

# Predestination

## Terminology

- What are we talking about?
- Predestination: God gives His grace to some and they will ultimately be saved
  - Predestination to heaven
  - Predestination to membership in the Church
- Reprobation: God withholds His grace from some and they will ultimately be lost

## Questions

- If everything is predetermined, why should I bother trying?
- Can I work harder at being a good Christian and change God's mind?
- If God just chooses to save some people and not save others without looking at merits, how can that be fair?
- If someone is trying really hard to be a good Christian but they're not "predestined", will God really send them to hell? How is that fair?
- Does God predestine to heaven with or without looking at merits?
- If He predestines to heaven without looking, then does He do the same for negative reprobation (letting someone go)?

## Truths in Balance

- God "already" knows the past, the present and the future. All time is open before Him. That's what His "omniscience" means.
  - "Already" is in quotation marks because when applied to God it is a misuse. If God is outside of time, if He sees all time—past, present, and future—as one, then words like "already", "not yet", "before" or "after" don't correctly apply to His point of view.
- We really do have free choices. We truly can choose, in a meaningful, true way, to accept or reject God's grace.
- We do not save ourselves. God saves us through His grace. Even our movement toward accepting His grace is due to His grace. We are saved by "grace alone".
- God predestines no one to hell. That is, God does not send a person to hell simply by His sovereign choice, without looking at how that person acts.
  - Therefore, if we end up in hell it is really through our own free choices.
  - The idea that God predestines to hell in the same way He predestines to heaven is called "double predestination"

## St. Augustine and *Massa Damnata*

- From <https://www.ewtn.com/library/THEOLOGY/AUGUSTIN.HTM>
- × Original sin damns all of humanity to hell through our own (inherited) fault, independent of any personal sins we may commit
- × God wanted to display mercy and justice
  - To display mercy, God chose a small percent to rescue
  - From the rest, God withheld His grace and they would go to hell
- × God chooses whom to rescue blindly, without any consideration of their lives or their faith
  - Augustine needed to say this, because if he didn't, then that would mean that we *earned* heaven through our faith or our actions, rather than its being a free gift through God's grace
  - See Pelagianism: We do not earn our own salvation
- According to Fr. William Most, this is a denial of God's love
  - In particular, it denies 1 Timothy 2:3-4 ("God our Saviour... desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.")
  - If God saves a few not out of love for them but only to make a point, then He doesn't love us, but only uses us
  - But we know that God really loves us, which means loving us for our own sake, not loving us for His benefit
  - Therefore, *Massa Damnata* is a mistaken idea

## Out of Bounds: Calvinism

- God has already chosen whom He will save from before the creation of the world (this is fine... we believe this, too)
- × He makes this decision based upon nothing other than His sovereign will
- × The goodness of the person, their faith or their acts have no bearing on this choice
- × A person's acts are evidence of election, not the cause of election
- × Once elected by God, there is nothing a person can do to lose their election: once saved, always saved
- × Nothing is left to chance: God's predestinating decision is always successful and cannot be resisted
- × Double predestination: God equally decides to destroy some just as He decides to save some
- × Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli all believed in double predestination
- × This is close to St. Augustine: Salvation comes through a free gift from God, but we have no choice to either accept or reject the gift: God's will is always done

## Out of Bounds: Pelagianism

- × We can choose to live without sin by our will alone, without the aid of divine grace, although God's grace assists in every good work
- × We can earn salvation by our own efforts (merits)
- Pelagius was condemned at the Council of Carthage (418) and the Council of Ephesus (431).

## Dominican / Jesuit controversy (1580's)

- From <http://www.clergy.asn.au/history/controversies-between-dominicans-and-jesuits/>
- Controversy arose between the Dominicans and the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in the late 1500's

### And in this corner, in the white habits: The Dominicans

- God decrees predestination or reprobation before consideration of merits and demerits
- God *permits faults* that He decides beforehand He will not forgive without considering whether the person will commit those faults; this is called *negative reprobation*
- Two types of grace: Efficacious grace and sufficient grace
  - Sufficient grace gives the *ability* to choose the good, or the *ability* to perform a good act, but we cannot *apply* that ability to *actually do* the good without efficacious grace
  - For example, fire has the *ability* to cook food, but without the cook *applying* food to the fire, nothing will be cooked
  - If the person does not resist sufficient grace, then God gives that person efficacious grace to actually *choose* the good, or *perform* the good act
    - Efficacious grace works infallibly in the person
    - Efficacious grace is also given to them who pray properly
    - *However, even not resisting* sufficient grace is a good act, which requires *efficacious grace*
- Therefore, the person to whom God gives grace to have faith, do good, and persist in the faith, will infallibly reach heaven
- 1 Corinthians 4:7a: "For who sees anything different in you?"
  - The distinction between the elect and the reprobate ultimately does not depend on the things that people do. (Fr. Most, p. 13)
  - Man is completely incapable of "distinguishing himself"
- Recall, however, that we truly do have free will. If the Dominican theory denied free will then it would be condemned
  - Even though God infallibly moves the human will, human beings remain free, because God's will is transcendent.
  - "It is obvious that this freedom is not an *autonomous* freedom." (Fr. Most, p.12)
  - We have the *ability* not to resist sufficient grace, but we cannot *apply* that ability without efficacious grace, which God may or may not give us
- Also, don't forget 1 Timothy 2:3-4 ("God our Saviour... desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.")

### And in this corner, in the black habits: The Jesuits

- Jesuits distinguish predestination overall from predestination to glory
  - Some Jesuits say that predestination to glory is decreed only after consideration of merits
    - These same say that reprobation is decreed only after consideration of demerits
  - Others say no, that it is decreed without consideration of merits
    - And that reprobation is similarly decreed without consideration of demerits
- Sufficient grace is enough to do a good act
  - Therefore, if we fail to do a good act it is through human free will alone

- Fr. Luis Molina: “Sufficient grace” is rendered “efficacious grace” by our consent
- Therefore, if God gives sufficient grace to two people to have faith, do good, and persist in the faith, one may cooperate with that grace and reach heaven, while the other may not
- God knows beforehand the outcome of our exercising our own free will
  - He does not know this because He predetermines it and therefore wills it
  - But he knows it because He created us and the circumstances in which we live, so with His divine knowledge he knows what we will do
- Some Jesuits say that God chooses—for those people for whom He has special benevolence—to give them graces that He knows will be sufficient in their circumstances to have them choose the good; then, after seeing their merits, He predestines them to the glory of heaven. (Fr. Most, 18)
- Others say that God first chooses the order of things in which he will place each person. He will then send them various graces without considering their merits or demerits. After foreseeing the merits of those who will choose the good, He predestines them to heaven
- Recall, however, that God is always the first mover: we do not *initiate* our own salvation; that would be Pelagianism

#### The Conclusion (1607)

- Pope Paul V decided not to decide
  - Both sides were allowed to continue teaching their respective doctrines
  - The Dominicans cannot call the Jesuits “Pelagians”
  - The Jesuits cannot call the Dominicans “Calvinists”

#### Fr. William Most

- Fr. Most’s book: *Grace, Predestination, and the Salvific Will of God*  
<https://www.chapters.indigo.ca/en-ca/books/grace-predestination-and-the-salvific/9780931888663-item.html>
- Regarding Augustine’s *Massa Damnata*, Fr. Most says that Augustine misunderstood the context of the comments about predestinations in St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans
  - Fr. Most says that all of the passages in Scripture regarding predestination are talking about predestination to *membership in the Church*, not predestination to heaven and much less to hell
- Fr. Most offers a modified version of the Thomistic (Dominican) solution
  - God wills all to be saved
  - God withholds His grace only from those whom He sees will reject that grace persistently and finally
    - Therefore, He reprobates because of demerit
  - God then predestines everyone else to heaven without looking at their merits

#### So What?

- God our Saviour... desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
- We do not save ourselves ... God is the first mover... we are saved by grace alone.
- We really do have free will to choose good or choose evil
- Nobody really knows exactly how it works, so there are disagreements