

QUESTION 24

The Book of Life

Next we must consider the book of life. And on this topic there are three questions: (1) What is the book of life? (2) Whose life is it the book of? (3) Can anyone be erased from the book of life?

Article 1

Is the book of life the same as predestination?

It seems that the book of life is not the same as predestination:

Objection 1: Ecclesiasticus 24:32 says, “All these things are the book of life,” and a Gloss adds, “that is, the New and Old Testaments.” But this is not predestination. Therefore, the book of life is not the same as predestination.

Objection 2: In *De Civitate Dei* 20 Augustine says that the book of life is a certain divine force by which it will come about that “each one remembers all his own good or bad works.” But a divine force seems to pertain more to an attribute of God’s power than to predestination. Therefore, the book of life is not the same as predestination.

Objection 3: Reprobation is opposed to predestination. Therefore, if the book of life were predestination, then there would be a book of death as well as a book of life.

But contrary to this: A Gloss on Psalm 68:29 (“Let them be blotted out of the book of the living”) says, “This book is the knowledge of God by which He has predestined to life those whom He foreknew.”

I respond: In the case of God, ‘the book of life’ is predicated metaphorically, according to a likeness taken from human affairs.

For it is customary among men that those who are chosen for some role should be recorded in a book, e.g., soldiers or advisors, who were at one time called ‘recorded fathers’ (*patres conscripti*). Now it is clear from what has been said (q. 23, a. 4) that all the predestined are elected by God to have eternal life. Therefore, the recording of the predestined is itself called ‘the book of life’.

However, something is metaphorically said to be recorded in one’s intellect when one holds it firmly in his memory—this according to Proverbs 3:1 (“Forget not my law, and let your heart keep my commandments,” and a little later, “Write them in the tables of your heart”). For things are likewise recorded in material books in order to aid the memory. Hence, God’s knowledge, by which He firmly retains the fact that He has predestined some to eternal life, is itself called the book of life. For just as the writing in the book is a sign of things that are to be done, so too God’s knowledge is a certain sign to Himself of those who are to be led to eternal life—this according to 2 Timothy 2:19 (“The sure foundation of God stands firm, having this seal: the Lord knows who are His”).

Reply to objection 1: ‘The book of life’ can have two meanings:

In one sense, the book of life is (a) the recording of those who have been elected to life, and this is the sense in which we are now talking about the book of life. In a second sense, ‘the book of life’ is the recording of those things that lead to life—and this in two ways: either (b) it is a recording of things that are yet to be done, and this is the sense in which the New and Old Testaments are called the book of life; or (c) else it is a recording of things that have already been done, and this is the sense in which the book of life is a divine force which brings it about that each one remembers what he himself has done.

In the same way, a book can be called ‘the book of war’ if it is either (a) a book in which those chosen for the military are recorded, or (b) a book in which the military arts are passed on, or (c) a book in which the deeds of the soldiers are recorded.

Reply to objection 2: The answer to this objection is clear from what has just been said.

Reply to objection 3: It is customary that only those who are chosen should be recorded—and not those who are rejected. Hence, there is no book of death for reprobation corresponding to the book of life for predestination.

Reply to argument for the contrary: There is a conceptual distinction between the book of life and predestination. For the former implies a knowledge of predestination, as is also clear from the Gloss adduced here.

Article 2

Is the book of life only about the life of glory had by the predestined?

It seems that the book of life is not only about the life of glory had by the predestined:

Objection 1: The book of life is the knowledge of life. But it is through His own life that God knows every other life. Therefore, ‘the book of life’ is predicated principally with respect to God’s life and not just with respect to the life of the predestined.

Objection 2: Just as the life of glory is from God, so too is the life of nature. Therefore, if the knowledge of the life of glory is called the book of life, then the knowledge of the life of nature will likewise be called the book of life.

Objection 3: There are some who are elected to grace without being elected to the life of glory; this is clear from John 6:71: “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” But as has been explained (a. 1), the book of life is the recording of God’s election. Therefore, the book of life is also about the life of grace.

But contrary to this: As has been explained (a. 1), the book of life is the knowledge of predestination. But predestination has to do with the life of grace only insofar as the life of grace is ordered toward glory. For those who have grace and yet fall short of glory are not predestined. Therefore, the book of life is only about the life of glory.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), ‘the book of life’ implies a certain recording or knowledge of those who have been elected to life. Now one is elected to what does not belong to him by his nature. Again, one is elected to what has the nature of an end; for instance, a soldier is elected or conscripted not for the sake of being armed, but for the sake of fighting. For this is the proper function to which soldiers are ordered.

Now as has been explained (q. 12, a. 4 and q. 23, a. 1), the life of glory is an end that lies beyond nature. Hence, the book of life has to do properly with the life of glory.

Reply to objection 1: God’s life, even insofar as it is a glorious life, is natural to God. Hence, with respect to God there is no election and, consequently, no book of life, either. For we do not say that a man is elected to have sensory powers or any of the other things that follow upon his nature.

Reply to objection 2: The answer to this objection is clear from what has just been said. For there is no election or book of life with respect to natural life.

Reply to objection 3: The life of grace does not itself have the nature of an end, but instead has the nature of a means to an end. Hence, one is not said to be elected to the life of grace except insofar as the life of grace is ordered toward glory. Because of this, those who have grace and yet fall short of glory are not said to be elected absolutely speaking; rather, they are elected only in a certain respect. Similarly, such persons are said to be written in the book of life not absolutely speaking, but only in a certain respect, viz., insofar as it is part of God’s knowledge and ordination that, because of their

participation in grace, they were to have a certain ordering toward eternal life.

Article 3

Is anyone erased from the book of life?

It seems that no one is erased from the book of life:

Objection 1: In *De Civitate Dei* 20 Augustine says, “The book of life is God’s foreknowledge, which cannot be mistaken.” But it is impossible for anything to be subtracted from God’s foreknowledge or, similarly, from His predestination. Therefore, no one can be erased from the book of life.

Objection 2: Whatever exists in a thing exists in it in the mode of the thing it exists in. But the book of life is something eternal and immutable. Therefore, whatever exists in it exists there immutably and indelibly, and not temporarily.

Objection 3: Erasing is opposed to writing. But no one can be written into the book of life *de novo*. Therefore, no one can be erased from it, either.

But contrary to this: Psalm 68:29 says, “Let them be erased from the book of the living.”

I respond: Some claim that no one can be erased from the book of life *in reality*, but that someone can be erased from it *according to human opinion*. For often in Sacred Scripture something is said to be done when it becomes known. Accordingly, some are said to be inscribed in the book of life insofar as men believe them to be inscribed therein because of the righteousness they see in them at present. However, when it becomes clear—either in this life or in the future—that they have fallen from righteousness, then they are said to be erased from the book of life. This is also the way in which such deletions are explained in a Gloss on Psalm 68 (“Let them be erased from the book of the living”).

However, not being erased from the book of life is counted among the rewards of the just in Apocalypse 3:5 (“He that shall overcome shall thus be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the book of life”), and what is thus promised to the saints does not exist just in human opinion. Thus, one can claim that being erased or not being erased from the book of life has to do not just with human opinion, but with reality as well. For the book of life is the record of those who have been ordered toward eternal life, and someone is ordered toward eternal life by two elements, viz., (a) by God’s predestination, and this is an ordination that never fails, and (b) by grace. For if anyone has grace, then by that very fact he is worthy of eternal life; and this ordination sometimes fails, since some who are ordered, by the grace they have, toward possessing eternal life fall short of eternal life because of mortal sin.

Therefore, those who are ordered *by God’s predestination* toward having eternal life are inscribed absolutely speaking in the book of life, since they are inscribed there as those who will have eternal life *in its own right*. And these will never be erased from the book of life.

By contrast, those who are ordered toward having eternal life not by God’s predestination, but *only by grace*, are said to be inscribed in the book of life not absolutely speaking, but only in a certain respect, since they are inscribed there as those who are going to have eternal life not in its own right, but *only in its cause*. And these can be erased from the book of life, where the deletion has to do not with God’s knowledge—as if God might foreknow something and afterwards not know it—but rather with the thing that is known. For God knows that someone is antecedently ordered toward eternal life and is afterwards not ordered toward it, because he falls from grace.

Reply to objection 1: As has been explained, the deletion has to do with the book of life not on the part of God’s foreknowledge—as if there were some mutability in God—but rather on the part of the

things foreknown, which are mutable.

Reply to objection 2: Even though things exist in God in an immutable way, they are nonetheless mutable in themselves. And it is to this that the deletion from the book of life pertains.

Reply to objection 3: In the same way that someone is said to be erased from the book of life, so too someone can be said to be inscribed there *de novo*—either according to human opinion or insofar as he begins *de novo* to have an ordering toward eternal life through grace. This is also included in God's knowledge, though God does not know it *de novo*.