

These propositions chiefly strike at the doctrine of absolute reprobation, according to which some people are not afraid to assert: That by an eternal and unchangeable decree, God has predestined to eternal damnation the great majority of humanity, not because they are made that way, nor because they are fallen, without any consideration of their disobedience or sin, but only in order to demonstrate the glory of his justice. They say that for this reason God has destined these miserable souls to walk in their wicked ways so that his justice may take hold of them.¹ They assert that God not only exposes them to this misery in many parts of the world by withholding from them the preaching of the Gospel and the knowledge of Christ, but also in places where the Gospel is preached and salvation by Christ is offered. They say that although God openly invites them, still he justly condemns them for disobedience,² although he has withheld from them all grace by which they might have accepted the Gospel. They assert that, by a secret will unknown to all human beings, God has ordered and decreed that they shall not obey (without any consideration of their disobedience or sin), and that the offer of the Gospel shall never be effective for their salvation, but only serve to cause them a greater condemnation.

¹ This is stated with even more emphasis in Latin: *ut miserae hae animae necessario in iniquitate versarentur ut justitia sua eos jure reprehenderet & affligeret*, “that these miserable souls must necessarily remain in their iniquity so that his justice may righteously condemn them and punish them.

² The Latin adds “*recusantes & rebellantes*” “people who refuse and rebel.”

Regarding this horrible and blasphemous doctrine, we have a common cause with many others, who have refuted it wisely and learnedly, according to Scripture, reason, and antiquity. Since so much has been said against this doctrine and little can be added except what has been said already, I shall be brief, yet I cannot skip it entirely, because it is so contrary to my way of thinking.

§ i. We can call this doctrine a innovation, since there is no mention of it during the first four hundred years after Christ. Since it is contrary to the testimony of the Scripture and to the substance of the Gospel, all the ancient writers, teachers, and doctors of the church pass over it with profound silence. The first foundations of this doctrine were laid in the later writings of Augustine; in his heated controversy against Pelagius he let fall some expressions which some people have taken up and used to establish this error. By doing this they contradicted the Truth and many other more frequent expressions of the same Augustine. Afterwards this doctrine was fomented by Dominic, a friar, and the monks of his order. At last, unfortunately, it was taken up by John Calvin (otherwise a praiseworthy man in several respects) which resulted in a great stain on his reputation and the defamation of the Protestant religion and the Christian religion in general. Though it received confirmation by the Synod of Dort it has since lost ground and begins to be denounced by most men of learning and piety in all Protestant churches. We would not quarrel with this doctrine only because of the silence of the ancients, the small number of its asserters, or the learnedness of its opposers, if we saw that it had any real foundations in the writings or sayings of Christ and the apostles. Moreover, it is highly injurious to God himself; to Jesus Christ our Mediator and Redeemer; to the power, virtue, nobility, and excellence of his blessed Gospel; and to all humankind.

§ ii First, it is very insulting to God, because it makes him the author of sin, which is completely contrary to his nature. I recognize that the supporters of this doctrine deny this conclusion; but that is pure illusion, since it so naturally follows from their doctrine. It is as ridiculous, as if someone stubbornly denied that one plus two is three. . . . I will cite a few among many passages. “I say that Adam fell by the order and will of God. God wanted man to fall.”³ “Man is blinded by the will and commandment of God.”⁴ . . . These are Calvin’s words. “God,” says Beza, “has predestined whomever he chose, not only to damnation, but also to the causes of it.”⁵ . . . Zwingli says, “God incites the robber to kill. He kills because God forces him to do it. If you say, he is forced to sin, I affirm that he is forced.”⁶ . . .

If these quotations do not plainly and evidently mean that God is the author of sin, we cannot seek the opinions of these men in their words, but must seek them in some other way. It seems as if they have adopted for themselves the monstrous double will they pretend God has: one by which they declare their minds openly, and another secret and hidden one which is completely contrary to the first. It does not help them at all to say that man sins willingly, since they believe that that willingness or propensity to evil is so inescapably imposed on him that he cannot do anything else, because God has decreed that he must be willing.

This argument is just as if I take a child who is unable to resist me, and throw it down from a high cliff. The weight of the child’s body makes it go down “willingly” and the violence of the crash against some rock or stone beats out

³ Calvin *in cap.* 3. *Gen.* RB

⁴ *Id.* 1 *Inst.* c. 18. s. 1 RB

⁵ Beza, *lib. de praed.* RB

⁶ Zwingli, *lib. de prov. c.* 5. RB

the child's brains⁷ and kills him. Let us suppose that the mind of the child is incapable of any will in this case; though the body of the child goes down "willingly"⁸ and the weight of that body, and not any direct blow of my hand (since perhaps I am far away) makes the child die, I ask you, is the child the real cause of death, or is it me? Let any reasonable person judge, if God's part in the sins of men is as great as seems clear by the statements quoted above, does not this make him not only the author of sin, but more unjust than the most unjust person?

§ iii. Second, this doctrine is insulting to God, because it says that he delights in the death of sinners, and even wants many to die in their sins, which is contrary to these scriptures: Ezekiel 33:11; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9. If, as these men affirm, he created humankind only to show his justice and power through them, and if for this purpose he has not only withheld from them the means of doing good, but also predestined that they would fall into evil,⁹ and forces them into great sins, certainly he must delight in their death, and will them to die, because he neither does, nor can do, anything contrary to his own will.¹⁰

§ iv. Third, this doctrine is very insulting to Christ our mediator, and to the efficacy and excellence of his Gospel, because it makes his mediation ineffective if it was decreed

⁷ The Latin is even more violent: *violentia lapsus in saxum prolabantis viscera & cerebra effunduntur*, "by the violence of this crash and fall on the rock the intestines and brains are splashed out."

⁸ Barclay uses the word "willingly" for the motion of the child's body, though in fact the body is no more capable of willing to fall than is the mind of a little child; the only agent is the mature man who throws the child down.

⁹ Latin: *& malum, ut pereat, praeordinaverit*, "and predestined them to evil, so that they would die."

¹⁰ Latin: *cum invitus Deus nihis agat*, because God doesn't do anything involuntary.

in advance that it should be useless for the majority of humankind, as if he had not by his sufferings thoroughly broken down the middle wall, nor removed the wrath of God, nor purchased the love of God towards all humankind.¹¹ It is useless to say that the death of Christ was effectual enough to have saved all humankind, if in fact its power is not extended far enough as to give all humankind a possibility of salvation.

Fourth, it makes preaching the Gospel mockery and delusion, if many of those to whom it is preached are excluded from its benefits by an irrevocable decree. It makes the preaching of faith and repentance wholly useless, as well as the whole Gospel message with its promises and threats, since all of that refers to a prior decree, and to a means which has been previously ordained.* Since that decree cannot fail, man doesn't need to do anything but wait for that irresistible snatch,¹² which will come if he is in the decree of election, although it may be at the last hour of his life. And he will never attain it, if he belongs to the decree of reprobation, no matter how patiently and diligently he waits.

Fifth, regarding the coming of Christ and his propitiatory sacrifice, which the Scripture affirms was the fruit of God's love to the world and done for the sins and salvation of all men; this doctrine makes the coming of Christ a testimony of God's wrath against the world, and one of the greatest judgments, and severest acts of God's indignation towards humankind. It says that Christ's coming was ordained to save only a few, and to harden the great majority of people

¹¹ This phrase is different in Latin: *nec iram Dei leniisset ad omnes homines*, "nor soothed the wrath of God towards all men."

¹² Later editors substituted the word "junction," a change which seems to us to take away the vividness and specificity of Barclay's word.

and augment their condemnation, because they don't truly believe in it; and the cause of that unbelief (as the [so-called] divines¹³ assert above) is the hidden counsel of God. Certainly the coming of Christ was never a testimony of God's love for them, but rather of his implacable wrath. If the phrase "the world" means the far greater number of those who live in it, God never loved the world according to this doctrine, but rather hated it greatly in sending his Son to be crucified in it.

§ v. Sixth, this doctrine is highly insulting to humankind, because it says they are in a far worse condition than the devils in hell. For at some time in the past, the devils had the ability to remain firm, and so they suffer only for their own guilt. But according to those men, many million people¹⁴ are tormented forever for Adam's sin, which they never knew about, which they were never accessory to. It makes them worse than the beasts of the field, since the master doesn't require them to do more than they are able, and if they are killed, death is the end of sorrow for them, whereas man is eternally tormented for not doing what he was never able to do.

This doctrine puts humankind in a far worse position than Pharaoh put the Israelites; though he withheld straw from them, yet by much trouble and hard work they could have gotten it:¹⁵ but these theologians say that God has withheld all means of salvation from humankind, so that they cannot attain it in any way. They put humanity in the condition which the poets imagine about Tantalus, who was suffering greatly from thirst, and standing in water up to his

¹³ In the seventeenth century, a "divine" was a theologian. Barclay is making a pun here. The brackets are in Barclay's original.

¹⁴ The Latin adds: *quibus nunquam fuit salutis oportunitatis*, "who never had an opportunity of salvation."

¹⁵ Exodus 5:7.

chin, but could never reach it with his tongue. He was tormented by hunger, and had fruits hanging near his lips in such a way that he could never reach them with his teeth. These things were not placed so near him to nourish him, but rather to torment him.

That is what these theologians do: they say that the blows of conscience and the outward creation of the works of Providence are sufficient to convince the heathens of their sin, to condemn and judge them, but these things are not enough to help them to salvation. They say that the preaching of the Gospel, the offer of salvation by Christ, the use of the sacraments, of prayer and good works, are sufficient to condemn those people within the church whom they consider reprobates. According to these theologians, these things are only useful to inform people and offer an appearance of faith and a vain hope. Because of a secret powerlessness which the reprobates had from infancy, all these good things are completely without effect to bring them even one step toward salvation and only serve to make their condemnation greater and make their torments more violent and intolerable.

I have now briefly refuted this false doctrine which stood in my way. Those that wish can see it refuted learnedly and piously by many others. I now come to the core of our Fifth Thesis: “God, who does not delight in the death of the sinner, but wants all to live and be saved, has so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that *whoever* believes in Him should be saved.” This is affirmed again in the Sixth Thesis in these words: “Christ tasted death for every man, of all kinds.”

Source: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition V & VI § i-v (Glenside PA: Quaker

Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 98-104; and Roberti Barclaii,
Teologiae verè Christianae apologia, facsimile (Amsterdam:
Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 64-69.