II PRE-EXISTENCE

**And from a cliff-top is proclaimed**

**The gathering of souls for birth,**

**The trial by existence named,**

**The obscuration upon earth.**

**-Robert Frost, The Trial by Existence**

A LOOK AT THE FALL AND ORIGINAL SIN

Some people consider the idea of a fall impossible. How, they reason, could a being made good ever even desire to do something evil? If it was made ‘perfect’, how could the thought ever enter its mind to be bad? This is a good question, but it ultimately rests on what I believe to be a misunderstanding.

The idea of a fall, or of a misused freedom, does not require us to believe that the creature or creatures who acted evilly were created ‘perfect’. Such creatures may have been created ‘perfectly innocent’, but that is different from supposing they were made already *perfected*. If we are to imagine the fall in picture form we should not imagine a descent from a higher plane to a lower, as if before the fall the good creature was heavenly and afterward it became earthly. I know much literature depicts things this way, but I think it’s wrong. We should, if we are thinking in picture form, imagine the fall like a person tripping as they try to climb up to something above them. That is, it ought to be thought of as a stumble while attempting to go from a lower level of reality to a higher. If creatures were *already* perfect before their fall, indeed they could not have fallen. Here I think the critics are right. In fact the idea that creatures would be required to make a choice at all seems pointless if they were already absolutely perfect. Being already divine, what more could they gain; what was the point of testing them?

A fall, then, need only imply an initial freedom which itself conditions the subsequent unfolding of good and evil effects. God evidently saw that it was good to bestow this dignity – this freedom - on His creatures. Apparently He is interested in creating a universe in which the beings He has made are themselves able to produce good things. In this they approach God Himself in their capacity of *being* good.

But there is one more difficulty about a fall, at least as it is commonly conceived. Traditional Christian teaching has always taught that all humans either have sinned, or will, once they reach a particular stage of moral development. What is known as the law, or morality, or conscience cannot be perfectly kept by anyone. Yet the very thing that sin presupposes, indeed the very thing that makes us responsible for it, is the fact that we *freely* commit it. By that I mean there is no imposed necessity from the outside, either from God or the laws of the universe, that cause us to sin. Now here comes the difficulty. If this is so – if, that is, we and we alone are responsible for our sin - how can it be true that all humans either have committed some sin or certainly will once they reach a certain stage of moral development? How is it true that no one can keep the moral law perfectly? If no human is ever forced or determined to sin, how can our universal *sinfulness* or *fallenness* be explained?

The first thing to point out here is that even if we couldn’t explain *how* this is, experience does not make it easy to deny either horn of the dilemma. You don’t have to read the New Testament to know that all people have, or at some point will, intentionally violate their own conscience. So even if we couldn’t find an answer, I think we would be justified in holding both truths – that all humans sin and that each sin is freely committed - in tension rather than rejecting one or the other. We would thus borrow a tactic from the forensic scientists: it’s not that we think reality itself is inconsistent; it’s just that our current perspective does not allow us to see a perfect synthesis of the data we have.

But this still leaves us with an uncomfortable state of affairs, rather like trying to put the same pole of two magnets against one another. Are we *forced* to hold this tension? Is there any system that provides an escape? I think there is. But before I discuss it let me mention two answers that are often given to the dilemma of ‘Original Sin’ that I think are incorrect.

The first response to the question of how is it that we will all freely though inevitably sin is the classic Augustinian view. This view says that we are all implicated in Adam’s free act - his trespass - in such a way that his will is transferred onto our own. There are several theories as to how this ‘transmission’ occurs. Some have said that since Adam was created perfectly innocent, he had, so to speak, the best humanity had to offer. In this way he served as a ‘perfect representative’. This enabled him to stand in the place of all other people who came after him, because if *he* fell, being perfect, so surely would anyone else. Another way to explain this transmission of wills – or *imputation* - is to say that we were all physically present inside the loins of Adam when he sinned. As such, once he broke God’s command, the effects were a ‘falling’ of his entire organism. This included his sperm. Therefore we are born with a will bent towards sin since, even at the moment of conception, it is a tainted seed which fertilizes the egg. Still other theories propound Adam as being the ideal *form* of ‘human nature’, and state that we somehow ‘participate’ in that form simply by being human and become corrupted by our participation. This connects closely with the Platonic doctrine that evil is inherent in a finite creation; so it would seem to result in the fact that sin comes about from a defect of finitude rather than a free and unecessitated act of the soul. If there are other ways to express the Augustinian theory – which makes Adam’s sin result in the depravity of the will of all his offspring – I cannot now think of them. The ones I have mentioned suffice to make my point.

The fatal difficulty with the Augustinian view, no matter how it is explained, is as plain as the simplest platitudes of morality: it attempts to transfer the guilt of one person onto another. If Adam’s sin resulted in the depravity of will in all his descendants, and if those descendants cannot resist acting on that will and are therefore counted for that reason *guilty*, then the mind, no matter how hard it tries or what ingenious systems it devises, cannot be brought to believe such a system is the product of a just or good God, let alone a God of absolute self-giving love. This imputation of guilt is something the human mind simply cannot conceive as being just or good.

If all have fallen in Adam, as the Scripture says, there must be some *way* in which all have fallen in him which does not negate each person’s individual freedom. The fact that humanity is somehow included in or a part of Adam is the entire basis for the Augustinian theory. But it’s no good to remove the very thing necessary for a collective fall in the first place: namely, the individual, independent will of the one who has fallen.

What way we may have all partaken in a primordial sin, I will return to later, but suffice it to say for the present that any theory we give that destroys the individual wills of those who are themselves fallen cannot be a system a just or good God would create. To be guilty means to be guilty of something *we* have done. But we cannot be guilty of a fall if we did not exist when the fall itself occurred; for *we* did not do it. In other words, even if Original Sin is an simply an inclination that does not itself cause any guilt in the one who has it, if it is still true that no one can perfectly resist the inclinations it produces, then this amounts to the same. If one becomes guilty for giving in to temptation, and if no one can perfectly resist temptation by their own power, then one is guilty for what he cannot help but do. Thus even if what we received from Adam is only a mere *propensity*, if that propensity is irresistible we’re essentially guilty for Adam’s sin.

The second common response to the Original Sin puzzle is to simply deny that all humans will certainly and necessarily sin. It is possible, according to this view, for humans to live perfectly good and sinless lives. Since their wills are not essentially corrupted, they are, at least with respect to their moral state, in no need of forgiveness or salvation. All do not necessarily need to ‘repent and believe’, for repentence implies being in a state of guilt. This is of course the Pelagian view of things. It holds that the will does not need to be delivered from *itself* but only from the bad circumstances around it, such as temptations and lusts and so on. It is not individually fallen or guilty like Adam’s. It may need ‘help’, but only in the sense that it needs help in continuing to be what it currently is. On this view we are not like someone drowning who needs a life jacket, but like a swimmer who only needs his muscles to go on working correctly.

The problem with this view is that it contradicts both experiential and Scriptural data which say that we are helpless in this life of perfectly conquering sin. We all fall victim to it, and freely. If we know one thing about human nature it is that we are all plagued with the inability to be as good as we want to be. St. Paul asserted a universal truth of the human condition when he said ‘I do not do the good that I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep doing.’[[1]](#footnote-1) This process, this struggle with the divided self, is something we all deal with. Similarly with respect to Christian teaching. Christ died, the Bible says, for the sins of ‘the whole world’. This implies that the whole world is guilty and in need of forgiveness. What would be the point in preaching the gospel if people did not needed to be saved from their *sins*?

How, then, do we solve this dilemma? How do we account for the fact that we have a corrupted will that we cannot perfectly master, and that *we* are responsible for this situation? Before I give my solution, there are a few more theories that I must address.

CALVINISMS DIFFICULTIES

I am stating up front that this chapter is my case against Determinism. In the Christian world this is also called Calvinism. In order to put forth my case for Pre-Existence (which is, indeed, a much older theory than Calvinism), it seems necessary to address three more popular systems: Calvinism, Molinism, and Open Theism. I will address them one by one. By showing the difficulties of each, I hope to pave the way for the view I think most reasonable and consistent with Christianity.

The three theories above are best articulated with respect to what they hold about the future and God’s knowledge of it. The nature of the future is particularly important in understanding the dilemma of Original Sin, or how it is that all humans who are born will certainly sin. The common question that I will be asking each of these theories is: how does God come by His foreknowledge? This question is, as it were, my common method of attack. In attempting to answer it we can best see the difficulties that each view has. So much for preliminaries: on to my case against Calvinism.

Calvinsim holds that God knows the future because he has unilaterally determined all of it. I contend that if this is the case – if, that is, He has unilaterally determined all that comes to be, past, present, and future – then God is the sole causative force of everything that exists: all that was, is, or will be. And if this is so then He is also the cause of all sin and evil. For they certainly exist!

The common Calvinist response to this criticism is to suggest some theory of ‘God’s action in secondary causes.’ The idea is that God moves secondary causes (the word *people* is never used) ‘in such a way’ where He is blameless for their acts. I find this notion inconceivable. If, for example, I were to make a murderous robot, I would be the cause of the murders that the robot committed. This would still be the case even if the robot wanted to commit the murders itself. To say that the robot possessed a mental state called ‘intentionality’ does not somehow transfer causality off of me – its maker – and *only* onto the robot. For I made the robot the way that it is. I created it with a ‘murderous nature’. It doesn’t matter if the robot agrees with its own desires and ‘does what it wants to do’. Its desires and states of intention are *evil* desires and intentions that *I* have caused.

Let me put the point another way. The phrase ‘God has determined in such a way’ either means that God has absolutely caused or it does not mean that. If it does not mean that, then Calvinism is false, and there are other beings in God’s creation which have independent, non-determined causative power. But if it *does* mean that God has absolutely caused all that happens, the phrase ‘in such a way’ is meaningless – mere filler – and God has caused all the evil and sin in existence.

In other words, the Calvinist distinction between God’s ‘permissive’ and ‘absolute’ will breaks down if God is the only determinative force in existence. For on the supposition that God is a single being, there are no other forces, no other wills, that have causative power independent of His own determination such that He can ‘allow’ them to do things. If I, pulling on the strings of a puppet, cause it to pull the cats tail, would it make sense to say I ‘allowed’ the puppet to do this? Words like ‘allow’ and ‘permit’ only make sense if there is another force outside one’s total causal control. Of course if God limits His causal power by creating free agents then this point disappears. But that option is not open to the Calvinist. On his system God has determined absolutely everything, including creaturely freedom. Thus everything, including evil human acts, moves by a necessity God Himself has imposed.

Now consistent Calvinism, it is true, grants this. What is odd is the failure to see that this admission logically entails that God is evil. One cannot maintain both a) that evil exists and b) that God has caused evil but is not evil. To cause evil to exist, even for God, would be evil. To put it another way, a God who caused evil would be an evil God. Either that or we cannot truly hold there is evil in the world. Evil must then be something we misperceive due to our ‘limited perspective.’ But if this is the case our entire distinction between good and evil breaks down altogether.

If it is true that a good God can unilaterally cause all the unimaginable evil in the world for no other reason than that He wills to, then what possible act could we attribute to God that we could not also attribute to Satan? If we say God is still good even though He has caused all the rapes, tortures, and sufferings in the universe, how do we not lose our ability to distinguish between good and evil or Him and the devil? What would God *not* be capable of? Before anyone says that Scripture forces us to hold that God is the source of all evil I would remind him of a point made by CS Lewis: it is only the *goodness* of God which makes worshiping Him permissible or even rational. A God who can intentionally will extracted torture and yet remain ‘good’ is so different from our conception of goodness that such a God may equally be able to send us to Hell for obeying Him. His ‘white’ may be our ‘black’. If cruelty is to Him somehow ‘good’, then His idea of Heaven may be our idea of Hell.

So far I have been claiming that if God causes evil then He is evil. But the obvious and common response to this accusation is this: without certain evils certain goods would not be possible. Therefore God may be forced to cause certain evils in order to bring about the most good possible. I think it is here, in this claim that good somehow is made more good by the presence of evil, that the root of the Calvinist error lies. I believe at the bottom of this error is idea that the *good is somehow metaphysically dependent on evil*. I will seek now to show how this is absurd on the Christian worldview.

God’s goodness, according to Christianity, is maximally perfect. ‘God is light’ St. John says, ‘and in Him there is no darkness at all.’[[2]](#footnote-2) Although it is true that there can be no evil without good, the opposite – that there can no good without evil – is not similarly true. God’s goodness is such that it does not *need* anything else other than itself to exist. It simply is, and is good, through and through. If we were to imagine the Good as such as the solid color white, then we would say that white does not need black in order to be white itself. White does not as it were ‘depend on’ black. Otherwise, here’s the issue. If God ‘needs’ evil in His creation, then Goodness, as such, needs Evil. I am dependent on food and water and air because without them I cannot exist. But, unless we are going to posit Dualism, the Christian God does not need evil in this way.  The good as such is not, and indeed cannot be, metaphysically dependent on evil. It would still be just as good if evil never existed. Indeed, apart from creation, God existing in his own right has no evil in Him at all.

Although we live in a world of contrasts, and we very often experience certain goods otherwise impossible without certain evil, this, I believe, is not because God’s inner life is dualistic in this way. It is because His omnipotence is such that He can draw forth good even out of evil. To suppose good needs evil would be equivalent to supposing a marriage needed adultery, or that a beautiful face needed some grotesque deformity, in order to be maximally good. A marriage *may*, in the long run, be better after adultery has occurred, but it is not something that *must* happen to have a maximally great marriage.

Therefore the unanswerable question for Calvinism is this: where – metaphysically speaking – does evil come from if not from the freedom of creatures? How can an all-good, all-powerful being make a ‘product’ containing evil? If God makes a world exactly how He wishes, like an artist painting a picture, in order to please Himself most, and if He must include evil in it to make the picture most beautiful, does this not mean that God’s will in some way requires there to be evil in order to be maximally satisfied? And how is this any different from saying that ultimately God wills and desires evil? If in God’s mind and will there is this need for evil, would this not make Him less than *all* good?

MOLINISM’S DIFFICULTIES WITH SOME THOUGHTS ON TIMELESSNESS AND SIMPLE FOREKNOWLEDGE

Some modern theologians would find a way out of the Original Sin problem by proposing something called ‘middle knowledge.’ Middle knowledge is simply God’s knowledge about what any creature would freely do under any circumstances. On this view we could say that all humans sin because God has arranged the human species so as to only produce beings He knew *would* sin. He does not *make* or *cause* their sin, as on the Calvinist scheme. He simply knows that if He creates a particular set of humans that they will sin if He places them in particular circumstances. I suppose one could maintain on this view that there may exist millions of intelligent races on other planets that did not have the universal human stain of original sin. God could create these beings ‘there’ rather than ‘here’ because of His middle knowledge, or knowledge of what any free being *would* do in any circumstance.

One can see how this theory would handle the problem of divine foreknowledge of future free choices. God would not know future free choices because He has determined them. Instead, He would know future free choices because He has decided to ‘allow’ them to be made by putting various creatures into the various circumstances that He knows will elicit them. It is like when a teacher allows a student to take an examination that the teacher knows the student will fail. The teacher’s knowledge does not *cause* the failure. She has simply allowed the student to exercise the consequence of a particular poor choice. In other words this scheme, unlike the Calvinist one, upholds without contradiction the distinction between God’s ‘permission’ and ‘determination’.

There is, however, a fatal problem with the Molinist view: it doesn’t provide an explanation as to how God could possibly come by His middle knowledge. According to Molinism, God has knowledge of future free choices - or ‘counterfactuals of freedom’ – even before creatures exist. That is, God knows what the free choices of any creature would be before that creature exists in any mode of being whatsoever. The *creation* of the creature in question and the granting of freedom to it do not ‘add’ anything to God’s knowledge. If this were true, however, then all future free choices of creatures are true *before* the creature itself is created. They would therefore be decided by something further back than the creature itself. In other words, the student will fail the examination even before he exists to exercise his own poor study habits. But if this is the case the student – or free creatures as such – do not themselves have any power over their own counterfactuals of freedom, for something other than *their own free selves* makes them true. Even if one maintains that every creature exists prior to its actual creation in the foreknowledge of God, it would still be the case that the counterfactuals of freedom of these creatures would be determined, not by the creatures themselves in their action, but by the ideas God has of them before they exist. And this notion - that God’s ideas of our choices are what ultimately determines them – is essentially equivalent Calvinism. It is God’s very nature and will which then determine absolutely everything that comes to be, including the exercise of our free will itself. In fact this is just the critique many Calvinist raise against Molinism. How, they ask, is it at bottom any different than Calvinism? If middle knowledge is true before God creates anything, then what He creates is determined by what is *already* in God’s mind.

This critique is known as the ‘grounding objection’. The essence of the objection is this. God cannot know the free response of a creature prior to freedom actually being given to that creature. This is because before freedom is actualized, the *truth* of the actualization of that freedom has not yet come to be. Therefore to say a counterfactual has truth value before it comes about is contradictory.

Let me try to further clarify the primary inconsistency in Molinism.

1. To make a free act is to bring about something that is not yet the case.
2. God knows free acts before they are made.
3. Therefore God knows something as ‘the case’ which is also ‘not yet the case’, which is absurd.

This much seems to me inescapable. If freedom is a gift, then we did not always (in the logical or metaphysical sense) have it. Therefore, there was a point at which we received it, and a point at which that reception by us was known to God for the first time. To put it another way, before God gave creatures freedom there was nothing for Him to know about that freedom. Further, if He has really chosen to give us this gift, and if that gift can really be used one way or the other by the one receiving it, then until the gift is received and exercised, not even God can know how it in fact *will be* used. For that would imply a contradiction: namely, to know something as having already occurred which has not yet occurred.

I suspect at this point there will be in the minds of many readers the obvious reply that God is outside of time, and as such His ‘now’ is not the same as ours, and that this implies that He can know everything at once, even the free acts of the future.

Far from lessening the difficulties of Molinism (or any view of God and free creaturely interaction) supposing that God is outside time altogether while creatures are in it actually makes things *more* problematic.

Where do I begin here? The first problem is that there is a contradiction involved in maintaining a timeless, impassible God *interacting* with free creatures. If God is impassible, His actions cannot be conditioned by the actions of what He has made. That just *is* what impassible means: to be affected by nothing. But if we are genuinely free, then this would mean God cannot ‘respond’ to us as we actualize our freedom.

If we are free, then we can do this, rather than that. If God were to interact with us based on how we act (which is a contingency), then it must be the case that He has the ability to act either this way or that way *Himself*, depending on what we do. Take the classic example of the forgiveness of sins. God only ‘forgives’ us because we have first sinned. If we never sinned, then He never would have had to forgive. But if we are free, then it is possible that we did not need to be forgiven. Therefore, in virtue of the fact that God forgives us, He cannot be impassible.

Support for the idea of a timeless God is frequently touted as being supported by science.[[3]](#footnote-3) You will often hear ‘Einstein proved x’ or ‘quantum physics now tells us y’. The problem is that some of what Einstein proved and what quantum physics tells us is self-contradictory. One common scientific view of reality is called ‘four-dimensionalism’. In this view, all objects in the universe exist as ‘space-time worms’. That is, they are spread out through a four dimensional space-time block in parts we call past, present, and future. Different ‘time-slices’ represent different temporal parts of one underlying whole ‘thing’. So, for instance, me as a child would be a time-slice or part of the whole me which extends throughout child, adult, and old-man as a space-time worm.

There are several absurdities that result from this view. The first is the denial of actual change in the universe. The concept of ‘change’ implies that a single thing itself flows *through* time (or ‘endures’ as philosophers of time say). That is, it is the same whole object – the same *me* - that is child, adult, and old man as I move from the past to the future. But if the future already exists as part of a four dimensional block, the same ‘me’ does not itself really *move* from one time slice to another. What we think of as change is simply an illusion, present at a particular time slice, that causes us to identify our present self with a past (or future) reality which it is not really connected to.

On this view we cannot even say that we have a singular consciousness that moves along the eternal block of past, present and future, as some theologians have proposed in the past[[4]](#footnote-4). Such thinkers held that, although all of space-time is ‘already there’, our consciousness moves along a line from left to light like a ‘moving spotlight’, and as such we come to know past, present and future moment by moment. The problem with this is that a moving spotlight presupposes the very thing that is being denied: namely, a present reality in which change occurs. In other words, if our consciousness is *moving* from one temporal slice to another, the flow of time must be real. For what ‘present-ness’ would the spotlight itself be moving in that allowed our consciousness itself to be *changing*?

The logical conclusion of four dimensionalism is an eternal block in which all time slices (and who slices them?) are simply ‘there’, unconnected to each other. Each of them contain a single ‘I’ or ‘self’ which has the illusion that it is somehow the same object as the slice that is sequentially before or after it. Do the oddities I previously alluded to now start to appear? In the first case, our whole conception of identity would be fallacious. It would be simply an illusion to say that a person is guilty of an act he did in the past: for in reality, the person we call guilty is a totally different person, he is totally cut off, from all previous and future persons that exist in space-time. Of course the person that we punish may *feel* guilty, but that is due to an illusion as well. By some mechanism of the universe our brains connect various time-slices and arrive at the fallacious idea of a ‘self’ that is the same and persists through time. But if reality is a four dimensional block, there is no meaningful way to connect all these indivisible, unchanging time-slices to one another. There is no way these temporal selves can be connected into any kind of substratum or whole that unifies them all.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The main problem that I am getting at is this. Any attempt to conceive of God existing in some sort of ‘now’ that is utterly different than our own is meaniningless at best and contradictory at worst. In other words I am claiming that to say that God exists ‘in all moments at once’ is nonsensical: the phrase ‘all moments’ necessarily precludes the possibility of being contained in any sort of ‘at once’ mode of being. Further, even if we suppose that God somehow *can* see all the temporal universe spread out in an ‘unbounded glance’, then this would simlutaneously preclude His ability to stick His finger in, so to speak, and interact with it. For just what does God see in this eternal present? He either sees the universe as it is, prior to any interaction of His own with it, or He sees Himself interacting with it, moment by moment. If the former is true, then He can’t interact with the universe without changing His eternal knowledge of it.[[6]](#footnote-6) It simply exists unchangeably as He sees it. On the other hand if God sees Himself interacting with the universe moment by moment because it is composed of free beings, then He must ‘wait’ to see how these beings respond to this interacting with them; in which case, His knowledge is itself contingent and not contained in a single, unchangeable ‘picture’ glance.

In other words the notion of God being timeless and His creation in time renders His interaction with said creation impossible. If He is timeless then He sees all moments of time at once and *already there*. But if this is so it would make impossible any tinkering with what He sees. The universe – and our free choices in it – would simply exist as an object of knowledge eternally, already. That is, what God eternally ‘sees’ is already something actualized and existing and other than Himself, in which case He could not control or manipulate it without changing what He sees altogether. The ‘timeless’ view (also called the Simple Foreknowledge view) then makes God’s timeless knowledge something He cannot act on in creation itself.

So what is the alternative? That God is ‘in time’[[7]](#footnote-7)? That He at some point ‘risks’ in creating free beings? Are we to think that we can ‘act’ on God, and that He ‘learns’ things? I personally see no problem in saying yes to these questions, for they seem to me perfectly consistent with, and a logical consequence of, the idea of God granting creatures freedom. That is, if we are really given freedom, and if God has lain down His omnipotence for us to ‘work-together’ with Him, or to *syn-ergos* as the Greek reads in 2 Corinthians 6:1, then this sort of relationship would require that we be able to affect, or impact, or impart some sort of ‘say-so’, on God’s decisions themselves. Insofar as God has limited Himself in this way and agreed to work with us, He has opened Himself up, as it were, to free, undetermined creaturely causation.

OPEN THEISM’S DIFFICULTIES

So much, then, for Calvinism and Molinism. My third concern has to do, you will remember, with a theory called Open Theism. Open Theism holds that God does not know the future insofar as the future is comprised of future free choices. This means that God does not know the future acts that depend on human freedom. In one sense this is a very reasonable view. As we saw, if God really *gives* freedom He cannot know how it will be actualized until after it has been used. But despite this advantage, there seem to me insuperable problems with the Open view in relation to a *Christian* theism.

The first difficulty is that Open Theism fails to account for the accurate predicting of future contingent events, or events that depend on the free will of humans. The most notable and momentous of these events is the crucifixion of Christ. This is something that Scripture says has been ordained ‘before the foundation of the world’. Some philosophers say that God can predetermine a particular end without predetermining the means to that end. But it seems to me, if a predetermined end (like, say, the crucifixion of Christ) is dependent on the free willed action of created beings, then the end cannot necessarily be guaranteed to occur unless the actions themselves are guaranteed to occur. If, for example, it depended on a human free choice, or a combination of several of them, that Christ would be crucified, how could even an omnipotent God guarantee that this would occur?[[8]](#footnote-8) The crucifixion either depended on free choices, or it did not. If it did, then unless those unknowable free choices (which God cannot determine) came about, the event would not come about either. How, therefore, could God’s determinate plan involve Christ’s death? If the event did *not* depend on human free choices, then Christ was crucified *necessarily*.

Another difficulty with Open Theism is this. The open view holds that the type of universe God created is one in which free will is possible, and this means that God has chosen not to ‘undo’ the free acts of any of His creatures. Insofar as he undoes any of the ‘free effects’ of free will, He would simultaneously be revoking the very power He bestowed on creatures to begin with. For example: I am not really free to shoot a gun if the moment I pull the trigger God makes the bullet miraculously disappear.

Again, this, on the surface is a very reasonable theory. However, if God cannot interfere with free will at all (since it is the ultimate good), and if free acts are being constantly determined within the flow of time, then this would seem to make providence of any kind impossible. If I don’t know what you’re going to do until the very moment you do it, how could my actions toward you be considered ‘providential’? Suppose a father lends his son a car. Since the father is not omniscient this may result in something horrible: say a deadly accident. Would we call the lending of the car a providential act? Would it not be the case that if the car was never lent a better outcome would be resulted? I see no reason to think that we are forced to hold that God interacts with His creation in this way. If we did believe this, would it not follow that some of God’s dealings with His creatures could have been better than they were? Such a picture reduces God to a kind of divine custodian rather than a sovereign orderer. He becomes someone who is always cleaning up after a mess and always acting after the fact.

I have said that the logic of Open theism entails that God never interfere with His creation or it is inconsistent. God can only ‘influence’ the universe; He cannot ‘break into’ it. But just how then can He possibly be the provident God of Scripture who orders all things from the beginning to the end?[[9]](#footnote-9) How could God have a particular plan for the unfolding of history? In other words, at the end of the day how is Open Theism different than Deism? Open Theists will say that the difference lies in that God *is* able to ‘break into’ creation whenever He wants to. But my question is: how could He ever want to? How does their theory provide a reason for such interference? It seems to me since the Open system is committed to making creaturely freedom the ultimate good of creation, God cannot then revoke such an ability without revoking what He considers (on this view) the highest good of all.

Open theism answers the question of why there is evil by saying that creaturely freedom is worth honoring even at such an horrendous price. This freedom need not be one which ultimately results in salvation either, for Open Theists hold that it is quite possible for much of the creation (or even all?) to be eternally separated from God. Therefore for the system to remain true to its principles, if free will is the highest good of all – so high that its existence justifies rape, torture, and eternal separation from God – it cannot turn around and say that God is justified in interfering with that free will to perform miracles. For *what* would be the reason for such an interference? Nothing can be put forward as a greater good than human freedom which has not already been conceded as a lesser good.

Consider: if God chooses not to interfere by miracle in situations of horrendous evil, such as in extracted torture, or in cases where suffering results from apparently no free will at all, such as when a mother accidentally locks her newborn in the car on a blistering summer day, how could such a God *ever* be justified in interfering by miracle? What *reason* does Open Theism offer for God stepping in on just *some* occasions that would not logically apply to several others of much greater magnitude? Remember, it cannot be because God’s foreknowledge sees that it is better to allow certain temporary evils because in so doing He can bring forth otherwise impossible goods. Open theism holds that God cannot know this future, and so His actions and dealings with creation in the present does not have a certain knowledge of the consequences of God’s own action. Thus the Open God is constantly risking with regard to how He acts towards what He has made. An Open Theist cannot say that God allows the Holocaust to occur because He knows at the end of the day the result will be more good than evil. Molinism can at least say that there is no *gratuitous* evil. It can at least say that God only allows the bare minimum necessary for achieving his ultimate purpose of drawing all souls freely to Himself. But what reason could possibly exist on the Open View for doing miracles ‘occasionally’? If it is to be consistent, I believe it must say that miracles (and God’s own direct interaction with the world) do not violate creaturely freedom. Yet if this is true, how can God control the course of events, be provent over suffering, and have a plan for history? How, in other words, could He have insured the plan of redemption from the ‘foundation of the world’ or ‘foreknow’ and ‘predestine’ the salvation of souls? How can He promise the triumph of good over evil and a time in which He ‘wipes away all tears from our eyes’?

Open Theism tries to alleviate the problem of suffering by saying that God in no way wills that it occurs. It exists because God has granted creatures freedom, and unfortunately this decisions makes Him powerless in preventing it. But what the Open view fails to realize is that even God’s decision not to prevent suffering – such as through the interference of free will - *is itself an expression of His will*. In other words His permissive will is still His *will*. He has still decided to let every particular experience of suffering happen for *some* reason. Therefore if He is a wise and good God He must have a good reason: that is He must know that suffering *can* serve (rather than only *possibly* serve) some greater good. But again what possible reason could a God who cannot know the future have for allowing any evil to occur? Without perfect foreknowledge, how can providence possibly exist? It seems to me Open Theism boils down to Deism: a universe in which God has established the parameters and where He lets it all play out, for good or ill.[[10]](#footnote-10)

It seems to me much more reasonable to say that if *anything* is providential, then *everything* must be, including evil. It makes no sense to say make two categories of events and call one category providential and the other non-providential. After all, what would these non-providential events be ultimately attributed to? Whatever we say here – ‘chance’, ‘free will’, a mere ‘byproduct’ of natural laws – all these things exist only because God has first permitted them to occur. He has still providentially allowed them to come about. Such things are not themselves the ultimate backstop for why non-provendential events occur: God is. So long as God is the one ultimately ‘permitting’ or ‘allowing’ everything that comes into existence then everything must be providential.

Deism is a logically consistent view. Indeed I can well believe that God set up the natural world and allowed for all sorts of human and cosmic free wills: that He has stepped back from creation and decided to watch it all unfold. But I cannot, at the same time, believe He could still be ‘providential’, or perform miracles, or have a particular plan or goal towards which He is moving creation. The sufferings in the universe are such that either they are all somehow necessary for God’s purposes, or the Creator has infinitely removed Himself from creation and has chosen not to intervene with it. To suppose that He intervenes ‘sometimes’ is to suppose an inconsistent picture of God. For what reason could there be in God intervening on *one* occasion, say with the healing of a blind man by Christ (which may, for all we know, have occurred due to the free willed act of some human or demon), that could not apply in a *million others* in which God doesn’t? And how could the Open God know that His intervention would ever produce the particular good He was aiming for?

RETURNING TO AN ANCIENT THEORY: SYNTHESIZING LIBERTARIAN AND COMPATIBILIST FREEDOM

So we finally come to the crucial question that the second part of this work seeks to address: is there an alternative view that solves the problems of Calvinism, Molinism, and Open Theism[[11]](#footnote-11)? That is, is there a theory that allows us to reconcile original sin, divine foreknowledge, providence, human freedom and suffering? Can we propose a system that enables God to truly respond and interact with His creation, as well as to have a guiding hand on all that occurs? I think there is such a system: the ancient Christian theory of pre-existence.

I hope the points made against Calvinism, Molinism, and Open Theism are enough to make palatable the initial distaste that pre-existence causes when it is suggested as a Christian theory. I say this based off the old medical adage that when the patient is sick enough he will try even the most odious medicine. But the rather shocking truth I want to suggest is this. If I am right and the three other systems above do have fatal problems – if, that is, they logically entail that certain other truths of Christianity are false[[12]](#footnote-12) - then pre-existence is simply the only Christian system left on the table. I know it initially *sounds* outrageously implausible, but what if it is an actual workable system? What if it it really *could* fit in the Christian teachings that these other theories cannot, without sacrificing any of the things they get right? And anyway, if we abandon pre-existence in favor of one of the three theories above, what piece of Christian doctrine are we prepared to dismiss? God’s foreknowledge? Miracles? God’s complete providence over suffering? His not being the author of evil? Surely these doctrines ought to be held onto at all costs. Even if pre-existence is false and even if it doesn’t help us see the solution, it is better to hold to no theory than to abandon any of these essential beliefs. But have we actually shown that pre-existence is false? Have we really even given it a fair hearing?

Some may be surprised that I call pre-existence a *Christian* theory at all. I admit that at first blush it certainly *feels* wrong and heretical. I know it did to me when I first began thinking about it. But I would remind the reader that Christian pre-existence is just as ancient as any other Christian theory concerning the origin of the soul. Indeed long before the system of Calvinism, Molinism, and Open Theism Pre-Existence existed as a thoroughly Scriptural and philosophical Christian model of reality. Within two generations after Christ you have an elaborate, unified theology, equipped to answer the biggest riddles of predestination, foreknowledge, human freedom, universal sinfulness, and the problem of pain and evil.[[13]](#footnote-13) I do not think much progress has been made since then, seeing as we are still plagued by the same issues. On the other hand the general structure Origen lays down in *First Principles* is able to rise above most of the apparent contradictions we see in Christianity and saves us from a mass of puzzles and dilemmas.

Here is our current situation. Human beings appear to be, based on Scripture and experience, ‘sinners by nature.’ No one can perfectly resist all the temptations that beset him: all freely fall prey to them at some point. Yet if sin really is something evil – if it really is the case that it *ought not to be* – then it cannot be something necessary in the process of human development. In other words, if sinning is a necessary part of our finite becoming, and if it is a necessary step in our spiritual evolution, then it would be *good* that we sin, since without sinning we could not progress. Sin would then be something we *had* to experience in order to grow. It would be a ‘growing pain’, like the pulling of a loose tooth. But if we are going to take sin in its full sense as something that ought not to be and as something that would not exist in a perfect race of human beings, then we must conclude that it is not something necessary for our spiritual development. This must be especially true if we are Christians: for Jesus Himself was perfectly human, and yet no sin was found in him.

Again how do we resolve this tension between the superfluity or *needlessness* of our sin, and yet its universality in human nature? We’ve seen that an inherited depravity, whereby the free willed act of one person leads to an enslaved and guilty will of all humanity, does not provide the answer, for it destroys individual responsibility. Far from making each human being guilty of his sinfulness, it makes him a victim of it. Guilt can only be meaningfully attributed to someone who has the power of self-decision: that is, to a person possessing true libertarian freedom. This freedom must involve more than simply being able to ‘do what we want to.’ For if at the back of all our ‘want to’s’ or states of intentionality there is an act of determination by God, then God alone is the ultimate cause of all that happens. He is not only ultimately, but solely responsible for all that occurs, because He has created us with the very dispositions that we cannot help but have. On this scheme we gain the obvious positive of attributing all good to the grace of God: a grace which compels the will of every martyr and saint. But it comes at a price: the desires of the murderer and rapist must be traced to the same source.

Even St. Augustine, by the way, who is said to have expounded this system of the imputation of one peron’s sin onto another, saw the problem with *absolute* determinism. He maintained that there was at least *one* human libertarian free will: Adam’s[[14]](#footnote-14). This perfectly free will was the source of all the subsequent evil inclinations of the human heart, and was as such the backstop that prevented all evil being traced directly back to God. Is it not remarkable how this fact has been so overlooked? The supposed father of Calvinism posits absolute libertarian freedom as a necessary cog in his scheme of theological gears. His whole treatment of guilt and grace depends on a notion that Calvinism and Determinism finds unintelligible: namely libertarian free will.[[15]](#footnote-15) Of course the Calvinist scheme makes these moves to give due honor to the fact that God has predestined all that comes to pass in this world. They rightly hold that nothing happens outside His plan or without His direct permission. Calvinism also takes seriously the universality of sin, the corrupt nature of our free will, and the impossibility of salvation without God’s grace.

These points, however, stand in tension. If we are free, why do we *necessarily* need salvation? And how can God predestine a universe without destroying our freedom and being the very course of evil? We must find a way of synthesizes the theological truths of both Calvinism and Free Will Theism: of both compatibilism and libertarianism.

I well understand the major point of compatibilism: namely, that we do not consciously choose our states of intention. We simply find ourselves already possessing such states. CS Lewis (who believed in free will) describes it nicely this way:

‘And what am I? The façade is what I call consciousness. I am at least conscious of the colour of those walls. I am not, in the same way, or to the same degree, conscious of what I call my thoughts: for if I try to examine what happens when I am thinking, it stops happening. Yet even if I could examine my thinking, it would, I well know, turn out to be the thinnest possible film on the surface of a vast deep. The psychologists have taught us that. Their real error lies in underestimating the depth and the variety of its contents. Dazzling lightness as well as dark clouds come up. And if all the enchanting visions are, as they rashly claim, mere disguises for sex, where lives the hidden artist who, from such monotonous and claustrophobic material, can make works of such various and liberating art? And depths of time too. All my past; my ancestral past; perhaps my pre-human past.’[[16]](#footnote-16)

This quote brings out my point nicely, which is this. Choices presuppose intentions, but the reverse is not true: intentions do not presuppose choices[[17]](#footnote-17). We can only deliberate about options only if we have some prior intention of choosing particular options in the first place. In other words, you cannot make a choice unless you first *aim* to choose something. And this aim or intention is not *itself* something chosen through deliberation. I can only *choose* water over soda if I first *prefer* something to drink, for example.

One who disagrees with this may reply that it is quite easy to choose different intentions. Rather than either soda or water you may choose not to drink anything at all, and as such you may declare you have proven that you can ‘chose against your intentions’. My replay is that even in this example, the choice of refusing to drink something must have, at the back of it, some prior intention that was not itself chosen, such as ‘proving to the writer of this book that choices are not determined by intentions.’ As much as I disagree with Jonathan Edwards in other areas, I fully agree with this particular maxim: we can choose as we please, but we cannot *please as we please*. It seems to me that making a choice is like steering a ship. Without some motive power *already* moving us in some direction, *steering* to get there is not possible.

On the other hand, I concede the point made by the libertarians: unless we are the ultimate *cause* of our intentions, we cannot be responsible for them. If I prefer to be a spiteful, greedy person rather than a selfless, gracious one, and if I am to be responsible for that preference, I must be more than a mere victim of my desires. I must be the *cause* of such things. This must mean something different than being simply ‘effected’ by an outside stimuli. That is, being in a state of hunger is very different from being in a state of pride. Hunger is something that *happens to* me. I am not the ‘cause’ of my hunger: rather my nervous system and belly are. Pride, however, is something I *do* and *consent to*. Its source is spiritual, intentional, *internal*. Hence, from a different angle, we come once again to the dilemma that has occupied us for the last several chapters: how can we be the cause of an intention that we do not choose? If we are in fact responsible for the fact that we *prefer* our state of sinfulness, but if we do not choose our preferences, how can we be guilty of them?

I submit that a theory of pre-existence, which posits an initial, unconditioned act at the beginning of the creation of the soul, can deliver us from this impasse. This initial, spiritual act would be categorically different from both our intentions and our choices as we come to them in time. It would be what is ultimately behind them and their basis. It would be their determining principle, so to speak. In other words, I think a pre-existent act shows us how we can be the ‘cause’ of our intentions, even though we do not consciously choose those intentions moment by moment. And at the same time this pre-existent act shows how God can know what we will freely do before we do it. Since He knows our deep, pre-temporal, ‘pre-human’ selves[[18]](#footnote-18), this allows Him to predestine the universe without violating our free will, for He knows the first act of our soul which determines its own free ‘nature’.

I do not think it necessary, or even wise, to speculate much on the nature of such a pre-existent act.[[19]](#footnote-19) Reason would suggest that it is made in a state of ‘epistemic distance’ from God. That is, it is made in the ‘space’ that God provides a soul to be free in. In this space the soul is enlightened by the Good in such a way that it is, to borrow Milton’s phrase, ‘sufficient to stand, though free to fall.’ The soul would be enlightened by, as it were, *resistible* grace. In other words it would be enlightened enough to reach out towards the good perfectly, but the light would not be so bright as to compel obedience and remove freedom. This sort of state of being, and this sort of interaction between God and creation, would be what Augustine attributed only to Adam in the garden of Eden, except applied to the whole human race.

If this is so it would be an error to suppose that the idea of pre-existence as such *necessarily* entails the ideas sometimes attributed to Origen,[[20]](#footnote-20) such as that the soul fell from a state of heavenly bliss. It was this ‘fabulous’ doctrine, by the way, as well as the necessary conclusion of a ‘restoration’, which was condemned at the fifth ecumenical council. The points made against pre-existence most always have to do with the *cyclic* nature of theory suggested: the ‘revolutions’ or ‘returnings’ of the soul to some prior heavenly state, which suggest an endless process of ascension and descension.[[21]](#footnote-21) The theory that I’m suggesting does not have these ‘monstrous’ features. I am positing an initial, primordial act of the soul which determines its temporal becoming and has a *completed* or finished state. Thus the concept of cycles or endless revolution never arises. This also allows us to transfer the original state that Augustine believed Adam was created in to apply to all of humanity at the beginning of their creation as well. We have already seen that a ‘fall’ need not be a decline from a higher, perfect state of being to a lower one. I’ve suggested it should instead be viewed as a ‘stumble’ while attempting to go from a lower, imperfect state of being (which does not equate to a *sinful* state) to a higher state. Neither must we conclude that the soul’s union to the physical body is an inherently evil union, which is another consequences sometimes attributed to pre-existence. There is no need to suppose that matter, as such, is bad, just because the soul pre-existed the current body and was sent into it. The body can retain the function it has always retained in theology: that of bringing the soul greater knowledge of God and His goodness.

As far as I can see, this *particular* version of pre-existence has never been officially condemned by historic Christianity. And although I am not an historian, I would be remiss not to mention that pre-existence, far from being a novel idea, has pervaded philosophical and theological thought from the first philosophical and theological writings we have. Neither was it held only by second rate thinkers. Consider here some of its exponents: Socrates, Plato, Virgil, Philo, Origen, Boethius, Kant, Henry More, Anne Conway, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Edward Beecher[[22]](#footnote-22), Julius Muller, Berdyaev, and Robert Forst.[[23]](#footnote-23) Even Tolkien includes pre-existence as part of his *Silmarillion,* and he[[24]](#footnote-24) and George MacDonald both[[25]](#footnote-25) allude to the possibility of reincarnation as a means of the soul’s migration in various places of their work.

The unbiased reader will notice that a large portion of these thinkers are *Christian*. Although this may come as a surprise, it ought not to. As I’ve already mentioned, pre-existence is as ancient as any other Christian theory of the soul’s origin. St. Augustine himself tells us that it was a common Christian view among others in his day. [[26]](#footnote-26) Those views were i) that all all souls are physically generated from the one given to the first man (traducianism); ii) that they are newly created by God when each person is born (creationism); iii) that they pre-exist elsewhere and are sent by God into the bodies at birth; and iv) that they come down into bodies of their own will. Thus in Augustine’s time, of the four current views regarding the creation of the soul, *two* of them involved pre-existence.

Interestingly, in his letters to Jerome Augustine expresses his agnosticism as to which of these four views should be preferred. [[27]](#footnote-27) Jerome evidently favored creationism, but Augustine finds insuperable difficulties with this view, most especially with the suffering of infants. ‘When I am confronted by the penal problem of the little ones, I am embarrassed, believe me, by great difficulties, and I am utterly lost for an answer.’[[28]](#footnote-28) He’s not only puzzled about the future punishment of infants not baptized and delivered from Original Sin (though he is puzzled by this as well), but also to ‘the sufferings which are to our sorrow endured by them before our eyes in this present life.’[[29]](#footnote-29) To those worried that Augustine is insensitive to the pains of babies and the young, I cannot recommend highly enough a reading of this letter. He does not turn a blind eye to the ‘wasting disease, racking pain, the agonies of thirst and hunger, the feebleness of limbs, the privation of bodily senses and the vexing assaults of unclean spirits’ of the young. He puts the case better than any critic could when he says ‘surely it is incumbent on us to show how it is compatible with justice that infants suffer all these things without any evil of their own as the procuring cause.’[[30]](#footnote-30)

At least in a few places, however, Augustine himself seemed to entertain the view that the soul pre-existed. In his commentary on Genesis he speculates that all souls were created in the first six days of creation. He says,

‘For if we do not believe that God still creates anything from nothing after He has created all things simultaneously, and if we therefore believe that He rested from all the works which He had begun to make and had finished, so that whatever He would subsequently make He would make from these works, I do not see how we can understand that He still creates souls from nothing. Perhaps we should say that in the works of the first six days God made the hidden day and (if this is what we are to believe) the spiritual and intellectual realm, that is, the united company of angelic spirits; and besides them, the world, namely, heaven and earth’ and then we should prehaps add that in these existing beings God created the reason-principles of other beings to come in the future, but not the begins themselves.’[[31]](#footnote-31)

He goes on to conclude that ‘Perhaps, then, the soul, before it was made into the nature of soul, whose beauty is virtue and whose deformity is vice, could have had its own kind of spiritual material which was not yet soul…’[[32]](#footnote-32) Augustine describes this sort of pre-soul as a ‘causal reason of the future human body’ that is united to the material from earth that constitutes the ‘flesh’.[[33]](#footnote-33) We also read a reference in Aquinas’ *Summa* that Augustine claimed that ‘We may believe, if neither Scripture nor reason forbid, that man was made on the sixth day, in the sense that his body was created as to its causal virtue in the elements of the world, but that the soul was *already created*.’[[34]](#footnote-34) Similarly in *Free Choice of the Will* – a book which, if thoroughly read, would change the ways we commonly think about Augustine[[35]](#footnote-35) – he offers the following speculation. ‘Perhaps’, he says, souls pre-existed ‘in some secret place assigned by God’ and were ‘sent to animate and govern the bodies of all the different persons who are born.’ If this is the case, ‘when these souls enter this life and endure the putting on of mortal limbs, they must also endure the forgetfulness of their former life.’[[36]](#footnote-36) But evidently Augustine himself never came to a settled position on the soul’s origin. He claims in *Retractions* that, as to how the soul comes into the body, ‘I neither then knew, nor do I know now.’[[37]](#footnote-37)

My present purpose, however, is not to do history, nor to get bogged down in the pendantry of what a particular thinker believed at a particular point in his life. My purpose is, rather, to more fully justify the reasonableness of the theory of pre-existence *itself*. It would be useless to show that Augustine or any other church father believed a theory if that theory was not first a reasonable interpretation of Christianity. Similarly, if a theory can be put forth which avoids the difficulties mentioned by Augustine and other ancient fathers, and if a strong case can be made for this theory based on Scripture, I think the fathers themselves would encourage us to explore such an option.

It is to the Srciptural case for pre-existence itself that I now turn.

PRE-EXISTENCE ASSERTED BASED ON SCRIPTURE AND GOD’S FOREKNOWLEDGE

The New Testament speaks of things happening ‘before the world began’ and ‘from the foundation of the world.’ I want to submit that when Scripture uses these phrases it means them to be taken literally.

To make my point, consider the logical progression of Christ’s death. The Bible says that Jesus was slain ‘before the foundation of the world’. Now, if this is true, and if Christ’s sacrifice was brought about not by an absolute necessity, but was rather dependent on the unforced entrance of sin, then the contingent reality which *gave rise to sin* must have been present ‘before the foundation of the world’ also. If sin presupposes free will (and if it doesn’t then it has been caused by God), then the crucifixion of Christ *also* presupposes free will. That is, if humanity never sinned, Christ would never have been crucified. He may have become incarnate – he may have ‘taken on human flesh from the foundation of the world’ - but he would not have been *slain* from the foundation of the world. After all, if there were no sinners, who would do the slaying?

Whenever sin occurred in the logical sequence of events, then, it could not have been *after* the plan to send Christ as a sacrifice. For if sin occurred logically after the plan, then the slaying of the Lamb would have been the *cause* of sin, rather than being caused *by it*. The only consistent conclusion to be drawn from this is the following supposition: if the Lamb was slain before the creation of the physical world, even only as a determinate plan in the mind of God, then our freedom which gave rise to that determination must exist before the physical world also.

Another interesting text in the New Testament says that the names of the saved were written in the Book of Life ‘from the foundation of the world’.[[38]](#footnote-38) Now, while this doesn’t explicitly say that souls pre-existed, the implication is that the contingent freedom of the soul in question, which itself determines whether or not any writing takes place, must have somehow been present at the time of its name being written. All the points about the Lamb’s slaying apply to the Book of Life: if the writing of names are in some way dependent on creaturely freedom, and if those names were written before the creation of the world, then creaturely freedom must exist before the creation of the world. If, on the other hand, we say that the writing was *not* dependent on the freedom of creatures, then the writing itself is what determines the free acts that make it impossible to be in the Book of Life to begin with. In other words absolute determinism follows.

I can imagine a critic reminding me that both of these texts are from the book of Revelation. My response is, if we set them aside as being ‘symbolic, apocalyptic imagery’, what sort of interpretation do we give them? Is it somehow less than ‘literally true’ that God predestined the death of Christ from the beginning of creation? The book of Acts, at least, would certainly suggest otherwise. It leaves little room for divine uncertainty when it says Christ was handed over to the authorities by the *deliberate plan* and foreknowledge of God.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Yet even if we take the rather unreasonable position that we simply cannot draw literal truth from the book of Revelation, we still have in the New Testament the *constant theme* or suggestion that there has been some interaction between God and man from the world’s ‘foundation’. Perhaps the strongest argument, then, is no single proof text, but simply the sheer frequency of the idea of a ‘pre-world state of affairs’ itself. By my count the phrase ‘foundation of the world’ appears in the NT ten times total, in seven *different* books. Compare this to other phrases or words we have made elaborate doctrines about.[[40]](#footnote-40) My task is not to compile a list of rarely used words which we have built dogmas upon.[[41]](#footnote-41) I’m simply trying to say that if we are to be consistent with how we’ve been doing theology, the sheer frequency of the phrases about a ‘pre-world’ should give us pause. Their regular use tells me that a *particular* idea, with a *particular* meaning, latently saturates the entire New Testament corpus. Consider, for instance, the verse which says that in Christ ‘all things *were* created… all things *have been* created through Him and for Him.’[[42]](#footnote-42) Does not a plain, unbiased reading of the text imply that all who are born on earth have in some way already been created by God through Christ? Once one’s eyes are open to the fact that perhaps the New Testament does allude to a pre-mortal state, the words of John 1 take on a profoundly shocking new meaning. The writer says that through the Word all things *were* made; he does not say that through the Word all things are *being* made.

There are, also, at least a few verses in the Old Testament that suggest that ancient Jews seriously entertained ideas about the soul’s creation prior to it being in the womb. At any rate they did not accept the idea that the soul is created ‘immediately at conception’. Consider the Psalmist’s words: ‘My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the *secrete place*, when I was woven together in the *depths of the earth*.’[[43]](#footnote-43) However vague such an idea it, it nevertheless suggests some ‘realm’ in which the soul exists prior to its union to its earthly body. Consider, also, what Solomon says: ‘The dust will return to the ground as it was, and the spirit *return* to God who gave it.’[[44]](#footnote-44) What sense does the word ‘return’ have, if the soul never existed in a place other than the physical body which is here described as ‘dust’? Perhaps Solomon found this notion in Job and other ancient Jewish writings, which describe a state at the beginning of creation when ‘all the sons of God shouted for joy.’[[45]](#footnote-45) Certainly, when Solomon wrote that wisdom ‘delighted in the sons of god’ at the beginning of the world, this goes against the idea that Adam and Eve were the *only* beings made upright, innocent, and good. And it is not only Solomon and the writer of Job who entertained this vision of a time in which souls existed before their physical bodies. It was implicitly assumed, at least momentarily, by Christ’s disciples themselves. They at least found it *possible* for a man to sin before his own birth.[[46]](#footnote-46)

For these reasons I believe that pre-existence should be taken at least as seriously as the doctrines of predestination and foreknowledge. To suggest that the phrases in the Old and New Testament that refer to a pre-mortal realm are mere idioms, or simply a Jewish manner of speaking, seems to me to do great violence to the passages in which they are used. For the Scripture expresses a particular *meaning* when it says we were ‘chosen before the foundation of the world’[[47]](#footnote-47), and that we were given grace ‘in Christ Jesus before the world began’[[48]](#footnote-48). When the writer says that Christ was ‘foreordained from the foundation of the world’[[49]](#footnote-49) He means, I believe, just that. What *is* meant in these texts if not what the writers say? If the idea of a state of affairs that existed before the creation of the physical world is a false picture based off an ‘idiom of language’, you may as well say that ideas like ‘foreknowledge’ and ‘predestination’ are false pictures as well. If you are going to rob the words of their meaning, you must put a meaning in their place. Otherwise you make God’s Word into a bunch of empty phrases that do not give us any insight into the nature of reality. Surely, at the very least, the argument is on the side of the reader who takes the words of Scripture at face value?

Speaking of foreknowledge and predestination, another case for pre-existence comes from the fact that it provides us a way of alleviating the otherwise unbearable tension between these two doctrines. This tension can be described like this. If our freedom is actualized in time, moment by moment, then God cannot know what we do until we do it: He therefore gets His knowledge of our freedom *after* we are already in the circumstances which allow us to be free. This would mean that He does not, strictly speaking, possess absolute foreknowledge of future free acts. Yet if this is true, He can neither predict nor predestine all that comes to pass, for part of what comes to pass are our free acts themselves and their effects in time.[[50]](#footnote-50) On the other hand, if God predestines our acts *before* we exercise our freedom in time, then we are not free: we simply carry out whatever determination God has made for us before we ever exist. How, then, can God have both foreknowledge of free actions and predestine all that comes to pass?

Pre-existence offers a solution. It does this by positing a logical moment *before* God’s decree of predestination in which He learns the free action of all the souls He’s created. This free action, since it is responsible for determining the ‘nature’ of the soul in which it is made, is able to provide Him with the foreknowledge of how that soul would express itself in any possible circumstance. God, being thus equipped, is then able to predestinate the universe to accomplish His perfect plan, without violating creaturely freedom. We therefore see a way to uphold both foreknowledge and predestination; creaturely freedom and divine sovereignty. We find a way to see what St. Paul could mean when he says, ‘those He foreknew, these He also predestined.’[[51]](#footnote-51)

What pre-existence essentially does is ground God’s middle knowledge. You will recall that Molinism’s fatal difficulty is that it cannot account for God’s knowledge of counter-factuals of freedom, or what creatures *would* freely do in any conceivable circumstance. This is because He has no way of knowing such a creature’s freedom since the creature does not yet exist. But if we exist in a pre-mortal realm before God’s decree to create this physical world - if, that is, we exist ‘before the foundation of the world’ as the New Testament implies – we are not left with the difficulty in explaining how God can know what we will freely do before He ever gives us freedom.

I will make one last Scriptural case for pre-existence. It will be rather brief. It is this. If we are born in the world needing to be *reconciled* to God, as the Christian view claims, then it would seem to follow that at one point we were *innocent,* or not *estranged* from Him. The New Testament uses words that would be meaningless without supposing there was some time in which we were innocent. What meaning do the words redeem, reconcile, and restore have, if we were corrupt from the very moment of our conception? The prefix ‘*re’* on all these words implies the *returning* or *reestablishing* of something formerly present. To be redeemed, for example, means to be redeemed *from* some state. But what meaningful state can we propose that does not involve moral guilt? We could hold that humanity needs to be ‘saved’, but only in the sense of being delivered from some external danger. But does it make sense to say the person is ‘redeemed’ by the fireman when he’s pulled out of the burning building? Is it meaningful to say that someone is ‘reconciled’ to the doctor who shocks him back to life?

Before I end this chapter I’d like to re-iterate a point I have alluded to above, but perhaps not made sufficiently clear. At any rate it is worth repeating. Believing in pre-existence does *not* necessarily entail believing a particular interpretation of Origen’s version of pre-existence[[52]](#footnote-52). The doctrine can be perfectly maintained without accepting all the consequences of his theology (whether they are correct or not). It need not be the case, for example, that before the pre-mortal world we communed with God in heavenly bliss. I reject this view because it seems to make possible an endless cycle of falls and ascensions of the spirit: for if we fell while *once* being in God’s presence, why could we not fall *again*? Another idea that has been held by many who believe in pre-existence, but which we need not maintain, is the belief that all evils in this life are ‘punishments’ for prior sins. Besides Christ’s explicit refutation of this belief[[53]](#footnote-53) it also seems to make God’s act towards humanity entirely retributive. Since God is perfect love I agree with MacDonald that retribution – or punishing merely for the sake of self-gratification – has no place in God’s interaction with His creation. If He punishes, it must be for some higher reason, such as purification or restoration. I will elaborate this point further later on. My point here is simply that we need not posit our pre-mortal existence as one in which we were bathed in divine light (which would indeed make falling difficult to explain), nor need we hold that all the pains and evils in the present life are retributive punishments for sins committed long ago[[54]](#footnote-54).

A DIGRESSION ON THE WILL, FREEDOM, AND OUR FIRST ACT, FOLLOWED BY REFLECTIONS ON THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

This chapter will be a digression on the previous one in which I will examine more closely the human will and then make some comments on the problem of evil.

All acts of will and reasoning are, in one sense, over once they are made the objects of thought. Once you look back and reflect on your prior states of will, you are no longer willing those prior states. You are, rather, willing the current state of reflection. But at the same time it is not some separate self, or separate will, over against us which we are looking back on. The ‘me’ that is at one moment willing and reasoning is not a different ‘me’ from the one who is now looking back on that former willing and reasoning process. There is a single self that underlies both of these experiences, even if the reflections of that self in consciousness come in separate images.

There is therefore something in us – call it a spirit or soul or even a sub consciousness – there is some free substance within us that operates on a level deeper than conscious choice. Although this deeper self does not consciously choose its inclinations or preferences, we find that it somehow still *agrees* with them. We find that our deepest feelings are not simply material data affecting us, as if they were the limbs on a tree that cannot help but bend with the wind. They are experiences that we consent to, that we are the source of. It is more like we are part of the growing process that parts the branches just there and places them just so.

We can distinguish, then, between feelings happening to us from the *outside* – like pain and hunger and sometimes joy – and feelings happening from the *inside* – like pride, envy, and love. The first group of things does not involve this concurrent agreement with the inner self. Pain and hunger and the like happen *to* us, but we can *act* prideful or envious. We find that our deeper self is already making movements of pride or envy the moment we find ourselves experiencing these conditions. We am not moved *by* them, but move *towards* them; they do not come to us, but come from us. This deeper self, as it were, reaches out towards them and *acquiesces*.

How are we to identify this deeper, spiritual self with our experience of ‘I’ that we recognize in states of conscious choice? Indeed, the situation above makes it look like the ‘I’ is a rather helpless passenger on a train driven by some unknown entity. Yet this cannot really be the case. The train is not driven by someone else: it is driven by us. Who else could it be that is at the wheel? If it is not us who is at the back of all our willing, how would it make any sense to call the volitions we have ‘ours’?

But at the same time how can we be the cause of our deeper volitions if we do not choose them? How can we be responsible for the deeper self is we don’t choose how it behaves? Again a theory of pre-existence nicely helps clarify this puzzle. For we answer it by saying that we cause our spiritual nature by a primordial act at the beginning of our existence. God creates us with the power to *be*, and the extent of this being is actualized by a free movement towards Good. This is our essential creaturely freedom, our *actus purus* analogous to His own *actus purus*, which is the root cause of what we call our subsequent ‘nature’ or becoming in time. Far from our free choices or inclinations being ‘random’ or ‘causeless’, they are ultimately grounded in the initial act of a freely created soul. Pre-existence allows us to see how there is a free, self-determinate, independent reality behind both psychological experiences of ‘I choose’ and ‘I must.’ Julius Muller put it best when he said

Causative self-determination is not really possessed, unless not only the conduct, but the very nature itself, is somehow conditioned by original self-determination. And this is freedom. An essence of nature is free when, starting from a state of original indeterminateness, it attains determinateness by self-decision.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Our theodicies cannot be truly adequate until we come to grips with the reality of this ‘deeper self’. If we fail to realize that our freedom spills over into realms beyond mere conscious choices in time, we do not have a theodicy big enough to fit all the fats. By not holding to a pre-mortal, free act, Open Theism concludes that God cannot be sovereign over evil, nor can He know our choices before we make them. This logically equates to Deism: a God who either cannot guarantee that good will triumph over evil, or a God who is not interested in the battle to begin with. On the other hand Calvinism, without positing a pre-existent act, loses the ability to attribute individual responsibility to our states of volition. Since there is no free spirit at the back of these ‘preferences’ or ‘inclinations’ to cause them, the only thing that could cause them would be God.

But if we ground God’s middle knowledge in a pre-mortal act, we find a way for God to *manage* evil to bring about His perfect ends without Himself causing it. Since He knows the ‘creaturely becoming’ of every free spirit based off its initial, pre-existent act, He can arrange things such that nothing happens gratuitously or without a reason, even evil. A good and wise God would not allow evil without some reason. On the whole, everything exists as part of His plan. It may simply be the case that God cannot realize that plan without evil temporarily existing. If you disagree, consider the alternative: if evil was not somehow necessary for the ultimate redemption of the world, why *would* or how *could* a good God allow it?

If God’s ultimate desire is the perfection or divinization of free creatures, it would follow that He *may* not be able to divinize them any other way than subjecting some them to suffering and ‘vanity’. The great strength of the free will defense concerning the problem of evil is *not* that all suffering can be attributed to a particular free willed choice - choices which, by the way, even *we* may on occasion justifiably prevent. Instead, the great strength of the free willed defense has to do with how it relates *soul making*. At the heart of all soul making theodicy is the fact that the free spirit as it exists in reality presents a true metaphysical difficulty, reaching down into mysteries beyond its own conscious awareness, which God cannot overcome by sheer omnipotent force. ‘Free choice’ – or, rather, the temporal experience of conscious volition – is simply the tip of the iceberg: the true spiritual self goes much deeper.

If this is so it may be the case that unfortunately, the experience of pain or even tremendous suffering may be necessary for our spiritual education. Affliction may be necessarily required in order to work in us, as St. Paul says, an eternal weight of glory.[[56]](#footnote-56) I do not mean that suffering is absolutely necessary. That would drive us back to Dualism which maintains that God cannot help but produce evil in His creation. I mean, rather, that *given our free nature*, it may simply be the case that without suffering, our spiritual natures would never reach the final product that God desires for them.

SUMMARY OF THE CASE FOR PRE-EXISTENCE

Thus far I have made a positive argument for the ancient Christian belief in the pre-existence of the soul. The argument has been more philosophical and Scriptural than historic, though an effort has been made to show that down through the ages pre-existence has been believed by a great many Christian thinkers and that a fully developed theory of the pre-existence of the soul predates even the establishment of the cannon of Scripture itself. My general case for pre-existence has been this: of the various theories of the origin of the soul, only one which posits that the soul exists prior to its union with the present body allows us to hold various Christian teachings without contradiction. These teachings include, but are not limited to, the following: the fall and the universality of sin, the freedom of every individual human being, God’s foreknowledge of the future, His absolute providence over all that occurs, and His innocence of being the author of sin. I have heavily engaged the three popular views of God’s foreknowledge of Calvinism, Open Theism, and Molinism, and have argued that all three of these views have insurmountable difficulties and cannot be rationally maintained. However, by positing the pre-existence of the soul I’ve shown that we can adopt a fourth theory of foreknowledge which avoids the problems of these theories but maintains the benefits of each. Specifically, we can have a God who risks and yet still controls all that comes to pass but who is not powerless in achieving His plans nor is He the ultimate cause of evil. My philosophical case has also engaged other rich topics such as the Pelagian vs Augustinian controversy, the debate between libertarianism and compatibilism, and the problem of evil. I maintained that by adopting a theory of pre-existence we can better reconcile the difficulties that emerge from these topics and form a more consistent Christian theology. Throughout I have also compared a *general* theory of pre-existence with the *particular* one of Origen and shown that one can quite easily believe in a pre-mortal state without holding the version commonly attributed to Origen. I argued that in light of this, ‘general pre-existence’ or ‘pre-existence as such’ has never been universally condemned by orthodox Christianity and can therefore be held by all sects of Christendom. My Scriptural case for pre-existence has rested mainly on the argument that Christ’s death was both a) contingent, and b) predestined before the foundation of the world. The only way to reconcile a and b while maintaining the inerrancy of Scripture is to suppose that the condition which gave rise to the sacrifice of Christ must have existed logically before the decree to create the current physical world. I have also argued that various other passages of Scripture make best sense when viewed in light of a pre-existing, though still created, species of rational beings.

That is a summary of my position thusfar.

1. Romans 7:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 1 John 1:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. William Lane Craig, however, has argued at length that far from science proving a timeless God, it quite reasonably supports the supposition that God Himself is in time and the universe is His absolute ‘clock’ or measure of temporal becoming. See his *God, Time, and Eternity*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. CS Lewis often spoke this way. As much as I love Lewis, it seems he did not, alas, see how this view of timelessness is self-contradictory. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On this theory you end up saying that an ‘I’ or ‘self’ can be predicated at every instant of time, but that ‘I’ or ‘self’ cannot be predicated at all instants of time. But that is absurd, like saying that every part of the paper is white but that the whole sheet is not. You cannot predicate a truth about every *single* part of an object which is not predicated of the *whole* object. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This is the difficulty with the ‘Simple Foreknowledge’ view: God’s knowledge is useless to Him in relation to what He sees. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. I personally find William Lane Craig’s point convincing that God is timeless sans creation and temporal subsequent to creation. See his essay ‘God, Time, and Eternity’ for more on this idea. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. At this point many Open Theists appeal to notions of probability: i.e. when you are dealing with billions and billions of contingencies, although no particular one can be guaranteed to necessarily occur, it becomes extremely likely that *some* of the contingencies will go the way you’re wanting them to. But I find the notion of probabilities incoherent when applied to absolutely free and contingent acts. Further, this still posits an uncertainty in the very means by which to redeem mankind: the crucifixion, which was ordained before the world began. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Here is another problem. On Open Theism human and angelic wills, when they resist this influence, cause evil. This is the sole cause of suffering. These things - evil and suffering - are the metaphysical price-tag of allowing creatures the freedom to do good. God must put up with them if He is going to allow the greatest good of all. But how can the freedom of one individual to do good or evil necessarily require that other people, oftentimes totally unknown in the mind of the very doers of said good and evil, suffer? Isn’t it at least possible to imagine a universe in which free beings are able to do good to each other without evil and suffering necessarily befalling the receiving party if the first party fails to do good? Suppose I was given the opportunity to cook a meal for several people. Must the alternative be that if I did not cook it that all those people would starve? [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. I have heard many say that God can still be provident by having ‘probable’ rather than ‘perfect’ foreknowledge. This seems to me like saying God can have ‘probable’ providence. It is an empty phrase. It does not give us a God who can put His hands on the situation, who can break into it, and who can guarantee His purposes will be achieved. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. I do not maintain that these views have no positives at all. Each have Scriptural and philosophical support, otherwise they would not be held. I simply think each view has fatal difficulties. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. I.e. Calvinism makes God the author of sin, Molinism destroys human freedom, and Open Theism eliminates God’s providence and control over evil. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Origen’s *First Principles* rivals any other systematic, comprehensive theology that we have. In fact Origen scholars often claim it as the *first* complete Christian system. In itself it is quite remarkable in clarity, breadth, logical consistency, and Scriptural quotation. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See On Rebuke and Grace, esp. chapter 31. Referring to Adam in his original state Augustine says ‘free will is sufficient for evil, but is too little for good unless it is aided by Omnipotent Good. And if that man [Adam] had not forsaken that assistance of his free will, he would always have been good; but he forsook it, and he was forsaken. Because such was the nature of the aid, that he could forsake it if he would, and that he could continue in it if he would, but not such that it could be brought about that he would.’ This seems to suggest that St. Augustine believed that at least Adam was given *resistible* grace. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Of course the Calvinists *do* have certain points in their favor. I am simply pointing out this particular inconsistency. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Note here Lewis’ reference to his *pre-human* past. Is it possible Lewis found the idea of pre-existence possible? This quote certainly seems to suggest so. For he says not the pre-human past of other beings, like his ancestors, but *his own* pre-human past. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The classic case for my point is put forward by Jonathan Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. i.e. the self that Lewis speaks of in the quote above [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. A helpful image, however, may be Tennyson’s ‘naked essence’ in his poem *The Two Voices*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. What Origen actually believed is much debated. It is not my purpose to argue a particular interpretation of him. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Augustine letter 166 which he says he protests against pre-existence due to the ‘incomprehensible revolutions’ of the soul; he says ‘I do not know how many cycles the soul must return again to the same burden of the flesh’. Chp 9, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Dr. Beecher has perhaps the most neglected yet learned work on Christian theology produced by America. See his *The Conflict of the Ages* for a theological and philosophical case for pre-existence and also his *History of the Opinions on the Scriptural Doctrine of Retribution* for a profoundly learned examination of early Christian beliefs of eschatology. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. For the most thorough study of the history of the thought of pre-existence see Terryl Given’s *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. For pre-existence, see the Music of the Ainur in the *Silmarillion*. For reincarnation, Tolkien calls Gandalf an ‘incarnate angel’ ‘sent to middle earth’ ‘embodied in physical bodies’ *The Letters of J. R. R Tolkien,*Humphrey Carpenter, editor (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), pg 202. In fact Tolkien seems particularly speculative about the interaction between spirit/soul and matter/body. He says ‘I do not see how even in the Primary World any theologian or philosopher, unless very much better informed about the relation of the spirit and body than I believe anyone to be, could deny the possibility of re-incarnation as a mode of existence, prescribed for certain kinds of rational incarnate creatures.’ *Ibid* pg 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. MacDonald suggests reincarnation as a means of spiritual education in several places; e.g. see his sermons It Shall not be Forgiven and The Hope of the Universe. Also in his book The Princess and Curdie there are examples of people being reborn in animals’ bodies and coming to repentance that way. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Augustine, *The Problem of Free Choice*, III.21, trans. Dom Mark Pontfiex (Westerminster, Marland: The Newman Press, 1955), pg 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See letters 143, 164, 166, where he expresses his difficulties with the common traducian and creationist views. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Letter 166, Chapter 6.16. In this letter he makes a particularly strong case against the creationist view. In my opinion if this letter is pondered deeply over it is enough to prove some theory of pre-existence. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* Vol II Books 7-12, trans. John Hammond Taylor (New York, NY: The Newman Press, 1982) pg 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid pg 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid. Actually something very similar to an initial ‘reasoning principle’ or ‘causal reason of the future human body’ is what I argue for regarding the soul’s initial state of being. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Summa Theologica, I. Q. 90 A 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Augustine defends libertarian free will as well as the ability of the soul to resist the effects of the sin of Adam as to guilt. He also gives an argument for the existence of God, explores the problem of animal pain, and discusses a ‘midpoint’ of Adam between being already perfected and having fallen into sin. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Augustine, *The Problem of Free Choice*, III.21 pg 198 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Augustine, *Retractions*, 1.1.3 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Revelation 17:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Acts 2:23 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. ‘Predestination’ or its root word, as well as ‘foreknowledge’ or its root, occur only four times each in the NT. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. It is, however, an enlightening exercise to count how many times certain words are used in the New Testament – such as atonement - and compare the attention these words have received versus the phrases ‘before the world began’ and ‘foundation of the world.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Colossians 1:16-17 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Psalms 139:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ecclesiastes 12:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Job 38:7. A strong exegetical case can be made that the preceding verse refers to angels and this verse – verse 7 – refers to humans. The former are described as ‘morning stars’ and the later ‘sons of God.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. John 2:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ephesians 1:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. 2 Timothy 1:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. 1 Peter 1:20 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Such as Peter’s denial, Judas’s betrayal, and Christ’s crucifixion [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Romans 8:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. I should mention that I think that Origen is the least studied and most underappreciated theologian in Christian history. I do not think his theology has been squarely faced and refuted. Along with MacDonald, I think Christianity would be better off if it took what Origen had to say seriously and considered the overall coherence of his vision of God and God’s relation to the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. John 9:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Although many scholars may disagree with me, for my own part I think Origen’s *First Principles* can be reasonably interpreted not to imply any of the problems of pre-existence that this chapter has dealt with. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Muller, Julius, *The Christian Doctrine of Sin*, p. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. 2 Corinthians 4:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)