

AS LORD/ (“consubstantial with the father” JHWE), Jesus is OMNISCIENT (all-knowing)

-“Now we are sure that you know all things. . . You came forth from God”

Ps 139:1-6; Jn 16:28-30; Heb 4:13

I. AS CREATOR/FIRST CAUSE/SUBSISTENT BEING, GOD IS NECESSARILY OMNISCIENT

- A. Inescapable inference: as maker fully understands his handiwork, so God, Maker of All, necessarily all-knowing); fully understanding Himself, God fully understands ALL (via eternal WORD), including right & wrong; Divine Wisdom (something akin to prudence) comprehending all aspects
 - 1. Naturalistic/mechanistic processes inevitably unintelligent—“Blind Watchmaker” of Dawkins
 - 2. Process theology (and pantheism) posit finite god, learning amidst evolving cosmos
 - 3. Classic, Orthodox Theism (a Personal/Intelligent LORD) alone grants omniscience to Creator, both of things actual and things potential
- B. Important caveats:
 - 1. Intrinsically non-knowables (e.g. how to square a circle) events obviously unknown to God
 - 2. Jesus “Kenosis” (self-emptying) involved momentary (33 year) self-imposed limits

II. BIBLE AFFIRMS GOD’S OMNISCIENCE

- A. O.T.: multitude of passages refer to God’s “infinite understanding” (Ps 147:5); He “sees all” (Job 34:21); “There is no searching his understanding” (Is 40:28);
- B. N.T. reiterates OT position: God “knows all things” (1 Jn 3:20); “the very hairs on your head are numbered” (Mt 10:29; “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13)
- C. God perfectly knows past (Rev 20:12); present (Mt 10:29-30) & future (Mk 8:31)
- D. God perfectly knows every human heart (1 Sam 16:7), thought (Ps 139:1-6) & every human need (Mt 6:24-36)
- E. Proposed ways of probing the mystery (probably all partially, not absolutely, true)
 - 1. Most all agree:
 - a. As eternal, outside of time, God sees all things simultaneously, not sequentially
 - b. Divine foreknowledge compatible with human agency (though “free will” variously defined)
 - 2. Aquinas argued God knows because He has decreed (and men “freely” act in accord with His will)
 - 3. Molina suggested “middle knowledge”—hypothetical grasp of what every person would freely will to do and then creating with that in mind
- F. Providence & Prayer perennially difficult resolution!

III. AS LORD, JESUS IS OMNISCIENT

- A. Re God—self-knowledge as “one substance with the Father” (Nicene Creed; cf. Jn 17:21); early evident (age 12) when “about my Father’s business,” discussing with rabbis in Temple; Jesus said “I have come forth from the Father,” and his disciples said “You know all things” (Jn 16:28-30)
- B. Re Truth—“I am the truth” (as the eternal Word” fully knows the essence of all that is)
- C. Re creation—“look at the birds” & “consider the lilies” (Mt 6:26-28)
- D. Re Scripture—“you have heard it was said” (Mt. 5:27)
- E. Re history—reminds hearers of Jewish past, Jonah *et al.*
- F. Re Satan & demonic powers (e.g. wilderness temptations; Gadarene demoniac)
- G. Re persons he met—“Lord, you know everyone’s heart” (Acts 1:24)
 - 1. Their history—woman at the well (Jn 4:18)
 - 2. Their thoughts—audiences (Mt 9:4; 12:25; Mk 2:6-8); Pharisees’ intents;
 - 3. Their character & potential—Nathanael (Jn 1:47-51)
- H. Re contemporary events—Lazarus’ death (Jn 11:11-15)
- I. Re immanent (first century) events: (1 destruction of Temple (Mk 13:2); (2 suitable donkey for Palm Sunday entrance (Lk 19:30); (3 preparations for Lord’s Supper (Mk 14:13-15); (4 Peter’s denial (Lk 22:34)
- J. Re final (end time) events; beatific vision;
- K. Re us & our world today—“will be with you, even unto the end” (Mt 28:20)
 - 1. Interceding for us with the Father—involved with us in prayer, healing & enlightening
 - 2. Drawing sinners unto Himself—“I stand at the door and knock” (Rev 3:20)

GOD'S STRATEGY IN HUMAN HISTORY

In his preface to *God's Strategy in Human History*, by R.T. Forster and V.P. Marston, the noted Evangelical scholar and self-described "impenitent Augustinian and Calvinist" F.F. Bruce wrote: "A Study of the following pages will impress on the reader that the initiative in saving grace rests with God; that the election of believers is 'in Christ'; and that election implies not that some are elected and the others consigned to perdition, but that some are elected so that others through them may receive the divine blessing" (p. viii). Forster and Marston assess foreknowledge and predestination within the context of the "conflict" between good and evil, the "text" of the human story illustrated by Job, where we discern the great truth that "in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose" (Ro 8:28, RSV). Here "The idea is not one of 'things' somehow working impersonally together, or even of God somehow working them together. The idea is of God co-working with those who love him, as Athanasius said: "to all who choose the good, God works with them for good" (p. 14). Still more, the Bible makes clear that such choices are, in fact, free choices, human decisions responsibly made for which we are accountable.

Countering the influential Reformed position so dominant in many Evangelical circles, the authors point out that its powerful presupposition, evident in the widely-used phrase "The Sovereignty of God," simply does not appear in the Authorized Version of Scripture! Clearly God is Lord of lords and King of kings, and some modern versions occasionally refer to God's "sovereignty," but the portrait of God in the Bible does not resemble the totally-controlling Master, the dexterous puppeteer of all that happens. To present their case, Forster and Marston engage in meticulous exegetical studies of crucial passages (especially Romans 9-11) and words (chosen, election, foreknowledge, predestination). They also explain, clearly and with extensive documentation, the issues underlying biblical passages—e.g. the views espoused by rabbis in first century Judaism—which make clear the true meaning of the texts.

Inevitably, when Scripture deals with *predestination*, we find persons chosen to carry out God's plan for mankind. Abraham was chosen for a specific task, not Lot or Melchizedek, though all three were right with God. Ishmael, Abraham's son, was not rejected by God simply because it was Isaac through whom He would bless the world with His saving plan. Jacob was favored over Esau, not as an individual elected to salvation, but as the chosen ambassador of God. In all these instances, cited by St Paul in Romans, the point is that God chose to work through certain nations to accomplish his divine design. Gentiles like Ruth, as well as Jews, knew God, for the "Old Testament says that whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved—which includes Gentiles as well as Jews" (p. 90). God elected persons like Abraham, or the nation of Israel, or the 12 apostles, or the Church, to do His work in the world. "Election is an office, a responsibility, a privilege. It is never an irresistible selection for final blessing" (p. 121). Such divine choices were "not a reward for merit, but part of a God-determined strategy" (p. 60).

Central to that strategy, of course, was the Incarnation and Work of God's Son, Jesus Christ. The Father chose to save the world through His Son, to win the final victory over evil. Consequently, "We are chosen in Christ. This does not mean that we were chosen to be put into Christ. It does not mean that God chose to make us repent but left others unrepentant! It means that as we repented and were born again into the body of Christ, we partake of his chosenness. He is chosen, and we are chosen in him" (p. 97). Predestination, it follows, has nothing to do with determining who becomes a Christian but with his eternal destiny once he embraces the Christ.

This position, Forster and Marston show, was that taken by the Early Church. They provide a helpful appendix containing persuasive, representative quotations which show that their views parallel those of theologians close to the New Testament world. Thinkers such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Jerome, Chrysostom, and Origen stressed God's foreknowledge in no way implied predestination. "The doctrine of 'free-will' seems to have been universally accepted in the early church. Not a single church figure in the first 300 years rejected it and most of them stated it clearly in works still extant" (p. 244). Heretics, indeed, denied it, but the orthodox tradition (Augustine excepted) insisted that free-will was graciously given and is sustained by God. Given Augustine's importance, the authors devote many pages to explaining and refuting his turn to predestinarian thought.

God's Strategy in Human History is more of a reference work than a monograph, a series of essays and exegetical excursions rather than a theological treatise. But it has great worth in taking critical biblical passages and fully explaining how they should be understood.

"Molinism"—Brad Chilton

Simply put: God knows in himself the free actions of secondary agents, that is, free creatures. God knows this information in himself and not as a result of an outside influence. With Molina's definition of middle knowledge in place, how does he defend the concept? Molina provides four proofs in Part IV of his *Concordia*.

First Proof: God Knows Factual Choices and Counter-factuals of Free Agents.

Molina notes that God has "certain cognition of some future contingents that depend on human free choice, but that neither have existed nor ever will exist in reality and that hence do not exist in eternity either; therefore, it is not simply because future contingents exist outside their causes in eternity that God knows them with certainty."^[2] Molina provides two Scriptural references to God's middle knowledge in history, and one from the Apocrypha. Molina refers to Jesus' middle knowledge of Tyre and Sidon's response in Matthew 11:21 had the miracles which were performed in Chorazin and Bethsaida had been performed there.^[3] He also gives the example of 1 Samuel 23:10-12 where David asks God about the decision that Saul would make concerning a town named Keilah.^[4] God uses a form of middle knowledge in both cases.

Second Proof: God Comprehends Thoroughly All Things that Exist in Himself.

Molina uses the term "natural knowledge" in disputation 49 to refer to middle knowledge. Molina notes that 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."^[5] That is to say, God eternally knows everything about everything he creates, including the free decisions a free agent would make, the circumstances leading to that decision, and whether or not a free agent would make a certain decision as opposed to the decisions not made.

Third Proof: Nothing Contributes to God's Knowledge.

Individuals claim that Molinism leads to open theism or that God's knowledge is contingent upon human beings. Molina does not make such a claim in his proofs. Molina notes that God "does not get His knowledge from things, but knows all things *in* Himself and *from* Himself; therefore, the existence of things, whether in time or eternity, contributes nothing to God's knowledge with certainty what is going to be or not going to be."^[6] God's knowledge is thorough and complete. Therefore, God's middle knowledge is part of God's overall knowledge of all things which comes from within himself and not from outside influences.

Fourth Proof: God Predestines According to His Middle Knowledge.

In understanding predestination and election, God has "providence and predestination with regard to future contingents."^[7] God makes his decree to provide the means and arrange the things necessary to arrange certain ends. God "foreknows future contingents with certainty . . . He knows them through a sort of [middle knowledge] and on the hypothesis that He should will to create and arrange things in this or that way, whereas in that free decree, which as a cause precedes the existence of future contingents both in eternity and in time, He knows them absolutely and without any hypothesis or condition."^[8] God knows what it would take to reach those whom he knows will respond to his free offer of grace.

Conclusion

Molinism is a solid solution to the biblical revelation given to us. No system is without its weaknesses. However, I do not see how Molinism could lead to open theism, as falsely ascribed by its opponents, and neither does Molinism lead to finite godism. Molina's description of middle knowledge is a theologically robust view based upon the aseity and sovereignty (and I feel even the simplicity) of God. Middle knowledge also fits well with the notion that God desires that all would be saved, but decrees that only those who respond to his grace would be saved. Personally, I think middle knowledge is a solid solution to the divine sovereignty and human freedom mystery.

MOLINIAN MIDDLE-KNOWLEDGE

In Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, one Dr. Mayo asked Johnson if he'd read Jonathan Edwards' works, denying free will. Johnson reflected that we simply know we're free, "surer than you can lift up you finger or not as you please, than you are of any conclusion from a deduction of reasoning." Admittedly, he said, "All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience is for it" (Apr 15, 1778). Abstract theories, frequently favor determinism. In the physical world, particularly the microscopic world, there's obviously a lock-step process which appears invariable. In the ancient world, fatalists explained how one thing necessarily follows another. Sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists today explain how our minds are pre-programmed—and our "free" thoughts and acts are pleasing illusions. And some theologians, impressed by the fact that God is Creator and Lord, the Sovereign of all that is, frequently minimize or deny the reality of human freedom.

And yet, I need no proof to believe that I am, that I need love, or that I'm free. There's an ancient truth, rooted in the Aristotelian tradition, that natural desires have real ends. That I, and billions of others throughout all ages, have longed for freedom says we're designed for freedom. Equally important, I also hold others accountable for their actions, blaming them for criminal acts, taking them to court for lawless behavior, refusing to blame society, or biology, or God or the devil, for murder, theft, drunkenness, adultery. There is, as Aristotle shows in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, a clear difference between voluntary and involuntary behavior. And (unless we slip into fashionable forms of economic or sociological determinism) we hold others accountable for voluntary behavior! As John Wesley wrote: "Indeed, if man were not free, he could not be accountable either for his thoughts, word or actions. If he were not free, he would not be capable either of reward or punishment; he would be incapable either of virtue or vice, or being either morally good or bad. If he had no more freedom than the sun, the moon, or the stars, he would be no more accountable than them" (Sermon 58: "On Predestination").

To this fundamental certainty, add the weight of the Christian tradition. Not a single Church Father, in the first 300 years, denied free-will. Heretics of various sorts—Gnostics, Manichees—did. St. Justin Martyr, mid-way through the second century, noted that "God, wishing men and angels to follow His will, resolved to create them free to do righteousness" (*Dialogue CXL*). St. Irenaeus of Lyons celebrated "the ancient law of human liberty, "insisting that "God made man a free (agent) from the beginning" and that "there is not coercion with God" (*Against Heresies*, XXXVII). Origen, the great Bible exegete, insisted that: "There are, indeed, innumerable passages in the Scriptures which establish with exceeding clearness the existence of freedom of will" (*De Prin*, 3,1). Jerome, who condemned the Pelagians as clearly as Augustine, wrote: "We have been created endowed with free-will," but it "depends upon the help of God and needs His aid moment by moment" (*Letters CXXXIII*).

To resolve what is frequently an impasse, let me suggest that the Wesleyan-Arminian position meshes nicely with Molinism—a "middle-knowledge" stance which seeks to revere God as omnipotent and omniscient, to compromise none of His glory and majesty while preserving man's freedom to love and live with Him. By nature, God knows all things possible because He knows Himself and as Creator knows all things possible concerning creation. In the words of James Arminius, who knew the positions of "Schoolmen" such as Molina, we must believe that God has "infinite intuition," but, as Molina said, "Foreknowledge is not a cause of that which is going to be, but rather that which is going to be is a cause of foreknowledge. For that which is going to be does not ensue upon foreknowledge, but rather foreknowledge ensues upon that which is going to be" (in *Concordia* 10.52.21). Having decided to create, God foreknew all that would transpire in the world he would make.

Middle knowledge is, like natural knowledge, logically prior to foreknowledge. God could envision a multitude of possible worlds, knowing how free persons would think and act in those worlds, before actually creating the one He thought best. Foreknowledge does not demand determinism. In creating, the God Who is Love desired everyone who would ever live to respond to His love. He wills that all men be saved. He grants sufficient grace for everyone. But He created free persons capable of refusing His offered salvation. All men have sufficient grace to be saved. But sufficient grace is not efficacious unless accepted. Knowing that some would refuse to be saved in the world He decided to create is not the same as predetermining who would, and who would not, respond to His grace.

Accordingly, Arminius' understanding of predestination can be summarized in four points. First, "God decreed to appoint his Son, Jesus Christ . . . who might destroy sin by His own death." The way of salvation has been predestined—in Christ sinful man may be saved. Secondly, God has decreed that all who repent and believe will be saved—that's the predestined way. Third, there is an appointed means, grace, whereby one is saved—and prevenient grace sufficiently touches all men sufficient for their salvation if only they repent. Finally, God's predestination is based upon his foreknowledge—he wills to save those he knows will accept His grace in Christ Jesus. (cf. M. Wyncoop, 53-54)