**ROSES Smell Better than a TULIP**

https://bellatorchristi.com/2016/10/10/roses-smell-better-than-a-tulip/

I have never been a connoisseur when it comes to flowers. In fact, on one Valentine’s Day, I sought to be a good husband and bought my wife some flowers. The store where I purchased them had a great deal. So, again thinking that I was being a good husband, I bought what I thought were roses. Unfortunately, it turned out that the flowers were tulips, explaining why the store had such a great deal on the flowers. My wife and I had a good laugh over my blunder. While the tulips were nice, roses would have been much better.

Theologians like acronyms. Calvinists from the time of the Synod of Dort have contrived an acronym explaining the core concepts of Calvinism. The acronym is TULIP. TULIP stands for the following:

***Total depravity:***Man[[1]](https://bellatorchristi.com/2016/10/10/roses-smell-better-than-a-tulip/" \l "_ftn1) is incapable of saving himself and is paralyzed by a sin nature.

***Unconditional election:***God has elected to save some and allows others to be condemned.

***Limited atonement:***Christ only died for the elect and not for the world.

***Irresistible grace:***Man does not have the ability to respond to the grace of God by himself. He needs the Holy Spirit to help him respond.

***Perseverance of the saints:***The elect will persevere in their faith.

The acronym holds problems with many texts of the Bible. For instance, the Bible notes that a person can resist the Spirit of God, even to the point of quenching the Spirit of God (Acts 7:51; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). In addition, there are several passages that indicate that God wishes to save all even though not all will be saved (2 Peter 3:19; Ezekiel 18:23). Also, the Bible presents the idea of a degree of human free will, something that otherwise makes the law of God seem somewhat bizarre.

Molinists, Congruists, Arminians, and even some Calvinists have adopted a better acronym to describe the truths of the Bible. Kenneth Keathley, in his book *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach,*provides an acronym first presented by Timothy George.[[2]](https://bellatorchristi.com/2016/10/10/roses-smell-better-than-a-tulip/" \l "_ftn2) The acronym is ROSES. It is interesting that George is a Calvinist and Keathley a Molinist and they both agree that ROSES is much preferable to TULIP. This brings to mind, what does the acronym ROSES indicate? ROSES represents the following:

***Radical depravity:***This takes the place of total depravity, the T of TULIP. Radical depravity, as Keathley notes, “more correctly emphasizes that every aspect of our being is affected by the fall and renders us incapable of saving ourselves or even of wanting to be saved.”[[3]](https://bellatorchristi.com/2016/10/10/roses-smell-better-than-a-tulip/" \l "_ftn3) Radical depravity allows for libertarian viewpoints, especially soft libertarianism as argued by Keathley, as it “contends that interaction between character and free choice is a two-way street, providing for a better model of human responsibility.”[[4]](https://bellatorchristi.com/2016/10/10/roses-smell-better-than-a-tulip/" \l "_ftn4) The varying ideas of determinism and libertarianism will be discussed in a future article.

***Overcoming grace:***This doctrine takes the place of irresistible grace, the I of TULIP. Overcoming grace is the idea that God’s continual calling overcomes the wicked nature of a person to allow a free response. Keathley presents an “ambulatory model”[[5]](https://bellatorchristi.com/2016/10/10/roses-smell-better-than-a-tulip/" \l "_ftn5) which recognizes two fundamental principles: the monergistic grace of God (that is, God is the only worker in salvation); and grace is resistible (that is, God offers grace to all, but the difference is the rebellion of the unbeliever as contrasted with the reception of the believer).[[6]](https://bellatorchristi.com/2016/10/10/roses-smell-better-than-a-tulip/" \l "_ftn6)

***Sovereign election:***Sovereign election takes the place of unconditional election, the U of TULIP. This doctrine affirms that God desires the salvation of all, but provides it for a few. This is possible to the three modes of knowledge that God holds: natural knowledge, which indicates God’s knowledge of all necessary truths; God’s free knowledge, which refers to those things which will occur in the future; and God’s middle knowledge, which represents God’s knowledge of what free creatures would do in certain circumstances. Sovereign election upholds both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of mankind.

***Eternal life:***The doctrine of eternal life replaces the P (perseverance of the saints) of TULIP. Instead of claiming that the elect will be saved and persevere, eternal life emphasizes that believers are transformed by the grace of God and are given a faith that will remain. The former leaves one in a constant state of flux, whereas the latter provides assurance as indicated when fruits of the Spirit and the internal witness of the Spirit are observed.

***Singular redemption:***The last doctrine, singular redemption, replaces the L (limited atonement) of TULIP. Simply put, singular redemption holds that Christ’s death was sufficient for the salvation of all, but efficient only for the elect, those who would respond to the Spirit’s call.

ROSES is a much better acronym for the truths of Scripture than is TULIP. As noted earlier, Timothy George, the innovator of the acronym, was himself a Calvinist. The acronym provides the ability to naturally accept the two fundamental truths provided in Scripture in that God is sovereign and that people are responsible for their actions. Thus, of the array of flowery acronyms, I much prefer the smell of ROSES to that of a TULIP.

*© October 10, 2016. Brian Chilton.*

**Sources Cited**

George, Timothy. *Amazing Grace: God’s Initiative—Our Response.*Nashville: Lifeway, 2000.

Keathley, Kenneth. *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach.*Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010.

**Notes**

[[1]](https://bellatorchristi.com/2016/10/10/roses-smell-better-than-a-tulip/" \l "_ftnref1) The terms “man” and “he” are used in this article to describe individuals of both sexes.

[[2]](https://bellatorchristi.com/2016/10/10/roses-smell-better-than-a-tulip/" \l "_ftnref2) Timothy George, *Amazing Grace: God’s Initiative—Our Response*(Nashville: Lifeway, 2000), 71-83; referenced by Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*(Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 2.

[[3]](https://bellatorchristi.com/2016/10/10/roses-smell-better-than-a-tulip/" \l "_ftnref3) Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*(Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 3.

[[4]](https://bellatorchristi.com/2016/10/10/roses-smell-better-than-a-tulip/" \l "_ftnref4) Ibid., 64.

[[5]](https://bellatorchristi.com/2016/10/10/roses-smell-better-than-a-tulip/" \l "_ftnref5) Ibid., 104.

[[6]](https://bellatorchristi.com/2016/10/10/roses-smell-better-than-a-tulip/" \l "_ftnref6) Ibid., 105.