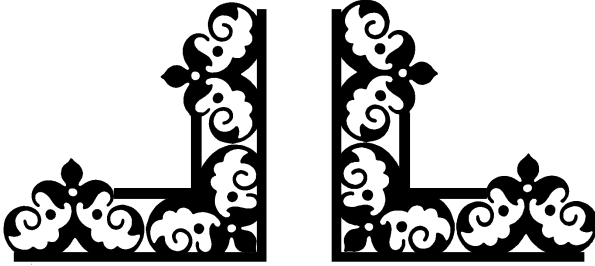


The Peter Martyr Library
Volume Eight

Predestination
and
Justification



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Predestination and Justification



Two
Theological
Loci

Peter Martyr Vermigli

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Predestination

PROLEGOMENA

1. [404] In case our reasoning should stray too far, which might easily happen in so large a field as God's predestination, a subject full of twists and turns, we intend to divide the subject into four principal parts.¹

First, I will examine carefully the nature and definition of predestination. Second, I will ask what the cause of predestination is, since nothing can be known adequately unless its cause is known. Third, I will consider the effects that predestination brings forth in men; there are many things that are most plainly understood from their effects. Last, I will ask whether its power is such that it brings necessity to man, whether it takes away or hinders the freedom of the human will, and whether it can be changed. After each of these parts has been discussed, we will end this discourse.

Yet I will not promise to say all that can be said, for there are innumerable things that present themselves to those considering this matter. For the moment, I will touch only those things that seem most necessary and are most controversial. Since my treatment is so compact, it will not be hard for others to gather many things elsewhere.

Before we proceed to the definition of predestination, there are two things I must answer: first, whether it befits true Christian religion to dispute or to preach about predestination: if it is not lawful, we would seem to be acting wickedly by writing on the topic. Second, Logicians first pose the question of whether a thing exists naturally goes before the question of what it is. Lest we go against that order, let us consider whether or not there is such a thing as predestination, so that afterward we may define it more certainly.

SHOULD PREDESTINATION BE TAUGHT?

Touching the first question, it is to be understood that God makes various choices, for there are some that serve to perform specific duties, such as election

¹The locus on predestination follows Martyr's commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans, chap. 9, *In Epistolam S. Pauli ad Romanos commentarii doctissimi...* (Basel: Peter Perna, 1558). It begins on p. 404; numerals in square brackets indicate page numbers in the 1558 Basel edition. Section divisions are from the *Loci Communes ... ex variis ipsius authoris scriptis, in unum librum collecti & in quatuor Classes distributi* (London: Thomas Vautrollerius, 1583), bk. 3, sec. 4, are included for convenience. Subject headings are given by this editor.

to the office of king or the office of apostle; there are other elections to eternal life. These are sometimes distinguished from one another, for it often happens that someone elected to a kingdom is not automatically elected to eternal life. This also happens regarding the office of an apostle, as in the case of Judas. Sometimes they are joined together, so that when it is spoken of temporal election, we may understand that the same applies to eternal election. Thus Paul says that he was “called to be an apostle and set apart from his mother’s womb,”² that is, to be an apostle and to preach the gospel. Yet together with this, we may understand that he was predestined to eternal salvation. Christ also said: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain.”³ Together with that, he commanded them to be of good comfort, for their names were written in heaven.⁴ Therefore, between these elections there is a great difference and also a great connection, so that often the one is taken for the other. So by his wonderful wisdom Paul made spiritual those things foretold of Jacob and Esau in Genesis and Malachi that seemed to be temporal.⁵

2. As to this latter [eternal] election, I see that there have been many who judged that this question should not even be raised. Their reasons, which are given by Prosper and Hilary (bishop of Arles and sometime disciple of Augustine)⁶ are stated in two letters prefixed to the book *The Predestination of the Saints*.⁷ These letters were written for this reason, that when Augustine was writing against the Pelagians about the grace of Christ, he taught many things about predestination in this book. Many of the brethren in France, and not minor figures, were greatly troubled and offended with this doctrine. They claimed [405] that this doctrine takes away from the fallen the opportunity to rise up again; and for those who are standing firm, it encourages slothfulness. The opposing parties [in France] judged that diligence is in vain if God’s predestination had already determined that the reprobate could not be restored and if there was no way the

²Gal. 1:15.

³John 15:16.

⁴Luke 10:20.

⁵Gen. 25:21; Mal. 1:2; Rom. 9:10.

⁶Prosper of Aquitaine (ca. 390–ca. 463) was a vigorous defender of Augustine’s theology in southern Gaul. There was also an otherwise unidentified Augustinian advocate named Hilary, who may have been associated with Sicily. See Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies*, rev. ed. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1986), 324. Traditionally, this Hilary, to whom Augustine addressed one of his letters, was thought to have been the bishop of Arles, and Vermigli seems to have made the same assumption here. For more on this problem see Owen Chadwick, “Euladius of Arles,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1945): 200–205.

⁷Augustine *Praed*, (PL 44.947ff.).

elect could fall away, even when they could not maintain a constant and firm course because they were uncertain of their predestination. Seeing then that this doctrine takes away industry and leaves only a kind of fatal necessity, it is much better that one should not speak of this matter.

They also add that it is superfluous to debate something that is beyond comprehension, for it is written “Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has become his counselor?”⁸ Therefore, they thought that we should teach that God in his goodness wishes all men to be saved, but since all men are not saved, it is because all men do not want to be saved. This, they say, is a safe doctrine. On the other side, the doctrine of predestination takes away all the power and usefulness of both preaching and admonitions as well as corrections, for if a certain number of the elect is appointed, which can neither be diminished nor increased, then preachers will labor in vain. If God’s decision is immovable, there will be an impenetrable confusion between elect and reprobate, so that no one can go from this group to that, nor can any pass over from that group to this. Therefore, all effort of teachers is vain and useless.

This doctrine also seems new to them, for the early fathers wrote nothing or very little about this matter, or else handled it in another way. Up to Augustine’s time the church defended the doctrines of the faith against heretics without this doctrine, and was content to be without it. They assert that those who teach it do nothing else than call men to uncertainty about God’s will, which accomplishes nothing except to drive them to despair. All these things were raised as objections to Augustine. If they were true, then we are now proceeding rashly and imprudently to treat predestination.

The reasoning with which Augustine defended himself can also defend our undertaking. Therefore, those things of which we wish to speak we will gather from two books of his, *The Gift of Perseverance*, chapters 14, 15, and 20, where Augustine refutes those objections we mention, and *Rebuke and Grace*, chapters 14, 15, and 16, where he treats the same issues.⁹

3. First, it is a wonder that they should think that the doctrine of predestination would subvert the good effect of preaching, especially since Paul, teacher of the Gentiles and preacher to the whole world, inculcates this doctrine in his letters, often clearly and explicitly, for instance in his letters to the Romans, the Ephesians, and Timothy. Also, Luke in the book of Acts¹⁰ and Christ himself in his sermons mention this doctrine. Christ says: “No one is able to snatch out of

⁸Rom. 11:34.

⁹Augustine *Persev.* 14, 15, 20 (PL 45.1013ff.); *Corrept.* 14–16 (PL 44.924ff.).

¹⁰Acts 2:23.

my hand those whom my Father gave me.”¹¹ Christ also says, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” And in the last days he will answer the faithful: “Come you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”¹² He gives thanks to the Father that he has hidden those things from the wise and revealed them to children, “for it was well-pleasing in his sight.” In another place he said: “I know the ones I have chosen”; also “You did not choose me, but I chose you.”¹³ If Christ and the apostles often spoke of predestination in their sermons, he is saying that no one should consider this doctrine of ours to be opposed to good preaching.

Paul also affirms that it does not follow that if our will, salvation, and good works depend on the will and decision of God, we should therefore cast away all our diligence, effort, and care. When Paul said that God works all things together in us both to will and to perform, he did not stop encouraging upright behavior.¹⁴ And when he wrote to the Philippians that God, who had begun a good work in them, would complete the work he had begun, so that they might be blameless in the day of the Lord (words that he attributes to God both the beginning and success of good works), in the same letter he strongly exhorts them to holiness.¹⁵

Christ also commanded his apostles to believe, but on the other hand, he said “No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him.”¹⁶ Christ also said, “He who has ears, let him hear.” Yet God said in the Scriptures that he would give them a heart from above to understand, eyes to see, and ears to hear.¹⁷ These things are not repugnant to one another, namely, that the appointment of good works lies in God and that the gift of good works is to be hoped for only from God’s hands, and that we must also devote our zeal, care, and efforts to upright and holy living. As was said, the Scriptures teach both.

Further, if we should deny predestination for this reason, then because God’s foreknowledge is similarly certain and cannot be deceived, shall we deny that God foreknows all things? In his book *The Perseverance of the Saints*, chapter 15, [Augustine] cites this example, which happened in his time. In the same monastery there was a certain man who was not upright in his life. When admonished, he used to say, “I shall be as God has foreknown me to be.” Augustine argued that

¹¹ John 10:29.

¹² Matt. 22:14; 25:34.

¹³ Matt. 11:25–26; John 13:18; 15:16.

¹⁴ Phil. 2:12–13.

¹⁵ Phil. 1:6, 27ff.

¹⁶ John 14:1; 6:44.

¹⁷ Matt. 13:9; Deut. 6:6.

he spoke the truth indeed. Although his judgment was true, yet every day he became worse and worse, [406] and finally he returned to his own vomit.¹⁸ What kind of man he will become, only God knows.¹⁹ Though this man abused the truth, yet none of the faithful will deny that God foreknows all things.

Christ showed that this foreknowledge of God does not impede good works when he commanded his disciples to pray, and yet told them also that God knew very well what things they required.²⁰ Therefore, God's foreknowledge does not call us back from a zeal for praying, for the things both profitable and necessary that God has decreed to give us, he has decreed to give them by this means of prayer.

They are also deceived who think that this doctrine is an unprofitable one; they do not understand its profit. To the godly, it is very profitable, to the end that they should not put any confidence either in themselves or in others, but should place all their hope and assurance in God alone. This is something that no one can do truly from the heart unless he is fully persuaded that his salvation and good works depend not on himself but on God.

We cannot acknowledge the gifts of God unless we understand from what fountain they spring, and that fountain is the free purpose and mercy of God given to those whom he has elected before the foundation of the world.²¹ Those who do not see this do not see the goodness of God towards them. By this doctrine men may be brought to glory not in themselves but in the Lord. They cannot do this who ascribe to their own free will even the tiniest bit of why they say they are chosen by God, for they have in themselves the basis of their boasting. Further, the Scriptures would have us mortify ourselves and act humbly; nothing brings this about more easily than this doctrine. The certainty of salvation also, which we defend, is better established by this argument than by any other. In 2 Thessalonians Paul orders us to give thanks to God, that we are elected by God,²² but we cannot do this unless election is seen and understood by us. Without this doctrine the grace of God cannot be defended against the Pelagians, for they taught that the election of God comes by our merits. The doctrine of free justification would also perish unless we understand predestination rightly. Therefore, since this doctrine, when soundly understood, is so profitable in so many ways, no one should count it unfruitful. When it is set forth in the Holy Scriptures, it can hardly be called a new doctrine.

¹⁸Prov. 26:11; 2 Pet. 2:22.

¹⁹Augustine *Persev.* 15.38 (PL 45.1017).

²⁰Matt. 6:9, 32.

²¹Eph. 1:4.

²²2 Thess. 2:13.

4. If the fathers before Augustine did not devote much effort to speaking about predestination, it should not surprise us, for when doctrines were more earnestly discussed and searched out, they provided occasions for new heresies, which often sprang up in the church. In the time before Pelagius, no one had spoken against the grace of God and so there was no need to defend it, but when there arose a new error, it was necessary that this doctrine should be examined more carefully.

Still, the fathers who came before Augustine did not always ignore predestination. Augustine himself proves it in his book *The Gift of Perseverance*, chapter 19.²³ Ambrose, commenting on the Gospel of Luke said “God could if he wished make ungodly persons godly.” He also said, “God calls them whom he has promised and those whom he will make religious.” He writes these things on that passage where it was written that the Samaritans would not receive Christ.²⁴ Augustine also cites Gregory of Nazianzus, who said “God gives to the faithful both to believe in the Trinity and also to confess it.”²⁵

When it was objected that this doctrine is very obscure and cannot be understood, and that it makes men uncertain of the will of God, Augustine answered: “It is indeed obscure and unsearchable if one should seek reasons for the judgments of God, for why some are rejected and why this or that one is chosen, but if all that Scripture transmits about predestination is taught, then those things are not so obscure but obvious to our faith.”²⁶

We do not counsel that when someone does something he should deliberate about his own predestination; rather, he should refer to the will of God expressed in the Scriptures. Everyone should trust that he is not excluded from predestination. Nor is it any obstacle to preaching that the number of the elect is certain and fixed, as it really is, for by preaching we do not go about trying to transfer men from the number of the reprobate into the number of the elect, but rather affirm that the elect, by the ministry of the Word, might be brought to their appointed end. As this ministry is profitable to the one, it brings destruction to the other, and takes away all their excuse. As to whether predestination and election to salvation may be said to pertain to all men, so that God “will have all men to be saved,”²⁷ we will speak to this later, in the proper place.

Meanwhile, Augustine tells us not to keep silent about the truth of predestination, for there is a danger that an evil understanding of predestination would

²³Augustine *Persev.* 19.49 (PL 45.1025).

²⁴Luke 9:53; Ambrose *Exp. Luc.* 7.27 (PL 15.1706).

²⁵Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 41.8 *Pent.* (PG 36.440–41).

²⁶Augustine *Persev.* 9.21 (PL 44.928–29), paraphrase.

²⁷1 Tim. 2:4.

corrupt the true doctrine. Moreover, those who have the capacity to understand should not be defrauded because others cannot understand it properly. Because this doctrine can bring so many consolations, it should be universally set forth to both the learned and the unlearned, although not always in the same way. Some people need milk, others need solid food.²⁸ This doctrine can be handled so that it will satisfy both learned and unlearned. Augustine accomplished this wisely, not only in his learned controversies against the Pelagians on this subject, but also in his homilies and sermons, in which he plainly and gently presented the subject to [407] the people. He asks, “What is more profound than the saying of John, ‘in the beginning was the Word’ or his other statement, ‘and the Word was made flesh?’”²⁹ Reading these sentences, many men fall and err fatally, and yet we must not cease to set them forth to the learned and the unlearned, only using different ways of speaking.

We should not preach predestination to the people of God in such a way as to say that whether you do this or that, you cannot alter the determination of God, and if you are of the elect, whatever you do cannot remove you from salvation, for this could easily hurt the weak and unlearned. An unskillful, or rather a malicious, physician who foolishly and unwisely applies a medicine that is otherwise good, may hurt someone’s health. To set forth this doctrine profitably and with fruit, the ends and utilities that we spoke of earlier ought to be regarded.

Let all our speech be directed to this, namely, that those who are of Christ should not put confidence in their own power and strength, but in God; that they should acknowledge his gifts and glory in God and not in themselves, and feel the grace and mercy that are given them, and that they are freely justified by Christ. Let them understand also that they are predestined to be made into the image of the Son of God, into the adoption of children, and to walk in good works.³⁰ Last, they have a testimony of the certainty of God’s goodwill toward them.³¹

Further, everything has handles by which it may be held effectively; if it should be taken by any of the other parts it would either slip from the hands or hurt the one who holds it. We have gathered this out of those books of Augustine which we just cited, and in which he answered the objections of Hilary and Prosper.

5. Now two doubts remain to be resolved: first, opponents argue that we approve a certain fatal necessity; second, they think that predestination drives

²⁸1 Cor. 3:2.

²⁹John 1:1, 14. Augustine *Conf.* 7.9, 13 (PL 32.741).

³⁰Eph. 1:5; 2:10.

³¹2 Cor. 1:12.

men to despair. Concerning the first issue, if by fate or destiny one understands a certain force proceeding from the stars, and that an invincible connection of causes by which God himself is brought to order, then quite rightly we reject utterly the idea of fate. But if by that name one understands the order of causes governed by God's will, then it cannot be seen as against piety. Still, in my judgment I think it best to abstain from that name, lest the unlearned think we approve the ideas of the pagans.³²

Augustine has written excellently on the matter in book 5, chapter 8 of *The City of God*.³³ According to predestination, neither are the natures of things changed, nor what happens by necessity or by chance, as we have said in our comments on providence.³⁴ Rather, by the effect of predestination, that is, by grace, we are made free from sin and made slaves of righteousness, which is a holy service and one to be loved in the Lord.

So far is predestination from breaking or diminishing our hope; it rather strengthens it to the greatest degree, for Paul in Romans 8 says: "Hope does not confound," and then adds, "we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God."³⁵ He confirms this from predestination: "For whom he foreknew, he also predestined," and adds, "Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall tribulation, or distress?" He then adds, "Neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities," and so on.³⁶ Therefore, we are not driven to despair by this doctrine, but rather greatly confirmed in hope, and by it we receive great comfort. Certainly it is much safer to commit our salvation to the care and providence of God than to our own judgment, for we are changeable every day and every hour, but insofar as our salvation lies in the hand of God, it is quite safe and sure. To conclude, the doctrine of predestination also greatly advances the glory of God; therefore, we should not shrink from it, especially since it is part of the Gospel, which is not to be received in part but fully and wholly. This ends the first part of our exordium.

DOES PREDESTINATION EXIST?

6. In the second part, we will consider whether predestination exists, lest we should seem to define something that is not real—not that anyone has ever openly and intentionally dared to deny God's predestination, but there have been

³²See Martyr on fate, "Providence," PW, 180ff., §4.

³³Augustine *Civ. Dei* 5.9 [sic], 2 (PL 41.149).

³⁴Apparently Vermigli is referring to his comments in ROM, 410–11. See also Vermigli, "Providence," PW, 187ff., §§8ff.

³⁵Rom. 8:28–29.

³⁶Rom. 8:29, 35.

some who proposed grounds on which, if granted, predestination could not stand.

Some say, especially Pighius, that in God there is neither past nor future, and therefore, God is always predestining and foreknowing in the present.³⁷ They argue that we are deceived if we think that God predestined some previously, that is, in the past. From this they draw many absurd conclusions, namely, since all things are present to God, he is always foreknowing and predestining. Pighius infers from this that it lies in every man how he will be foreknown by God. That is, it is in our own power to be predestined as we wish.

Pighius strays far from the truth. Although in God there is no course of time nor any past or future, that creature whom God foreknows and predestines is not without a beginning; it is not coeternal with God the creator. It follows of necessity that God predestined it before it was born, for predestination is one of those divine actions that looks to other things. Therefore, we must not fly to the eternity of God, for in it men have no participation with God the creator.

This may be more clearly understood of the past. One might say, "Certain men are now dead [408] and gone, but to God all things are present; therefore, God now predestined them and also it is now in their power how to be predestined." On this point no one is so foolish that he cannot see the absurdity. They are not now predestined when they come to their end, nor does it lie in their power whether they exist or how they exist. If their argument is so weak concerning the past, how firm can it be with regard to the future?

Let us leave this argument, even though it is quite solid, and let us consider what the Scriptures say. Paul states that although the twins Jacob and Esau "were not yet born, and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might stand (not because of works) but because of him who calls, it was said, 'the elder will serve the younger,'" and does he not assert to the Ephesians, "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world"?³⁸ These and many other passages clearly declare that men are predestined before they begin to have their being. He who takes this away from us takes from us a great consolation, for from this we know that God predestines us to glory in eternity.

Let us now see how Pighius twists these things back and forth so that he can refute this, that our doings are determined and appointed by God before they take place. Pighius thinks that man's free will would fall away and we would be left under necessity. This evil, as Pighius sees it, can be remedied if we say that God

³⁷Vermigli is referring to Albert Pighius, *De libero hominis arbitrio et divina gratia* (Cologne: M. Movesianus, 1542), fol. 125r–v (hereafter Pighius, *De libero*).

³⁸Rom. 9:11–12; Eph. 1:4.

does all things in the present; but he should have remembered that in the Prophets and other Scriptures there are many prophecies in which many things were determined and appointed long before they were done. What shall we say? Should we think that those prophecies were not given before those things which were to come? Christ says, "It was so that the Scriptures should be fulfilled."³⁹ Therefore, these fond imaginations serve no purpose. With their lying inventions these men strive only to obscure things that are plain and clear, lest they be found out in how they pour out their black ink.

7. Pighius also goes further and says that the providence of God has not allowed men to know the time or manner of either life or death. Indeed, he says, there have been many in God's providence who might have lived longer if they had not shortened their lives through negligence or intemperance, for if these things were so determined, a murderer who has killed someone may be excused because he has done the will of God.

I wonder how such a great theologian could let such an old wives' tale come out of his mouth, as if when the murderer kills someone he wishes to please God. He considers this alone, how to play the thief and carry out his hatred and hostility. How could he understand that this is the will of God, when God has commanded the opposite in his law? Does he think that Judas can be excused for his wicked treason because he had heard the Lord foretell his mischievous act? Or shall Pharaoh be excused because God had foretold that his heart would be hardened? Therefore, it is foolish to infer from God's ordering of things that sins are excused.

Pighius adds still another argument: If our actions should be determined by God in this way, then all our care, diligence, and effort would be removed, for what profit is there to avoid unsafe and dangerous journeys or winter sailings, or drunkenness, or unhealthy food, if both the manner and time of death and other such things already have been appointed by God with certainty?

Here comes to my mind what Origen said, in the second book against Celsus, where he mentions a subtle argument among those writing about fate.⁴⁰ A certain man advised a sick man not to send for the physician because it is already appointed by destiny either that he will recover of this disease or not. If it is his destiny to recover, then he will not need the physician, and if not, the physician cannot help; therefore, whether fate has decreed that he will recover or not, it is useless to send for the physician. In another illustration a man dissuaded his

³⁹John 7:42.

⁴⁰Origen *Cels.* 2.20 (PG 11.838–39).