

## Doctrine of Irresistible Grace

### Wikipedia

#### A Historical Setting of Calvinist-Arminian debate

In the Catholic Church, debates concerning the respective role of efficacious grace and free will led to the establishment of the Congregatio de Auxiliis at the end of the 16th century by the Pope Clement VIII. The Dominicans insisted on the role of the efficacious grace, but the Jesuits embraced Molinism, which postulated greater liberty in the will. These debates also led to the famous formulary controversy in France which pitted the Jansenists against the Jesuits.

The Doctrine of Irresistible Grace is one of the so-called Five points of Calvinism that were defined at the Synod of Dort during the Quinquarticular Controversy with the Arminian Remonstrants, who objected to the general predestinarian scheme of Calvinism. In Calvinist churches, the doctrine is most often mentioned in comparisons with other salvific schemes and their respective doctrines about the state of mankind after the Fall, and it is not a common topic for sermons or studies otherwise.

#### Doctrine of Irresistible Grace

1. Irresistible Grace (or efficacious grace) is a doctrine in Christian theology particularly associated with Calvinism, which teaches that the saving grace of God is effectually applied to those whom he has determined to save (the elect) and, in God's timing, overcomes their resistance to obeying the call of the gospel, bringing them to faith in Christ.
2. The fourth-century Church Father Augustine of Hippo taught that God grants those whom he chooses for salvation the gift of persevering grace, and that they could not conceivably fall away.
3. This doctrine gave rise to the doctrine of irresistible grace (*gratia irresistibilis*), though the term was not used during Augustine's lifetime
4. According to Calvinism, those who obtain salvation do so, not by their own "free" will, but because of the sovereign grace of God.
5. That is, men yield to grace, not finally because their consciences were more tender or their faith more tenacious than that of other men.
6. Rather, the willingness and ability to do God's will, are evidence of God's own faithfulness to save men from the power and the penalty of sin, and since man is so corrupt that he will not decide and cannot be wooed to follow after God, God must powerfully intervene. In short, Calvinism argues that regeneration must precede faith.
7. Calvin says of this intervention that:

"it is not violent, so as to compel men by external force; but still it is a powerful impulse of the Holy Spirit, which makes men willing who formerly were unwilling and reluctant," and John Gill says that:

"this act of drawing is an act of power, yet not of force; God in drawing of unwilling, makes willing in the day of His power: He enlightens the understanding, bends the will, gives an heart of flesh, sweetly allures by the power of His grace, and engages the soul to come to Christ, and give up itself to Him; he draws with the bands of love. Drawing, though it supposes power and influence, yet not always coercion and force: music draws the ear, love the heart, and pleasure the mind."

8. Jonathan Edwards has sometimes been quoted as referring to the irresistible call of God as the "holy rape of the soul," but the phrase does not appear in Edwards' Works. Instead, the phrase seems to have been coined by Puritan scholar Perry Miller, and many Calvinists distance themselves from it.

### **Arminian Objections to the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace**

9. Christians associated with Arminianism, notably followers of John Wesley and part of the Methodist movement, reject the Calvinist doctrine.
10. Instead, they believe that God's prevenient grace is provided to all human beings alike though perhaps in different measures, drawing them toward His love and salvation. In this view,
  - after God's universal dispensation of grace to mankind, the will of man, which was formerly adverse to God and unable to obey, can now choose to obey by acquisition of Christ;
  - and although God's grace is a strong initial move to effect salvation, it can ultimately be resisted and rejected.
11. Both sides agree that the resistibility of grace is inexorably bound up with the theological system's view of humanity's inability to respond to God and of the extent of God's grace.
12. As Calvinist Charles Hodge says:
 

"The (Arminian) and (Roman Catholic) doctrine is true, if the other parts of their doctrinal system are true; and it is false if that system be erroneous. If the (Calvinistic) doctrine concerning the natural state of man since the fall, and the sovereignty of God in election, be Scriptural, then it is certain that sufficient grace does not become efficacious from the cooperation of the human will."
13. Thus the Calvinist passages which Calvinists interpret as the sovereignty of God in election are also relevant here.

## Lutherans and Irresistible Grace

14. Like Calvinists, Lutherans view the work of salvation as monergistic in which an unconverted or unrepentant person always resists and rejects God and his ways.
15. Even during conversion, the Formula of Concord says, humans resist "the Word and will of God, until God awakens him from the death of sin, enlightens and renews him."
16. Furthermore, they both see the preaching of the gospel as a means of grace by which God offers salvation.
17. Calvinists distinguish between a resistible, outward call to salvation given to all who hear the free offer of the gospel, and an efficacious, inward work by the Holy Spirit.
18. Every person is unwilling to follow the outward call to salvation until, as the Westminster Confession puts it, "being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed by it."
19. Once inwardly renewed, every person freely follows God and his ways as "not only the obligatory but the preferable good," and hence that special renewing grace is always effective.
20. Contrary to the Calvinist position, Lutherans hold that whenever the Holy Spirit works outwardly through the Word and sacraments, he always acts inwardly through them as well. Unlike Calvinists, Lutherans believe the Holy Spirit always works efficaciously.
21. The Word heard by those that resist it is just as efficacious as the Word preached to those that convert.
22. The Formula of Concord teaches that when humans reject the calling of the Holy Spirit, it is not a result of the Word being less efficacious.
23. Instead, contempt for the means of grace is the result of  

"the perverse will of man, which rejects or perverts the means and instrument of the Holy Ghost, which God offers him through the call, and resists the Holy Ghost, who wishes to be efficacious, and works through the Word..."
24. Lutherans are certain that the work of the Holy Spirit does not occur merely alongside the means of grace to regenerate, but instead is an integral part of them, always working through them wherever they are found. Lutherans teach that the Holy Spirit limits himself to working only through the means of grace and nowhere else so that those who reject the means of grace are simultaneously resisting and rejecting the Holy Spirit and the grace he brings.
25. The statement of St. Paul is said to confirm that those whom God effectually calls necessarily come to full salvation:

- *Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

But it is especially several verses from the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, which contains a record of Jesus' teaching on humanity's abilities and God's activities in salvation that serves as the central proof text for the Calvinist doctrine:

- *John 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. 38 For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. 39 And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.*
- *John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*
- *John 6:65 And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.*

26. Proponents of Arminianism argue that the word "draw" (Greek: ἔλκω, *helkō*) as used in John 6:44 does not require the sense of "drag", though they admit this is the word's usual meaning.

- *John 18:10 Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.*
- *John 21:6 And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.*
- *John 21:11 Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, and hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.*
- *Acts 16:19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,*
- *Acts 21:30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.*
- *James 2:6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?*

27. Arminians try to point to John 12:32 as an example of their position.

- *John 12:32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*

28. Arminians interpret this to mean that Jesus draws all people to Himself but some are able resist this drawing since, if the call is truly irresistible, then all must come to Christ and be saved.

29. They may also note that in the Septuagint version of Jeremiah 38:13, when Jeremiah is lifted out of the pit where he was left to die, this Greek verb is used for the action which his rescuers performed after he voluntarily secured the ropes under his armpits, and that this rescue was certainly performed in cooperation with Jeremiah's wishes.

30. Therefore, they may argue, even if the semantics of "draw" are understood in the usual sense, this should only be taken to indicate the source of the power, not the question of whether the person being drawn independently desires the drawing, or to indicate that the drawing is done irrespective of their wishes.

31. Calvinists argue that:

- the word "draw" should be understood according to its usual semantics in both John 6:44 and 12:32;

*John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

*John 12:32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*

- the word "all" (translated "all people" in v. 12:32) should be taken in the sense of "all kinds of people" rather than "every individual";
- and thus the former verse refers to an irresistible internal call to salvation and the latter to the opening of the Kingdom of God to the Gentiles, not a universal, resistible internal call. Some have asserted on this basis that the text of John 6:44 can entail either universalism or Calvinism, but not Arminianism.

32. Arminian William Barclay argues that "man's resistance can defeat the pull of God" mentioned in John 6:44,

- *John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

33. However, commentator Leon Morris contends that

- "not one of (Barclay's) examples of the verb ('draw') shows the resistance as successful. Indeed we can go further. There is not one example in the New Testament of the use of this verb where the resistance is successful. Always the drawing power is triumphant, as here."