

Objections Answered

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Dr. Boettner was born on a farm in northwest Missouri. He was a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary (Th.B., 1928; Th.M., 1929), where he studied Systematic Theology under the late Dr. C. W. Hodge. Previously he had graduated from Tarkio College, Missouri, and had taken a short course in Agriculture at the University of Missouri. In 1933 he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity, and in 1957 the degree of Doctor of Literature. He taught Bible for eight years in Pikeville College, Kentucky. A resident of Washington, D.C., eleven years and of Los Angeles three years. His home was in Rock Port, Missouri. His other books include: *Roman Catholicism*, *Studies in Theology*, *Immortality*, and *The Millennium*.

OBJECTIONS COMMONLY URGED AGAINST THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

1. THAT IT IS FATALISM

MUCH misunderstanding arises through confusing the Christian Doctrine of Predestination with the heathen doctrine of Fatalism. There is, in reality, only one point of agreement between the two, which is, that both assume the absolute certainty of all future events. The essential difference between them is that Fatalism has no place for a personal God. Predestination holds that events come to pass because an infinitely wise, powerful, and holy God has so appointed them. Fatalism holds that all events come to pass through the working of a blind, unintelligent, impersonal, non-moral force which cannot be distinguished from physical necessity, and which carries us helplessly within its grasp as a mighty river carries a piece of wood.

Predestination teaches that from eternity God has had one unified plan or purpose which He is bringing to perfection through this world order of events. It holds that all of His decrees are rational determinations founded on sufficient reason, and that He has fixed one great goal "toward which the whole creation moves." Predestination holds that the ends designed in this plan are, first, the glory of God; and second, the good of His people. On the other hand Fatalism excludes the idea of final causes. It snatches the reins of universal empire from the hands of infinite wisdom and love, and gives them into the hands of a blind

necessity. It attributes the course of nature and the experiences of mankind to an unknown, irresistible force, against which it is vain to struggle and childish to repine.

According to the doctrine of Predestination the freedom and responsibility of man are fully preserved. In the midst of certainty God has ordained human liberty. But Fatalism allows no power of choice, no self-determination. It makes the acts of man to be as utterly beyond his control as are the laws of nature. Fatalism, with its idea of irresistible, impersonal, abstract power, has no room for moral ideas, while Predestination makes these the rule of action for God and man. Fatalism has no place for and offers no incentives to religion, love, mercy, holiness, justice, or wisdom, while Predestination gives these the strongest conceivable basis. And lastly, Fatalism leads to skepticism and despair, while Predestination sets forth the glories of God and of His kingdom in all their splendor and gives an assurance which nothing can shake.

Predestination therefore differs from Fatalism as much as the acts of a man differ from those of a machine, or as much as the unfailing love of the heavenly Father differs from the force of gravitation. "It reveals to us," says Smith, "the glorious truth that our lives and our sensitive hearts are held, not in the iron cog-wheels of a vast and pitiless Fate, nor in the whirling loom of a crazy Chance, but in the almighty hands of an infinitely good and wise God."¹

Calvin emphatically repudiated the charge that his doctrine was Fatalism. "**Fate**," says he, "is a term given by the Stoics to their doctrine of necessity, which they had formed out of a labyrinth of contradictory reasonings; a doctrine calculated to call God Himself to order, and to set Him laws whereby to work. **Predestination** I define to be, according to the Holy Scriptures, that free and unfettered **counsel of God** by which He rules all mankind, and all men and things, and also all parts and particles of the world by His infinite wisdom and incomprehensible justice." And again, ". . . had you but been willing to look into my books, you would have been convinced at once how offensive to me is the profane term **fate**; nay, you would have learned that this same abhorrent term was cast in the teeth of Augustine by his opponents."²

Luther says that the doctrine of Fatalism among the heathen is a proof that "the knowledge of Predestination and of the prescience of God, was no less left in the world than the notion of divinity itself." In the history of philosophy Materialism has proven itself essentially fatalistic. Pantheism also has been strongly tinged with it.

No man can be a consistent fatalist. For to be consistent he would have to reason something like this: "If I am to die today, it will do me no good to eat, for I

¹ The Creed of Presbyterians, p. 167.

² "The Secret Providence of God", reprinted in *Calvin's Calvinism*, pp. 261, 262.

shall die anyway. Nor do I need to eat if I am to live many years yet, for I shall live anyway. Therefore I will not eat." Needless to say, if God has foreordained that a man shall live, He has also foreordained that he shall be kept from the suicidal folly of refusing to eat.

"This doctrine," says Hamilton, "is only superficially like the pagan 'fate.' The Christian is in the hands not of a cold, immutable determinism, but of a warm, loving heavenly Father, who loved us and gave His Son to die for us on Calvary! The Christian knows that 'all things work together for good to them that love God, even to them that are called according to His purpose.' The Christian can trust God because he knows He is all-wise, loving, just and holy. He sees the end from the beginning, so that there is no reason to become panicky when things seem to be going against us."³

Hence, only a person who has not examined this doctrine of Predestination, or one who is maliciously inclined, will rashly charge that it is Fatalism. There is no excuse for anyone making this mistake who knows what Predestination is and what Fatalism is.

Since the universe is one systematized unit we must choose between Fatalism, which ultimately does away with mind and purpose, and this biblical doctrine of Predestination, which holds that God created all things, that His providence extends to all His works, and that while free Himself He has also provided that we shall be free within the limits of our natures. Instead of our doctrine of Predestination being the same with the heathen doctrine of Fatalism, it is its absolute opposite and only alternative.

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³ *Bondage of the Will*, p. 31.