE NATURE OF HUMAN FREEDOM

1 Peter 1:19-20 and Revelation 13:8 indicate that the death of Christ for the sins of the world was foreknown from (and before) the foundation of the *cosmos*. God knew that there would be sin, and that Christ would die for it as a result. While these texts alone cannot adjudicate among the three views, they do have some significant implications regarding the nature of creaturely freedom, which it itself has a bearing on each of the three views. If God foreknew Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb from the foundation of the world, it follows that He foreknew sin.

Calvinism

If God foreknew sin, the question arises of how He foreknew this. If Calvinists and open theists are correct that the only means by which God foreknows specific creaturely free acts with certainty is through foreordination, it follows logically that they must conceive of God specifically and unilaterally ordaining the origin of sin. This has significant problematic implications for the Scriptural data regarding the character of God (e.g. Psalm 7:11; 5:4; Rev. 16:5; 15:3; etc.). There is a tension in Calvin in regard to the issue of the relationship between God and sin. On the one hand, he affirms God's unilateral determination of all that occurs, and yet He also sometimes affirms that He merely permitted rather than specifically designed the origin of sin. Words such as "command," "ordain," "cause" and "permit" are all used in regard to the origin of sin.¹⁵ "Permit" seems to

XVII on the Understanding of God," 341-343 <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/arminius/works2.iii.xvii.html>; *The Works of James Arminius*, Vol. 3, "Sixth Proposition of Arminius," 65, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/arminius/works3.iv.viii.html?highlight=saul#highlight>.

15. See e.g. Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 153 (1.15.17) where he writes, "Though we say that Satan resists God, and does works at variance with His works, we at the same time maintain that this contrariety and opposition depend on the permission of God." Compare this to

be odds with even compatibilist freedom, especially when the origination of evil is said to lie with Satan alone. “By calling him [Satan] the father of lies, he [Christ] puts it out of his power to charge God with the depravity of which he was himself the cause.”¹⁶ Language of permission implies a degree of libertarian freedom which seems to stand in tension with claims that God unilaterally and unconditionally ordains all things that come to pass. From whence do these permitted conditions arise that (consistent with compatibilist freedom) determine the sin? If any of them involve human desires or choices which are not also governed by God’s meticulous determination, then libertarian freedom has been assumed in some way. But if the determining conditions are also themselves determined by God (which would be consistent on that view), then language of permission seems to lose its significance, or become a euphemistically misleading appellation.¹⁷ On this compatibilist scheme, the only means by which the certainty of God’s foreknowledge could arise is if God also causally determined (not just permitted) every circumstance in which these choices would occur, because on compatibilism the circumstances themselves (the conditions as well as the desires of the human agent) are determinative of what they will in fact do. Calvin asks the question of how it is that God moves in the hearts of the ungodly. He answers:

footnote 6 above where Calvin writes that the devil and the ungodly cannot move a finger to sin “unless in so far as he permits, nay, unless in so far as he commands; that they are not only bound by his fetters, but are even forced to do him service,” *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 194 (1.22.11).

16. *Ibid.*, 152 (1.14.16). Erickson also discusses God’s permission of sin, in which he writes, “We must understand that the will of God permits rather than causes sin. . . . But by his permitting the conditions that lead a person to commit a sin and by his not preventing the sin, God in effect wills the sin.” Erickson, 334. Erickson appears to adopt a position of what could be called “quasi-Molinism” (see 333) in which he posits that human sin is not actually caused by God, but rather permitted by Him, and actually causes Him sorrow (334). He suggests that the difference between his view and Molinism is his acceptance of God’s “suasive”—read irresistible grace (848-851)—in regard to salvation (333). Thus he appears to espouse a view of selective determinism in salvation, but Molinism everywhere else. The problem is this: If God “does not enjoy the destruction of the ungodly” and it “gives him sorrow,” yet he refuses to perform His “suasive” work to effect their salvation, in what sense can it be the case that He actually wills their salvation, loves them, or is actually be sorry for their being lost? According to his compatibilistic conception of freedom, God could “suasively” cause all persons to accept Him freely.

17. See David Baggett and Jerry Walls, *Good God: Theistic Foundations of Morality*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 72-73, where the Calvinistic use of euphemism is addressed.

The hand of God rules the interior affections no less than it superintends external actions. . . . When what God wills to be done cannot be done by willing men,¹⁸ their hearts being inclined so they will, He Himself effects this, not only by helping in their hearts but by determining them, so that, though they had no such intention, they fulfill what his hand and counsel decreed.¹⁹

Yet he denies that God is the author of sin²⁰ and suggests that the intentions of evildoers and Satan differ from God's intention in regard to the motivations of their acts.²¹

But this introduces an insuperable contradiction with the claim that God specifically determines all of the intentions of the wicked as well, otherwise God could neither (on this view) accomplish His purposes nor predict with precision their free acts without such causal determinism.²²

Open Theism

Writing from the open theist perspective, Richard Rice acknowledges the language of foreknowledge, predestination, and the existence of texts such as 1 Pet. 1:20 and Eph. 1.

His explanation for such occurrences is to suggest that every such predictive passage is

18. If God never merely permits (176), it is unclear what Calvin means here by saying that God "cannot" accomplish His will by the wills of men. If God sometimes permits people's own wills to do as they wish and then uses them to accomplish His purposes, again libertarian free will has been assumed, and there *is* in fact a degree of permission at work in God's will.

19. Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, translated by J.K.S. Reid, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 176. If God never merely permits (176), it is unclear what Calvin means here by saying that God "cannot" accomplish His will by the wills of men. If God sometimes permits people's own wills to do as they wish and then uses them to accomplish His purposes, again libertarian free will has been assumed, and there *is* in fact a degree of permission at work in God's will.

20. *Ibid.*, 179, 181.

21. *Ibid.*, 181-182.

22. Feinberg, 701, appears to have the same problem when he argues for compatibilism, but suggests that God's decree is not causal for the desires by which people freely act. If this is not the case, then from what source do the desires arise? And how can God have meticulous providence over particular acts if He is not specifically determining the desires which obtain at any given moment? His solution is to attempt to incorporate middle knowledge into his deterministic scheme (751-752). Feinberg suggests that God creates the circumstances in which humans find themselves, but that the individual acts chosen are those of the free intentions of the person. Since God knows what each person will compatibilistically freely do in any given set of circumstances, God can providentially order the world, including evil actions. However, the same problem still remains: If God is providentially ordering the world, He cannot allow persons to follow the desires which (on compatibilism) necessarily dictate their actions by means of *just any* set of circumstances, but only those which obtain by which God achieves His intended unilaterally determined goals (since libertarian freedom does not exist). And since each set of circumstances obtains in conjunction with all of the previous sets of circumstances, God must causally determine each set of circumstances in order to obtain the results He desires at any given set of later circumstances. There is no place in this scheme for any use of middle knowledge of human free actions. On any kind of view which precludes libertarian freedom, God is not at all taking into account the free actions of human beings who could potentially thwart one of His antecedently willed purposes, which is to say that He need not, indeed *cannot* (absent libertarian freedom) take into account what human beings would freely do in a given set of circumstances, since the divine will is completely without any impediment whatsoever in achieving its intended purposes. Moreover, in such a case, why would God use evil *at all* if He could unilaterally create circumstances in which all persons would come to (compatibilistically) freely obey Him at all times? Helm ("The Augustinian-Calvinist View" in *Divine Foreknowledge*, 173-181) also falls into the problem of invoking permission, without sufficient regard to how it effectively annihilates divine providence in his system. Craig notes this in his response ("A Middle-Knowledge Response" in *Divine Foreknowledge*), 205.

conditional in nature.²³ The implication is that Christ may not have gone to the cross for our salvation, or that the origin of sin that resulted in the propitiation of Christ was unknown to God before it occurred. Boyd claims that the future is partially settled by God, and partially open—that is that he acknowledges that aspects of the future are in fact settled in terms of God’s foreknowledge and/or predestination, but that it is not necessarily the case that everything is foreknown or predestined.²⁴ Boyd writes that “if any event was predestined and foreknown, it was that Jesus would die for the sake of sinners.”²⁵ He then suggests that the fact of Christ’s prayer for the removal of the cup of His suffering is evidence that God can modify His plans in the flow of history. There are at least four significant problems here (as will be addressed further below).²⁶ First, in order for God to foreknow Christ’s death for sinners—especially in the *detailed manner* in which the passages Boyd cites elucidate regarding particular individuals and incidents (in addition to other passages which he does not mention, e.g. Mark 10:33-34)—God would have to have a capacity for foreknowledge that would certainly supersede the claims of open theists that such foreknowledge or predestinations are merely occasional or always conditional in nature. Second, if foreordination is invoked for these events, open theists are then burdened with God being the deterministic author of numerous particular acts of sin which led to the foreknown details of the cross event as well as all those which led to it throughout history—the very circumstance that is sought to be avoided in the model, thus essentially undermining its very *raison d’être*. Third, for the cross event to occur with the time, place, manner, circumstances, and people in which it did, God would have to have an

23. Richard Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective” in *The Openness of God*, 53-58.

24. Boyd, “God Limits His Control” in *Four Views*, 198.

25. Ibid. He lists texts to confirm this conclusion: Isa. 53; Zech. 12:10; Matt. 20:18, 28; Acts 2:23; 4:28; Rev. 13:8.

26. Where Boyd attempts to address the particularity of the predictions.

exhaustive knowledge of the history preceding it. Finally, Boyd does not consider an alternative explanation for God's prediction of Christ's sacrifice and Jesus' prayer to avoid it if possible. Even if Christ could have refused to go through with the sacrifice, this would in no way impinge upon God's foreknowledge.²⁷ If Christ actually failed to proceed with the propitiation, the prophecies regarding it would never have occurred, not to mention many other aspects of the fabric of reality. God foreknew the cross because in fact He knew that Christ would indeed persevere, as well as the fact that He would pray in the garden to have the cup taken away.

Molinism/Arminianism

Molinists and Arminians, in consonance with this alternative option, suggest that God, via His middle knowledge, recognized that Satan, certain angels and human beings would sin in certain circumstances, or possibly in any possible circumstances (see discussion of "transworld depravity" below) and thus the Trinity planned accordingly to send Christ as the means of atoning for sin since they knew that it would certainly occur. God foreknew the death of Christ on the cross because He foresaw sin, its results, and all the details of history which led up to it, as a result of his middle knowledge of future contingents combined with His own plan to create the universe with certain parameters, creatures with others, interact with these contingents by means of His own actions, influences, allowances, and concurrences (see more this term in the meticulous providence section below). Molina wrote,

27. The issue here is not the peccability of Christ, but rather the accuracy of God's foreknowledge. God foreknew that Christ would succeed, even if in fact He could have failed. 1 Pet. 1:19-20 does not address the issue of the peccability of Christ, but rather the fact that the Godhead knew that Christ would in fact provide redemption by means of His propitious death.

Through his natural knowledge²⁸ God comprehends Himself, and in Himself He comprehends all the things that exist eminently in Him and thus the free choice of any creature whom He is able to make through His omnipotence. Therefore, before any free determination of His will, by virtue of the depth of His natural knowledge, by which He infinitely surpasses each of the things He contains eminently in Himself, He discerns what the free choice of any creature would do by its own innate freedom, given the hypothesis that He should create it in this or that order of things with these or those circumstances or aids—even though the creature could, if it so wiled, refrain from acting or to do the opposite, and even though if it was going to do so, as it is able to freely, God would foresee *that very* act and *not* the one that He *in fact* foresees would be performed by that creature.²⁹

Arminius, recognizing the problem with determinist accounts of sin, wrote thusly,

It [determinist predestination] ascribes to God certain operations with regard to man, both external and internal, both mediate (by means of the intervention of other creatures) and immediate—which Divine operations being once admitted, man must necessarily commit sin, by that necessity which the schoolmen call "a consequential necessity antecedent to the thing itself," and which totally destroys the freedom of the will. Such an act does this doctrine attribute to God, and represents it to proceed from his primary and chief intention, without any foreknowledge of an inclination, will, or action on the part of man.

From these premises, we deduce, as a further conclusion, that God really sins. Because, according to this doctrine, he moves to sin by an act that is unavoidable, and according to his own purpose and primary intention, without having received any previous inducement to such an act from any preceding sin or demerit in man.

From the same position we might also infer, that God is the only sinner. For man, who is impelled by an irresistible force to commit sin, (that is, to perpetrate some deed that has been prohibited,) cannot be said to sin himself.³⁰

Possible reasons for why God created the circumstances in which He knew that sin would occur (though the circumstances themselves were not determinative)³¹ will be discussed below in the final section on possible worlds theory and the divine decrees.

GOD'S PREDESTINATION OF SAVED INDIVIDUALS IN CHRIST

Ephesians 1; 2 Timothy 1:9; Romans 8:28-30; 9; Acts 13:48; and 1 Peter 1:2 all refer to the fact that God foreknew³² and predestined specific individuals to eternal life in Christ.

28. In Disputation 49, where this passage occurs, Molina had not yet formulated his distinct terminology of "middle knowledge" that arises in Disputation 52. Here he refers to "natural knowledge" in terms which he later applies to "middle knowledge." The difference between the two is one of contingency. As the translator and editor Freddoso explains, "What distinguishes God's knowledge of conditional future contingents from the rest of His natural knowledge is that it is metaphysically possible that He should have known truths other than the ones He in fact knows about conditional future contingents." *Concordia*, 119, n. 16.

29. Molina, 119.

30. Arminius, *Works of James Arminius*, vol.1, "Declaration of Sentiments: On Predestination—3. I Reject this Predestination for the Following Reasons," XIII, 630 <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/arminius/works1.iii.ii.iii.html?highlight=permit,the,fall#highlight>.

31. Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 134.

32. The Calvinist contention that "foreknew" means or at least includes "foreloved" may in fact be true (see e.g. Erickson, 858), but has no direct bearing on the question of whether election is conditional or unconditional. God could view those with love whom He foreknew would freely respond to His salvific initiatives. Similarly, the question of corporate or individual election does not settle the issue either. It seems evident that Romans 9 and these other passages do, at least possibly, refer to individual election.

Calvinism

Calvinists read these passages as referring to unconditional election to salvation, but in fact there is nothing in them that necessitates a determinist reading of them. There are quite a number of passages that suggest a universal salvific call of God to all people, and that God in fact foreknew that the cross would be a means to this end (John 12:32; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2; John 3; Rom. 3:19-31; Rom. 10-11; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; etc.). All of these passages affirm the universality of the potential efficacy of the cross event for all people, as well as the call to repentance and salvation, though all do not accept this call. Calvinists sometimes do not deal adequately (if at all) with these passages;³³ they suggest that they refer to only all *kinds* or *nations* of people;³⁴ or they attempt to affirm both God's will that all be saved as well as His will that only some be saved by appealing to differing wills in God. Frame even writes that "the reprobate are also blessed by the fact that God gives them an opportunity to turn from their wickedness and believe in Christ"³⁵ in one place, and yet in another he affirms that God's decretive will is at odds with his prescriptive will—and that both are equally authoritative.³⁶ He also suggests that God cannot do logically contradictory actions.³⁷ It remains unclear how there can be logical coherence between the three propositions that God could desire the salvation of all persons, at the same time *unilaterally and unconditionally* decree that He will provide His salvifically, monergistically, effective grace only to some, and also actually provide the "opportunity" for the reprobate

33. Erickson (852) mentions these passages in his description of the Arminian position, but he does not deal with them in terms of fitting them into his scheme of irresistible election and "soft determinism" (856-859).

34. This kind of argumentation (not surprisingly) was employed by Calvin himself. See his *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 1 Tim. 2:4. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom43.iii.iv.i.html>.

35. Frame, 418.

36. *Ibid.*, 538.

37. *Ibid.*, 518.

to repent—when the only means of their doing so is His own will which has decreed that He will never provide this opportunity.

Open Theism

Open theists, on the other hand, deal with these cross and predestining passages in a different way. According to open theist Richard Rice, the people whom God foreknew and predestined might in fact be lost.³⁸ This seems difficult to reconcile with texts such as Rom. 8:28-30; Matt. 24:13; and Acts 13:48 which seem to indicate that those whom God foreknew who would remain in Christ will in fact be saved—they will be “glorified” and “saved” because they were “ordained to eternal life.” These passages are consistent, however, with Molinism’s concept of middle knowledge. God knew who it was who would remain in faith in Christ if such persons accepted Him after God’s prevenient grace and offer of the Gospel (by various means). He accordingly predestined such persons to be conformed to Christ’s image and to be saved in eternity.

Boyd claims that the passages examined above which speak of God’s universal salvific will (1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2—in addition to Ezek. 18:23; 33:11) demonstrate that it would be implausible for God to seek to save those whom he knows will be lost in the end.³⁹ The problem here is that God affirms this very situation in certain texts (i.e. Isa. 1:18-20; 6:9-10; Ezek. 3:7-10; 18; 33:1-20; Matt. 13:11-16). He states that He will provide opportunities to those whom He knows will not accept them. Boyd seems to fall into a contradictory conundrum here. He posits that persons such as Pharaoh were so completely settled in character that this state provided the means by which God could

38. Rice, 56-58.

39. Boyd, “God Limits His Control” in *Four Views*, 202. “Does not the fact that God *tried* to get people to acquiesce to his will suggest that God believed at the time that it was at least possible that agents might comply? Yet doesn’t the fact that people ended up rejecting God’s will, despite his efforts to the contrary, indicate that God was not *certain* the people would not comply?”

reasonably predict that he would not listen and harden his heart (as he analogously argues in the cases of Peter and Judas).⁴⁰ Yet Exod. 5-11 reveals that God repeatedly warned and entreated Pharaoh to not resist His summons, all the while telling Moses that he would in fact do so (e.g. Ex. 3:18-20; 4:22-23; 10:1-6; 11:1-10). So Boyd's objection applies with equal force to his own view, since he does posit that God knew Pharaoh would not listen, and yet God repeatedly entreated him to repent anyway.

Molinism/Arminianism

Molinists and Arminians would suggest that the distinction in God's will that all be saved and His will that only some are takes into account the free choice of human beings who can accept or reject His offer of salvation. Erickson asks the important question of why it is that some believe and some do not, if in fact (as Arminians affirm) all persons are depraved and unable to accept God's offer of salvation without His initiative (e.g. Rom. 8:7-8; Eph. 2).⁴¹ Here Molinist Keathley provides an important description:

The mystery of exactly why one says "no" to grace remains unsolved. Evil, at a fundamental level, is irrational, and rejecting Christ is the ultimate evil (John 3:18). I can no more explain why people turn down the gospel than I can give the ultimate reason why Satan rebelled or Adam fell. The Bible gives no explanation as to why sin exists. Evil, by its very nature, seems to be an impossible conundrum.⁴²

The focal point of Eph. 1 is that all who are predestined are not predestined in abstract isolation, but are viewed as such because they are integrally connected to Christ, they are predestined only "in Him." This phrase occurs eight times in the first 13 verses of the chapter. The passage does not state specifically whether predestination is conditional or unconditional, but it does mention human activity—both hoping and believing, in verses 12-13, and the following chapter 2 mentions the role of faith in salvation (v. 8)—though no one can boast of anything due to God's enabling grace which gives salvation as a gift. The

40. Boyd, "The Open Theism View," in *Divine Foreknowledge*, 20-21.

41. Erickson, 857.

42. Keathley, 130.

question at issue is whether this gift is imposed or received, or perhaps imposed and then received (as in Calvinism). In this passage, the means by which a person is connected to Christ is via their faith response to God's offer of salvation. So it is reasonable to at least infer in Eph. 1 that the predestined individuals according to divine foreknowledge were not selected arbitrarily, but conditionally. Consistently in Paul and John, salvation is conditionally (but not meritoriously) procured by means of faith (John 3; 6; 7; 8; Rom. 3-11; Eph. 2; 1 John 5:10-20; etc.). The presence of the faith condition seems to undermine Calvinists claims that the grounding of election is based on unilateral divine irresistible grace and unconditionality. This is particularly the case because it is consistently maintained that those who are lost are lost because they did not respond in faith, and those who are saved are said to be saved because they did (Matt. 23:37; Luke 7:30; John 3:36; 5:19-47; 6:40-66;⁴³ 7:16-38; 8:12-58; Rom. 2:1-11; 3:20-31; 4:12-25; 5-8; 9:30-33; 10:1-13; 11:15-32; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Heb. 3:12-4:11; 1 John 1:6-2:2; 5:10-20). Passages such as Isa. 6:9-10; Matt. 13:11-16; Rom. 11:6-9 do not contradict this. God knows, by means of His middle knowledge, that the offer of the gospel is a savor of life to some and a savor of death to others (2 Cor. 2:14-16) such that in the very act of offering the grace to those whom He knows will reject it, He is in fact hardening them, as was the case with Pharaoh and the people of Israel (more on this below). Again, unconditionality is not the only (nor the most promising) explanation for these kinds of texts. God's use of His middle knowledge is able to hold together the various strands of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in a much more coherent manner than the determinist alternative.

43. As will be shown further below, there is both divine initiative and contingent human response affirmed in this pericope—those who are drawn by God must hear and learn from Him (v. 45), and then believe (v. 47).

This is also the case in Romans 9: Even if this chapter teaches individual election to salvation or damnation of particular persons (Jacob and Esau),⁴⁴ the data of the text does not contain any indication that such decrees are unconditional. Individual election is not the core distinguishing element of Calvinist soteriology—*unconditional* individual election is—and this is precisely what is missing from this chapter. It states that God knew the destinies of Jacob and Esau before they were born (vv. 11-12). It states that these destinies were according to His choice and election (v. 11). It states that human willing and running are impotent in themselves for causing salvation, but God’s initiative and mercy are necessary for it (v. 16). It states that God can choose to harden some and give (salvific) mercy to others (v. 18). But the passage also states that those in Israel that were hardened came to be in this state because of their unbelief and attempts to earn God’s salvation through works (vv. 30-33). The larger pericope continued in chapter 11 contains further information which show that persons can be lost who were once in faith, and persons who once had faith and then lost it can be brought back into God’s salvation (11:19-24). The repeated conditional clauses in vv. 22-23 underscore the reality of the necessity of human response to God’s grace in order for the contingencies of being broken off or grafted in to take place. The call of God in Romans 8 and 9 is echoed by the necessity of the call of human beings upon the Lord in chapter 10. Even the “golden chain” passage of Romans 8:28-30 contains a condition: only those who love God (v. 28) are those who are called, predestined, justified, and glorified. They love God because this love has been shed abroad in their

44. I tend to believe that it does, over against other Arminian interpreters (see Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 582 for the various views). What I am suggesting here—i.e. that God’s election is in regard to salvation on the basis of foreseen faith—is in line with Jack Cottrell (<http://jackcottrell.com/notes/election-calvinism-and-the-bible-part-two/>); John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, (London, Epworth, 1950), 556-558; quoted in Moo, 582; Daniel Whedon <http://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/whe/romans-9.html>; as well as those of Arminius, “Analysis of the Ninth Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans,” 485-519, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/arminianism/the-works-of-james-arminius/volume-3/analysis-of-romans-9/>. I thus also agree with Calvinist Thomas Schreiner (“Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election unto Salvation? Some Exegetical and Theological Reflections” *JETS* 36 [March] 1993, 25-40) that this passage is in fact about individual election to salvation—but not that it is unconditional.

hearts due to their having been justified by faith (Rom. 5:1-5). Paul's point here parallels that of chapter 4—the true children of Abraham are those who have his faith, not simply all Israelites, and he underscores that it is God's sovereign prerogative to extend His mercy to the Gentiles who have faith and harden those Israelites who do not. As Ambrosiaster writes, God's promises are given "only to those who are children of the promise, that is, who God foreknew would receive his promises, whether they are Jews or Gentiles."⁴⁵ As Arminius wrote, "the Scriptures know no Election, by which God precisely and absolutely has determined to save anyone without having first considered him as a believer. For such an Election would be at variance with the decree by which he hath determined to save none but believers."⁴⁶

Erickson claims that there is no biblical basis for the universality of God's wooing prevenient grace⁴⁷—the Arminian concept that God's grace reaches to all people (John 1:9—the light of Christ) before their awareness of it, in preparation for His fuller revelation of the Gospel. In fact, there are many passages that convey this concept, as well as one quite explicit mention of grace being offered to all persons (Titus 2:11)—the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people (for those who accept it by faith—Rom. 3-5). Ephesians 2 refers both to the initiating action of God as well as the faith response of human beings. John 12:32 indicates that the cross would be the means of drawing all people to Christ. Hebrews 2:9 indicates that Christ tasted death for every human being. There are passages which affirm that God's propitiation in Christ is available for all, but only effective for those who accept it (1 Tim. 4:10; 1 John 2:2). God's love is displayed in the

45. Ambrosiaster, *Ad Romanos*, CSEL, quoted in Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 816.

46. Arminius, *Works*, vol. 2, "Nine Questions: Question 1, 64.
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/arminius/works1.iv.xxx.i.html?highlight=decrees#highlight>.

47. Erickson, 857.

cross event such that it draws all people toward the God who gave Himself in this way (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10). The drawing of God (John 6:44) must be accompanied by hearing, learning, and believing (vv. 45-47).

It is here that crucentricity is revealed as an important methodology. As Arminius noted, unconditional predestination is dishonorable to Jesus Christ:

This doctrine is highly dishonourable to Jesus Christ our saviour. For, 1. It entirely excludes him from that decree of Predestination which predestinates the end: and it affirms, that men were predestinated to be saved, before Christ was predestinated to save them; and thus it argues, that he is not the foundation of election. 2. It denies, that Christ is the meritorious cause, that again obtained for us the salvation which we had lost, by placing him as only a subordinate cause of that salvation which had been already foreordained, and thus only a minister and instrument to apply that salvation unto us. . . . If this be true, it was therefore impossible for the salvation of such men [unconditionally elected] to have been lost, and therefore unnecessary for it to be repaired and in some sort regained afresh, and discovered, by the merit of Christ, who was fore-ordained a saviour for them alone.⁴⁸

In light of the New Testament passages on the cross of Christ, it cannot be affirmed that God only desires to save some unconditionally. The focus of these passages is that of God's loving act of propitiation in the cross, its efficacy for all persons, and the contingency of salvation based on the response of faith. It would seem rather difficult to glean from a careful reading of these passages a secret will of God (which contradicts His other will of the offer of salvation to all) which locks out some from salvation, and that the cross only atoned for the sins of some.⁴⁹ Ephesians 1:11 is often posited by Calvinists as a proof text for unilateral causal determinism,⁵⁰ however, it does not explicitly affirm this. It simply states that God's will and counsel are involved, in some sense, in "all things." There is no difficulty in fitting this into Arminian or Molinist conceptions in which the will of God designedly ordains (by various means, including permission) all things, for His sovereign

48. Arminius, *Works*, vol. 1, "I Reject this Predestination for the Following Reasons," 630-631.
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/arminius/works1.iii.ii.iii.html?highlight=entirely,excludes,him#highlight>

49. It would seem that the simplest and most logical approach would be to read the "many" passages (e.g. Matt. 20:28; 26:28; Heb. 9:28) as falling within the semantic umbrella of the "all." In order to read these as being restrictive to only the elect, it would have to be argued that there are compelling reasons for not doing so, as well as demonstrating why the "all" passages are restricted in some way beyond what they appear to explicitly affirm—the cross is effective for all potentially, but only in the fullest sense for those who believe.

50. See e.g. Frame, 144; Paul Helseth, "God Causes All Things," *Four Views on Divine Providence*, 30-31.

purposes, while taking into account human free choices, which His will and prevenient grace has also provided for (Deut. 30:19; Heb. 10:10-39; Titus 2:11; John 12:32; Rev. 22:17).

Arminius and Molina Diverge

There is one further significant point to be noted here in regard to election, foreknowledge, and predestination, and that is the important differences which existed between Arminius and Molina. According to MacGregor,⁵¹ Molina posited that Romans 9 did in fact teach a kind of unconditional election according to only “the free will of God;” the idea here being that in selecting to create the world that obtains (read complete states of affairs that were foreseen to obtain at all temporal moments throughout history), He in effect unilaterally predestined who would be saved and who would be lost in this actual world, and that in other possible worlds, those who are saved in this world could have been lost in another and vice versa. Molinists Craig and Keathley also affirm this concept of unconditional election by means of world selection. Though Craig does not use this term, he does state that “the very act of selecting a world is a sort of predestination. . . . Given that God’s middle knowledge is correct, God, in creating certain persons who will freely accept His grace, thereby ensures that they will be saved.”⁵² He, like Molina, posits the idea that by selecting a world, God in effect unilaterally predestined who will be saved and who will be lost. Keathley goes further and explicitly refers to predestination as being “unconditional.”

God’s decree of election is unconditional while his rejection of the unbeliever is conditional. . . . If God knows that a certain man will freely accept the gospel while that man’s brother freely will not, and yet God decides to create both of them anyway, then this is a mysterious, sovereign, and unconditional determination on the part of God. . . . Whether I exist at all, have the opportunity to

51. Kirk R. MacGregor, “Can Little’s Creation Order Theodicy be Reconciled with Sovereign Individual Predestination?” (paper presented at the Annual ETS meeting, Valley Forge, PA, 2005), 2-4.
<http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/papers/ets/2005/MacGrego/MacGrego.html>

52. Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 136.

respond to the gospel, or am placed in a setting where I would be graciously enabled to believe are sovereign decisions made by him.⁵³

While further discussion of possible worlds will be addressed further below, including further reasons for why I both agree and disagree with Keathley's formulation, suffice it to note here that these Molinist views are not sufficiently taking into account (1) the contingency of a faith response (regardless of whatever world obtains) inherent in the passages examined above, (2) the extent to which all states of affairs that obtain for any given individual in any possible world are conjoined with those of other persons, such that one person's salvation cannot be isolated without taking into account that of others, and most importantly (3) the extent to which each state of affairs that obtains in any feasible world are not as unilaterally determined by God as is suggested by these statements—rather, the states of affairs that exist in any possible world are the result of an innumerable set of divine-human interactions such that the language of God unilaterally “placing” people in various settings is misleading.

Arminius, on the other hand, when writing of God's predestination, recognizes three important elements that comport with the findings of this section: (1) God's most important decree is that of predestining Christ to be our Savior. (2) God's predestination involves the contingency of faith, and is not therefore unconditional. (3) God's predestination and election is both corporate (in regard to all who believe) and individual (in regard to those individuals who actually will do so), as well as based on His middle knowledge (here called foreknowledge) of what persons would freely do if they were to be created, given prevenient grace, and the opportunity to believe.

I. The first absolute decree of God concerning the salvation of sinful man, is that by which he decreed to appoint his Son, Jesus Christ, for a Mediator, Redeemer, Saviour, Priest and King, who might

53. Keathley, 153-155.

destroy sin by his own death, might by his obedience obtain the salvation which had been lost, and might communicate it by his own virtue.

II. The second precise and absolute decree of God, is that in which he decreed to receive into favour those who repent and believe, and, in Christ, for his sake and through Him, to effect the salvation of such penitents and believers as persevered to the end; but to leave in sin, and under wrath, all impenitent persons and unbelievers, and to damn them as aliens from Christ.

III. The third Divine decree is that by which God decreed to administer in a sufficient and efficacious manner the means which were necessary for repentance and faith; and to have such administration instituted (1.) according to the Divine Wisdom, by which God knows what is proper and becoming both to his mercy and his severity, and (2.) according to Divine Justice, by which He is prepared to adopt whatever his wisdom may prescribe and put it in execution.

IV. To these succeeds the fourth decree, by which God decreed to save and damn certain particular persons. This decree has its foundation in the foreknowledge of God, by which he knew from all eternity those individuals who would, through his preventing grace, believe, and, through his subsequent grace would persevere, according to the before described administration of those means which are suitable and proper for conversion and faith; and, by which foreknowledge, he likewise knew those who would not believe and persevere.

GOD'S METICULOUS PROVIDENCE IN THE CROSS EVENT (AND ELSEWHERE)

Acts 2:23 and 4:28-29 indicate that God had meticulous providence over the cross event. God predestined particular individuals to do certain things at a particular point in history for certain ends.

Molinist/Arminian Meticulous Providence Alternative to Determinism

Again, Calvinists read these passages (as well as the other ones that will be examined here) as being evidence of deterministic causation and compatibilist freedom.⁵⁴ However, these passages can be read quite effectively by means of God having Molinist middle knowledge such that He can influence and create circumstances in which He knows that free creatures will commit evil acts that will serve His ultimate consequent will purposes. These are cases of God's "weak actualization." As Alvin Plantinga explains,

Suppose God knows that if he creates you free with respect to *A* in some set *S* of circumstances, you will refrain from *A*; suppose further that he brings it about (narrow sense) that you *are* free with respect to *A* in *S*; and suppose finally that you do in fact freely refrain from *A*. Then in a broader sense of 'bring about' we could properly say that God has brought it about that you freely refrain from *A*. We must make a corresponding distinction, then, between a stronger and a weaker sense of 'actualize'. In the strong sense, God can actualize only what he can *cause* to be actual; in that sense he

54. See e.g. Helseth, 113; Erickson (368, 370) seems to use Acts 2:23 and Eph. 1:11 to support the idea of compatibilism, though (as shown above) his view actually breaks down to a quasi-Molinism in regard to providence with a determinist soteriology.

cannot actualize any state of affairs including the existence of creatures who freely take some action or other. But so far we have no reason for supposing that the same holds for *weak* actualization.⁵⁵

God can truly accomplish all things “according to the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11), including the predestination of the cross event, through both primary and secondary causes. God did not desire these evil acts in a vacuum, but weakly actualized them because of the foreknown free decisions of the people involved. That this is the case is evident in the case of Pilate: God sent his wife a dream, as well as Christ’s own testimony to warn him not to do as he did, and yet at the same time He used His middle knowledge to take Pilate’s recalcitrance into consideration in planning the timing and details of the cross event. He could also, through various means, without abridging human freedom, taking into account His middle knowledge, actually arrange for Pilate, Herod, and all the others involved to be in the places they were at the time of the crucifixion—e.g. by having them be born at certain times and places. Craig writes regarding Acts 4:27-28,

If we take the biblical word “foreknowledge” to encompass middle knowledge, then we can make perfect sense of God’s providential control over a world of free agents. For via his middle knowledge, God knew exactly which persons, if members of the Sanhedrin, would freely vote for Jesus’ condemnation; which persons, if in Jerusalem, would freely demand Christ’s death, favoring the release of Barabbas; what Herod, if king, would freely do in reaction to Jesus and to Pilate’s plea to judge him; and what Pilate, if holding the prefecture of Palestine in AD 30, would freely do under the pressure of the Jewish leaders and the crowd. Knowing all the possible circumstances, persons, and permutations of these, God decreed to create just those circumstances and just those people who would freely do what God willed to happen.⁵⁶

My only (yet significant) caveat here would be to say that the language of “creating circumstances” could be misleading, and indeed even appear to move Molinism rather too close to Calvinism and further open theist objections.⁵⁷ If God allows for libertarian freedom, circumstances cannot be unilaterally created, but must take into account the free creaturely decisions in the whole web of history (more on this below), yet God can have

55. Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 172-173.

56. Craig, “God Directs All Things” in *Four Views*, 86.

57. See e.g. Hasker, (101) who writes in reference to Molinism, “He [God] is not a manipulator, relating to us by ‘pressing the right buttons’ to get the exact response he desires to elicit.”

significant means of involvement in the creation of various sets of circumstances through His influences and providentially direct actions.

Erickson seems to suggest that all Arminians or non-determinists must adopt a “general” view of providence rather than a “specific” one.⁵⁸ I would argue that a Molinist/Arminian can have a very specific divine providence—“meticulous providence” while yet retaining room for human freedom. I concur with Erickson that there are many scriptural passages that affirm a specific providence,⁵⁹ but I would suggest that all of these can all be explained more effectively by Molinist readings which include weak actualization by means of middle knowledge. What is particularly important to address is how God’s providence relates to human sin. God can “weakly” arrange for *freedom-permitting* circumstances in which He knows that certain individuals (with all of the states of affairs in the actual world obtaining up until that point—states of affairs which have also included divine-human interactions and freedom) will be in certain places at certain times in which they will sin, and that He can use this middle knowledge for His providential purposes. For example, Molina writes of Peter’s denial of Christ in this way,

It is necessary that such an act be preceded from eternity by the following predeterminations on God’s part: (i) a volition to create the whole order of things all the way up to Peter, and to concur with each secondary cause, whether free or natural, which existed in the series extending from the beginning of the world all the way up to the begetting of Peter; (ii) . . . to cooperate with all the causes that directly concur to generate Peter; and thus (iii) a volition to confer on Peter, in part by Himself directly and in part by the mediation of secondary causes, free choice and the rest of (iv) a volition to concur in the production of all those things that were required up until Peter would arrive at the instant of the speaking with all the circumstances then obtaining; finally, (v) a volition not to deny Peter in his freedom will thus to speak, but always to assist him by means of that concurrence in such a way that if Peter should will to speak or to exercise some other operation, He would aid him in the same way, and thus (vi) a volition to confer that concurrence on him because He saw that in his freedom Peter would speak. [And further, that there was a] predetermination to permit Peter, for the sake of the excellent end that God Himself intended by this permission, to perform the evil action that He foresaw would occur under those circumstances because of Peter’s free choice.⁶⁰

58. Erickson, 369.

59. A sampling of these passages adduced by Erickson include Gen. 50:20; Ps. 139:16; Prov. 16:1, 33; 19:21; Isa. 10:5-12; Dan. 2:21; 4:24-25; Acts 2:23; 1 Sam. 24:1; 2 Thess. 2:10-12.

60. Molina, 243, 247.

Take as another example the situation with Pharaoh's hardened heart. Scripture indicates that God had an important role in placing Pharaoh on the throne at the time and place in which he was in fact reigning (Ex. 9:14-17; Rom. 9:17), and further, that God would use this situation for His providential purpose of having His glory displayed. How He accomplished the particular occurrence of Pharaoh's rulership is not known, but it is certain that He could do it without violation of human freedom—for example by certain influences that He knew would result in certain actions in certain circumstances in using His middle knowledge. In regard to Pharaoh's rebellion, God could weakly actualize the hardening of Pharaoh's heart *by the very means of actually sending Him warnings and grace*, as the narrative in Exodus indicates. God knew that this grace would be rejected such that it would fulfill His providential purposes. God certainly did not make Pharaoh evil or stubborn, but since no actualizable (see below) world existed in which there were better or less complicated means of extricating Israel from bondage, God incorporated Pharaoh's stubbornness into His plan.

A similar situation arose in the case of Samson in Judges 14. God had warned the Israelites to not marry those of the evil nations around them (Deut. 7:3-4; Joshua 23:12-13), and yet the passage indicates that somehow Samson's marriage to the Philistine woman was "of the Lord." This implies more than mere providential passive allowance, but rather some kind of active, purposeful use of middle knowledge. God must have had some role in Samson meeting this woman at the time he did—even if that role involved a divine intervention much further removed in time in regard to both or either of them. Clearly it was against His prescriptive will that he marry her, but He could be involved in setting up circumstances (while not unilaterally violating moral freedoms) in which He knew that

Samson would make this choice. God set in order (again, using His middle foreknowledge, influence, permission, and concurrence) these circumstances because He knew what the results would be if they obtained. God, through His Holy Spirit, would all the while be actively influencing Samson *not* to marry this woman (as we saw above in the case of Pilate being warned not to do the very thing that God had predestined Him to do)—He would be influencing him to stay at home and marry an Israelite. But He also knew that Samson would reject these influences and go his own way against God's will instead. The unfolding of the subsequent narrative reveals that God's foreknowledge (based on His middle knowledge) was accurate—Samson's marriage to this Philistine woman set in motion a chain of events, the end result of which was that many Philistines were destroyed—which the text indicates was the end goal (v. 4). How all this occurred was not in accordance with God's prescriptive will, but it accomplished His purposes through His actively permissive will. But the human side must also be considered. Evidently, as the text implies, Samson would not have otherwise embarked upon his divinely directed call to fight the Philistines, had not this marriage taken place. So God had to accomplish His goal by this rather circuitous route of having Samson meet this woman and knowing that he would fall in love with her, which set in motion the whole range of circumstances that followed in which His providential goals were realized. It should be noted that they would have been realized in a far better manner had Samson not been as he was or had done as he did—yet the confluence of divine actions and human choices resulted in God's providential will being accomplished. All of the above also applies to the Joseph narrative as well as any other passage which affirms God's providential role in weakly actualizing human sin through His planned allowances.

1 Corinthians 2:8, another passage centered around the cross event, seems to point rather specifically to God's having middle knowledge.⁶¹ God knew what would have happened (counterfactuals of creaturely freedom) if the rulers of this age had known the predestined mystery of God. There are at least two options involved here: (1) The mystery was kept hidden because the people did not want to see it revealed. For example, Luke indicates that the Pharisees rejected the purpose of God for them by rejecting Christ (Luke 7:30). They could have known the mystery, but it was hidden from them because of their unwillingness to receive it. On the other hand, the hiddenness of the mystery might have occurred because God knew via His middle knowledge that these rulers would not have received it anyway had they seen it, and thus He withheld it from them entirely. This would not mean that they were precluded from salvation, but that either (a) they were withheld from the knowledge of God's mystery until such a time as they would be actually open to it (such as the priests who accepted Christ after the cross—Acts 6:7) or (b) they had already missed their opportunities for salvation, and were so hardened that no evidence or grace from God would reach them. This appears to be the case described by Paul in 2 Thess. 2:10-12. The reason given for the people in question being lost is mentioned first—they did not love the truth which could have saved them. Then God sends them strong delusion so that they believe a lie. Finally, it is mentioned they are lost because they did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. God's delusion—which would seem to be a matter of, again, His using His middle knowledge to arranging circumstances in which the lie would be believed—is only a response in judgment to what has already been freely

61. There are several other texts which also seem to infer God's having middle knowledge, including Ex. 3:19; 1 Sam. 23:6-10; and Matt. 11:21-23.

chosen by those who have rejected His salvation. Again, divine-human interactions in the texts are best explained by the Molinist/Arminian model.

Open Theism Precludes Meticulous Providence

Open theists do not seem to have an adequate explanation for passages such as these that include such specificity. On the open view, God would have no way of knowing whether the rulers of this age would or would not crucify Jesus if they did not know the mystery of God; He could not know whether Samson's marriage, the treachery of Joseph's brothers, or the stubbornness of Pharaoh would have any positive outcomes at all. He could not plan for them in providential ways but simply guess well and hope for the best. He would have no way of knowing whether Samson's marriage would result in his apostasy or Joseph's being sold would result in his own rejection of God or death on the journey. Thus He could not providentially ensure that there was a "certain man" (who "just happened" to be at the right place at the right time) who told Joseph of his brothers' whereabouts (Gen. 37:15-17); nor could Samson's marriage be "of the Lord" in any sense because (for all God knew) Samson's character might be so bad that nothing good would ever result from this unfortunate turn of events.

The approach taken by open theists seems to be to avoid the specificity. For example, Boyd refers to Peter's set character as a basis for Christ's being able to predict His denial. But what aspect of Peter's character would reveal that his denials would take place *3 times before the cock crowed twice*? Boyd also evades the specificity of the Acts 2:23 and 4:27-28. "God orchestrated events to the extent that certain wicked people (and certain wicked spirits, John 12:27; 1 Cor. 2:8) acted out their self-acquired characters and did what

they wanted to do in conformity with his plan to have his Son betrayed and crucified.”⁶²

There are at least three problems here: First, what does God “orchestrating” events mean on the open theist view? God does not have middle or foreknowledge, so how could He count on these particular people to have these particular bad characters at this particular time and place? Second, Boyd refers to God knowing that Christ would be betrayed and crucified as part of His “plan.” But how could God plan for these specific details on open theism? What in the characters of the people involved would reveal this? Might not the Jewish leaders (due to their characters) simply have killed Jesus by stealth themselves? How could God know that Judas would betray Christ? Was that specifically part of his character? Third, Mark 10:33-34; Ps. 22; Isa. 53; Dan. 9; etc. indicate very specific times and details in regard to Christ’s death which are not revealed by character analysis. All of these events were predicted and fulfilled precisely. As noted above, Rice suggests that all predicted events are conditional prophecies, but how would he (he does not say) account for such a high degree of specificity in the fulfillment of these prophecies? It is one thing to affirm (as is evident in Scripture) that there are indeed conditional prophecies (i.e. Jonah; certain aspects of prophecies to Israel; etc.) that contain a great deal of specificity (“40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown”) which never transpire, but what of those that actually do transpire? Were these mere skillful guesses on God’s part? God could know Pharaoh’s stubbornness, to be sure, but how could God (without middle or foreknowledge) know *exactly how long* the Israelites would be in bondage (including how long all the events in Egypt would last—Gen. 15:13-16)? Again, as noted previously, the only way, on this view, for God to know these details with such specificity (without middle or foreknowledge)

62. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 122-123, quoted in Paul Kjos Helseth, “Response to Gregory Boyd” in *Four Views*, 215.

would be for Him to actually causally and unilaterally determine them to take place via innumerable operations of compatibilist freedom situations in which people could not do otherwise from what they did (due to determining circumstances which were also decreed by God), including many sinful actions. Again, the open theist model, designed to be set over against Calvinism, actually, if consistently applied on the basis of these claims, becomes subsumed into the same condition—God unilaterally determines sin.

Open theists point to passages of Scripture in which God appears to gain new information—e.g. Gen. 18:21; 22:12—or places where He is said to “regret” things He has done (Gen. 6:6-7; 1 Sam. 15:35). While some view these passages as anthropomorphic, I would suggest that there are other alternatives.

In regard to Gen. 18:21, it should be noted that God’s foreknowledge of Abraham’s future is evident in the surrounding verses. God says, “I know him”—He knows that he will command his children and that all the families of the earth will be blessed in him (vv. 17-19). But what of verse 21, where God says that He will personally go down to Sodom to (seemingly) find out how bad the situation is? It appears that the overall message of the narrative is to show how reluctant God is to destroy the cities—He tells Abraham that He will not destroy them if there are 10 righteous people there; He says that He will go down Himself to see. In fact, His going down is in fact what further demonstrates how evil the cities had become. God experienced how unredeemable the situation was in some deeper way for Himself. This passage also has ramifications for helping to explain 22:12. If God knew (as expressed in chapter 18) prior to Abraham’s offering of Isaac that he would have a great nation, that he would instruct his children after him, etc., then it follows that He also knew that Abraham would pass this test (in Ch. 22) as well. This again appears to be a case

of God experientially condescending to teach His people, and experiencing their responses to Him in a vivid way. These kinds of passages do not contradict God's exhaustive foreknowledge—He could know from all eternity what He would do and still experience it in some way, with human beings in time, yet still retaining His transcendence of space and time.⁶³

In Genesis 6 and 1 Samuel 15, the Hebrew root *nakham* is used. This can mean either to be sorrowful or to repent. As Norman Gulley observes,⁶⁴ the emphasis in these passages is on the former—God is sorrowful about what has transpired due to a decision He made and its resultant consequences. But it does not logically follow from this that He did not know that it would occur. Even on a human level, we are often sorrowful about things that we know would happen, and yet this does not mean that we did not know that they would occur or were mistaken in our beliefs.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS: POSSIBLE WORLD THEORY AND THE DIVINE DECREES

What can be minimally affirmed in regard to biblical descriptions of divine foreknowledge is that it encompasses both natural knowledge, middle knowledge, and resultant free knowledge after He uses this conceptually available data to order the world according to His divine providential purposes, taking into account creaturely free decisions. This is, accordingly, closest to the Molinist and Arminian accounts of divine foreknowledge, decrees, predestination, and plan—with the important differences discussed above. While Arminius is less specific than Molina in regard to his account of divine foreknowledge and providence (at least in regard to certain details examined here), it appears that he is closer

63. I have deliberately avoided addressing the question of the relationship of God and time in this paper, mainly because it does not have a determinative bearing on the questions here explored. Suffice it to note that there is a deep mystery in this subject, such that all of the views have unsolvable (at least in this life) difficulties. For a good introductory study of the various views, see Gregory E. Ganssle, ed. with introduction, *God and Time: Four Views*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

64. Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity*, vol. 2, (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), 261.

to the findings of this research. On the Calvinist and open theist models do not appear to take sufficiently into account the biblical data in certain significant ways, as well as its systematic and logical implications. As John Peckham writes,

I believe that Molinism provides an internally coherent and viable model demonstrating the composability of EDF and LF [exhaustive divine foreknowledge and libertarian freedom], which together best explain Scripture's depiction of divine providence and unfulfilled desires while coherently maintaining that God irrevocably grants creaturely freedom (and thus is not the author of evil) and exercises providential sovereignty to certainly accomplish his purpose.⁶⁵

One Decree or Many?

Regarding the pre-creation decrees of God, it appears that Arminius' conception is essentially correct. God's most important decree, as envisaged by the New Testament evidence examined here, was that to appoint Christ as the Savior of the world—which actually implies, as was addressed in the first section above, God's complex foreknowledge—natural, middle and free—given that the origin of sin as well as the subsequent history of humankind must be taken into account in this decree. Contra MacGregor,⁶⁶ I do not see an appreciable difference between Arminius' view of the order of God's knowledge and Molina's conception. Arminius wrote,

God knows 1. Himself what He, of Himself is able to do. 2. All things possible what can be done by those beings which He can make. 3. All things which shall exist by the act of creation. 4. All things which shall exist by the act of creatures and especially of rational creatures, whether moved by those actions of His creatures, especially rational ones; and 5. What He is about to do; whether moved by those deeds of creatures, and especially rational ones; or at least by occasion received from them.⁶⁷

His points 2, 3, 4 and 5 essentially correspond, it seems to me, to Molina's second logical moment—God's middle knowledge.

But we have also seen that there was a problem with Molina's conception of predestination—he viewed this as being unconditional, and based solely upon God's will to

65. John C. Peckham, "Providence and God's Unfulfilled Desires," *Philosophia Christi*, 15 (2013), 227-236, 233. Peckham adds, however, the caveat that "questions remain, and I am not committed to the view that Molinism describes about the operation of divine foreknowledge and providence."

66. MacGregor, 7.

67. Arminius, *Works*, vol. 3, "Sixth Proposition of Arminius," 65-66, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/arminius/works3.iv.viii.html>.

decree that a certain world (state of affairs) exist. By making this decree, God unilaterally determined who would be saved and who would be lost, and that in another possible world, these states of affairs could be reversed. The problem here, as was noted, is that this isolates individuals in a way that is impossible in any possible world. Each individual's identity is linked with every other individual, such that in other possible worlds the individuals "essences"⁶⁸ might not even be retained. Every state of affairs that obtain in any given world can potentially alter the identity of each individual. Also, given the interconnectedness of human life, it seems implausible that the switching of one saved person into a lost one would have significant ramifications for many other persons (that is if they were to retain their essences in the other possible world) which would seem to rule out the interchangeability hypothesis of Molina and MacGregor. As discussed above, MacGregor's and Keathley's conception (bolstered by Molina) of unconditional election is misleading for several reasons,⁶⁹ as is the language of God "placing" people in or "creating" circumstances—which could imply deterministic conclusions.

Divine-Human Interaction and Possible Worlds

What is implied by the present study is this: Every aspect of a possible world is contingent upon both divine and creaturely freedom. As Plantinga writes,

The essential point of the Free Will Defence is that the creation of a world containing moral good is a co-operative venture; it requires the uncoerced concurrence of significantly free creatures. But then the actualization of a world *W* containing moral good is not up to God alone; it also depends upon what the significantly free creatures of *W* would do if God created them and placed them in the situations⁷⁰ *W* contains. 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

68. See Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 49-53 where he discusses the elements of creaturely essence.

69. Where it was noted that these schemes fail to take into account "(1) the contingency of a faith response (regardless of whatever world obtains) inherent in the passages examined above, (2) the extent to which all states of affairs that obtain for any given individual in any possible world are conjoined with those of other persons, such that one person's salvation cannot be isolated without taking into account that of others, and most importantly (3) the extent to which each state of affairs that obtain in any feasible world are not as unilaterally determined by God as is suggested by these statements—rather, the states of affairs that exist in any possible world are the result of an innumerable set of divine-human interactions such that the language of God unilaterally "placing" people in various settings is misleading."

70. Given the context, the language of "placing" in circumstances seems less confusing here.

whose co-operation he must depend. Thus is the power of an omnipotent God limited by the freedom he confers upon his creatures.

The very circumstances that obtain at any given moment are contingent partially upon all of the other preceding sets of circumstances in any given world such that they are the product of at least both divine and human activities (as well as other supernatural forces, nature, etc.). Accordingly, I would suggest that the traditional language of God having only one creative decree by which all history is known to Him, is misleading at best. It would seem better to say (no matter which view of God and time one holds) that there are actually an innumerable set of such decrees, because God has to decide what to do with His immense middle knowledge data. He has to decide how to create life on earth, what kind of test (if any) to give to the humans, how to respond to their failure, what to say to Cain when he sins, how to respond to the antediluvian wickedness, whom to choose (Abraham) to continue His covenant promises, what to do about Joseph and his brothers, all the way down to the time of the cross of Christ and beyond. Recall Molina's description of Peter's denial above, and multiply it by an incomprehensibly large number—representing each person who has ever lived and every set of circumstances in every possible, feasible, as well as the actual world, replete with divine-human interactions in which God uses His middle knowledge to plan and respond to human beings' free choices—and it can be seen, I think, that the language of a single creation decree is inadequate.

Why Are the Lost Created?

There are some aspects of each human life that are unilaterally determined by God. It seems to me evident from the biblical evidence that each human life is a divinely created in the womb (Ps. 139, etc.). This raises immediately the question, on a middle knowledge Molinist account, of why it is that God creates persons whom He knows will be lost. As

Plantinga shows, however, certain worlds are not feasible for God.⁷¹ Via His middle knowledge He knows that any actualizable fallen Earth set of circumstances will contain free creatures that will choose to rebel against Him and be lost. Given that this is the case, actualizing a world in which all are saved is not a feasible world for God to instantiate. While all the reasons for God's decision to give life to those for whom it will end in being lost eternally are not revealed, there are some hints in Scripture (Prov. 16:4; Ex. 9:16; etc.). Since God knows that there are no feasible worlds in which all persons are saved, He can use His middle knowledge to providentially incorporate the circumstances of the lives of the lost into His plans. To take just one example: God knows that there will be many godly parents who will raise their children with a solid Christian foundation and yet later abandon the faith. Yet had they not existed, their children may not have come to be saved in the actual world. So their existence, as does that of any lost person, can be used for God's good purposes in various ways.

Taking the question back even further, we could ask the question of why it was that God ordered the creation and test of Adam and Eve as He did, knowing that they would fail. Or going even further back—why did God create angels in heaven whom He knew would rebel? Clearly these are questions that Scripture has not revealed answers to, but given that the Judge of all the earth always does what is right (Gen. 18:25), it can at least be assumed that while this may not be the best of all possible worlds, it is at least one of the best feasible ones, given all the various contingencies with which God is confronted.

71. Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 34-44.

How Does God Know?

Scripture does not address, either, the significant philosophical question of how it is that God knows the counterfactuals of freedom—what is the basis for His middle knowledge. It does, however, as suggested here, provide sufficient evidence for the fact that He has middle knowledge, which, is, I would suggest, fundamentally more significant.

Salvation in Different Possible Worlds

Regarding soteriology, another major question that arises on Molinism is this: While I noted above my reluctance to accept the interchangeability hypothesis regarding the saved and the lost, we should still consider whether there are sets of circumstances in other possible worlds such that persons who are lost in this world would be saved in another one (given the retention of their essences in that world). Jesus and Paul (Matt. 11 and 1 Cor. 2:8) seem to be alluding to this very fact. If Tyre and Sidon or Sodom and Gomorrah had seen Christ's ministry, they would have repented. Keathley rightly asks the question of why it was then, that Christ did not in fact go to Tyre and Sidon to perform these miracles. His answer is that God does not have to provide "optimal circumstances" for each person—i.e. freedom permitting circumstances in which God knows that they would choose to repent.⁷² But what are these "optimal" circumstances? Presumably he means ones in which God, via middle knowledge, knows will involve a positive salvific response. But this is potentially misleading, as will be shown. Certainly there are possible worlds in which these alternate circumstances may have obtained, but these may have not been actualizable worlds. For example, what if it were the case that the people of Tyre and Sidon would have prevented Christ from entering their territory, or if they were to have expelled

72. Keathley, 158.

him before He was able to perform any miracles? The counterfactual of freedom that Christ proclaimed would still be true (that they would have repented had they seen the miracles), it's just that the world in which that set of circumstances obtained was not feasible, due to the "transworld depravity" of these inhabitants—that is, their sinful action in regard to this set of circumstances in all possible worlds—in regard to Christ's visit. Of course this is not the only option for explaining Christ's statement, but it does seem to militate against Keathley's suggestion that God could simply unilaterally create "optimal circumstances" for each person to be saved.

The world chosen by God to actualize contains the eventual free choice of the saved to accept Christ, and such a world could not have existed in God's decrees had not He foreseen this free response via His middle knowledge. And the circumstances that obtain in which a person accepts Christ, while they are freedom permitting, are not determinative. So it cannot be said that God elects by creating circumstances alone. God must elect based on both His involvement to create those circumstances of grace (the cross, prevenient grace, the persons' experiences that obtain during conversion, etc.) *as well as* the person's freely chosen responses to these graces, including their acceptance of Christ.

Let us consider the example of Joe: Joe is a person who lives in a town we'll call Hoton. God knows via His middle knowledge that if evangelist Zepho travels to town Hoton, distributes various advertising for his meeting, and that Joe would respond to this invitation, attend the meeting and be converted. However, this world is not the actual world, these circumstances never obtain, and Joe is lost. Is this a problem? And if so, why? The most promising way of addressing this is to suggest that the world in which Joe is saved was not an actualizable world, given the factors of human freedom. Let us suppose

that Zepho considers holding meetings in Hoton, but decides to hold them in Yorbax instead. We could even propose that God influenced Zepho to hold the meetings in Hoton, but that he resisted this call and went to Yorbax instead. Knowing this, God then influences many people in Yorbax who freely respond to Zepho's evangelism there and hence 50 people are saved as a result. God might know that if the meetings had been held in Hoton, Joe and 28 other people would be saved as a result. Suppose, however, that Zepho goes to Yorbax and the situation is the opposite—only 10 people are saved there, and had he gone to Hoton, 70 people including Joe would have been saved. The fact remains, however, that the alternative world in which Zepho goes to Hoton was not actualizable due to Zepho's freedom. Here is where God's admonition to Ezekiel regarding his responsibility to proclaim God's messages becomes germane—if Ezekiel were to not do so, God would hold him accountable for those lost as a result, while at the same time holding the lost persons justly accountable (Ezek. 3:17-21), such that they could not justly blame God, or even the other person for their lostness. "Lost Joe" cannot complain in the judgment concerning his fate due to different possible circumstances. Those different possible circumstances were not *actualizable ones* due to various factors, including human free decisions, including his own. In any possible world, Joe could have been "saved Joe"—God's grace was sufficient for him. The fact that God knew that there were possible (but not feasible) worlds in which Joe is saved is irrelevant, even if one of them was locked out due to other people's free choices. Everyone is judged on the basis of who they are in the actual world, not possible, yet unfeasible ones.⁷³

73. I leave open the possibility here that God may take into account in His judgement what the person would have decided in regard to their faith in Christ had they lived (in the case of infants who die, or other possible circumstances of persons who have the incapacity to accept or reject Christ for various reasons). Perhaps He would consider their choice for or against Christ as it would have obtained the possible

There are other possibilities with regard to Joe: Perhaps it is the case that in any possible world, Joe would not attend any evangelistic meetings, or if he would, in all cases he would freely reject the message—“transworld depravity” in regard to evangelism. In all of these cases, Joe has had ample opportunity to respond to God—given His prevenient grace (in various forms); and that he could have no cause for charging God with injustice, especially since the possible worlds in which he obtained a different experience may not have been feasible, or at least had distinct disadvantages. Of course it could also be the case that Zepho goes to Yorbox, Joe hears and accepts the message, and is saved. Joe is still saved by the grace of God through faith alone, not on the basis of circumstances alone.

Foreknowledge and Freedom

Regarding the other major question of the reconciliation between foreknowledge and freedom, Scripture does not address all of the philosophical questions that arise.⁷⁴ However, it does provide sufficient data to lead to the conclusion that there is no inherent conflict between them. If God can predict the cross event, predestine individuals to salvation, plan for specific events surrounding it—with such minute detail and precision as has been described here, involving as it did the whole of history (not to mention the many other examples in Scripture of minutely detailed fulfilled prophecies—e.g. Gen. 15:13-20; Isaiah 45:1-7; Daniel 2; 7-9; etc.), it follows He have exhaustive foreknowledge. And if Scripture indicates that human beings are free to accept or reject His gracious offer of salvation through this cross of Christ, it follows that human beings have significant libertarian freedom. In light of the cross of Christ, divine sovereignty, foreknowledge, predestination, and human freedom are all revealed to be harmonious.

world in which the person who died would have continued to exist—from the standpoint of circumstances which would resemble the actual world as closely as possible in that world.

74. For a helpful treatment of the most significant of them, see Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 51-115.

ELLEN WHITE COMMENTS

Ellen White seems to have some passages which imply meticulous providence and which are consonant with a middle knowledge model of meticulous providence:

Still the heart of Pharaoh grew harder. And now the Lord sent a message to him, declaring, "I will at this time send all My plagues upon thy heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like Me in all the earth.... And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee My power." Not that God had given him an existence for this purpose, but *His providence had overruled events* to place him upon the throne at the very time appointed for Israel's deliverance. Though this haughty tyrant had by his crimes forfeited the mercy of God, yet his life had been preserved that through his stubbornness the Lord might manifest His wonders in the land of Egypt. *The disposing of events is of God's providence. He could have placed upon the throne a more merciful king, who would not have dared to withstand the mighty manifestations of divine power. But in that case the Lord's purposes would not have been accomplished.* His people were permitted to experience the grinding cruelty of the Egyptians, that they might not be deceived concerning the debasing influence of idolatry. In His dealing with Pharaoh, the Lord manifested His hatred of idolatry and His determination to punish cruelty and oppression.⁷⁵

Caiaphas was the one who was to be in office when type met antitype, when the true High Priest came into office. Each actor in history stands in his lot and place; for God's great work after his own plan will be carried out by men who have prepared themselves to fill positions for good or evil. In opposition to righteousness, men become instruments of unrighteousness. But they are not forced to take this course of action. They need not become instruments of unrighteousness, any more than Cain needed to. God said to him, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." Cain would not hear the voice of God; and as a result, he became his brother's murderer.

Men of all characters, righteous and unrighteous, will stand in their several positions in God's plan. With the characters they have formed, they will act their part in the fulfillment of history. In a crisis, just at the right moment, they will stand in the places they have prepared themselves to fill. Believers and unbelievers will fall into line as witnesses to confirm truth that they themselves do not comprehend. *All will co-operate in accomplishing the purposes of God, just as did Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod. In putting Christ to death, the priests thought they were carrying out their own purposes, but unconsciously and unintentionally they were fulfilling the purpose of God.* He "revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him."⁷⁶

FURTHER RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to engage with and evaluate models of divine foreknowledge, predestination and providence according to the scriptural data regarding the cross of Christ. In the process, the Molinist and Arminian schemes (with some modification of the former) have emerged as the models most consistently consonant with the materials here studied. It remains for someone or a group of people to investigate the canonical data of

75. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 267.

76. *Ibid.*, "Caiaphas," *Review and Herald*, June 12, (1900).

Scripture as a whole in order to ascertain further information regarding divine foreknowledge, predestination, and meticulous providence, etc. Christian philosophers will continue to debate the question of how it can be that God can know the future exhaustively, or if He in fact does so. While this is an important question, I would argue that addressing it must be grounded more fully in the scriptural materials and their systematic implications, the core of which centers significantly around the cross event, which accordingly provides a Christocentric basis for approaching these issues, and which has formed the framework for the foundational conclusions advocated here.

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