# God's Knowledge within the Decree: Development by Departure, and the Muller Question

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**Abstract**

The quarrel between advocates of libertarian freedom of the will and compatibilists is a quarrel over the wrong thing. Each side fixes its eyes on the decree and neither asks what the decree consists of, so that one defends, and the other attacks, a Christianized fatalism that leaves the creature no real freedom and threatens to make God guilty of the evil creatures do. I argue that the decree consists of God's idea of the created order, his will to actualize it, and his knowledge of it, and that the idea, an order in which finite creatures freely worship and love a God whose wisdom, justice, mercy, and power are displayed in his dealings with them, gives guidance to the rest. God's knowledge of what free creatures would do is therefore within the decree, with no middle knowledge prior to it. Seven principles carry the argument, from the distinction of idea from will to the covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son. The seventh is that the creature's freedom is a sovereignly created necessity, because that covenant and every covenant with man require real worshipers, and real worshipers must be free. I put the argument to Richard Muller's three questions, taking Calvin's order, the modification of Gomarus and Walaeus, and Gisbertus Voetius, whose second moment of God's knowledge lies within the decree and after an act of the will. The result is development by departure, without disruption, by rational theological development and not by simple exegesis.

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## 1. The question and the test

Richard Muller's question is the test this paper has to pass, and it is three questions, not one. I give each in his own words.

1) The first is about continuity: is there continuity or discontinuity between the theology of the master, Calvin in this case, and the doctrine of his successors? Muller writes: "In the analyses of Calvin and 'Calvinism' especially there has been great interest in the question of continuity or discontinuity between the theology of the master and the doctrine of the successors."[1]

2) The second is about disruption: did the successors distort Calvin's system, or did they follow his lead? Muller asks: "Did later writers disrupt the balance of Calvin's thought and produce a distortion of the system developed by the great Reformer of Geneva, or did they simply follow Calvin's lead as they defended and solidified the system of Reformed or Calvinist doctrine?"[2]

3) The third is about system: "Specifically, did these epigoni construct a system centered upon and controlled by the doctrine of predestination to the detriment of the other focal points of early Reformed thought?"[3]

Muller presses the third question further at the opening of his second chapter, against an assumption he means to dislodge. "Underlying much of the scholarship in which an attempt is made to distinguish between the theology of Calvin and that of his successors is the assumption that Calvin's own thinking, if it rests upon any principle, rests on a scriptural principle, whereas that of his successors, in its search for consistency, rests upon certain specific doctrinal principles as, for example, the so-called 'central dogma' of predestination." And then: "The question that needs to be asked is not whether Calvin is a scriptural theologian and the Reformed scholastics unscriptural rationalists, but whether the doctrinal motifs drawn by Calvin from scripture are echoed, elaborated, developed, or neglected and set aside by the systems of the 'orthodox' or 'scholastic' thinkers of subsequent generations."[4] The part of that distinction my argument needs is small: any development by the successors, on the subject before me, was a rational, theological development and not simple exegesis of Scripture.

So the test is this. I take one point of doctrine, how God's knowledge of what free creatures would do stands to his decree, and I put Muller's three questions to it. The subject is narrow on purpose. It is where the quarrel over determinism and freedom is fought, and it is where Calvin's successors parted from one another over what God knows and when. I set Calvin's order first, then the modification of Gomarus and Walaeus, then Voetius, whose text sets out three moments, and at the end I put the three questions to that evidence.

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[1] Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1986; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), Introduction, 1.

[2] Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, Introduction, 1.

[3] Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, Introduction, 1.

[4] Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, chap. 2, 17.

I write this for Samuel, my grandson, who will ponder the question it answers, and I want him to have a better and clearer explanation than the age-old discussion has given. The ancient Greek philosophers who stood by fatalism, and defended it vehemently as the only defensible position, also left work explaining and making a place for the freedom of the creature's will within certain parameters. The cylinder pushed and rolling in a certain direction was the illustration of Chrysippus, offered to solve the dilemma between the determinism of fatalism and the freedom creatures perceive in themselves. Christian philosophers and theologians argue the same dilemma: how can the creature be free in a meaningful sense, in a desert sense, if the creature's actions have been ultimately determined?

My answer to that question is also an answer to Muller's three, in the sense that certain among the Reformed Orthodox (RO) took a nuanced view of the divine decree, one that Calvin did not take, but may have if he had considered it. It was a different view from what I would call the majority position among Calvin's followers in the RO camp, and it is best described as different in the sense of legitimate development. I bring that out in the historical analysis of these men. My position is biblical, I hope, and that is my greater motivation, so that if I depart from Calvin I am not bothered. I am firmly in the RO camp on most of my positions, but only because I believe the position of historic Calvinism is the most biblical. There are areas of disagreement, and as I have researched the positions of Calvin's successors I have found numerous nuances, like Bullinger's treatment, or lack of it, of reprobation, and, here, the effect God's knowledge has on his decree.

**2. The wrong argument**

The quarrel between the advocates of libertarian freedom of the will (LFW) and the compatibilists does not end, and the reason it does not end is that both sides are arguing over the wrong thing. Both argue over the decree. The compatibilists defend a version of fatalism and call it divine determinism, and the advocates of LFW attack a version of fatalism and call it divine determinism. The compatibilist arguments are good arguments for how free will can work within fatalism, and the arguments for LFW are good arguments for why fatalism is not right. Neither side distinguishes fatalism from divine determinism in anything other than words, and neither does it in argument. What stands between them is a Christianized fatalism that gives the creature no real freedom and threatens to make God guilty of the evil creatures do.

Most advocates of LFW have a problem with determinism and freedom as they bear on causality and causal chains, and the compatibilists have the same problem in their own explanations and defenses. Both conceive of causality as laws for moving and functioning. Ideas are altogether different. I mean God's ideas of creation and creatures, ideas that are necessary to his knowledge and wisdom because they (and we) are his ideas.

Fatalism is blind. Nothing in it intended anything, and a creature in it is a puppet whatever name the system gives him, moved by causes that no one conceived. The God of Scripture is a perfect, personal being who has an idea of what he is making, and who cannot think thoughts or have

ideas contrary to his nature. A debate that carries on as though the decree were a chain of causes, and asks only whether the chain is strong enough to hold the creature or loose enough to let him go, has left that God out. There is a better way than either camp offers, and it begins with the thing neither camp examines.

***Libertarian freedom of the will (LFW)***

I take the case for LFW at its best, in the definitions of Tim Stratton, a Molinist whose definition of LFW I do not balk at. I follow him from his online articles and his book. My summary of his definition is this: the ability to choose or think otherwise. An agent possesses the ability or power to choose or think genuinely between a range of options, or to refrain, consistent with his nature, where the ultimate outcome is not causally determined by antecedent factors outside the agent. The agent is the primary, initiating cause of his choices or thoughts, and is not causally determined by external forces, whether natural laws, physical prior states, or divine determinism. I have no problem with that definition if "antecedent factors outside the agent" and "divine determinism" are defined and clarified as not referring to the creator's activity in creating or sustaining his creation, created for his purposes.

Stratton's own words, where I quote them, are from *Human Freedom, Divine Knowledge, and Mere Molinism*, 2nd edition (Wipf & Stock, 2026). He defines determinism this way: "A specific event is determined if antecedent conditions are sufficient to necessitate said event."[5]

That is an insufficient definition, because all the conditions for creation and for sustaining creation are antecedent conditions sufficient to necessitate every event that ever takes place. In that sense, the sense in which we as creatures were not consulted about being created, and have not been consulted about God's maintaining creation after the fall, we wind up with some form of necessity imposed on us. A definition of determinism that takes in the creator's act of creating and sustaining has already condemned every creature, the Molinist as much as the compatibilist, and a definition that no creature can escape cannot mark off one view from another.

When he gets to libertarian freedom, Stratton defines it so: "If a person's choice, action, evaluation, or judgment is neither random nor determined by something or someone else, then this person possesses libertarian freedom." He goes on: "It can also be expressed this way: Libertarian freedom is the ability to choose or act such that antecedent conditions are insufficient to causally determine or necessitate one's choice or action."

And further: "However, if one does possess opportunities to choose among alternative possibilities in the actual world, then it follows that one is not causally determined by something or someone else. With biblical data in mind, we can also understand libertarian freedom in this manner: the opportunity to exercise an ability to choose between at least two options, where the

[5] Timothy A. Stratton, *Human Freedom, Divine Knowledge, and Mere Molinism: A Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Philosophical Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2026), 2.

prior conditions are insufficient to causally determine or necessitate the agent's choice." And then, "That's a fancy way of saying the ability to do otherwise."[6]

***Limited Ultimate Freedom (LUF)***

Limited Ultimate Freedom, LUF, is what I intend, as compared with libertarian freedom of the will, LFW. I define LUF as freedom of ambition, desire, thought, action, and choice without coercion, specifically to pursue, want, think, act, or choose otherwise in the circumstances. It is the freedom each creature has over his own choices and decisions and actions within the created order, that is, freedom without coercion. Humanity is reasonably free within its appointed realm. In essence, God has not mandated that I sin or do anything inconsistent with my nature, desire, impulse, will, or ambition. On some fundamental level, everything is determined by virtue of having God as creator and sustainer, but that creation, the result of his decree to create, did not require me to sin or choose wrong or act in error. I view this freedom as part of both diachronic and synchronic contingency and necessity of the consequence, not necessity of the consequent, a point I state among the principles below.

God's idea of creation was an idea of what would make the most of his own impressiveness in displaying grace, justice, love, mercy, and wisdom, while also actualizing creatures who could meaningfully receive and respond to this revelation of his impressiveness in genuine love and worship and fascination, such that the creatures could peacefully revel in the joyous rapture of contemplating and worshiping him as he is. That requires LUF.

Ultimate freedom of the type that God has is impossible for anyone but God. A limited freedom, what you might even call a limited, ultimate freedom, hence the LUF I am using here, is what creatures have because we are bound to the temporal order. The issue of circumstances creates a limitation to that freedom.

Neither Stratton's definition of determinism nor his definition of libertarian freedom has a place for the one thing that explains how a creature can be free under a sovereign God. That thing is the idea.

**3. What the decree contains**

Both camps would say that the decree involves knowledge and will. It involves more than that. It involves the idea of the scenario that God wants, a scenario that will maximally declare his impressiveness in wisdom and graciousness and justice and mercy and power, and in the argument over the decree both camps leave the idea out. They take the decree to be, in effect, the will of God, and then they argue over what the will determines. But the decree contains more than the will and the choice in the willing of God. It includes what Herman Bavinck referred to as the idea of a thing, and so God's idea of creation, and his idea of the creature, the creature with a free will bearing the weight of that free will, is included in the decree.

[6] Stratton, *Human Freedom*, 6, for all four quotations in this passage.

The difference between an idea and a law is what matters here, and no one has said it better, perhaps, than Herman Bavinck in *Christian Worldview*:[7]

> Led by this, Christian philosophy could also appropriate the Platonic-Aristotelian doctrine of ideas, the forms, in a modified sense. Indeed, we cannot arrive at the account of things without such forms. But these forms are not to be handled as, in the Kantian sense, categories that we apply to the matter of perception by our spiritual industry. They are, rather, neither something subjective alone nor something passive that is carried into the material of our perception. But they are to be considered objective ideas ….
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> The word must be joined by the deed, generation must be joined by creation, wisdom must be joined by God's decree, in order to grant a real existence to what existed eternally in the divine consciousness as an idea. … According to Scripture, ideas have no objective, metaphysical existence outside God but rather exist only in his divine being. …
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> Newton believed the "ideas" [*formae*] of things could be exchanged for laws. But this is not so, and the aforementioned return to the "substantial forms" [*formae substantiales*] now shines sufficient light on this. Ideas and laws are different. Ideas express created things' manners of being, and laws, their manners of moving and functioning. Created things function differently, to the degree that they are different. Whoever loses sight of this distinction runs the risk of hypostatizing the laws as Plato did the ideas and of allowing them to hover above the things, like demonic powers. Because created things differ from each other in idea and character, however, they move and function according to different laws.

The distinction Bavinck makes in *Christian Worldview* about the idea is a profound and important distinction. I am not saying that Bavinck says what I say. Reading Bavinck led me to my thought, which is that the idea of the created order is an identifiable part of God's knowledge and of the decree, and that neither camp has given it its place.

To say that the idea cannot be distinguished from the rest of the decree, or cannot be separated from God's knowledge or God's will, is, I think, a false statement. To say that God cannot have an idea that he actualizes is another false statement. My point is that God's idea of the world and the creatures he wanted to create involved his knowledge and involved his will. It is just like when I have an idea that I am going to make myself a sandwich: I know that I can make the sandwich, it is within my power, I know what kind of sandwich I want, and I go and make the type of sandwich that I want to eat. I have an idea of the sandwich that I desire that is separate from the knowledge of the sandwich and separate from the choice to make the sandwich.

The two camps present a dilemma: either the decree determines and the creature is not free in a desert sense, or the creature is free and the decree must wait on what he does. The dilemma holds

[7] Herman Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, trans. and ed. N. Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton, and Cory C. Brock (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 77–91. The block quotation draws on pp. 77, 79, and 89–90. Omissions are marked by ellipses, and the note number after "demonic powers" is omitted.

only if the decree is the will alone. If the decree also contains the idea, God neither waits on the creature nor coerces him. He conceives an order in which creatures act without coercion, wills it, and knows it. The creature's act is then neither a surprise to the decree nor forced by it. It is part of what was conceived.

That is the distinction this paper makes. It is not made in modern compatibilist arguments, and it was not made in the Reformed orthodox positions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or even later. Some of those writers speak of the idea in connection with the decree, as I show below, but I do not find that any of them takes it as the part of the decree that gives guidance to the rest. It is not argued against in the positions of the libertarian-freedom-of-the-will advocates either, because nobody thinks of this concept, the idea of God's creation and created order and creatures in the mind of God, as being the subject of the argument, when it should be.

I do not reject the compatibilist arguments. They are sound, and they are sufficient on their own ground. My argument is that the idea of God was to create a world where creatures could have LUF, in a sense that they were not bound by the decree to love God without their own choice, or by the decree in the sense that libertarian freedom of the will advocates have a problem with. To say that God could not do such is to limit his power. It is also to limit his prerogative. I am saying our focus and emphasis and argument has been on and over the wrong thing. We need to go back and look at the reality of who God is.

### *Two neighbors on the question: Bavinck and Vos*

Two other Reformed writers stand near this question, and I set them beside my position without making them say more than they say. Herman Bavinck takes up middle knowledge directly in the second volume of his *Reformed Dogmatics*. He reports that the Jesuits, following the semi-Pelagian line, introduced between God's necessary and free knowledge a knowledge of contingent events logically antecedent to his decrees, in order to square omniscience with human freedom, and he rejects it. His reason is that the decrees, and not the world, are the medium in which God knows: "Not the world but the decrees are the medium from which God knows all things."[8] The doctrine, he adds, makes contingent events free and contingent also in relation to God. He leaves no third region. What is merely possible and will never be realized is present in God, he says, "only as an idea," and what will be realized is the content of his free knowledge: "There is no middle ground between the two, no 'middle' knowledge."[9]

Geerhardus Vos is an older neighbor on the same ground. In his *Reformed Dogmatics* he divides God's knowledge into necessary and free, and counts middle knowledge something that Jesuits, Lutherans, and Remonstrants introduce between the two. Against it he says that the opponents

[8] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 198–200, in the section "The Problem of Middle Knowledge"; the quotation is at 200. Bavinck's note numbers are omitted from all quotations from this work.

[9] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:202. The phrase "only as an idea" is from the sentence that begins "Between that which is merely possible and will never be realized."

seek to unite two things that logically exclude each other, since freedom of action in a Remonstrant sense and advance knowledge of that action are not compatible, and he grounds the certainty of free actions in the decree: "Not foreknowledge as such but the decree on which it rests makes free actions certain."[10] Where he sets out how the decree is formed, Vos has reason and will working together in it: "God's necessary knowledge provides the material for His decree," and God's free will, led by sufficient reasons, chooses from that material what will become real. On that act of will rests the free knowledge of God, which proposes the objects of the decree not as purely possible but as they will become real in time.[11] Asking how the decree stands to God's being, he keeps God's thinking and willing from being divorced from his being, and he speaks of the thing decreed as "the idea of it as decreed in God's mind," which does not coincide with God's being and can therefore be removed from it.[12]

Bavinck and Vos both reject middle knowledge, and both tie God's free knowledge to what he has decreed. On those two points they are neighbors to Voetius and to me. Both also speak of the idea in connection with the decree. But neither maps causation as I do, and neither distinguishes the concept of the idea within the creation and the decree to create as I do. When Vos says that necessary knowledge provides "the material" for the decree, he is speaking of what God's will has to choose from, not of a cause in my scheme. I distinguish idea as active intention and knowledge as a passive possession. My four-causes mapping in section 5 and my idea of creation are my own application, and I claim neither of them for Bavinck or Vos. They are neighbors, and I use them as a foil or as support, as the point requires.

### 4. The paradigm: seven principles

Seven principles carry the argument. I state them together here, so that every section after this one can be read as the defense of one or more of them.

***1. The idea is distinct from the will.*** God's idea of the created order is one thing, his will to bring it into being is another, and his knowledge of what he has conceived and willed is a third. God is simple, and these are not three parts of God. They are distinctions that we have to make in thought, and the Reformed tradition and the writers before it made them. The error of the debate I am answering is to treat the idea as if it dissolved into the will, so that the decree is only what God willed, and then to argue about the decree as though willing were all it contained. Section 8 argues this, and the subsection below gathers the writers who give me the vocabulary.

***2. Contingency is both diachronic and synchronic, and the necessity is of the consequence.*** When God decrees, what follows is the necessity of the consequence and not the necessity of the consequent. If God has decreed that I will do a thing, then it is necessary, as a consequence of the decree, that I will do it. The thing I do is not thereby necessary in itself. The creature's act stays

[10] Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Theology Proper*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012–2014), 1:18–20, questions 55–59; the quotation is at 1:20, question 59.

[11] Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:81, question 5, in the chapter "Of God's Decrees in General."

[12] Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:93, question 15(a) and (c).

contingent in both senses: at the moment of choosing, the creature could have chosen otherwise, which is contingency at the same time, and over the course of time what is the case could have been otherwise, which is contingency across time. That is why I can say that on some fundamental level everything is determined by having God as creator and sustainer, and also that creation did not require me to sin. LUF, as I defined it in section 2, is freedom of this kind.

***3. The atemporal and the temporal are two perspectives, and Scripture presents both.*** The tension between divine determination and creaturely freedom is a tension between two perspectives, and not between two contradictory propositions. From God's atemporal perspective, as the creator and sustainer who stands outside time, everything is determined, because he made it and holds it. From the creature's temporal perspective, man deliberates, is appealed to, chooses, and is held to account. The compatibilist argues from the first perspective and the advocate of LFW from the second, and each is right about what he sees and wrong to take it for the whole. The Bible presents both, side by side, and Isaiah prays out of both at once. I set out the frame in the Asymmetric Dual Frame paper I have written elsewhere, and the mapping of the four causes in section 5 is laid over it.

***4. The four causes are mapped over both perspectives together.*** Viewed from the atemporal perspective alone, God is all four causes. Viewed from the creature's perspective alone, the creature has all four levels. Mapped over both orders at once, the formal and the final cause are God's, and the material and the efficient cause are the creature's. Section 5 gives the mapping.

***5. The decree cannot be considered except through its parts.*** The decree is not a bare act of will. It consists of parts, and the parts are the idea God has of the created order, the will by which he decides, and the knowledge he has of what he has conceived and decided, together with the power and the authority by which he actualizes it. The knowledge and the idea are in the decree. A debate that takes up the decree as a whole, and argues for it or against it, is arguing about a thing it has not examined.

***6. God's purposes are essential to the idea of creation, and they center on the covenant of redemption.*** The idea of creation is the idea of an order that serves a purpose, and the purpose is the Father's gift of a people to the Son in the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*), made between the Father and the Son before creation. That covenant, and not the covenant of grace, is the purpose. The covenant of grace is how the purpose is carried out among men in time. Section 5 gives the evidence.

***7. The creature must be free, as God must be sovereign.*** The creature's freedom is not a concession God makes and not an opening the system leaves. It is a sovereignly created necessity, because the covenants between God and man require real parties and real worshipers. The creature has to be free in the same way that God has to be sovereign. Section 6 gives the argument.

***The idea in the older writers***

I do not say that the writers I now cite hold the distinction I propose. Reading them prompted my thought, and what their pages show is that the idea has long been treated as an identifiable part of what God knows, and that it has been joined, in one way or another, to his will. The use I make of it, as the part of the decree that gives guidance to the rest, is mine.

Augustine taught that the ideas are the principal forms or reasons of things, stable and unchangeable, themselves not formed and therefore eternal, and contained in the divine intelligence.[13] Aquinas, in the first part of the *Summa theologiae*, takes the point over and says that it is necessary to posit ideas in the divine mind, because the world was not made by chance but by God acting through his intellect, so that there must be in the divine mind a form after whose likeness the world was made. He says also that the idea in God is nothing other than the divine essence, and then draws the distinction I need: the word idea names the essence not as essence but as the likeness or reason of this or that thing. It is a distinction of reason in a simple God, and it is the kind of distinction I am making.

Aquinas does not leave the idea alone. God's knowledge is the cause of things insofar as it has will joined to it, because an intelligible form is a principle of action only when an inclination to the effect, which is the work of the will, is added to it. So it does not follow that whatever God knows is, or was, or will be, but only what he wills; and in the case of things that merely can be, it is not in his knowledge that they be, but that they can be. In the *Disputed Questions on Truth* he allows an idea even of what neither is, nor was, nor will be, because God has a virtually practical knowledge of what he is able to make, and he adds that such ideas are in a manner undetermined, because God is determined by the purpose of his will to produce only the things that are, will be, or have been. That is the order I am after: the idea, the power that can actualize it, and the will that determines what is actualized.

The Reformed orthodox put the same relation in their own terms. Stephen Charnock, in his discourses on the divine attributes, says that "The Knowledg of Vision follows the Act of Gods Will, and supposeth an Act of Gods Will before, Decreeing things to be." In the same place he says that "If we could suppose any first or second in Gods Decree, we might say God knew them as possible before he Decreed them; he knew them as future because he Decreed them."[14] And later in the same discourse: "Nothing can pass out of the rank of things meerly possible into the

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[13] Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 46, as quoted in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 15, a. 2, sed contra: "ideae sunt principales quaedam formae vel rationes rerum stabiles atque incommutabiles, quia ipsae formatae non sunt, ac per hoc aeternae ac semper eodem modo se habentes, quae divina intelligentia continentur." Latin text of the Leonine edition, Corpus Thomisticum, www.corpusthomisticum.org. Translations of Latin in this paper are mine. Latin quoted in these notes keeps its accents and ligatures as printed, with the long s written s and VV written W; abbreviations are expanded in square brackets, and any other oddity is kept as printed with [sic].

[14] Stephen Charnock, *Several Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (London: D. Newman, T. Cockerill, Benj. Griffin, T. Simmons, and Benj. Alsop, 1682), 276.

order of things future, before some Act of Gods Will hath passed for its futurition."[15] Charnock has the idea in the same frame. God, he says, "sees the nature of things in the Ideas of his own mind, and the events of things in the Decrees of his own Will,"[16] and he is "not only the efficient, but the exemplary cause," so that he knows what his power has wrought as a carpenter knows a house he has built, "by consulting the Model in his own mind, whereby he built it."[17] Turretin, in the place where he denies middle knowledge, says that the natural and the free knowledge differ in order, because "the natural precedes the decree, but the free follows it because it beholds things future; now they are not future except by the decree."[18] And in the locus on the decrees he says that they take on the notion of a double cause, efficient and exemplar: "Exemplar because the decree of God is (as it were) the idea of all things out of himself, after which as the archetype (archetypon) they, as the ectypes (ektypa), are expressed in time."[19] Turretin and Charnock both say that the decree is what brings a thing into futurity, and Voetius says the same in his third moment, as I show in section 7. Charnock's rule, that nothing passes from the merely possible to the future without an act of God's will, is a rule I take as mine.

Norton, in *The Orthodox Evangelist*, says that "the Divine Essence as willing the futurition of things, is that increated *Idea* of all things."[20] Barthold Holtzfus, in his Frankfurt (Oder) dissertation on creation of 1706, defines the exemplary cause as an internal form presented to the divine intellect, known by it as imitable by creatures, and not as intelligible things standing outside God to which God looked and by which he was helped in creating. Vos, in his article on omniscience in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, separates God's knowledge of things from his creating of them, and says that in God, as in man, the intellect and the will are distinct faculties. For him the source of God's knowledge of the world is God's knowledge of himself: "All that is actual or possible in it therefore is a reflection in created form of what exists uncreated in God." And he says that "the knowledge of God and the purposing will of God are distinct, and that not the former but the latter determines the certainty of the outcome."[21]

Bavinck's chapter on the divine counsel stands nearest of all. He says that God's counsel is "both the 'efficient' and 'exemplary' cause of all that is,"[22] and he calls election "the divine 'idea,' the blueprint of the temple that God builds in the course of the ages and of which he is the supreme

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[15] Charnock, *Several Discourses*, 292.

[16] Charnock, *Several Discourses*, 305.

[17] Charnock, *Several Discourses*, 283.

[18] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 213 (topic 3, question 13).

[19] Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:312 (topic 4, question 1, §7).

[20] John Norton, *The Orthodox Evangelist* (London: John Macock for Henry Cripps and Lodowick Lloyd, 1654), chap. 1, 16.

[21] Geerhardus Vos, "Omniscience," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr (Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1915), 4:2191–92.

[22] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:339, in chapter 7, "The Divine Counsel."

builder and architect."[23] A few pages later he says that the ideas included in the decrees are derived from the fullness of knowledge eternally present in God, so that possibility and actuality do not coincide, and a logical distinction has to be made between the content of God's self-knowledge and that of his knowledge of the world.

What I am arguing is that the debate between the camps has been conducted as if these parts were not in the decree. The idea is there, joined to the will, and the will is what makes the difference between what God knows as possible and what he knows as future. The decree is where that happens.

## 5. God's purposes and the four causes

I use a four-causal system, and even the words that Aristotle used, but I use them in a different way. The material cause and the efficient cause belong to the creature. Those are causation levels within the creaturely paradigm. The formal cause and the final cause are God's, and those levels of causation belong to the independent, self-existent, personal, all-powerful, perfect being that we refer to as God.

That is within the atemporal and temporal paradigm that we think of, with creation and with God outside of creation. Within creation there are also two levels. There is the three-dimensional-plus-time reality that we exist in, or are able to perceive as human beings. But there is also, outside of that or along with it, the multidimensional higher reality that we cannot perceive except mathematically; that is where the angels exist. God, then, atemporally, is outside of that, but he is also able to enter into that temporal creation.

### *Each side alone, and both orders together*

The causes can be taken from either side of the Creator and creature distinction, and the two views must not be confused. If you view the causation levels from the atemporal perspective alone, that is, from God's position alone, the Creator is all four causes: it is not just his purpose (final cause), but his potential and power (material cause), his idea (formal cause), and his decree or exertion of will (efficient cause). But what governs all of this ultimately is his final cause, the purpose for which he created everything. Viewed from the creature's perspective alone, the creature is or has all four levels of causation, too. Those are the limits of the Aristotelian definitions and levels. In a real sense God is the cause in all four senses in the atemporal realm, choosing, via his knowledge of how mutable creatures would handle the weight of freedom, to create and enter into a creation where they are both free in a desert sense and he is sovereign.

This is a difficult understanding, and I expect resistance to it. When the causes are mapped over both orders at once, the atemporal and the temporal, we are limited to using two for each. God is the formal cause: God is the pattern or blueprint that defines what creation is, specifying and determining and configuring what creation is. And God is the final cause: the ultimate end or

[23] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:341.

goal or reason for which all things exist and have been brought into being, that is, God's purposes. Man is the material cause: the raw material out of which he is made and continues to persist in the final product, specifically his nature as created in the image of God. And man is the efficient cause: his own primary agency, the impulse or force initiating change and action and decisions, and bringing into existence the temporal effects that are under his control. On the temporal level, then, man, creatures, humanity, are the material and efficient cause, and God is the formal and final cause. The limits of definition and mapping exist because the mapping is part of the temporal set of classification for causes in the temporal order.

So the four causes differ from the Aristotelian categories in that I view formal and final causation as ultimate and primary causes, and the causal arena of God, and I view material and efficient causation as secondary categories belonging to man. That definition fits within the temporal arena of the atemporal and temporal distinction we make in the Asymmetric Dual Frame paper I have written elsewhere. God's formal cause includes God's ideas of what he was going to create, that is, humanity with the weight of freedom, but necessarily in a mutable condition in that state of freedom. God's final cause is his purpose and purposes for which he created, that for which he providentially governs and even intervenes to accomplish by and in creation. In this schema the formal level of causation is subject to the final level, in the sense that God's idea of creation is subject to his purposes. God's purposes give rise to the idea by which God accomplishes those purposes.

***God's purposes***

These purposes are outlined and presented or referenced in passages like Ephesians 3:10; 1 Corinthians 1:24; Colossians 1:16; Romans 11:33–36; Isaiah 43:7; Genesis 1:26–27; 1 John 3:8; Luke 19:10; Ephesians 1:9–11; Exodus 9:16; John 4:23; and others. Essentially, these purposes can be drawn together to state that God's purposes are to declare or express, in a sensible way, his impressiveness in power, and wisdom, and justice and mercy. It is that final cause of God that his formal-cause conception, or ideas of creation, are subject to, and I see this as within the decree.

The purpose passages say that God's desire is to express and declare and share with free creatures his impressiveness. It is completely right for God to do that, because he is the chief and best of beings; there is none like him. Who other than himself would he want to express the impressiveness of? So it is not self-centered in the way that we would call ourselves if we were doing that, because he is the chief and best of beings. Through the decree he accomplishes this without violating what is necessary in the creature, namely libertarian freedom. I prefer LUF to LFW, but either can be used within the parameters I am laying out here, because creatures cannot be coerced in their response to God's impressiveness, else the response that God purposes is not genuine.

To make this point clear and defensible, the subject of the debate must be shifted from the decree itself to what the decree consists of, and then to the right aspect of the decree. I define the decree

as consisting of parts including God's power, will, knowledge, authority, and self-focused idea. That concept of the idea as a part of the decree, as separate from knowledge within the decree, should be the focal point of how determinism and freedom fit together. The argument always seems to focus on the decree itself, and then to move to knowledge and how that affects the decree, without ever noticing the distinctiveness of the idea as separate from knowledge: God's idea of a creation and created order wherein he could have a relationship with finite creatures who would freely worship and adore and revel in their relationship with him. If you are limited to the language of chronological moments in an attempt to understand the point, the idea of this creation comes before the design of the created order, or the knowledge of that design. The simple idea itself is one that God, by virtue of his authority and power, is capable of actualizing, and it is this focus that answers the questions and solves the supposed problems, because God's purpose is bound up in this idea.

To argue over whether God determined my sin or my error is to miss the fact that God purposed a creation that involved creatures with LFW/LUF enjoying the blessing of worshiping him. The fact that this purpose involved sin and error and evil does not stem from God's intention in the sense it is so often discussed on this subject. It stems from what is possible and impossible, namely the impossibility of any creature bearing the weight of complete freedom without ultimately needing deliverance by God. God then, by decree, causes this idea to be actualized. This is his purpose, and the final cause in the mapping I am suggesting.

***The covenant of redemption***

God's purposes are essential to understanding his idea of creation, and those purposes center on the covenant of redemption, the agreement of the Father and the Son before creation that the Son would redeem and the Father would give him a people. The later Reformed orthodox called it the *pactum salutis*, the pact of salvation. It is this covenant, and not the covenant of grace, that is the purpose. The covenant of grace is made in time, with sinners, through Christ. It presupposes the covenant of redemption and carries it out. The covenant of redemption has no creature as a party. It is the Father's gift to the Son, and it can therefore stand in God's purposes before creation and before the fall, as the end for which the idea of the created order is conceived.

The writers themselves show how the doctrine was held. Muller says that it had a "rather abbreviated pedigree" and gives its actual formulation to Cocceius "and several others of his generation."[24] Witsius said it was "unjustly traduced as a new and a late invention," though he found "few among the more ancient who have professedly handled this subject."[25] Oecolampadius, commenting on Isaiah 55:3 in 1525, says that God entered into a pact with his Son our Lord Jesus Christ, whom Isaiah here, as in many places, calls David, and whom God raised from the dead, and that as God did this for his Son, so with the greatest faithfulness he will

[24] Richard A. Muller, "Toward the Pactum Salutis: Locating the Origins of a Concept," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 65.

[25] Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. William Crookshank (Edinburgh: Thomas Turnbull, 1803), vol. 1, bk. 2, ch. 2, §16, p. 180.

be merciful to the believer.[26] Beza's Latin New Testament of 1567 renders the Lord's words in Luke 22:29 with the verb *paciscor*: I make a pact with you, as my Father made a pact with me, a kingdom.[27] Arminius, in his doctoral oration of 1603, says God was "willing to treat with our High Priest rather in the way of covenant, than by a display of his authority," and he sets out a demand, a promise, an acceptance and an oath. In his first oration he adds that faith in Christ is necessary not only by God's decree but also "on account of the promise made unto Christ by the Father, and according to the covenant which was ratified between both of them."[28]

In the Scottish and English writers the covenant is stated plainly. Dickson, in his speech before the Glasgow Assembly of 1638, speaks of "the Covenant of redemption betwixt God and Christ," and says that this covenant "was done and endit before ever there was a word of it in the world."[29] Bulkeley, in the second edition of 1651, grants that "there is a covenant passed betwixt the Father and the Son, concerning our salvation."[30] Bavinck, looking back over the Reformed, says that they "sought and found for these covenants in time a stable, eternal foundation in the counsel of God, and again regarded this counsel—conceived as aiming at the salvation of the human race—as a covenant between the three persons in the divine being itself (pactum salutis, counsel of peace, the covenant of redemption)."[31] He finds the covenant of redemption, briefly, already in Olevianus, Junius, and Gomarus, and developed at length by Cloppenburg and Cocceius, and he adds that the novelty of Cocceius lay in dividing all the material of dogmatics by the covenant and not in the covenant concept as such.[32]

The Leiden *Synopsis* and Walaeus use different language. A disputation under Polyander has Christ offer himself as sponsor "*ex decreto sacrosanctae Trinitatis*," from the decree of the most holy Trinity.[33] A disputation under Walaeus has Christ lay down his life "*ex propria voluntate, secundum mandatum Patris*," of his own will, according to the Father's command, and the same

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[26] Johannes Oecolampadius, *In Iesaiam prophetam Hypomnematon, hoc est, Commentariorum Ioannis Oecolampadii Libri VI* (Basel: Andreas Cratander, 1525), fol. 268r, on Isa. 55:3: "inijt pactum cum filio suo domino nostro Ihesu Christo, quem hic, sicut in multis locis, Dauid uocat, & resuscitauit eum à mortuis, ita & summa fide misericors tibi erit."

[27] Theodore Beza, trans., *Iesu Christi D[omini] N[ostri] Nouu[m] testamentu[m], Gr[aece] & Lat[ine]* ([Geneva]: Henricus Stephanus, 1567), on Luke 22:29: "Ego igitur paciscor vobis, prout pactus est mihi Pater meus, regnum".

[28] James Arminius, "Oration IV," in *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825), 351–52; "Oration I, On the Object of Theology," in *Works*, 1:279. Latin: *Iacobi Arminii … Opera theologica* (Lugduni Batavorum: apud Godefridum Basson, 1629), Oratio de sacerdotio Christi, 16–17, and Oratio de obiecto theologiae, 38.

[29] Alexander Peterkin, ed., *Records of the Kirk of Scotland*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: John Sutherland, 1838), 158. The speaker is printed "Mr David [Dick]" at 156, and the speech runs 156–59. Spelling as printed.

[30] Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 2nd ed. (London: Matthew Simmons for Thomas and Andrew Kembe, 1651), 31.

[31] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 213, in the section "The Pactum Salutis."

[32] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 104.

[33] *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, ed. H. Bavinck (Leiden: Didericum Donner, 1881), 250 (disp. 26, praeses Johannes Polyander, thesis 3). The English renderings of the *Synopsis* Latin are mine.

sentence stands in Walaeus's own *Opera*.[34] Those are not a *pactum* between Father and Son. They do have pieces I need: a decree of the Trinity, a command of the Father, and a Son who acts of his own will.

The covenant of redemption is not a second thing laid beside the decree. Cocceius, in the fifth chapter of his *Summa*, where the margin at §88 reads "Pactum Dei Patris & Filii," says that the pact is "non cum homine lapso, sed cum Mediatore," not with fallen man but with the Mediator, and later calls it the eternal decree of the Father and the Son, "aeterno hoc decreto Patris & Filii," by which the one became surety, and the other cast our sin on him and promised him a seed out of the mass of the perishing as his lot and inheritance.[35] Dickson, in his *Therapeutica Sacra*, says that "This covenant of redemption, is in effect one with the eternall decree of redemption," and, on the other side, that "the decree of redemption is in effect a covenant."[36] Owen, for his part, says that the covenant "differeth from a pure decree," because from the distinct actings of the will of God in the Father and the Son there arises "a new habitude or relation, which is not natural or necessary unto them, but freely taken on them."[37] I take the two together. The covenant of redemption is the decree in its personal and voluntary form, the Father and the Son each willing what the other wills and each receiving a relation to the other. That is why it can be the purpose, and why the purpose belongs to the decree and not outside it.

What the covenant of redemption does for my argument is give the order of the purposes. Owen says the transactions between the Father and the Son were "by the way of 'counsel,' for the accomplishment of the end designed in a covenant."[38] And on the Son's "Lo, I come" he says that "there is herein represented unto us as it were a consultation between the Father and the Son with respect unto the way and means of the expiation of sin, and the salvation of the church."[39] A counsel about the way and the means has an end that the means serve. That end is the final cause I described above: that God declare and share with free creatures his impressiveness in power, wisdom, justice, and mercy. Dickson's theses put the end ahead of the work of creation: the Mediator was "made sure of succes before he pat hand to the making of the world."[40] So I take the order to be the end, then the idea of the created order that serves it, then the means by which

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[34] *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, 274 (disp. 28, praeses Antonius Walaeus, §7); Antonius Walaeus, *Opera omnia* (Leiden: Franciscus Hackius, 1643), 2:338.

[35] Johannes Cocceius, *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testamento Dei*, 6th ed. (Amsterdam: widow of Joannes and Abraham à Someren, 1691), chap. 5, §88 (p. 85), where the margin reads "Pactum Dei Patris & Filii" and the text reads "Pactum scil[icet] non cum homine lapso, sed cum Mediatore"; and §93 (p. 91): "aeterno hoc decreto Patris & Filii ( quo hic sponsor factus est, ille peccatum nostrum in hunc conjecit …".

[36] David Dickson, *Therapeutica Sacra* (Edinburgh: Evan Tyler, 1664), bk. 1, chap. 4, 25.

[37] John Owen, Exercitation XXVIII, §13, in *The Works of John Owen, D.D.*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 19 (London and Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854), 88.

[38] Owen, Exercitation XXVIII, §10, in *Works*, 19:85.

[39] John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, on Heb. 10:7, in *Works*, ed. Goold, vol. 23 (London and Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1855), 468.

[40] Peterkin, *Records of the Kirk of Scotland*, 1:159.

the end is reached, in the language of moments that I am forced to use, and all of it within the decree.

I take the means to be Christ, and I take the people to be given to him in the same eternal purpose. The Savoy Declaration puts it in an order I can use: it pleased God, "in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus his only begotten Son, according to a covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and man," and "unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed."[41] Witsius states the covenant as "the will of the Father, giving the Son to be the head and Redeemer of the elect; and the will of the Son, presenting himself as a sponsor or surety for them."[42] Christ is the chosen means, and the people are concomitant with him, given to him in the same purpose.

The covenant of grace follows from that gift and is not its equal. Dickson's first thesis puts the covenant of redemption ahead of it: there is "a Covenant of redemption betwixt God and the Mediatour Christ, preceiding the Covenant of Grace and Salvation made betwixt God and the faithfull Man through Christ."[43] Gillespie says that "the Covenant made with us, did spring out of the Covenant made with Christ,"[44] and Witsius says that the covenant with the elect "pre-supposes the first, and is founded upon it."[45] The people of the covenant of grace are the people the Father gave the Son. The purpose that governs the idea of creation is therefore the gift, and the covenant of grace is the way the gift is brought home.

### *Neighbors on the causes*

Bavinck uses the language of causes in *Christian Worldview*, and I set two of his sentences beside my mapping without saying that he maps as I do. Of the ideas in God he writes: "Ideas can be the *causae exemplares* ['model causes'], but being alone can be no *causa efficiens* ['efficient cause']."[46] And of purpose and the causes that serve it: "Just as the one who sets a certain goal then uses the means and goes down the paths necessary to reach it, so do 'final causes' [*causae finales*] everywhere use 'efficient causes' [*causae efficientes*] to realize themselves."[47] In the *Reformed Dogmatics* he calls God's counsel both the "efficient" and "exemplary" cause of all that is.[48] These are neighbors to what I say about the formal and final causes. The assignment of material and efficient causation to the creature, and of the four causes

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[41] *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order* (1658), chap. 8, §1, text at grace.org.uk/faith/savoy1.html. The Westminster Confession 8.1 has the same sentence without the clause "according to a covenant made between them both."

[42] Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, vol. 1, bk. 2, ch. 2, §2, pp. 169–70.

[43] Peterkin, *Records of the Kirk of Scotland*, 1:159.

[44] Attributed to Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened, or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption between God and Christ, as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace* (London: Tho. Parkhurst, 1677), 1.

[45] Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, vol. 1, bk. 2, ch. 2, §1, p. 169.

[46] Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, 78.

[47] Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, 90.

[48] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:339.

to the two orders together, is mine. The nearest thing in the neighbors to my formal cause is Bavinck's statement that ideas can be model causes.

### *In salvation: Romans 5 and federal headship*

Romans 5 is where the mapping has to be understood in salvation. Paul sets Adam and Christ side by side: "as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."[49] We fell in Adam seminally and covenantally, as the race is in its head and as the parties to a covenant are in the one who stands for them, and the guilt that came to us is punishable guilt. God therefore owes no one salvation. The Canons of Dort say that he is "under no obligation to confer this grace upon any,"[50] and I take that at full force.

In terms of the causes, the creature's material causation, the creature's bent soul, was enslaved to sin. Before the fall in the garden this soul, this material cause, was innocent and free, but mutable. So when salvation takes place, God takes over that efficient causation on the part of the creature to change the material causation level from one that is dead, deaf, and blind to one that is alive, hears, and sees, if we stay with the biblical metaphors. The Canons describe the change in terms I can use. The grace of regeneration "does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks," but spiritually quickens the will and "at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends it," and in that change, the Canons say, "the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consist."[51] The gospel is the instrument, which Paul calls "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."[52] Then the creature is free again in his levels of causation, both materially and efficiently, just as Adam was in the garden.

Everything that I have said about this refers ultimately to Adam in his mutable condition in the garden as he represented us there, and that is why the federal headship that Paul expresses in Romans 5 has to be understood before anything in the doctrine of salvation can be.

## 6. The creature's freedom: a sovereignly created necessity

### *The chief reason*

Freedom without coercion is not an end in itself, and I say what it is for, because this is where I part from both sides of the debate. The compatibilist argues for the creature's freedom as a concession, something God allows and the system makes room for. The advocate of libertarian freedom of the will argues for it as a necessity for desert and responsibility, and I agree that it is. I argue that it is a necessity because it is necessary for the covenants between God and man to be real covenants, and above all for the covenant of redemption to be fulfilled.

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[49] Rom. 5:19 (ESV).

[50] Canons of Dort (1618–19), Heads III/IV, art. 15. English text at ccel.org (Christian Classics Ethereal Library).

[51] Canons of Dort, Heads III/IV, art. 16.

[52] Rom. 1:16 (KJV).

The covenant of redemption is the purpose to which the idea of creation is subject, and it is a real covenant between persons. Owen says that the will of the Father and the Son concurred in this matter, which "was necessary, that the covenant might be voluntary and of choice."[53] I take it that if the covenant between the Father and the Son is real because it is voluntary, then the people given to the Son in it are given in a covenant that is real too, and a people given to the Son has to be a real people.

What the Father gives the Son is a people of worshipers. The Savior says that the hour is coming, and is now here, when "the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him."[54] He says that "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."[55] And he speaks to the Father of "the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me."[56] Worship in spirit and truth is not worship that has been extracted. A people compelled to love, or whose love is only the working out of causes outside them, are not lovers. The church the Father gives the Son is a real bride, and the group of the redeemed, given to Christ, must be real worshipers and lovers of God if the covenant's promise is to be fulfilled. To be real they must be free.

The same is true of the covenants between God and man. The covenant of grace springs out of the covenant made with Christ, and a covenant with a creature who is not free is not a covenant with him. If the creature is not free, then the covenant of grace is not a real covenant with him, and the original covenant of creation and Adam's fall in it are not real either. Adam, as federal head, either could have done otherwise or was an actor in a script.

So freedom is a sovereignly created necessity and not a concession. It is an integral part of the idea God has, and knows, and wills in the decree, and the creature has to be free in the same way that God has to be sovereign. God has to be sovereign because he is God. The creature has to be free because God has purposed what only a free creature can be: a real worshiper, a real bride, a real party to a real covenant. The necessity is created, by the same decree that created the creature, and it binds the creator only through what he has himself purposed. That is why it is no limit set on God from outside, and why it is no concession.

The compatibilist grounds the creature's freedom in what God allows. The advocate of libertarian freedom of the will grounds it in what desert requires. I ground it in what the covenants require, and the covenants in what God purposed. The fourteen reasons that follow are additional to this one, and each of them reads better for it.

The consequence for the debate is plain. If freedom is a concession, a better system might make it smaller or take it away, and the compatibilist is free to argue that the concession costs nothing.

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[53] Owen, Exercitation XXVIII, §11, in *Works*, 19:86.

[54] John 4:23 (ESV).

[55] John 6:37 (ESV).

[56] John 17:6 (ESV).

If freedom is only the ground of desert, then God's sovereignty and the creature's freedom are rivals, and the advocate of LFW is right to be afraid. If freedom is a created necessity, set in the idea God conceived for the sake of his covenants, then it neither limits God from outside nor stands in his way. It is as much a part of what God has purposed as his sovereignty is a part of what he is.

The mapping of the causes does not change. God's side stays the formal and final cause, and the creature's side stays the material and efficient. The covenant of redemption stands on God's side, in his purposes. It does not make God a cause on the creature's side, and it does not take the creature's own efficient causation from him. In salvation, as I said with Romans 5, God takes over the creature's efficient causation to change the material, and the creature is free again. The covenant of redemption is the purpose in Christ for which he does that.

***Scripture on both sides***

The solution to the conflict between determinism and freedom of the will will necessarily involve passages like Romans 11:36 and Isaiah 63:17. These passages maintain God's fundamental sovereignty as creator, sustainer, and ultimate purpose of creation, while showing in a passage like Isaiah 63:17 that biblical writers held absolute sovereignty and determinism and freedom of the will in their minds in the same thought, without the apparent conflict we so often find in it. I use Romans 11:36 and Isaiah 63:17 only as anchors of what other passages say; there are numerous cross references.

Romans 11:36 allows for the solution I am proposing when it says "of him and through him and to him are all things." In the King James Version: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."[57] Isaiah 63:17 admits God's absolute control, which he obviously has in creating and sustaining creation, that is, sovereignty without fatalism. In the English Standard Version: "O LORD, why do you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart, so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage."[58]

The reality of God's determinism, and of sovereignty expressed in determinism, is amply displayed in numerous other passages like Isaiah 63:17. These include Isaiah 6:10; Ezekiel 14:7–9; Joshua 11:20; Deuteronomy 2:30; John 12:40; 2 Thessalonians 2:11–12; Romans 9:18–20; Psalm 119:36; Acts 2:23; Acts 4:28; Isaiah 46:10; Genesis 50:20; Matthew 26:24; Isaiah 53:10; Hebrews 6:17; Ephesians 1:11; and others. Yet the biblical writers represent it along with desert responsibility and blame and judgment, without any sense of the contradiction so many sense or feel when the subject is considered. The closest thing to a difficulty is Paul's dialogue in Romans 9, where he anticipates the questions of his readers, and even then Paul does not open God's

[57] Rom. 11:36 (KJV).

[58] Isa. 63:17 (ESV).

secret counsel to them, and he does not soften the explanation, but asks, in effect, who are you to reply against God?[59] Both lines of texts are to be taken at full force.

Equally obvious from the Scriptures is the idea, nay the absolute necessity, of human freedom to the point of desert responsibility. All the appeals to repentance throughout Scripture would be little more than theater without it. By that freedom I mean LUF, as I defined it above: the freedom of a creature, without coercion, within the created order. I deny the accusation that this definition means creatures do or can operate independently of divine control.

***Fourteen further reasons***

Fourteen further reasons follow, each additional to the chief reason.

***1. Temptation.*** In order for temptation to be a reality, and to involve an enemy of our souls as a tempter, we must have the ability to do otherwise in choosing an alternative possibility. To deny such a freedom makes the subject of temptation nothing more than theater, illusion, and an unnecessary plot mechanism in the story of God's dealings with humanity. This seems to be little more than common sense. The classic example is also the original example, the temptation of the first pair in Genesis 3. No one reading that interprets it in any way other than that Eve, then Adam, had the ability to do otherwise. The later Biblical narrative gives too much weight to the results of the pair's failure there to view their temptation as anything other than real, and so not just theater. The same is true of the other temptation that serves as a classic example, that of Christ in Matthew 4, Mark 1, and Luke 4. There Christ is correcting the original failure as the second Adam, and through his active obedience and his resisting of temptation he secures, for those who come to him in faith, a status of righteousness by which we may be appropriately clothed in God's presence in eternity.

***2. God's permissive will.*** A second reality that best fits with LUF is the reality of God's permissive will. The concept runs throughout the writings of the Reformed Orthodox theologians. The permissive will of God is that by which God allows things that his preceptive will says are wrong. He allows sin. He allows wrong choices. He allows mistakes. He allows all of these things. That is his permissive will. By way of explanation, the decretive will, by which God decreed everything, involves two things: his preceptive will and his permissive will. In order to deny rightly that God is the author or cause of sin, and to deny that he coerces human agents to sin, Augustinian thought developed the idea of God's permissive will, which was further developed in the later history of the church. Augustine asserts that God's permission is not a failure of power when he says, "Nothing, therefore, happens but by the will of the Omnipotent, He either permitting it to be done, or Himself doing it."[60] Calvin and the later

[59] Rom. 9:19–20 (ESV): "You will say to me then, 'Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?' But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?"

[60] Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love* 95, trans. J. F. Shaw, in *On the Holy Trinity; Doctrinal Treatises; Moral Treatises*, ed. Philip Schaff, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ser. 1, vol. 3 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887).

Reformers developed the concept further, but my point here is that it is a concept at all. That it is a concept fits only with LUF and with the Biblical portrayal that God intended such liberty on the part of his creatures in order to accomplish his multi-faceted and dynamic purposes. Why does there need to be a "permissive" will if God's decree negates LUF? Again, this is little more than common sense.

***3. God's question about Ahab.*** A third reality that necessitates LUF surrounds the question God asks in 1 Kings 22:20: "Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?"[61] If God has not decreed a set of circumstances wherein LUF is a reality on every creaturely level, where does this question come from? The question supposes a genuine interaction, and the development and acceptance of a genuine plan to influence Ahab. How can one make sense of such passages without LUF? It is an impossibility. Most compatibilist accounts do manage to make the passage fit by logically maneuvering concepts, but that does not seem necessary if we stay with the text. I do not say that the logical explanations are unnecessary, but I do claim that they have not been pressed far enough, because they have not been required to take into account both the purposes of God and the creator/creature distinction. If I were pressed to choose a side, I would choose one of the compatibilist camps because of their emphasis on the priority of God in their understanding, but I find they all fall short regarding LUF, and on that point I disagree with them. This passage, and others like it, such as Job 1, would be theater and not reality.

***4. David at Keilah.*** Another related reality that requires LUF is the hypothetical circumstance set out in 1 Samuel 23:10–13. What God essentially says there is that if the circumstances are changed, an alternative possibility will prevail. In the passage, David prays, asking God whether Saul would come to the city of Keilah, where David was staying, and whether the people of the city would hand him over. To both questions God answers in the affirmative: Saul would come to the city, and the people of the city would hand David over to Saul. Yet when David, in response to the answered prayer, leaves the city, none of what God said in his answers to David happens. This hypothetical situation serves to show how God governs and is not challenged by LUF, and also how LUF might be exercised in alternative possibilities.

***5. The flood.*** A fifth reality surrounds the Noahic flood and the necessity for that event. If divine determinism negates LUF, why was there the need for it? I know that the answer most compatibilists will give is that it was simply the decreed plan of God, and I agree, but look at how it is presented to the reader in God's Scriptural revelation of himself. Genesis 6 says: "Then the LORD said, 'My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.' … The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found favor in the eyes of

[61] 1 Kings 22:20 (ESV).

the LORD."[62] A couple of things leap out here, things which are hard to explain without LUF and a different understanding of the divine deterministic decree. One is the "regret" language. You cannot legitimately explain that away just because it does not fit your chosen systematic narrative. A second is the statement that Noah "found favor in the eyes of the LORD," which has the force of being set against God's regret over the rest of humanity.

***6. Pharaoh.*** Another issue arises with the statement in Romans 9:17: "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.'"[63] That important verse describes the authority of God in election and in pursuing his purposes. It would make no sense in the sense it has here if it were true of every agent's every choice, as it would be if LUF were not a reality and divine determinism negated it. Now, you can say that this same statement is true of every agent's every choice, but you cannot say it with an equivalence to this passage. This passage shows a unique redemptive-historical intensification of providence: not the ordinary pattern, in which God normally governs without becoming a rival intramundane second cause, but an exceptional bringing-about of his purpose through this individual, in whom he forms the decisions that led him to do what he did. That is part of the point of the passage: God is sovereign and has the right to do as he chooses. God does not ordinarily have to "enter time" as a second influence alongside the creature's, and what we see in Pharaoh is a rare, purpose-driven special providence within the temporal order he created.

***7. Adam's answer.*** If LUF is not a reality, then Adam's veiled accusation in Genesis 3:12 misses the bigger and better accusation by a mile. Scripture says there: "The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.'"[64] Adam was blaming the woman, but he was also blaming God for giving her to him. This classic approach to our sin that we all experience and express was and is the best opportunity to make the real and more obvious accusation if there were no LUF. If that were the case, Adam could have and should have said, "Well, you ordained this, so how is it my fault?" Again and again, LUF is the only position that makes complete sense of the Scriptural revelation.

***8. Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28.*** Then one might ask why I point to the example of dual causation found in Genesis 50:20. There we read: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."[65] Showcased there is the causation of the brothers as well as the simultaneous causation of God. This is unlike the example of Pharaoh, in my opinion, but more like the statement of Paul in Romans 8:28, where Paul promises: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."[66] In these

[62] Gen. 6:3, 5–8 (ESV).

[63] Rom. 9:17 (ESV).

[64] Gen. 3:12 (ESV).

[65] Gen. 50:20 (ESV).

[66] Rom. 8:28 (ESV).

verses, God reveals himself to be working behind the scenes of free choices, intervening and contravening where necessary, to bring about that which is best for his people in the pursuit of his purposes. How does that square with a determination that negates LUF? How does the decree have to work around anything if it is indeed a decree that negates LUF? These verses seem to clearly indicate that God is not only working through creaturely actions, but also around those actions. It seems this is how he has chosen to showcase and fulfill his purposes.

***9. Nehemiah's confession.*** A ninth consideration is the juxtaposed comparison found at Nehemiah 9:33: "Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly."[67] There God's complete faithfulness is juxtaposed with our complete wickedness, a comparison that is gutted of its full significance without LUF. Without LUF, we are also in danger of gutting the reality of the repentance being expressed. Without LUF, this verse and the surrounding passage make little sense.

***10. Justice, mercy, and grace.*** Consider the realities of justice, and mercy, and grace. If LUF is anything less than what I have defined, if it is some version of modern compatibilism, then we find ourselves possibly undermining the definitional depth of these realities. Here I will say plainly that I do not believe the Westminster and Second London Confessions did this in their language of God establishing the necessity of secondary causes. That language allows for, and in my opinion even demands, the interpretation that I am proposing. My proposal comes from the perspective of fully embracing Dort's five points in my soteriology, and I embrace a full Reformed view of God's sovereignty. I just do not believe that modern compatibilists, or Luther and Calvin, or the RO ever gave a full treatment to these realities that added anything to our understanding beyond what we can find in the apostolic fathers through to Augustine. More importantly, I believe the position I am proposing is Biblical, taking into account all of the Biblical revelation and seeking to understand that in terms that best account for the whole corpus. Justice and mercy and grace are definitionally deeper than we can imagine, such that the life and death and resurrection of Christ alone fully plumbs their depths, and without LUF I do not see that.

***11. God's manifold wisdom.*** Denying LUF would also seem to require a rewrite of purpose passages like Ephesians 3:10. There Paul writes: "so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."[68] I could say the same about other purpose passages pointing out different but similar realities, but here Paul describes God as deliberately showcasing his manifold wisdom. If divine determinism, a reality I fully embrace, determines human decisions without LUF, then it seems to me the passage should have said that God was deliberately showcasing his great power and not his wisdom, because the wisdom required to work through and around and contrary to creatures with LUF is obviously much greater than the wisdom required to bring about, deterministically, the

[67] Neh. 9:33 (ESV).

[68] Eph. 3:10 (ESV).

decisions that he alone wants. That would be much easier, and it would showcase his power more than his wisdom. I believe LUF more fully expresses God's wisdom and power in the reality he has created. And I believe the wisdom required to accomplish this is so far beyond fascinating that the angels are curious and fascinated by it, as Peter says in 1 Peter 1:12: "things into which angels long to look."[69]

***12. The decree and Christ.*** A twelfth reason is that denying or limiting LUF seems to make God's decree the central issue of the discussion without considering the primary focus of the decree. All of the argumentation on both sides of this debate focuses on the substance, and timing, and extent of the decree, consistently without focusing on the purpose of the decree in Christ. In a real sense, then, it feels as if the decree replaces Christ in our thinking. My point is that Christ is central, and not the decree in the same sense; that is, the decree is central in that and because it is God's work to showcase and eternally focus on Christ.

***13. The unpardonable sin.*** The thirteenth reason is the subject of the unpardonable sin and the passages of Scripture that warn us of it. Without getting into a definition of it, I simply say that there would be no legitimate reason for warning us against it, for warning us that it could not be forgiven, were it not for LUF.

***14. Prayer.*** The fourteenth and final reason is prayer, as we find it in Isaiah 63:17, quoted above. There Isaiah prays, acknowledging the sovereign determinism of God and, along with that, asking God to change things. He is holding in his mind two things that we consider contradictory in this discussion and in this debate, but he did not consider them contradictory. They were not contradictory. They may have been contradictive, but not contradictory. That is what I am arguing for in this paper, and in the larger paper I have written elsewhere on Asymmetric Dual Frame compatibilism: these things are not contradictory. My partial proof of that is that the biblical writers, like Isaiah in Isaiah 63:17, held these things together without considering themselves to be contradicting themselves when they prayed. So prayer, and even more specifically prayer like that, is another reason, the fourteenth in this list, for the necessity of LUF. It is something God designed creatures to have, through the idea he had of creating an order in which he would create creatures with LUF, creatures with liberty, whom he would not coerce or design to do wrong, except on occasion, as with Pharaoh and a few other occasions where God steps in and does something with those individuals. God had this idea of a created order wherein he would create creatures who could be free, and therefore freely choose to worship him in adoration and to love him genuinely without being constrained.

### *Liberty in God, and not a liberty from God*

There is a distinction within the liberty of freedom, and by it we should mean a liberty in God and not a liberty from God. This distinction only fits clearly as and if we properly map causation as I have mapped it above, according to the parameters of what is revealed in Scripture.

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[69] 1 Pet. 1:12 (ESV).

### *Five parameters*

As we map out the biblical parameters, we need to: (1) identify who God reveals himself to be as creator and sustainer and sovereign; (2) show humans being appealed to as decisive; (3) show humans being described as responsible and morally obligated; (4) show God's purposes working through creation and creatures; and (5) note the absence of any perceived conflict with this in the lives of God's prophets and spokesmen, outside Paul's anticipated questions in Romans 9.

## 7. Calvin, Gomarus and Walaeus, Voetius

In this section I take Calvin's order, then the modification of Gomarus and Walaeus, and then Voetius.

### *Calvin's order, and development by departure*

Calvin did not present a developed, systematized account of the logical order of God's decrees. That was left to the later RO scholastics, but his seminal writings in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* indicate the beginnings of what would later be called both sublapsarianism and supralapsarianism. In essence, either God decreed election and reprobation prior to decreeing creation and the fall, or God decreed creation and permitted the fall prior to decreeing election and reprobation. Both positions would claim Calvin, and some, like Bullinger, would essentially reject the reprobation aspect of any such order. But Calvin, like the later RO, focused on and emphasized the decree, without any development of nuance, except in cases where the question of knowledge was considered, as in the case of Gomarus and Walaeus.

I do not have a problem with the position of Gomarus and Walaeus on this point. I just do not believe their modification of middle knowledge is helpful or accurate, because it continues to distinguish knowledge in a sense that portrays God as cogitating over the best possibility out of a number of possibilities, rather than seeing that knowledge as integral to the decree. Here Bavinck's distinction of the idea, which I quoted in section 3, helps.[70] I have no problem with their position on knowledge, or its closeness to Molina's; I could use it, and one could argue it, but it focuses on the wrong thing. God did not have to think through possibilities or decide upon the best idea for his purpose, or what his purpose should be. He conceived that perfect idea and purpose out of his perfection.

Bavinck is a neighbor here too. He says that with respect to middle knowledge "the question is not whether things [or events] are not frequently related to each other by some such conditional connection, one that is known and willed by God himself. If this is all it meant, it could be accepted without any difficulty, just as Gomarus and Waldeus [sic] understood and recognized it in this sense. But the theory of middle knowledge is aimed at something different: its purpose is to harmonize the Pelagian notion of the freedom of the will with God's omniscience."[71] That is a neighbor's report of how they understood it. It is not my reading of them, and I do not rest on it.

[70] Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, 77–91.

[71] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:200.

I take their modification as a departure from Calvin's order, and I label it both development and departure, such that it is development by departure. In my opinion, it is development without helpfulness, but it is development.

***Voetius: the second moment lies within the decree***

I turn now to Gisbertus Voetius. His second moment is God's knowledge of things as possible and as conditioned, and I hold that Voetius puts it within the decree and not before it. My treatment of Voetius stands or falls on that point, so I rest it on his own words and not on what later writers say about him.

The passage is in volume 1 of his *Selectae disputationes theologicae*, printed at Utrecht in 1648, in a treatise headed *De conditionata seu media in Deo scientia*. The treatise has four sections. The first three are dated in December 1643, and each of the three carries the name of Matthias Nethenus of Rees as author and respondent. Voetius presided. On the page where the treatise begins he tells the reader that he had himself given his students only a taste of the subject, that one of his students afterward handled it thoroughly and learnedly under his presidency, and that it seemed good to him to insert the work there. The English renderings in this section are my own.[72]

> *Controversiam de scientia media, cujus nos solummodo gustum studiosis nostris tunc dederamus, annis aliquot post unus ex discipulis ex professo & docte pertractavit, & publica disputatione sub nostro praesidio ventilandam proposuit, Diatriben illam visum est hic inserere ….*[73]
>
> The controversy about middle knowledge, of which we had then given our students only a taste, one of our disciples some years later treated thoroughly and learnedly, and proposed to be debated in public disputation under our presidency; it seemed good to insert that treatise here ….

I therefore cite this passage as the Utrecht position, published by Voetius as his school's answer. The voice in the section I quote is the respondent's ("I consider," "I hold").[74] Voetius also stated his view in his own name, and I start there.

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[72] Gisbertus Voetius, *Selectae disputationes theologicae*, vol. 1 (Utrecht: Johannes à Waesberge, 1648). Voetius's Latin is given in modern spelling, with the long s written s, ligatures written out, and abbreviation and accent marks dropped.

[73] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:264.

[74] The passage quoted below, 1:293–95, is the voice of the respondent, Matthias Nethenus, under Voetius's presidency; the disputation heading on p. 285 is dated 29 December 1643. The phrases "I consider" and "I hold" in that passage are the respondent's. Voetius speaks in his own name in the first passage quoted (1:264) and in his treatise on the knowledge of God (1:257).

In the treatise on the knowledge of God, in the same volume, Voetius says he has already refuted middle knowledge at length in his dissertation on the term of life, and that he showed there that it is nothing but a purely indefinite knowledge, that is, the knowledge of simple intelligence. Then he gives two brief reasons. It is the second that matters for my argument:

> *Scientiam mediam ex professo refutavimus Dissertat. de Termino Vitae arg. 15. pag. 275. edit. in 4. ubi ostendimus eam nullam esse nisi pure indefinitam seu simplicis intelligentiae ....*[75]
>
> We refuted middle knowledge thoroughly in the Dissertation on the Term of Life, arg. 15, p. 275, quarto edition, where we showed that there is none except a purely indefinite one, that is, that of simple intelligence ….

> *omnia sunt a Deo absolute praeordinata, & dependent ab ejus voluntate. Ergo independenter a scientia conditionalium ea decrevit Deus ....*[76]
>
> All things are absolutely foreordained by God and depend on his will. Therefore God decreed them independently of a knowledge of conditionals ….

Voetius does not deny that God knows what free creatures would do in any circumstance. What he denies is that this knowledge is a third kind standing between the knowledge of the merely possible and the knowledge of what will be, and he denies that God has it before the decree. The treatise puts the question in exactly those terms. It grants the knowledge and asks only about its order:

> *Fatemur quidem necessarium ut Deus ab aeterno conspexerit omnes possibiles modos causarum secundarum in actionibus vel solitariis vel sociis, ac proinde ut certo norit quid hac illave occasione posita futurum esset aut non futurum: sed quaeritur, num ante conspectionem decreti sui ...*[77]
>
> We grant indeed that it is necessary that God from eternity beheld all possible modes of second causes in their actions, whether alone or joined, and therefore that he knew with certainty what would or would not be future if this or that occasion were posited; but the question is whether before the sight of his decree …

> *Quaestio enim est: Num ante omnem suae voluntatis actum ista conditionata certo praenorit Deus?*[78]
>
> For the question is: did God foreknow those conditioned things with certainty before every act of his will?

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[75] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:257, paragraph 8. Voetius cites his *Dissertatio de termino vitae*, arg. 15, p. 275 (quarto edition); nothing is quoted from that work beyond what he says of it here.

[76] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:257, paragraph 8.

[77] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:272. The quotation is cut here; the printed sentence continues.

[78] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:272.

That is my question too, and it is the question this paper asks of every writer in this section. Voetius answers it in the passage I now give in full, because my whole claim about him turns on it. He speaks of two states of the object of God's knowledge, possibility and futurition, and of three moments:

> *Considero in objecto scientiae divinae duos status possibilitatis & futuritionis, sed tria momenta. Primum quando Deus intuendo suam omnipotentiam vidit quid absque contradictione a se fieri possit. Alterum, quando omnium fieri possibilium modos, connexiones & concatenationes apud se decreto absoluto praefinivit, id est, quid causa, quid effectum, quid medium, quid finis, quid prius, quid simul, quid posterius foret aut non foret; sed cum hac cautione, si vellet eas futuras.*[79]
>
> I consider in the object of divine knowledge two states, of possibility and of futurition, but three moments. The first, when God, looking upon his own omnipotence, saw what could be done by him without contradiction. The second, when he predefined with himself, by an absolute decree, the modes, connections and concatenations of all things possible to be done, that is, what would or would not be cause, effect, means, end, prior, simultaneous, later; but with this proviso, if he should will them to be future.

Look at what he says of the second moment. God fixes the modes, connections and order of all things possible, and he does it by an absolute decree, *apud se*, with himself. The only qualification is the proviso that this is on the supposition that he wills them to be future. Then comes the third moment:

> *Tertium, quando inter illas res, sub conditione tali praefinitas, discrimen statuit, relicta quibusdam conditione illa & super addito tali decreto: nolo futuras: ab aliis sublata conditione ejusque in locum substituto tali decreto: volo futuras: In tertio momento statuo rem demum extrahi ex statu possibilitatis in statum futuritionis …*[80]
>
> The third, when among those things, predefined under such a condition, he established a distinction, that condition being left to some with the added decree "I do not will them to be future," and taken away from others and replaced by the decree "I will them to be future." In the third moment I hold that the thing is at last drawn out of the state of possibility into the state of futurition …

[79] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:293. The voice here is the respondent's; see the note above.

[80] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:293.

The difference between the first two moments and the third is the difference between possibility and futurition. The difference between the first and the second is the difference between knowing before any act of the will and knowing after one. He says so in the same sentence, after the semicolon, and this is the clause I rest on:

> *in prioribus duobus manere in statu possibilitatis, hoc tamen discrimine, quod eas in primo per naturam & ante omnem voluntatis actum cognoscat, in secundo post actum voluntatis.*[81]
>
> In the first two [the thing] remains in the state of possibility, with this difference, that he knows them in the first by nature and before every act of the will, in the second after an act of the will.

So here is my argument in a few lines. The first moment is God's natural knowledge of what his power can do, and it comes before every act of his will. The second moment, by Voetius's own statement, comes after an act of the will, and that act is a decree. What the second moment knows is still a possibility and not a future thing. So it is knowledge of the possible and of the conditioned, but it is had within the decree and not ahead of it. The third moment is the decree that some of these possibilities are to be future and some are not. There is no place in this scheme for a knowledge of what free creatures would do that is had before God wills anything. That place is exactly the place middle knowledge claims, and in Voetius that place is empty.

Voetius sees that his second moment looks like a conditioned decree, the thing he has been attacking, and he deals with the objection openly. He says it may seem that in that second moment he is establishing a conditioned decree in God. He answers that it differs from the conditioned decrees of his opponents as light from darkness, and one of his reasons is that the condition is placed by God himself:

> *Neque secundo mirum videri debet, quod videar in secundo illo momento statuere in Deo decretum aliquod conditionatum.*[82]
>
> Nor should it seem strange in the second place that I seem in that second moment to establish in God some conditioned decree.
>
> *Nam Primo haec conditio libere est a Deo posita, est in Deo & ab eodem libere removeri potest, ita ut ejus hic voluntas a nulla alia extra ipsum incerta conditione suspendatur.*[83]
>
> For, first, this condition is freely posited by God, is in God, and can freely be removed by him, so that his will here is suspended by no uncertain condition outside himself.

[81] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:293.

[82] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:293.

[83] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:294.

To me that is the heart of it. The condition lies in God. It is not a circumstance outside him that his will waits upon. He also says why the connections between the conditioned things and their outcomes are firm, and he names what they do not rest on:

> *non casu & fortuito, neque ex natura partium neque ex circumstantiarum quarundam congruitate, neque a stoico quodam fato, sed a libero Dei decreto.*[84]
>
> not by chance and fortuitously, nor from the nature of the parts, nor from the fitness of certain circumstances, nor from any Stoic fate, but from the free decree of God.

Then he says plainly how God knows the conditioned future things that the disputed Scripture texts refer to. He does not say by a middle knowledge. He says by the knowledge of vision, in his decree, and he names the second moment as well as the third:

> *Dico quod Deus futura illa conditionata ab aeterno viderit & nunc adhuc videat, non per mediam aliquam sed per visionis scientiam, in decreto suo praedeterminante connexionem & concatenationem, non tantum omnium entium, praestituto tempore futurorum, in tertio; sed etiam ullo tempore fieri possibilium, in secundo illo momento.*[85]
>
> I say that God saw from eternity those conditioned future things, and still sees them, not by any middle [knowledge] but by the knowledge of vision, in his decree predetermining the connection and concatenation, not only of all beings that are future at the appointed time, in the third moment, but also of things that could come to be at any time, in that second moment.

Here the second moment is called a moment of the decree in so many words. The things that could come to be at any time belong to the decree that predetermines their connections, and God knows them there. Voetius then adds that in this moment God can know, from his decree, what another world would have held if he had willed to create it:

> *Ita ut Deus in hoc momento ex decreto suo etiam scire possit, si alium mundum creare vellet quot in eo angeli hominesque forent ….*[86]
>
> So that God in this moment, from his decree, can also know, if he willed to create another world, how many angels and men would be in it ….

[84] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:294.

[85] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:294–95 (the sentence runs across the page).

[86] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:295.

He closes the argument by turning the question back on his opponents. They want a certain knowledge of future contingents in God before every act of the will, and he says the texts they bring will not give them that:

> *Anne certam aliquam ejusmodi futurorum contingentium in Deo notitiam dari ante omnem voluntatis actum?*[87]
>
> Is any certain knowledge of such future contingents given in God before every act of the will?
>
> *hoc tantum probant cognosci illa certo a Deo, sed nonnisi post decretum Dei: quod & nos libenter damus & mediam istam scientiam funditus evertit.*[88]
>
> they prove only this, that those things are known with certainty by God, but only after the decree of God; which we gladly grant, and which overturns that middle knowledge from its foundation.

Voetius puts the knowledge of conditionals within the decree and after an act of the will. The knowledge God has of how free creatures would act is real and certain, and none of it is had before the decree. He calls the second moment a moment of possibility, and he puts it after the will, in the decree.

Anyone who wants Voetius on the side of middle knowledge has to find in him a knowledge of conditionals that he places before the will, and he places none.

***What Voetius reports of his own school***

Two points remain, and I state them so as to claim no more than Voetius gives. The first is something he reports about his own school that bears on Muller's question. Of middle knowledge he says that our doctors cast it out as soon as it became known, as a deceitful covering of Pelagianism, except that one or another went against the stream; and of these, he says, at least two differed from the orthodox in the look of their words and their manner of explaining, and not in fact:

> *nisi quod contra torrentem DD. ivit unus atque alter; quos tamen, saltem duos ex iis, scimus verborum specie & explicandi modo potius, quam reipsa ab orthodoxis dissensisse ....*[89]
>
> except that one or another of the doctors went against the stream; of whom, however, at least two, we know, differed from the orthodox rather in appearance of words and manner of explaining than in fact ….

[87] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:295.

[88] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:295.

[89] Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, 1:266. The page does not name the two.

Voetius's verdict does not settle mine. My own view of Gomarus and Walaeus is as I stated it above. Still, his testimony is useful for the Muller question, since it shows a contemporary who thought that at least two of the doctors who went against the stream differed from the orthodox in words and manner of explanation; he does not name them. It shows the same contemporary building a scheme in which no knowledge of conditionals is had before the decree.

The second point is that the second moment is knowledge in a state of possibility. Voetius is not saying that God decides what a free creature will do and then finds out what he decided. He is saying that knowledge of what would happen on any supposition is fixed in God's own decree about the modes and connections of things, and that the third moment is the decree that some of these things are to be future and some are not. I take this to fit what I have said about the creature's freedom and God's sovereignty, and I come back to it in section 8.

## 8. God's knowledge within the decree

God chooses, via his knowledge of how mutable creatures would handle the weight of freedom, to create and enter into a creation where they are free in a desert sense and he is sovereign. That knowledge sits within the decree, with no middle knowledge prior to it.

I believe that the knowledge is within the decree, because I believe that in the decree you had the idea, knowledge, and will of God together as one, along with the decision to decree things as they are. I think to separate those, as they have been separated in the compatibilists' arguments and in the arguments of the libertarian-freedom-of-the-will side, winds up being something that you cannot do, given the fact that we are dealing with a personal God. We are not dealing with fate. We are dealing with a perfect, personal being who cannot think thoughts or have ideas that are contra his nature.

Middle knowledge needs a truth about what the creature would do that stands before and apart from anything God wills. I have no need of one. What the creature would do in a circumstance belongs to the creature God has conceived, and God conceives him, wills him, and knows him together.

### *The question of foreknowledge*

One question is this: was God's foreknowledge of what man would do determinative, or was God's decree determinative of what he would choose to actualize in this world?

The neighbors and the older writers answer this question on the side of the decree. Bavinck rejects the order in which God learns "from the will of creatures," and he puts the decrees in the place of the world as the medium of God's knowledge.[90] Vos grounds the certainty of free actions in the decree and not in foreknowledge as such. Charnock and Turretin, as I showed in section 4, say that the free knowledge follows the decree because things are future only by it, and Voetius's third moment is the decree that draws some of the possibilities out of the state of

[90] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:200–201.

possibility into the state of futurition. I take that as the neighbors' and the older writers' answer, and I give mine as the position of this section: the knowledge is within the decree.

***Objections***

It will be said that this is middle knowledge under another name. It is not. Middle knowledge, as Voetius and Bavinck describe it, is a knowledge of what free creatures would do that stands between God's necessary and free knowledge and logically before his decrees, and both of them refuse it for that reason. I put the knowledge inside the decree, with the idea and the will. Where an account of middle knowledge has God survey the possibilities for the best one, I say that God had nothing to survey, because the order was conceived by him, and he knows it as he conceived and willed it.

It will be said that the idea is only the will under a new name. A man who has an idea of a sandwich has not yet chosen to make it, and a man who knows that he could make it has not yet chosen to. God is simple, and these are not parts of God, but the distinction is one that our thought has to make, and the older writers I have cited made it in their own terms.

Nor does the position weaken Dort. I hold that the Canons of Dort are exegetically correct, and I hold every one of their five points. The Canons say that God owes grace to no one and that regeneration does not treat men as stocks and blocks, and the idea I propose is the reason both can be true together: God conceived an order of free creatures, willed it, and knows it, and he owes the fallen creature nothing, and he quickens the will that he renews without violence to it.

What is at stake can be put shortly. Either the decree is the will alone, and then the argument between the camps is rightly a choice between a God who waits on his creatures and a God who works puppets, or the decree contains the idea, and then there is no such choice to make. Scripture shows us neither a God who waits nor a God who works puppets. It shows us a God who has conceived, willed, and known from eternity an order of creatures who can freely worship him, and who accomplishes it, in the whole and in every part, without taking from the creature the freedom that his purpose requires.

**9. Answering the three questions**

In section 1 I set out Muller's three questions: continuity or discontinuity between Calvin and his successors; whether they disrupted the balance of Calvin's thought or followed his lead; and whether they constructed a system. I have asked them of one subject, God's knowledge and the decree, and I now put each to the evidence.

The first question is continuity or discontinuity. Obviously, there has been both continuity and discontinuity, the tension of which tended toward development. There is continuity in the basic position held and refined by way of nuance and systemization; the discontinuity is found in the consideration of division within the knowledge of God. The continuity is plain in Voetius. He holds that all things are absolutely foreordained by God and depend on his will, and that God therefore decreed them independently of a knowledge of conditionals. That is Calvin's ground,

with the will and the decree governing all. The discontinuity is the division: the two states and three moments with which Voetius orders God's knowledge toward his will. He treats the order of God's knowledge to his will as the whole issue, and he places the knowledge of conditionals after an act of the will, in the decree. That is the departure.

The second question is disruption or following Calvin's lead. In this, Calvin's lead was followed without disruption. Voetius reports of his own school that the doctors who went against the stream differed from the orthodox in the look of their words and their manner of explaining, and not in fact. A contemporary witness judges the difference to be one of explanation. His own scheme grants what is true in the conditioned knowledge, that God knows with certainty what would be on any supposition, and keeps it after an act of the will, so that nothing is taken from the decree. The departure I propose goes the same way. It adds the idea to the decree and takes nothing from God's sovereignty.

The third question is whether they built a system. But as we have seen, all of their development was a rational, theological development and not simple exegesis of Scripture. The scheme of two states and three moments, with its terms of cause, effect, means and end, prior, simultaneous and later, is scholastic apparatus, and the apparatus was built to answer a rational question: in what order does God know what a free creature would do, and what does he will? The disputed Scripture texts that Voetius says his opponents bring furnish the occasion. They do not furnish the order. On this subject the apparatus serves the freedom of the decree and does not deduce everything from predestination, since the condition of the second moment is freely posited by God, is in God, and can freely be removed by him.

**Conclusion**

I do not have a problem with the position of Gomarus and Walaeus on this point. I take their modification of middle knowledge as development by departure from Calvin's order without disruption. I do not find it helpful or accurate, because it continues to distinguish knowledge in a sense that portrays God as cogitating over the best possibility out of a number of possibilities, rather than seeing that knowledge as integral to the decree. The knowledge of how mutable creatures would handle the weight of freedom is contained in the idea God had of the creation he would create. That idea, and the knowledge of it, sits within the decree, with no middle knowledge prior to it, because in the decree the idea, knowledge, and will of a personal God are one. The argument between the compatibilists and the advocates of libertarian freedom of the will has been over the decree, and it has missed God's idea of the created order, which gives guidance to and drives the decree. The purpose of that idea is the covenant of redemption, the Father's gift of a people to the Son, and a people can be given to the Son as real worshipers only if they are free. The creature's freedom, LUF, is freedom without coercion within that created order, with God sovereign and his purposes governing all.

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