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# **“You Know It Completely”**

**The Concept of Middle Knowledge and  
Biblical Interpretation in  
Luis de Molina, Herman Bavinck, and William Lane Craig**

**Sze Sze Chiew**



VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT

**“You Know It Completely”**

**The Concept of Middle Knowledge and Biblical Interpretation in**

**Luis de Molina, Herman Bavinck, and William Lane Craig**

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad Doctor aan  
de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,  
op gezag van de rector magnificus  
prof.dr. F.A. van der Duyn Schouten,  
in het openbaar te verdedigen  
ten overstaan van de promotiecommissie  
van de Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid  
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door

Sze Sze Chiew

geboren te Kuala Lumpur, Maleisië

promotoren:    prof.dr. C. van der Kooi  
                      prof.dr. G. van den Brink

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## Introduction

I have a deep desire to know how it can be that God knows all things beforehand and that, nevertheless, we do not sin by necessity ... Since God knew that man would sin, that which God foreknew must necessarily come to pass. How then is the will free when there is apparently this unavoidable necessity?

Augustine of Hippo<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 Foreknowledge and Freedom: Some Initial Observations

#### 1.1.1 Theoretical and Practical Issues

Many Christians believe that the biblical Scriptures display a God who has sovereign control over all earthly affairs. God knows the future, and everything that happens occurs in accordance with His preordained decree. Accordingly, God not only has unlimited power but also exhaustive and infallible knowledge of the future. Especially in the Reformed tradition, this cluster of beliefs is deeply ingrained in the hearts and minds of believers. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646; hereafter WCF) clearly expresses this view, stating that: “In His sight all things are open and manifest, His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature so as nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, God perfectly knows the past, present and future of the contingent world.

On the other hand, there is an equally settled opinion among Christians that humans have freedom, as there is clear Scriptural evidence that humans were created by God as morally responsible beings with the ability to make real and meaningful moral decisions. In this connection, WCF elucidates that:

After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Besides this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.<sup>3</sup>

For many Christians, however, such an understanding of God’s knowledge and human freedom creates a serious tension.<sup>4</sup> If God knows and controls all things, it seems that there is no option for earthly creatures to do anything other than what God has ordained or at least foreknown. If this is true, Augustine’s old question, which we took as this chapter’s motto, arises: how can humans be free and how can human choices be real? Or is there a possibility that humans are free and yet their actions are preordained, or at least foreknown? The manner in which foreknowledge coheres with freedom has puzzled theologians and philosophers

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1993), Book III, ii.

<sup>2</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646, repr., Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1963), II.2.

<sup>3</sup> *The Westminster Confession*, IV.2.

<sup>4</sup> Hereafter referred to as the foreknowledge-freedom tension or problem

throughout church history.<sup>5</sup> Both theology and philosophy have a long history of wrestling with the tension between foreknowledge and freedom. As we proceed, we will see that in contemporary discussions, the tension turns out to be more complex than suggested by the range of standard questions aforementioned.

The tension between foreknowledge and freedom exists not only in theory or academia, but also in the practice of the Christian life. The way Christians view the relationship between divine foreknowledge and human freedom has a direct bearing on how they respond to various issues in their lives, such as the meaning of prayer, the need for evangelism, and the understanding of suffering and evil. Among these various practical issues, the problem of evil is perhaps the most dominant: how can one believe in a sovereign and good God while suffering and evil prevail? Also, it might seem immensely unjust for God to hold humans morally accountable for what they do if all human actions are determined by God.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, for Christians in my home country, Malaysia, these questions have implications beyond the practical issues in their personal spiritual lives. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, the major religions being Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity. Other religions in this environment also discuss questions about freedom of the will and responsibility. Although Muslims affirm human freedom and responsibility, total submission to Allah's will in all aspects of their lives is of utmost priority.<sup>7</sup> As for Buddhists and Hindus, the belief that the actions of their past lives influence the conditions of their current and subsequent lives (e.g., social status, prosperity, spirituality etc.) may be so strong that they accept there is nothing they can do to attain liberation.<sup>8</sup> Thus, they often accept events in their present lives as "fate" which cannot be changed. Obviously, how believers of each of these religions understand the issue of freedom impacts their decisions and actions in their daily lives. It is crucial for Christians in Malaysia to have a better understanding of the biblical notions of foreknowledge and freedom (through a more hermeneutical-theological approach), not only to seek answers for themselves, but also to engage in interfaith dialogue

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<sup>5</sup> Notably, WCF provides the answer to this question by pointing out the relationship between the first cause and the second causes: "Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet by the same providence He orders them to fall out, according to the nature of the second cause, either necessarily, freely, or contingently" (see *The Westminster Confession*, V.2). In other words, while it strongly holds to God's total sovereignty in predetermining whatsoever comes to pass, WCF does not want to undermine human freedom, but endorses the responsibility of human beings as second causes, in which human freedom significantly plays a role in God's plan for the created world. Nevertheless, for many Christians the question remains, because it is not completely clear how this cooperation between first and secondary causes can be fleshed out in a coherent way.

<sup>6</sup> In my experience of serving as a pastor and a seminary lecturer, I have been struck by the high frequency of questions of this nature being brought up in a variety of settings. Many Christians struggle to accept the classical view of God's foreknowledge and sovereignty in this connection.

<sup>7</sup> The teaching of *al-ḥaḍā' a'l-ḥadar* was frequently used to designate the absolute nature of the Divine Decree; while generally both the existence of the divine decree and human responsibility are affirmed, "the latter is dependent on the decree itself through the *kasb*, the relationship, created by God, between acts and the subjects who performed them" (See Gardet L, "al-Ḥaḍā' Wa 'l-Ḥadar," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs [Brill Online, 2013]; [http://www.brillonline.nl/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-kada-wa-l-kadarCOM\\_0407](http://www.brillonline.nl/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-kada-wa-l-kadarCOM_0407) [Accessed 4 April 2013]).

<sup>8</sup> According to the teachings of *Karma* in Buddhism and Hinduism, *Karma* (which in Sanskrit literally means "action" or "deed") represents the general law of cause and effect in the universe and a moral law, which determines what reward or punishment will be distributed into successive rebirths. Good deeds produce good *Karma* and lead towards liberation; bad deeds produce and lead to the opposite; see Ninian Smart, "Karma," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 4, ed. P. Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 325-326.

that is important for maintaining a harmonious society in a multi-ethnic and multi-religion country such as Malaysia. Christians should not only be able to indicate where their views and attitudes overlap with those of adherents of other religions, but also where they differ (and for what reasons).

### **1.1.2 A Preliminary Contour of What Follows**

Clearly, as shown above, the tension between foreknowledge and freedom is broad. It is not merely a theoretical issue, but a practical one as well. For this reason, this present study investigates this topic, not hoping to solve the foreknowledge-freedom tension (which probably cannot be totally solved in rational terms), but to search for a biblical-theological framework that offers insights and guidelines that help reshape and refocus the foreknowledge-freedom discussion. Then drawing on these insights and guidelines, the objective is to see how Christians can fruitfully approach the questions arising from these two claims. In order to introduce the motive, thesis, and goal of this study in a more detailed way, and to explain my methodological approach, in what follows I first explore the current controversies surrounding foreknowledge and freedom, followed by a brief description of the most prominent solutions put forth to reconcile them (Section 1.2). In so doing, we will see that one particular solution—namely, the middle knowledge theory—requires special and further attention. Next, I focus on outlining the main issues and arguments that come up in the contemporary revival of this theory, which consequently shows the urgent need of investigating the vitality of this theory from a biblical-theological perspective (Section 1.3). I then outline key questions of inquiry and propose a method that re-contextualizes this inquiry in its biblical context (Section 1.4). Finally, I end with the description of the contents of the following chapters (Section 1.5).

## **1.2 The Analytical Discussion: A State of the Question**

This section has three main purposes. First, I attempt to provide sufficient background to help us grasp the foundational issues at stake in contemporary discussions of the relationship between foreknowledge and freedom. I then briefly survey important issues that can be discerned in these debates, including basic definitions of the concepts involved (1.2.1). Second, I briefly introduce four main positions/solutions proposed to reconcile the tension between foreknowledge and freedom, and I delineate some of the strengths and weaknesses of each of them (1.2.2). Third, following from the preceding introduction, I point out the solution that necessitates our particular attention and the reasons why (1.2.3).

### **1.2.1 Outlining the Problem**

Classical philosophers and Christian theologians have long attempted to explain the controversial issues involved.<sup>9</sup> St. Augustine's *On the Free Choice of the Will* was an important landmark in these debates, but so were his later anti-Pelagian writings in which he

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, Cicero (106BC-43BC) had denied omniscience because he could not harmonize it with free will (see Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De senectute; De amicitia; De divinatione*; with an English translation, trans. William Armistead Folconer [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996], II.5-7). Marcion shared the same position (see Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, ed. and trans. Ernest Evans [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972], II.5). As for Origen (185-254), he held that God's foreknowledge is not the cause of future events; God knows them beforehand because they are bound to happen as a result of the free decisions of human beings (see Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. and intro. Henry Chadwick [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980], II:20).

emphasized God's sovereignty and predestination more than he had done before, according to many at the expense of human freedom and responsibility. The medieval scholastics were unanimous in claiming both that God is omniscient and that humans have freedom, though they held different views as to how the two are compatible. The debates became lively again during the Reformation period.

In contemporary discussions, most theologians and Christian philosophers have tried to solve the problem in ways that maintain both claims; the solutions put forth to reconcile foreknowledge and freedom<sup>10</sup> are presented and discussed from different perspectives. Generally, we can distinguish two spectrums. The first spectrum correlates freedom with the understanding of God's sovereign control in our world (i.e., the extent to which God governs the world and how He does so, and consequently, what such intervention does to human freedom).<sup>11</sup> Here, foreknowledge is discussed as part of what it means for God to be 'in control'. The second spectrum discusses freedom and its relationship to foreknowledge more directly (i.e., the extent to which or the way in which foreknowledge is compatible with freedom). Different views are found in each of these spectrums, and different solutions are proposed to support the arguments for these views respectively. As this research is devoted to foreknowledge as such and its relationship to freedom, the following focuses on discussing issues within the latter spectrum, which is more directly related to the purpose of this research.

The question of the relation between "God and freedom" has been vigorously debated during the past half millennium. Although new arguments have developed in the course of time, the dispute has not been resolved successfully. It continues to be debated and remains an important and sharply contested issue in both contemporary theology and philosophy of religion;<sup>12</sup> and it "has been arguably the most historically influential aspect of the entire free will debate."<sup>13</sup> This is particularly the case when "knowledge" has been generally understood as a stronger concept than mere belief. While belief is usually seen as a view that something is true (though it could be wrong even if supported by evidence), "to know" something means that one must have grounds to justify the belief one claims to know is indeed true. In our situation, applying such a distinction to understanding God's knowledge in relation to humankind raises a problem.

As an omniscient God who has infallible knowledge of everything that will happen, God could not be wrong in the things He knows and believes, including our future decisions and actions. Now, the mere fact that God infallibly knows our future actions before we perform them logically seems to imply that we have only one option: to do what God already knew we should do. In other words, we cannot choose or act contrary to what God knows. Unfortunately, however, this rules out genuine freedom, especially a particular understanding of freedom that is presupposed and incorporated in contemporary discussion, namely the libertarian view which holds that a human agent can always do otherwise than what he/she

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<sup>10</sup> Hereafter referred to as the foreknowledge-freedom solutions

<sup>11</sup> See David Basinger and Randall Basinger, eds., *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> William Hasker, "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom," in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, second edition, ed. Robert Kane (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 39. Almost every major philosopher in the past two millennia responded to the issue of free will and it is "perhaps the most voluminously debated of all philosophical problems" (cf. Susan Wolf, *Freedom within Reason* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993]).

<sup>13</sup> Hasker, "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom," 39; see also Robert Kane, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, 33.

does (meaning our actions are not causally determined).<sup>14</sup> How or whether it is possible to logically fit the two apparent contradictory ideas of “to do what God already knew we should do” and “to do otherwise than we do” together without contradiction or logical fallacy has occupied the attention of contemporary discussions on this matter.<sup>15</sup>

Contemporary Christian philosophers and theologians divided by schools of thoughts that define freedom differently attempt to show various possible ways for foreknowledge and freedom to both be true without rational contradiction. Generally, there are three positions here: determinism, indeterminism, and compatibilism. Regarding determinism, there is hard determinism and soft determinism. As to hard determinism, everything that happens is causally determined, and hence freedom in any sense is ruled out. Concerning soft determinism, it holds to a compatibilist notion of freedom (and therefore in fact coincides with compatibilism), according to which actions are defined as free if humans perform them voluntarily or willingly, without coercion by any power outside of themselves. This position implies that God has control over all events and has exhaustive knowledge of everything that will happen, and thereby God ultimately determines what humans will do in all circumstances (so human actions as well are causally determined); but human actions are still free if they are performed out of a person’s own wishes. Therefore, humans cannot be removed from moral responsibility, for they do consider options when making choices (though given all the relevant causal factors preceding the choice, they could not have acted differently). With regard to indeterminism, it holds to the libertarian view of freedom, and so naturally claims that genuine free human action rules out or is incompatible with determinism and causal determinism. This position is also called incompatibilism. Finally, as stated above, compatibilism shares the same features as soft determinism; in this position, humans still act freely even though all events are determined by God.

Now, clearly, the soft determinists do not have a problem in upholding both foreknowledge and freedom as long as freedom is understood in the compatibilistic sense. It is not surprising that this side of the debates has been reduced over the years since the conflict between foreknowledge and freedom can clearly be solved according to this position. The determinists’ position has gradually receded from the present discussions too, since the foreknowledge-freedom tension is either not a significant problem (e.g., the hard determinism position), or it is resolvable as well (e.g., the soft-determinism/compatibilism position). The foreknowledge-freedom problem, then, as pointed out by an updated recent overview of the theological debates (mainly among analytic philosophers), is especially significant to those committed to *libertarian freedom*/indeterminism. In their view, foreknowledge and freedom seem to be incompatible (at least at first sight). As a response, two distinct questions, labeled by Alfred J. Freddoso the “source question” and the “reconciliation question” have emerged as attempting to solve the presupposed incompatibility. The former concerns “the way in which God obtains knowledge of the future;” the latter concerns “the logical consistency of

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<sup>14</sup> In philosophy, the traditional sense of free will is “the power of agents to be the ultimate creators (or originators) and sustainers of their own ends or purpose” (see Robert Kane, ed., *The Significance of Free Will* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1996], 4). Today, free will is generally defined as “a particular sort of capacity of rational agents to choose a course of action from among various alternatives.” Expanding from such a definition, the libertarian view of free will claims that various options confronting a human agent must all be “live” options (i.e., not causally determined) for the decision and action of the human agent to be free.

<sup>15</sup> Hasker, “Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom,” 40. According to Hasker, the main issue surrounding the foreknowledge-freedom problem lies in incorporating the notion of libertarian freedom in a viable account of freedom in relation to foreknowledge and other external factors. This theological problem soon linked up with the study of freedom with other disciplines as well, e.g. (neuro) philosophy and the neurosciences.

foreknowledge and freedom.”<sup>16</sup> William Hasker points out that most of the current discussions focus on the “reconciliation question.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, logical coherence turns out to be the major motivating factor in theological debates; and the libertarian solutions offered to reconcile the logical difficulties between the two claims are often mentioned and continue to be discussed. In light of these considerations, the four most prominent solutions proposed by the libertarians—Boethian, Ockhamist, Open Theist, and Molinist—are analyzed in the following section.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.2.2 The Boethian, Ockhamist, Open Theist, and Molinist Solutions

In the sixth century Boethius proposed atemporal eternity as the way to resolve the problem. On the one hand, God is outside of time, so temporal distinctions of past, present, and future are not applicable to God. On the other hand, God sees all of time at once, so that everything that is past, present, and future from our perspective is all before God in one single “eternal now.” In other words, God’s knowledge is timeless. Since all things/events are timelessly present to God, it is slightly misleading to ascribe *foreknowledge* to God. Also, there is no problem with the compatibility of foreknowledge and freedom because the future is still open from our perspective; since we do not know what God knows about our future, we are not and cannot be driven by that future information when we make our choices in the future.<sup>19</sup> Although this solution has its strengths, it seems to be inconsistent with libertarian freedom. For instance, although God sees all things as present, He still knows and sees things which from our perspective are future; how then is it possible that humans have the power to do something different than what God knows? It appears that even insisting that someone only *will* do what God foreknows rather than stipulating that he or she *must* do what He decreed does not help us to escape from the old problem that foreknowledge and freedom seem incompatible.

The Ockhamist approach stems from William of Ockham in the fourteenth century. Using the notion of accidental necessity<sup>20</sup> and distinguishing ‘hard and soft facts’,<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Hasker, “Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom,” 40. See also Alfred J. Freddoso, “Introduction,” in Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, trans. Freddoso (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Hasker, “Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom,” 40.

<sup>18</sup> Each of these solutions has many ramifications and has raised complex questions. I will not enter into all the details and the arguments between their proponents and opponents. Rather, I will briefly describe the main features and highlight the issues of crucial significance in these solutions.

<sup>19</sup> For detailed discussion and interaction with this view, see Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 97-99; David Widerker, “A Problem for the Eternity Solution,” *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 29 (1991): 87-95; Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Prophecy, Past, Truth, and Eternity,” in *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 5 of *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. James Tomberlin (Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1991), 395-424; and David Widerker, “Providence, Eternity, and Human Freedom: A Reply to Stump and Kretzmann,” *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (April 1994): 242-254.

<sup>20</sup> According to William of Ockham, the past is necessary in the sense he called “accidental necessity”: Something that is accidentally necessary did not have to occur, but once it happened, it cannot be changed (e.g., once an act is actualized, no one can change it, but that does not mean it had to be done).

<sup>21</sup> There is much debate over the definition of hard and soft facts. We certainly need not enter into the details but just grasp their basic notion. Basically, a hard fact is the genuine fact of a past and completed event; hence, it is indifferent from what happens in the present or future. A soft fact mixes past and present, past and future, or present and future; hence its truth or falsity is not future-indifferent. For further description and explanation of the concepts, see Alvin Plantinga, “On Ockham’s Way Out,” *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 245-248. For the intricacies of the debates on hard and soft facts, see John Martin Fischer, “Hard-Type Soft Facts,” *The Philosophical Review* 95, no. 4 (October 1986): 591-601; Eddy M. Zemach and David Widerker,



Ockhamists contend that: for event x, I am in a position to prevent x, but in fact will freely perform x instead.<sup>22</sup> Let us take this proposition as an example: “God believed in the year 2000 that I shall return to Malaysia in January 2015.” This proposition must be true if God foreknows the future; but it is a soft fact as I write this now in 2010. If I do return to Malaysia in January 2015, this proposition will be both true and accidentally necessary after that. Of course, it is not unavoidable that I will have to return to Malaysia when January 2015 arrives; I am free to make a choice. Notably, the Ockhamist does not say that God does not know the future. Nevertheless, the Ockhamist is saying that God’s knowledge is dependent on what we will and would do (i.e., God’s past knowledge is not accidentally necessary). If this is the case, does this not imply that we have causal or counterfactual power over God’s past knowledge? Alvin Plantinga has indeed proposed a modern version of the Ockhamist solution, whereby humans have counterfactual power over God’s past beliefs.<sup>23</sup> But if that is the case, how can our future choice change the past?<sup>24</sup> Would this not appear to be backward causation? Moreover, the Ockhamist does not provide a convincing explanation as to how exactly God intuitively knows the future, since as actions are not causally connected and determined, it seems that there is nothing for God to “know” until we decide.

The next approach is the Open Theist view (also called the “Openness of God” view or Free Will Theism) according to which God does not have knowledge of future contingent events, because such future events, including human free choices, do not yet exist so as to be known. Open Theism has engaged in a direct challenge of the classical understanding of God. Its proponents contend that there are many Scripture references that require people to choose between various options; if God knows and decides everything, the requirement to choose makes no sense, and it is also unfair for God to hold humans accountable for decisions they do not make freely.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Scripture also shows that things do not always happen as God plans. As such, God rules the world in a general way, as an all-loving God who is willing to take risks. He does not control everything that occurs, and is open to take different routes to achieve His general goals, depending on the choices we make, and hence what options we leave Him. In other words, the God-world relationship involves a dynamic give-and-take, and an open, partially undecided future.<sup>26</sup> It appears that such a view seems difficult

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“Facts, Freedom and Foreknowledge,” *Religious Studies* 23 (1987): 19-28; William Lane Craig, “‘Nice Soft Facts’: Fischer on Foreknowledge,” *Religious Studies* 25 (1989): 235-246; John Martin Fischer, “Soft Facts and Harsh Realities: Reply to William Craig,” *Religious Studies* 27 (1991): 523-539.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed explanation of this view, see William of Ockham, “*Ordinatio*, Prologue, I,” *Opera Philosophica et Theologica*, eds. G. Gál and S. Brown (St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1967ff. *Opera Theologica*, I), 23-24; Morris, *Our Idea of God*, 94.

<sup>23</sup> See Plantinga, “On Ockham’s Way Out,” 235-269; and Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 70-71.

<sup>24</sup> Nelson Pike, “A Latter-Day Look at the Foreknowledge Problem,” *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 33 (1993): 142.

<sup>25</sup> For further explanation, see Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger’s *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1994); Clark Pinnock’s *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001); John E. Sanders’ *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1998); William Hasker’s *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); David Basinger’s *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Clark Pinnock, “God Limits His Knowledge,” in *Predestination and Free Will*, 149; Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 233-235; Jack Cottrell, “The Nature of the Divine Sovereignty,” in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1989), 103. In short, this view argues for a responsive God who limits His own control to give humanity libertarian freedom. Though each leading proponent of Open Theism might differ in some minor issues, they share core tenets such as: (1) freedom is defined as truly free in the libertarian sense; (2) God is open to the future—God depends on, or takes

to harmonize or fit with Scriptural teaching about God's sovereignty and the immutability and impassibility of God's nature.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the Open Theist has often been charged with portraying a limited and anthropomorphic God: that this is a theology of "God's lesser glory."<sup>28</sup>

There is yet another solution that requires our attention, namely the Molinist (or the middle knowledge) solution, often believed to have stemmed from the thought of the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535-1600). In general, middle knowledge refers to the knowledge through which God knows what any human being would freely do given a set of conditions x, y and z. Such conditional propositions are known as "counterfactuals of freedom." The Molinist solution claims that besides knowing what has happened, is happening, and will truly happen in the future, through His middle knowledge God also knows what every individual would freely do in every possible situation. God then chooses and manages the conditions that apply in such a way that we will freely decide to do what He wants done. God's providential plans are then realized without human libertarian freedom being compromised. In Molina's time, this theory had been charged with compromising the omnipotence and omniscience of God, as it understands God as one who reacts to the result of His finite creation prior to and apart from His divine willing. Although this objection carries on to the present time, the greatest challenge contemporary Molinists face, however, is the objection that this theory does not itself incorporate any particular solution in reconciling the foreknowledge-freedom problem. Clearly, this is a serious objection to a theory that is intended to reconcile and affirm foreknowledge and freedom.

### 1.2.3 Some Concluding Remarks on the Solutions

In the preceding sections we have seen the main characteristics of four proposals and the respective challenges they face. We have also gained some fundamental understanding of the issues surrounding the foreknowledge-freedom discussion, and learned that the proposals put forth to reconcile foreknowledge and freedom are not mutually exclusive, and certainly are not unappealing either. Each of these solutions has its strengths and weaknesses. An observation from a recent literature on foreknowledge and freedom is worth noting. According to this literature, although the view that foreknowledge is not the cause of human actions (e.g., the Boethian and Ockhamist solutions) is still popular, it is not a major concern in recent discussions.<sup>29</sup> The reason is that most contemporary theologians and Christian philosophers—including the soft determinists and indeterminists—do not claim that foreknowledge *causes* human actions (as noted in Section 1.2.1). In addition to the specific problems mentioned above, the Boethian and Ockhamist solutions seem to have lost much of their appeal in mainstream contemporary discussions. While the Open Theist solution remains an option in recent studies, middle knowledge is presumably the most thought-provoking and intriguing of all solutions, considering that it is one of the most heavily debated theories in historical and contemporary literature on foreknowledge and freedom, and it continues to generate lively debates even today. This recognition has prompted the need to

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account of, what is happening in the world and then responds appropriately; (3) God's greatest attribute is love; (4) God takes risks; and (5) God learns and changes His mind.

<sup>27</sup> For interaction with this view among its proponents and opponents, see Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," 141-175; and Bruce Reichenbach, "God Limits His Power," in *Predestination and Free Will*, 99-137. See also Clark Pinnock, ed., *Grace Unlimited* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975).

<sup>28</sup> Hasker, "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom," 53.

<sup>29</sup> See the overview of recent discussion on this topic by Hasker, "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom," 41.

focus on studying this particular theory, and to investigate the issues at stake in the debates over this theory. To this I now turn.

### 1.3 An Intriguing Solution: The Theory of Middle Knowledge

In this section I provide a snap-shot of the contemporary debates on the theory of middle knowledge as they go on in analytical philosophical theology. In doing so, it will become clear why middle knowledge is one of the most heavily and lively debated theories today. More importantly, however, discerning the core concerns among the friends and foes of Molinism will lead us to recognize an unfortunate blind spot in the contemporary discussion of this theory.

We learn from the preceding section that middle knowledge is not a new concept. It originated with Molina and he used it in the late sixteenth century to address the problem of foreknowledge and freedom. Molina's middle knowledge proposal and its implications soon triggered extensive dispute between the Jesuits and Dominicans.<sup>30</sup> As time passed, middle knowledge slowly phased out of the picture in theological discussion until the early 1970s, when Alvin Plantinga unwittingly made use of it to construct a version of the "Free Will Defense" answer to the problem of evil. Thus, the theory was reintroduced and revived.<sup>31</sup> Alfred Freddoso's translation of Molina's *Concordia* (Part IV) further revitalized the theory in contemporary literature, where it received another boost from Thomas Flint's work<sup>32</sup> and continues to make a remarkable comeback among present-day analytical philosophers, such as William Lane Craig and many others who have actively incorporate it into their formulation and application of Christian doctrines.<sup>33</sup>

As a result, middle knowledge has not just been of interest among Christian philosophers, but in recent years it has been given increased attention in the theological field as well. It has attracted a large number of supporters and an equally large number of opponents. Two notable opponents, Robert Adams and William Hasker, have argued against the possibility of middle knowledge. Hasker and Adams argue that it follows from Molinism that we do not bring about the truth of counterfactuals of freedom.<sup>34</sup> As mentioned in the

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<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 2.3.2 and Chapter 3.4.2 for more detailed historical background of this theory.

<sup>31</sup> See Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 30. It is worth noting that when Plantinga articulated his arguments for the truth of counterfactuals in his free will defense against the problem of evil, he was at first unaware of Molinism and the historical connection of middle knowledge (see Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* [Clarendon, NY: Oxford University Press, 1974, chp. 9]; and "Self-Profile" in *Alvin Plantinga*, vol. 5 of *Profiles: An International Series of Contemporary Philosophers and Logicians*, eds. James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen [Dordrecht, NL: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985], 50).

<sup>32</sup> Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> For example, Thomas Flint incorporates middle knowledge into prophecy, prayer, etc. (Flint, "Two Accounts of Providence," in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris [New York: Cornell University Press, 1988], 147-81); Bruce A. Ware sees middle knowledge as a promising solution to the question of human freedom (Ware, "A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views*, ed. Bruce A. Ware [Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2008], 109-113); and Terrance Tiessen attempts to appreciate the strength of middle knowledge by proposing a model which holds Calvinism and Molinism together (Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000]).

<sup>34</sup> William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Robert M. Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 343-354, and "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," in *Middle Knowledge: Theory and Applications*, eds. William Hasker, David Basinger, and Eef Dekker (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), 35-50; William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise*

brief description of middle knowledge (ref. Section 1.2.2), this theory requires the existence of counterfactuals of freedom in order to uphold the whole concept.<sup>35</sup> Hence, objections to it have certainly caught the attention of scholars. While Plantinga and Edward J. Wierenga replied to Adams's objection,<sup>36</sup> Flint rebutted Hasker.<sup>37</sup> Craig has also critiqued Adams' arguments, which triggered extensive debates between Craig and Adams, as well as Craig and Hasker, resulting in Flint and Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski also joining in to rebut Adams.<sup>38</sup> Besides these debates, Richard Gaskin brought up other problems with the logic of middle knowledge;<sup>39</sup> and David Hunt has argued for middle knowledge on the grounds that its status is similar to free knowledge.<sup>40</sup> Notably, our survey up to this point shows that the numerous debates among these scholars are largely sparked by the metaphysical questions as to whether counterfactuals of freedom have truth value and by some other aspects pertaining to the logical coherency of this theory. In other words, recent discussions on middle knowledge have focused heavily on the logical analysis of this theory.

Amidst all the studies and discussions on the topic so far, the following are the few that have attempted to approach it from a more theological perspective. Jerry Walls has objected to the theory of middle knowledge by arguing that Molinism is as problematic as Calvinism especially on the issue of the goodness of God and eternal damnation, since under middle knowledge, people are still predestined to hell.<sup>41</sup> Alfred Freddoso has given a good account of both the theological and philosophical objections that have risen against middle knowledge.<sup>42</sup> Eef Dekker has provided a defense of middle knowledge from a hermeneutical perspective.<sup>43</sup> Travis James Campbell has presented a historical and theological study and critique of middle knowledge.<sup>44</sup> Terrance Tiessen has offered a proposal he called "Calvinist Middle Knowledge," in which compatibilist freedom (instead of libertarian freedom) and a temporal God (instead of a timeless God) who has middle knowledge is proposed.<sup>45</sup> In short,

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*God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Baker book House, 1987), 138-145.

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 2.2.3 and Chapter 4.4 for further elaboration of this proposition and debates about it.

<sup>36</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "A Response to Adams' Argument," in *Middle Knowledge*, 51-57; Edward J. Wierenga, "The No Grounds Objection," in *Middle Knowledge*, 58-67.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Flint, "Hasker's Attack on Middle Knowledge," in *Middle Knowledge*, 77-96.

<sup>38</sup> After Craig criticized Adams' arguments (Craig, "Robert Adams' New Anti-Molinist Argument," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54 [1994]: 857-861), Hasker defended Adams (Hasker, "Middle Knowledge: A Refutation Revisited," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 [April 1995]: 223-236) and responded to Craig (Hasker, "Explanatory Priority: Transitive and Unequivocal, a Reply to William Craig," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 [1997]: 389-393). Craig replied to Hasker (Craig, "On Hasker's Defense of Anti-Molinism," *Faith and Philosophy* 15 [April 1998]: 236-239); and Hasker gave a rejoinder to Craig (Hasker, "Anti-Molinism Is Undefeated!" *Faith and Philosophy* 17 [January 2000]: 126-131). Flint (*Divine Providence*) and Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski (*The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991]) also attempted to refute Adams' claims. Hasker replied to Zagzebski's arguments (Hasker, "Zagzebski on Power Entailment," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 [1993]: 250-255) and Zagzebski gave a rejoinder (Zagzebski, "Rejoinder to Hasker," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 [April 1993]: 256-260).

<sup>39</sup> Richard Gaskin, "Conditionals of Freedom and Middle Knowledge," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 43 (1993): 412-430.

<sup>40</sup> David P. Hunt, "Middle Knowledge: The 'Foreknowledge Defence,'" in *Middle Knowledge*, 97-117.

<sup>41</sup> Jerry Walls, "Is Molinism as Bad as Calvinism?," in *Middle Knowledge*, 269-282.

<sup>42</sup> Alfred J. Freddoso, "Objections to Molinism, and Replies," in *Middle Knowledge*, 22-34.

<sup>43</sup> Eef Dekker, "'You Know When I Sit Down and When I Rise Up': The Omniscience of God," in *Understanding the Attributes of God*, eds. Gijsbert van den Brink and Marcel Sarot (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), 161-178.

<sup>44</sup> Travis James Campbell, "Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 1-2.

<sup>45</sup> Terrance L. Tiessen, "Why Calvinists Should Believe in Divine Middle Knowledge, Although They Reject Molinism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 69 (2007), 345-366. A detailed account of Tiessen's

although there are works that argue for and against middle knowledge from different perspectives, in comparison to the numerous studies of it that are exclusively philosophical in their orientation, studies based on a theological and especially a biblical approach are limited.

This focus of current studies of middle knowledge is surprising. For apart from a wealth of philosophical considerations, the appeal to *biblical texts* played an important role in the work on middle knowledge by both its original advocates and critics. For example, Molina appeals to Ps. 139:3-4, Isa. 41:23, 48:5, Jn. 14:29 and Heb. 4:13 to support his understanding of divine foreknowledge of future contingents, and argues that 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24 are direct Scriptural indications of middle knowledge. Moreover, the most active advocate of middle knowledge today, William Lane Craig, also points to 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24 as important Scriptural evidence of this theory. The historical development of this theory, its emergence and trajectories show that this theory was associated with the interpretation of Scripture and the implications derived from it. Nevertheless, as shown above, in current discussions scant attention has been given to examining middle knowledge theologically and exegetically. On account of this observation, this study proposes an approach of discussing middle knowledge that differs from the focus of most contemporary discussions of this theory. In so doing, it fills an unfortunate gap in recent discussions (i.e., the lack of examining this theory from a biblical-theological perspective).

#### **1.4 Approaching the Problem: Re-contextualizing the Issue in Its Biblical Context**

This section has three main purposes. First, it concludes and outlines from our study thus far the reason and need of re-contextualizing the discussion of foreknowledge and freedom in its original biblical-theological setting (1.4.1). Second, it concludes and underscores from our preceding study the reasons of fulfilling the need aforesaid by focusing on the theory of middle knowledge; followed by laying out the questions of inquiry (1.4.1). Third, it explicates the methods this study undertakes to achieve its goal, as well as the questions it seeks to answer (1.4.2).

##### **1.4.1 Outlining the Inquiry**

First, broadly speaking, this chapter has shown that reconsidering the way and focus of studying foreknowledge and freedom contributes to the process of discussion as it goes on. This is even more acute under the current circumstance that metaphysical analysis alone is assumed to be adequate to approach the foreknowledge and freedom issues (ref. Section 1.2.1), whereas unfortunately maintaining logical consistency is not without its challenges. Since logical consistency is a major factor in harmonizing foreknowledge and freedom, the solution offered must not only show a possible way in which both foreknowledge and freedom can be true without contradiction; it should be consistent with the logic or the overall system it presupposes as well. This is especially pertinent with regard to the notion of freedom. For example, in a significant article titled “Divine Foreknowledge and Alternative Conceptions of Human Freedom,” William Alston contends that the libertarian line on the foreknowledge and freedom issue actually adopts a different concept of freedom than

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proposal is found in his book *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* See esp. 289-337. For a similar view, see Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton III: Crossway Books, 2004). Paul Helm responded in a rejoinder that the ground of this model suffers serious rational defects (see Paul Helm and Terrance L. Tiessen, “Does Calvinism Have Room for Middle Knowledge? A Conversation,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 71 [2009]: 437-454).

libertarianism itself, which in fact places them in the determinist camp.<sup>46</sup> Feinberg echoes that many of the resolutions offered by libertarians are guilty of the error Alston mentions, and hence their proposed solutions do not fit in a system consistent with libertarian freedom.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, as Christians who are committed to take Scripture seriously, such a contemporary development of this topic that is largely disconnected from biblical interpretation, biblical theology, and hermeneutics, calls for serious attention, since the subject discussed arises from our understanding of Scripture in the first place. It is strange for Christians to speak about God's knowledge and its relation to human freedom without taking into account the most authoritative source that Christians recognize on this matter. Karl Barth reminds us that a true epistemology can be derived only from the actual unfolding of the content of the Word of God. We can only understand how God is knowable from the way He has chosen to be known Himself, and in light of the knowledge we have acquired this way, we can then understand ourselves.<sup>48</sup> Hence, there is a need to broaden the perspective from which we study the issue so as to include the interpretation of Scripture in relation to foreknowledge and freedom. This does not mean that there is no such work among contemporary publications; indeed, works intended to offer biblical-theological dialogue between advocates of different schools of thought can be found,<sup>49</sup> but they are scarce and it seems difficult for advocates of different positions to agree upon their respective interpretation of Scriptural texts. In light of these considerations, it seems that the dialogue can be enriched if the theological arguments are supported by a biblical-theological framework proposed in light of present-day hermeneutical studies. This framework can serve as an evaluation guideline for Scriptural interpretation as well.

Second, narrowly speaking, this chapter has shown that it is legitimate to re-contextualize the discussion of foreknowledge and freedom through focusing on studying middle knowledge. Since Scriptural texts from the beginning have been used as proof-texts for this theory, it is not only an issue of philosophy and a subject of discussion for analytical philosophers, but should also be investigated in the theological and hermeneutical contexts which contributed to the flourishing of middle knowledge. However, as shown in the survey above, whereas this theory's philosophical ramifications have been widely discussed in contemporary scholarly literature during recent decades, investigation of the Scriptural texts employed by Molina and its other advocates as biblical evidence is either lacking or limited. Therefore, there is a need to broaden the horizons within which the theory of middle knowledge is studied by a biblical-theological approach in order to arrive at a fair judgment and evaluation of middle knowledge. In short, a critical examination of the attempts to defend or criticize the theory of middle knowledge with reference to the Bible is needed. Considering that in the course of the discussion, Molina, Bavinck, and Craig have made influential contributions to the discussions of middle knowledge, this research aims to discover:

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<sup>46</sup> William Alston P, "Divine Foreknowledge and Alternative Conceptions of Human Freedom," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 18 (1985): 19-32.

<sup>47</sup> John S. Feinberg, *No One like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 737.

<sup>48</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III/3, eds. Geoffrey William Bromiley & Thomas Forsyth Torrance, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley & R. J. Ehrlich (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960), 102-104.

<sup>49</sup> See Feinberg, *No One like Him*, where Feinberg provides intriguing arguments to answer questions often raised by advocates of different camps.

**How are biblical texts used by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig in their discussions of middle knowledge? And how (if at all) can these texts bear on the issue of middle knowledge in light of present-day biblical theological scholarship?**

In order to answer this main research question, the following subsidiary questions are investigated: what is the role and function of the Bible in Molina, Bavinck, and Craig's discussions of middle knowledge? How do they use biblical texts? What is the role and function of the biblical texts frequently used by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig in light of contemporary biblical-theological scholarship? Moreover, given the present-day situation in Scriptural studies, what is the viability of the classical proof-texts they use in their arguments either to defend or refute middle knowledge? Is it legitimate to conclude that Scripture or parts of it affirm or imply middle knowledge? Given that the interpretation of Scripture has advanced since the time of Molina, it is appropriate to compare the textual interpretations of Molina, Bavinck and Craig with the ways in which the very same texts are (or can be) interpreted in light of present-day biblical scholarship. It will be rewarding to discover whether any or all of these biblical texts can still play a role in contemporary reflection on the nature of God's knowledge. Lastly, our answers to the aforementioned questions should offer important theological insights into the complex discussion on divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

#### **1.4.2 Methodological Considerations**

At this juncture it should be noted that it is not the aim of this research to seek for new strategies or to propose any new solution to deal with the foreknowledge-freedom problem, but to reshape and refocus the criteria of how to discuss the problem by focusing particularly on studying and evaluating middle knowledge from a biblical-theological perspective.

Moreover, current tendencies in systematic theology (as exemplified, for example, by the many recent publications on "theological interpretation" of the Bible) show increasing desire for a closer and more careful engagement of biblical theology and historical exegesis within the discipline of systematic theology. This current focus echoes the crucial necessity of paying careful attention to the function and interpretation of biblical texts in theological, hermeneutical and historical discourse. This research seeks to participate in, and contribute to, this emerging line of research by extending it to the doctrine of divine omniscience, unduly dominated these days by non-theological approaches. Given the remarkable developments and advances in exegetical study, it seems legitimate to make use of these findings to aid in a better understanding of Scripture in order to provide a more convincing ground for the systematic-theological reflection on God's knowledge and human freedom. Hence, this research combines and interrelates standard methods in historical theology (especially the history of biblical interpretation) and biblical theology so as to make a creative contribution to systematic theology.

First, in three separate chapters I examine the writings of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig on the topic of middle knowledge, focusing especially on the role of the Bible in their arguments. Next, I investigate how the biblical texts that play a role in these authors' defenses or refutations of middle knowledge are interpreted in the work of contemporary biblical scholars, or how these should be interpreted from their methodical perspectives. In order to do this in a constructive way, I first examine how these passages might be read generally in light of biblical scholarship. I then concentrate on a couple of biblical scholars who, while avoiding the hermeneutical naivety of the *loca probantia* method, still

acknowledge the legitimacy of theological appropriations of the Bible in contemporary systematic thinking. Specifically, the works of Brevard S. Childs (Old Testament) and Anthony C. Thiselton (New Testament) will be consulted in this connection. Childs' "canonical approach" and Thiselton's focus on philosophical pre-understandings in our interpretation of the Bible should offer crucial hermeneutical insights for understanding the message of the Scriptural texts cited by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig. Finally, I elaborate a creative proposal as to how the insights gained might apply to the theory of middle knowledge and what this means for our overall evaluation of this theory. Does it indeed offer a theologically viable way out of the classical conundrum of divine foreknowledge and human free will? The following, more detailed description of the content of each chapter, lays out how the aforesaid methodologies are carried out in this study.

## **1.5 An Overview: Content of Chapters**

This introductory chapter has provided a contour outline of the current controversies surrounding foreknowledge and freedom, and presented a brief description of the prominent solutions put forth to reconcile these two notions. I then focused on one particular solution—namely, the middle knowledge theory. I outlined this theory through a brief survey of its contemporary debates, which showed the main arguments that come up in its contemporary revival within analytical philosophical theology. In so doing, it turned out that the Bible played at best a minor role in these discussions.

Chapter 2 begins with an introduction and analysis of the theory of middle knowledge as elaborated by Luis de Molina within its historical and theological background. It shows how Molinism subsequently became one of the most disputed doctrinal issues in Roman Catholic Church history. I then move into studying the Scriptural passages on which Molina based his concept. A first approximation is made of how these passages might be read through the lenses of biblical scholarship. In light of the preceding investigations, I examine and evaluate Molina's interpretation of the Scriptural texts he cites; and the role played by these Scriptural texts both in his writings and in the intra Roman Catholic debates sparked by him.

Chapter 3 investigates how middle knowledge has been understood in the Reformed theological tradition as culminating in the work of Herman Bavinck. In this way, the post-Reformation trajectories of the theory are brought into play. I examine the reasons why Reformed Orthodoxy and other Protestant lines of thought refuted middle knowledge, again focusing especially on the role of the Bible in their arguments. In this connection, Bavinck's treatment of divine foreknowledge and his critique of middle knowledge in particular are examined in detail. It is shown that while inheriting important strands of the tradition of Reformed Orthodoxy, Bavinck also moved beyond this tradition in some crucial respects, such as his theory of "organic" biblical inspiration. Therefore, it is inquired to what extent Bavinck's use of Scripture in refuting middle knowledge is similar to or different from that of his Reformed predecessors. What was the role of the Bible and biblical interpretation in the Reformed rejection of middle knowledge, and what difference did Bavinck's new approach to Scripture make in this respect?

Chapter 4 continues investigating the theory of middle knowledge by focusing on the arguments of one of its most prominent contemporary proponents, William Lane Craig. Attention is given to the metaphysical principles that play a foundational role in Craig's argument. In this way, the difference between Craig's account of middle knowledge and the



classical defense will become clear, as well as the challenges he (and contemporary Molinists) face in light of this. I then investigate the biblical references Craig uses to support his (philosophical) conclusions. Next, the critiques of Craig's arguments by some of his peers are rehearsed, with special attention given to how these scholars deal with the proof-texts used by Craig. This investigation aids in comparing the ways in which biblical data are used in contemporary analytical and biblical theology. At the end of the chapter, its main results are presented and evaluated.

Chapter 5 is devoted to a more in depth study of "middle knowledge and the Bible" in light of contemporary biblical scholarship. The plan is to gain some hermeneutic insights through studying the works of Brevard Childs and Anthony C. Thiselton, and in turn apply them to our understanding of the message of the Scriptural texts cited by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig. As this aim requires numerous inquiries, it is split into two chapters. This chapter carefully studies the parameters of Child's "canonical approach" and Thiselton's hermeneutical proposal of "the fusions of two horizons," and then it makes some observations and conclusions that will be carried forward to the next chapter.

Chapter 6 takes the observations and conclusions deriving from the findings in Chapter 5 to formulate a framework for a possible theological appropriation of the Bible. This framework is then applied in a responsible manner to the classical proof-texts that were adduced in support of divine foreknowledge; as well as the classical proof-texts that were adduced in favor of (or against) middle knowledge. The goal is to investigate to what extent these texts can still stand as viable testimonies for divine foreknowledge, as well as for or against middle knowledge. And if it turns out that this is not at all the case, what would this mean for the classical debates on middle knowledge—should they henceforth be conducted without any appeal to the Bible or lose any connection with the Bible whatsoever? Finally, what would it mean to interpret the classical proof-text passages theologically from a contemporary biblical theological point of view? The results of this chapter will exhibit important theological-biblical implications for the use of Scripture in (philosophical) theology in general and the theory of middle knowledge in particular.

## Middle Knowledge in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries: Luis de Molina

Unless we want to wander about precariously in reconciling our freedom of choice and the contingency of things with divine foreknowledge, it is necessary for us to distinguish *three* types of knowledge of God.

Luis de Molina<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Introduction

#### 2.1.1 Molina's Role in the Debate

The Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535-1600) was a prominent figure in the history of Roman Catholicism in responding to the issue of efficacious grace arising from the Council of Trent (1547).<sup>2</sup> The doctrine of grace/providence elaborated by the Council of Trent is open to interpretation when it postulates the cooperation of divine grace and human freedom as the constituents of salvation but without providing theological clarity as to how these two relate.<sup>3</sup> Several key questions regarding the nature of the relationship between God's efficacious grace, predestination, and freedom are left unanswered. Traditions of the sixteenth century solve the problem either by appealing to a strong divine decree of predestination or by treating salvation as dependent on humans. Hence, efforts are made to affirm divine grace, providence, foreknowledge and predestination without eliminating human cooperation. In the latter part of the sixteenth century, Molina generated widespread debate when he tried to solve the problem of freedom and foreknowledge. Molina explains in *Concordia*<sup>4</sup> how in his view God possesses foreknowledge through middle knowledge, and argues that God's decisions are guided by such knowledge. The publication of *Concordia* not only aroused a controversial storm at that time, but it is also an invaluable resource for the discussion of middle knowledge today. Molina's place and work in the discussion of middle knowledge (as well as foreknowledge and freedom) is well established and recognized. This chapter therefore introduces, investigates, and evaluates the theory of middle knowledge proposed by Molina – and especially its biblical ramifications.

#### 2.1.2 An Outline of What Follows

In what follows, I begin with a brief theological and historical account of the dispute between the Jesuits and the Dominicans (Section 2.2.1). Having gained some general background understanding of the formulation of middle knowledge, I proceed to analyze the theory as elaborated by Molina within its historical background (Section 2.2.2); and the objections

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<sup>1</sup> Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 168.

<sup>2</sup> See Freddoso, "Preface," in Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, vii.

<sup>3</sup> For a general historical background of Molinism, see Manfred Biersack, "Molinism," in *The Encyclopaedia of Christianity*, vol. 3, eds. Erwin Fahlbusch and G. W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 618-620.

<sup>4</sup> The complete title of *Concordia* is *Liberi Arbitrii cum Gratiae Donis, Divina Praescientia, Providentia, Praedestinatione et Reprobatione Concordia* [The Compatibility of Free Choice with the Gifts of Grace, Divine Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination and Reprobation]. It had altogether four editions and the last edition prepared by Rabeneck divided the *Concordia* into seven parts; divine foreknowledge is discussed in Part IV (see *Luis de Molina: S.J.: Liberi Arbitrii cum Gratiae Donis, Divina Praescientia, Providentia, Praedestinatione et Reprobatione Concordia*, ed. Johann Rabeneck S.J. [Ona and Madrid, 1953]). In this study, the English version of Part IV of the *Concordia* translated by Freddoso will be used.

raised against it during his time (Section 2.2.3). Next, I move to the main Scriptural passages Molina uses to substantiate his concept and briefly examine the message of these texts as appropriated in the history of Christian exegesis (Section 2.3.1-2.3.3). This naturally leads to the final section of this chapter, which evaluates Molina's interpretation or understanding of the Scriptural texts he cites (Section 2.4.1), and the role these passages played both in the thought of Molina himself and in the Roman Catholic debates sparked by him (Section 2.4.2).

## 2.2 *Scientia Media*

Molina's treatment of foreknowledge and middle knowledge is rooted in the theological context of his time. As a result, I begin by sketching the dispute between Molina and the Dominicans within the broad theological context of the debate over foreknowledge during the sixteenth century, through which I show how this context shapes the formulation of Molina's theory, and the significant issues that kindle his disagreements with the Dominicans; followed by how the dispute was ended (Section 2.2.1). I then introduce the theory of middle knowledge. Following the contours of Disputation 52 in Part IV of the *Concordia*, I begin with Molina's biblical understanding of divine knowledge. I then lay out the essentials of Molina's theory of middle knowledge and explain how this theory functions in his scheme, which consists of three types of divine knowledge, and how Molina reconciles foreknowledge and freedom using this theory (Section 2.2.2).<sup>5</sup> Finally, I point out the criticisms and objections raised against such an attempt at reconciliation during Molina's time by other groups besides the Dominicans (Section 2.2.3), which further shows why this theory became the subject of one of the most chaotic doctrinal disputes in Roman Catholic Church history, while it was also being rejected by other Christian groups.

### 2.2.1 Dispute between the Jesuits and Dominicans

Sixteenth century Catholic theologians and philosophers generally view Thomist metaphysics as a crucial source in the construction and defense of their theological thoughts and theological system of God. In other words, the works of Aquinas shaped the dialectical parameters of the study of foreknowledge and freedom.<sup>6</sup> However, Aquinas' perceptual model of God's knowledge might seem to portray God as a passive information recipient of the created world (although this is certainly never the intention of Aquinas),<sup>7</sup> an idea which is

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<sup>5</sup> Molina's theory of middle knowledge is extensive. I shall not enter into a detailed account of his entire conceptual argumentation and analysis due to the focus of this study. Rather, I aim to present the essentials that provide a sufficient understanding of this theory which enables us to proceed to biblical-theological examination. For a detailed philosophical exposition of Molina's theory of middle knowledge, see Freddoso, "Introduction," in Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, 1-62.

<sup>6</sup> Freddoso provides an explanation of the historical background of Molina, and attempts to show that Molina's theory is rooted in his understanding of Aquinas' views of determinism (see Freddoso, "Introduction," 7-8). Pegis studies the historical background of Molina's view of freedom, and argues that Aquinas in fact formulated his teaching in opposition to the necessitarian metaphysics of the Arabian philosophers (e.g., Avicenna). Molina, while trying to fight against the necessitarian theology of the sixteenth century Protestants, also follows Aquinas in avoiding the necessitarianism of Avicenna in his arguments (see also Anton C. Pegis, "Molina and Human Liberty," *Jesuit Thinkers of the Renaissance*, Gerard Smith, ed. [Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1939], 75-131). Pegis concludes that having failed to discover a way by which the freedom of man can be explained in and by the causality of God (without attributing determinism to God and without falling into the problem of necessitarianism of Avicenna), Molina uses the theory of middle knowledge to uphold both divine foreknowledge and human freedom. The studies of Freddoso and (especially) Pegis show us the concern and intention of Molina which influenced and determined his approach from the very beginning.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province as *Summa Theologica* (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1981). q. 14, 1.5, 8 and 16; and Molina, *On*

rejected by both Jesuits and Dominicans. As a result, they replaced Aquinas' model by appealing to two very different ideas. Simply put, the Dominicans held to a strong notion of God's providential activity, whereas the Jesuits emphasized human freedom.<sup>8</sup> Following the Jesuits' tradition, Molina begins his argument with a strong notion of contingency and human freedom, and argues that this notion perfectly agrees with the doctrine of divine grace/providence.<sup>9</sup> Molina's proposal differs from the teaching of the Thomists and the Dominicans who are soteriologically Augustinian. It is not surprising that this soon brought the Jesuits (represented by Molina and Francisco Suarez [1548-1617]) into extensive debates and severe controversies with the Dominicans (whose leading figure was Domingo Banez [1528-1604]).

When the dispute began to jeopardize both civil and ecclesiastical harmony in the Catholic Church, religious and political leaders sought the intervention of the Holy See. However, the dispute between the Jesuits and the Dominicans became so fierce that not even the pope could decide on the case, and it created such a problem for the theology of the day that nearly every contemporary theologian touched on it.<sup>10</sup> The reports and letters of the Jesuit Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), who was heavily involved in resolving the conflict, are worth noting. In his lengthy reports to the Pope, Bellarmine referred to the teaching of Aquinas, Augustine, and the Council of Trent, and contended that the majority of the charges against Molina are false.<sup>11</sup> Bellarmine stated that although he does not agree with all the contents of the *Concordia*, he does not condemn it absolutely or declare it to be Pelagian (as the Dominicans suspected) since some of Molina's propositions had been taught by the scholastic theologians whom the Church had not condemned.<sup>12</sup> In 1597, Bellarmine wrote to Pope Clement VIII, suggesting that the Pope resolve the dispute with both the theory of the Dominicans and the Jesuits being permitted:

Besides, it is not easy to convict either party of manifest error since both admit the authority of the Council of Orange and Trent, and each alleges on its own behalf at least apparent testimonies from St Augustine and St Thomas. Furthermore, it is difficult to believe that the Holy See could be induced to fix a charge of error in doctrine on a whole religious order and on entire universities ... the University of Salamanca favors the Dominicans to a certain extent, while the University of Alcala is almost completely on the side of the Jesuits.

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*Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 49 (sec. 1-7). For a careful account of Thomas' own views on and solution to the freedom-foreknowledge dilemma, see esp. Harm J. M. J. Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God: Thomas Aquinas on God's Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible Will* (Nijmegen: Thomas Instituut, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> John Martin Fischer, "Review of *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)* by Luis De Molina: trans. Alfred J. Freddoso," *The Philosophical Review* 101, no. 2 (April 1992): 387.

<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the lively debates over future contingency since the fourteenth and fifteenth century, though distinctively non-Thomistic, were largely philosophically oriented, and it is assumed that Molina naturally engaged with the various non-Thomistic positions (for a detailed historical account of the key issues, see Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg, eds., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982]; Tamar Rudavsky, ed., *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy: Islamic, Jewish and Christian Perspectives* [Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1985]).

<sup>10</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, vol. III (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 419. Hereafter referred as *PRRD III*.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed description of Bellarmine's assessment, see James Brodrick, *Robert Bellarmine: Saint and Scholar* (London: Burns & Oates, 1961), 196-202.

<sup>12</sup> See Brodrick, *Robert Bellarmine*, 197-199.

Therefore it is vain to hope for an end of the controversy by a definite decision on the points in dispute.<sup>13</sup>

In 1601, Bellarmine wrote another letter to the Pope in which he again pleaded with him to restore concord between the orders of the Dominicans and the Jesuits, and once more affirmed that middle knowledge is a theory “commonly taught in the schools as being consonant with the Scripture, the Fathers, and plain logic.”<sup>14</sup>

A papal commission was set up in 1597-1601 to investigate Molina’s theory, and it recommended to the Pope three times to condemn the propositions of Molina.<sup>15</sup> Although the majority was against Molina, difficult substantive questions and political considerations prevented the Pope from making a clear decision.<sup>16</sup> At the end of the commission, after sixty-eight sessions of the *Congregation de Auxiliis* (Commission on the help [*auxilia*] afforded by divine grace) and thirty-seven debates in 1602-1605, Pope Paul V (1605-1621) declared that “an end was put to the disputes,” and allowed “each party to defend its own doctrine, enjoin[ing] each from censuring or condemning the opposite opinion.”<sup>17</sup> This decision was largely due to the efforts of Bellarmine. The Pope also expressed that he would decide the issue at an opportune time, but he did not do so during his pontificate and neither have any of his successors.<sup>18</sup> While middle knowledge narrowly escaped papal condemnation, it remained a view in the Roman Catholic Church, and rapidly found acceptance with the Arminians, and soon after with the Socinians of the seventeenth century.<sup>19</sup> Though it was accepted by these parties, the response it received from other Protestant and Reformed theologians has been largely negative. Some Protestant groups even viewed this theory as heterodox. Controversies over it rekindled again at various times in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

From the preceding analysis, we discovered the theological context of Molina’s time and the significant issues being considered in the debate over middle knowledge. The examination above indicates the extent of the dispute, and the main issues considered in the evaluation of this theory. The history of the dispute prompts us to recognize that besides the extensive examinations performed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is worthwhile and rewarding to further examine this theory through another perspective which this study undertakes. In order to do so, however, we first of all need to understand the theory of middle knowledge itself. We seek this understanding in the next section.

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted from Brodrick, *Robert Bellarmine*, 204-205.

<sup>14</sup> Brodrick, *Robert Bellarmine*, 211.

<sup>15</sup> Biersack, “Molinism,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Christianity*, 619; and Brodrick, *Robert Bellarmine*, 206-207. The commission recommended the condemnation of sixty-one propositions put forward by Molina in March 1598; and again of forty-two propositions in November 1598. Finally, in 1600, they condemned Molina along with twenty propositions of his theory.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, although the commission set up to examine the *Concordia* reported to the Pope in 1598 two times that it had to be prohibited and condemned, the decision was never made. In addition to Molina himself addressing a long letter to the Pope, the Jesuits implored various influential authorities (such as the King of Spain, Philip III, Empress Maria of Austria and the Archduke Albert, among many others) to intercede and appeal for their Society. As a result, further investigations were ordered to take place instead of prohibiting the *Concordia* (see Brodrick, *Robert Bellarmine*, 206-207). For a detailed historical account of the dispute and Bellarmine’s reports, see Brodrick, *Robert Bellarmine*, 189-216.

<sup>17</sup> Brodrick, *Robert Bellarmine*, 214.

<sup>18</sup> Brodrick, *Robert Bellarmine*, 215.

<sup>19</sup> Arminius used the basic form and intention of Molina’s argument to formulate the philosophical foundation of his view of predestination. The Socinians applied middle knowledge in their understanding of God’s essence and attributes, and claimed that God has limited foreknowledge of future contingents on the grounds that future contingents are uncertain.

### 2.2.2 Divine Knowledge: Natural, Middle, and Free

In Part IV of the *Concordia*, Molina states: “That there is foreknowledge of future contingents in God is absolutely obvious from the sacred writings, so much so that the contrary position is not only irrational...but is also a manifest error from the point of view of faith.”<sup>20</sup> Molina then cites and connects the content of Scriptural texts such as Ps. 139: 3-5,<sup>21</sup> Isa. 41:23 and 48:5, Jn. 14:29, and Heb. 4:13 to affirm God’s exhaustive foreknowledge, and to contend that all things are exposed and open to God’s eyes, and He knows all contingent things.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Molina stresses, God does not begin to know these things when they are actual, since that would mean God changed from not knowing to knowing. Therefore, God knows future contingents *before* they exist. From his explanation of these texts, Molina then asserts that “Unless we want to wander about precariously in reconciling our freedom of choice and the contingency of things with divine foreknowledge, it is necessary to distinguish the divine knowledge into three types,”<sup>23</sup> or three logical moments, namely natural knowledge, middle knowledge and free knowledge. Some scholars have diagrammed Molina’s view as follows:<sup>24</sup>

Moment 1: God’s natural knowledge of everything that could be

Moment 2: God’s middle knowledge of everything that would be

Divine Decree

Moment 3: God’s free knowledge of everything that happens in the actual world

Molina holds that God is atemporal and does not have successive temporal experience. It follows that God’s knowledge exists as a timeless intuition that comprehends all truth. Therefore, Molina stresses that the term “logical moments” is not used in the sense of chronological relationship or temporal succession. Rather, the relationship between these three types of divine knowledge is logical in the sense that God’s knowledge of a certain type of propositions is conditionally prior to His knowledge of certain other propositions, as the above diagram shows. Molina argues that apart from God’s “natural knowledge” of necessary truths and “free knowledge” of God’s own actions,<sup>25</sup> there is Scriptural evidence for “middle knowledge.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 52, sec. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Molina uses the Vulgate rather than the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, the Vulgate numbering of Ps. 138:3-4 (which corresponds to the Hebrew Scriptures’ Ps. 139: 3-5) is used in *Concordia*. As this study follows the Hebrew Scriptures, the designation Ps. 139:3-5 is used hereafter.

<sup>22</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 52, sec. 8. Additionally, Molina also quotes Wisdom 8:8 and Ecclesiasticus 23:28-29. This study examines only the Scriptural texts generally accepted by Christians as canonical. Therefore, the non-canonical Wisdom 8:8 and Ecclesiasticus 23:28-29 cited by Molina are not included in this study.

<sup>23</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 52, sec. 8 -10. This preceding introduction is summarized and rephrased from these pages.

<sup>24</sup> For example, see Travis James Campbell, “Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 68, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 2; William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 131.

<sup>25</sup> Reformed orthodoxy inherited from the medieval theologians a set of distinctions in explaining divine knowledge. For example, “natural knowledge” is used to refer to God’s indeterminate knowledge of all possibilities; and “free knowledge” refers to God’s determinate foreknowledge of the necessary and certain effects of His decree. Thomists and Calvinists have traditionally distinguished natural knowledge from free knowledge; Molina postulated another kind of knowledge—middle knowledge—between the two.

<sup>26</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 52, sec. 8.

How, then, do God's natural, middle, and free knowledge work according to Molina's scheme? Molina elucidates that through divine natural knowledge, God "knew all the things to which the divine power extended either immediately or by the mediation of secondary causes, including not only the nature of individuals and the necessary state of affairs composed of them but also the contingent states of affairs."<sup>27</sup> To express this differently, through His natural knowledge God comprehends an infinite variety of possible worlds that could exist if He were to will them into being. It is called natural because it exists in the mind of God naturally and essentially, that is, independently of the divine decree. For example, God knows that Peter *could* choose not to reject Christ; or that Judas *could* choose not to betray Christ. As for free knowledge, it is God's knowledge "by which, after the free act of His will, God knew absolutely and determinately, without any condition or hypothesis, which ones from among all the contingent states of affairs were in fact going to obtain" or not going to obtain.<sup>28</sup> Simply put, it is the divine cognition by which God knows everything that has happened, is now happening, or will happen in this existing and contingent world. It is called free because it is based on God's free decision to create this world and not another. For example, Peter could choose not to deny Christ, but that is not what actually happened as God has sovereignly decreed that Peter will deny Christ three times before the rooster crows. Now, between natural knowledge and free knowledge, there exists a third kind of knowledge called middle knowledge:

... the third type is middle knowledge by which, in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty of free choice, He saw in His own essence what each such faculty would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or in that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things—even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite ...<sup>29</sup>

... it should be said (i) that *middle* knowledge partly has the character of *natural* knowledge, since it was prior to the free act of the divine will and since God did not have the power to know anything else, and (ii) that it partly has the character of *free* knowledge, since the fact that it is knowledge of the one part rather than of the other derives from the fact that free choice, on the hypothesis that it should be created in one or another order of things, would do the one thing rather than the other, even though it would indifferently be able to do either of them.<sup>30</sup>

Apparently, middle knowledge derives its name from the fact that it stands in the "middle" between the merely possible and the necessary. It is God's knowledge through which He knows all possible worlds, including what would happen in every possible world if He were to put someone in a given situation. For example, God knows under what circumstances Peter would not have chosen to deny Christ; under what circumstances Judas would have chosen not to betray Christ but to remain faithful to Him, et cetera. In short, taking again Peter's denial of Christ as an example, an illustration of how God's natural, middle, and free knowledge work together would be: Through His natural knowledge God knows Peter *could* either deny or not deny Christ; with His middle knowledge God knows under what circumstances Peter *would* deny Christ and would not deny Christ; and through His free knowledge God knows that Peter *will* deny Christ, which is based on His decree to create this world rather than another.

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<sup>27</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 52, sec. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 52, sec. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 52, sec. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 52, sec. 10.

Now, although middle knowledge shares features with both natural knowledge and free knowledge, Molina stresses that it cannot be reduced to either one of them. It cannot be reduced to natural knowledge because the content of middle knowledge does not lie within the scope of God's power, so that God has no control over what He knows through such knowledge. It cannot be reduced to free knowledge either because it is prior to any free decree of God's will. This seems to be an important feature of Molina's account of middle knowledge. In Molina's words,

Perhaps someone will ask if such middle knowledge should be called free or if it should be called natural. To this question it must be replied, first, that such knowledge should in no way be called *free*, both because *it is prior to any free act of God's will and also because it was not within God's power to know through this type of knowledge anything other than what He in fact knew*. Second, it should likewise not be said that this knowledge is *natural* in the sense of being so innate to God that He could not have known the opposite of that which He knows through it. For if created free choice were going to do the opposite, as indeed it can, then God would have known that very thing through this same type of knowledge, and not what He in fact knows. Therefore, it is no more natural for God to know through this sort of knowledge one part of a contradiction that depends on created free choice than it is for Him to know the opposite part.<sup>31</sup>

Middle knowledge, in other words, is divine knowledge of contingent events that is logically antecedent to God's decree (i.e., prior to God's will). The meaning of Molina's assertion that "God knows future contingents *before* they exist" (as mentioned in the beginning of this section) is now clearer. It appears that Molina is claiming that what God knows through middle knowledge, He knows *before* His divine willing. As Molina emphasizes,

All contingent states of affairs are, I repeat, represented to God *naturally, before* any act or free determination of the divine will; and they are represented not only as being *possible* but also as being *future*—not *absolutely future*, but *future under the condition and on the hypothesis* that God should decide to create this or that order of things and causes with these or those circumstance. Once the determination of the divine will is added ... God knows all the contingent states of affairs with certainty as being future *simply* and *absolutely*, and now *without any hypothesis or condition*.<sup>32</sup>

Why, then, is it important for Molina to hold that God has knowledge of future contingents *before* they exist? We understand from the "logical moment" of God's knowledge in Molina's scheme that the term "*before*" is used non-temporally. Molina holds that God does not have successive temporal experience—in God there is no succession among His cognitive and volitional acts. But "in our way of conceiving," there is a basis in reality for us to distinguish and understand God's knowledge and will. In Molina's words,

It is not simply because things exist outside their causes in eternity that God knows future contingents with certainty; rather, before (in our way of conceiving it, but with a basis in reality). He creates anything at all, He comprehends in Himself—because of the depth of His knowledge—all things which, as a result of all the secondary causes possible by the virtue of His omnipotence, would contingently or simply freely come to be on the hypothesis that He should will to establish things with certain circumstances; and by the fact that through His free will He established in being that order of things causes which He in fact established, He comprehend in His very self and in that decree of His all the things that were in fact freely or

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<sup>31</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 52, sec. 10 (italics mine).

<sup>32</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 50, sec. 15.



contingently going to be or not going to be as a result of secondary causes—and He comprehended this not only prior to anything’s existing in time, but even prior (in our way of conceiving it, with a basis in time) to any created thing’s existing in the duration of eternity.<sup>33</sup>

Now, for Molina, God’s concurrence with this world is intrinsically neutral<sup>34</sup> and there is genuine causal indeterminism in the created world. If God had only natural knowledge of what each secondary cause is *able* to do, and not what it *would* do in any possible situation, God would not have any knowledge of “absolute future contingents”<sup>35</sup> that are produced directly by the secondary cause (e.g., Peter will freely sin in state of affairs D). It is only if God’s concurrence is intrinsically neutral that His own causal contribution to contingent effects produced by the secondary cause does not imply a unique determination of those effects. If there is genuine causal indeterminism in the created world, it is only through having an infallible and comprehensive pre-volitional (in the logical order) divine knowledge of “conditional future contingents”<sup>36</sup>—a knowledge that includes an understanding of which effects *would* result from causal chains involving created causes (e.g., if I engaged in physical exercise more often, I would have better health)—that God can still be fully in control of the world.

Such knowledge is not God’s natural knowledge, because it involves metaphysically contingent states of affairs; neither is it God’s free knowledge, because it involves effects of created causes. It has to be a knowledge that stands in the “middle” which enables God to take into account the free decisions of creatures in His planning, and to will to actualize a possible world that does not violate the freedom of creatures (although He knows with certainty what they will do) and yet coheres with His will as well. In other words, it is a knowledge God uses as the basis to make a decision about the outcome He desires, and then He actualizes the possible world that contains the situations that will produce the outcomes He wants. In short, by His middle knowledge, God selects and actualizes the possible world that best corresponds with His purpose. Consequently, He knows what every creature would do under any possible circumstances or what will take place in the world. In such a way, Molina contends that freedom is upheld without eliminating foreknowledge (and divine grace). As Molina puts it, “God is like a prince who gives horses to those he foresees will ride them to the destination he has in view. Obviously this knowledge does not destroy the freedom of the horsemen.”<sup>37</sup> According to Molina, it is clear from God’s response to David’s consultation in 1 Sam. 23: 10-12 and Jesus’ words concerning Tyre and Sidon in Matt. 11:21 that such knowledge is indicated in the Scripture, for these texts show that God/Jesus knew

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<sup>33</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 49, sec. 8; see also Disputation 53, pt. 1, sec. 20 for Molina’s further explanation concerning this point.

<sup>34</sup> According to the medieval Aristotelians, in order for creatures to exercise genuine causal power, God must act to bring about the relevant effect. When secondary causes produce an effect according to God’s intention, God’s general concurrence is said to be efficacious; but when secondary causes fail to do so and God grants His cooperation, God’s general concurrence is seen to be inefficacious (or merely sufficient). Molina, however, rejects this concept and denies that secondary causes need to be moved by God in order to exercise causal power. Molina argues that God’s concurrence upon this world is neither efficacious nor inefficacious; rather God’s concurrence is “neutral” causal influence rendered by the secondary causes (see Freddoso, “Introduction,” 17-18). The disagreement between Molina and Banez on this point (see Section 2.2.3) had significant impact on the debates of causal indeterminism and freedom during their time.

<sup>35</sup> According to Molina, “absolute future contingents” are the future-tense states of affairs which now obtain, or present-tense states of affairs that will obtain (Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 50, sec. 15)

<sup>36</sup> To put it another way, “conditional future contingents” are the ones that have both false antecedents and false consequences (Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 50, sec. 15-16).

<sup>37</sup> This is a citation of Molina’s words from Brodrick, *Robert Bellarmine*, 200.

what would happen if a certain free action occurred; and God knows it without decreeing the condition or willing the contingency<sup>38</sup> (see Section 2.4).

### 2.2.3 Objections Raised in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Having now grasped the modal notions of foreknowledge and the account of freedom presupposed in Molina's ideas, we are in a position to understand better why his theory was not only condemned by the Dominicans, but why it was rejected by a large number of other Thomists and Protestants as well. The problem of middle knowledge, for those who object to it, did not pertain to God's foreknowledge of future contingents. For example, both Banez and Molina believed that God has prior knowledge of future contingencies. The difference is that for Banez, such knowledge is post-volitional (i.e., according to God's own infallible decrees), whereas for Molina it is pre-volitional (i.e., based on facts which logically come before God's volitional act). Molina contends that God uses His pre-volitional natural knowledge and middle knowledge to choose which circumstances He decides to actualize; only "after" having made this decision, God has knowledge of the real future. Banez rejects the proposal of Molina because it assigns too much to human freedom, a deficiency which he aligns with the Pelagianism condemned by Augustine.<sup>39</sup> But Molina thinks Banez falls into the determinism advocated by the Lutherans and Calvinists, and rejects his view in turn.

Besides the Dominicans, none of the Thomists or the Reformed theologians denied divine foreknowledge of future contingency as well; what they denied was that *future contingencies could be interpreted as sets of future conditions known by God other than as mere possibilities, which are known by God prior to God's willing them*.<sup>40</sup> As we have seen, for Molina's theory to function, the existence of foreknown conditions lying outside God's will is required. The problem is, as pointed out by Richard Baxter (1615-1691), in order for God to have the kind of foreknowledge of future conditionals that Molina ascribes to Him, God would have to be ignorant of His determination and decision. The "if" of the conditional would represent an uncertainty in God Himself, which interferes with the belief that there can be nothing that falls outside the scope of God's will.<sup>41</sup> It is precisely at this point that middle knowledge was problematic to the larger number of Dominicans and Reformed theologians of the seventeenth century. In other words, middle knowledge was rejected not merely because it differed from the theological view that all things happen solely according to the divine decree that God Himself freely willed and directly controlled, but because of the fundamental theological problems inherent in it.

In sum, the preceding investigation revealed the problem of middle knowledge troubling the Dominicans (and other Protestants and the Reformed); the dispute over middle knowledge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries focused on the question of *foreknown conditions*. Or to be more precise, the question was whether there can be any *true knowledge*

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<sup>38</sup> Molina also cites Wisdom 4:11, 14 as Scriptural indication of middle knowledge (see *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 49, sec. 9). As mentioned earlier, this research will include only the generally shared canonical texts.

<sup>39</sup> When viewed in today's philosophical studies, Molina's conception of freedom is obviously indeterministic (in modern terms he is a libertarian). However, we must take note that the dispute between Molina and Banez is different from the contemporary debate between libertarians and compatibilists. Since both Molina and Banez denied the (compatibilists') view that it is possible for a free action to occur by a necessity of nature (see Fredosso, "Introduction," 24-28; Fischer, "Review of *On Divine Foreknowledge*," 387-388).

<sup>40</sup> See Muller, *PRRD* III, 420-421. As pointed out by Muller, it is interesting to note the profound agreement between the Reformed and the Dominicans on this point.

<sup>41</sup> Muller, *PRRD* III, 422-423. This is further illustrated in Chapter 3, see Chp. 3.2.2.

*in God logically or conceptually prior to, and independent of, God's will* (other than God's natural knowledge). Since the concern and aim of this study is to contribute to the discussion of middle knowledge through a biblical-theological examination (the aforesaid question of foreknown conditions, however, will be discussed in Chapter 4), the next issue that requires our attention is to study the Scriptural texts used by its original advocates, in order to find out whether these texts indicate or imply the Molinists' notion of foreknown conditions.

## 2.3 Scriptural Grounds of Molina's Views

The following examination is made from two perspectives: Molina's Scriptural grounds for divine foreknowledge of future contingents (i.e., Ps. 139:3-5; Isa. 41:23 and 48:5; Heb. 4:13 and Jn. 14:29), and his Scriptural grounds for middle knowledge (i.e., 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24).

### 2.3.1 Scriptural Ground of Molina's Views of Divine Foreknowledge?

As shown in Section 2.2.2, we learned that Molina affirms God's foreknowledge of future contingents by referring to Ps. 139:3-5; Isa. 41:23 and 48:5; Heb. 4:13 and Jn. 14:29. We do not find a detailed exegetical explanation of these texts in *Concordia*, but from how he describes God's knowledge and his way of arriving at his description (as shown in Section 2.2.2), we realize that Molina develops his view of future contingents from these texts: we see that Molina first cites these texts to affirm that an omniscient God must have exhaustive knowledge of all things (including all future contingents); from his reference to these texts, he then asserts that future contingents are known by God prior to God's will. Molina provides profound metaphysical analysis in proving the logical possibility of this interpretation; this is not a surprise considering the theological context of his time. Nevertheless, since Molina takes these texts as *biblical evidence* for his understanding of foreknowledge of future contingents, his use of these texts still calls our attention to the following question: do the Scriptural texts Molina cites indicate or imply the underlying notions of Molina's account of divine foreknowledge of future contingents as Molina understands them?

A few remarks must be made before we begin our examination. In what follows, I focus on evaluating Molina's interpretation and use of the Scriptural texts he cites (i.e., whether these texts indicate divine foreknowledge according to how Molina understands them). In doing so, I will compare Molina's interpretations to a small sample of (other) exegetical voices past and present, covering the history of biblical interpretation from the early church to the present day. In this we will be able to find out to what extent Molina's interpretations are exceptional and to what extent they are shared by others. I will then return to these texts in Chapter 6 after I have proposed a framework for a theological appropriation of the Bible, and apply the framework along with the results in this section in reconstructing the biblical-theological message of these texts (i.e., what is the *theological scope* of these texts and what can we infer from them). In other words, the following serves as a first approximation of how these texts might be interpreted in light of biblical scholarship.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Anticipating the role of Childs and Thiselton in this present chapter and their broader discussion in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, attention is provisionally given to the general perspectives of Childs and Thiselton in this connection. Hence, the following investigations engage a diversity of exegetical works, starting from the exegesis of the early church fathers, to the scholars close to Molina's time, as well as contemporary biblical scholarship, in order to aid us in moving from our own horizon or presuppositions to meeting the horizon of the Bible.

Chapter 6 will then build on the examination results of this chapter, and further broaden the study of these texts.

### a. Psalm 139:3-5

<sup>3</sup>You scrutinize when I travel and when I rest; in fact, with all my ways you are familiar. <sup>4</sup>For example, a word need not be on my tongue, for you to know all about it, YHWH. <sup>5</sup>Back and forth you enclose me; you put your hand upon me. Psalm 139:3-5

The early church fathers generally see divine omniscience and omnipresence as the major theological teachings shown in Psalm 139 vv3-5. For Basil the Great, Augustine, and Theodoret of Cyrus, these verses help us better understand the depth of God's knowledge through observing the wonder of divine providence. As for Chrysostom, this passage witnesses the incomprehensible divine omnipresence that God is present everywhere.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, scholars of the seventeenth century generally viewed vv3-5 as biblical evidence of divine omniscience as well. For example, Poole remarks that v3 reflects divine omniscience in the sense that God knows what we intend to speak when we have not yet uttered one word of it.<sup>44</sup> Henry states that vv3-5 affirm God's perfect knowledge of all things.<sup>45</sup> In the nineteenth century, Barnes holds that vv1-18 is a celebration of "God's omniscience and omnipresence, as our ground of confidence and hope."<sup>46</sup>

Contemporary scholars such as Anderson and Holman express a similar view by pointing out that "my path" (or "travel" as translated above) and "all my ways" are often used as a metaphor for any activities. God's complete knowledge of all our thoughts and actions is expressed clearly in vv3-5.<sup>47</sup> The psalmist reacts to God's omniscience with wonder, confessing that God's knowledge is beyond comprehension.<sup>48</sup> Krasovec states that the psalmist is driven to acknowledge the totality of his own limitation and inadequacy (cf. Job 42:2, 3b).<sup>49</sup> In this connection Holman notes the contrast between the human and divine representations shown in vv1-12. On the one hand, it shows "the multiplicity of the psalmist's activities and the agitation of various human possibilities;" on the other hand, it indicates "the majestic superiority of God's knowledge, comprehending everything by the mere fact of presence."<sup>50</sup> We learn from the preceding that such a view, which sees vv3-5 as biblical evidence of divine (omnipresence and) omniscience, has a long history of interpretation. It is not a surprise that this view has become an understanding of this passage with which most Christians are familiar.

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<sup>43</sup> Quentin F. Wesselschmidt, ed., *Psalms 51-150*, vol. VIII of *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 382-385. This portion on different views of classical exegesis is taken from these pages.

<sup>44</sup> Matthew Poole, *Annotations on the Holy Bible*, 2 vols. (London, 1683-1685), repr. under the title *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), Ps. 139:5, in loc. II.

<sup>45</sup> Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Bible*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhcc.xx.cxxxix.html?scrBook=Ps&scrCh=139-139&scrV=0-0#xx.cxxxix-p8.1> (Accessed 28 December 2014).

<sup>46</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes Notes: Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms Volume 1* (1870-72; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 290.

<sup>47</sup> Jan Holman, "Analysis of the Text of Ps. 139," *BZ* 14 (1970): 43-44.

<sup>48</sup> Arnold A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms: 73-150*, vol. 2, part of *The New Century Bible Commentary*, eds. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black (London: Oliphants, 1972), 906.

<sup>49</sup> Krasovec studies the polar expression in Psalm 139 (vv 2a, 3a, 5a are used within single cola; while in vv 8, 9, 11, they extend to whole lines) and concludes that they are used to express totality (see Jože Krašovec, *BZ* 18 (1974), 232-233).

<sup>50</sup> Jan Holman, "The Structure of Psalm CXXXIX," *Vetus Testamentum* 21, fasc. (July 1971): 301.

There are, however, scholars who offer a rather different exegesis of vv3-5. Allen points out that in the Old Testament texts, the associations of the terms “know” (יָדַע), “examine” (חָקַר), “see” (רָאָה) in vv16, 24, and “probe” (בָּחַן) in v23 are used to refer to God’s providential role as judge by way of metaphor—punishing the guilty and acquitting the innocent.<sup>51</sup> The use of these texts in Psalm 139 indicates that the psalmist is in some way under attack. Hence, in vv1b-6, the psalmist is not meditating on divine attribute but praying for the vindication of God’s oracle.<sup>52</sup> Terrien shares the same perspective and states that similar to the prophet Jeremiah, the psalmist begs the Lord to search him (Ps. 139:24; cf. Jer. 6:16).<sup>53</sup> The traditional attributes of God (e.g., omniscience/omnipotence) “should be considered as the tools, not the purposes, of an extraordinary poem of supplication whose subjective imagination reveals an exceptionally intense intimacy with YHWH.”<sup>54</sup> Dahood explains that YHWH’s “palm” or “hand” in v5 describes YHWH’s absolute control of the psalmist’s actions: The psalmist professes his innocence regarding the charges brought against him before YHWH who has complete knowledge of his whole life and who knows him inside and out (as the parallelism of vv2a and 3 and vv2b and 4 conveys).<sup>55</sup> For Coote, the God of Psalm 139 is not about omniscience or omnipotence at all. Rather, this psalm points to the divine control of a creature’s life.<sup>56</sup>

Clearly, in the view of most scholars since the early church to the present time, God’s exhaustive knowledge of all things is portrayed in vv3-5. Although some affirm omniscience as the main theological message of vv3-5; others point to a close interrelatedness between omniscience and providence, in which omniscience is explained in light of the psalmist’s confession of God’s absolute providence. How then are we to understand the indication of God’s knowledge in these verses? What is the meaning/role/function of God’s attributes and their relation with God’s providential work shown in vv3-5 in light of their place in the context of Psalm 139? Consequently, what is the theological message we may glean from Psalm 139? Is it legitimate to hold vv3-5 as evidence of divine foreknowledge of future contingents? These are important questions requiring answers, and I will return to them in Chapter 6 after proposing a theological framework.

At this point, although we have not formulated answers to the questions mentioned above, we can make two conclusions from the preceding investigation. First, as shown above, the early church fathers and the exegetes during and around Molina’s time generally understood vv3-5 as Scriptural evidence of God’s comprehensive knowledge. It seems most likely that Molina’s understanding of vv3-5 is related to how these verses were traditionally interpreted. Second, although at this point we have not reached conclusions regarding the questions above, we can learn from the exegetical works of biblical scholars that even though vv3-5 indicate a certain description of God’s knowledge which informs us of the vastness and remarkable depth of God’s knowledge, these verses do not suggest that God’s knowledge of

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<sup>51</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* (revised edition), vol. 21 of *Word Biblical Commentary*, gen. eds. Bruce M. Metzger and others, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 327.

<sup>52</sup> Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 327.

<sup>53</sup> Terrien, *The Psalms*, 80.

<sup>54</sup> Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 79.

<sup>55</sup> Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III: 101-150*, vol. 16 of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1970), 284-288.

<sup>56</sup> Robert B. Coote, “Psalm 139,” in *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis*, eds. David Jobling and others (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1991), 38.

future contingents is prior to His will (see Section 2.2.2 and Section 2.3.1 for Molina's usage and understanding of these verses). It seems difficult to assume and hold that such a notion or understanding is implied in the description of God's knowledge in vv3-5.

### **b. Isaiah 41:23 and 48:5**

Announce events coming after this that we may know that you are gods. Indeed, do (something) good or do (something) bad. Isaiah 41:23

I announced (it) to you long ago. Before they happened, I let you hear (about them). Lest you say 'My idol did them. My idol and my image commanded them.' Isaiah 48:5

For the early church fathers Jerome and Theodoret of Cyrus, God's declaration in Isa. 41:23 shows the powerlessness of idols—that they are unable to change anything at all in the real world.<sup>57</sup> As to Isa. 48:5, Eusebius of Caesarea explains that though the Israelites are faithless to God's covenant, God foretold them future events through His merciful love, so that they will refrain from engaging with the idols.<sup>58</sup> For Henry, a Protestant theologian close to Molina's time, divine omniscience is indicated in Isa. 41:23 and in Isa. 48:5. God told the Israelites beforehand of their deliverance, so that they may recognize it from God's acts instead of false idols.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Barnes states that the prediction of future events is the highest evidence of omniscience and divinity; God shows that He alone was the true God worthy to be trusted.<sup>60</sup>

Most contemporary biblical scholars generally have a rather similar exegesis of Isa. 41:23 and 48:5. It is commonly agreed that these two passages are closely related to the historical background of the writer. Blenkinsopp, Herbert, and Watts point out that Isa. 41:21-29 is described as a trial in which YHWH summons the nations to attend in a court for a trial with the gods (41:21). The opposing gods are challenged to state their case and offer their legal evidence for claiming the rank of divinity (41:22-23). When they are asked to explain the past and predict the future, their inability to do so reveals that they are false deities (41:24). Then YHWH presents the legal evidence for His claim to sovereignty—He is the only deity capable of both predicting and bringing about events in human history (41:25-28).<sup>61</sup>

The majority of contemporary scholars agree that no prophecy is alluded to in Isa. 48:5, but rather the claim is made that God had regularly fulfilled his prophecies in the past. The point made is certainly not new, but rather a summation of a repeated idea (see 41:22-23; 42:9; 43:9; 44:6-8; 54:21; 46:9-10). Walls and Oswalt argue that God revealed His secrets of what He would do because of the fallen human nature. Humanity refused to see the normal signs that point to the existence of a God who is not subject to their control. Thus, God inspired prophets with specific predictions of coming events. If the events did come true as

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<sup>57</sup> Mark W. Elliott, ed., *Isaiah 40-66*, vol. XI of *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 30.

<sup>58</sup> Elliott, ed., *Isaiah 40-66*, 101.

<sup>59</sup> Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Isaiah to Malachi*, vol. IV of *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc4.Is.xlii.html> (Accessed 28 December 2014).

<sup>60</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes Notes: Notes on the Old Testament: Isaiah Volume 1* (1870-72; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 187.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, vol. 19A of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 2000), 20; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* (revised edition), vol. 25 of *Word Biblical Commentary*, gen. eds. Bruce M. Metzger and others, eds. John D. W. Watts and others (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 118; A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, part of *Cambridge Bible Commentaries on the Old Testament* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 37-39. This paragraph is based on the study of these scholars and summarized from these pages.

predicted, this would be strong evidence that God is who He says He is. God showed the Israelites that it was not the Babylonian gods who had the ability to bring about what was said or prophesied earlier, but only YHWH.<sup>62</sup>

It is interesting to note the similarity between the early church and the contemporary interpretation of Isa. 41:23 and 48:5 (e.g., most of the exegesis relates to the powerless idols, the unfaithful Israel, and the faithful YHWH). On the other hand, Molina and the exegetes close to his time mainly focus on interpreting these two passages as Scriptural indications of divine omniscience or foreknowledge. How we are to evaluate the different views offered by exegetes relates to answering questions such as: How do these two passages function in their respective chapter, as well as in the larger context of the book of Isaiah? Consequently, how are we to explain the meaning/role/function of God's knowledge indicated in these passages in light of our answers to the preceding question? Is it legitimate to conclude that these two verses speak about divine omniscience? These questions can be answered more adequately after proposing a theological framework which we can apply in interpreting these texts. Hence, I will return to them in Chapter 6.

At this juncture, although we have not formulated any answers to the questions mentioned before, we learn from the preceding investigation that none of the scholars deny that divine foreknowledge of future contingents is indicated in Isa. 41:23 and 48:5 (as shown above, the difference is about the interpretation of the meaning and purpose of such an indication). Hence, it seems natural that Molina cites these two verses as his biblical evidence of divine foreknowledge. Nevertheless, as pointed out by most scholars, the comparison made between YHWH and other gods in these two texts illustrates and reveals the great difference between the two; and the expression of who God is in Isa. 48:3-5 informs us about the extent of God's knowledge, in that He knows future events "before they came to pass." From this explanation, it seems that most likely at best divine natural and free knowledge according to the scholastic distinction of divine knowledge (ref. Section 2.2.2) are suggested in Isa. 41:23 and 48:5. The fulfillment of events which God had announced to the Israelites before they happened demonstrates that God foresees all things (by His natural knowledge of everything that could be); and next, He freely appoints future events (which He then knows by His free knowledge of everything that happens in the actual world), and governs the world by His will. In this way, according to what seems to be the mainstream exegesis in biblical scholarship, the description of God as knowing all contingent things "before" they happen does not imply that God's knowledge of future contingents is prior to His will.

### **c. Hebrews 4:13**

Nothing in creation is hidden from God's sight, but everything is uncovered and exposed to the eyes of the one to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:13

Chrysostom interprets that the metaphor of "open" (or "exposed") describes clearly that nothing is able to escape from God's attention. For Ambrose, v13 especially shows that we are unable to conceal our sins from God who is the discernor of our thoughts and intentions. Symeon shares the same view, but stresses that God is the judge who examines all of the ill thoughts of our hearts—even though they are not expressed in words (just as one who has a lustful thought of a woman has already committed adultery with her in one's heart).

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<sup>62</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, part of *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, eds. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 261-263. This whole paragraph is summarized and rephrased from these pages.

Theodoret of Cyrus sees the metaphor of “open” as pointing out that just as sacrificial animals are laid bare and silent, when we are judged for the ungodly things we have done, we receive the punishment silently, realizing that it is justice.<sup>63</sup>

Interpreters of later centuries such as Henry believe that the focus of Heb. 4:11-16 is witnessing to who Christ is; and hence, the person of Christ, particularly His foreknowledge is confessed in v13.<sup>64</sup> Brown also thinks that omniscience is ascribed to Christ v13; such an intimate knowledge of Christ illustrates the superiority of Christ—that in Him we have a great High Priest who knows us much more intimately than we know ourselves.<sup>65</sup> Calvin had a different view. For Calvin, the conjunction of “nothing in creation” is rendered for affirming the truth that no creature can be hidden from the examination God performs by His Word.<sup>66</sup>

Contemporary biblical scholars offer varying understandings of this text as well. Generally they contend that v13 emphasizes a God who judges everything based on two foundations. First, an impression of total exposure and utter defenselessness in the presence of God is sharpened in v13.<sup>67</sup> Bruce explains that this characteristic feature may represent the helpless dilemma of all created persons when brought face to face with their Creator.<sup>68</sup> In other words, v13 confesses that before God everything lays exposed and powerless,<sup>69</sup> nothing escapes His scrutiny, and it is to Him that our final account must be rendered. Koester points out that the impossibility of avoiding God’s examination plays an important role in the common rhetorical strategy of Hebrews.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, it would be difficult for the listeners to exempt themselves from its scope. Second, the writer assumes that the listeners are familiar with the idea of future judgment that will be performed by God, and hence stresses that

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<sup>63</sup> Erik M. Heen and Philip D. W. Krey, eds., *Hebrews*, vol. X of *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 62-64.

<sup>64</sup> Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Acts to Revelation*, vol. VI of *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc6.Heb.v.html?scrBook=Heb&scrCh=4-4&scrV=13-13#Heb.v-p1.4> (Accessed 28 December 2014).

<sup>65</sup> John Brown, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (1862; repr., Kuala Lumpur: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), 221-222.

<sup>66</sup> John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Hebrews*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom44.x.iii.html> (Accessed 28 December 2014).

<sup>67</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, vol. 47 of *Word Biblical Commentary*, gen. eds. Bruce M. Metzger and others (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 103. Notably, there is considerable difference of opinion concerning the meaning of the verb τετραχλισμένα. According to Montefiore and Wilson, the most attested meaning of τετραχλισμένα is “to grip by the neck” or metaphorically “to prostrate” (Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, part of Black’s New Testament Commentaries, gen. ed. Henry Chadwick [London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964], 89); R. Mc L. Wilson, *Hebrews*, part of *New Century Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Ronald E. Clements [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987], 88-89).

<sup>68</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, part of *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, gen. ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 114. Bruce points out that τετραχλισμένα can be used for the description of bending back the neck (e.g., bending back the sacrificial animal’s neck for the fatal stroke) or seizing the throat (e.g., the wrestler’s grip of the antagonist’s throat akin to the bandit’s garrotte, rendering him limp and powerless).

<sup>69</sup> Lane, *Hebrews*, 103. According to Lane, τετραχλισμένα coupled with γυμνά, “uncovered” or “naked,” can only express a state of exposure to God’s scrutiny.

<sup>70</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, vol. 36 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 280. See also Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, part of *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 264-265. According to Ellingworth, the idea that people cannot hide from the sight of God is attested well in classical literature (e.g., Seneca, *Ep.* 83:1; Epict. 2:11, 14), the O.T. Scriptural texts (e.g., Psalm 139), and other Jewish writings (Aristeas 132f.; Bar. 83:3).



anyone who thinks he/she can deceive the Judge—the God who sees and scrutinizes everything—is in trouble.

Gouge’s exposition focuses on another perspective. He sees that the double negative in the first clause, grammatically acceptable in Greek, intensifies the point and therefore indicates the impossibility of concealing anything from God.<sup>71</sup> This paints a vivid picture of who God is: His knowledge differs radically from human knowledge, since humans apprehend things successively one after another, proceeding from an unknown or less known stage to a known or more known. Contrary to human beings, v13 shows that God does not acquire knowledge by successive reasoning. Rather God apprehends by ὁφθαλμοῖς, that is, by “looking” on them, which seems to be one simple act without division and distraction.

It is interesting to note that most early church exegetes interpret v13 as pointing to “God who sees everything” based on the metaphor of everything being “open.” Most contemporary scholars express similar views, although based on a different perspective; for them, the testimony of divine scrutiny identified in v13 shows that no one can escape the *judgment* of God who scrutinizes everything. There are others who see v13 as showing the fundamental difference between God’s knowledge and human knowledge; and some think it points to Christ’s omniscience. How do we evaluate these various interpretations before us relate to questions such as: What can we understand from the setting of v13—its place in Hebrews 4 and its relation to vv7-12? Consequently, what can we conclude about the confession of God that He “sees” and “knows” everything in v13? Is this passage about divine omniscience or foreknowledge, and what are the criteria for making this conclusion? These questions will be taken up in Chapter 6.

#### **d. John 14:29**

And now I have told you before it happens, that when it does happen you may believe. John 14:29

Clearly, vv27-31 is Jesus’ encouragement to the disciples; and in v29, Jesus is referring to the whole process of His death, resurrection, ascension, and giving of the Spirit. Augustine explains that when our Lord says “when it does happen,” He certainly means that they would see Him after His death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father. And when the disciples saw that what Christ predicted actually happened, they would believe that He was indeed the Son of the living God with increased faith—a faith that was once impaired by His death, but now was repaired by His resurrection.<sup>72</sup>

According to Carson and Keener, v29 clarifies that Jesus’ comment in v28 is not to grieve the disciples, but rather to build their faith when the events of which Jesus speaks actually occur, and to reassure them that this is part of God’s plan.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Brodie, Malina and Rohrbaugh also elucidate that Jesus’ words will have a greater effect on the disciples in the future. When the things of which Jesus speaks come to pass and the disciples recall His words,<sup>74</sup> they will preach throughout the whole world all that Jesus had instructed

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<sup>71</sup> William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1980), IV, 76.

<sup>72</sup> Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *New Testament IVb: John 11-21 of Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*: (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007). 157.

<sup>73</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 508; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003). 982.

<sup>74</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expositional Commentary, Volume. 4, John 13:1-17:26* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 222.

them.<sup>75</sup> Morris states that the last verb πιστεύσητε carries the meaning that the disciples will trust their Master even more when they see His words confirmed.<sup>76</sup>

Others explain v29 from another perspective. Witherington, Brown, Moloney and Boice elucidate that this verse emphasizes the reason why “the disciples were to be at peace even though Jesus was to be taken from them.”<sup>77</sup> Jesus repeatedly stated that it would be better for Him to depart and to have the Holy Spirit replace Him, so that they would be led by the Holy Spirit into an understanding of the reason for His death and resurrection.<sup>78</sup> As Moloney states, “the spirit-filled disciples would experience deepening belief which cannot be matched by anything the world can provide.”<sup>79</sup> Lastly, Larsen has a rather different view. Larsen points out that the writer of the Johannine Gospel explicitly portrays Jesus as the omniscient subject of cognition; and v29 is one Johannine text that shows how Jesus knows what will happen in the future course of history.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, for Köstenberger, Jesus’ foreknowledge is highlighted in v29.<sup>81</sup>

We see again the interesting similarity between the early church and most of the contemporary interpretations of this text. We learn that Augustine, Witherington, Carson and those who accord with their views contend that this text is about the positive consequences and positive purpose of Christ’s departure. However, as Christ is referring to His death, resurrection, ascension, and giving of the Spirit, which had not yet happened, v29 indeed implies that Christ knows what will happen before it happens. The question of how are we to interpret the indication of Christ’s foreknowledge in v29 in light of further investigation of biblical-theological scholarship will be considered in Chapter 6. Nevertheless, at this juncture, we observe that similarly to Ps. 139:3-5, Isa. 41:23 and 48:5, and Heb. 4:13, divine foreknowledge is shown in Jn. 14:29, and although there have been different views of how to interpret this passage, at this point, at a very general level, we learn from the exegesis of various scholars that Molina’s understanding of divine foreknowledge (i.e. God’s knowledge of future contingents is prior to His will) involves assumptions which go beyond what can be derived from Jn. 14:29.

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<sup>75</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 585; Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 470; Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 232.

<sup>76</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 585.

<sup>77</sup> Ben Witherington III, *John’s Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 248.

<sup>78</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, XIII-XXI*, vol. 29A of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1970), 655.

<sup>79</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, part of *Sacra Pagina Series*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 413.

<sup>80</sup> Kasper Bro Larsen, “Narrative Docetism: Christology and Storytelling in the Gospel of John,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 350-352. Larsen contends that the Johannine Jesus knows everything, including the future (e.g., 6:5-6; 13:11, 21, 19, 38; 14:29; 16:30; 18:4, 32; 19:28; 21:17), the inner thoughts of others (e.g., 2:24-25; 5:6; 6:61, 64; 16:19); His own death and glorification (e.g., 12:23; 13:1; 17:1); and His return to the Father (e.g., 6:62; 7:33; 13:3; 14:12; 16:5, 10, 16-33).

<sup>81</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, part of *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, eds. Robert Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 445.

### 2.3.2 Scriptural Grounds of Molina's Knowledge of Counterfactuals?

We find a limited number of evaluations of the Scriptural evidence for middle knowledge, partly because the relevant texts seem inconclusive on the matter to many. Thus, there is certainly a need to examine whether this is indeed the case. A fair and appropriate judgment as to whether Scripture warrants middle knowledge needs to begin by investigating what is the biblical-theological message of the texts traditionally put forward to support it. We will now continue this evaluation by examining whether Molina has legitimately used 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24 as Scriptural evidence of middle knowledge.

#### a. 1 Samuel 23:6-13

<sup>6</sup>After Abiathar, the Son Ahimelech, had fled to David, he went down with David to Keilah, with the ephod in his hand. <sup>7</sup>Saul, who had been told that David had come to Keilah, said, 'God has handed him over into my hand for he has boxed himself by going to a city with doors and a bar.' <sup>8</sup>Saul summoned all his troops for war to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. <sup>9</sup>Because David knew that Saul was conspiring evil against him, he said to Abiathar, the priest, 'Bring the ephod here.' <sup>10</sup>David prayed, 'O YHWH, God of Israel, your servant has heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city on account of me. <sup>11</sup>Now, will Saul come down as your servant has heard? O YHWH God of Israel, tell your servant.' YHWH replied, 'He will come down.' <sup>12</sup>David then asked, 'Will the citizens of Keilah hand me and my men into the hand of Saul?' YHWH answered, 'They will hand you over.' <sup>13</sup>So David and his men, some 600 in number, rose and went out of Keilah and wandered wherever they chose. When Saul was informed that David had escaped from Keilah, he stopped his military manoeuvre. 1 Samuel 23:6-13

The early church seemingly did little exegetical work on this passage. In the early Middle Ages Bede focuses on David's dwelling in the wilderness and interprets it as an allegory of Christ's presence with the tested believers during the age of aridness, as well as when they finally appear before God.<sup>82</sup> As for Molina, he contends that,

in vv10-12 David consulted the Lord about whether Saul was going to descend upon Keilah, and the Lord responded, 'He will descend.' He consulted again, about whether the men of Keilah, who had received nothing but kindness from David, were going to hand him and the men with him over into the hands of Saul. And the Lord responded, 'They will hand you over.' Notice, God knew these two future contingents, which depended on human choice, and He revealed them to David. Yet they never have existed and never will exist in reality, and thus they do not exist in eternity either.<sup>83</sup>

Rijssen, a Protestant theologian arguing against Molina here, asserts that the possibility or conditional contingency that "if David had stayed in Keilah, he would have been betrayed" is merely a plan and intention of the people of Keilah, rather than an action that might have hypothetically occurred.<sup>84</sup> Hence, the betrayal at Keilah is no event at all; and prior to David's decision not to remain there, it seems to be a pure possibility arguably belonging to divine natural knowledge. Furthermore, the future conditional of "if David ...", when posed as pure possibility prior to God's decree, is nothing more than a logical hypothesis. Insofar as it is nothing, there is no conditional contingency for God.<sup>85</sup> Likewise Ridgley asserts that as a pure possibility, the betrayal of David if he had stayed in Keilah is

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<sup>82</sup> John R. Franke, ed., *Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel*, vol. IV of *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 300-301.

<sup>83</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 49, sec. 9.

<sup>84</sup> Leonard van Rijssen, *Summa theologiae* (Ann Arbor: UMI 1999), III. xxiv, argument 5, objection 1.

<sup>85</sup> Rijssen, *Summa theologiae*, III. xxiv, controversia, obj.3.

simply an unfulfilled intention in the minds of the people in Keilah, and it eventually shown to be a false proposition as it is not God's providential will.<sup>86</sup> In other words, similar to Rijssen, Ridgley says that the conditional "if David ..." is not a future contingent at all. As Mastricht asserts, there is nothing prior to God's decree but pure possibility: "God's decree establishes the order of things—it does not proceed from foreknowledge of the order."<sup>87</sup>

Most contemporary biblical scholars, such as Tsumura, Kline, Mauchline, Smith, and Ackroyd, generally focus on solving the somewhat awkward position of v6. According to them, the narrative sequence and development of vv6-13 indicate that David sought divine guidance regarding two questions: Would Saul actually destroy Keilah in order to destroy David? If that was Saul's purpose, would the people of Keilah surrender David in order to save their city? Scripture shows that David accepted the answer from God.<sup>88</sup> Klein interprets v6-13 within the context of the entirety of Chapter 23, and explains that the narrative highlights the message of "Yahweh did not surrender David into Saul's hands (v14). That providential note sums up the theological function of the encounters between Saul and David in this chapter."<sup>89</sup> The strong comparison of David having only six hundred men and Saul leading "all his troops" (v8) to besiege David shows that even during such a critical condition, the faithless citizens of Keilah and the Ziphites (vv19-24) cannot end David's freedom, as YHWH did not give him into Saul's hand. Moreover, the contrast is shown in the spiteful plot of Saul and the military victories of David which came by divine permission; and the presence of divine oracles throughout David's journey recorded in the chapter (vv9-12) accentuate the same YHWH who gave the Philistines into David's hand and would not give David to Saul.<sup>90</sup>

There are a few who understood vv1-13 differently. For McCarter, the purpose of vv1-13 is to highlight "the value of the priest and ephod to David at a particular juncture in the larger story of David's rise."<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Bergen explains that the central event in vv7-13 is "David's pursuit of divine counsel by means of the ephod" through which this passage is related to the themes and theological intent of 1 Samuel, such as David seeking for divine approval rather than acting according to his own intention; David's vital relationship with God; the contrast between David and Saul who fails to communicate with God.<sup>92</sup>

The studies of contemporary biblical scholars have helped to solve the narrative difficulty that seems to occur in 1 Sam. 23:10-13. We see that generally there has been little

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<sup>86</sup> Thomas Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity: wherein the Christian religion is explained and defended: being the substance of several lectures on the Assembly's Larger Catechism* (New York: Readex Microprint Corporation, 1972), 155.

<sup>87</sup> Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia* (Switzerland: Inter Documentation Co. AG, microfiches, 1916), II.xiii.22.

<sup>88</sup> David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 551-556; ed. John Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, part of *New Century Bible* (London: Oliphants, 1971), 159-160; Henry Preserved Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1898), 210-212; Peter R. Ackroyd, *The First book of Samuel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 181-182.

<sup>89</sup> Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, vol. 10 of *Word Biblical Commentary*, gen. eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1983), 233.

<sup>90</sup> The preceding summary of Klein's explanation is taken and rephrased from Klein, *1 Samuel*, 230-233.

<sup>91</sup> P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel*, vol. 8 of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980), 371-372.

<sup>92</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *1,2 Samuel*, part of *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 234.

controversy raised against the results of their studies. It is accepted that the text describes David's consultation for God's guidance and receiving answers from God. Clearly, the problem of this passage lies more with the theological implications one derives from it. As shown above, Rijssen and Ridgley argued from a broader theological understanding of God that there is no conditional contingency for God.<sup>93</sup> Klein argues more directly from the historical context and content of vv6-13, and points out that this passage speaks about divine providence. In addition to the exegesis of other scholars, all these show that 1 Sam. 23:10-13 does not aim at providing an idea about God's knowledge. Although it indicates that God knows what would have happened had another possibility occurred, the conditional of "if David ..." if understood from the narrative of 1 Samuel 23, carries a theological function that points to God's providential guidance of David as he fled from Saul. If this is the case, it is difficult to take this passage as biblical evidence of God's knowledge of future contingents arising from human action, which is how Molina understands it; or to explain it with assumptions which are not based on and even beyond what the text is speaking about. I will return to this in Chapter 6 and then make a final conclusion regarding the interpretation of this passage.

#### **b. Matthew 11:20-24**

<sup>20</sup>Then He began to reproach the cities in which He had done the majority of His miracles, because they did not repent: <sup>21</sup>Woe to you, Chorazain; woe to you, Bethsaida; because if the miracles that have been done among you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup>Nevertheless I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgement than for you. <sup>23</sup>And you, Capernaum: Will you be exalted up to heaven? You will go down to Hades. Because if the miracles that have been done among you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. <sup>24</sup>Nevertheless I tell you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you. Matthew 11:20-24

Jerome elucidates that Jesus laments Chorazin and Bethsaida in this passage, for even after witnessing the great miracles of Jesus, they did not repent; and the consequence of rejecting the prophecy of Jesus after receiving so much privilege is sinking to hell. Similarly, for Hilary, this passage shows that it was necessary for the Jews to be admonished due to their faithlessness. Chrysostom points out that the goal of the comparison between cities Jesus made and of the use of harsh words in this passage is to call the Israelites to repentance in every possible way.<sup>94</sup>

For Molina, it is clear from v21 that God knows that there would have been repentance in sackcloth and ashes among the Tyronians and Sidonians on the hypothesis that the wonders that were worked in Chorazain and Bethsaida had been worked in Tyre and Sidon. But because the wonders that could hypothetically occur there were not in fact actualized, this repentance never did and never will exist in reality—and yet it was a future contingent dependent on the free choice of human beings.<sup>95</sup>

Some contemporary biblical scholars such as Stock and Goulder think that eschatological judgment and repentance constitute the key theological messages of vv6-13,

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<sup>93</sup> The question of whether God knows conditionals conditionality is certainly a question that requires further investigation. I will return to this point in Chapter 4.

<sup>94</sup> Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 1-13 of Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 1a* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 226-228. This paragraph on different views of classical exegesis is taken from these pages.

<sup>95</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 49, sec. 9.

rather than the pronouncements on the destiny of the Gentiles. The Matthean community that settled in the districts of Chorazain, Bethsaida and Capernaum, knows Israel's history and the ending of Israel's unrepentant cities. The writer uses this knowledge to emphasize Jesus' call to conversion and repentance.<sup>96</sup> The community is warned not to ignore the miracles of Jesus as they had previously done.<sup>97</sup> As Harrington states, the text is a warning not to stand on one's spiritual privileges; what Israel saw as the just punishment of its enemies remains a possibility for itself if it fails to respond correctly to Jesus.<sup>98</sup>

There are some who mainly emphasize God's judgment in their exposition. Witherington, Carter, and France argue that this passage shows the wickedness of people's hearts and their final ending—though they witness Jesus' miracles, they refused to repent; as such, they will stand under judgment.<sup>99</sup> Holding to the same view, Hagner maintains that the reality of the future judgment of the cities of Galilee points to the supreme importance of Jesus' mission and message: "The meaning of the failure of Jesus' mission to Israel will remain unclear until the disciples grapple with the problem of the failure of their mission to Israel (cf. Ro. 11:11–12, 25)."<sup>100</sup> Osborne thinks that the judgment Jesus pronounces in this passage leads to two theological messages: God is omniscient, and everyone will receive what they deserve; just as there are degrees of rewards, there are probably degrees of punishment as well—the Galilean cities which have been given more will receive a more severe penalty.<sup>101</sup>

Other biblical scholars offer different emphases. Albright, Mann, Hill, and Keener focus on showing the connection of the cities mentioned in vv20-24 with the Old Testament prophecies (cf. Isa. 23:1-7; Jer. 2-11; Ezek. 26-28; Am. 2:4-3:8).<sup>102</sup> Nolland explains this text from its structural setting and states that vv20-24, 25-27, and vv28-30 are put together as a set ("rejected and accepted by;" "hidden from and revealed to"), but together they provide a "part two" to the section that began at 11:2.<sup>103</sup> Lastly, Craig thinks this text is probably religious hyperbole meant to underscore the depth of the depravity of the cities in which Jesus preached.<sup>104</sup> But Cook postulates that conditional prophecy may be viewed as

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<sup>96</sup> Floyd V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960), 140-141; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 438.

<sup>97</sup> Augustine Stock, *The Method and Message of Matthew* (Collegeville: A Michael Glazier Book, 1989), 189-190; M. D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974), 360.

<sup>98</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. *The Gospel of Matthew*, part of *Sacra Pagina Series* (Collegeville: A Michael Glazier Book, 1991), 165-166.

<sup>99</sup> Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 166; Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 255-256; Ben Witherington III, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Matthew* (Macon: Smith & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2006), 236; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 436-439.

<sup>100</sup> Donald A Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, vol. 33A of *Word Biblical Commentary*, gen. eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, eds. John D. W. Watts and Ralph P. Martin (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 312.

<sup>101</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, gen. ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 432-435.

<sup>102</sup> W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, vol. 26 of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), 142-143; David Hill, ed., *The Gospel of Matthew*, part of *New Century Bible* (London: Oliphants, 1977), 203-204; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 344.

<sup>103</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 465.

<sup>104</sup> Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 137; cf. below, chapter 4.

indicative of middle knowledge as God warns the people by presenting them with a genuinely possible future.<sup>105</sup>

As shown above, though scholars approach vv20-24 from different perspectives, most generally appeal to the historical context of this passage and the core theological message of the book of Matthew, and conclude that vv20-24 not only show how Israel is less receptive to Jesus' message to repent than their heathen neighbors, but also warn them and call them to repentance. Hence, similar to 1 Sam. 23:6-13, according to the exegesis of various scholars, there can hardly be any convincing indication or theological implication of middle knowledge in Matt. 11:20-24. I will return to this text in Chapter 6 as well to make a final conclusion of the interpretation of this passage.

## 2.4 Evaluation

We are now at the stage where we can make an overall concluding evaluation of our preceding findings from two perspectives: the validity of the Scriptural evidence given by Molina (2.4.1); and the role of the Bible in formulating his arguments (2.4.2).

### 2.4.1 Theological and Hermeneutical Issues in Molina's Views

We have gained some understanding of the theological problems inherent in the theory of middle knowledge for the Dominicans and Protestant groups through the study in Section 2.2.2 and Section 2.2.3. As pointed out in these two sections, for them, middle knowledge is problematic because when it interprets God's knowledge of future contingents as future conditions known by God prior to His willing them, it sacrifices the biblical notion of God, making God dependent on others for His determination of reality and actual decisions. Hence, I have proceeded to examine the Scriptural texts Molina cites to explain divine foreknowledge and biblical evidence of middle knowledge. Through a succinct hermeneutical examination in light of the main lines of interpretation running from the early church to contemporary biblical scholarship we were led to a first approximation of the horizon of the biblical texts we studied. Putting aside the question of how we are to make evaluations of the different exegetical results placed before us (e.g., what are the legitimate evaluating criteria and the reasons for selecting such criteria) that will be addressed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, at this juncture we are able to make the following evaluations.

We learn from our investigations of Ps. 139:3-5; Isa. 41:23 and 48:5; Jn. 14:29 and Heb. 4:13 that indeed none of these texts denies divine foreknowledge of future contingents, and one may even derive from some of these texts such implication (e.g., God is depicted as one who knows the future and who is directing the course of world history toward His foreseen ends; God knows all things that are and are not, will be and will not be). As shown in our investigations, some of these texts in one way or another imply the knowledge that God *must* have and the knowledge that God has *freely* according to His will. If one would want to derive from these texts a theological concept or distinction of God's knowledge, it seems that the concepts of divine natural and free knowledge most frequently encountered among the Thomists and Calvinists are the concepts indicated in some of these texts. Nevertheless, these texts do not speak about God's foreknowledge as how Molina defines it (i.e., in terms of pre-volitional knowledge of future contingents). It is also important to note

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<sup>105</sup> Robert R. Cook, "God, Middle Knowledge and Alternative Worlds," *Evangelical Quarterly* 62 (1990), 299. See Section 4.6.1.a for a further illustration of Cook's view.

that most of the Scriptural interpretations during or close to Molina's time do not understand these texts in this way. Thus, Molina does not understand foreknowledge of future contingents as how it is customarily understood. Although he stresses that there is no temporal succession in God's knowledge, and he sees divine foreknowledge of future contingents as sets of conditions foreknown by God in a logical sense, our examination shows that there is no such "logical" indication provided by Scriptural texts. These texts do not imply God's foreknowing a future contingent apart from His willing, as Molina holds.

As for 1 Sam. 23:10-12 and Matt.11:20-24, although these passages indicate God's knowledge of what would have happened had another possibility obtained, this does not prove that God knows conditional contingents according to Molina's view. More importantly, our investigation of the historical and theological aspects of these texts demonstrated that they do not seem to imply middle knowledge. Rather, David's search for God's guidance and receiving answers from Him in 1 Sam. 23:10-12 points to divine providence; and Jesus' statements in Matt.11:20-24 are a comparison made between certain historical cities and the Matthean community in order to call the audience to repentance. These are important hermeneutical results that have been largely ignored in both sixteenth century and contemporary discussions of middle knowledge. By far, Molina and most Molinists focus on the possibility of David staying in Keilah and being betrayed by its inhabitants (but not the theological function of this conditional statement); as well as the possibility that what Jesus said would have happened to the cities of Tyre and Sidon (but not the message that Jesus is communicating).

#### **2.4.2 The Role of the Bible and Its Relation with Molina's Views**

Our study in Section 2.3 showed that Molina did attempt to include Scriptural reflection in the process of formulating his theory of middle knowledge. However, we learn from his use of Scripture, his formulation and the structure of this theory that he provides strong conceptual arguments of how such understanding is formed through metaphysical analysis. It seems that most likely Molina appeals to Scripture to support his philosophical conclusions without making biblical interpretation a significant part of his arguments. We also see from the history of the papal examination of middle knowledge that the appeal to church tradition and metaphysical analysis play a major role (see Bellarmine's letters and reports to the Pope). Now, again, considering the broader theological context during Molina's time, we find that the post-Tridentine Roman Catholic theology was largely dominated by Thomism, and that as a result of its close engagement with scholastic theology, philosophy was viewed as a valid and legitimate way of formulating theological arguments and interpreting Scripture. In this light, it is not surprising that proving the possibility of the logical reconciliation of foreknowledge and freedom through metaphysics played a decisive role in Molina's argument.

Nevertheless, as already mentioned, Molina uses Scriptural texts and asserts that there is Scriptural ground for his view of divine foreknowledge and middle knowledge. In addition, given the fact that the problem of foreknowledge-freedom arises from theological claims rooted in centuries of reflection upon Scripture, it is legitimate to hold that a genuine proposal for the reconciliation of the questions about foreknowledge-freedom should conform to the message of Scripture. We see that in addition to the complicated issues involved in solving the dispute between the Dominicans and Jesuits, the theological and hermeneutical issues arising from Molina's use of Scripture reflect the less substantial role of the Bible in the formation and discussion of middle knowledge.



## 2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the theory of middle knowledge within its historical and theological context. We learn that since Molina's goal was to solve a theological problem for which he certainly cited Scriptural evidence to support his arguments, a hermeneutical investigation of the Scriptural texts Molina uses is necessary in addition to all the extensive analytical examinations done since the sixteenth century up to its current discussion. Hence, the Scriptural texts cited by Molina are studied through the lenses of a sample of exegetes since the early church till the present day, and the hermeneutical and theological problems of Molina's understandings of these texts are presented as well. The results of this chapter will be carried on to the last two chapters, in which they will be evaluated in light of a proposed theological framework formulated through studying the hermeneutical-theological views of Childs and Thiselton.

I am aware that the validity and soundness of Molina's arguments are to be evaluated on the basis of the relevant philosophical issues (which will be briefly addressed in Chapter 4) since middle knowledge is fundamentally a philosophical theory. It is certainly not the intention of this research to downplay the valuable analytic arguments presented by Molina, or to focus on an issue that is not Molina's main concern. My intention, however, is to show that the way to find decisive arguments regarding the discussion and evaluation of middle knowledge is to look into the missing gap as mentioned in Chapter 1—the biblical-theological aspect of its discussion that interrelates biblical, historical and hermeneutical findings (rather than just strategies for dealing with a problem that have already been discussed for a long time).

Let us now proceed to the next chapter in which we investigate how middle knowledge is viewed and evaluated as time moved on from the period of Molina into the post-reformation era. In studying Herman Bavinck, we will see a rather different method of handling the relationship between metaphysics, church tradition, and Scripture that brings about a different understanding and evaluation of middle knowledge as well.

## Middle Knowledge and Reformed Theology: Herman Bavinck

In the knowledge of God things are interrelated in the same web of connections in which they occur in reality ... every human decision and act is motivated, rather, by that which precedes it, and in that web of connections it is included in the knowledge of God.

Herman Bavinck<sup>1</sup>

### 3.1 Introduction

#### 3.1.1 Bavinck's Role in this Study

Before I sketch the outline of this chapter, let me briefly mention why Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) is selected for this study. Bavinck has often been characterized as a man who stood between the two worlds of orthodoxy and modernism.<sup>2</sup> He was described by one of his contemporaries as “a Secession preacher and a representative of modern culture.”<sup>3</sup> Such a comment is certainly not inaccurate, as Bavinck's writings and ministry show that he consistently worked towards “a Christian worldview that incorporated what was true in both pietism and modernism, while above all honoring the theology and confessions of the Reformed tradition dating from Calvin.”<sup>4</sup> Such a striking duality continues to be reflected in his mature theology in the *Reformed Dogmatics*. Bavinck's work that discusses claims about divine foreknowledge in light of Scripture and Reformed theology is an invaluable resource to help us grasp the post-reformation Reformed understanding of God's knowledge, especially since Bavinck was one of the significant Reformed theologians who engaged in substantial discussion on middle knowledge. Moreover, given the context of Bavinck's time when the modern worldview was seeking to understand the world and humanity apart from God, Bavinck's attempts to renew the vitality of theology by engaging in the existential struggle with the intellectual climate of his time, in many ways seem an increasingly appropriate challenge for Christians in the twenty-first century. By focusing primarily on Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*, we hope to learn how middle knowledge has been

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (hereafter *RD*), vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 202-203.

<sup>2</sup> Bavinck initially studied at Kampen Theological School (operated by the Reformed Church), but after a year, he expressed his desire to study with the University of Leiden's theological faculty, which was renowned for its radically modernist and scientific approach to theology. This decision stunned his parents and his church community. Bavinck explained that his desire is “to become acquainted with the modern theology firsthand” and to receive “a more scientific training than the theological school is presently able to provide” (cited by John Bolt in Herman Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundation of Creation Theology*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999], 11).

<sup>3</sup> Cited by Bolt in Bavinck, *In the Beginning*, 12. The contemporary cited is the Reformed jurist A. Anema, who was a colleague of Bavinck at the Free University of Amsterdam.

<sup>4</sup> Bavinck, *In the Beginning*, 11-12. As pointed out by Bolt, such assessments of Bavinck are given by F. H. von Meyenfeldt in “Prof. Dr. Herman Bavinck: 1854-1954, ‘Christus en de Cultuur,’” *Polemios* 9 (15 October 1954); as well as by G. W. Brillenburg-Wurth in “Bavincks Levenstijd,” *Gereformeerd Weekblad* 10/25 (17 December 1954). Although Bavinck shared the tension he faced between the two worlds, his willingness to take modern thought and science into serious consideration and his commitment to Reformed theology and spirituality is a hallmark of his work. For example, such a character and attitude is shown in Bavinck's approach to apologetics. Bavinck states that “Theology is an independent science and has its own *principia* and does not borrow them from philosophy.” No doubt faith is always pre-supposed in Bavinck's apologetics, though he appreciates modern thoughts (see Bavinck, *In the Beginning*, 56).

understood in the Reformed tradition, and in turn, also gain insights into the role of Scripture in our investigation of God's knowledge.

### 3.1.2 An Outline of What Follows

This chapter is devoted to studying how middle knowledge has been understood in the Reformed theological tradition as expounded in the work of Bavinck. As Bavinck developed his theology in line with the Reformed tradition, at times moving beyond it as well, it is legitimate to begin our study of Bavinck with how the Reformed orthodox of the sixteenth and seventeenth century understand the relationship between theology and the Bible (3.2.1); followed by the reasons why the Reformed (and other Protestants) refuted middle knowledge (3.2.2). I then investigate the foundation of Bavinck's method, with special attention given to his explanation of the organic nature of Scripture (3.3.1) and the organic relationship between Scripture and theology (3.3.2), in order to set the stage for Bavinck's treatment of divine foreknowledge (3.4.1) and his critique of middle knowledge (3.4.2). This investigation enables us to address the key areas: the differences between Molinism and Reformed Orthodoxy (3.5.1); how Bavinck's use of Scripture in refuting middle knowledge is similar to and different from that of his Reformed predecessors (3.5.2); and the role of the Bible in Bavinck's method of theology (3.5.3).

## 3.2 The Reformed Doctrine of *Scientia Dei*

We have seen from the historical overview of the theory of middle knowledge in Chapter 2 that while being accepted by the Jesuits, Arminians and Socinians, the response it received from other theologians and exegetes, including the Reformed thinkers of its time, has been largely negative. The Reformed objection to middle knowledge is certainly closely related to the Reformed doctrine of God as a whole as it was developed from the theological principles and method of the Reformed orthodox. Hence, the following begins with a brief overview of the major theological principles of the Reformed orthodox (3.2.1), in order to put us in a position to better understand the problem of middle knowledge according to the Reformed doctrine of God (3.2.2).

### 3.2.1 The *Principia* of the Reformed Orthodox

Studies on the Reformed doctrine of God show that although there were various developments of terminology and method during the sixteenth and seventeenth century,<sup>5</sup> at the most fundamental level, the basic theological framework of Protestant theology remained unaltered (e.g., the identification of Scripture as the prior norm and sole ultimate authority in Christian doctrine, with tradition clearly subordinate to Scripture, was not changed).<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, the Reformed Orthodox offers a series of distinctions concerning divine knowledge which distinguishes God's knowledge in terms of its varied objects. For example: *scientia necessaria sive naturalis* and *libera sive voluntaria* (see Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomsom [Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 1978], 72-74); *scientia simplicis intelligentiae* and *scientia visionis* (see Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 74); *scientia practica* and *scientia speculativa sive theoretica* (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II/1: *The Doctrine of God*, ed. Geoffrey William & Thomas Forsyth Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker et al [Edinburgh: T & T Clarks, 1957], 567) *scientia generalis* and *scientia particularis*, *scientia approbationis* and *scientia reprobationis* (Thomas Watson, *God's Anatomy upon Man's Heart* [Sermon, 27 December 1649], 152).

<sup>6</sup> This emphasis unites the Reformation with the Protestant orthodoxy, as well as with the major medieval scholastic teachers, including Aquinas and Scotus (see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed*

overall pattern or approach of the Reformed doctrine of God (e.g. treating the divine essence and attributes as well as the doctrine of the Trinity) during this period abided by the fundamental definition of Scripture as *principium cognoscendi* (principle of knowing),<sup>7</sup> and acknowledged a hermeneutical role of Scriptural texts as providing *principia* or *axiomata* from which conclusions could be drawn. Thus for the Reformed, the deductive derivation of positive theological formulations indicated the logical process of drawing conclusions from principles or axioms, but any firm ground of theological conclusions was not to be found in the logical process as such; instead, logic or reason was used as an instrument to understand the implications of the *principium cognoscendi*, which must be the source of the individual principles or axioms leading to theological argumentation.<sup>8</sup>

In short, clearly, the development of scholastic terminology in the Reformed doctrine of God does not diminish the commitment to the emphasis on the authority of Scripture or alter the patterns of biblical interpretation developed during the era of the Renaissance and Reformation. *Sola Scriptura* remains the *principium unicum* (sole principle)<sup>9</sup> that cannot be replaced in the theological formulation of the Reformed Orthodox doctrine of God.

### 3.2.2 The Problem of *Scientia Media*

The above provides us with some crucial background to understand why middle knowledge became a profound problem for Protestantism and for the Reformed tradition. Let me refer again to the biblical example cited by Molina in 1 Sam. 23 to elaborate how the above mentioned is demonstrated in the Reformed interpretation of this passage. According to Molina, although God obtains knowledge of conditional contingencies such as “if David had stayed the night at Keilah, he would have been betrayed,” God knows it without decreeing the condition or willing the contingency.<sup>10</sup> This particular kind of divine knowing was denied by the majority of the Reformed theologians on the basis that there is no such knowing according to the Scriptural teaching about God’s essence. Notably, as pointed out in Chapter 2, none of the Reformed theologians denied the divine foreknowledge of future contingency; what they denied was that future contingencies could be interpreted as sets of foreknown conditions known by God rather than as mere possibilities, and also known by God prior to God willing them.<sup>11</sup> As Francis Turretin (1623-1687) explains, the problem was not over “necessary conditional future things, which on this or that given condition cannot but take place,” such as “if the sun rises, it will be day”. The problem concerned “contingent conditional future things which—the condition posited—can be or not be.”<sup>12</sup> By intentionally placing middle knowledge between God’s natural and free knowledge, middle knowledge does not merely understand God as having willed a particular world or preferring a particular

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*Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, vol. III, *The Divine Essence and Attributes* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003], 403). Hereafter referred as *PRRD* III.

<sup>7</sup> According to the Protestant scholastics, theology has two *principia* (foundations): Scripture (i.e., the revelation) and God (i.e., the one who reveals himself)—as God is the one who reveals Himself in Scripture, God Himself is the *principium essendi* of theology. The *principium cognoscendi* is then a term referring to Scripture as the epistemological principle of theology, without which there could be no true knowledge of God and therefore no theological system; see Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 244-245.

<sup>8</sup> The paragraph on the Reformed principle of the doctrine of God is drawn from Muller, *PRRD* III, 99.

<sup>9</sup> *Principium unicum* is a term applied to Scripture as the sole source of theology (see Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 245).

<sup>10</sup> This is discussed in Chapter 2. See Chp. 2.3.2 for a more detailed explanation.

<sup>11</sup> Muller, *PRRD* III, 420-421.

<sup>12</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. III, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992), xiii. 6, 8.

world over another, but discerns a kind of divine cognition arising from future contingencies *prior* to or *apart* from the divine willing/decreed.<sup>13</sup>

Many of the Reformed theologians, following Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676) and Abraham Heidanus (1597-1678), saw the theory of middle knowledge as introducing a new form of determination into the universal order. They held that while this theory claims to discuss future contingents lying outside of God's will, it in fact introduces the concept of a world order where events and things are not caused by God. The notion not only had consequences for God's essence and His determination, "but would also to the same degree impede the divine establishment of all things in their necessity, contingency, and freedom."<sup>14</sup> Edward Leigh (1602-1671) thus commented that middle knowledge "is a great dishonour to God, as if He knew the futuration of things by second causes." That would render God's knowledge uncertain and dependent on the creature.<sup>15</sup> Or as Voetius argues,

if there is middle knowledge in God, dependent on "external objects," then there is an eternal priority of these creatures and creaturely events over God and "creatures will not depend on God alone, but God will instead depend on creatures as his exemplars." This divine dependence, in turn, would argue the absolutely certain existence of future contingents "prior to all divine decrees" ... (and) introduces a causal necessity into their effects—that is, the necessity of the consequent, which, from the perspective of the consequent act or thing itself is an absolute necessity. A radical conception of foreknowledge that insists on a divine foreknowledge of conditionals as conditional, in other words, reifies the conditionals, places events and things outside of the divine purpose, and hypothesizes an order of occurrences that, therefore, impinges negatively on the divine willing.<sup>16</sup>

The Reformed exegetes draw out their theological point from Scriptural passages which indicate the absolute omniscience and all-comprehensive willing of God, and the relationship between them.

First, they point to Scriptural evidence of divine omniscience, such as: the prediction of King Ahab's death "by an arrow shot at random" (1 Ki. 22:17-18, 34); the bondage and deliverance of Israel from Egypt foretold four hundred years in advance (Gen. 25:13-14); God's prediction to Moses of Pharaoh's obstinacy (Ex. 3:19-20); Joseph's advancement in Egypt and the various dreams he interpreted with the power of God, which were all contingent events; and God's prediction of the unexpected cruelty of Hazael upon his ascension to the throne, which is contrary to Hazael's own expectation (2 Ki. 8:12-13); as well as the prediction of Jesus Christ about his betrayal by Judas prior to Judas' decision to commit the crime (Jn. 6:70-71).<sup>17</sup> In sum, God knows all future events with certainty by Himself—this quality of God knowing everything is called omniscience. It follows that God not only knows things as an individual, but He knows the immediate circumstances and incidental properties of all things.<sup>18</sup> By implication, God knows all possible contingents and the future.

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<sup>13</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* III, xiii.5-8.

<sup>14</sup> Muller, *PRRD* III, 425.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Leigh, *A System or Body of Divinity*, vol. II (London: E. Griffin, 1654), vii.

<sup>16</sup> Muller, *PRRD* III, 425.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity: wherein the Christian religion is explained and defended: being the substance of several lectures on the Assembly's Larger Catechism*, vol. 1 (New York: Readex Microprint Corporation, 1972), 69.

<sup>18</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* III, xii.13.

In connection with this, the Reformed also point to a Scriptural text that teaches about God's knowledge of Himself. When Paul says, "the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:10–11), he implies that God's own being is unlimited—He is an infinite Spirit. This reveals that the understanding or knowledge of God follows from His nature, specifically from the identification of the living God as an infinite Spirit. If God is infinite, He certainly fully knows Himself in every detail and to perfection.<sup>19</sup> Given that God fully knows Himself, He knows everything He is able to do. God's knowledge of what He is able to do is then related to omnipotence, for God to know things to be possible, is to know what He can do. Baxter states that on these grounds, God's knowledge consists of what He can do, what He knows to be possible, and what He will do.<sup>20</sup> Thus, God's knowledge is an ontological issue that relates to God's essence. At this point, we see that the Reformed exegesis and explanation on God's knowledge is guided by how God's essence is portrayed in Scripture, rather than being interpreted as an independent subject.

Second, the Reformed point to Scriptural evidence of absolute divine willing. "He [God] determines things to come, even things which seem most free and contingent, as the thoughts of men's hearts."<sup>21</sup> According to Greenhill, Ezek. 38:10-18 shows that "if God did not permit a thing to come to pass, how could it come to pass without some action, and God's concurrence to that action, for there is no action or cause producing any effect, with which God doth not concur, La. 3:37; Pr. 21:1; 16:1."<sup>22</sup> There must be a causal determination that moves any future contingent from the realm of mere possibility to the realm of actuality, which is ultimately the will of God. Without divine determination, even the free and contingent could not exist at all. In connection to this point, Baxter again emphasizes that such determination by God is not caused by the finite order.

If we may or must say that God from eternity fore-knew our propositions of future contingents, which are conditional, yet we must not say or think that His knowledge *quoad actum* is conditional, so as that the creature's state is the condition of God's knowledge in its self: But only that the object is a conditional proposition, speaking the condition of the event fore-known: from which God's act is denominated conditional only *denominazione extrinseca*, not as *an Act*, but as *This act*...Nor doth God's foreknowledge that Adam will sin in such circumstances, make his understanding depend on the creature, but only to be terminated on the creature as an object.<sup>23</sup>

Third, concerning the relationship between divine omniscience and divine willing, the above shows that in the Reformed view divine foreknowledge itself is not causal. Rather divine foreknowledge is related to causality by means of God's will. In other words, foreknowledge is grounded in the will of God: God has foreknowledge of what He wills to actualize.<sup>24</sup> In sum, from the Reformed perspective of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, God knows contingents with certainty either according to His knowledge of all possibilities or He knows them according to his visionary knowledge of all that He has willed.

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<sup>19</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* III, xii.18.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Baxter, *Catholike Theologie: Plain, Pure, Peaceable; for Pacification of the Dogmatical Word-Warriours* (London: Robert White for Nevill Simmons, 1675), I. iv.41-43.

<sup>21</sup> William Greenhill, *An Exposition of the Prophet Ezekiel*, rev. and corr. James Sherman (London: Samuel Holdsworth, Amen Corner, 1839), 758 (col. 1).

<sup>22</sup> Greenhill, *An Exposition of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 758 (cols. 1-2).

<sup>23</sup> Baxter, *Catholike Theologia*, I.xii.259; cf. Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 70 (col.1).

<sup>24</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* III, xii.18.

In sum, we can understand from the above survey that the most pressing objection of the Reformed against middle knowledge is that it destroys the lordship of God. By sacrificing the sovereignty of God it alters the relationship between God and finite creatures. Given the assumption that God's knowledge and decree are not caused by things exterior to God, middle knowledge cannot be justified. In other words, the logic of this theory is incoherent with biblical exegesis and interpretation as it functions in the Reformed doctrine of God. In Johannes Cocceius's (1603-1669) view, *scientia media* renders God's knowledge and willing dependent on human actions, which reduces God to a classical "Jupiter who consults the Fates."<sup>25</sup> Hence, "there can be no *scientia media* because there can be no being independent of the divine will."<sup>26</sup> Turretin echoes that if every hypothetical affair or any counterfactual is dependent upon God, there can be no being independent of the divine will.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the other issue of middle knowledge is the problem of knowing conditionals conditionally. For the Reformed theologians, God does not know conditionals conditionally since there is no such hypothesis at all (I have explained this in Chapter 2.3.2 sub a).

In terms of the method used in theological formulation and argumentation, we see from the above examination that there is a clear continuity in the interpretation of key biblical texts traditionally related to the formulation of the doctrine of God (e.g., the relationship between divine foreknowledge and willing).<sup>28</sup> Holding to Scripture as *principium cognoscendi* that provides *axiomata* from which any conclusion about the truth of God could be deduced and explained, the Reformed rational arguments or their application of logic in the understanding of God's knowledge is bound by exegesis of Scriptural texts (and not just selected or partial ones), and by subsequently drawing conclusions from Scriptural texts about God's essence as a whole (e.g., divine unity and sovereignty). As a result, middle knowledge was rejected as its theological conclusion does not seem to accord with the biblical *principium* as a whole. Hence, though the controversy between the Dominicans and the Jesuits had its impact on the Reformed particularly following the publication of Molina's *Concordia*,<sup>29</sup> this theory was problematic for the Reformed.

### 3.3 Bavinck's *Organic Motif in Scripture and Theology*<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> William J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669)* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 167.

<sup>26</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* III, xiii.10

<sup>27</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* III, xii.10. Ridgley also shares the same comment that "the will of the creature is not independent from the divine will" (see Ridgley, *Body of Divinity*, 70).

<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Muller observes that in the Reformed discussion of divine essence and attributes, the biblical divine "names" were emphasized and taken as the point of departure. This pattern was different from the medieval scholastic systems which typically identified divine properties as "names" rather than attributes. This reveals the Reformed emphasis on exegetical aspects (see Muller, *PRRD* III, 97).

<sup>29</sup> For instance, several Reformed theologians acknowledged the need to clarify the discussion of the divine knowledge of possibilities and contingencies posited by Molina, and therefore drew some limited guidance from Molina's argument.

<sup>30</sup> For Bavinck, God creates an "organic centre" in Christ, in whom He fully reveals Himself to humanity; God's revelation is made known to humanity through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, without adding anything new to God's revelation which is fully complete (see Bavinck, *RD* I, 383). This becomes an important basis of Bavinck's works. In his *RD*, Bavinck often applies the *organic* imagery or concept within the (Christ-centered) Trinitarian perspective to explain various theological *loci* (e.g., revelation; soteriology; ecclesiology; eschatology etc.). This section only focuses on the *organic* motif shown in Bavinck's discussion of Scripture and theology. See on this James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism. Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), esp. 171.

With the preceding survey laying some preliminary ground for us to understand Bavinck's views on divine knowledge, we now proceed to our discussion of Bavinck. When discussing the right method and organization of dogmatics, on the one hand, Bavinck follows the Reformed tradition and strongly holds that every dogmatic theology begins with the doctrine of Scripture as the epistemological foundation of theology; on the other hand, Bavinck moves beyond the Reformed tradition and further develops his understanding of Scripture and theology. Hence, in order for us to accurately grasp Bavinck's view of foreknowledge and middle knowledge, it is necessary for us to first begin with how Bavinck understands Scripture (3.3.1), and the relationship between Scripture and theology (3.3.2), through which we also learn how Bavinck responds to the Roman Catholic view of Scripture and theology. In considering our investigation in Chapter 2, it is especially worthwhile to find out how Bavinck develops his views on Scripture and theology in responding to the Roman Catholic method of theology.

### 3.3.1 The *Organic* Nature of Scripture

Although the Council of Trent affirmed that both the Old Testament and New Testament are "divine writings," it also extended the inspiration of Scripture to the church's tradition. Entering into the post-Tridentine era, Roman Catholic theologians developed a variety of views of Scriptural inspiration, including differing convictions about the nature and extent of inspiration.<sup>31</sup> The Reformed, on the other hand, accepted inspiration in its full positive sense and extended it to Scripture in all its parts. However, in the eighteenth century, the rise of rationalism had separated the "Word of God" from the Bible, and Scripture was judged in many ways to be fallible and deficient. In such an unstable situation, intellectually and spiritually, Bavinck attempts to show the proper understanding of the nature of Scripture by emphasizing the notion of "organic inspiration" over against both the "dynamic" way and the "mechanical" way of understanding inspiration.<sup>32</sup>

Bavinck points out that Scripture is called *theopneustic* ("divinely inspired" or "God-breathed") in 2 Tim. 3:16, not primarily with a view to its content but by virtue of its origin. It is not "inspired because and insofar as it inspires" but conversely, "it breathes God and inspires because it has been inspired by God."<sup>33</sup> On the one hand, *theopneustia* confesses the truth of inspiration—it claims that the Spirit is immanent in God's work of salvation in special revelation. Hence, Scripture is sealed by the internal testimony of the Spirit of God—God is His own witness of His Word.<sup>34</sup> This leads to the affirmation that Scripture is

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<sup>31</sup> For instance, some maintained that the inspiration of the Spirit upon the authors was extended to every individual words. Some held that inspiration had extended to other writings as well, provided they contained no deception. There are others who preferred limited inspiration, and held that the inspiration was extended only to the religious-ethical teachings, allowing for the possibility of fallibility for the rest of the biblical content (see Bavinck, *RD I*, 428-435, for Bavinck's illustrations on the different views of Scriptural inspiration).

<sup>32</sup> Bavinck points out that the "dynamic" view in which inspiration only consists in actively arousing religious affections in the biblical writers confuses inspiration with regeneration, and places Scripture on an equal position with devotional literature. The "mechanical" notion, in turn, emphasizes only the supernatural element present in inspiration, but detaches the Bible writers from their personalities, gifts and historical contexts, turning them into mindless instruments in the hand of the Spirit. As a result, it fails to do justice to the role of the biblical writers as secondary authors. For Bavinck, the Reformed orthodox view of inspiration is too mechanical (see Bavinck, *RD I*, 430-431).

<sup>33</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 430, and 425.

<sup>34</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 43, and 583-584.



*autopistos* (i.e., self-authenticating and self-convincing),<sup>35</sup> which means that its authority finally rests exclusively in itself, such that it cannot be proved. The doctrine of inspiration, hence, is not an explanation or theory of Scripture, “but it is and ought to be a believing confession of what Scripture witnesses concerning itself ...”<sup>36</sup> It is not a scientific pronouncement but a confession of faith. On the other hand, 2 Tim. 3:16 shows that the right understanding of *theopneustia* affects the relationship between the primary author and the secondary authors<sup>37</sup>—*theopneustia* is the Spirit of God who works in and upon the consciousness of the biblical authors. That prophets and apostles are people “borne by God” (2 Pet. 1:19-21) points to the fact that it is God who speaks in and through them.<sup>38</sup> The fact of original inspiration and the nature of Scripture as the inspired Word of God affirm that Scripture has to be viewed organically. Bavinck then extends this organic motif to the ongoing and unique illuminating work of the Spirit in human’s heart and mind: Scripture not only *was* inspired by the Spirit, but still *is* “God-breathed” and “God-breathing.”<sup>39</sup> The Spirit does not withdraw from the Scripture after the work of inspiration, but continues to sustain the Scripture through working in the hearts and minds of humanity.<sup>40</sup> In other words, “Scripture is inspired as well as inspiring.”<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, according to Bavinck, the parallel and intimate relationship shown between the incarnation of Christ and the inspiration of Scripture affirms that only the view of organic inspiration can do justice to the nature of Scripture: the external Word (external *Logos*) has become *sarx* (flesh); the spoken Word (internal *Logos*) has become Scripture.<sup>42</sup> Bavinck explains, just as Christ took the form of a servant and became incarnate in the world, so also the revelation of God—the Word—entered into the world in the servant form of written language.<sup>43</sup> In this sense Scripture too flows from the incarnation, and its continuation as well.<sup>44</sup> Notably, Bavinck’s view on biblical truth as incarnational is not just an illustration to explain the nature of Scripture, but foundational for his concept of God’s revelation as well

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<sup>35</sup> The Greek term *autopistos* is often paired with *axiopistos* (ἀξιόπιστος “trustworthy”) to denote that Scripture is trustworthy in and of itself (*in se* and *per se*). No appeal to external authority (whether church or tradition) is needed for Scripture in order to endorse it as the norm of faith and practice (see Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 54). With regards to the English translation of *autopistos*, Henk van den Belt points out that “self-authenticating” focuses more on the origin of Scripture; whereas “self-convincing” points to the way Scripture functions for the believer is a more proper translation as it maintains the element of trust from the Greek noun *pistis* (see Henk van den Belt, “Herman Bavinck and Benjamin B. Warfield on Apologetics and the *Autopistia* of Scripture,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 [April 2010]: 38).

<sup>36</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 436.

<sup>37</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 425, 428.

<sup>38</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 388.

<sup>39</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 385.

<sup>40</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 439-440.

<sup>41</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 388.

<sup>42</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 380. In the older theology, little connection was made between divine revelation and divine inspiration, as if Scripture dropped out of heaven and apart from historical context. But the newer theology swings to another extreme by detaching the two, making Scripture a human record of revelation. Bavinck sees the need to show the connection between the two through identifying parallels between God’s revelation in Christ and God’s revelation in Scripture (see also *RD I*, 381-382).

<sup>43</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 354, 380-381, 457. Bavinck reminds that we must be aware that this does not imply that Scripture is fallible. “Just as Christ’s human nature, however weak and lowly, remained free from sin, so also Scripture is ‘conceived without defect or stain.’” Hence, though Scripture was written by human authors, it is safeguarded from error and free from human flaw (*RD I*, 435). This shows clearly that Bavinck’s view on the infallibility of Scripture flows out of the connection between the incarnation and sinlessness of Christ (*RD I*, 398).

<sup>44</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 380.

as for his dogmatic method.<sup>45</sup> Bavinck elucidates that the revelation that we received in Christ through Scripture does not place itself beneath, but above us. Hence, the authority of the Bible is normative and causative, it maintains itself and conquers human hearts by itself as well.<sup>46</sup> This is the very reason why Scripture, accepted *a priori* without being proved, is our only source of knowledge of God (and consequently the *principium* of theology). This is why Bavinck stresses that the Christian theologian must take his/her starting point in Scripture.<sup>47</sup> When discussing the right dogmatic method, Bavinck uses the term *autopistos* to stress that Scripture is its own interpreter—it is to be believed according to its own account, it is the judge of all controversies, and the Christian dogmatic method is determined by its nature as well.<sup>48</sup>

We understand from church history that there is a tension between the authority of Scripture and the authority of the church. The Roman Catholic Church sees the church as the medium between God and believers. In other words, the *testimonium* expresses itself exclusively through the church. Thus, Roman Catholicism and Reformational thought differ in their answer to the question of where God revealed himself, or where lies the starting point of a person's certainty of God's revelation (i.e., in Scripture or the church).<sup>49</sup> Bavinck takes the *organic* nature of Scripture and extends this *organic* motif to clarify the relationship between Scripture, the church, and the believer's faith. Bavinck affirms Scripture as the *principium externum* (external written word of God), and connects it with the *principium internum* (the internal principle of faith/faith resting on the testimony of the Spirit). In this connection, he deals extensively with the inner testimony of the Spirit as the real ground for true certainty of faith.<sup>50</sup>

Bavinck explicates that although proofs and reasoning have their value, the testimony of the Spirit far surpasses them all.<sup>51</sup> It is the Spirit of God alone who is able to testify God's truth to our hearts and lead us to absolute certainty. The revealed truth of God is sealed in our hearts through the testimony of the Spirit itself.<sup>52</sup> In other words, the revelation of God can be believed only in a religious sense on the basis of God's authority. Now, the voice of God's authority can be heard either in Scripture or through the church.<sup>53</sup> The church plays an important role as the believer's initial aid to faith, and the believer's permanent motive for

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<sup>45</sup> By placing *Logos* as the center of God's revelation, Bavinck shows that the correspondence of the internal *Logos* and the external *Logos* ultimately rests on the fact that both are generated by the divine *Logos* (see E. P. Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* [Asses: Van Gorcum, 1959], 143). Hence, all knowledge ultimately depends on the knowledge of God (the *principium essendi* of all science). However, the knowledge of God is not revealed to us directly, but is made known to us through the creation in which the divine *Logos* is displaced, as well as the human mind which is created in the image of God and is able to discern the *Logos* in the created world (see Hendrik van den Belt, "Autopistia: The Self-Convincing Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology," [PhD diss., Universiteit Leiden, 2006], 290-291).

<sup>46</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 505.

<sup>47</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 54.

<sup>48</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 78, 86, 354.

<sup>49</sup> See *RD I*, 455-463, for Bavinck's historical account of how Rome and the Reformation differ in their understanding of the authority of Scripture and the church's authority.

<sup>50</sup> Notably, herein we see Bavinck attempts to use the *externum-internum* distinction to show how the objective truth (i.e., Scripture) corresponds with the subjective certainty of faith (i.e., the Spirit). See also ft. 61.

<sup>51</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 506. Elsewhere Bavinck also stresses that faith does not depend on evidences; and he argues that evidences provided by human beings are insufficient to prove the truth of Scripture (see Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, trans. Harry der Nederlanden [St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1980], 60).

<sup>52</sup> See Bavinck, *RD I*, 586-588, 597.

<sup>53</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 579-580.

faith as well.<sup>54</sup> However, the church is not the believer's final ground or constitution of faith: the church does not stand above Scripture. As Bavinck puts it, a good doctrinal method takes into account Scripture (as a whole), the church, and the consciousness of believer. But the relationship among these three must be carefully defined:<sup>55</sup> The foundation of God's truth is Scripture, which flows into the consciousness of believer through the church.<sup>56</sup>

In short, we see that while affirming and following the Reformed commitment that the authority of Scripture lies completely in Scripture itself, Bavinck differs from the Reformed in developing this point in terms of his organic conception of Scripture. Bavinck's view on Scripture becomes a good foundation and advantage for him to clarify the relationship between Scripture, the church, and the consciousness of believer. Through the application of the *externum-internum* distinction (the Reformed, however, do not explain faith by referring to the *internum principium*),<sup>57</sup> Bavinck affirms the pedagogical role of the church in one's faith, provided that the church is not the ground or cause of one's faith.<sup>58</sup> This paves the way for Bavinck to point out that Scripture is the unique principle of theology and of the church as well. This naturally leads us into further investigation of how Bavinck responds to the biblical criticism that had arisen in his time, as well as how he responds to the Roman Catholics who held strongly to church tradition as the ground of theology.

### 3.3.2 The Organic Relationship between Scripture and Theology

Historically Reformed orthodoxy seems to have come to an end in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Bavinck attempts to revitalize it by focusing on its theological sources. One of the new issues Bavinck had to face in his doctrine of Scripture was the challenge of biblical criticism. Although Bavinck had a passion for the issues of modern culture and responded to his opponents in a synthetic and irenic manner,<sup>59</sup> Bavinck argued strongly that the Scripture is the authority and foundation of God's revelation, thus continuing a main concern of Reformed orthodoxy; and he continued to affirm Scripture as the sole foundation of theology, highlighting the organic relationship between Scripture and theology.

Bavinck uses the Reformed terminology of *principium* (foundation) and further develops it to explain the organic relation between theology and Scripture. By distinguishing

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<sup>54</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 457. In addition, Bavinck stresses the difference between the "motive" and the "final ground" of faith, the latter of which is only the grace of God (see Bavinck, *RD I*, 578).

<sup>55</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 84.

<sup>56</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 84. The *necessitas* of Scripture is not accepted by Roman Catholicism. Bavinck explains that according to the Reformed orthodoxy, "Pedagogically the church is prior to Scripture. But in the logical order Scripture is the sole foundation (*principium unicum*) of church and theology." Hence, church confession and tradition must be according to and subjected to Scripture (see Bavinck, *RD I*, 86).

<sup>57</sup> In Van den Belt's discussion of Bavinck's application of the *principia*, he points out the distinction between Bavinck and the Reformed orthodox with regard to the usage of *principium internum*, and states that this terminology is customarily used by the Reformed with reference to the Holy Spirit (and its relation to theology), but not to faith (see Van den Belt, "Autopistia," 258; and 263-271).

<sup>58</sup> Bavinck argues that the Protestant theologians had weakened Augustine's saying of "I indeed would not have believed the gospel had not the authority of the Catholic Church moved me" by thinking Augustine is referring only to the origin of faith. Bavinck contends that for Augustine the church continually moved him towards faith, and supported him in times of struggle. Augustine does not mean that the authority of the Scripture depends on the church, that the church is the ground of his faith. But Augustine allows a more important role for the church as a witness to Scripture. Similarly, Bavinck admits the pedagogical role of the church for one's faith (see Bavinck, *RD I*, 457, 578).

<sup>59</sup> Bavinck's response was seen as unusual to his church, and thus caused some suspicious feedback (see Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 37). However, though Bavinck takes modern thoughts into serious consideration, it is never without critical reflection (see Bavinck, *RD I*, 56).

*principium essendi* (essential foundation/a term applied to God), *principium cognoscendi externum* (the revelation of God through the Son/Scripture), and *principium cognoscendi internum* (the illumination of the Spirit or the Spirit itself) and connecting these to the distinction of *theologia archetypa* (the knowledge that God has of Himself) and *theologia ectypa* (the knowledge of God that is communicated to us), Bavinck explains the relationship between Scripture and theology:<sup>60</sup> First, God knows Himself; He is the essential foundation and source of theology (*principium essendi*). Second, God made Himself known to us through His Son/Scripture (*principium cognoscendi externum*). Third, God's revelation is illuminated in our consciousness through the Spirit (*principium cognoscendi internum*).<sup>61</sup> The *theologia archetypa* is in the divine consciousness; whereas *theologia ectypa* is granted to us in revelation and Scripture.

The above analysis shows that theology is nothing else than the imprint and reflection on our consciousness of the *principium essendi*. If this is the case, then clearly the *principium* of theology does not depend on anything else but Scripture alone. Scripture, accepted *a priori* without being proved, is the only *principium* from which theology is drawn. This is why Bavinck uses the term *principium* for Scripture, rather than *fons* (source), which implies a mechanical relation between Scripture and theology, as though dogmas could be drawn from Scripture like water from a well.<sup>62</sup> Bavinck intends to show the organic relation between Scripture and theology by stressing that “there are no dogmas in Scripture, but the material for them is all to be found in it. Hence, dogmatics can be defined as the truth of Scripture, absorbed and reproduced by the thinking consciousness of the Christian theologian.”<sup>63</sup>

Holding to the authority of Scripture as the *principium unicum* (sole foundation) of theology, Bavinck continues to explain that the definition of “dogmatic” contains an authoritative element. Just as political dogmas rest on the authority of civil government and philosophical dogmas rest on the authority of their argumentation, a theological doctrine derives its authority from divine witness.<sup>64</sup> Hence, any truth or doctrine that does not rest on the authority of God revealed in Scripture is not acceptable to Reformed orthodoxy. Unlike Roman Catholic thought and the school of Schleiermacher, whose dogmatics are ultimately founded on the church and the individual believer respectively, Reformed theology only rests on Scripture. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is no relation between the authority of the church and doctrine. By distinguishing *dogma quoad se* (as it has to do with itself, i.e., Scripture) and *dogma quoad nos* (as it has to do with us, i.e., church confession), Bavinck shows the distinction and relation between the authority of the church and doctrine:<sup>65</sup> the church is given authority by God to preserve and defend the truth of God entrusted to her; hence, the church confessions are standards of doctrine through which doctrine is passed

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<sup>60</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 213-214; see also 506-507.

<sup>61</sup> Additionally, Bavinck also places the *principia* in Trinitarian perspective and explains it through the application of the epistemological object-subject dichotomy: The objective revelation of the Son/Scripture (*principium cognoscendi externum*) is incomplete without the subjective revelation of the Spirit (*principium cognoscendi internum*)—the light of God can only be seen in His light (see Bavinck, *RD I*, 505-506).

<sup>62</sup> Bavinck's emphasis on the *principia* is certainly related to his discussion with Ethical Theology. Ethical Theology referred to Scripture as *fons* and *norma*, instead of the *principium* of theology. Bavinck acknowledged the element of truth in Ethical Theology, but also pointed out that in his view this theology led to mysticism, subjectivism and even pantheism. Notably, in as much as Bavinck values religious subjectivity, he stresses that it may never become the principle of our knowledge of God. See Van den Belt, “*Autopistia*,” 261, 263.

<sup>63</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 89.

<sup>64</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 29.

<sup>65</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 30.

down. However, the church's authority upon doctrine is not sovereign and legislative but ministerial and declarative.<sup>66</sup>

In addition, Bavinck states that the term "tradition" has a broader meaning than articulated by Roman Catholic theology. Rome understands tradition or doctrine as that which has been passed down by the apostles, and preserved and defined specifically by the Pope. In other words, tradition "ran on an independent parallel track alongside of Scripture, or rather, Scripture alongside of tradition."<sup>67</sup> Bavinck asserts, however, that tradition "in its proper sense is the interpretation and application of the eternal truth in the vernacular and life of the present generation."<sup>68</sup> As such, the Reformed only recognize tradition that is founded on, and flows from, Scripture. On the one hand, we see from Bavinck's treatment of Scripture and theology that he is always cautious of subjectivism and counterbalances it by objective truth (which is illuminated to the believer by the Spirit). For this reason, we see that when Bavinck responds to his opponents (including Roman Catholic theologians), he strongly stresses and always points back to the organic nature and authority of Scripture. On the other hand, Bavinck's concern to prevent theology from falling into subjective rationalism propels him to consider how Scripture is understood by the church. Next, we will examine more specifically how Bavinck's views of Scripture, theology, and tradition are demonstrated in his understanding of divine foreknowledge and his criticism of middle knowledge.

### **3.4 Bavinck's Discussion of Divine Foreknowledge**

As mentioned above, Bavinck is aware of both subjectivism and objectivism and attempts to balance between the two. It is rewarding to find out how Bavinck applies his views as mentioned in Section 3.3 in his discussion of divine foreknowledge, and how this makes a difference in his evaluation of middle knowledge in comparison to that of Reformed orthodox theology. Hence, the following investigates how Bavinck approaches and explains God's knowledge (3.4.1); and how he applies his views of God's knowledge in evaluating middle knowledge (3.4.2).

#### **3.4.1 Divine Knowing: Its Manner, Objects, and Degree<sup>69</sup>**

Bavinck begins his discussion on divine knowing by showing how all of Scripture presupposes God's consciousness and knowledge, speaking figuratively of this as "light": God is light and in Him is no darkness (1 Jn. 1:5); God dwells in unapproachable light (1Tim. 6:16) and is the source of all light in nature and in grace (Ps. 4:6; 27:1; 36:9; 43:3; Jn. 1:4,9; 8:12; Jas. 1:17 etc.). If there is "no darkness at all" in God, but He is entirely "light," then God is Himself both entirely holy, and entirely filled with self-knowledge, and He knows all things other than Himself through the full knowledge of Himself. In other words, God knows all things in and of and by Himself (not by observation). Scripture also indicates that God knows everything that exists outside His being, and all creatures fall within the compass of His knowledge—it extends to everything: the most minor (Mt. 6:8, 32; 10:30 etc.); the most deeply concealed things (Jer. 11:20; 17:9-10; 10:12 etc.); human origin, nature, all human

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<sup>66</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 31.

<sup>67</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 493.

<sup>68</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 493.

<sup>69</sup> The paragraphs in this section summarize and rephrase Bavinck's discussion on "Intellectual Attributes" in *Reformed Dogmatics* (hereafter *RD*), vol. 1I, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 191-197; also 178-179.

actions (Ps. 139); weakness and sin (Ps. 69:5; Jer. 16:17; 18:23 etc.); the conditional (1 Sam. 23:10-13; 12:8,2 13:19 etc.); things of the future (Isa. 41:22; 42:9; 43:9 etc.) and everything else is known by God. Nothing escapes God's comprehensive knowledge. Bavinck concludes that God is omniscient in the strictest sense—past, present, and future; the most hidden and insignificant details—everything is “open and laid bare in the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13).

Moreover, not only does God know everything (1 Jn. 3:20), He knows things before they exist (Isa. 46:10; Am. 3:7; Dan. 2:22; Ps. 139:6 etc.). Citing Augustine: “This world could not be known to us unless it existed; it could not have existed, however, unless it had been known to God,”<sup>70</sup> Bavinck affirms that God, the creator of all things, knows them before they existed. Lastly, God knows all things *a priori*, they are present to Him from eternity (1 Cor. 2:7; Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4-5; 2 Tim. 1:9), which indicates that God knows all things together by one eternal act of understanding without division and distraction. In other words, God's knowledge both of Himself and of the universe is certain and complete (Ps. 139:1-3; Heb. 4:13), not capable of being increased (Isa. 40:13f; Rom. 11:34).

Pantheistic thinking (as Bavinck saw it exemplified in Eduard von Hartmann), however, denies the Scriptural understanding of God's knowledge when it conceives of the unconscious as the unity of things; the absolute is then incapable of consciousness. Bavinck asserts that one who does not acknowledge a purpose in the universe does not require a self-conscious God; however, one like von Hartmann who argues for a teleological worldview must have a self-conscious and intelligent God, otherwise he/she is unable to explain the rise of consciousness from that which is unconscious. If rational human beings exceed all other creatures, it is impossible to see God as unconscious—it is impossible that He who forms the ear or eye cannot hear or see. In other words, the perfection in the human creature points to the perfection in God. Furthermore, “unlike finite human consciousness, God's self-consciousness has no limitation.”<sup>71</sup> The content of God's self-knowledge is no less than His eternal and pure being. “Being and knowing coincide in God. He knows Himself through His being.”<sup>72</sup> God's absolute self-consciousness also differs but inseparable from His world-consciousness.

Bavinck continues to elucidate that the fact that God knows all things possible, or His omniscience can be deduced from God's full knowledge of Himself, allows us to take our understanding of the distinction between God's self-consciousness and His world-consciousness one step further. Out of the infinite fullness of His own ideas, God did not arbitrarily select a few for the purpose of creation. Rather, by His “free knowledge,” God encompasses the ideas that in their realization best reveal His perfections in His creature, and He created the world according to such knowledge. Closely connected, God's “free knowledge” is related to His “natural knowledge” as ectype relates to archetype—God's archetypal perfections are revealed ectypically in His creation. In sum, nothing can happen except by the will of God. God's self-knowledge precedes all events and nothing can happen except by His will, as God first knows himself, and second, all possibilities. In other words, God does not know things through or by means of things. God knows all actualities as He has willed them to be.

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<sup>70</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XI, trans. Gerald G. Walsh and Grace Monahan (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981), 10; idem, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor (New York, N.Y: Newman Press cop, 1982), V, 18.

<sup>71</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 179.

<sup>72</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 195.

Based on the above understanding, Bavinck asserts that one cannot speak of “foreknowledge” in the case of God. “Foreknowledge” is called so only with respect to humanity, but not with respect to God who has no distinctions of time. Whatever is past and future to us is immediately present in His sight. For that reason, we should not speak of God’s foreknowledge but simply of God’s knowledge. The division of God’s omniscience into foreknowledge is a human conception. Scripture, however, often conveys the idea that God’s omniscience temporally precedes the existence of things; without this auxiliary image we cannot even speak of God’s omniscience. As a result, the question about how omniscience harmonizes with freedom arises. But the proposition that rejects omniscience (e.g., Cicero and Marcion) or sees God’s omniscience as limited (e.g., Socinians) is inconsistent with Scripture. Referring to the principle of Augustine according to which the human will along with human nature and all its decisions, is included in, posited, and maintained by foreknowledge (rather than being destroyed by it), Bavinck affirms and maintains both foreknowledge and freedom; and he points out that scholasticism is in line with Augustine with regard to this. The Jesuits, however, brought change when entering the discussion. Bavinck then moves to the discussion of middle knowledge and responds to it according to the biblical and theological principles as mentioned in the preceding section.

### 3.4.2 Bavinck’s Criticism of Middle Knowledge<sup>73</sup>

Following the biblical and theological understanding that God knows all things *from and of Himself*, God’s knowledge is *a priori*. That is to say, insofar as God knows things according to His essence and not by deriving it from the will of creatures or the rest of creation, Bavinck holds that God’s self-knowledge precedes all other knowledge. It follows that God knows all genuine impossibilities—namely, things that are contrary to His will or impossible according to His essence. Stated otherwise, God knows with all sufficiency the possibilities or things that He does not will to actualize or make, as it is His will that defines the realm of the actual. This indicates that God does not derive knowledge from the will of creatures, and He does not act on the grounds of His knowledge of counterfactual events that He has not willed. Also, according to the theological understanding of divine natural and free knowledge, God’s knowledge stands in relation to His power and will. God’s will defines the realm of the actual.<sup>74</sup>

Based on the above, Bavinck asserts that middle knowledge brings the Pelagian notion of the freedom of the will—in the sense of liberty of indifference—into harmony with God’s omniscience. Following Reformed orthodoxy, Bavinck contends that in order for the theory of middle knowledge to function, there must be finite contingents outside of God’s willing that He reacts to. In Molina’s scheme, God does not derive knowledge of the free actions of human beings from His own being (divine natural knowledge) and His own decrees (divine free knowledge), but from the will of creatures. This means that God derives knowledge from the world that He could not obtain from Himself; and that the human will is by its nature indifferent (it can do one thing just as well as another). Things do not happen because God knows them; rather God foreknows them because they are going to happen. Moreover, in order for the theory of middle knowledge to function, God’s cognition must not solely be rooted in God’s will but also in possible outcomes that depend on human conditions. God looks on, while humans decide.

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<sup>73</sup> The paragraphs in this section summarize and rephrase Bavinck’s discussion on “The Problem of Middle Knowledge” in *RD II*, 198-203; also 178-179.

<sup>74</sup> See Bavinck’s discussion on the “Free and Necessary Will of God” in *RD II*, 203-237.

According to Bavinck, the relationship between God and the entire finite order is being challenged here. Christian theology maintains that the world was brought into being by an act of God's free and sovereign will, and that God had His own wise reasons for His will. "His will is one with His being, His wisdom, goodness, and all His other perfections ... God's sovereignty is one of unlimited power, and not of blind fate, incalculable choice, or dark force of nature. It is the will of an almighty God and gracious father."<sup>75</sup> But by seeing God as one who needs to derive His knowledge from the world of creatures instead of from His own being, the creature is now the sovereign and autonomous creator: first, the human person decides, then God matches a plan that corresponds to that decision. The entire history of humanity is taken out of God's controlling hands and placed in human hands. In short, the sequence is not "natural knowledge—the decree to create—free knowledge"; instead, it is "natural knowledge—middle knowledge—the decree to create." Accordingly, God becomes dependent on the world, and derives knowledge from the world that He did not have and could not obtain from Himself. Something can therefore come into being quite apart from God's will. As a result, "Grace is dispensed, according to merit; predestination depends on good works."<sup>76</sup> This perspective clearly diverges in principle from the teaching of Augustine and Aquinas, which holds that nothing can happen except by the will of the omnipotent.

Bavinck also contends that the Scriptural evidence cited by the Jesuits is without warrant and does not prove what needs to be proved. To be sure, there is no doubt that Scripture acknowledges the fact that God has put things in a varied web of relational connections, and that these connections are frequently of a conditional nature so that one thing happens after something else happened first;

Admittedly, they [the texts cited by Jesuits] speak of condition and fulfillment, of obedience and promise, of assumption and consequences, of what will happen if one path is chosen or another) But no one of these texts denies that in all cases God—though He speaks to and deals with humans in human terms—knew and determined what would surely happen. Between that which is merely possible and will never be realized—present in God only as an idea—and that which is certain and has been decreed by God, there is no longer any area left that can be controlled by the will of humans. Something always belongs either to the one or to the other. If it is only a possibility and will not be realized, it is the object of God's "necessary" knowledge; and if it will indeed one day be realized, it is the content of his "free" knowledge. There is no middle ground between the two, no "middle" knowledge.<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore, Bavinck asserts that the theory of middle knowledge fails to achieve its aim: it does not leave human conduct totally free. If God infallibly knows in advance what a person will do in a given situation, He can foreknow this only if the person's motive determines his or her will in one specific direction and this will therefore does not consist in indifference. On the contrary, if that will were indifferent, foreknowledge would be impossible and only post-factum knowledge would exist. As Cicero states, "if he knows it, it will certainly take place, but if it is bound to take place, no such thing as chance exists." Therefore, Bavinck concludes along with the later Augustine that we must seek the solution in another direction. The freedom of the will does not consist in indifference or unpredictability but in the "rational delight" with which we do things, and such delight is implied and upheld by God's foreknowledge rather than standing in conflict with it.

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<sup>75</sup> Bavinck, *RD* II, 181.

<sup>76</sup> Bavinck, *RD* II, 201.

<sup>77</sup> Bavinck, *RD* II, 202.



The human will, along with its nature, antecedents and motives, its decisions and consequences, is integrated into “the order of causes that is certain to God and embraced by his foreknowledge.” In the knowledge of God things are interrelated in the same web of connections in which they occur in reality. It is not foreknowledge, nor is it predestination, that now and then intervenes from above with compelling force; every human decision and act is motivated, rather, by that which precedes it, and in that web of connections it is included in the knowledge of God. In keeping with their own divinely known and ordained nature, contingent events and free actions are links in the order of causes that, little by little, is revealed to us in the history of the world.<sup>78</sup>

Additionally, Bavinck’s view on “wisdom” shows again why the theory of middle knowledge is problematic to him. According to Bavinck, God’s knowledge, when viewed from another angle, is called “wisdom.” By referring to Scriptural texts (e.g., Deut. 4:6-8; Ps. 19:7; 111:10; Job 28:28; Prov. 1:7; 9:10), Bavinck explains that knowledge suggests a discursive, theoretical Greek model, and is often totally unrelated to life; on the other hand, wisdom points to something that is intuitive, practical and goal-oriented. Such an orientation is found to a high degree in Israel in the Old Testament. The Israelites were nurtured and led by the fear of the Lord, and began to penetrate into God’s works in nature and in His laws, through which they marveled at God’s wisdom. The New Testament continues this line of thought. It ascribes wisdom to God, declares that the world was created by the word of God, and indicates that God’s wisdom is revealed in the cross, in Christ, in the church, and in all His guidance to Israel and the Gentiles.

By showing that true wisdom is rooted in the fear of the Lord and consists in the moral discipline of conforming to God’s law (as in the Old Testament), and identifying wisdom as the handmaiden of revelation and God’s word (as in the New Testament), Bavinck connects God’s works (in creation and His words) with God’s wisdom: God creates and preserves the world by the Logos. Bavinck then affirms that God does not act arbitrarily or accidentally but with His supreme wisdom. Following Augustine, Bavinck links this point to a modified version of Plato’s “ideas” (that signify powers that are not autonomous but subject to God’s will) and elucidates that God can be viewed as an artist in His creating through ideas that are not outside of Himself, but coming from His very being. God can also be viewed as the architect and builder of the entire universe who guided all His works by His wisdom towards His pre-established goal. The wisdom of God that is manifest in the creating, ordering, guiding, and governing of all things reflects His knowledge and who He is.<sup>79</sup> Clearly, this is not how the theory of middle knowledge and its underlying assumptions would understand God’s knowledge, who He is, and how He acts. Hence, it is clear why Bavinck argues against this theory.

### **3.5 Evaluation**

Based on our investigations from Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and to this present chapter, we have gained a clear picture of the differences between Molinism and the Reformed view at this point. Also, we have seen how Bavinck responds to middle knowledge. Hence, the following section presents an evaluation from three perspectives: the differences between Molinism and the Reformed Orthodox position (3.5.1); the differences between Bavinck and the Reformed Orthodox position (3.5.2); and the role of the Bible in Bavinck’s arguments and his use of Scripture (3.5.3).

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<sup>78</sup> Bavinck, *RD II*, 202-203.

<sup>79</sup> This entire paragraph up to this point is summarized from Bavinck, *RD II*, 203-207.

### 3.5.1 Molinism and Reformed Orthodoxy: *Scientia Dei* and *Sola Scriptura*

First, as shown in Section 3.2.1 and 3.3.1, for Reformed orthodoxy which holds Scripture as the *principium unicum* by which any conclusion about the truth of God can be deduced and explained, God's knowledge is an ontological issue that relates to God's essence according to their exegesis of Scriptural texts. Thus, the problem of middle knowledge is not simply an issue of sacrificing certain theological implications in order to hold on to others. Rather, the issue at stake is that the theory of middle knowledge denies a large number of Scriptural texts that declare God's absolute knowledge in its connection with God's power and will. This eventually raises serious questions concerning the relationship between God and the entire order of finite being: how could God know future contingents lying outside of His will? Interestingly, as we learned in Chapter 2, for Molina (and contemporary proponents of middle knowledge), divine foreknowledge is undoubtedly a biblical notion. Indeed it is for the sake of defending foreknowledge and human freedom that Molinists advocate middle knowledge. The question, though, is whether Molina has defended foreknowledge and human freedom in a way which does justice to the Scripture as a whole.

Second, there is an obvious difference and gap between Reformed orthodoxy and Molinism concerning the role of Scripture and how Scripture is used, and the usage of metaphysics in formulating theological argumentation. We have seen in Chapter 2 how Molina builds his arguments for middle knowledge through metaphysical analysis, whereas most likely biblical texts are used to support the presuppositions and propositions he derived from philosophical analysis. As we have seen in this chapter, the Reformed orthodox understands philosophy and reason as necessary ancillary tools in theological formulation. For example, foreknowledge is necessarily concluded from omnipotence (as it is God's power that defines the realm of the genuinely possible); and since God is pure actuality, He is wholly independent and uncaused by creatures. However, their doctrine of divine foreknowledge (and omniscience) is primarily developed from biblical exegesis concerning God's self-existence as a whole. Hence, by appealing to Scripture, the Reformed argued that there is no foreknown condition to God since God's knowledge is not caused or constrained by the external finite order. There is no being independent of the divine will.

Third, in relation to the aforementioned, in order to harmonize foreknowledge and freedom, reconfiguring the notion of God's self-existence seems to be acceptable for Molinism. For the Reformed, the main concern is not to harmonize the two, but rather to unfold and preserve biblical truth. Hence, in this view the theory of middle knowledge and its underlying notion are more than just a threat to the traditional doctrine of God. Rather, the Molinist understanding of who God is, how He acts, and His relationship with the entire order of finite being is considered as contradicting Scriptural revelation. This contradiction is especially a problem for the Reformed who stresses that a proper theological method depends on what Scripture says about God.

Fourth, we see in Section 3.2.2 and Section 3.4.2 a more specific depiction of how the Reformed referred to and used Scriptural texts in their arguments against middle knowledge. On the one hand, it is shown that Reformed theologians derived their understanding of God's knowledge from their exegesis of Scriptural texts. We learn from these two sections that Reformed theologians—including Bavinck—mainly followed how the texts (which they cited) were understood in large parts of the Christian tradition. Yet on the other hand, it is worth asking whether the Reformed interpreted the texts they cited in a legitimate way in light of present-day biblical scholarship. This is especially pertinent since Bavinck was

always cautious of subjectivism and the danger of placing one's own scientific insight above Scripture's teaching about itself. Whether the Reformed/Bavinck's interpretation and use of Scripture are in accordance with the message of Scripture calls for investigation. More so, as we have examined and evaluated Molina's interpretation of the texts he cited, it is necessary to examine and evaluate the Reformed orthodox and Bavinck's interpretation of the texts used to support their arguments as well. This is an important question that will be taken up in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

### 3.5.2 Bavinck and Reformed Orthodoxy: Similarities and Differences

First, as mentioned earlier, for Bavinck, the Reformed view of inspiration is too mechanical. We therefore see that while Bavinck affirms the important Reformed confessional understanding of the *autopistia* of Scripture as a logical necessity for the *principium unicum* of theology, he goes a step further to use it differently in theology. By emphasizing that the *autopistia* of Scripture flows from its permanent *theopneustia* in an organic way, Bavinck strengthens the reason why Scripture is the *principium unicum* of theology. Bavinck points out that God's revelation in Scripture has an inherent power to conquer the believer's mind and heart; hence, the self-convincing Scripture is its own interpreter and sole foundation of theology. Closely related, Bavinck continues to take another shift from the Reformed position. By extending the use of *principia* to not just the logical necessity for theology, but associating it with the growing of one's faith, Bavinck explains that God's (objective) revelation in Scripture becomes (subjectively) true to the believers only through the continuing inspiring work of the Spirit. In short, we see that Bavinck continues within the Reformed tradition but gives its theological terminologies new meaning when he deems it appropriate, and he applies them to meet the challenge of his time (e.g., Bavinck links the organic understanding of the *autopistia* of Scripture as the foundation of theology to the illumination of the Spirit in a believer's heart to avoid subjectivism).

Now, to read Bavinck's positions on Scripture and theology reveals the Christ-centered, Trinitarian basis of these views (ref. Section 3.3.1 and 3.3.2): God is the essential foundation (*principium essendi*) of all things created through the Word (*Logos*); Scripture is the external cognitive foundation (*principium externum*); and the Spirit is the internal principle of knowing (*principium internum*)—it is the Father who through the Son/Logos reveals Himself to us by the Spirit. In short, the Father, Son, and Spirit convey the knowledge of truth to us. By way of revelation, the Father makes Himself known to us as the primary efficient cause of all things through the Son, and the Spirit who inspired Scripture continues to illuminate us in our understanding of Scripture. We saw in our discussion of the Reformed dogmatic method that it held to Scripture as the *unicum principium* of theology, but did not make a direct distinction between *principium externum* and *principium internum*. Bavinck, however, by making such distinction based on the organic, Trinitarian view of Scripture, provides a strong argument that theology must begin with Scripture, proceed from faith, and be articulated by its own *principia*. This perspective becomes the groundwork of Bavinck's positive theological formulations (e.g., divine knowing) and his polemical arguments (e.g., against middle knowledge). Middle knowledge is to be repudiated because it aims at something different from the Scriptural teaching of God's essence and His relationship with His creatures.

Second, by stressing the relation between the *autopistia* of Scripture and the (three-fold) testimony of the Spirit (i.e., the Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture also testifies to Scripture in the heart of individual believer and in the communion of saints; ref. Section 3.3.1

and 3.3.2), Bavinck makes it clear that the self-authenticating Scripture is its own interpreter, not the church. But the church plays an important pedagogical role in leading one to and keeping one in the faith. This view differs from the Reformed Orthodox position that made a stronger separation between Scripture and the church. Following the Reformed tradition, Bavinck certainly holds that Scripture could not be guaranteed by the church or proved by evidence. But he also takes the differences between Roman Catholics (where “testimony” is more institutional) and the Reformed (where “testimony” is more personal)<sup>80</sup> as an advantage in expounding his theology. In so doing, he attempts to prevent Reformed orthodoxy from falling into rationalism, as well as to keep theology from falling into subjectivity or mysticism which sees the human heart (feelings and consciousness) as the principle of theology. As a result, we see that Bavinck treats Reformed orthodoxy with both affirmation and criticism, while he also values the Catholic tradition with critical appreciation. The following further affirms this point.

Third, when encountering the theory of middle knowledge, Reformed orthodoxy was pressed to make use of the distinctions inherited from medieval scholastic theology concerning divine foreknowledge (especially the categories of natural knowledge and free knowledge) as the sole proper mechanism of understanding divine knowing, and to explain the difficulties that occur in the biblical language of divine willing (see Section 3.2.2). Bavinck, however, did not make a strong argument based on the scholastic distinctions of God’s knowledge in his criticism of middle knowledge. Rather, he uses the distinctions to affirm God’s comprehensive knowledge, and to distinguish God’s self-consciousness from His world-consciousness in order to contend against the pantheistic argumentation of a limited self-knowing God.<sup>81</sup> In his criticism of middle knowledge, besides citing Scriptural texts about the nature or self-existence of God, and interpreting them according to the church’s exegesis, he refers to Augustine’s and Aquinas’ view of God’s knowledge to show how middle knowledge diverged in principle from their teachings. When viewed in this perspective, Bavinck seems to have broadened the scope of criticism against middle knowledge.

Certainly, the differences between Reformed orthodoxy and Bavinck are related to their different historical and polemical contexts. When viewed historically in their argument against middle knowledge, the Reformed orthodox attempted to maintain the soteriological monergism of the Reformation over against the rise of synergistic theologies at a technical level. Bavinck, on the other hand, attempted to fight against modernism while speaking to the modern world. Bavinck’s context led him to incorporate philosophical and worldview questions, to dialogue with these questions, and to make use of, or to renounce, modern thoughts where he finds it appropriate. For example, we see that following the Reformed tradition, divine wisdom functions as a necessary aspect of Bavinck’s discussion of divine omniscience (see Section 3.4.2). But at the same time, Bavinck moves a step forward to explain divine wisdom by making a connection with a modified version of Plato’s “idea,” and yet pointing out that such an understanding is different from the modern philosophical concept of “idea.” In so doing, Bavinck concludes that divine wisdom is “the “fashioner” of all things (Wis. 7:22), which creates and governs all things, leading them onward to their destination ....”<sup>82</sup> In this way, Bavinck argues that the theory of middle knowledge that sees God as deriving His knowledge from the will of creatures (rather than solely from His wisdom) is to be rejected.

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<sup>80</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 582-583.

<sup>81</sup> Bavinck, *RD II*, 195.

<sup>82</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 207.

### 3.5.3 Bavinck's Method of Theology: The Role of the Bible

A cursory reading of the *Reformed Dogmatics* reveals the regularity with which Bavinck opens every locus with biblical references. He then often moves into a historical survey of the development of the particular doctrine he is discussing from the church fathers to Reformed orthodoxy and the contemporaries of his time. He develops his own views in dialogue with them, and responds to the issues raised with positive and critical consideration of Reformed orthodoxy, Protestant theology more broadly conceived, and the Roman Catholic tradition as well. We have seen in Section 3.4.1 and Section 3.4.2 that such an approach is demonstrated in Bavinck's discussion of divine knowing and his critique of middle knowledge.

It seems that in terms of structural organization, Bavinck takes his starting position in Scripture. In terms of methodology, Bavinck considers and applies Reformed confessional theology as well as scholasticism when he finds it appropriate.<sup>83</sup> What can we then conclude about the use of the Bible and philosophy in Bavinck's theological method? What is the relationship between theology and philosophy in Bavinck's works? Different scholars who studied Bavinck from different perspectives or foci have come to different conclusions.<sup>84</sup> From our study of this chapter and the evaluation made above, we can at least identify the following characteristics of Bavinck's theology.

First, holding firmly to the organic authority of Scripture as the *principium unicum* of theology, Bavinck often begins his theological discourse with Scriptural references. His effort to ground theology in Scripture is shown. Second, our preceding study shows that when formulating his theological position, Bavinck often utilizes and adopts the Augustinian and Thomist disciplines that make use of the elements of neo-Platonism and Aristotelian logic in explaining biblical ideas. For example, we have seen that Bavinck follows the Augustinian Trinitarian formulations in framing and analyzing the central conceptual role of the *Logos* as the center of God's revelation (ref. Section 3.4.1-3.4.2), which appears to be an important structuring principle of Bavinck's theology. One may not be unfamiliar with Bavinck's frequent reference to Augustine's major works (*The City of God*; *Confession*; and *On Christian Teaching*) in his *Reformed Dogmatics*. In other words, Augustine's philosophy of knowledge has great influence in shaping the groundwork of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*. Also, in Bavinck's use of the Reformed terminology such as *principia*, he gives it new meaning by taking it as a logical starting point of all knowledge and science, and applies it theologically using the epistemological concept of correspondence between subject and object that stems from Aristotelian logic. Similarly, the Aristotelian logic is applied by

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<sup>83</sup> Above, we identified the usage of scholastic theology in Bavinck's discussion of divine willing and middle knowledge. According to the observation of John Bolt, Bavinck's inclination to make use of scholastic theology is also shown clearly in his articulation of justification and regeneration (see John Bolt, "The Bavinck Recipe for Theological Cake," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 13-14).

<sup>84</sup> Van den Belt makes a concise review of the different evaluations of Bavinck's theology by different scholars (see van den Belt, "Autopistia," 290-291): For Heideman, Bavinck relies on Aristotle and Aquinas for his concept of the *principia*; and he charged Bavinck with Pantheism due to his close association of subject and object in his theology (cf. E. P. Heideman, *Revelation and Reason*, 144). According to Bremmer, the structure of Bavinck's theology shows that he derived his *principia* from Aristotelian logic; and he concludes that Bavinck's philosophical position is in line with Neo-Thomism (cf. R. H. Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, 155, 315-330). As for Van den Belt, he thinks that the relationship between objective and subjective truth is certainly foundational for Bavinck's theology; and he concludes that Bavinck's attempts to link theology to epistemology and science (through giving the *autopistia* of Scripture a different function) is more of a retreat than a successful victory (see van den Belt, "Autopistia," 313).

Bavinck in his explanation of the freedom of the will as a “rational delight” (ref. Section 3.4.2)

Now, returning to the question of the role of the Bible and the relationship between theology and philosophy in Bavinck’s method of theology, it seems legitimate to conclude the following: the organizational structure and methodology of Bavinck’s theology suggest that he unilaterally starts from Scripture as theology’s sole foundation, and then attempts to use philosophical considerations in its service. Nevertheless, according to the observations shown above, it seems that Bavinck was clearly influenced by the philosophical epistemologies derived from Augustine and Aristotle, and he developed his understanding of Scriptural texts in relation to theology from these philosophical backgrounds to such an extent that at times he seems to be approaching theology from a philosophical perspective. We may ask, therefore, whether Bavinck indeed worked as unilaterally from Scripture to theological and philosophical reflection as he claims, or whether, alternatively, he was involved in a hermeneutical circle here.

The relationship between the biblical-theological and philosophical traditions in Bavinck’s thinking calls for further evaluation. I will take up this point in Chapter 6 after proposing a framework of theological appropriation of the Bible that I attempt to apply in evaluating the method of Bavinck (and Molina and Craig as well). Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Bavinck’s interpretation of Scriptural texts is based on the church’s exegesis. In other words, Bavinck follows how these texts are generally understood by the Reformed and others. Given that one of the intentions of this present study is to investigate the Scriptural texts cited by Bavinck in light of biblical-theological scholarship, it is legitimate and rewarding to investigate the Scriptural texts Bavinck cites and uses to form his arguments against middle knowledge. One may observe that the main texts Bavinck uses are similar to those used by Molina and contemporary Molinists such as Craig, which are discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4. To avoid redundancy I will then make an evaluation of Bavinck’s interpretation of these texts in Chapter 6.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In general, continuing from Chapter 2, the investigation of this chapter showed the reasons why middle knowledge was understood by the orthodox theologians as a threat not merely to the traditional doctrine of God, but to the whole of Christian doctrine: in their view the relationship between God and the entire order of finite being was challenged to a great extent. They considered the theory of middle knowledge as an expression of a synergistic soteriology. Furthermore, through studying Bavinck’s approach towards Scripture and its relationship with theology, this chapter aimed at offering insights in how we can understand foreknowledge and middle knowledge in light of the teaching of Scripture as a whole. On the one hand, Bavinck’s treatment of the Christian tradition is a great example and reminder to us. He shares the interests of various theologians and challenges of his time, but is always aware of the dangers of both subjectivism and rationalism. He uses the traditional theological terminologies but refines their meanings, and uses them as a stronger foundation to refine the Reformed arguments in rejecting theories such as middle knowledge. On the other hand, the Scriptural interpretation of Bavinck and his method of theology as a whole require our further attention and evaluation. Nevertheless, before we can make such considerations and evaluations, we have yet another area of examination—namely, the arguments of one of the most prominent contemporary proponents of middle knowledge, William Lane Craig. To this I now turn.

## Middle Knowledge in Recent Studies: William Lane Craig

It is up to God whether we find ourselves in a world in which we are predestined, but it is up to us whether we are predestined in the world in which we find ourselves.

William Lane Craig<sup>1</sup>

### 4.1 Introduction

#### 4.1.1 Craig's Role in the Debate

As it was stated at the beginning of this research, ever since middle knowledge was rekindled in the 1970's in certain Christian circles, it has been vehemently defended by some philosophers and theologians and has a number of prolific representatives today. William Lane Craig (1949- ), an American philosopher and theologian who has spent at least thirty years of hard work to prove the compatibility of foreknowledge and freedom, has become one of the most enthusiastic contemporary advocates of middle knowledge especially in the theological field.<sup>2</sup> For Craig, the theory of middle knowledge is "one of the most fruitful theological ideas ever conceived."<sup>3</sup> In many of his works on the subject of God's knowledge, not only did he vigorously defend middle knowledge, but he also applied it to a wide range of theological issues, such as the inspiration of Scripture, divine providence and predestination, and the perseverance of the saints. Craig is seen as one of the ablest theologians in both reviving Molina's theory of middle knowledge as well as applying it to Christian doctrines and practices.<sup>4</sup> His works are mentioned and consulted in almost all current discussions on middle knowledge. As such, it is appropriate to continue our investigation on middle knowledge by studying how it is perceived in contemporary studies as expounded in the work of Craig. This study will help us understand the issues in recent scholarship on middle knowledge, and especially the role of the Bible to contemporary theologians who defend it.

#### 4.1.2 An Outline of What Follows

In what follows I first begin with a brief overview of Craig's view on the logical relationship between foreknowledge and freedom, as this plays a crucial role throughout Craig's arguments (4.2.1). This leads to Craig's emphasis on proving the logical possibility of foreknowledge. Through this contention, he introduces the idea that future events are known

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<sup>1</sup> William Lane Craig, "'No Other Name': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 179.

<sup>2</sup> As briefly presented in Chapter 1.3.2, the revival of the theory of middle knowledge in the theological realm took place most notably through the efforts of William Lane Craig, Thomas Flint, Alfred Freddoso, and Alvin Plantinga. As for Craig, his contributions to the modern theological discussion are shown in many ways. Besides the many articles he has written on this subject, he has given a helpful historical overview of the foreknowledge and freedom dilemma in his scholarly work *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden: Brill, 1988) (see Travis James Campbell, "Historical and Theological Studies: Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68, no. 1 [Spring 2006]: 1). He has also offered his own insights in his works such as *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience* (Leiden: Brill, 1991); *Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987); and *What Does God Know? Reconciling Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Norcross, GA: Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 127.

<sup>4</sup> John S. Feinberg, *No One like Him* (Illinois: Crossway Books, 2001), 747.

by God prior to His divine decree, and thus sets the stage for introducing middle knowledge (4.2.2). This section furnishes us with some background required to understand Craig's main concern and argument as we proceed. I then move to Craig's explanation of middle knowledge, a theory that he believes best explains *how* God knows future events (4.3.1); followed by some remarks concerning the difference between the classical and modern defense of middle knowledge, which highlights the main challenges Craig and contemporary Molinists are facing (4.3.2). This leads to a survey of the common objections raised against middle knowledge in contemporary debates, including the critique of Craig's views by his peers (4.4.1-4.4.3).

After investigating the significant (philosophical) aspects involved in Craig's argument and contemporary studies of middle knowledge, I turn to one of the main concerns of this chapter namely, the role of the Bible in Craig's formulation of his arguments. I begin with a full overview of Craig's biblical account of God's comprehensive knowledge (4.5.1); followed by the biblical references he uses to support the foundation of middle knowledge (4.5.2). We are then at a stage where an evaluation based on our preceding findings is appropriate (4.6.1-4.6.4). Considering the objective of this research, attention is given to how Scripture is interpreted from Craig's methodical perspective; how biblical and theological scholars deal with the biblical proof-texts used by Craig; and the role of the Bible in Craig's defense of middle knowledge. Finally, this chapter concludes by addressing the role of Scriptural texts in modern scholars' defense or refutation of middle knowledge (4.7).

## **4.2 Craig's Views of Foreknowledge and Freedom**

### **4.2.1 The Logical Order of Foreknowledge and Freedom**

All Molinists, including Craig, hold to two vital beliefs: God has exhaustive foreknowledge; and human beings are absolutely free in the libertarian or indeterministic sense. For the Molinist, not only can these two beliefs be reconciled; taken together, they in fact entail the notion of middle knowledge. However, Craig is fully aware of the major (philosophical) arguments raised against the possibility of keeping both beliefs: it is generally argued that precognition in God entails determinism, which in turn negates libertarian freedom; thus, foreknowledge and freedom are mutually exclusive. In the opinion of Craig, the main reasoning which underlies such objections is fatalism. According to the theory of fatalism, it is not within our power to do anything to prevent the actualization of something that will definitely happen in the future.<sup>5</sup> Fatalism can be easily translated into a theological form or understanding of God's knowledge that runs as follows: Given an omniscient God who foreknows everything, it is not within our power to do anything other than what we shall do; otherwise God's foreknowledge would not be true. Apparently, this is a denial of libertarian freedom, since we are not free to choose and do anything other than what we shall do. Hence, it is Craig's utmost concern to argue at length "that the whole idea of fatalism is incoherent and that the fatalistic argument commits a logical fallacy"<sup>6</sup> in order to demonstrate why and how precognition does not entail determinism.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Craig, fatalism is different from determinism's view that all our actions are determined by prior causes. Fatalism does not necessarily hold that everything is causally determined. For Craig, the issue of fatalism cannot remain indifferent to Christians because it has had great influence in the theological realm and even some prominent Christian thinkers such as Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, and Paul Helm embraced theological fatalism (see Craig, *Only Wise God*, 13-14).

<sup>6</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 16. In the second half of the twentieth century, the problem of fatalism (particularly theological fatalism) has rekindled the fires of philosophical controversy. Craig points out that a



To begin, Craig highlights the difference between the logical and temporal order.<sup>7</sup> Craig points out that “while God’s foreknowledge is *chronologically* prior to future events, nonetheless the future events are *logically* prior to divine foreknowledge.”<sup>8</sup> Taking Nelson Pike’s classical example of “Jones mowing his lawn,”<sup>9</sup> Craig disagrees with Pike’s argument that Jones must mow his lawn if God foreknows he will do so, and counters that Jones in fact has the power and freedom to act differently; but whatever Jones does, God will foreknow. Notably, this does not mean that Jones’ action *causes* God’s foreknowledge, but rather God foreknows *because* Jones mows. This is a logical order instead of a causal relation between the two: “God’s foreknowledge is *chronologically* prior to Jones’ mowing the lawn but Jones’ mowing the lawn is *logically* prior to God’s foreknowledge. Jones’ mowing is the ground; God’s foreknowledge is its logical consequent.”<sup>10</sup> Such a logical order “does not mean that there was a time at which certain events occurred without God’s knowing about them. The priority here is purely logical, not temporal.”<sup>11</sup>

Notably, “Jones has the power and freedom to act differently” implies that human agents have the power to act in a way that the future could be *different* (though not *changed*). As Craig puts it, “the future is predeterminate in that future propositions have a determinate truth value, but that does not mean that the future is predetermined.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed it is true that the past and future are logically unchangeable, but the future is causally open in the present moment. In order to explain this in a clear manner, Craig calls our attention to the critical distinction between *changing* past or future events and *causing* past and future events:

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remarkable number of contemporary philosophers, such as A. N. Prior, Peter Geach, John Martin Fischer, Richard Taylor and others, embraced fatalistic positions knowingly or unknowingly in their discussions. The fatalists have either argued that divine foreknowledge (or the antecedent truth of future contingent propositions) and human freedom are incompatible; or that the propositions of future contingents are neither true nor false, so that they do not fall within the scope of divine omniscience (see Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 14-21; *Only Wise God*, 51-54). On the other hand, there are fatalists who try to correct the logical fallacy by making God’s foreknowledge necessary in some sense (see Craig, *Only Wise God*, 75-82). Craig argues that all these proposed routes are ultimately unsuccessful (see Craig, *Only Wise God*, 55-66 and 83-116; *Divine Foreknowledge*, 75-82); and hence, fatalistic reasoning is to be rejected in the theological field, just as it has been rejected in other areas.

<sup>7</sup> According to Craig’s definition, “To say that something is logically prior to something else is *not* to say that one occurs before the other in time. Temporally, they could be simultaneous. Rather, logical priority means that something serves to explain something else. The one provides the grounds or basis for the other. For example, the premises in an argument are logical prior to the conclusion, since the conclusion is derived from and based on the premises, even though temporally the premises and conclusion are all simultaneously true” (Craig, *Only Wise God*, 127-128).

<sup>8</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 128.

<sup>9</sup> Pike contended that if God foreknew eighty years ago that Jones was going to mow his lawn this Saturday, then by virtue of God’s foreknowledge Jones is not free to do otherwise. If he was, Jones could make a truth known by God to be untrue, which is impossible. Pike attempted to avoid theological fatalism by positing God’s timelessness, arguing that God “simply ‘sees’ and believes whatever Jones is doing,” and Jones has the power to perform an action other than that which he is performing so that God’s belief would be other than what it is (see Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970], Chapter 4). Craig on the contrary argues that Jones has the power to act differently, but whatever he chooses to do, God would have known it beforehand (see Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 25). Craig stresses that once this counterfactual analysis in which non-actual events are “within one’s power” is grasped, the heart of fatalism is removed (see Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 161). Therefore, Craig rejects Pike’s claim that foreknowledge necessitates the events foreknown (since the relationship between foreknowledge and freedom is logical, not causal).

<sup>10</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 73-74.

<sup>11</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 128.

<sup>12</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 136.

To change a past or future event would be to bring it about either that an event which actually did occur did not in fact occur or that an event which actually will occur will not in fact occur. To cause a past or future event would be either to produce an event via an exercise of efficient causality such that the occurrence of the event precedes temporally the exercise of that causal power or to produce an event via an exercise of efficient causality such that the occurrence of the event succeeds temporally the exercise of that causal power.<sup>13</sup>

According to these definitions, “to cause the past or future does not imply changing the past or future, since one causes what has been or will be.”<sup>14</sup> Hence, neither the past nor the future can be changed, but clearly the future is open to causation in the present moment; and human agents cause the future freely.<sup>15</sup> As Craig puts it,

... assuming that our actions are not causally determined, we have the ability to act in ways other than we in fact act and were we to act in these other ways, then states of reality conditional upon those acts would be different than they in fact are ... From the fact that certain states are already actual it necessarily follows that the actions of which they are the consequence will be actual, but it does not follow that the actions could not fail to be actual. From the fact that their consequences are actual, we know that the actions will be actual, for were they not to be actual, different consequences would have obtained. It still lies within our power to perform different actions and so to determine past states of affairs which are consequences of those actions ... So long as we can act such that, were we to act in that way, the past would have been different, no threat to human freedom can raise its head.<sup>16</sup>

In short, Craig is saying that human agents (and their actions) have causal effects on the future and determine which course of events will be actualized.<sup>17</sup> God’s foreknowledge does not detract from this. Thus, the combination of foreknowledge and freedom does not entail theological fatalism, and it is certainly very well possible to hold both of them together. Therefore, unlike other solutions whereby foreknowledge is rejected in order to preserve libertarian freedom or vice versa, Craig suggests that libertarian freedom can be attributed to human agents within a framework that also places everything within God’s control and decision, with the condition that God has knowledge of future events that are free. Now the question is: How can God have such knowledge? Is it possible at all to foreknow future events, and if so through what mechanism(s)? To these questions we turn in the next section. In this section, we have seen that the metaphysical principle of “logical order” serves as key foundation for Craig to build his argument.

#### 4.2.2 The Logical Possibility of Foreknowledge

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<sup>13</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 90-91, cf. *Only Wise God*, 76.

<sup>14</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 91.

<sup>15</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 92.

<sup>16</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 161.

<sup>17</sup> Regarding the possibility of causing past events, Craig examines the logical possibility of backward causation, a theory that holds it is possible to produce an event in the past, so that the effect precedes the cause (see Craig, *Only Wise God*, 76). Now, Craig indeed concedes that backward causation is logically possible. For if backward causation was logically impossible, the past would be causally closed in the sense of being necessary: it could not have been different. In that case, fatalism would succeed, and God could not have foreknown anything else than He in fact foreknew. Hence, Craig concludes that backward causation is logically possible (thus fatalism fails) but it is ontologically impossible. Nonetheless, this is not a problem for Craig, because the relationship between foreknowledge and freedom is logical, not causal. As such, foreknowledge does not imply or require backward causation (see Craig, *Only Wise God*, 81-82).

Craig points out that when those who deny foreknowledge have failed to show that it is incompatible with freedom, they often turn to a second wave of dispute: there is no way for God to know future free acts, particularly because the future does not exist, hence is not there to be known.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, “how an indeterminate event can be known prior to its occurrence” becomes a question.<sup>19</sup> Since the future does not exist, after all, it seems as if no statement corresponds with it; as such, future-tense statements are neither true nor false. Craig counters that this is a misunderstanding of truth as correspondence, as this would be only true in the case of true present-tense statements.<sup>20</sup> For true statements of other tenses, the events described need not exist in order for propositions about them to be true.<sup>21</sup> Based on his concept of logic (as mentioned in the above section), Craig reasons that since future events are logically (not chronologically) prior to foreknowledge, whether a statement about future events is true or false is determined by how things turn out; and God, being omniscient, knows all true future-tense statements even at a time when their objects are still entirely nonexistent.<sup>22</sup> In Craig’s words,

One could also correctly say that the future events are logically prior to the truth or falsity of statements about them, since these statements are true or false on the basis of how the events turn out ... Chronologically, certain future-tense statements are true from the beginning of time and are simultaneously known by God; later on, the events corresponding to these statements occur. Logically, God foreknows the events because certain future-tense statements about them are true, and such statements are true because the events will occur ... this does not mean that there was a *time* at which certain events occurred without God’s knowing about them. The priority here is purely logical, not temporal.<sup>23</sup>

Craig’s point is that insofar as a person’s free act is “logically prior to the truth value of propositions about it, the chronological priority of the proposition being true or being truly asserted is irrelevant to the issue of what is within one’s power.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, the statement about an event is true or is a true proposition because the event really happens, not the other way around. Notably, this also means that it has nothing to do with whether the statement concerning this event is made *before* or *after* the event; rather what matters is that

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<sup>18</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 119.

<sup>19</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 226. Additionally, Craig points out that an indeterminate event cannot be known by inference from present states of affairs, since it is causally indeterminate with regard to them. As such, it is ultimately on these grounds that both Richard Swinburne and Anthony Kenny deny foreknowledge of future contingents, not because foreknowledge leads to fatalism, but, as Kenny states, because there can be no correlation between the acts of a future free agent and God’s foreknowledge (see Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977], 172; Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979], 58).

<sup>20</sup> For example, “President Reagan is signing the tax-reform bill” is true if and only if President Reagan is now signing the tax-reform bill. Indeed, in the case of true present-tense statements, the event or thing referred to must exist (see Craig, *Only Wise God*, 56).

<sup>21</sup> For example, a past-tense statement such as “Reagan won the 1980 presidential election” is true if and only if this really happened in 1980. Hence, for this statement to be true, the election cannot be happening now, because “the tense of the statement requires that the event described happened before the statement became true.” In short, for this statement to be true, it is necessary that what it described *has* existed. Similarly, for the future-tense statement such as “a woman will win the 2016 presidential election” to be true, it is not required that the election somehow exists now, but that the election *will* exist. As such, it is a complete misunderstanding to think that the event or thing described by the statement must exist in order for the statement to be true (Craig, *Only Wise God*, 56-57).

<sup>22</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 82.

<sup>23</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 128.

<sup>24</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 158.

the human agent who actualized the event had the power to perform or not to perform the action (even if the statement about this event had been made prior to the action taken).

Craig points out that the question regarding the *basis* of foreknowledge is usually approached from one of two angles: the empiricist or the rationalist.<sup>25</sup> The empiricist approach eventually runs into the problem of denying God's knowledge of the past and future, and is therefore problematic for Craig. Craig prefers the rationalist approach, which affirms God's foreknowledge. Craig further explains that a rationalist model may come in different forms: "one could hold that God's knowledge of future-tense statements is simply innate and logically foundational. Or one could maintain that God's knowledge of future-tense statements is based on logically prior statements which He knows and which enable Him to know the truth of future-tense statements."<sup>26</sup> For Craig, the latter form penetrates deep into the structure of middle knowledge<sup>27</sup>—a theory that he thinks best explains how God as perfectly omniscient and human beings as genuinely free are compatible notions. I now proceed to further explain Craig's notion of middle knowledge.

### 4.3 Craig's Theory of Middle Knowledge

#### 4.3.1 Three Logical Moments of God's Knowledge

Following Molina, Craig explains that God has three different types or three "logical moments" of knowledge namely, natural knowledge, middle knowledge, and free knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Craig emphasizes that whatever God knows, He has known from eternity and simultaneously. So temporally there are no distinct moments in God's knowledge. As such, it is crucial not to assume temporal succession or chronological relationships in God's knowledge. Logically there is, however, a certain structure to God's knowledge, and some aspects of His omniscience are prior to others. This relationship within God's knowledge is "logical" in the sense that "His knowledge of certain propositions is conditionally or explanatorily prior to His knowledge of certain other propositions."<sup>29</sup> Each type of God's knowledge, that is, presupposes the preceding type(s). Notably, just as the logical relation of foreknowledge and freedom is vigorously pursued by Craig to show compatibility, the

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<sup>25</sup> Referring to Edward Khamara's work on this subject (Khamara, "Eternity and Omniscience," *Philosophical Quarterly* 24 [July 1974]: 212-218), Craig explains that the empiricist tends to interpret foreknowledge on the perception model, which consequently construes God as an omni-perceiver. The rationalist, on the other hand, tends to interpret foreknowledge in purely conceptual terms: "God innately knows all true statements. Since true future-tense statements are included among them, He foreknows the future." See Craig, *Only Wise God*, 121.

<sup>26</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 122.

<sup>27</sup> As we proceed to the following section, we will see more clearly how Craig relates or applies such an understanding of "logical priority" to his explanation of the "logical moments" of God's knowledge (see ft.38, 41), in which middle knowledge is placed in the "middle" as the second logical moment.

<sup>28</sup> Craig's definition of these three types of knowledge and their logical sequence is similar to Molina's, thus I will not repeat the explanation of these forms of knowledge already presented in Chapter 2. For Craig's detailed explanation, see Craig, *Only Wise God*, 129-131; "No Other Name," 172-188 and 232-234; *What Does God Know?*, 45, 57.

<sup>29</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 237. Craig explains, just as how we talk about temporal or chronological moments (ref. Section 4.3.2), so can we speak about logical moments. "Logically, in the first moment certain events occur; in the second moment statements about them are true or false; and in the third moment God knows only and all the true statements. The moment at which an event occurs is logically prior to the moment at which God knows about it." Craig emphasizes that "this does not mean that there was a *time* at which certain events occurred without God's knowledge about them." (Craig, *Only Wise God*, 128).

concept of logical priority continues to play a very important role in his account of middle knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

By stressing that middle knowledge is placed logically (not chronologically) in between—in the middle of—natural knowledge (i.e., God’s knowledge of all necessary truths and all logical possibilities) and free knowledge (i.e., God’s knowledge of everything that happens in the actual world; this includes God’s foreknowledge of creaturely contingents), Craig explains that God knows what every possible creature *would* freely do (not just *could* do) in any possible set of circumstances. As Molina explained, through middle knowledge God identifies the limited “range of possible worlds” that He could create, given the free choices that creatures would make in those worlds. God then freely decides to create this particular world based on what He knows through middle knowledge.<sup>31</sup> In the contemporary discussion of middle knowledge, God is said to know through middle knowledge certain propositions or states of affairs,<sup>32</sup> which are often termed counterfactuals of freedom.<sup>33</sup> “A counterfactual proposition is a subjunctive conditional which presupposes the falsity of the antecedent.”<sup>34</sup> To put it simply, a counterfactual is a proposition or state of affairs that is counter to what actually takes place in the real world (e.g., actions which a free agent would carry out in certain hypothetical situations but which he or she never actually carries out). Examples of counterfactual propositions might include: if Peter was not in the Sanhedrin courtyard after Christ was arrested, he would not have disowned Christ; if I engaged in physical exercise more often, I would have better health.

Craig takes Peter’s denial of Christ as an example to explain how the three logical moments of God’s knowledge work: God knows through His natural knowledge (in the first moment) all the possible things that Peter *could* do if placed in certain circumstances. But God knows through middle knowledge (in the second moment) the circumstances under which Peter would or would not use his libertarian freedom to deny Christ, as well as the number of times that he would deny Christ.<sup>35</sup> Hypothetically speaking, for example, had state of affairs A occurred, Peter would not have denied Christ; had state of affairs B occurred, Peter would have denied Christ only once; had state of affairs C happened, Peter would have denied Christ twice; and so on. Siding with the other Molinists, Craig ascribes contra-causal freedom to Peter, i.e., the freedom to do otherwise under all these circumstances.<sup>36</sup> But God

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<sup>30</sup> In Craig’s words, “In order to understand the concept of middle knowledge, it is imperative that we first understand the concept of logical priority. This is a very subtle notion, especially in the context of middle knowledge.” (Craig, *Only Wise God*, 127).

<sup>31</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 130-131.

<sup>32</sup> As we saw in Chapter 2, Freddoso explained that “Molina’s use of the Latin term *complexio* oscillates between the English terms ‘proposition’ and ‘state of affairs.’ Accordingly, ... there is an exact isomorphism between propositions and states of affairs. That is, to each proposition there corresponds just one state of affairs, and vice versa; a proposition is true (false) if and only if the corresponding state of affairs obtains (fails to obtain).” (Freddoso, “Introduction,” in Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988], 10)

<sup>33</sup> In contemporary philosophical discussion of middle knowledge, “counterfactuals of freedom” are also called “counterfactuals of creaturely freedom,” or “counterfactual conditionals.” In this research, “counterfactuals of freedom” will be employed because this term is used more often in most scholarly discussion. Also, to be exact it is counterfactuals of *libertarian* freedom to which this term refers.

<sup>34</sup> Campbell, “A Reformed Critique,” 3.

<sup>35</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 130.

<sup>36</sup> “Contra-causal freedom” is a philosophical term used in defining libertarian freedom. It refers to a person’s freedom to choose other than what he/she has in fact chosen at the time of choice. Or, in the words of Molina, “And so given the same disposition and cognition ... on the part of the intellect, the will is by its innate freedom able to will or to dissent or to neither will nor dissent.” (Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Concordia IV*, Disputation 53, pt. 2, sec. 17).

knows exactly how Peter would use his freedom under any circumstances in which God might place him, as His middle knowledge encompasses all counterfactuals of creaturely free choices. In other words, God knows that Peter, if he were placed in state of affairs D, would deny Christ three times. When God decided and decreed state of affairs D to happen, He freely anticipated and knew with certainty the precise outcome of what would happen before it actually did happen.<sup>37</sup> Simply put, after reviewing all possible scenarios for the course of universal history through His middle knowledge, God selects the one that best corresponds with His purposes. Consequently, through His free knowledge (in the third moment), God knows what every possible creature *will* do under the selected circumstances and what will, as a result, actually take place in the real world.

Given the idea that middle knowledge is logically prior to God's decision to create the world—a divine knowledge upon which His decision to create the world is based on—Craig holds that middle knowledge is God's knowledge of the contingent but is independent of His will. As such, middle knowledge is neither part of God's natural knowledge (which is independent of His will but necessary) nor of God's free knowledge of the contingent (which is dependent of His will). In short, by unfolding God's knowledge in this threefold logical structure, Craig attempts to provide a rational explanation of *how* it is that God can have exhaustive foreknowledge and control everything that happens, including our libertarian free actions and their results. The role of middle knowledge in this process is to function as the “logical moment” which explains how God's decision is guided by this knowledge.

### 4.3.2 Difference from Classical Defense

We see that though Craig's overall explanation of middle knowledge is similar to Molina's, his (and others')<sup>38</sup> modern defense of middle knowledge differs from the classical defense because it emphasizes logical order or logical priority (e.g., the application of counterfactuals of freedom). At this juncture, we should see the importance of advocating the truth value of counterfactuals for Craig and contemporary Molinists, as counterfactuals provide a strong basis for adhering to the philosophical coherence of middle knowledge. As Craig argues, if counterfactual propositions are true, it means that God knows them since an omniscient God knows all true propositions; and if it is true that God knows them prior to His divine decree, God must have known them through middle knowledge.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the epistemic status of counterfactual propositions became one of the most important issues troubling Molinists over the past forty years. Ken Perszyk correctly states, “God has middle knowledge only if there are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom that are contingent but over which He has no control. Counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are not the only putative objects of middle knowledge, but they have been the most important and controversial in recent times.”<sup>40</sup> It is therefore necessary to have an overview of this controversy to acquire an accurate picture of middle knowledge. To this I now turn.

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<sup>37</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 130.

<sup>38</sup> For example, see Alvin Plantinga, “A Response to Adams' Argument,” in *Middle Knowledge: Theory and Applications*, William Hasker, David Basinger et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), 51-57; and “Middle Knowledge and the Free Will Defense,” in *Middle Knowledge*, 198-217. Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); and “Whence and Whither the Molinist Debate: A Reply to Hasker,” in *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate*, ed. Ken Perszyk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37-49. Alfred J. Freddoso, “Objections to Molinism, and Replies,” in *Middle Knowledge*, 23-34; and “Introduction,” 1-81.

<sup>39</sup> Craig, “The Middle Knowledge View,” in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, eds. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 136-137; *Divine Foreknowledge*, 246-269.

<sup>40</sup> Ken Perszyk, “Introduction,” in *Molinism*, 2.

#### 4.4. A Survey of Recent Objections against Middle Knowledge<sup>41</sup>

“Molinism was born amid controversy and has never escaped from it.”<sup>42</sup> Our study in Chapter 2 has shown that in Molina’s time, the dispute was more about whether there could be any true “prevolitionals” (i.e., propositions logically or conceptually prior to and independently of God’s will).<sup>43</sup> In recent times, while the “Molinism War” continues, more issues of concern are involved. In his 2011 work, *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate*, Perszyk attests that the main contemporary criticisms over Molinism centre around two broad clusters of issues: theoretical and practical (or “applied”) ones.<sup>44</sup>

##### 4.4.1 Objections of Theoretical Issues

As to theory, there are two main objections:<sup>45</sup> (1) there neither are nor can be true counterfactuals of freedom (all are either false, or true or false) because they fail to be grounded in reality (the “grounding” objection); (2) there neither are nor can be true counterfactuals of freedom prior to God’s decision, because their truth value depends on the actual created world.<sup>46</sup> Apparently, both of these objections seriously challenge the truth value of the counterfactual propositions that are central to Molinism. Hence, much has been written about the “grounding” objection and its contention has been modified and transformed into different versions over the years. Generally, it is argued that there neither are nor can be contingently true counterfactuals of freedom because there is nothing in reality that “grounds” their truth or makes them true. Counterfactuals of freedom or counterfactual statements about what a person would freely have done under different circumstances cannot be true, because they are just statements about events or actions that will never exist, or they are statements about creatures that will never exist. Since they are conditionals of only what would exist if the situation were different, they do not correspond to reality and hence cannot be true. Who or what grounds their truth becomes an unanswerable question as well.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, it is also pointed out that the premises on which Molinism stands, taken together with other principles, establish a more complicated anti-Molinist argument. Since in Molinism, we freely do something only if we are able to do otherwise in the same circumstance, we in fact have no counterfactual power over any true antecedents and their consequents, so none of our actions is or would be free.<sup>48</sup> If this is the case, there are no true

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<sup>41</sup> The contemporary debate on Molinism started in 1974 and continues today. As we will see in the following survey, the issues discussed are mainly philosophical; and the issues involved are complex and have led to more and more sophisticated versions of the argument over the years. Since the goal of this research is not to analyse and evaluate the philosophical considerations of middle knowledge, but rather to examine the biblical backgrounds and role of the Bible in this theory, I shall not present a detailed account of the objections raised against it. Instead I provide a brief survey of the debates in order to show the crux of the debates.

<sup>42</sup> Hasker, “The (Non-)Existence of Molinist Counterfactuals,” in *Molinism*, 26.

<sup>43</sup> Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, chp.2.

<sup>44</sup> Perszyk, “Introduction,” 8; Craig, *Only Wise God*, 139.

<sup>45</sup> These two objections have been briefly mentioned in Section 1.3.2, where a survey of the contemporary debates on middle knowledge was presented.

<sup>46</sup> Hasker, “The (Non-)Existence of Molinist Counterfactuals,” 26.

<sup>47</sup> The ‘grounding’ objection was brought into the modern debate by Robert Merrihew Adams (see “Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14, (April 1977): 109-117, or in *Middle Knowledge*, 35-50).

<sup>48</sup> See Hasker, “The (Non-)Existence of Molinist Counterfactuals,” 26-36. A Molinist’s response to this objection can be seen in: Alvin Plantinga, “Replies to My Colleagues,” in *Alvin Plantinga*, vol. 5 of *Profiles: An International Series of Contemporary Philosophers and Logicians*, eds. James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van

counterfactuals of freedom. In other words, in Molinism, we do not “bring about” the truth of any counterfactuals of freedom about us. This argument is initiated by Hasker and is commonly known as the “bring about” argument. Moreover, if we assume that counterfactuals do have truth value, their existence turns out to be incompatible with libertarian freedom as well. This is because if any counterfactuals of freedom were true, they would be part of, or entailed in, the “fixed” history of the world prior to our choices and actions (since they have already had causal consequence), so we would have no control of any sort over them.<sup>49</sup> If this is the case, we would not be the ultimate source of any of our choices and actions, and so we would not be free. While Molinists claim to be the champion of libertarian freedom, they are committed to principles that are inconsistent with it, so the objection goes.

Craig gives three reasons for holding that counterfactual statements can be true. First, “very little reflection is required to reveal how pervasive and indispensable a role such counterfactuals play in rational conduct and planning,”<sup>50</sup> since “we use such statements all the time: ‘if I had known you were coming, I would have baked a cake’ ... we ourselves often appear to know such true counterfactuals.”<sup>51</sup> Second, the Law of Conditional Excluded Middle (LCEM)<sup>52</sup> also holds for counterfactuals of a certain special form, usually called “counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.”<sup>53</sup> Third, the Scriptures are replete with counterfactual statements (e.g., the “repenting texts” of God), so that the Christian theist, should at least, be committed to the truth of certain counterfactuals about free, creaturely actions.<sup>54</sup> However, for others, this is certainly not the case. Robert Adams says that he doubts if counterfactual propositions “ever were or ever will be true;”<sup>55</sup> Bruce Reichenbach agrees as he does not see any comprehensive grounds on which such propositions can be true;<sup>56</sup> and William Hasker claims that the concept of middle knowledge is self-

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Inwagen (Dordrecht, NL: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985), 378; and “A Response to Adams’ Arguments,” in *Middle Knowledge*, 51-57. Freddoso, “Introduction,” 68-75. Flint, *Divine Providence*, ch.5; and “Whence and Whither the Molinist Debate: A Reply to Hasker,” in *Molinism*, 37-49. Edward J. Wierenga, “Providence, Middle Knowledge, and the Grounding Objection,” *Philosophia Christi* 3 (2001): 447-457; and “The No Grounds Objection,” in *Middle Knowledge*, 58-67. Craig, “Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the ‘Grounding Objection,’” *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001): 337-352, and “Ducking Friendly Fire: Davison on the Grounding Objection,” *Philosophia Christi* 8 (2006): 161-166. Also, a three-way exchange debate was made: Trenton Merricks (see “Truth and Molinism,” in *Molinism*, 50-72) argues that Hasker’s argument fails; Hasker (see “Trenton Merricks on Some Anti-Molinist Argument,” in *Molinism*, 73-77) and Dean Zimmerman (see “Pro Haskeris Contradictione,” in *Molinism*, 78-89) replied to Merricks; and Merricks responds to their replies (see “Replies to Hasker and Zimmerman,” in *Molinism*, 90-95). See also Chapter 1, footnote 38, for the debates among Craig, Adams, Hasker, Flint and Zagzebski.

<sup>49</sup> Hasker, “The (Non-)Existence of Molinist Counterfactuals,” 26-27.

<sup>50</sup> Craig, “Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the ‘Grounding Objection,’” 338.

<sup>51</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 139.

<sup>52</sup> LCEM is the claim that, for any proposition or counterfactual with the same antecedent and opposite consequents, either  $A \rightarrow B$  or  $A \rightarrow \sim B$  is true. For a detailed explanation of LCEM, see David Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973), 79-83.

<sup>53</sup> Craig’s application of LCEM in explaining counterfactuals of freedom: “if S were in C, S would freely do A, where S is a created agent, A is some action, and C is a set of fully specified circumstances including the whole history of the world until the time of S’s free action ... For since circumstances C in which the free agent is placed are fully specified in the counterfactual’s antecedent, it seems that if the agent were placed in C and left free with respect to action A, then he must either do A or not do A. For what other alternative is there?” So one of these two counterfactuals must be true. Hence, it is undeniable that there are true counterfactuals of freedom (see Craig “Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the ‘Grounding Objection,’” 338).

<sup>54</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 127.

<sup>55</sup> Adams, “Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,” 110.

<sup>56</sup> Bruce Reichenbach, “The Deductive Argument from Evil,” *Sophia* 20 (April 1981): 25-42.



contradictory.<sup>57</sup> For Craig, such an objection rests on the same basis as the argument against foreknowledge. Generally, then, he responded with the argument of logical order (as shown in Section 4.3.2).<sup>58</sup>

The second objection, which can also be seen as one version of the grounding objection, argues that God simply could not have been guided by middle knowledge in deciding which world to actualize, because which counterfactuals of freedom are true depends on the actual world; but the actual world is determined in part by God's decision.<sup>59</sup> Hence, Edward Wierenga, though a friend of Molinism, points out that if counterfactuals were true, they would be true "too late" for God to apply them in His providential deliberations.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, other works have discussed this objection. According to recent literature, those engaged in the theoretical objections (especially the "grounding" objection) have collectively grown weary from the seemingly endless and unyielding debate over the years,<sup>61</sup> and new directions have been sought to advance the debate.

#### 4.4.2 Objections of Practical Issues

Notably, both of the theoretical objections mentioned above critically attacked the Molinist account of providence;<sup>62</sup> these objections became part of the reasons that gradually shifted the attention of the debate from theoretical issues to the applied or practical aspect. In recent years, an increasing amount of work has been invested in "applied Molinism," whose concern "is not with providing a defense against general objections to the coherence or plausibility of the notion of middle knowledge, but with applications of it to specific aspects of God's providential governance and a range of Christian beliefs and practices related to it"<sup>63</sup> (e.g., the inspiration of Scripture, the perseverance of the saints, papal infallibility, prophecy, and petitionary prayer).<sup>64</sup> Craig thinks that it would be "on the basis of practical application—the

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<sup>57</sup> William Hasker, "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge," *Nous* 20 (1986): 545-557.

<sup>58</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 140-141.

<sup>59</sup> See Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," 110-111; and Kenny, *God of the Philosophers*, 70-71.

<sup>60</sup> Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 148. Wierenga is not an anti-Molinist, but he agrees with the difficulty or trouble shown in Molinism. Hence, he rejects the suggestion of "counterfactuals of world-actualization" as a solution to the problem; and he develops a new approach "according to which the relevant conditionals are built up in stages, with the antecedents of the conditionals at each stage including information about the initial segment of the world up to that point." See "Tilting at Molinism," in *Molinism*, 119.

<sup>61</sup> Although for a time it seemed that the grounding problem might be solved by the suggestion of "possible-world semantics" (see Edwin Mares and Perszyk, "Molinist Conditionals," in *Molinism*, 97-115), this grounding did not yield pronounced results or lead to much progress after all (see Freddoso, "Introduction," 75). Hence, relying on "possible-world semantics" to solve the grounding problem has virtually disappeared.

<sup>62</sup> As stated earlier in Chapter 2 Molina's formulation of middle knowledge is closely related to the doctrine of divine grace and providence: it was an attempt to affirm divine grace, providence, foreknowledge and predestination without eliminating constitutive human cooperation (see Section 2.2.1). We learned from the works of contemporary Molinists that such attempts and purposes certainly remained important for them.

<sup>63</sup> Perszyk, "Introduction," 12.

<sup>64</sup> Plantinga's use of middle knowledge in response to the problem of evil was an opening act for the development of this "applied Molinism." Since then, Craig and Flint have been at the forefront of this project, followed by many others. For example: Craig on the inspiration of Scripture (see "'Men Moved by the Holy Spirit Spoke from God' (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration," *Philosophia Christi* 1 [1999]: 45-82); Christian exclusivism (see "Middle Knowledge and Christian Exclusivism," *Sophia* 34 (1995): 120-139); the perseverance of the saints (see "'Lest Anyone Shall Fall': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Perseverance and Apostolic Warnings," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 29 [1991]: 65-74); non-miraculous special providence (see "Creation, Providence and Miracles," ed. Brian Davies, *Philosophy of Religion* [Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1998], 136-162), and missionary

theological fruitfulness or lack thereof—that Molinism stands or falls.”<sup>65</sup> Apparently, for the Molinist, “applied Molinism” plays a crucial role not only in advancing the discussion of middle knowledge, but also in deflecting the theoretical objections to middle knowledge. Nevertheless, disagreements and questions are also raised concerning the applicability of middle knowledge. It is argued that Molinism does not have nearly as much of an advantage over other accounts (such as the Thomist, Open Theist, etc.); it is also pointed out that Molinism has an edge on certain applied issues but gets shipwrecked on others.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the question of “whether middle knowledge is a benefit or liability overall for a satisfying doctrine of providence” is often asked.<sup>67</sup> For some, the Molinist account of providence has a negative overall affect on God’s providence, and in particular on God’s relation to free creatures: “either it gives God too much control (robbing Him of His ability to create free creatures or relate to them in the right way) or it gives God too little control (robbing Him of His sovereignty).”<sup>68</sup> If these arguments are correct, they threaten an important alleged advantage of Molinism over its opponents, since we concluded from Craig’s account (as mentioned at the beginning of this section) that Molinists see the practical advantages as the greatest strength and determining factor of this theory’s plausibility.

#### 4.4.3 Objections Comprising a Mixture of Theoretical and Practical Issues

Besides the objections mentioned above, there are also criticisms from different perspectives that deeply challenge Molinism.<sup>69</sup> For example, John Martin Fischer contends that Molinism may provide the “nuts-and-bolts” answer to the foreknowledge and freewill problem, but it does not provide a “philosophical explanation” to solve the incompatibility between the two; rather it provides an illuminating model of providence.<sup>70</sup> Again, this threatens an important assumption of Molinists such as Craig who think that “one of the most helpful consequences of middle knowledge is the reconciliation of divine sovereignty and human freedom.”<sup>71</sup> Similar to Fischer, Greg Restall is doubtful about the role of Molinism in the free will debate. Restall affirms that on the one hand, the Molinist conception of human freedom implies an

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evangelism (see “Should Peter Go to the Mission Fields?,” *Faith and Philosophy* 10 [1993]: 261-265). Flint on papal infallibility, prophecy, and petitionary prayer (see *Divine Providence*); and the Incarnation (see “‘A Death He Freely Accepted’: Molinist Reflections on the Incarnation,” *Faith and Philosophy* 18 [2001]: 3-20; and “The Possibilities of Incarnation: Some Radical Suggestions,” *Religious Studies* 37, no. 3 (September 2001): 307-320). Also, Del Ratzsch on evolution (see “Design, Chance, and Theistic Evolution,” ed. William A. Dembski, *Mere Creation* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998], 289-312); Michael Rea on original sin (see “The Metaphysics of Original Sin,” in *Persons: Human and Divine*, eds. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], 319-356).

<sup>65</sup> Craig, “Middle Knowledge and Christian Exclusivism,” 121.

<sup>66</sup> Perszyk, “Introduction,” 11-12.

<sup>67</sup> Perszyk, “Introduction,” 3, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Perszyk, “Introduction,” 5. Perszyk points out that, e.g., Open Theists have argued that middle knowledge would give God too much control. The Thomists, on the other hand, have argued that middle knowledge gives God too little control. Additionally, on the issue of “the problem of evil,” the Molinists and Open Theists think Thomism (including Augustinianism and Calvinism) comes off worse with respect to this issue; Open Theists tend to think Molinism is slightly better than Thomism, but is still a clear detriment (on this and other applied issues) to a satisfying account of providence. In short, the same problems and objections crop up.

<sup>69</sup> Each of these criticisms involves complex arguments, which can hardly be described in a few lines; and since the intention of this section is to provide a sense of some other challenges Molinists face besides the more prominent ones mentioned in the above sections, I will not explain these criticisms, but briefly refer to them.

<sup>70</sup> See John Martin Fischer, “Putting Molinism in its Place,” in *Molinism*, 5.

<sup>71</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 135. Similarly, Robert Kane expressed the same view; see *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 157.

open or unsettled future, yet on the other hand, the notion of middle knowledge guarantees God's omniscience or exhaustive foreknowledge of our free actions.<sup>72</sup> To Restall, such a combination has deep philosophical problems. By rehearsing Nuel Belnap and Mitchell Green's argument against a distinguished single future in the context of branching time, Restall shows that it applies equally to the view of combining Molinism and branching time.<sup>73</sup> As for Travis J. Campbell, the inconclusiveness of the answer given by the Molinists (concerning the truth of counterfactual propositions) made it "hard to avoid the conclusion that libertarianism leaves one without a locus of praise or blame," since "if all of what I am does not determine my choice, then all of what I am cannot be praised or blamed for those choices. In effect, I am not wholly responsible for my choice."<sup>74</sup> Indeed, as identified earlier, many prominent philosophers agree that counterfactuals of freedom are in fact necessary truths, whose truth-value is not at all determined by the free agent. It would seem that in Molinism libertarian freedom is not the best way to uphold human responsibility.

Having now investigated the significant philosophical aspects of Craig's argument, as well as the contested issues involved in contemporary studies of middle knowledge (I will return to some of these issues in Section 4.6), we are at the point where we can study the biblical ramifications of Craig's arguments.

## 4.5 The Role of the Bible in Craig's Discussions

This section is devoted to investigating the role of the Bible in Craig's arguments. To begin, Section 4.5.1 delineates Craig's biblical account of God's comprehensive knowledge of the present, past and, future. This analysis illumines Craig's overall understanding of God's knowledge. In Section 4.5.2, I then focus on presenting the biblical references and theological arguments Craig uses to support his theory of middle knowledge, through which Craig's usage and treatment of biblical texts is further shown.

### 4.5.1 Biblical Evidences of God's Comprehensive Knowledge

As already stated, Craig and the Molinists affirm God's comprehensive knowledge of the present, past and future. Besides presenting the logical order between foreknowledge and freedom, and also defending middle knowledge, Craig appeals to biblical narrative and points out that both "the Old and New Testaments consistently portray God as the one who knows everything, including all things present, past, and future."<sup>75</sup> To begin, Craig cites Scriptural texts of the Old Testament concerning God's knowledge of the present. Craig explains, Scripture repeatedly tells us that God observes and knows everything, including the ways and acts of every individual (e.g., Job 31:4, 34:21; Ps. 119:168; Jer. 16:17, 32:19). Nothing escapes God's knowledge (e.g., Job 24:23, 38:31-33; Ps. 147:4; Isa. 40:26). Moreover, God not only observes, but He also understands His creation (e.g., Job 38-41, 28:12-27; Ps. 33: 13-15) and knows the very thoughts of all individuals—He discerns and weighs human hearts and minds (e.g., Jer. 17:9-10; Ps. 139:23-24, cf. Ps. 7:9, 94:11; Jer. 20:12). Likewise, such knowledge of God is emphasized in the New Testament (e.g., Acts. 1:24, 15:8; Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 4:5; 1 John 3:19-20; Heb. 4:12-13). Furthermore, since all the past was already present

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<sup>72</sup> Greg Restall, "Molinism and Thin Red Line," in *Molinism*, 227-238.

<sup>73</sup> Restall, "Molinism and Thin Red Line," 227-238.

<sup>74</sup> Travis James Campbell, *"The Beautiful Mind: A Reaffirmation and Reconstruction of the Classical Reformed Doctrines of the Divine Omniscience, Prescience, and Human Freedom"* (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2004), chp. 7-8, 10.

<sup>75</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 22.

to God and He has known it, and He sees everything that is happening in the present, it is most unlikely that God does not know the past completely (this can only be the case, Craig rightly contends, when God forgets things, but “such a lapse of memory is foreign to the biblical God”<sup>76</sup>). In occasions where we find the concepts of remembering and forgetting applied to God in Scripture, they are usually associated with God’s faithfulness to the Israelites (e.g., Ex. 2:24; Deut. 4:31; Ps. 98:3) and the faithlessness of the Israelites to God (e.g., 1 Sam. 12:9; Isa. 17:10; Jer.2:32; Hos. 4:6). In sum, Scripture implicitly indicates that just as God knows everything that happens, He likewise remembers everything that has happened and which He has already known (Ps. 56:8; Mal. 3:16).<sup>77</sup>

Finally, Scripture also depicts God as the one who knows all *future* events and “directs the course of world history towards His foreseen end (e.g., Is. 44:6-8; 46:9-10; Eph. 1:10; 3:9-11; 1 Peter 1:20 etc.).”<sup>78</sup> Craig explains that God’s knowledge of the future appears to be an important prophetic pattern that underlines the biblical view of history. The fulfilment of prophetic prediction by true prophets of the Old Testament concerning significant events of history (e.g., Gen. 15:13-14; Gen. 40:8; 1 Kings 13:2-3, 20-24; 2 Kings 8:7-15) was clear evidence of foreknowledge. In other words, the prophet’s ability to foretell the future is rooted in God’s knowledge of the future; and Isaiah takes such knowledge of God as an imperative and decisive test in distinguishing the true and false gods (e.g., Is. 41:42-44; 44:6-8; 46:9-10). Such prophetic patterns continue in the New Testament. The Gospel writers point out that the life and ministry of Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies (e.g., Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 23, 4:14-16; 8-17; 12:17-21; Mark 1:2-4; 9:9-13; Lk. 7:18-23, 27; 18:31-33; Acts. 2:16-21; 3:18; 4:25-28; 7:52). Scripture also characterized Jesus as a prophet who made many prophetic proclamations, such as the following: events before the end of the world and the destruction of Jerusalem (Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21); the acts and thoughts of His disciples and other people (Mk. 14:18-20; Jn. 1:47-50, 2:24-25, 3:10-12, 4:17-19, 29, 6:6, 64, etc.) including the betrayals of Judas and Peter (Acts 2:23, 35, 30-31); and His own passion, death, resurrection and return (Mt. 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34) and many other events. Furthermore, God’s knowledge of the future is explicitly expressed in the New Testament through an entire family of words: “foreknow” (*proginosko*), “foreknowledge” (*prognosis*), “foresee” (*proorao*), “foreordain” (*proorizo*), and “foretell” (*promarturomai*, *prokatangello*). Thus, Craig concludes that the doctrine of foreknowledge is well established in both the Old Testament and New Testament.<sup>79</sup>

Additionally, Craig comments on foreknowledge and foreordination. He thinks there is no linguistic evidence suggesting that these terms are synonyms, and there is also no clear biblical indication that foreknowledge is based on foreordination rather than the opposite. Craig points out that the prophets’ ability to foretell the future is indeed rooted in God’s foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:11; Acts 3:18; Gal. 3:8);<sup>80</sup> thus an incident such as the handing over of Jesus was in accord with God’s knowledge of what would happen, and even with His decided purpose (Acts 2:23, 25, 30-31; 4:28).<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, texts such as Acts 4:28 are not talking about foreknowledge but about middle knowledge, which enables God to foreknow in

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<sup>76</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 24

<sup>77</sup> This paragraph is summarized and rephrased from Craig, *Only Wise God*, 26-37. All biblical references are given by him.

<sup>78</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 26-27.

<sup>79</sup> This paragraph is summarized and rephrased from Craig, *Only Wise God*, 21-25. All biblical references are given by him.

<sup>80</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 32.

<sup>81</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 33.

advance what would happen.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, although “foreknowledge”/“foreknow” is associated with “elect”/“foreordain” in 1 Pet. 1:1-2 and Rom. 8:29, we cannot be sure from these texts whether foreordination is or is not based on foreknowledge. In any case, Craig argues that it could be best interpreted as “God foreknows His elect in the sense that He personally knows them in advance;” and on the basis of such knowledge (i.e., middle knowledge), “before they come to be, God elects them and foreordains them to glorification.”<sup>83</sup> Craig thinks this is a plausible interpretation of “foreknow” in these Scriptural passages.

## 4.5.2 Biblical and Theological Evidence of Middle Knowledge

### a. Scriptural Indications

Referring to the two most cited Scriptural texts by the sixteenth century theologians<sup>84</sup> namely, 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24, Craig states that God demonstrated His knowledge of future counterfactuals of freedom, or actions people would freely do if certain circumstances existed. For example, in 1 Sam. 23:6-13, God knew Saul *would* come after David if he *were* to remain at Keilah, and that if Saul *were* to come after David in Keilah, the men of the city *would* betray him. If we are to take God’s answers through the ephod as simple foreknowledge, we must conclude that God’s answers were false, “since what was predicted did not happen. But if the answers are understood as indications of what would happen under certain circumstances”<sup>85</sup> then they can be true and serve as evidence of middle knowledge. Similarly, Jesus declares in Matt. 11:20-24 that “if His miracles *had been* performed in certain cities,” the inhabitants “*would have* repented.” Clearly, Jesus knows how certain people would have acted in a particular situation. Hence, Craig says these two passages were taken as positive proof of middle knowledge.<sup>86</sup>

Other Scriptural evidence given by contemporary Molinists consists of passages that seem to suggest that God changes His mind due to the decisions of humanity. Craig cites Genesis 6:6 and 1 Samuel 15:11, 35 as Scriptural evidence that “God’s sovereignty is not a blind force acting irrespective of human actions, but is contingent in certain cases upon human decision.”<sup>87</sup> According to Craig, the Bible depicts humans as having genuine freedom, and that in many cases what God does depends on how humans respond to His initiatives. In several Scriptural texts, God is even said to be sorry that He had carried out some previous action: God regrets creating the human race (Gen. 6:6) and God regrets His choice of making Saul king (1 Sam. 15:10).<sup>88</sup> Hence, it also seems clear that God’s foreknowledge of many future events cannot be explained in terms of foreordination. Now, friends and foes of

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<sup>82</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 33.

<sup>83</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 34.

<sup>84</sup> Notably, it is strange that Craig does not specify which theologians he is referring to.

<sup>85</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 132.

<sup>86</sup> This paragraph up to this point is summarized from Craig, *Only Wise God*, 131-133. See also, Craig, *What Does God Know?*, 9-10. In his other article, Craig takes 1 Cor. 2:8 as an example and states that “the rulers of this age” in this verse refers to either the Jewish and Roman authorities (cf. Acts 4:27-28), or the spiritual principalities and powers (Gal. 1:4, cf. 1 Cor. 2:6). In either case, Craig argues, we see in this verse a counterfactual of creaturely freedom, and God’s knowledge of such truth. Hence, Craig concludes, “we have strong *prima facie* warrant for holding that there are true counterfactual concerning what creatures would freely do under various circumstances” (see “Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the ‘Grounding Objection,’” 338-339).

<sup>87</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 46.

<sup>88</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 46-48.

Molinism have responded to the Molinist interpretation of these texts, and we will return to these responses in Section 4.6.1. Let us now continue our investigation by sketching the theological arguments for middle knowledge that Craig discerns.

## b. Theological Ramifications

Craig argues that middle knowledge offers great theological payoffs. First, for Craig, “foreknowledge without prior middle knowledge would be exceedingly strange,” as God would find Himself “with knowledge of the future but without any logically prior planning of that future.”<sup>89</sup> But with middle knowledge, God knows what any creature would do in any situation; hence, “God can, by creating the appropriate situations, bring it about that creatures will achieve His ends and that they will have done so freely.”<sup>90</sup> Middle knowledge explains, in other words, how God can have complete knowledge of everything that happens, including our free actions. It solves the contradiction between God’s sovereignty and human freedom, and consequently provides the key to God’s *providence*. Second, following the first point, Craig explains, “Everything which happens comes to pass either by the will or permission of God. God wills every good thing directly”<sup>91</sup> and desires us to choose the good in all circumstances. Nonetheless God permits *sin* and sinful acts that He knew we would freely commit. But God arranges things providentially so that “in the end even sinful acts of creatures will serve to achieve His purposes” (ref. Gen. 50:20).<sup>92</sup> Third, middle knowledge provides an intriguing account of *predestination* that is fully compatible with libertarian freedom. In God’s middle knowledge, “He knows who, as circumstances vary, would freely accept and who would freely reject His initiatives.”<sup>93</sup> As a result, the act of selecting a world to be created is a sort of predestination. The person who God knows would respond positively to His grace will do so and will be saved. Although they are still free to reject God’s grace, if they were to reject God’s grace, God’s middle knowledge would have been different. Hence, God had provided everyone sufficient grace in all possible worlds, and those who are lost have no one to blame but themselves since their predestination to damnation is a result of their own choice to reject God.<sup>94</sup>

In addition, for Craig, the Molinist account of predestination serves as an effective rapprochement between Calvinists and Arminians.<sup>95</sup> This is because it preserves libertarian freedom and advocates a conditional election that is grounded in what God foreknew each individual would do when God’s efficacious grace was given to him.<sup>96</sup> It is hence able to

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<sup>89</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 134.

<sup>90</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 135.

<sup>91</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 135.

<sup>92</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 135.

<sup>93</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 136.

<sup>94</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 242; also in his article “No Other Name,” Craig attempts to provide a possible answer to the question of why not all persons are saved by God. Craig argues that the loving God who desires the salvation of all, supplies sufficient salvation to every individual, yet it is not feasible for Him to create a world in which all are saved, as through His middle knowledge, He knows that there is no world in which everyone freely receives Christ. Therefore God chose to actualize a world having an optimal balance between the number of the saved and the number of the damned (see 241).

<sup>95</sup> Craig, “Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 161.

<sup>96</sup> In order to prove this, Craig sets forth a comparison between Thomism, Congruism (inspired by Suarez), and Molinism to show that on the issue of foreknowledge and freedom, Lutheranism/Calvinism is more consistent Thomism; whereas Congruism holds to unconditional election and libertarian freedom; and though Molinism preserves libertarian freedom, it advocates a conditional election that is grounded on God’s knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom. Now, the Arminians will not go so far to accept the Thomist view, but

reduce the chasm that separates the Calvinists and Arminians, since the election of those who are saved is both God's free decision and the consequence of libertarian free choice to believe. Finally, Craig also applies middle knowledge in explaining how Scripture could be both the Word of God and the word of man as affirmed by traditional Christian doctrine. Craig contends that given His middle knowledge, God knew what each author of Scripture would freely write when placed in certain circumstances, and by arranging them to be in such circumstances, God achieved the Scriptures—a product freely composed by human authors but at the same time, His Words as well.<sup>97</sup> Now, though these theological implications seem plausible to Craig, we will see in the next section that they are not without problems.

In sum, it seems legitimate to conclude from the study of this section that the biblical delineation of God's knowledge plays a crucial role especially in Craig's affirmation of God's comprehensive knowledge. Especially in his work, *Only Wise God*, Craig consults Scripture and begins his arguments with how the Bible depicts God's knowledge, and he strives to defend God's comprehensive knowledge of the past, present, and future. However, since some philosophers had denied that foreknowledge is possible and rejected the notion, Craig desires to show that such a concession is unwarranted and that objections to the compatibility of foreknowledge and freedom can be rationally resolved. Hence, as shown in Section 4.2, Craig more commits to proving how foreknowledge is logically possible and in turn, suggesting a rational proposal (i.e., middle knowledge) that is able to incorporate both foreknowledge and freedom. Craig's commitment and emphasis is further shown in the following section.

## 4.6 Evaluation

The investigations of Section 4.2-4.5 have given us grounds not only for understanding Craig's arguments and the issues at stake in this theory, but also the way that Christian philosophers and theologians have defended this theory. We are now in the position to present some observations and evaluative comments. The responses of select contemporary scholars (who either support or refute middle knowledge) will be examined in due course.

### 4.6.1 Biblical Grounds of Evaluation

#### a. 1 Samuel 23:6-13 and Matthew 11:20-24

Let me begin with the responses of contemporary scholars towards the biblical evidence of Molinism. Kenny points out that theologians today would commonly think that the main Scriptural texts (i.e., 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24) cited by Molinists do not prove the case. Regarding 1 Sam. 23:6-13 he says, "The oracle consulted by David had only two sides to it, probably marked 'yes' and 'no'. Such an apparatus would be incapable of marking the difference between knowledge of counterfactuals and knowledge of the truth-value of material implications. Since the antecedent of David's questions was false, the same answers would have been appropriate in each case."<sup>98</sup> Freddoso responded that Kenny's argument is far from convincing. According to Freddoso,

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by laying middle knowledge as the common ground, the chasm that separates Calvinists and Arminians can be reduced to the small divide that distinguishes Molina from Suarez (see Craig, "Middle Knowledge," 157-158).

<sup>97</sup> See Craig, "'Men Moved By the Holy Spirit Spoke From God' (2 Peter 1.21)," 45-82.

<sup>98</sup> Kenny, *God of the Philosophers*, 64.

... we may safely assume that even if *God* knows the distinction between counterfactual and material implications, *David* did not. But in that case God's affirmative answers were deceptive if His advice presupposed that David's question involved material implications. At the very least, David would have every right to feel betrayed upon learning that yes was likewise an "appropriate" answer to the alternative question "If I stay in Keilah, will Saul refrain from invading?"<sup>99</sup>

First, based on our hermeneutical examination of 1 Sam. 23:6-13 in Chapter 2.3.2.a, both Kenny's and Freddoso's arguments involve assumptions and inferences that go far beyond what one can actually derive from these verses. This is especially true because the theological scope of the narrative is not about explaining or analysing God's knowledge from a human perspective. Based on the content of 1 Sam. 23:6-13, there is simply no biblical ground to make the same inferences as Kenny and Freddoso do. Second, if one wishes to press and find an explanation for the conditional contingents shown in the narrative through a philosophical-theological consideration, the narrative shows that there is one actuality to know—that is, David does not stay and is not betrayed. As to the other conditional—the counterfactual one—of "David staying and being betrayed," we learn from the narrative that God does not actualize it. In other words, it is not known by God as an actuality, but it is an unwilld possibility or logical hypothesis in a possible world that He does not choose to actualize.<sup>100</sup> Hence, the narrative indeed shows that God knows counterfactuals, but at best one may understand from the narrative that God knows them as un-actualized hypotheses. In other words, God's awareness of counterfactuals is not, in and of itself, evidence that God knows them through middle knowledge. Also, if God knows counterfactuals as possibilities or hypotheses, it does not seem legitimate to conclude that something that eventually did not happen is false. On that account, Craig's argument (that we must conclude God's answers through the ephod were false if we are to treat them as simple foreknowledge) is unconvincing.

Let us now turn to Matt. 11:20-24. Both Craig and Cook interpret this passage similarly. Craig states that Matt. 11 "is probably religious hyperbole meant to underscore the depth of the depravity of the cities in which Jesus preached."<sup>101</sup> Cook analogously adds that the conditional prophecy in this passage may be viewed "as indicative of middle knowledge as God warns the people by presenting them with a genuinely possible future."<sup>102</sup> For Kenny and Freddoso, Jesus' words about Tyre and Sidon are rhetorical. However, Freddoso also thinks that this passage is not merely rhetorical, as vv22-24 indicate that the Israelites are less receptive to Jesus' teaching than their heathen neighbours.<sup>103</sup> However, according to our investigation in Chapter 2.3.3.b, Jesus' statement in vv20-24 is certainly neither simply a religious hyperbole as Cook asserts, nor rhetorical as Kenny and Freddoso think. We gained this understanding from our examination of this passage, which not only reveals the Israelites' response to Jesus' teaching but also warns them and calls them to repentance. In other words, this passage is not about communicating God's knowledge to us. If this is the case, Matt. 11:20-24 is hardly to be taken as biblical evidence of middle knowledge.

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<sup>99</sup> Freddoso, "Introduction," 63.

<sup>100</sup> I draw this point from Muller, *PRRD* III, 430-433.

<sup>101</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 137.

<sup>102</sup> Robert R. Cook, "God, Middle Knowledge and Alternative Worlds," *Evangelical Quarterly* 62 (1990): 299.

<sup>103</sup> Freddoso, "Introduction," 63-64.



Now, putting aside the fact that these biblical texts are not to be taken as indicating middle knowledge, it is surprising to note that for Craig, biblical evidence does not play a decisive role after all. In Craig's words,

since Scripture does not reflect upon this question, no amount of proof-texting can prove that God's counterfactual knowledge is possessed logically prior to his creative decree. This is a matter for theological-philosophical reflection, not biblical exegesis. Thus, while it is clearly unbiblical to deny that God has simple foreknowledge and even counterfactual knowledge, those who deny middle knowledge cannot be accused of being unbiblical.<sup>104</sup>

According to Craig's comments, the validity of middle knowledge is to be studied and evaluated through theological-philosophical reflection, because we cannot prove from Scripture whether God possess middle knowledge. Nevertheless, as we have seen this theory is viewed by many as unbiblical due to the results of biblical exegesis. Interpreters can hardly find, as it were, any biblical indication of this theory, especially since it contradicts other Scriptural texts that speak directly to divine knowing. Second, as pointed out above the Scriptural texts cited by Craig to support his arguments did not seem to mean what he thought. These facts lead one to question whether the theory of middle knowledge is indeed a matter of theological-philosophical reflection, or whether it instead concerns biblical exegesis.

#### **b. "Repenting Texts"**

What about the fact that Scripture regularly indicates that God regrets or repents from His previous actions, as Craig points out? Do such texts not show that God can change His mind on account of certain human free choices? According to biblical studies, "to regret" or "to repent" means "to suffer emotional pain."<sup>105</sup> In Genesis 6:6, God is said to have regretted (נחם) and felt bitterly indignant (עצב) about making humanity on earth. The root עצב is used to express the most intense form of human emotion, a mixture of rage and bitter anguish (e.g., David reacted similarly when he heard of Absalom's death in 1 Sam. 20:34). This word is used of God's feelings in only two other Scriptural texts (Ps. 78:40 and Isa. 63:10) and only here is the verb supplemented by the phrase "bitterly," which underlines the strength of God's reaction to human sinfulness.<sup>106</sup> Biblical scholars thereby suggest that "regret" or "repent" is used as an expression of God's present reaction or intention in a particular situation or moment. If this is the case, we need not understand these texts as suggesting that God could have acted differently (i.e., as pointing out that He would have rather not created humanity or made Saul king). It seems more convincing to accept a literal and grammatical understanding of "regret" or "repent," in which case these texts just describe God's present reaction (e.g., sorrow and displeasure) or intention in a particular situation. In other words, instances in Gen. 6:6 and 1 Sam. 15:10 express God's present displeasure toward the sinfulness of human beings. These instances do not seem, then, to be strong evidence of God changing His mind and action due to human response.

Another reason to prefer the above view is because of its coherence with Scriptural texts that declare, "God is not a son of man ... that He should change His mind" (Num.

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<sup>104</sup> Craig, "The Middle Knowledge View," 125.

<sup>105</sup> H. Van Dyke Parunak, "A Semantic Survey of NHM," *Biblica* 56, no. 4 (1975): 512.

<sup>106</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, vol.1 of *Word Biblical Commentary*, gen. eds. Bruce M. Metzger and others, eds. John D. W. Watts and Ralph P. Martin (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 2002), 144.

23:19); “He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change His mind ...” (1 Sam. 15:29). When our “repenting texts” are an expression of God’s present reaction with respect to a particular situation, it follows that if the situation changes, God’s expression of intention will also change. Notably, this indicates that God responds differently to different situations—not that God reacts to human action—and that His responses are coherent with His nature and power. This point is demonstrated through other “repenting texts” with which many readers of the Bible are very familiar, such as the successful prayer intervention of Moses that prevented God’s judgment upon the Israelites (Ex. 32:9-14), and YHWH withdrawing His judgment from Nineveh (Jnh. 3:10). God’s declaration that He would send judgment to the Israelites was true. If the situation had remained the same, God would indeed have sent His judgment. Nevertheless, the situation changed (e.g., Moses prayed for God’s mercy earnestly; the people of Nineveh turned from their evil ways) and *God responded to this changed situation* (i.e., answering Moses’ prayer; and withholding His judgment from Nineveh). Notably, God’s change is coherent with His nature—sending judgment because He is a holy and just God; answering prayer and withholding judgment because He is a gracious and loving God. In short, hermeneutical and theological studies show that the “repenting texts” are not a Scriptural warrant for middle knowledge.

#### 4.6.2 Theological Ground of Evaluation

In Craig’s opinion, it is difficult to prove directly from a biblical perspective whether God possess middle knowledge, but middle knowledge is “so fruitful in illuminating divine prescience, providence, and predestination that it can be presumed unless there are insoluble objections to it.”<sup>107</sup> Thus, even though according to the objection raised by opponents that no clear or direct biblical indication of middle knowledge exists, this is not a problem for Craig. Clearly, Craig has great confidence in the theological fruitfulness of middle knowledge, and he seemingly assumes that Molinists have or can successfully defend against the theoretical and practical objections placed before them. Besides the objections presented in Section 4.4.3, we must now investigate whether the utility of middle knowledge is as promising as Craig claims it to be.

##### a. Divine Prescience

In an era when many have abandoned the classical theological understanding of omniscience, Molinists such as Craig and Dekker have attempted to defend it through a hermeneutical study of omniscience that eventually suggests middle knowledge. As Dekker is one of the few Molinists who have attempted to defend middle knowledge from a hermeneutical and historical perspective, it is worth looking at the arguments he presents in his article, “The Omniscience of God.”<sup>108</sup> Akin to Craig, Dekker begins his arguments by looking into texts that both suggest omniscience (e.g., Ps. 139; Isa. 41:21-23, 42:9, 44:8; Job 38-41; Matt. 11:21; Ac. 2:23; Gal. 3:8) and the contrary (e.g., the “repenting texts” such as Gen. 6:6-7; 18:20-21; 1 Sam. 15 and Jn. 3-4), as well as texts that point to God’s knowledge of counterfactual conditionality (e.g., 1 Sam. 23:11-12 and Matt. 11:21). Dekker concludes from his exegesis of these texts that Scripture ultimately affirms the validity of omniscience—that God has perfect and complete knowledge of all possibilities and actualities. Dekker also

<sup>107</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 137.

<sup>108</sup> Eef Dekker, “‘You Know When I Sit Down and When I Rise Up’: The Omniscience of God,” in *Understanding the Attributes of God*, eds. Gijsbert van den Brink and Marcel Sarot (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), 161-178. This following part of this paragraph on Dekker’s arguments is summarized from this article.

points out that in the post-biblical tradition the biblical notion of classical omniscience is almost universally followed by Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and medieval scholasticism. The question that follows is whether such a notion of omniscience is compatible with libertarian freedom. Hence, Dekker launches into a conceptual analysis of omniscience and concludes that the classical notion of omniscience is possible only if God has “counterfactual power over the past” (which corresponds to Molina’s theory of middle knowledge).

Dekker indeed appears to have made a good defense of the truth of omniscience (which affirms foreknowledge) by consulting various Scriptural texts and theological traditions. However, certain aspects of his arguments require our attention. Although Dekker is able to suggest that omniscience and human freedom are compatible through the application of middle knowledge, the Scriptural texts that Dekker cites do not simply declare God’s knowledge that comprehends and encompasses all things from eternity; these texts also indicate that God derives knowledge of humanity’s free actions from His own being and sovereign will.<sup>109</sup> In other words, these texts reveal not only God’s absolute omniscience, but also the theological implication that His knowledge neither depends on, nor is it determined by, anything outside Himself. Although Dekker cites these texts and claims God’s absolute omniscience, he omitted these theological insights. It seems most probable that, in accordance with Craig, this is not a problem for Dekker because in order to hold together both libertarian freedom and omniscience, “God indeed needs middle knowledge if He is to know alternatives before exercising His will.”<sup>110</sup> Now, the questions that are certainly worth asking are: Does it really matter whether God derives knowledge of all possibilities and actualities solely from Himself rather than from the choices and actions of secondary causes? What are the consequences of omitting the theological implication mentioned above? Since it is Dekker’s (and Craig’s) intention to preserve biblical truth according to the contents of Scriptural texts, these questions need to be answered. We attempt to address these questions in the next section.

## **b. Divine Existence**

We learn from our investigation in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 about the theological problem of placing middle knowledge intentionally between natural and free knowledge. Although the main disputes during Molina’s time and in the present seem different, they each boil down to a dilemma over God’s existence. Scholars have objected to Molinism on the issue of God’s existence in different ways.<sup>111</sup> First, for God to know counterfactuals (in the manner Molinists defined them) He must not be fully certain or know Himself since these counterfactuals exist outside of His decree or will. This position contradicts a large number of Scriptural texts that declare God’s full knowledge of Himself. Second, it follows that God could not be absolutely omniscient and omnipotent since His knowledge is limited. This outlook reduces God’s nature and knowledge to passive potency. Third, God consequently becomes less than absolutely independent and instead becomes dependent on the world. God knew, for instance, what Peter would do in a particular situation simply *because* Peter would do it in that situation. The upshot is that God acts on the ground of His knowledge of actual events that He has not willed. Moreover, the implication is that God had to choose within the range of possible worlds presented before Him, and He cannot actualize any world He

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<sup>109</sup> This will be shown more clearly as we proceed to Section 4.6.2.b.

<sup>110</sup> Dekker, “The Omniscience of God,” 177.

<sup>111</sup> The following three points are taken from our previous examinations in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3; for detailed explanations and reasons of how and why these points are reached see Chap. 2.3.3, Chp. 3.2.2, and Chp. 3.4.2.

pleases.<sup>112</sup> Campbell contends that by making God “something less than absolutely independent,” middle knowledge “metaphysically reduces God to the same level as the creature, for God is now seen to be a mixture of act and potency.”<sup>113</sup>

The modern Banezian, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, charges that middle knowledge imposes divine passivity because God is the first determining Being—because God alone is Being in whom essence and existence are identical, we must conclude that “He alone is infinite, and that nothing that is external to Him can exist unless it has been created and preserved in being by Him, and nothing external to Him can act without the divine motion.”<sup>114</sup> This indicates that God alone, who is Being, does not depend on creatures for His knowledge. As Garrigou-Lagrange avers,

God’s knowledge cannot be determined by anything which is extrinsic to Him, and which would not be caused by Him. But such is the *scientia media*, which depends on the determination of the free conditioned future; for this determination does not come from God but from the human liberty, granted that it is placed in such particular circumstances ... Thus God would be dependent on another, would be passive in His knowledge, and would no longer be Pure Act. The dilemma is unsolvable: Either God is the first determining Being, or else He is determined by another; there is no other alternative. In other words, the *scientia media* involves an imperfection, which cannot exist in God. Hence there is a certain tinge of anthropomorphism in this theory.<sup>115</sup>

Freddoso responded to Garrigou-Lagrange regarding this objection. Freddoso states that according to Molina, “middle knowledge is from eternity ‘counterfactually dependent’ on what creatures will do if placed in various situations;” in fact, “all God’s knowledge of creature effects—of necessary effects as well as contingent effects, of absolute future contingents as well as conditional future contingents—is counterfactually dependent on what secondary causes would do in various situations.”<sup>116</sup> Freddoso explains further,

In general, for any created effect *S* such that *S* will or would obtain in circumstances *H*, if the relevant secondary agents were not going to cause *S* to obtain in *H*, then God would never have believed that *S* would obtain in *H* ... So the mere fact that God’s middle knowledge is counterfactually dependent on what creatures would do is not at all problematic, but is rather a simple consequence of God’s being necessarily omniscient.<sup>117</sup>

Clearly, Freddoso offers his answer from an analytical perspective. As we have seen from our investigations in Chapters 2 and 3, there is a difference in how God knows conditional contingents through a biblical-theologically concept and a philosophical concept. According to the theological concept, the way God knows what He knows is different from the analysis of created effect *S* and circumstances *H* offered by Freddoso (ref. Chapter 2.4.1, Chapter 3.4.2, Chapter 4.4.2). Up to this point, we see that a purely philosophical argument does not adequately seem to answer and solve the evaluative comments mentioned in the beginning of

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<sup>112</sup> Notably, these points show that although Dekker intends to uphold divine omniscience, his proposal seems to present the contrary by asserting that God knows counterfactual of freedom especially prior to His divine willing.

<sup>113</sup> Campbell, “A Reformed Critique,” 16.

<sup>114</sup> Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and Nature: A Thomistic Solution to Certain Agnostic Antinomies*, trans. Dom Bede Rose, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Herder, 1936), 557-558.

<sup>115</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *The One God: A Commentary on the First Part of Saint Thomas’ Theological Summa*, trans. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis: Herder, 1943), 465-466.

<sup>116</sup> Freddoso, “Introduction,” 67.

<sup>117</sup> Freddoso, “Introduction,” 67.

this section. Moreover, as Freddoso identifies Garrigou-Lagrange's objection as a theological one,<sup>118</sup> it even seems necessary to look at the problem of divine passivity on a biblical-theological ground rather than mainly from an analytical perspective.

Now, what about Craig? What does he think about this? He believes that even though middle knowledge metaphysically reduces God to the same level as humanity (who needs a cause), such a restriction does not impugn God's omnipotence; yet it "does reveal restrictions on what God can actualize as a consequence of purely logical considerations," and "such a restriction poses no non-logical limit to God's power."<sup>119</sup> Stated otherwise, Craig holds that such a limit is not a negation of God's universal causality; rather the limits it places on divine omnipotence are purely logical. Having said this, Craig in fact admits that middle knowledge compromises God's pure actuality or self-existence, but even so this is not an issue in his view:

Despite Molinist protests, I think we will have to admit that this is true. But at the same time ... this seems to me of no great consequence. As I argued earlier, God's simple foreknowledge can be understood as determined in its content by what will in fact occur. This sort of determinacy or passivity on God's part seems to me altogether innocuous, and if this sacrifices the Thomistic view of God as Pure Actuality, then so be it. The Thomistic view, that God determines not only the truth of future contingent propositions, but also the truth of counterfactuals of freedom, seems to lead inescapably to making God the author of sin and to a denial of human freedom and responsibility in general.<sup>120</sup>

Regardless of whether Craig's comments on the Thomistic view of God are accurate (see Section 4.5.3.d), Craig's response is startling in the sense that he does not respond to the Scriptural texts that stand in opposition to his view. Admittedly, Scripture does not directly state that God is *actus purus*, but the Bible has implicitly and explicitly indicated God's divine self-existence. For instance, Scripture declares that God has life in and of Himself (Ex. 3:14; Jn. 1:3; Rom. 11:25-36; 1 Cor. 8:6); God who made the world and everything in it does not live in temples nor is He served by human hands as though He needed anything, for it is in Him that we live (Act. 17:24-28). Thus, everything exists and was created by God's will (Rev. 4:11; Rom. 11:33-36). "No one has advised God either in the creation or in the administration of the world" (Isa. 40:13-14).<sup>121</sup> The implication of these Scriptural texts is clear: the self-existing God does not need anything from human beings; instead He obtains everything from Himself and He is the source of all knowledge, all wisdom, and all understanding. It follows that God's knowledge is not based upon secondary causes, but is solely from Himself. Contrary to Craig's arguments, in other words, the existence of any human or heavenly consultation that adds something to God is denied in Scripture. According to the biblical descriptions of God as Creator, God does not and could not need anything from His creation. There is certainly more to say about these biblical texts and their theological implications, but at this juncture it is sufficient to show again that God's knowledge is an ontological issue inseparable from His essence (e.g., pure actuality, etc.). We cannot just hold one theological concept and not the other. Consequently, it is questionable whether the restriction middle knowledge imposes upon God is comprehensible from a purely logical standpoint (without considering other biblical texts relating to God's nature).

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<sup>118</sup> Freddoso, "Introduction," 62.

<sup>119</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 274.

<sup>120</sup> Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 272-273.

<sup>121</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, part of *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, eds. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 60.

### c. Providence and The Problem of Evil

Does the Molinist view offer a satisfactory answer to the question of evil without succumbing to the dilemma that they charge others with? <sup>122</sup> Helm notes that the theory of middle knowledge does not escape the dilemma of making God the author of sin. According to Molinism, although the existing world exemplifies counterfactual truths that are not grounded in either God or His decree (which means that God is not the grounds of any counterfactuals), God is still the actualizing cause of that which occurs in this present world. If this is the case, God is still more-or-less responsible for the existence of evil. In this position, however, it is not clear how Craig escapes the dilemma he charges the Augustinian-Calvinist view with, even though he rejects God's pure actuality. Helm explains,

Craig says that the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective ... holds that foreknowledge is based upon foreordination: God knows what will happen because he makes it happen." Three things on this. First, taking this claim at face value, it is not a doctrine that the ancient Greek fatalists would have recognized. Second, these expressions are inaccurate. God's foreordaining x is not equivalent to God's making x happen. For according to the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective, God ordains evil by willingly permitting it. Third, on the question of the authorship of evil, there is not a hairsbreadth between the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective and Craig's Molinism. According to Craig's description of Molinism, "God decreed to create just those circumstances and just those people who would freely do what God willed to happen." While this description does not entail that God is the author of evil (any more than the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective does), it does entail that God decreed all sinful acts to happen and decreed them precisely as they have happened. If this is so, the God of Molina and Arminius seem to be as implicated in the fact of evil as much (or as little) as the God of the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective.<sup>123</sup>

Additionally, for the Molinist the existence and entrance of evil into the present was not according to God's will. Although God was able to prevent evil, He had to permit the possibility of evil in order to preserve libertarian freedom that allows humanity to make real choices. The underpinning of this understanding unavoidably gives rise to the following problems. If genuine choices have to allow for the possibility of choosing evil, it follows that God's choices neither are nor cannot be real (since God cannot choose evil); or God's choices are real with the possibility that He might choose evil in some instances. Obviously, not only are these implications horrifying; they also contradict the Scriptural texts that affirm God as the designation of what is real, and the texts that declare God's holiness, righteousness, and goodness. It seems, therefore, that middle knowledge falls into another kind of dilemma. It either has to sacrifice certain Scriptural texts or make God the author of evil. In either case, this is not the Molinists' intention. But they seemingly fail to show why and how God cannot work in this way in the world, preserving both His nature (e.g., power and holiness) and individual human responsibility for sin, without sacrificing the message of Scripture.

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<sup>122</sup> Regarding the question of the authorship of evil, because this present study is not intended to discuss the problem of evil or defend the view of any particular position, I shall not go into a detailed discussion of it, but only respond with a few remarks to the Molinists' account of it in light of biblical-theological grounds.

<sup>123</sup> Paul Helm, "An Augustinian-Calvinist Response (to Middle-Knowledge)," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, 158-159. Additionally, it has been effectively explained by many prominent theologians (such as Craig) that the traditional Augustinian-Calvinist view regarding divine decree does not suggest that such a doctrine makes God the author of sin (see Campbell, "The Beautiful Mind," chp. 6.).

#### d. Predestination and Freedom

As we know, it is the Molinists' utmost desire to preserve libertarian freedom. We see in Section 4.5.2.b (and part of 4.5.1) Craig's attempt to show how libertarian freedom is sustainable in God's salvific predestination. As it is shown, Craig assumes that predestination is based on God's foreknowledge of a person's faith (since he argues that God's predestination of some to be saved is based on God foreseeing their response to His grace). Now, upon reflection such a system fails to offer genuine freedom. For if God can look into the future and see that person A *will* accept Christ as Saviour in a particular situation and that person B *will not* accept Christ in a particular situation, those facts that God sees in the future are already *fixed* and already *determined* in the sense that they could not be otherwise. In other words, no matter how we see it or explain it, we could not escape from the dilemma that even with the counterfactuals of freedom, "what a person *would* do in a particular situation" is still something already fixed and determined (as stated in Section 4.4.3.c, there must be a causal determination that moves any contingent from the realm of mere possibility into the realm of reality). A question that naturally arises is: what could possibly be the causal determination that led to these destinies? Perhaps some may argue that they are determined by an impersonal force in the universe, or surrounding circumstances that led to the results of how things are. But what kind of benefits can we get from such an answer? How can libertarian freedom be preserved alongside the existence of causal determination?

Campbell and Garrigou-Lagrange highlight a similar problem, albeit from a different perspective. According to Molinism, Campbell contends, when Peter chooses to deny Christ God knows under which circumstances Peter would freely choose to deny Christ and places Peter in those circumstances. If this is the case,

We are left asking, "What is it about those circumstances that influenced Peter to make the choice?" If the answer is, "Nothing about the circumstances that influenced Peter," then we are left asking about the relevance of saying, "God knew in which circumstances Peter would choose to deny Christ." If the answer is, "There is something about the circumstances that influenced Peter to make his choice," then the circumstances become the determining factor in Peter's decision, not Peter himself.<sup>124</sup>

Referring to Garrigou-Lagrange, Campbell asserts that the answer aforesaid inevitably falls prey to an environmental determinism of human choice rather than the compatibilist or libertarian notions:

If it is maintained that before any determining divine decree (positive or permissive), God foresees infallibly such a conditional free act of the future by reason of the virtue priority of truth over goodness, one falls back into fatalism or determinism of the circumstances. For, after all, according to the hypothesis, this free act of the future is determined neither by the divine decree nor in the created will which is free or indifferent. For it to be foreseen infallibly and not merely conjecturally, it must therefore be determined by the circumstances.<sup>125</sup>

In other words, if the free choice of humanity is not determined by God's decree, yet is foreseen infallibly by God (i.e., not merely conjecturally), then it must be determined by circumstances and not by humanity. Thus instead of defending libertarian freedom, middle

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<sup>124</sup> Campbell, "A Reformed Critique," 19-20.

<sup>125</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and Nature*, vol. 2, 484-485.

knowledge suggests the contrary. Certainly Craig and other Molinists would not say that the destinies of humanity are controlled by some kind of forces (e.g., environment, circumstance, or fate) other than God. However, if God determines the destiny of humanity, then this seems to correspond to the Thomist and Calvinist notion of God's determination that Molinists contest. Interestingly, Walls makes this point when he objects to middle knowledge. Walls argues that since Molina maintained that God chooses to place people "or allows them to be put in circumstances in which He knows they will choose evil and be damned,"<sup>126</sup> Molinism is morally preferable to the Calvinist teaching of predestination. Middle knowledge is incompatible, in other words, with libertarian freedom. This is the case even if it holds that God reacts to human action prior to His divine willing, since in the end God determines the ultimate outcome.

### 4.6.3 Philosophical Ground of Evaluation<sup>127</sup>

As shown in Section 4.4.3, the philosophical problems that Molinists face are not small or irrelevant; instead they shake the core foundation of middle knowledge. Molinism is doomed if these objections succeed. After approximately forty years of discussion, the question of whether the metaphysical "ground" of middle knowledge is warranted remains inconclusive to many prominent philosophers (and theologians). Although Molinists turned their attention more to developing the area of "applied Molinism," the problems they face in this area are formidable as well (ref. Section 4.4.2). More importantly, we learn from our investigation in this chapter that the fruitfulness of "applied Molinism" is in fact closely related to the Molinists' success in solving the theoretical objections. As Perszyk states, the questions lurking in the theoretical objections are "what would count as overall success or failure for a specific version of "applied theism"—Molinist, Opennist, Thomist, and so on ..."<sup>128</sup> Also Flint, although he is an important contemporary advocate of the Molinist view, stresses, "Here, as in so many areas of philosophy, the evidence [for either compatibilism or libertarianism] is simply not conclusive, and the rationality of dissenting opinions ought to be acknowledged by even the most fervent proponents of either side."<sup>129</sup> In other words, whether libertarian freedom is the best way to preserve the notion of human responsibility remains an open question. Flint's comment reflects that the libertarian model of human freedom contains certain internal flaws. Given the fact that middle knowledge is committed to a strong account of libertarian freedom, Flint's comment not only shows the issue at stake in "applied Molinism." More importantly, it implies that Molinists have not overcome the critiques confronting them, and their failure to address these objections echoes the need to consider a more holistic approach—for instance, a biblical-theological investigation as a legitimate criterion in advancing the discussion of this theory.

## 4.7 Conclusion

First of all, Craig's effort in rejecting theological fatalism and defending foreknowledge should be appreciated. To his credit, Craig consults Scripture and holds Scripture as an important source for his theological understanding of God's knowledge. Nonetheless, we

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<sup>126</sup> Walls, "Is Molinism as Bad as Calvinism," in *Middle Knowledge*, 275.

<sup>127</sup> As much had already been said about the philosophical problems of middle knowledge (especially given that most contemporary discussions of this theory are analytically orientated), and as the focus of this study is not philosophical, and I have provided a brief survey of the recent objections against middle knowledge in Section 4.4.3, I do not intend to add more in this section.

<sup>128</sup> Perszyk, "Introduction," 12.

<sup>129</sup> Flint, *Divine Providence*, 26.



discover that Craig's desire to provide a rational solution to the foreknowledge-freedom problem; and although he examines divine foreknowledge on Scriptural grounds and defends it as biblical, he switches into an analytical examination when dealing with its relationship to human freedom. Dekker presents a similar manner of argument—that is, a Scriptural examination of omniscience followed by an analytical examination of its compatibility with human freedom. The seeming assumption is that the compatibility between foreknowledge and freedom (or perhaps the kind of compatibility that the modern mind hopes to attain) cannot be achieved on a Scriptural foundation. As a result, we see the obligatory and primary role of logical consistency in the way Craig formulates his argument; and it is most unfortunate that Scripture seems to be peripheral to the more extensive (philosophical) method in Craig's approach.

Second, does God possess middle knowledge according to Bible? Do we need biblical evidence to affirm the notion of this theory? As identified earlier, if God has middle knowledge then His knowledge, including His power, is limited. But this perspective contradicts the Scriptural indication of divine omnipotence and divine omniscience. By and large, then, whether Scripture indicates middle knowledge is an imperative criteria in evaluating this theory, because accepting it also means rejecting or sacrificing some important biblical messages of God and His nature. Any serious Christian should be aware of this implication. It is regrettable that how middle knowledge can be sustained in light of Scriptural texts that, for example, are concerned with the priority of God over creation, and the knowledge that God has of all things in His creation (without being caused by the finite order), are questions not addressed by Craig or other Molinists through biblical-theological consideration.

Third, does middle knowledge solve the tension between foreknowledge and freedom? Putting aside the long debated philosophical question of whether there are true counterfactuals of freedom (which according to the following explanation, need not be one's ultimate determining factor of the validity of this resolution), if God really knows all possible worlds and what human beings would do in various circumstances, some form of determination inevitably seems required. In this case, how then is there room for libertarian freedom? Moreover, our investigations show that in the course of defending their position, Craig and other Molinists have left key unanswered questions, which not only challenge the Scriptural explanation of God but also the grounds for middle knowledge. For example, if we return to the Molinists' assertion that evil does not accord with God's will, it follows that all evil came into existence even though God does not desire it. If so, how can evil exist if God did not want it to exist? Does this mean that God is unable to control and keep evil out of His creation? Can we then have the assurance that God will triumph over evil eventually? Molinists do not offer satisfactory (biblical) answers to these questions. Also, Craig has not offered suitable reasons and grounds for holding that God is not wholly self-existent, since a self-existent God conflicts with the notion of middle knowledge according to the logical consistency of this theory.

Fourth, at this juncture we see the difference between a theological and philosophical concept of foreknowledge (and consequently, its relation to freedom). This chapter has shown that on the one hand, the theological notion of foreknowledge more adequately accords with the overall biblical account of God than the philosophical notion of it (such as middle knowledge). On the other hand, at the conceptual level middle knowledge is problematic in corresponding to a consistent definition of the philosophical concept of genuine freedom. What does this mean? This point again echoes the need of employing a biblical-theological

evaluation of middle knowledge. In Chapters 2 and 3, we discovered the difference in results and consequences of treating the priority of the Bible differently; and the biblical texts used by Molina and Craig are compared with the way these texts are interpreted in light of biblical scholarship in Chapter 2. Our next job is to continue and broaden our study of the Scriptures cited by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig through contemporary systematic-theological reflection on the nature of God's knowledge. We will further discuss this topic in Chapters 5 and 6.

## The Canonical Approach of Brevard Childs and The Hermeneutical Approach of Anthony Thiselton

If it is I who say where God will be, I will always find there a [false] God who in some way corresponds to me, is agreeable to me, fits in with my nature. But if it is God who says where he will be...that place is the cross of Christ.

Anthony C. Thiselton<sup>1</sup>

### 5.1 Introduction

#### 5.1.1 The Role of Childs and Thiselton in this Study

In Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, we examined the biblical texts that Molina and Craig cite to help formulate their arguments, through which we acquired knowledge of how they understand these texts and how contemporary biblical scholars interpret them as well. As we enter into this chapter, we are at the stage of pursuing a more in-depth study of what it would mean to interpret the classical biblical proof-texts cited by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig from a contemporary biblical-theological point of view (through proposing and applying a framework for a possible theological appropriation of the Bible). To work toward this constructive goal, we will draw on Brevard Childs' "canonical approach" and Anthony Thiselton's hermeneutical approach.

Before I begin, let me briefly mention that studying the works of Childs and Thiselton is necessitated for the following reasons: First, both scholars are well recognized as the leading authoritative voices in the area of contemporary biblical studies. Childs' works are acclaimed for having stimulated new scholarly ventures that highlight the significance of the theological study of Scripture for biblical studies;<sup>2</sup> and the works of Thiselton are seen as a major step forward in hermeneutics.<sup>3</sup> Second, both scholars have sought a connection

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, "Resituating Hermeneutics in the Twenty-First Century," *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: Collected Works with New Essays* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 45. This is a citation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*Meditating on the Word* [Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1986], 45).

<sup>2</sup> See Dennis T. Olson, "Seeking 'The Inexpressible Texture of Thy Word': A Practical Guide to Brevard Childs' Canonical Approach to Theological Exegesis," *Princeton Theological Review* 14, Issue 38 (2008): 53. In addition, as Peter Kline comments, Childs is "one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most respected and groundbreaking theological exegetes; he is for many a model of faithful Christian scholarship and exegesis (see Peter Kline, "Prolegomena," *Princeton Theological Review* 14, Issue 38 (2008): 5. Christopher Seitz states that Childs' *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* is "a book with arguably the greatest impact on Old Testament scholarship in this century" (see C. R. Seitz, *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 102); and he can "think of no person who made a greater contribution to the work of unifying the Bible, theology and church life together in a very serious way, not in a flimsy or a pious way" (See [http://www.yale.edu/divinity/news/070625\\_news\\_childs.shtml](http://www.yale.edu/divinity/news/070625_news_childs.shtml) [Accessed 10 March 2014]).

<sup>3</sup> Thiselton has received significant recognition for his valuable scholarship and contribution to academia. This has included the publication of a recent volume entitled *Horizons in Hermeneutics* intended to honour him for his significant influence and impact upon the fields of hermeneutics and biblical study (see Stanley E. Porter and Matthew R. Malcom, eds., *Horizons in Hermeneutics: A Festschrift in Honour of Anthony C. Thiselton*, [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013], ix). Also, a volume in Scripture and hermeneutics series edited by Thiselton was published in his honour (see Craig Bartholomew and others,

between modern biblical theology and the task of constructing dogmatic theology. As it is the main aim of this research to investigate the concept of middle knowledge and the biblical interpretation of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig, it is hoped that the works of Childs and Thiselton can offer new insights into this area. Third, both scholars are strongly committed to integrate faith and scholarship. Throughout their careers, they have practiced an exemplary form of Christian scholarship that has benefited both the church and the academy. As it is stated in the beginning of this research, the foreknowledge-freedom problem does not occur in theory, but in the course of everyday Christian life; it is hoped that we can draw on Childs' and Thiselton's works to demonstrate how the foreknowledge-freedom debate implicates day-to-day life.

### 5.1.2 An Outline of what Follows

In order to achieve the goal mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, our study is split into two chapters. This present chapter focuses on studying the parameters of Childs and Thiselton's hermeneutical approaches. The intent of this chapter is to build preparatory grounds that can be carried forward and applied in the next chapter. The next chapter attempts, therefore, to articulate a framework of a theological appropriation of the Bible, and applies this framework to illumine the theological messages of the biblical texts cited by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig in their arguments; and to make a final evaluation of their interpretation of these biblical texts. The intention at this stage is thereby to reflect upon the biblical texts under examination and gradually widen our horizon to apprehend how these texts are situated within the broader narrative of the Bible.

To begin, this chapter embarks on a study on Childs. Section 5.2 describes and provides a brief orientation of Childs' conception of "canonical approach." I first present the key assumptions undergirding Childs' method (5.2.1). I then map out the overarching, theological sweep of Childs' method (5.2.2). With the results of our studies from 5.2.1-5.2.2, I proceed to how Childs applies his canonical approach to the interpretation of Scripture (5.2.3). I then end the study of Childs with some observations deriving from the preceding sections (5.2.4). I next turn to Section 5.3, which focuses on Thiselton. I begin with a brief introduction that analyzes Thiselton's hermeneutical approach by looking at his definition of "hermeneutics" and his view of how philosophy can help biblical hermeneutics (5.3.1). I then outline some key elements and practices involved in Thiselton's approach of "the fusion of two horizons" (5.3.2). This study of Thiselton ends with some observations deriving from the preceding sections as well (5.3.3).

Before I proceed, two brief remarks are necessary concerning the content of this chapter. First, Childs' canonical approach to theological exegesis is immense and variegated; and Thiselton's works are vast in their scope and extensive in their content. It is impossible to examine their works sufficiently in a single chapter, and it is not the aim of this chapter to present a full or detailed account of their approaches or to attempt a summary of their works. Instead the main focus of the following sections, in keeping with the purpose of the next two chapters and the entire project, is confined to studying and providing the elements of Childs' and Thiselton's approaches that lead us to our intended purpose and goal of discovering a

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eds., *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001]). In addition, it is well acknowledged that his *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* is an excellent resource and textbook for students, and his *Two Horizons* is seen as bringing the application of hermeneutics to biblical theology into a new phase (see *Expository Times* 91 [1980]: 289; *Religious Studies* 16 [1980]: 496-497; *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 [1980]: 178-180; *Theology Today* 37 [1981]: 506-508).

more definitive ground for the systematic-theological evaluation of, and reflection on, the Scriptural texts cited by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig in their discussion of middle knowledge. Second, I am aware that even though the works of Childs and Thiselton are embraced by scholars worldwide, criticism and objections are raised against their works as well. As the focus of this chapter is to study the approaches of Childs and Thiselton and to acquire insights from them on theological exegesis, I will not present and discuss the debates involved, but rather I will only take into account the relevant objections or the weakness of their approaches when articulating my assessment of their approaches.

## 5.2 A Description of Childs' Canonical Approach

Childs' approach is complex, so framing his work can be difficult. In order to study and present Childs' work in a constructive and clear manner, in what follows I identify the important introductory elements and points of intersection in Childs' approach by presenting the two key assumptions shown in Childs' method. Having set the stage for introducing the canonical approach, I present the central task of Childs' exegesis through referring to the six features of the church's exegetical tradition as recognized by Childs. Lastly, having obtained an understanding of Childs' approach from a broader perspective, I turn to a narrower perspective identified in Childs' works that focuses on how to perform the canonical interpretation of Scripture.

### 5.2.1 Two Key Assumptions of Childs' Canonical Approach<sup>4</sup>

If we are to grasp the heart of Childs' first assumption, we initially need to have an idea of Childs' understanding of the foundational nature of the church. For Childs, the sequential nature of the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) expresses a story of history (*Geschichte, Historie*) of God communicating to His chosen people by means of Scripture, as well as the ongoing struggle of the chosen people to hear God through Scripture (in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit). Given this consideration, the church is part of this story.<sup>5</sup> The history of the church shows that although the church has faced great challenges in proclaiming the coherency of God's truth, she has made consistent witness to this truth. Hence, Childs is convinced that biblical texts, through a variety of distinctive methods, have been shaped throughout the ages so as to be accessible to subsequent generations.<sup>6</sup> This, then, is the first and core assumption of Childs' approach.

Based on such an assumption, Childs' orientation is on attending to the ways in which specific biblical texts were collected, shaped, and interpreted in the process of transmission in the ancient Israelite communities, so that these texts could speak to the later generations who had not participated in the original events of revelation.<sup>7</sup> In Childs' words,

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<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Olson's article "Seeking 'The Inexpressible Texture of Thy Word'," 53-68), in which he provides a clear introduction to Childs' works, and identifies the two key assumptions that lie in Childs' approach. This section is drawn from Olson's article, alongside my observations from Childs' works.

<sup>5</sup> Agreeing with Gerhard Ebeling who once spoke of church history as the exposition of Scripture, Childs holds that the church's ongoing struggle to hear God's word is indeed part of the genuine history of the church (see Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 299).

<sup>6</sup> Olson, "Seeking 'The Inexpressible Texture of Thy Word'," 55.

<sup>7</sup> Childs emphasizes that his approach is not another criticism or method. He is unhappy that it has been described by others as "canonical criticism," as this term implies that "the canonical approach is considered as another historical critical technique which can take its place alongside of source, criticism, form critics, rhetorical criticism, and similar methods" (Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*

I am using the term “canon” to refer to that historical process within ancient Israel—particularly in the postexilic period—which entailed a collecting, selecting, and ordering of texts to serve a normative function as Sacred Scripture within the continuing religious community. In the transmission process, traditions which once arose in a particular milieu and were addressed to various historical situations were shaped in such a way as to serve as a normative expression of God’s will to later generations of Israel who had not shared in those original historical events.<sup>8</sup>

For Childs, then, the term “canon” or “canonical” when applied to biblical interpretation is not primarily about “the formal function of separating the books that are authoritative from others that are not.”<sup>9</sup> He is “including under the term not only the final stages of setting limits on the scope of the sacred writing—canonization proper.”<sup>10</sup> Rather, the term is used as an interpretive orientation that encompasses the diverse factors involved in the formation and interpretation of the Bible—“the process by which authoritative tradition was collected, ordered, and transmitted in such a way as to enable it to function as sacred Scripture for a community of faith and practice.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, “canon” “as received, collected, and interpreted material of the church establishes a theological context in which the tradition continues to function authoritatively for today.”<sup>12</sup>

Notably, the above definition indicates that Scripture must be interpreted in relation to its function within the *community of faith*. Hence, it is emphasized explicitly in Childs’ works that Scripture is to be interpreted within the communities of faith, guided and confirmed by the Holy Spirit through its resonance with the church’s Christological rule of faith.<sup>13</sup> The task of the canonical interpreter or the church is thus to stand within a human ecclesiastical tradition, and at the same time struggle to discern the truth of God revealed in Scripture,

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[Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 82). Childs stresses that this is not how he envisions the “canonical approach.” However, it is worth noting that Childs does not reject the historical-critical method, but he is convinced that historical-critical reconstruction had led to a hermeneutical impasse and had nothing to say theologically, and all other methodologies are inadequate to either ask or expect to answer theological questions as well (see Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970], 141-143).

<sup>8</sup> Brevard S. Childs, “Interpretation in Faith: The Theological Responsibility of an Old Testament Commentary,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 18 (October 1964): 438.

<sup>9</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 99. Additionally, for Childs there is a hermeneutical distinction between the overall canonical (confessional) shaping of the Bible and the exegetical task that often opens to multiple meanings and interpretations of the Bible (see Brevard S. Childs, “Speech-act Theory and Biblical Interpretation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 [2005]: 380-383).

<sup>10</sup> Brevard S. Childs, “The Exegetical Significance of Canon for the Old Testament,” in *Congress Volume Göttingen 1977* (VTSup 29; Leiden: Brill, 1978), J. A. Emerton and others, eds., 67.

<sup>11</sup> Childs, “Exegetical Significance,” 67.

<sup>12</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 70. Elsewhere in his works, Childs also points out that “canon” involves “the process of religious interpretation by a historical faith community left its mark on the literary texts which did not continue to evolve and which became the normative interpretation of those events to which it bore witness” (see Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 73).

<sup>13</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 67. See also *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 99-100; *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 15. Childs stresses that on the one hand, the complete canon of the church as the rule of faith sets for the church the proper theological context in which Christian community stands. On the other hand, the object of critical theological examination continues to be subordinated to its subject matter—that is, Jesus Christ. This movement from the outer parameters of tradition to the inner parameters of God’s word is constitutive of the church’s ongoing search for the Bible (see *Biblical Theology*, 67-68). “Canonicity as the ‘rule of faith’ was a confession of the divine origin of the gospel that had called the church into being;” and Scripture served as “testimony that the salvation and faith of the old covenant was one with that revealed in Jesus Christ” (Childs, “An Interview with Brevard S. Childs,” [www.philosophy-religion.org/bible/chlds-interview.htm](http://www.philosophy-religion.org/bible/chlds-interview.htm) [Accessed 22 May 2014]).

seeking to understand *how* the biblical writers constructed the texts that enabled them to express the divine truth to successive generations in a normative way.<sup>14</sup> Given this understanding, canon “*is the rule that delineates the area in which the church hears the word of God.*”<sup>15</sup>

The second assumption of Childs’ approach is the affirmed reality of an *external living God*. Childs maintains that ultimately it is God who works through the communities of faith as they interpret Scripture to speak to the world. Hence, Scriptural interpretation is not about appealing to an imaginative literary world or reconstructing ancient history. It involves profound engagement with the particular details, texture, and plain sense of a specific biblical text, as well as the role of this text within both Old and New Testaments.<sup>16</sup> Such an attentive engagement is done in prayerful expectation that God will speak through the Holy Spirit who works in the community of faith.<sup>17</sup> The focus of the “canonical” approach is not, as a result, on the debates concerning the list of the biblical canon, but rather on interpreting Scripture as a *witness* to God and God’s work in the world.

In sum, we learn from the above that the final or “received” form of the biblical texts (rather than the earlier stages of their development) is emphasized in Childs’ method;<sup>18</sup> also, the role of the community of faith (rather than individual authors or sources) is stressed. We will see in the following section that these two key assumptions undergird much of Childs’ approach, and constantly function as intersection points in Childs’ argument.

## 5.2.2 Six Features of Childs’ Exegesis

In the last published book before his death, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*, Childs identifies six features of the church’s exegetical tradition or, in the words of Childs, the “family resemblance” of Old Testament exegesis.<sup>19</sup> Childs stresses that these features are discernible characteristics constituted in his method, from which he attempts to enlarge and cultivate his approach. These six features provide us guidance in understanding how Childs arrived at his hermeneutical conclusions, and how he thinks the Bible should be interpreted today. In the following, therefore, I use these six features as an overarching framework through which we can discover Childs’ canonical approach.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 67.

<sup>15</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 99 (italics mine).

<sup>16</sup> Olson, “Seeking ‘The Inexpressible Texture of Thy Word,’” 56.

<sup>17</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 99-100.

<sup>18</sup> A good short account of Childs’ canonical approach is provided by Christopher Seitz, “Canonical Approach,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, eds. Kevin Vanhoozer and others (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 100-102. Seitz explains that the canonical approach does not deny the complexities underlying the formation of the canonical texts etc. Its focus is not on “the world behind the text” (i.e., the concern of the ancient historian), but rather on “the world within the text” and on “the world in front of the text” (i.e., the continuing life of communities of faith—both Jewish and Christian). Hence, in the canonical approach attention is given to the final or the “received” form of the Scripture.

<sup>19</sup> See Childs, *Struggle*, 299-324. Childs states that in spite of different ages and cultures, there is a “family resemblance” among the ways in which faithful response to the Bible occurs (Childs, “Interpreting the Bible amid Culture Change,” 210). Hence, Childs opposes the view that there are no rules for interpreting the Bible, and that each interpreter offers one’s own imaginative construal. Childs asserts that there has always been a “family resemblance” within the church in regard to understanding its sacred Scripture. These “family resemblances” function as boundaries “within which acceptable interpretation of the Bible can be made, outside of which is the threat of heresy” (see Childs, “Speech-act Theory,” 383-384).

<sup>20</sup> During my research and study on Childs’ works, I found that Childs’ writing on the “family resemblance” in the concluding section of his *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* not only tells us Childs’ hermeneutical conclusions of how the Bible should be interpreted today, it in fact reflects and in

## a. The Authority of Scripture

For Childs, the basic theological understanding of “Scripture is authoritative” refers to Scripture as the “witness” of the divine truth.<sup>21</sup> Based on his understanding of the nature of the church (ref. Section 5.2.1), Childs asserts that biblical authority is not a static dogmatic “given” within the history of the church, “but receives its true meaning within a specific context in which its message is proclaimed and received in the obedience of faith.”<sup>22</sup> “Scripture accrues its proper authority when it is read and celebrated in the community of the church.”<sup>23</sup> This points to the fact that biblical authority is about a living and on-going relationship between God and His chosen people, through which God guides them to the fullness of truth by the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, for Childs, “authority” entails a relational concept: “The Scripture not only is inspired in its origin, but is continuously infused with the promise of divine illumination. Depending on its particular context, Scripture can be described both as being the Word of God and becoming the Word of God.”<sup>24</sup> The authority of Scripture, on that account, consists in its role as both witness to God (the text’s true subject matter) and the means for understanding God’s truth.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, such a unique relationship between God and His people, and the role of Scripture in this relationship, indicates the task of the community of faith in the process of interpreting Scripture.<sup>26</sup> Says Childs,

The biblical text must be studied in closest connection with the community of faith which treasured it. Obviously these texts can be studied from any number of other contexts and perspectives, but not as Sacred Scripture! The authority of the canon of Scripture is not a claim of objective truth apart from the community of faith but it is a commitment to a particular perspective from which the reality of God is viewed.<sup>27</sup>

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some ways summarizes Childs’ canonical approach. Later it came to my knowledge that Philip Sumpter uses Childs’ views of these “family resemblances” to introduce Childs’ approach in his article “Brevard Childs as Critical and Faithful Exegete,” *Princeton Theological Review* 14, Issue 38 (2008): 96. Hence, the points in Section 5.2.2.a -5.2.2.f are drawn from Sumpter’s article, along side with my own observations from Childs’ works.

<sup>21</sup> Childs, *Struggle*, 300. Hence, Childs asserts that it is a mistake to suggest that any ecclesiastical body “can ever ‘make a book canonical.’ Rather, the concept of canon was an attempt to *acknowledge* the divine authority of its writings and collections.” (see Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 105 [italics Childs’])

<sup>22</sup> Childs, *Struggle*, 302.

<sup>23</sup> Childs, “Interpreting the Bible amid Culture Change,” 210.

<sup>24</sup> Childs, “Speech-act Theory,” 381. Childs makes a functional distinction between “Scripture” and “canon.” According to Childs, although both refer to the authoritative collection of sacred writings as the means of apprehending God’s will, “Scripture” refers to the divine authority of these writings that derives from the inspiration of God’s Spirit. “Canon” generally refers to the scope of the authoritative collection of sacred writings. This distinction is important to understanding Childs’ views of canon. Childs states that although the question of scope and role of translation of Scripture is an issue, it is important not to overestimate the scale of the problem, “In spite of areas of disagreement [concerning a few books on the periphery], the Bible in its various forms has continued to function in authoritative norm for the church throughout its history” (see Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 66).

<sup>25</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1962), 98.

<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note the close similarity between Bavinck and Childs’ view on the authority of Scripture (ref. Chp. 3.3.1).

<sup>27</sup> Childs, *Struggle*, 321. In connection with this, Childs warns that Scripture cannot be interpreted “as an extrinsic ecclesiastical norm, independent and superior in authority to the Bible itself ... The text itself must render the proper *scopus* of Scripture which the church only receives and acknowledges” (see *Biblical Theology*, 72). Childs stresses that to understand the Bible as Scripture means to reflect on the witness of the text transmitted through the testimony of the prophets and apostles. In other words, it involves understanding biblical history as the activity of God testified to in Scripture.

<sup>28</sup> Childs, *Myth and Reality*, 98.



This is why the “canonical” approach is a theological or hermeneutical activity,<sup>28</sup> through which Scripture was shaped and interpreted so that it could function as authoritative for generations not in the original contexts of the texts’ first composition.<sup>29</sup> In the shaping process of the canonical approach, different parts of the canon were interchanged to produce a new angle of vision on the texts; and hence, Childs holds that biblical/exegetical commentary is the unique genre that has the capacity to interpret Scripture for changing needs.

## **b. The Literal and Spiritual Senses of Scripture**

Childs is aware that the nature of the relationship between the literal (particular) and spiritual (general) dimensions of Scripture has been an issue in the church. He puts forth his proposal on this issue when discussing Scriptural interpretation. To begin, drawing on the principle of “faith seeking knowledge,” Childs points out that understanding the divine reality requires a starting point from and within faith:

the true expositor of Christian Scripture is the one who awaits in anticipation toward becoming the interpreted rather than the interpreter. The very divine reality which the interpreter strives to grasp, is the very One who grasps the interpreter. The Christian doctrine of the role of the Holy Spirit is not a hermeneutical principle, but that divine reality itself who makes understanding of God possible.<sup>30</sup>

Childs’ first point is that “theological reflection must ultimately be on the subject matter of the text, so that the basic thrust of theological interpretation is from the literal to the spiritual.”<sup>31</sup> For Childs, in other words, the fundamental focus of Christian interpretation is on the spiritual sense. Secondly, acknowledging Scripture as “witness” to the divine truth (ref. 5.2.2.a) leads to recognizing that various voices within the whole Bible (in relation to the divine reality) can only be heard from “the partial grasp of fragmentary reality found in both Testaments to the full reality which the Christian church confesses to have found in Jesus Christ, in the combined witness of the two Testaments.”<sup>32</sup> As such, exegesis is to resonate in a new and creative fashion in order to illumine the various dimensions of the text. There is no fixed, temporal sequence in exegesis. Rather, exegesis moves “within a circle which encompasses both the movement from text to reality as well as from reality to the text” within the dynamics of the biblical witness.<sup>33</sup> For this reason, “allegory or typology, when properly understood and praised, remains an essential part of Christian interpretation.”<sup>34</sup> Childs contends, moreover, that the canonical approach offers the possibility of genuine exegesis,

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<sup>28</sup> Childs, “Speech-act Theory,” 380-381. In Childs’ judgment, the most fundamental flaw in the new hermeneutical theory arises from the failure to understand the role of the church in collecting, shaping, and interpreting the Bible. The canonical approach is a far more complex historical, literary, and theological phenomenon than is usually recognized.

<sup>29</sup> Childs, *Introduction*, 60; “Speech-act Theory,” 383.

<sup>30</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament* (London: SCM, 1992), 86.

<sup>31</sup> Sumpter, “Brevard Childs as Critical and Faithful Exegete,” 100.

<sup>32</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 85.

<sup>33</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 379.

<sup>34</sup> See *Biblical Theology*, 55-63. As long as allegory is understood to be a means of moving to the ultimate subject matter of text while respecting the literal sense of the text itself, Childs agrees that “allegory, used in its broadest sense, is constitutive of Christian interpretation as a means of discerning the mystery of Christ” (see Childs, *Struggle*, 302).

because it takes seriously the different dimensions of the text and the distinct contexts in which the text functions.<sup>35</sup>

### c. The Two Testaments of Scripture

Childs is aware of the two different aspects concerning the relationship (or the continuity and discontinuity) between the two Testaments throughout church history.<sup>36</sup> “In what sense can one speak of the canonical shaping of the Christian Bible when the process by which the two Testaments were joined appears to be quite different from the process reflected in each of the individual Testaments?”<sup>37</sup> For Childs, the answer lies in a *kerygmatic* (Christological) reading of Scripture that preserves the unity of its one composition consisting of two separate Testaments.<sup>38</sup> Childs stresses that on the one hand, the Old Testament is an integral part of the Bible because of its witness to Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the New Testament makes its witness in a different form than that of the Old Testament. It is not just an extension of the old covenant, but something totally new that has entered into the story of God—an explosion of God’s news that tells of the new, redemptive intervention of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>39</sup> This theological paradox is seen in the fact that this totally new witness is borne out in terms of the old, and in that transforms the Old Testament.<sup>40</sup> The Old Testament is understood by way of its relation to the New Testament, and the New Testament is incomprehensible apart from the Old Testament. As such, the Old Testament’s witness must indeed be heard in its own voice (e.g., it must be interpreted within its historical, literary, and canonical context); yet Old Testament scholarship must also learn from New Testament research.

Moreover, Childs elucidates that the juxtaposition of the two Testaments not only establishes a historical continuity between Israel and the church, but it is also an affirmation of the theological continuity that allows for rich theological diversity;<sup>41</sup> and it implies that there is no one overarching hermeneutical theory by which to resolve the tension between the two Testaments.<sup>42</sup> A variety of different theological strategies are made “to articulate and understand the theological relationships of the two dispensations: the one purpose of God, the one redemptive history, the one people of God, prophecy and fulfilment, law and gospel,

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<sup>35</sup> Childs, “Interpreting the Bible Amid Cultural Change,” 210-211. In this article, Childs attempts to address the question of why the church’s understanding of the Bible changes from generation to generation. Childs points out that the usual interpretations that focus on the changing effect of shifting culture are inadequate. The newer methods of biblical interpretation were shaped by one’s own expectations or subjectivity. Hence, the changing understanding of the Bible is required (see 207-209). How then can the church decide what in the new biblical interpretation is faithful to the old, and what is a repudiation of the faith? Childs answers that there is no formula to invoke, but the church has been given the parameters of a rule-of-faith (see 211) with which Childs sees his canonical approach is in line (see also, Childs, “Interpretation in Faith: The Theological Responsibility of an Old Testament Commentary,” *Interpretation* 18 [1964]: 438).

<sup>36</sup> Some argued for the Hebrew Scripture of the Old Testament on the fact that God’s word to Israel had been preserved in Hebrew Scriptures, and they were the proper traditions of the tradition. Furthermore, Jesus stemmed from the patriarchs according to the flesh. However, others argued that the catholicity of the Christian faith was expressed in the continuity of sacred tradition from the risen Lord to His church. Also, the New Testament is deeply marked by its widespread use of the LXX. Moreover, the New Testament writers bore witness to Christ by transforming the Old Testament in a way that often stood in tension with the original sense of the Hebrew Scripture (see Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 64-65).

<sup>37</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 73.

<sup>38</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 65-66.

<sup>39</sup> See Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 76-78, 722-723; “The Canon in Recent Biblical Studies: Reflections on an Era,” 45.

<sup>40</sup> See Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 722.

<sup>41</sup> See Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 719-722.

<sup>42</sup> See Childs, *Introduction*, 659-671.

shadow and substance, etc.”<sup>43</sup> Hence, the concern of biblical theology is “to engage in the continual activity of theological reflection which studies the canonical text in detailed exegesis, and seeks to do justice to the witness of both Testaments in the light of its subject matter who is Jesus Christ.”<sup>44</sup>

#### **d. The Divine and Human Authorship of Scripture**

The church has long confessed that Scripture is divinely and humanly authored. However, the question has been raised concerning the relationship between the divine and human: how could a fallible human receive words from God? Childs’ answer rests on his definition of “authority” (ref. 5.2.2.a) “They were regarded so not only because of their divine source, but also by their assigned role as the medium of God’s continuing communication.”<sup>45</sup> “The movement by which human speech becomes the vehicle of divine revelation was by means of the Holy Spirit;” “the human words were not appropriated, changed, or semantically filtered, but illuminated in their original temporal form as a divine vehicle.”<sup>46</sup> In addition, the work of the Holy Spirit is also shown in illuminating the church to understand the living words of God. Moreover, “the concept of canon was a corollary of inspiration.”<sup>47</sup> The church has never claimed the formulation of the canon of Scripture as its own work, but understood it to be the authentic Christian response to divine revelation. Another question raised concerning the authorship of Scripture is the issue of unity in its diverse transmission (e.g., the Hebrew text and the Greek Septuagint do not always agree). Childs’ perspective is rooted in his view mentioned above in Section 5.2.2.b (the fundamental focus of biblical interpretation is on the spiritual sense) and 5.2.2.c. (the integrity of the individual Testaments is held in tension). Hence, Childs holds that biblical theology should hear the different voices of biblical texts.<sup>48</sup>

#### **e. The Christological Content of Scripture**

The church has also long struggled with the question of whether there is a determined meaning within the biblical texts. Although Childs defends dialogical and dialectical exegetical activity and proposes a multiple-level reading of the Bible according to different contexts (ref. 5.2.2.b), based on his key concept of Scripture as “witness” to the divine reality (ref. 5.2.2.1), he elucidates that it is only when the diversity of witnesses in both Testaments is related to their “subject matter” (*res*) that we can comprehend the Bible’s coherence.<sup>49</sup> The unity of the Bible cannot be found in the canon itself, but only in the extra-textual reality of Christ who is the source of the “inner unity” possessed by the two Testaments. It is a basic Christian confession that all Scripture bears testimony to Jesus Christ; in this sense, there is a single and unified voice in Scripture.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 73.

<sup>44</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 78, 722.

<sup>45</sup> Childs, “Speech-act Theory,” 379. In this article, Childs’ view on the relationship between the divine and human authorship of Scripture is shown through his exploration of the speech-act theory in its relation to biblical interpretation. Childs offer a critical assessment of N. Wolterstorff and Thiselton’s applications of this theory, and concludes that the application of Thiselton is far different from that of Wolterstorff and avoids many of the problems that plague Wolterstorff’s exegesis (see 391). In the section on the issue of divine appropriation of human speech, Childs stresses that the human words were not transformed into a new form of illocutionary divine discourse, but were now understood and made alive through a divine activity (see 378-380).

<sup>46</sup> Childs, “Speech-act Theology,” 380.

<sup>47</sup> Childs, “Speech-act Theology,” 381.

<sup>48</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 85.

<sup>49</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 55, 589.

<sup>50</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 725.

## **f. The Dialectical Understanding of the History of Scripture**

Childs uses the term “dialectical” (in its non-technical sense) to describe some of the essential features of the Christian understanding of history—the distinctions made between empirical history and biblical history. Throughout history, the church has held that the two dimensions cannot be fused, yet they cannot be separated either. But a consensus concerning the relation of the two was never reached. The problem worsened after the Enlightenment, when a direct relation between text and event became difficult to assume. Childs is critical of both conservative and liberal reactions to this problem, and he attempts to do justice to Israel’s history while at the same time acknowledging the challenge of modernity. He does this by suggesting the following principles of interpretation:<sup>51</sup> to avoid rationalistic assumptions that would deny the outer (public testimony) and inner (confessional witness) dimensions of Israel’s history; to do justice to the divine and human agency involved in Israel’s history; to avoid treating Israel’s history as a separate part of *Heilsgeschichte*; and to avoid the arrogance of changing Israel’s judgment due to the assumption of modern critical superiority.

### **5.2.3 Childs’ Application of the Canonical Interpretation of the Bible**

It is necessary to note that Childs neither indicates nor highlights the steps of a biblical-theological interpretation of Scripture. Nevertheless, upon his reflection of the Trinitarian “identity of God” in the Old and New Testament witnesses, Childs wrestles with the question of how our fuller knowledge of the Triune God affects our interpretation of both Testaments; and how we relate such knowledge to the church’s canon.<sup>52</sup> Childs believes that the answers to these questions lie in a dialogical and dialectical reading of Scripture that involves the three avenues I present below.<sup>53</sup> Considering that the answer to Childs’ questions is inseparable from his key assumptions presented in Section 5.2.1 and exegetical features presented in Section 5.2.2, these three steps provide a compact and practical guide to Childs’ canonical interpretation of the Bible. Moreover, in Childs’ defense of the multiple-level reading of Scripture, similar steps are also illustrated to demonstrate how we can perform canonical interpretation of Scripture.<sup>54</sup> To these three steps I now turn.

#### **a. First Avenue: Discerning the Plain Sense of the Text**

As we have already seen, Childs holds that in order “to hear the voice of each biblical witness in its own right” and with its own integrity, it is “absolutely necessary to interpret each passage within its historical, literary, and canonical context.”<sup>55</sup> In short, the interpreter’s first and primary step (especially when interpreting the Old Testament) is to discern the best possible reading of the “plain sense” of the text—to let the text have its say. The Old Testament text must be heard as much as possible within its ancient Near Eastern history and there is “no legitimate way of removing the Old Testament’s witness from its historical

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<sup>51</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 99-101.

<sup>52</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 379.

<sup>53</sup> In his introduction to Childs’ canonical approach, Olson overviews Childs’ most important works and points out that this brief section of “Reading Scripture in the Light of the Full Divine Reality” in *Biblical Theology* provides us with a practical and compact guide to the critical steps involved in Childs’ canonical interpretation of Scripture or theological exegesis of the Bible (Olson, “Seeking ‘The Inexpressible Texture of Thy Word’,” 57).

<sup>54</sup> See Childs, “Interpreting the Bible Amid Cultural Change,” 61-63.

<sup>55</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 379.

confrontation with ancient Israel.”<sup>56</sup> In order to do so, a close work of translation, historical-critical and literary analysis, as well as paying attention to the way in which the text has been shaped and situated in its larger literary context, is required.<sup>57</sup> Childs reminds us that the best tools to study the Bible are grounded in the doctrine of the incarnation—in the fact that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human. Just as overemphasizing or downplaying the divinity or humanity of Christ leads to serious theological errors, so too when it is either the literal or spiritual sense of the Bible is stressed. A method of dialectical understanding is required for us to understand God’s Words through human interpretation.<sup>58</sup> Notably, Childs’ points in this step are described in our previous study in Section 5.2.2.b, 5.2.2.c, as well as 5.2.2.d.

### **b. Second Avenue: An Intertextual Dialogue between the Two Voices<sup>59</sup>**

As mentioned in Section 5.2.2.c, Childs emphasizes the unified message between the two distinctive voices of the Old and New Testaments, while at the same time stating that “both Testaments make a discrete witness to Jesus Christ which must be heard, both separately and in concert.”<sup>60</sup> Hence, a reading is required that proceeds “from the fact of a two part canon, and seeks to analyze structural similarities and dissimilarities between the witnesses of both Testaments.”<sup>61</sup> This step involves not merely a history of exegesis, “but an exegetical and theological enterprise which seeks to pursue a relationship of content.” As such, the interpreter should analyse the variety of possible relationships between the specific text(s) of the Old Testament and New Testament, and allow for one of many possibilities on how the Testaments might relate to one another, so that the harmony, diversity, and distinct voices of the Testaments are preserved and heard without prematurely fusing them. This is especially important inasmuch as the two Testaments represent two different historical experiences of God’s people. Of course, as we have seen in Section 5.2.2.c, Childs is aware of the complex issues involved in the relationship between the two Testaments. Childs proposes that just as the church took centuries to seek and preserve the inner unity of the Trinity, theological interpretation should likewise seek to preserve the distinctiveness of the two Testaments by bringing them into mutual relationship and conversation.

### **c. Third Avenue: Discerning a True Witness to the Living God<sup>62</sup>**

As stated in Section 5.2.2.b, Childs proposes that the interpreter moves from biblical witness to divine reality.<sup>63</sup> The last essential step involves moving “from the dual witness of Scripture

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<sup>56</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 379.

<sup>57</sup> Childs explains, the literal sense is not merely the semantic or linguistic level of meaning, but an actualisation of the text for each successive generation of the community of faith based on the linguistic meaning in its canonical context. Childs demonstrates such a way of handling the biblical text in his commentary on Exodus. Childs first examines carefully the textual level of each unit of the text with a new translation of the Hebrew text. This includes “restoring the best text” but also “seeking to understand how the text was heard and interpreted by later communities.” Then he examines the historical development that lay behind the final form of the biblical text with regard to both oral and literary levels. This includes form-critical and tradition-historical analyses, and careful source analysis. Then he refers to other sources (e.g., commentary; materials of New Testament’s reading of the Old Testament) (see Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* [London: SCM, 1974]).

<sup>58</sup> Childs, “The Canon in Recent Biblical Studies,” 44-45.

<sup>59</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 378.

<sup>60</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 77.

<sup>61</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 77.

<sup>62</sup> See Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 379-380.

<sup>63</sup> Childs states that we are neither prophets nor apostles: we lack direct experience or access to God’s reality and revelation; rather, God’s revelation is given to us through its authoritative witness of the Bible. How

to the reality of God to which the witnesses point, namely the subject matter itself, the reality which evoked the witness.”<sup>64</sup> At this juncture, the interpreter engages in a careful study of the individual text, paying attention to its context within Scripture, and studying other texts that may be related to its content, theme, and other areas, as well as considering the overall witness of Scripture regarding this text. As we inevitably come to Scripture with our own pre-understanding of its meaning, the interpretive task involves self-discernment through using external resources such as the church’s traditions (e.g., creeds, confessions, catechisms, and other testimonies) that function as the church’s operative rule of faith. But, as Childs emphasizes, the interpreter’s fuller grasp of God’s reality “is not a collection of right doctrine or some moral idea, but a response to the living God who graciously allows God’s self to be known.”<sup>65</sup>

#### 5.2.4 Concluding Observations: Canon, Community, and Theological Continuity

In sum, we learn from the above study that Childs’ approach to biblical interpretation is complex. In other words, it seems that Childs does not aim to provide a single hermeneutical method or a fixed, step-by-step exegetical order. Rather, based on the two key theological assumptions underlying his approach (Section 5.2.1) and his understanding of the “family resemblance” of church exegesis (Section 5.2.2), Childs desires to alert us to the boundaries within which the church has wrestled in understanding God’s words. He also wants the church to continue to struggle to hear God’s voice.<sup>66</sup> By way of his three-step canonical approach, moreover, he attempts to provide a more reliable theological structure to guide the church in biblical interpretation (Section 5.2.3).<sup>67</sup> The following are some observations derived from the preceding study.

First, in the previous chapters this study has examined and evaluated the Scriptural interpretations of Molina and Craig. In the evaluative process, we often encountered questions such as: what are legitimate criteria for evaluating their Scriptural interpretations and the reasons for selecting such criteria? Or which tradition(s) are we to work with, and why are the tradition(s) we work with prioritized over others? Childs offers answers to these questions. He claims that the church’s exegetical tradition or the “family resemblance” of exegesis can be discerned in faithful response; it provides boundaries beyond which biblical

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a truthful exegesis is performed becomes a question. Hence, this last step offers guidance to achieve a truthful exegesis. Additionally, Childs stresses that the movement from *res* to witness does not destroy the historical voice of the text. But a knowledge of the nature of the subject matter does affect the perception of the text, influence the questions asked, and the response received in interpretation (see *Biblical Theology*, 380)

<sup>64</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 380.

<sup>65</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 382.

<sup>66</sup> Seitz identifies the heart of Childs’ biblical theology as an outworking of the fact that “we are neither prophets nor apostles.” He thinks this may be the hermeneutical heart of Childs’ proposal—a description of how the community of faith engages in theological interpretation given our contemporary context (see Seitz, *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 102). For Sumpter, the true theological heart of Childs’ approach is the belief in the content of the rule of faith itself (see Sumpter, “Brevard Childs as Critical and Faithful Exegete,” 116).

<sup>67</sup> Though there are some differences between Seitz and Sumpter regarding the core theological concern of Childs, they both agree that Childs’ attempt to provide a compass to guide the church in the on-going struggle of interpreting the Scripture. Additionally, Driver considers the development of Childs’ work and concludes that Childs’ work “is not the means between left and right, nor a quest for Arcadia, but rather a broad inter-confessional and international range of engagement in service of church and world. It is an effort to describe the nature of truly theological exegesis and to point toward a viable execution of it for his generation, as well as for a future generation.” (See Driver, “Later Childs,” *Princeton Theological Review* 14, Issue 38 [2008]: 124.)

interpretation as a whole forbids us to go, as well as guidelines for why we choose to work with a certain “tradition.” This study’s evaluation of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig’s use and interpretation of Scripture is undergirded by the consideration that “Scripture as authoritative, in its two discrete witnesses, resonates with the Christological rule of faith in the church, confirmed by the action of the Holy Spirit, accrues textual authority, and witnesses to the living God.”<sup>68</sup> Of course, when we apply the “family resemblances” offered by Childs as a practical framework for Scriptural interpretation and evaluation, an additional explanation concerning the spectrum of these resemblances is needed. Hence, the next chapter will elaborate the “family resemblances” that are incorporated more directly in our final evaluation of the Scriptural interpretation of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig.

Second, during an era when Old Testament scholarship often explored comparatively small units of texts, Childs turns the focus to a wider and more extensive textual study by affirming the Old and New Testament as two distinctive voices that constitute one “shared reality”—the unified Christological message.<sup>69</sup> Though biblical scholarship has advanced since Childs’ era, he continues to alert us to the importance of studying biblical texts in light of the possible relationships between the text(s) of the two Testaments, and he reminds us the importance of investigating the cumulative teaching of Scripture on a particular issue as a whole through considering what each relevant text means. Childs’ approach (e.g., the “three avenues” of interpreting Scripture) keeps us from studying particular texts without reflecting on biblical theology on a larger scale. Childs’ method is especially significant when too often the interpretative process faces the danger of interpreting Scripture without considering the whole biblical-theological view, and Scripture(s) is interpreted as individual fragments (without consideration for their relation with the larger context of either its place in the biblical book or in the entire Bible). It is rewarding to make our evaluation of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig through a biblical-theological investigation that apply these reminders of Childs, especially when there is little work dedicated to such an examination in the discussion of middle knowledge.

Third, Childs emphasizes the unity of the two Testaments in relation to “the God of Israel and the church,” and he stresses “the identity of the Christian God with the God of the Old Testament.”<sup>70</sup> This reminds us that not only is there historical continuity between Israel and the church, but there is also theological continuity between them. As shown in the beginning of our study, for Childs part of the history of God’s people (including the church) involved a response to Scripture. Therefore, to speak of the canon implies that a historical study of Scripture ought to intersect with the theological interpretation of Scripture for the life of the community of faith. As such, we also see that for Childs, biblical interpretation is the task of the community of faith (rather than individuals); and Scripture is rightly interpreted and understood in light of the rule of faith given to the church. This directs our attention to the need to account for the creedal context that comes from a long history of the church’s exegesis and interpretation of Scripture, recognizing that the creedal context serves well to keep us from falling away from the comprehensive vision of who God is and how He acts as shown in the entire Bible. To express this point in a way that relates to the context of this present study, the creedal context serves as a parameter that helps us ask the right questions while investigating the Scriptural texts cited by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig, and it helps us evaluate their use of these texts as well.

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<sup>68</sup> Driver and Childs, *Biblical Theologian For the Church’s One Bible* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 4.

<sup>69</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 91-94.

<sup>70</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 203.

Fourth, the community of faith has a crucial place and role in Childs' approach. Nonetheless, certain practical problems seem to arise from this emphasis. For example, Childs attempts to solve the tension between the verbal/literal sense and the figurative/interpreted sense of Scripture. He does so by appealing to the multiple senses of Scripture, which he believes each community of faith has the responsibility to discern. However, this does not solve the problem since the figurative sense is based on a theological understanding that is open to multiple senses within the ongoing life of the church. Therefore, one or more meanings may be found even within one tradition or one community of faith. This naturally leads to difficult questions such as: who and what determines which figurative sense is a faithful interpretation of Scripture and how is it arrived at. Similarly, when Childs alerts us that the solution to the Christian churches' problems in each of the six exegetical "family resemblances" do not lie in a single or fixed formula, but rather in the multiple-level reading of the biblical text, one may wonder what is the decisive factor that determines which reading is a faithful interpretation (I will return to this in Chapter 6).

As stated earlier, Childs' approach is not without criticism nor is it totally embraced by all scholars.<sup>71</sup> It has encountered extensive and divergent scrutiny during the past three decades. Suspicion concerning the validity of this canonical approach has been raised and the issues involved are complicated.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, Childs has provided certain criteria for assessing Scriptural interpretations. He has also offered insights for proposing a theological appropriation of Scripture, which will be presented in the next chapter. At this juncture, having concluded our study on Childs' approach and pointed out key elements related to our study, let us now turn to Thiselton.

### 5.3 A Description of Thiselton's Approach

Thiselton's works usually constitute a large spectrum of different approaches that include comprehensive accounts or surveys of historical and contemporary developments. This mark of historical depth and contemporary breadth is especially clear in his major works.<sup>73</sup> As mentioned earlier, the following is not intended to offer a review or summary of Thiselton's works; instead it is meant to introduce the key elements of his approach that are relevant to the present and next chapter. Therefore, the following begins with Thiselton's understanding

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<sup>71</sup> For instance, James Barr contends that the term "canon" does not stand for a practical approach to biblical exegesis, but masks profound confusion. Barr criticizes Childs' approach as in a "state of disarray or breakdown;" and "the speculative element in its reconstructions" in Childs' *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* is very close to the fundamentalist one. Barr fears that Childs' work will usher in a "post-critical era" and predicts that some evangelicals would exploit Childs' critique of historical criticism (see Richard Schultz, "Brevard S. Childs' Contribution to Old Testament Interpretation: An Evangelical Appreciation and Assessment," *Princeton Theological Review* 14, Issue 38 [2008]: 69).

<sup>72</sup> Schultz presents an overview of the extensive and widely divergent ways in which Childs' canonical approach has been assessed and appropriated in evangelical scholarship during the past three decades. Although Schultz does not evaluate the assessments, he concludes that judging from the publications reviewed, the overall evangelical reception towards Childs' works has been more positive than negative (see Schultz, "Brevard S. Childs' Contribution to Old Testament Interpretation," 90).

<sup>73</sup> For instance, in *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), Thiselton provides a comprehensive survey of hermeneutic methods and development covering from historical (e.g., Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, John Calvin, and many others) to contemporary approaches (e.g., Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Rudolf Bultmann, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Eberhard Jüngel, and many others).



of hermeneutics and its relation to philosophy (5.3.1), followed by how such a notion of hermeneutics is carried out in the process of “the fusion of the two horizons” (5.3.2).

### 5.3.1 Hermeneutical Currencies

#### a. The Meaning and Scope of Hermeneutics

To begin, Thiselton makes a clear distinction between interpretation/exegesis and hermeneutics: “whereas *exegesis and interpretation* denote the *actual process* of interpreting texts, *hermeneutics* also includes the second-tier discipline of asking *what exactly we are doing when we read, understand, or apply* texts.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, hermeneutics investigates how we read, understand, and respond to Scriptural texts written in a time and context different than our own.<sup>75</sup> This definition underscores that hermeneutics addresses the basic question, “[C]an the Bible mean anything we want it to mean? How can we agree about norms or criteria for the responsible and valid interpretation of Scripture?”<sup>76</sup> Consequently, hermeneutics sets out to explore “the conditions and criteria that operate to try to ensure responsible, valid, fruitful, or appropriate interpretation.”<sup>77</sup> But how can such an interpretation be attained? For Thiselton, the answer lies in the active engagement of the “two horizons.”

The term “two horizons” is not strange to someone familiar with Thiselton’s works. Thiselton proposes to engage a “fusion of two horizons” in biblical interpretation. The first horizon primarily concerns a hermeneutic of communication (i.e., the current context/the reading process), and the second horizon concerns a hermeneutic of truth (i.e., the biblical context/the text).<sup>78</sup> Both horizons interact and one leads to the other. We can recognize from Thiselton’s understanding of hermeneutics that it is different from the traditional definition, because its emphasis is on integrating the historicity of the interpreter and the historicity of the text.<sup>79</sup> In Thiselton’s words, “hermeneutics in the more recent sense of the term begins with the recognition that historical conditioning is two-sided: *the modern interpreter, no less than the text, stands in a given historical context and tradition.*”<sup>80</sup> The hermeneutical goal, therefore, is that of a steady progress toward a fusion of horizons.<sup>81</sup> But this is to be achieved in such a way that the particularity of each horizon is fully considered and respected,

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<sup>74</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 4 (italics his).

<sup>75</sup> Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 1, 4.

<sup>76</sup> Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 2.

<sup>77</sup> Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 4.

<sup>78</sup> Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, xx-xxi. See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 165-166; 305-306; and 316-327.

<sup>79</sup> Gadamer is regarded by Thiselton as of fundamental importance in hermeneutics, as he thinks it is Gadamer who really focuses on the need for hermeneutics and “the modern end of the problem,” and points out that one is unable to realize the need for a fusion of two horizons without awareness of their existence (see Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 10-12). Under the influence of Gadamer, Thiselton develops the framework of his hermeneutics (see Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 10-12).

<sup>80</sup> Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 11 (italics his).

<sup>81</sup> Citing the writings of Gadamer: “the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past” and “understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves,” Thiselton stresses that in the engagement of the two horizons, neither horizon remain static or untouched by the other, and such a process of engagement is “transformative.” (Thiselton, “The Significance of Recent Research on 1 Corinthians for Hermeneutical Appropriation of this Epistle Today,” *Neotestamentica* 40 [2006]: 344).

including respecting the rights of the text and allowing it to speak.<sup>82</sup> Thiselton points out that all interpretations come with pre-understanding, or pre-judgment, or traditions. No one expounds the Bible without bringing his/her own references or assumptions deriving from sources outside the Bible.<sup>83</sup> Therefore,

To begin with, the interpreter brings his own questions to the text. But because his questions may not be the right ones, his initial understanding of the subject matter is limited, provisional, and liable to distortion. But this provisional understanding, in turn, helps him to revise his questions and to ask more adequate and appropriate ones.... The process continues until he is in a position to ask questions which have clearly been shaped by the text itself; so that he achieves a progressively more adequate understanding of its subject matter.<sup>84</sup>

We see from the above quotation that for Thiselton the recognition of the second horizon plays a vital role in the process of interpretation, through which pre-understanding is prevented or its extent is reduced. Moreover, it is the recognition of the second horizon that undermines the naïve realism that has dominated much of modern biblical interpretation (we will return to this crucial part of Thiselton's view in Section 5.3.2.a). Let us now proceed to another important area in Thiselton's works, namely the role of philosophy in the task of exegesis.

## **b. Philosophy and Hermeneutics**

For Thiselton, hermeneutical issues are deeply philosophical. It is his desire to relate philosophical consideration to theology and biblical interpretation, and provide a foundation (much in line with the tradition of Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein) from which a constructive hermeneutics can be developed.<sup>85</sup> He points out that appropriating contemporary philosophical insights to the task of exegesis enables fruitful engagement with Scripture and benefits the church. It does so for the following reasons:<sup>86</sup> First, philosophical categories are applied by New Testament scholars, and so these categories must be considered if we are to dialogue effectively with these scholars. Second, philosophy is helpful in describing the nature of the hermeneutical process and assessing this process. Third, insofar as interpretation deals with technical (e.g., textual exegesis) and general (e.g., meaning and language) problems that relate closely to philosophy, philosophical concepts must be included in our consideration.<sup>87</sup> Fourth, philosophy provides useful conceptual tools for biblical interpretation. Fifth, every interpreter handles Scriptural texts with a pre-understanding; philosophy helps the interpreter detect his/her presuppositions and enlarge

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<sup>82</sup> Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 445. In connection to this point, Thiselton reiterates Schleiermacher's emphasis on preserving both the horizons of the text and of the reader.

<sup>83</sup> Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 114.

<sup>84</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, "The Use of Philosophical Categories in New Testament Hermeneutics," *The Churchman* 87 (1973): 93.

<sup>85</sup> Such a characteristic is shown clearly in Thiselton's works. He generally includes extensive examination and detailed analysis of the works of the major philosophers (especially from Friedrich Schleiermacher to the present) as he appropriates them for his hermeneutical theological views and position.

<sup>86</sup> Thiselton, "The Use of Philosophical Categories," 87-100. Notably, Thiselton addresses the relationship of philosophical and biblical interpretation especially in his two monographs, *Two Horizons* and *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

<sup>87</sup> Citing Bultmann: "Every theology is dependent for the clarification of its concepts upon a pre-theological understanding of man that, as a rule, is determined by some philosophical tradition," Thiselton asserts that philosophical tradition does not compromise theology, rather it makes theology more critically self-conscious (Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 228).

his/her critical capacities. Thiselton is aware of Tertullian's concern with the "dangers of Athens," and he defends his philosophical position by stressing that his concern is not to adopt the conceptuality of a particular philosophy, but "to draw a variety of conceptualities from other traditions, and critically to compare what each may achieve or fail to achieve."<sup>88</sup>

### 5.3.2 Biblical Interpretation as the Fusion of Two Horizons

#### a. "Engaging" and "Enlarging" Horizons

In *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, Thiselton extends his concern from the interrelationship between hermeneutical and philosophical interpretations of Scripture to consider how both shape Christian doctrine; and he proposes the "hermeneutics of doctrine" that focuses on hermeneutics as a starting point to develop Christian doctrine.<sup>89</sup> In Thiselton's explanation of what is involved in the "hermeneutics of doctrine," his hermeneutical approach is exemplified in an instructive manner. At the beginning of this book, Thiselton asks,

*Biblical hermeneutics explores levels of meaning, strategies of reading, historical distance, appropriation, engagement, and formation, and often features patient and active listening. The relation between, text, community and tradition remains constantly in view. Can these habits of the mind, with the historical, intellectual, and moral resources of hermeneutics, be placed at the service of understanding, exploring, appropriating, and applying Christian doctrine?*<sup>90</sup>

Thiselton proposes to answer the question aforesaid by drawing on the principal proponents of modern philosophical hermeneutics (such as Gadamer, Wittgenstein, Ricoeur, and others), and engaging the theological concepts of contemporary theologians (such as Moltmann and Pannenberg) to develop a hermeneutics of and for doctrine. Based on his commitment to engage the two horizons, Thiselton begins by approaching doctrine from the horizon of the current context, then towards the horizon of the biblical texts. Thiselton asserts that an interpreter who utilizes "hermeneutics" in the service of "doctrine" begins by asking current "motivated questions that arise from life";<sup>91</sup> with such questions, he/she moves into the horizon of Scripture, into the history of doctrinal development, and back to the current horizon in an attempt to respond to the contemporary question with biblical doctrine. In other words, Thiselton again stresses that the interpreter should recognize his/her pre-understandings formed by socio-religious-linguistic-economic location and the concerns raised by it. Through the acknowledgment of presuppositions, the interpreter then gains additional self-understanding of himself/herself, and begins to expand and transform his/her own horizon of understanding when engaging into an active dialogical relationship with the horizon of the other (i.e., a text/a doctrinal position/a person, etc.).<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 292. Herein we see again that Thiselton's approach is heavily influenced by Gadamer's view that "a particular hermeneutical insights come through a particular philosophical perspective. No single philosophy provides a comprehensive theory of hermeneutics, even that of Gadamer" (Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Transforming Biblical Reading* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992]).

<sup>89</sup> Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, xii.

<sup>90</sup> Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, xx (italics his).

<sup>91</sup> Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 144.

<sup>92</sup> See Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 305-306; and "Significance of Recent Research," 344-345. Elsewhere Thiselton makes a similar argument: "The goal of biblical hermeneutics is to bring about an active and meaningful engagement between the interpreter and text, in such a way that the interpreter's own horizons is reshaped and enlarged" (Thiselton, *New Horizons*, xix).

Considering the relationship between the two horizons, Thiselton elucidates that the engagement of horizons must begin with the primary acknowledgement that the biblical text is genuinely “other.”<sup>93</sup> Doing justice to the “otherness” of the biblical text involves attention to the contextualized “directedness” that the Scriptural texts are written by authors living at a time and context different than us.<sup>94</sup> Hence, the two horizons can never fully converge, but one is led to certain understandings of the other. In Thiselton’s words,

hermeneutical distance is never entirely eliminated. This is part of maintaining “respect for each different horizon of understanding.” Nevertheless, in the very *process* of seeking to understand what is “other,” *horizons move and expand... Horizons change for a person who is moving ...* Thus the horizon of the past ... is always in motion .... A close or fixed horizon is generated only by a single point of view or by a “position”.<sup>95</sup>

Therefore, Thiselton points out that the hermeneutical task lies not in eliminating the tension or distance between the two horizons.<sup>96</sup> Rather, the horizon of the text must come into creative interaction with the horizon of the interpreter. As mentioned above, when the interpreter moves between the two horizons, the horizons expand. In this way, “Biblical texts can transform readers, but readers also transform texts.”<sup>97</sup> How, then, is such a fusion of the horizons accomplished? This question takes us to the next section.

## **b. Multidisciplinary and Interdisciplinary Practices**

Thiselton is convinced that as an academic and practical discipline, hermeneutics must be a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary endeavour in order to uphold the “otherness” of the biblical text. By stressing the multidisciplinary nature of hermeneutics and presenting various hermeneutical theories and positions, as well as demonstrating the exegetical tasks that engage the biblical, philosophical, literary, social, and linguistic aspects, Thiselton argues that there is a plurality of hermeneutical models according to various reading situations.<sup>98</sup> In other words, hermeneutics is a collected work of multi-dimensional disciplinary perspectives, rather than being bound to one particular approach. Hence, Thiselton urges the interpreter to practice respect for different arguments and positions, to encounter the integrating dimension

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<sup>93</sup> Thiselton is fond of quoting Bonhoeffer’s theological encapsulation of the hermeneutical principle that the text to be interpreted is genuinely an “other” subject to be encountered, rather than an object to be mastered (see Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 559-560). We also see this in his other works in which he stresses that hermeneutics is a practice that involves understanding, love, and respect for the “other” (see Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, xvi-xix).

<sup>94</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizon*, 559-560.

<sup>95</sup> Thiselton, “Significance of Recent Research,” 322. This is cited from Gadamer.

<sup>96</sup> Thiselton, “Significance of Recent Research,” 322. This is cited from Gadamer.

<sup>97</sup> Thiselton, *Thiselton on Hermeneutics*, 11.

<sup>98</sup> See Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 349-384, in which Thiselton lays out ten strategies for reading texts in varied situations (e.g., various forms of semiotic theory, socio-critical theory, liberation hermeneutics, reader-response criticism, deconstruction, and others). For Thiselton, reception theory, which is grounded on Gadamer’s approach and the interdisciplinary approach of Ricoeur, are useful strategies for understanding the relation of the two horizons. Besides, holding that interpretation takes place “through” language, Thiselton sees that models that are not linguistically grounded lack a firm basis for hermeneutics. This leads Thiselton to discuss issues of language in hermeneutics and apply speech-act theory in his works. Thiselton believes that speech-act theory, though not necessarily the only hermeneutical framework, enables one to move from the words to the world, in the sense that the world is first conformed by the word (see “Jesus the Christ,” *Thiselton on Hermeneutics*, 465-466.).

of the subject, and subsequently to evaluate critically one's own interpretation of the Scriptures.<sup>99</sup>

Closely related, Thiselton stresses the need to enter into "dialogue with other traditions with special reference to the points at which overlapping and crisscrossing between community-boundaries occurs."<sup>100</sup> In considering the promises given to Israel and to the church, Thiselton notes that these promises also remain for those who read and believe in them. The developments in hermeneutics show that interpreters read the Bible in the context of social communities—not only the communities of faith, but others as well.<sup>101</sup> Taking the biblical books of Job and Ecclesiastes as examples, Thiselton argues that they are written without a specific answer to the problem they address. These books invite the interpreter to participate as well as to wrestle with the problem. Therefore, an ongoing conversation between theory and application among communities is necessary. In the process, older formulations may turn out to be inadequate and new formulations be raised. For Thiselton, if the Bible is to be interpreted properly and effectively, acceptance of new formulations is needed. Similarly, new formulations are not to be given ultimate status, as meaning is always context-relative. In stressing the need for dialogue among communities during the process of biblical interpretation, Thiselton affirms that the author's role and the biblical context must not be sacrificed, as they provide guidance to the interpreter. Thiselton accepts that many biblical texts express a goal. Thus examining their original intention prevents the interpreter from falling into the error of intentional fallacy.

Thiselton's discussions and demonstrations of the principles and conceptual tools involved in exegesis are competent. As a leading proponent of speech-act theory, Thiselton illustrates the hermeneutical significance of speech-act theory for biblical interpretation to demonstrate how conceptual tools can be of help for the task of exegesis.<sup>102</sup> Thiselton takes Psalms as an example to explain the function of speech-act theory, whereby he emphasizes that the symbol in biblical texts may remain primary as a vehicle of power, but the symbol "functions on the basis of traditions of interpretation which have been established in the light of crucial reflection, including the use of communicative and didactic texts, and narrative-texts which offer patterns of personal identification."<sup>103</sup> In addition, Thiselton moves through various models of reading (e.g., existentialist approach, reader-response approach, etc.) to demonstrate the practice of preserving both the horizons of the text and the reader. Thiselton is aware that such a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary enterprise could entail pluralism. He therefore stresses that interpretation must not only be creative, but also faithful and true.

The very questions in multidisciplinary hermeneutical theory about the nature of enquiry, language, and understanding which address the whole academic community also address the Christian community with parallel urgency to ask how the language of the biblical writings may speak creatively, and may be read and understood with transforming effects. How we

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<sup>99</sup> See Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 1-16. For example, Thiselton employs Jesus' parables as an examination of a series of different hermeneutical methods applied to the interpretation of parables; and he concludes from his examination that the genre of parable cannot be generalized. In other words, the key to understand all parables cannot be found in one single approach, and they have to be approached multi-dimensionally (see Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 35-39).

<sup>100</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 588-589.

<sup>101</sup> In stressing the practice of dialogue with other traditions, Thiselton even strives to develop public criteria for the precision of religious language by referring to the works of Wittgenstein.

<sup>102</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, part of *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Carlisle: Paternoster and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 578.

<sup>103</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 598.

read, understand, interpret, and use biblical texts relates to the very identity of Christian faith and stands at the heart of Christian theology.<sup>104</sup>

Hence, when considering the nature of Christian theological construction, although Thiselton affirms that it is not a one-sided discourse, he contends that the following considerations should be involved:<sup>105</sup> First, “doctrine evolves through corporate and communal endeavour.” Second, “Christian doctrine like Christian Scripture is *formative*. It actively shapes a community of faith.” Third, “doctrine is not rooted in Scripture, but also intertwined with life, liturgy and practice.... This coheres with what Paul called *building up*.”

### 5.3.3 Concluding Observations: Hermeneutics, Philosophy, and Doctrine

First, by redefining “hermeneutics” Thiselton helps us recognize the necessary and active engagement of the “two horizons”—the horizon of the reader and the horizon of the text. Thiselton’s insistence on the “two horizons” signifies the importance and need of engaging the two. In addition, his point that every interpreter encounters the biblical text with certain presuppositions reminds us to be cautious of the presupposition that may hinder our objectivity when interpreting Scripture. Indeed, as it is shown in the extensive historical survey of hermeneutics presented by Thiselton, interpreters of all eras recognize and attempt to avoid the problem of presupposition. This is an especially crucial point and one of the reasons why this study focuses on investigating and evaluating the biblical texts Molina, Bavinck, and Craig cited to support their respective views. As we have learned from the previous chapters that there is a need for us to “bring” the Scriptural interpretation of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig to meet with the “otherness”—the horizon of the Bible—with respect.<sup>106</sup> Consequently, in such a process, we as modern readers are led to meet the horizon of the Bible as well when we continue (and broaden) the discussion of middle knowledge through a biblical-theological perspective.

Second, as it is pointed out in the preceding study on Thiselton, one of his aims is to demonstrate how multidisciplinary practices and varied conceptual tools can aid exegesis. He has also provided profound practical illustrations and applications in his monographs of how philosophical considerations can be used in a biblically oriented and exegetically grounded approach, through which he also helps readers understand faith and doctrine. With this perspective in view, it seems that Thiselton attempts to unite a number of different horizons—the horizon between philosophy and hermeneutics, the horizon between the Bible and theology, and the horizon between faith and doctrinal practice. These attempts of Thiselton in many ways are related to the task of this present study and the reason why Thiselton’s approach is considered here. In order to avoid the danger of anachronism when we investigate the respective arguments of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig, in the previous

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<sup>104</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 2. In Thiselton’s exposition of the major themes in Christian doctrines, we see that he attempts to achieve a faithful and true interpretation of biblical texts by beginning from the specific standpoint of hermeneutical currencies and resources, and then he re-examines the doctrine in relationship to biblical texts (see Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrines*, 177-574).

<sup>105</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew and others, eds., *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 7 (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press; and Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 26-27.

<sup>106</sup> Thiselton’s view of the “two horizons” is rooted in Gadamer’s hermeneutics, the ability of which to interpret text has been critically questioned. Certainly, Gadamer’s hermeneutics and the criticisms it received are another subject that is not to be addressed here. Rather, this is to point out that while applying the proposal of Thiselton, one needs to consider the implications of Gadamer’s hermeneutics and the possible consequences of such implications. In this study, the “two horizons” is understood in its general meaning—the horizon of the reader and the horizon of the text.

chapters (and the next chapter) attention is given to the historical and theological horizons of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig. And in light of Thiselton's (along with Childs') approach, the next chapter proposes a framework that considers the integration of different horizons involved in a biblical-theological interpretation of Scripture (in light of biblical scholarship which appeals to philosophy, theology, and doctrinal practice in Scriptural interpretation), and applies it to the Scriptural texts cited by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig.

It is not only rewarding to make a final evaluation of how Molina, Bavinck, and Craig used and interpreted Scriptural texts through the proposed framework, but it also serves as an example of broadening the way middle knowledge is discussed through a biblical-theological approach that encounters different horizons. Of course, when we apply the perspectives of Thiselton (those that have more direct relevance and are more applicable to the task of this study) in the interpretation and evaluation of Scriptural texts, an additional explanation is needed on how these perspectives are incorporated, and also within which boundaries they should be used (this will be addressed in Chapter 6) .

Third, we learn from our study of Thiselton that fundamental to his approach that attention to philosophical considerations allows the biblical text to speak more clearly in its own right. We also learn that holding to the notion of "respect for the other," Thiselton stresses that hermeneutics should do justice to the diversity and particularity of the biblical texts. Hence, for Thiselton, hermeneutics should seek to renounce manipulative ways of understanding and communicating. Thiselton emphasizes repeatedly and explicitly the significance of a multidisciplinary approach and the plurality of hermeneutical methods (by which philosophical analysis is applied in a significant way to attain the meaning of Scriptural texts). Therefore, Thiselton speaks of an open system, in which the need for an ongoing conversation among communities, and continual establishment of new formulations of Scriptural interpretation through multidisciplinary approaches, are emphasized. There is no single hermeneutical method for Thiselton, and he encourages creative interpretation.

Thiselton's proposals face criticisms. With regard to his philosophical multidisciplinary approach, some scholars have questioned whether the heavy reliance on speech-act theory is justifiable.<sup>107</sup> Some have pointed out that the problem of speech-act theory is its level of abstraction. It introduces, as it were, a philosophical construct to handle the theological problem of divine-human discourse. Others have argued that it is not clear in Thiselton's proposal of interpretation what role modern linguistics plays.<sup>108</sup> Also, some have criticized Thiselton for not explaining precisely how he sees faith as relating to reason, and hence to philosophy.<sup>109</sup> Insofar as philosophical conceptual tools play a major role in Thiselton's approach, these objections are worth noting.

Regarding his "openness" to creative interpretation, although Thiselton states that any new formulations must be faithful and true, other scholars have questioned whether interpreting Scripture in an "open system" (e.g., dialogue with other traditions by establishing public criteria of meaning) is possible or workable at all.<sup>110</sup> This is because different

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<sup>107</sup> See Porter, *Hermeneutics*, chp 1.

<sup>108</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>109</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew, "Three Horizons: Hermeneutics from the Other End—An Evaluation of Anthony Thiselton's Hermeneutic Proposals," *European Journal of Theology* 5.2 (1996): 131-132.

<sup>110</sup> Brian J. Walsh, "Anthony Thiselton's Contribution to Biblical Hermeneutics." *Christian Scholar Review*, 14 (1985): 234-235.

communities hold to different forms of traditions, and follow different language systems in defining terms. For example, “cross” has different meanings to different communities such as Christians or Buddhists or Hindus and their life style. True public criteria of meaning cannot be established as easily as Thiselton proposes. While we are to cultivate a critical and reflective attitude when approaching the different horizons involved in interpreting Scripture (as Thiselton suggested), these objections are worth noting as they show the practical difficulties involved in Thiselton’s approach, and they call for continual assessment when applying them in the exegetical task (I will return to some of these relevant criticisms in Chapter 6).

## 5.4 Conclusion

Our study in this chapter shows that while the methods of Childs and Thiselton are biblically oriented, in terms of methodology they approach hermeneutics differently. Simply put, Childs takes biblical theology as the point of entry, whereas Thiselton appeals to philosophy as the major point of contact. Childs’ method stems from understanding the entire Bible not simply as a literary deposit, but as a sacred book (with a unified message) that belongs to the church—a book that God gives to the church and whose truth the church discerns through the Holy Spirit. Hence, Childs attempts to guide the church through his “canonical approach” to better understand the Bible. While Thiselton’s concern is encountering the horizon of the interpreting reader and the horizon of the Bible through a robust multidisciplinary approach, he attempts to bring philosophical considerations to bear on biblical interpretation with an open system. When viewed from this perspective, it appears that Thiselton distances himself from traditional biblical exegesis, but he makes fruitful use of the harvest of contemporary disciplines. Childs and Thiselton’s different hermeneutical approaches exemplified the issues (both positively and negatively) that modern interpreters need to recognize. Both Childs and Thiselton proposed ways by which the church can continue to better understand the Bible, refine theology and doctrine, and apply theological teaching in Christian life. The next chapter hence attempts to propose a framework based on Childs and Thiselton’s approaches that we can apply in evaluating the biblical interpretations of Molina, Bavinck, and Thiselton.

The young Karl Barth once said that the “strange world” within the Bible is a “strange new world.”<sup>111</sup> Though this saying may seem outdated, it reminds us of the church’s ongoing struggle to understand and interpret the Bible. Both Childs and Thiselton stood in times where biblical interpretation faced challenges of all kinds, and they attempted to provide guidance in the midst of these challenges. Despite all the complicated issues involved and the criticisms raised against their approaches to Scriptural interpretation, Childs and Thiselton call our attention to the fact that we study the Scriptures to know the living God (i.e., reflecting on the activity of God, understanding His message to the community of the faith, etc.), as it is God who works through our interpretation of Scripture to speak to the world. Childs’ following statement effectively reminds the church that we are to seek to better understand God’s truth through the words He has already revealed in the Bible and given the church:

I do not come to the Old Testament to learn about someone else’s God, but about the God we confess, who has made himself known to Israel, to Abraham, Isaac and to Jacob. I do not accept the approach like some ancient concept, some mythological construct akin to Zeus or Moloch, but to our God, our Father. The Old Testament bears witness that God revealed

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<sup>111</sup> See Karl Barth, “The Strange New World within the Bible,” in *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 28-50.



himself to Abraham, and we confess that he has broken into our lives. I do not come to the Old Testament to be informed about some strange religious phenomenon, but in faith I strive for knowledge as I seek to understand ourselves in the light of God's self-discourse. In the context of the church's Scripture I seek to be pointed to our God who has made himself known, is making himself known, and will make himself known.... Thus, I cannot act as if I were living at the beginning of Israel's history, but as one who already knows the story, and who has entered into the middle of an activity of faith long in progress.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London: SCM, 1985), 28-29.

## A Possible Theological Appropriation of the Bible

When that which is set forth is acknowledged to be the Word of God, there is no one so deplorably insolent—unless devoid also of both common sense and of humanity itself—as to dare impugn the credibility of Him who speaks.

John Calvin<sup>1</sup>

### 6.1 Introduction

#### 6.1.1 Where Do We Stand Now?

After a long investigative journey since the beginning of this research, at this juncture it is necessary to review briefly where we stand now as to the progress of our investigation. This review will help orient us before moving forward in this concluding chapter.

As stated in Chapter 1, this research is devoted to finding out how biblical texts are used by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig in their discussions of middle knowledge and how (if at all) these texts bear on the issue of middle knowledge in the light of current biblical theological scholarship. In light of Thiselton's emphasis on encountering the "otherness" of the biblical texts, our investigations in Chapters 2–4 are undergirded by the idea that the horizon of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig (and the interpretations of the biblical texts they cited to support their respective views) meets the horizon of the Bible. Through examining and evaluating their interpretations of these texts, we have gained knowledge of the Bible's role in their arguments, and an understanding of the viability of the Scriptural texts they cited to support their arguments. With this work completed, we are ready to broaden the horizon in which the theory of middle knowledge is studied. We will further investigate what theological conclusions we can draw from a contemporary biblical-theological point of view when we engage the classical proof-text passages cited by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig. In order to do so in a constructive way, in Chapter 5 we have gone through a careful study of the parameters of Childs and Thiselton's hermeneutical methods (with attention given only to the areas that are necessary for, and related to, the core concern of this research).

Continuing from Chapter 5, this present chapter considers the observations deriving from our findings of how Childs and Thiselton approach the Bible, and to propose a framework for a possible theological appropriation of the Bible—the conditions or lenses through which we can study and interpret the Bible theologically. Consequently, I attempt to widen our horizon to apprehend how the biblical texts cited by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig are situated within the broader story of the Bible. I do this by applying my proposed framework. This then leads to the question: how could our own present horizons be transformed by the Bible's horizon in light of biblical-theological studies? To what extent can these texts still stand as viable testimonies for or against middle knowledge? And, if it turns out that this is not the case at all, what would this mean for the classical debates on middle knowledge?

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), John T. McNeill, ed., Ford Lewis Battles, trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I.7.1.

### 6.1.2 An Outline of What Follows

I first begin by sketching a framework of a theological appropriation of the Bible deriving from the results of our studies in Chapter 5 (6.2.1-6.2.5). I then attempt to make a final evaluation of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig through the following three sections: an evaluation of the biblical texts cited by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig in light of the proposed framework (6.3.1); conclusions drawn from the preceding evaluation (6.3.2); and lastly an evaluation of their use of the Bible (6.3.3). I then move to a discussion of where the preceding results lead us—or how we are to continue the discussion of middle knowledge considering the results of all our investigations (6.4). Finally, this chapter ends with a conclusion of this research project (6.5).

## 6.2 A Possible Theological Appropriation of the Bible

A few remarks are necessary before I begin. I am aware that among biblical scholars, the parameters of appropriate biblical interpretation continue to be debated.<sup>2</sup> I am also aware that despite the increased interest in theological interpretation of the Bible and a resurgence of related publications, no general agreement has been reached among the advocates of theological interpretation on the questions such as: what exactly is theological interpretation; and how a biblical-theological interpretive practice is to proceed.<sup>3</sup> It should be clear that I do not intend to formulate any particular hermeneutical or academic methodology for a theological interpretation of Scripture or theological exegesis. Rather, my intention is to propose a framework of parameters within which a theological reading and interpretation of Scripture could occur. Consequently, I suggest that we reconsider the criteria of what is involved in the study of middle knowledge (as well as the study of foreknowledge and freedom).

### 6.2.1 The Beginning and Ending of the Knowledge of God: The Bible

We learned from our study in the previous chapter that when Childs speaks of and deals with the tension and the unity of the two Testaments, or when Thiselton speaks of the tension and fusion of the two horizons, the Bible figures centrally as the vehicle for knowing God. Childs' canonical approach, which derives its authority from the biblical text, especially

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<sup>2</sup> There are different proposals as to how we read and interpret the Bible. For instance, the “theological interpretation” which different scholars speak of it in fairly diverse ways; examples include Dale B. Martin, *Pedagogy of the Bible: An Analysis and Proposal* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008); Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); A. K. M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); and many others which I cannot attempt to list exhaustively. See also Stanley E. Porter, “What Is Hermeneutics?,” *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Jason C. Robinson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), chap. 1, Kindle; and Daniel J. Treier, “Biblical theology and/or theological interpretation of scripture,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 61, no.1 (2008): 13-31, in which Treier offers an account of different views of biblical theology and theological interpretation and attempts to define the relationship between the two disciplines.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see J. Gordon McConville and Craig Bartholomew, eds., *The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Joel B. Green and Max Turner, eds., *The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Stanley E. Porter, “What Exactly Is Theological Interpretation of Scripture?” in *Horizons in Hermeneutics: A Festschrift in Honor of Anthony C. Thiselton*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Matthew R. Malcolm (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013), 234-267.

offers significant bearing on the epistemic relationship revealed in the Bible that it is God communicating to His chosen people. To put it in another way, God is the cause of the communicatory relationship between Himself and humanity; Scripture is a means by which God reveals Himself and His relationship to us, and draws us to the eternal fellowship that He has accomplished in Jesus Christ. In line with this emphasis, the interpreter's task is to discern God's revealed truth in the Bible, for the inherent nature of Scripture's subject matter is the focus of our attention. Such conviction is shown in the way Childs handles the "economic" and "immanent" distinction in Trinitarian theology, in which he argues that studying God's being is not for philosophical clarity in light of the modern challenges to Scripture, but more importantly, it is a response to the subject matter.<sup>4</sup> The interpreter is called to say nothing more or nothing less than the God who reveals Himself in Scripture. This points to an extremely crucial fact: knowledge of God must begin with God and end with God.<sup>5</sup>

We see clearly that giving primary attention to Scripture's subject-matter is certainly a sustained focus and characteristic of contemporary biblical scholars such as Childs and Thiselton. If this is the case, it becomes appropriate and necessary to work with Scripture as the primary foundation and criteria in framing one's understandings of middle knowledge (as well as foreknowledge and freedom). This is especially important since the subject discussed (i.e., God's knowledge and its relation with human freedom) arises from our understanding of Scripture in the first place. This understanding is in line with the Reformed tradition's insistence that the interpreter must place oneself under the Word, and it continues to be of upmost importance to theologians such as Barth who holds that a true epistemology can be derived only from the actual unfolding of the content of the word of God. For Barth, "God is known through God, and through God alone;"<sup>6</sup> we can only understand how God is knowable from the way He Himself has chosen to be known, and in light of the knowledge we acquired this way, we can then understand ourselves.<sup>7</sup>

In short, in our pursuit of understanding the issues pertaining to God's knowledge (e.g., whether God obtains middle knowledge, the "theological" implications we derived from middle knowledge, etc.) we need to begin with and learn from how God revealed Himself to us in the revealed truth of the Bible. This parameter requires, then, that we turn to the Scriptural texts as the starting and ending point of our understanding of God's knowledge and human freedom. This is especially important because we have seen in Chapter 1 that the contemporary discussions of this topic are largely analytically focused, and we have also seen in Chapters 2–4 the trajectory of metaphysical application in the discussions of foreknowledge and middle knowledge (though the extent of it is different). Given that the issue of foreknowledge-freedom arises from a theological claim rooted in the churches' reflection of Scripture, a genuine proposal for reconciling the questions about foreknowledge-freedom should conform to the message of Scriptural texts as well.

## 6.2.2 Encountering the Living God: The Lordship of the Triune God

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<sup>4</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament* (London: SCM, 1992), 370.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce L. McCormack, ed., *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 211-212, 226-227.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, eds. G. W. Bromley and T. F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, and others (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 179.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/3, eds. G. W. Bromley and T. F. Torrance, trans. A. T. Mackay, T. H. L. Parker, and others (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 102-104.

Childs' identification of the "family resemblance" of theological exegesis (see Chapter 5.2.3) and his application of the canonical interpretation of the Bible (see Chapter 5.2.4) indicate that a particular doctrine of God is presupposed and articulated in his approach. Indeed, following Calvin and Barth, Childs holds that thinking about God is thinking primarily about the reality of God.<sup>8</sup> C. Kevin Rowe's study on Childs' works leads him to conclude that Childs' canonical approach "is not about hermeneutics in general, but about the particular kind of hermeneutics required in light of the complex texture of God's self-revelation;"<sup>9</sup> and Childs' overall approach or his entire formation of how to read the Bible is an outworking of the dogmatic theological view of a Triune God.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as our study in Chapter 5 has shown, considerable attention to the Trinitarian conception of God as revealed in Christ, and reflection on the difference such a conception makes in biblical interpretation, are shown explicitly and implicitly in Childs' works. For example, we recognized from Childs' emphasis on the unity of the two Testaments that Scripture is, in his view, grounded in God's particular acts in relation to Israel and Jesus Christ (see Chapter 5.2.3.c and 5.2.3.e); and hence "the focus of Biblical Theology lies in the relationship between the two Testaments in respect to the messianic hope."<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, Childs emphasizes that the Old Testament is to be read as "a witness to the Christian faith,"<sup>12</sup> rather than as proof of prophecy fulfilled in Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup> "All New Testament writers came to the Old Testament from the perspective of faith in Jesus Christ."<sup>14</sup> As such, the Old Testament is to be read from the perspective of the Christ event. The true identity of Jesus Christ cannot be understood from the New Testament alone or apart from the Old Testament. It is necessary for one first to experience faith in Jesus Christ, then only subsequent to this experience would the Old Testament be a witness to the Christ in faith.<sup>15</sup> As we have seen in our study of Childs, the witness nature of the Old Testament and New Testament also emerges in his view of the unity of Scripture that functions "as a witness to the Living Lord"<sup>16</sup> (see Chapter 5.2.3.a and 5.2.3.b). Reflection on Childs' account of the unity of the two testaments has significant bearing on our interpretation of Scripture, because it generates the focal point of our reading and interpretation of the Bible: Scriptural texts are to be interpreted in light of the lordship of the Triune God as the overarching unified message of the Bible.<sup>17</sup> We are, then, to encounter the living God and to know Him through the unified message of Scripture, and so give our praise and worship to Jesus Christ the Lord.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 82.

<sup>9</sup> C. Kevin Rowe, "The Doctrine of God Is a Hermeneutic," in *The Bible as Christian Scripture: The Work of Brevard S. Childs*, eds. Christopher R. Seitz and Ken Harold (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 169.

<sup>10</sup> Rowe, "The Doctrine of God," 166. Rowe points out that upon Childs' insistence to reflect on God's being, and holds that we are to interpret the Scripture in light of "the full-blown reality of God" (see Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 380).

<sup>11</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 453.

<sup>12</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 229.

<sup>13</sup> Childs opposes treating the messianic promise or prediction of the OT as a proof of prophecy fulfilled in the NT. In the view of Childs, the Christ event comes first, and the OT is to be read from the perspective of that faith event. The faith of the NT writers hence becomes the key for understanding the OT (see Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 220-229; Gerhard F. Hasel, "Recent Models of Biblical Theology: Three Major Perspectives 65," *Andrews University Studies*, vol. 33 [1995]: 65).

<sup>14</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 229.

<sup>15</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 460.

<sup>16</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 724.

<sup>17</sup> Upon his insistence to reflect on God's being, Childs urges the interpreter to read the Scripture in light of "the full-blown reality of God;" (*Biblical Theology*, 380) and to interpret Scripture in a theologically responsible exegetical manner that involves at least two dimensions: the biblical text must be handled in a

This focus is also shown in Thiselton's work. In Thiselton's explanation of the biblical text, he points out that God is the source of all Christian doctrines, and the God of Christian doctrines is a living and dynamic God. Thiselton states, "If it is I who say where God will be, I will always find there a [false] God who in some way corresponds to me, is agreeable to me, fits in with my nature. But if it is God who says where he will be ... that place is the cross of Christ."<sup>19</sup> Though Thiselton speaks of this for a different purpose, the necessity of acknowledging the lordship of Jesus Christ in the interpretation of biblical texts is indicated in his approach. We see that most contemporary theologians hold to the same emphasis. For example, Barth points out that revelation finds expression in the Bible as a witness to "the lordship of the Triune God."<sup>20</sup> Clearly, according to contemporary biblical and theological scholars, an appropriate interpretation of Scripture is guided by the understanding that Scripture is grounded in God's saving acts in relation to Israel and Jesus Christ, and that Scripture is to be interpreted as part of the Trinitarian and Christological truth revealed in the Bible. Consequently, the theological teachings we derive from the biblical text are subject to this overall hermeneutical picture of the Triune God who saves humanity with grace and power. If this is the case, this seriously redirects or refocuses the way we interpret the Scriptural texts that are associated with God's knowledge and human freedom—including the Scriptural texts that we traditionally hold as indications of divine foreknowledge, and the texts Molinists hold as Scriptural evidence for middle knowledge.

### 6.2.3 Working towards a Coherent Biblical Vision of God: Creedal Context

As we see in Chapter 5.2.2 for Childs, Scripture is properly understood in view of the church's rule of faith as a coherent account of God. In other words, in the context of the church's confession, Scripture is the means of encountering the living God.<sup>21</sup> Such a crucial role for the church and rule of faith in Childs' thought is well known, and it offers significant insights into how we should interpret the Bible. Narrowly speaking, approaching Scripture in light of the rule of faith entails taking into consideration the agreed beliefs of the early church (e.g., Trinitarian and Christological confession) that are encapsulated in confessions and creeds. Broadly speaking, this indicates that we encounter Scripture as part of the living community of faith stemming from the period of early churches that confessed the creeds.<sup>22</sup>

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critically responsible manner (*Biblical Theology*, 94); the text calls for a response (*Biblical Theology*, 335-336). In short, an interpretation of Scripture that reflects who God is leads to a response or to worship the living Triune God.

<sup>18</sup> See Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 378-382.

<sup>19</sup> Thiselton, cited in "Resituating Hermeneutics," 45; cf. *New Horizons*, 619.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, eds. G. W. Bromley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. T. Thomson and H. Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 19.1.

<sup>21</sup> See Daniel R. Driver, "Childs and the Canon or Rule of Faith," in *The Bible as Christian Scripture*, 247-248.

<sup>22</sup> I draw the understanding of rule of faith from Leonard G. Finn, "Reflections on the Rule of Faith," in *The Bible as Christian Scripture*, 231-237. Finn provides a survey of different paradigms of the rule of faith; and argues that it is to be understood within an understanding of the Scripture and the church. By presenting a brief historical understanding of the rule of faith according to Irenaeus (for Irenaeus, the rule of faith is Christ according to the Scriptures), Finn contends that it was recognized from the earliest period of the church that the Scriptures of Israel and Christian proclamation spoke about the same Jesus Christ who was one in being with the God of Israel who raised him from the dead on the third day. The apostolic witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that reflects the ontological reality of God already present in Israel's Scripture shows that the grammar of Christian proclamation is from the beginning the grammar of Israel's Scripture. This leads to the recognition that the rule of faith is grounded in the beginning of the church and is the foundation of its continuing life. In sum, the rule of faith entails a dialectical relationship between the Scripture and apostolic proclamation, as well as between the Scripture and the church (see Leonard G. Finn, "Reflections on the Rule of Faith," 231-237).

This understanding leads to two reflections: the church is involved in responding to Scripture in which the rule of faith was given; creeds facilitate, and are a crucial context for our interpretation of Scripture.<sup>23</sup>

Hence, along with Childs' and Thiselton's proposal that interpreting the Scriptures involves the application of multiple lenses along the way, I would stress that we are to work towards a coherent biblical vision of God, and the rule of faith provides a crucial context for us to determine that vision. Certainly confessions and creeds may not determine our interpretations of all biblical texts, but the creedal context helps us focus on asking the right questions of the texts, and also elicit answers that are coherent with the aforesaid vision. This lens puts our reading and interpretation of Scripture into proper perspective. The ultimate interpretative interest of the church is encountering God in a holistic sense and responding to God. In light of the rule of faith, Scripture is rightly understood as a coherent divine narrative. It helps us see the risk of neglecting the clear focus of divine activity that is essential to interpreting Scripture. It also echoes the emphasis stated in Section 6.2.1—that of the priority of the Bible in our quest of knowing God and how He acts. In connection to this point, as shown in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, in order for the theory of middle knowledge to function, God's knowledge and power have to be limited, which not only conflicts with the views and intentions of Molina and Craig, but also contradicts the powerful, saving God we see in the Bible (and thus confessed in creeds and confessions). If this is the case, this again requires rethinking how we ask questions about foreknowledge-freedom in the first place.

In addition, as already mentioned, Childs' emphasis on the rule of faith highlights the importance and correlation between Scripture and the church; and Thiselton's approach—engaging the two horizons of the interpreter and the text that identifies interpretation as a communal activity—also places clear emphasis on the role of the church. Nevertheless, as explained in Chapter 5.2.4 and 5.3.3, problems seem to arise from Childs and Thiselton's application of this point. In response, in my view Scripture is indeed to be interpreted by the Christian community, but such a communal focus must acknowledge and incorporate the issues related to and elaborated in the following two parameters, to which I now turn.

#### **6.2.4 Relating Scripture and Theology: The Larger Context of Bible and Its Method**

The definition of Childs' "canon" implies that a particular Scriptural text is related to the larger context of the entire Bible. This points to the crucial recognition that a particular Scriptural text is to be interpreted within the whole of the biblical-theological view of the Bible. In other words, the interpretation of the Scriptural text is to be understood in accord with and brought to bear upon other theological implications derived from Scripture as a whole. This recognition affirms, then, that Scriptural texts must be understood exegetically within their historical and literary contexts, with appropriate attention given to the historical, literary, grammatical, and theological dimensions of Scripture. As a matter of fact, these hermeneutical principles were implied in the rule of faith and served as parameters of the early churches in interpreting Scripture and formulating its theology. We learn from the early churches the result of applying these hermeneutical principles in the rule of faith. The rule of faith reflects the result of acknowledging Scripture as a revelatory activity of God and interpreting Scripture as a unity; it also presents the result of a Christologically-centred

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<sup>23</sup> A similar view is presented by Finn. He argues that the church "exists by and with the dialectical relationship between the Scripture and the apostolic proclamation/the rule of faith;" and the church exists for such proclamation as well—the church preserves and conveys it through continued preaching and teaching (see Finn, "Reflections on the Rule of faith," 237).

interpretation of Scripture. Consequently, the rule of faith shows the result that reveals the limits of contextual interpretation as well. Hence, considering the problems that occur from Childs and Thiselton's application of the role of the church, in my view the aforesaid hermeneutical principles should continue to act as decisive factors that determine which reading (of the community of faith) is a faithful interpretation.

Furthermore, with respect to Thiselton's proposal of applying multidisciplinary measures in the course of interpreting Scripture, he states that we are not to adopt the worldview of particular philosophers, but to borrow conceptual tools from other traditions, and critically to compare what each may achieve or fail to achieve. I would stress that such efforts are only legitimate if built on and within the preceding parameters (Section 6.2.2 and Section 6.2.3). Childs' three-step canonical approach (ref. Section 5.2.3) reminds us that any acquired theological teaching or implication requires a careful and proper interpretation process that is guided by certain parameters. Indeed as Christians we are to engage Scripture in dialogue with other disciplines, but we need to do so within the parameter by which we can evaluate legitimate methods, and acknowledge that erecting other disciplines or structures around Scripture does not itself constitute a faithful interpretation of Scripture.

In conjunction with this, Barth's discussion of the appropriate use of philosophical consideration in theology is worth noting:<sup>24</sup> (1) We must be aware of every proposal of thought we bring to the Scriptural text and how it is different from the biblical world, for the object of Scripture is God's revelation in Jesus Christ; (2) Philosophy can have only the fundamental character of a hypothesis, which in and by itself is inadequate to apprehend and interpret Scripture; (3) The use of philosophy in Scriptural exegesis can claim no independent interest in itself. It is not the absolute end of the exegetical task; (4) There are no indispensable reasons for preferring one particular system of philosophy to another; hence, we are not to bind ourselves to one philosophy as the only scheme; (5) A scheme of thought is legitimate and fruitful only when it is determined by the text of Scripture and the object within it, which means the truth of our interpretation is determined and measured by the object mirrored in the text.

In short, along with Thiselton's view that "Scripture is the word of God to the church and for the church,"<sup>25</sup> and hence "Biblical hermeneutics cannot let itself be dictated to by a general hermeneutics,"<sup>26</sup> I would also stress that indeed we are to include other academic disciplines in our considerations, but our interpretation of Scripture is not to be determined by academic disciplines or standards that reject the unified biblical-theological message of the Bible, or only relate to certain Scriptural passages on the basis of certain criteria. John Webster correctly reminds us that "what is involved in reading this text is determined by this text."<sup>27</sup>

### 6.2.5 Responding with Obedience: Faith Seeking Understanding

As Childs points out, because it is ultimately the Spirit of God who evokes the witness of the two Testaments together in one Bible, "If the church confesses that the Spirit of God opens

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<sup>24</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 730-734.

<sup>25</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 475.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 188.

<sup>27</sup> John Webster, "Reading Scripture Eschatologically," in *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom*, eds. David F. Ford and Graham Stanton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 246.



up the text to a perception of its true reality, it also follows that the Spirit also works in applying the reality of God in its fullness to an understanding of the text. The two movements cannot be separated.”<sup>28</sup> “The true expositor of the Christian Scripture is the one who awaits in anticipation toward becoming the interpreted rather than the interpreter. The very divine reality which the interpreter serves to grasp, is the very One who grasps the interpreter. The Christian doctrine of the role of the Holy Spirit is not a hermeneutical principle, but that divine reality itself who makes understanding of God possible.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, not only must Scriptural interpretation be positioned within the church, shaped by theology, and engaged with different disciplines; it is inspired by the Holy Spirit as well. This also points to the fact that discerning the work of the Spirit is to occur in the church, not on the basis of individual experiences.

As the great tradition of “faith seeking understanding” insists, we know God’s truth through attentive engagement with the Scriptures, and such consideration conforms us to what is known rather than the other way around. One can observe from Barth’s doctrine of the Word of God that he includes a very broad theological and hermeneutical horizon of understanding within which the Word of God is to be interpreted, but he focuses particularly on God’s action in self-revelation (i.e., the Word of God which becomes incarnate as Jesus Christ) as the sole and sufficient basis of theology. Barth does not say much about the problem of hermeneutics, but speaks of hermeneutical understanding through a Trinitarian dimension: the church’s obedience to Scripture is a response to the Holy Spirit, who makes such obedience possible and the acknowledgment of the lordship of God, Father, and Son.

Clearly, we see that in the minds of contemporary biblical scholars or theologians, the work of the Holy Spirit is involved in Scriptural interpretation and has a direct bearing on it. They recognize and confess that the task of Scriptural interpretation is an act of faith, which is inseparable from the renewal of one’s mind by the Holy Spirit. A faithful theological interpretation of Scripture is performed under the manner of submitting and subjecting oneself to the Holy Spirit, to be transformed by Him, and so to learn to hear and recognize His voice through Scripture.

### **6.3 An Overall Evaluation of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig**

In Chapter 2.3.2 and Chapter 4.6.1, the Scriptural grounds of Molina and Craig have been studied and evaluated (in terms of how they use and understand the texts they cited). I have, however, refrained from presenting the final conclusion of the theological scope of these texts (e.g., what can we understand about the capacities or virtues of God from these texts deriving from a broader biblical-theological order), and intend to discuss it only at this stage where I have developed the aforesaid framework, and apply the framework in the following evaluation.

Therefore, in what follows in Section 6.3.1, I propose a theological reading and interpretation of Ps. 139:3-5, Isa. 41:23 and 48:5, Heb. 4:13; and Jn. 14:29 with the aforesaid parameters as an overarching framework, along with the results of the previous examinations in Chapter 2.3 and Chapter 4.6. The reason for focusing on these selected texts is not only because Molina quoted them as biblical evidence of his view of divine foreknowledge of future contingents, but they are also generally held by Christians as the classical biblical

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<sup>28</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 382.

<sup>29</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 386-387.

proof-texts for foreknowledge, as well as cited by Bavinck and Craig in their discussions of foreknowledge. It is hence worthy and rewarding to find out whether these texts still stand as viable testimonies for their views on foreknowledge. I then also make a final concluding remark on 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24, which Molina and Craig cited as Scriptural indications of middle knowledge. This naturally leads to Section 6.3.2, in which an overall evaluation of the use and role of Bible in Molina, Bavinck, and Craig is made; and Section 6.3.3, a reflection of where the result of this research project leads us.

### 6.3.1 The Theological Scope of Scriptural Texts

#### a. Psalm 139:3-5

Let us begin with Ps. 139:3-5. According to some scholars, vv3-5 demonstrate the radical distinction between divine knowing and human knowing (see Chapter 2.3.2.a). God knows things that, from our perspective, do not exist. The fact that God “knows it all” indicates that God’s knowledge is an eternal knowledge of all things whether past, present, or future. Hence, for most Christians vv3-5 indicate that God foresees all things (also since “nothing is hidden from His eyes”). Such a view is also supported by the evidence that it corresponds to other Scriptural texts such as Ps. 94:9-11; Matt. 6:8; and Rom. 11:33, which depict God as one who hears and sees, knows the inward plans of His adversaries, and knows our needs even before we ask Him. Similarly, Molina holds that vv3-5 indicate God’s knowledge of future contingents, and moreover, that God knows them before they exist (i.e., prior to His divine willing).

Now, first in light of the parameter stated in 6.2.4, let us attempt to read this psalm giving specific attention to its historical setting in light of its genre. We learn from biblical studies of Psalm 139 that the issue of this psalm’s genre has provoked considerable discussion. Basically, biblical scholars agree that Psalm 139 is an individual prayer addressed to God in time of trial (see Chapter 2.4.1.a). The prayer is expressed in the following setting and structure: it begins with YHWH examining and knowing the whole life of the psalmist (vv1-2a), and ends with a prayer for YHWH’s continual examining and knowing (v23) and the conviction that YHWH’s hand will lead his way (v3, v10, v24). We infer from such a structure that the psalmist is a religious leader who was under the attack of incumbent authority who acts against YHWH (vv19-22). The psalmist keeps and confesses his loyalty to YHWH, which YHWH knows thoroughly; whatever he does, he knows he could never escape from YHWH, who knows everything about him (vv1-6) and even formed him from before his birth (vv13-16).

Clearly, reading Psalm 139 in its historical setting, we see that constant exposure to divine scrutiny is expressed in this psalm; and through the psalmist’s confession of such scrutiny, *divine control* of a believer’s life is revealed. The meaning of God and His intimate providence for a believer, particularly in a situation of attack and stress, is shown thoroughly in the psalmist’s prayer. A literal translation of these texts strengthens such an interpretation as it shows clearly the extent of God’s infinite care for, and His absolute control of, the movements of a creature’s life: “<sup>3</sup>you measure up my wandering and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.<sup>4</sup> For not a word is on my tongue, but, behold, YHWH, you know it all.<sup>5</sup> You have encircled me behind, and in front, and your hand is laid upon me.”

Second, through the psalmist’s confession of God’s personal and intimate care and control of his life, we gained a certain understanding of God’s knowledge. The psalmist’s

confession that all things—actions, thoughts, and words—are exposed before God shows that God knows all things in the broadest and most general sense. In other words, in light of the preceding investigation, it is clear that God’s knowledge is presented in relation to His work in His creation in vv3-5. Therefore, on the one hand I disagree with scholars such as Coote who thinks that divine omniscience and omnipotence are not witnessed in vv3-5 at all (ref. Chapter 2.4.1.a). On the other hand, however, the capacity of God’s cognition is not the theological *scope* of these texts.

In addition to what has been stated, I would point out that understanding Ps. 139:3-5 especially in light of the parameter stated in Section 6.2.2-6.2.3, we come to see that these texts confess a God who cares, saves, and guides the psalmist—a God who has a close and personal relationship with the psalmist. As pointed out by biblical scholars, the Psalms have “theological uses” both through their liturgical repetition and didactic authority as a way of shaping and nurturing the community of faith in a peculiar way.<sup>30</sup> In the Psalms God is offered as “incomparable” both in power (the emphasis of the hymns) and in solidarity (as stressed in the complaints).<sup>31</sup> The God of the Psalter is from first to last a sovereign God who creates, redeems, and consummates His creation.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, such a profound sense of the existential reality of God is disclosed in Psalm 139. Our faith is strengthened by the theological message of Psalm 139 that we cannot flee from the absolute paternal care of the saving God that will not leave us.

#### **b. Isaiah 41:23 and Isaiah 48:5**

As shown in our investigation in Chapter 2.3.1.b., the comparison made between YHWH and other gods in Isa.41:23 and 48:5 illustrates vividly the great difference between the two: YHWH challenges the gods to demonstrate their control over past and future events, and they are revealed as false deities when they fail to do so (41:23). YHWH, on the other hand, visibly shows His sovereignty through announcing events in advance (41:21-29; 48:5). Indeed, as most biblical scholars have sufficiently pointed out from historical study of Isa. 48:5, a sovereign God who alone can lay claim to world sovereignty is disclosed in this verse (see Chapter 2.3.2.b). Nevertheless, in light of the parameter stated in Section 6.2.4, in order to understand the individual texts of Isa. 41:23 and 48:5 and their theological message, I propose to interpret these texts by paying closer attention to how they function in the present form of the text, as well as in the larger context of the book of Isaiah. Childs’ expositions of these texts through his canonical approach are especially helpful in this respect.

Childs expounds Isa. 41:23 from a larger literary composition and points out the following: the message confessed in the prologue (Isa. 40:8) and reaffirmed in the epilogue (Isa. 55:11) is now being confirmed in reference to Cyrus (Isa. 41:21-29), showing that “the

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<sup>30</sup> See Patrick D. Miller, “The Theological Significance of Biblical Poetry,” in *Language, Theology, and the Bible: Essays in Honour of James Barr*, eds. Samuel F. Balentine and John Barton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 213-230.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “The Psalms in Theological Use: On Incommensurability and Mutuality,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, eds. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, Jr. (Boston, Brill, 2005), 581.

<sup>32</sup> See Patrick D. Miller, “The Sovereignty of God,” in *The Hermeneutical Quest: Essay in Honour of James Luther Mays on His Sixty fifth Birthday*, ed. Donald G. Miller, (PA: Pickwick, 1986), 267-313. For Miller, the primary metaphors for God’s sovereignty are: king, judge and warrior. Yahweh’s role as judge (ref. Ps 94) fits in Ps.139.

God of Israel has given His word, and the word of God will fulfil itself.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, this passage affirms not just divine control, but also the confirmation of God’s sovereignty by His word, *Scripture*. A related view is expressed by Goldingay. Goldingay asserts that admittedly Isa. 41:21-29 does emphasize actual prophecy and fulfilment, but the general statements of Isaiah 41 primarily concerned a particular set of historical events related to the rise of Cyrus the Persian.<sup>34</sup> Hence, the link between the words God speaks and the event that vindicates that word is not so much of prediction and fulfilment, but rather the means of God’s acting.<sup>35</sup> In this regards the Babylonian gods could hardly compare with YHWH.

Moreover, Childs explains, Isaiah 41 cannot be fully understood without looking into Isaiah 42. As intertwined with the trial of the gods there is another major theme in chapter 41, namely divine hope for salvation. YHWH communicates to the suffering exiles that the “God of creation is not only willing but fully able to execute His purpose with Israel and the world.”<sup>36</sup> In short, Isa. 41:23 points to the only sovereign God who saves, and whose words stand forever. It is this God in whom the Israelites should place their hope and trust.

Interestingly, Childs connects Isa. 41:21-24 to his exposition of Isa. 48:5. Childs elucidates that through the contrast made between “former things” and “the things to come” shown in these two texts, YHWH’s absolute sovereignty is disclosed. It is in fact striking that in Isa. 48:5, God addresses Israel (instead of the foreign nations or false gods as in Isa. 41:23) when affirming His sovereignty by bringing about past events. This seems to highlight the deep stubbornness of Israel. They have refused to believe God and are even ready to attribute to the idols the power of evoking past events; Babylon has fallen and Israel has been freed, but as God’s people they still do not trust their true deliverer and do not understand the true meaning of deliverance.<sup>37</sup>

A theological interpretation of Isa. 41:23 and 48:5 as shown above leads us to acknowledge *divine sovereignty* especially in light of the power of God’s words and His act of deliverance. Through the way God’s knowledge is expressed in these texts (e.g., that God knows “the coming things” and does so “before they came to pass”), we learn that God’s knowledge is made known through God’s own declaration of His sovereignty. This means that one may derive from these texts a certain understanding of God’s knowledge, but it is necessary to understand it in light of the sovereign God who fulfils the events that He had announced before they happened. Moreover, the historical contexts of these two verses tell us that God did that because fallen human nature refuses to see the normal signs that point to His existence (see Chapter 2.4.1.b). This leads us to reflect that similar to the Israelites, we often refuse to acknowledge God, even after we have experienced His works in our lives. We would see our accomplishments as the result of our own hard works, rather than attributing them to God’s work in us and admitting His sovereignty over our lives.

In sum, understanding Isa. 41:23 and 48:5 in light of the parameters stated in Section 6.2.2-6.2.4 leads us to unfold the theological scope of these texts by how they function in their respective chapter and in the book of Isaiah (ref. Section 6.2.4). As a result, we are brought to acknowledge God’s sovereignty over His creation (ref. Section 6.2.2), and we are

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<sup>33</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: a Commentary*, eds. James L. Mays and others (Old Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 322.

<sup>34</sup> John Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40-55* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), 139.

<sup>35</sup> Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 139.

<sup>36</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 317.

<sup>37</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 375.

also called to admit God’s control in our life personally, and learn to give thanks to Him and glorify Him (ref. Section 6.2.3).

### **c. Hebrews 4:13**

As to Heb. 4:13, various biblical scholars hold that the main theological message of this text is that “God who sees everything judges” (see Chapter 2.4.1.c). Indeed, this is how this text is traditionally understood (especially on the point that God knows everything). Again, I would attempt to interpret this text in light of the parameter explained in Section 6.2.4.

To begin, the setting of v13 shows that along with v12, it is a conclusion of vv7-11. By referring to the specific historical event of Israel’s unbelief and disobedience to God and His words at Kadesh (v.7, cf. Ps. 95:7b-8 and Nu. 14:43), as well as the severe consequences of their rebellion, the author of Hebrews tells his readers in vv12-13 that “God’s word, whose sanctions were imposed so effectively upon the Exodus generation, is performative today and confronts the Christian community with the same alternatives of rest and wrath. Those who remain insensitive to the voice of God in Scripture may discover that God’s word is also a lethal weapon.”<sup>38</sup> As pointed out by various scholars, a literal translation of v13 οὐκ ἔστιν κτίσις ἀφανὴς ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ “no creature unrevealed before Him,” together with the images γυμνά “naked” and τετραχλισμένα “helpless exposure”<sup>39</sup> indeed offers a powerful testimony to divine scrutiny. But let us take note that as shown above, when viewed in its context such a powerful testimony is made in relation to v7-10 and v12.

In other words, a confession of total exposure to God (v13) is made with the declaration of exposure to Scripture (v12). Moreover, in this passage the warning in vv1-13 is sustained by specific reference to Israel’s rebellion and refusal to trust God’s words. This helps us to recognize that Israel in Kadesh stood in a relationship to the community of faith today. Similar to Israel, then, the task of the community of the church today is to enter into God’s rest through listening to His Word, having faith in His Word, and responding to His voice in Scripture with obedience.<sup>40</sup> Notably, such a reading and interpretation of Heb. 4:13 not only differ from how this verse is traditionally understood and used, but it leads us to realize from the theological scope as pointed out above the power of Scripture, its works in our lives, and our attitude towards Scripture. Such an important recognition transforms the way we make theological claims from this verse and apply it in our Christian life.

### **d. John 14:29**

As shown in Section 2.3.1.d., most scholars (such as Witherington, Carson, and those who agree with their views) do not understand this text as emphasizing Christ’s ability to foretell what is going to happen. Rather, they allege that this text is about the positive consequences of His departure (namely, the sending of the Holy Spirit) and the positive purpose of this

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<sup>38</sup> Lane, 103. Lane points out that “performatives,” by definition, “commit the speaker to stand by his words, which is demonstrated with reference to Ps 95:7b-11 in Heb. 3:7-11 (cf. Caird, *Language and Imagery of the Bible*, 20-25) and had immediate relevance for a community that had become careless in its attitude toward the word of promise expressed in Scripture.”

<sup>39</sup> This is my translation of the text. Though τετραχλισμένα may refer to different actions and descriptions as Bruce points out, generally these descriptions are describing a state of powerlessness or helplessness. Thus, it seems appropriate to translate τετραχλισμένα as “helpless exposure,” which also expresses well the core message of Heb. 4:13.

<sup>40</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 97-105.

statement (namely, to strengthen the disciples' faith). To a great extent, this interpretation seems convincing as its exegesis is built on reading v29 in the context of the book of John as a whole. If this is the case, it shows that this text is not about divine omniscience. However, as Christ is referring to His death, resurrection, ascension, and giving of the Spirit that had not yet happened, v29 does imply Christ's foreknowledge—that He knows clearly what is going to happen. Therefore, although we may not conclude that this text highlights Christ's foreknowledge (as Molina, Larsen, and Köstenberger see it), such knowledge is implied here. Yet a careful examination of the Scriptural text shows that the theological scope of this verse is not about Christ's foreknowledge, especially based on the careful consideration of the organizational unit in the book of John, and reading v29 as part of the whole of the book of John as well.

#### **e. 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24**

Let us turn to 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24, which Molina and Craig argue are the main Scriptural evidence of middle knowledge. As the focus of Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 naturally lead to a detailed evaluation of Molina's and Craig's use of these texts, we have gone through a considerable biblical-theological investigation of these texts and evaluated Molina and Craig's interpretation of them. In addition to what we have already mentioned in the previous evaluation, I would further point out the theological scope of these two passages in light of the framework proposed in this chapter.

Let us begin by investigating the setting of 1 Samuel 23 within its historical context. The setting of this chapter shows that throughout this chapter, David's journey is accompanied by divine oracles (v2, v4, v11, and v12). YHWH's answer to David's questions through the ephod in vv6-13 show that it is YHWH who did not surrender David into Saul's hand (v14). YHWH's providential care for David is expressed throughout this chapter. When viewed in its context, this providential indication sums up the theological function of the encounters between Saul and David in this chapter: the same YHWH who gave the Philistines into David's hands (v4) would not give David to Saul (v14).<sup>41</sup> Although the citizens of Keilah and the Ziphites were faithless, YHWH's providence is not absent from David in times of trials. In sum, *divine providence* appears to be the theological scope of this passage. This theological point reassures us of God's constant care of us, and draws us to seek His guidance and trust Him. As for Matt. 11:20-24, as our previous study has sufficiently shown, when viewed within the historical background and theological theme of the book of Matthew as a whole, Matt. 11:20-24 is about God's eschatological judgment and call for repentance (see Chapter 2.4.2.b). This theological scope continues to speak to the people of this present time, urging them to respond to Christ's salvation, and acknowledge Him as the living Lord of their lives.

#### **6.3.2 The Scriptural Ground of Evaluation**

More can be said for each of the Scriptural texts we studied above. But the investigation this chapter intends to achieve has been made. At this juncture, it is legitimate to make a conclusion. In the preceding examination, I have applied the framework as elaborated in Section 6.2 as the overarching structure in reading and interpreting the above Scriptural texts (with reference to the examination results presented in Chapter 2.3 and Chapter 4.6 as well). For example, I have engaged the particular details, texture, and plain sense of the text in order

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<sup>41</sup> Klein, *1 Samuel*, 233.

to hear the text as much as possible within its historical context, and to examine its possible relation with other texts with respect to content, theme, and other matters relevant to its role within the larger witness of Scripture. I have also attempted to move from the text to its witness of God—to reflect upon how the text relates to us.

As a result, our investigation shows that the theological scope of Ps. 139:3-5; Isa. 41:23 and 48:5; Heb. 4:13; as well Jn. 14:29 is Theocentric; it is about the absolute mightiness of God—His divine sovereignty, power, and deliverance. In line with this, we are led to understand that the indication of God’s knowledge and will in these texts are associated with God’s presence and ability, His saving grace and act, and His covenant with those who acknowledge Him as saviour. In other words, God’s knowledge or foreknowledge in these texts points to God’s benevolent power and action, rather than to how much God knows. Therefore, it is legitimate to conclude from our investigation that the texts do not construe foreknowledge specifically as sets of conditions foreknown by God prior to His divine willing (which is how Molina and Craig understand them).

We may state that these texts implicitly or explicitly indicate God’s knowledge, but central to my concern here is to point out that the affirmation of God’s knowledge in these texts does not make the capacity of God’s cognition the theological scope of these passages. Rather, the vastness of God’s knowledge indicated in these texts reveals to us who He is and how He acts: God “is omnipotent in His knowing and willing, and His omnipotence is the omnipotence of His knowing and will.”<sup>42</sup> Hence, “God’s knowledge does not come about in virtue of a special capacity or in a special act ... His being is itself also His knowledge.”<sup>43</sup> Consequently, we are led to understand our position before the almighty God, to respond to His love and humbly acknowledge Him as the living God of our life, and to trust and obey His words. In short, the underlying notion of Molina and Craig’s understanding of divine foreknowledge is far beyond what these texts speak about.

We also learn that 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24 are not Scriptural indications of middle knowledge. It is difficult for one to derive biblical evidence of middle knowledge from God’s awareness of conditional contingents indicated in these passages. In fact, these two passages say nothing about human freedom or the relation between God’s knowledge and human freedom. If so, we can rightly conclude from our investigations that middle knowledge stands on weak, or to be more precise, no biblical ground. There is no Scriptural warrant for middle knowledge.

As for Bavinck, we saw in Chapter 3.4.1 that his understanding of these texts is closely related to Reformed orthodoxy, which normally discusses the topic of God’s knowledge by referring to the broader picture or approach of God’s cognitive capacities, such as wisdom (*sapientia*) and understanding (*intellectus*). Hence, Bavinck’s elaboration on the Scriptural texts he uses shows the significant implications of the Reformed orthodoxy that closely tied God’s knowledge and God’s wisdom with the Logos/Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, in light of the exegetical and theological results we gained from biblical-theological scholarship and the framework proposed in this chapter, we recognize that the *scope* of some of the classical proof-texts used as indication of God’s knowledge (for instance the texts that we have studied above) is not about divine knowledge. Bavinck’s argument against middle knowledge would be even more convincing if he were to show a more in-depth study of the

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<sup>42</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 543.

<sup>43</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 547.

theological message of the Scriptural texts he used, and employ a less Aristotelian method in his approach (I will take up this point in Section 6.3.3).

### **6.3.3 The Usage and Role of the Bible**

In the respective chapters in which we study Molina, Bavinck, and Craig, we evaluate their use of Scripture or the role of the Bible in their arguments (with attention given to their historical contexts). In addition to our study in this chapter, it is appropriate that we now make a final evaluation of how they use and interpret the Bible.

At this juncture, we should have a clear picture from our study of Molina that following the tradition of the Jesuits, Molina certainly practiced scholastic theology (which was closely linked to Aristotle's philosophical methodology) in his discussion of foreknowledge and freedom. Hence, it seems most likely that Molina only appeals to the Bible to support some of the conclusions he arrived at by philosophical argumentation. He uses Scripture as a means of mapping God's knowledge in order to uphold middle knowledge that fits into an indeterministic view of freedom. Similarly, although Craig begins his arguments by defending the doctrine of divine omniscience on biblical grounds, his intention to provide a rational and harmonized solution to the problem of foreknowledge-freedom led him to focus on proving the logical consistency between the two through metaphysical analysis. However, it is worth noting that, as already discussed in Chapter 4.4, solely focusing on philosophical analysis does not generate a fruitful understanding of God's knowledge and freedom as the Molinists think (e.g., following the logical consistency of this theory, humanity does not possess libertarian freedom). We see that middle knowledge faces serious challenges that have brought endless and yet unyielding debates over the past forty years.

Moreover, I would stress that especially with respect to the parameter stated in Section 6.2, we must recognize that the interpretation of Scriptural texts and the theological propositions we derive from the texts are to accord with, and brought to bear upon, other theological implications derived from the Bible as a whole. This also means that we must be aware of the risk of giving up certain important doctrines of Christianity due to holding some theological proposition that stands in contradiction to the theological implication derived from the Bible as a whole. Ironically, the notion of middle knowledge seems to contradict the belief of this theory itself. For example, in order to hold 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24 as direct indications of middle knowledge, Molina and Craig have to give up the doctrine of divine omniscience that the theory of middle knowledge asserts (see Chapter 2.4.1 and Chapter 4.6.2).

As for Bavinck, on the one hand, we learn that he holds Scripture as the foundational and sole authority for theology. Hence, when encountering the issues of foreknowledge-freedom, his concern is not to harmonize foreknowledge and freedom, but rather to unfold and preserve biblical truth of how they are revealed in the Bible. As a result, in his discussion of foreknowledge, Bavinck does not fall into the problems of the Molinists, where significant portions of the biblical account of God's essence are given up in order to maintain libertarian freedom (as pointed out and explained particularly in Chapter 2.4.1 and Chapter 4.6.2). Middle knowledge is rejected by Bavinck because it stands in contradiction to the understanding of Scripture that came through a long history of the church's exegesis and interpretation of who God is, how He acts, and His relationship with the entire order of finite beings.



On the other hand, it is apparent from Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* that he makes use of elements of neo-Platonism and Aristotelian logic in explaining biblical ideas; and to a large extent, his theology rests on his interpretation of Augustine. This certainly does not mean that Bavinck adopted all of Augustine's philosophy. Rather, he revises it where he finds appropriate. Nevertheless, overall Augustinian philosophy shaped the groundwork of Bavinck's theological interpretation, and he not only adopts Augustine's thought at times, but he internalizes it as he sees that "the entire dogmatic development in east and west culminated in Augustine."<sup>44</sup> Hence, we see how the idea of philosophical epistemology rooted in Augustinian philosophy underpinned and shaped Bavinck's view on Scripture (see Chapter 3.5.3).

Two conclusions can be made from the preceding evaluations. First, our study of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig shows at least one similarity among them: faith seeking understanding is a faith-based endeavour in which metaphysics must be taken into serious consideration. Although the extent and the way metaphysics is used is different in their approaches (and hence we see the different priority given to Scripture), to be sure, they all encounter the biblical world using the tradition or system of their respective time. We have seen that following the tradition that philosophical analysis is a way of seeking and understanding biblical truth, Molina and Craig mostly used Scripture to support their philosophical arguments and conclusions, whereas following the tradition of Augustine (and Aquinas), Bavinck used metaphysics to shape his Scriptural interpretation and theological stance (although he begins his discussion with biblical references).

This reveals that all three individuals approach the horizon of the Bible with the system at the back of their mind. The Bible is treated in coalition with their system—they bring their horizon into the Bible. In other words, they explain the Bible through the lens of their own horizon, instead of encountering the horizon of the Bible. Although the different theological and historical contexts of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig led them to place different emphases on the role of Bible and philosophy, and handle the relationship between the two differently, our study shows that biblical texts are interpreted in coalition with how their respective tradition understands these texts. This brings us to the next point.

Second, in terms of whether Scripture warrants middle knowledge, though Bavinck provides a more convincing biblical-theological argument, this chapter demonstrates through the work of Childs and Thiselton (which aims at bringing the horizon of the interpreter to meet with the horizon of the Bible) that the scope of the Scriptural texts used by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig is in fact rather different from how these thinkers understood them. This difference leads us to recognize the urgent and important need to meet the "otherness" of the biblical texts in order to really grasp the texts' biblical-theological message.

#### **6.4 Implications for the Contemporary Debates on Middle Knowledge**

As emphasized by Thiselton, the two horizons of the interpreter and the Scriptural text are to engage with each other, so that new insights emerge and the horizon of the interpreter is transformed and reshaped. Hence, the last question we are now left to answer is: where does this research project leave us? How can our horizon be widened and reshaped after our investigations of the selected biblical passages (and engagement with the horizons of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig)?

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<sup>44</sup> Bavinck, *RD I*, 136

In considering the proposed framework that is sketched in light of Childs and Thiselton's approaches, we see that the priority of Bible is certainly a significant characteristic of contemporary biblical-theological scholarship. It is legitimate to conclude that in the views of contemporary biblical scholars and theologians, a scientific and truly objective approach requires a firm commitment to the object under investigation. If we were to understand God's knowledge and its relation to freedom, we must turn to the texts of Scripture themselves as the starting and ending point of our quest and answer, not as finding support for the intention or view we concluded from other fields or disciplines. Or, to put it in the language of Thiselton, we are to move from our (or the contemporary) horizon of interpretation of the biblical texts to the horizon of the real meaning of Scripture, in order to know God according to how He revealed Himself.

Admittedly, turning to the Scriptures as the beginning and end of the study of foreknowledge-freedom is largely omitted in most contemporary studies of this topic. As already shown, philosophical constructions that analyse God's knowledge and freedom with mainly logical propositions lead to treating foreknowledge and freedom as incompatible. Certainly, the question of whether foreknowledge and freedom are compatible lies beyond the scope of this study and cannot be adequately answered here. This research does not aim at offering another philosophical solution to the foreknowledge-freedom tension, but contributes to a more hermeneutical-theologically responsible approach when dealing – and living – with the tension. We recognize from our study of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig that the foreknowledge-freedom tension cannot be rationally solved by exclusively philosophical approaches. The still existing, unsolved difficulties in the theory of middle knowledge itself and the unanswered questions it raises (after years of debates and discussions) show the limitation of such an approach.

I believe that recognizing this *limitation* is as an important implication for contemporary debates on middle knowledge, and it is a major broadening of the horizon and way of studying the foreknowledge-freedom tension. On one hand, in the "world" where philosophical consideration is imposed upon Scriptural texts in order to harmonize foreknowledge and freedom, our horizon is widened by the recognition that we are not to adopt too easily the "solutions" in which foreknowledge and freedom are assumed to be incompatible, or shy away from Scriptural texts that do not fit in to our "system." On the other hand, we are also to acknowledge the need of exploring a framework that investigates the foreknowledge-freedom tension theologically and exegetically, including careful reflections upon biblical passages that are usually seen as irrational or incoherent in terms of foreknowledge and freedom. We need to turn to the Scriptures, to explore a framework where we can learn to know who God is and His ways with humankind. As it is demonstrated in Section 6.3.1, interpreting those Scriptural texts within the proposed parameters redirects our focus of how they are usually understood. This leads us to the next point.

We learn from the evaluation in Section 6.3.2 that the all-encompassing extent of God's knowledge is to be understood with His being and work as the eternal and powerful saving God. In other words, understanding the capacities or virtues of God theologically reveals who God is, and draws us to worship Him and acknowledge Him as the living God of our lives. This shows the difference of treating foreknowledge apart from the theological order or theological understanding. Certainly, more exegetical and theological works are to be undertaken in order to further broaden the study of foreknowledge and freedom (e.g., to apply the proposed parameter in interpreting a wider range of Scriptural texts, or other Scriptural texts that Bavinck and Craig used to support their arguments); and applying them

to help develop a proposal on how Christians in my home country, Malaysia, can have better and more fruitful dialogues with other religious groups (ref. Chapter 1.1.1). But this is the work of another project. At this point, we see the need to let God be God as He revealed Himself in the written word of the Bible. Only when we let God be Himself can we begin to allow ourselves to know how are we to understand ourselves (including our freedom).

## **6.5 Final Conclusion**

Our surveys on how foreknowledge-freedom is commonly being studied in (philosophical) theology clearly show that in most of the discussions, “freedom” entails the philosophical indeterministic notion of “absolute power to contrary.” This has become a parameter within which the perennial debate over foreknowledge-freedom must be assessed. Christian philosophers and theologians have a long history of attempting to harmonize the indeterministic view of freedom with the biblical account of God’s exhaustive knowledge. Some may solve a particular part or some parts of the problem in one way or another, but the tension between foreknowledge and freedom haunts us still as the solutions offered to solve the tension usually raise further questions and challenges.

Hence, as mentioned in the beginning of this research, this project seeks to reshape the criteria of how to understand the problem of foreknowledge and freedom by focusing particularly on the ways of studying and evaluating middle knowledge. I have shown and argued that besides the remaining unsolved difficulties this theory faces, there is a “missing” gap in the study of middle knowledge that needs to be filled, if we are to move forward in the discussion and evaluation of this theory. Hence, I have argued for the need to reverse the pattern of inquiry regarding middle knowledge, endeavouring not to fit God into our story, but entering into His narrative to know Him and our position before Him. I then attempted to achieve this goal and contribute to the discussion of middle knowledge by focusing on studying and evaluating this theory from a biblical-theological perspective, and I have proposed a framework of a theological appropriation of the Bible. In light of the proposed framework and contemporary biblical-theological scholarship, I have attempted to show that the theological scope of the classical biblical texts (which Molina, Bavinck, and Craig cited as Scriptural evidence in their argument) is not about how much God knows, but who He is and how He acts. Furthermore, the Scriptural texts cited by Molina and Craig are not Scriptural evidence for middle knowledge. I have come to the conclusion that Scripture does not warrant middle knowledge; and that to accept the Molinists’ account of God’s knowledge and their metaphysical definition of freedom leads to sacrificing and downplaying the overall biblical-theological account of God—the sovereign and saving God who creates, redeems, and consummates His creation.

## Summary

Christian theologians and philosophers have a long history of attempting to reconcile the perceived tension between the doctrine of God's foreknowledge on the one hand and human free will and responsibility on the other. Throughout the centuries various solutions have been proposed as to how to retain both concepts in a coherent way. One of these solutions focuses on the concept of middle knowledge: apart from "natural knowledge" of necessary truths and "free knowledge" of God's own actions, God also knows counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. That is, God knows what any human being would freely do given a set of conditions *x*, *y* and *z*. God can then manage the conditions that apply in such a way that God's providential plans are realized without human (libertarian) freedom being compromised. This theory originates with the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535-1600), was contested by Reformed theologians such as Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), and makes a remarkable comeback among present-day analytical philosophers such as William Lane Craig (1949-).

Apart from a wealth of philosophical considerations, the appeal to *biblical texts* also plays an important role in the work on middle knowledge by each of these thinkers. For example, Molina appeals to Ps. 139:3-4, Isa. 41:23, 48:5, Jn. 14:29 and Heb. 4:13 to support his understanding of divine foreknowledge of future contingents, and argues that 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24 are direct Scriptural indications of middle knowledge. Moreover, one of the most active advocates of middle knowledge today, William Lane Craig, also points to 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24 as important Scriptural evidence of this theory. However, whereas the theory's philosophical ramifications have been widely discussed in contemporary scholarly literature during the past decades, surprisingly little attention has been given to its use of biblical texts. This research aims at filling this gap, by critically examining the attempts to defend or criticize the theory of middle knowledge with reference to the Bible. Considering that in the course of the discussion, Molina, Bavinck, and Craig have made influential contributions to the discussions on middle knowledge, in three separate chapters the writings of Molina, Bavinck and Craig on the topic of middle knowledge are carefully examined with special attention given to the role of the Bible in their arguments. I also investigated how the biblical texts which play a role in these authors' defense or refutation of middle knowledge are interpreted in the work of contemporary biblical scholars, or how these should be interpreted from their methodical perspectives.

In the chapter on Molina, I introduce the theory of middle knowledge within its historical and theological context. I show from the broader theological context at Molina's time that post-Tridentine Roman Catholic theology was largely shaped by Thomas Aquinas as appropriated in contemporary Thomism and that as a result of its close engagement with scholastic theology, philosophy was viewed as a valid and legitimate way of formulating theological arguments and interpreting Scripture. In this light, proving the possibility of the logical reconciliation of foreknowledge and freedom through metaphysics played a decisive role in Molina's argument. I show that although Molina did attempt to include Scriptural reflection in the process of formulating his theory of middle knowledge, the way in which he uses the Scriptures reveals that most likely he did not make biblical interpretation a significant part of his arguments. Rather, his appeals to Scripture seem intended to support his pre-conceived philosophical conclusions. I then examine Ps. 139:3-5; Isa. 41:23 and 48:5; Jn. 14:29 and Heb. 4:13. I argue in a provisional way that these texts do not speak about God's foreknowledge as Molina defines the concept (i.e. in terms of pre-volitional knowledge of future contingents); and although 1 Sam. 23:10-12 and Matt. 11:20-24 indicate God's

knowledge of what would have happened had another possibility obtained, this does not prove that God foreknows conditional contingents in the way in which Molina conceives of this (i.e. that God obtains middle knowledge).

In my discussion of Molina's theory of middle knowledge, I point out that for Molina's theory to function the existence of foreknown conditions lying outside God's will is required. This became a critical reason that not only middle knowledge was fiercely condemned by the Dominicans in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; it was rejected by a large number of other Thomists, Protestants, and the Reformed theologians as well. Middle knowledge was problematic to these groups because by intentionally placing it between God's natural and free knowledge, middle knowledge does not merely understand God as having willed a particular world or preferring a particular world over another, but discerns a kind of divine cognition arising from future contingencies *prior* to or *apart* from God's will. In order for God to have this kind of cognition, God would have to be ignorant of His determination and decision, which interferes with the theological belief that there can be nothing that falls outside the scope of God's will. As a result, middle knowledge seemed to them to destroy the lordship of God—by sacrificing the sovereignty of God, it alters the relationship between God and finite creatures.

In the chapter on Bavinck, I point out that by holding to Scripture as theology's *principium cognoscendi*, the Reformed application of logic in the understanding of God's knowledge is bound by exegesis of Scriptural texts. Middle knowledge was rejected by the Reformed as its theological conclusion does not seem to accord with the biblical *principium* as a whole. Bavinck further develops the Reformed terminology of *principium*, and applies it in explaining the organic nature of Scripture and its organic relation with theology. This provides a strong argument of Bavinck that theology must begin with Scripture, proceed from faith, and be articulated by its own *principia*. I showed that this perspective becomes the groundwork of Bavinck's positive theological formulations (e.g., on divine knowing) and his polemical arguments (e.g., against middle knowledge). Based on this ground, Bavinck strongly argued that middle knowledge is to be repudiated because it aims at something different from the Scriptural teaching of God's essence and His relationship with His creatures. It brings the notion of the freedom of the will—in the sense of liberty of indifference—into harmony with God's omniscience. In terms of the role of the Bible in Bavinck's arguments, as shown above, Bavinck wants to start unilaterally from Scripture. Nevertheless, his articulation and usage of theological terms such as *principium* indicates the philosophical epistemologies he derived from Augustine and Aristotle. His understanding of Scriptural texts is influenced by these philosophical backgrounds to such an extent that at times he seems to be approaching theology from a philosophical perspective. We may ask, therefore, whether Bavinck indeed worked as unilaterally from Scripture to theological and philosophical reflection as he claims, or whether in fact there is a two-traffic going on here.

Then I move to the chapter on Craig. I study Craig's view on the difference between logical and temporal order, which serves as the key foundation for his explanation of the logical order between foreknowledge and freedom: divine foreknowledge is *chronologically* prior to future events, whereas future events are *logically* prior to divine foreknowledge. By applying this metaphysical principle of "logical order," Craig argues that human agents have causal effects on the future and determine which course of events will be actualized, while God's foreknowledge does not detract from this. From this point, Craig affirms that libertarian freedom can be attributed to human agents within a framework that also places everything within God's control and decision, with the condition that God has knowledge of

future events that are free (i.e. middle knowledge). This leads me to study Craig's version of middle knowledge (which is similar to Molina's) more closely, and to survey the theoretical and practical objections raised against (this version of) middle knowledge in contemporary debates.

I then turn to investigate Craig's biblical account of God's comprehensive knowledge, and the biblical references he uses to support the theory of middle knowledge. My investigation shows that the biblical delineation of God's knowledge plays a crucial role especially in Craig's affirmation of God's comprehensive knowledge, and he strives to defend God's comprehensive knowledge of the past, present, and future. Nevertheless, although Craig examines divine foreknowledge on Scriptural grounds and defends it as biblical, he switches to an analytical examination when dealing with its relationship to human freedom. The obligatory and primary role of logical consistency is shown in the way Craig formulates his argument (e.g. the application of "logical order" in showing the compatibility of foreknowledge and freedom, and in affirming the possibility of middle knowledge). Lastly, I evaluate the biblical and theological grounds of Craig's (and his peers') arguments, and conclude that the theological notion of foreknowledge more adequately accords with the overall biblical account of God than the philosophical elaborations such as middle knowledge.

The last two chapters are aimed at providing the guidelines that lead to the intended purpose and goal of discovering a more definitive ground for the systematic-theological evaluation of, and reflection on, the Scriptural texts cited by Molina, Bavinck, and Craig. To work toward this constructive goal, I concentrate on the works of Brevard S. Childs (OT) and Anthony C. Thiselton (NT). I study the orientation of Childs' conception of "canonical approach" and Thiselton's hermeneutical approach which emphasizes the fusion of "two horizons." Attention is given to the church's exegetical tradition or the "family resemblance" of exegesis laid out by Childs, as it provides boundaries beyond which biblical interpretation as a whole forbids us to go. Thiselton's insistence on the active engagement of the horizon of the reader and the horizon of the text is an especially crucial point and one of the reasons why this study focuses on investigating and evaluating the biblical texts Molina, Bavinck, and Craig cited to support their respective views. Taking into account the observations deriving from my findings of how Childs and Thiselton approach the Bible, I proposed the following framework for a possible theological appropriation of the Bible—the conditions or lenses through which we can study and interpret the Bible theologically: (1) The Beginning and Ending of the Knowledge of God: The Bible; (2) Encountering the Living God: The Lordship of the Triune God; (3) Working towards a Coherent Biblical Vision of God: Creedal Context; (4) Relating Scripture and Theology: The Larger Context of Bible and Its Method; (5) Responding with Obedience: Faith Seeking Understanding.

I then propose a theological reading and interpretation of Ps. 139:3-5, Isa. 41:23 and 48:5, Heb. 4:13; Jn. 14:29; 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24 with the aforesaid parameters as an overarching framework, along with the results of examinations in the precious chapters. My investigation shows that the theological scope of Ps. 139:3-5; Isa. 41:23 and 48:5; Heb. 4:13; as well Jn. 14:29 is theocentric; it is about the absolute mightiness of God—His divine sovereignty, power, and deliverance. In line with this, I argue that the indication of God's knowledge and will in these texts are associated with God's presence and ability, His saving grace and act, and His covenant with those who acknowledge Him as saviour. In other words, God's knowledge or foreknowledge in these texts points to God's benevolent power and action, rather than to how much God knows. Therefore, it is legitimate to conclude that these

texts do not construe foreknowledge specifically as sets of conditions foreknown by God prior to His divine willing (which is how Molina and Craig understand them). As about 1 Sam. 23:6-13 and Matt. 11:20-24, it is difficult to derive biblical evidence of middle knowledge from God's awareness of conditional contingents indicated in these passages, especially when these two passages say nothing about human freedom or the relation between God's knowledge and human freedom. If so, we can rightly conclude from our biblical-theological investigations that middle knowledge does not stand on firm biblical ground. Furthermore, to accept the Molinists' account of God's knowledge and their metaphysical definition of freedom leads to sacrificing and downplaying the overall biblical-theological account of God—the sovereign and saving God who creates, redeems, and consummates His creation.

In considering the proposed framework that is sketched in light of Childs and Thiselton's approaches, we see that the priority of the Bible is certainly a significant characteristic of contemporary biblical-theological scholarship. It is legitimate to conclude that in the views of contemporary biblical scholars and theologians, a scientific and hermeneutically sensitive approach requires a firm commitment to the object under investigation. If we are to understand God's knowledge and its relation to freedom, we must turn to the texts of Scripture themselves, not as finding support for the intention or view we concluded from other fields or disciplines, but as the starting and ending point of our quest and answer. Admittedly, turning to the Scriptures as the beginning and end of the study of foreknowledge-freedom is largely ignored in most contemporary studies of this topic. We recognize from our study of Molina, Bavinck, and Craig, however, that the foreknowledge-freedom tension cannot be rationally solved by exclusively philosophical approaches.

In my view, recognizing this *limitation* has an important implication for contemporary debates on middle knowledge: what is called for is a major broadening of the horizon in studying the foreknowledge-freedom tension. On the one hand, in a context where philosophical considerations are imposed upon Scriptural texts in order to harmonize foreknowledge and freedom, our horizon is widened by the recognition that we are not to adopt too easily the "solutions" in which foreknowledge and freedom are assumed to be incompatible, or shy away from Scriptural texts that do not fit in to our "system." On the other hand, we are also to acknowledge the need of exploring a framework that investigates the foreknowledge-freedom tension theologically and exegetically, including careful reflections upon biblical passages that are sometimes seen as irrational or incoherent in terms of foreknowledge and freedom. There is a need to reverse the contemporary pattern of inquiry regarding middle knowledge, endeavouring not to fit God into our story, but entering into His narrative to know Him and our position before Him. We need to turn to the Scriptures, to explore a framework where we can learn to know who God is and His ways with humankind. As it is demonstrated in this research, interpreting those Scriptural texts within the proposed parameters redirects our focus of how they are often understood.

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