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To cite this article: Antonio Gerace (2016) Luis de Molina's 'middle knowledge': Thomas Stapleton's 'antidote' to John Calvin, *Reformation & Renaissance Review*, 18:2, 105-122

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14622459.2016.1191826>

Published online: 22 Jun 2016.

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Luis de Molina's 'middle knowledge': Thomas Stapleton's 'antidote' to John Calvin[†]

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The Bible commentator, Thomas Stapleton (1535–98), an English Catholic exile in Leuven and Douai, played a vital role in the 'golden age of biblical scholarship' (1550–1650). His *Antidota* (1595) aimed at giving the 'correct' interpretation of the Bible in response to the 'poisoned' commentaries of Calvin and others. This battle for the 'true' faith also involved Stapleton in internal Catholic debates, especially the *de auxiliis* controversy pitting Jesuit theologians insisting on human free will against their more Augustinian-inclined peers emphasizing God's grace. While previous scholarship placed Stapleton within the latter camp because of his extensive citation of Augustine, this paper intends to establish that Stapleton actually belonged to the first group and that his orientation was not to Augustine, rather the Spanish Jesuit theologian, Luis de Molina (1535–1600). Through an analysis of Stapleton's *Antidota*, and specifically his commentary on Matthew 11:21, this paper demonstrates Stapleton's dependence on Molina's so-called theory of 'middle knowledge'.

KEYWORDS Thomas Stapleton, Luis de Molina, Jean Calvin, middle knowledge, grace, predestination, free will, Jesuits, Augustinianism

Introduction

A so-called golden age of biblical scholarship developed at the University of Leuven [Louvain] and at its daughter University in Douai between 1550 and 1650.¹ The

[†] For this article, I will use the Douay-Rheims English Vulgate (= DRV). Patristic quotations will be from the *Patrologia Latina* (= PL) and the *Patrologia Graeca* (= PG), both edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, and from the *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (= CCSL) published by Brepols.

¹ See Wim François, 'Augustine and the Golden Age of biblical Scholarship in Leuven (1550–1650)', in *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation: Books, Scholars and Their Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. B. Gordon and M. McLean (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 235–89.

impetus for this development was provided by the Council of Trent, especially its fourth session in 1546, which supported text-critical studies of the Vulgate, asking for a new edition to correct the scribal mistakes occurred in its long history. Following Trent, Catholic theologians and ecclesiastics in the Low Countries felt the need to reply to the ‘venom of heresy’ — from the 1560s onwards, especially Calvinism — by returning to a thorough study of the Scriptures. The first field into which Leuven biblical scholars ventured was actually the emendation of the Latin Vulgate and the establishment of a new critical edition, thus executing the request made by the Council fathers during the fourth Tridentine session.²

Moreover, the Council of Trent in its fifth session issued the decree ‘De instituenda lectione sacrae Scripturis et liberalium artium’ [On the Institution of a Lectureship of Sacred Scripture, and of the Liberal Arts], encouraging the study of the Bible, under the Church’s supervision. This led to the establishment of several chairs of Sacred Scriptures, especially by the Spanish Catholic monarchs in the Low Countries. In 1546, Emperor Charles V founded the royal chair of Sacred Scriptures at the faculty of theology in Leuven,³ and in 1562, Philip II, king of Spain, established a new university in Douai.⁴ Therefore, in addition to this text-critical work, Leuven and Douai theologians also sought to explain the Scriptures according to Catholic doctrine and in few years they became important centres for theological studies and, given their proximity to the British Isles, these university cities attracted English Catholic exiles, who started to leave England at the beginning of the Elizabethan Protestant era. In this article, I will deal with one of these scholars who left England for Spanish Netherlands: Thomas Stapleton. He was a beneficiary of the two institutions; he was educated in Leuven and in Douai, where he studied controversial theology and sacred Scripture, and he later returned to Leuven to assume the chair of sacred Scripture (1590).

In those years, moreover, Catholicism was upset by a strong, internal debate, the so-called *de auxiliis* controversy,⁵ over the role played by God’s grace and human free will in the economy of salvation. Two major ‘factions’ animated that debate: the anti-Pelagian Augustinian-minded scholars, who stressed the importance of the grace, and the Jesuits, who underlined the significance of human free will. Although he was member of the Society of Jesus, Thomas Stapleton was first listed among the moderate Augustinian-minded theologians, since Augustine was

² The reference is to the decree ‘De editione, et usu sacrorum librorum’, issued on 8 April 1546.

³ Wim François, ‘*Augustinus sanior interpret Apostoli*. Thomas Stapleton and the Leuven Augustinian School’s Reception of Paul’, in *A Companion to Paul in the Reformation*, ed. R. W. Holder (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 363.

⁴ Jan Roegiers, ‘Catholic Universities and the Enlightened State: The Leuven Case’, in *Université, église, culture: l’université catholique à l’époque moderne: de la réforme à la révolution XVIème - XVIIIème siècles*, ed. M. L. Roche (Paris: FIUC, 2004), 194–96.

⁵ Famous are the controversies between the Dominican Domingo Bañez and the Jesuit Luis de Molina in Spain, and between Michael de Bay and the Jesuit Leonard Lessius in the Spanish Netherlands. This debate led to the constitution of *Congregatio de auxiliis*, by Clement VIII in 1597; however, in 1607, Paul V intervened. Molina reported that he ‘issued a decree forbidding the antagonists [Dominicans and Jesuits] to call one another’s views heretical or even temerarious, in the technical jargon of theological censure. The Holy See would, the Pope continued, resolve the issue at an opportune time. It stands as a tribute to the prudence of Paul V and his successor that this ‘opportune’ time has yet to arrive’. Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge* (part IV of the *Concordia*), trans. A. J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), viii.

the main source in his writings, and few elements of typical Jesuit teachings were found in his reflections on postlapsarian man. In this article, however, I will show textual proofs of Stapleton's adhesion to Jesuit concepts, and in particular his dependence on the Spanish Jesuit, Luis de Molina, and his 'middle knowledge' theory, which the English Jesuit used to counter Calvin's notion of God's prescience and predestination.

Thomas Stapleton and his commentary on the Bible

Thomas Stapleton (1535–1598),⁶ was one of several Catholic scholars who moved from England to the Spanish Netherlands at the beginning of the Elizabethan era (1558–1603). When the English Parliament invoked the Act of Supremacy of 1558, it conferred the title of 'Supreme Governor of the Church of England' on Queen Elizabeth, following a brief reinstatement of Catholicism during the reign of Queen Mary I. The Spanish Netherlands was, therefore, a place of refuge for Catholics from the British Isles. Scholars, in particular, preferred to base themselves in the university town of Leuven⁷ and later on in Douai, following the establishment of a university there. Thomas Stapleton, after having studied theology in Oxford and having become holder of the prebend in Chichester Cathedral, refused to swear the Oath of Supremacy (1558)⁸ and, 'soon after the accession of Elizabeth ... retired with his father and family to Leuven and applied himself to the study of theology'.⁹

In 1569, Stapleton moved to Douai, where he collaborated with another English exile, William Allen (1532–1594), on the opening of the English College. In 1571, he began teaching as a professor of divinity at the university, a position that he held until 1582, except for a brief period in 1576–1577, when an anti-Spanish faction took possession of the city, during the Dutch Revolt.¹⁰ In this short intervening period, he visited Rome for the second time (following his first pilgrimage in 1562).¹¹ After having resigned his professorship and canonry in 1582, Stapleton began his noviciate in the Society of Jesus in Douai. He recalled this period in his

⁶ For a short introduction to this author, see Marvin R. O'Connell, 'Stapleton, Thomas (1535–1598)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, online edn, 2004–2016; for further biographical information see internal. Gordon Albion, 'An English Professor at Leuven: Thomas Stapleton (1535–1598)', in *Miscellanea historica in honorem Alberti De Meyer: Universitatis Catholicae in Oppido Lovaniensi iam annos XXV professoris*, Recueil de travaux d'histoire et philologie, 22–23 (Leuven: Presses universitaires de Leuven, 1946), Vol. 2, 895–913; Marvin R. O'Connell, *Thomas Stapleton and the Counter Reformation* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1964); Michael Richards, 'Thomas Stapleton', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 18, no. 2 (1967): 187–99; François, 'Augustinus' – this article should be supplemented with Wim François, 'Tomás Stapleton (1535–1598): La caída de Adán y sus consecuencias para la onne posteridad ¿Exégesis agustiniana o criptojesuita?', *Augustinus* 55 (2010): 129–40.

⁷ Albion, 'Thomas Stapleton', 897. On the academic relationship between Leuven and England, Oxford in particular, see among others, C. J. Fordyce, 'Louvain and Oxford in the Sixteenth Century', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 12 (1933): 645–52.

⁸ See François, 'Augustinus', 397; also François, 'Tomás Stapleton', 129–40. In this article, I will show the Jesuit inspiration in Stapleton's works, following the suggestion by François in the conclusion of his latter article.

⁹ Albion, 'Thomas Stapleton', 901.

¹⁰ François, 'Tomás Stapleton', 131.

¹¹ O'Connell, *Thomas Stapleton*, 28.

Compendium breve, et verum [Short and True Survey], admitting that after almost two years, he ‘was succumbing under the burner’ of Jesuit education.¹²

In those years, Catholicism was embroiled in *de auxiliis* controversy which pitted anti-Pelagian, Augustinian-inclined Catholic scholars against Jesuit theologians over the question concerning the role played by human free will in the economy of salvation. In Leuven, the theological milieu was more anti-Pelagian, Augustinian-minded. The teachings of the Society of Jesus were not appreciated by eminent authors such as Michael de Bay (1589) and John Hessels (1522–1566).¹³ One of the most pronounced instances of this controversy occurred when the Flemish Jesuit, Leonard Lessius (1554–1623), was judged to be a semi-Pelagian, because of the theories expounded in his *Theses theologicae* (Leuven, 1586). He was condemned, first by the Leuven faculty of theology (1586), and a year later by that of Douai (1587).¹⁴ Thomas Stapleton, remaining close to the Jesuit ideals and having known Lessius in Douai for fifteen years, defended him during this controversy.¹⁵ The consequence for doing so was his ostracism by the Augustinian-minded professors at the university of Douai. He no longer received important offices. It was only in 1590 that Philip II appointed him royal professor of Sacred Scripture at the university of Leuven, since Stapleton ‘was demonstrably loyal to Spain’.¹⁶

Throughout his career as a scholar, Thomas Stapleton wrote Bible commentaries in order to oppose the biblical expositions of John Calvin, as well as those of Theodore Beza.¹⁷ Stapleton considered these two Reformed theologians to be the main polemical targets of his *Antidota*.¹⁸ Printed in Antwerp and in Lyons between 1595 and 1598, the *Antidota* were scholarly commentaries on large parts

¹² The date is a matter of discussion. According to Albion, Stapleton began his novitiate in 1582, see Albion ‘Thomas Stapleton’, 904. However, according to O’Connell, Stapleton ‘presented himself to the Jesuits at Douay’ in 1585; O’Connell, *Thomas Stapleton*, 41. François follows Albion, since Stapleton started his novitiate after having taught controversial theology for 11 years, and in 1582 Wilhelmus Estius replaced him as professor of controversial theology at the University of Douai, see Wim François, ‘Thomas Stapleton, controversetheoloog tussen Engeland en de Nederlanden’, in *Religie, hervorming en controverse in de zestiende-eeuwse Nederlanden*, eds. Violet Soen and Paul Knevel (Herzogenrath: Shaker Publishing, 2013), 50, n. 45. What we know concerning Thomas Stapleton’s time in the Jesuit seminary cannot be more than what Stapleton writes in his *Compendium verum, et brevem*: ‘Exterior vires annis de more duobus/Hisque fere expletis oneri succumbo’, Thomas Stapleton, *Compendium verum, et brevem*, in *Opera omnia*, 4 vols (Paris: Föüet, 1620), vol. 1, iij.

¹³ On the Augustinian atmosphere in Leuven, see Mathijs Lamberigts and Ledo Kenis, eds. *L’Augustinisme à l’ancienne Faculté de théologie de Leuven* (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 1994). In particular on John Hessels, see Wim François, ‘Augustinian Bible Exegesis in Leuven: The Case of John Hessels’ Commentary on 1 John 2,15–18a’, *Augustiniana* 57 (2007): 399–424.

¹⁴ For Leonard Lessius, see for example, E. J. Van Eijl, ‘La controverse louvaniste autour de la grâce et du libre arbitre à la fin du 16ième siècle’, in *L’Augustinisme à l’ancienne faculté de théologie de Leuven*, eds. Lamberigts and Kenis, 207–82.

¹⁵ Cf. Van Eijl, ‘La controverse louvaniste’, 234, n. 71.

¹⁶ O’Connell, *Thomas Stapleton*, 42–44.

¹⁷ By searching for every occurrence of *Bez** in the *Digital Library of Catholic Reformation*, the name of Theodore Beza occurs seventy-four times in Stapleton’s *Antidota evangelica in Evangelium Matthaei*. In particular, Stapleton refers mainly to Beza’s *Confessio Christianae fidei* (1560) and *Annotationes maiores in Novum Testamentum* (1594). As for Calvin, his name appears 1096 times, searching for all its cases. Stapleton refers mainly to *Institutiones christianae religionis* (1559) (= *Institutes*) and to the *Commentarii in harmoniam ex tribus Evangelistis compositam* (1563) (= *Harmony*).

¹⁸ Even in his *Compendium* Thomas Stapleton refers to Calvin and Beza, declaring the aim of his *Antidota*: ‘Antidota aggredior, diris aptanda venenis/Quae passim haeretici scriptis sparsere sacris/Impius imprimis Calvinus, Bezaque posthinc/Quinque tomos scripsi’, Stapleton, *Compendium verum, et brevem*, iij. Moreover, Stapleton referred to Wolfgang Musculus (1497–1563), ‘De coena Domini’ and ‘De magistratibus’ in *Loci communes theologiae sacrae scripturae* (1560), and to Martin Chemnitz (1522–86), *Examen concilii tridentini* (1565). He only mentioned Martin Luther (1483–1546), Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560) and Huldrych Zwingli (1483–1531) by name.

of the New Testament – on the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and the epistles of Paul to the Romans and to the Corinthians. Stapleton also published homiletic expositions, the most famous being the *Promptuaria* [Storehouses] (Antwerp, 1591–1594), in order to aid priests in the preparation of their sermons. Because the influence of Calvinism was very strong in the Low Countries and in England at the time,¹⁹ he regarded the training of clergy in sound Catholic principles to be of the utmost importance. Only in this way could Calvin's ideas regarding predestination, grace and free will be countered.

Given that the theoretical assumptions of *Antidota* are more relevant than the practical teachings of *Promptuaria* to this article, I will now focus upon a pericope taken from his *Antidota evangelica in evangelium sancti Matthaei* [Evangelical Antidotes on the Gospel of St Matthew], published in 1595. Through the reading of this selected passage, Matthew 11.21, I will show the Jesuit, or rather Molinist, influence on this work, which is especially interesting given the primacy of Augustine's authority in early-modern Leuven.²⁰

A revealing title

Thomas Stapleton's intent behind the *Antidota* is already deducible from the title: to provide an 'antidote' to the 'venom of heresy', and in particular to the heresy of Calvinism. The author wishes to explain the genuine meaning of Jesus' words so that the faithful could understand them in the right way.²¹ The methodology used was simple but effective: he explained the meaning of a pericope in the light of Catholic faith, quoting Augustine as his main ancient source. Although he refers to the bishop of Hippo more than anyone else, Stapleton's view is no less indebted to the Spanish Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina, whose work *De liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis, divina praescientia, praedestinatione et reprobatione Concordia* [The Compatibility of Free Choice with the Gifts of Grace, Divine Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination and Reprobation],²² as I will show in this article.

Before examining details of Stapleton's reliance on Molina, it is necessary to briefly recall John Calvin's concepts of prescience and predestination, which are at issue in the passage of the *Antidota* under discussion here. Although Stapleton does not cite Calvin's *Institutes* in this specific pericope, referring instead to the

¹⁹ For instance, Stapleton reported: 'Hinc exerunt Calvinistae per totam Galliam, & in Hollandia, sicut & Anabaptistae ... Puritani in Anglia Calvinii sententiam sequuntur', Thomas Stapleton, *Antidota evangelica in Evangelium Matthaei* [18: 17–18] (Paris: Foüet, 1620), 55.

²⁰ On the primacy of Augustine's authority in Leuven, see Lamberigts and Kenis, *L'augustinisme*. Moreover, soon after the *de auxiliis* controversy, Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), bishop of Ypres, elaborated a theology particularly centred on Augustine, expounded in a work entitled, not by coincidence, *Augustinus*, posthumously published in 1640 and became the basis of Jansenism. On Jansenism, see, for instance, Dominik Burhard and Tanja Thanner, eds, *Der Jansenismus - eine 'katholische Häresie'? Das Ringen um Gnade, Rechtfertigung und die Autorität Augustins in der frühen Neuzeit*, Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien und Texte, 159 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2014).

²¹ 'Haec de voce & verbo Evangelii, eiusque vero sensu contra pestilentissimam haereticorum depravationem praemittere operae precium duximus, ut quis si Evangelii finis ac scopus Lector orthodoxus intelligat', Stapleton, *Antidota in Evangelium Matthaei*, 4.

²² Luis de Molina, *De liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis, divina praescientia, praedestinatione et reprobatione Concordia* (Lisbon: António Ribeiro, 1588). On Luis de Molina and his thought, see also M. Kaufmann and A. Aichele, eds. *A Companion to Molina* (Brill: Leiden, 2014). For the English translation see Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*. Fredoso's translation is of the disputations 47–53, as in Molina's *Concordia*, 196–271.

Harmony, it seems clear that he has a specific chapter (21) of the *Institutes* in mind: 'Eternal election, by which God has predestined some to salvation, and others to destruction'. There, Calvin offers a synopsis of his thinking about God's election. In regard to prescience, he asserts that it is the knowledge of

all things always were, and ever continue, under his eye; that to his knowledge there is no past or future, but all things are present, and indeed so present, that it is not merely the idea of them that is before him (as those objects are which we retain in our memory), but that he truly sees and contemplates them as actually under his immediate inspection. This prescience extends to the whole circuit of the world, and to all creatures.²³

Calvin further explains what is commonly called the 'double predestination doctrine': God, from eternity and only according to his own judgment decrees those who are to be saved and those who are to be damned.²⁴ A similar view had been rejected during the sixth session of the Council of Trent in the decree *De justificatione* [On justification]; even though the Council Fathers stressed the priority of God's grace, they admitted the necessity of human free will in the process of salvation. However, the council avoided giving a clear interpretation of the relationship between God's predestination and human actions, leaving Catholic theologians with the difficult task of solving this problem.

Currently Wim François is possibly the only scholar who has taken an interest in Thomas Stapleton's theory of predestination, grace, and human free will as found in his Bible commentaries. François (2009) first positions Stapleton within Leuven's Augustinian-inclined school, since the Englishman uses the bishop of Hippo as the most authoritative source for his works, although 'his interpretation of Augustine is moderate, so that he keeps at a distance from the, in the meantime, condemned Baianism'.²⁵ However, by continuing to read Stapleton, François (2010) was able to find clear elements of Molinist teachings in the *Antidota apostolica in epistolam B. Pauli ad Romanos*, in passages dealing with postlapsarian man and his possibility of salvation. Although Augustine remains Stapleton's most authoritative source in these passages, while Molina is never mentioned,²⁶ François maintains that Stapleton was in fact looking for a concordance between the 'authorized Augustinian-minded tradition' and the 'Jesuit Molinism'.²⁷ Following up on François' portrayal of a 'Jesuit-minded' Thomas Stapleton, the present article analyses his *Antidota in Evangelium sancti Matthaei*, in particular the comment on Matthew 11:21, where he quotes passages from Luis de Molina's *Concordia* where the Spanish Jesuit expounds in minute detail his 'middle knowledge' theory.

²³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols, ed. John McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press; London: S.C.M. Press, 1960), III.21.5.

²⁴ 'God by his eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all those whom it was his pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was his pleasure to doom to destruction. I maintain that this counsel, as regards the elect, is founded on his free mercy, without any respect to human worth, while those whom he dooms to destruction are excluded from access to life by a just and blameless, but at the same time incomprehensible judgment', John Calvin, *Institutes*, III.21.7.

²⁵ François, 'Augustinus', 385–86.

²⁶ François refers to Stapleton's analysis of Romans 5:12; 5:18–9; 6:12; 6:20; 7:7–13; 10:5–8. As is seen below, in the *Antidota apostolica in epistolam B. Pauli ad Romanos*, commenting on Romans 11:29, Stapleton quotes Molina directly, by referring to his 'middle knowledge' theory.

²⁷ François, 'Tomás Stapleton', 140.

Matthew 11:21. Chorazin and Bethsaida

While Stapleton shows his dependence on Molina in several places,²⁸ perhaps the clearest example comes from his comment on Matthew 11:21. There Christ says: *Woe to thee, Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida: for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes.* According to Stapleton, Christ is here speaking about the contingency of things, namely, the fact that an event might have occurred in the past but did not (that is, the possible repentance of Tyre and Sidon) or that an event might happen in the future (that is, the repentance of Bethsaida and Chorazin). He is thereby also speaking about the freedom of human action. Thus, in Stapleton's opinion, the kernel of this passage is the relationship between God's foreknowledge and human free will.

With this interpretation to hand, Stapleton accuses Calvin of having distorted the real and genuine meaning of Jesus' words, as explicated in Calvin's *Harmony*.²⁹ There Calvin argues that Christ is speaking '*humano more*' [in a human manner]: he is using a simple metaphor to indicate how deep the sin of Chorazin and Bethsaida was, saying that it was even worse than that of Tyre and Sidon.³⁰ Indeed, Tyre and Sidon would have repented if there had been miracles, while the other two cities refused to repent even though they had Christ's preaching. Hence, the sin of Chorazin and Bethsaida was worse than that of Tyre and Sidon. In the first case, there was only ignorance, while in the second malice — with God's irremediable contempt.

However, Stapleton sees Calvin's analysis as a distortion of Christ's words. Stapleton suspects that Calvin only argues that Christ is speaking *humano more*, because he, Calvin, was unwilling to accept the idea that Christ would speak about human free will, even though this seems to be clearly shown through Christ's reference to the choice of the citizens of Chorazin and Bethsaida not to believe. Stapleton argues that this passage of the Gospel simply does not give support to Calvin's view because it provides a concrete example of human free will — 'infallible foreordination' to use Stapleton's expression — rather than of God's double predestination. For this reason, Calvin has to maintain that Christ is speaking *humano more*, accommodating his speech to men. Therefore, according to the Englishman, Calvin distorts the real meaning of Jesus' words in this instance; for Stapleton, they are not a kind of metaphor, but a vehicle of true teachings which Stapleton calls '*documenta*'.³¹ In

²⁸ Another important passage in the *Antidota* is the comment on Matthew 23:37, where again Stapleton quotes Molina, with a parallel passage in the *Promptuarium Catholicum super Evangelium in festis sanctorum*, where the Jesuit is cited in a marginal note. However, I will postpone the analysis of Stapleton's comment on Matthew 23:37, in both the *Antidota* and the *Promptuarium* for a forthcoming publication. On Matthew 11:21, Stapleton does not analyse this passage in his *Promptuaria*, except for a brief mention in the *Promptuarium morale in Evangelia dominicalia, pars hyemalis* (Paris: Fouet, 1620), 83. In any event, this latter case does not offer interesting elements for this study.

²⁹ Stapleton, *Antidota in Evangelium Matthaei* [Matthew 11:21], 31. Stapleton, commenting on this verse, does not mention John Calvin's *Institutes*, but refers instead to the *Harmony*.

³⁰ Cf. John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke* [Matthew 11:21], eds. D. W. Torrance, T. F. Torrance, trans. A. W. Morrison (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), vol. 2, 15–6. On the use of the expression '*humano more*' and for further sources, see for example, the chapter *Accommodatio Dei* by Jon Balserak, in Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *The Calvin Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 372–77, esp. 372–73.

³¹ Stapleton, *Antidota in Evangelium Matthaei* [11:21], 32.

this way, Stapleton had the opportunity to explain his view regarding the relationship between God's foreknowledge and human free will. Yet, the major part of his argumentation, divided into seven steps, relies completely upon Luis de Molina. Indeed, Stapleton consistently (though not always correctly) points out the references to *Concordia* (1588), referring readers to that text for a more complete treatment of this theme.

Matthew 11:21. God's omniscience and human free will

The first teaching concerns God's omniscience. According to Stapleton, God's knowledge does not depend the object of knowledge actually existing; thus, he is able to foresee not only what will actually be, but also what might have been in the future. Indeed, in Stapleton's opinion, there are two ways to know something:

1. The 'knowledge of vision (merely free)', which depends on the actual existence of the object of knowledge. In this case, God can have 'knowledge of vision' of future events only if they will actually be realized. In this instance, Stapleton also makes reference to Augustine, when he says that, through his foreknowledge, God 'foreknew what would be, not what would not be'.³² Therefore, the 'knowledge of vision' is the knowledge of the entities that God freely chose to create.
2. The 'knowledge of simple intelligence (merely natural)', which does not depend on the actual existence of the object of knowledge. In this case the knowledge depends entirely on the subject, who is able to have comprehension of what is not as well as what might be. In other words, the 'knowledge of simple intelligence' is God's knowledge of all possible entities that are in his mind.

So, concerning the future contingents, in this case what Tyre and Sidon would have done if there had been preaching and miracles, God cannot have knowledge of vision, properly, because the object of knowledge does not exist. It is merely an uncreated entity or an un-actualized potentiality. However, he does have knowledge of simple intelligence. Therefore, God has comprehension of these non-existent futures, meaning that he is able to foresee all possible parallel futures, including those events that will not be. Stapleton assumes that Christ has such knowledge of 'simple intelligence', that Tyre and Sidon might have been converted if there had been miracles. Thus, Jesus refers to the possible effect of a cause that had not occurred.

The dichotomy between these two kinds of divine knowledge is by no means an original development of Stapleton's, as he freely admitted. Rather, it is a development of Luis de Molina's.³³ Indeed, the Spanish Jesuit elaborates on these two ways of knowing — the 'knowledge of simple intelligence' and the 'knowledge of

³² Augustine, *On the Predestination of Saints*, in *Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, trans. J. A. Mourant (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 249.

³³ 'God's knowledge of things that are still contingently future in time does not, properly speaking, have the character of knowledge of vision [*scientia visionis*] until those things actually exist in time; rather, in the meantime it has the character of a knowledge of simple intelligence [*scientia simplicis intelligentiae*], because the things that are its objects do not yet exist. But since the proper duration of that knowledge is eternity, and because in eternity it coexists with future time,

vision' — linking them together through an intermediate type of knowledge he calls 'middle knowledge'. On the basis of this knowledge, God is able to foresee what men may freely do in the infinite variety of every possible circumstance. However, prior to dealing with this latter kind of knowledge, it is necessary to discuss the meaning of eternity in Molina, because this concept is closely linked to that of foreknowledge, since God has foreknowledge of human actions in his eternal existence. If eternity is considered to be that condition in which all things are present, as Calvin had maintained, there would not be space for human free will, since men's actions, which lie in the future, are actually present in God's eternal existence. Therefore Molina, wishing to maintain human free will, could not accept this view of eternity, as that 'whole, simultaneous, perfect possession of a limitless life',³⁴ thus the entire extension of time, simultaneously developed. He did not consider it to be an eternal present, existing without any difference between past and future. In fact, according to Molina, eternity can be conceived of as not containing the future. He explains this concept by way of a geometrical example. Taking a point x to represent simple eternity, I can draw a circle around it to represent time. The circumference has a starting point a , the beginning of the world. Thus, each instant of time is represented by a singular point on the temporal line, up until b , the present. Obviously, the arc ab is the past. God, from his eternal condition x , has a 'knowledge of vision' about this part of time, since each instant has already existed. Translated in geometrical terms, there is a one-to-one correspondence between the centre and each point of the circle already drawn. By virtue of this correspondence, God knows with 'knowledge of vision', since there is an object of knowledge.

those things that will in the end be present, God's knowledge may simply be called a knowledge of vision in relation to all the things that will exist in any interval of time', Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, q. 14, ar. 13, d. 49, 127. Italics in the text. Already Thomas Aquinas dealt with *scientia visionis* and *scientia simplicis intelligentiae* (cf. *Commentary on the Sentences* I, d. 39, q. 1 art. 2) but he did not introduced the concept of middle knowledge, developed by Molina and upon which Stapleton relies, as I will show in the pages below. In particular, in the passage of the *Antidota* here analysed, Stapleton mentions Aquinas just once, while he always quotes Molina.

³⁴ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. D. R. Slavitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008) 5.6.9–11, 169. Calvin's idea of eternity, how it is expressed in the above-mentioned definition of prescience, is actually the same articulated by Boethius.

So, the centre of the circle x is simple eternity, to which each point of the circle corresponds, viz. the passing time, but it can correspond to all indivisibles only when all points on the circumference have been drawn. Hence, where there is no one-to-one correspondence, it means that the ‘future’ still has to be delineated.³⁵ Although in his simple-eternal condition x , God is able to foresee future events, he cannot have ‘knowledge of vision’, since these events still have yet to be. Yet God still has a sure foreknowledge thereof, even if this certitude cannot be given by the existence of the object itself. God is still able to see something that is uncertain and fallible thanks to his omniscience.³⁶ This is possible thanks to another kind of knowledge, the so-called ‘middle knowledge’, which is a sort of intuition³⁷ capable of knowing the free will of everybody and the ways in which it will be used. This knowledge is not ‘free’, since it is antecedent to God’s voluntary act of creation. Precisely because of that, men conserve their free will. Thus, it is not God, but man, who actualizes a particular potentiality. When this happens, God knows what man will do, but he knows in such a way that his knowledge leaves human action unaltered.

To summarize, there are three types of knowledge:

- (a) ‘Knowledge of simple intelligence merely natural’, or omniscience. God knows all potentialities, both those that will be actualized and those that will not be actualized. This knowledge is natural, in the sense that it is constitutive of God’s own being. Thus, it is prior to any intervention of his will into acts of choosing what should be created or not.³⁸
- (b) ‘Middle knowledge’, or foreknowledge of future contingents. This knowledge is not natural, in the sense that it is not constitutive of God’s own being. Thus, it cannot be focused upon all potentialities. Through ‘middle knowledge’, God has certain foreknowledge of those events that would occur in the future, even though their existence is not necessary. This knowledge is based on the ‘knowledge of simple intelligence merely natural’, but with a more restricted focus. It is directed not toward potentialities *simpliciter*, but only toward those potentialities that would be actualized. Moreover, this knowledge is antecedent to God’s will, in the sense that he knows a particular event, even though he has

³⁵ Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, q. 14, ar. 13, d. 49, 125–6.

³⁶ ‘Thus, while the full force of created free choice is preserved, and while the contingency of the things remains altogether intact in the same ways as if there were no foreknowledge in God, God knows future contingents with absolute certainty – not, to be sure, with a certainty that stems from the object, which is in itself contingent and really able to turn out otherwise, but rather with a certainty that flows from the depth and from the infinite and unlimited perfection of the knower, who *in Himself* knows with certainty an object that *in its own right* in uncertain and deceptive’, Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, q. 14, ar. 13, d. 51, 157. [Italics in the text.]

³⁷ The Italian philosopher, Martinetti, defined the middle knowledge as ‘una specie di divinazione misteriosa’ [a kind of mysterious divination], see Piero Martinetti, *La libertà* (Milano: Libreria Editrice Lombarda, 1928), 48. Although this book is quite old, this scholar was able to explain very well, and in a few lines, Molina’s theory of *scientia media*. For English and updated literature on the middle knowledge, see Juan Cruz Cruz, ‘Predestination as Transcendent Theology: Molina and the first Molinism’, in *A Companion to Luis de Molina*, eds. M. Kaufmann and A. Aichele (Leiden: Brill, 2014) 102, n. 42. See also William Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suárez* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Richard Gaskin, ‘Conditionals of Freedom and Middle Knowledge’, *The Philosophical Quarterly* 43 (1993): 412–30 and the chapter dedicated to the middle knowledge by Freddoso in Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, 46–61. Moreover, still important is Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet, *Prédestination et grâce efficace: controverses dans la Compagnie de Jésus au temps d’Aqua viva 1610 - 1613: histoire et documents inédits* (Leuven: Leuven Museum Lesianum, 1931).

³⁸ See Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, 47.

not (yet) decided whether he will create it or not or, more accurately, whether he will actualize it or not.³⁹

- (c) 'Knowledge of vision merely free', or knowledge of 'all *actual* or *absolute* future contingents'.⁴⁰ This knowledge is free precisely because it depends only on God's will. 'Freedom' should therefore be understood as a voluntary act of choice, without external conditioning. Molina's notion of freedom corresponds to the concept of ἀντονομία (the 'freedom to use its own laws'). Thus, 'free knowledge' follows the voluntary act of actualizing (or not actualizing) a particular potentiality. 'Knowledge of simple intelligence', by contrast, is natural because it is an integral part of the divine nature, and it acts before the will.

Accordingly, in a logical order God (a) sees all possible potentialities through his 'knowledge of simple intelligence'; (b) foreknows what men will decide to do, or which potentialities would be actualized, through his 'middle knowledge'; (c) knows the potentiality will be actualized with 'knowledge of vision'.⁴¹

Stapleton's use of Molina's middle knowledge: the seven teachings

Molina's theory of threefold knowledge is fully embraced by Stapleton in the *Antidota*. An additional proof of this is given by his comment on Romans 11:29: '*For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance*' (DRV). Here Stapleton provides a short synopsis of the 'middle knowledge' theory, by giving a further explanation of Molina's system. Somehow, he also completes the scheme he had already presented in the comment on Matthew 11:21, where he had just introduced the notions of 'knowledge of vision' and 'knowledge of simple intelligence', leaving aside the 'middle knowledge'. In the comment on Romans 11:29, Stapleton recalls that in God there is a 'natural knowledge' of all potentialities, a 'free knowledge' of those potentialities which will be actualized, since they are consequence of a free act of God, and in between these two, there is a 'middle knowledge' of those potentialities that *ex hypothesi* [in accordance with the hypothesis stated] will be actualized. Indeed, in itself it is not necessary that a particular potentiality becomes act, and in fact its opposite could also occur, but that potentiality will be actualized since it is part of a cause–effect order. That is to say on one hand that the necessity of these potentialities is not absolute, but conditional, on the other hand that the actualization of a particular potentiality is foreseeable. This 'middle knowledge' is neither 'free', since antecedent to any free act of God, nor 'natural', since through it God knows both the potentialities which will be actualized and their opposites.⁴² In conclusion, Molina and Stapleton seem to want to maintain that God's eternal decision

³⁹ 'Perhaps someone will ask if such middle knowledge should be called free or 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', Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, q. 14, ar. 13, d. 52, 168. [Italics in the original.]

⁴⁰ Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, 47.

⁴¹ See Gaskin, 'Conditionals of Freedom and Middle Knowledge', 412–13.

⁴² Thomas Stapleton, *Antidota apostolica in epistolam ad Romanos* [Romans 11:29] (Antwerp, 1595, 701).

to actualize a particular temporal line depends on his prevision of free human decisions. However, in another instance, he affirms that the reason for God's choice is inscrutable. Indeed, according to Molina, God gives his assistance not on the basis of his prevision of men's use of their free will. In other words, there is no cause-effect relation between human actions and God's aids. Rather, God acts only according to his own will.

The first teaching which Stapleton deduces from Matthew 11:21 needs a long exposition, being the notion of 'middle knowledge' that is difficult to explain, but necessary for comprehending the remaining six '*documenta*'. The second teaching which Stapleton infers from this pericope has to do with the strict correlation between free will and human acts. Indeed, Christ said: 'Woe to thee, Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida: for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes'. Stapleton explains that Christ was imputing a graver sin to Chorazin and Bethsaida than he was to Tyre and Sidon, since Chorazin and Bethsaida chose, in conformity with their free will, not to believe. Actually, according to Stapleton, it is not possible to commit a sin without freely consenting to it. In sin, human free will is necessarily involved. Stapleton explains this concept by directly quoting Molina's *Concordia*, and he further exhorts the reader to turn to this book in order to have a more complete overview of the problem.⁴³ In particular, Molina affirms not only that Chorazin and Bethsaida chose not to believe, but further remarks that God did not deny his assistance to them, namely by miracles and preaching. Otherwise, it would not have been possible to blame them for failing to obey God. Here Molina refers to Augustine's explanation that when someone fails to believe, the fault is not on the side of God, but on the side of men, because God cannot deny himself.⁴⁴

The third teaching tries to explain the efficacy of miracles and the reason why they are useful for converting some people but not all. In fact, given the same divine aids, some choose to believe in Christ while others do not. For example, these miracles and preaching were not successful in converting Chorazin and Bethsaida, although Tyre and Sidon would have believed, in the event that they had received the same aids received by Chorazin and Bethsaida. Stapleton refers to Molina in order to provide a complete overview of the question. First, Molina maintains that although there is no merit before prevenient grace, a lot depends upon free will. Conversion to faith in Christ is not only to be attributed to God instilling his grace, but also to human free will, as well as to external aids, namely miracles and the preaching of the Gospel.⁴⁵ Therefore, in order to obtain eternal salvation, there is a strict relationship between prevenient grace on the one hand and human cooperation on the other. In support of this, Molina refers to Christ's words: '*No man can come to me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him; and I will raise him up in the last day*' [Jn 6:44]. Based on this, Molina argues that nobody can reach salvation unless

⁴³ Stapleton, *Antidota in Evangelium Matthaei*, Mt. 11:21], 32.

⁴⁴ Molina was referring to Augustine, *In Evangelium Ioannis tractatus centum viginti quatuor*, 53, 9, in CCSL 36, 456.

⁴⁵ 'Tertium ex hoc loco documentum, quòd cum aequali Dei auxilio alius interdum convertitur, alius non convertitur: de quo vide eundem q & art. eisdem, disput. 12. Quae enim auxilia gratiae apud Iudaeos istos non valuerunt, eadem apud Tyrios & Sidonios valitura fuisse Christus affirmat', Stapleton, *Antidota in Evangelium Matthaei* [11:21], 32. Cf. Molina, *Concordia*, q. 14, ar. 13, d. 12, 38.

God has led him to conversion, with the assistance of prevenient grace, and the person has cooperated through his own free agreement.⁴⁶ In a separate passage, Molina further clarifies his position, explaining the temporal and logical connection between grace, free will, and salvation. Molina argues that when God gives prevenient grace to someone, they accept it and follow Christ, although they can also choose not to accept it. The previous condition, namely prevenient grace, of this subsequent consequence, namely conversion, does not remove the freedom from the person vis-à-vis this consequence. It still depends upon his free choice through the act of belief.⁴⁷ In short, the conversion is caused by human agreement, not only by God's grace. If someone fails to believe, it is precisely because of their choice not to believe.

The fourth teaching simply affirms that among the aids of God's grace, which induce men to believe, there are also miracles, which are external suasions. God does not directly induce men to believe, but he uses miracles as a way to convince men to convert themselves. They are 'external suasions' because they are beyond the subjects to whom they are addressed.⁴⁸ In the fifth teaching, Stapleton develops further the fourth '*documentum*', trying to explain how God uses his assistance to induce men, throughout their lives, to believe in him. According to the Englishman, grace's aids are not given by God in relation to the prevision that He has of the use which men will make of their free will. Rather, God sends his aids only of his own will. Molina maintains the same, explaining that, during human life, God gives the gifts of his prevenient, exciting, and cooperative grace, not on the basis of his prevision of man's use of free will but because of his own divine and inscrutable will.⁴⁹ Stapleton proposes this idea not only by quoting Molina, but also by referring to Augustine's *De dono perseverantiae* [On the Gift of Perseverance]. There, the bishop of Hippo dealt with children who had died before receiving the baptism by drawing a parallel with the case of Tyre and Sidon, in order to show that God does not judge men on the basis of the actions that he has foreseen, but on those that actually occurred. In neither case does God concede his gift, the baptism of the children and the miracles shown to Tyre and Sidon, respectively. Instead, God's decision not to bestow his aids on them leads both the non-baptized children and the two cities to eternal death, since they died tied to original sin. Augustine explains that God's decision to give his aid is always inscrutable (in particular, Augustine was speaking about the gift of perseverance), adding that those people

⁴⁶ Cf. Molina, *Concordia*, q. 14, ar. 13, d. 12, 37–40.

⁴⁷ Cf. Molina, *Concordia*, q. 14, ar. 13, d. 12, 40.

⁴⁸ 'Quantum documentum, quòd inter auxilia gratiae, quibus ad credendum homo excitatur, miracula veluti suasiones externae computantur. Quod etiam ex oratione Apostolorum Act. 4. & ex effectu prophetandi quem Paulus describit 1. Cor. 14. colligi potest. Vide eundem Molinam q. & art. eisdem, disput. 38', Stapleton, *Antidota in Evangelium Matthaei* [Matthew 11:21], 31.

⁴⁹ 'Quantum documentum, quòd haec & alia auxilia gratiae specialia Deus non confert pro ratione usus liberi arbitrii praevisi aut futuri, nec ad illos omnes, Evangelii praedicatores misit quos ad fidem convertendos praevидit, sed salutis media pro suo solo beneplacito disponit: quod idem ex his verbis docet Molina q. 23. art. 4. & 5. disp. 1. membro 4. & S. Augustinus in libro de dono perseverantiae. cap. 9.', Stapleton, *Antidota in Evangelium Matthaei* [Matthew 11:21], 32. Cf. 'Quarè licet Deus dona sua gratiae praevenientis, excitantis, & cooperantis ad accessum ad Christum, non distribuat pro qualitate usus liberi arbitrii & cooperationis adulti praevisae, sed pro sua tantum voluntate', Molina, *Concordia*, q. 14, ar. 13, d. 12, 40. Cf. also Molina, *Concordia*, q. 23. ar. 4. & 5. d. 1. m. 4, 321. In this case Molina does not quote Augustine's *De dono perseverantiae*, although he referred at several points to the bishop of Hippo, such as *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, 14.26, PL 44, col. 979.

who receive gifts were predestinated to receive them.⁵⁰ It seems clear that human contributions to salvation, in Augustine's view, are completely absent. However, Stapleton, along with Molina, try to combine human free will and God's predestination. Thereby, they substantially change Augustine's assumption, stressing the importance of human merit in the economy of salvation, an aspect which was considered to be too close to Pelagianism by the Catholic Augustinian-minded milieu.

The sixth teaching focuses, once again, upon divine omniscience. In God, there is a sure prevision of future contingents, but also a free predestination and free election of the faithful, as well as a just rejection of the sinful on the basis of God's prevision.⁵¹ It seems clear why Stapleton speaks about 'prevision' instead of 'knowledge of simple intelligence' and of 'predestination' instead of 'knowledge of vision'. Indeed, 'prevision' seems to be the immediate effect of the 'knowledge of simple intelligence'. I have omniscience or 'knowledge of simple intelligence', so I have certain prevision of future contingents. Concerning 'predestination', I know what will actually be in the future (knowledge of vision), thus, according to my will, I create this particular temporal line, that is: I predestinate.

Stapleton again supports his theory by quoting Molina. The Spanish Jesuit affirms that prior to creation God foreknows with certainty all future contingents, thanks to his 'knowledge of simple intelligence merely natural', but He also predestinates, choosing to create, according to his 'knowledge of vision merely free'. To explain the relation between prevision and predestination, Molina uses a metaphor: an artisan cannot know which instrument he would use to produce a given artefact until he has a clear idea of how to make it. Similarly, God first knows all future contingents, and then he chooses the potentialities that will be actualized. If this were not the case, God's actions would be indifferent, and the creation would be random, before any divine knowledge. However, this is clearly in contrast with Catholic faith.⁵² Indeed, God acts in accord with middle knowledge, and for this reason, God foreknows what men will freely choose. Therefore, it seems that God predestinates *post praevisa merita* [after foreseen merits], so after having seen the merits, he does it from eternity.

However, the literature on Molina correctly reports that the Spanish Jesuit never used this expression, nor did Stapleton, who avoided using technical terminology in his arguments.⁵³ Nevertheless, from Molina's words it is clear that God predestinates after having seen, without this prevision influencing his decisions. In place of 'post', Molina preferred to use the preposition 'per' – 'per propria merita' [through (their) own merits],⁵⁴ clearly as opposed to *propter* [because of].⁵⁵ What

⁵⁰ Cf. Augustine, *On the Gift of Perseverance*, in *Four anti-Pelagian Writings*, 286, 289–90.

⁵¹ 'Sextum documentum, quod ex loco convincitur certa futurorum etiam liberè contingentium in Deo providentia, & electorum quidem praedestinatio atque electio gratuita, reproborum verò reiectio iusta: quod in eodem vide Molinam q. 14. art. 13. disput. 49.', Stapleton, *Antidota in Evangelium Matthaei* [11:21], 32.

⁵² Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, q. 14, ar. 13, d. 49, 121–2.

⁵³ See for instance, Martinetti, *La libertà*, 49; Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*, 25; Cruz, 'Predestination', 104.

⁵⁴ Searching 'per propria merita' in the Digital Library of the Catholic Reformation, this expression occurred just ten times in Molina's *Concordia*.

⁵⁵ 'Simul observa, me non dixisse, adultos praedestinos esse propter propria merita, sed per propria merita: illud enim esset falsum; hoc autem est verum', Molina, *Concordia*, q. 23, ar. 4 & 5, d. 1, m. 9, 350. Cruz, as he affirms, based his analysis on Le Bachelet, *Prédestination*.

does 'per' mean in this context? As Molina affirms, God first knows what will be through natural knowledge and middle knowledge, then he creates a particular temporal line. However, the reason for God's decision is still to be identified. Clearly, it cannot be based on foreseen merits,⁵⁶ otherwise God would not be free to choose, since his predestination would be determined by human merits. Here, Molina completely rejects Pelagianism, which assumes that men are able to obtain salvation without God's aid, even after Adam's sin.

Moreover, according to Molina, men are predestinated through their own merits, or rather, men (also) reach salvation through their own merits. In other words, human free will is a concurrent cause with respect to God's grace. They are two parts of one integral cause.⁵⁷ It is important to note that Molina uses the preposition 'per', wanting to state precisely that the merits are the human instrumental cause for the salvation, while God's aids are the divine instrumental cause. Molina does not use the expression '*causa instrumentalis*' [instrumental cause], to refer either to God's aids or to human merits, but it could reasonably be argued from the foregoing example of the artisan that the category applies. As Molina explains, God uses his aids as an artisan uses his tools.

Indeed, after having seen all future events in his eternal existence, God chose to create a particular temporal line, during which he arbitrarily grants his aids, but grace alone is not enough, since men also receive eternal life partly through their own merits. In this way, Molina wants to preserve the human free will in the economy of salvation. However, God simply 'takes into consideration' what men will do, but again he does not grant his aids on the basis of their future merits, but only according to his own will, as shown in the fifth teaching.⁵⁸ The problem of sin still remains, but Molina would answer that God's will to create a particular temporal line depends on his middle knowledge, which is anterior to His will. Thus, he creates simply knowing what men will do, although their actions are not necessary *in se*, since men could even do the opposite of what they will actually do. In any case, according to Molina, God's knowledge cannot influence human actions, precisely because the middle knowledge is anterior to his will, namely prior to the act of creation.

Finally, the last teaching relates to the inscrutable divine will. God justly chose not to perform miracles in Tyre and Sidon. He did many other things — which one does not know — but they chose not to believe.⁵⁹ This last point is vital, because it reveals

⁵⁶ *Propter*, when using the accusative, introduces a complement of external cause: in this case, human merits are the cause of God's decision.

⁵⁷ 'totus effectus, totaque actio, totalitate ut vocant effectus, & est à Deo, & ab arbitrio nostro, tanquam à duabus partibus unius integrae causae, tam actionis quàm effectus', Molina, *Concordia*, q. 14, ar. 13, d. 12, 42. See also Martinetti, *La libertà*, 49.

⁵⁸ 'Dio relativamente alla predestinazione non ha potuto non tenere conto dell'uso del libero arbitrio. Non si può dire che Dio abbia distribuito la grazia in proporzione della buona volontà: ma non si può nemmeno dire che Dio non ne abbia tenuto conto', Martinetti, *La libertà*, 50–1.

⁵⁹ 'Postremò documentum, quòd isti Tyrii & Sidonii revera fuissent convertendi (ut Christus disertè dicit) si virtutes ibi factae fuissent, nec propter defectum efficacis gratiae (quae per illa miracula fuisset efficax propter liberi arbitrii consensum quem illa miracula cum auxiliis gratiae indubiè eliciissent, ut Christus docet) sed propter defectum miraculorum, & aliorum mediorum, quae iustè Deus illis subtraxit; alia tamen multa illis faciens quae eos promovebant ad salutem (ait in hunc locum Corn. Iansenius) non fuisse conversos: de quo etiam vide Molinam q. & art. citatis disput. 38. pag. 239.' It is interesting to note that in this passage Stapleton refers not only to Molina, but also to the Leuven and Bible exegete, Cornelius Jansen (the Elder), bishop of Ypres, although parenthetically only, to confirm Molina's idea about the different

the inner problematic of Molina's theory. As shown above, God has created a particular temporal line *ab aeterno* [from eternity] and *per propria merita*, but it should also be stressed that predestination, or reprobation, is not 'because of foreseen merits'; it is based on God's will.⁶⁰ From eternity, he inscrutably decides to exercise his external means, such as miracles or preaching, through some people during their life, but never because of their foreseen merits. He gives his aids only on the basis of his *beneplacito*, because of his mercy and his generosity, more to some than to others. As the Italian philosopher Piero Martinetti summarizes:

Anterior to each act of his will, through 1) 'knowledge of intelligence' and 2) 'middle knowledge' God foresaw a) the infinite possible combinations of beings, b) the activities of men, both free and unfree, within the all possible combinations c) the aids which he could have given to them and d) the effects which would result from these aids. Among all these combinations, he actualizes *ab aeterno* the one which subsists today and which will subsist till the end of world ... by virtue of 'middle knowledge' ... The reason for the choice of this [particular] order is solely in God's will and not in any foreseen act or [foreseen] merit of created beings; to the question of why God, even though foreseeing the ruin of many beings, had chosen this [particular] order, Molina can only take refuge in the inscrutability of God's plans.⁶¹

Conclusion

The analysis of Stapleton's *Antidota* on Matthew 11:21 shows a strong Jesuit influence on him, and which was due to his formation in Douai, where he took a clear position in the *de auxiliis* controversy. In the Low Countries in particular, this fiery debate opposed two currents, radical anti-Pelagian Augustinianism, represented by authors such as Michael de Bay and John Hessels, and Molinism. The ideals of Catholic anti-Pelagian Augustinianism seem very close to Calvinist teachings, since they reduce the role played by man's free will in the economy of salvation. By contrast, the humanism-inspired Jesuit School, represented by Luis de Molina, holds to a more optimistic anthropology, stressing the capacity of man to do good works that are meritorious to gaining eternal life. Between these two Catholic schools, anti-Pelagian Augustinianism and Molinism, Stapleton clearly views the latter as representative of the true Catholic teaching, and as the only possible 'antidote' to the 'poison' of Calvin's theology. Indeed, Stapleton relies upon Molina's 'middle knowledge' theory, in order to counter Calvin's notions of prescience and

helps given by God. Jansen taught theology at the faculty of theology of Leuven (1562–64/68) when Thomas Stapleton was a young student there. Jansen's Augustinianism was moderate, in contrast to his fellow-theologians, Michael de Bay and John Hessels. However, references to Jansen (and even to Augustine) do not show an original development of Molina's theory made by Stapleton; indeed, the Spaniard also quoted Jansen and Augustine in passages, which Stapleton clearly read, since he simply summarized Molina's thought by quoting the same sources. See, for instance, Stapleton, *Antidota in Evangelium Matthaei* [11:21], 32 f., and Molina, *Concordia*, q. 14, ar. 13, d. 39, 208. See Cornelius Jansen's *Commentarium in suam concordiam, ac totam historiam evangelicam partes IIII* (Lyon: Landry, 1597 [Leuven: 1572]), II 358–9.

⁶⁰ 'praedestinatio non est propter merita praevisa, ita neque reprobatio, sed in solam liberam voluntatem Dei ea reducenda est', Molina, *Concordia*, q. 23, ar. 4 & 5, d. 4, 309. It is important to note that 'meritum' in Latin is a 'vox media', so that it means not only 'merit', but also 'demerit'. Therefore, God acts after having seen what men would earn, salvation or damnation, but he decrees only on the basis of his own will.

⁶¹ Martinetti, *La libertà*, 50 (my translation).

salvation in relation to human free will. According to these notions, prescience is the knowledge of how 'all things always were, and ever continue ... there is no past or future, but all things are present ... this prescience extends to the whole circuit of the world'.⁶² In clear opposition to this view, Stapleton and Molina consider God's foreknowledge as 'middle knowledge': God foresees men's use of free will, but in spite of this eternal prescience, human actions still retain their contingency. Indeed, *ex hypothesi*, men could even choose to do the opposite from what they actually choose to do. This difference leads to two opposing views of salvation. For Calvin, God, by an eternal decree, through predestination, divides the saved from the damned, without any reference to human merits. Yet according to Stapleton and Molina, good works are an instrumental cause of salvation, working together with the auxiliary grace of God.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Mr. Sean O'Dubhghaill and Drs Jeremy Hovda for their invaluable assistance in translating the text. I wish also to thank Professor Wim François (KU Leuven) for his perceptive and constructive comments.

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⁶² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.21.5.

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