

## *Double Predestination*

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*(Excerpted from a longer dissertation)*

### *The Double-Predestination Distortion*

The distortion of double predestination looks like this: There is a symmetry that exists between election and reprobation. God WORKS in the same way and same manner with respect to the elect and to the reprobate. That is to say, from all eternity God decreed some to election and by divine initiative works faith in their hearts and brings them actively to salvation. By the same token, from all eternity God decrees some to sin and damnation (*destinare ad peccatum*) and actively intervenes to work sin in their lives, bringing them to damnation by divine initiative. In the case of the elect, *regeneration* is the monergistic work of God. In the case of the reprobate, sin and *degeneration* are the monergistic work of God. Stated another way, we can establish a parallelism of foreordination and predestination by means of a *positive* symmetry. We can call this a *positive-positive* view of predestination. This is, God *positively* and *actively* intervenes in the lives of the elect to bring them to salvation. In the same way God *positively* and *actively* intervenes in the life of the reprobate to bring him to sin.

This distortion of positive-positive predestination clearly makes God the author of sin who punishes a person for doing what God monergistically and irresistibly coerces man to do. Such a view is indeed a monstrous assault on the integrity of God. This is not the Reformed view of predestination, but a gross and inexcusable caricature of the doctrine. Such a view may be identified with what is often loosely described as hyper-Calvinism and involves a radical form of supralapsarianism. Such a view of predestination has been virtually universally and monolithically rejected by Reformed thinkers.

### *The Reformed View of Predestination*

In sharp contrast to the caricature of double predestination seen in the positive-positive schema is the classic position of Reformed theology on predestination. In this view predestination is double in that it involves both election and reprobation but is not symmetrical with respect to the mode of divine activity. A strict parallelism of operation is denied. Rather we view predestination in terms of a positive-negative relationship.

In the Reformed view God from all eternity decrees some to election and positively intervenes in their lives to work regeneration and faith by a monergistic work of grace. To the non-elect God withholds this monergistic work of grace, passing them by and leaving them to themselves. He does not monergistically work sin or unbelief in their lives. Even in the case of the "hardening" of the sinners' already recalcitrant hearts, God does not, as Luther stated, "work evil in us (for hardening is working evil) by creating fresh evil in us."<sup>2</sup> Luther continued:

When men hear us say that God works both good and evil in us, and that we are subject to God's working by mere passive necessity, they seem to

imagine a man who is in himself good, and not evil, having an evil work wrought in him by God; for they do not sufficiently bear in mind how incessantly active God is in all His creatures, allowing none of them to keep holiday. He who would understand these matters, however, should think thus: God works evil in us (that is, by means of us) not through God's own fault, but by reason of our own defect. We being evil by nature, and God being good, when He impels us to act by His own acting upon us according to the nature of His omnipotence, good though He is in Himself, He cannot but do evil by our evil instrumentality; although, according to His wisdom, He makes good use of this evil for His own glory and for our salvation.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the mode of operation in the lives of the elect is not parallel with that operation in the lives of the reprobate. God works regeneration monergistically but never sin. Sin falls within the category of providential concurrence.

Another significant difference between the activity of God with respect to the elect and the reprobate concerns God's justice. The decree and fulfillment of election provide mercy for the elect while the efficacy of reprobation provides justice for the reprobate. God shows mercy sovereignly and unconditionally to some, and gives justice to those passed over in election. That is to say, God grants the mercy of election to some and justice to others. No one is the victim of injustice. To fail to receive mercy is not to be treated unjustly. God is under no obligation to grant mercy to all — in fact He is under no obligation to grant mercy to any. He says, "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy" (Rom. 9). The divine prerogative to grant mercy voluntarily cannot be faulted. If God is required by some cosmic law apart from Himself to be merciful to all men, then we would have to conclude that justice demands mercy. If that is so, then mercy is no longer voluntary, but required. If mercy is required, it is no longer mercy, but justice. What God does not do is sin by visiting injustice upon the reprobate. Only by considering election and reprobation as being asymmetrical in terms of a positive-negative schema can God be exonerated from injustice.

### *The Reformed Confessions*

By a brief reconnaissance of Reformed confessions and by a brief roll-call of the theologians of the Reformed faith, we can readily see that double predestination has been consistently maintained along the lines of a positive-negative schema.

The Reformed Confession: 1536

Our salvation is from God, but from ourselves there is nothing but sin and damnation. (Art. 9)

French Confession of Faith: 1559

We believe that from this corruption and general condemnation in which all men are plunged, God, according to his eternal and immutable counsel, calleth those whom he hath chosen by his goodness and mercy alone in our Lord Jesus Christ, without consideration of their works, to display in them the riches of his mercy; leaving the rest in this same corruption and condemnation to show in them his justice. (Art. XII)

The Belgic Confession of Faith: 1561

We believe that all the posterity of Adam, being thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of our first parents, God then did manifest himself such as he is; that is to say, MERCIFUL AND JUST: MERCIFUL, since he delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable council, of mere goodness hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without respect to their works: JUST, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves. (Art. XVI)

The Second Helvetic Confession: 1566

Finally, as often as God in Scripture is said or seems to do something evil, it is not thereby said that man does not do evil, but that God permits it and does not prevent it, according to his just judgment, who could prevent it if he wished, or because he turns man's evil into good. . . . St. Augustine writes in his *Enchiridion*: "What happens contrary to his will occurs, in a wonderful and ineffable way, not apart from his will. For it would not happen if he did not allow it. And yet he does not allow it unwillingly but willingly." (Art. VIII)

The Westminster Confession of Faith: 1643

As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected . . . are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power. through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as He pleaseth, for the glory of His Sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice. (Chap. III — Art. VI and VII)

These examples selected from confessional formulas of the Reformation indicate the care with which the doctrine of double predestination has been treated. The asymmetrical

expression of the "double" aspect has been clearly maintained. This is in keeping with the care exhibited consistently throughout the history of the Church. The same kind of careful delineation can be seen in Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Zanchius, Turretini, Edwards, Hodge, Warfield, Bavinck, Berkouwer, *et al.*

### ***Foreordination to Reprobation***

In spite of the distinction of positive-negative with respect to the mode of God's activity toward the elect and the reprobate, we are left with the thorny question of God predestinating the reprobate. If God in any sense predestines or foreordains reprobation, doesn't this make the rejection of Christ by the reprobate absolutely certain and inevitable? And if the reprobate's reprobation is certain in light of predestination, doesn't this make God responsible for the sin of the reprobate? We must answer the first question in the affirmative, and the second in the negative.

If God foreordains anything, it is absolutely certain that what He foreordains will come to pass. The purpose of God can never be frustrated. Even God's foreknowledge or prescience makes future events certain with respect to time. That is to say, if God knows on Tuesday that I will drive to Pittsburgh on Friday, then there is no doubt that, come Friday, I will drive to Pittsburgh. Otherwise God's knowledge would have been in error. Yet, there is a significant difference between God's knowing that I would drive to Pittsburgh and God's ordaining that I would do so. Theoretically He could know of a future act without ordaining it, but He could not ordain it without knowing what it is that He is ordaining. But in either case, the future event would be certain with respect to time and the knowledge of God.

Luther, in discussing the traitorous act of Judas, says:

Have I not put on record in many books that I am talking about *necessity of immutability*? I know that the Father begets willingly, and that Judas betrayed Christ willingly. My point is that this act of the will in Judas was certainly and infallibly bound to take place, if God foreknew it. That is to say (if my meaning is not yet grasped), I distinguish two necessities: one I call *necessity of force* (*necessitatem violentam*), referring to action; the other I call *necessity of infallibility* (*necessitatem infallibilem*), referring to time. Let him who hears me understand that I am speaking of the latter, not the former; that is, I am not discussing whether Judas became a traitor willingly or unwillingly, but whether it was infallibly bound to come to pass that Judas should willingly betray Christ at a time predetermined by God.<sup>3</sup>

We see then, that what God knows in advance comes to pass by necessity or infallibly or necessity of immutability. But what about His foreordaining or predestinating what comes to pass? If God foreordains reprobation does this not obliterate the distinction between positive-negative and involve a *necessity of force*? If God foreordains reprobation does this not mean that God forces, compels, or coerces the reprobate to sin? Again the answer must be negative.

If God, when He is decreeing reprobation, does so in consideration of the reprobate's being already fallen, then He does not coerce him to sin. To be reprobate is to be left in sin, not pushed or forced to sin. If the decree of reprobation were made without a view to the fall, then the objection to double predestination would be valid and God would be properly charged with being the author of sin. But Reformed theologians have been careful to avoid such a blasphemous notion. Berkouwer states the boundaries of the discussion clearly:

On the one hand, we want to maintain the freedom of God in election, and on the other hand, we want to avoid any conclusion which would make God the cause of sin and unbelief.<sup>4</sup>

God's decree of reprobation, given in light of the fall, is a decree to justice, not injustice. In this view the biblical *a priori* that God is neither the cause nor the author of sin is safeguarded. Turretini says, "We have proved the object of predestination to be man considered as fallen, sin ought necessarily to be supposed as the condition in him who is reprobated, no less than him who is elected."<sup>5</sup> He writes elsewhere:

The negative act includes two, both preterition, by which in the election of some as well to glory as to grace, he neglected and slighted others, which is evident from the event of election, and *negative desertion*, by which he left them in the corrupt mass and in their misery; which, however, is as to be understood, 1. That they are not excepted from the laws of common providence, but remain subject to them, nor are immediately deprived of all God's favor, but only of the saving and vivifying which is the fruit of election, 2. That preterition and desertion; not indeed from the nature of preterition and desertion itself, and the force of the denied grace itself, but from the nature of the corrupt free will, and the force of corruption in it; as he who does not cure the disease of a sick man, is not the cause per se of the disease, nor of the results flowing from it; so sins are *the consequents*, rather than the *effects* of reprobation, necessarily bringing about the futuration of the event, but yet not infusing nor producing the wickedness.<sup>6</sup>

The importance of viewing the decree of reprobation in light of the fall is seen in the ongoing discussions between Reformed theologians concerning infra- and supra-lapsarianism. Both viewpoints include the fall in God's decree. Both view the decree of preterition in terms of divine permission. The real issue between the positions concerns the *logical order* of the decrees. In the supralapsarian view the decree of election and reprobation is logically prior to the decree to permit the fall. In the infralapsarian view the decree to permit the fall is logically prior to the decree to election and reprobation.

Though this writer favors the infralapsarian view along the lines developed by Turretini, it is important to note that both views see election and reprobation in light of the fall and avoid the awful conclusion that God is the author of sin. Both views protect the boundaries Berkouwer mentions.

Only in a positive-positive schema of predestination does *double-predestination* leave us with a capricious deity whose sovereign decrees manifest a divine tyranny. Reformed

theology has consistently eschewed such a hyper-supralapsarianism. Opponents of Calvinism, however, persistently caricature the straw man of hyper-supralapsarianism, doing violence to the Reformed faith and assaulting the dignity of God's sovereignty.

We rejoice in the biblical clarity which reveals God's sovereignty in majestic terms. We rejoice in the knowledge of divine mercy and grace that go to such extremes to redeem the elect. We rejoice that God's glory and honor are manifested both in His mercy and in His justice.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*