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Divine Election, Reprobation & God's Efficacious Providence Regarding Sin

The adversaries of free grace and efficacious grace have in all ages of the Church turned the edge of their swords and principal forces against the Doctrine of Reprobation and God's efficacious concurrence to and providence over sinful acts, because in these oppositions they conceit that they can most securely conceal themselves under a pretext of vindicating Divine Benevolence, Justice and Holiness; hence men's corrupt minds always endeavored to load this hypothesis of God's efficacious concurrence to the substrate matter of sin, with all manner of black prejudices and ugly consequences - the Pelagians imputed the same to Augustine, as if he introduced a fatal necessity, whereby he made God to impel men to sin, &c. But these black and scandalous imputations have been in all ages wiped off by the orthodox, and we no way doubt but will be still more and more dispelled into mere smoke and vapor, as evangelic light does more and more shine forth in its meridian glory, as Proverbs 4:18. --- Reprobation admits no formal motive, proper condition or cause. This proposition is generally denied by the New Methodists {aka pseudo 'Calvinists';} who grant, that God decrees all good absolutely, but as for Sin, say they, God decrees that only respectively and conditionally. But we no way doubt but that God's Decree of Reprobation, whereby He determines to leave men to sin, is absolute, as well as the Decree of Election. Yeah, it is to me a thing altogether impossible to defend an absolute decree of election, and yet to make the decree of reprobation conditional and respective; for if the absolute good pleasure of God be the only cause why some are elected, must it not also be the only cause why others are rejected? Does not the Election of the one necessarily imply the Reprobation of the other? It's true, our Divines, that follow the Sublapsarian mode, as Davenant {John Davenant 1572-1641} speak of Sin as a common condition belonging to the whole mass of corrupt nature, yet they allow not of any distinctive condition or formal cause or motive, which should incline the Divine Will to reprobate one rather than another; for nothing can move the Divine Will, but what is some way antecedent to it. Now the consideration of all sin is subsequent to some act of God's Will. The act of Reprobation is not merely negative, but positive and efficacious. It's granted, that some of our Divines make mention of a negative act of Reprobation, which they term non-election or preterition, yet hereby they intend not a suspense act of the Divine Will, but include also a positive efficacious act. - In the matter of reprobation God is considered as a Sovereign Absolute Lord, not as a Righteous Judge. The Pelagians, Molinists {named after the 16th Century Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina who attempted to reconcile the providence of God with human free will}, Arminians, and New Methodists consider God in the act of Reprobation as a just Judge, not as a Supreme Absolute Lord; whence they conclude, that it is unjust with God to reprobate any but on prevision of their sins; not considering that Reprobation is not an act inflicting punishment, but of denying benefits, wherein the Liberty and Dominion of God is only to be attended; according to that of the Apostle, Rom.9:21, "Hath not the Potter power over the clay, &c." What is Sovereign Dominion, but an absolute right to dispose of what is our own? And shall we not allow the same Dominion to God, which is allowed to the Potter over the Clay? Is the Sovereign Lord tied to His creature by any Law, more than what is in His own

nature and will? Hence it follows; that the Decree of Reprobation is most absolute and independent as to all distinctive conditions or cause in man. The absolute will of God is the alone cause of Reprobation. As Augustine asserts, "It is a great injury to God, when men search for causes of things superior to His sovereign will; for His will is such a supreme Rule of Justice, as that whatsoever He wills is for that very reason, because He wills it, to be accounted just." So Bradwardine {Thomas Bradwardine 1290-1349} proves strongly, "That albeit God punisheth no man eternally without sin committed in time; yet He doth not eternally reprobate any for sin as a cause antecedently moving His Divine Will." - And our Divines generally grant, that there can be no other cause assigned to Reprobation, than the absolute sovereign good pleasure of God. --- "Hath not the Potter power over the clay, &c." Rom.9:21,22. Here Paul refutes the proud Pelagian blasphemies by an argument taken from God's absolute Dominion and Sovereignty over His creature. As if He had said; Has not the Potter an absolute dominion over the clay, to form it into what shape He please; and shall we not allow the great Creator of all things the same absolute dominion? Did He not make all things; and therefore may He not assume the prerogative of ordering all things to the ends for which they were made? As He gives to every creature what shape He please, so cannot He appoint them to what end He please, and direct them infallibly to that end? Is it not an end sufficient for the being of any creature, to be the glory of any attribute; and therefore if God make a creature to be a vessel of wrath fitted to destruction, is there any injury done to the creature? Thus Paul concludes, verse 22 - "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction," signifying in the original to fit, frame, or set together; thence, to ordain, decree, or constitute. Namely God's eternal ordination or absolute Decree of Reprobation founded on His absolute Sovereignty. - This is also evident from that parallel text, Jude 4. "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." These ungodly men are said to be ordained/designed, and as it were before written in the book of God's Predetermination, to be ordained to this condemnation. So that it is evident, that God foreordained and decreed, not only their destruction, but to leave them to those sins, which should cause the same. To sum up: Absolute Reprobation is not the cause either of men's sins, or damnation. It's true, elective Grace is the cause of faith and salvation; but the Decree of Reprobation is not the cause of sin or damnation. That Reprobation withdraws not any power from the person reprobated; yet we deny, that it is unjust for God by an absolute, efficacious Decree to reprobate some for the glorifying of His own justice; for albeit the Decree of Reprobation be not an act of justice, yet it is not unjust for God to reprobate any. We deny also, that there is any motive, cause, or condition of Reprobation, as it regards the act of the Divine Will. Whence also; we deny, that the act of Reprobation is merely negative; but affirm, that it is positive and absolute. Hence, it necessarily follows, that when God predestines and pre-ordains in like manner, by an efficacious act of His own Sovereign Will to leave men to their own sinful courses, and efficaciously to concur to the substrate matter of those sins. --- God's providential restriction, government and ordination of sin unto His own glory does potently demonstrate His predetermination to the material entitative act thereof. Albeit God be not the Author of sin, yet He is the Orderer thereof; and how can He be the sovereign Orderer of it, unless He apply the will to the entitative act thereof? - Does Divine providence order all things most potently or mightily? And must not also men's sins be included under this universal disposition? And how can God order men's sins mightily or infallibly for His

own glory, unless He predetermine the will to the material entitative act? Take acts most intrinsically evil, even the hatred of God, the common instance given by our adversaries, and unless we grant, that God does infallibly apply and predetermine the will to the material entitative act, what will become of the providence of God? Would it not soon be banished out of the world? Does not the sacred Scripture assure us, that all men by nature before conversion are Haters of God, Rom.1:30, and Enemies of God, Rom.8:7? And hence, are not all the human acts of men in such a state spirited with hatred and enmity against God? Now if God does not predetermine and apply the wills of such men to their material entitative acts put forth by them, what room is there left for Divine providence amongst such? Would not this antithesis of our adversaries exempt all pagans that ever were or shall be, all unconverted Jews, yea nineteen parts of twenty at least amongst such as are called Christians from any predetermination or efficacious gubernation of Divine providence? I would fain have our opponents seriously to consider this, and how much their antithesis tends to Epicurean Atheism, which cuts off the providence of God from intermeddling with human affairs; certainly nothing more darkens the glorious beauty and perfection of Providence. Would the wise Rector ever have sin to come into the world, had He not known how to have wrought His own ends by it, yea infallibly to have predetermined it to His own ends? Is not the Lord of Lords served in His own house, this great Universe, by the vessels of dishonor, II Tim.2:21? Has He not power to let forth the sins of men, and restrain them at His pleasure? And how can He do this, if He does not predetermine the wills of men to the entitative acts? Does anything more directly conduce to the perfection of Divine providence, than that it does determinately will and predestine all things, and destine them to the ends intended by Him; and can God perform this, unless He move and apply all second causes to their determinate acts and effects; and can this be perfected, if Divine providence does not predetermine the wills of men and all their acts, even such as are most sinful, considered materially and entitatively, to their certain determinate effects? Does it not belong to the perfection of Divine providence, not only to ordain means for an end, but also infallibly to attain the end by the means appointed? And can God infallibly attain the end appointed by men's sins, unless He infallibly determine the will to the entitative act of such sins? Should God appoint means for an end, and leave it to the indifference of man's ambulatory will to execute those means, or not, how could Divine providence reach its end infallibly? Yea how could God ever attain any certain prescience that His end should be attained? Suppose it to be the crucifixion of our Lord, appointed by God as a means absolutely necessary for the salvation of sinners; I demand, how this end can be infallibly attained by this means, so absolutely necessary, unless God predetermine the wills of His bloody enemies to this entitative act of crucifying the Lord of Glory, which on their parts was intrinsically evil? Again, how could the omniscient God infallibly foreknow, that any sinner should ever be saved by this means, if the means were not predestined and predetermined by Him? Were the providence of God about mens sins only general and indifferent, without a particular modification, application and determination of the entitative act, would not the influx and concurrence of mans free will be exempt from the influx, providence and will of God? It's a good observation of Aquinas {Thomas Aquinas, 1225-1274,} that "Divine providence extends itself only to such things, unto which Divine causality extends itself;" and certainly Divine causality extends itself to no second cause, act, or effect, but what it predetermines; for wherein consists that causality of the first cause on the second, but in applying the second to its act? And if God applies the second

cause to its act, does He not predetermine the same? May we not therefore regularly conclude that if God does not predetermine the will to the natural entitative act of sin, He has no prescience of, nor providence about the sinful act, neither can He infallibly reach His intended end thereby! Lastly, what would become of Christ's providential Kingdom as Mediator, should He not predetermine the wills of wicked men to the entitative act of their sins? Has not Christ as Mediator purchased all the services and actions of the most wicked men, so far as to render them infallibly subservient to the advance of His own Kingdom? Has not God the Father put the government of the world into His hands? Is he not King of Nations, as well as King of Saints? Do not all kings reign by Him? Has He not power given Him over all flesh, as well sinful as sacred; and does He not order all things in the wisest manner for the good of His people and His own glory, as Rom.8:28? Is it possible that the sinful actions of wicked men should infallibly subserve the good of the Church and the glory of Christ's mediatorial Kingdom, did He not infallibly predetermine them to the substrate matter of their sins? How could Cyrus, an hater of God, be His shepherd, to deliver the captive Jews, should not God have predetermined Him to all his sinful acts? Can wicked men, whose actions are all intrinsically evil, because full of hatred against God, do such service, without the least difference as to the spiritual state of the people of God, were not their wills predetermined to the entitative acts of their sins? Can we imagine how Christ, into whose hands the administration of all things here below is put, could so wisely, potently, and irresistibly order and dispose of all the sins of men, for the supreme ends He has designed them to, unless He does predetermine mens wills to all their entitative acts, though ever so intrinsically evil? Certainly the antithesis of our adversaries would divest Christ of the principal part of His Government as Mediator in His providential Kingdom! - To me it is an eternal truth, that either the will of man depends on the will of God for all its natural motions, or the will of God depends on the will of man; which to affirm is blasphemy! Theophilus Gale {Court of the Gentiles Book 3: Divine Predetermination, 1678}