



## MEMORANDUM

TO: Jason Bradfield, Interim President of Whitefield Theological Seminary

Rev. Todd Ruddell, Reformed Presbyterian Church

FROM: Roderick O. Ford, Fellow of Whitefield Theological Seminary

RE: **On Predestination-** Calvinism, Augustinianism, and Wesleyan-Arminianism

DATE: 17 March 2023

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Dear Rev. Bradfield and Rev. Ruddell:

This is my definitive update on my evolving views on Calvinism and Predestination.

I feel that I owe to Whitefield Theological Seminary an explanation of my current personal and theological views of “Calvinism,” as well as an apology if my previous statements have created confusion with respect to what I actually believe about Calvinism.

Since the year 2020, I have been grappling with the doctrine of Predestination, and I informed Dr. Ken Talbot that I had been having problems—within the depths of my Christian conscience—with being labeled a “Calvinist” because that doctrine of Predestination seemed harsh.

I informed Dr. Talbot that I had been following along with St. Augustine's theology, and I could not honestly see how Augustine's definition of Predestination in *The City of God* squared with Calvin's definition of Predestination. In *The City of God*, Augustine says the following:

This race we have **distributed into two parts, the one consisting of those who live according to man, the other of those who live according to God.** And these **we also mystically call the two cities**, or the two communities of men, of which **the one is predestined to reign eternally with God, and the other to suffer eternal punishment with the devil.** This, however, is their end, and of it we are to speak afterwards.... Of these two first parents of the human race, then, Cain was the first-born, and he belonged to the city of men; after him was born Abel, who belonged to the city of God. For as in the individual the truth of the apostle's statement is discerned, 'that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual,' [1 Corinthians 25:46.] whence it comes to pass that each man, being derived from a condemned stock, is first of all born of Adam evil and carnal, and becomes good and spiritual only afterwards, when he is grafted into Christ by regeneration: so was it in the human race as a whole. When these two cities began to run their course by a series of deaths and births, the citizen of this world was the first-born, and after him the stranger in this world, the citizen of the city of God, predestinated by grace, elected by grace, by grace a stranger below, and by grace a citizen above. By grace—for so far as regards himself he is sprung from the same mass, all of which is condemned in its origin; but God, like a potter (or this comparison is introduced by the apostle judiciously, and not without thought), of the same lump made one vessel to honour, another to dishonour. But first the vessel to dishonour was made, and after it another to honour. [Romans 9:21] For in each individual, as I have already said, **there is first of all that which is reprobate, that from which we must begin, but in which we need not necessarily remain; afterwards is that which is well-approved, to which we may abide.** Not, indeed, that every wicked man shall be good, but that no one will be good who was not first of all wicked; but the sooner any one becomes a good man, the more speedily does he receive this title, and abolish the old name in the new. Accordingly, it is recorded of Cain that he built a city, but Abel, being a sojourner, built none. For the city of the saints is above, although

here below it begets citizens, in whom it sojourns till the time of its reign arrives, when it shall gather together all in the day of the resurrection; and then shall the promised kingdom be given to them, in which they shall reign with their Prince, the King of the ages, time without end. <sup>1</sup>

As I was concerned with Augustine's usage of the words "**need not necessarily**" remain [in the state of reprobation]," I informed Dr. Talbot that I did not see how Augustine's theology on Predestination was the same as Calvin's theology on Predestination. See, e.g., the historian T.H.L. Parker's description of Calvin's doctrine as follows:

Calvin's doctrine of predestination first appeared in its developed form in the 1539 *Institutio*, although it had been present as a constant presupposition in the first edition. It was not original and J.B. Mozley can even say: 'I see no substantial difference between the Augustinian and Thomist, and the Calvinist doctrines of predestination.... Those who suppose that St. Augustine differs from Calvin in his doctrine of predestination, do not really know the doctrine which St. Augustine held on the subject. Mozley is right in general; and Calvin himself supposed his doctrine to differ from Augustine's not at all....

Hence Calvin's definition of predestination runs:

We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or death.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 478-479.

<sup>2</sup> T.H.L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography*, pp. 141-142.

Dr. Talbot informed me that Augustine's *The City of God* was written before his more mature theology on Predestination which was adopted in later writings.

I checked to see if Augustine had any subsequent writings on the subject matter of Predestination, after *The City of God* (426 A.D.) and *On Grace and Free Will* (426 or 427 A.D.).

I researched the matter and discovered that Augustine has one definitive writing on the subject of Predestination, to wit: *On the Predestination of the Saints* (428-429, A.D.). Furthermore, I note Chapter 35 of that writing which states, in no uncertain terms, a definition of Predestination, citing Ephesians 1:3-14, that is more closely aligned with that of Calvin's, to wit:

Chapter 35 [XVIII.]— Election is for the Purpose of Holiness.

Who can hear the apostle saying, Blessed be the God and Father of [our Lord Jesus Christ](#), who has blessed us in all spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ; as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be [holy](#) and without spot in His sight; in [love predestinating](#) us to the adoption of children by [Jesus Christ](#) to Himself according to the good pleasure of His [will](#), wherein He has shown us favour in His beloved Son; in whom we have redemption through His blood, the remission of [sins](#) according to the riches of His [grace](#), which has abounded to us in all wisdom and [prudence](#); that He might show to us the [mystery](#) of His [will](#) according to His good pleasure, which He has purposed in Himself, in the dispensation of the fullness of times, to restore all things in [Christ](#), which are in heaven, and in the earth, in Him: in whom also we have obtained a share, being [predestinated](#) according to the purpose; who works all things according to the counsel of His [will](#), that we should be to the praise of his [glory](#); — who, I say, can hear these words with attention and intelligence, and can venture to have any [doubt](#) concerning a [truth](#) so clear as this which we are defending? **God chose Christ's members in Him before the foundation of the world; and how should He choose those who as yet did not exist, except by [predestinating](#) them? Therefore He chose us by [predestinating](#) us.** Would he choose the [unholy](#) and the unclean? Now if the question be proposed, whether He would choose such, or rather the [holy](#) and unstained, who can ask

which of these he may answer, and not give his opinion at once in favour of the [holy](#) and pure?

Why God chose this theological system—to predestinate souls for eternal salvation even before they are born in the flesh—is beyond my poor power to question. Nor shall I venture to do so.

Today, I am satisfied that the gift of Faith (and Eternal Salvation) is God’s to give—not that of the clergy, the institutional church, or any other theological or man-made system. The theological system of Augustinian-Calvinism thus refutes the Roman Catholic system that assumes “justification by works as well a faith.”

On the other hand, the Arminian system, as described by John Wesley and the Methodists, seems to suggest only that the work of preaching the Gospel and the work of charity must be directed towards all mankind—not being judgmental, not hesitating to treat all mankind with dignity through prejudgments that some of them have been damned to reprobation by an “eternal decree” from God. As I understand Wesley and other Arminians, practical Christian ministry must naturally “assume” that every man and every woman should hear the Gospel since they *might be among* the Elect—i.e., as Augustine says, “**they shall all be teachable of God.**” I note that even Augustine of Hippo seemingly adopted this position in *On the Predestination of the Saints* (428-429, A.D.), Chapter 14, where he writes:

And yet in *a certain sense* **the Father teaches all men to come to His Son.** For it was not in vain that it was written in the prophets, And **they shall all be teachable of God.** John 6:45 And when He too had premised this testimony, He added, **Every man, therefore, who has heard of the Father, and has learned, comes to me.** As, therefore, we speak justly when we say concerning any teacher of literature who is alone in a city, He teaches literature here to everybody — not that all men learn, but that there is none who learns literature there who does not learn from him — **so we justly say, God teaches all men to come to Christ, not because all come, but because none comes in any other way.** And

why He does not teach all men the apostle explained, as far as he judged that it was to be explained, because, willing to show His wrath, and to exhibit His power, He endured with much patience the vessels of wrath which were perfected for destruction; and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy which He has prepared for glory. Romans 9:22 Hence it is that the word of the cross is foolishness to them that perish; but **unto them that are saved** it is the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:18 **God teaches all such to come to Christ**, for He wills **all such to be saved**, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. And if **He had willed to teach even those to whom the word of the cross is foolishness to come to Christ, beyond all doubt these also would have come.** For He neither deceives nor is deceived when He says, Everyone that has heard of the Father, and has learned, comes to me. Away, then, with the thought that any one comes not, who has heard of the Father and has learned.

Here we see that Augustine agrees with Calvin, where he says “if He had willed to teach those to whom the word of the cross is foolishness... beyond all doubt these also would have come.” This plainly supports the doctrine “total depravity,” “irresistible grace,” “limited atonement,” “perseverance of the saints,” and “unconditional election.”

But, at the same time, Augustine also says, “in a certain sense the Father teaches *all men* to come to Christ” and “they *all* shall be teachable.” And so, “all” people are thus “teachable.” Here, Augustine’s usage of the words “all” and “teachable” supports the Wesleyan-Arminian viewpoint on “universal atonement,” which supports the preaching and teaching of *all* persons. But Augustine also acknowledges what the Wesleyan-Arminians call the “condition,” namely, that a person must “come to Christ.” Here, again, Augustine uses the words, “— **so we justly say, God teaches all men to come to Christ, not because all come, but because none comes in any other way.**” Thus, the Wesleyan-Arminians describe this process—i.e., preaching the Gospel to all under their theory of “universal atonement”—where a person “comes to Christ” as the “conditional election.” However, the Calvinist call this same exact same process as “irresistible grace.”

**PREACHING AND  
THE RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL/ TO COME TO CHRIST**

**Calvinism**  
“Irresistible Grace”

**Arminianism**  
“Conditional Election”

- A person hears the Gospel and “Responds” by “Coming to Christ”
- In Calvinism, this phenomenon is called “irresistible grace”
- In Wesleyan-Arminian, this same phenomenon is called “conditional election”
- Nevertheless, both the Calvinists and the Wesleyan-Arminians are referring to the exact same Pool or Group of Persons, who we may rightfully call the “Saints”

Now why does Augustine acknowledge that “all” persons are “teachable,” unless he meant to also state that every person is fully capable of understanding the difference between good and evil as well as the promise of salvation. Nevertheless, “some” persons do not respond to the Gospel and do not come to Christ. Here, the Calvinists refer to the failure to respond or come to Christ as the “eternal decree of reprobation.” However, the Wesleyan-Arminians refer to this failure to respond or come to Christ as the resistance to grace or as “resistible grace” – thus referring to the plain fact that “all” are “teachable” but that some refuse to be taught, and thus “resist” this grace.

Neither Augustine or Calvinism acknowledge that some persons “resist” the Gospel or that some persons resist coming to Christ. But clearly, both Augustine and Calvinism acknowledge that, in essence, this is precisely what nonbelievers do: they resist the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and they live unholy and unrighteous lives. But it is clear to me that both the Augustinian-Calvinists and the Wesleyan-Arminians are referring to the exact same spiritual phenomenon.

## RESISTANCE TO THE GOSPELS/ REFUSAL TO COME TO CHRIST

<b>Calvinism</b> “Reprobation by God’s Eternal Decree”	<b>Arminianism</b> “Resistible Grace”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A person rejects the Gospel and “Responds” by “Refusing to Come to Christ”</li><li>• Under both Augustinianism and Calvinism, this phenomenon is called “eternal reprobation by God’s eternal decree”</li><li>• Under the Wesleyan-Arminian system, this same phenomenon is called “resistible grace”</li><li>• Nevertheless, both the Calvinists and the Wesleyan-Arminians are referring to the exact same Pool or Group of Persons, who we may rightfully call the “Reprobates”</li></ul>	

At this juncture, in a sense, Augustine of Hippo is saying in *On the Predestination of the Saints* that the individual hearer of the Gospel must respond to the Gospel (i.e., **to learn to Come to Christ**). This is the “condition” upon which the Wesleyan-Arminian hinges. On the other hand, the Calvinists say that this is not a “condition” but is in fact God’s eternal decree, who which Augustine of Hippo also agrees, stating, “And if **He had willed to teach even those to whom the word of the cross is foolishness to come to Christ, beyond all doubt these also would have come.**”



<b>“Calvinism and Arminianism”<sup>3</sup></b>	
<b>Orthodox Calvinist Theology— TULIP</b>	<b>Arminian Theology—ACURA</b>
1. Total depravity	1. All are sinful (“Total depravity”)
2. Unconditional election	2. Conditional election
3. Limited atonement	3. Unlimited atonement
4. Irresistible grace	4. Resistible grace
5. Perseverance of the saints	5. Assurance of salvation

In conclusion, and most significantly, both Calvinists and Wesleyan-Arminians should at least acknowledge that, the “Perseverance of the Saints” (i.e., Calvinism) and the “Assurance of Salvation” (Arminianism”) mean the same thing and describe the same pool or class of persons: i.e., the Saints, who God has both foreknown and predestinated.

And so, my “Reformed Methodist Theology” holds that Calvinism, Augustinianism, and Wesleyan-Arminianism need not contradict each other, especially since the ultimate Last Judgment of God shall judge the secrets of men by the Lord Christ Jesus. Romans 2:11-16.

### **CONCLUSION**

Given my understanding, I believe that it would not be improper for me to utilize the titles of “Calvinist” or “Wesleyan” or “Augustinian,” because I believe that these doctrines essentially refer to the same Christian theology and doctrine.

I apologize for any confusion from my previous assertions stating, “I am not a Calvinist.” What I intend to say is that, “As an Augustinian theologian, I see no real dispute between Calvinism and Wesleyan-Arminianism, because they are both referring to the same soteriological system.

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<sup>3</sup> Don Thoresen, *Calvin vs. Wesley: Bringing Belief in Line with Practice* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), p. 139.

When Dr. Talbot and I spoke, I explained to him my “Augustinian” theology and philosophy, and he concurred, stating that this *sufficiently* expressed the Calvinist point of view.

Yours Faithfully,

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