

AN INTRODUCTION TO *SALVATION AND SOVEREIGNTY*

KENNETH D. KEATHLEY.¹

Last November at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Gerry Breshears of Western Seminary presented a paper on Calvinism and Arminianism in which he asked, “Why do so many Christians try to be some sort of ‘Calminian?’” He provided his own answer: “It’s because they read their Bibles.” I agree with his observation. Calvinists rightly note that Scripture declares that salvation is completely a gracious and sovereign work of God. And Arminians correctly emphasize the biblical teaching that a hearer of the gospel is called upon to choose, that the ability to choose truly is in his power (via a work of grace), and that he will be held accountable for his choice. Many Calvinists and Arminians argue that their respective positions are mutually exclusive, so they conclude no mediating position is possible. Yet serious students of the Bible cannot help but notice that it seems to teach many elements of both systems in the very way that supposedly is impossible.

This is where Molinism steps in. Molinism is a theological model that demonstrates it is reasonable to affirm simultaneously divine sovereignty and human choice in a way that does justice to both concepts. I wrote *Salvation and Sovereignty: a Molinist Approach* in the hope of encouraging the typical Baptist, who generally is a Biblicist, and of helping him or her realize that he or she can hold to a mediating position between Calvinism and Arminianism without sacrificing logical coherence. In 1791, the great pastor John Leland is reported to have declared, “I conclude that the eternal purposes of God and the freedom of the human will are both truths, and it is a matter of fact that the preaching that has been most blessed of God and most profitable to men is the doctrine of sovereign grace in the salvation of souls, mixed with a little of what is call Arminianism.” (Quoted in Allen and Lemke: 2010, 46) In *Salvation and Sovereignty*, I have endeavored to strike the balance that Leland promoted.

I wish to express my gratitude to the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* for devoting the space it has to reviews of *Salvation and Sovereignty*. I do not think the book gives the last word on the subject; nor do I think Molinism unlocks all divine mysteries. But it is a very fruitful model that seemingly does justice to disparate biblical themes. A Molinist can throw himself into the task of fulfilling the Great Commission while holding to two biblical truths that at first seem contradictory. The Molinist can preach and witness with the confidence that the Lord of the harvest will accomplish His perfect work (Acts 18:9-10) while simultaneously realizing that his decision to obey (or disobey) will have eternal consequences (Ezek 3:17-18). For the glory of God alone.

Ken Keathley
Wake Forest, NC
New Years, 2011

¹Kenneth D. Keathley (PhD, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) Senior Vice President of Academic Administration, Dean of the Faculty at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina.