

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

January 1999

Copyright 2003 John W. Robbins Post Office Box 68, Unicoi, Tennessee 37692

Email: [Jrob1517@aol.com](mailto:Jrob1517@aol.com)

Website: [www.trinityfoundation.org](http://www.trinityfoundation.org)

Telephone: 423.743.0199

Fax: 423.743.2005

## A Biblical Theodicy W. Gary Crampton\*

Ronald Nash has written that "the most serious challenge to theism was, is, and will continue to be the problem of evil."<sup>1</sup> Warren believes that "it is likely the case that no charge has been made with a greater frequency or with more telling force against theism of Judeo-Christian [Biblical] tradition" than the complication of the existence of evil.<sup>2</sup> And David E. Trueblood has boldly maintained that the obstacle of evil and suffering in the world is "evidence for the atheist."<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the Biblical writers themselves address the issue of God and evil. The prophet Habakkuk complained, "You [God] are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours" (1:13)? And Gideon asked, "O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this [hardship] happened to us" (*Judges* 6:13)?

If, according to the Bible, God, who is omnipotent and benevolent, has eternally decreed all that ever comes to pass, and if He sovereignly and providentially controls all things in His created universe, how is He not the author of evil? How can evil exist in the world? How do we justify the actions of God in causing evil, suffering, and pain? This is the question of "theodicy." The word, which supposedly

was coined by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), is derived from two Greek words (*theos*, God, and *dike*, justice), and has to do with the justification of the goodness and righteousness of God in the face of the evil in the world.

As we will see, however, the problem of evil is not the compelling argument it is made out to be. In fact, as Gordon Clark has said, "whereas various other views disintegrate at this point, the system known as Calvinism and expressed in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* offers a satisfactory and completely logical answer."<sup>4</sup> The answer, as we will see, lies in the Christian's epistemological starting point: the Word of God.

Throughout the centuries there have been numerous quasi-Christian attempts to deal with this issue. Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of the Church of Christ, Scientist, simply denied that evil exists; that is, evil is illusory. More recently E. S. Brightman and Rabbi Harold Kushner opt for a finite god. Their god is limited in power or intelligence; hence, he cannot be blamed for evil in the world.

Zoroastrianism and Manicheanism, on the other hand, explicitly posit an ultimate dualism in the universe. Good and evil have existed both co-eternally and independently, in the form of finite deities. Neither has yet destroyed the other. This accounts for the mixture of good and evil in our

<sup>1</sup> *Faith and Reason* (Zondervan, 1988), 177.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas B. Warren, *Have Atheists Proved There is No God?* (Gospel Advocate Co., 1972), vii.

<sup>3</sup> *Philosophy of Religion* (Harper and Row Publishers, 1957), 231.

<sup>4</sup> *God and Evil* (The Trinity Foundation, 1996), 7.

world. Leibniz rationalistically contended that God was morally bound to create "the best of all possible worlds." Since there is evil in the world, God must have seen that this was the best of all possible worlds he might have created.

These theories, of course, fall far short of a Biblical theodicy. The Bible makes it very clear that evil is not illusory. Sin is real; it brought about the Fall of man and the curse of God upon the whole cosmos.<sup>5</sup> Neither is God to be viewed as a less than almighty and all-knowing deity. He is the *ex nihilo* Creator of the universe. Moreover, the fact that God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things rules out any form of dualism.<sup>6</sup> God brooks no competition.

Leibniz is also in error. He speaks of God's moral responsibility to create the best out of a number of possible worlds, each of which is more or less good. Leibniz has things in reverse. God did not choose this world because it is best; rather, it is best because God chose it. God's choices are not determined by anything or anyone outside himself. Calvin clearly understood this principle when he wrote: "For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever He wills, by the very fact that He wills it, must be considered righteous. When, therefore, one asks why God has so willed you are seeking something greater and higher than God's will, which cannot be found."<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, Leibniz's view also tends to eliminate man's responsibility for sin by representing sin as little more than a misfortune that has befallen him. Again, the Bible is very clear that man is responsible for his sin. In David's prayer of repentance, for example, in *Psalms* 51, he puts the blame, not on God, nor his mother, nor on Adam, all of which are links in the chain leading to his sinful actions. Rather, David places the blame squarely upon the sinner: himself.

<sup>5</sup> Even if evil were illusory (which it is not), the illusions would exist and have to be accounted for as evil illusions.

<sup>6</sup> In actuality, the philosophic system called dualism is absurd. If there were two co-eternal and co-equal deities, we could not say that one was good and one evil. That is, without a superior standard to determine what is good and evil, good and evil cannot be predicated of anything. But if there is such a superior standard (that is, something above the two deities), then there is no ultimate dualism.

<sup>7</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Westminster, 1960), III:23:2.

Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, also pondered the nature of evil. In his *City of God*, and elsewhere, he maintained that since God has created all things "good" (*Genesis* 1:31), evil cannot have an independent existence. Evil is the absence of good, as darkness is the absence of light. Evil, then, is the absence of good; it is not the positive presence of something. This being the case, said Augustine, evil cannot be the *efficient* cause of sin; it is a *deficient* cause in the creature. Evil, being the absence of good, or the presence of a lesser good, is the result of the creature's turning away from the commands of God to a lesser good: the will of the creature. Herein is the essence of evil: It is the creature, not God, who is the creator of sin. But this does not give us a solution either. As Clark wrote, "Deficient causes, if there are such things, do not explain why a good God does not abolish sin and guarantee that men always choose the highest good."<sup>8</sup>

Arminianism, as a quasi-Christian system, also fails to give us a solution. Arminian theologians attribute the origin of evil to the free will of man, rather than the will of God, positing a dualism of sorts. In his freedom, Adam chose to sin, apart from God's sovereign will. Adam had a "liberty of indifference" to the will of God. God "merely permitted" man to sin. The idea, however, of God's "permitting" man to sin does not solve the problem. Clark explained: "Somehow the idea of God's permitting evil without decreeing it seems to absolve God from the charge that He is the 'author' of sin, but one must be careful, both with respect to the logic of the argument and to the full Scriptural data. God 'permitted' Satan to afflict Job; but since Satan could not have done so without God's approval, the idea of permission hardly exonerates God. Is perfect holiness any more compatible with approving or permitting Satanic evil? If God could have prevented, not only Job's trials, but all the other sins and temptations to which mankind is subject--if He foresaw them and decided to let them occur--is He less reprehensible [on this view] than if He positively decreed them? If a man could save a baby from a burning house, but decided to 'permit' the baby to burn, who would dare say that he was morally perfect in so deciding?"<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *God and Evil*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *First Corinthians* (The Trinity Foundation, 1975, 1991), 156-157.

Such a non-Christian view of permission and free will cannot coexist with omnipotence. Neither is the Arminian view of free will compatible with God's omniscience, because omniscience renders the future certain. If God foreknows all things, then of necessity they will come to pass; otherwise, they could not be "foreknown." God foreknew, even foreordained, the crucifixion of His Son by the hands of sinful men. The godless men who carried out the act are responsible for their sin (*Acts* 2:22-23; 4:27-28). Could they have done differently? Could Judas Iscariot not have betrayed Jesus Christ? To ask the questions is to answer them.

Christian theology does not deny that Adam (and all men after him, for that matter) had a "free will" in the sense of "free moral agency." Men are not rocks or machines. All men think and choose in this sense of the term; otherwise, they could not act. Men choose to do what they want to think and to do; in fact, they could do no other than choose. What Christian theology does deny is that man has the "freedom of indifference." His ability to choose is always governed by factors: his own intellections, habits, and so forth. All his choices are determined by the eternal decrees of God.

This is not only true with regard to post-Fall man, it was also true of Adam prior to *Genesis* 3. The major difference, and it is major, is that post-Fall man, who still maintains his moral agency, has lost that which Adam originally possessed: the ability to choose what God requires. Fallen man, in his state of total depravity, always chooses to do that which he desires, but his sinful mind in rebellion against God, dictates that he always chooses evil (*Romans* 3:9-18; 8:7-8; *Ephesians* 4:17-19). The ability to choose good is only restored through regeneration.

Man, then, is never indifferent in his willing to do anything. God has determined all things that will ever come to pass. God's sovereignty does not undermine but rather establishes the responsibility of man. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (3:1 5:2, 4), correctly states that: "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away,

but rather established. Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, He orders them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extends itself even to the first Fall, and all other sins of angels and men, and that not by a bare permission, but such as has joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends; yet so as the sinfulness thereof proceeds only from the creature, and not from God; who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin."

God, says the *Confession*, is the sovereign first cause of all things, many of which occur through the free acts of man. Man is free from the control of molecules in his brain, but not from the decrees of God. The end that is decreed by God must never be separated from the means that He has also decreed, as second causes. God, wrote Clark, "does not arrange things or control history apart from second causes.... God does not decree [the end] apart from the means. He decrees that the end shall be accomplished by means of the means."<sup>10</sup>

This is the reason, according to the *Confession*, that God is not to be considered "the author or approver of sin." God is the sovereign first cause of sin, but He is not the author of sin. Only creatures can commit and do commit sin. This view taught by the *Westminster Confession* is the Calvinistic concept of determinism. The word *determinism* often carries with it an evil connotation, but this should not be the case. The word *determinism* expresses a very Biblical and high view of God, and it gives us the only plausible theodicy. God determines or decrees every event of history and every action of all his creatures, including men.

Moreover, that which God decrees is right simply because God decrees it; God can never err. God, says the Scripture, answers to no one: "He does not give an accounting of any of His words" (*Job* 33:13). He is

<sup>10</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956, 1965), 38.

the lawgiver (*Isaiah* 33:22; *James* 4:12); man is under the law. God is accountable to no one; He is *ex lex* ("above the law"), whereas man is *sub lego* ("under the law"). The Ten Commandments are binding on man, not God. The only precondition for responsibility is a lawgiver--in this case, God. Thus, man is necessarily responsible for his sin because God holds him responsible; whatever God does is by definition just; and God is completely absolved of the accusation that He is the author of sin.

The determinism expressed in the statements of the *Westminster Confession* is not the same thing as fatalism or behaviorism. In fatalism, god, or the gods, or the Fates, determine some if not all outcomes, apparently apart from means. In behaviorism, the actions of men are determined, not by God, but by chemicals in their brains and muscles.

Someone will object, Is not murder sin and contrary to the will of God? Then how can it be that God wills it? The answer is found in *Deuteronomy* 29:29: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." Here Moses distinguishes between God's decretive will ("secret things") and His preceptive will ("those things which are revealed"). The decretive will (God's decrees) determines what must happen; the preceptive will (God's commands) is the law which men are obliged to obey. The decretive will is largely hidden in the mind of God; it is absolute and determined by Him alone; it is not for man to know unless God reveals it. The preceptive will, on the other hand, is wholly revealed in Scripture. It is that will of God for man by which he is to live. Hence, it is for us and our children to know and to obey. The word *will* is ambiguous. It would be better to speak of God's commands and his decrees. Man is held accountable for his disobedience to God's commands, not God's decrees. Man cannot disobey God's decrees, for God is sovereign. In the example used earlier, God from all eternity decreed Christ's crucifixion, yet when it was carried out by the hands of sinful men, it was contrary to the moral law, that is, God's commands.

Standing on the "rock foundation" of the Word of God as our axiomatic starting point (*Matthew* 7:24-25), we have an answer to the problem of evil. God, who

is altogether holy and can do no wrong, sovereignly decrees evil things to take place for his own good purposes (*Isaiah* 45:7). Just because He has decreed it, his action is right. As Jerome Zanchius wrote: "The will of God is so the cause of all things, as to be, itself without cause, for nothing can be the cause of that which is the cause of everything. Hence we find every matter resolved ultimately into the mere sovereign pleasure of God. God has no other motive for what He does than *ipsa voluntas*, His mere will, which will itself is so far from being unrighteous that it is justice itself."<sup>11</sup>

Sin and evil therefore exist for good reasons: God has decreed them as part of His eternal plan, and they work not only for His own glory, but also for the good of his people. With this Biblical premise in mind, it is easy to answer anti-theists, such as David Hume, who argue that the pervasiveness of evil in the world militates against the existence of the Christian God. Hume, for example, argues as follows:

1. A benevolent deity will prevent [all] evil from occurring.
2. An omniscient, omnipotent deity is able to prevent [all] evil.
3. Evil exists in the world.
4. Therefore, either God is not benevolent, or He is not omniscient or [not] omnipotent.<sup>12</sup>

One problem with Hume's argument is his starting point. His first premise is false. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that Hume can coherently define *good*, *evil*, and *benevolent*, it does not follow that a benevolent deity will prevent all evil from occurring. Hume assumes that a benevolent deity is benevolent toward all his creatures, but Scripture explicitly denies that premise. All things work together for good, not for all God's creatures, but only for those who are called according to his purpose.

Solving the problem of evil is a matter of adopting the correct starting point. With the Bible as our axiomatic starting point, the existence of evil is not a

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Gordon H. Clark, *An Introduction to Christian Philosophy* (The Trinity Foundation, 1993), 113-114.

<sup>12</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, in *God and Evil*, edited by Nelson Pike (Prentice Hall, 1964).

significant problem at all. In fact, the existence of evil is far more problematic in the unbeliever's worldview. Without a coherent standard of right and wrong, evil and good, how can one even define *evil*? The problem of evil cannot be coherently formulated on non-Christian grounds. And if Christian grounds are assumed in order to pose the problem, Christian grounds, that is, the Scriptures, explain evil's purpose in the world. "All things work together for good to those who love God and are called...."

Finally, a Biblical theodicy maintains, as the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (3:5; 5:1) says, that all that God decrees and providentially brings to pass are "all to the praise of His glorious grace... [It is] to His own glory." Robert Reymond correctly states that "the consentient view of all Scripture is that God's supralapsarian purpose in creating the world is that He would be glorified (*Isaiah* 43:7, 21; *Ephesians* 1:6-14) through the glorification of His Son, as the 'first-born among many brothers' (*Romans* 8:29), and the Lord of His church (*Philippians* 2:11; *Colossians* 1:18). Creation's *raison d'être* then is to serve the redemptive ends of God."<sup>13</sup>

Hence, it is logically consistent that the Fall of mankind had to occur if God is to be ultimately glorified through the glorification of His Son. That is, God's foreordination of the Fall, and His providentially bringing it to pass, are necessary. He has purposed it for His own glory. The apostle Paul speaks to this in *Romans* 5:12-19. There we read that Adam and Christ are federal heads of two covenantal arrangements. It is necessary to postulate that if Adam had successfully passed his probation in the Garden (that is, the covenant of works), he would have been confirmed by God in positive righteousness. He would have passed from the state of being *posse peccare* (possible to sin) to the state of *non posse peccare* (not possible to sin). Adam's righteousness, then, would have been imputed to all of his descendants (that is, the entire human race). And all mankind would have gratefully looked to him, not Christ, as Savior. For all eternity, God would then share His glory with His creature: Adam. Ironically, the obedience of Adam would have led to idolatry. Therefore, that alternative world is logically

impossible. Only the actual world, in which the Fall of man occurred, is logically possible and redounds to the glory of God alone. Had Adam obeyed, Jesus Christ would have been denied His role as "the first-born among many brothers" and the Lord of His church. And the Father would not receive the glory for His work through the Son. It seems, then, that this supralapsarianism view of the purpose of creation is in agreement with a number of the Puritans who referred to the *Genesis* 3 event as "the fortunate Fall."

Not only is the only logically consistent universe one in which evil exists for God's purposes, but God's people will be far more blessed because of the incarnation and Christ than they could ever have been blessed by an obedient Adam.

\* Dr. Crampton is a free-lance writer, living in Montpelier,

Virginia. This article is an expanded version of a piece that first appeared in *The Issacharian Report*, February 1994.

13. Robert L. Reymond, *God and Man in Holy Scripture* (unpublished syllabus, Covenant Theological Seminary, 1990), 126, 127, 142.

<sup>13</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *God and Man in Holy Scripture* (unpublished syllabus, Covenant Theological Seminary, 1990), 126, 127, 142.

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

November, December 1982

Copyright 2003 John W. Robbins Post Office Box 68, Unicoi, Tennessee 37692

Email: [jrob1517@aol.com](mailto:jrob1517@aol.com)

Website: [www.trinityfoundation.org](http://www.trinityfoundation.org)

Telephone: 423.743.0199

Fax: 423.743.2005

## The Sovereignty of God

Gordon H. Clark

Many of the matters discussed in the earlier sections—the Covenants, the Incarnation, the Satisfaction, and indeed Absolute Necessity—come to a head under the rubric of sovereignty. One question previously raised was whether God could have sovereignly dispensed with justice. The two Hodges decide in favor of justice and reject sovereignty. Let the reader understand that this treatise maintains that Christ satisfied the justice of his Father. What the treatise aims to show is that the Hodges and others have formulated an incorrect disjunction between the two. Or, to anticipate, justice is itself based on sovereignty. This includes the idea that the atonement was absolutely necessary. The theology of Charles Hodge is impeccable on nearly every point, yet some of his paragraphs (as I have indicated in other publications) suffer from confusion.

The question, "How is justice related to sovereignty?" can arise only within the sphere of Calvinism. Lutheran theology is more anthropocentric than theocentric. Krauth, an influential Lutheran theologian, in his *The Conservative Reformation and its Theology* (123ff.) claims that Arminius was largely influenced by Lutheranism. Krauth's decisive example is Arminius' choice and denial of the five points of Calvinism: It was Arminius, not some Calvinist, who selected the TULIP as the essence of Calvinism. On this, says Krauth, Arminianism and Lutheranism are in accord. Some semi-Calvinists

are in partial agreement. A. H. Strong (*Systematic Theology*, II, 635) remarks, "We prefer to attribute God's dealings to justice, rather than to sovereignty." This statement is immediately connected with the imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity, but it is reasonable to suppose that Strong would say the same thing of the atonement also. The statement is vague, suggesting a mere preference that would allow some role to sovereignty if one should press it. Strong supports his preference by five considerations. The first is, "A probation [in the case of Adam] is more consistent with divine justice than a separate probation of each individual...." If we end the sentence here, the reply is that most people would insist that a probation of each individual is more just, while imputation more clearly depends on sovereignty. Actually the sentence continues "of each individual with [his] inexperience, inborn depravity, and evil example, all favorable to a decision against God." But with the exception of the evil example, the conditions falsify the situation. Adam was equally inexperienced, and a probation for each individual could occur only if each were innocent as Adam was. That is, the theory rejects inborn depravity. Hence the argument fails on two counts. Second, "A constitution which made a common fall possible may have been indispensable to any provision of a common salvation." The answer is, "may have been" is insufficient. To prove his point, Strong should have said, "must have been." Perhaps it is wise to omit Strong's other

reasons. They all seem irrelevant to me, but the reader can read Strong for himself and decide.

However, as was just said, the problem is essentially a problem for Calvinism because, unlike the other theologies, it stresses both justice and sovereignty. The question is, How are they related? On this subject, Charles Hodge has a peculiar paragraph. It seems to contradict itself. The subhead (*Systematic Theology*, I, 539) is "The Decrees of God are Free," and the following quotation is a part of it.

1. They [the decrees] are rational determinations, founded on sufficient reasons. This is opposed to the doctrine of necessity, which assumes that God acts by a mere necessity of nature, and that all that occurs is due to the law of development or of self-manifestation of the divine being. This reduces God to a mere *natura naturans*, or *vis formativa*, which acts without design. The true doctrine is opposed also to the idea that the only cause of events is an intellectual force analogous to the instincts of irrational animals. The acts performed under the guidance of instinct are not free acts, for liberty is a *libentia rationalis*, spontaneity determined by reason. It is therefore involved in the idea of God as a rational and personal being that his decrees are free. He was free to create or not to create ... to act or not act ... not from any blind necessity, but according to the counsel of his own will.

This paragraph contains considerable confusion; but before examining it, it will help to quote parts of a subsequent paragraph in which Hodge more clearly shows his basic orthodoxy.

The decrees of God are free in the sense of being absolute or sovereign.... the decrees of God are in no case conditional. The event decreed is suspended on a condition, but the purpose of God is not. It is inconsistent with the nature of God to assume suspense or indecision on his part. If he has not absolutely determined on what is to occur, but waits

until an undetermined condition is or is not fulfilled, then his decrees can neither be eternal nor immutable.

This latter paragraph is much clearer than the former. We may agree with the former that the decrees, including of course everything connected with the atonement, are "rational determinations." By this phrase, I understand that the whole plan of history is teleological. Prior events prepare for later events. Judas's betrayal prepared for the arrest and the crucifixion. But contrary to what Hodge says, this does not rule out "the doctrine of necessity." While one must reject the idea that there is any development in God, there is indeed development in history. Nor is the word "mere" very clear, when Hodge says that God does not act by a mere necessity of nature. If the term *natura* is meant to indicate the physical universe—Mother Nature as some poets call it, and *natura naturans* as Spinoza said—of course we agree with Hodge's statement. Furthermore, Hodge's reference to Spinoza seems to support the idea that he is thinking of the universe. Spinoza was a pantheist who frequently used the phrase *Deus sive Natura*. But Hodge seems to me to have confused Mother Nature with the nature of God. The important question is whether God acts necessarily by his own nature. Could God have willed to save no one? Could God have willed that Antony should have been victorious, or that the Duc de Guise should have defeated Henry IV? If one says that the defeat of Antony was necessitated and that God could not have willed otherwise, it does not follow, as Hodge seems to say it does, that God would have acted without design. Nor does the doctrine of necessity require that God's intellectual force be analogous to the instincts of irrational animals. At best Hodge has in his attack on Spinozism used language that can be applied to views that are not at all Spinozistic. And one of these views is the Christian doctrine of God and his decrees.

One of the terms the Hodges use with confidence and satisfaction is *freedom*. God was free to create or not to create; God was free to save or not to save men; but if he freely chose to save any, he was necessitated to sacrifice Christ. In this he was not free. It is reasonable to suppose that this language

somewhat reflects the discussions on the free will of man. At any rate, the idea of God's freedom should be clarified. Some types of freedom are obviously irrelevant to the present discussion: a man may be free from disease, free from prejudice, or free from his previous wife. Though these meanings are irrelevant, one notes that freedom is often, almost always, freedom *from* something.

Spinoza is an exception, for his freedom is a freedom *to*. A grain of wheat is free to grow, if it is planted in good soil rather than having fallen on a rock where a bird can pick it up. The bird is more free than a grain of wheat because, if this rock had no grain of wheat on it, the bird can fly and find food elsewhere. A man is more free than a bird because he can survive in many more circumstances. Thus, Spinoza says, freedom is not the ability to do either of two things in the same circumstance, but the ability to do the same thing in many circumstances.

Arminian and Romish freedom is the power of contrary choice. There is nothing, absolutely nothing in any circumstance in heaven above, or earth beneath, or the waters under the earth—but especially in heaven above—that necessitates a given volition. The opposite choice is always as possible as the one chosen.

But what might divine freedom be? One thing is clear. There is no power, circumstance, or principle external to God that necessitates or even induces him to do anything. Of course, before the creation of the world there were no circumstances at all, though some philosopher might say that there were eternal principles external to him. But for the Christian there was nothing before he created something. But does this mean that God could have chosen no to create?

The confusion that permeates discussion on this subject arises from the rather natural impulse to understand the will of God as similar to the will of man, or, more accurately, similar to what many theologians think the will of man is. In particular, they picture God as earlier undecided, and later at a moment in time God makes a choice. The theologian may indeed recognize that there is no

external motivation, but he still holds to the possibility that God could have willed otherwise.

This confusion is due to the fact that the authors often forget that God is immutable. Grotius seems to have argued that no one form of atonement is absolutely necessary. The law, he maintains, is a product of the divine *will* and not something inherent in his nature. Therefore God is *free* to enforce, to abrogate, or in any way to alter the laws. Grotius is not the only one who seems to assume that God's will is *free* in the sense that he can change his mind at any time. Freedom, however, should be defined, and the implications of the definition should be stated. For example, human freedom may consist in the circumstance that one's conduct is not determined by physicochemical law. From this definition, if accepted, it follows that the universe is not a mechanism. But, so far as this definition goes, human conduct can be necessitated by a divine teleological law. As for the freedom of God, he is surely free from control by any superior power, for there is no power superior to God. But as immutable by nature—see Grotius's distinction between will and nature a few lines above—God's will and action are unalterable.

Hodge—who rejects Grotius's view of the atonement—is perhaps a little, but not much, better. God, he says, "will the precept *because* it is *intrinsically* right.... There must be an absolute standard of righteousness." Such a statement places a standard of justice outside of God. The standard is *intrinsically* right, hence independent of God's sovereignty—indeed, sovereignty has been abandoned. Hodge, however, wants to avoid this implication, for unlike Grotius, Hodge immediately adds, "This absolute standard is the divine nature ... the divine intelligence." This addition gives the impression of maintaining divine sovereignty as against any external power or principle. But it faces an equally difficult objection. It raises the question as to the difference between will and nature. What is nature? Do we not speak of the nature of God, the nature of God's will, the nature of God's intelligence? Nature is not a constituent of anything. It is simply the thing's characteristics. God's nature, like a dog's nature, is such and such because such are the characteristics of the dog or of God. The



nature is simply the way the dog or God acts. There is no *nature* that controls God's will. As Isaac Watts once wrote, "Dogs delight to bark and bite, for 'tis their nature to."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to examining the term *nature*, one must ask what is *will*? If we speak of the human will, we refer to a somewhat momentary act of choice. After having considered the relative desirability of this versus that line of action—or, what is the same thing, between an action and doing nothing—such as investing in AT&T or just leaving the money in the checking account—and having puzzled over it indecisively for a period of time—we come to a conclusion and make our choice: We decide and do it. Then when we start to study theology and to consider the will of God, we are apt to think, or subconsciously suppose, that God makes decisions. He willed to create, he willed—after some deliberation—to save some, and so on. Though we may not say so out loud, we suppose that God was puzzled: He could create or he could refuse to create; he could save or could refuse to save some; and if he decided to save some, he could use any means imaginable.

Now, although these choices are all of one nature, all subject to the same considerations, Hodge and others want to give the last question an answer different from their answer to the prior questions. This seems to me to be logically inconsistent, for if it relieves God of indecision on the last point, it pictures him as indecisive on the prior points and assigns to him a relatively momentary act of choice. This makes God a temporal creature—or if not a creature, at least a temporal being.

Such a view is utterly inconsistent with divine omniscience. The immutable God never learned anything and never changed his mind. He knew everything from eternity. This *everything* includes both the number of mosquitoes in Jackson Hole and the number of planets in the solar system. Underlying these two examples is the creation of a temporal universe. For time began with the creation of the first nonomniscient angel.

---

<sup>1</sup> The hymn, with animadversions on childhood, never became popular in the churches.

Without claiming infallibility, and certainly no omniscience, I believe the above to be substantially what the Bible implies. Perhaps one should quote a few of the more clearly supporting verses. This is all the more appropriate because many, even most, of the volumes on Systematic Theology are strangely deficient at this point. Fortunately the indispensable Charnock fills the gap. Yet as Charnock shows, most of the Scriptural references are examples rather than universal claims. If God knows the number of hair on our heads and calls all the stars by name and notices the fall of every sparrow, we are encouraged to believe that he knows everything. There are nonetheless certain more general statements and inferences from his other attributes. Some of the latter will be quoted first.

The first of these verses is one that can easily be misunderstood, but neither should it be undervalued.

Psalm 147:5: Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.<sup>2</sup>

1 Samuel 2:3: The Lord is a God of knowledge.

Colossians 2:3: In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

These three—especially the latter two—are sufficiently universal and should, even by themselves, be considered conclusive. The next two might not seem universal by themselves, but it would be difficult to deny their implications.

---

<sup>2</sup> Though this verse helps to confirm God's omniscience, it must not be pressed too far. The Hebrew word does not mean *infinite*. In fact, Hebrew seems not to have any word meaning infinite. *Mispar*, the word in this verse, means a *number*. It can mean a small number or a large number. David sinfully wanted to know the relatively small number of his people. God knows the relatively large number of the stars. It is a delicate question whether God's knowledge is infinite in the English sense of the word. If it were, God's knowledge would be incomplete, if not unsystematic. The number of prime numbers equals the number of numbers because both are infinite; so that if God's knowledge were infinite, there would always be an extra item beyond the last. There would be no completeness. It is true that there can be an infinite 'number' of propositions by counting the series: Today is Tuesday, it is true that today is Tuesday, it is true that it is true that today is Tuesday, *ad nauseam*.

Isaiah 46:10: Declaring the end from the beginning.

Hebrews 4:13: There is no creature that is not manifest in his sight.

Could anyone be bold enough to assert that there are some non creatures which might not be manifest in his sight? The following verses show that God's knowledge neither increases nor diminishes because he is immutable and eternal.

Exodus 3:14: I AM THAT I AM.

Psalms 90:2: From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.

Malachi 3:6: I am the Lord, I change not.

1 Timothy 1:17: Unto the King eternal ....

James 1:7: The Father of lights with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow cast by turning.

Now come some verses that give examples, remarkable examples, of what God knows. Charnock cites dozens of such verses and expounds them all at length. Less than a half a dozen should suffice here. They all tie in with the doctrine of the Atonement.

John 13:18: I know whom I have chosen.

Romans 9:11: The children being not yet born ... That the purpose of God according to election might stand ....

Ephesians 1:4: ... chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 1:9: ... according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.

2 Timothy 2:19: The Lord knoweth them that are his.

Notice that the first and fifth verses quoted, not to mention the others, make sense only if there are some whom God did not choose and are not his.

From the immutability and omniscience of God, it follows necessarily that there is indeed no other possible method of salvation—not, however, for the reasons Hodge gives, but simply because of this

immutability. In much of this discussion, the authors speak as if God on one occasion produced an act of will and on another occasion he made another voluntary act. The Westminster Standards, however, reproduce the Biblical position that God is immutable. Therefore, not only is the propitiatory method of atonement absolutely necessary, but also the number of mosquitoes in the world at any given instant. Every detail is a part of the all-comprehensive divine decree. God foreordains whatever comes to pass. Everything is necessary. This view exalts the sovereignty of God. This view exalts God. Do not think that the reference to mosquitoes was flippant. William Cullen Bryant was no Calvinist, and his theology is deplorable; yet on one occasion he stated the truth, even if he could not properly apply it to himself. A Christian can detach his lines from the Bryant theology and repeat with appreciation these words from *To a Waterfowl*:

There is a Power whose care

Teaches thy way along that pathless coast,

The desert and illimitable air—

Lone wandering, but not lost.

He who, from zone to zone,

Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,

In the long way that I must tread alone

Will lead my steps aright.

This settles the question as to whether the method of the atonement is based on sovereignty or on justice, and the question whether God could have refused or neglected to save anybody. Not a chance. As previously asserted by the present writer, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross satisfied the justice of the Father. But now it should be clear that justice is one facet of sovereignty. There is no moral principle superior to God. I can say that there is no moral principle superior to the will of God. God's will and God's intellect are identical. Justice is what God thinks. To suppose that anything could have been otherwise is to suppose that God could have been otherwise than he is. The salvation of the elect is a part of the sovereign play by which the universe

goes on. God had to create—not because there was some power external to him, but because he is God. A God who might not create, or would not have created, is simply not the Biblical God.

In this twentieth century, people like to be modern and up-to-date. Anything even ten years old—not to say two hundred or two thousand—is pass, benighted, medieval, stupid, unenlightened, erroneous, illogical, and just plain false. We today are educated. As one sweet little third-grader told her mother: I don't need to learn arithmetic; I'm developing a social consciousness. That is why Johnny can't read—theology.

Some Christians, *mirabile dictu* and *gloria in excelsisDeo*, still remember *Rock of Ages*. Of course, they do not know that the author wrote on the present subject, any more than they know of his other 149 hymns. Here then is something quite new and up to date, so far as the present generation is concerned.

Augustus Toplady wrote, among other things, "Observations on the Divine Attributes."<sup>3</sup> The simplicity of God and the identity of all the divine attributes, used above to settle the relation between justice and sovereignty, Toplady expresses in the following words. "Although the great and ever blessed God is a Being absolutely simple ... he is, nevertheless, in condescension to our weak and contracted faculties, represented in Scripture as possessed of divers properties, or attributes, which though seemingly different from his essence, are in reality essential to him, and constitutive of his very nature" (p. 675, col. 1). Toplady, then, specifies "his eternal wisdom, the absolute freedom and liberty of his will, the perpetuity and unchangeableness, both of himself and his decrees, his omnipotence, justice, and mercy."

The material is so good that it demands great restraint not to quote the entire article, twelve pages of long double columns. Fear not, modern reader, I shall give only a few short paragraphs.

<sup>3</sup> Pagination from *The Complete Works of Augustus M. Toplady*, London, 1869.

God is ... so perfectly wise that nothing ... can elude his knowledge ... 'Known unto God are all his works from eternity.' Consequently God knows nothing ... which he did not know and foresee from everlasting.... Whatever he foreknows to be future shall necessarily and undoubtedly come to pass. For his knowledge can be no more frustrated... than he can cease to be God. Nay, could either of these things be the case, he actually would cease to be God.

Some people argue that knowledge or foreknowledge does not necessitate anything. Even a man may know that an event will occur tomorrow, but this does not mean that he causes it to happen. Perhaps so. But if he does not cause it to happen, there must be some other cause which does; for unless it were certain, he could not know it.<sup>4</sup> Now, then, since omniscience shows that all events are certain, it follows that if God does not cause them, there must be a cause external to and independent of God. In other words, God has ceased to be God. Toplady recognizes this in this paragraph: "God's foreknowledge, taken abstractly, is not the sole cause of beings and events; but his will and foreknowledge together. Hence we find, Acts 2:23, that his determinate counsel and foreknowledge act in concert, the latter resulting from and being founded on, the former" (675, col.2).<sup>5</sup> Note that *foreknowledge* is dependent on determinate counsel. This is not true of a man. For example, I know that Christ will return. The event is determined, certain, and necessary. But I did not determine it.

Just a few more lines from Toplady: "Whatever comes to pass comes to pass by virtue of this absolute omnipotent will of God, which is the

<sup>4</sup> The illustration is faulty from the start because no man knows what will happen tomorrow.

<sup>5</sup> I have not quoted an intervening paragraph which asserts that though man acts "from the first to the last moment of his life, in absolute subserviency ... To the purposes and decrees of God concerning him; notwithstanding which he acts freely and voluntarily as if he was *sui prijuris*, ... absolutely lord of himself." Translating this, and John Gill's term, *coaction*, into twentieth-century English, it means that man is free from the compulsion or 'coaction' of physicochemical mathematical equations. But that the will is not free from God, and that it is God who makes us willing, is stated in the Westminster Confession, X, i; compare IX,3.

primary and supreme cause of allthings.... The will of God is so the cause of all things as to be itself without cause; for nothing can be the cause of that which is the cause of everything" (677). Later in the volume (784-819, all double columns) there is his article, "The Scheme of Christian and Philosophical Necessity Asserted."

In contrast with the types of interest prominent among the relatively conservative Christians of the present day, those of an earlier age can be instructive. William Cunningham, Professor of Church History at New College, Edinburgh, recounts<sup>6</sup> an interesting attack on Dr. Chalmers by Sir William Hamilton. The latter denounced the former as a fatalist, a pantheist, and as being ignorant and suicidal in theology. His reason was that Chalmers taught the doctrine of philosophical necessity. Cunningham's conclusion was that the Westminster Confession permits but does not teach philosophical necessity, that Chalmers not only was at liberty to accept that view, but that also his orthodoxy was impeccable.

On a lower level, a much lower level, *The Presbyterian Journal*, November 18, 1981, includes an article by the Rev. Donald A. Dunkerley entitled "Hyper-Calvinism Today." This author is to be highly commended because he knows what hyper-Calvinism is, and he states the definition clearly. Most popular writers and preachers neither state nor know it. Hyper-Calvinism is "that view of Calvinism which holds that 'there is no world-wide call to Christ sent out to all sinners, neither are all men bidden to take him as their Savior.' Hyper-Calvinists ... maintain that Christ should be held forth or offered as Savior to those only whom God effectually calls" (14).

It seems that there are such people, people who are derisively called Hard-shell Baptists. There must be very few such, and I do not know of any Presbyterians who qualify. Dunkerley himself acknowledges that they are "an almost negligible minority."

Yet, though he knows very well what the term means, he wants to extend its pejorative overtones to people to whom the term does not apply. His method is to ask rhetorical questions which he wants his readers to answer in the affirmative, when clearly the correct answer is negative. In spite of his acknowledgment that Hyper-Calvinists are an almost negligible minority, and after describing various forms of evangelism, he complains that "we lack and urgently need in our day [a] compassionate evangelism." Well, this is true, but in its context it seems to mean that hyper-Calvinism is almost the worst aberration of the twentieth century. Perhaps also of the eighteenth century, for Whitefield, whom he cites with approval, hardly evinces the evangelistic methods he seems to require.

Of course the Bible commands us to preach the Gospel to all men. To a hyper-Calvinist who insisted that a minister should preach the Gospel only to the elect, Clarence Edward Macartney, if I remember correctly, replied, "You point out to me which persons are the elect and I shall confine my preaching to them."

But when Mr. Dunkerley wants to tell everyone that "God loves you," I wonder how he can defend that phrase when not only Jacob, but Esau also is in the audience.<sup>7</sup>

Such then is my view of sovereignty, and my replies to assorted objections. *Deo soli gloria.*

<sup>6</sup> *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*; first published, 1862; London 1967; 471-524.

<sup>7</sup> In the article it seems that the hyper-Calvinist and Mr. Dunkerley misunderstand John 3:16, and that the latter's doctrine of assurance is at variance with the First Epistle of John