

**Predestination in Islam:
An Overview, and a Comparison of Apologetic Approaches**

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Introduction

One of the major beliefs about Allāh held by the majority of Muslims is that of his absolute sovereignty. This concept is unavoidable for Muslims since it is explicitly taught in the Qur’ān. For example:

To Him [Allāh] is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: When he decreeth a matter, He saith to it: “Be,” and it is. (2:117)

Allāh doth blot out or confirm what He pleaseth: with Him is the Mother of the Book¹. (13:39)

And Allāh did create you from dust; then from a sperm-drop; then He made you in pairs. And no female conceives, or lays down (her load), but with His knowledge. Nor is a man long-lived granted length of days, nor is a part cut off from his life, but is in a Decree (ordained). All this is easy to Allāh. (35:11)

Whom God does guide,-he is on the right path: whom He rejects from His guidance,-such are the persons who perish. (7:178)

It follows logically from the above that Islam would have a concept of Predestination, and indeed it does. The Arabic term for this is *Qadar*, which has a semantic range that encompasses ideas of “decree” and “ultimate destiny.” This being the case, it should come as no surprise that, just as within Christianity, so in Islam, there are those that embrace the idea of Allāh’s absolute control and decree over all elements of the universe, and those who struggle with it and try to find middle ground between what the Qur’ān and the Hadith say with regard to Allāh’s hand on all events, and human free will. However, the many ayat in the Qur’ān, along with quotations in the Hadith²

¹ *Umm al-Kitab*, the “book” in which Allāh has, supposedly, decreed all things

²For example: “Suraqah ibn Malik ibn Ju'shum came and said: Allāh's Apostle (peace be upon him), explain our religion to us (in a way) as if we have been created just now. Whatever deeds we do today, is it because of the fact that the pens have dried (after recording them) and the destinies have begun to operate or these have effects in future? Thereupon he said: The pens have dried and destinies have begun to operate (Suraqah b. Malik) said: If it is so, then what is the use of doing good deeds? Zuhayr said: Then AbuzZubayr said something but I could not understand that and I said: What did he say? Thereupon he said: Act for everyone is facilitated what he intends to do.” (Muslim 4/2040; no. 1217 in *The Alim*)

Also: “Allāh's Apostle the true and truly inspired, narrated to us, ‘The creation of everyone of you starts with the process of collecting the material for his body within forty days and forty nights in the womb of his mother. Then he becomes a clot of thick blood for a similar period (40 days) and then he becomes like a piece of flesh for a similar period. Then an angel is sent to him (by Allāh) and the angel is allowed (ordered) to write four things: his livelihood, his (date of) death, his deeds, and whether he will be a wretched one or a blessed one (in the Hereafter) and then the soul is breathed into him. So one of you may

seem to affirm the idea that nothing, even the destiny of the soul after life, is outside of Allāh's control.

This paper will seek to summarize what the Qur'ān and the Hadith teach with regard to *Qadar*, compare this to the Biblical view of Predestination, and compare and evaluate two opposing apologetic approaches to the issue from a Christian perspective.

All citations from the Qur'ān (Yusuf Ali's translation) and the Hadith are taken from The Alim CD-ROM, version 6 (Silver Spring, Md: ISL Software Corporation), 2000.

The Qur'ān and the Hadith on Predestination

In essence, Islam teaches that Allāh is the creator of all things, and it is he who has ordained all that will happen. When a person is conceived in the womb, Allāh writes the path of that person's life, so it cannot be anything other than what Allāh has decreed. Allāh will then so order the man's life and draw him toward good deeds or evil deeds so that he may be properly judged according to his conduct and, at the end of his life, receive the just reward for the life he has lived: Paradise or Hell. In the course of his life, the man may be tempted by *jinn*, which are spiritual beings that are suppose to be morally neutral, but have a tendency to draw people into sin. However, his ultimate end has been decreed by Allāh, and the balance of his life, whether he has succumbed to sin more than he has striven for good, has also been planned and decreed by Allāh.

This is, of course, a very brief statement of the concept without the nuances and explanations that would normally be provided by the Muslim theologian to try to blunt the harsh edges of what this says. Historically, objections have been raised within the Islamic community along the lines of: "if Allāh has so decreed every aspect of my life to the very end, why should I strive? What's the point?" and "if Allāh is able to decree anyone to Paradise, then isn't Allāh unjust if he does not decree all to Paradise?" In

do (good) deeds characteristic of the people of Paradise so much that there is nothing except a cubit between him and Paradise, but then what has been written for him decides his behavior and he starts doing (evil) deeds characteristic of the people of Hell (Fire) and (ultimately) enters Hell (Fire); and one of you may do (evil) deeds characteristic of the people of Hell (Fire) so much so that there is nothing except a cubit between him and Hell (Fire), then what has been written for him decides his behavior and he starts doing (good) deeds characteristic of the people of Paradise and ultimately) enters Paradise." (Bukhari 11/477; 9.546 in The Alim).

response to these objections, the Muslim theologian might suggest that Allāh decrees both the means and the ends, so one cannot help but strive, even though Allāh has decreed the result beforehand. Allāh does not force one to act, because he so affects the desires of men that they will want to act in the way Allāh ordains:

Verily, (the ends) ye strive for are diverse. So he who gives (in charity) and fears (Allāh), And (in all sincerity) testifies to the best,- We will indeed make smooth for him the path to Bliss. But he who is a greedy miser and thinks himself self-sufficient, And gives the lie to the best,- We will indeed make smooth for him the path to Misery; Nor will his wealth profit him when he falls headlong (into the Pit). Verily We take upon Ourselves to guide, And verily to Us (belong) the End and the Beginning. (Qur'ān 42:4-13)

To the accusation that Allāh is unjust to punish any when he could ordain all men to Paradise, one response is that if mercy belonged to man and Allāh stole it from him, that would be unjust; but mercy belongs to Allāh and he is free to distribute it however he wishes.

Ultimately, though, Muslims are not encouraged to dwell too deeply on the subject of *Qadar*, since it involves speculation in things that only Allāh knows. Instead of becoming concerned with questions of Allāh's justice, and one's own decreed end, the Muslim should concern himself with obedience and faithfulness to Allāh, and let Allāh be concerned with the things he has prescribed.

Critiquing *Qadar* : The Geisler Approach

In his book Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross, co-written with Abdul Saleeb³, Dr. Norman Geisler provides a critique of this teaching (pp. 140-145 of the first edition). Geisler is solidly Arminian in his theology, and has attacked Reformed doctrine, particularly Calvin's Five Points, in various fora, always with the same misunderstandings and misrepresentations.⁴ As with most Arminians, Geisler holds to the idea that God has chosen an undefined group of people that will be saved, but, even

³ Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross, (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Mi, 1993)

⁴These have all been adequately documented and answered in James R. White, The Potter's Freedom, (Calvary Press: Amityville, Ny, 2000).

though He loves all men equally and desires each one to be saved, He has given each man the ability to choose whether or not he will belong to that number. God provides His Church, His Word, and many evidences of His existence to all creation, and extends the offer of salvation to all of fallen mankind through the shed blood of His final and greatest gift: His Son, who sacrificed Himself on the cross for every person who has and ever will live. However, it is up to each sinful man to accept God's offer in order to be saved. If man does not accept, then he will have consigned himself to eternal punishment, despite God's loving efforts to save him. If he does accept, that man is welcomed into Heaven when he dies.

After seeing what Islam teaches with regard to Predestination, it comes as no surprise to learn that Geisler takes issue with the Muslim view. The following evaluation of his critique is by no means in defense of the Muslim position, but to illustrate how Geisler's own theological position has weakened his apologetic response.

Geisler breaks his critique of the doctrine of *Qadar* into four categories: the logical problem, the moral problem, the theological problem, and the metaphysical problem. The logical problem he sees with *Qadar* is the fact that the Qur'ān depicts Allāh acting in contradictory ways, and describing him in contradictory terms. "For example, God is 'the One Who leads astray,' as well as 'the One Who guides.' He is 'the One Who brings damage,' as also does Satan" (p. 141). He finds the Muslim response that these contradictions are not part of Allāh's essence but expressions of his will to be "inadequate." As Geisler points out, one's actions flow from one's essence. In other words, a rational person acts in a way that is in character with who he is. That being the case, the God of Islam would be a God of contradictory essence.

The moral problem, according to Geisler, is simply that Islam's "extreme determinism" robs man of moral responsibility for his actions. Since Allāh ordains a man's path, and causes him to act in ways that lead to either Heaven or Hell, Allāh is unjust to condemn man for sin over which man has no power. He claims that the attempts by Muslims to deny this only work if they are willing to distort what the Qur'ān plainly teaches.

Geisler's theological problem with *Qadar* is that, since in Islam Allāh wills both the faith of the believer and the unbelief of the unbeliever, Allāh is thus made to be the author of evil.

Finally, the metaphysical problem Geisler sees is in the fact that this concept of absolute sovereignty has led to the idea that since Allāh's will is the only will, then Allāh is the only one who actually acts: the rest of creation is passive, waiting for Allāh to move. Further, some have suggested that if no-one but Allāh has the ability to act, then nothing else has true being but Allāh. This has led some mystical Islamic sects to seek the annihilation of one's individuality.

Problems with Geisler's Critique

The Logical Problem

This author had the mixed blessing of studying Hebrew under a professor who was clearly very adept in Semitic languages, but was also quite virulently anti-Christian. As a result, he was able to give an accurate presentation of the structure and rules of Hebrew grammar, and yet present passages to translate that were, it seemed, chosen because of their "problematic" nature with regard to Christian theology. One such passage was Isaiah 45:7: עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם וּבֹרָא רָע. He would give a little half-smile as he reminded the class that the Hebrew literally means "making peace and creating evil," no doubt hoping to cause discomfort to those in the room who were compelled by faith to accept this declaration as the Word of God. His translation was accurate, though: there is no getting around the fact that the Hebrew text is attributing to God the ability to form all that is good and all that is bad. The first half of the verse also attributes to God the creation of both light and darkness. Ultimately, what the prophet is communicating here is precisely what Geisler is objecting to: the all-encompassing and all-pervasiveness of God's sovereignty. If God did not bring about both good and bad, if He is only responsible for all that is good, then where did the other come from? Is there a creator other than God? The Bible firmly insists that there is not. Arminians object by arguing

that God is not the author of evil⁵, and this lies at the heart of Geisler's response. A later section of this paper will deal more fully with the issue of the origin of sinful acts, but suffice it to say that the Muslim could easily counter Geisler's logical objection by citing this and other passages in the Old Testament that show God's sovereign control extending to opposite extremes, and asking him to explain the contradictory nature of his God. If God only leads people to do good things, then why did He cause Joseph's brothers to sell Joseph into slavery (Genesis 50:20), and harden Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 7:3)? Can Geisler offer a more satisfactory explanation than the Muslim?

The Moral Problem

Again, the Muslim could object to this criticism by pointing Geisler to passages where God claims that sinful men have acted according to His plan (Genesis 50:20; Exodus 7:3; Isaiah 10:5-14; John 19:11; Acts 4:27-28). While Geisler loves to give man the ability to exercise free will outside of God's direct influence, he does so contrary to the testimony of Scripture. Man does not and indeed *cannot* act outside of God's purposes. When discussing the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled as proof of His divinity, Geisler makes the following statement:

But what are we to say about the prophecies involving miracles? He just happened to make the blind man see? He just happened to be resurrected from the dead? These hardly seem like chance events. If there is a God who is in control of the universe, as we have said, then chance is ruled out... But it is not just a logical improbability that rules out this theory; it is the moral implausibility of an all-powerful and all-knowing God letting things get out of control so that all his plans for prophetic fulfillment are ruined by someone who just happened to be in the right place at the right time. (Answering Islam, pp. 249-250)

It appears that Geisler does not really grasp the level of control that God has to have over the universe to be sure that prophecy is fulfilled precisely as He intends. In a game of chess between Fred and George, Fred may have worked out a strategy for

⁵This phrase, while not actually stated in this way in the Bible, is supposedly a summary of passages such as Deuteronomy 32:4 ("His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. He is a faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He") and Psalm 5:4 ("You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil"). While these passages reflect God's hatred of evil, they do not, however, speak to whether or not God would initiate evil for a greater, holy purpose. See the discussion later in the paper.

moving one of his pawns to George's end of the board in order that it might become a queen. His strategy may be first-class, but he cannot guarantee that George has not discerned his intentions and has devised a number of measures to hinder and possibly thwart Fred's progress. Moreover, how can Fred be sure that he won't be distracted by something and forget the strategy, or perhaps be overtaken by a sudden need for the bathroom which takes him away from the game and gives George, an unscrupulous opponent, the opportunity to rig the game in his favor? For Fred to be infallibly certain that his pawn will reach its intended destination, he must have complete control over all factors, including his opponent's strategy, the course of all of George's pieces, and even the movements of his bladder. R. C. Sproul has often, and well, said that there is no such thing as a maverick molecule in the universe. If there was, there would be a chance that a prophecy may fail to come to pass, or a decree of God might not stand. It seems, therefore, that Geisler does not appreciate how important it is for God to have complete control even over the seemingly free-will actions of men, otherwise Moses might not have gone to Egypt, Judas might not have betrayed Jesus, or Pilate may have decided not to have Jesus crucified.

The Theological Problem

The idea that if God ordains evil He becomes the author of evil has already been addressed to some extent. For now, it is enough to re-state that the Bible plainly teaches that God is behind all of the actions of men, whether good or bad. The question is not, therefore, "does the Bible give God the ability to ordain evil?" but rather, how do you deal with the fact that God does ordain both good and evil actions. It does not seem that Geisler has any better response to this than the Muslims.

The Metaphysical Problem

While it may be true that mystical Islamic groups have taken this doctrine to an extreme and formed outrageous belief systems as a result, that is hardly an argument against the doctrine itself. The existence of Gnosticism does not make the doctrine of Christ's deity suspect, nor does the existence of Arianism invalidate the doctrine of

Christ's humanity. While these might be dangers resulting from this doctrine, they by no means refute it.

The Problem with *Qadar*

Having established the fact that the concept of God's sovereign control over all creation, even to the final destination of one's eternal soul, is a Biblical concept, and having presented passages to demonstrate this (to which could be added Romans 9, Acts 13:48, and Psalm 139, which further show that all things in life are under God's eternal decree, including salvation), it remains now to offer a more Biblical critique of the Islamic concept of *Qadar*.

The main problem with the "Geisler Approach" to this subject is that, given his predisposition to reject any notion of God's sovereignty that would appear to rob man of his free will, he tends to ignore a lot of the Biblical evidence for Predestination that the astute Muslim could easily throw back at him, leaving him in a position of having to refute both Islamic and Biblical ideas of the sovereignty of God while trying to defend his Arminian position upon very shaky theological ground. In other words, Geisler's Arminianism blinds him to the fundamental problem with the Islamic doctrine of *Qadar*. It is not the fact that God is able to decree a man's path and predetermine his final destiny that is the major theological problem with the Islamic view; rather it is the fact that Allāh appears to do this *without any reason or motive for so doing*. Why does Allāh choose to send one man to Paradise and another to Hell? Regardless of whatever else the Muslim might say, the bottom-line of his response can only be because that is Allāh's will. How can the Muslim be assured that Allāh has not decreed that he will suffer in Hell at the end of his life? Ultimately, he cannot. He can hope that any good he has done is as a result of Allāh's intention to give him eternal Bliss, but he cannot know for sure that Allāh might snatch that from him at the end. If there is no rhyme or reason to why a man goes to Heaven, why should there be one for sending a man to Hell?

There is a concept in Islam of man's "natural inclination," which is called *fitrah*. At birth, each person's *fitrah* is pure, free from erroneous ideas, and ready to take in sound teaching. However, soon after birth, this *fitrah* is corrupted by *jinn* (spirits that tend to lead a man to sin) and devils. Allāh will intervene and protect and guide those he

wishes to lead ultimately to Heaven, and simply leave the rest to be led astray by the *jinn* and the devils (though he guides the path of these people too, to make sure they do not suddenly decide to resist these temptations and seek out paths of righteousness contrary to Allāh's decree for their lives).

This idea of *fitrah* is clearly far removed from the Biblical idea of Original Sin. The Bible teaches that as a result of Adam's transgression in the Garden of Eden, sin entered the world and caused Adam and his progeny to experience spiritual death (Romans 5:12). As a result of this, every person is born with a natural inclination to sin (Romans 3:9-18). It is this natural inclination towards sin that results in every person being under God's just wrath, and subject to final and eternal punishment in Hell (Romans 1:18-32). So, rather than man being born in a neutral state that God either preserves or corrupts according to what final end He has decreed for that man, Biblically speaking, man is born in a corrupt state, subject to the full wrath of God against his sin, and dependent upon God's mercy in Christ to save him.

To be fair, Geisler does point out that it is man's sinful original state that requires the work of a Saviour to pay the penalty for man's sin: to stand in his place and take the wrath of God upon Himself. However, he fails to see how vital this is to understanding the true nature of the Biblical doctrine of Predestination. In Islam, since all men are born with a pure *fitrah*, there appears to be no reason why Allāh could not tell the *jinn* and the devils to leave his creation alone and allow all men to follow the way of truth leading to Heaven. Perhaps this is really why Muslims are not encouraged to think too long and hard over the doctrine of *Qadar*: the picture it paints of Allāh is not at all flattering. Rather than a loving God who sacrifices His Son to allow some of those justly condemned to go free, the God of Islam is a capricious God who takes a group of innocent people and sends some to burn in Hell, and others to follow Him to Paradise.

Biblical Predestination

In Biblical Predestination, all men deserve Hell, and God could show His perfect justice by delivering all of mankind to eternal destruction because of their sin. However, God chooses to show perfect mercy too by delivering some of those condemned, sending His Son to atone for their sin that they might enter Heaven. God is not obliged to do this,

but it is an act of His supreme grace. So, those who are condemned to Hell cannot complain that they were not saved: they are getting what their sins deserve, and God has acted justly towards them. Those who receive the gift of eternal life cannot boast in anything they have done because they, like the others, deserved eternal death, but by God's grace, are the recipients of everlasting life. So God is glorified in both the execution of His perfect justice, and in the manifestation of His perfect grace and mercy (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Mention has been made already of the fact that, according to Islamic theology, when Allāh ordains someone's eternal destiny, He will also either protect that man from corruption, or deliver him to the paths of corruption, so that at the end of his life, his final state will be plain from the kind of life he has led. This would be like sentencing an infant to end up in prison when he is thirty, and then making sure that for the first thirty years of his life he lives in the kind of environment, and associates with the kind of people, that will ensure he will be in trouble with the law when he reaches that designated age. In contrast to this, the Bible speaks of God changing a man's heart of stone to a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26-27), so that those He has decreed to be saved will, upon conversion, have their hearts that were cold to God and the things of God changed to hearts that desire to be honoring and pleasing to God. In Ephesians 2, Paul describes this transformation when he speaks of the Ephesian believers (numbering himself among them) at one time being "dead in trespasses and sins" and living "in the lusts of our flesh" and being "by nature children of wrath." This is the natural state of man: he is a God-hater, following his own desires, deserving of death but not concerned to do anything about it. However, Paul continues:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)

God acts upon the hearts of those he chooses and enlivens them so that they no longer crave their own desires but long to please God and pursue His righteousness. He

doesn't have to persuade them to follow Him: they now possess that desire for themselves. Those who are unconverted remain as God-haters without the desire to please God.

Absolute Sovereignty and the Purposes of God

To return to an earlier question: how is it that God can cause or create good and evil and not be either contradictory in nature, or the author of evil? The fact that the Bible teaches God's sovereignty over all types of action has already been demonstrated through the citation of various passages, and so this question is not one that can, or should, be avoided.

In the first place, it should be evident that, unlike the God of the Qur'ān and the Hadith, the God of the Bible is perfectly loving, perfectly just, and perfectly merciful.⁶ So God's nature is defined by these things. God cannot be malicious, unjust, or callous any more than God could sin. So when God turns the Assyrians against Israel, or puts it in the heart of the Roman and Jewish leaders to crucify Christ, or whatever acts of evil may be done by evil men, while the hearts of those performing the acts are motivated by evil, God is using their wickedness for His good and holy purposes. This is precisely what Joseph is saying in Genesis 50:20: the evil intentions of the sinful hearts of his brothers were actually for the glorious and righteous purpose of God in saving many people. From the very beginning, God's motives were pure, and even though sinful acts were necessary for the outworking of His plan, God did not sin, and He did not need to coerce Joseph's brothers into sin. Joseph's brothers willfully, and gladly committed the sin. For this reason, God is not the author of sin, because God's intentions were never evil; there is no sin in God, so God cannot "author" sin. However, the brothers intended evil from the beginning, and committed sin from hearts that were naturally disposed to wickedness.

⁶ One point that Geisler and Saleeb make well is the fact that Muslim theologians refuse to say that Allāh can be defined by abstract concepts such as "love" or "hate": Allāh is loving, compassionate, wrathful, or whatever he needs to be as he sees fit at that time. Of course, this raises all sorts of issues with regard to Allāh's moral condition, since this proposes that Allāh is morally neutral, leaving open the possibility that he might act capriciously, or according to the whim of the moment, with no real long-term high moral objective (e.g., the salvation and spiritual development of his people).

Romans 8:28 declares: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Paul does not say that God only works in good things, but He works in *all* things; this would include the sinful actions of men. Why would God work in all things, including sinful actions? The latter part of the verse speaks to God’s motivation: the good of those who love Him, i.e., His people. Every single movement of every atom or particle in the universe has been purposed by God for the benefit of His people. Every birth, every death, every sunrise, every hurricane, every act of benevolence, every act of evil—all with the purpose of bringing about good for the People of God, the Bride of Christ, His Church. This is in stark contrast to the God of Islam who condemns the innocent to Hell, chooses equally innocent people for Heaven, and rules the universe on a whim.

The doctrine of *Qadar* is still debated within Muslim circles, and there are many discussions available of the subject, both in book form and online. The intention of this paper, however, was to get to the heart of the issue that the Christian might be equipped to use this as a springboard for evangelism to Muslim neighbors and co-workers. May the Lord be pleased to use it for His glory.