

Exploring biblical and logical foundations for establishing a rigorous compatibility between divine sovereignty and human freedom

Dr. Călin Ioan Talos¹

Abstract

Throughout the history of Christian theology, the antinomy between, on the one hand, the divine will expressed through foreknowledge and predestination and, on the other hand, the human will expressed through limited knowledge and free choice, has been perpetuated. Since both of these wills claim their presence in the immanent order of everyday reality and the divine will is essentially sovereign, then to what extent does man have free will or freedom of choice? The answer to this question has divided theologians into different groups and theological rationalities. Some have brought to the fore the theory of predestination and the sovereignty of God, and others have invoked the compatibility of foreknowledge and human free will, developing theories that highlight human freedom.

In this article, I will highlight two compatibilist theories, that of John Calvin and that of Luis de Molina. At the same time, I will show that, according to the fundamental principles of logic, contradiction and the excluded middle, Calvinism denotes a high view of God's sovereignty and a low view of human liberty, whereas Molinism, a high view of creaturely freedom, but a low view of God's sovereignty. Finally, I will propose, based on the biblical texts and the logic of *included middle*, evoked by the Romanian-French physicist, Basarab Nicolescu, the exploration of a rationality that gives rise to a high view of God's sovereignty, as well as a high view of human freedom, creating the premise for the elaboration of a rigorous compatibilism.

Key words: Calvinism, Molinism, predestination, free will, included middle, sovereignty.

¹ Călin-Ioan Talos PhD, Babeş Bolyia University, Cluj-Napoca, PhD, Kings College, London, Lector, Universitatea Emanuel Oradea, calin.talos@yahoo.com.

Calvinistic Compatibilism: Secret Predestination

In this section I will present the compatibilist perspective of John Calvin (1509-1564) on the relationship between divine predestination and human choice, showing that this perspective formulated in the light of the fundamental principles of logic denotes a high view of God's sovereignty, but a low view of human freedom. First of all, we will explore Calvin's notion of predestination, and then that of free will, in order to finally outline the relationship between creaturely freedom and the dominant character of the divine will.

Paul Helm notes that "Calvin never forgot that the *Institutes* was not a textbook or a *summa* but a manual of instruction in the Christian faith for believers" ² Therefore, we cannot expect a systematic presentation of his conception of predestination. But in the pages of the *Institutes*, Calvin usefully dwells, from time to time, on this topic. In fact, Helm argues that predestination is not the main premise of Calvin's thought. ³

However, Calvin supports the cause of God's predestination of men, on the ground that "of the common mass of mankind, some should be predestinated to salvation, and others to destruction." ⁴ He repeatedly calls this predestination the secret predestination, closely following Augustine in this approach. ⁵ As Richard A. Muller notes, "John Calvin was part of a long line of thinkers who based their doctrine of predestination on the Augustinian interpretation of St. Paul." ⁶

Calvin is keen to point out that "our salvation flows from the fountain of God's mercy" ⁷ Thus, obtaining salvation is not due to any specifically human merits, but exclusively to God's mercy. Man is essentially fallen, and only God's mercy makes possible man's access to the path of salvation. The following rhetorical questions expressed by Calvin denote this fact: "And what is this but a plain declaration of the Lord, that he finds no cause in men to induce him to show favour to them, but derives it solely from his own mercy;" ⁸ Nothing good dwells in man. ⁹

² Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 8.

³ Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 96.

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trad. John Allen, e-artnow, 2021, p. 2030.

⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 2241.

⁶ Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree, Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins*, Original published in 1986. Republished in 2008, Ebook edition created 2012, Ebook corrections 2020, Michigan: Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020.

⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 2030.

⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 2067.

⁹ Romans 7:18 (ESV).

Although God, in a sovereign way, makes it easy for man in general to have access to the thought of eternity,¹⁰ yet, in particular He elects only some to salvation, ensuring that they shall thereby obtain the gift of salvation: “Election . . . is the mother of faith.”¹¹

If God chooses only some for salvation, what about the others? Calvin elaborates on the notion of predestination of all men by showing that this is the way “by which God adopts some to the hope of life, and adjudges others to eternal death [. . .] Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which He has determined in himself, what he would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not treated with similar destiny; but eternal life is fore-ordained for some, and eternal damnation for others”¹². Calvin’s theological notion of predestination, part of the theology of providence, brings to the fore the truth that God is sovereign, therefore “[d]ecision of salvation or death belong to Him.”¹³

However, the divine decree of electing some to heaven and others to eternal damnation is not without justification in Calvin’s theology. He refers to the sinful nature of man and the consequences of his actions which cannot go unpunished.¹⁴ But still, isn’t it incorrect that God does not give freedom of choice to His creatures? In a historical period in which the individual considers himself part of a collectivist and pyramidal social mechanism, which strictly imposed obedience to the king who had the right of life and death over his subjects, Calvin responds to this objection, referring to Romans 5:20-21, where the Apostle Paul disapproves as irrational of the clay criticizing the potter’s decisions, pointing out that “we must always return at last to the sovereign determination of God’s will, the cause of which is hidden in himself.”¹⁵

Calvin does not exclude the fact that man has the capacity of choice. Man was originally endowed with “a mind capable of discerning good from evil, and just from unjust; and of discovering, by the light of reason, what ought to be pursued or avoided;”¹⁶ This mind was also given the will: “To this he has annexed the will, on which depends the choice.”¹⁷ In addition to the will to do, God also

¹⁰ Ecclesiastes 3:11 (ESV).

¹¹ apud Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, p. 79.

¹² Calvin, *Institutes*, pp. 2039-2040.

¹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 2098.

¹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 2012.

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 2092.

¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 408.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 408.

endowed man with the ability to choose: “To these was added choice, to direct the appetites, and regulate all the organic motions”.¹⁸ Adam’s ability to rightly choose good over evil was compromised, however, only when he fell into sin. Here are the words of the theologian: “Yet his choice of good and evil was free; and not only so, but his mind and will were possessed of consummate rectitude, and all his organic parts were rightly disposed to obedience, till, destroying himself, he corrupted all his excellencies.”¹⁹ From that moment, man no longer had a pure will and an unaltered capacity for choice.²⁰ The degradation of the capacity to choose has spread over all humanity: “At present be it only remembered, that man, at his first creation, was very different from all his posterity, who, deriving their original from him in his corrupted state, have contracted an hereditary defilement.”²¹

The fact that man is “corrupted in all the parts of his nature, and deprived of supernatural gifts”²² it makes it easy for Calvin to understand that the human will is not genuinely free and that, by way of consequence, right choice would necessarily claim the divine illumination of the human will. Calvin evokes Augustine’s view of the human will by showing that this capacity is defeated by sin, captive to it, and incapable “towards righteousness”, devoid of freedom, except where, as has been said, it is set free by divine grace.²³

Calvin develops a theory in which divine sovereignty expressed through predestination and human freedom manifested through self-choice are compatible.

This compatibilist perspective emerges from Calvin’s response to the serious objections raised to his theory of predestination according to which God predestined all the deeds of men, including “corruption which is now stated as the cause of condemnation”.²⁴ On this subject, Muller explains the fact that the reformed theologian, when he interpreted Ephesians 1:5-8, exposed the notion of predestination in close connection with the four Aristotelian causes: the first cause, called the efficient cause, the second cause, the formal cause, the third, the material cause and the last, the final cause: “Calvin comes to terms with the scholastic Augustinianism of primary and secondary causes and of the necessary

¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, pp. 408-409.

¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 409.

²⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 409.

²¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 410.

²² Calvin, *Institutes*, p.538.

²³ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 546.

²⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 2092.

ordering of events and things at the level of primary causality without a disruption at the level of secondary or inferior causality of the contingent character of things or of the responsibility of human beings for all acts of will.”²⁵ The first cause is God, secondary causes are all contingent causes such as forces of nature or human will. Muller states the following: “Here also is Calvin’s defense against the charge of Bolsec that he had followed Lorenzo Valla in the development of an utterly deterministic system: this is not a thoroughgoing necessitarianism insofar as it respects contingency and real possibility at the level of secondary causes. Calvin could state categorically that God had not “necessitated the sin of men”.²⁶ So, at the level of choosing between the possibilities of action, man is not determined, he alone is responsible for the decisions of his heart, regardless of the circumstances in which he finds himself. Of course, there is a correspondence between the primary cause and the secondary causes, between the divine will and creaturely freedom, but only through the subordination of the latter to the former.

A compatibilist presentation of Calvinism can be formalized in Paul Helm’s terms, thus:

“[A] person is free (though he may be necessitated) when, roughly speaking, he is exercising his choice in a way that is in accordance with his preferences even though such exercise may involve elements of psychological constraint”.²⁷

“Psychological freedom may be consistent with . . . metaphysical necessity”²⁸

Therefore, a person is free when he is exercising his choice in a way that is in accordance with his preferences even though such exercise may involve elements of metaphysical necessity.

Metaphysical necessity also presupposes the necessity of sin²⁹ which cannot be dispossessed of its bonds except by conversion, Helm points out: “Because man sins of necessity, he can only be redeemed by conversion”³⁰, and conversion is the exclusive work of God.³¹ That is why the metaphysical necessity of sin can only be substituted by the metaphysics of redemption. A person, therefore, is free

²⁵ Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, p. 79.

²⁶ Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, p. 79.

²⁷ Paul Helm, “Calvin and Bernard on Freedom and Necessity: A Reply to Brümmer”, *Religious Studies*, 30(4), 457–465, (1994), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20000113>, p. 460.

²⁸ Helm, “Calvin and Bernard on Freedom and Necessity”, p. 461.

²⁹ Helm, “Calvin and Bernard on Freedom and Necessity”, p. 462.

³⁰ Helm, “Calvin and Bernard on Freedom and Necessity”, p. 463.

³¹ Helm, “Calvin and Bernard on Freedom and Necessity”, p. 464.

when he is exercising his own choice either under the constraints of the metaphysical necessity of sin or in those of redemption. In other words, freedom of choice, in the view of Calvinism, is a genuine freedom by virtue of the fact that it is an action of its own, that is, it is exercised by a conscious agent, although it is a tributary one, since it obviously involves the constraints of metaphysical necessity. It is a freedom in need. Man is necessarily oriented by sin to perdition, but the grace of God reorients some, with sufficient necessity, to salvation.

After Calvin ensures that divine sovereignty is left intact at the cost of highlighting a constrained human freedom, realizing that a perfect fit between divine sovereignty and human freedom is not possible, and content with a flimsy compatibilism, he invokes the transcendent character of divine justice.³²

The two principles of the logic of non-contradiction and the excluded middle require the admission and validation of both contrary positions, predestination and free will, to be removed. Calvin, animated by a high view of God supports divine sovereignty and implicitly predestination, preserving freedom within the narrow perimeter of metaphysical necessity, which creates the profile of a low view of creaturely freedom.

To conclude this section, the theological perspective of secret predestination has the indisputable merit of emphasizing God's sovereignty, but a few things can be objected to it. First of all, by pre-destining some to eternal damnation, it irreversibly victimizes the human being by transposing it into the posture of its restraint in the capricious captivity of necessity. If man is irredeemably destined for perdition anyway, then moral striving may be a lost cause. Secondly, through the predestination of all things, both the epistemic error of man, as well as the commission of evil by the human creature, as well as the unfortunate circumstances of man can all be put, uncritically, to the account of God, which can cause alienation from faith. Thirdly, the fact of the unilateral and secret divine decree of man's destiny which, obviously, can be a fatal and undesirable one, can lead to defeatism, in any of its desperate forms: social isolation or nihilism.

However, despite the fact that Calvin's conception of predestination, part of the theology of providence, circumscribes at best a tenuous compatibilism, the image of God as the first, dominant cause, fully generates both the feeling of divine omnipresence and the desirable sensation that everything is under divine control and that everything makes sense, even if the behind-the-scenes springs of divine reason remain, for now, not fully understood.

³² Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 2093.

Molinistic Compatibilism: Middle Knowledge

Luis de Molina (1535-1600) was a 16th-century Catholic theologian who actively participated in the European scholastic phenomenon, accommodated among other regions and by the Iberian peninsula, his birthplace.³³ This theologian developed a theological approach that would make room for moral responsibility in the equation. Molina put forward the idea that man has a room for maneuver in the divine plane in which he can decide and act unhindered by any inextricable divine programming.

Molina distinguished “Three types of knowledge in God”³⁴: “One type is purely *natural*, and accordingly could not have been any different in God. Through this type of knowledge He knew all the things to which the divine power extended either immediately or by the mediation of secondary causes, including not only the natures of individuals and the necessary states of affairs composed of them but also the contingent states of affairs . . .”³⁵. “The second type is purely *free* knowledge, by which, *after* the free act of His will, God knew *absolutely* and *determinately*, *without any condition or hypothesis*, which ones from among all the contingent states of affairs were *in fact* going to obtain and, likewise, which ones were not going to obtain.”³⁶ “Finally the third type is *middle* knowledge, by which, in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty of free choice, He saw in His own essence what each such faculty would do with its innate freedom . . .”³⁷. This kind of knowledge is independent of God’s will, as Molina states.³⁸

William Lane Craig points out that divine knowledge possesses three logical moments.³⁹ Although, “It is important to emphasize again that temporally there are no such successive moments in God’s knowledge. His decision to create the world is an eternal decision; there never was a time when God had middle knowledge but lacked free knowledge.”⁴⁰ Firstly, in regard to what is in God’s nature or essential to Him, Craig explains, there is a natural knowledge, that is, a knowledge which coincides with the faculty of His omniscience, this faculty being aware of all possibilities or possible worlds, not only of individual

³³ Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, Part IV of the *Concordia*, trans. and introduction by Alfred J. Freddoso, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, p. vii.

³⁴ Molina, *On Divine*, p. 168.

³⁵ Molina, *On Divine*, p. 168.

³⁶ Molina, *On divine*, p. 168.

³⁷ Molina, *On divine*, p. 168.

³⁸ Molina, *On divine*, p. 168.

³⁹ Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 237.

⁴⁰ Craig, *The Only Wise God, The Compatibility of Divine Freedom*, pp. 288-289.

essences.⁴¹ According to His nature, God knows in advance all the possibilities of decision and action of created beings, all that they *can do*, given certain states of affairs. This knowledge does not depend on what God would like to happen, i.e., “on the free decision of His will”.⁴² Secondly, there is a divine knowledge, called “middle knowledge”, which anticipates everything that created beings *will do* in the given perimeter of their states of affairs, perimeter or context that precedes their choice. And this not because of the pressure of these circumstances in which they will find themselves, but because of their own unhindered deliberation.⁴³ In the Molinist view, through middle knowledge God foreknows, but does not follow His divine will, repressing it intentionally. This chronological stage in divine thought is called “middle knowledge” because it is found in the middle between the first moment in the logic of the unfolding of divine knowledge and the third.⁴⁴ In this temporal moment of divine thought, the divine will is not determinative, but determined by the truth of the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, as we shall see below.

Alfred J. Freddoso explains middle knowledge as follows: “Like natural knowledge but unlike free knowledge, middle knowledge is prevolitional, with the result that God has no more control over the states of affairs He knows through His middle knowledge than He does over the state of affairs He knows through His natural knowledge.”⁴⁵ Further, “By His natural knowledge God knows that it is metaphysically possible but not metaphysically necessary that Adam will sin if placed in the garden; by His free knowledge He knows that Adam will in fact be placed in the garden and will in fact sin. What He knows by His middle knowledge, on the other hand, is something stronger than the former but weaker than the latter, namely, that Adam will sin *on the condition* that he be placed in the garden. So God has middle knowledge only if He knows all the conditional future contingents.”⁴⁶

Middle knowledge looks at counterfactual, virtual things, things imagined, not actualized, but anticipated by the divine intellect, things that would occur under certain circumstances. This knowledge is not essential to God in the sense that the actions of creatures do not depend on the divine will, but entirely precede it. God, at this logical moment, is in a passive situation regarding his will. In both

⁴¹ Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 237.

⁴² Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 237.

⁴³ Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 238.

⁴⁴ Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 238.

⁴⁵ Molina, *On Divine*, p. 47.

⁴⁶ Molina, *On Divine*, p. 47.

“natural knowledge” and “middle knowledge” no decision of the divine will is involved.⁴⁷

Craig notes that “true contrafactuals are contingently true”.⁴⁸ They belong to the free decision of the human agent. Craig is keen to point out that “although it is essential to God that He have middle knowledge, it is not essential to Him to have middle knowledge of those particular propositions which in fact he does know.”⁴⁹

Moreover, God does not possess middle knowledge about “decisions of His own will”⁵⁰ in the context of counterfactual things, imagined in the process of anticipation. If the free will of human beings depended on the divine will, they would be deprived of freedom because they would be determined by it. In order to recognize this creaturely freedom, Molina resorts to the exception “decisions of God’s will from divine middle knowledge”⁵¹.

The third logical moment, after that of knowing all possibilities and after that of facilitating creaturely freedom, is the moment when God decrees the actualization of that anticipated world through middle knowledge.⁵² So, through natural knowledge, God knows everything that *can be done* by created beings, through middle knowledge He knows everything that they *would do*, given certain circumstances, and through God’s “free knowledge” what created beings *must do* given the divine decree of creation. This third moment of divine knowledge unfolds only after God has decreed the actualization of the world known and chosen by Him through middle knowledge. This last moment in the chronology and logic of divine thought, Craig says, “is denominated ‘free knowledge’ by Molina because it is logically posterior to the decision of the divine will to actualize a world”.⁵³

Regarding the compatibility between predestination and the freedom of choice of created beings, Craig is convinced that “middle knowledge also serves to reconcile predestination and human freedom. In Molina’s view, predestination. . . is the order and means by which God ensures that some free creatures attain eternal life [. . .] God knows that many will freely reject His sufficient grace

⁴⁷Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 238.

⁴⁸Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 238.

⁴⁹Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 238.

⁵⁰Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 238.

⁵¹Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 238.

⁵²Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 239.

⁵³Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 239.

and be lost [. . .] Thus, predestination and human freedom are entirely compatible.”⁵⁴

More precisely, “middle knowledge” presupposes the fact that God, before proceeding with His creation, knew everything that any being would do, therefore He created every course of actions of every human being, building the history of the world based on this knowledge. So, the average knowledge of God depends on what free beings will do under certain circumstances. Here are Molina’s words: “this knowledge depends on the fact that the being would in its freedom do this or that, and not the other way around.”⁵⁵ Calvin is unhappy with the consideration that God would have foreknowledge of human deeds without predestining their actualization, stating the following: “If God simply foresaw the fates of men, and did not also dispose and fix them by his determination, there would be room to agitate the question, whether his providence or foresight rendered them at all necessary. But since he foresees future events only in consequence of his decree, that they shall happen, it is useless to contend about foreknowledge, while it is evident that all things come to pass rather by ordination and decree.”⁵⁶ For Calvin the predestination of men to perdition, “all things being at God’s disposal . . .”⁵⁷ it is legitimized by the earthly model, as I said before, of the king who disposes of the life and death of his subjects; but not for Molina. Molina is sensitive to the fact that a man cannot be convicted of actions that he had no way of doing otherwise since they were imposed upon him by necessity and without right of appeal. Therefore, middle knowledge is a significant theological contribution that Molina brings up into the theological dialogue.

However, some objections can be raised to this perspective as well.

Final remarks. In the last part of this section, I will highlight two objections that can be raised against Molinism: that of the predestination of a world among the possible ones and the one that I call the “middle trap of middle knowledge”.

Objection to the predestination of free creatures to one of the possible worlds.

Middle Knowledge presupposes that God knew the counterfactual truth of the best possible version of the world in which each of the created human beings has the opportunity to be themselves, in their most honest version, having the

⁵⁴Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, pp. 241-242.

⁵⁵Molina, *On Divine*, p. 170.

⁵⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, p.2099.

⁵⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, p.2098.

freedom to decide and act in such a way that he can freely choose or knowingly reject the grace of salvation, after which God, on the basis of the same middle knowledge, will compose a course of the things of the world so that it does not violate creaturely freedom and, at the same time, corresponds to the general purpose He has for the world. Some observations are necessary here: according to “middle knowledge” God suspends his own will in order to facilitate the freedom of decision and action of human beings, giving them the possibility of producing evil. Since the suspension of the divine will causally precedes counterfactual evil (physical, moral, or spiritual), the divine decision to self-suspend its will at the counterfactual level is the cause by conscious omission of counterfactual evil. If counterfactual evil had not been preceded by God’s deliberate will to self-repress His will, then it would not have existed. Counterfactual evil is present in the world, not by God’s commission, but by the deliberate omission of God’s will. James expresses himself about the mistake of omission.⁵⁸

The core of this objection can be expressed formally as follows:

1. It is known that different environments of existence affect differently the agents of the path they occupy.
2. There is the counterfactual truth about world X that influences the freely created agent A to choose action B, under circumstances C, which is different from the counterfactual truth about world Y that influences freely created agent A about choosing action B1, under circumstances C1 unlike of world Z, with action B2 and circumstances C2, and so on up to Bn, respectively Cn.
3. According to Molinism, God predetermines by divine decree the actualization of the counterfactual truth of world X in which the freely created agent A is influenced to choose an action B, under circumstances C.
4. Therefore, God, by the decree of creation, predetermines agent A to be influenced about an action B, different from B1 or B2. Thus, God predetermines agent A to be influenced to act in the sense of action B and not in the sense of action B1, B2, or Bn.

By actualizing the counterfactual truth about world X, Agent A is predetermined to bear the different influences of world X as opposed to those of worlds Y or Z in which he might have acted quantitatively or qualitatively differently. Therefore, the divine decree, even if it does not restrict the freedom of agent A,

⁵⁸ James 4:17 (ESV).

in relation to the counterfactual truth of world X, it restricts the freedom of agent A, in relation to the counterfactual truth of world Y or Z.

The objection of the “middle trap”

According to Molinism, God mentally operates on counterfactual truth by foreknowing the factual truth whose actualization He freely decrees through free knowledge. Through middle knowledge, God represses His will so that created beings can be free to respond affirmatively or negatively to the offer of saving grace. This repressed divine will is released only when middle knowledge is consumed as a logical moment and when God gives way to his will to act in consequence of the decisions and actions of free beings known to him through his foreknowledge. God had a choice between giving freedom to human beings and depriving them of freedom. As we will see below, any of these alternatives puts God in eternally regrettable poses, in a trap with no way out, hence the idea of the *middle trap of middle knowledge*.

Namely, God could order the non-granting of the freedom of decision and action to human beings. In this case, God could create either human robots, lacking free decisions, but programmed to do good, or arrested humanoids, free creatures, capable of doing evil, but always forced to avoid it. In this case, God’s freedom of decision is maximal, but human freedom is either not granted or not actualized, there being only two logical possibilities, the robot man, or the man harnessed to the saddle of absolute and arbitrary coercion. Since man was made an eternal being, both these situations would have compelled God to the eternal suffering of seeing His creature in unworthy and unhappy postures.

In terms of granting freedom, we have a regrettable alternative. If some of the free beings, assuming their freedom, receive the divine offer, then their decision and actions accord with the divine will, but if some free beings reject the offer of saving grace, then their decisions and actions are discordant with the divine will, and are antagonistic to it. Leszek Kolakowski notes this aspect in the following words: “If He is not indifferent, but subject to emotion like us, He must live in a constant state of sorrow when He witnesses human suffering. He did not cause it or want it, but He is helpless in the face of all the misery, the horrors and atrocities that nature brings down on people or people inflict on each other.”⁵⁹ Since the suffering of some human beings is eternal, then the suffering of God is eternal too. The perspective of Molinists, such as Craig, is that the state of the present

⁵⁹ Leszek Kolakowski, *Is God Happy, Selected Essays*, Agnieszka Kolakowska - translations and introduction, New York: Basic Books, Electronic Edition, 2013, p. 278.

universe is ultimately tragic.⁶⁰ So tragic is the condition of the alienated in the eyes of the saved that, in Thomas Talbott's terms, Craig considers that "[i]n effect God performs a kind of lobotomy on the redeemed; he simply 'obliterates of their minds' any knowledge of those persons who come to be lost."⁶¹

Therefore, the Molinist theology and logic of "middle knowledge", portrays God trapped in suffering regardless of His alternatives. This would be the *middle trap of middle knowledge*. He also suffers if man is deprived of freedom, an alternative excluded from the Molinist theodicy, but He also suffers because of the restriction of His own will, according to the middle knowledge theory, and the granting of freedom to human beings. Of course, this dilemma is not peculiar to Molinism solely, but it is an inescapable reality of its cosmology.

Through its implications, Molinism profiles a low view of God and a tragic theodicy. But this is exactly where the tragedy of this narrative resides. Since God knows in advance that some free beings will choose alienation from Him and others dependence on Him by faith, why does He not extract the former from actualization, thereby absolving them of the suffering and tragic consequences of alienation? Is God somehow caught in the middle trap? The fact that the Molinist viewpoint betrays a cosmology with tragic aspects, enrolls it into an *insufficiently* elaborated *compatibilism*.

Rigorous compatibilism: included middle

In this last section I propose to explore the possibility of developing a rigorous compatibilist perspective that facilitates the understanding that divine will expressed through predestination and human will manifested through free choice can harmonize in perfect metaphysical and theological symmetry. In this sense, I will succinctly transpose the logic of the *included middle* and its scientific horizon of provenance as invoked by the academician Nicolescu, I will show the fact that the Bible evokes both the existence of divine will and human freedom, in its revelational perimeter, going on to extract, finally, some theological conclusions as a consequence of the discussed issue.

The exploration of quantum physics made the researcher, in general, face the strange phenomenon of noticing that light, as a physical phenomenon, is at the same time a wave and a corpuscle. This referral is scandalous, Nicolescu notes, philosopher and professor of quantum physics at the Sorbonne University, Paris,

⁶⁰ Thomas Talbott, "Craig on the Possibility of Eternal Damnation," *Religious Studies* 28, no. 4 (1992): 495–510. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20019574>, p. 508.

⁶¹ Talbott, "Craig on the Possibility of Eternal Damnation," p. 508.

because it defies classical logic.⁶² Classical logic does not admit a third “T” that is both A and non-A at the same time and under the same ratio.

Classical logic is based on three fundamental principles: the principle of identity, when $A = A$, the principle of contradiction, when A is different from non-A, and the principle of the excluded middle, when a valid term or proposition is either A or non-A, the third “T” variant, the one in which something is at the same time and under the same A and non-A ratio, is excluded.

The intellectual scandal that Nicolescu talks about consists in the fact that quantum mechanics admits, despite classical logic, mutually contradictory couples united in ambivalent pairs, such as the notion of “wave and corpuscle, continuity and discontinuity, separability and non-separability, local causality and global causality, symmetry and symmetry breaking, time reversibility, etc.”⁶³ What had to be done now? There were only two options, either we remain faithful to classical logic and thus pay tribute to frozen perplexity and ignorance, or we admit mutually contradictory binary notions for the sake of their enormous predictive power and evidence, but in this case, we are forced to accede to the transgression of classical logic by accepting a logic that makes room for the third “T”.

The founders of quantum mechanics, faced with this dilemma, turned to this last option, Nicolescu notices: “In 1936, Birkhoff and van Neumann presented a first proposal of such a quantum logic. Since then, a significant number of works (Mackey, Jauch, Piron, etc.) have been dedicated to the study of a coherent formulation of a quantum logic. The ambition of such a logic was to resolve the paradoxes generated by quantum mechanics and to try, as far as possible, to reach a greater predictive power than through classical logic.”⁶⁴

The credit for developing quantum logic goes to Stephane Lupasco, who aptly formulated *included middle* logic as a “true, formalizable, and non-contradictory logic”.⁶⁵ The included third implies a “unifying third of A and non-A”⁶⁶. Under the aspect of the social value of the *included middle*, the “progressive updating of the state T”⁶⁷, Nicolescu believes that this logic, through its specific reflex to avoid the “transformation of contradictions into opposites” would generate a

⁶² Basarab Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea? Reflecții în Jurul Operei lui Stephane Lupasco*, trad., Simona Modreanu, Romania, Iași: Editura Junimea, 2009, p. 23.

⁶³ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 23.

⁶⁴ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 25.

⁶⁵ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 26.

⁶⁶ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 27.

⁶⁷ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 56.

society based on a “philosophy of freedom and tolerance”⁶⁸ very different from a philosophy of social conflict and recurrent wars. Together with Jean-Francois Mahlherbe, Nicolescu believes that “the interaction between the included middle and Wittgenstein's language games could have important repercussions in the formulation of a contemporary ethics”⁶⁹.

However, the fundamental role played by *the included middle* principle is to facilitate access to new levels of reality. The notion of *level of reality* belongs to Nicolescu. In the terms of the Romanian - French physicist and philosopher, it can be said that the logic of *the included middle* (included third) “induces an open, Godelian structure of the ensemble of levels of reality”⁷⁰. Here's how: “1. A couple of contradictions (A, non-A) located at a certain level of reality is unified by a state T located at an immediately neighboring level of reality; 2. In turn, this state T is linked to a couple of contradictions (A', non-A'), located at its own level; 3. The pair of contradictions (A', non-A') is, in turn, unified by a state T' located at a different level of Reality, immediately adjacent to the one in which the ternary (A', non-A', T). The iterative process continues ad infinitum, until the exhaustion of all levels of reality, known or imaginable”⁷¹.

Returning to the quantum phenomenon, in which light is defined as both a wave and a corpuscle, it must be respecified that through the prism of classical logic, this phenomenon is contradictory and therefore unintelligible, it “appears as a struggle between two contradictory elements (example: wave A and the non-A corpuscle)”⁷². We cannot admit an A/non-A union, that is, an included third, unless we accept the idea of the existence of a new level of reality, with a new logical system, with a new rationality, in which the logic of the *included middle* appears as a functional logic. Quantum physics admits such a level of reality, called the *quantum level*, different from the macrophysical one. At this second level of reality, Nicolescu emphasizes, “what appears as disunited (wave or corpuscle) is actually united (quantum), and what appears as contradictory is perceived as non-contradictory.”⁷³ The principle of the *included middle* does not, therefore, negate the value of the excluded middle, since it acts, as said, at another *level of reality*, but it strictly outlines its sphere of action. A significant logical proof that the excluded middle is valid is precisely the ground it constitutes for

⁶⁸ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 56.

⁶⁹ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 56.

⁷⁰ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 83.

⁷¹ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 83.

⁷² Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 80.

⁷³ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 81.

differentiating the *included middle* from itself, because, as we can see, the *included middle*, being different from the excluded middle, cannot be both itself and its opposite at the same time. But it is not the logic of the excluded middle that prevails in the structural ensemble of the unified reality, but the logic of the included middle. Only the *included middle* paves the way to new levels of reality.

The principle of the *included middle* proposes a new rationality. But when we, as subjects of knowledge, relate to this new level (or new levels) of reality as an object, we are dealing with two realities of epistemological value. Both are validated as such by how they respond to perception. The level of reality that responds to our perception, i.e., *resists*, is the concrete level, and the one characterized by *the zone of non-resistance to perception* “allows and requires the interaction between subject and object”⁷⁴. It is a new, deeper level of reality, it is a *hidden* level of reality, and it plays the role of the *hidden third*. Nicolescu mentions that “the hidden third is alogical, because it is entirely located in the non-resistance zone, while the *included middle* is logical, because it refers to the contradictory A and non-A, located in the resistance zone”⁷⁵. But, continues Nicolescu, “both unite contradictory things: A and non-A, in the case of the included middle and subject and object in the case of the hidden third party”⁷⁶. Since in the zone of resistance the subject and the object are separated, in the zone of non-resistance the subject is unified with its object, it can be both subject and object or neither subject nor object at the same time.

Nicolescu’s thesis, on which the principle of transdisciplinarity is based, is that “Reality is One, at the same time unique and multiple”⁷⁷ but it is layered on different levels. However, Nicolescu proposes that we consider reality simultaneously, as an open, Godelian unity, that is, appreciating it both through the prism of the *hidden third*, when the unity of things is undifferentiated, and through the prism of the levels of reality where unity is a composite of differences.

What is relevant to the theme of the binomial predestination (man is not free)/freedom (man is not predestined), is the fact that Nicolescu identifies the Sacred as an experience of an “irreducible real”⁷⁸. The Sacred is part of the new rationality, a reality that is a *hidden third*, accessed through the *included middle*.

⁷⁴ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 90.

⁷⁵ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 90.

⁷⁶ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 90.

⁷⁷ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 91.

⁷⁸ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 93.

The sacred is “that which binds beings and things”⁷⁹, an “extraordinary, unexpected and surprising Eros” that “crosses levels of Reality and levels of Reality of the subject”⁸⁰, it can be approached neither subjectively nor objectively, but in a *complex* way. The sacred escapes the human capacity for knowledge and full representation, it is the *hidden third* that expresses itself through a break in symmetry and proposes a new rationality in which opposites are reconciled in *complexity*

Both the Bible and apophatic theology reveal that God’s thinking transcends our capacity for knowledge and that transcendence represents a higher level of reality than the linear or sequential one in which we live. Although God has access to the level of immanent reality in which we live, we do not have access to that of transcendence. The apostle Paul rhetorically highlights this truth as follows: “So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”⁸¹ And in the Epistle addressed to the Romans, the Apostle Paul exclaims: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”⁸² God’s thinking constituting in the apostle’s vision a reality that exceeds our power of comprehension. Job is realistic when he asks: “Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?”⁸³ The author of Psalm 92 is impressed by the depth of God’s thoughts saying: “How great are your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep!”⁸⁴ Isaiah also notes the fact that God’s skill cannot be penetrated: “The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.”⁸⁵ Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, appreciates that God reveals to us some of the things of transcendental reality with the explicit purpose of letting us own and relate to the standard of His ethical and spiritual system: “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”⁸⁶

If we admit the theory of different levels of reality, an immanent reality and a transcendent reality, then we must admit both a linear, consistent logic, focused on the principles of non-contradiction and the excluded middle, and a divine,

⁷⁹ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 93.

⁸⁰ Nicolescu, *Ce Este Realitatea?*, p. 94.

⁸¹ 1 Corinthians 2:11b (ESV).

⁸² Romans 11:33 (ESV).

⁸³ Job 11:7 (ESV).

⁸⁴ Psalms 92:5 (ESV).

⁸⁵ Isaiah 40:28 (ESV).

⁸⁶ Deuteronomy, 29:29 (ESV).

timeless, and non-consistent, a logic of the *included middle*, in which antinomies harmonize, opposites are reconciled, antinomies are resolved into ambinomies on the basis of springs still unknown to the mind tributary to temporality and three-dimensional space. Moreover, the Apostle Paul believes that human beings will also have access to such knowledge, that is why he clearly affirms the hope of our transition from a limited knowledge, specific to the immanent level of knowledge, to a knowledge specific to the higher level, when he says: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”⁸⁷ It is clear, according to the words of the apostle Paul, that there are truths known partially in this horizon of immanence, but which can be fully known in eternity. Should the antinomy of predestination/creaturely freedom also be part of this category? The answer to this question has three reasons to be yes. Firstly, the Bible speaks openly both of predestination, foreknowledge, and pre-decree of things, and of man’s free will, free choice, and moral responsibility without indicating any dialectical tension between them. Secondly, as previously shown, the fundamental principles of logic rule out the possibility that man is both predestined and morally responsible for the things he has done in a contingent universe. The excluded middle claims either that man is not predestined but free, as libertarian theories try to demonstrate, or that man is predestined but not free, as fatalists and exponents of fragile compatibilism reveal. Calvinism and Molinism brought into the light of logic and theological criticism betray either a high view of God’s sovereignty, but a low view of creaturely freedom, as is the case of the first theology, or a high view creaturely freedom, but a low view of God’s sovereignty, as is the case of the second one. Thirdly, the antinomies predestination/free will, predestination/human responsibility, are more easily explained within a theory that admits the existence of *levels of reality* where there can be both a high view of God’s sovereignty and a high view of human freedom.

According to the theory of the *levels of reality* of Nicolescu and Lupasco, we can integrate the antinomies predestination/creaturely freedom, predestination/human responsibility in the following argumentation:

1. The theory of levels of reality validates antinomian propositions of the type A/non-A based on the logic of the *included middle*.
2. The pairs predestination/creaturely freedom, predestination/human responsibility represent antinomic propositions of the type A/non A.

⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV).

3. Therefore, the theory of levels of reality validates the pairs predestination/creaturally freedom, predestination/human responsibility in the logic of the *included middle*.

The relevance of this argument has the role of eliminating the dialectical anxiety by including the antinomies under discussion in the category of quantum (ambinomia) and theological binomials that have become axiomatic, which have not only a discursive role, but also an explanatory one, contributing significantly to the advancement of knowledge. In the category of these fundamental binomials are those of light, corpuscle/wave, of Christ, man/God, the Bible, human literature/divine literature, and the Holy Trinity, one Being/Three Persons.

But if we integrate the antinomy of predestination/creaturally freedom, predestination/human responsibility in a logical formula that correlates the theory of *levels of reality* with the Pauline epistemic hope, then we can formulate the following logical argument:

1. The truth of antinomian propositions is either partially known or unvalidated in the light of the logic of the immanent order (excluded middle), whereas in the light of the logic of the transcendent order (included middle) it is fully known and, at the same time, logically validated.

2. The pairs predestination/creaturally freedom, predestination/human responsibility represent antinomian propositions.

3. Therefore, the truth of the pairs predestination/creaturally freedom, predestination/human responsibility is either partially known or unvalidated in the light of the logic of the immanent order (excluded middle), whereas in the light of the logic of the transcendent order (included middle) it is fully known and, at the same time, logically validated.

The value of this formulation is to point out the existence of a new level of reality, a new logic, according to which antinomian pairs are validated in ambinomies. This syllogistic argumentation equally admits the convergence of God predestining all things according to a vast series of biblical texts (Deuteronomy 7:7; Proverbs 16:4, 9; Jeremiah 1:5; Matthew 24:31; John 15:16 ; Acts 2:23; Romans 8:29-33; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 1:3,4,11-12; Galatians 1:15-16; Colossians 3:12-13; Philippians 2:13; Titus 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:9; James 4:15; 1 Peter 1:1-2, 18-20;), and the fact that man is free to decide and act unconstrained by necessity physical or metaphysical, as appears from other biblical texts (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:2; Deuteronomy 23:23; 30:15-20;

Joshua 24:25; Psalm 54:6; 119:108; Mark 8 :34; Galatians 5:13, John 8:38; 1 Peter 2:16;).

The rationality of the levels of reality also explains the argument of the Apostle Paul in Romans 9. The excluded middle logic promotes one of the parties in an antinomial relationship. In this text, predestination seems to be promoted at the expense of free will and, implicitly, human responsibility. Classical logic, therefore, creates the premise of criticism and indignation under this aspect: “What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? [. . .] You will say to me then, ‘Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’”⁸⁸ The apostle Paul responds by emphasizing, through the analogy of the clay vessel and the potter, that we are in relation to God only a simple object made of clay, while God is a wise craftsman. Therefore, our mind compared to God’s mind is a clay mind with inferior logic, while God’s mind is a non-consecutive, non-limited mind capable of solving the most complex problems and deepest mysteries, such as the predestination/free will antinomy. Not only can we live with this binomial, but because of it we justify our entirely free and responsible choices and due respect to God as absolute Sovereign.

The theory of *levels of reality* in convergence with the Pauline epistemic hope makes solving the problem of the convergence of the antinomial binomial to be transferred from the level of human thinking, to the level of God’s thinking or from the present to the future. Through this transfer, human thought is freed both from the duty of resolving it, in the epistemic hope of finally attaining the complete truth of its synthesis, and from the burden of the dialectical tension and cognitive dissonance that derives from it. But in addition to the fact that the antinomy in question has a logical validation, this, like the binomial corpuscle/light in the quantum binomial, leads to the advance of theological knowledge and the foundation of Christian ethics, joining the category of other ambinomic pairs such as that of the dual nature of Christ, or of the double essence of the Bible. According to rigorous compatibilism animated by the logic of the *included middle*, the image we have of God is that of an absolute Sovereign, the God of Anselm of Canterbury, a maximal being in all aspects, and the image we have of us as human beings is that of creatures endowed with complete freedom.

So, the logics of *included middle* correlated with the *Pauline epistemic hope* gives rise to a high view of God’s sovereignty and a high view of human freedom. The reader may consider equally that God predestines everything, that God is in full control of the created world, but also that, according to a divine logic, man

⁸⁸ Romans 9:14 (ESV).

is entirely free to choose and therefore fully responsible for his decisions and actions. But this synthesis is realized in all its complexity only in the mind of God or, according to the epistemic hope of the apostle Paul, it can also be known by the human mind at the moment of our entry into the glory of heaven.

Conclusion:

With the aim of exploring a possibility of theological harmonization of the antinomian notions predestination/free will, predestination/human responsibility, I probed both the theological springs of Calvinistic compatibilism, where I considered *fragile compatibilism*, as well as the intimate structures of Molinistic compatibilism, conceived as *insufficient compatibilism*. The first perspective I considered fragile because it subsumes creaturely freedom to metaphysical necessity, and the second one I called insufficient due, on the one hand, to the predestination of creatures to a world that they did not choose, but which influences them profoundly, and on the other hand, due to the “middle trap”, of the middle knowledge. So, the first compatibilism describes a high view of divine sovereignty, but a low view of human freedom, while the latter depicts a high view of human freedom, but a low view of divine sovereignty. For a more succinct presentation of both positions I will present them below in syllogistic form:

According to Calvinism there is the following formulation:

1. If God foreknows that person A will do action “a” in circumstance X, then person A will do action “a” in circumstance X.
2. God foreknows that person A will do action “a” in circumstance X.
3. Therefore, person A will do action “a” in circumstance X.

Molinism’s objection to the above formulation is that the thesis does not necessarily derive from the premises, according to modal logic. That is why this theological perspective advances the following formulation:

1. Since person A is free to do action “a” or action “b”, or any other action, in circumstance X, and person A freely chose to do action “b” in circumstance X, then God foreknew that A would do action “b” in circumstance X.
2. Person A chose to do action “b” in circumstance X.
3. Therefore, God foreknew that person A would do action “b” in circumstance X.

Here it must be reiterated that we can only think linearly, syllogistically, discursively, and God is totally different from us, a fact that explains why we cannot represent God's thinking in the same way as we think, in successive logical stages. When, however, we project onto God and His thinking, the image we have of how our thinking works, we proceed anthropomorphically, committing the theological error of reducing God's attributes to human attributes.

Under this aspect, of the total difference between God's thinking and human thinking, I explored the possibility of bringing into discussion the rationality guided by the logic of the *included middle*, as it was presented by Nicolescu. This elaborates the theory of *levels of reality* that corresponds to both a number of biblical texts and the Pauline epistemic hope. According to the rationality of the immanent and transcendent levels of reality, the predestination/free choice antinomy is validated by the logic of the *included middle*. The implications of this perspective is that according to it a high view of God's sovereignty and a high view of creaturely freedom are highlighted, God is absolutely sovereign, and man is fully free to choose and alone responsible for his actions.

It is important to show, here in conclusion, that before Nicolescu, and around the same time as Lupasco, there were Mircea Eliade and Petru Culianu, concerned with the logic of the *included middle*.⁸⁹ The latter made the following clarifications: "it is often called 'negative logic', in reality it is a non-Aristotelian logic, logic that, without recognizing the principle of the excluded middle, transcends both affirmation and negation"⁹⁰. This logic has known, historians of religions say, multiple expressions in Mahayana religiosity. At this point it should be noted that a theological approach in the spirit of the *included middle* could invoke the third "T" to justify any theology. Or this fact would be regrettable! It must be said that the Pauline epistemic hope does not legitimize the whole momentum of the theory of *levels of reality*, but tempers its scope. The logic of the included middle does not apply to the truths of the revealed immanent level of reality, but only to those antinomian pairs evoked by the Bible, whose internal connection has been left unclarified in the act of revelation.

Of course, this note does not diminish the value of the theory of *levels of reality* (which I have simplified by talking only about the immanent and the transcendent level of reality), but it has the merit of warning about possible speculative flare-ups which, in the case of biblical Christianity, will be avoided if the latter is even

⁸⁹ Mircea Eliade, Petru Culianu, *Dicționar al Religiilor*, cu colaborarea lui H. S. Wiesner, București: Humanitas, 1993, p. 74.

⁹⁰ Eliade & Culianu, *Dicționar al Religiilor*, p. 74.

more concerned with establishing its theses on the stable and lasting ground of special revelation.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight that the convergence between the theory of *levels of reality* (which integrates the logic of *included middle*) and the *Pauline epistemic hope* advances the sovereign image of God and an optimistic perspective on man's freedom of choice, a fact that makes the idea invoked in this work worth exploring further and passed through the filter of theological criticism.

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