

PREDESTINATION AND FREEWILL IN THE BIBLE AND THE QUR'AN A COMPARATIVE APPRAISAL

micah 6:8

by

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Statement of the Problem

Predestination and Free-Will are perhaps the most controversial theological concepts. The theological problem of whether or not divine will determine humans actions and salvation remains unresolved. Many Christians as well as Muslims are of the view that prior to creation, God had predestined the fate of man. Others hold the opposite view that man is the determiner of his fate. The Jabarites among the Muslims and the Calvinists among the Christians believe in the doctrine of predestination while the Qadarites and Mu'tazilites among the Muslims and the Pelagians in Christianity believe in Free-Will.

It is paradoxical that each group finds justification for its views from the scriptures which is to say that the two concepts are affirmed therein. In the light of this, it is generally believed that the scriptures contain contradictory teachings on these subjects. In our view, this results from lack of proper understanding of the scriptural teachings on predestination and free-will. This paper therefore attempts to examine the context of predestination and free-will in the Bible and Qur'an with a view to justifying the extent to which the teachings of the two scriptures on the two concepts are mutually complementary rather than contradictory as it is often thought.

Divine Sovereignty and Predestination

Theologically predestination is defined as 'the act of God in determining the destiny of man'.¹ This is the belief that every human soul has been predestined from eternity either to suffer perdition or to attain salvation. Whether or not this is the actual teaching of the Bible and Qur'an would be unfolded in this treatise.

Predestination from the view points of the Christian and Muslim predestinarians derives from divine sovereignty so much stressed in the two scriptures. Three passages of the Bible are regarded as a *locus classicus* for the doctrine² viz; Rm. 9:6-23; 8:29-30 and Eph. 1:3-4 while the Qur'anic verses on

1. Wyld, H.C., *The Universal English Dictionary*, (R.K.P. Toppan, nd), p. 906.
2. Apart from these three principal passages, reference is made to predestination in Acts 13:48; I Pt. 2:8; Rev. 17:8; Jn. 6:44.

which the doctrine is based are numerous. In Rm. 9:6–23 emphasis is laid on divine will and divine sovereignty in a way to suggest that God wields His power in an arbitrary manner. Similarly the Qur'an lays stress on supremacy of divine will in *Surahs* 2:284; 10:99 and 24:45 among others though without obliterating the human will as will be brought to light later.

A brief exegesis of these passages is pertinent to know what they are actually talking about. Rm. 9:6–23 in this regard reads in parts:

stout . . . Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel and not all are children of Abraham because they were his descendants; but "through Isaac shall your descendants be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants. For this is what the promise said: "About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son." And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, she was told the older will serve the younger.

As it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means, for he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So it depends not upon man's will or exertion but upon God's mercy. . . He has mercy upon whom ever he wills and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills. Why does he still find fault? But who are you a man to query God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder why have you moulded me thus? Has the potter no right over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?

This passage no doubt explains unambiguously the supremacy of God's will to do whatever He likes. Hence the choice of Jacob and the rejection of Esau as well as the choice of Isaac and the rejection of Ishmael, not because they had done something good or bad but because of His call. According to this passage, it depends not upon man's will or exertion but upon God's mercy. Paul ~~does~~ ^{thus} emphatically stresses that divine election or predestination does not rest on merit but solely on God's call and mercy. The question then arises: If God's purpose of election takes no account of merit is there no injustice on God's part? Rather than address himself to this question, Paul tries to reaffirm uncompromisingly his belief in the absolute sovereignty of God.

A more pertinent question, is raised in Verse 19: Why does God still find fault; after all, man has only obeyed His wish in doing his sinful acts? Paul's

reply is that man has no right to question God's dealings with him, being God's creature. Here again, the Apostle refuses to address himself to the real issue but stresses the infinite transcendence of God.

Rm. 9:6 – 23 is certainly a complex passage. The scripture itself attests to the fact that Pauline writings are not easy to comprehend.³ This perhaps accounts for the conflicting interpretations the Biblical scholars have given to the passage. Thiessen⁴ for instance explains the passage in the light of the doctrine of inherited sin. Predestination to him is the act of God whereby he chose some for salvation solely on the basis of sovereign grace apart from the merits or acts of the individuals. In other words, human action emanating from his will is irrelevant to the determination of his fate. To Thiessen, in view of the doctrine of inherited sin, God is under no obligation to elect any one since all have lost their standing before God. He contends that divine election is an act of grace in that God had chosen those who are utterly unworthy of salvation arguing that man deserves the exact opposite, but in His grace, He chose to save some.

In the same vein, Barret⁵ opines that if God shows any favour at all to the sinful man it is out of His mercy and if He does nothing he is not unjust for man deserves nothing because of his sinful nature. These scholars' argument is not plausible because it does not explain the rationale for the selection of some for salvation in spite of the fact that all men inherited the original sin.

Charles Core's⁶ interpretation of the Pauline Views on predestination appears plausible. According to him, Paul conceives God's predestination and election as resting upon the Lord Himself and upon those members of His body who are to be conformed to His likeness as taught in Eph. 1:4. He asserts that vocation is from God alone, but the high calling does not carry salvation with it as evident in 1 Tim. 2:4–6. The elect members of Jesus may fall from him; if their membership ceases, their election ceases with it and others must take their place as illustrated in the story of the olive contained in Rm 11:17 and the story of Judas alluded to in Act. 1:20. What Charles is saying in essence is that it is wrong to make salvation dependent upon God's arbitrary will and sacrifice human freedom for the divine sovereignty. How then does he interpret the passage?

3. ³ II Pt. 3:16 and II Cor. 11:6.

4. ⁴ Thiessen, H.C., *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Eedman's publishing Company Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979) p. 257.

5. ⁵ Barret, C.K.: *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, (Adams and Charles Black, London, 1971) p. 185.

6. ⁶ Charles Core & Co. (eds), *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture including the Apocrypha* part III (Society of promoting Christian Knowledge 1929) p.441.

He is of the view that Paul does not at all discuss the relation of the divine sovereignty to human free-will in the passage rather he only answers a Jewish objection to the doctrine he preaches. What is this doctrine? He maintains that the Jews have forfeited their place in the divine purpose. The Jews' objection is that God has pledged Himself to Israel, His people and He cannot go back. Paul's teaching, the way the Jews see it, amounts to charging God with unfaithfulness. Paul's answers to their objections as contained in Chapters 9:11 are as follows:

- (i) God has never thus sacrificed his freedom. He is absolutely free to do whatever He likes.
- (ii) God's present rejection of Israel is morally justified.
- (iii) It shows that it is only for a limited time and it is being made the means to universal calling.

stop

In the light of the foregoing, Paul would be grossly misconceived if we interpret him as emphasizing arbitrariness in the divine will at the expense of the infinite wisdom and infinite love which that will expresses. Paul is fully persuaded that the will of God is exercised in perfect wisdom and love. Hence in chapter 11:22-24 he asserts that divine mercy is open to whoever obeys the wish of God. An insistence on the absolute will of God without an equal firm insistence on the infinite wisdom and infinite love would be taking on an appearance of a monstrous tyrant.

We can now examine the Qur'anic verses giving express¹⁰⁰ to absolutism of divine power and will:

~~He~~ He forgives whom He pleases and punishes whom He pleases. For God has power over all things. (2:284).

Say, "To God belongs the convincing argument.

Had He willed, He would have guided you all". (6:149)

... If it has been the will of your God, they would all have believed. . . (10:99)

No soul can believe except by the will of God."

"... God creates what He wills, for verily God has power over all things. (24:45)

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~~stop~~ The expressions of *mashiyyatullah* (the divine will) evident in the verses here quoted emphasises divine omnipotence. God as the creator of the universe and everything contained therein exercises His power and control on them. This accounts for preponderance in the Qur'an expressions such as: God is powerful over all things; God creates whatever He wills; God does

whatever He wills. These expressions are only meant to show divine majesty and God's relationship with his creatures. The fact that God does and creates whatever He wills does not mean He creates or does evil even though His authority cannot be challenged if He does it. But because He is not a despot He refrains from tyranny and evil inclination. According to the Qur'an, *shaytan* is the instigator of evil conduct as evidenced by *Surah* 4:60 and 4:118-120. In point of fact the will of man is equally stressed in the Qur'an as evident in *Surah* 18:28-29 though this is more often than not made subject to the will of God as we read in *Surah* 74:54 and *Surah* 76:29-30. This will be examined in detail under free-will.

Akin to the expressions of *mashiyyatullah* contained in the above verses is ascribing to God the power to lead man astray, the power to guide him aright and the power to seal his heart, ears and eyes so that he is prevented from understanding, hearing and seeing. Examples of such verses are listed below:

By it He causes many to stray and many He leads into the right path. But He causes not to stray except those who forsake (the path). (2:26). . . . Would you guide those whom God has thrown out of the way, never shall you find them way. (4:88).

Whom God leaves straying never will you find for him the way. (4:143)

God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing and on their eyes is a veil great is the penalty they incur. (2:7).

Thus God seals up every heart of arrogant and obstinate transgressors. (40:35).

Such are men whose hearts God has sealed and who follow their own lusts. (47:16)

stop

X A parallel manifestation of divine omnipotence is evident in Exodus 4:21 from which we read about God hardening the heart of Pharaoh, thus preventing him from executing the divine plan despite the miracle of Moses. The passage runs thus:

And the Lord said to Moses,

"When you go back to Egypt,

see that you do before Pharaoh

all the miracles which I have put

in your power, but I will harden his

heart so that he will not let the people go.

The Muslim and Christian predestinarians undoubtedly see these passages as lending credence to their belief in predestination. We have noted above the assertion of Theissen and Barret that God is under no obligation to show

mercy to man, because he is utterly unworthy of salvation as a result of his inherited depravity. In the same vein commentators on the Qur'an like Jalalayni,⁷ Baydawi,⁸ Ibn-Kathir⁹ and ash-Shaokani¹⁰ among others have interpreted 'leading astray or aright' and sealing the heart, ears and eyes by God as consequent upon predetermined divine plan. According to Ibn-Kathir, the prophets were only sent to admonish people to enable God have argument against the people." Ash-Shaokani argues that God leads astray because *al-Mudillu* is one of his attributes.¹² In our view, these scholars have failed to grasp the import of expressions of *Mashiyyatullah* contained in the verses. Ash-Shaokani is wrong to have ascribed *al-Mudillu* to God because there is no Qur'anic passage in which God is described with the attribute. The title is used with reference to Satan in *Surah 29:15* while *Surah 28:8* attributes to God the beautiful names which are said to be ninety-nine. *Stup*

Zamakhshari¹³, apparently for lack of faith in the doctrine of predestination, being a Mu'tazilite differs remarkably from the above commentators and interpretes the Qur'anic passage ascribing to God the sealing of the heart, ear and eyes metaphorically. He contends that *Sura 2:7* quoted above contains a trope (*majaz*) whereby both kinds of the trope are taken into consideration, namely metaphor (*isticarah*) and simile (*tamthil*). Thus the heart and the hearing of the unbelievers are represented as things through which one has assurance as if through sealing that they do not listen attentively and they are unwilling to listen to it. The *tamthil* is presented when the heart, hearing and eyes are likened to things that are separated from what they should perceive because of a partition.

Metaphorical interpretation may not be appropriate in this context in view of the fact that references in these passages are made to particular unbelievers, hypocrites and transgressors. The interpretation of commentators like an-Nasafi,¹⁴ Sayyid Qutb¹⁵ and M. M. Ali¹⁶ appears more in

7. As-Suyuti and At Mahally: *Tafsir at Jalāyn* (Ahmad Hanafi publication, Cairo, nd.) p. 198.
8. Al-Baydawi, Nasiru din, *Anwar at-Tanzil wa Asrar at - ta'awil* (Dar, al-Fikr, 1982) p.335f.
9. As-Sabuni, M.A. *Tafsir ibn Kathir* Vol. II (Dar al-Qur'an Karin Bayrut, 1981) p.29.
10. Ash-Shaokani, M.A., *Fathul Qadir* Vol. III Dar al Fikr, nd) p.94.
11. Ash-Shaokani, M.A. *Op. cit.* Vol II, p. 290.
12. Ash-Shaokani, M.A. *Op. cit.* Vol. II p. 94.
13. Az-Zamakhshari, J.M. *Tafsir al-Kashshāf* Vol. I (Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, Baerut nd.) p. 155ff.
14. An-Nasafi, A.A. *Tafsir an-Nasafi Vol. II Dar al-Fikr nd) p. 255.*
15. Sayyid. Qutb; *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* Vol. v (Dar Ahya' al-Turath al-Arabi Baerut, 1967) p.136.f

consonance with the teachings of the Qur'an. They interpret placing a seal on the heart, ears or eyes and being led astray or aright as consequent upon the course man has chosen for himself. This is clearly expressed in *Surah 2:26* quoted above and corroborated by *Surah 13:27* which reads:

Truly God leaves to stray
whom He wills, but He guides
to Himself those who turn to
Him in penitence.

According to these verses, the expression of divine will connotes God's pleasure to leave in error those invited to noble deeds who refuse to heed and choose to remain in error, while God's pleasure to guide is exercised in favour of those who heed the divine admonition. This interpretation is plausible because it takes cognisance of free-will. *Stup*

In the same vein Pardington,¹⁷ while interpreting the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, contends that God's providential control with reference to man's evil acts, can be preventive as in the example of Abimelech's attempt to snatch Abraham's wife Sarah,¹⁸ it can be permissive as in the example of Hezekiah who was left to himself in order to try him concerning the sign that had been done in the land.¹⁹ it can be determinative, i.e. prescribing its bounds and effects as evident in the limit of power given Satan;²⁰ it can be directly as illustrated in the evil done to Joseph by his brothers which God turned to good for him;²¹ it is however not compelling. It sounds logical therefore to conclude that God hardens Pharaoh's heart first by permitting him to harden his own heart, second by giving him light and then leaving him to resist it and third by abandoning him to his evil inclination.²² This is the

16. Ali, M.M. *The Holy Qur'an - Arabic Text English Translation and Commentary* (Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Isha a al-Islamiyyah, Lahore, 1963) Note 1278.
17. Pardington Outline Studies in Christian Doctrine (Christian Publications Inc. Harrisburg, 1926) p. 105.
18. Gen. 20:1-7.
19. II Chr. 32:31.
20. Job 1:12.
21. Gen. 50:15-21.
22. Other scholars like Whitely, D.E.H. are of the view that the ultimate fate of Pharaoh, Israel or Esau is not discussed in Rom. 9-11, rather, the passage is concerned with what use God makes of an individual to achieve his purpose in history Whitely's view is contained in his book. *The Theology of St. Paul*, Oxford, 1976).

exact position of the Qur'anic commentators who argue that God sets a seal on the heart of man in consequence of the course he has chosen for himself.

Divine foreknowledge and predestination

Predestination interpreted in terms of divine foreknowledge has a more solid foundation in the Bible than in the Qur'an. This view of predestination is derived from Rom 8:29-30 which declares:

We know that in everything
God works for good with those
who love him, who are called
according to his purpose
For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed
to the image of his son, in order
that he might be the first-born
among many brethren. And those
whom he predestined he also
called and those whom he called
he also justified and those whom
he justified he also glorified

This passage contains five concepts representing stages of the Christian doctrine of grace namely: divine foreknowledge, predestination, election, justification and glorification. Divine foreknowledge apparently determines predestination and election. According to the passage, the foreknown are the predestined, the predestined are the elected. Election is certain for every believer by the mere fact that he believes. Those whom He elected are justified because they responded in faith to His call; those whom He justified He also glorified and glorification is the final consummation of God's saving purpose in the Christian belief.

Foreknowledge is the key word in the passage. It connotes that God in His foreknowledge perceives what each man will do in response to His call and He elects men to salvation in harmony with His knowledge of their choice of Him. This view affirms the divine attribute of omniscience by which God knows before hand what the future holds for man. He knows what man needs before he asks because perfection of prescience belongs to God. A concept of predestination based on divine foreknowledge may sound plausible provided it is devoid of Thiessen's kind of interpretation. How does he define divine foreknowledge? He says for God to foreknow is for God to choose; His foreknowledge is His choice, the word 'know' carries the idea of to know intimately and to know with appreciation.¹⁹ What Thiessen is saying in

essence is that creatures must be and must become what God know them to be. This interpretation is born out of the belief that determination of man's fate is the subject of arbitrary exercise of divine will. This as earlier mentioned is extraneous to the Biblical teachings.

The third major Biblical passage on which the doctrine of predestination is based, Eph 1:3-6 seems to reveal the actual teaching of the scripture on the concept. The passage reads:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the beloved.

The above passage clearly shows that there is a people who, have been chosen by God in love before the foundation of the world. Barclay²⁴ identifies three lines of Pauline thoughts in the passage: the fact of God's choice the bounty of God's choice and the purpose of God's choice. God is spoken of as choosing man and not man choosing God.²⁵ That which are to be found only in the heaven which is outside the power of man to attain. And lastly, the purpose of God's choice of Christians is the need to be holy and blameless. Thus this passage attaches a condition to election, that is only the Christians who are holy and blameless would be qualified to be among the elect. This corroborates our assertion that salvation, though dependent on divine will, also requires human cooperation. Ryrie's paradoxical statement will perhaps explain explicitly the import of the condition attached to election. He says: there are unsaved elect people alive today, who though elect are now lost and will not be saved until they believe.²⁶

In our view Eph. 1:3-6 does not teach predestination of salvation without merit. The main thought in the passage is that the Church is securely based on the power of God. It least discusses who is to be a member of the church

23. Psa. 75: 6-7 and Lk. 1:52.

24. William Barclay: *The Letters to Galatians and Ephesians* (The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh 1976) p. 77.

25. Cf Jn. 15:16.

26. Ryrie, C.C. *A survey of Bible Doctrine* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1972) p. 118.

27. Cf. Surahs 11: 133; 35: 38; 49: 18; 59: 20.

or who is not to be. As a matter of fact verse 10 of the chapter hints at the eventual salvation of all.

Despite the frequent emphasis of the Qur'anic verses on divine omniscience none associates predestination with divine foreknowledge. However Muslim theologians have been influenced by such verses to formulate a belief in the doctrine of predestination. One of the many verses is *Surah* 6:59 which declares:

Silent
With Him are the keys of the unseen, the treasures that none knows but He. He knows whatever there is on the earth and in the sea. Not a leaf doth fall ^{out} put with His Knowledge. There is not a grain in the darkness (or depths) of the earth, nor anything fresh or (green or withered but is inscribed) in a record clear (to those who can read).

Silent
Commenting on the above verse Yusuf Ali²⁸ interpretes 'clear record' in the passage as referring to the eternal law according to which everything seen and unseen is ordered and regulated. Every creature is subject to His law, the fresh, the withered, the living and the lifeless, nothing is outside the plan of His creation. This interpretation does not suggest divine predestination without reference to merit, it only connotes divine control in the running of the universe. We shall discuss this further under divine providential control.

Divine providential control of creatures

We should not be misconstrued as undermining the sovereignty of God in our views on predestination. The Bible and Qur'an recognise that God exercises providential control over the universe in general and man's affairs in particular. Evidences abound in the Bible to corroborate this assertion. Below are few examples:

Samuel is cautioned not to grieve over Saul because he has been rejected by God from being King over Israel.

God knew man before He formed him in the womb; He consecrated him, before he was born.

Paul claims that he had been set apart for his mission before he was born.

The lifting up comes neither from the east or the west but God who executes judgement puts down whom He wills and lifts up whom He wills.²⁹

28. ¹Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an - Text, Translation and Commentary* (Amana Corp. Brentwood, Maryland, 1983 p. 304, Note 881.

29. Cf. Lk. 1:52 and *Surah* 3:26.

God is the supplier of the needs of every individual.³⁰

God's hardening of the heart of Pharaoh.³¹

The foregoing passages make it abundantly clear that God being the Creator of the universe exercises control over the lots of man: his successes or failures; his fortunes or misfortunes as well as his sustenance.

Similarly in the Qur'an, the impression is given that God's providential control covers the happenings in human life on which man has no control such as death,³² sickness, health; success, failure, fortune and misfortune. *Surah* 9:50-51 lends credence to this view when it reads:

If good befalls you it grieves them, but if misfortune befalls you they say, "We took indeed our precautions beforehand," they will turn away rejoicing, Say! "Nothing will happen to us except what God has decreed for us. He is our protector and on God let the believers put their trust."³³

Silent
Aside from the affairs of man, the Qur'an regards God's premeasurement of the nature of created things as falling under divine providential control. More often than not the term *Qaddara* or its derivatives as used in Qur'an connotes this idea. M. M. Ali quoting Raghīb defines *Qaddar* or *Taqdir* to mean the measure of created things.³⁴ According to the Qur'anic usage of the terms, we can say the taqdir of man's sperm is to produce nothing but human beings while the taqdir of the sun is to rise in the east and set in the West. Taqdir in other words means 'law of nature'. The nature of the sun, moon, stars, rain, rivers plants etc have been premeasured by God under His providential control as evident in different passages of the Qur'an, including *Surah* 87:1-3, which describes God as the Guardian-Lord who creates and gives order and proportion to creation; who ordains laws and grants guidance.³⁵ This suggests to us that after creation, God does not withdraw from overseeing the affairs of the creatures, He directs their course and growth, He supplies their needs till they reach full maturity when decay starts to set in. The sort of guidance which the Qur'an talks about can be

30. Cf. Gen. 22:8; 22:14, Dt. 8:3.

31. *Supra* pp. 9 and 11 Other Biblical references on the same subject are Ex 7:13; 8:15 and Rom. 9:17-18.

32. ¹⁷*Surah* 3:154.

33. ¹Cf. *Sūrah*s 10:49; 10:53; 16:61 and 3:158.

34. ¹Ali, M. M. *The Religion of Islam* (National Publication and Printing House, Cairo nd) p. 315.

35. ¹See also *Sūrah*s 23:18; 25:2; 36:38; 54:49 and 80:18-19.

inferred from Is. 45:5 in which God describes Himself as He who girds. While God plays this role the free-will granted man is not necessarily obliterated.

Free-Will according to the Bible

Arguments to justify the validity of free-will as a theological concept are not based on reason as it is often thought but in the Scriptures. In some Biblical passages free-will is deduced by inference, i.e. inference from the fact of unlimited atonement, the divine command to work for one's salvation, divine justice, and need for evangelism and prayer. These facts lead us to conclude that if God destines us to salvation, he does so through our meritorious labour.

The belief that atonement is for all is derived from Jn. 3:16, I Jn. 2:2; I Tim 2:6; Rom. 11:12; Act 17:30 and Eph. 1:10. Jn. 3:16 asserts that because of the love God has for mankind He offers His only son as ransom that whoever believes in him (without exempting any) should not perish, but have eternal life. I Jn. 2:2 explains this further when it says: he (Jesus) is the expiation of our sins, and not ours only but also for the sins of the world. Even though atonement is for all as indicated in these passages it does not mean that all will be saved. The condition attached is the belief in God which is a product of the exercise of free-will. This is further corroborated by Act. 16:31 and Eph. 2:8-10. Aside from this, other Biblical passages stress the need for the believers to work out their own salvation. For instance, in Eph. 4:1-3 Paul implores the believers to lead a life worthy of their call with all lowliness and meekness. This is reechoed in I Thess 2:11-12. An explicit injunction to work out one's salvation is contained in Phil. 2:12-13 which reads:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

To work for one's salvation necessarily implies using one's free-will which if misused makes the believer stand the chance of forfeiting all spiritual blessings.

One major objection against predestination – in the sense of divine arbitrary determination of man's salvation or damnation – is its portrayal of God as unjust and partial in his dealings with his subjects. This runs counter to the teachings of the Bible. Divine justice is affirmed in the Scripture as an attribute of God; hence Job 34:12 asserts that God will not pervert justice. Divine love and justice are entrenched in the doctrine of grace which consti-

tutes the bed-rock of Christian faith. Grace from the Christian point of view is defined as love in God regarded as free and unpurchased coming out of its own accord to bless the undeserving.³⁶ Predestination as a religious dogma is therefore contrary to the nature of God who is just and loving.

The scriptural charge to evangelize lends support to the entrenchment of free-will in the Bible. We are informed in Mark's gospel that Jesus, before his ascension charged his disciples with the task of preaching the gospel to the whole world.³⁷ Different prophets have been raised by God among different peoples with the purpose of propagating His message. With the cessation of prophecy, spiritually inclined people have been engaged in evangelical work in keeping with the scriptural injunctions. These efforts would be in vain if the fate of man has been predetermined before creation.

Lastly, the scriptural charge to have recourse to prayer in view of its efficacy to change the course of the believers life lends credence to the validity of free-will as a scripturally based dogma. The Bible not only urges the Christians to pray, it also teaches the manner of prayer.³⁸ Requests for material things of this world are discouraged while the supplicant is urged to seek the kingdom of God. The philosophical question which arises in the light of the foregoing is: of what significance is the recourse to prayer if man's fate has been predestined in actuality?

Free-Will according to the Qur'an

The Qur'an is perhaps more emphatic than the Bible in its stress on free-will as the source of human action. The Qur'anic injunctions on this subject are explicit as is evident in the following:

Surah 6:70: "... Proclaim (to them) this truth: that every soul delivers itself to ruin by its own acts. . .

Surah 9:70: "... it is not God who wrongs them, but they wrong their own souls.

Surah 10:108: O ye men, truth has reached you from your Lord, those who receive guidance do so for the good of their soul, those who stray do so to their own loss. And I am not over you to arrange your affairs.

Surah 13:11: "... Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves. . . ."

Surah 18:29: Say! the truth is from your Lord, let him who will believe and let him who will reject it; for wrong doers we have prepared a fire. . . ."

36. Wiley, H. O. and Culbertson, P.T. *Op. cit.* p. 266.

37. Mk. 16:15-16, 4 Rm. 10:14.

38. Set Mat. 6:8; 6:32-33 and Tim. 1:18.

Surah 41:46 'Whoever works righteousness benefits his own soul, whoever works evil, it is against his own soul; And your Lord is not in the least unjust to the servants'.

Surah 76:2-3: 'Verily we created man from a drop of sperm, in order to try him, we gave him (the gift) of hearing and sight. We showed him the way he is either grateful or ungrateful'

Perhaps the strongest Qur'anic verse in support of free-will is *Surah* 6:70. Here, the Scripture wants man to know that he has personal responsibility for whatever he does. This view leads to Muslims' disbelief in the vicarious atonement. In *Surah* 9:70, the assertion that God does not wrong them but they wrong their own souls alludes to the atrocities and wickedness perpetuated by the people of Nuh,³⁹ the 'Ad,⁴⁰ the Thamud,⁴¹ the people of Ibrahim,⁴² the men of Midian⁴³ and the people of Lut,⁴⁴ which earned them their punishment. The divine punishment on them is therefore a consequence of the misuse of their power of free-will.

Al-Hagg in *Surah* 10:108 alludes to the scripture which in the Muslims' belief is a source of guidance and a criterion between right and wrong emanating from a divine source. If it is accepted it is of no benefit to the prophet and if it is rejected it is to the rejecters' loss. Man is given a certain amount of free-will and the responsibility is his and cannot be shifted to the prophet.⁴⁵

Most commentators relate *Sūrah* 13:11 to free-will. Yusuf Ali⁴⁶ for instance in his commentary is of the view that man is created virtuous and pure; he is given intelligence and knowledge; he is endowed with instruments of divine grace and mercy. In spite of all these, Man has the power of discretion to go against God's will. When he flagrantly does this he has made his own sight blind and changed his own nature from the beautiful mould in which God formed it. The consequence of such an action is the divine wrath which inevitably descends on man.

Sūrah 18:29 makes it abundantly clear that the will of man is his choice. He has the freedom to believe or to disbelieve. Whichever he chooses will be

39. See *Surah* 7:59-64.

40. See *Sūrah* 7:65-72.

41. See *Sūrah* 7:73-79.

42. See *Sūrah* 6:74-82.

43. See *Sūrah* 7:85-93.

44. See *Surah* 7:80-84.

45. Yusuf Ali: *The Holy Qur'an, Text, Translation and Commentary* (The Islamic Foundation, Canada, 1975) p. 512, Note 1490.

46. *Ibid.* p. 606, Note 1817.

rewarded. *Sūrah* 41:46 echoes *Sūrah* 10:108. However, the passage makes allusion to the attribute of divine justice. As earlier mentioned, one major objection against predestination is that it portrays God as unjust and partial in his dealings with His subjects. This runs counter to the Qur'anic teachings as evident in this *Sūrah*. If God is never unjust to His servants as claimed in this verse He could not have arbitrarily predestined man's salvation or damnation without reference to merit.

Lastly, *Sūrah* 76:2-3 is another strong Qur'anic verse affirming free-will. Commenting on the verse Sayyid Qutb⁴⁷ opines that man is granted the organs of sight and hearing as means of helping him to follow the right guidance. He is particularly endowed with the eyes so that he can recognise the evidence of God's might and the signs that pervade the universe which should prompt him to adopt faith. All these verses make it abundantly clear that the Qur'an is consistently uncompromising in its teachings about free-will. The references show that man is the architect of his conduct, he is responsible not only for the use or misuse of the powers he has been endowed with.

The protagonists of predestination doctrine in Christianity and Islam

The Calvinists (named after John Calvin) are the protagonists of predestination doctrine in Christianity.⁴⁸ Their counterparts in Islam are the Jabarites. John Calvin played a leading role in the formation of the early Protestants' theology. Calvinism in this theology is synonymous with predestination. John Calvin's view of predestination was considered heretical by the Catholic Church because it consisted in a single-handed divine act in which human choice had no role, and also because of present reprobation as a positive act of God. This led to his conversion to Protestantism in 1532. He argues:

We call predestination God's eternal decree by which He has determined in Himself what He would have become of every individual of mankind, for they are not all created for similar destiny, but eternal life is foreordained for some and eternal damnation for others. Every man therefore being created for one or the other of these ends, we say he is predestined either for life or for death. . . In conformity therefore to the clear doctrine of the scripture, we assert that by an eternal and

47. Sayyid Qutb: *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (Vol. 8) (Dar al-Ihya' at-Turath al-Arabiyy Bairut 1967) p. 394ff.

48. *Encyclopedia Britannica* Vol. III (Inc. Helen Homing Way, Benton, Chicago 1973-1974) p. 671.

immutable counsel, God has once for all determined both whom He would admit to salvation and whom He would condemn to destruction.⁴⁹

It is evident from the above quotation that predestination in the Calvinistic interpretation refers to God's arbitrary determination from creation to save certain men and condemn the rest to eternal damnation such that the fate of every man is decided before coming into existence. The Jabarites have expressed a similar view. Jabariyyah was an Islamic sect founded by Jaham b. Safwan during the Umayyad reign. Though the Jabarites claim to have derived their doctrine from the *Salaf (the early Muslims)* we cannot rule out the possibility of their being influenced by their contact with foreign civilisation and culture during the wars of expansion. Their view of predestination can be summarised thus:

Man is not responsible for any of his actions which proceed entirely from God; he has no determining power to do any act, nor does he possess the capacity of free volition, he is the subject of absolute divine sovereignty in his actions without ability on his part for will or power of choice; God absolutely creates actions within him just as He produces activity in all inanimate things awards and punishments are subject to absolute divine sovereignty.⁵⁰

It has been argued that this view is based on *Sūrah* 37:96 which asserts: "God has created you and what you make." One will be interpreting the verse out of context if 'what you make' (*ma ta malum*) understood to be applicable to any free action of man. The fact remains that reference in this passage is being made to the idols carved by the idolators (Read the passage from verse 94) whose substance is created by God.⁵¹

In an attempt to justify their doctrine of predestination, the Jabarites have argued that God has power to stop the sinners from committing sins since he has power over all things. On the strength of this argument, they claimed that their sinfulness was due to the will of God. The reigning Umayyads during the period also attributed their irreligiosity to the will of God.

Ash'arism is sometimes thought to be a continuation of Jabarism as Mu'tazilism is of Qadarism. *Ascarism* proposes Jabarism under the thin

49. Wiley H. O. and Culbertson P.T. *Introduction to Christian Theology* (Beacon Hill Press, Kansas, 1946) p. 257.

50. Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1974) p.412.

51. See Zamakhshari *al-kashshaf* on *Sūrah* 37:96.

disguise of the theory of acquisition (*Kasb*). One of the renowned Muslim theologians who sees the doctrine of *Kasb* as a camouflage is Imam Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzi. He discards the veil of acquisition by means of which he feels the Ash'arites intend to escape the charge of fatalism. Fakhr al-Din advocates naked determinism.⁵² He seems to be obsessed with the doctrine of the first cause which postulates that God is the only efficient cause and nothing occurs except in accordance with the divine will. He identifies the influence of divine will on the will of man with what he calls the dominant motive which merges with the will power given to man. He explains that before the dominant motive (created in man) comes into operation no acts ensue from man, but when it has become operative man's action becomes necessary. The dominant motive is what he believes to have compelled infidelity in the heart of unbelievers. In the light of this submission, Fakhr al-Din has given little or no consideration to the idea of divine justice as well as to human responsibility or accountability and reward.

The Qur'an, however, accords due recognition to the coexistence of the two. This is based on several verses, including *Surahs* 74:54-56; 76:29-31 and 81: 27-29. We can illustrate with the third passage which reads:

Verily this is no less than a message to all the worlds; (with profits) to whoever among you wills to go straight; but you shall not will Except as God wills, the Cherisher of the worlds.

Sayyid Qutb⁵³ in his characteristic manner has a long exegesis on this passage which unfolds any ambiguity that might be contained in it. He opines that the Qur'an is a reminder to all men therefore it is up to every individual to choose whether to follow the right path or not. In his view, since God has granted every one his or her free-will, then every human being is responsible for himself. The right path according to him has been indicated for every one who wishes to be upright. Anyone who follows a different path shall therefore bear responsibility for his action. He contends that there are in the human soul and in the universe at large numerous signs which beckon every man and woman to follow the path of faith which are so clearly visible and so powerful in their effect that one needs a determined effort to turn one's back on them. In view of this, it is man's own will which leads him away from God's guidance.

52. See Muhibbu-din, M.A.: *The Philosophical Theology in the Tafsir of Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzi* (Unpublished M. Phil Dissertation of Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan 1983, p. 137f

53. Sayyid Qutb: *Op. cit.* Vol. VIII, p. 484ff.

According to Qutb the Qur'ānic expression, 'you shall not will except as God wills', indicates that the operative will behind everything is the will of God. He calls our attention to the fact that the Qur'ān makes a statement of this type whenever the will of human beings or creatures generally is mentioned. The reason for this according to him is that everything in the universe is subject to the will of God. No one has a will which is independent from that of God. That he grants man a free-will is part of his own divine will like everything else.

It is in consequence of this and similar passages of the Qur'an that Ash'arism contends that the Qur'an neither presents God as a despot as upheld by the Jabarites nor says that man's freedom is limitless according to the Mu'tazilites belief. This being the case, it is argued that the Qur'anic position is that of a middle course. To my mind the Qur'anic passage referred to above does not necessarily preach predestination. It only emphasises the supremacy of the divine will from which derives human will.

The doctrine of predestination as conceived by the Calvinists and Jabarites runs counter to the Biblical and Qur'ānic teachings on the subject. Predestination is not taught in the two scriptures to the total exclusion of man's free-will. The doctrine as taught by the two sects leaves many problems unresolved. The following questions would need satisfactory answers if the arguments in defence of predestination were to be considered seriously:

- (i) If the actions of man have been eternally predetermined what is the import of freedom of choice emphasised in several Qur'ānic verses or the doctrine of unlimited atonement entrenched in the Bible.
- (ii) If human conduct has been predestined, of what essence are the divine commands and prohibitions, divine promises and threat, contained, in the revealed scriptures and why were the prophets raised?
- (iii) If sinful acts like polytheism, robbery, adultery have been pre-decreed by God it follows that to do such things is to render obedience to God and it means God is a participator in such sinful acts.
- (iv) If God has predestined sinful acts for man how just and merciful would he be as the two scriptures claim?
- (v) And lastly the doctrine of predestination is incompatible with the importance attached to prayer or evangelism in the scriptures. These will be examined appropriately under free-will.

The Sectarial interpretation of free-will doctrine

From the point of view of the history of Christian theology, Pelagianism is important as an extreme free-will position. This theological system denies the necessity of supernatural grace for man to be able to exercise his will. It

maintains that by the mere use of free-will, man is able to believe and act in a salutary manner without the assistance of supernatural grace and still attain eternal beatitude.⁵⁴ This view to us is a negation of the essence of the doctrine of divine grace and therefore unbiblical. The doctrine of supernatural grace manifested in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ undoubtedly serves as the bed-rock of the Christian faith.

Analogous to Pelagianism in Islam are *Qadarism* and *Mu'tazilism*. They hold tenaciously to the doctrine of free-will on the basis of the verses of the Qur'an quoted above. The *Qadariyyah* as a theological school emerged purely to antagonise the *Jabariyyah* views of predestination under the leadership of theologians like Ma'bad ibn-Jubba't, Yūnus Al-Aswānī and Ghailam Dimashkī. Their views were later upheld and exaggerated by the Mu'tazilites.

They adopted the doctrine of free-will and human responsibility out of the conviction that it is impossible for God to compel a man to do a thing and later punish him for it. Ameer Ali discusses Mu'tazilite doctrines in some details.⁵⁵ The following aspects are relevant to the present discussion.

- (i) Man is the creator of his action whether good or bad.
- (ii) He gets reward and punishment in the future world by merit of what he does.
- (iii) No moral evil and iniquity or unbelief or disobedience can be referred to God because if He has caused unrighteousness to be, He would be Himself unrighteous.
- (iv) God the all Wise does only that which is beneficial and good and that a regard in the light of wisdom is incumbent upon him.
- (v) The cognition of good and evil is within the province of reason.

The Mu'tazilites' views are derived from:

- (i) Qur'ānic emphasis on divine justice.
- (ii) Qur'ānic enjoinder of virtuous conduct and prohibition of vices.
- (iii) Qur'ānic promises and threats.

These views are logical and plausible but extreme like those of the Jabarites. Among their extreme views is the belief that man is the creator of his action, thus denying God any control of the will of man. This is contrary to the teachings of the Qur'ān. The Mu'tazilites views were too radical for the common people; hence they were later overshadowed by Ash'arism during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil.

54. *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. II (Magraw-Hill Book Company, Washington D.C. 1966) p. 715.

55. Ameer Ali, *op.cit.*, p. 415.

Conclusion

The thesis of this paper as evident in the foregoing appraisal is that predestination when understood as implying God's indiscriminate and arbitrary determination from eternity of man's salvation or damnation (without reference to merit) as upheld by the Calvinists and the Jabarites runs counter to the spirit of the Biblical and Qur'anic revelations. Similarly, the understanding of free-will which regards man as solely responsible for his actions with no iota of divine control as upheld in Pelagianism as well as Mu'tazilim is extraneous to the teachings of the two scriptures.

The problem with the protagonists of these two extreme views is their inability to grasp the import of the relationship between human and divine will in relation to human action. This has even led some scholars to the conclusion that the scriptures are filled with contradictions on these subjects. In our opinion the relationship between the divine will and human will is complementary and analogous to the interrelatedness of the workings of parts of the body. Each part though different from the other parts cannot act independently of the other parts. For instance the movement of the hands is directed by the brain, yet, the movement remains an act of the hand. Similarly a man's action remains his own even though God is working in him. The good or bad deeds of man remains his even though it is God who is behind them, just as the movement of the hand, even though it is dependent on impulses from the brain. Thus God and man cooperate though not as equals but as a higher order cooperating with a lower order. Here lies the significance of the Biblical expression: 'it depends not upon man's will or exertion but upon God's mercy' and the Qur'anic expression: 'you will not will except as God wills.'