

Synergism and Monergism: which one is scriptural?

Does our salvation depend on (1) God's Grace, or on (2) our own free-will, or on (3) both God's Grace and our Free-Will? The first means that our salvation depends solely on God while in the second one we are the ones who decide whether we want to be saved. The third view implies both God and us contribute in our salvation.

To answer the above question Scripture (Romans 9:21-23) uses a metaphor of God as the potter while we are the clay. God molded us to become either vessel of beauty or vessel for menial use. Whether a piece of clay becomes a vessel of beauty or a vessel for menial use is at the sole discretion of the potter - as clay we can neither choose nor decide. Predestination, which means God is in control in everything, is a doctrine rooted in Scripture (Isaiah 46:9-10). In relation to our salvation, predestination means God from the very beginning chose those He wants to be saved or the Elect. Thus in Matthew 25:34 Christ told the Elect (the sheep) to enter the kingdom of heaven *prepared for them from the foundation (creation) of the world*. Does God also do the same to those who will end up in hell or the Reprobate? Scripture says God desires salvation of all men (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9). He has no intention to put any one in hell (Ezekiel 33:11) and His Grace brings salvation to *all men* (Titus 2:11) through Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22). The phrase "prepared from the foundation of the world" is *not* applied to the goats (the Reprobate) in Matthew 25:41 – the verse plainly says that hell is prepared for the devil and his angels, not for them.

The debate on the relation between our free-will and God's grace in our salvation did not start during sixteenth century Reformation. In early fifth century *Pelagius* and *Caelestius* taught that the *Fall*, i.e. when the first man (Adam) committed the first sin, does not affect all mankind. In other words there is no such thing as Original sin. We can achieve salvation (or sinless state in Pelagius terminology) using our free will - God's grace has only optional role in assisting our free will. Against their teaching, now known as *Pelagianism*, Augustine (died in 430 AD), bishop of Hippo in North Africa, taught the Fall makes all of us born with Original Sin which makes us inclined to sin and therefore unable to reach salvation without God's grace. Augustine did not deny the existence of free will but unless it is moved by God's grace we can do nothing¹. He introduced what is now known as *prevenient* grace, i.e. grace that precedes and governs our free will. Later some tried to have middle ground between Pelagianism and Augustinianism - they admitted the existence of original Sin but we are still able to *initiate* our salvation using our free-will and only then God will assist us with His Grace, a necessity to achieve our salvation. In other words God's grace, though a necessity, is *not* prevenient in our salvation. Their view is now known as *semi-pelagianism*. In a nutshell in pelagianism our salvation depends on our free-will while in semi-pelagianism it depends on our free-will and God's Grace. There is no predestination in both pelagianism and semi-pelagianism - our salvation or damnation depends on us. Pelagianism and semi-pelagianism were condemned in the (second) council held in *Orange* (or *Arausio*) in southern France in 529 AD. Its 25 canons followed by conclusion² declared that (1) the existence of original sin, (2) prevenient grace from God makes us able to do good works, to obey His Commandments and to be saved, (3) God foreordained no one to evil.

Reformation gave rise to a new debate on the issue not addressed in the council of Orange, i.e. when God's grace works in us (1) do we cooperate or work together with it using our free will or (2) are we simply passive which implies His grace alone works in us? The former view is now known as synergism. Catholics and *Arminianist* Protestants are synergists. The name Arminian came from Dutch theologian *Jacob Harmensen* or in Latin *Jacobus Arminius* (1560 – 1609). The latter (and opposing) view is now known as *monergism*. Protestants and "Bible only" Christians who adhere to Reformed theology (Calvinism) based on the teachings of John Calvin (1509 – 1564) and his successors are monergists. Both synergism and monergism teach that our salvation depends on God's Grace, which implies there is predestination, both Election and Reprobation. This may surprise many monergists who tend to confuse synergism with semi-pelagianism³. The following two column table gives comparison between synergism and monergism:

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Synergism

The word synergism comes from *syn* and *ergon* – prefix *syn* means together and (Greek noun) *ergon* means work.

Synergism is theological belief that we cooperate or work together with God's Grace.

When Scripture says we are dead in sins (Ephesians 2:1, 5; Colossians 2:13) it can be interpreted without making analogy to physical death. Scripture says the soul that sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:4); and whoever sins is of the devil (1 John 3:8). Thus our sins do not entitle us to enter heaven.

After the Fall, human nature is wounded but not totally corrupted⁴. We still have free-will but without God's prevenient grace we cannot use it to believe in Christ, to obey God's commandments and to be saved⁵.

The (Greek) word regeneration occurs only twice in New Testament (Matthew 19:28 and Titus 3:5) and neither of them talks about being regenerated as understood by monergists today.

Catholics relate regeneration in Titus 3:5 to Sacrament of Baptism, through which we are regenerated⁹ into new life (Romans 6:4)

The Greek verb *sunergeo*, meaning to work together, appears in New Testament in a number of places, of which three are:

And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked [Greek sunergountos] with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen (Mark 16:20, RSV).

We know that in everything God works [Greek sunergei] for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28, RSV)

Working together [Greek sunergountes] with him

Monergism

The word monergism comes from *mono* and *ergon* – prefix *mono* means single and (Greek noun) *ergon* means work.

Monergism is theological belief that God alone, through His Grace, works in us.

Monergism is based on the interpretation of the phrase "dead in sin or trespasses" in New Testament (Ephesians 2:1, 5; Colossians 2:13). Monergists draw an analogy between "dead" in those verses and physical death, i.e. a physically dead person obviously can do nothing.

After the Fall, human nature is totally deprived⁶. We still have free-will but it always follows our sinful nature⁷. We are spiritually dead even though biologically alive⁸.

Because men are spiritually dead God must first monergistically regenerate them. It is an instantaneous change from spiritual death to spiritual life. Once they become spiritually alive they can come to Christ willingly, i.e. no kicking and screaming¹⁰. In other words monergistic regeneration must take place before faith in Christ¹¹. This is how monergists of today understand regeneration.

Luther related regeneration with Baptism, i.e. he believed in Baptism of Regeneration¹². Calvin understood regeneration as renewal of man, a process that includes not only divine act which originates the new life, but also conversion and sanctification¹³. Despite of this fact Sproul wrote that the Reformers taught the same regeneration as understood by him today⁸. Hodge C. wrote that regeneration, renovation and conversion were used interchangeably and only later, regeneration was used to indicate the instantaneous change from spiritual death to spiritual life¹⁴. Turrentin also considered regeneration as renovation from corrupt nature and part of sanctification¹⁵.

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[God], then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1, RSV)

Scripture also uses corresponding Greek adjective *sunergos*, meaning fellow worker, in a number of places, one of them is:

For we are God's fellow workers [Greek *sunergoi*]; *you are God's field, God's building* (1 Corinthians 3:9, RSV)

According to Sproul only regeneration is monergistic – the rest that includes conversion and sanctification is synergistic¹⁶. Berkhof¹⁷ and Hodge A.A.¹⁸ also taught that only regeneration is monergistic and we do cooperate after being regenerated. Horton, on the other hand considers regeneration and justification as monergistic. While he admits men are not passive during Sanctification he stops short from referring it as synergism¹⁹.

Analogy of Synergism

In a wedding both bride and groom are asked whether she/he is willing to take the other as husband/wife. Unless it is a forced marriage, both bride and groom are free – both can say “Yes” or “No”. Both voluntarily say “Yes” because both are convinced the other is her/his soul mate. Thus *prevenient* and *efficacious* Grace from God makes the Elect voluntarily cooperate with it using their free will, *while they remain free*.

Analogy of Monergism

In a car repair shop when a mechanic decides to repair a damaged car, he/she does not require any cooperation from the car and there is no kicking and screaming from the car either. The car can neither say “Yes” nor “No” and it is not required to do so. Thus God *efficacious* grace *monergistically* works on the Elect, who, like damaged cars, were spiritually dead persons. No cooperation is required and no kicking and screaming either.

Against synergism

1. Synergism makes God's grace depend on our free-will and this contradicts Scripture that says: *So it [election] depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy* (Romans 9:16, RSV).

This could be the most common but false charge monergists make against synergism.

Catholics do believe in Election. It implies the Elect will go to heaven only by grace of God. If they are the one who choose heaven then there is no such thing as Election.

God gives the Elect *prevenient* grace, which is also *efficacious*. The Elect co-operate with *prevenient* grace for simple reason - because it is *efficacious*, not because they have stronger or better free-will than the rest (the Reprobate). Yes, they remain free, which means they can

Against monergism

1. Monergism teaches that God from eternity *unconditionally* decided whom He will monergistically regenerate and therefore will be saved (the Elect) and whom He will bypass from being regenerated and therefore will end up in hell (the Reprobate).

As mentioned earlier Scripture plainly denies that God predestines any to hell but call all men for salvation. Keep in mind that according to Scripture (Numbers 23:19) God will fulfill what He says.

Standard reply from monergists is the word “all” does not mean all without exception, i.e. it refers only to the Elect. For example Berkhof wrote: *the context clearly shows that the “all” or “all men” of Rom. 5:8 and 1 Cor. 15:22 include only those who are in Christ, as contrasted with all who are in Adam. If the word “all” in these passages is not*

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reject this grace, but they don't do so for the same reason - grace given to them is efficacious. We call it efficacious grace for good reason – it is grace that always brings effect. Thus in synergism salvation of the Elect depends on God's grace, not on their free-will. There is no conflict between synergism and Romans 9:16.

Monergists also believe in efficacious grace or effectual calling – in fact they prefer this term to irresistible grace. Irresistible grace, while being the “I” of TULIP, may cause misunderstanding²⁰. To monergists grace is efficacious because the Elect are spiritually dead and no cooperation is required while being regenerated.

Since *many* (not all) monergists believe only regeneration is monergistic and what come after it are synergistic, the same question can be applied to them: If the Elect become spiritually alive after being regenerated, do their conversion and sanctification, both require their co-operation, depend on their free-will or on God's grace? If they answer both depend on God's grace, then they should not have problem with grace-dependent synergism.

2. Synergism makes us contribute in our salvation through good works.

Co-operation does not imply contribution. For example, can the blind man in John 9:1 – 7 claim he contributed in his healing? He did co-operate with Christ by following His instructions but certainly he did not contribute. Does the Greek verb “sunergeo” (meaning to work together) in Romans 8:28 and 2 Corinthians 6:1 imply contribution? Can any missionary claim that his/her missionary works contribute to salvation of others?

Does Scripture say we are required to do good works? When one asked Christ what he must do to inherit eternal life, His answer was (1) to love God with all his heart, soul, strength and mind and (2) to love his neighbor as himself (Luke 10:25-28) – both are embedded inside the Ten Commandments. Thus Trent's Canon XX of the

*interpreted in a limited sense, they would teach, not merely that Christ made salvation possible for all men, but that He actually saves all without exception.*²¹

But 1 Cor. 15:22 says “in Christ shall all”, not “all in Christ shall”. If “all “ in “in Adam shall all die” means absolute all, why the second all does not mean the same? Berkhof statement that interpreting “all” in the above verses will imply universalism (Christ saves all men or all men will go to heaven) is baseless. God offers salvation to all men does not imply that all men will be saved.

Catholics believe that God does *not* give the Reprobate efficacious grace but He still gives all men *sufficient* grace. The Reprobate will end up in hell because of their own will, not because God wants them to be there²². Catholic position on Reprobation is referred as Positive *Conditional* Reprobation²³. Thus to Catholics the word “all” in 1 Corinthians 15:22 and Titus 2:11 means all men without exception and Catholics do not have problem with Christ statement about the goat (the Reprobate) in Matthew 25:41.

2. By grace alone through faith alone is the slogan of monergists. Thus monergists, like any Protestants (including Arminianists who follow synergism) say that our good works are neither necessary for nor the ground of our justification. It is faith alone that justifies and good works are fruits or outcome of faith-alone justification.

The question is: while good works are not necessary for justification are they necessary for salvation? In 1535 Luther wrote that works are necessary for salvation, i.e. faith saves inwardly while works save outwardly²⁵. According to Turrentin good works are necessary for salvation.²⁶ He wrote that good works are required as means and way to possess salvation²⁷, they are highly necessary²⁸ and without them our salvation cannot be achieved.²⁹ For sure Turrentin did explain why what he wrote above in no way contradicts justification by faith

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decree on Justification²⁴, which many monergists cite as proof of salvation by works in Catholic teaching, simply echoes what Christ said.

Does God reward our good works, which Catholics believe only possible with prevenient grace from God, with eternal life? According to Scripture the answer is Yes (John 5:25-29; Romans 2:6-7). Catholics consider this reward as God's gift – it is not something we deserve.

Catholics believe we will enter heaven if we die without any un-repented mortal sin – it depends neither on the amount of good works we do nor on the amount of sin we commit. Scripture says (1 John 5:16-17) there is deadly (mortal) sins and non-deadly ones. Those who die with un-repented mortal sin, even only one, will go to hell. Their good works, no matter how impressive and how many they are, will not save them (Ezekiel 18:24, 26). Since the reward of our good works, possible only with His prevenient grace, is God's gift there is nothing unfair from God's side when He does not take them into account if one dies with one mortal sin. In the same way God does not take into account how many sins we commit if we die without any un-repented mortal sin (Ezekiel 18:21, 27-28). Keep in mind that without God's prevenient grace given through Christ by the Holy Spirit we cannot repent from our sin. Thus in synergism salvation is always by grace and is never by works.

alone³⁰. Sproul wrote faith alone justification is inevitably accompanied by works because it is not by faith that is alone³¹. If good works are necessary or required as fruit or effect of justification, the next question is what is the minimum amount or frequency of good works one must do?

In one video presentation³² Sproul talked about carnal Christian, a Christian who has Christ as Savior but not as Lord. A spiritual Christian is the one who has Christ both as Savior and Lord. Sproul admitted that there is carnal Christians (cf. Romans 7:14-20). According to Sproul a "Christian" who completely carnal is not Christian but a Christian cannot be completely spiritual either. This implies a Christian is to be X % spiritual and (100 – X) % carnal. The question is what is the minimum X (0% < X < 100%)? Sproul did not address this question in the video.

Catholics believe that inclination to sin always remains with us after Baptism, which we can resist with the help of grace (1 Corinthians 10:30)³³. When we fail and commit sin Christ gave the authority to forgive sins to the Church (John 20: 22-23). To Catholics there are no issues of maximum tolerated carnality or minimum required spirituality or minimum amount or frequency of good works. As shown in the left column the only requirement to enter heaven is when one dies without any un-repented mortal sin.

End Notes (underlined emphasis is mine):

¹ *Therefore, my dearly beloved, as we have now proved by our former testimonies from the Holy Scripture that there is in man free determination of will for living rightly and acting rightly; so now let us see what are the divine testimonies concerning the grace of God, without which we are not able to do any good thing.*

Augustine: On Grace and Free Will. Chapter 7

For complete text refer to <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf105.xix.iv.html>

² <http://www.ewtn.com/library/COUNCILS/ORANGE.HTM>

³ *The difference between Augustine and Cassian [John Cassian, died c. 435 AD, was originator of semi-pelagianism] is the difference between monergism and synergism at the beginning of salvation. Cassian*

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and semi-Pelagianism is, with respect to the sinner's initial step toward salvation, decidedly synergistic. God makes his grace available to sinner, but the sinner must, with his infirm will, cooperate with this grace in order to have faith or to be regenerated. Faith precedes regeneration.

Sproul, R.C.: *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will*, page 73

Robert Charles Sproul (born 1939) is president of Reformation Bible College, Reformed theologian, author of numerous books and founder of Ligonier Ministry.

⁴ *Although it is proper to each individual, original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam's descendants. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted.*

Catechism of the Catholic Church # 405

⁵ *When God touches man's heart through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, man himself is not inactive while receiving that inspiration, since he could reject it; and yet, without God's grace, he cannot by his own free will move himself toward justice in God's sight*

Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1993

If any one saith, that without the prevenient inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and without his help, man can believe, hope, love, or be penitent as he ought, so as that the grace of Justification may be bestowed upon him; let him be anathema.

Council of Trent: Canon III of the decree on Justification

⁶ *Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.*

Westminster Confession of Faith, IX.3

⁷ *after the fall, though the will itself remains free, its capacity for choice is limited by the sinfulness of human nature. Human beings retain the capacity of choice, but all choosing occurs in the context of sin.*

Donald K. Mc Kim (Editor): *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, page 145

As Calvinists we hold that the condition of men since the fall is such that if left to themselves they would continue in their state of rebellion and refuse all offers of salvation.

Boettner, L.: *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, page 163

Lorraine Boettner (1901 – 1990) was Reformed theologian and author

However, after the fall, people are bent toward unbelief and sin. The heart chooses that which it approves and desires.

Horton, M.: *For Calvinism*, page 39

Michael Scott Horton (born 1964) is *J. Gresham Machen Professor* of Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California and Editor in chief of *Modern Reformation* magazine.

⁸ *When we considered in an earlier study our condition of original sin, we used the biblical metaphors of death and slavery. By nature we are born into this world DOA, dead on arrival, spiritually although alive*

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biologically. We have no inclination whatsoever in our souls towards the things of God – no interest, no passion, no love. We are dead. Because we are spiritually dead, we are slaves to the sinful impulses and lusts that drive our behavior. We are not just participation in sin; such a description is far too weak. The Bible teaches us again and again that we are slaves to sin. Sin is not only in our nature, but it is our master.

Sproul, R.C.: Romans, St Andrew's Expository Commentary, page 188-189

⁹ *This sacrament [Baptism] is also called the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit [Titus 3:5], for it signifies and actually brings about the birth of water and the Spirit without which no one can enter the kingdom of God [John 3:5].*

Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1215

¹⁰ *Calvinism does not teach and never has taught that God brings people kicking and screaming into the kingdom or has ever excluded anyone who wanted to be there. Remember that the cardinal point of Reformed doctrine of predestination rests on the biblical teaching of man's spiritual death. Natural man does not want Christ. He will only want Christ if God plants a desire for Christ in his heart. Once that desire is planted, those who come to Christ do not come kicking and screaming against their wills. They come because they want to come. They now desire Jesus. They rush to the Savior. The whole point of irresistible grace is that rebirth quickens someone to spiritual life in such a way that Jesus is now seen in his irresistible sweetness. Jesus is irresistible to those who have been made alive to the things of God. Every soul whose hearts beats with the life of God within it longs for the living Christ. All whom the Father gives to Christ come to Christ (John 6:37).*

Sproul, R.C: Chosen by God, pages 122 – 123

¹¹ *The Reformers taught not only that regeneration does precede faith but also it must precede faith. Because of the moral bondage of the unregenerate sinner, he cannot have faith until he is changed internally by the operative, monergistic work of the Holy Spirit. Faith is regeneration's fruit, not its cause.*

Sproul, R.C.: *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will*, pages 23

¹² *In Titus 3:5 St. Paul terms Baptism "a washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit." In the last chapter of Mark we read that "he who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). And in this passage Christ declares that whoever is not born anew of the water and the Holy Spirit cannot come into the kingdom of God. Therefore God's words dare not be tampered with. Of course, we are well aware that Baptism is natural water. But after the Holy Spirit is added to it, we have more than mere water. It becomes a veritable bath of rejuvenation, a living bath which washes and purges man of sin and death, which cleanses him of all sin.*

Luther: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John Chapter 3*
English translation from Luther's Works Vol. 22, page 284

Baptism, then, signifies two things—death and resurrection, that is, full and complete justification. When the minister immerses the child in the water it signifies death, and when he draws it forth again it signifies life. Thus Paul expounds it in Rom. 6[:4]: "We were buried therefore with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." This death and resurrection we call the new creation, regeneration, and spiritual birth.

Luther: *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*
English translation from Luther's Works Vol. 36, page 68

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¹³ *In one word, then, by repentance I understand regeneration, the only aim of which is to form in us anew the image of God, which was sullied, and all but effaced by the transgression of Adam. So the Apostle teaches when he says, "We all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." Again, "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds" and "put ye on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Again, "Put ye on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Accordingly through the blessing of Christ we are renewed by that regeneration into the righteousness of God from which we had fallen through Adam, the Lord being pleased in this manner to restore the integrity of all whom he appoints to the inheritance of life. This renewal, indeed, is not accomplished in a moment, a day, or a year, but by uninterrupted, sometimes even by slow progress God abolishes the remains of carnal corruption in his elect, cleanses them from pollution, and consecrates them as his temples, restoring all their inclinations to real purity, so that during their whole lives they may practice repentance, and know that death is the only termination to this warfare.*

Calvin, J.: *Institutes of Christian Religion*, III.3.9

¹⁴ *In theological language, it is called regeneration, renovation, conversion. These terms are often used interchangeably. They are also used sometimes for the whole process of spiritual renovation or restoration of the image of God, and sometimes for a particular stage of that process.*

With the theologians of the seventeenth century conversion and regeneration were synonymous terms.

By a consent almost universal the word regeneration is now to designate, not the whole work of sanctification, nor the first stages of that work comprehended in conversion, much less justification or any mere external change of state, but the instantaneous change from spiritual death to spiritual life. Regeneration, therefore, is a spiritual resurrection; the beginning of a new life.

Hodge, C.: *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, page 3, 5

Charles Hodge (1797 – 1878) was Reformed theologian.

¹⁵ *Rather, it [sanctification] is used strictly for a real and internal renovation of man by which God delivers the man planted in Christ by faith and justified (by the ministry of the word and the efficacy of the Spirit) more and more from his native depravity and transforms him into his own image.*

But because this real change of man is made by various degrees, either by efficacious calling (which carries with it the donation of faith and of repentance by faith and a translation from a state of sin to a state of grace); or by regeneration (which bespeaks a renovation of the corrupt nature); or by the infusion and practice of holiness, hence sanctification is now extended widely to the whole state of the believer and embraces also calling itself. In this sense, Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews, often designates believers by "those who are sanctified" (tous hagiazomenous, Heb 2:11, 10:14). It is also taken more strictly and properly for renovation after the image of God. This follows justification and is begun here in this life by regeneration and promoted by the exercise of holiness and of good works, until it shall be consummated in the other glory. In this sense, it is now taken passively, inasmuch as it is wrought by God in us; then actively, inasmuch as it ought to be done by us, God performing this work in us and by us.

Turrentin, F.: *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 2, page 689

Francis Turrentin (1623 – 1687) was Swiss-Italian Reformed Theologian.

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¹⁶ *This view is clearly monergistic at the initial point of the sinner's movement from unbelief to faith. The whole process, however, is not monergistic. Once the operative grace of regeneration is given, the rest of the process is synergistic. That is, after the soul has been changed by effectual or irresistible grace, the person himself chooses Christ. God does not make the choice for him. It is the person who believes, not God who believes for him. Indeed the rest of the Christian life of sanctification unfolds in a synergistic pattern.*

There is much confusion about the debate between monergism and synergism. When Augustinianism is defined as monergistic, one must remember that it is monergistic with respect to the beginning of salvation, not to the whole process. Augustinianism does not reject all synergism, but does reject a synergism that is all synergism.

Sproul, R.C.: *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will*, pages 73

Sanctification is not monergistic. It is synergistic. That is, it demands the cooperation of the regenerate believer.

Sproul, R.C.: *Chosen by God*, page 131

¹⁷ *Regeneration, then, is to be conceived monergistically. God alone works, and the sinner has no part in it whatsoever. This, of course, does not mean, that man does not co-operate in later stages of the work of redemption. It is quite evident from Scripture that he does.*

Berkhof, L: *Systematic Theology*, page 473

Louis Berkhof (1873 – 1957) was Reformed Systematic Theologian

But though God only is the author of conversion, it is of great importance to stress the fact, over against a false passivity, that there is' also a certain co-operation of man in conversion.

Berkhof, L: *Systematic Theology*, page 490

It [Sanctification] is essentially a work of God, though in so far as He employs means, man can and is expected to cooperate by the proper use of these means.

Berkhof, L: *Systematic Theology*, page 532

¹⁸ *The act of grace which regenerates, operating within the spontaneous energies of the soul and changing their character, can neither be co-operated with nor resisted. But the instant the soul is regenerated it begins to co-operate with and sometimes, alas! also to resist subsequent gracious influences prevenient and co-operative.*

Hodge, A.A.: *Outlines of Theology*, page 448-449

Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823 – 1886) was Reformed theologian and son of Charles Hodge

¹⁹ *It is vital to distinguish the new birth (or effectual calling) from conversion. In the former, we are passive: acted upon and within by the triune God through the gospel. In the latter we are active (having been "activated" by grace), since we are raised from spiritual death to everlasting life.*

In conversion (unlike regeneration), we are told, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). This does not mean that in conversion our salvation shifts from God's sovereign grace in Christ to our activity and

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cooperation, but that salvation that has been given is worked out by the same Spirit, through the same gospel, in a genuine relationship in which we become covenant partners who are now alive to God in Christ. Apart from our repentance and faith, there is no justification or union with Christ. Yet even this human response is a gift of the Spirit through the gospel.

Does this mean that we are monergists at the point of regeneration and justification, only to become synergists thereafter? Not at all, our faith and grateful obedience are not only responses to God's gift, but are produced in us from beginning to end by the same grace of God.

Horton, M.: *For Calvinism*, page 110, 111

²⁰ *I once heard the president of a Presbyterian seminary declare, "I am not a Calvinist because I do not believe that God brings some people, kicking and screaming against their wills, into the kingdom, while he excludes others from his kingdom who desperately want to be there."*

I was astonished when I heard these words. I did not think it possible that the president of a Presbyterian seminary could have such a gross misconception of his own church's theology. He was reciting a caricature which was as far away from Calvinism as one could get.

Sproul, R.C: *Chosen by God*, pages 122 – 123

²¹ Berkhof, L: *Systematic Theology*, page 396

²² *God predestines no one to hell; for this, a wilful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end.*

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²³ *According to the teaching of the Church, there is conditioned positive reprobation, that is, it occurs with consideration of foreseen future demerits (post et propter praevisa demerita).*

The conditional nature of Positive Reprobation is demanded by the generality of the Divine Resolve of salvation. This excludes God's desiring in advance the damnation of certain men (cf. 1 Tim. 2, 4; Ez. 33,11; 2 Peter 3,9).

St. Augustine teaches: "God is good, God is just. He can save a person without good works, because He is good; but He cannot condemn anyone without evil works, because He is just" (Contra Jul. III 18, 35)

Ott, L.: *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, page 245

Ludwig Ott (1906 – 1985) was Catholic priest and theologian

²⁴ *If any one saith, that the man who is justified and how perfect soever, is not bound to observe the commandments of God and of the Church, but only to believe; as if indeed the Gospel were a bare and absolute promise of eternal life, without the condition of observing the commandments ; let him be anathema.*

Council of Trent: Canon XX of the decree on Justification

²⁵ *I reply to the argument, then, that our obedience is necessary for salvation. It is, therefore, a partial cause of our justification. Many things are necessary which are not a cause and do not justify, as for instance the earth is necessary, and yet it does not justify. If man the sinner wants to be saved, he must necessarily be present, just as he asserts that I must also be present. What Augustine says is true, "He who has created*

Synergism and Monergism: which one is scriptural?

you without you will not save you without you.” Works are necessary to salvation, but they do not cause salvation, because faith alone gives life. On account of the hypocrites we must say that good works are necessary to salvation. It is necessary to work. Nevertheless, it does not follow that works save on that account, unless we understand necessity very clearly as the necessity that there must be an inward and outward salvation or righteousness. Works save outwardly, that is, they show evidence that we are righteous and that there is faith in a man which saves inwardly, as Paul says, “Man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved” [Rom. 10:10]. Outward salvation shows faith to be present, just as fruit shows a tree to be good.

Luther: *The Disputation Concerning Justification*, from Luther’s Works Vol. 34, page 135

²⁶ *Third Question: The Necessity of Good Works*
Are good works necessary to salvation? We affirm

There are three principal opinions about the necessity of good works. First is that of those who (sinning in defect) deny it; such were formerly the Simonians and the modern Epicureans and Libertines, who make good works arbitrary and indifferent, which we may perform or omit at pleasure. The second is that of those who (sinning in excess) affirm and press the necessity of merit and causality; such were the ancient Pharisees and false apostles, who contended that works are necessary to justification. These are followed by the Romanists [Catholics] and Socinians of our day. The third is that of those who (holding the middle ground between these two extremes) neither simply deny, nor simply assert; yet they recognize a certain necessity for them against the Libertines, but uniformly reject the necessity of merit against the Romanists. This is the opinion of the orthodox.

Turrentin, F.: *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*,
Seventeenth Topic: Sanctification and Good Works, Vol. 2, page 702

²⁷ Hence it is evident that the question here does not concern the necessity of merit, causality and efficiency - whether good works are necessary to effect salvation or to acquire it of right. Rather the question concerns the necessity of means, of presence and of connection or order - Are they required as the means and way for possessing salvation? This we hold.

ibid, page 702

²⁸ For since the will of God is the supreme and indispensable rule of our duty, the practice of good works cannot but be considered as highly necessary (which the Lord so often and so expressly recommends and enjoins in his word). There is no need to refer to passages for they are so numerous. Let the following be specially consulted (1 Thess. 4:3, 4; 1 Jn. 4:21; Jn. 13:34; Mt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 1:15, 16; 2 Pet. 1:5-7, 10; Rom. 6:11, 12; 12:1, off.). And so far from leaving to each one the license of living according to his pleasure, it openly condemns and abhors it (Rom. 6:1, 2, 15; Gal. 5:13; 1 Thess. 4:7; 1 Pet. 2:16) and declares that believers are “debtors” who are bound to new obedience by an indissoluble and indispensable bond (Rom. 8:12; 13:7; 1 Jn. 4:11), not only by the necessity of the precept, but also by the necessity of the means.

ibid, page 703

²⁹ For since good works have the relation of the means to the end (Jn. 3:5, 16; Mt. 5:8); of the “way” to the goal (Eph. 2:10; Phil. 3:14); of the “sowing” to the harvest (Gal. 6:7, 8); of the “first fruits” to the mass (Rom. 8:23); of labor to the reward (Mt. 20:1); of the “contest” to the crown (2 Tim. 2:5; 4:8), everyone sees that there is the highest and an indispensable necessity of good works for obtaining glory. It is so great that it cannot be reached without them (Heb. 12:14; Rev. 21:27).

ibid, page 705

Synergism and Monergism: which one is scriptural?

³⁰ *Although we acknowledge the necessity of good works against Epicureans, we do not on this account confound the law and the gospel and interfere with gratuitous justification by faith alone. Good works are required not for living according to the law, but because we live by the gospel; not as the causes on account of which life is given to us, but as effects which testify that life has been given to us.*

ibid, page 705

³¹ *Justification is by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone. Saving faith is not a “lonely” faith, having no works following as a companion.*

Sproul, R.C.: *Faith Alone*, page 156

³² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhgBuHVDtmA>

³³ *An inclination to sin that Tradition calls concupiscence, or, metaphorically, ‘the tinder for sin’ (fomes peccati); since concupiscence ‘is left for us to wrestle with, it cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ.*

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