

The Double Predestination to Holiness and Sin

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The question whether there is a double predestination to both holiness and life and sin and death, or only a single predestination to holiness and life, was raised in the fifth and sixth centuries, during the Semi-Pelagian controversy, and afterward in the ninth century, in the controversy between Gottschalk and Ratramnus on the one side, and Rabanus Maurus and Hincmar on the other. The stricter Augustinians affirmed the *predestinatio duplex* to both holiness and sin; the milder affirmed only the single predestination to holiness. Both alike, however, opposed the synergistic Semi-Pelagianism. The Calvinistic reformers and the Calvinistic creeds asserted the twofold predestination. The Westminster Confession declares it plainly. It is explicitly taught in Scripture. In Rom. 8:29, it is said that 'whom God did foreknow, he also did predestinate proorise to be conformed to the image of his Son'. This is predestination to holiness. In Acts 4:27, 28, it is said that 'against thy holy child Jesus, Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and all the people of Israel were gathered, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before proorise to be done'. This is predestination to sin. Compare also Acts 2:23; Luke 22:22; Jude 4. Precisely the same Greek word is employed in both texts, and should therefore be translated by precisely the same English word in both. James's translators render it by 'predestinate' in Rom. 8:29, and by 'determined before' (predetermined) in Acts 4:28. There is no material difference between 'predestinate' and 'predetermine,' but it would have been better to have employed either one word or the other in both instances, because a merely English reader might be led to suppose that two different Greek words are employed in the original. The Revisers consistently render proorise in both texts by the synonymous term 'foreordain'. Hetherington (Westminster Assembly, Chap. x.) contends that 'predestinate' and 'foreordain' are not synonymous and interchangeable, because in Conf. iii. 3, the first is used with everlasting life, and the last with everlasting death. His statement is as follows: 'By predestination, the Westminster divines meant a particular decree determining to confer everlasting life. By foreordination, they meant a decree of order or arrangement determining that the guilty should be condemned to everlasting death; and this they regarded as the basis of judicial procedure

according to which "God ordains men to dishonor and wrath for their sin". Let it furthermore be remarked that while according to this view the term predestination could never be applied to the lost, the term foreordination might be applied to the saved, since they also are subjects in one sense of judicial procedure'. There are the following objections to this denial that predestination and foreordination are equivalent terms, and to this definition of foreordination: 1. One and the same word, *proorise* is employed in Scripture to denote the divine action in reference to both holiness and sin, life and death, and therefore if two different words are employed to translate it, they ought to be synonymous and applicable to both cases alike. 2. Lexicographers regard them as synonymous. Stormonth, e.g., defines 'foreordain' by 'predestinate', and 'predestinate' by 'foreordain'. 3. If *proorise* in the instance of sin and death, means only a judicial decision to punish sin, then, in the instance of holiness and life, it would mean only a judicial decision to reward holiness. If it is predestination to penalty in one case, it must be predestination to reward in the other. But when St. Paul declares that 'whom God did foreknow he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son', he means that He predestinated them to the conformity itself, and not merely to the reward of it. 4. To say, as Hetherington does, that 'to foreordain some men to everlasting death' is 'a decree determining that the guilty shall be condemned to everlasting death' (i.e., to the penalty of sin), is to misconceive the nature of a decree. The matter of a decree is always optional. It supposes the possibility of the contrary. When God decrees the creation of the world, He is at liberty not to decree it and not to create it. But when He condemns the guilty to punishment, this is not an optional matter, but follows necessarily from the nature of the divine justice and the threatening of the divine law. There is, therefore, no more place for a decree 'to condemn the guilty to everlasting death' than for a decree that virtue shall be rewardable, or that two and two shall make four. The same remark applies to Hetherington's definition of 'predestination' as 'a particular decree determining to confer everlasting life'. Everlasting life, strictly speaking, is the reward of obedience, which follows necessarily from God's promise, 'This do and thou shalt live', and from the nature of remunerative justice. There is nothing optional in it. We cannot conceive of God's decreeing not to reward obedience, and still less to punish it. Unless, therefore, 'conferring everlasting life' includes the origination in the elect of the holiness which is rewardable with everlasting life, as was probably the view of Hetherington, it is not the predestination which St. Paul describes as a predestination 'to be conformed to the image' of the Son of God.

In the Pauline conception, predestination, or fore-ordination, covers and includes both the holiness that is to be rewarded with life, and the sin that is to be punished with death. The holiness of the elect is predestinated, and the sin of the non-elect likewise. Both alike are represented by the apostle as standing in a certain relation to the divine purpose and the divine action, and this purpose and action are designated by the one word *proorise*. To omit both the holiness and the sin from the predestination, and retain only the recompense of each, is to mutilate the Biblical representation, and convert the divine predestination of Conf.

iii. 3, into the divine adjudication or sentencing of Conf. iii. 7. And to omit the sin but retain the holiness, as is done by those who adopt the single predestination and reject the double, though much less defective, is yet defective in omitting that element of revealed truth contained in texts like Acts 4:27, 28; 2: 23; Luke 22:22; Jude 4; Rom. 9:21, et alia, whereby sin as well as holiness is taken out of the sphere of chance and brought within the divine plan.

If, then, the Holy Spirit inspired St. Paul to employ the word *proorise* to denote the nature of God's action both when He predestinates the elect to holiness and the non-elect to a sin like that of crucifying the Lord of glory, it becomes a most important question: What is the nature of this predestinating action of God? What does it include and what does it exclude? The answer is, that God's predestinating in election and preterition is his making the origin of holiness in an elect sinner, and the continuance (not origin) of sin in a non-elect sinner, a certainty in his plan of the universe, in distinction from a contingency outside of that plan springing from chance; and that it includes certainty only, and excludes necessity and compulsion. Opponents of the doctrine of decrees, from the beginning, generally assume that to decree holiness or sin is to necessitate them. The defenders of the doctrine uniformly deny this. They contend that when the divine decree relates to the action of the human will, be it holy or sinful action, there is certainty, but not compulsion. The Westminster Confession, iii. i, declares that 'God [fore] ordains whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature; nor is the liberty of second causes taken away, but rather established'.

How can these things be? How, in the first place, does God make the origin and everlasting continuance of holiness in an elect sinner a certainty without compelling and necessitating his will? By the regenerating and sanctifying agency of the Holy Spirit; by 'working in the will, to will and to do of his good pleasure'. Phil. 2:13. Scripture teaches that this operation of the Spirit does not destroy the freedom of the will. 'If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed' John 8:36. And the report of consciousness agrees with this; for the regenerate man has no sense of being forced and unwilling in any of his experiences and exercises.

How, in the second place, does God make the everlasting continuance of sin in a non-elect sinner a certainty without compelling and necessitating his will? By letting him alone, or, in the Confessional phrase, by 'passing him by', and leaving him wholly to his own self-determination in sin? The sublapsarian preterition, which is that of the Westminster Confession and all the Reformed creeds, supposes the fall in Adam and the existence of sin to be prior, in the order of nature, to both election and preterition. Election and preterition, consequently have reference to the continuance of sin, not to the origin of it. All men fall in Adam, without exception; so that there is no election or non-election to the fall itself, but only to deliverance from it. Both election and preterition suppose the fall, and are inexplicable without it as a presupposition. Men are elected from out

of a state of sin; and men are passed by and left in a state of sin. 'They who are elected [and they who are passed by] being fallen in Adam,' etc., Conf. iii. 6. Election stops the continuation of sin; preterition permits the continuance of it. The non-elect man, then, like the elect, being already in the state of sin and guilt by the free fall in Adam, nothing is requisite in order to make it certain that he will for ever remain in this state but the purpose of God not to restrain and change the action of his free will and self-will in sin by regenerating it. To denominate such merely permissive action as this, compulsion, is absurd. And yet this permissive action of God secures the certainty of everlasting sin and death in the case of the non-elect, just as infallibly as the efficient action of God secures the certainty of everlasting holiness and life in the case of the elect. But in the former instance the certainty is secured wholly by the action of the sinner himself, while in the latter instance it is secured by the action of the Holy Spirit within the sinner. This leaving of the sinful will to its own movement makes endless sin an infallible certainty. For the sinner himself will and can never regenerate himself; and if God has in his sovereignty decided and purposed not to regenerate him, his willing and endless continuance in sin and death is certain. Every Christian knows that if, in his unregeneracy, he had been left wholly to his own free will, without any restraint from God, he would infallibly have gone from bad to worse for ever and ever.

In these two ways of efficiency and permission, God 'foreordains' and makes certain two things that unquestionably 'come to pass,' namely, the everlasting holiness and life of some men, and the everlasting sin and death of some men; 'yet so as thereby God is not the author of sin; nor is violence done to the will of the creature; nor is the liberty of second causes taken away, but rather established'. When God predetermined from eternity not to restrain and prevent 'Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and all the people of Israel', from crucifying his beloved Son, but to leave them to their own wicked inclination and voluntary action in the case, he made this crucifixion a certainty, but not a necessity, as is evinced by the 'woe' pronounced upon them by the Son of God. Luke 22:22. Men with hearts and dispositions full of hatred toward the Saviour of the world, if left to themselves are infallibly certain to cry, 'Crucify him; crucify him'. John 19: 6-15.

The Confession (vi. i; L.C. 19) declared that God 'permits' sin, but that it is not a 'bare permission'. Conf. v. 4. The permission that is adopted by the Assembly is one that occurs by a voluntary decision of God which He need not have made, had He so pleased. He might have decided not to permit sin; in which case it would not have entered his universe. The 'bare permission' which is rejected by the Assembly means that God makes no voluntary decision at all in the case; that He could not have prevented the fall of angels and men, but stands 'like an idle spectator', having no control over the event which He witnesses. Augustine makes the following statement in his *Enchiridion*, Ch. 100: 'In a way unspeakably strange and wonderful, even what is done in opposition to God's will [of desire] does not defeat his will [of decree]. For it would not be done did He not permit it,

and of course his permission is not unwilling, but willing; nor would a Good Being permit evil to be done except that in his omnipotence He can turn evil into good'. Calvin, adopting Augustine's phraseology, concisely marks the difference between the two permissions in the remark, that 'God's permission of sin is not involuntary, but voluntary' Inst. I. xviii. 3. Both Augustine and Calvin had particular reference, in this connection, to the first origin of sin in angels and men.¹ But their statement holds true of the continuance of sin in angels and men. When God passes by all the fallen and sinful angels, and does not regenerate and save any of them, it is by a positive voluntary decision that might have been different had He so pleased. He could have saved them. And when God passes by some fallen and sinful men and does not regenerate and save them, this also is a positive voluntary decision that might have been different had He so pleased. He could have saved them. To deny this option of God in either instance is to deny, first, the divine sovereignty in the exercise of mercy; and, second, the divine omnipotence in the control of creatures.

Notes

'The permissive decree as related to the origin of sin presents a difficulty that does not exist in reference to the continuance of sin. The certainty of the continuance of sin in fallen man is easily explained, by merely leaving the fallen will to its self-determination. But merely leaving the unfallen will to its self-determination would not make its apostasy certain; because it was endowed by creation with a power to remain holy as created, and there was no punitive withdrawal of any grace given in creation until after apostasy. How, under these circumstances a permissive decree which does not operate by direct efficiency can make the fall of a holy being certain, is an inscrutable mystery. Respecting it, Turretin (VI. vii. i) makes the following remark: 'Two extremes are to be avoided. First, that of defect, when an otiose permission of sin is ascribed to God. Second, that of excess, when the causality of sin is ascribed to him. Between these extremes, the orthodox hold the mean, who contend that the providence of God extends to sin in such way that He does not involuntarily permit it, as the Pelagians say, nor actively cause it as the Libertines assert, but voluntarily ordains and controls it'.

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