GRACE AND FREE WILL:
THREE SIXTEENTH CENTURY DEBATES
by Stephen Bilynskyj

Am I free to accept or reject the grace of God? Do I make any contribution to my salvation? One segment of the church has regularly answered these questions in the negative. Another part of the church has often answered affirmatively. The question of the relationship between God's work of grace and human free will has dogged the steps of Christian doctrine since its earliest days. Romans 9 suggests that Paul wrestled with the question and came up with a negative answer with respect to human free will. But support for both sides of the controversy may be and often has been found in his letters.

In this paper I want to look at the three major debates concerning grace and free will in the sixteenth century. I wish to show that the issue cuts across the Catholic and Protestant division and that there are certain temperamental characteristics distinguishing the disputants on one side from those on the other. I want to look at the debate between Erasmus and Luther, the controversy between the Calvinists and the Remonstrants, and the debate between Luis de Molina and Domingo Báñez. I will also briefly note where the radical reformers stood on the issue.

Let me first set out a little historical background to the debates. The issue of grace and free will first became a major doctrinal question in the dispute between Augustine and Pelagius in the fifth century. Pelagius' moral earnestness led him to emphasize moral responsibility, which led in turn to a concern for the freedom of the human will. An inherited guilt of original sin would seem to eliminate responsibility. So Pelagius denied original sin and affirmed a human ability to do that which is good, even apart from the grace of God. Augustine's response was the absolute denial of any human capacity for good apart from grace and the denial even of any freedom with respect to the acceptance of grace. One received grace as a result of God's eternal, predestining decree. Grace does not depend on human choice.

The extremities of the Pelagian and Augustinian positions led, in the middle ages, to a series of positions which attempted to reconcile human free will with the predestining grace of God. Because Pelagianism was condemned as a heresy at the Third General Council in Ephesus in 431, the church tended to be more tolerant to positions which leaned in the Augustinian direction, downplaying free will. Any movement toward a greater emphasis on human free will could be labeled "Pelagian," and so was risky to maintain. Nonetheless, the general understanding in the middle ages was that Catholic doctrine allowed for human free will. Thus we have the well-known statement of Bernard of Clairveaux, "Take away free will and there remaineth nothing to be saved; take away grace and there is no means whereby it can be saved."[1]

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[1] Bernard of Clairveaux, *Concerninq Grace and Free Will*, translated by Watkin W. Williams (London: 1920), p. 5.

Probably the most subtle reconciliation of grace and free will in the middle ages is to be found in the work of Thomas Aquinas. Thomas adopts a remarkably Augustinian view of predestination. But he combines the view that God's knowledge is the effective cause of all that happens with some subtle distinctions concerning levels of causality. God's causal power necessitates all that happens, but everything is caused in its own proper mode. Since what happens in the world is contingent, it is the case that God brings about events in the world in the mode of contingency. Since the proper mode of human action is freedom, God causes human actions to occur freely. Thus, with respect to those actions which merit grace, God wills that certain individuals freely perform those actions. God is the determining cause of merit, so grace is definitely the gift of God. But the actions which obtain merit are done freely and so are truly meritorious.

Duns Scotus, in keeping with the general emphasis on will in the late middle ages, gave somewhat more rein to free will by his doctrine that the human will is by nature free. This led thinkers in the reformation period to associate his name with more Pelagian positions than he actually held. In the general reaction to Scholasticism, the subtleties of Aquinas' and Scotus' views on grace and free will were largely ignored. We can see especially in Luther and Erasmus a kind of impatience with the tight reasoning and systematic investigation that characterized the Scholastic approach to free will.

Luther and Erasmus

Erasmus published the *Diatribe de libero arbitrio* in the fall of 1524. His disagreement with Luther had been growing since Luther's open attack on the institution of the papacy in 1520. Erasmus' friends had been urging him to publicly rebuke Luther for some time. Erasmus finally chose to use as the occasion for a published challenge to Luther certain claims concerning free will which Luther had made in his *Assertio* concerning the articles condemned by Leo X. Erasmus focused on the following statement:

> I was wrong in saying that free choice before grace is a reality only in name. I should have said simply: "free choice is in reality a fiction, or a name without reality." For no one has it in his own power to think a good or bad thought, but everything (as Wyclif's article condemned at Constance rightly teaches) happens by absolute necessity.[2]

Erasmus' major concerns are that Luther's view yields a kind of fatalism which leads to moral laxity,[3] and that removing any possibility of meritorious action makes God unjust in His condemnation of those who sin. Thus Erasmus suggests — and Luther rightly chastises him for it — that even if fatalism were correct, it ought not to be promulgated before

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[2] Martin Luther, *Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per Bullam Leonis X novissimam damnatorum* (December, 1520), Article 36 (WA 7). The explanation of Article 36 in the Defense and Explanation of All the Articles in Luther's Works, vol. 32, edited by George W. Forell, pp. 92-94, makes the point less stringently, without mentioning necessity.

[3] Cf. E. Gordon Rupp, "The Erasmian Enigma," in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation* (Philadelphia: 1969), p. 9.

the general public.[4] Here the impatience of the age comes through as Erasmus argues that lengthy and meticulous debate about the issue of free will may be permissible but it is certainly not expedient. Scripture itself is obscure on the point of free will, and the whole matter is one in which it is better not to delve too deeply.

Thus, though Erasmus feels compelled to answer Luther, who he believes has gone too far in his attack on free will, he does not wish to bother with the subtleties of the Scholastic theologians' work on the subject.[5] Rather, he wants to present a case, based on simple reason and on Scripture, which is sufficient to refute the extreme denial of free choice.

Erasmus rightly sees that the dispute he has with Luther is largely a matter of the interpretation of Scripture. More precisely, the question to be faced is the method of interpretation. Erasmus acknowledges the difficulty of understanding Scripture on the matter of free will and he appeals to the authority of the fathers and doctors of the church to resolve the difficulty. Essentially, he sets the learning and spirituality of these authorities against what he sees as an appeal to a private movement of the Spirit claimed by some of the reformers.[6] Moreover, while the Erasmian interpretation of Scripture usually represents the cleaner, humanist concern for the natural sense of the text, he is willing to follow the Scholastics in their use of a tropological interpretation. Luther takes him thoroughly to task for such a method.[7]

Despite the appeal to church authority, the heart of Erasmus' case is a fairly straightforward marshaling of scriptures that support free choice and an attempt to deal with those passages which seem to deny free choice. He begins his exegetical argument by defining free choice as "a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them."[8] This definition is defective in its failure to mention the relationship of free will to grace.[9] But the main problem with respect to the dialogue with Luther is the inclusion of the notion of merit in the phrase "things which lead to eternal salvation." Erasmus is driven, by his construal of free choice, to affirm that human beings make some contribution to the production of their salvation. That is, his position comes down to the contention that a human being may do something, albeit a very small something, which contributes to the work of grace.

Yet the Erasmian concerns are, as I have noted, human moral responsibility and the justice of God. Neither concern necessitates a human part in salvation. Rather, all that is required is freedom of choice between good and evil acts, and freedom to accept or reject the offer of salvation. Of course, Luther would be unhappy to admit either of the two latter

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[4] *De libero arbitrio*, translated by E. Gordon Rupp and A. N. Marlow, in Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation, pp. 40, 41. (All references to Erasmus' work are to this version.)
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 68.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 45.
[7] Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, translated by Philip S. Watson and B. Drewery, in Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation, pp. 220ff. (All references to Luther's *De servo arbitrio* are to this version.)
[8] *De libero arbitrio*, p. 47.
[9] Rupp, "The Erasmian Enigma," p. 12.

freedoms. The freedom of the will to do good or evil he would, in particular, vehemently reject. For him, the human will is in such bondage that there exists no capacity for good. This is really the main issue between the two opponents. Luther feels that Erasmus has not taken the bondage of sin seriously, while Erasmus clearly sees that Luther's view destroys moral responsibility.

Because the issue of merit generates no little fog and because Erasmus confuses things by calling the view that the will can do nothing good apart from grace a "probable opinion,"[10] neither Luther nor Erasmus really comes to grips with the nature of the human response to grace.[11] Philip Watson points out that Luther implies some freedom in that response by his contention that the fault for one's rejection of grace is all on the human side, not on God's.[12] But the Erasmian position goes too far by turning the response to grace into an action, however small, that merits grace.

Thus the successful part of Erasmus' work is his argument for a measure of human moral responsibility. The argument is very simple. Scripture presents certain commands or obligations for human beings to fulfill. There are things that we ought to do. To these is applied the basic moral truth that "ought implies can." If God demands certain good acts, then it must be possible to do good, or else one is not responsible for not doing good and God is unjust for punishing one's failure to do good. This argument is the heart of Erasmus' view and, as we shall see, Luther denies its soundness.

Erasmus' work is weak, however, in that in its avoidance of theological subtlety it simply allows theological confusion about the relationship between grace and free will. Luther is able to make quite some mileage out of the confusion. As I turn to Luther's response, let me first address Luther's attack on some lesser points in Erasmus' treatise. Then I will turn to Luther's own view of free will and his handling of Erasmus' central argument for free will as a condition of moral responsibility.

Luther's response to Erasmus' critique of his view of free will, *De servo arbitrio*, was a much longer work than that of his opponent and appeared in December of 1525. Luther turns the tardiness of his own reply into a rhetorical thrust by claiming that he at first deemed *De libero arbitrio* to be unworthy of a reply. The first substantial point Luther makes is a rejection of Erasmus' claim that the matter of free will is an inexpedient and unnecessary subject for dispute. Here Luther's own theology quickly comes to the fore. If any part of salvation is allowed to be a human contribution, then a blow has been struck at the heart of Luther's understanding of the Gospel. Salvation is by God's grace alone. Thus the discussion of free will is anything but inexpedient or superfluous. It is absolutely crucial to maintain that salvation is the work of God alone; the notion of free will threatens that crucial point.

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[10] *De libero arbitrio*, p. 89.

[11] Rupps "The Erasmian Enigma," p. 12.

[12] Watson, "The Lutheran Riposte," in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, p. 25f.

Connected with his assertion of the importance of the issue is Luther's rebuttal of one of Erasmus' reasons for seeing the debate as less than crucial. Erasmus had maintained that Scripture is unclear about free will, as it is unclear about many other subjects. In reply, Luther appeals to what has come to be called the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture. The Bible is absolutely clear on all important matters.[13] Since free will is an important matter, the Bible is clear about free will. But the disagreement is again about the importance of the issue. Erasmus would not deny that those things which are of greatest importance, for him, "the precepts for the good life," are clearly discerned in Scripture.[14] The difference is over the question of what really matters. Luther is concerned with assurance of salvation; Erasmus is concerned about the godly or good life.

Turning to the question of God's foreknowledge and necessity, Luther rebukes his opponent for brushing aside the issue. He himself enters upon a rather Scholastic discourse on the nature of God's foreknowledge. He maintains that God's foreknowledge entails the necessary occurrence of that which He foreknows. Erasmus' weak appeal to the Scholastic distinction between necessity of consequence and necessity of the consequent is easily demolished.[15] For Luther is correct that God's foreknowledge, if necessary, does entail the necessity of that which is foreknown. The result, for Luther, is the embracing of something very close to fatalism.

Luther's own view of free will is clearly stated in his *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles*. Free will is not only a mere name but it is in reality nothing at all.[16] Human beings act as they do out of necessity because God's foreknowledge makes all that happens necessary. In this, he is essentially in agreement with several of the Scholastics. But Luther also believes that the human will is under bondage to Satan and to the effects of original sin. This is a decidedly Pauline way of looking at the issue. At the fall, humanity became enslaved to Satan and is powerless to obtain its own release. Moreover, the effects of the fall are such that human beings are totally incapable of any good action. Thus Luther maintains that apart from grace there exists no capacity in a human being to turn or apply oneself to that which "leads to salvation." "Free will," if it has any significance at all, applies only to the one who has experienced grace.[17]

E. Gordon Rupp points out that Luther, by his own admission, scarcely deals with the latter part of Erasmus' work.[18] But Luther does deal, in his own way, with the argument which I have said is the heart of Erasmus' case. Luther focuses on Erasmus' interpretation of Ecclesiasticus l5:14-17 as a text where God presents human beings with a choice to obey His commands or not. The text says, "If thou wilt observe the commandments . . ., they shall preserve thee." But Luther says that the inference to the existence of some capacity to

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[13] *De servo arbitrio*, pp. 110ff.
[14] *De libero arbitrio*, p. 39f.
[15] See *De libero arbitrio*, p. 68 and *De servo arbitrio*, p. 120f.
[16] See *Luther's Works*, vol. 32, pp. 92-94.
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] "The Erasmian Enigma," p. 10.

actually keep the commandments is a faulty one. He enters upon a typical diatribe against reason,[19] but what is actually happening is that he is applying his understanding of the Law to the passage in question.

Luther viewed the Law as a heuristic device of God's. He follows Paul's suggestion in Galatians 3:24 that the Law was a pedagogue. The purpose of the Law was to show us our incapacity to fulfill God's standards of righteousness. Thus no call for obedience or for a choice (e.g., Joshua 24:15) implies any human power to be obedient or make the right choice. Instead, such passages only point out the human lack of freedom. Thus we see Luther's tendency to force all of Scripture into the hermeneutical mold of his own version of Pauline theology.

We can now see some of the difference in temperament which lies behind the debate between Erasmus and Luther. Erasmus reflects a classical concern for the "good life." His piety is essentially practical. Free will appears as a necessary condition for that piety. Scripture is to be understood in terms of what must be the case if one is to lead a life reasonably directed toward godliness.

In Luther we see a driving concern for the truth of the Gospel. That concern is practical, for it is motivated partly by an intense desire for assurance of salvation. That assurance, however, is only possible when the truth is maintained. Thus Luther's concern is strongly doctrinal. Any moderating approach to the issue is unacceptable because the truth may be lost.

Erasmus is also willing to focus more on what it is to be human and what a human being may become. His anthropology casts a wider net. But Luther can only see humanity as it stands before God, sinful and lost. No anthropological reflections about the natural powers of human beings may be allowed to undermine our perception of the gravity of the human situation.

Calvinism and the Remonstrants

The Calvinist-Arminian debate is not a personal dispute between the two men, John Calvin and Jacobus Arminius. Calvin died in 1564, when Arminius was only four years old. But Arminius' work was done in the context of Calvinist thinking and his critique of basic Calvinist tenets is such that his name has become synonymous with that tendency in theology which rejects the rigid predestinarianism and denial of free will of Calvin. Thus a consideration of the views of Calvin and Arminius is a helpful way to see the distinct approaches to the question of free will in the latter part of the sixteenth century.

Calvin is best known for his emphasis on the doctrine of predestination. Luther is no less a predestinarian than Calvin and in some ways he is more of a fatalist. But the heart of Calvin's theological system revolves around God's predestination of some human beings to

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[19] *De servo arbitrio*, p. 184.

salvation, whereas Luther focuses more on our experience of grace, which is the result of predestination. Luther counsels those troubled by the doctrine of predestination to consider "the wounds of Christ."[20] But for Calvin the destiny of every human being is fixed by an eternal decree of God. It is this "election" which ought to be the comfort and assurance of the Christian. This emphasis on election as the means for understanding God's work of grace makes Calvin as much an opponent of free will as Luther.

But it would be a mistake to make predestination the absolute center of Calvin's theology. His concern with the notion of election is the natural outgrowth of his desire to ascribe all of salvation to grace. Thus the doctrine of predestination is in the latter part of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, following the exposition of the necessity of grace. It is really the lack of free will which requires predestination; it is not predestination that rules out free will.

Calvin occasionally uses the image of bondage or slavery to describe the human condition, just as Luther does. But Calvin also speaks of a corruption of human nature that is the consequence of the fall. This corruption is a "natural" inability to do good. It is not natural in the sense that it is a created condition — God is not the author of sin. Adam, before the fall, had true freedom to do that which is good. That freedom was lost in the fall.[21] But the corruption is natural in the sense "that no man may think that anyone obtains it through bad conduct, since it holds all men fast by hereditary right."[22]

Calvin, unlike Luther, shares Erasmus' concern that a denial of freedom to do what is good will result in a general moral complacency. But that is only one side of the danger that faces one considering the extent of human ability. To move in the Erasmian direction and affirm free will to do good is to deprive God of honor and to fall "into ruin through brazen confidence."[23] The solution is to maintain the Augustinian denial that human beings are capable of any good act, and yet to instruct a person to "aspire to a good of which he is empty, to a freedom of which he has been deprived."[24] Presumably such aspiration will only reveal more clearly our inability and need for God's grace. Thus moral instruction serves the same heuristic purpose that the Law does for Luther.

Calvin maintains moral responsibility by appealing to the distinction between necessity and compulsion. Humans sin by necessity, but they are not compelled to sin. Sin is desired, so it is culpable, even though it is desired of necessity. That is, human beings do what they want, so they are responsible for what they do, even if they cannot help what they want. Jonathan Edwards turns this distinction between necessity and compulsion into the

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[20] Philip S. Watson, *The Concept of Grace* (Philadelphia: 1959), p. 96f.
[21] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: 1960), vol.- I, p. 195.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 254.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 255.
[24] *Ibid*.

classic defense of the Calvinist view of the will in his *On the Freedom of the Will*, written nearly two centuries after Calvin.

Thus there can be no question that salvation is not merited in any way by free human action, since no deed of merit is possible for us. Moreover, there is not only no human merit as part of salvation, there is no place for any act of the human will at all. It is not the case that grace is offered by God and freely accepted or rejected by human beings. Rather, the very acceptance of grace is by the power of grace, indeed by a "special" grace. This point becomes an issue later for Arminius. For Calvin, participation in God's salvation is a result of election and is not conditional on any human act.

Election, therefore, though it is not the basis for denying free will in Calvin's theology, is the key to understanding why free will is denied. The implications of the doctrine are terrible: Not only are some destined from eternity for salvation, but the rest are eternally destined for damnation. But Calvin's concern in it all is that there be a secure basis for hope in the face of human moral inability.[25] So it is not God's foreknowledge alone that imposes necessity on human actions, contrary to Luther's more scholastic suggestion. Instead, God foreknows the eternal destiny of each individual because He has eternally decreed and willed what that state shall be.[26] That this implies that "Adam's fall irremediably involved so many peoples together with their infant offspring, in eternal death, . . . because it so pleased God," is "horrible" but nonetheless true, says Calvin.[27]

Jacobus Arminius studied and wrote in the context of the Dutch Calvinism of the end of the sixteenth century. Though it may be surprising to the contemporary reader, his views are often very much in line with Calvin's. However he differed from Calvin in several important areas. In particular, Arminius challenged the Calvinistic view of predestination and affirmed human free will within limits. His views were formulated in disputes with his Calvinistic colleagues in the university of Leiden. After his death, his teaching became the basis of the "Remonstrant" party, which drew up a confession of sorts in 1610. Arminianism was condemned by the Synod of Dort, which met in 1618 and 1619 -and formulated the creedal basis of modern Dutch Protestantism.

Carl Bangs points out that Arminius inherited much of his logical method from Petrus Ramus, a philosopher who criticized the logic of Aristotle. Ramus' logic had a practical bent to it, proceeding from general to particular. This practicality carries over to Ramus' view of theology. He defined it as the "science of living well."[28] Thus there is an influence on Arminius which is reminiscent of Erasmus and his concern for morality and the practical "good life." As Bangs puts it, Arminius saw Ramism as "a new spirit, non-dogmatic, open to human values, and concerned with practice."[29]

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[25] *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. II, pp. 921, 922.
[26] *Ibid*., pp. 954-955.
[27] *Ibid*., p. 955.
[28] Carl Bangs, *Arminius* (Nashville: 1971), p. 62.
[29] *Ibid*., p. 63.

Arminius' basic challenge to strict Calvinism was a denial of the sort of predestination doctrine which came to be known as "supralapsarianism" after the Synod of Dort. According to this "high" Calvinism, the decrees of election and reprobation were prior to God's decision to permit the fall. The decrees lie in a hidden, secret will of God, which contrasts with the revealed will of God that all should be saved and none should perish. Arminius found this rigid predestinarianism repugnant because it entailed the view that God created individuals whom He had already committed to damnation. Thus God created in order to damn.[30]

For the supralapsarian view, Arminius substitutes what may be called "infralapsarianism," the view that the decrees of election and reprobation are based upon a consideration of human beings as sinful, that is, as already created and allowed to fall. Moreover, election, according to Arminius, is conditional. It is based on God's foreknowledge of the individual's response to grace.[31] This is Arminius' most significant departure from Calvin. It links him with the Catholic thinker, Molina, and sets him off not only from Calvin and Luther, but also from Thomas Aquinas, who maintained that predestination is the cause of God's foreknowledge of the merit of the elect.

The challenge to the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination is based in the fundamental conviction that it is within the power of the human being to resist the saving grace of God. To assert that grace is irresistible and, therefore, that free will plays no part in salvation, is simply contrary to the Scriptures.[32]

With respect to the sort of free will that Erasmus was concerned with in order to establish moral responsibility, Arminius is not entirely clear. This is partly because he divides the kinds of good which are or are not within human power. Natural goods are always within the capability of human beings. But he is in absolute agreement with Luther's and Calvin's view that human beings can do nothing spiritually good apart from grace. Like Calvin, he maintained that Adam was capable of this sort of good before the fall, but that capability was lost to the human race after the fall.[33] But, contrary to Luther, the free will to do that which is pleasing to God is restored in regeneration. Nonetheless, the restoration is a process rather than an instantaneous effect, and so the regenerate person faces a long struggle against sin.[34]

Arminius' view of free will to do good raises two questions. The first is whether the Calvinist view of inability, which he adopts, allows for moral responsibility. How are fallen human beings responsible for not pleasing God, if they simply cannot? The second question is whether the free will of the regenerate person entails the possibility of a "falling away" of a true Christian. Arminius and the Remonstrants in general were accused of denying the

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[30] Cf. Arminius' Declaration of Sentiments in *The Writings of James Arminius*, vol. I, translated by James Nichols (Grand Rapids: 1966), p. 223.
[31] *Ibid*., pp. 247, 248.
[32] *Ibid*., p. 254.
[33] Cf. Public Disputation XI in *The Writings of James Arminius*, vol. I, pp. 523-531.
[34] *Ibid*., p. 529.

doctrine of the peers severance of the saints. But their position was actually more restrained. They simply affirmed the possibility of a falling away and indicated that certain passages in Scripture suggest that a true believer may fall away and perish.[35] So Arminius, like Erasmus, maintains that there is a human part in believing. But, for Arminius, the part is nothing of merit. Bangs puts it succinctly.

> The part man plays in salvation is believing. Evangelical belief is the free choice to receive offered grace, which offered grace makes the free choice possible. In all of this man does nothing apart from grace: he earns nothing; he contributes nothing; but he chooses freely, and it is a choice which he can refuse to make, for grace is not an irresistible force.[36]

The capability to believe is itself a gift of grace, of a grace universally bestowed. that is, it is what may be called prevenient grace." One may wonder how a universally bestowed grace differs from a natural ability. Donald M. Lake says that Arminius' view is simply that they are different. Prevenient grace is bestowed by God, but natural moral effort is exerted by human beings.[37] The latter is useless for salvation, but the former makes the reception of saving grace possible.

I have already indicated that Arminius shared with Erasmus a bent for making theology practical. Calvin, like Luther, was concerned with the assurance of salvation, and he seemed to feel that all would be lost if any door was opened to a human part in salvation. We may also tie Erasmus and Arminius together in their concern for the part reason plays in theology. This is seen in Arminius in his predilection for Ramist logic. Unlike Luther, Calvin is not inclined to diatribes against reason in theology, but one gets the impression that Calvin sees sustained rational argument as just a rhetorical device necessary for the complete refutation of all his opponents and the compete establishment of his own position.

The Radical Reformers

It is enough here to point out that all of the radical or Anabaptist reformers were essentially on the Erasmian-Arminian side of the division over free will and grace. The anthropology of the radical reformation centered in a doctrine of human free will. Some of the radical reformers reacted directly to Martin Luther's *De servo arbitrio*. Their concerns were those of Erasmus. An absolute predestination and necessity makes God unjust and responsible for evil, and the doctrine of the bondage of the will destroys human moral responsibility.[38]

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[35] See Declaration of Sentiments V in *The Writings of James Arminius*, vol. I, p. 254 and "Remonstrance of 1610" in *Calvln and the Reformed Tradition*, edited by James Leo Garrett, Jr. (Nashville: 19803, pp. 408-410.
[36] Bangs, *Arminius*, p. 216.
[37] Lake, "Jacob Arminius' Contribution to a Theology of Grace," in *Grace Unlimited*, edited by Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: 1975), p. 238.
[38] See Alvin J. Beachy, *The concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop: 1977), p. 33f. and pp. 46-56.

Molina and Báñez

The debate over grace and free will was not limited to the reformation church in the sixteenth century, though it was particularly crucial to the Protestant concern for salvation by grace alone. But the debate also took form in Catholic circles as a dispute between the Jesuits and the Dominicans in Spain in the last part of the sixteenth century.

The Catholic situation was different from the Protestant debates. The Council of Trent had declared, against the reformers, that freedom of the will was not lost in the fall, and that the operation of divine grace was not opposed to free will. Thus the Catholic disputants agree over the reality of free will. Nonetheless, attempts to reconcile grace and free will generated Catholic views which mirror in many ways the Protestant debates.

Luis de Molina and Domingo Báñez are the principle figures in the confrontation between the Thomist understanding of the operation of grace and a new way of solving the problems. The new solution was Molina's invention. Molina was born in Spain in 1535. He became a Jesuit at age 18 and spent most of his theological career in Portugal. In 1589 he published his *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum qratiae donis, divlna praescientia, providentias praedestinatione et reprobatione*,[39] a work of thirty years labor. In this book he attempts a new explanation of the problems surrounding grace and free will, based on the innovative concept of a divine scientia media or "middle knowledge."

Molina's views produced an immediate reaction, especially among the Dominicans. Báñez, in particular, reacted strongly to Molina, feeling that the Thomistic philosophy had been perverted. The controversy quickly spread to all of Spain. Most Jesuits sided with Molina and were accused by the Dominicans of being Pelagians. The Molinists, on the other hand, intimated that the Dominican views were really in line with those of the reformers. The uproar was such that a special Congregation was called to investigate the matter in Rome in 1598. The investigation was completed in 1607, seven years after Molina's death.

Both parties had full opportunity to state their respective cases; but the end of the matter was that both opinions were permitted. At the same time the Jesuits were forbidden to call the Dominicans Calvinists, while the Dominicans were told that they must not call the Jesuits Pelagians.[40] In other words, a decision was not made, but in the meantime the parties to the debate were asked not to call each other names. Molina held strongly to the doctrine of free will, feeling it necessary to counter the views of the reformers.[41] With respect to the question of whether human beings are free to do that which is good, his answer is affirmative. Human beings, in spite of original sin, are free with respect to ethical good and evil in their natural actions. Moreover, there is, by a universal and prevenient grace, a

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[39] No English translation of this work exists [This is no longer true. See *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the "Concordia")*, translated, with an introduction and notes, by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).].

[40] Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. III, part II, *The Revival of Platonism to Suarez* (Garden City: 1963), p. 163.

[41] J. Pohle, "Molinism," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. X,

freedom to do that which is salutary in God's eyes.[42] But Molina is able to avoid Pelagianism in these views by appeal to his version of the notion of divine concurrence. Already in Thomism it was an accepted truth that whatever any created thing does is the act both of the creature and of God. God concurs with the action of the creature. Thomas described the concurrence as God applying the creature to its proper operation as an instrument of His power, much the way a pen is applied to the operation of writing by a scribe. Such a view is clearly open to the objection that such actions cannot truly belong to the creature. This is especially clear with respect to free actions. If human beings are viewed as instruments in the hand of God, then their actions are not free.

Molina proposed to understand God's concurrence as a general influence which was given its specific application by the creature. God acts conjointly with the creature to produce whatever the creature's proper effect may be. Molina's image of this cooperative notion of concurrence as two men together pulling a boat (God and the creature together producing an effect) drew heavy fire from his Thomist opponents because it suggested that God was not able to produce the effect on His own. But Molina's view enabled him to see human free acts as truly determined by the human being but requiring the action of God for their performance. With respect to salutary acts, the concurring action of God is supernatural. Thus Molina is able to maintain that no human being can do that which merits salvation, apart from grace.

But, as I have already mentioned, the key to Molina's thought is the idea of middle knowledge. It is this notion which allows him to retain a strong concept of predestination and yet affirm the freedom of the will to accept or reject grace. Middle knowledge is that knowledge God has which seems to lie between His knowledge of all possibilities and His knowledge of all actual future events. That is, God knows everything that might possibly happen. He also knows everything that actually will happen. But Molina suggested that God has another sort of knowledge, knowledge of "what would happen if . . ." In other words, God knows what human beings would freely do if placed in any particular circumstance.[43] For example, Senator Blowhard may never be offered a bribe. But God knows if the Senator would accept the bribe, if it were offered.

Therefore, Molina asserts, God knows how human beings would respond to any possible offer of grace. "God infallibly foresees from all eternity what attitude man's will would in any conceivable combination of circumstances assume if this or that particular grace were offered it."[44] This knowledge, then, guides God as He decrees predestination and reprobation. He supplies sufficient grace for salvation to all, but by His middle knowledge knows who would accept it who would not accept no matter how it were offered. On the ba-

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[42] *Ibid.*, p. 438.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 439. See also Dom M. John Farrelly, *Predestination, Grace, and Free Will* (Westminster, Maryland: 1964), pp. 262-270.
[44] J. Pohle, "Molinism," p. 439.

sis of His knowledge that a given person would accept a certain offer of grace, God determines to offer that grace, thus making it certain that that person will accept. Thus the acceptance (or rejection) of grace remains free, but is nonetheless predestined and certain.

Molinism has obvious affinities with the Arminian notion of conditional election. But Molina attempted to avoid the charge that God's predestination is conditioned by the free actions of human beings by maintaining that God is not guided by any actual action of a human being. Instead, God determines who will actually accept or reject the offer of grace, guided by knowledge of who would accept grace, if it were offered.

Báñez is among the foremost interpreters of Thomas Aquinas. It is often suggested that modern Thomists read Thomas through Báñezian lenses. At any rate, Báñez complained that Molina's view still makes God's knowledge of the human response to grace the determining factor of His will in predestination. The classical Thomist position is that predestination is not based in foreknowledge of merit on the part of those predestined. The decree of predestination precedes and is the basis of God's foreknowledge of the merit of those who will be saved. In Báñezian Thomism, God knows what will happen because He has determined what will happen. The affinity with Calvin's views should be apparent, and it is not surprising that in the heat of the debate the Dominican Thomists were called "Calvinists" by the Molinists.

But Báñez would rightly reject the Calvinist label, for, unlike Calvin, the Thomists strongly affirmed the reality of free will. In fact, Báñez would say that it is Calvin who limits God's power by supposing that genuine free will could be an impediment to God's disposing of grace where he wills.[45] If God wants a person to freely consent to grace, then it is within God's power to bring that consent about. The fact that God causes a free act does not remove the fact that it is also caused by a human being. The act, therefore, is still free. Once again, the Thomist view is that God's causality is such that it causes not only the event but also the modality of the event. Thus an event must happen if God wills it, but if God wills an event to happen contingently, then the event is not itself necessary. Here the appeal is again to the distinction between the necessity of consequence and the necessity of the consequent. the distinction also holds for free actions. Whatever actions God wills for human beings must be done, but if God wills them to happen freely, then they will happen freely. Thus the actions that merit salvation are determined to happen in God's decree of predestination, but they are, all the same, free actions. Thus God's gift of grace is in no way dependent on human action and humans remain free.

Molina and Báñez both worked under the shadow of the challenge of the doctrine of the reformers. Though both of them affirm free will, it is apparent that a concern for God's honor akin to Calvin's and Luther's motivated Báñez to adopt a position in which the authenticity of free will may be seriously challenged.

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[45] Farrelly, *Predestination, Grace, and Free Will*, p. 5.

I myself incline to the side of these controversies represented by Erasmus, Arminius, Molina and the radical reformers. Erasmus was probably bested by Luther with respect to their debate. But I see the basic argument for free will as a necessity for moral responsibility as sound. Arminius and Molina provide fruitful lines for reconciling human free will with grace as the truly free gift of God. I believe some fruit might come out of interaction between the two traditions begun by Arminius and Molina.

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