

## The Creator's Decrees and Foreknowledge and the Creature's Freedom of Will according to Domingo Báñez, Luis de Molina, and Bartolomeo Mastri

*Marco Forlivesi*

### **Introduction**

The wish to prove the compossibility of omnipotent, divine action and infallible foreknowledge, on the one hand, and the freedom of angelic and human will, on the other, is one of the questions to which theist thinkers have returned again and again throughout the last two millennia. As far as Christian authors are concerned, the problem arose when the wish to hold the rational creature to be solely responsible for sin (an idea developed by Christian authors from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century) intermingled with the Neo-Platonic theory according to which it is simply nonsensical to think of any object or act whatsoever as independent, even to the least degree, of the prime source of reality. Well known outcomes of this state of affairs are Augustine of Hippo's struggle against Pelagius' doctrine, Augustine's Neo-Platonic interpretation of "free will" as "good will" and his later doctrine of perfect divine predestination.

Even that compossibility was also debated during the Early Middle Ages, the problem became more acute as a different notion of free will gradually gained ground over the Neo-Platonic one: the notion of freedom as a power of self-determining

an otherwise indeterminate and extrinsically indeterminable self (at least under certain conditions). Thanks to this notion, Christian authors of the High Middle Ages were able to account for a number of angelic and human features (last but not least, the possibility of losing salvation), yet they also unchained two mammoth themes: the compatibility of this notion of freedom with the Augustinian doctrine of divine grace and human salvation (a doctrine forged according to Neo-Platonic premises), and the compossibility of omnipotent, divine predestination and omniscient foreknowledge, on the one hand, and the freedom of created wills, on the other.

As far as public resonance and political consequences are concerned, the late medieval debates culminated in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century clash between Protestantism and Catholicism. Although by means of different intellectual paths, both Martin Luther and John Calvin (Jehan Cauvin) promoted the theses according to which all created things are entirely and perfectly subordinated to God's decisions, by which He rules each and every creature, and divine foreknowledge is infallible precisely because it is based upon those decisions. One has consequently to admit that every creature exists and acts by (albeit extrinsic) necessity, that God decides efficiently and infallibly whether a person is inescapably destined for condemnation or for salvation, and that man simply has to accept the fact that all God's decisions, including those condemning someone, are perfectly just, which is something that exceeds the understanding of human minds.

The most famous action taken by the Roman Catholic Church aiming to combat the Reformation was the convocation of the Council of Trent. In particular, during the sixth session of the Council, on January 13<sup>th</sup> 1547, a decree was issued defining the Roman Catholic doctrine of grace and justification. According to this decree and the following canons, man's salvation lies beyond his own powers and, in order to be attained, necessarily requires divine grace. Man does not contribute in any way to God's initial decision to confer grace on him, yet he does not obtain this grace purely passively: it is in his power either to

accept or to reject it, and herein lie the expression and the role of the freedom of his will.

The conflict concerning the relation of divine grace and human will historically polarised the positions, yet two points should not be overlooked. The first consists in the fact that, beyond the tangle of contrasting biblical sentences and theological disagreements over their interpretation, a specifically philosophical problem constituted the core of the debate: the puzzle of the compossibility of divine omnipotent action and infallible omniscient foreknowledge, on the one hand, and the freedom of created wills, on the other. The second point consists in the fact that the parties at war were also torn within themselves by vehement disputes. In the present article, we shall focus on the last decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. During that time, one of the fiercest disputes in the history of Catholicism took place. The debate is recorded in historical annals under the name “dispute between the Báñezians and the Molinists”, where the former were mainly representatives of the Dominican Order and followers of the doctrine of Domingo Báñez OP (1528-1604), while the latter were representatives of the Jesuit Order and followers, at least to some degree, of the doctrine of Luis de Molina SJ (1536-1600). Both Báñez and Molina considered themselves Thomists, even though the Dominican emphasized Thomas’ debts to Augustine while the Jesuit tried to escape Thomas’ limitations by adopting Ockham’s ideas. We shall then see the attempt of a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Scotist to overcome the limitations of the doctrines of both Báñez and Molina.

## **1. The dispute between Báñezians and Molinists**

### *1.1 Preliminaries to the crisis*

The Jesuit Order, while explicitly assuming the role of combating the Reformation, took as one of the foundations of its cultural, pastoral and political mission the defence of the rel-

evance of the freedom of human will in the process of salvation. Yet, by following that path the Jesuits entered into a conflict with some other relevant Catholic doctrinal traditions. In 1582, a young Jesuit, Prudencio de Montemayor, set out several theses in an academic dispute in Valladolid, and they immediately triggered some harsh criticism from two of the chief participants in the future “Molinist issue”: Francisco Zumel OdM (1540-1607) and Domingo Báñez. Báñez collected some of Montemayor’s theses and presented them to the Spanish Inquisition, which was governed by Dominicans. Among the theses contested by Báñez, one can recall the following. God did not foresee, nor yet predetermine the number of all the single things that exist; in particular, He neither foresaw nor predetermined all the single good deeds; in actual fact, He only foresaw and predetermined the fact that good deeds could be carried out by the free will of creatures. Moreover, God’s foreknowledge of the free volitions of a creature does not depend upon the fact that He predefined those volitions; rather, He has such knowledge because those volitions will actually be performed by the creature in the future.

In 1584, the Spanish Inquisition condemned the statements by Montemayor reported by Báñez, and, in the same year, the latter published his *Scholastica commentaria*, where he stated his own theses concerning the nature of human freedom and the relationship between human will and God’s acts. A year later, in 1585, a new outburst of the dispute on the question of the relationship between grace and the consent of the will appeared. Lenaert Leys SJ (*Leonardus Lessius*; 1554-1623) was appointed teacher of scholastic theology at the Jesuit College at Leuven. His teachings aroused reservations and arguments amongst his students, not all of whom were Jesuits. The Theological Faculty of the University of Leuven took an active interest in the discussion and in 1587 condemned 34 theses (31 of which on predestination, grace and free will) taken from the notes of the students that had attended Leys’ course the previous year. Leys’ position on the compatibility of grace, providence and free will abided by one facet of the decree issued by

the Council of Trent: in his opinion, grace and free will cooperate, and only the grace that is freely accepted by the human will is such as to be efficacious (*gratia efficax*), i.e., it is such as to lead to salvation. On their part, the university theologians of Leuven, led by Michel de Bay (*Michael Baius*; 1519-1589), advocated the traditional Augustinian thesis: God's decision to save someone cannot be challenged by the will of the latter; specifically, His efficacious grace is such in itself and it makes men's love for Him both voluntary and necessary at the same time. In 1588, the Spanish Jesuit, Luis de Molina, published his *De concordia liberi arbitrii cum divinae gratiae donis*. Here he developed a radical criticism of Báñez's position and propounded a theory alternative to that of the Dominican. In the following years, Báñez, Molina and the Orders they belonged to exchanged increasingly harsh accusations of heresy, the Dominicans charging the Jesuits with Pelagianism and the Jesuits charging the Dominicans with Calvinism.

### 1.2 *The two doctrines in conflict*

As the reader has seen, the problem at issue concerns the Christian doctrine of grace and salvation; nonetheless, it is founded on a crucial philosophical difficulty, which can be summarised in three questions. The first question concerns the nature of God's foreknowledge and its foundation. The second question concerns the nature of God's freedom, human freedom and their respective possibility. The third question concerns the compatibility between the possible answers to the first two questions. No matter how different the solutions may be, they all share two preconditions. The first precondition consists in the view that God's foreknowledge is clear, complete and hence can never be thought of as approximate or hypothetical, nor as being dependent on the actual being of creatures in any way. The second precondition consists in the definition of the constituent elements of the philosophical problem grounding the basis of all the facets of the dispute, namely: God's knowl-

edge, His decrees (*decreta*), human knowledge, human will and the acts of God upon creatures and in particular upon human will and its acts.

The Dominican, Domingo Báñez, advocated the following theory.

First. All faculties of the creature, including will, are in potency with respect to their own acts. In order to pass from potentiality to actuality, i.e., to produce their acts, they need a principle of action, a mover, other than themselves. This principle of action cannot be anything but God, who causes the transition of the faculties from potentiality to actuality as an efficient cause. Specifically, every divine causation of this type is a physical premotion towards a definite act (*praemotio physica ad unum*). It is “physical” in the sense that it is real and effective, not just a suasion or something to be understood metaphorically; it is a premotion in the sense that it is a motion that is exerted upon the creature’s faculty and makes it produce an act; it is directed towards a single act in the sense that each physical premotion makes the faculty produce a precise act and that one alone. The physical premotions towards definite acts are effects of God’s decrees; thus, His decrees are the causes of each act of every created will, including the future acts of created wills; consequently, God’s decrees also found His perfect foreknowledge of each future act of every created will. In general, God knows everything, including each act of every created will and all that will occur in the future, not simply because He knows everything that He can create, but specifically because He knows everything that He decides to create, on the one hand, and nothing other than what God decides to create exists, on the other hand.

Second. Báñez agrees that the freedom of the human will consists in the power to self-determine oneself should one be in a state of indeterminacy. Nonetheless, according to Báñez, human will is indeterminate only with respect to the finite goods that the human intellect presents to human will and only as long as God’s foreknowledge is not taken into consideration; on the contrary, when the act of will is considered together with the divine premotion, no indeterminacy is possible.

Third. According to Báñez, God knows future events and the free acts of created wills solely as a result of His decrees (*post decretum*), whereas man's will is in a state of indeterminacy if and only if will is considered before divine premotion, i.e., apart from God's decree (*ante decretum*).

As for the solution of the Jesuit, Luis de Molina, it develops in the following three statements.

First. As is also the case with Báñez, all created beings only exist because of God's general influence that preserves their existence, and this also applies to the wills of creatures and their acts. Yet, Molina differs from Báñez in claiming that the production of these acts does not require any previous immediate intervention by God and that, by His decrees, God merely provides the individual acts of the individual created wills with their existence. The freedom of the will consists in the fact that at the same time will can generate an act, can refrain from producing an act or can generate an act at variance with the act it is generating at that very moment. In other words, human will can turn from potentiality to actuality by itself, without any need of any mover other than the will itself. In short, according to Molina, God only cooperates in the production of the acts of human will as far as He contributes to their existence in the very moment when the human will generates them; by contrast, God does not move the human will before it acts. This thesis has two consequences. On the one hand, human will can be in a state of indeterminacy and therefore it can determine itself in every respect and in a full sense; on the other hand, God's decrees cannot be the basis for God's foreknowledge.

Second. Molina distinguishes three types of divine knowledge: natural knowledge, free knowledge and middle knowledge. The first consists in God's knowledge of the creatures that He can create, be it through direct creation or through secondary causation. This type of knowledge concerns the essences of individuals, the necessary connections between these essences (and hence the events perforce consequent to the fact that some things are set while others are not), and the possible connections between these essences (and hence the possi-

ble, i.e. contingent, events that become possible as far as some things are set whereas others are not). God's natural knowledge, specifies Molina, precedes God's decrees. Divine free knowledge follows God's free decrees, i.e., it consists in God's knowledge of the things that He (in any case, freely) decides to create. This type of knowledge concerns existing individuals and is entirely definite. Divine middle knowledge consists in God's knowledge of conditional future events, i.e., of all the acts that may be generated by each and every created free will in every possible configuration of circumstances.

On the one hand, unlike natural divine knowledge, divine middle knowledge concerns contingent beings and facts; on the other hand, unlike free divine knowledge, it precedes the divine decrees, so that it concerns facts that do not depend on divine decisions. Nevertheless, this type of knowledge is faultless: subsequent to God's determination of a certain set of circumstances, His supreme wisdom allows Him to know infallibly the free choices of human wills without suppressing their freedom. This knowledge, Molina claims, is not conjectural; on the contrary, it is certain and unchangeable. However, he specifies, it is such not due to its object, which is essentially uncertain, but because of the knowing subject, who has the power to scrutinise, within His own essence, the human wills with such a depth of insight as to be able to see their free choices within any given set of circumstances.

Third. Perfect divine foreknowledge and human free will are therefore fully compatible. God does not cause the free acts of created wills; even so, He can foresee them with certainty and soundly thanks to the force of His sight. In short, according to Molina, God knows future events and the free acts of created wills previous to, and apart from, His decree (*ante decretum*); moreover, the human will is in a state of indeterminacy and has the power to determine itself even if God's decrees are taken into consideration (*post decretum*).

The contrasting shortcomings of the doctrines of Báñez and Molina are rather clear. As far as Báñez's position is concerned, one may wonder what remains of human free will if we assume that a created will is free only insofar as it is considered



separately from a divine motion that is in reality indispensable. As for Molina's position, God's middle knowledge appears either a powerful, yet hypothetical, science or the expression of an exceedingly complex, but ineluctable, chain of events. In the first case, middle knowledge could not be certain and infallible; in the second case, the freedom of the creature would be lost. One may thus wonder how Molina's recourse to the sublime, all-encompassing nature of God's knowledge can be a means of evading these two alternatives.

## 2. The Scotistic endeavour

During the decades spanning the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the entire 17<sup>th</sup> century, many attempts were made to overcome the problematic aspects of the aforementioned positions, or to confute both of them definitively and to propound alternative theories. Among these attempts, a notable one was developed by a number of Scotist authors, who named their system "doctrine of the concomitant decree" (*decretum concomitans*). The 17<sup>th</sup>-century Conventual Franciscan biographer, Giovanni Franchini from Modena (1633-1695), related this doctrine to his confrère Giuseppe La Napola Jr. from Trapani (1586-1649), but the latter did not publish his writings and, as far as I know, none of them is currently extant. Be that as it may, the doctrine of the concomitant decree is expounded in several printed works by 17<sup>th</sup>-century Scotists. Among them, the treatment of the topic that is presented in the *Disputationes theologicae in quatuor libros Sententiarum* by the Conventual Franciscan, Bartolomeo Mastri from Meldola (1602-1673), appears clear and meticulous; thus, I shall present the contents of this work.

Mastri explains the issue in detail in the first volume of his *Disputationes theologicae* – a volume published for the first time in Venice in 1655<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, the subject is treated in the dis-

---

<sup>1</sup> BARTHOLOMAEUS MASTRIUS, *Disputationes theologicae in primum librum Sententiarum*, Apud Ioannem Iacobum Hertz, Venetiis 1655.

putations 3 (*On Divine Intellect*), 4 (*On Divine Will*), and 5 (*On Divine Predestination and Condemnation*)<sup>2</sup>. According to Mastri, the problem of the relationship between God's foreknowledge and His will, on the one hand, and the acts of created free wills, on the other, has to be posed as follows.

At first, Mastri seems to oppose Báñez's doctrine of physical premotion, but he is actually more critical of Molina's view. Indeed, Mastri writes that it is wrong to state that the will of God is the entire principle of the efficiency of secondary causes: if that were the case, he argues, the secondary cause would not be a principle of any activity. However, Mastri does not reject the core of Báñez's position. He certainly wishes to emphasize that secondary causes are truly causes, i.e., principles of activity, nonetheless he agrees that the secondary causes are subordinated to the primary cause and that their acts are possible only because of a divine concurrence and assistance (*concursum; influxum*). In detail, as far as the acts of created free wills are concerned, Mastri states that God contributes to them in a two-fold way, i.e., issuing two sets of decrees (*decretum, praefinitio, praedefinitio*). First of all, the created free will needs assistance in order to be and to be what it is, i.e., to be capable of producing free choices; thus, one has to admit that God decrees that each and every existing free will exists, and that God himself is prompt to assist it in producing whatever volition it will generate. Secondly, single volitions need assistance in order to exist; thus, one has to admit that God decrees that each and every

---

<sup>2</sup> *Ibi*, disp. 3 *De divino intellectu*, q. 3 *De futuris absolutis. An Deus cognoscat futura contingentia absoluta, et quo medio*, pp. 199a-258b; disp. 3, q. 4 *De scientia futurorum conditionatorum*, pp. 258b-295b; disp. 4 *De divina voluntate*, q. 2 *An Deus decreto suo absoluto, et efficaci praedefiniat omnes actiones nostras liberas distincte, et in particulari*, pp. 305b-313a; disp. 4, q. 3 *An etiam actus nostri mali sint a Deo praedefiniti*, pp. 313a-323b; disp. 4, q. 4 *An ad conciliandum efficaciam divini decreti cum libertate nostra opus sit illud concipere, ut nunc egrediens a divina voluntate*, pp. 323b-342a; disp. 5 *De divina praedestinatione, et reprobatione*, q. 2 *An electio efficax ad gloriam sit ante, vel post meritum praevisionem*, a. 10 *Quinta obiectio ex libertate expeditur*, pp. 466a-473a.

single volition freely generated by existing free wills exists. The first set of divine decrees precedes the acts of the created will; these decrees are general, neutral and conditional, and stand more on the side of the faculty than on that of the act. The second set of divine decrees concerns single volitions; these decrees are particular, determinate and absolute, and stand more on the side of the act than on that of the faculty.

As we can see, Mastri's position on this topic is closer to Báñez's position than to Molina's. Mastri agrees with Molina on the thesis that God contributes to the existence of each and single free volition of the created will in the very moment when the latter generates the former, and yet he also claims that God can only contribute to the existence of that act by establishing it eternally and that He actually decrees the existence of that act from eternity, in an immutable and infallible way. According to Mastri, this applies to each and every future event and this is exactly the manner in which divine providence predestines every future thing, concretely and in the smallest details<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, Mastri claims that God can have a true, certain and infallible foreknowledge of the free choices of created wills solely on the basis of His decrees (*post decretum*) and that He actually has such a knowledge. Having said this, Mastri is conscious of being in an awkward position. He argues that if all the single created beings were not eternally predetermined by divine decree in all details, definitely and positively, the way according to which God can assist them to be and can know (or "foreknow") them certainly and infallibly would be incomprehensible; however, if this is the case, one may wonder how created wills can be undetermined and can determine themselves, i.e., how they can freely generate acts of choice.

Mastri attacks the problem in three steps. First of all, he points out that if one interpreted the relation between God's decrees (in particular the second set of decrees) and the free

---

<sup>3</sup> One may notice that Mastri thinks that this schema also applies to the morally evil choices, even if in that case Mastri prefers to say that they are not "wished" by God but only "allowed" by him.

choices of created wills as a plain causal primacy of the former over the latter, then the freedom of choice of created wills would be lost. Neither the recourse to the eminence of the power of God's will (as usually with the Thomists), he argues, nor the recourse to the abyss of God's knowledge (as with the Jesuits) can solve the problem: the causal primacy of God's decree and the ineluctability of its effects would still be in force<sup>4</sup>. Consequently, Mastri advances a different concept of the aforementioned relationship. God's decrees, he writes, control the created will; thus, there is only one way to allow the created will to control itself: it has to be granted the power to determine conversely the decrees of God. Evidently, Mastri has to clarify how this may occur and to prove that this is the case; this point constitutes the third step in his argument.

God's decrees, Mastri points out, are expressions of God's will; therefore, one has to shed light on its nature. God's will, Mastri argues, is infinite not only insofar as its power is concerned, it is also infinite insofar as its freedom is concerned. This means, Mastri continues, that God's will virtually but perfectly contains all possible created free wills and all their possible choices. This character of God's will, Mastri claims, allows God to simulate within His own will any possible free choice whatsoever a created will would make if it were independent of God; moreover, Mastri states, God actually simulates them. By means of this simulation, God exactly and eternally knows which free choice a certain created will will make if it is free, i.e., undetermined and self-determining. Thus, God can eternally decree that precisely that volition exists in time; moreover, Mastri states, God actually decrees it. Finally, by means of this decree, on the one hand God both perfectly predetermines each act of every created free will and exactly and eternally knows which free choice a certain created will makes at

---

<sup>4</sup> One may notice that Mastri is also concerned about God's freedom. If the acts that God generates depended only upon His knowledge and its contents, Mastri states, all those acts might not be free but they would be directed by the laws of necessity.

a certain moment; on the other hand, that choice is made as if the created will that made it were free, i.e., undetermined and self-determining. In short, thanks to the aforementioned character of God's will, to God's decision to avail Himself of it, and to God's decision to respect and enforce the simulated choices of the created wills virtually contained in His will, on the one hand God perfectly predetermines and knows the choices of created free wills, on the other hand created free wills control God's decrees and therefore control themselves.

Mastri calls this theory "doctrine of the concomitant decree". One should note that the concomitance in question does not consist in collaboration or simultaneousness between the decrees of God's will and the choices made by the created will; rather, it consists in the fact that none of them (God's decrees and angelic or human choices) precedes the other as a cause of the acts of the latter.

The clarity and power of this doctrine are impressive, and even if it adopts some tenets of Báñez's and Molina's positions, it is really alternative to both of them. Given the assumption that an omniscient and omnipotent creator exists, the doctrine of the concomitant decree clarifies that neither the creator's divine power nor His divine knowledge, however we interpret them, can be the first and foremost foundation of the freedom of created wills; rather, the deepest root of the possibility of the freedom of created wills (i.e., of the radical power to determine oneself) lies in the infinity of the creator's free will considered precisely as free. As a remarkable result, this doctrine states not only that divine domination and (fore-) knowledge are possible solely as a consequence of God's decrees, but also that even the freedom of existing created wills is actually possible solely as a consequence of God's will and, eventually, of his decrees.

However, despite its audaciousness, when sifted with the same rigour that Mastri exercised in evaluating the doctrines by Báñez and Molina, even the doctrine of the concomitant decree appears to be problematic, albeit in an interesting way. As we have seen, Mastri states that God, within his own free will, has the power to simulate any possible free choice that any creat-

ed free will whatsoever can make. However, this is not yet the last achievement that God can attain. According to Mastri, the infinity of God's will, the aforementioned infinite power to simulate perfectly the created free will and its choices, allows God to anticipate the choices that existing created free wills actually make at any moment in time. This thesis appears to present two problems. On the one hand, supposing that God can simulate any possible choice of a certain created free will, one may wonder how God can discern the single choice that this individual created free will in reality makes at a certain moment in time. On the other hand, supposing contrariwise that God can simulate those choices alone that a possible created free will would make if it existed, one may wonder in what sense this particular and created free will can be conceived as something different from God's will. In other words, one may wonder how the aforementioned virtual simulation existing in God's will can be distinguished from "reality", which is assumed not to be just a facet of God's being. In truth, despite Mastri's opposing claims<sup>5</sup>, every particular possible free will and "its" choices plainly appear to be nothing but aspects of God's will.

### **Conclusion: the failure of Catholicism conceived as a theoretical project**

All things considered, it appears that none of the attempts of the principal Catholic thinkers in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century succeeded in developing a solution to the problem of the compatibility of the decrees and foreknowledge of a transcendent, omniscient and omnipotent creator with a creature's free will. Interestingly, considering both Molina's achievements concerning God's knowledge and the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Scotistic results concerning God's will, the time was ripe for the resurgence of a monistic view of reality. One may think that, thanks to the work

---

<sup>5</sup> MASTRIUS, *Disputationes*, disp. 3, q. 3, a. 9, n. 183, p. 248a-b.

of these authors, the world actually proved to be a performance internal to God, even though, as the remarkable Scotist theory of the concomitant decree suggests, it might be a performance determining a number of aspects of itself.

Furthermore, the entire historical and institutional development of the question is instructive. In 1588, thanks also to the intervention of Roberto Bellarmino SJ, Pope Sixtus V issued three briefs in order to settle the “Leys issue”. In them, Sixtus V declared that every conclusion concerning the topic of dispute between Leys and the Leuven university theologians fell within the sole competence of the Pope, ordered the nuncio in Cologne to collect all the documents and pieces of information concerning the case and imposed silence on the disputing parties, specifying that this silence should be kept until the Pope issued a pronouncement of clarification. However, no pope has ever issued the announced pronouncement.

In 1594, in the context of the “Molina issue”, the conflict between the Jesuits and the Dominicans became so publicly vehement, especially in Spain, that the King of Spain, Philip II, forced the Pope, Clement VIII, to summon the opposing parties and take jurisdiction over the case. In 1597, Clement VIII instituted a commission named “Congregation *de auxiliis*” (i.e., “on the <divine> aids”) which had the task of assessing the orthodoxy of Molina’s book. However, the Jesuits succeeded in modifying the original purpose of the commission, adding the task of clarifying the characteristics of divine grace in itself. In 1604, Clement VIII died without having taken a decision on the issue and the new Pope, Paul V, decided that the Congregation *de auxiliis* should continue its work. However, in the next few years it became clear that the members of the Congregation were able neither to formulate a conclusive theory concerning the nature of the effects of grace in the creature, nor to issue a judgment on the orthodoxy of Molina’s work. Early in September, 1607, after considering the inconclusive results of a further meeting of the Congregation that was expected to be decisive, Paul V summoned the Master General of the Dominicans and the Superior General of the Jesuits and gave the following speech:

As for the “*de auxiliis* issue”, Our Lord [i.e. the Pope] has made the disputants, as well as the consultants, understand that they may return to their houses. He also said that in due time His Holiness will issue his declaration and decision. He also prohibited most gravely that in the meanwhile, when treating these matters, nobody shall venture to qualify or censure the other party, commanding moreover both the Dominicans and the Jesuit Fathers that if someone failed in this, he had to be punished severely, and His Holiness further pointed out that this order of his was to be followed inviolably<sup>6</sup>.

Despite this prohibition, which was also somehow a compromise, the tension between the parties did not decrease. Hence, in 1611, by means of an edict of the Roman Inquisition, Paul V restrained the publication of works *in materia de auxiliis*, specifying that anyone who wanted to have a work of his printed on this topic, should previously send the text to the Inquisition for approval. As was the case of Sixtus V, Paul V also died without issuing any final statement on the topic *de auxiliis*, and hitherto the teaching promised by Paul V has never been issued by the papacy. Apparently, to the present day the pledge of Paul V has not been kept.

Needless to say, despite the prohibitions of Paul V, the dispute never completely disappeared. In the Protestant field, which was not subject to the papacy's domination, during the early years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century two antagonistic views of predestination came into conflict: one propounded by François Gomar (Franciscus Gomarus; 1563-1641), advocating the strict di-

---

<sup>6</sup> «Nel negotio de auxiliis, Nostro Signore ha fatto intendere a i disputanti, e consultori, che possono tornare alle case loro. Et ha detto che a suo tempo la Santità Sua darà fuori la sua dichiarazione, e determinatione. E tra tanto ha ordinato molto seriamente, che nel trattare di queste materie, nessuno ardisca di qualificare, o censurare l'altra parte: ordinando di più tanto a i Domenicani, quanto alli Padri Giesuiti, che se alcuno mancherà in questo, sia punito severamente: intendendo Sua Santità, che questo suo ordine si eseguisca inviolabilmente». Quoted from JACOBUS HYACINTHUS SERRY, *Historia Congregationum de auxiliis divinae gratiae sub summis pontificibus Clemente VIII et Paulo V*, Sumptibus Societatis, Antverpiae 1709, lib. 4, cap. 22, col. 587.



vine control of every creature, and the other advanced by Jakob Hermanszoon (*Jacobus Arminius*; 1560-1609), who tried to combine divine foreknowledge and the unpredictability of the acts of created free wills. A formal end to this debate was put by the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619), which condemned the followers of Hermanszoon (known as Remonstrants, or Arminians) and decreed their suppression. In the Catholic field, the dispute was particularly revived as a consequence of the posthumous publication, in 1640, of the work *Augustinus* by Cornelis Jansen (*Jansenius*; 1585-1638); in a certain sense, the clash between Dominicans and Jesuits resurged in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a clash between Jansenists and Jesuits. As is largely known, this conflict left hardly any writers of the time unconcerned, even those who were not university professors.

To sum up, those who have asserted, and still assert, that they are the infallible rulers of the Roman Catholic Church, i.e. the popes, have never issued any reasonable clarification of one of the basic tenets of the Catholic creed. Moreover, not even the most subtle and profound Catholic thinkers have succeeded in proving the compossibility of an omnipotent creative action and omniscient knowledge and the freedom of created free wills. One may thus think that, despite the overwhelming political power of the papacy and the current obtrusive ubiquity of its claims, Catholicism as a theoretically viable hypothesis came to a dead end no later than in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.