

## **CHAPTER ONE WHAT IS MOLINISM?**

It was May of 1973 and I was two months shy of twelve years old. Our small United Methodist Church in Indiana had invited an evangelist, Y. D. Westerfield, from Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky, to preach at special evening meetings for the week. I was not at all excited about it because my mom wanted me to attend. I hated going to church. I was finishing sixth grade, loved baseball, was very much drawn to the model of a family member who told me of his wild escapades when he was a boy, and so I would sneak a baseball into Sunday morning services with me, I would try and sit at the end of a pew and look at the window, and I would dream of more exciting things I could be doing. I had no interest in what was being said at regular Sunday services, and certainly no interest in going to more services where there was more preaching!

But there were movements, things going on behind the scenes of which I was unaware. My mom was fervently praying for her youngest child. She knew I was heading down a path that was away from God. There was also a desire in my heart for my life to be significant. And, as much as I tried to snuff it out, there was sensitivity to what was right and wrong. Little did I know that, as C.S. Lewis famously described his own conversion, the great fisherman in the sky had his hook in my mouth and was reeling me into the boat.

I do not remember anything that the Rev. Westerfield preached that week, but I do remember that at one of the services this eleven year old boy came under great conviction of his sin, realized he was on his way to hell, and wanted nothing more than to “gain Christ” (Phil. 3:8). That time is such a sweet memory for me, for it was as if light filled the vast and dark cavern of

my soul. And from then on I wanted nothing more than to serve my Savior. Oh how I loved him and his Church from that day!

Yet, as I think back on that evening, the events that led up to it, the events that transpired afterward, and even of the other people who were present, so many questions arise. If God answered the prayers of my mom and worked mightily in my heart so that I would trust in Christ, in what way did my faith and repentance comprise free decisions on my part? If the Spirit of God placed within me a desire to please God, in what ways could my subsequent desires, decisions, and actions to obey God be free? If all these decisions were free on my part, in what way can we say that the sovereign God was governing me and my actions through his providence—that salvation was ultimately of him? And finally, what about other people who were present, those who heard the same messages and did not respond? Maybe some of them never responded. Are their actions free? Was God also governing them?

Molinism posits middle knowledge as a way of bringing together God's sovereignty and man's responsibility to answer such questions—and doing this in such a way that claims to preserve indeterministic human freedom. The Molinist would say that little Tommy Barnes, in 1973, was governed by God in a strong way that he was certain to trust in Jesus Christ, but at the same time, his faith and repentance were not determined, and in such a way, at the same time, he could also have rejected Christ.

Since many readers are not familiar with Molinism's history, let's take a look at how it arose.

### **The Origin Of Molinism**

Luis de Molina was a sixteenth century (born in 1535) Spanish Jesuit Counter-Reformer.<sup>1</sup> The Roman Catholic theologian was both committed to God’s “prevenient grace, which stirs and solicits the will of man...[that] may be either accepted or resisted by the human will”<sup>2</sup> and also was troubled by the sense that God’s infallible foreknowledge, implicit in those who followed the approach of Thomas of Aquinas and explicit in the Protestant Reformers, denied indeterministic freedom.<sup>3</sup> Molina described this freedom in this way: “...given the same disposition and cognition on the part of the intellect, the will is by its innate freedom able to will or to dissent or to neither will nor dissent.”<sup>4</sup>

The problem Molina faced can be illustrated in this manner. If God infallibly knows that Tommy Barnes will go to a special service in May of 1973 and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, then Tommy Barnes will certainly do that. As a result, there is some sense in which Tommy is unable to avoid this, which would seem to deny indeterministic free will. Yet, if Tommy truly were able to make another choice that night at the special service, then God’s foreknowledge is not infallible.

Molina and modern Molinists have rejected Open-Theism, Simple Foreknowledge Arminianism, and Calvinism in favor of a fourth approach, one that includes “middle

---

<sup>1</sup> Travis James Campbell, “Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique” (accessed from monergism.com on April 20, 2015), 1; “Luis de Molina,” in *Catholic Encyclopedia* (accessed at newadvent.org on April 20, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> William Lane Craig, “Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?” in Clark H. Pinnock, Ed., *The Grace God God And The Will Of Man* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 141.

<sup>3</sup> For the reality Molina was motivated by the implications of Thomistic Theology and Reformed Theology, see Robert R. Cook, “God, Middle Knowledge, And Alternative Worlds,” *Evangelical Quarterly*, 62 (1990): 294.

<sup>4</sup> *Liberi Arbitrii cum Gratiae Donis, Divina Praescientia, Providentia, Praedestinatione et Reprobatione Concordia*, 4.2, cited in Campbell, “Middle Knowledge,” 1-2. This is a classic and typical way of describing libertarian or indeterministic freedom.

Keathley, *Salvation*, chapter 3, argues for what he wisely calls soft indeterminism, an indeterminism that is not absolute. Rather, choices, he recognizes, are limited by character—in the case of humans—and character in turn is shaped by previous choices. In this book I will argue for soft determinism.

knowledge.” This doctrine must be understood in light of the categories theologians used in Molina’s day. Both followers of Aquinas and Reformed Theologians distinguished between natural (or necessary) and free knowledge.<sup>5</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> c. Reformed theologian, Francis Turretin, for example, spoke of both natural and free knowledge—arguing these encompassed all the knowledge God had.<sup>6</sup> Some Reformed theologians still speak of the logical moments of God’s natural and free knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Molina argued for a third kind of knowledge God possessed: Molina and his followers have set forth three logical moments in the life of God, which can be diagrammed as follows:<sup>8</sup>

[Logical] Moment 1: God’s natural knowledge of everything that *could* be.

[Logical] Moment 2: God’s middle knowledge of everything that *would* be.

**Divine Decree**<sup>9</sup>

[Logical] Moment 3: God’s free knowledge of everything that *will* happen in the actual world.”

Let’s look more closely at these three kinds of knowledge according to the Molinist model.

## A Closer Look At Molinism

<sup>5</sup> Campbell, “Middle Knowledge,” 4. See also John D. Laing, “The Compatibility Of Calvinism And Middle Knowledge,” *JETS*, 47, 3 (September 2004): 456; Craig, “Rapprochement?” 145; and William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility Of Divine Foreknowledge And Human Freedom* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf And Stock Publishers, 199, repr.), 119ff.

<sup>6</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes Of Elenctic Theology* (3 vols.; ed. James T. Dennison Jr.; Trans. George Musgrave Giger; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 1:212-13, cited in Paul Helm, Terrance L. Tiessen, “Does Calvinism Have Room For Middle Knowledge? A Conversation,” *WTJ*, 71, 2 (Fall 2009): 437.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation And Sovereignty* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, Kindle Edition), 150. See also Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology: New Combined Edition*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 102.

<sup>8</sup> The following diagram is taken from Campbell, “Middle Knowledge,” 2. Campbell adds: “One will find a similar diagram in William Lane Craig, *What Does God Know? Reconciling Divine Foreknowledge And Human Freedom* (Norcross, Ga.: Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, 2002), a popular booklet expounding Molinism. That these three kinds of knowledge have a logical and not temporal relationship, see Craig, “Rapprochement?” 145; and William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility Of Divine Foreknowledge And Human Freedom* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf And Stock Publishers, 1999, repr.), 129-130.

<sup>9</sup> By divine decree we mean God’s eternal purpose by which he has chosen all that will come to pass (the actual world with all its creatures, events and facts exists).

God's natural or necessary knowledge is his knowledge of all that could happen, in other words, the possible worlds that could be. This knowledge:

*...refers to that part of God's knowledge which he knows by his very nature.... Included here is God's knowledge of all metaphysically necessary truths and all possible truths. Thus natural knowledge, properly conceived, is that part of God's knowledge which could not have been different from what it is. It follows from this that the content of God's natural knowledge is independent of his will.... [Natural knowledge is] logically prior to any act of will on God's part....<sup>10</sup>*

Thus, what is being asserted in God's natural knowledge is that, "He knows all possibilities, everything that could happen.... These fully formed possible scenarios are generally called possible worlds. There is an infinite upon infinite number of possible permutations of how things could have been."<sup>11</sup> What is more, "a central feature of God's natural knowledge is that the content of this knowledge is essential to God; indeed this is why such knowledge is natural. It does not depend on God's will, but necessarily belongs to God's omniscience."<sup>12</sup> In other words, God, by his very nature, has this knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

The second kind of knowledge that theologians of the Middle Ages, as well as Molina, posited is God's free knowledge—his knowledge of the world that he did make and all that will happen, all that will be actualized in that world. "The free knowledge of God comprehends everything that has/is/will happen in this existent and contingent world."<sup>14</sup> It is called "free" since it is based upon God's free decision to create the world that is and not another. It is also

---

<sup>10</sup> John D. Laing, "The Compatibility Of Calvinism And Middle Knowledge," JETS, 47, 3 (September 2004): 456. Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 129, explains that included in this natural knowledge are the "laws of logic."

<sup>11</sup> Keathley, *Salvation*, ch. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Craig, "Rapprochement?" 146.

<sup>13</sup> Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 129.

<sup>14</sup> Campbell, Middle Knowledge," 3.

called free because it “has its source solely in his mind and will.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, free knowledge:

*...refers to that part of God's knowledge which he knows by his creative act of will. Included here are truths which refer to what actually exists (or will exist). Since free knowledge comes from God's creative act of will, it follows that the content of that knowledge is contingent. It includes only metaphysically contingent truths, or truths that could have been prevented by God, if he had chosen to create different situations, different creatures, or not to create at all. Thus, free knowledge can be characterized as dependent upon or logically posterior to God's will.*<sup>16</sup>

Molina and Molinists assert that God freely chose to “actualize” the world that is, and, “Of the infinite possibilities available to God, He was under no compulsion to choose this one. Yet He chose a world that contains free moral agents—angels and humans—who make genuinely free decisions”<sup>17</sup>—namely, the world that is. “According to the theory, middle knowledge is similar to natural knowledge in that it is prevolitional, or prior to God’s choice to create and therefore its truth is independent of God’s determining will. Likewise, it is similar to free knowledge in that the truths that are known are contingent (not necessary) because, in the mind of the Molinist, they are dependent on creaturely will.”<sup>18</sup>

William Lane Craig explains how the three kinds of knowledge relate:

*For example, [God] knows whether Peter, if he were placed in certain circumstances, would deny Christ three times. By his natural knowledge God knew in the first moment all the possible things that Peter could do if placed in such circumstances. But now in this second moment he knows what*

---

<sup>15</sup> Paul Helm, “Molinism 101,” 1 (accessed from Ligonier ministries on April 22, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Laing, “The Compatibility,” 456-57. See also Craig, “Rapprochement?” 146; Turretin, *Elenctic*, 1:212-13.

<sup>17</sup> Keathley, *Salvation*, ch. 1. As will be shown below, I believe that the Molinist position cannot consistently argue for such a free creative act of God and such free works of providence given their commitment to indeterministic human freedom.

<sup>18</sup> Laing, “The Compatibility,” 457. Andrew A. Postiff, “The Theological Viability of Middle Knowledge” (A Paper Presented To W. Combs For Seminar In Soteriology, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006), 4, adds: “Natural knowledge does include possibilities, but middle knowledge further limits these possibilities to those which are in harmony with the free wills of creatures. And by the point that God’s free knowledge has been ‘settled,’ there are no more open possibilities, but God knows all circumstances and all the decisions that free creatures will make in them.”

*Peter would in fact freely choose to do under such circumstances. This is not because Peter would be causally determined by the circumstances to act in this way. But God knows which way Peter would freely choose. God's knowledge of Peter in this respect is not simple foreknowledge. For maybe God will decide not to place Peter under such circumstances or even not to create him at all. Middle knowledge, like natural knowledge, thus is logically prior to the decision of the divine will to create a world.*<sup>19</sup>

Given only natural knowledge and free knowledge, according to the Molinist, there is not sufficient explanation of God's knowledge to posit why he made the world he did and why or how his manner of creation preserves indeterministic human freedom and also how it successfully addresses the issue of pain and evil (why did God create a world in which there is sin?). So, Middle knowledge is affirmed, which is God's comprehension of all that would happen if certain things were different or if certain things were true.<sup>20</sup> In other words, "God's middle knowledge comprehends everything that would happen if God had been willing to decree its occurrence."<sup>21</sup>

To put it another way, this involves "God's knowledge of possibilities involving human choice (the 'counterfactuals of freedom' as they have been called),"<sup>22</sup> i.e. all counterfactuals of (indeterministic) free choices."<sup>23</sup> This knowledge allows God to know that if he made a different

---

<sup>19</sup> Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 130.

<sup>20</sup> This knowledge for God is posited based upon all the subjunctive conditionals in Scripture. Also, it is asserted that since God is omniscience, this omniscience would include all possible actions or outcomes that could happen if certain things were true.

<sup>21</sup> Campbell, "Middle Knowledge," 4.

<sup>22</sup> Helm, "Molinism," 2; Campbell, "Middle Knowledge," 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> Campbell, "Middle Knowledge," 5.

Keathley, *Salvation*, 35: "A counterfactual is a conditional statement that has two distinctive features: (1) It involves a condition that is contrary to fact....; and (2) it expresses a truth that belongs to this actual world."

Craig, "The Middle Knowledge View:" 120: "Counterfactuals are conditional statements in the subjunctive mood...."

world than what he did, what would happen in that world.<sup>24</sup> So, for example, if God made a world in which the Jews and Jewish leaders of the first century had ignored Jesus, God knows what events and decisions would come out of such a world. He also knows if he made a world in which those same Jewish leaders and Jews had accepted Jesus as Messiah, what events and decisions would come about as a result. God also knows what would have happened with Tommy Barnes had the United Methodist Church in Belleville, Indiana did not invite a special speaker to hold special services in May of 1973. “The content of God’s middle knowledge can be seen as a virtually infinite number of propositions of the form, ‘If person P were in situation S, then P would freely perform action A.’”<sup>25</sup>

Kenneth Keathley adds: “An important note to make...is that God does not perceive what free creatures would do, but rather He conceives their choices within Himself. That is, God does not look forward in time to ascertain what decisions [people] would make; instead He innately knows all free choices due to his omniscience.”<sup>26</sup> Keathley adds that “the source of that knowledge is not the creature...[but] God Himself.”<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Craig, “Rapprochement:” 147, further explains: “...[God] knew what Peter would do within any possible order of circumstances, then, given the decision of his will to bring about a certain set of circumstances, God knew what Peter [will] in fact do.”

<sup>25</sup> Laing, “The Compatibility:” 457. Laing adds: “It should be noted that the actual existence of P or the occurrence of S or A is not necessary for God to have this knowledge” according to the Molinist position.

<sup>26</sup> Keathley, *Salvation*, 39.

<sup>27</sup> Keathley, *Salvation*, 39. Craig, “Rapprochement:”147, cites Molina himself: “[God] saw in his own essence what each such will would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things—even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite....” Postiff, “The Theological Viability:” 4-5, adds that the Molinist asserts, “...God knows each creature so well that he knows what free choice the creature would make in any possible circumstance.” He then explains: “In the literature this is called the doctrine of supercomprehension.” These assertions, in part, are set forth to answer the grounding objection set forth by some opponents of Molinism, namely that there is not sufficient ground for God to have middle knowledge in regard to all future truly free human choices and actions.

## Advantages Of Molinism<sup>28</sup>

The first advantage of this view is that Molinists typically are concerned to interact with Scripture and to hear what it has to say—attempting to craft their view upon it. They highlight that Scripture teaches a strong view of God’s sovereignty, the reality of genuine human freedom, and also the reality of God’s omniscience.<sup>29</sup>

Flowing out of the first advantage is a second: Molinists attempt to give a strong place to God’s sovereignty and providence—as does Scripture. Craig, after a significant discussion from Scripture on God’s knowledge of past, present, and future, affirms the following: “...the biblical conception of history is not of an unpredictably unfolding sequence of events plunging haphazardly without purpose or direction, rather God knows the future and directs the course of world history toward his foreseen ends.”<sup>30</sup> Craig adds: “God’s knowledge of the course of world history and his control over it to achieve his purposes seem fundamental to the biblical conception of history and are a source of comfort and assurance to the believer in times of distress.”<sup>31</sup> Finally, Craig also writes:

*The Molinist has this very, very strong sense of divine sovereignty and meticulous providence. Molina said, “Not a leaf falls from the tree but that it does so either by God’s will or permission.”*

---

<sup>28</sup> The advantages I set forth here are advantages, if Molinism is consistent with the biblical data. What we will discover, however, is that it is not overall and so the advantages do not really hold. Another way to put this is that these are advantages in regard to what the Molinist is attempting to do.

<sup>29</sup> Keathley, *Salvation*, ch. 1, is a good example of one who argues this way. Passages often set forth to support the idea that God has middle knowledge are found in Postiff, “The Theological Validity:” 6: Ex. 13:17; 1 Samuel 23:10-12; Jer. 38; 42:10, 13, 16; Matthew 11:21, 23; 2:13; 1 Cor. 2:8. Postiff (8) adds: “All of these examples support the idea that God knows the woulds of situations that never did in fact come to pass.” See also Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 131-32, who particularly mentions 1 Samuel 23:6-13; Matthew 11:20-24.

<sup>30</sup> Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 26. Craig cites Isaiah 44:6-8; 46:9-10; Revelation 1:17; 22:13.

<sup>31</sup> Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 27. Craig cites Ephesians 1:11; 3:9, 11; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; 1 Peter 1:20. Even though Molinism shares with Open Theism and simple foreknowledge Arminianism a commitment to indeterministic human freedom and also a view of God’s sovereignty and providence that, at least to some degree, is conditional upon man’s free decisions, Molinism does provide more room for God’s providence in that it speaks of God having a directional role in the world and its history by freely creating the world and its circumstances he desires. This is why I believe Molinism is the best of the views that advocate indeterministic freedom.

*And if he were living today I think he would say that the tiniest motion of a sub-atomic particle cannot occur but without God's direct will or permission. So this is a very strong view of sovereignty and control.”<sup>32</sup>*

Along with an attempt to be biblical and to affirm a strong view of God's sovereignty and providence, Craig also offers a unique level of honesty among those advocating for a theological position: “Does God, then, possess middle knowledge? It would be difficult to prove in any direct way that he does, for the biblical passages are not unequivocal. Nevertheless, the doctrine is so fruitful in illuminating divine prescience, providence, and predestination that it can be presumed unless there are insoluble objections to it.”<sup>33</sup>

In Craig's honesty we also discover another advantage to Molinism introduced—that it potentially solves so many theological difficulties—including:<sup>34</sup> (1) The imputation of Adam's sin (if any of us had been there, we would have done the same thing Adam did); (2) Salvation of infants and unevangelized (God judges based on what they'd do, if they were confronted with the gospel); (3) Guidance (Christians often ask for guidance, based on God knowing the wisdom or lack thereof of multiple paths we could take); (4) Foreknowledge, [sovereignty,] providence, and predestination (and especially showing how the Bible teaches these and an indeterministic approach to man's freedom, as the Molinist would argue); (5) Biblical inspiration (how the Bible can be both from God and truly written by man); (6) Perseverance; and (7) The problem of evil.

---

<sup>32</sup> Craig, “Calvinism Vs. Molinism,” 64.

<sup>33</sup> Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 137. In addition to appreciating Craig's honesty, we also discover in this statement a key to evaluating Molinism: Are there “insoluble objections to it”? This is precisely what this book will argue, namely that in the seven key theological truths regarding how God is sovereign and exercises his providence, how man's will functions, and in the necessity of God's initiating saving and transforming grace for salvation, sanctification, and glorification, that we have insoluble objections to it.

<sup>34</sup> For this paragraph, see Postiff, “The Theological Viability:” 10-17; Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 151; and Craig, “The Middle Knowledge View:” 125. Craig avers (“The Middle Knowledge View: 127): “Middle knowledge...is one of the most fruitful theological ideas ever conceived.” Toward the end of *The Only Wise God* (p. 151) and after arguing there are no good philosophical or theological objections to it, Craig writes: “...the doctrine of divine middle knowledge...ought to be accepted mainly because of its great theological advantages.”

The benefit of positing middle knowledge, so argues the Molinist, is that it allows God to know everything that could be (infallible foreknowledge), it allows God to decree in a strong way all that is and thus to know infallibly what will happen in the actual world that is (but to do so in a way that the events and decisions are supposedly not caused decisively by God; rather they originate in the heart of the person, and so God's decrees are dependent upon human choice).

*"And so the key to Molina's doctrine of providence is that by means of His middle knowledge God knows what free agents would freely do in any set of freedom-permitting circumstances that God might put them in. so, by creating those circumstances and putting the agents in them, God then, so to speak, takes hands off and He lets the agent freely choose what he wants but He knows how that agent would choose.... And so then by creating the circumstances and putting the agent in it, God's free knowledge falls out automatically."<sup>35</sup>*

So, for example, in the first century all those who made decisions to betray Jesus (Judas), to pursue his crucifixion, even though he had committed no capital crime (Jewish Leaders), and those who made the decisions to have him crucified (Pilate, the Roman soldiers who carried it out, and the Jewish citizens who called for him to be crucified), were all making these decisions in a manner that they were not divinely-caused, they were not caused in any other determined manner, and so all these persons were contra-causally free and yet, at the same time, God could know ahead of time infallibly that this could happen, if certain antecedent events and decisions took place, and that it would happen, if he created the world that is. So, God could conditionally decree such a world and know that such events will happen and so move through prophets to predict them, without causing them. According to the Molinist, man's indeterministic freedom (along with responsibility) are preserved and we can still speak of God's decree, a strong sense of his providence, and a sovereign God.

---

<sup>35</sup> Craig, "Calvinism Vs. Molinism," 65.

Something else that we must grasp as an advantage is that some modern Molinists postulate that God is a Maximally Great and good Being, as Scripture does. In regard to this attribute, the Molinist holds that God would love all humans in the fullest saving manner, that he would desire as many as possible (all) to be saved, and that he would not desire any to go to hell. As such, Middle knowledge provides a paradigm that allows as many free agents as possible to be saved (and thus as few as possible to go to hell). This assumes that God chose to create the best of all possible worlds in which these outcomes would be actualized.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, by way of advantages, we must see that Molinism is an attempt to affirm a strong sense of sovereignty, yet at the same time preserve human freedom and, as such, guard Christianity from being identified with naturalistic determinism.

### **The Relationship Of Molinism To Arminianism**

How Molinism relates to Arminianism is somewhat complicated. On the one hand, “it has become generally accepted that [Jacobus] Arminius was familiar with Molina’s...work and made use of the idea of middle knowledge.”<sup>37</sup> Some state it with even greater certainty: “As Arminius makes clear...[in] his own formulations dealing with the issues of election, grace, free will, and the related problem of the extent of divine concurrence in free or contingent events, [he] looked...to the refined metaphysics of the Jesuit...Luis de Molina.”<sup>38</sup> Even Molinist, Craig, affirms, Molinism...entered into Protestant theology through Jacob Arminius and there is a kind

---

<sup>36</sup> For these three sentences, see Tim Stratton, “The Petals Drop: Why Calvinism Is Impossible,” at [freakengministries.com](http://freakengministries.com) (accessed April 15, 2015). See also Craig, “Calvinism Vs. Molinism,” 65-66.

<sup>37</sup> Laing, “The Compatibility:” 457. He cites Eaf Dekker, “Was Arminius A Molinist?” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 27 (1996): 337-52.

<sup>38</sup> Richard A. Muller, “Grace, Election, And Contingent Choice: Arminius’s Gambit And the Reformed Response,” in Thomas R. Schreiner, Bruce A. Ware, Ed’s., *The Grace Of God, The Bondage Of The Will*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 253. Postiff, “The Theological Viability:” 14, agrees.

of bastardized Molinism that goes under the name Arminianism today, though it usually is somewhat different from what Molina said.”<sup>39</sup>

It is not only the fact that Arminius came to affirm middle knowledge that shows the close relationship between the two views, it is also that they both affirm indeterministic human freedom.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, Molinists desire to distinguish their view from Arminianism because, even though both advocate indeterministic human freedom and both have Jacobus Arminius as part of their theological pedigree, there are differences between Molinism and the most typical views of Arminianism,<sup>41</sup> especially when it comes to their view of the relationship of God’s sovereignty and providence to free human decisions. Molinist Kenneth Keathley highlights that Arminians view that relationship more passively and Molinists more actively:

*“Arminianism...[typically believes] God decrees to elect the church as a corporate body, and those individuals who choose Christ are then viewed as the elect, while those who reject Him are reprobate. In this respect Arminians view God’s decree as the mere ratification of human choices. But the Bible presents God’s electing decision as something much more active and decisive. Unlike Arminianism, Molinism describes God as using His foreknowledge in a sovereign, unconditional manner.”*<sup>42</sup>

No doubt some Calvinists may be tempted to view Molinism as Arminianism by another name because of their shared commitment to indeterministic human freedom. Yet, I think it important to distinguish the two views out of fairness to both and especially in this book—where we are interacting with Molinism as the best view that affirms indeterministic freedom and a

---

<sup>39</sup> Craig, “Calvinism Vs. Molinism,” 64.

<sup>40</sup> In a personal conversation with my friend and Molinist, Tim Stratton, he put the relationship in this way, “Arminianism exists under the umbrella of Molinism.”

<sup>41</sup> Implied in Craig’s essay (“Rapprochement:”) which argues that Molinism can bring together Calvinists and Arminians is a distinction between Molinism and Arminiansim.

<sup>42</sup> Keathley, *Salvation*, 141. Keathley’s assertion that God uses his foreknowledge in an unconditional manner in inconsistent with what most Molinists assert about the relation of God’s decrees to human choices.

view of God’s sovereign providence that fits with such human freedom. Molinists argue for a stronger and more active view of the latter.

This brings up an issue we must address? Can Molinism truly argue for the exercise of God’s sovereignty or his foreknowledge in a free and unconditional manner? And, if not, does it matter? These questions lead us to the next subject for us to take up in this chapter and that is an introduction to the problems present in Molinism—a subject that will be addressed with more detail in the rest of the book.

### **An Introduction To Problems With Molinism**

One of the first and greatest problems Molinism has is that even though its view of God’s sovereign providence is stronger and better than Arminians who advocate only simple foreknowledge and it is certainly better than that of Open Theists, it still posits a God that is limited by and dependent upon human free choices in a manner that Scripture does not support. The Molinist affirms God, by his middle knowledge, “can plan a world down to the last detail”<sup>43</sup> and some even say in a sovereign, free manner.<sup>44</sup> Yet, the choices set before God are “outside his control and [are] simply given,” and so are “outside the pale of God’s omnipotence,”<sup>45</sup> and so some options are not open to God. For example, it is very possible that God could not create a world in which some who do not believe would choose Christ or in which Peter “freely affirms Christ” in the circumstances that he was in that led to his denials—without violating his

---

<sup>43</sup> Craig, “The Middle Knowledge View:” 122.

<sup>44</sup> Keathley, *Salvation*, 141. Additionally, Keathley, in his Introduction, writes that Molinism formulates a radical compatibilism—[that includes] a Calvinist view of divine sovereignty....” Elsewhere (p. 18) he seems to argue that God was able to decree whatever world he desired. However, his first assertion is simply not true (as this book will demonstrate) and his second assertion is highly debatable

<sup>45</sup> Craig, “Rapprochement?” 148.

freedom.<sup>46</sup> Most Molinists understand that in God's middle knowledge he "knows which of the possible worlds known to him in the first moment are within his power to create."<sup>47</sup> Because God's middle knowledge is dependent upon man's free choices,<sup>48</sup> it is not possible for God to plan any world he desires.<sup>49</sup> It will be argued in this book that the kind of sovereign freedom God exercises in his works of providence is not limited by human freedom. God's sovereign, free decrees never violate his attributes, i.e. his character, and they do not violate the laws of logic (God cannot create a married bachelor or a square circle). In this sense we can say they are limited. But we must not locate the limitation at a point Scripture does not—i.e. at man's will. It would appear that some Molinists would suggest that God has some ability to bring about different choices in man through antecedent circumstances and without violating indeterministic freedom. Nevertheless, it still stands that the Molinist model views God's sovereign providence limited by man's free choices and this is precisely what Scripture does not teach.

Another problem has to do with Molinism's assertion that God certainly plans what he decrees in large part by decreeing the circumstances that surround free decisions, i.e. "circumstances caused directly by God"<sup>50</sup>—and this based upon middle knowledge.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Craig, "Rapprochement?" 148.

<sup>47</sup> Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 130. Craig goes on to assert that "it is not within God's power to create some worlds." What is more, he adds that God's middle knowledge serves to delimit the range of possible worlds to those he could create given the free choices would make in them.

<sup>48</sup> Postiff, "The Theological Viability:" 4, understands this about Molinism.

<sup>49</sup> In a lengthy treatment of this subject Basinger, "Divine Control:" 60-64, argues convincingly that the God of the Molinist cannot plan any world he might desire, but only those open to him based upon man's indeterministic free choices.

Keathley, *Salvation*, 25-26, inconsistently speaks of God's freedom and the notion that "the Lord's sovereignty over creation requires that it places no constraints upon him.... Nothing internal or external compelled Him to create this or any world." However, other Molinists acknowledge that God was limited in creation and is limited in the exercise of his providence by man's choices.

<sup>50</sup> Craig, "Rapprochement?" 149.

Specifically, the problem is seen with this question, “Do the antecedent movements and choices of the person, along with circumstances determine the choice(s)?” The answer from the Molinist is, “No. The person’s choices originate from their own will and whatever choice they make, they could make another choice, but yet, different choices may be made in different circumstances.” We might answer, “O.k., but then what impact do the antecedent choices and the circumstances have upon further choices?” The answer has to be that at least, “They have some ability to direct choices or at least limit choices.” For example, when a young woman chooses to consume alcohol and eventually to use that alcohol to numb her pain from previous sexual abuse—and, as a result, become an alcoholic—she has given strong direction and limitation to her choices that come to her as an alcoholic subsequently. If, while under the influence, she chooses to get into a car and drive—leading to an accident that takes the life of another driver—we both hold her responsible, but also affirm that her previous choices had strong influence upon her deadly choice to drive.

Here is the rub. How much influence or direction can antecedent choices and circumstances have upon a person’s will and subsequent choices and for those choices to remain still free in an indeterministic way? The Molinist will say that circumstances matter and antecedent choices matter, but they are not altogether determinative. And we must ask, “How so?” Unless the Molinist can say that since Jones rejected the gospel, it must mean that he would not have responded positively in any world God could have created,<sup>52</sup> the very view itself affirms that the circumstances and antecedent choices of Jones at least set the table for his free choice to reject

---

<sup>51</sup> e.g. Craig, “Rapprochement?” 144, 145, 148, 151; Craig, “The Middle Knowledge View:” 122; Keathley, *Salvation*, 151, 154.

<sup>52</sup> Keathley, *Salvation*, 163 (f.n. 54) rejects this view: “It must be noted that I am not appealing to the ‘transworld depravity’ argument made by some Molinists. This argument posits that the only lost persons God creates are those who would have been lost in all possible worlds. This position seems to go against Matthew 11:20-28 and 26:24.”

Christ—and because God decreed this particular world and its circumstances, this is why that particular free choice of Jones was made. This begins to sound very much like the view of freedom I will set forth in this book and not indeterminism.<sup>53</sup>

I believe this is a problem for Molinism. A great deal of the view (and what distinguishes it from forms of Arminianism that hold only to simple foreknowledge) rests upon God decreeing the world that is—along with its circumstances and facts—and that this stands behind the free choices that a person makes. Yet, for indeterminism to hold, the circumstances cannot determine the outcomes.

### **Should Calvinists Adopt Middle Knowledge?**

Before we leave this initial discussion of Molinism, we need to ask whether or not Calvinists could or should adopt Molinism’s middle knowledge view? The question arises since a few Calvinists have come out in favor of some version of middle knowledge—although they advocate deterministic and not indeterministic human freedom.<sup>54</sup>

There is no question that God has knowledge of counterfactuals, as Scripture affirms (e.g. Mt. 11:21). However, to assert that this knowledge of God is knowledge of free creaturely choices and actions in the indeterministic sense is problematic for it is inconsistent at key points along the way with scriptural teaching (which I believe is soft deterministic Calvinism).

---

<sup>53</sup> Postiff, “The Theological Viability:” 24, as well as Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000, repr.), 349, agree.

<sup>54</sup> Keathley, *Salvation*, 162-63, mentions the interesting development of some Calvinists trying to incorporate middle knowledge into their system. He mentions specifically Bruce Ware, John Frame, and Terrance Tiessen (Postiff, “Theological Viability:” 32f., and Laing, “The Compatibility:” 459, also mention these three, plus John Feinberg, though Feinberg is skeptical about the usefulness of such knowledge). On Terrance Tiessen’s advocacy of middle knowledge for the Calvinist, see Terrance Tiessen, “Why Calvinists Should Believe In Divine Middle Knowledge, Although They Reject Molinism,” WTJ, 69 (2007): 345-66, as well as Paul Helm, Terrance L. Tiessen, “Does Calvinism Have Room For Middle Knowledge? A Conversation,” WTJ, 71, 2 (Fall 2009): 437-454.

If God has exhaustive knowledge of the choices of free humans (in the indeterministic sense), this means that God must have first decreed that he would create humans with such freedom. Yet, if that is the case, then it means such knowledge is not prior to God's divine decree.<sup>55</sup> Yet, even beyond this, the Scriptural data, as we will see in Chapters Four-Seven, leads us away from concluding that indeterministic freedom was part of the divine decree of God and also leads us toward a view of God's sovereignty and providence that include his initiation and governance behind all human choices, human actions, and other events in the world. This is one of the key truths that emerge from Scripture. If we are accurate in these conclusions, then there is no need for middle knowledge. The only reason to divide God's knowledge of counterfactuals from his natural knowledge is in order to preserve an indeterministic view of human freedom. Without that need, there is no need for the Calvinist to posit middle knowledge.<sup>56</sup>

Another of the key points that emerge from Scripture includes God's decree to create all that exists in order to display his attributes, including not just his attributes such as love and grace, but also his attributes of justice and mercy (Chapters Two-Three). What is more, so that he could display attributes such as love and grace to a greater degree, so Scripture argues, he decreed the world he did. According to Scripture, there is never anything coming close to an assertion that God created in the way he did and ordered the world he did either to preserve indeterministic human freedom, or because of the reality of indeterministic human freedom. As such, there appears to be no commitment to indeterministic freedom in the biblical material that deals with why God created. This calls into question a key reason for the development of Molinism in general, and middle knowledge in particular.

---

<sup>55</sup> I am dependent upon Postiff, "The Theological Viability:" 36, for this insight.

<sup>56</sup> For this insight I am dependent upon Paul Helm, "Does Calvinism Have Room?" and Paul Helm, "Shunning Middle Knowledge," in *Helm's Deep Blog* (May 1, 2009, accessed 12/27/16, at paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com).

Yet, beyond this, another key point that emerges is that the kind of freedom the Bible teaches humans have is that known as compatibilistic or soft deterministic freedom (Chapters Seven-Ten). Since this is the case, any understanding of God's knowledge of counterfactuals need not (should not!) include a commitment to preserving indeterministic human freedom—which is the main reason for positing middle knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

Should we look to Molinism and its commitment to middle knowledge to explain how Tommy Barnes could trust in Christ freely in May of 1973 and, at the same time, God could be seen as exercising a strong sense of sovereignty and providence in his life? Based upon key points in the Bible, we must look to a different explanation. In the remainder of this book I will set forth those theological truths.