

Theme 4A Religious concepts of predestination

Key concepts:

- **St Augustine** shaped his views on **predestination** whilst debating the **Pelagian controversy** that questioned whether God's absolute grace was the only thing necessary for salvation.
- Predestination refers to the religious teaching that our ultimate end has been set out in advance by God.
- Genesis 3 shows Adam and Eve were created perfect, with an essentially free human nature (**liberum arbitrium**) to make free choices.
- They turned away from God and were tempted by the Devil in an event that has become known as **the Fall**.
- This first sin corrupted the entire human race so that we are all, by nature, now inclined towards earthly pleasure and away from God (**concupiscence**).
- This is Augustine's doctrine of **Original Sin**.
- As a result of the Fall, all humanity is born **massa peccati** (a lump of sin) and all deserve punishment.
- Through the Fall humans have lost their moral liberty (**libertas**) leaving us with a second human nature that, whilst still free, only desires sin.
- Humans cannot make themselves worthy of God's salvation. They require God's grace, through baptism, to remove original sin and His grace through Christ's salvation on the cross.
- Those given salvation by God are known as the **elect**. Those who are not, are known as the **reprobates**.

- **John Calvin** was a protestant reformer, and the **doctrine of election** was not a major portion of his work.
- Five points of Calvinism were presented by the Calvinists at the Synod of Dort as a direct response to challenge from the Arminians.
- God's power is absolute, and nothing happens unless by God's will or permission. Scripture is the only source of knowledge about God.
- Calvin taught that Adam was created perfectly and then fell from grace according to God's decree.

- Human beings are **totally depraved** as their will and intellect have been corrupted by sin. They cannot do anything to save themselves from sin.
- God actively chooses some for election and some for damnation regardless of their own worth. This has become known as **unconditional election**.
- The elects are **justified**. They are given a new standing before God, and **sanctified** – they are given the ability to become more holy during their lives.
- Christ's death was only for the sins of the elect, not for everyone. This is known by Calvinists as **limited atonement**.
- The reprobate sins of their own free will, but there is nothing they can do to save themselves because God has not chosen them for salvation.
- The **perseverance of the elect** means that the elect cannot fall away and will remain faithful until the end. This is because God is **irresistible grace**. Therefore, anyone who falls away was not really the elect to begin with.

Key quotes:

'Give me the grace to do as you command, and command me to do what you will.' – St Augustine

'For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.' – Romans 8:29

'God preordained, for his own glory... a part of the human race, without any merit of their own, to eternal salvation and another part, in just punishment of their sin, to eternal damnation.' – John Calvin

Issues for analysis and evaluation:

Key arguments/debates

Some argue that one cannot rationally believe in both free will and predestination at once.

Others argue that if God predestines everyone then it makes him the author of sin, which is inconsistent with other Christian doctrine.

Some argue that there is no purpose in punishment or reward if God controls who are the elect and who are reprobates.

Key questions

Is there a rational basis for belief in both free will and predestination?

If God controls human destiny, does it matter how we behave in the present?

What problems does it raise for God's nature if humans are predestined?

Key words:

Predestination	Pelagian controversy	liberum	Arbitrium	the Fall
concupiscence	original sin	massa peccati	libertas	elect
reprobates	doctrine of election	totally depraved	unconditional election	justified
Sanctified	limited atonement	perseverance of the elect	irresistible grace	