

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Man: How Dead?

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1:4-5)

At first glance the question—How dead is man?—may seem a bit absurd. However, as we survey the varied interpretations of man, sin, and the fall that have surfaced since the writing of the New Testament, we readily grasp the necessity to ask the question. Our view of man, sin, and the fall will frame our views on every other major Biblical doctrine, particularly those doctrines that deal with man's salvation.

A near-impassable chasm exists in contemporary Christian thought regarding the impact of the fall on man. We tend to associate the names of two men with the two dominant ideas, Arminius and Calvin. However, it may well be that we miss a more historical point by stopping with these two names. "The five points of Calvinism" did not originate with John Calvin. Calvin died without any thought of summarizing his theology into these five points. Moreover, Calvin's theology was not significantly different from the views held by the other leading Reformers. After Calvin's death Arminius became a teacher in a Reformed college and introduced his rejection of Reformed theology. He summarized his objections in five fundamental points. The Synod of Dort, convened in 1618-19 (Calvin died in 1564.), examined and eventually condemned Arminius' views. Their rejection of Arminius' five points of disagreement with the dominant Reformed theology became the five points of Reformed theology, not merely the five points of "Calvinism." It is highly likely that Arminius' thinking was strongly influenced by a counter-Reformation Jesuit priest, Luis de Molina. Molina contrived the idea of "middle knowledge" on which to build his case for human free will and—eventually—salvation by works, not by God's grace. In Molina's thinking, man returns to the center of salvation in the place of God.

That Arminius advocated free-will is a well-documented fact of history. What is often overlooked is the fact that, like Molina, Arminius also an appeal to middle

knowledge. What Arminius thought regarding the knowledge, or understanding, of God may be found in his "Disputations on Some of the Principal Subjects of the Christian Religion" (1610), Disputation IV, "On the Nature of God."¹

I have no interest in "Catholic-bashing." If I agreed with the theology and practice of the Roman Catholic Church, I'd be a member of that church. In the contemporary setting of our culture's struggle with such moral issues as abortion I honor the courage of the Roman Catholic Church to stand up against this moral evil, regardless of popular opinion. However, in terms of Christian theology I merely acknowledge the obvious when I state my disagreement with Roman Catholic theology. In its efforts to eliminate opposition by means of the Inquisition the Catholic Church failed. In its support of Molina it nearly succeeded. Arminius effectively embraced Roman Catholic counter-Reformation theology and drove a wedge into the Reformation movement. Luther remained apart from other Reformers because of his strong views of Communion, but his theological ideas were quite similar to the dominant Reformation doctrine held by the other leading Reformers. By their embracing Arminius' teachings, Protestant theologians unwittingly

¹ Quoted from *MOLINA, ARMINIUS, PLAIFERE, GOAD, AND WESLEY ON HUMAN FREE-WILL, DIVINE OMNISCIENCE, AND MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE* by Barry E. Bryant at the website listed in this note. Interested readers may find a wealth of information regarding the link between Molina, a Jesuit counter-Reformation Roman Catholic, and Arminius. Interestingly this union of ideas affirms that Arminius' thinking was in fact borrowed counter-Reformation theology, not true Reformation theology. http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrn/1/26-30/27.4.htm. This website is Wesleyan and therefore sympathetic to Molinism.

have embraced Roman Catholic theology! Dr. Robert Morey confronts the Molinistic view of “middle knowledge” directly.

The first problem that the supporters of Middle Knowledge face is that it is not a part of apostolic and historic Christianity. In Jude 3, we are told:
to contend earnestly for the Faith which was once for all of time delivered unto the saints.

Protestant theologians have always believed and taught:

If a doctrine is new, it is not true.

If it is true, it will not be new.

The Reformers, the Puritans, etc. spent a great deal of time and energy tracing their doctrines in church history all the way back to the first century. Why did they do this? They had two reasons that weighed heavily on their mind.

First, from Jude 3, it is obvious that “the Faith,” i.e. the body of doctrines that constitutes biblical Christianity, was delivered once and for all of time in the first century in the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles (Eph. 2:20; 3:4-5). The Christian Church is to defend the doctrines given by the Apostles (Acts 2:42). If a doctrine was not taught by the Apostles, it does not constitute a part of “the Faith.”

Second, Jude used the aorist tense when he used the word *paradoqeish* (delivered) to emphasize the finality of the Faith. When it comes to doctrine or morals, there will be no “new” revelations after the New Testament. The principle of sola scriptura means that what we believe and how we live is to be determined by Scripture alone.

This understanding works well when we deal with the Book of Mormon, the Divine Principle or the visions of Ellen White. They cannot be accepted because they teach new doctrines that were not a part of biblical and historic Christianity.

It is a wonder to us that some of those involved in the Middle Knowledge doctrine will refute Mormonism by pointing out the recent origins of Smith’s doctrine and then turn around and say that the fact that the doctrine of Middle Knowledge is of recent origin has no bearing on the issue! Hypocrisy has no limits!

What should we do with doctrines such as Middle Knowledge that have appeared only in recent church history? All the Protestant and Roman Catholic reference works that deal with the history and origin of the doctrine of Middle Knowledge state that it was invented by a Jesuit priest by the name of Luis Molina, as part of the counter-Reformation.

The Jesuits were given the task of retaking those countries that had been won over by the preaching of the Protestant Reformers. They used two methods to overcome Protestantism.

First, they tortured, murdered and made war on Protestant nations to force people to return to popery. The Jesuits during the Thirty Years War and in the Inquisition slaughtered several million Protestants. (See Foxes Book of Martyrs for the details.)

Second, they invented doctrines that would undercut the four foundational truths of the Reformation: salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone. According to the standard reference works, the doctrine of Middle Knowledge was invented by Molina to undercut the Reformation doctrine that we are saved by grace alone and not as a reward for anything done by us.

Does God reward us with the decree of salvation on the basis of what He foresaw we would do by our own power? Thus He decreed to save us because He foresaw that we would repent and believe? Is God’s grace given in response to what we will do before (and thus without) His grace? Does He love us because He foresaw that we would first love Him? Does He choose us because He foresaw that we would first choose Him? For Molina, the decree to save us is a reward for what God foresaw we will do by our own power.

Many Catholic theologians were horrified by what Molina invented and labeled it as nothing more but a modern twist on the old Pelagian heresy. They almost succeeded in getting one Pope to condemn it.

But opposition to Molinism died down once it was seen that it deceived Protestants quite easily. Jesuit universities in Protestant countries made a point of indoctrinating

Molinism into those Protestants who foolishly chose to be educated by them.

As these Jesuit-trained Protestants rose to prominence in Evangelical circles, they in turn introduced the Jesuit doctrine of Molinism in Protestant circles. But, knowing that the average Protestant was suspicious of anything coming from the bloodthirsty Jesuits who had murdered their forefathers, it was decided to rename the doctrine “Middle Knowledge” instead of “Molinism” in the attempt to hide its Jesuit origins. But a rose by any other name still smells the same.

A few Protestant supporters of Molinism such as William Lane Craig have admitted the Jesuit origin of the doctrine, and even warned that Molina had defective views of grace. But the vast majority of those who teach it either ignorantly or deceptively teach that it a part of historic and biblical Christianity.

Since Molinism (or Middle Knowledge) is clearly of recent origin, it is not a part of “the Faith once for all of time delivered to the saints.” Thus it cannot in principle be found in Scripture because the authors of the Bible died many centuries before Molina invented the doctrine.

How then can those who teach the doctrine of Molinism find it in the Bible? By reading it back into biblical texts and thereby committing the fallacy of issegesis.²

The commonplace Arminian idea that God chose us to salvation based on His foreseeing our decisions, good works, faith, etc. is the final conclusion of Molina’s “middle knowledge.” This doctrine flies in the face of Scripture’s repeated assertions that election began with God, not with man.

² This extended quote may be found at the following website:
<http://www.faithdefenders.com/FaithDefenders/Tools/PrintFriendly.aspx?{82AAEA2B-10EE-4E23-BBA3-AC4FB7EF18D6}>. A web search on “Molinism” will yield a wealth of information, both pro and con, regarding this teaching. It can hardly be denied from a factual and historical basis that Molina contrived the idea as a concerted effort to undermine the doctrinal foundations of the Reformation and salvation by God’s free and sovereign grace.

Far earlier than the Reformation and Molina, the nature of man and the fall surfaced in Christian thought, the focus of a major schism within the Catholic Church. Late in the fourth century Pelagius and Augustine engaged in a heated controversy regarding the impact of the fall on man and eventually man’s role in his salvation.

According to Pelagius there are three features in human action: power (*posse*), will (*velle*), and the realization (*esse*). The first comes exclusively from God; the other two belong to man. Thus, as man acts, he merits praise or blame. Whatever his followers may have said, Pelagius himself held the conception of a divine law proclaiming to men what they ought to do and setting before them the prospect of supernatural rewards and punishments. If man enjoys freedom of choice, it is by the express bounty of his Creator; he ought to use it for those ends that God prescribes.

The rest of Pelagianism flows from this central thought of freedom. First, it rejects the idea that man’s will has any intrinsic bias in favor of wrongdoing as a result of the fall. Since each soul is created immediately by God, as Pelagius believed, then it cannot come into the world soiled by original sin transmitted from Adam. Before a person begins exercising his will, “there is only in him what God has created.” The effect of infant baptism, then, is not eternal life but “spiritual illumination, adoption as children of God, citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem.” Second, Pelagius considers grace purely an external aid provided by God. He leaves no room for any special interior action of God upon the soul. By “grace” Pelagius really means free will itself or the revelation of God’s law through reason, instructing us in what we should do and holding out to us eternal sanctions. Since the revelation has become obscured through evil customs, grace now includes the law of Moses and the teaching and example of Christ.

...This rosy view of human nature and inadequate understanding of divine grace was finally condemned in 431 at the Council of Ephesus.³

³ Elwell, Walter A, Editor, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books 1984) Article “Pelagius, Pelagianism” by B. L. Shelley, 833-834.

Subsequent to Pelagius' fall from favor within the Roman Church, a group of church leaders attempted to develop a compromise view between that of Pelagius and Augustine. Interestingly this view was condemned in the Council of Orange (529 AD). After the Reformation Semi-Pelagianism, as it came to be known, was associated with the teachings of Louis de Molina.⁴ Wayne Grudem defines Pelagian doctrine; "...God holds man responsible only for those things that man is able to do. Since God warns us to do good, therefore, we must have the ability to do the good that God commands. The Pelagian position rejects the doctrine of "inherited sin" (or "original sin") and maintains that sin consists only in separate sinful acts."⁵ Grudem counters this idea with "...The true measure of our responsibility and guilt is not our own ability to obey God, but rather the absolute perfection of God's moral law and his own holiness (which is reflected in that law)."⁶

Thus the ideas taught by Arminius actually trace their roots through Molina to Pelagius—or at the least to semi-Pelagian thought (Admittedly Pelagius' ideas were even more radical than semi-Pelagian thinkers and Molina.). It is fascinating that the Roman Catholic Church condemned both Pelagianism (Council of Ephesus, 431 AD) and semi-Pelagianism (Council of Orange, 529 AD). Apparently the church's embracing of Augustinian thought in these two councils was not whole-hearted, clearly evidenced by the entrenched view of salvation by works that the Roman church taught at the time of the Reformation. A cliché is attributed to Tetzl, a popular monk in Germany at the time of Martin Luther, "When a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from Purgatory springs," as he shamelessly sold indulgences to raise funds for the Roman Church's hunger to fund massive construction in Rome. Apparently Luther was rather successful in combating Tetzl's collection efforts in Germany.

What are the implications of these ideas? If you review the syllogisms of the prior chapter, you will note that the implications of Pelagius', Molina's, and Arminius' teachings leave us with a "fall that was not a fall." Man didn't really fall as a result of his sin in the Garden of Eden. He

⁴ Elwell.... Pages 1000-1001 in an article "Semi-Pelagianism" by R. Kyle.

⁵ Grudem, Wayne, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 499.

⁶ Grudem..., 499.

could keep the law prior to his sin; he is capable of keeping the law of God after his sin. Notice the significant manner in which Pelagius and his followers define "grace," "...an external aid provided by God," leaving..."no room for any special internal action of God upon the soul."

I have quoted extensively from pertinent historical/theological sources in this chapter. The link between Roman Catholic theology through Molina and Arminius are typically ignored by most proponents of both Reformed and Arminian theology. In subsequent chapters we will examine the central thesis of these teachings on the nature of the fall and the will of man before and after the fall. On the day that Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, did they die as God warned, or did they merely become temporarily ill? Clearly their immediate death, God's specific penalty for breaking His law, was not physical death, for they lived long lives after that event. However, their immediate change in attitude and conduct provides clear evidence that something happened to them immediately upon their breaking God's law, precisely as God had warned them. What happened to them? Did the impact of their sin merely represent one isolated act of sin with no lingering consequences on either them or their offspring? Did the impact of their sin affect all of their essential being, or was their will left untouched by their sinful act? These questions will frame our theological outlook in all other major doctrines that we consider.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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