PREDESTINATION

The American Career
of a Contentious Doctrine

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Doctrine of Discord

Predestination in American Christianity

This I know, that no one has been able, without falling into error, to argue against this predestination, which we defend according to the holy Scriptures.

—*Augustine*, On the Gift of Perseverance *(429)*

That afternoon I came to understand that one of the deepest purposes of intellectual sophistication is to provide distance between us and our most disturbing personal truths and gnawing fears.

—*Richard Russo*, Straight Man *(1997)*

D ESPITE THE CLOUDY and unseasonably chilly weather, I was in good spirits as I drove down Interstate 74 from Indianapolis toward Cincinnati in the early spring of 2006. My three young children and I were on our annual "give-Mom-a-break" trip to see my parents in North Carolina. The early morning had been the usual last-minute frenzy as I packed the Toyota minivan to the hilt and we said goodbye to my wife. Now I was savoring a calm moment in the car as my seven-year-old son sat absorbed in a book and my five-year-old and two-year-old daughters scribbled on notepads with new markers whose novelty had not yet worn off in the 45 minutes we had been on the road.

I was jolted from my reverie by a highway sign flashing "Caution: Tornado Damage Ahead." The previous night, the tornado siren in our Indianapolis neighborhood had sounded, but when the thunderstorm passed without incident, we breathed a sigh of relief and went about our business. Now I wondered if the same thunderstorm had spawned a twister after all. A mile later, the houses beside the interstate told the terrible tale of nature's fury. Where one home stood intact with only light debris littering its roof, the one next door was a pile of rubble. Dozens of people were outside under overcast skies picking through their scattered belongings. The sight left me with a sick feeling, and I reflexively glanced in the rearview mirror to see if my children were also watching. To my relief, all three were still absorbed in books and drawing. Since our move from Massachusetts to Indiana two years earlier, our son had expressed concern about the frequent talk of tornadoes in the Hoosier State. I was glad to escape the burden of explaining this disturbing scene. Yet the arbitrary wrath of tornadoes inevitably haunts adults too with the question of why one person escapes destruction and another does not. Tornadoes, in other words, prompt questions of predestination.[1]

Chicago Tribune writer Julia Keller expressed this eloquently in her Pulitzer Prize–winning series on a deadly tornado that struck the town of Utica in northern Illinois on 20 April 2004, killing eight people. "The survivors," she wrote, "would henceforth be haunted by the oldest, most vexing question of all: whether there is a destiny that shapes our fates or whether it is simply a matter of chance, of luck, of the way the wind blows."[2] Keller described the disaster's cruel ironies, including the story of three friends who, on the storm's approach, fled their mobile home park by car and took refuge in the basement of a solidly built, 117-year-old tavern, only to die there when the funnel cloud hit the building directly. Another tavern only a block away was spared.

For Christians, such tragedies invariably revive the question of predestination in its most general sense, namely, whether God foreordains all things for his purposes. Though this is often called *predestination* in the popular press, it is more properly called *providence*, meaning the divine superintendence of all events toward preordained ends. For many Christians, the Utica deaths, like any deaths, also prompt questions of predestination in its technical sense, meaning the divine foreordination of each person's eternal destiny in either heaven or hell. For persons who perish suddenly, as did the Utica eight, perhaps without having experienced a firm sense of religious conviction or assurance, the question of predestination can torment their loved ones left behind. Does God predestine certain persons for salvation regardless of their actions, or does salvation depend in some sense on a person's cooperation? Either possibility can be unsettling for those unsure

Makeshift memorial to the eight people killed in a tornado at Utica, Illinois, on 20 April 2004. Photograph by Zbigniew Bzdak, *Chicago Tribune*.

of a loved one's (or their own) status. A strict doctrine of absolute predestination can make God's sovereign will seem as arbitrary and cruel as a tornado, whereas a thoroughgoing emphasis on human cooperation can seem to impose an impossible responsibility, especially in the case of a life cut short. Yet for those who find assurance that God has foreordained them to heavenly bliss, absolute predestination can be the sweetest of all doctrines, providing comfort even amid a tragedy like Utica's tornado. And for those who rest their confidence in free cooperation with the divine invitation, life's chaos is held at bay by the assurance that God does not act capriciously but instead saves persons by a logic adapted to human capacities. Predestination is thus an idea that typically elicits strong reactions: either it is the rock of Christian certainty, without which no true hope is possible, or it is the most dangerous of doctrines, one that risks negating the "Come unto me" of Jesus' gospel promise.

This book is about the American career of this contentious doctrine. My primary concern will be predestination in its proper theological sense, referring to the eternal destinies of individuals. Of all traditional Christian doctrines, few, if any, have caused as much controversy as this question of whether a person's fate in either heaven or hell is sealed from the beginning of time. It is not that Christianity lacks other contentious doctrines. In the earliest centuries of the tradition, Christians were consumed by infighting over the divinity of Jesus and the doctrine of the Trinity. But whereas these questions were more or less settled by the early church councils and the ecumenical creeds they hammered out, there has never been a reigning orthodoxy on predestination. This is evident in the division between Eastern and Western Christianity, which arose not only over linguistic and political issues but also over predestination, with the East rejecting Augustine's absolutist view that God elects certain persons apart from any foresight of their conduct. Even within the West, strict Augustinianism has always had critics, and this became uniquely apparent in the United States, where doctrinal disagreements routinely gave rise to new factions and denominations. Indeed, I argue in this book that predestination has been one of the most important but unacknowledged sources of discord in churches across the denominational spectrum.

As an intellectual history of this clash of ideas and parties, this book is written for anyone—academic or not, religious or not—who has ever been curious about predestination and why it has often inspired such vehemence. The existing literature on predestination is mostly Protestant and confessional and rarely deals with the American context.[3] As a historian, I do not seek to advance a particular theological position. Neither will I attempt to catalogue the opinions of every major thinker and denomination; such an exhaustive account would make for tedious reading. I have likewise ruled out any effort to survey the many compelling treatments of predestinarian themes in American literature or politics, tasks undertaken by other scholars.[4] This volume instead paints the big picture of predestination's career in American theology, situating the most notable debates on the broad canvas of Western Christianity since Augustine. To be sure, predestinarian debates are not unknown outside of this Western Christian (Catholic and Protestant) orbit. A broad study remains to be written, for example, of predestinarianism in Islamic theology and its role in the worldviews of Muslims in the United States. But the present volume is intended as a guidebook through the thickets of predestinarian controversies among U.S. Protestants and Catholics.

Predestination as a source of Christian doctrinal conflict must be distinguished from predestination as a subject of debates in classical and contemporary philosophy. Predestination is not the same as what philosophers

call *fatalism*, which is usually defined as the absolute and unalterable determination of all things by an impersonal force (personified in Greek mythology by the Fates, or *Moirae*, the fearsome determiners of human destiny). Fatalism suggests that human action is futile, whereas another philosophical term, *determinism*, simply means that all events occur as part of a chain of causation, whether the causes be divine (in the case of the Christian predestination) or some other (including mechanical, genetic, environmental, and psychological). Determinism does not necessarily exclude a measure of human involvement within the complicated chain of causation; indeed, the theory of *compatibilism* (sometimes called soft determinism or reconciliationism) maintains that determinism is not incompatible with human free will, which is defined as the absence of external physical constraints or coercion.

Most Christian predestinarians have been in some sense compatibilists because to define predestination otherwise would imply fatalism. "[W]e are falsely and maliciously charged with this very dogma," complained John Calvin, who cited talk of "fate" as one of the "profane and vain babblings" condemned by the apostle Paul.[5] Yet to maintain, as Calvin and others influenced by Augustine always have, that the unaided human will is "free" (not compelled) *only* to act wickedly, since original sin obliterated humans' innate ability to choose the good, is to raise at the very least certain logical difficulties about how genuine human freedom really is. Compatibilism, as historian Allen Guelzo has memorably put it, "always has an air of unreality to it, of talk that somehow masks the obvious."[6] Contemporary secular philosophers, meanwhile, typically find religious versions of compatibilism unreal for a different reason, namely, their reliance on traditional theistic language about God, sin, and the like. For such philosophers, scientific discoveries in evolutionary biology and quantum physics have permanently altered the terms of discussion about free will and determinism.[7] An ancient theologian such as Augustine looks hopelessly superstitious and irrelevant from a rigorously naturalistic perspective.[8]

I do not intend to tackle compatibilism as a purely philosophical question, nor do I wish to wade into post-Darwinian discussions of determinism and free will. Instead, the American religious debates that concern me here presuppose the deep influence of Augustinian anthropology—the idea that humans are sinful to the core and therefore deserve eternal damnation. Only within contexts where this notion of original sin is taken for granted does predestination become for its most ardent believers a doctrine of mercy. That is, if everyone's default destination is presumed to be hell, then the idea that God grants executive clemency to certain condemned people becomes a singular comfort. If, on the other hand, original sin is denied or at least

tempered by the idea that all humans receive an initial gift of grace that enables the damaged will to turn freely to Christ, then the doctrine of God's unilateral choice to save some and to damn others seems arbitrary and even cruel. These are the terms of the debates I trace in this book. I am particularly interested in the question of conditionality, which has dogged Christian predestinarians from the beginning: does God predestine individuals—and even the Fall of humans into original sin—without regard to their foreseen conduct? Few Christian thinkers have denied predestination outright, but instead some have conceived of the issue in this way—whether God elects (and reprobates) people unconditionally or whether the divine decree is somehow conditional upon a human response. As such, the doctrine of predestination is inseparable not only from the problem of original sin but also from other theological questions. Do the church's rites of baptism and the Eucharist have any saving benefit if the elect are already determined? Does purgatory exist as a middle state of purification offering a way out of the all-or-nothing equation of heaven and hell? In the wake of the Enlightenment, still more questions surrounding predestination emerged, including doubts about the existence of a literal hell, the authority of the Bible, and the extent of God's providential involvement in the lives of individuals. Predestination cannot be viewed in isolation but must be seen as part of a package of these interrelated issues. Christian believers who accept the total package necessarily reject or deemphasize certain alternatives.

Yet what precisely does a strong belief in predestination exclude? Predestination is usually regarded as the opposite of free will, and though this dichotomy recurs frequently in the account to follow, I would argue that it misses the more important religious consequence of believing that God preselects the saved and the damned. (The compatibilist position, in any case, is that predestination and free will are not mutually exclusive.) A second major argument of this book, in addition to the claim that predestination is the proverbial elephant in the living room of American denominationalism, is that the most interesting antithesis is not between predestination and free will but between predestinarianism and sacramentalism. In using two words with the suffix *-ism*, I mean to suggest that these are two larger ways of being religious—two forms of piety, two religious aesthetics—that have existed in tension throughout Christian history. Predestinarianism presupposes the utter transcendence and hiddenness of an all-determining God. It is no coincidence that the strongest predestinarians have often been equally strong iconoclasts—people who, like the New England Puritans, insist that any representation of God in earthly media violates the biblical commandment against idolatrous "graven images." Predestinarian piety entails abject surrender to God's infinite majesty and trust in his divine purpose to save

his elect from the mass of fallen humans. Sacramentalism presupposes the real presence of God in the earthly elements of water, bread, and wine. In common with many traditional religions in other cultures, it assumes the efficacy of priestly sacrifice and takes for granted that reception of the consecrated elements opens wide the gate of heaven to all below, to paraphrase one medieval liturgy.[9] In place of predestinarianism's mystical awe before God's electing decree, sacramentalism cultivates mystical wonder before the power of priestly ritual.

These two forms of piety appear to be mutually exclusive. If God chose his elect before the foundation of the world, as the King James Bible phrases it, then no worldly ritual would seem to have genuine saving power. Consequently, it is frequently assumed (particularly by Protestant polemicists) that Catholicism, as the most sacramental of Western traditions, has no use for predestination. Catholics are seen as interested only in doing the right works to get into heaven. By the same token, a strongly predestinarian tradition such as Puritanism appears in Catholic eyes to have thrown the baby out with the bath water, or sacrificed the promise and comfort of the sacraments in an excessive zeal to purge idolatrous confidence in anything but God's electing grace.

The reality is more complicated. Just as Christians in various contexts have attempted to reconcile predestination and free will, both the Catholic and Puritan traditions have produced important thinkers who have attempted to argue for the compatibility of predestinarian and sacramental piety. Yet the latter form of compatibilism has proved no less elusive than the former, and the tension drives some persons to embrace extremes, either a magical view of the sacraments as working automatically like charms (a notion Catholic officialdom has roundly rejected) or a self-described Christian fatalism that views all human efforts (not only churchly sacraments but even missionary preaching) as futile. I will explore these extremes, as well as the more ambiguous options in the spectrum's broad middle, in the pages to follow.

Chapter 1 surveys the long historical background to American debates from the early church to the turn of the seventeenth century. In the first millennium of Western Christianity, in the wake of Augustine's debate with his contemporary Pelagius, predestination's tension with free will preoccupied the theologians. With the rise of medieval eucharistic devotion, however, the sacraments gained increasing prominence in Christian theology. The Protestant reformers' reassertion of Augustine's strong predestinarianism in the sixteenth century was in large measure a reaction to the perceived abuses of the medieval sacramental system. Yet the reformers did not abandon the sacramental economy completely, and their infighting over the efficacy of

the church's rites proved to be the greatest obstacle to Protestant unity and further complicated future debates over predestination. So began the great age of confession writing, as the various Protestant factions crafted careful statements of their respective positions. These confessions became the foundation for Protestant scholasticism, which produced the most sophisticated elaborations of predestination since the Catholic scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas and other medieval schoolmen. Out of the Protestant scholastic debates emerged two lasting options—dubbed Calvinist (unconditional predestination) and Arminian (conditional predestination)—that mirrored in certain respects earlier Catholic opinions (not all of them orthodox). Understanding these debates, even at a basic level, requires a high tolerance for technical distinctions, so some readers may wish to bookmark the glossary of theological terms at the back of the book while perusing chapter 1. Because predestinarian disputes have sometimes hinged partly on terminology, I have specified in the glossary how I use certain words in this book.

In the last third of chapter 1 and throughout chapter 2, I focus on the transatlantic Puritan movement, which was the most important conduit of the Protestant scholastic heritage in colonial America. In treating the Puritans as my foundational American case study, I am not suggesting that predestination's American career actually began with them. Symbolically, at least, the doctrine came to what is now the United States in the sixteenth century, with the first forays into Florida by Spanish Dominicans and Jesuits, whose leading theologians would later clash in a major predestinarian controversy, and by an ill-fated group of French Calvinists (Huguenots), who lost their lives and their Florida outpost to the Spanish. English Protestants, meanwhile, brought the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer and predestinarian beliefs to the Roanoke "Lost" colony in 1584 and to Jamestown in 1607. The initial Puritans did not arrive in New England until 1620, when a group of separatists landed at Plymouth. By then, the Dutch had gained a foothold in New Netherland (New York), where the first Dutch Reformed minister in America, Jonas Michaelius, arrived in 1628 and began preaching to his congregation on Calvinist themes.[10] In 1630, more than a century after Ponce de León claimed Florida for the Spanish, we at last come to the founding of the most important Puritan colony, Massachusetts Bay. To the chagrin of its leaders, it was quickly followed by Maryland, the first Catholic-founded colony in British America, where Father Andrew White, an English Jesuit who lost his Louvain professorship because of his conservative Thomism (which tended away from the Jesuit emphasis on free will), celebrated the first Mass in 1634.[11] Thus, by the early 1630s, predestinarian doctrine was already implicitly or explicitly present in America in a variety of "denominational" guises.[12]

Yet compelling reasons remain for paying special attention to the Puritans. As we will see, the New England innovation of requiring would-be church members to make public professions of their conversion experiences put questions of election and reprobation in the foreground of the average Puritan's lived religion. I will consider the doctrine's everyday consequences in the religious experiences of believers and wade into a muddy debate among historians: did predestination engender agony or ecstasy? The answer is far from simple and requires us to plumb the depths of a kind of ecstatic agony—that elusive hybrid of anxiety and assurance—that was the pious goal indoctrinated in the laity by Puritan clergy. From the standpoint of the history of doctrine, Puritanism also affords an especially striking example of the abiding tension in Western Christianity between sacramentalism and predestinarianism. Though Puritans, like most Protestants, were ardently opposed to "popery" and its emphasis on the saving efficacy of the Mass, a persistent sacramental strain in Puritan piety shaped the New England experience of predestination in significant ways. The founding Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay colony were not separatists but dissidents within the Church of England, which was perennially torn between ritualists, who leaned in a Catholic direction, and low-church, zealously committed Protestants such as the Puritans. Although the Puritan movement was dedicated to purifying the English church of all the alleged impurities of Catholicism, Protestant and Catholic elements were not easily separated in the thought of Puritan theologians, who were not averse, as we will see, to invoking Catholic authorities in support of a predestinarian agenda. The Puritan case, in other words, vividly illustrates two foundational premises of this book: predestination was not an exclusively Protestant doctrine, and the sacramental-predestinarian tension cut across the Catholic-Protestant divide.

Chapter 3 examines the emergence of Arminianism and other challenges to absolute predestination in eighteenth-century America. Much of the early opposition to the old Puritan synthesis came from Anglican missionaries bent on bringing their wayward brethren back into the fold of England's established church. Some of these Anglicans were motivated by high-church sacramentalism, and it is often forgotten that this outlook informed the young John Wesley, the Methodist founder and the most famous Arminian in U.S. history. Wesley came to blows with other evangelical revivalists over predestination, and the resulting rift remains starkly apparent in evangelicalism to this day. The eighteenth century was also the Age of Reason, and as such, it bequeathed to American culture an enduring strain of doubt about predestination and the associated doctrines of hell and providence. The Puritan synthesis was thus buffeted from two sides: by Arminian evangelicals who viewed the predestining God of Calvinism as an impediment to

spreading the gospel, and by Enlightenment rationalists whose emphasis on reasonability and proof would ultimately infect even many evangelicals with an aversion to mystery in religion.

The American Revolution unleashed yet another indirect but profound threat to absolute predestination—the overthrow of monarchy by republicanism—and set the stage for the religious ferment described in chapter 4. This political context, in which white male Americans became the masters of their own destinies, helped to propel a variety of groups, including not only the ubiquitous Methodists but also the upstart Campbellites, Stoneites, Mormons, and Adventists. What united them, in addition to charismatic founders driven by a back-to-the-Bible mentality, was the burning conviction that scripture testified conclusively against Calvinistic determinism. And though the U.S. Constitution originally denied the power of self-determination to women and African Americans, they too rode the wave of anti-predestinarianism in the young republic. Some achieved new heights of perfectionist zeal, preparing the way for later movements such as Pentecostalism, which would subvert predestination by the most radical means available to Christians—a direct pipeline to the Holy Spirit. Others, such as the women of New England's patrician Beecher clan, turned to writing as a balm for wounds inflicted by their ancestral Calvinism. The product of their labors, though not accepted into the theological canon of their day, would be nothing less than an intellectual reassessment of the entire Augustinian-Puritan heritage.

Yet old-style European confessionalism did not go gently into the night, and in chapter 5 we will see it revived by immigrant Catholics and Lutherans. These seemingly strange bedfellows shared a history of internal strife over predestination (at least among their theologians) and a robust sacramentalism that set them apart from most other Christians in the United States. In different ways, both of these immigrant groups attempted to domesticate the werewolf of predestination—Catholics by entrusting the fate of dead individuals in part to living family members, who sought the masses of the church and the intercession of local saints; Lutherans by an ongoing process of confessional reinterpretation aimed at tempering Martin Luther's harshest predestinarian conclusions. Catholic theologians were no less versed than their Protestant brethren in the theoretical facets of predestination, but in actual practice, Catholicism was distinctive because of its belief in purgatory. Despite popular images of the fire and pain of purgatorial punishment, the underlying assumption of a middle state was optimistic: most persons who died in communion with Rome would attain heavenly bliss after enduring an intermediate trial. Because the length of purification could be shortened by the efforts of the living faithful, however, purgatory appeared

to Protestants as a mischievous effort by the church to inflate its own intercessory authority, in violation of Protestantism's "grace alone." Purgatory thus became a favorite subject of predestinarian polemics between Catholics and Protestants, with Lutherans eagerly joining the melee. Ironically, Lutherans had their own way of blunting predestination's sharp edges by multiplying distinctions and qualifications in a way that would have made a medieval schoolman proud. This effort, begun in the sixteenth century under the conciliatory Philipp Melanchthon, proceeded apace in America until the domesticating zeal of the first wave of immigrants ran up against the back-to-Luther mentality of a new boatload of arrivals. The result was a spectacular predestinarian controversy in the 1880s that ensnared not a few laypeople and has affected Lutheran synodical alignments down to the present day. In 1999, descendants of the domesticating party signed a historic ecumenical declaration with Rome that pointed indirectly to broad areas of agreement between Catholics and Lutherans on predestination.

Chapter 6 brings the narrative back to two Anglo-Protestant groups with genetic links to Puritanism: the Presbyterians and the Baptists. Both are well known in U.S. history for the splits they suffered over revivalism, biblical interpretation, and slavery. But predestination always lurked just below the surface, and controversy erupted every time some faction attempted to articulate the definitive Presbyterian or Baptist position. Presbyterians were every bit as confessional as Lutherans—"Westminster" had no less of a talismanic quality than "Augsburg"—so when a movement arose in the late nineteenth century to soften the Westminster Confession's statement on God's eternal decree, traditionalists cried foul. The revisionists eventually won a partial victory, but not before drawing a reluctant former U.S. president into the fray, igniting a firestorm in the denominational press, and contributing to North-South tensions dating from before the Civil War. Baptists, meanwhile, were purportedly noncreedal and nonconfessional, but ever since their origins in the seventeenth century, they had disagreed over statements of faith, with predestination usually the major sticking point. In the Southern Baptist Convention (today, America's largest Protestant denomination), these tensions simmered until the turn of the twenty-first century, when conservatives who engineered a successful takeover of denominational institutions descended into name calling and recriminations in a family feud over the Calvinistic doctrine of election. This led to the spectacle of a lieutenant of fundamentalist stalwart Jerry Falwell denouncing the "Calvinist jihad" waged by fellow Baptist conservatives. The no-holds-barred nature of the dispute was abetted by the freewheeling culture of the Internet, which opened to armchair theologians the opportunity to proclaim, like Martin Luther long ago, "Here I stand!"

The Internet is one of two profound cultural developments in recent American religion; in the book's conclusion, I ponder the other: the Protestant megachurch, pioneered by figures like California pastor Rick Warren. Because megachurches downplay doctrinal and denominational distinctions in order to reach the widest possible audience, they would seem to spell the eventual demise of a dogma as technical and contentious as predestination. (Warren's Saddleback Church is in fact Southern Baptist, an affiliation not apparent to the casual visitor.) Yet though precisely delineated doctrines may be treated like mildewed artifacts from the basement of some declining town-square parish, a vaguer language of foreordination is arguably stronger than ever in the megachurch-driven evangelicalism of today. The bible of this perspective is Warren's runaway bestseller, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, which dances around predestination without actually using the word and which takes as its fundamental premise that nothing in life (or death) is arbitrary. This unreflective blend of predestination and providence, long a characteristic of lived Christianity, is meant to be comforting in times of trial: a loved one's death happens because God has a "higher purpose" in store for that person. The goal of a purpose-driven life is to banish the specter of randomness, the haunting fear that humans are subject only to the way the wind blows. Even a tornado has purpose, though in this life we cannot know why it visits destruction on some persons and not others. Historian Elaine Pagels once speculated that the doctrine of original sin had endured for 1,600 years because "people often would rather feel guilty than helpless."[13] So too with the doctrines of destiny: many people would rather believe that a wise God predetermines everything—even unpleasant things—than contemplate the alternative.

Yet as soon as one probes beneath the general assumption that God is in control, the knottier problem of predestination invariably reemerges. As a university professor, I am always struck by this when I teach the history of Christianity and my students are confronted, often for the first time, with the logic of the Augustinian position. As soon as it hits them that God, by this reasoning, predestines future persons without regard for what they will do, many of my students are indignant. "How can that be fair?" some ask. Others, even some from purportedly Calvinistic traditions, insist that this is not the God in whom *they* believe. Then, I further muddy the waters by interrogating Arminianism. If God predestines for salvation only those people he foresees will have faith, does that mean his sovereign will somehow *depends* on the free choices of his creatures? Then again, if he foresees those choices, are they truly free?

These perennial questions troubled me too as an undergraduate, and it was only years later, in working on this book, that I realized how truly

complex predestination really is, like a thick forest of tall trees with branches scaling the mystical heights of heaven and roots planted in many layers of human culture. In plunging as an intellectual historian into this dense woodland—entangling myself in technical theology and inquiring into the cultural contexts that gave rise to such complexity—I also realized how easy it is to miss the forest for the trees. That is, in approaching predestination as purely an academic problem, one can all too quickly lose sight of the simple question underlying it all: where do we go when we die? Intellectualism can become a refuge from the unsettling, even visceral, nature of this question, which haunts nearly all people from time to time. Predestination at its heart is elemental, indeed mystical. I hope this book helps to analyze and contextualize this troublesome doctrine without demystifying it, for when its mystery is lost, so too is its power.

The Predestinarian Labyrinth

Historical Background

No one who wishes to be thought religious dares simply deny predestination.

—*John Calvin,* Institutes of the Christian Religion *(1559)*

In the 1540s, after the French reformer John Calvin made his permanent home in Geneva and restructured its church government in hopes of making the city a model of Protestant virtue, some of the townspeople chafed under his discipline. Tensions mounted when he excluded several prominent citizens from receiving the Eucharist on grounds of sexual or other immorality. One June day in 1547, Calvin ascended his pulpit in the Church of Saint-Pierre to find a death threat scrawled on a sign: "We've had enough of blaming people. Why the devil have these renegade priests come here to ruin us? Those who have had enough, take their revenge." Beware, the message warned, that you don't meet the fate of Monsieur Werly—a reference to a Fribourg man who had been murdered in a riot 14 years earlier.[1]

The authorities quickly arrested Jacques Gruet, who though descended from a respectable family was something of a village atheist. A search of his house turned up papers accusing Calvin of blatant hypocrisy, blaspheming Christ as a madman and impostor, and condemning the Christian God as a cruel monster who created humans merely for destruction. Some members of the city council also suspected Gruet of being part of an alleged French plot

to invade Geneva. Under repeated torture, he confessed to having left the note in the pulpit. He was found guilty of blasphemies against God, offenses against the civil magistrates, and threats to the ministers of God. On 26 July, barely a month after his arrest, he was beheaded.[2]

Gruet's execution hardly quelled all dissent, for a few years later, controversy erupted anew when several Genevans, one of them a prominent theologian, accused Calvin of making God the author of sin with the idea that certain people were predestined to wickedness and thus to eternal destruction. Calvin retorted that in failing to respect the "secret judgments" of God, his "ignorant and malicious" critics were turning a blind eye to the manifest testimony of scripture that God fitted vessels both of mercy and of wrath.[3] The critics nevertheless prompted Calvin to expand his treatment of predestination, a doctrine mentioned only twice in the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. By the end of Calvin's life, the cumulative disputes had left him not a little defensive and embittered. "[Y]ou are a perverse and unhappy nation," he wrote, addressing his countrymen from his deathbed in 1564, "and you will have troubles when God shall have called me away." "I have not falsified a single passage of the Scriptures, nor given it a wrong interpretation to the best of my knowledge."[4]

John Calvin on his deathbed. Anonymous nineteenth-century engraving, after painting by Joseph Hornung. Meeter Center, Calvin College.

Two centuries later, the career of America's Calvin, the New England theologian Jonathan Edwards, mirrored the travails of his Geneva predecessor. After Edwards preached on predestinarian themes with a vengeance in the Connecticut Valley revival of 1734–1735, one restive citizen, the elderly Bernard Bartlett, was sentenced to a whipping—punishments had moderated slightly by then—for calling Edwards "as Great an Instrument as the Devil Had on this Side [of] Hell to bring Souls to Hell."[5] Yet Edwards had more to contend with than an isolated crotchety layman. Among his fellow clergy, the Calvinist doctrine of predestination was under assault by the theological perspective known as Arminianism, drawing Edwards into pamphlet wars and prompting him to seek the help of ministerial associations in policing unorthodoxy. The worst trouble for him personally came when he began restricting the Lord's Supper to persons judged to be truly godly. As we will see in the next chapter, this rigorist stance, informed by predestinarian logic, denied to the laypeople automatic access to what many felt was a Christian birthright: the saving benefit of the sacrament. The result was Edwards's dismissal from his Northampton, Massachusetts, congregation, which left him, like Calvin, defensive and embittered. In a farewell sermon to his parishioners, he warned that they would one day stand with him before the judgment seat of Christ. The hearts of all would then be turned inside out, revealing in a "clear, certain and infallible light" who had been right and who had been wrong. Edwards further admonished them to guard in the interim against the encroachment of the Arminian error, which was "creeping into almost all parts of the land, threatening the utter ruin of the credit of those doctrines, which are the peculiar glory of the gospel."[6]

What were these doctrines, the defense of which plunged Edwards into a self-described "abyss of trouble and sorrow" and caused Calvin to lament that he had lived "amid continual strifes"?[7] Though the conflicts in Geneva and Northampton involved many doctrinal complexities, including issues of human nature and sacramental efficacy, underneath them all was the fundamental, burning question of predestination. If, as Calvin and Edwards taught, God had already chosen a select few for salvation, then this stark reality had profound consequences for other Christian doctrines. "This the Scripture has told us, that there are but few saved," Edwards told his flock in his farewell, "and we have abundant confirmation of it from what we see."[8] It was a hard message, and it drove some laypeople to rebel against their ministers. But for the clergy themselves, the flak they took for predestination, however painful in the short term, confirmed in their own minds the correctness of the doctrine. Such zealous ministers consoled themselves

with Christ's own words from the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

PREDESTINATION'S ORIGINS:
FROM PAUL TO AUGUSTINE

In order to understand how predestination became such a contentious doctrine and why it was inseparable from other key issues of belief and practice, we must look back two millennia, long before Calvin or Edwards, to the beginning of Christianity itself. The Christian idea of predestination is rooted in the New Testament, which reflects the Greco-Roman philosophical interest in questions of fate and destiny as well as the Hebrew Bible's central theme of Israel's election. Consequently, the Greek New Testament uses both the verbs *proorizō* (to predestine, to decide beforehand) and *eklegomai* (to choose, to elect).[9] The verb *proorizō* occurs six times in the New Testament. Of these instances, two refer in a general sense to God's prior determination of events (Acts 4:28; 1 Cor. 2:7) and four refer to the predestination of persons (Rom. 8:29, 30; Eph. 1:5, 11). The verb *eklegomai* occurs more frequently, sometimes in the general sense of choosing, as when Jesus refers in John 6:70 to his choice of the 12 disciples, and sometimes in clear reference to the election of persons for ultimate salvation (e.g., Mark 13:20; John 15:16). Other terms that factor into later predestinarian controversies include *proginōskō* (to foreknow), as in Romans 8:29, and *prognōsis* (foreknowledge), as in Acts 2:23. These words, as their appearances suggest, are the roots of the English "prognosticate" and "prognosis." Similarly, the adjective *eklektos*, referring to the elect or chosen, figures prominently in scripture (e.g., Mark 13:20; Rom. 8:33), in reference not only to humans but also to angels (1 Tim. 5:21; cf. Jude 1:6, which refers to angels who fell from grace). Both the ideas of foreknowledge and of the elect are combined in 1 Peter 1:2, which the King James Bible translates as "elect according to the foreknowledge of the Father," a phrase charged with meaning for those who would later maintain that election was only in light of a person's foreseen faith.

Of all the New Testament references to predestination and election, the most sustained discussion, and the most significant for eventual American debates, occurs in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, chapters 9–11. The apostle could not have foreseen the elaborate edifices of Catholic and Protestant theology that would be built upon these three short chapters. In his own

time, before the codification of creedal orthodoxies or the birth of powerful church institutions, the issue was rather different: how God's election of Israel could be reconciled with the fact that many Jews had not accepted Christ. The question was particularly troubling for Paul, a Jewish convert to Christianity. His conclusion—"not all Israelites truly belong to Israel" (9:6)—would be spun out by later Americans in manifold ways. Salvation had never been by virtue of physical descent or good works but through God's gracious favor alone. As proof, Paul cited God's preference for Jacob over his brother, Esau (Gen. 25), and quoted the reference to this from the prophet Malachi: "I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau" (Mal. 1:2–3; Rom. 9:13). Paul also invoked God's words to Moses: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Ex. 33:19; Rom. 9:15). As a further illustration of his point, Paul compared humans to clay in the hands of a potter—an image beloved of later Augustinians and Calvinists—and asked: "Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use?" (Rom. 9:21).

Paul's conviction that certain persons were chosen for "special use" stemmed in part from his own conversion experience, which he elsewhere recounted with predestinarian overtones, noting that God had set him apart before he was born and called him through his grace (Gal. 1:15). Yet in his letter to the Romans, he acknowledged the obvious objection to predestinarian logic—that it was unfair. Was God unjust, he asked rhetorically, in choosing certain persons over others? "By no means!" Salvation depended in no way on works but entirely on God's mercy, which he showed to all those, whether Jew or Gentile, who had faith in Christ (9:14–16). "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (10:13). Though only a remnant of the Jews had accepted Christ and thus were "chosen by grace" (11:5), this too was part of God's plan of election. A "hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of Gentiles has come in," at which point "all Israel will be saved," in fulfillment of God's promise (11:25–26).

As the infant Christian movement separated from Judaism and canonized a new body of sacred texts, Paul's writings acquired the timeless status of scripture. Romans 9–11 became the great Rorschach test for Christians' opinions—now formed in a variety of new contexts—on the preexisting question of predestination. Absolute predestinarians pointed to the images of Jacob and Esau and of the potter molding the clay as proof that God's grace was utterly gratuitous and that the salvation of sinners was the divine prerogative alone. Defenders of free will interpreted Paul's words as primarily a discourse on Israel's destiny and seized upon the promise to all who

call on the name of the Lord as proof that God saves anyone who freely responds to him. Which view held sway often depended on the apologetic needs of the moment and the external forces weighing on the apologist.

In the early church, the emphasis fell on human freedom as the antidote to the perceived fatalism of astrologers, Gnostics, and Stoics.[10] The Stoic teaching that all things happen according to the necessity of fate, complained Justin Martyr (c. 100–165), relieved humans of any responsibility for their actions, rendering true virtue impossible. Justin insisted that God endowed both humans and angels with free will and justly punished the sinful ones with eternal fire.[11] This outlook particularly affected the Eastern churches, which followed figures such as John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), the patriarch of Constantinople, in refusing to read Paul in a deterministic way. Thus, on Romans 9, Chrysostom argued that it "is not on the potter that the honor or dishonor of the vessel depends but rather on those who make use of it. It is the same way with people—it all depends on their own free choice." Chrysostom linked predestination to God's foreknowledge of each individual's freely chosen action: "God does not have to wait, as we do, to see which one will turn out good and which one will turn out bad. He knew this in advance and decided accordingly."[12]

It is sometimes forgotten that the greatest thinker of the early Western church, Augustine of Hippo (354–430), also at first insisted that "God only predestined those whom he knew would believe and follow the call."[13] Augustine drew this conclusion partly from Romans 8:29 ("For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son"), upon which he remarked in an unfinished pair of commentaries in 394–395.[14] Yet barely two years later, in his first literary work as bishop of Hippo Regius in North Africa, Augustine turned again to Romans in response to a friend's query and reached a radically different conclusion: God did not choose Jacob (or anyone else) in view of foreseen faith. "In resolving the question," he later recalled, "I really worked for the free choice of the human will, but the grace of God won out."[15] Humans could not choose God; he chose them. Why he chose some and not others was not for fallible creatures to understand. His grace was a free gift that no one deserved. This conviction helped to inspire Augustine soon thereafter to write his most famous work, the *Confessions*, which recounted how God chose him despite his earlier life of sexual immorality and religious skepticism.

Though the *Confessions* would prove timeless as a spiritual autobiography, in Augustine's own day the text helped to spark a major predestinarian controversy. At issue was his famous prayer in book 10, expressing the powerlessness of humans to obey God and to bring about their own election:

"Give what you command, and command what you will."[16] When a bishop in Rome quoted the line approvingly, one listener, the British layperson and ascetic Pelagius, was indignant. Augustine's words seemed to reduce humans to puppets, insulting not only their own integrity but also the goodness of their creator. Pelagius soon wrote a response to Augustine, criticizing him for abandoning his position from an earlier treatise, *On Free Choice of the Will*. So began more than a decade of bitter debate in which Pelagius, set opposite the influential Augustine, became the whipping boy of Western theology after his positions were condemned by a succession of councils, emperors, and popes. Even his corpulent appearance became the subject of ridicule; the celebrated biblical scholar Jerome compared him to a tortoise and elsewhere said he was weighted down with porridge.[17] Yet the real weight of the Pelagian controversy was in the volume of polemical literature produced, including some of Augustine's most unqualified and influential defenses of predestination.

In *On the Predestination of the Saints*, Augustine again insisted that God did not select persons for salvation because of their foreseen faith. He repeatedly appealed to the "unchangeable truth" of John 15:16: "You did not choose me but I chose you."[18] Surely, God did not save or damn people based on their future actions since some lives were cut short, before the individuals had a chance to come to saving faith.[19] Augustine then invoked the case of infants—a move fated to win him no friends among the most ardent American defenders of free will. Those who died in infancy, he went on in *On the Gift of Perseverance* (a companion piece to his predestination treatise), proved that foreseen actions could not be the ground of salvation; otherwise, we would be left with the absurd conclusion that persons are damned or saved for things they *would have done* had they lived. Even the issue of infant baptism revealed God's predestinarian designs in this world and the next. Why, Augustine asked, did the infants of Christian parents sometimes die before they could be baptized, whereas the dying infants of unbelieving parents sometimes lived long enough for a priest to intervene and administer the sacrament? "Clearly this shows that there is no respect of persons with God," Augustine concluded (echoing Matt. 10:29).[20] Just as God determined whom to admit to heaven, God also controlled admission to the hospital of the church's sacraments.[21]

Indeed, in Augustine's mind, predestination ultimately came down to this: all humans are born terminally ill with sin and thus deserve damnation. Birth defects prove the point. If babies suffer defects through no fault of their own, then we are forced to abandon all faith in divine justice. Surely, then, some infants are born disfigured or crippled as punishment for their own inbred sin.[22] The fact that God preserves other equally sinful infants

from harm—and elects only certain persons to ultimate salvation—merely reveals grace for what it is: something completely unmerited. "In giving to some what they did not deserve, clearly [God] willed that his grace be gratuitous and thus truly grace."[23]

Augustine could not foresee the vehemence of some modern objections to the justice of his doctrine of original sin—the idea that Adam and Eve transmitted a sinful nature to their posterity. Like other ancients, he lacked the resources of modern science for explaining the causes of things he observed in the world. It was therefore plausible to him that birth defects were the wages of an inherited sin. It also seemed obvious to him that humanity was a *massa perditionis* (mass of perdition)—a universally fallen multitude. How else could one explain the constant turmoil and sorrow of human existence? In the final days of his life, when Augustine was writing on predestination, the world seemed particularly dark as Vandal invaders closed in and laid siege to Hippo. Predestination in this context, as historian Peter Brown has noted, was "a doctrine of survival, a fierce insistence that God alone could provide men with an irreducible inner core."[24] God's elect saints might endure earthly tribulations, but thanks to God's free gift of grace, they would ultimately persevere in faith and attain heavenly bliss.

Augustine's basic insight on the primacy of God's electing grace was destined to become more or less official in the West, though predestinarian debates hardly ended with his death in 430. One of his contemporaries, John Cassian, a monk in Gaul, had expressed many Christians' difficulty in reconciling strict predestination with the biblical assurance that God "desires everyone to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4). Cassian's solution, much later misleadingly labeled "semi-Pelagianism," did not go so far as to deny original sin (the Pelagian position, which Cassian abhorred) but did allow for a measure of human cooperation with God. The human will's capacity to choose the good was not obliterated by Adam's sin but merely injured. Humans retain enough God-given natural ability to take the initial step toward Christ, whose additional grace is needed to bring the process of salvation to completion. Those people who fail to exercise their wills in taking the initial step are entirely culpable for their own damnation and are acting against God's own will for all to be saved.[25] Theologians in Augustine's orbit in North Africa, meanwhile, reiterated his strongly predestinarian views, arguing that when Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:4 that God desires everyone to be saved, "everyone" means the elect, who are chosen from all classes and conditions of persons.[26]

Ultimately, after a century of debate and convoluted church politics, the Second Council of Orange (529) endorsed Augustinianism, but not without

qualification. The beginning of faith in a person is always due to divine grace, the council decreed, dealing a blow to anything resembling a Pelagian confidence in human nature. At the same time, the council strongly warned against emphasizing predestination to such an extent that both salvation and damnation were seen as equally willed by God.[27] Such a doctrine of "double" predestination was an ever-tempting logical conclusion for those who would maximize the sovereignty of God. Three centuries after Orange, what one historian has called a theological free-for-all ensued in Germany and France when the monk Gottschalk (c. 804–869) argued for double predestination, insisting that anything less violated God's complete sovereignty.[28] On this view, any admixture of human free will would make God somehow dependent on the actions of his creatures, somehow subject to change. And "for God to change would be for him to die, to cease to exist," Gottschalk reasoned. Not surprisingly, his absolutist position did not sit well with some members of the church hierarchy, who feared that it would give the laypeople license to neglect the sacraments. Gottschalk's impetuous and tactless personality, moreover, clashed with the equally impatient and autocratic style of Hincmar, archbishop of Reims, who sentenced him to be scourged in front of a fire until he agreed to burn the supporting texts he had collected from scripture and the fathers. Later, when Gottschalk refused to renounce his own views, he was imprisoned until the end of his life and was denied the sacrament, even on his deathbed.[29] Yet Hincmar did not enjoy a lasting victory. The synods convened to deal with the ninth-century controversy, like the Second Council of Orange, left a mixed legacy: Gottschalk's position was condemned by a meeting of bishops in 853, only to be supported by another gathering two years later.[30]

THE RISE OF MEDIEVAL SACRAMENTALISM

The councils of the sixth and ninth centuries, in addition to revealing the bishops' divided opinions over the human and divine wills, left unresolved a question that would prove far more significant for predestination's subsequent career: in what sense is a person saved by the church's sacraments? While the Second Council of Orange had maintained that the grace of baptism enabled Christians "to perform all things that pertain to the soul's salvation," it remained unclear how to square this with the idea that God saves only the elect.[31] One solution was to say that God allows only the elect to be baptized, but this seemed unlikely in the case of people who lapsed into mortal sin after baptism and remained unrepentant at their deaths. To restrict baptismal regeneration to the elect, moreover, seemed to render the

church and its rites superfluous. Ever since Augustine, Catholic tradition had defended the objective efficacy of the sacraments against Donatist rigorists who insisted that baptism and the Eucharist had no effect if administered by unworthy priests. Even so, many medieval theologians found Augustine frustratingly vague on how a predestining God saved through water, bread, and wine.[32]

Augustine also bequeathed to the Middle Ages the question of whether living persons could do anything to influence God's judgment on the dead. In his *City of God*, he presupposed that certain people who had completed insufficient penance for their sins would endure a period of purifying punishment after death.[33] That such people were ultimately predestined for salvation was not at issue; the question was whether the prayers of the living could shorten the temporal penalties inflicted on the dead. The Bible suggested as much in 2 Maccabees (part of the Apocrypha, which Protestants later rejected), where the Jewish hero Judas Maccabeus prays for a group of his dead soldiers "that they might be delivered from their sin" (12:45).[34] Similarly, Augustine prayed for his dead mother, Monica, in a fervent concluding section to book 9 of his *Confessions*. In his other writings, however, he stopped short of specifying what sins could be atoned for after death or of naming the place of purification (the term *purgatory* did not emerge until the twelfth century). To describe an actual place in lurid detail would be to stoop to the level of popular religion—something the intellectually aristocratic Augustine was loath to do.[35]

Augustine's aversion to unreflective popular piety resembled the attitude of the medieval scholastic theologians, whose rise paralleled the emergence of universities in Europe. The greatest scholastic was Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274), whose encyclopedic *Summa Theologiae* subjected popular assumptions about the magical efficacy of the sacraments and prayers for the dead to dispassionate analysis. It was not that Aquinas lacked sacramental zeal. According to tradition, Pope Urban IV commissioned him to write the liturgy for Corpus Christi, a feast commemorating the institution of the Eucharist, which involved elaborate processions of the Host (the consecrated wafer) through the streets of many European towns.[36] One part of the liturgy, the hymn "O Salutaris Hostia" (O Saving Victim), expressed Aquinas's fervent hope in the Eucharist's saving power: "O saving Victim, / opening wide the gate of heaven to us below; / our foes press on from every side; / your aid supply, your strength bestow!" At the same time, the liturgy expressed the Catholic belief that although the Blessed Sacrament unfailingly conveys Christ's body to all, the actual reception of grace presupposes the recipient's standing in a right relationship to God: "Good and bad, / they come to greet him; / unto life the former eat him, / and the latter unto death."[37] Aquinas

elaborated this idea in his *Summa Theologiae*, where, as theologian Joseph Wawrykow has noted, he consistently rejected "a mechanistic or automatic bestowal of grace through sacramental performance."[38]

Similarly, on the question of whether the predestination of individuals could be influenced by prayers or masses for the dead, Aquinas was careful not to claim too much. Here, he invoked the distinction between primary and secondary causes. God, as primary cause, preordains each person's destiny: this cannot be changed. But the effects of his prior decision play out through secondary causes such as the prayers of the faithful. Predestination can therefore be "helped by creatures, but not blocked."[39] On predestination more broadly, Aquinas's outlook was essentially that of the late Augustine. He dismissed as "mad" the notion that a person's merit, as foreseen by God, could play any role in election; otherwise, grace would lose its gratuitous character. As for the charge that God is unfair in choosing only a select number for salvation, Aquinas insisted that this would be unjust only if God deprived people of something they were owed. But God owes humans nothing; they are all equally sinful and deserving of damnation. Aquinas also quoted Augustine on why God saves certain persons and not others: "Wherefore he draws this one and not that one, seek not to decide if you wish not to err."[40] It was an admonition that Protestant disciples of Augustine could later cite with relish—an apparent reality check on the popular belief that religious rituals or other meritorious actions could somehow win God's favor.

Yet popular religion has a way of reasserting itself, for as the famous sociologist Max Weber once observed, the security provided by a tested and proven "magical" formula can be far more reassuring than the experience of worshipping an omnipotent God who is not subject to magical influence.[41] Popular religion, in Weber's definition, assumes that certain sacrifices, incantations, or other ritual actions can in effect coerce god(s) through an unfailing relationship of cause and effect. This was how many late medieval laypeople came to view the efficacy of the Mass, whether offered for the living or the dead. Ironically, the cool logic of the theologians indirectly contributed to popular enthusiasm about the Mass as performed magic. The decisive idea was transubstantiation, elaborated by Aquinas, which applied the logical categories of Aristotle to explain the miraculous transformation of the "substance" of the eucharistic elements into the body and blood of Christ, even though the "accidents" (or appearances) of bread and wine remained. Popular religion was unconcerned with Aristotelian categories but came to regard the moment of transubstantiation in the Mass—believed to coincide with the words of institution, "Hoc est corpus meum" (This is my body)—with special awe. Once transformed into Christ's body, the Host

acquired magical powers. For many laypeople, simply viewing the wafer when the priest elevated it after saying the words of institution became a substitute for actual reception of the Eucharist, which most parishioners did infrequently, often out of fear of unworthiness. The moment of elevation, typically signaled with the ringing of a bell, became the supernatural high point of the Mass for the laity, prompting one thirteenth-century bishop to complain that people ran into the church at the bell's sound.[42] Seeing the Host was thought to bring benefits both in this life (safe childbirth, safe travel, cure for illness) and in the life to come. Many people sought to view the Host at least once a day and complained to church authorities when not enough masses were provided in local parishes.[43] Masses were also popularly viewed as having saving power for the dead, prompting reports of souls who returned from purgatory to haunt their living relatives until the Blessed Sacrament was offered in their memory.[44] And though theologians would always rail against superstitious abuses (for example, people carrying consecrated wafers away from church in their mouths and using them as charms), the consolation afforded by a magical or quasi-magical view of the sacraments was too considerable for church authorities to ignore.[45]

Indeed, the perceived readiness of the church to exploit popular belief in sacramental magic to enhance its own power was a major reason for the Protestant Reformation, especially after another of the church's seven sacraments, penance, was linked to abuse of the system of indulgences. Penance involved confession of one's sins to a priest, who pronounced absolution. Forgiven sins, however, still carried temporal penalties in purgatory, which could be remitted through works of satisfaction in this life. Temporal penalties could also be removed by indulgences, which drew on the church's "treasury of merit"—the storehouse of good works performed by Jesus and the saints—to lessen time in purgatory both for the living and for those already dead.[46] These slips of paper promising relief from purgatorial punishment became controversial in the early sixteenth century when the German church began selling them to pay debts to the pope and to help build a new St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. As the indulgence preacher Johann Tetzel's notorious jingle put it: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings / The soul from purgatory springs." This was the famous occasion for Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses (1517), which ignited a firestorm after they were published in both Latin and German. "It is sure that when a coin tinkles greed and avarice are increased," one thesis asserted, "but the intercession of the church is the will of God alone." Another thesis condemned as vain any confidence in salvation because of a letter of indulgence, even if guaranteed by the soul of the pope himself.[47]

Although Pope Pius V ultimately banned all sales of indulgences in 1567, the controversy indelibly colored Protestant perceptions of Catholic piety. Centuries later in America, many Protestants still equated Catholicism with the fraudulent trafficking in what Luther called "cheap grace." They condemned the Mass as "hocus pocus," dismissing it as superstition at best and sorcery at worst. What such views ignored was the profound comfort that many Catholics derived from the sacramental system. Historian Miri Rubin has written eloquently of this in her book on the Eucharist in late medieval culture. Sacramental mediation, she notes, was "this-worldly in emphasizing that channels of regeneration and salvation were available and attainable, renewable and never exhaustible." The Eucharist in particular was a promise "fulfilled here and now, offering powerful and tangible rewards to the living in the present, as well as to their relatives, the dead."[48]

PROTESTANTISM AND PREDESTINARIAN PIETY

Elements of medieval sacramentalism persisted in some forms of Protestantism, despite Protestants' nearly universal hostility toward such doctrines as transubstantiation and purgatory. Luther's own faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is well known. To those who would explain the bread and wine's significance in purely symbolic terms, he thundered: "Before I would have mere wine with the fanatics, I would rather receive sheer blood with the pope."[49] Even Reformed Protestants such as the Scottish Presbyterians, heirs of the furiously anti-Catholic John Knox, developed a tradition of annual communion occasions—four-day festivals centering on the celebration of the Lord's Supper.[50] Yet in their rebellion against Roman authority and the sacramental abuses of the medieval church, the early Protestants rediscovered the spiritual power of predestination to strip away all intermediaries between the individual and God. Aesthetically, predestination was no less mystical than medieval sacramentalism. The goal of both was an awestruck apprehension of God's grace, but whereas sacramentalism achieved it through ritual, predestination achieved it through contemplation. To surrender oneself to the inscrutable divine will—to accept the doctrine of humans' utter powerlessness to redeem themselves—was to prostrate oneself before God's absolute glory and majesty. Those who embraced this piety regarded it as religion pure and undefiled, monotheism in its most authentic and compelling form. "All things happen by necessity," declared Luther in refuting the humanism of Erasmus.[51] To deny divine control over all things is to deny God himself. The human will, Luther said, borrowing an earlier

medieval image, is like a beast of burden that either God or Satan rides. The will is powerless to choose which rider will mount it, "but the riders themselves contend for the possession and control of it."[52]

Here was Christianity in its undiluted biblical essence, or so predestinarians have often claimed. In reality, the "strong wine" of predestination (as Luther called it), like the medieval eucharistic ritual, was mediated by church tradition.[53] The first great mediator was the late Augustine, whose reading of Romans 9 influenced Luther to conclude that the election of Jacob over Esau was not based on any foreknowledge of Jacob's merits but simply on God's inscrutable choice to save him from the mass of sinful humanity.[54] Luther's strong predestinarianism must also be seen as a reaction to the late medieval *via moderna*, or "modern way," of William Ockham (c. 1285–1347) and his follower Gabriel Biel (c. 1420–1495). This school of theology taught, contrary to the earlier view of Thomas Aquinas, that humans retain enough natural ability to initiate their own salvation by "doing their best," which God rewards with an infusion of grace. Confounded by the uncertainty of what counts as one's "best," Luther conjured up Augustine the exegete to do battle against the "new Pelagians."[55] Augustinianism was already in the air thanks to the fourteenth-century theologians Gregory of Rimini and Thomas Bradwardine, archbishop of Canterbury, who, like Gottschalk five centuries before, spoke unflinchingly of both election and reprobation and insisted that God saves people without any regard for their future good conduct.[56] Thus, when Luther made his storied discovery that humans are justified by grace through faith, he was in one sense simply rediscovering Augustine's basic claim that God bestows righteousness on sinners as a pure gift. Where Luther differed from the Neoplatonic Augustine was in his comparatively hostile attitude toward philosophical speculation and human reason.[57] Consequently, Luther always cautioned against speculation about predestination, which he warned was the devil's way of making the passion of Christ and the sacraments of no effect. The sacraments, he insisted, were instituted "to drive such speculations out of your mind."[58]

Luther's confidence in sacramental efficacy, motivated by his antirational trust that Christ meant what he said when he proclaimed "This is my body," helped to make Lutherans a special case among Protestants on the question of predestination, as we will see in chapter 5. Luther's view contrasted sharply with that of his Swiss contemporary Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) of Zurich, who insisted that by the "is" in "This is my body," Christ meant "signifies." After the two men failed to reconcile their differences on the Eucharist at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, Luther wrote to his wife in disgust that God must have blinded the Zwinglians.[59] Luther and Zwingli also differed on the authority of the Bible, on which Zwingli had resolved to

preach in its entirety, verse by verse—even the epistle of James, which Luther had rejected because of its emphasis on works. Finally, whereas Luther made justification the linchpin of his theology, Zwingli stressed God's absolute sovereignty in a way that almost seemed to revive the Stoicism of Seneca, whom the Zurich reformer admired. An affinity for Stoic determinism was perhaps not surprising for a man who narrowly escaped death from the plague when it ravaged Zurich in 1519–1520. Believing himself to be God's chosen instrument, Zwingli carried the same sense of destiny to his death in battle against an army of Switzerland's Catholic cantons.[60]

Zwingli foreshadowed the fighting spirit of Reformed Protestantism when it became an international movement, but it was the second-generation reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) of Geneva who gave the Reformed tradition its most influential early statements on predestination. Calvin's name is virtually synonymous with the doctrine, a popular association that Calvin specialists never tire of lamenting. Their complaint is not without merit. Calvin was in one sense no more of a predestinarian than Luther, whom he admired for restoring the purity of the gospel. Calvin was also closer to Luther than to Zwingli on the Eucharist—for Calvin, Christ's presence was spiritual but still "real"—and he waged an unsuccessful campaign for more frequent celebrations of the Lord's Supper in Geneva.[61] The sections on predestination in the final edition of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) come well into the work and occupy only around 5,000 words, compared to the 14,000 words devoted to civil government.[62]

Nevertheless, in a crucial respect, predestination loomed larger for Calvin than for Luther. Calvin found the doctrine more *pastorally* useful than Luther did, and the social context in Geneva helps to explain why. After the city-state embraced the evangelical cause in 1536, it became a haven for Protestant exiles fleeing persecution in other parts of Europe. Calvin himself was an exile from Catholic France who hoped throughout his life that his homeland would one day embrace the Reformed religion. As a city of refugees, Geneva was hypersensitive to the advancing Catholic military threat. The defeat of the Protestant Schmalkaldic League in Germany in 1547 came as an ominous sign, as did the accession of the Catholic Mary Tudor ("Bloody Mary") in England in 1553, which sent more exiles, including the zealous Scotsman John Knox, fleeing to Geneva. Predestination served in this context, much as it did for Augustine facing the disintegration of the Roman Empire, as a doctrine of consolation and survival. Earthly existence, Calvin taught, was perpetual warfare, and the righteous would always suffer the hatred of the sinful majority. Yet persecution and dislocation did not happen without reason. Such adversity was God's providential means of

testing his elect, who would be vindicated in the end.[63] Predestination and the broader doctrine of providence therefore served the same purpose of convincing a beleaguered community of Christians that God was firmly in control of their destinies. "We have no other place of refuge than his providence," Calvin wrote. Commenting on this, the late Reformation historian Heiko Oberman argued that outside of the context of persecuted refugees, "Calvin's doctrine of election is not only abhorrent but also ungodly. But within this horizon of experience it is a precious experiential asset."[64]

Not surprisingly, therefore, the discussion of predestination in book 3 of the *Institutes* reads like a practical manual for the believer and, as such, is more systematic than anything Luther wrote on the subject.[65] Calvin admitted that predestination was a "baffling question" for many and conceded that excessive curiosity about God's secret counsels could be spiritually perilous. "If anyone with carefree assurance breaks into this place, he will not succeed in satisfying his curiosity and he will enter a labyrinth from which he can find no exit."[66] Yet he hastened to add that within the limits of what God revealed in scripture, predestination must be preached to the faithful. To avoid the subject for fear of disturbing "weak souls" was to reproach God himself, "as if he had unadvisedly let slip something hurtful to the church."[67] Calvin went on to discuss the facets of the doctrine point by point, insisting with Augustine that the case of Jacob and Esau proved that election was not based on divine foreknowledge of human merits. Why God chose one over the other was simply because it pleased him. Since God's will is by definition righteous, his choice of humans is also just; to question his will is to succumb to the blasphemous error that human standards of judgment are higher than divine wisdom.[68]

In defending the divine prerogative, Calvin did not shy away from the conclusion that God actively wills reprobation just as he wills election.[69] Here, the Geneva reformer departed from the more typically Augustinian way of describing reprobation, that God simply passes over some people, leaving them in the mass of condemned humanity.[70] For Calvin, logical consistency demanded a double decree of election and reprobation. As one theologian has explained Calvin's reasoning, God could not be thought of as doing anything by default.[71] Calvin saw evidence of God's active reprobation of persons in scripture, including Pharaoh's hardened heart (Ex. 4:21), the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction (Rom. 9:22), and even the many parables spoken by Christ, which transmitted his doctrine "wrapped in enigmas" so as to cast the reprobates into "greater stupidity." Calvin quoted Jesus' answer to his disciples on why he spoke in parables: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not

been given" (Matt. 13:11).[72] Such biblical passages in his view clearly precluded any possibility that scripture taught universal salvation. He reverted to the Augustinian method of explaining 1 Timothy 2:4 ("who desires everyone to be saved"): this meant only that the elect are chosen from all stations of society.[73] The stark truth of predestination was that God did not discriminate in fitting either vessels of wrath or vessels of mercy. "The decree is dreadful indeed, I confess," Calvin wrote. But for the elect, predestination is "very sweet fruit" when they realize that the mercy of election is illumined by the justice of reprobation. Both sides of the decree reflect God's glory.[74]

The glory of predestination for Calvin was a bit like a painting that reflects the supreme artifice of its creator. And yet, as with any aesthetic object, its beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Calvin's dig in the *Institutes* at the carping of "stupid men" against predestination reflected the reality that even in the holy commonwealth of Geneva, there were Philistines who failed to perceive the beauty of an unconditional double decree.[75] His substantially expanded discussion of predestination in successive editions of the *Institutes* was partly in response to objections raised by several Genevans to his preaching. During the height of these controversies in the 1550s, he also penned a significant treatise defending predestination.[76] The most famous of the critics was the French physician and former Catholic Jérôme-Hermès Bolsec, who accused Calvin of making God the author of sin. After public disputations that left some of the civil authorities mystified by the technicalities ("The things they talk and dispute about are vast and difficult," one official confessed), Bolsec was banished from the city.[77] Not long after, another Frenchman was hauled before the consistory for cursing Calvin's doctrine of predestination with an expletive. The authorities reproached him for his vulgarity, but he defended himself with the explanation that he came from "a country where they talk that way."[78] The incident hardly stifled all criticism. Soon, several pastors from other Swiss cities weighed in with their own attacks on Calvin's predestinarian doctrines. Meanwhile, in Bern, where opposition to Calvin had coalesced under Bolsec's influence, the authorities banned all polemical exchanges on the issue, hoping to keep the peace.[79] By Calvin's death in 1564, predestination was well on its way to becoming what one scholar has called the "werewolf of Reformed theology."[80]

The controversies of the 1550s proved that even in communities that were the most sociologically predisposed to see themselves as enclaves of elect saints, a doctrine that was comforting to many would never be comforting to all. Similar tensions would emerge in the Calvinist commonwealths of New England, but not before Protestantism experienced its birth pangs in the mother country. In the Reformation's tumultuous course in England,

predestination emerged front and center, with Geneva playing an important supporting role as the midwife of a Calvinist movement that would seek to remake the English church in its own image.

THE ENGLISH REFORMATION AND THE
RISE OF PURITANISM

The spiritual economy of England on the eve of the Reformation was deeply sacramental, characterized by what historian Diarmaid MacCulloch has called a "gigantic consumer demand of the dead."[81] Masses for the dead were the spiritual good demanded by their living relatives, who took for granted the power of the Blessed Sacrament to lift souls from purgatory and save all those who trusted in the literal communion with Christ's body. Like most of his subjects, King Henry VIII was wedded to this traditional sacramentalism and even issued (with the probable help of a few theologian ghostwriters) a treatise attacking Martin Luther's views, including his repudiation of purgatory and masses for the dead.[82] In gratitude for the book, Pope Leo X bestowed upon Henry the title "Defender of the Faith," not knowing that a later pope would excommunicate the king in the famous dispute over his request for an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon.[83] For all his lingering sympathies with Catholic doctrine, however, Henry's declaration of himself as supreme head of the Church of England in 1534 set the stage for his reform-minded archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, to begin moving the church in a new direction. The extent of Cranmer's Protestant inclinations became clear in 1547 when Henry died and his nine-year-old son succeeded him as Edward VI. Having received a thoroughly Protestant education—one of his tutors was a correspondent of Calvin—Edward was hailed upon his accession as the new Josiah, the latter-day counterpart to the reforming Judean boy-king of scripture. For Edward's handlers, especially Cranmer, the Tudor Josiah created an incomparable opportunity to fashion a distinctively Protestant English church.

Two months after Edward's coronation, the Catholic emperor Charles V dealt the Protestant cause on the Continent a serious blow by defeating the Schmalkaldic League at Mühlberg, Saxony. Cranmer quickly rolled out the welcome mat for some of the Continent's leading evangelical refugees, including Peter Martyr (Pietro Martire Vermigli) and Martin Bucer, and saw to their appointment as regius professors of divinity. Steeled by a faithful-remnant mentality, Bucer and Peter Martyr were thoroughgoing predestinarians, and Cranmer shared their zeal. Though some modern interpreters have wanted to see the archbishop as "sweetly reasonable and Anglican,"

notes MacCulloch, "Thomas Cranmer, theologian, without the doctrine of predestination is *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark."[84] Likely with help from the continental refugees, Cranmer proceeded to draft a doctrinal statement for the Church of England, the Forty-two Articles. Article 17 asserted that "before the foundacions of the worlde were laied," God decreed by his secret judgment to save those whom he had chosen and to "bring them to euerlasting saualtion by Christ, as vesselles made to honour." In a swipe at the Catholic economy of salvation, the articles also dismissed purgatory as "repugnant to the woorde of God."[85] The question now was whether Cranmer's reformation could win over ordinary people, many of whom were still attached to the idea that salvation for the living and the dead could be procured sacramentally.

The reformation of the "common sort," as the theologians called them, would have to wait. Barely two weeks after Edward VI promulgated the Forty-two Articles, the young king died suddenly and was succeeded by his Catholic half sister Mary, who would execute 282 men and women for heresy, including Cranmer, who went to the stake repudiating the pope as "Christ's enemy and [the] antichrist." Now it was the English Protestants' turn to be refugees, and some 800 fled to the Continent, many to Calvin's Geneva, where they continued to develop predestination and the associated doctrines of grace as bulwarks against the alleged Pelagianism of the Catholic oppressors.[86] One product of the exiles, the Geneva Bible (1560), helped to disseminate a predestinarian theology through its extensive annotations, which were expanded in successive editions. Predictably, the marginal notes on Romans 9, printed in small type, occupied nearly two-thirds of a page in the 1602 edition, which bore the exegetical stamp of Theodore Beza, Calvin's colleague and eventual successor.[87]

Fortunately for the exiles, Mary's reign was even shorter than the sickly Edward's. When she died in 1558, Protestantism again became official under Elizabeth I, who promulgated the Thirty-nine Articles (still printed in modern editions of the Book of Common Prayer), which retained the Forty-two Articles' basic doctrine of predestination. The reiteration came on the heels of a report submitted to Elizabeth by one returned exile, Edwin Sandys, the future archbishop of York, who complained that "some men of late are risen, which do gainsay and oppugn [the] truth" of predestination.[88] Sandys was evidently referring to a group of populist Protestant "free-willers," some of whom had been incarcerated together with their predestinarian opponents during Mary's reign, sparking an unlikely theological debate behind the walls of London's King's Bench Prison.[89] But this populist undercurrent was not the only reason that many Elizabethan clergy sought to reinforce predestinarian doctrine. Increasingly, they saw predestination as a way of

inoculating the laity against the scourge of a resurgent Catholic Church, which was then concluding the counterreformation Council of Trent and dispatching missionaries of the new Jesuit order to the New World. Fears of Catholicism were also running high thanks to John Foxe's immensely popular *Actes and Monuments* (1563), which catalogued gruesome stories of the Protestant martyrs. Many clergy feared a Catholic conspiracy to revive "works righteousness" among the laity and suspected that the Protestant free-willers were unwittingly abetting the cause.

So began a major offensive by the Elizabethan "godly" (the nickname of those clergy who later would be denominated as Puritans)[90] to disabuse the laity of what one godly divine, George Gifford, called "common man's pelagianism."[91] In published sermons and popular dialogues, clergy such as Gifford taught a Protestant theology of grace alone. Predestination was the fortress that safeguarded the all-sufficiency of God's grace—no magical sacramental formula or work of penance could alter the divine decree—and was a practical source of comfort for the believer. The comfort derived from the assurance of one's election, which could be obtained by scrutinizing one's life for the signs of holiness that would inevitably arise in persons chosen by God. The suspicious resemblance of such self-scrutiny to the meritorious works of Catholicism was a latent contradiction that radical Puritan "antinomians" would later exploit. But in the Elizabethan years, godly clergy trafficked heavily in practical manuals urging the laity, as Gifford memorably put it, to "beate [their] braine[s] more earnestly about heavenly thinges."[92]

As they were writing how-to manuals for the laity, the godly clergy also were theorizing about predestination in increasingly technical fashion. The most important writer of both technical and practical works was the Cambridge theologian William Perkins (1558–1602).[93] Like the young Augustine, who sowed his wild oats before converting, Perkins was reputedly promiscuous and drunken in college until a profound conversion experience turned him to a pastoral vocation. His early preaching about damnation, according to one chronicler, "left a doleful Echo in his auditours ears a good while after," though in his "older" age (he died at 44 of an apparent gallstone), Perkins "altered his voice, and remitted much of his former rigidnesse, often professing that to preach mercie was that proper office of the Ministers of the Gospell."[94] Ironically, Perkins's powerful sense of God's mercy toward the elect led him to articulate predestination in a way that many later critics regarded as anything but merciful.

Perkins's most famous treatment of predestination was not a treatise but a chart, specifically the table included in his book, *A Golden Chaine*, which appeared in the first of many editions in 1591.[95] The book's title referred to the so-called *armilla aurea* (golden chain), the name used by Reformed theologians for the unbreakable sequence of salvation spelled out by the
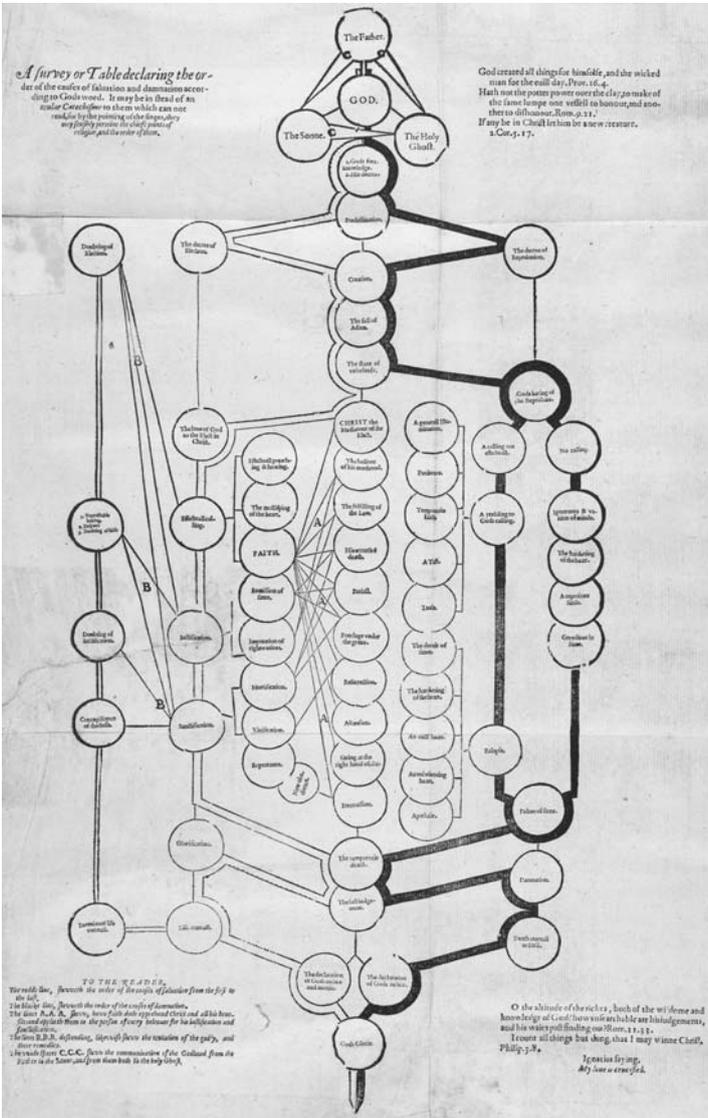
Chart illustrating God's predestinarian decrees, from William
Perkins, *A Golden Chaine* (1591), photographed from the
1608 edition. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library,
Yale University.

apostle Paul in Romans 8:30 ("Whom he did predestinate, them he also
called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified,
them he also glorified"). Based on this biblical foundation and drawing on
a similar chart by Calvin's successor Theodore Beza, Perkins's diagram sys-
tematized the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) in elaborate detail, showing

the main stages (election, effectual calling, justification, sanctification, glorification) and the possible "tentations" (trials, temptations) of the godly. The chart likewise schematized the stages of reprobation, which together with election pointed to "Gods Glorie" and which is manifested when the reprobates receive justice and the elect receive mercy.[96]

The chart's most controversial feature, however, was its attempt to illustrate how predestination fit into the sequence of God's own logic. The top of the diagram depicted the triune God as decreeing election and reprobation *prior* to decreeing the creation of the world and the Fall of Adam. Here, it seemed, was absolute predestination pushed to its logical extreme: God took nothing into account—not even Adam's future sin—in deciding to save some and to damn others. Election and reprobation were utterly gratuitous; they depended on no merit or demerit that God foresaw in individuals. Predestination was God's great primal act and was logically influenced by nothing—not even the pitiable (or, viewed from a different angle, contemptible) sight of the future mass of fallen humanity. The very creation of the world was subordinate to the prior manifestation of God's mercy and justice in the decrees of election and reprobation. Such a stark view came to be known among Reformed theologians as *supralapsarian* (from the Latin *supra lapsum*), meaning that predestination occurred "above" or prior to the Fall in the sequence of God's logic. (The sequence is logical rather than temporal, the dogmaticians stressed, since everything is eternally present in the divine mind.) Supralapsarianism departed from the more typical *infralapsarian* view, classically expressed by Augustine, that predestination occurred "below" or after the Fall, meaning that God first decreed the creation and the Fall and only then decreed to save some and damn (or "pass over") others.[97]

Perkins apparently devised his table as a practical aid for understanding his larger work. The only problem was that some readers looked only at the table.[98] The larger text of *A Golden Chaine*, along with Perkins's later works, such as *A Christian and Plaine Treatise of the Manner and Order of Predestination*, revealed the complex qualifications in his thinking about the decrees. As Richard Muller has shown, Perkins was in some respects actually milder in his views than Calvin, though many later interpreters have assumed the opposite. For Perkins, the decrees of the creation and Fall differed in that God positively willed the former and "permitted" the latter; for Calvin, both were positively willed acts.[99] Perkins also anticipated the objection that supralapsarianism portrayed God's "loving" or "hating" *future* persons, a logical stumbling block for some critics. Perkins's solution to this problem involved a multiplication of distinctions. He subdivided the divine decrees of election and reprobation into "double acts"—the ends and the means. The end of election was God's eternal purpose to manifest his mercy in saving

certain persons, regardless of their merits. The means of election was the actual saving of chosen persons through the merits of Christ, who as a co-eternal member of the Trinity was both the elect and the electing mediator. Perkins further subdivided the means into five "degrees" involving the ordaining, promising, exhibiting, applying, and accomplishing of Christ's mediating work. As for reprobation, its end was God's eternal purpose to manifest his justice in forsaking certain persons, regardless of their sins. The means of reprobation was the actual ordaining of forsaken persons for destruction, which Perkins further subdivided into two "degrees" involving God's deserting (or denying persons the grace to persevere in goodness) and damning (or punishing persons for the sin they freely willed "in Adam"). God therefore hated and damned actual persons for actual sins; only his *initial* act of reprobating future persons was decreed in the abstract, apart from sin.[100]

The technical heft of Perkins's exposition of the decrees—the preceding summary reveals merely the tip of the iceberg—was typical of the output of the Protestant scholastics who flourished between the late sixteenth and late eighteenth centuries. The Puritan doctrines of predestination must be seen in the context of this international movement of Protestant orthodoxy in which English, Dutch, German, and other nationalities of dogmaticians shared a common language (Latin) and developed a common specialized vocabulary.[101] Predestination was not the controlling principle of their systems, which attempted to elaborate all subtopics of Christian theology. Neither were the doctrines of the decrees intended to violate the unity of God's essence. The scholastics in fact insisted on God's simplicity (again, using a technical term: *simplicitas Dei*), meaning that there were no logical distinctions in the divine mind. Perkins explained that he had divided and subdivided the decrees solely for the sake of human understanding.[102] Yet in giving predestination its most laboriously precise exposition since the scholasticism of the Middle Ages, figures such as Perkins left themselves open to the charge, later leveled against the New England Puritans, of intellectual arrogance. Many critics simply did not believe the scholastics' denial that their systems were intended to penetrate the impenetrable mysteries of God's essence. The ambitious scope of the scholastic project also created many possibilities for technical disagreements among the theologians themselves.

ARMINIANISM VERSUS "FIVE-POINT" CALVINISM

The most spectacular of the Protestant scholastic disputes originated in the work of the Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius (1559–1609), whose teachers had included Theodore Beza. While serving for 15 years as a Reformed

pastor at Amsterdam, he wrestled extensively with the predestinarian intricacies of both Catholic and Protestant scholasticism and wrote a refutation of Perkins's *Manner and Order of Predestination*.[103] In 1603, after plague broke out in Leiden and killed two of the university's three theology professors, Arminius was appointed to the faculty. He soon clashed with his colleague Franciscus Gomarus, an ardent supralapsarian, in a protracted controversy that led Arminius to make his famous *Declaration of Sentiments* (1608) just one year before his death.[104]

As the *Declaration* made clear, Arminius opposed both the supra- and infralapsarian versions of the decrees, though he reserved particular scorn for supralapsarianism, which he found utterly at odds with scripture and repugnant to God's wisdom, justice, and goodness. Anticipating later objections to absolute predestination among many American evangelicals, he accused the supralapsarians of extinguishing all zeal for the conversion of sinners. Even prayer in a supralapsarian scheme was rendered futile, he charged, except as a way of worshipping God.[105] As an alternative to supra- and infralapsarian predestination, both of which he felt made God the author of sin, Arminius outlined his own fourfold order of the decrees whereby God (1) appointed Jesus Christ as Savior, (2) determined to save all those who repented of their sins and believed in Christ, (3) provided in a "sufficient and efficacious manner" the means necessary for repentance and faith, and (4) elected to salvation those persons he foresaw would believe and persevere.[106]

The third and fourth decrees in Arminius's fourfold scheme revealed the crux of his disagreement with Calvinism. He believed that through the saving death of Christ, God provided prevenient grace (Latin, *gratia praeveniens*: grace that "comes before") to all persons, not just the elect.[107] This initial infusion of grace preceding conversion enables fallen humans to cooperate with God, if they so choose, by not resisting the Holy Spirit's workings in their souls. As one contemporary theologian has explained it, prevenient grace created not so much a *free* will but a will *freed* to accept or reject Christ. Without this initial gift of grace, humans would remain completely in bondage to sin and unable to turn to God. Indeed, Arminius strenuously denied the accusation that his theology amounted to Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism, which taught that the Fall did not obliterate all freedom in humans to choose the good. To the charge that his system violated the cardinal Protestant principle of grace alone, Arminius pleaded not guilty.[108] He also insisted that he still believed in predestination. As the fourth decree in his scheme defined it, Arminian predestination was conditional upon humans' freely willed response to God.

Conditional predestination, however, raised the same logical difficulties that had once vexed Augustine. In what sense does an all-knowing, all-determining God leave predestination open to human response? If God knows how each person will respond, does this foreknowledge not amount to foreordination? Arminius insisted that prevenient grace gives humans genuine freedom, but his explanation of the nature of divine foreknowledge of human choices was typically scholastic in its complexity. Occasional references in his writings to "middle knowledge" (*scientia media*) have led some interpreters to conclude that he accepted the theory of Luis de Molina (1535–1600), a Spanish Jesuit, that God knows certain things hypothetically. That is, God foreknows how a free creature will respond, given a particular set of circumstances. Though God creates circumstances based on this foreknowledge and in this way predestines for salvation those people he foresees will accept his grace, humans' future actions remain "free" because they are logically prior to—indeed, they are the ground of—God's electing choice.[109]

Regardless of whether Arminius was influenced by Molinism, the idea that any future human action could be the cause of God's decision was anathema to strict Calvinists, who considered it a grave affront to absolute divine sovereignty.[110] Arminius's death in 1609 hardly put an end to the controversy, for the next year in the Arminian Articles, or *Remonstrance*, his supporters (known as Remonstrants) formally reasserted three anti-Calvinist positions: election is based on divine foresight of faith; the atonement is universal, remitting the sins of all who believe; and grace is resistible. The Remonstrants further provoked their opponents, who tended to be older, more established ministers, by calling for a national synod to reconsider the Calvinism of the Belgic Confession (1561). Soon, a contra-Remonstrant party issued its own statement reasserting a Calvinistic line against the young Turks. The battle lines were drawn, and in an age when preaching still served as a form of popular entertainment, persuasive clergy drew many laypersons into the fray. "People argued about the issues on passenger barges and sang partisan songs in front of the houses of prominent members of the opposite faction," notes social historian Philip Benedict.[111] Nothing less than the future of the Reformation in Holland seemed to be at stake. A national synod was finally convened, but in the end, the contra-Remonstrants outmaneuvered their opponents. Reformed orthodoxy was enshrined in the Canons of Dort (1618–1619), whose predestinarian propositions henceforth were known by an acronym that spelled an appropriately Dutch flower, TULIP: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. Though the synod

rejected a minority attempt to endorse supralapsarianism, opting instead for the milder infra- position, TULIP was nevertheless a strict rule of faith. All people sin in Adam, and from this mass of condemned sinners, God elects a certain number according to the "good pleasure of his will," without regard to their foreseen faith. Christ's death, though sufficient for the whole world, is effective only for the elect, who cannot fail to receive God's grace and persevere to the end.[112]

The codification of "five-point Calvinism" (another nickname for TULIP) at Dort resembled an earlier attempt by Puritans in England to give predestinarian orthodoxy official creedal status. Historians still debate whether an informal Calvinist theological consensus existed among late Tudor and early Stuart church leaders (even those who were not "hot" Puritans), or whether the hallmark of English Protestantism was by then a distinctively Anglican moderation on contentious doctrinal questions.[113] What is clear is that late in Elizabeth's reign, an anti-Calvinist faction emerged at Cambridge University, prompting the archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, to issue the Lambeth Articles (1595) in hopes of quelling the unrest. Drafted in their initial form by the Cambridge Puritan theologian William Whitaker, the articles anticipated Dort's affirmation of unconditional election and the perseverance of the saints. To the archbishop's embarrassment, however, Queen Elizabeth refused to make the articles officially binding. In a letter to Whitgift, the queen's privy counselor noted that Her Majesty disliked the parading of disputed points of predestination, "a matter tender and dangerous to weak and ignorant minds."[114]

After the Virgin Queen died in 1603 and was succeeded by Scottish monarch James I, he too rebuffed a request, this time by the Puritans, who presented their grievances at the Hampton Court Conference (1604), to incorporate the Lambeth statements into the Thirty-nine Articles in the Book of Common Prayer. Like Elizabeth, the king feared that "stuff[ing] the book" with the arcane conclusions of theologians would confuse and divide the "simple people."[115] James himself was not unsympathetic to the cause of international Calvinism. When the Arminian controversy arose in Holland, he authorized the public burning in England of books by Conrad Vorstius, Arminius's like-minded successor at Leiden. He also urged the Dutch authorities to convene the Synod of Dort and sent an English delegation. In so involving himself in Dutch affairs, the king hoped to prevent Arminianism from "creep[ing] into the bowels of our owne Kingdom."[116] Nevertheless, by the early 1620s, a religious and political crisis was unfolding in Europe, and James began to back away from his public pro-Calvinist rhetoric. The Protestants had just lost Bohemia and the Palatinate to the Catholics in the first phase of the Thirty Years' War, and Spain appeared bent on reconsolidating its former control

Labyrinth (gloss on Psalm 119) from Francis Quarles, *Emblemes* (1643). Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

over the Netherlands. James hoped to negotiate a peace through an ill-fated Anglo-Spanish marriage alliance for his son Charles. Amid these delicate dealings with a Catholic power, the king rejected a request by English Calvinists to make the Canons of Dort binding in England.[117]

In the meantime, it was becoming clear that a distinctive English brand of Arminianism (whose proponents nevertheless usually rejected the name) was making significant inroads among the nation's religious intelligentsia. These English Arminians, more sacramental and high church than their Dutch counterparts, cultivated what they called the "beauty of holiness"—a ceremonialism enriched by the very things the Puritans regarded as abominable papist idolatries: vestments, candles, crosses, incense, altars fenced off by rails, and gestures such as genuflecting and making the sign of the cross. To the English Arminians, these high-church features elevated the dignity of the sacraments as actual means of grace, whereas the Puritans' predestinarianism inevitably weakened belief in the sacraments' inherent power. The Puritans' insistence on preaching predestination further undermined sacramentalism by making the sermon, rather than priestly ceremonies, the focal point of religious services. Thus, advocates of a higher ceremonialism, such as the bishop of Winchester, Lancelot Andrewes, urged a respectful agnosticism on predestinarian questions. The rout of the Dutch Arminians at the Synod of Dort only increased the alarm of English Arminians that an aggressive predestinarianism was on the march. By the final years of James's reign, tensions between Arminians and Puritans were running so high that the king banned all clergy below the rank of bishop from preaching on the "deep points of predestination, election, reprobation, or of the universality, efficacy, resistibility, or irresistibility of God's grace."[118]

James died in 1625, and as had been the case ever since Henry VIII's break with Rome, the change in monarch brought religious upheaval as well. A few weeks after the king's death, his son Charles I married Princess Henrietta Maria of France, sparking a new controversy over the reality—finally consummated this time after the failed Spanish marriage scheme—of a Catholic queen at court. Outwardly, Charles remained loyal to England's established Protestantism and adhered to the anti-Catholic policies of his predecessors. (He broke a number of promises made to France, as conditions of his marriage alliance, to improve the legal status of English Catholics.) Charles also was willing to criticize Arminianism when such censures served his political purposes. But while his innermost theological views remained an enigma, temperamentally the new king was cut from the same cloth as the English Arminians, with their hierarchical, ceremonial vision of religion and society. Though the Puritans also accepted many traditional social hierarchies, the implicit egalitarianism of absolute predestination (that God elects without regard to status or merit), combined with the perceived air of moral superiority among the self-proclaimed godly, often set Puritanism at odds with royalist ideology. The Arminians' priestly, high-church style, along with their firm Anglican commitment to ecclesiastical government by

bishops, was far better suited for ceremonially reinforcing the king's prerogatives as head of both church and state.[119]

Consequently, when Archbishop of Canterbury George Abbot, a card-carrying Calvinist appointed by King James in 1611, died in 1633, Charles seized the opportunity to elevate the influential Arminian bishop of London, William Laud (1573–1645), to the see of Canterbury. Like the late Lancelot Andrewes, whom he had succeeded for a time as dean of the Chapel Royal, Laud regarded debate over predestination as unseemly and divisive. He had no patience for godly preachers who repeatedly hammered home strict Calvinism, which he believed made God "the most unreasonable tyrant in the world." The focus of his own piety was instead the Eucharist. As he once explained, in terms that would have set Puritan teeth on edge, "the altar is the greatest place of God's residence upon earth, greater than the pulpit; for there 'tis *Hoc est corpus meum*, This is my body; but in the other it is at most but *Hoc est verbum meum*, This is my word."[120] Upon becoming archbishop, Laud wasted no time in implementing this eucharistic vision. He oversaw the refurbishment of altars in many churches and beefed up the enforcement of prescribed prayer book rituals. He hounded outspoken Puritan clergy and disbanded a lay organization that sought to purchase church livings for godly preachers. Charles, meanwhile, reissued his father's Book of Sports, which allowed games and other entertainments on Sundays after religious services, and required all clergy to read the directive from the pulpit—a slap in the face to strict Puritan sabbatarians. All of these developments prompted accusations of popery from beleaguered Puritans, who feared that the Church of England was capitulating to the forces of the Antichrist. The inhospitable climate soon drove some of the most zealous clergy to the woods of America, where they assumed they could preach predestination unmolested by the doctrine's sacramentalist detractors. Little did these exiles know that Old World tensions would all too soon reemerge in New World guises.