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**Prescience, Predestination, and the
Creator-Creature Distinction:
Francis Turretin's Critique of
Luis De Molina's *Scientia Media***

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The Jesuit order was barely emerging from infancy into adolescence in the late sixteenth century when it found itself in the midst of a great theological quarrel with their new rivals, the established Dominicans. Controversy was first instigated when Jesuits such as Francisco Suarez (1548-1617) and Luis de Molina (1535-1600) began advocating significant modifications to the widely accepted Thomistic view of predestination, human freedom, and divine foreknowledge. Dominican leaders such as Francisco Zumel (1540-1607) and Domingo Bañez (1528-1604), whose order was closely associated with Thomas Aquinas, saw traces of Pelagianism in the proposed revisions. As a result, they viewed this aspect of Jesuit theology to be a vital threat to the doctrinal health of the church.

If the coals of debate were hot by 1587 from the innovative thought of theologians such as Suarez and Pedro de Fonseca (1528-1599), the fire of controversy grew to full flame with the 1588 publication of Molina's *Liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis, divina praescientia, providentia, praedestinatione et reprobatione concordia*.¹ In his influential work Molina posited a third kind of divine knowledge, a *scientia media*, according to which God

¹ The section of Molina's *Concordia* that deals especially with his conception of *scientia media* is Part IV. Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988).

determines whom he predestines. Working in the context of the Counter-Reformation, his formulation was intended to remedy the Protestant error of accentuating divine sovereignty to the extent that human freedom is violated.² Bañez and other zealous Dominicans, determined to serve as defenders of orthodoxy, accused Molina of parting from tradition in the direction of Pelagianism.

The quarrel reached such a crescendo that Iberian leaders, in an attempt to preserve social peace, finally appealed to Pope Clement VIII (1536-1605) to settle the matter in 1594. The result was a papal commission for the 1597 *Congregatio de Auxiliis*, which was organized to reach an official verdict on the issue. For ten years the vicious debate continued to be played out on the world's grandest doctrinal stage – the papal courts. Just when it appeared that the Dominicans would be victorious in the dispute, Molina died. Despite the absence of the argument's most significant instigator, the dispute continued by means of reports, dossiers, tracts, and even verbal debates in Clement's presence.³ Finally, in 1607, assisted by the efforts of Cardinals Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) and Jacques du Perron (1555-1618), Pope Paul V (1550-1621) issued a decree that permitted both Jesuit and Dominican views, but “the Jesuits were forbidden to call the Dominicans Calvinists, while the Dominicans were told that they must not call the Jesuits Pelagians.”⁴

Though to this day the Roman Catholic Church tolerates both the Jesuit and Dominican views on divine foreknowledge and predestination, Molina's conception of middle knowledge in his *Concordia* has continued to exercise influence in Protestant circles, particularly among Arminians. As Richard Muller has explained,

In Arminius' hands, the idea of middle knowledge retained the direction given to it by Molina and became the philosophical underpinning of Arminius' doctrine of predestination; in Socinian hands, however, it was drawn out in relation to a revised view of the divine essence and

² William V. Bangert, S.J., *A History of the Society of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (The Institute of Jesuit Sources: St. Louis, 1986) 115; William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents From Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), 169.

³ Bangert, *History of the Society of Jesus*, 116.

⁴ Frederick Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy*, vol. III: *Ockham to Suarez* (London: Burns and Oates, 1968), 344.

attributes, including the claim that there was indeed succession in God, and transformed into a doctrine of limited divine foreknowledge.⁵

It is, therefore, not altogether surprising to observe a revival in Molinism that has paralleled the increasing popularity of Arminian and Open Theist theology in American Protestantism.⁶ A growing number of American Protestant theologians, such as William Lane Craig, have found in Molina's *scientia media* a system that appears to logically harmonize a conservative understanding of divine sovereignty with a libertarian notion of human free will.

In the revisitation of Molina's supposition, however, some scholars and theologians have maintained a degree of near-sightedness when recounting the historical development of this doctrine. The story is typically portrayed as strictly a Jesuit-Dominican in-house affair.⁷ The sole critique of Molina's position on foreknowledge and predestination, according to the standard account, came from the voices of the Dominican camp. While the debate between Roman Catholic orders is an imperative part of the narrative to be sure, it is also helpful to grasp the Protestant reaction to Molina's *Concordia* in the seventeenth century. Few writers acknowledge today that during the 17th century, the majority of post-Reformation Reformed theologians offered their own version of a critique of *scientia media*.⁸ It is valuable to understand the unique way in which certain Reformed figures have evaluated the Jesuit position.

One such seventeenth-century Protestant theologian who offered a critique of Molina's doctrine as expounded in the *Concordia* was the Italian Reformed scholastic Francis Turretin. Though Turretin and Molina were not contemporaries, the Reformed thinker saw in Jacobus Arminius's (1560-1609) theology a Protestant translation of

⁵ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 418.

⁶ See Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing House, 1987); Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*; William Hasker, *God, Time, and Foreknowledge* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989); Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989); Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Possibility of an All-Knowing God* (New York: Martin's Press, 1986).

⁷ Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 169-206. See also Freddoso's preface to Molina's *On Divine Foreknowledge*.

⁸ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 420-421.

the Jesuit *scientia media*. Partially in response to this developing threat to the Reformed system, Turretin in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* outlined six reasons why middle knowledge was to be rejected.⁹ The current study endeavors to demonstrate that in Turretin's six-fold critique of Molina's doctrine of *scientia media* in his *Concordia*, their differing views can largely be attributed to conflicting presuppositions regarding the Creator-creature distinction, that is, the nature of God in relation to humanity. In order to sufficiently examine this issue, however, it is first necessary to flesh out the way in which Molina presented God's *scientia media* in the *Concordia*.¹⁰

Molina's Doctrine of Scientia Media

When analyzing Molina's theology, it is imperative to grasp the two-fold influence involved in the development of his thought; namely, the nature of Jesuit views on human liberty and the teaching he received from his instructor Fonseca.¹¹ The former played a foundational role in providing Molina with anthropological presuppositions regarding the innate and fundamental freedom of the human will, presuppositions that served as the foundation on which he developed his version of middle knowledge. The Jesuit tradition was widely known for its great libertarian concern for the preservation of human free will. Working within this context, it is not at all surprising to see the doctrine of middle knowledge produced and developed within Jesuit circles, particularly in a time in which the Roman Catholic Church sought a lucid response to the rapidly spreading Protestant movement.

If the former influence provided the backdrop for Molina's theology, the latter played a more direct role in the formation of his thought. Fonseca, at times referred to as the "Aristotle of Portugal," was an early architect of the notion of middle knowledge.¹² While Molina has often been presented as the author of *scientia media*, he is

⁹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George M. Giger and ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P and R, 1992-6), I.xiii.9-23.

¹⁰ For a more detailed exposition of Molina's doctrine of *scientia media*, see Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 169-206.

¹¹ Bangert, *History of the Society of Jesus*, 115-116.

¹² James Brodrick, S. J., *The Progress of the Jesuits (1556-79)*, (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947), 132.

more accurately described as the scholar who developed this concept into a comprehensive and attractive alternative, other than the anathematized Pelagianism, to Augustinian, Thomistic, and Protestant notions of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human liberty.¹³ Fonseca speculated about a divine knowledge of contingent futures antecedent to and independent of the decree. Leonardus Lessius (1554-1623), a Jesuit instructor of theology at the University of Louvain, also contributed to what would become Molina's doctrine of middle knowledge in suggesting that God does not grant saving grace to anyone unless he foresees one freely exercise their free will toward salvation.¹⁴ Molina, advancing the mission of his predecessors, worked with these ideas in bringing middle knowledge to maturity.

As was highlighted earlier, Molina conceptualized middle knowledge in response to a perceived problem in the Augustinian tradition that overemphasized God's sovereignty to the point at which it infringed upon human liberty. Beginning with this conviction, he opened his discussion of middle knowledge in the *Concordia* by exploring the nature of future contingencies and what things can be known by God.¹⁵ Molina adopted the traditional, Aristotelian conception of agents that distinguished between the natural and the free, a distinction was also transferred to types of knowledge.¹⁶ Natural knowledge, according to the common understanding, incorporates all things that are possible, while free knowledge comprises those things whose futurity is definite in that they are determined by the divine will.

Molina continued by examining Aquinas's response to Scotus regarding the question whether God knows future contingent things with certainty. While he agreed with Aquinas that God knows future contingents, he went on to disagree with Aquinas's reasoning that God's knowledge of contingents is predicated on their existence with God in eternity. He was forced to reckon with the Thomist argument because Dominicans were appealing to it as a fundamental feature of

¹³ Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 418; Turretin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.2.

¹⁴ Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 169.

¹⁵ Molina, *Concordia*, 4.47-48.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 4.47.4 n.4.

their critique of middle knowledge. After speculating that Aquinas might not sincerely have held to this claim, Molina concluded in disagreement with Aquinas's statement on the issue.

It is not simply because things exist outside their causes in eternity that God knows future contingents with certainty; rather, before...He creates anything at all, He comprehends in Himself – because of the depth of His knowledge – all the things which, as a result of all the secondary causes possible by virtue of His omnipotence, would contingently or simply freely come to be on the hypothesis that He should will to establish these or those orders of things with these or those circumstances.¹⁷

In other words, Molina was not comfortable with Aquinas's explanation for how God knows with certainty all future contingents; namely, that all future contingents exist in eternity with God, transcending the bounds of time.

Molina's response to Aquinas's statement is helpful in understanding both the doctrine of middle knowledge and the motivation behind its inception. A system that allows all future contingents to exist in eternity with God was a threatening prospect in eyes of the Jesuits in that it would reduce the role of the human will in acting as a causal agent. This is why as part of his argument against the Thomist view Molina submitted that future contingents, by their very nature, are bound by time and their respective causes.¹⁸ The futurity of a contingent, according to Molina, is dependent on a cause being exercised; likewise, a future contingent cannot exist in the past, present, or in eternity. If all future contingents exist in eternity, then God does not need to look into the future to see what choices humans will freely make.

This line of reasoning led Molina to the heart of middle knowledge. Central to Molina's thesis in the fourth part of his *Concordia* is that God bases his predestination upon his eternal foreknowledge of the choices each individual will freely make in the future.¹⁹ Included in divine foreknowledge are all possible future contingents, both those that will reach futurity and those that will not,

¹⁷ Ibid, 4.49.8.

¹⁸ Ibid, 4.49.7-14; Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 171-173.

¹⁹ Molina, *Concordia*, 4.49.1-8.

which are determined by the employment of human free will. Since God knows all future contingents, Molina reasoned, he knows even the minutest detail that will factor into each free decision that will be made, which consequently allows him to know with certainty which choices will be made. This knowledge, therefore, must exist antecedent to the divine decree, which was a major departure from the established understanding of the divine attributes.²⁰ It is thus called “middle” knowledge in that it resides between God’s natural and free knowledge.²¹ As Richard Muller has observed of *scientia media*, “it understands God neither as simply willing a particular possible world rather than another nor as having willed a particular (actual) world, but as foreknowing and reacting to the result of a finite contingency or conditionality as prior to and apart from his willing.”²²

For example, Molina would be comfortable saying that God predestined John Smith unto salvation, but only according to his *scientia media* redefinition of predestination. In other words, Molina would argue that while God predestined John before the foundation of the world, John still exercised an utterly free will in choosing salvation. In spite of the fact that John’s decision was independent of the divine decree and only a possible future contingent before creation, God foreknew John’s choice because he knew all of the external and internal factors that would be involved in John’s decision. Molina explained that God “saw in His own essence what each such faculty would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or in that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things – even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite.”²³ As a result, God knew with certainty that John would choose salvation over damnation. John’s choice then becomes the impetus for God’s predestination. Therefore, while Molina was indeed willing to employ the term predestination, he redefined it in such a way that significantly altered the substance of its meaning from the historic, orthodox conception.

²⁰ Ibid, 4.52.9; Turretin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.1-8; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 417-424.

²¹ Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 125; Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 175-176.

²² Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 419.

²³ Molina, *Concordia*, 4.52.9.

In examining Molina's doctrine of middle knowledge it is imperative to observe the scriptural texts to which he referred in expounding his position. While there were many passages that he highlighted while defending his view, two are especially helpful to examine for our purposes, namely Matthew 11:21 and 1 Samuel 23:10-12.²⁴ As was acknowledged earlier, Molina disagreed with Aquinas's statements on the presence of future contingents in eternity with God.

It is clear from Sacred Scripture that the supreme God has certain cognition of some future contingents that depend on human free choice, but that neither have existed nor ever will exist in reality and that hence do not exist in eternity either; therefore, it is not simply because future contingents exist outside their causes in eternity that God knows them with certainty.²⁵

Molina supported this claim by pointing to Matthew 11:21, "If the wonders that have been worked among you had been worked in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes." He explained that this verse reveals God's knowledge of conditional future contingents that never reached actuality. Had the wonders that were worked in Chorozain and Bethsaida been worked in Tyre and Sidon, repentance would have been the outcome. As it was, however, the wonders were worked in Chorozain and Bethsaida; so "this repentance never did and never will exist in reality – and yet it was a future contingent dependent on the free choice of human beings."²⁶ Therefore, as Molina reasoned, although God foreknew both conditional future contingents, their futurity is dependent on the independent actions of the human will.

Likewise, Molina addressed 1 Samuel 23:10-12.²⁷ In this text, David submitted two inquiries to God. When he asked if Saul would come to Keilah to destroy the city, the Lord responded, "He will come down." When David inquired whether the inhabitants of Keilah would hand him and his men to Saul, the Lord responded, "They will surrender you." Molina was quick to highlight the fact that neither of

²⁴ Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 183.

²⁵ Molina, *Concordia*, 4.49.9.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. Molina, using the Vulgate, referred to this passage as 1 Kings 23:10-12.

these events actually came to pass, which reveals God’s knowledge of conditional future contingents that never reach actualization because of free human choices. As he argued from Matthew 11:21, Molina contended here that since these events never occurred, this result derived from the independent choices of the human will. God was merely revealing two conditional future contingents to David. This narrative in 1 Samuel and Jesus’ words in Matthew 11:21, according to Molina, prove that the scriptures reveal that God possesses a middle knowledge.²⁸

Turretin’s Critique of Scientia Media

In spite of the fact that Francis Turretin was not a contemporary of Molina, he was forced to deal with the doctrine of middle knowledge when it began to make inroads into the Protestant movement.²⁹ He performed his response to Molina’s theology in the context of his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Turretin stated from the outset that his point of contention with the Jesuit’s view was “not whether God knows future contingencies (for all agree that God knows from eternity by a certain knowledge not only things themselves, but all their combinations and connections, whether present, past and future, or necessary and contingent).”³⁰ The question of the matter, rather, was whether future contingents belong to a knowledge that is independent from the natural and free knowledge of God. Turretin was uncomfortable with a system that allowed a knowledge antecedent to the divine decree.³¹ As a result, he developed in his *Institutes* a six-fold critique of middle knowledge that attempted to expose the doctrine as being in violation of an orthodox understanding of the Creator-creature distinction.

Turretin opened his critique of Molina’s *scientia media* by appealing to the historic Christian notion of divine knowledge. According to Turretin’s reasoning, there is simply no room for any knowledge of future conditional things since “natural and free knowledge embrace all knowable things and entities and are not to be

²⁸ Ibid, 4.49.9-10; Craig, *Problem of Divine Knowledge*, 183.

²⁹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 418.

³⁰ Turretin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.5.

³¹ Ibid, I.xiii.8.

multiplied unnecessarily.”³² All knowable things are either possible (though will never reach actuality) or future (i.e. things that will certainly reach actuality). Turretin saw no possibility for a third category since the other two categories already incorporate all knowable things.

Molina, on the other hand, posited a third category of possible future conditionals that were dependent upon human free will.³³ The critical point of error in Molina’s doctrine, according to Turretin, was that this third category introduced knowledge that precedes the divine decree. This is apparent in Turretin’s explanation that knowable things “are such either from a condition only possible or powerful, yet never to take place, or from a condition *certainly future and decreed*.”³⁴ While the decree clearly played a significant role in Turretin’s critique of middle knowledge, he delayed a full treatise on this point in order to highlight in this first section his contention that Molina’s doctrine introduced a third category of knowledge that was foreign to the Christian tradition.

The second point in Turretin’s critique of middle knowledge relates to the question of what determines a thing to be true or untrue. When he opened this section by stating, “Things not true cannot be foreknown as true,” he had in mind a presupposition that only the determination of the divine will can cause a conditional future thing to be true.³⁵ In order to illustrate his point further, Turretin used the Sidonians as an example, who would have repented if the powers had been granted to them, “for they would have been indifferently disposed in their nature to repent or not to repent, those powers being given.” Therefore, he continued, the truth of their repentance must come from another source, namely the divine will.

Turretin argued that in removing the decree from the equation, middle knowledge leaves such determinations without a cause. In other words, God’s knowledge does not cause a future contingent to be true, “not his essence or knowledge, for neither can operate *ad extra* separated from the will.”³⁶ Simply placing divine knowledge

³² Ibid, I.xiii.9.

³³ Molina, *Concordia*, 4.49.9.

³⁴ Turretin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.9. Italics added.

³⁵ Ibid, I.xiii.10.

³⁶ Ibid.

prior to the decree does not produce a system that allows for efficacious causes that are able to produce the objects of this middle knowledge. The issue, once again, boils down to the role of the decree of the Lord in relation to human actions, not to the question whether contingents have their existence in eternity. Turretin's contention was that no future conditional can be known antecedent to the decree. In order to substantiate this statement, he related the point to the fundamental relation of cause to effect. He argued, "as no effect can be understood as future (whether absolutely or hypothetically) without the divine decree... so no future conditional thing can be knowable before the decree."³⁷ The reason he so adamantly claimed there can be no true future effect apart from the decree is because *no creature can exist apart from divine causality*. If no effect can be understood as future without the decree, then no future conditional can be knowable before the decree. Molina's doctrine of the nature of God permitted human agents to function in a context that is independent from God's will. Turretin was uncomfortable with this construction in that it violated the historic understanding of the nature of causes. It is for this reason that he turned his third critique toward the discussion of the nature of and relationship between first and second causes.

Continuing the line of reasoning from his second critique, Turretin began his third argument addressing the nature of middle knowledge. The primary concern for Turretin in this section of his *Institutes* was that which Molina has placed as the object of *scientia media*. According to the Patristic, Medieval, and Reformed theology, all acts of the created will are embraced by God's providence to the extent that no actions of the created will come to pass independent of the divine will. This was an imperative principle for Turretin. He defended this foundational tenet by stating, "Now that there is such a subjection of the created will is evident from the dependence between the first cause and second causes, between Creator and creatures."³⁸ In other words, to suggest that the human will operates apart from the decree is tantamount to removing the first cause from the process, which renders all proceeding second causes impotent.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, I.xiii.11.

Turretin further established his argument by anticipating a Molinist response to his third critique. Some middle knowledge defenders would retort that the orthodox relationship between first (God's decree) and second (created will) causes is preserved in their system because the created will has been sovereignly granted its liberty from the creator. Turretin's response to this explanation was that the proposition is simply impossible. If God imbued the created will with utter liberty with regard to its actions, "it would not be indeed the first being, but yet it would be the first operator (nor any more the second, but the first cause because if it depended in being upon God, it would not depend upon him in operation.)"³⁹ Middle knowledge, according to Turretin's assessment, strips the Lord of his status as first cause and replaces him with the created will, thus weakening divine providence and omnipotence.

The fourth argument Turretin presented concerned the degree of certainty that can be attributed to the knowledge that *scientia media* purports to attain. A major defect of the middle knowledge position, according to Turretin, is that it only grants God the ability to know uncertain knowledge, and, as he began this section of his critique, "No uncertain knowledge should be ascribed to God."⁴⁰ The reason that no uncertain knowledge ought to be attributed to God is that by establishing the object of divine knowledge to be an uncertain thing, as Molina acknowledged, "if something that is foreknown by God as going to occur were not to occur, then God would be actually mistaken."⁴¹

Getting to the heart of the argument, Turretin questioned how an uncertain thing could be the object of certain knowledge. "Again knowledge either makes the event certain or foresees it as certain."⁴² Examining the former, if knowledge makes an event certain, then there is no room for middle knowledge since any indifference of the human will no longer exists. According to the latter, there can be no possibility to know something as certain if it is an uncertain and indifferent thing, namely, the *adiaphorian* of the created will.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, I.xiii.12. Molina's response to this critique in Disputation 52 of his *Concordia* is unhelpful at best. See also Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 192.

⁴¹ Molina, *Concordia*, 4.52.5.

⁴² Turretin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.12.

Turretin here distinguished himself from those who, with Aquinas, maintained that God knows all things with certainty because all things exist with God in eternity. The only acceptable answer to the question of how can God know future contingencies with certainty, according to Turretin, is that all future contingencies receive their futurity through the divine decree. He explained, “Since, therefore, the certain necessity of the event cannot be founded on the contingent connection of the ends or on the knowledge which recognizes but does not make the thing, it follows that it is only from the efficacious decree of the connector.”⁴³ Though in disagreement with Aquinas with regard to whether all future contingents exist with God in eternity, Turretin interestingly concludes his fourth argument by quoting from the *Summa Theologiae* regarding divine knowledge and the decree.⁴⁴ It is significant that he utilized Aquinas, with whom he disagreed on many theological points, because in siding with one of the most prominent theologians of the Medieval and Roman Church, Turretin located Molina’s view to be situated outside of his own tradition.

The penultimate critique Turretin submitted in his *Institutes* rides closely on the heels on which his fourth point ended. Continuing his discussion of the relationship between first and second causes, he observed, “This middle knowledge takes away the dominion of God over free acts because according to it the acts of the will are supposed to be antecedent to the decree and therefore have their futuration not from God, but from itself.”⁴⁵ If the acts of the created will are placed prior to the divine decree, as Molina would have it, then God no longer serves as the first cause of all things in the created realm. To press the point further, *scientia media* places God in a position of dependence on the created will, which is said to be the independent basis on which the Lord determines his decree.⁴⁶ Divine providence

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid; “He who knows an effect contingent in its own cause only and not in some superior cause certainly determining it, has only a conjectural knowledge concerning it; since from an indifferent cause as far as it is indifferent, a determinate act cannot flow; and for the same reason from a contingent antecedent, as far as it is contingent, a necessary conclusion cannot flow before the decree of the divine will’ (ST, I, Q. 14, Art. 13, p. 83).”

⁴⁵ Ibid, I.xiii.13.

⁴⁶ Molina, *Concordia*, 4.51-52.

and omnipotence are thus diminished in that God's decretive power relies on the acts of the fickle human will.

Since middle knowledge is prior to the divine will, its content is independent of the divine will and, hence, outside the pale of God's omnipotence. Just as God's knowledge of logical truths is outside His control and is simply given, so, too, His knowledge of what would be the free decisions of created wills under certain circumstance is simply given and outside His control.⁴⁷

As Turretin explained, God "could decree or dispose nothing, unless a determination of the human will were posited which God would see in such a connection of things."⁴⁸ As was quoted earlier, Craig has acknowledged this much in his exposition of Molina's theology.

Anticipating a middle knowledge defense of this critique, Turretin addressed the possible response that might claim that middle knowledge preserves God's dominion over creation in that he could remove certain circumstances affecting the movement of the human will. Turretin rejected this argument by using Peter's denial of Christ as an example. Some Molinists such as Craig contend, "God could prevent Peter's denial of Christ by not creating Peter at all...or else by creating a different set of circumstances under which Peter would not have denied Christ."⁴⁹ Turretin did not accept this defense on the grounds that by preventing Peter's birth, God would only have exercised dominion over Peter's being, but not over Peter's free actions.⁵⁰ Since God's foreknowledge of future contingents and decretive determination depend upon the free will of his creation, middle knowledge does not allow divine power to alter external circumstances. Craig explains, "God cannot control the fact that were He to bring about a certain set of circumstances then Peter would freely deny Christ. Since the content of divine middle knowledge thus depends on what the creatures themselves would do, God cannot control what He knows by His middle knowledge."⁵¹ Turretin's foundational doctrine of the nature of God conflicted with Molina's

⁴⁷ Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 176.

⁴⁸ Turretin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.13.

⁴⁹ Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 176.

⁵⁰ Turretin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.13.

⁵¹ Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 176.

presupposed doctrine of the divine attributes in that Turretin's system maintained the historic Creator-creature distinction, which viewed the human will to be by nature subject to the will and dominion of the Lord.

Turretin's final argument against Molina's notion of *scientia media* focused on the bases for divine predestination according to the Jesuit system. According to the traditional Christian understanding of predestination, God determines his predestinating acts according to his purpose and good pleasure. According to Molina's system, however, divine middle knowledge is introduced as a third reason for God's determination of predestination. As Turretin explained, the Molinist view maintains that, in addition to God's purpose and good pleasure, "the foreseen consent of the will of Jacob placed in such circumstances would be at least the condition without which God could not predestine to salvation Jacob rather than Esau."⁵² Appealing to Romans 9:11-12, he argued that the predestination of Jacob is presented in the text to be determined not upon the (foreseen and free) deeds of either child, but "that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." Indeed, the very reason for the divine decree, in the *scientia media* construct, is not put in God, but in man.⁵³

Middle knowledge, in Turretin's appraisal, not only diminished the scope of God's dominion over his creation; the Molinist position was also at odds with the gospel of Christ in that it placed the works of the human will as the condition of justification rather than the grace of God. In placing the independent actions of the created will prior to the divine decree, God is forced to play the role of cosmic reactor to the *adiaphorian* of the will. God's decretive act of predestination, according to the middle knowledge system, is stripped of its efficacious power in that it is reduced to being the divine acknowledgement of human good works. The crux of these differing conclusions reached by Molina and Turretin can thus be identified as their disparate conceptions of the Creator-creature distinction.

Before concluding the examination of Turretin's critique of middle knowledge, it is helpful to briefly observe his interaction with

⁵² Turretin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.14.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Molina's biblical exegesis. Due to space considerations, this endeavor will be limited to the two texts utilized by Molina earlier in this study. The Jesuit's exegetical conclusion deduced from Matthew 11:21, one may remember, is that God knew the potential result had Christ's wonders been executed in Tyre and Sidon, namely repentance. Molina maintained, however, that this possible repentance, though known by God, "was a future contingent dependent on the free choice of human beings."⁵⁴ He argued that this text substantiates the middle knowledge contention that it is the human will that determines the actuality of conditional future contingents.

Responding to this interpretation, Turretin suggested, "The words of Christ [in Matt. 11:21] are not to be strained to the letter, as if they referred to something which on a certain condition would be determinately future."⁵⁵ In other words, the passage is not to be rendered as an excerpt from a philosophical treatise in which logical suppositions are presented in sequential order. Turretin contended that one should honor the literary nature of such a phrase, recognizing that "Christ does not speak of the foreknowledge of any future conditional things, but wishes by using a hyperbole to upbraid the Jews for ingratitude and impenitence greater than that of the Tyrians and Sidonians."⁵⁶ Christ's language in Matthew 11:21, according to Turretin, is similar to the exaggeration of the teacher who, addressing a pupil, exclaims, "If I had taught an ass as long, he would have known it." Just as the meaning of the teacher's statement is not that an ass literally would be able to understand what the pupil could not, so too the meaning of Christ's declaration was not that the citizens of Tyre and Sidon literally would have repented had the wonders been performed in their cities. Rather this passage has to do with Christ's rebuke of Jewish unbelief. In other words, Turretin proposed that middle knowledge was simply beyond the scope of Matthew 11:21. The only way for one to exegete a Molinist rendering of this text is to import *scientia media* presuppositions into it.

⁵⁴ Molina, *Concordia*, 4.49.9.

⁵⁵ Turretin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.16.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Another biblical passage on which Turretin challenged Molina's interpretation is 1 Samuel 23:10-12. Molina argued that the Lord's responses to David's inquiries in this text prove God's knowledge of conditional future contingents that are dependent upon human free will. In other words, as Muller has observed, Molina asserted that God knew that his statements of conditional contingencies would not achieve futurity, but he knew this without decreeing the condition or willing the contingency.⁵⁷

Turretin's response to Molina's rendering of this text was simply to point out that this passage does not present "a prediction of future things which were still in futurity" as Molina suggested.⁵⁸ The declarations of the Lord in response to David, rather, were a demonstration of God's revelation of the wills and intentions of Saul and the men of Keilah. As Turretin explained, "the words 'to descend' and 'to deliver up' do not refer to the act itself as hypothetically future, but (as often elsewhere) they are put for the purpose and intention, i.e., to have in the mind to do this."⁵⁹ This ability of the Lord to read the heart and intentions of his creation is revealed in numerous instances in scripture. Turretin presented, by way of example, Acts 12:6 in which Luke reveals God's knowledge of Herod's intention to bring an imprisoned Peter forward, even though this event did not reach futurity. In addition, Acts 16:27 shows God's knowledge of a prison guard's intention to commit suicide upon realization that he allowed prisoners, including Paul, to escape during his slumber. A middle knowledge rendering of these texts would be to claim that God only knew the conditional future contingencies of Herod's and the prison guard's actions, but such a Molinist interpretation, according to Turretin, clearly would necessitate the interpreter to adopt a middle knowledge presupposition before approaching scripture. Turretin maintained that a consistent and faithful exegesis of the aforementioned texts provides no proof for the existence of middle knowledge as explicated by Molina.

⁵⁷ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 421.

⁵⁸ Turretin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.15; Molina, *Concordia*, 4.49.9.

⁵⁹ Turretin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.15.

Conclusion

When Pope Paul V issued a decree that permitted both Jesuit and Dominican positions on predestination and the knowledge of God, debate over the doctrine of middle knowledge did not cease. Protestant pariahs such as Arminius saw in middle knowledge a system that permitted a libertarian anthropology while concurrently avoiding some of the theological pitfalls that earned Pelagianism an unorthodox brand. This rise in the popularity of *scientia media* in Protestant circles, however, concerned many Reformed theologians who viewed the development as a threat to the orthodoxy and health of their young movement.⁶⁰ As a result, people such as Francis Turretin deemed it necessary to offer a Reformed critique of this new doctrine.

It is incumbent upon historians and theologians to examine the distinctly Protestant appraisals of middle knowledge during the seventeenth century, especially the ways in which these critiques differed from those of the Dominicans. Diverging from the standard Dominican and Thomist contention that all contingents exist in eternity with God, Turretin focused his critique on Molina's positioning God's knowledge of future contingents prior to the divine decree.

Throughout Turretin's appraisal of Molina's conception of middle knowledge, his argument continuously returned to the inherent relationship between Creator and creature. The Molinist position, in his estimation, erred in reversing the roles of Creator and creature. Since divine predestination is determined by God's knowledge of the conditional future contingencies of the free human will, the creature is granted the role of first cause for its own acts (even if not for its being). God's decretive role is thus reduced to a mere acknowledgement of the independent acts of the human will. Middle knowledge is at odds with the Reformed understanding of the nature of God as sovereign Creator, Lord, and Redeemer. The disagreement between Molina and Turretin over the issue of prescience and predestination, therefore, cannot be resolved without first resolving their conflicting doctrines of God. While their disagreement as found in the pages of Turretin's *Institutes* revolved around the nature and

⁶⁰ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 418.

basis of predestination, the argument hinged upon their divergent presuppositions regarding the divine attributes and the nature of the Creator-creature distinction.

Turretin concluded his six-fold critique of *scientia media* by highlighting the greatest error of the Molinist system. For Turretin, middle knowledge has as its logical conclusion a defective doctrine of justification. He lamented what he saw to be the ultimate fruit of middle knowledge, “Thus grace might with greater propriety be called the servant of the human inclination than the mistress, and the companion than the cause, making God depend upon man rather than man upon God.”⁶¹ Perhaps one might not have found such a thorough critique of Molina’s theology in Reformed writings had the doctrine of *scientia media* remained strictly a Roman Catholic debate. It should not be altogether surprising, therefore, that Reformed scholastics such as Turretin devoted space in their writings to a refutation of this doctrine when it began making inroads into Protestant circles, for they saw it as an assault on the very gospel of the Reformation.

⁶¹ Turretin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.14.