

Present Truth

A magazine dedicated
to the restoration
of New Testament Christianity
in this generation

Sola Gratia Solely by Grace
Solo Christo Solely by Christ
Sola Fide Solely by Faith

SEPTEMBER 1976
Vol. 5, No. 6

ELECTION

Letters—page 3

Editorial Introduction—page 5

The Legal and Moral Aspects of Salvation (Part 3)—page 6

The Order of Justification and Regeneration—page 15

Recent Reformed Criticisms of the Canons—page 18

Election Means Preference—page 30

The Doctrine of Election—page 32

The Elect of God—page 38

Present Truth

Present Truth is a magazine dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and committed to upholding the great Reformation principle of justification by faith.

Editor: Robert D. Brinsmead
Publishing Editor: Norman Jarnes
Research Director: Douglas Ort
Art Director: Donald Muth

Publishers: A group of Christian scholars and businessmen without denominational sponsorship who have united to uphold the objective gospel amid the present deluge of religious subjectivism. Multitudes are being caught up in the popular and frantic effort to find satisfaction in some sort of religious experience. *Present Truth* is a voice in this barren wilderness of groveling internalism, a voice which boldly proclaims those great principles upon which the Reformation was founded—namely:

1. *Sola gratia.* God's saving activity outside of us in the person of Jesus Christ is the sole *ground* of our salvation.
2. *Solo Christo.* Christ's doing and dying on our behalf is the sole *basis* of our acceptance and continued fellowship with God.
3. *Sola fide.* The Holy Spirit's gift of faith through the hearing of this objective, historical gospel is the sole *means* whereby Christ's substitutionary life and death are imputed to us for justification unto life eternal. He who is thus justified by faith and filled with God's Spirit will glory only in Christ's cross and make God's saving work in Christ the central affirmation of his Christian witness. Though he will be careful to obey God and please Him in all things, he will continue to repent rather than glory in the feeble attainments of his own Spirit-filled life.
4. *Sola Scriptura.* The Bible and the Bible only is the Christian's objective and infallible rule of faith and practice, alone sufficient that he may "be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

Present Truth is not only committed to the task of upholding these founding principles of the Reformation, but it believes that we today must allow these principles to call all that we do and all that we teach into question. These principles call all traditions into question and all statements about the truth into question—even the ones set forth in this magazine. Our vision is a new Reformation that will recover what the Reformers bequeathed us and complete the restoration they so nobly began.

Present Truth is committed to the time-honored verities of the Christian faith—such as the Trinity, deity of Christ, virgin birth, blood atonement, bodily resurrection and ascension, second coming, final judgment, justification by faith alone, sanctification through the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, and glorification at Christ's soon return. The *Present Truth* ministry receives no denominational support. It is made possible through contributions from those who are dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and committed to upholding the great Reformation principle of justification by faith. Your support is appreciated. All gifts are tax deductible in the U.S.A.

Subscriptions are free upon personal request. Simply send your subscription request, together with your name and address, to the following *Present Truth* address nearest you:

P.O. Box 1311	P.O. Box 333
Fallbrook, California 92028	Tweed Heads, N.S.W. 2485
U.S.A.	Australia

To Contributors: Since truth is above the preferences and prejudices of any denomination, the editors welcome contributions from anyone and will judge them on their merit alone. If you wish a manuscript returned, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Moving? Please send your change of address four weeks in advance. Be sure to include both your old and new address.

Present Truth is published by New Reformation Fellowship.

Copyright © 1976 by *Present Truth*, P.O. Box 1311, Fallbrook, California 92028, U.S.A.





Letters

Address Letters to *Present Truth*,
P.O. Box 1311, Fallbrook,
California 92028.

Sola Scriptura

Sir / Some of the critics whose letters you have been honest and fair enough to print in your "Letters" section should consider more carefully your remark about throwing down your magazine "the moment they run into anything that will challenge a single point of their sacred traditions." How often we unknowingly (or even knowingly) make tradition the real basis for our beliefs instead of searching out truth for ourselves! How many of us swallow "hook, line and sinker" what our denomination or pastor or our favorite magazine says instead of studying the Scriptures for ourselves to see if it is true! We need to remember the experience of Paul and Silas at Berea. "The Jews here were more *civil* than those at Thessalonica: they received the message with great eagerness, *studying the Scriptures* every day to see whether it was as they [Paul and Silas] said" Acts 17:11, NEB). You are right when you suggest that "we judge truth on its own merits irrespective of who said it."

Glenn Salisbury
Oregon

"The Legal and Moral Aspects of Salvation"

Sir / Having come out of the Roman Catholic Church, I really appreciate your emphasis on imputed righteousness. And I certainly agree that the Protestant movement is rapidly becoming Roman Catholic in its view of the legal and moral aspects of salvation.

William G. Boggess
Mississippi

"Why Existential Theology Is Bankrupt"

Sir / The title of Jon Zen's article, "Why Existential Theology Is Bankrupt" (July, 1976), attracted me because several years ago I wrote my master's thesis on the subject of "Existentialism of Albert Camus' *The Stranger*

Compared with New Testament Teachings." I noticed that Mersault, the main character of Camus' book, violated nine of the ten commandments. The only one he did not violate was: "Thou shalt not bear false witness." In spite of the fact that Mersault had killed a man, his existentialism had him beating his head against a prison wall, thinking that because he was honest, society should not be punishing him with imprisonment. How different from the New Testament teaching: "If you trespass in one point, you are guilty of all"! Jon Zens is accurate in his evaluation of existential theology as being bankrupt.

Ellis J. Gerber
Minnesota

"Nothing But the Gospel"

Sir / Your May issue on "Nothing But the Gospel" was 100% tremendous—another blow at American salesmanship in evangelism and subjectivism in church life!

Donald R. Vroon
New York

Sir / Your magazine is frightfully narrow and devious. The Good News is more positive in my estimation.

Hans Rollmann
Canada

Sir / For years I thought it was odd that the gospel meant "Good News." It was something everyone talked about but never really explained the beauty of. However, as presented in *Present Truth*, the gospel is certainly "Good News."

The May issue, "Nothing But the Gospel," was especially clear. With a proper understanding of the gospel, I can now see how everything in the Bible ties together consistently and with deeper meaning. I only wish that more people could understand and accept the true meaning of the "Good News" gospel.

Mike Shearer
Oregon

Sir / Geoffrey J. Paxton has been gifted in being able to take a very difficult subject and then make clear what he wishes to say to his readers. I was greatly helped by his answer to "What Is the Gospel?" (May, 1976). It helps greatly to have someone of his ability make so clear in words what one believes to be the true gospel as proclaimed in God's Word.

George S. Honour
Canada

"The Old Testament"

Sir / I was impressed by your evaluation of dispensationalism as stated by Graeme Goldsworthy in his article entitled "The Kingdom of God and the Old Testament" (February, 1976): "Dispensationalism, to its credit, treats the Old Testament very seriously." Men and women who take very seriously what God has written in the Old Testament! May we all be dispensationalists in this sense.

George W. Zeller
Minister
Connecticut

Sir / Your February, 1976, issue included the section by Ronald R. Lambert, "Solomon and the Meaning of Life." The material was very fine, but there is one point that may have added strength to what Mr. Lambert was saying. The word in Ecclesiastes which is commonly translated "vanity" or, as in the New English Bible, "emptiness," is better translated "mystery." This was first brought to my attention by Dr. Toyozo Nakarai and later confirmed by an article in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (11:2:95, an article by W. E. Staples entitled "The 'Vanity' of Ecclesiastes"). Since then I have found this in other sources.

"Mystery, mystery, says the Preacher, mystery, all is mystery. What does man gain from all his labour and his toil here under the sun? Generations come and generations go, while the earth endures for ever."

Those who would claim, on the basis of the term "vanity" or "emptiness,"

that Solomon has a pessimistic attitude toward life would be left in the cold. This book reflects the thrust of Solomon's inquisitive nature. It is only natural that he should question the mystery of life, the injustice of the wicked man prospering while the just man suffers, the ultimate end of human existence—death. The final words of the book would also have a more significant meaning. Life *is* a mystery . . . unless you know the Creator.

"The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. Because God will bring every act to judgement, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil."

Richard L. White
West Virginia

Horried

Sir / I am horried at your emphasis on the new birth. You say that your magazine is dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity in this generation. As far as I am concerned, it is more of a distortion of New Testament Christianity. Your magazine certainly cannot aid in the sharing of the Good News of the kingdom when your emphasis on the new birth is so radical and offbeat.

Gerald L. Stanley
Baptist Minister
North Carolina

A Vote for *Present Truth*

Sir / I have been receiving *Present Truth* magazine for a couple of years now and consider it the most important magazine I have ever encountered. I am currently doing a series of doctrinal studies to present to my church and have just glanced through your special issue on "Sanctification" (February, 1975). What a tremendous work it is! I believe God has used this magazine in my life to keep me from drowning in the sea of subjectivism—to which I was heading. This does not mean that I agree with everything I read in your magazine. No one would or should do that. However, *Present Truth* puts the emphasis where it ought to be—on Jesus Christ and the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ. This letter is written as a "vote" to keep your magazine in print.

James B. Hensley
Baptist Minister
Florida

Limited Scope

Sir / I want to call attention to the limited scope of your periodical. After three or four issues you have said all you are going to say: "Salvation is by grace." That is just a small part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bible encompasses a much greater area of living. I prefer discussions on them all. In short, a "life system" covers how we are to live after we have accepted the truth of salvation by grace.

Jake Fenenga
South Dakota

Monumental Efforts

Sir / I especially appreciate the strong stand your magazine takes on the implications of justification by faith—i.e., sanctification. Thank you for your monumental efforts.

Wayne Jamison
Evangelical Free Church Minister
Illinois

Meat

Sir / I can only say "Thanks to God" for the vastly important service you are rendering to the Christian community. Yours is the only Christian periodical I am familiar with that has any content whatsoever that could be classified as meat. Your publication has had a great impact on my theological thinking, especially in the areas of justification and sanctification. Understanding the truth about sanctification has completely freed me from the "yield" theology so prevalent in the overwhelming majority of Christian teaching today. *Present Truth* has also been instrumental in showing me the value of reading Reformed literature, which has been one of the greatest blessings God has ever brought into my life.

Richard L. Woodward
Mississippi

From South Africa

Sir / I am sorry that you have to start a new publication just to be anti-Pentecostal and anti-charismatic. I have glanced through *Present Truth*, and I see that you have done a lot of twisting of the truth. I think you could find more profitable things to do than attacking others and would strongly suggest that you search for the truth rather than try to make everyone believe the way you do.

M. Fynn
South Africa

Sir / Thank you for the work you put into your magazine, making it a most stimulating publication. I often refer to *Present Truth* for sermon and Bible study material. There is a desperate need for the truth of justification by faith to be taught and understood in South Africa, as we are being carried away by experience-centered Christianity.

Peter Smallbones
Minister
South Africa

Controversial

Sir / I find your presentations stimulating, controversial and most edifying.

Richard Olson
Student
Minnesota

Educational

Sir / I find your material enjoyable and inspiring. You do a fine job of education on those of us who thought we were already educated. Keep up the good work.

Michael D. Vlad
Church of God Minister
California

Sir / In my 75th year, in the ministry since 1925, I have been "in the books" a great deal. But it is my regret that I did not have your clear presentations coming to me until this late date. It is certain that there would have been less confusion.

Stanley Hunt
Minister
Oregon

Old-fashioned Thinking

Sir / I appreciate your magazine. What you are attempting to do is greatly needed in these days of hyper-emotional cultism. I do not always agree with what you say, but it is refreshing to be challenged to do some honest-to-goodness, old-fashioned thinking.

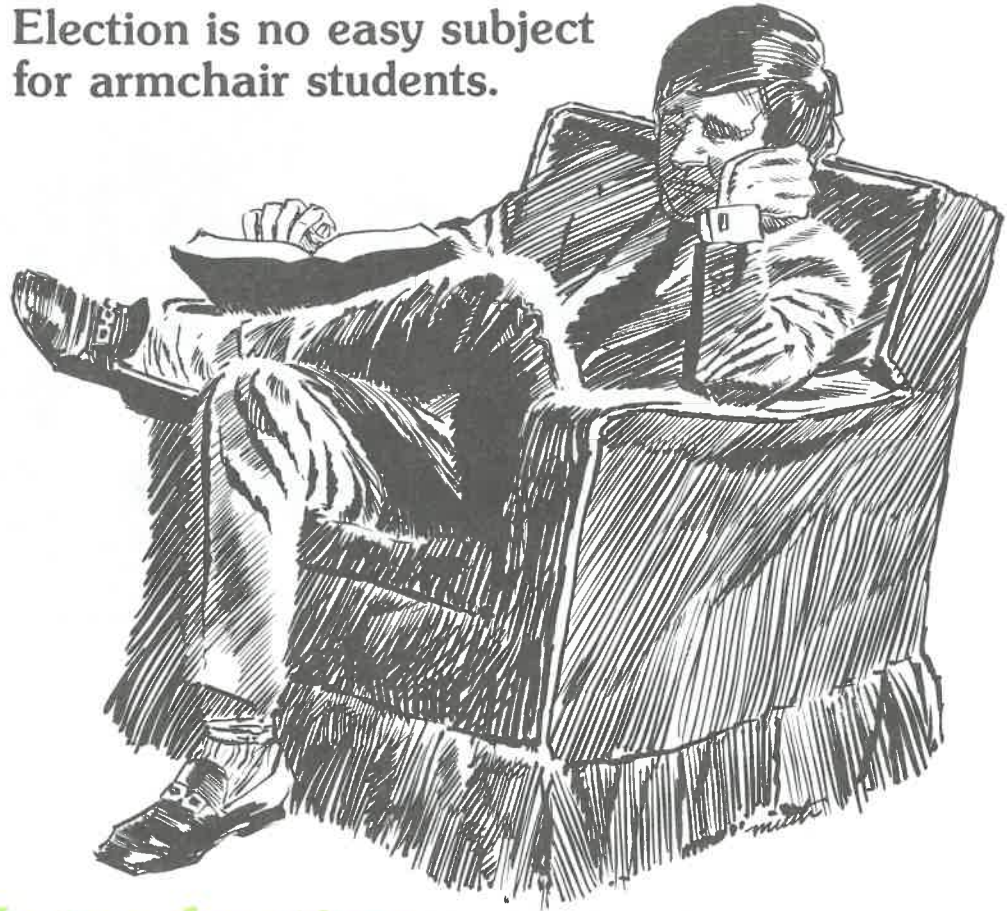
Jim Bryant
Baptist Minister
Missouri

Willing to Dig

Sir / I have appreciated *Present Truth*. I'm a retired policeman with only a high school education, and sometimes I find your material quite heavy. However, with a dictionary, Strong's concordance and the Bible I am able to extract many useful and thought-provoking ideas.

Samuel H. Hower
Virginia

Election is no easy subject
for armchair students.



Editorial Introduction

At last an issue on "Election," which we especially hope will elicit considerable response from our Reformed readers! *Present Truth* opens its columns for comments either positive or negative.

We have reprinted several articles on the subject of election by some notable scholars, not because we necessarily agree with them, but because (1) we should all know what significant points are being taught in the Christian church, and (2) we think the articles are significantly stimulating to challenge our thought and study on the question of election.

Included is Karl Barth's famous statement on "The Doctrine of Election." This was the center point of Barth's theology. We think that the comments by Bernard L. Ramm in *The Evangelical Heritage* (Word Books) are worth repeating here. He writes:

At certain points neo-orthodoxy has not broken with the presuppositions of liberalism and has given a historic doctrine a novel twist which the evangelical cannot approve. The evangelical can, however, learn from neo-orthodoxy . . . It would certainly be shortsighted of the fundamentalist and evangelical if prejudice against Barth were so irrational that

they could not profit from Barth's assaults upon liberal theology . . . The evangelical can greatly enrich his own understanding of theology and especially of historical theology by a diligent study of the massive writings of Barth and Brunner. I repeat: Barth and Brunner must be read dialectically. One should not remove his critical spectacles when he reads these men. But they were men of massive learning who took the historic doctrines of the church with great seriousness . . . To read Barth and Brunner in a spirit of negativism is to impoverish one's knowledge of theology. To read them dialectically is to have the good without the evil and to separate the error in the quest for truth.—pp. 110-120.

Election is no easy subject for armchair students. It may take some application to digest this issue. As in the Bible, the reader will find some sections simple and some quite ponderous. We have not repeated the orthodox Reformed view of election, because that is well known. Rather, the articles are more or less a reflection on a vital area of our Reformation heritage.

Come, let us reason together.

R.D.B.



The Legal and Moral Aspects of Salvation

Robert D. Brinsmead

Part 3: In the Matter of Election

In Parts 1 and 2 of this series we showed:

1. Sin is guilt (legal) as well as pollution (moral).
2. The atonement is a penal satisfaction to the law (legal) as well as a revelation of God's love to the sinner (moral).
3. Salvation consists in justification with its verdict that a man stands right in the eyes of the law (legal) as well as sanctification with its transformation of man's character (moral).

We also saw that in correctly relating these two aspects of redemption the *legal* must not only be given the primacy, but it must take precedence over the *moral*. This was the genius and brilliant light of the Reformation. The moral renewal of man was not denied or even devalued by the Reformers, but they knew that man's salvation must rest on the acts of God in Jesus Christ. The legal view of sin, the legal view of the atonement, and the legal view of justification did not give life to legalism. Rather, they gave legalism its "deadly wound."

These legal aspects of redemption, comprehended by the Pauline and Reformation doctrine of *justification by faith*, became a great central truth which explained other truths. Luther said:

The doctrine of justification must become the great center, the strategic vantage point from which we view all other doctrines.

If the article of justification is lost, all Christian doctrine is lost at the same time . . . It alone makes a person a theologian . . . For with it comes the Holy Spirit, who enlightens the heart by it and keeps it in the true certain understanding so that it is able precisely and plainly to distinguish and judge all other articles of faith, and forcefully to sustain them.—*What Luther Says*, ed. E. Plass (Concordia), Vol. 2, pp. 702-714, 715-718.

In past issues of *Present Truth* we have stated our position that the doctrine of justification must become the great center, the strategic vantage point from which we view all other doctrines. Of all sections of the Protestant movement, none see themselves as greater defenders of the Reformation heritage than those who take the name "Reformed." The legal aspects of sin and salvation are forthrightly expressed by all good Reformed theologians. The inflexible demands of God's law, the

satisfaction of its claims by Christ's death on the cross, the forensic meaning of justification, and the "third use of the law" all find their place in Reformed theology. There are some solid substance and sound divinity here which are sadly lacking in most other forms of "wishy-washy" evangelicalism. Folk too used to a diet of evangelical cotton candy would be well advised to read some divinity and theological substance found in such Reformed "heavyweights" as Berkhof, Warfield, Hodge, Buchanan, Denney, Smeaton, etc.

Yet, in a very important area, has there been a failure on the part of Reformed theology to carry through with the principle of rightly relating the legal and moral aspects of redemption? Has the doctrine of justification in Christ been kept at the center of the theological system? What about the whole matter of *predestination*?

It often happens that in the heat of controversy a disputed point is bolstered up to such an extent that it becomes the virtual center of theology. Has this evolutionary process also befallen some of those great Protestant stalwarts called Calvinists? Is there a difference here between Calvin and the Calvinists? Reformed scholar James Daane points out in his recent book, *The Freedom of God* (Eerdmans), that Calvin dealt with predestination in his *Institutes* under the section on soteriology—after he had thoroughly dealt with the central issue of justification. Predestination was not his starting point. He did not deal with it in the earlier chapters on theology proper. However, in the seventeenth century the Calvinist theologians developed a concept of "the divine decrees" which made a certain view of predestination the starting point and center of a whole theological system. This has saddled the Reformed branch of the church with some knotty and embarrassing theological problems from which it has never been able to extricate itself.

At this juncture we do not draw attention to the arguments used by the avowed opponents of the Reformed faith, but we mention some of the difficulties in the Reformed system which have been commented upon by Reformed scholars themselves:

1. The idea of a pretemporal decree to elect some and reprobate others "unconditionally" is not really an election "in Christ." True, "in Christ" is sometimes brought into this theory of election, but only as a *method* of effecting God's decision. Behind this "in Christ" there is the still deeper ground of election and reprobation. The act of election itself is *outside* of Jesus Christ.



All that we may know about God and election has been revealed in His Son.

2. Jesus Christ is not the starting point of theological thinking in this Reformed system. Instead, the starting point is an abstract, philosophical and speculative view that intrudes directly into the unveiled divine glory and makes the Almighty subject to the scrutiny of human logic.

Luther rightly said that we must not presume to gaze upon God's unveiled glory but be content to know Him only as He is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. All that we may know about God and election has been revealed in His Son. Christ is the truth. The Christ event is the truth about the future, for in His death and resurrection the events of the last judgment have already been disclosed. He is also the truth about the past. Jesus Christ is the full disclosure of what God planned from eternity. In this matter of election it is important that we determine to know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

3. When it is asserted that God has decreed to pass some by and withhold from them the gift of faith, this makes God the cause behind some not receiving faith. Although Calvinists will hotly deny that God is the cause of sin, it has not been easy for them to avoid the charge altogether. How can they when men like Peter Y. De Jong flatly state, "God clearly foreordains evil."—*Crisis in the Reformed Churches* (Reformed Fellowship, Inc.), p. 148.

4. Reformed scholar James Daane (*The Freedom of God* [Eerdmans]) says that the Reformed doctrine of

While the Reformed Christian appreciates the great Reformation heritage, there is no reason for him to take the position that Luther or Calvin, Westminster or Dort, fixed the canon of theological truth.

election (and reprobation) is unpreachable. He reminds us of the arguments over whether or not the gospel should be preached to *all* men and shows how that question has tortured the Reformed communities for centuries. Despite herculean efforts by one after another of their scholars, they still cannot lay the vexing question to rest. Daane says that while the Reformed theory of election can be argued about or discussed *apologetically*, it is unpreachable. No one can preach reprobation, since only that which is the object of faith can be preached. Daane also points out that it is a fact that election is not preached from Reformed pulpits:

Hoeksema and Van Til have made the most comprehensive and sophisticated attempts to bridge the gap between election and preaching. None tried harder, none wrestled more seriously and vigorously with this problem. Compared to their efforts, those of the seventeenth-century Scottish and the eighteenth-century Dutch Reformed theologians were simplistic and naive. Yet for all their effort, Hoeksema and Van Til were no more successful than their Scottish and Dutch predecessors. Once one commits himself to the decree of decretal theology, it is theologically impossible for him to allow, justify, or explain preaching the gospel to all men. So, too, it is impossible for him to bring election into the pulpit.—*Ibid.*, p. 33.

5. In order to justify the Reformed doctrine of predestination, Hoeksema argues that God is not affected in any way by events outside of Himself. God's love, for instance, is not a response to man's plight, and divine mercy is not called into exercise by man's need. When God loves, says Hoeksema, He is really only loving to Himself. When He is merciful, He is only merciful to Himself. Christianity is hereby reduced to cold, hard logic where there is neither pathos nor tears. Add to this the bold claims that God does not love all men, and there emerges an image of a cruel, hardfisted determinism that is absolutely unmoved by human tragedy.

6. The theory of predestination that, by God's pre-temporal decree, objectivizes two fixed groups called "elect" and "reprobate" may not be as bad as fatalism, but it still comes through with the image of a rigid determinism. Despite all the efforts of well-meaning scholars to soften the fixed expression of the face of Calvinistic determinism, they cannot get rid of that cold, frozen decree which determines everything that comes to pass—whether, as Daane laments, it is the price of rhubarb on tomorrow's market or today's football score. Human responsibility may be loudly affirmed, but if everything has been programmed beforehand, human freedom is still an illusion.

7. If all events have been determined beforehand by divine decree, how can we, or even God, take history seriously? And since the gospel is history, how can we take the gospel seriously? Does not a deterministic view of history empty history of any real content?

8. One who follows the Reformed view of election is led to seek his sense of security in his own piety. This, it has been pointed out, is inevitable since the "perseverance of the saints" is the only real evidence that the Calvinist has of his election. Despite the much vaunted objectivity of the Calvinistic view of election, the Reformed believer can only ground his certainty of election on his subjective experience.

These are just some of the difficulties that Reformed scholars themselves have drawn attention to in the Reformed system of theology. But when they look around at other alternatives—generally the Arminian view of election on the ground of foreseen faith and obedience together with the denial of the sinner's "total depravity"—Reformed scholars are prepared to live with these difficulties rather than accept the intolerable consequences of the alternative system. In other words, if the Calvinist is pressed hard on any of the difficulties arising from his system of theology, he says that he is not going to jump out of the frying pan of Calvinism into the fire of Arminianism. Looking at the difficulties of another system makes it easier for him to live with his own difficulties.

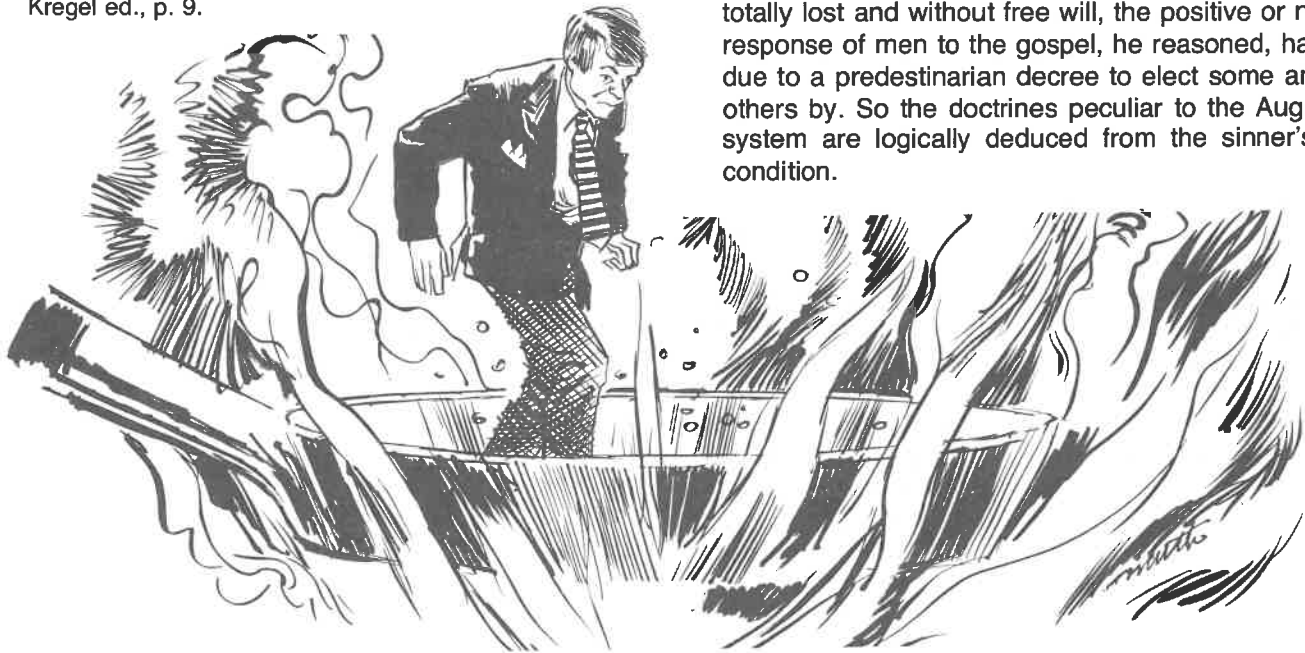
There appear to be three options open to the Reformed Christian at this point:



1. He can surrender his system in favor of the Arminian system. Knowing the grave difficulties in the Arminian system, most Reformed people would rather live with their own theological difficulties.

2. He can stay *dead* true to his tradition and spend the rest of his days polishing up the “five points” and zealously guarding them against people who would in any way tarnish them. This appears to be the avowed purpose of some Reformed groups (and publications) which seem to do nothing except go around like an orthodoxy patrol in defense of “TULIP.”¹ This gets as dry as the hills of Gilboa, which had neither dew nor rain. We are reminded of what Spurgeon said of Gill:

The portrait of him . . . turning up his nose in a most expressive manner, as if he could not endure even the smell of free will. In some such vein he wrote his commentary. He hunts Arminianism throughout the whole of it . . . he falls upon a text which is not congenial to his creed, and hacks and hews terribly to bring the Word of God into a more systematic shape.—*Commenting and Commentaries*, Kregel ed., p. 9.



And it could be added, some self-styled followers of Spurgeon seem to do the same!

3. He can take seriously the challenge of being “reformed and always reforming.” While he appreciates the great Reformation heritage, there is no reason for him to take the position that Luther or Calvin, Westminster or Dort, fixed the canon of theological truth.

We hope that our Reformed readers will take this third option. If so, we can together go on and try to plow some new ground. Accordingly, we now want to take the Reformation insights into the legal and moral aspects of redemption and apply them to the doctrine of election. Or to put this another way, we will look at certain aspects of Reformed theology in the light of justification by faith.

Augustine’s Premise

The starting point of “TULIP” is total depravity. In this it is truly a reflection of Augustine’s system of theology. Augustine’s thinking about predestination and grace was conditioned by his understanding of the condition of fallen man. Against Pelagius he had argued convincingly that fallen man is totally enslaved. In himself he has no desire to repent, no ability to believe, no inclination to come to God, and therefore no free will. The Reformers revived Augustine’s insight into “total depravity.”² Even Luther, who outgrew Augustine in most areas of thought, said that Augustine was good on one thing, and that was his doctrine of sin and the fallenness of man.

Augustine reasoned out his doctrine of predestination anthropologically—that is to say, it was determined by his view of man’s *moral* condition. If sinners are totally lost and without free will, the positive or negative response of men to the gospel, he reasoned, has to be due to a predestinarian decree to elect some and pass others by. So the doctrines peculiar to the Augustinian system are logically deduced from the sinner’s moral condition.

¹“TULIP” stands for the five points of Calvinism—total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.

²“Total depravity” does not mean that man is as bad as he can be but that the whole man, even the best in man, is tainted with human sinfulness.

It is generally thought that the only way to avoid the logic of Augustinianism (or Calvinism) is to deny the sinner's enslavement (total depravity) and posit some free will in man. But our objection at this point is that Augustine did not take the concept of the sinner's enslavement far enough. He only saw man's enslavement as based on his inward, moral condition. But man is not just a slave due to his *moral* condition. More fundamentally, he is a slave due to his *legal* position. This is Paul's theology of law, sin and human freedom. According to Paul, man is a debtor and therefore a prisoner to the law. It is the power of the law which binds the sinner to the service of sin (1 Cor. 15:56; Rom. 7:1-8). As we saw in Part 2 of this series, the sinner cannot be delivered from the law (and hence from his enslavement to sin) by any moral transformation. Nothing which happens *in* the sinner (moral change) can affect his standing before the law as a condemned sinner.

What we are again affirming is that the legal position of a man takes precedence over his moral condition. Man is not just a slave due to his moral disease. He is guilty before the law. He is a slave legally. The power that holds him in prison is not just a moral disease. It is the power of an omnipotent law.

The Pauline doctrine magnifies grace and the salvation provided by God. Man could not be saved simply by being cured of his moral disease. God Himself had to provide a remedy by an act which was legal—an act completely outside of man.

When we assert that the *legal* takes precedence over the *moral*, we do not only mean this in the matter of enslavement. We mean it also in the matter of liberation. For instance, if a sinner is justified by God, he is righteous in the eyes of the law despite the fact that he is still a very imperfect and sinful creature. When Jesus Christ was numbered with the transgressors, He was treated as a sinner, treated as if He were not in fact righteous, treated as if His moral righteousness did not exist. So God treats the justified sinner as if his moral disease did not exist.

We have seen that if an enslaved sinner were morally transformed, the law would still treat him as if such moral transformation did not exist (just as a converted murderer in the criminal court is guilty all the same and must still pay for his crime). But on the other hand, if the sinner is legally freed, he is free indeed and may act as if his moral disease were nonexistent.

These are the implications of justification by faith (the legal aspects of redemption). But Augustine did not clearly distinguish between justification and sanctification. In Augustine's thought the sinner was justified by moral renewal, and in this Augustine's teaching was the forerunner of the Catholic Church's doctrine of justification by infused righteousness.

Calvin, of course, did clearly apprehend the truth of justification by a forensic righteousness, and he did



Man is not just a slave due to his moral condition. More fundamentally, he is a slave due to his legal position.

When we assert that the legal takes precedence over the moral, we do not only mean this in the matter of enslavement. We mean it also in the matter of liberation.



clearly distinguish between the legal and moral aspects of redemption. But in the system known as Calvinism this insight into justification by faith was not carried through and did not determine the view of the related doctrines of grace. This has thrown the Calvinists into some utterly impossible and indefensible difficulties:

1. Calvinism (contrary to John Calvin himself) claims that the sinner must be *regenerated* by the Holy Spirit before he can believe and be *justified*. A typical Reformed publication (*The Grace of God* [The Banner of Truth Trust]) says, "He must be born again (which is a sovereign act of God) before he can repent and believe."

How does the Calvinist arrive at this position? By applying logic rather than revelation to man's moral condition. He reasons that since man has no free will due to his moral condition, his inward condition must be changed before he can be free to choose to accept the gospel and be justified.

In this the Calvinist has put the *moral* before the *legal*. He admits that justification is a legal freedom, but he is forced to place the acquisition of moral freedom before his acquisition of legal freedom. This placing of regeneration before justification is a Romanizing tendency in the Reformed church—and it is indefensible. The Calvinist at this point says that freedom to believe and accept the gospel is based on a regenerating act within man, while the Catholic says that justification

is based on a transforming act within man. *In both cases the moral change in man precedes and leads to the legal change.* The Calvinist has betrayed John Calvin and the heart of the great Reformation right at this point.

2. The Calvinist at this point posits some sort of residual freedom (howbeit by grace) in the regenerate. Here is one area of his being about which he thinks he can pray, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men." This differs radically from the great apostle who confessed, even after his conversion, ". . . I am carnal, sold under sin . . . I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing . . ." (Rom. 7:14, 18).

Is not the Calvinist's position at this point a denial of the Reformation's insight into *simul justus et peccator* (at the same time totally righteous and totally a sinner)? Does not "total depravity" of nature apply to the believer as well as to the unbeliever? Is there any part of the believer's existence which is not defiled by his fallen condition? Is not the believer bound to uninhibitedly confess his sinnerhood? (1 John 1:8).

In order to be true to the Reformation the believer must confess that in himself he is a sinner, and only in Christ is he righteous. That means, if it means anything at all, that in himself he is not free, and only in Christ is he free.

It is misleading and erroneous, as well as conducive to pride, for anyone to imagine that he now has some permanent (residual) donation of freedom that sets him apart from the rest of mankind. In himself man—every man—is a sinner and not free. Like righteousness and immortality, freedom is found only in Jesus Christ and is communicated to man only in the gospel, which must come to him not just once but continually. The idea of some residual freedom given to the regenerate

Like righteousness and immortality, freedom is found only in Jesus Christ and is communicated to man only in the gospel, which must come to him not just once but continually.

belongs to the same stock as the idea of inherent righteousness and innate immortality. What an anomaly that this idea of regeneration before justification and the innate freedom of some men should be held in a system collectively and fondly called "the doctrines of grace"!

3. In Part 2 of this series we showed that not only must the legal aspects of salvation take precedence

over the moral, but *the moral must be based on the legal*. "Sanctification" which is not based on justification is no true sanctification at all. It is not moral but immoral for the simple reason that it is not legal (lawful). Referring again to the illustration of marriage, legal union must precede conjugal union. Otherwise it is immoral. God will never be a party to spiritual fornication. Or to change the figure, the sinner has to be adopted as a son (legal) before he is made a son vitally (Gal. 4:5, 6). The primacy of justification is at stake here, and the Calvinists have compromised it. The great moral change called regeneration or the new birth is distorted into an immoral change when it is placed before justification. In order to consistently maintain this "illegal" *ordo salutis*, great scholars like Hodge have had to contend that regeneration or the new birth is only a subconscious change in man—something which takes place before the sinner knows anything about it, something done without the sinner's consent.

4. Then there is a further difficulty. The Reformers believed in *mediate* grace and not *immediate* grace. That is to say, the Holy Spirit only comes to man in the preaching of the gospel. But Calvinism at this point proposes that the Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner before he hears the gospel. The result of this theory of a subconscious regeneration is that the Reformed generally (there are exceptions) have a very weak regeneration, and in all too many cases among Reformed communities there is evidence that people need to experience that great moral change known in the Bible as regeneration or the new birth. The new birth is not some secret, quasi relationship between Christ and the believer, but accompanying the verdict of justification, it is a great change in the moral state of which the believer is very conscious (Rom. 8:16; Gal. 4:5, 6). The historian Philip Schaff is right when he says that John Wesley's emphasis on a visible, conscious regeneration accompanying justification was his great contribution. And on this point Wesley was more in harmony with John Calvin than those who generally took the name "Calvinists."³

The Christological Basis of Human Freedom

We have already pointed out that the Augustinian system is anthropologically based—it starts from man's moral condition (total depravity) and reasons out its system from that starting point. It is preoccupied with the moral aspect of man's bondage and fails to appreciate the more primary feature—the legal aspects of human bondage and freedom. Or we could state the matter another way and say that the Augustinian system is not Christologically based. According to this system the ability of the believer to exercise free will is not

³On the doctrine of justification Wesley affirmed that he did not differ from Calvin "one hair's breadth."



based on what the believer has in Christ but upon what he is supposed to have imparted to him in regeneration. Further, Augustine's pretemporal decree to elect (select) some to salvation is not based on Jesus Christ—it is not an election in Christ.⁴

Since only that which is in Christ can stand in the judgment of God, it follows that everything which is outside of Christ must be disapproved. Because the Augustinian system of predestination is clearly outside of Christ, it cannot stand justified in the court of divine truth.

Here is a sinner. In himself he has no freedom at all. To begin with, he is in debt to the law. Because he

⁴"In the beginning was the Word . . ." (John 1:1). ". . . He is before all things, and by Him all things [including election] consist" (Col. 1:17). Before election or anything else there stands Jesus Christ. God does nothing before Him, without Him, or apart from Him. All that God does He does on account of Him, for Him, and by Him. Christ is not just the means of effecting God's decision. He is the divine reason (*Logos*) and substance of God's decision.

From eternity God decreed that in all things Christ should be preeminent (Col. 1:18). Jesus Christ is the Man of God's own choosing. The Christ event is the disclosure of God's "decree." That is the good news of election.

Since only that which is in Christ can stand in the judgment of God, it follows that everything which is outside of Christ must be disapproved.

All that happened to humanity in Adam has been more than reversed by what has taken place in Jesus Christ.

has failed to render to it a life of perfect righteousness, his life is forfeited, and he is obligated to make full satisfaction to the law's penal claims. By the power of that omnipotent law he is bound to the service of sin (1 Cor. 15:56; Rom. 7:8). Or to put this another way, God's wrath ("the law worketh wrath" [Rom. 4:15]) has abandoned him to the control of sin. All this has come about by the sin of Adam, his legal representative (Rom. 5:16-19). Then too, his nature is disposed to hatred of God and to love of evil. So we may safely concede the Augustinian premise that in Adam man is totally lost. He is so enslaved to do evil that he is not free to live a life of righteousness.

But that is not all that needs to be said about human nature. God appointed His Son to be the second or last Adam, the new Representative to legally act for lost man. Jesus Christ assumed human nature. There is no justification for limiting or particularizing redemption at this point, for the fact of Christ's assumption of human nature will not allow it. The nature of all men is the same. Jesus did not take the nature of some men and redeem that, but he took the nature common to all men and redeemed that.

We must say that in Jesus Christ human nature has been set free as surely as Christ has been set free from the grave. In Christ human nature is not only free from depravity, but having fulfilled and satisfied the law by life and death, it is free from all debt to the law (Rom.

7:4, etc.). The human nature which is in Christ is free to give everything to God which God requires and free to receive everything from God which God promises. All that happened to humanity in Adam has been more than reversed by what has taken place in Jesus Christ.

This does not mean, as some have contended, that because of the death and resurrection of Christ all men, *ipso facto*, are free to accept salvation any time they choose. The freedom is in Jesus Christ alone. Christ's atonement was the fulfillment of the covenant between the Father and the Son. It was a legal transaction which gave Christ the legal rights and titles to man's lost inheritance. Christ did not only purchase some men by His blood, but He bought the whole race of men and thereby gained the right to be the Judge of all. The only right Christ has to judge all is because He has "bought" all—even those reprobates who deny Him (see 2 Peter 2:1). If He has bought them, they belong to Him, and He has full rights to decide their fate.

The rights and titles gained by Christ's atonement are the basis of His intercession at the right hand of God. Unfortunately, the great Bible doctrine of intercession has largely slipped out of sight, and many Christians fail to rivet their attention on it (often preferring to concentrate on Christ's indwelling in the throne room of their own hearts). Christ's intercession is both Godward and manward, since He is the Mediator of the covenant. Godward, He pleads that sinners be given another probation. As long as He pleads or intercedes, the door of salvation will remain open to "whosoever will." If Christ should cease His intercession at the right hand of God, human probation would close, and there would be no further opportunity to repent and come to God.

Christ's intercession is also manward. Every soul is His property, and He has purchased the freedom of human nature. Christ has the right to come to the sinner and to give him freedom. Christ comes to the sinner clothed in the gospel, and when the gospel is given to him, freedom is given to him. Only as he hears this gospel does he have freedom to break from his slavery to the kingdom of darkness. This freedom is not an inherent quality in the sinner. It does not even inhere in him by some mysterious act of quasi regeneration. The freedom is "an alien freedom"—it is in Jesus Christ. Yet it comes to the sinner and is given to him in the gospel, which is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16).

At this point the Calvinist may ask, "How can the sinner, who is dead in sins and totally depraved, be free to accept Christ?" We simply answer that the legal aspect of redemption takes precedence over the moral condition of man. Calvary proves this, and the doctrine of justification proves it! If a sinner can be legally freed, then he is free irrespective of his moral condition. The legal so transcends the moral that even the dead can hear the voice of the Son of God and live. When our

sins were imputed (legal) to Christ, God treated Him as if His moral righteousness did not exist; and when His righteousness is imputed to us (legal), God treats us as if our moral condition did not exist—and we can act as if it did not exist! Thus the objection about the total depravity of man's nature is, at this point, a denial of the power of the gospel.

In Christ humanity is already justified and freed (Rom. 5:18; 6:7). When, by the power of His intercession and the agency of the Holy Spirit, Christ comes in the power of the gospel to the sinner, justification and freedom verily draw nigh to him, and—irrespective of his moral condition—he is given the right to exercise the freedom which humanity has in Christ.

If the sinner believes, we must say that his salvation and his ability to accept Christ are wholly of grace. That ability was given him of God in the coming of the gospel. We cannot, however, explain why any man rejects the gospel. To give a reason for unbelief would be to excuse it. There is no excuse. "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 18:31). God Himself has no answer to that question. Because unbelief is so inexcusable, it is so damnable.

Does man's unbelief mean that God stands helplessly on the sidelines? Does puny man checkmate the Almighty? No, for the Scripture teaches that even if no one believed what God has done, God's plan and purpose has already been carried out in Jesus Christ, and it is a glorious success whether men believe it or not. ". . . what if some of them did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid . . ." (Rom. 3:3, 4). ". . . it is not as though the Word of God had failed" (Rom. 9:6, RSV). Christ declared through Isaiah, "And now, saith the Lord that formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob again to Him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and My God shall be My strength" (Isa. 49:5). Even the wrath of man praises God (Ps. 76:10), for in His unsearchable wisdom God causes even those who oppose the truth to work for the vindication of the truth (2 Cor. 13:8).

The Advantages of This Approach

We suggest that this approach to the problem of free will retains all that is really essential in the Reformation heritage while it avoids the difficulties of a rigid determinism:

1. It does not force us to put regeneration before justification.

2. It avoids the pitfall of positing some sort of residual free will in the regenerate as if they henceforth and forever have an automatic freedom within themselves. The truth is that in himself the believer is not one whit freer or better than the unbeliever (see Rom. 7:14, 18).

3. It makes the believer just as dependent upon the gospel for his salvation and freedom as the unbeliever. For if the freedom is outside of man, in Jesus Christ, and comes to man only in the gospel, it follows that a man is made free and kept free only by continually hearing the gospel.

There is a tendency in Reformed circles to relegate salvation to something that happened "back there." Even justification is often regarded as a once-and-for-all event. In circles that are less sophisticated theologically, there is a slipping into a crude "once-saved-always-saved-ism" with its tendency to boast of personal election as if it had become a simple, historical reality.

4. This approach makes the believer conscious that salvation must be mediated to him constantly. Unless he keeps hearing the gospel, he will slip back into bondage. The biblical warnings about falling from grace (see Gal. 5:4, Rom. 11:20, 21, and the numerous warnings in the book of Hebrews) are taken with the seriousness which God's Word demands. In the present existential situation the believer stands only by faith, and his salvation hangs in hope. Neither salvation nor election will become personal, empirical fact until the judgment and the last day.

5. This doctrine is truly preachable because it proclaims Jesus Christ as the elect Man (see Peter's sermon in Acts 2:22-36) and exhorts even believers to make their calling and election sure by being diligent to be found in Him (2 Peter 1:5-11).

6. Its view of man's free will is Christologically based, and its view of election is Christologically based. Both man's decision for Christ in time and God's decision for Christ in eternity are possible solely because of Jesus Christ.

7. It maintains the primacy of the legal or Christological aspects of redemption over the moral or anthropological aspects of redemption. Or to say this another way, it maintains the primacy of justification over regeneration and sanctification.

8. It can truly be proclaimed as good news to all men.

A Concluding Word

The thoughts and arguments suggested in this article are not put forward with the idea of overthrowing the Reformed faith, but they are suggested possibilities for its purification. Those who believe that the Reformed church should also be the church that is always reforming will be open to examine new lines of thought even as they cling (and should cling) to the precious old light passed on to us with no little toil and vigilance. So we conclude with Paul's appeal, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21).

(Concluded)



The Order of Justification and Regeneration

Remarks on Justification and Regeneration, by Gordon H. Clark

Editorial Note: We here reprint a statement sent to us in 1973 by the respected evangelical and Reformed scholar, Gordon H. Clark. It was published in the "Letters" section of our June, 1973, issue of *Present Truth* together with a brief editorial comment which we made at that time. This editorial comment is also reprinted here at the conclusion of Dr. Clark's statement.

The special issue of *Present Truth* devoted to discussions of "Justification by Faith" is the first copy of the magazine that I have seen. Its emphasis on the "material principle" of the Reformation and its opposition to Romish theology speak clearly to these times when the Protestant churches have largely rejected the Bible.

Among the magazine's excellent pages, however, there was one article—so it seems to me—that did not properly represent the historic Protestant view. On page 18 Rome is characterized by the phrase, "Re-

generation—a necessary condition for justification," and the Reformation is characterized by the phrase, "Regeneration—the immediate consequence and fruit of justification." With respect to this latter phrase there are two points to be considered: (1) the article's argument from the Bible is incomplete and in places fallacious, and (2) the historical evidence necessary to conclude that the theology of the Reformation is in view is missing.

On the first point I shall try to be brief. Page 18, column 2, after quoting Romans 4:5 that God justifies the ungodly, says, "This scripture certainly contradicts the notion that God justifies only regenerate saints." The paragraph fails to show any contradiction. The following paragraph correctly states that God justifies the uncircumcised; but Romans 4:9-11 (quoted) does not mention regeneration, as would be necessary for a conclusion about regeneration; and the appended explanation, which says that "the new life is the sign and witness of the blessing of justification," does not reproduce the thought of the passage from Romans, for the scripture says that circumcision (not the new life or regeneration) is the sign. Page 19, point 4, adds to Romans 5 something about a "new heart," which is not found in

the text. Finally, so far as Scripture and argument go, page 19, column 2, says, "To those who respond to His drawing, the Spirit gives faith and repentance." Is this not Romanism? An unregenerate sinner, totally depraved, dead in sin, who does not seek God, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, who has no fear of God before his eyes, cannot respond. He will become able to respond only after the Spirit resurrects him to newness of life.

The second point is the absence of evidence that Reformation theology makes faith prior to regeneration. The only attempt to provide evidence is a quotation from John Wesley on page 21. But John Wesley was a disciple of Arminius, whose rejection of the Reformation doctrines was declared heretical by the Synod of Dort in 1620. Therefore Wesley's theology is not a competent testimony to what the Reformers taught.

One of the best witnesses of what the Reformation taught is the Westminster Confession of 1645-49. Its reliability is such that thousands of ministers from that day to this have subscribed to it. The men who framed it were the most devoted ministers of their day, the most competent and the best informed on the theology of the previous century. The Westminster Confession, X, 1, 2, states, "God . . . enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God . . . renewing their wills . . . effectually drawing them . . . they being made willing by his grace . . . [are] enabled to answer this call and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it."

To which I should like to add John 5:24: "He who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not come into judgment, but has [already (perfect tense)] passed from death to life." Note that when the sinner hears and believes, i.e., exercises faith, he has already been regenerated.

Further evidence that this is the Reformation view and that the theologians who remained true to the Scripture so testify will be found in W.G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, page 509: "A man is not regenerated because he first believes in Christ, but he believes in Christ because he has been regenerated." The whole chapter defends this position.

Similar thoughts are found in H.B. Smith, *System of Christian Theology*, page 557, and even in the wavering theologian, Augustus Strong, Volume 3, page 825.

Then finally, Charles Hodge, the prince of American theologians, in successive chapters, discusses regeneration in Volume 2, chapter 14, and in Volume 3, chapter 15. Faith comes in chapter 16; and chapter 17 continues with justification. It is clear, therefore, that the article herein discussed does not correctly describe the Reformation position as against Romanism.



Calvin very decisively places justification before regeneration, not in temporal but in logical sequence.

Editorial Comments

Thank you, professor, for your stimulating comments. We are aware that some later Calvinists have tended to place regeneration before justification. As for Calvin, he declared, ". . . justifying grace is not separate from regeneration although these are distinct things. —*Institutes*, Bk. 4, chap. 2, sec. 2. In fact, in a certain passage in the *Consensus Tigurinus*, Calvin very decisively places justification before regeneration, not in temporal but in logical sequence. He writes, "*Dum fide inserti in Christi corpus, idque spiritus sancti virtute, primum iusti censemur gratuita iustitiae imputatione, de inde regeneramur in novam vitam.*" —Cited by Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, tr. Philip Mairet (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 256.

A further comment: Surely you are not unaware that the whole Lutheran stream of the Reformation very decidedly places justification before regeneration. The Formula of Concord distinctly says that "the renewal . . . follows justification" and "succeeds the righteousness of faith" (see *Book of Concord*, p. 253). John Wesley did not follow Luther on everything, but he certainly followed Luther on the order of salvation. We would like some Lutheran scholars to comment on this letter. —Ed.

Further Observations on the Order of Justification and Regeneration

All those who stand in the tradition of the Reformation believe that justification and regeneration are closely related and that one cannot and will not be present without the other. However, there has been some sharp disagreement as to their logical order, if not their temporal order.

There is no question about Calvin's placing justification before regeneration in the order of logic (see *Institutes*, Bk. 3, chap. 11, secs. 6, 11). G.C. Berkouwer also acknowledges this in his *Faith and Justification*, pages 29, 30.

The systematic Calvinists of the seventeenth century, however, reversed Calvin's order and put regeneration before justification. This was the result of moving the doctrine of an arbitrary predestination to the center and starting point of their theological thinking.

There are several grave difficulties with this order of salvation:

1. It reduces the great regenerating work of the Holy Spirit to a secret act of divine grace which is subconscious in whom it is inwrought. Wesley's insistence on a very conscious experience of renewal by the Holy Spirit helped to correct the arid intellectualism and incipient antinomianism in this idea of a secret, subconscious regeneration.

2. It tends to elevate regeneration over justification.

3. It turns Paul's doctrine of the justification of the ungodly (Rom. 4:5) into justification of the reborn. This is a Romanizing tendency and bears a remarkable resemblance to the decree of Trent which says that "if they [men] were not born again in Christ, they would never be justified"—"Decree Concerning Justification," chap. 3.

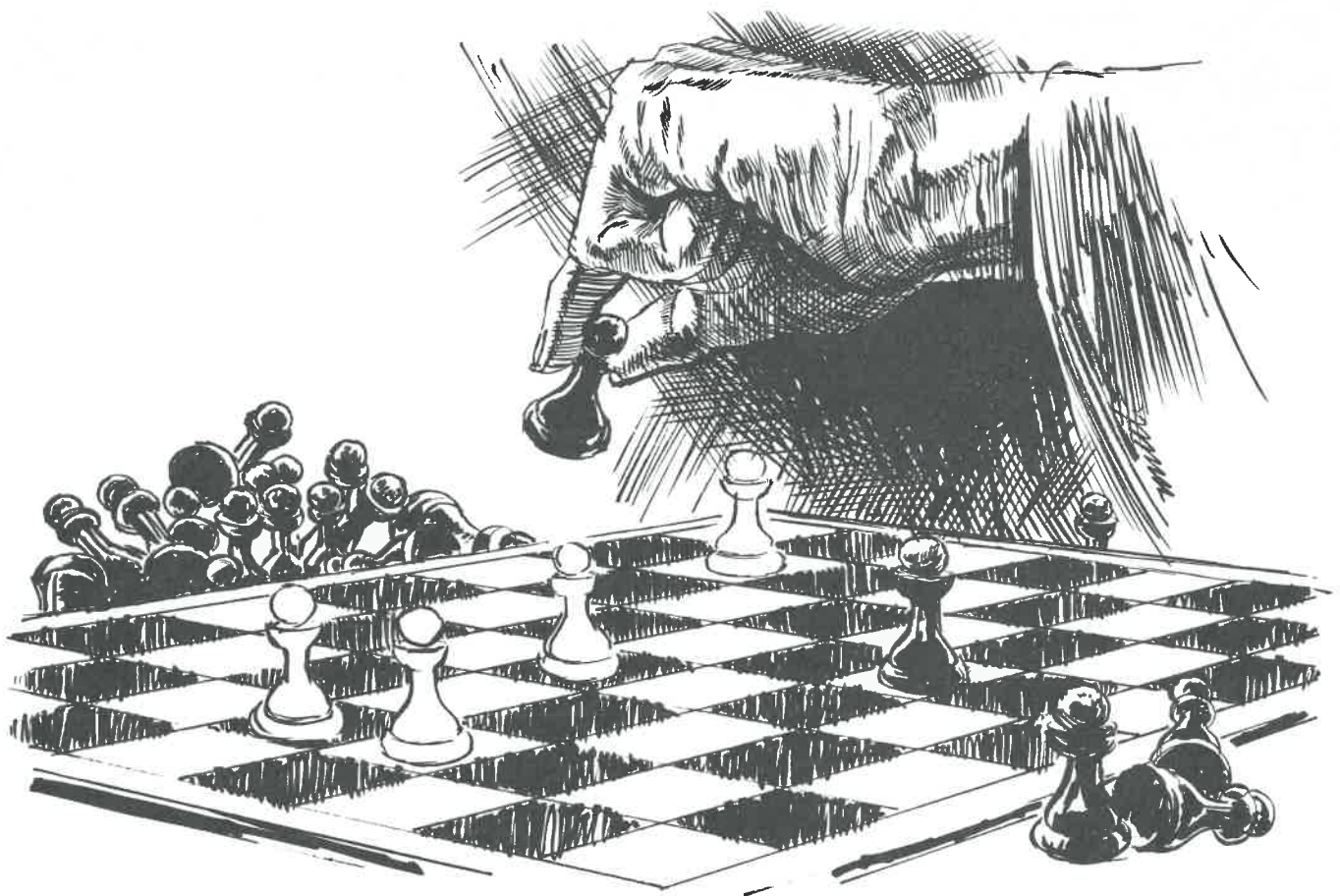
4. It has regenerating grace creating *immediately*—i.e., apart from the means of grace, which is the preached Word of God. According to the words of Jesus in John 3, the uplifting of Christ is the means of the new birth. Peter declares that the new birth is accomplished by the Word of God (1 Peter 1:23). The Holy Spirit comes to men only in and with (but not apart from) the preaching of the gospel. What is the justification, therefore, for saying that the Holy Spirit regenerates men even before and quite apart from hearing the gospel?

5. The claim that men already possess eternal life before they are justified (see Clark's comment on John 5:24) turns the work of justification by faith into an empty formality. Clearly, if a man is unjustified (i.e., prior to his justification), he is condemned, and the wrath of God abides on him until the moment he is justified in the

verdict of the Judge. Justification itself is the verdict of life (see Rom. 5:18). In his *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* Melancthon is quite right when he keeps referring to justification as "justification unto life eternal." John 5:24 is not saying that a man has eternal life before he hears and believes but that, as a believer, he will not come into judgment (condemnation at the last day) because he has already, by faith, passed from death unto life. Just as there is no personal justification without faith, so there is no personal salvation and possession of eternal life without faith. And there is no faith without hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Dr. Clark asks how it can be that dead men can hear the Word of God. But Jesus declares, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). True, our Lord is speaking in the context of the physical resurrection, but even this illustrates the resurrection to spiritual life by the Word of God. Calvinism is to be faulted when it proposes that God's grace imparts eternal life apart from the means of grace in the preaching of the gospel. For further discussion on this matter of regeneration and human freedom, see the article, "The Legal and Moral Aspects of Salvation" (Part 3), in this issue of *Present Truth*.—Ed.

Just as there is no personal justification without faith, so there is no personal salvation and possession of eternal life without faith.

The Holy Spirit comes to men only in and with (but not apart from) the preaching of the gospel.



Recent Reformed Criticisms of the Canons

Klaas Runia

This volume [*Crisis in the Reformed Churches*] on the Synod of Dort and its doctrinal decisions would not be complete, if it did not contain a chapter dealing with recent criticisms of the *Canons*. On purpose we confine ourselves to criticisms coming from theologians belonging to the Reformed tradition. Theologians coming from other traditions, especially from Arminian and Liberal backgrounds, naturally are critical of the *Canons*. But in their case it is usually not the *Canons* which are specifically criticized, but they reject the whole complex of doctrines dealt with in this statement. For theologians of the Reformed tradition the situation is different. In most cases they belong to churches which have accepted the *Canons* as one of their subordinate standards. These theologians therefore have subscribed to

the *Canons* and will not easily criticize their own confession. Yet in recent years many critical voices have been heard, both in Europe and in the United States. In this chapter we shall briefly discuss these criticisms.

* * * * *

We begin with Karl Barth. To some it may seem strange that we include him among the *Reformed* theologians. Is it not true that on decisive points Barth has deviated from the theology of the reformers in general and from Calvin's theology in particular? Although the answer to this question is "Yes," it cannot be denied that Barth belongs to the Reformed tradition. He himself has stated this more than once and his theology, especially his *Church Dogmatics*, bears it out in many places.

Barth deals with the *Canons* in his doctrine of elec-

Reprinted from *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, Peter Y. De Jong, editor (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1968), pp. 161-180. Used by permission. Footnote numbering appears as in original.

tion.¹ During the discussion he refers several times to them. Right at the beginning he praises them for the fact that, in spite of the inclusion of reprobation in their doctrine of predestination, they formulated election itself in such a way that it really had "the character of evangelical proclamation."² This is particularly true of the formulation of *Canons* 1, 7.

Yet Barth has a very serious objection against their doctrine. He believes that in the *Canons* we find the idea of a *decretum absolutum*, just as in the theology of all the reformers. Although they all maintained that our election is an 'election in Christ' and spoke of Christ as the *speculum electionis* (Calvin³) or the *liber-vitae* (*Formula of Concord*⁴), yet this 'in Christ' was not the final word. Actually it referred only to the *ordo salutis* (Christ as the mediator and executor of our salvation). Behind this 'in Christ' there was still deeper ground of election and reprobation: God's eternal decree, by which, in sovereign freedom, He decreed to save some in and through Christ and to leave others in their sin and perdition. The Arminians saw this serious defect and over against the Calvinists they stated that "Christ, the mediator, is not only the executor of the election, but the foundation of the very decree of election."⁵ Unfortunately their own understanding of the election was very faulty. With their doctrine of foreseen faith they themselves were the last exponents of medieval semi-Pelagianism and at the same time the first exponents of Neo-Protestantism. Over against them the Calvinists of Dort were altogether right, when they maintained that our salvation is wholly a matter of divine election. Unfortunately they maintained this by taking recourse to the *decretum absolutum* idea. In this same connection Barth criticizes *Canons* 1, 7, which before he had praised so highly.⁶ Although Jesus Christ is mentioned, He is mentioned after the decision about election and reprobation has already been taken.

In all this we touch upon the very nerve of Barth's criticism. Again and again he returns to this point. In the section on "Jesus Christ, Electing and Elected" he severely criticizes Calvin on this same point, and also the *Canons*.⁷ The electing God of Calvin is a *Deus nudus absconditus*, and the same is true of the *Canons*. "Jesus Christ is not in any sense the *fundamentum electionis*. . . . but at very best He is only the *fundamentum salutis*."⁸ Later on, in his discussion of the 'perseverance of the saints,' Barth once more mentions the same point. Again he rejects the view of the Arminians, he even calls it "unspiritual, impotent and negligible—a feeble postlude to the Catholicism of

the later Middle Ages and a feeble prelude to rationalist-pietistic Neo-Protestantism."⁹ In principle he himself agrees with Calvin and the Synod of Dort. He even calls the doctrine of perseverance the "supreme statement of predestination." Yet there is again the old criticism. Although at this point the Synod "almost exclusively" referred to "Jesus Christ, the Word of God and his promises," yet the doctrine could not work properly, as appeared rather soon after the Synod, because the *decretum absolutum* remained the last background. This is clear from the fact that with regard to the 'certainty' about our election, the Synod does *not* first mention the "constant promises of God" but "the marks proper to the children of God" (Rejection of Errors V, 5). Barth regards this as a necessary and unavoidable consequence of the *decretum absolutum* idea. If we have not been elected from all eternity 'in Christ,' then Christ cannot be the real *speculum electionis*, then we have to seek our last certainty somewhere else, and the only remaining possibility is that we seek it in the fruits of election in our own life.

* * * * *

It cannot be denied that Barth raises a very fundamental question regarding the *Canons*. If he is right in his criticisms, they would really stand condemned. The whole idea of a *decretum absolutum* is utterly foreign to the Bible. The real heart of the biblical doctrine of election is that we have been chosen 'in Christ' before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4, cf. 1 Tim. 1:9). But is Barth right? Not all Reformed theologians agree on this point. For instance, C. Van Til states that "the Synod of Dort had no nominalist notion of a will of God to which a second decision of God had to be added in order to connect election properly with the love of Christ."¹⁰ James Daane, on the other hand, says that "in its teaching about individual election the *Canons* do not even mention the Pauline expression 'in Christ,' except in the Rejection of Errors and even there the 'in Christ' is not even at issue."¹¹

Unfortunately it is not possible within the limits of this chapter to examine this point at great length. We should not forget that Barth accuses not only the *Canons* but the theology of all the Reformers, especially of Calvin. For Calvin's view we may refer to G. C. Berkouwer's *Divine Election*, who declares that Barth's "dogmatical-historical judgment does not conform to Calvin's reflections on the *speculum electionis* and on Ephesians 1:4."¹² Berkouwer does not deny that Calvin did not always state the matter clearly and adequately, but at the same time adds that "at a decisive point he rejected

¹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II, 2, pp. 3-506.

²Op. cit., 17/18.

³Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xxiv, 5.

⁴Formula of Concord, Ep. XI, 7.

⁵C.D., II, 2, 67.

⁶Op. cit., 69.

⁷Op. cit., 1/11.

⁸Op. cit., 11 2/3.

⁹Op. cit., 332.

¹⁰C. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 1962, 166.

¹¹J. Daane, in a review of Van Til's book, in *The Reformed Journal*, Jan. 1963, 29.

¹²G.C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 1960, 155/6.

The real heart of the biblical doctrine of election is that we have been chosen “in Christ” before the foundation of the world.

precisely the penetration into *deus nudus* (the Father alone, as Calvin puts it) by saying that the heart of the Father rests in Christ.”¹³) The same is true of the *Canons*. They too do not always state the matter clearly and adequately, but there is no doubt that the fathers of Dort would all reject the idea of a *decretum absolutum*, apart from Jesus Christ. Chapter 1, 7 states that God has chosen from the whole human race “a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom he from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect and the foundation of salvation.” Unfortunately the English translation of this sentence is somewhat ambiguous. First, the phrase “He chose . . . to redemption in Christ” could be interpreted as meaning that Christ is only the *fundamentum salutis*. The Latin text, however, reads: “ad salutem elegit in Christo.” In other words, the ‘in Christ’ qualifies the act of choosing. Secondly, in the last clause of the above quoted sentence the word ‘also’ has been left out. Both the Latin and the Dutch version read: “whom He *also* from eternity appointed. . . .” In other words, the article clearly distinguishes between our election in Christ (i.e., Christ as the foundation of election¹⁵) and Christ’s appoint-

¹³Op. cit., 156. Cf. also 57 ff. (Calvin on the ‘absolute power’ of God); 105ff. and 139ff. (Christ, the mirror of election). Unfortunately this cannot be said of all later theologians. E.g., L. Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 1932, completely omits a discussion of the ‘in Christ’-dimension of election. Although we are convinced that the author himself would utterly reject the *decretum absolutum*-idea, it cannot be denied that his presentation often gives the impression of speaking of a *deus nudus*.

¹⁵We use this term, not in the way of the Arminians at Dort (this has always been rightly criticized, because they saw the divine election as ‘motivated’ by Christ’s act, cf. Berkouwer, op. cit., 134f.), but in the way it was used by the English delegates at Dort, viz., that from all eternity God appointed Christ as the Head of the elect and the elect themselves as members of Christ. Cf. *Acta*, as republished in the 19th century by J.H. Donner and S.A. van den Hoorn, 342.

ment as Mediator (i.e., Christ as the foundation of salvation). The *Canons* do not see Christ only as the executor of the (previously decreed) election, but the election itself is in Christ.¹⁶

Yet it cannot be denied that in the *Canons* this central aspect of the biblical doctrine of election does not receive the emphasis it deserves. Because 1, 7 is preceded by an article that speaks of a general double decree of election and reprobation, in which the ‘in Christ’ aspect is altogether missing, the conclusion that there is a *decretum absolutum* behind the election-in-Christ could be drawn, and I am afraid that, unintentionally, the *Canons* thus have given occasion to later deterministic misunderstandings, which especially since the 18th century have plagued and still are plaguing large sections of the Reformed community. I am also sure that, if the *Canons* were to be rewritten in our day, the central affirmation of our election in Christ should be brought out more clearly and more unequivocally.

* * * * *

If the “Canons” were to be rewritten in our day, the central affirmation of our elected in Christ should be brought out more clearly and more unequivocally.

¹⁶The judgments of the various groups of delegates vary at this point. Some very clearly state that our election was ‘in Christ,’ e.g., the English and the Genevan delegates, cf. *Acta*, 342, 385. Others mention Christ as executor only; e.g., the delegates from Switzerland (375), Nassau (368, 382), Bremen (394) and Emden (399, 409). The reason for this emphasis of Christ as executor lies no doubt in the fact that the Arminians explained the phrase ‘election in Christ’ in the sense of a ‘*fides praevisa*,’ viz., He chose us as *being* in Christ. Hence the Swiss delegates declare: “But although the election refers to Christ, the Mediator, in whom we are all elected unto salvation and grace, yet God chose us, not as being in Him before we were elected, but in order that we should be in Him and saved by Him” (*Acta*, 375). It is to be regretted that these theologians were led by this fear of misinterpretation by the Arminians, and therefore were unable to do full justice to the ‘in Christ’ of Eph. 1:4. The official *Canons*, however, cannot be said to have succumbed to this fear. Read 1, 7.

Woelderink's view of the "Canons" is a combination of deep appreciation and of fundamental criticism.

We now come to some publications of theologians belonging to the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk). In 1951 a booklet on *The Election* was published by Dr. J. G. Woelderink. This booklet is particularly interesting, because the author himself came from a strict-Calvinist background, with leanings towards hyper-Calvinism. In nearly all his writings, and in particular also in this booklet, he opposed all hyper-Calvinist tendencies while at the same time trying to remain faithful to the deepest intentions of Reformed theology.

What is Woelderink's view of the *Canons*? It is a combination of deep appreciation and of fundamental criticism. Fully agreeing with the teaching that our salvation is due to God's electing love, he at the same time sees two contrasting lines in the *Canons*. The first five articles of Ch. 1 take their starting point in the Gospel. But in art. 6 they switch over to a second line of thought, which takes its starting point in the decree.¹⁷ That this is the major point of criticism appears from the fact that time and again he returns to this same point.¹⁸ To him this is the basic error of all Calvinist parties at Dort, both the Supralapsarians and the Infralapsarians. Because of their emphasis on the decree they were necessarily thinking in terms of causality¹⁹, and consequently "election and rejection were no longer channels through which the stream of God's virtues broke forth, but they became springs which produced salvation and perdition."²⁰ It was no longer sufficient to ascribe faith to God's grace, and unbelief to man's sinful heart. No, God too had his share in unbelief, in as far as He had decreed "to leave the non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy" (1, 6). The natural result of this 'causal' way of thinking was that in 1, 12 all emphasis is placed on man's inner spiritual life, where he can observe "the infallible fruits of election."

Woelderink's own solution is to see election primarily and essentially as *an act of God in time*. His main Scripture proof is taken from the Old Testament²¹, but he finds the same emphasis also in the New Testament. He does not deny that we are allowed to proceed from

election as God's act in time to God's election from eternity, but this should not be done in terms of an abstract, eternal decree, but we should see the eternal God Himself who in his electing love guarantees the relationship of grace which He has established with us.²² If one wants to speak of a decree, one should do this in the form of the 'Covenant of Redemption,' in which the triune God appointed the Son as Redeemer.

Rejection, too, is seen as an act of God in the history of the world and in the concrete lives of sinful people. In the case of rejection, however, we are *not* allowed to go back to an eternal decision of God "before the foundation of the world." Woelderink utterly rejects the idea of an eternal decree of reprobation.²³ At this point the *Canons* have gone beyond the limits of Scripture. It is not surprising, therefore, that they do not give any Scripture proof for this aspect of their teaching.

* * * * *

There are undoubtedly elements of truth in Woelderink's criticisms of the *Canons*. We too believe that there are traces of 'causal' thinking. But at the same time we believe that Woelderink on his part has fallen into the other extreme and is virtually 'historicizing' and 'actualizing' election. Paul's statement that God chose us in Christ "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4) hardly plays any part in Woelderink's conception.²⁴ Election and rejection only 'happen' in an 'open situation.' This is so much so that according to Woelderink

¹⁷J.G. Woelderink, *De Uitverkiezing*, 1951, 19.

¹⁸Cf. op. cit., 23, 25, 26, 76.

¹⁹Cf. op. cit., 19, 21, 22, 23, 26.

²⁰Op. cit., 21.

²¹Op. cit., 43ff. One of Woelderink's criticisms of the *Canons* is that they almost completely ignore the O.T. (op. cit., 8). This criticism is valid and explains the onesided emphasis on individual election in the *Canons*.

²²Op. cit., 49.

²³Op. cit., 35, 45f., 49, 58f.

²⁴He does discuss it on p. 57, but by distinguishing between predestination and election he virtually separates the expression 'before the foundation of the world' from the election.



Of great significance is a document on election adopted by and published on behalf of the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. . . . not only the “Canons,” but the “Belgic Confession” as well is criticized.

election can change into rejection, and *vice versa*.²⁵ At this point he is very close to Barth's conception. Yet his position is also different from that of Barth, because he rejects the latter's objectivism of grace and its implied universalism.²⁶ The Bible knows not only of the light of the Gospel, but also of a shadow, the dark shadow of final rejection and therefore of final perdition.

* * * * *

Of great significance is a document on election adopted by and published on behalf of the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. This *Pastoral Letter* is particularly significant, because the *Canons* are one of the subordinate standards of this church. The *Letter* openly and joyfully confesses the miracle of *election*. “The congregation of Jesus Christ, drawn by the Holy Spirit from the darkness of guilt and lost-ness into the light of Christ's grace, confesses its faith in the electing

²⁵Op. cit., 46, 53. Cf. also his view that believers can fall away completely and definitely, 53f.

²⁶Op. cit., 70f.

God.”²⁷ On the one hand, this is a humbling confession, for it means that we cannot redeem ourselves in any way. On the other hand, it is a comforting confession, for it means that our salvation rests on the faithfulness of God. This divine election becomes manifest in history. God gives faith to sinful people, through his Word and Spirit. But behind this divine act in history we may see God's eternal decree, which is fulfilled in this act. “In all this God is the decreeing, and deciding God, and He is such in his eternity, which is before, above, after and in our time.”²⁸

Rejection too is an act of God in history.²⁹ But in this case we may not infer an eternal decree of rejection. Although such a conclusion may seem to be natural and valid, Scripture itself never employs this logic.³⁰ Texts that have often been quoted in support of such an eternal decree of rejection (such as Prov. 16:4; Matt. 13:10-13; 22:14; Acts 13:48; Rom. 9:11; 1 Pet. 2:8; Jude 4; Revel. 17:8) do not really teach this.

After all this it is not surprising to see that the *Letter* contains a number of criticisms of the *Canons*. In fact, not only the *Canons*, but the *Belgic Confession* as well is criticized, especially art. 16, which speaks of God's “leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.”³² The *Canons*, 1, 6, however, go beyond this and, in spite of what has been said in 1, 5, suggest “that human guilt is not the last word about the ground of rejection.”³³ Other points of criticism are that Word and Spirit are not always kept

²⁷*De Uitverkiezing. Richtlijnen voor de behandeling van de leer der uitverkiezing, aanvaard door de Generale Synode der Nederlands Hervormde Kerk, 1960, 13.*

²⁸Op. cit., 14.

²⁹Op. cit., 15f., 26ff.

³⁰Op. cit., 18; cf. 35.

³¹Op. cit., 30ff.

³²Op. cit., 35f.

³³Op. cit., 39.

inseparably together³⁴, that the certainty of election is too much sought in pious man himself³⁵, that the election of the individual believer is onesidedly stressed³⁶, and that the Scripture proof given is very weak.³⁷

These last points, however, are only minor criticisms. The real criticism of this *Letter* is that the idea of 'causality' is found in the teaching of the *Canons*. This idea, especially as it is applied to rejection, is the reason that the final responsibility of the sinner is obscured and God, somehow, seems to become the final 'cause' of man's perdition. Again we feel inclined to agree with this criticism, yet we also believe that the *Letter* itself is in danger of actualizing the election. The doctrine of election seems to be nothing more than a confession of God's free grace in our life. But does the Bible not say more? There are, especially in the New Testament, many passages that speak of God's pre-determination (cf. Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29, 30; Eph. 1:4-11; etc.). It is striking that in the *Letter* Eph. 1:4 is discussed in connection with the realization of the election. At this point the *Canons*, in spite of their 'causal' way of thinking, are closer to the fulness of the biblical message than this *Letter*.

* * * * *

Finally we come to recent criticisms of the *Canons* by theologians of the Reformed Churches (Gereformeerde Kerken) of the Netherlands. The one who started the new discussions on the *Canons* was G. C. Berkouwer, in his volume on *Divine Election*. Throughout the volume we observe his deep appreciation for the teaching of the *Canons*, against Barth's accusation of teaching a *decretum absolutum*.³⁸ He is of the opinion that Barth himself with his concentration upon Jesus Christ as the electing God transgresses the limits of God's revelation. Although he appreciates Barth's desire to banish all uncertainty from preaching by anchoring our election in the factuality of Christ, yet he believes that Barth falls into the other extreme. "If Barth's argument is that the consoling pastoral message misses its ontic foundation, we must reply that it is rather Barth's doctrine of election with its universality that evokes the problem which Barth thinks the Reformation left unanswered. For with Barth Christ is not so much the mirror of election as the *manifestation* of the election of God, a universal manifestation which may be disregarded in unbelief, but which cannot be

undone."³⁹ Likewise he defends the so-called *sylogismus practicus*, as found in the *Canons*, over against such theologians as Weber, Niesel, Klingenburg and others.⁴⁰

Yet Berkouwer himself also sees 'certain problems' in the *Canons*, especially in 1, 6. While in 1,5 the *Canons* have clearly stated that the "cause or guilt of unbelief" is "in man himself," 1, 6 seems to go beyond this. "One's first impression is that this is a simplistic way of explaining causality."⁴¹ Berkouwer, however, tries to defend the *Canons*. "When we read 1,6, we see that it directs our attention to the acts of God in the life of man." A connection is laid "between sinfulness and stubbornness on the one hand, and the judicial acts of God on the other hand, not in the sense that either belief or unbelief become an independent and autonomous power over against the counsel of God, but in the sense that non-granting is evidently meant as the judicial act of God toward man in sin."⁴² In spite of this defense, Berkouwer is well aware of the fact that there are certain difficulties in the formulation of the *Canons*. Cautiously he admits that "it could be wished that also in 1, 6 the light of the epilogue had been shining more clearly and that therefore the criticism of the *eodem modo* had been more explicit." It is indeed "difficult to indicate completely and clearly the harmony between 1, 6 and 1, 5." But then he immediately adds, more or less as an excuse for the *Canons* that this same "opaqueness" is noticed wherever these things are discussed. "It is not the opaqueness of paradoxical irrationality, but the opaqueness which is due to (the nature of) unbelief, and which can be described from two sides: from the side of God's judgment and from the side of man's sin." "The imbalance of the *causa*-concept which we observe in Calvin and in the *Canons* is, on the level of human insight, a proof of the inexplicability of sin and unbelief. We prefer this imbalance rather than any synthesis from the point of view of the *praescientia* of determinism."⁴³

In the foregoing paragraph the Conclusion of the *Canons* was mentioned. This epilogue plays a dominating part in Berkouwer's interpretation. Two statements from the epilogue are mentioned again and again. The Synod rejects the idea that its doctrine teaches "that God, by a mere arbitrary act of his will, without the least respect or view to any sin, has predestinated the greatest part of the world to eternal damnation, and has

³⁴Op. cit., 39. Cf. *Canons* III-IV, II and 17.

³⁵Op. cit., 39f. Cf. *Canons* I, 12, 13, 16; III-IV, 13.

³⁶Op. cit., 40. Cf. *Canons* 1, 7, 10, 15.

³⁷Op. cit., 40f. The O.T. is hardly quoted. Many quotations from the N.T. are based on a wrong interpretation (Matt. 10:25, in I, 18 and Matt. 11:25, in Rejection of Errors I, 8; Acts 15:18 and Eph. 1:11 in I, 6). In I, 15, dealing with the decree of reprobation, no Scripture proof is given at all!

³⁸G.C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 1960, 145ff.

³⁹Op. cit., 161.

⁴⁰Op. cit., 279ff.

⁴¹Op. cit., 180.

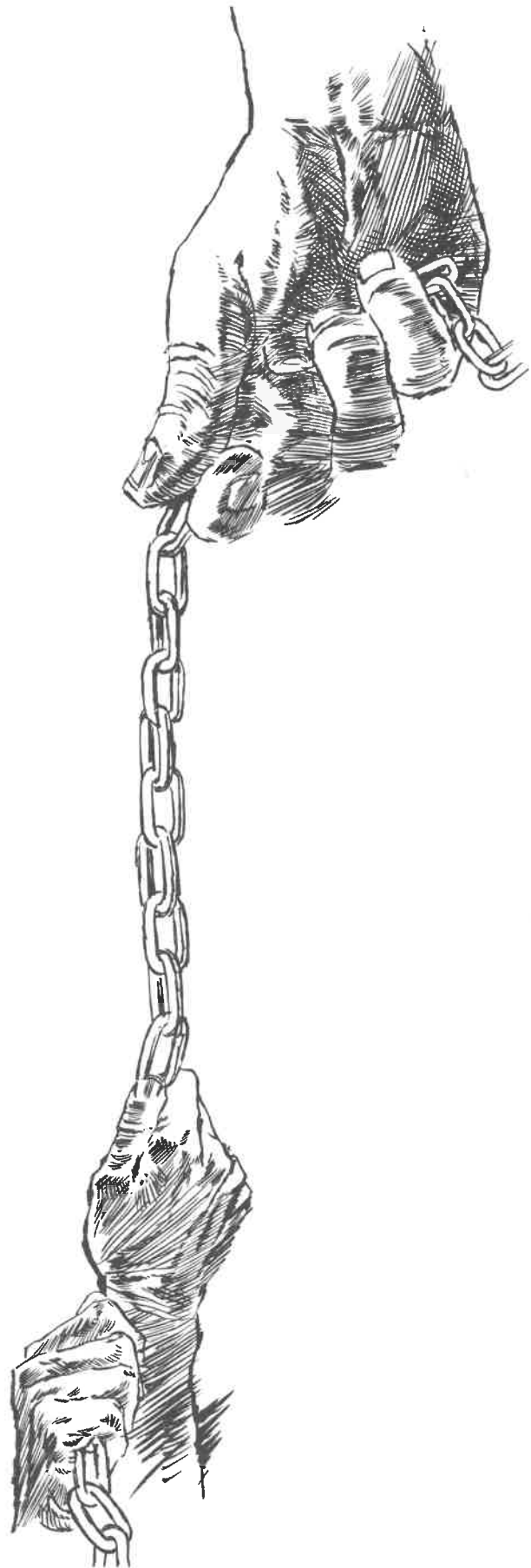
⁴²Op. cit., 181.

⁴³Op. cit., 181. The last words of this sentence in the English translation are incorrect. They should not read: "the *Praescientia* of determinism," but "*praescientis* (i.e. indeterminism) or determinism." Cf. the Dutch edition, 212.

created them for this very purpose" and "that in the same manner (Latin: *eodem modo*) in which the election is the foundation and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety."⁴⁴ We are not saying too much, when we call the *non eodem modo* in particular the master key which Berkouwer uses to open the door to the real teaching of the *Canons*, especially its teaching about reprobation.

In the chapter on 'Election and Rejection' Berkouwer more than once emphatically states that "Scripture repeatedly speaks of God's rejection as a divine answer in history, as a reaction to man's sin and disobedience, not as its cause."⁴⁵ In this connection he points to such texts as 1 Sam. 15:23; 2 Kings 17:20; Deut. 28:15ff.; Lament. 5:22; Ps. 51:13; 78:67; Is. 50:1ff.; etc. He then asks the question: is there any reason to add anything to this Scriptural testimony?⁴⁶ Is there still a 'plus,' the 'plus' of God's eternal decree? Is there a double cause, one in man's sin and guilt, and a second and deeper one in God's predestination? According to Berkouwer Calvin at times wrote as if there were such a second *causa* in God. He even writes that "Calvin has seen the actual *causa* in predestination."⁴⁷ Berkouwer's own view is that the concept of cause is altogether insufficient. "One can never come to an acceptable solution by means of the concept of cause."⁴⁸ It leads inescapably to some form of determinism. This does not mean that Berkouwer chooses for indeterminism as the solution. The struggle between determinism and indeterminism in the doctrine of election is a futile one. As we are not allowed to make the divine counsel the abstract principle of explanation of sin and unbelief and perdition, so we are not allowed either to withdraw sin and unbelief from God's counsel. Quite often it has been tried to do this by speaking of autonomy, synergism, *praescientia*, *nuda permissio*, *liberum arbitrium*, over against God's election.⁴⁹ But this is an impossible solution. "Nothing can be made independent of the counsel of God." Berkouwer himself believes that we should stop at the well-known words of Augustine: *contra*, but not *praeter voluntatem Dei*.

He interprets the *Canons* in the same light. "When the Church, in the *Canons*, for example, speaks of God's decree, it does not mean that we are confronted with an impersonal, iron law, a *fatum* of causal determination."⁵¹ Reformed theology has always realized that neither determinism nor indeterminism provide a solu-



⁴⁴Cf. op. cit., 20, where they are mentioned for the first time.

⁴⁵Op. cit., 183.

⁴⁶Op. cit., 185.

⁴⁷Op. cit., 187. But read also 189, where Berkouwer points out that time and again Calvin breaks through this scheme of a twofold *causa* and confesses that "the real cause of sin is not the counsel of God, but man's sin." On p. 190 Berkouwer adds: "Dort's criticism of the *eodem modo* finds its *præludium* in Calvin."

⁴⁸Op. cit., 188; cf. 189, 200, 215f.

⁴⁹Cf. Dutch edition, 237.

⁵⁰Op. cit., 201.

⁵¹Op. cit., 204.

tion. Hence it maintained both that the *decretum Dei* is *Deus decernens* and that this *Deus decernens* is the God who reveals to us His sovereignty and freedom in the powerful 'before' of His revelation.⁵² The Preacher understood this well, when he said: "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it; and God hath done it, that men should fear before him" (Eccl. 3:14).

The question must be asked here, whether there is still a place left for a *decree of reprobation*. Berkouwer is very cautious. H. Berkhof of Leiden, in a review of Berkouwer's volume on election, wrote: Berkouwer is silent on 1, 15 and this is significant!⁵³ Although Berkouwer a few times does speak of a decree of reprobation, he usually puts the word 'decree' between inverted commas. I believe that we may say that there is virtually no place for such a 'decree' in Berkouwer's theology. He himself stops at the two statements from his epilogue, quoted before, and at the fact that in Scripture God's rejection is always a reaction against man's prior rejection of God. He is and remains very cautious, but I believe that H. N. Ridderbos was right, when he wrote that although Berkouwer is in full agreement with the basic motifs of the *Canons*, the emphases are definitely somewhat different from those in the *Canons*.⁵⁴

More than ten years after the publication of his book on *Divine Election* Berkouwer touched again upon the *Canons* in a long article on "Questions around the Confession."⁵⁵ This time he speaks of 'tensions' in the *Canons*.⁵⁶ On the one hand, there is 1, 5, which clearly speaks of man's own guilt, on the other hand, there is 1, 6, which speaks of God as the cause behind receiving and not receiving faith. At this point there is something problematical in the formulation. Berkouwer tries to solve the problem by distinguishing between the basic motif and the framework of the *Canons*. The basic motif is quite clear and fully scriptural. The central intention of the *Canons* is to speak of "the undeserved election, the sovereignty of grace in the way of salvation, the election as the fountain of every saving good. Clearly and continually we hear the voice of the Gospel in the references to the 'golden chain of our salvation' and the 'in Christ'.⁵⁷ But the framework, within which this basic motif is expressed, is not always clear and pure. It is the framework of 'causality.' There is a 'causal' approach, which is strongly influenced by a certain *exegesis of Romans 9*.⁵⁸ The sovereignty of God is apparently seen as something deeper or higher than the 'ekloge' of Rom. 9:11. One gets the impression that there are two themes: on the one hand, the merciful purpose of

⁵²Op. cit., 204/5.

⁵³H. Berkhof, *In de Waagschaal*, XI, 24.

⁵⁴H.N. Ridderbos, *Gereformeerd Weekblad*, XI, 33.

⁵⁵G.C. Berkouwer, "Vragen rondom de belijdenis," *Geref. Theol. Tijdschrift*, LXIII, i, pp. 1-41.

⁵⁶Art. cit., 14.

⁵⁷Art. cit., 11.

⁵⁸Art. cit., 16.

Several Reformed theologians in the Netherlands have openly stated that they agree with Berkouwer's criticism of the "Canons."

election; on the other, the absolute sovereignty of God 'in general.' Renewed study of Romans 9-11 in recent years, however, has convincingly shown that there is not such a double theme. The only theme Paul deals with is that of the 'ekloge,' the purpose of election, which God works out in the history of Israel. The emphasis is on God's acts of election in history and not on a pre-temporal decree that in a causal way determines all things.

There is no need here to go any further into the details of the article. The central question Berkouwer discusses is whether one can still be faithful to the confession, if one is critical of its 'framework' but fully agrees with its basic motif. His answer is in the affirmative, for faithfulness to the confession is not a matter of certain terms, but rather of the total structure of the confession. There is therefore no need to lodge a gravamen against the *Canons* at this point.

* * * * *

This new approach of Berkouwer has been rather influential. Several Reformed theologians in the Netherlands have openly stated that they agree with Berkouwer's criticism of the *Canons*. I am thinking here in particular of A.D.R. Polman, for many years professor of systematic theology in the Reformed Seminary at Kampen. In his earlier publications he fully upheld the views of the *Canons*, but gradually, mainly under the influence of Barth and Berkouwer, he has changed his mind.⁵⁹ He summarizes his own view as follows. There are *two dangers* that continually threaten the biblical doctrine of God's election and rejection: *causal deter-*

⁵⁹A.D.R. Polman, "De leer der verwerping van eeuwigheid op de Haagse conferentie van 1611," in *Ex. Auditū Verbi*, Festschrift for G.C. Berkouwer, 1965, 193.

minism and (often as a reaction against the first) *synthetic synergism*. Causal determinism is the result of taking one's starting point in an abstract, sovereign decree, based on the concept of 'absolute power.' The consequence of this starting point is that election and rejection become two parallel, symmetrical lines, which both proceed from the absolute decree. But this is nothing else than causal determinism. In reaction, synthetic synergism overemphasizes man's responsibility and then projects this back into God's decree in the form of *praescientia* or *praevisio*. According to Polman the Bible does not know about a pre-temporal decree that in causal way determines all things, but it only speaks of a gracious election in Christ before the foundation of the world. When it mentions rejection, it is always a rejection in history, in which God's reaction against man's rebellion becomes manifest. This does not mean that man's sinful activity becomes autonomous over against God's counsel. The Bible sets the two aspects side by side, and leaves it at that. We have to respect these limits of our reflection. But it is quite clear that every one who objectivizes the elect and the reprobate in two fixed groups, can no longer do full justice to the serious call of the Gospel, which also comes to the reprobate.⁶⁰

Polman is well aware of the fact that he deviates from the *Canons*. Somewhere he writes that the real problem is not God's free, sovereign good pleasure in the life of the believers, but the *partial symmetry* between the decree of election and rejection, in which from all eternity God has elected and rejected certain persons. "The latter is confessed in the *Canons* (1, 6 and 15) and this is *not* accepted by us." The fathers of Dort never produced scriptural evidence for this view, but based it on a mere logical conclusion. If some people call this a valid and necessary conclusion, then they should realize that the Bible itself never draws this conclusion.⁶¹

Reformed theologians of the Netherlands, however, are not the only ones who have followed this new line of thought. Also in the Christian Reformed Church of the U.S.A. there are similar voices. I am thinking here in particular of some articles by H.R. Boer and H. Pietersma in *The Reformed Journal*.⁶² Boer summarizes the 'ambiguities' in the context in which the decree of reprobation stands in the *Canons* as follows: "1. That man alone is responsible for his unbelief. That lack of faith arises from the decree of reprobation. 2. That God is in no wise responsible for the unbelief of man. That the decree withholds the gift of faith and the grace of conversion. 3. That God unfeignedly calls all men to faith. That in the reprobate the response of faith is impossible. 4. That election and the promise of the gospel must be

preached. That reprobation in its very nature appears not to be capable of being preached." Boer does not openly attack the *Canons*. Neither does he speak of a 'causal' way of thinking, but it is quite obvious that his criticism is along the same lines as that of Berkouwer and Polman.⁶³

* * * * *

It is evident that for all these theologians the doctrine of an eternal decree of reprobation is the 'piece de resistance.' To see the problem in its proper perspective, however, we wish to draw the attention to three things.

First, none of these theologians wants to limit God's power and sovereignty. All of them reject every form of synergism, which is so characteristic of all Semi-Pelagianism, including that of the Arminians. When these theologians question or reject an eternal decree of reprobation, they are not motivated by the desire to give some place to even a partial autonomy of the human will. On the contrary, they all fully agree with the *Canons* when the latter teach that we have been chosen by God in Christ before the foundation of the world. Or to put it in the formulation of 1, 5: "Faith in Jesus Christ and salvation through Him is the free gift of God."

Secondly, we should remember that most Reformed confessions of the Reformation period are either silent on reprobation or speak of it in very cautious terms. Even Calvin himself did not mention it in the *Catechism of Geneva*, the *Confession of the Schools* and in his draft for the *French Confession*. For a further survey we may refer to Berkouwer's *Divine Election*, Ch. VI, where he discusses and rejects Warfield's interpretation of this silence and caution. Berkouwer's own view is that "in the Reformed confessions there is an intuitive and reflexive understanding of the Scriptural message of election."⁶⁴

Thirdly, at the Conference of Arminians and Calvinists, at the Hague in 1611, the Dutch Calvinists more than once stated that their controversy with the Arminians did *not* concern the latter's view of reprobation. They declared "that they would have left the Arminians free in their view of reprobation, if only they (i.e. the Arminians) had been willing to confess that God out of mere grace, according to his good pleasure, had elected some to eternal life, without any regard to their faith as a preceding condition."⁶⁵ At the close of the conference they reiterated: reprobation is not a matter of controversy, if only election out of pure grace is maintained.⁶⁶

I believe it is important and necessary to keep these three points clearly in mind, when we discuss the matter

⁶⁰Op. cit., 189-190. Cf. also Polman in several articles in *Gerereformeerd Weekblad*, XVII, 10, XVIII, 2 and, in particular, in XIX, 4.

⁶¹Polman, "Waar is the banier?" II, in *Gerereformeerd Weekblad*, XIX, 4, p. 26.

⁶²H.R. Boer, "The Doctrine of Reprobation and the Preaching of the Gospel," *The Reformed Journal*, March, 1965; *ibid.*, "Reprobation in Modern Reformed Theologians," April, 1955. H. Pietersma, "Predestination," Dec. 1966, Jan., Feb., May-June and Nov., 1967.

⁶³The same is true of Pietersma. In his articles, however, we again find the tendency to 'actualize' election. He formulates predestination as "God's entering into history to deal with men in a new way," viz., in Jesus Christ. In his statements the pre-temporal aspect ('before the foundation of the world'), (Eph. 1:4; cf. I Tim. 1:9) is not done full justice.

⁶⁴G.C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 195.

⁶⁵A.D.R. Polman, in *Ex Auditū Verbi*, 183; cf. 188.

⁶⁶*ibid.*, *Gerereformeerd Weekblad*, XIX, 5, p. 34.

of reprobation. It undoubtedly helps us to see the problem in its real proportions.

* * * * *

When we now turn again to the *Canons*, we must admit that there are indeed two lines of thought. On the one hand, the *Canons* take their starting point in the Gospel. Here all emphasis is laid on the 'ekloge.' Salvation is wholly and fully God's work. It is God who has chosen those who believe in the Gospel. He has chosen them in Christ before the foundation of the world "out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will" (1, 7). Their faith is not their good work, but it is the "free gift of God" (1, 5). At this very point we find the real controversy with the Arminians⁶⁷, who in their defense of man's free will, made election conditional upon foreseen faith.

In addition to the above the *Canons* equally emphasize that unbelief is man's fault. "The cause of guilt of this unbelief as well as of all other sins is no wise in God, but in man himself" (1, 5). This too is part of the clear teaching of Scripture. Man is always seen as responsible for his own sin and the blame for his unbelief is always put squarely upon the sinner himself. In no respect can God ever be held responsible for it, not even in an indirect sense. God is holy. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). But there is also a second line of thought in the *Canons*, namely, the line of 'causality.' We find this in particular in 1, 6, which opens with the following words: "That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God's eternal decree." Reading this, one cannot help wondering whether there were some traces of the idea of 'absolute power' in the minds of the author. At any rate it was at this point the Arminians always concentrated their attack. Time and again they repeated the accusation: you make God responsible for unbelief. At the conference of the Hague in 1611 they described the views of the Calvinists as follows: "those who are predestinated unto perdition (being by far the majority) must be damned necessarily and unavoidably, and they cannot be saved."⁶⁸ The Calvinists, on the other hand, always rejected this view as a caricature. They were firmly convinced that this was unbiblical and repudiated it as a statement of their own position, yet the question may be asked whether the conclusion of the Arminians was not valid, if one takes 1, 6 and 1, 15 seriously. Is it really possible to avoid this conclusion? Of course, we gratefully notice that the fathers of Dort rejected it, but was it not a valid implication of their second line of thought?

The main question, however, is whether Scripture



The main question is whether Scripture itself speaks of an eternal decree of reprobation. . . . It is very striking indeed that the "Canons" themselves do not mention any Scripture proof at all.

itself speaks of an eternal decree of reprobation. It is indeed very remarkable that the main 'proof' in Reformed theology has always been the 'logic' of the situation. At the Conference of The Hague the Calvinists stated: "When we posit an eternal decree of election of certain particular persons, it clearly follows that we also posit an eternal decree of rejection or reprobation of certain particular persons, for there cannot be an election without a rejection or reprobation. When from a certain number some persons are elected, then by this very act others are rejected, for he who takes them all does not elect."⁶⁹ A similar line of argument we find in the judgments given by the various groups of delegates at Dort. In fact, the argument appears in several forms. Some say that, if there is a decree, "It is a fixed rule: what

⁶⁷Cf. *Ibid.*, in *Ex Auditu Verbi*, 179, 184, 185; Woelderink, *op. cit.*, 79.
⁶⁸Polman, *op. cit.*, 177.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, 183.
⁷⁰*Acta*, 361, 367.



God does in time, He must have, from eternity, decreed to do."⁷¹ Others again say that if unbelief were the sole cause of rejection, all would have been rejected. Reformed theologians of our 20th century still use the same kind of argument. When L. Berkhof gives his proof for the doctrine of reprobation, he begins with the following statement. "The doctrine of reprobation naturally follows from the logic of the situation. The decree of election inevitably implies the decree of reprobation. If the all-wise God, possessed of infinite knowledge, has eternally purposed to save some, then He *ipso facto* also purposed not to save others. If He has chosen or elected some, then He has by that very fact also rejected others."⁷³ And L. Boettner opens his discussion of 'Reprobation' with these words: "The doctrine of Predestination of course logically holds that some are foreordained to death as truly as others are foreordained to life. The very terms 'elect' and 'election' imply the terms 'non-elect' and 'reprobation.' When some are chosen out others are left not chosen."⁷⁴

It is of course true that 'logic' does plan an important

part in theology. Reformed theology has always freely acknowledged its good right. The *Westminster Confession* states that "the whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence, may be deduced from Scripture" (Ch. 1, vi). By this very means the church has developed its doctrine of the Trinity and also its Christology, yet the question must always arise: is a particular consequence 'good and necessary'? In general we must say that especially at the point of an eternal decree of reprobation we have to be most careful. And one should ask oneself: why does Scripture itself not draw this conclusion, if it is so natural and so logical?

It is very striking indeed that the *Canons* themselves, in 1, 15, do not mention any Scripture proof at all. In other articles, which touch upon the same matter, the Scripture proof given is very weak, to say the least.⁷⁵ The same is true of Reformed theology in general. The texts that are usually mentioned are all ambiguous and they all allow a different and better interpretation.⁷⁶

⁷¹Acta, 385.

⁷²Acta, 359.

⁷³L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 1953, 117/8.

⁷⁴L. Boettner, *op. cit.*, 104. For other examples, see H.R. Boer, "Reprobation in Modern Reformed Theologians," *The Reformed Journal*, April, 1965.

* * * * *

⁷⁵Cf. G.C. Berkouwer, *art., cit.*, 16/17.

⁷⁶Cf. *Herderlijk Schrijven*, 30f.

This criticism of the *Canons* by some Reformed theologians in recent years, does not mean that these theologians themselves wish to derogate from the sovereignty of God or that they deny God's eternal counsel. Polman, for instance, says: "God elects a man without any ground in this man. God rejects the man who rejects Him, *without becoming dependent* on the negative decision of this man.⁷⁷ Rejecting the solution of the Calvinists at Dort, they equally reject the Arminian solution, namely, God's *praevisio* of unbelief which would precede his decree.⁷⁸

They cannot accept these solutions for two reasons. First, they refuse to accept a 'causal' connection between God's decree and that which happens in history. They believe that the whole concept of causality is out of place here. Causality would mean that there is no place for human responsibility, which is clearly depicted on nearly every page of Scripture. In addition, history would lose all its significance. It would only be a mechanical, pre-determined outworking of a divine decree. Secondly, they also refuse to change the biblical asymmetry between election and rejection, into a symmetrical, logical system, in which salvation and perdition evolve from the one decree in two parallel lines. "He who wants to be 'logical' here, must either make faith the work of man alone or unbelief the work of God."⁷⁹ But both conclusions are evidently unscriptural.⁸⁰ The Synod of Dort has clearly seen this, as appears from the Conclusion, in which it declares that the expression "that in the same manner (*eodem modo*) in which the election is the fountain and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety" is one of the many things "which the Reformed Churches not only do not acknowledge, but even detest with their whole soul"! If it is objected that the synod did not always adhere to this in the formulation of the *Canons*, especially in 1, 6 and 15, we immediately grant this. But Berkouwer is undoubtedly right when he says that the real intention of the synod is found in this rejection of the *eodem modo* and not in the causal framework which we find in 1, 6 and 15.

It is obvious that there are many unsolved problems left. The Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (Ned. Herv. Kerk) rightly demands of its theologians that they must try to penetrate deeper into this 'paradox,' namely, that faith is God's gift and that unbelief has its sole cause in man's own heart.⁸¹ At the same time it adds that "The Church has to call a halt to every one who wants

to weaken or remove this paradox."

The only correct starting point for all our thinking about election and rejection, I believe, lies in the Gospel itself. We are very happy to note that the Synod of Dort has seen this too (1, 1-5). Unfortunately it has not adhered to this one starting point. In 1, 6 it has added another line of thought, namely, one that starts from the counsel of God. Taking into account the whole pattern of thinking at that time (cf. the controversy between the Supralapsarians and the Infralapsarians) this is not surprising. As a matter of fact, the Synod was right when it saw an inseparable connection between the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as preached by the church, and the divine counsel. The problems can definitely not be solved by a mere historicizing and actualizing of election and rejection. But at the same time, we must say that the Gospel may not be robbed of its power by a method of thinking that takes its starting point in an eternal counsel and then proceeds to draw logical conclusions from this counsel. I often wonder whether the 'solution' is not to be sought in a deeper study of what we mean by the word 'eternal,' when we speak of God's eternal counsel. Did Reformed theology perhaps overemphasize the pre-temporal nature of the divine counsel? Did it perhaps too simply identify the eternal nature of the counsel with the eternal nature of God Himself? There are many questions here and it is obvious that in many respects we in this 20th century have not progressed much beyond the fathers of Dort. Perhaps we shall never get much further. But be this as it may, the depth of these problems remains a tremendous challenge for the future.

The only correct starting point for all our thinking about election and rejection, I believe, lies in the gospel itself.

It is obvious that in many respects we in this 20th century have not progressed much beyond the fathers of Dort.

⁷⁷Polman, *Gerformeerd Weekblad*, XVII, 10. Underlining by us.

⁷⁸Cf. Polman, *Ibid.*, XIX, 5.

⁷⁹Polman, *Ibid.*, XVII, 10.

⁸⁰Cf. *Herderlijk Schrijven*, 18/19.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 19.



Election Means Preference

Harry M. Kuitert

Jesus Christ prefers the lost, the publicans and sinners, the sick and rejected. In a word He prefers all those in need of His saving hand.

"Election" is the most offensive word in the vocabulary of the church! Its very offensiveness compels us to take a hard look at it. What is the connection between this word and the total message of the Bible? And if we are offended by it, are we offended by God's preferences or by our misunderstanding of election?

First something about the word "preference." This is without doubt the basic sense of the word "election," at least in the Old Testament. Genesis 29:30 tells us

that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. But in the next verse we are told that he hated Leah. To love, here, means to prefer someone. To hate seems to mean not to prefer someone. Jacob prefers Rachel; he does not prefer Leah (see 1 Sam. 1:5 for a comparable instance).

We have to see these words as part of the whole Old Testament word-picture; we have to hear the whole story if we are to understand the bits and pieces of it. For instance, Jesus does not mean to tell us in Luke 14:26 that we really ought to hate our mothers and fathers—not as we think of hate. Again, it is a question of preference. Matthew suggests the sense, in his rendering of the same statement: "He who loves father or mother *more* than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). Malachi 1:2, 3 has to be read the same way: " 'I have loved you,' says the Lord. But you say, 'How hast thou loved us?' 'Is not Esau Jacob's brother?' says the Lord. 'Yet I loved Jacob and I hated Esau.' "

The notion of preference provides the content of the word "election." A Hebrew dictionary tells us this, but so do the many places in the Old Testament where "to love more than" and to "choose out" are parallels (Deut. 4:37; 7:8; 10:15, etc.). To elect means to have

Reprinted from *Signals from the Bible*, by Harry M. Kuitert, translated by Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 73-76. Used by permission.

The preaching of the Gospel is the same as the preaching of God's preference.

Partnership in the covenant rests in election.

preference for. It is in this sense that Israel is the elect people. They are the people of God's preference (Amos 3:2; Ps. 147: 19, 20).

The main issue of the Bible's message of God's election is not what we sometimes call predestination. It is rather God's preference, as He brings it to light. But is this democratic of God, to prefer one people? Does the word "preference" soften the blow; is not preference about the same thing as arbitrary choice?

To answer this question we have to keep our Bible open. We should ask ourselves *whom* it is that God prefers. We can best get at this by reading the story of Jesus Christ, for He stands in our midst as *the* representative of this God who has preferences. Anyone who has seen Him at work has seen God Himself at work (John 14:9).

For whom does Jesus Christ show preference? Is it not clear on every page of the Gospel? He prefers the lost, the publicans and sinners, the sick and rejected. In a word He prefers all those in need of His saving hand. We *can* describe God's preferences: they are preached to us in the whole Bible, and preached with great force and clarity. Notice that I said *preached*. The notion is not swept under a rug somewhere. To put it boldly, though without exaggeration, the preaching of the Gospel is the same as the preaching of God's preference. Anyone who does not have a feeling for this has not grasped the point of the Gospel. He is something of a Pharisee. To the Pharisee Jesus' preferences were offensive; he forgot how to understand Israel's God and thus he could not understand Jesus as God's representative.

The preference of God—Jesus let us see what it was like; He witnessed to it in all His words and actions. What He told us comes to this: God's preference means that He is a merciful God and intends to stay that way. We get a glimpse of His manner of being God, His "style" (as G.C. Berkouwer puts it), by looking at His election (His having preferences). He does not want to exercise His Godness except by showing Godly mercy. This is why we cannot get close to God "on the basis of works." This is why we can get close to Him only as He (in His bottomless mercy) calls us (Rom. 9:11).

This is the golden thread that binds Romans 9 together. Paul is not dealing with the question of the pre-destiny of some individuals; he is revealing God's preferences. Why should Isaac be chosen instead of Ish-

mael; why Jacob instead of Esau? It is because God wanted to maintain His style, Paul says; that is, it is not that one man is better or older than another that qualifies him for God's preference. God's mercy alone accounts for it. A man is a Christian by the grace of God, not by His Christian accomplishments. To put it another way, partnership in the covenant rests in election.

The purpose of preaching election is made quite clear in the Scriptures. First, one begins to praise God when he knows God's preference (His election), for one praises when he discovers mercy. Our standing with God rests in Christ alone: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:31—King James). We can be part of God's program—this is almost incredible!

The Psalms of Israel are rooted deep in an awareness of God's preference. So are the songs of praise we find in the New Testament. We begin to sing when we discover that we Gentiles share with Israel in God's covenant promise (Eph. 3:6; Acts 11:18; Rom. 11:33-36).

The other side of God's preference is this: We can take part only as people who have no right to take part—and who know it. The preaching of God's preference is humbling to hear. It brings us to our knees; it makes us hold out our hands and implore that we too be allowed to take part (see Matt. 15:21-28 and Luke 7:1-10).

This is what the Pharisees could not swallow. Were they not allowed to take part? Naturally they were. They were *called* to take part. But they had to come in the same way—humbly, modestly, like the shy woman of Matthew 15. They had to ask, as a child asks: "If you please."

The real offense taken at the preference of God lies here—not in an intellectual notion of something like fatalism. To read fatalism into God's election can happen only through a serious misunderstanding of the Bible. It is not as though we cannot know where we stand with God. The proclamation of God's preference tells us that we can know, and know exactly, where we stand with God. The fatalism that has now and then crept into the church's talk about God rises out of another place: it comes out of the question of whether God's sovereign power and our free will can fit together. Are these not two exclusive notions that contradict each other? They are indeed to anyone who will not hold up his hands to ask.

But what do I have to fear from God's preference once I have discovered what that preference is all about? Once we know what sort of people He prefers, His sovereign power becomes our blessedness. This is what Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:3-6.

Once we know what sort of people God prefers, His sovereign power becomes our blessedness.



The Doctrine of Election Karl Barth

Between God and man there stands the person of Jesus Christ, Himself God and Himself man, and so mediating between the two. In Him God reveals Himself to man. In Him man sees and knows God. In Him God stands before man and man stands before God, as is the eternal will of God, and the eternal ordination of man in accordance with this will. In Him God's plan for man is disclosed, God's judgment on man fulfilled, God's deliverance of man accomplished, God's gift to man present in fulness, God's claim and promise to man declared. In Him God has joined Himself to man. And so man exists for His sake. It is by Him, Jesus Christ, and for Him and to Him, that the universe is created as a theater for God's dealings with man and man's dealings with God. The being of God is His being, and similarly the being of man is originally His being. And there is nothing that is not from Him and by Him and to Him. He is the Word of God in whose truth everything is disclosed and whose truth cannot be over-reached or conditioned by any other word. He is the decree of God behind and above which there can be no earlier or higher decree and beside which there can be no other, since all others serve only the fulfilment of this decree. He is the beginning of God before which there is no other

Jesus Christ is the election of God before which and without which and beside which God cannot make any other choices.

beginning apart from that of God within Himself. Except, then, for God Himself, nothing can derive from any other source or look back to any other starting-point. He is the election of God before which and without which and beside which God cannot make any other choices. Before Him and without Him and beside Him God does not, then, elect or will anything. And He is the election (and on that account the beginning and the decree and the Word) of the free grace of God. For it is God's free grace that in Him He elects to be man and to have dealings with man and to join Himself to man. He, Jesus Christ, is the free grace of God as not content simply to remain identical with the inward and eternal being of God, but operating *ad extra* [in addition] in the ways and works of God. And for this reason, before Him and above Him and beside Him and apart from Him there is no election, no beginning, no decree, no Word of God. Free grace is the only basis and meaning of all God's ways

Reprinted from *The Doctrine of God; Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, Part 2, by Karl Barth, translated by G.W. Bromiley et al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), pp. 94-125. Used by permission.

In its simplest and most comprehensive form the dogma of predestination consists in the assertion that the divine predestination is the election of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the electing God, and He is also elected man.

and works *ad extra*. For what *extra* is there that the ways and works could serve, or necessitate, or evoke? There is no *extra* except that which is first willed and posited by God in the presupposing of all His ways and works. There is no *extra* except that which has its basis and meaning as such in the divine election of grace. But Jesus Christ is Himself the divine election of grace. For this reason He is God's Word, God's decree and God's beginning. He is so all-inclusively, comprehending absolutely within Himself all things and everything, enclosing within Himself the autonomy of all other words, decrees and beginnings . . .

In the beginning, before time and space as we know them, before creation, before there was any reality distinct from God which could be the object of the love

of God or the setting for his acts of freedom, God anticipated and determined within Himself (in the power of His love and freedom, of His knowing and willing) that the goal and meaning of all His dealings with the as yet non-existent universe should be the fact that in His Son He would be gracious towards man, uniting Himself with him. In the beginning it was the choice of the Father Himself to establish this covenant with man by giving up His Son for him, that He Himself might become man in the fulfilment of His grace. In the beginning it was the choice of the Son to be obedient to grace, and therefore to offer up Himself and to become man in order that this covenant might be made a reality. In the beginning it was the resolve of the Holy Spirit that the unity of God, of Father and Son should not be disturbed or rent by this covenant with man, but that it should be made the more glorious, the deity of God, the divinity of His love and freedom, being confirmed and demonstrated by this offering of the Father and this self-offering of the Son. This choice was in the beginning. As the subject and object of this choice, Jesus Christ was at the beginning. He was not at the beginning of God, for God has indeed no beginning. But He was at the beginning of all things, at the beginning of God's dealings with the reality which is distinct from Himself. Jesus Christ was the choice or election of God in respect of this reality. He was the election of God's grace as directed towards man. He was the election of God's covenant with man . . .

In its simplest and most comprehensive form the dogma of predestination consists, then, in the assertion that the divine predestination is the election of Jesus Christ. But the concept of election has a double reference—to the elector and to the elected. And so, too, the name of Jesus Christ has within itself the double reference: the One called by this name is both very God and very man. Thus the simplest form of the dogma may be divided at once into the two assertions that Jesus Christ is the electing God, and that He is also elected man.

In so far as He is the electing God, we must obviously—and above all—ascrcribe to Him the active determination of electing. It is not that He does not also elect as man, i.e., elect God in faith. But this election can only follow His prior election, and that means that it follows the divine electing which is the basic and proper determination of His existence.

In so far as He is man, the passive determination of election is also and necessarily proper to Him. It is true, of course, that even as God He is elected; the Elected of His Father. But because as the Son of the Father He has no need of any special election, we must add at once that He is the Son of God elected in His oneness with man, and in fulfilment of God's covenant with man. Primarily, then, electing is the divine determination of the existence of Jesus Christ, and election (being elected) the human.

Jesus Christ is the electing God. We must begin with this assertion because by its content it has the character

and dignity of a basic principle, and because the other assertion, that Jesus Christ is elected man, can be understood only in the light of it.

We may notice at once the critical significance of this first assertion in its relation to the traditional understanding of the doctrine. In particular, it crowds out and replaces the idea of a *decretum absolutum* [absolute, or eternal, decree]. That idea does, of course, give us an answer to the question about the electing God. It speaks of a good-pleasure of God which in basis and direction is unknown to man and to all beings outside God Himself. This good-pleasure is omnipotent and incontrovertible in its decisions. If we are asked concerning its nature, then ultimately no more can be said than that it is divine, and therefore absolutely supreme and authoritative. But now in the place of this blank, this unknown quantity, we are to put the name of Jesus Christ. According to the witness of the Bible, when we are called upon to define and name the first and decisive decision which transcends and includes all others, it is definitely not in order to answer with a mysterious shrug of the shoulders. How can the doctrine of predestination be anything but “dark” and obscure if in its very first tenet, the tenet which determines all the rest, it can speak only of a *decretum absolutum*? In trying to understand Jesus Christ as the electing God we abandon this tradition, but we hold fast by Jn. 1:1-2.

Jesus Christ was in the beginning with God. He was so not merely in the sense that in view of God's eternal knowing and willing all things may be said to have been in the beginning with God, in His plan and decree. For these are two separate things: the Son of God in His oneness with the Son of Man, as foreordained from all eternity; and the universe which was created, and universal history which was willed for the sake of this oneness, in their communion with God, as foreordained from all eternity. On the one hand, there is the Word of God by which all things were made, and, on the other, the things fashioned by that Word. On the one hand, there is God's eternal election of grace, and, on the other, God's creation, reconciliation and redemption grounded in that election and ordained with reference to it. On the one hand, there is the eternal election which as it concerns man God made within Himself in His pre-temporal eternity, and, on the other, the covenant of grace between God and man whose establishment and fulfillment in time were determined by that election. We can and must say that Jesus Christ was in the beginning with God in the sense that all creation and its history was in God's plan and decree with God. But He was so not merely in that way. He was also in the beginning with God as “the first-born of every creature” (Col. 1:15), Himself the plan and decree of God, Himself the divine decision with respect to all creation and its history whose content is already determined. All that is embraced and signified in God's election of grace as His movement towards man, all that

Jesus Christ is the divine election of grace.

results from that election and all that is presupposed in such results—all these are determined and conditioned by the fact that that election is the divine decision whose content is already determined, that Jesus Christ is the divine election of grace.

Thus Jesus Christ is not merely one object of the divine good-pleasure side by side with others. On the contrary, He is the sole object of this good-pleasure, for in the first instance He Himself is this good-pleasure, the will of God in action. He is not merely the standard or instrument of the divine freedom. He is Himself primarily and properly the divine freedom itself in its operation *ad extra*. He is not merely the revelation of the mystery of God. He is the thing concealed within this mystery, and the revelation of it is the revelation of Himself and not of something else. He is not merely the Reconciler between God and man. First, He is Himself the reconciliation between them. And so He is not only the Elected. He is also Himself the Elector, and in the first instance His election must be understood as active. It is true that as the Son of God given by the Father to be one with man, and to take to Himself the form of man, He is elected. It is also true that He does not elect alone, but in company with the electing of the Father and the Holy Spirit. But He does elect. The obedience which He renders as the Son of God is, as genuine obedience, His own decision and electing, a decision and electing no less divinely free than the electing and decision of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Even the fact that He is elected corresponds as closely as possible to His own electing. In the harmony of the triune God He is no less the original Subject of this electing than He is its original object. And only in this harmony can He really be its object, i.e., completely fulfil not His own will but the will of the Father, and thus confirm and to some extent repeat as elected man the election of God. This all rests on the fact that from the very first He participates in the divine election; that that election is also His election; that it is He Himself who posits this beginning of all things; that it is He Himself who executes the decision which issues in the establishment of the covenant between God and man; that He too, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is the electing God. If this is not the case, then in respect of the election, in respect of this primal and basic decision of God, we shall have to pass by Jesus Christ, asking of God the Father, or perhaps of the Holy Spirit, how there can be any disclosure of this decision at all. For where can it ever be disclosed to us except where it is executed? The result will be, of course, that we shall be driven to speculating about a *decretum absolutum* instead of grasping and



So much depends upon our acknowledgement of the Son, of the Son of God, as the Subject of predestination.

affirming in God's electing the manifest grace of God. And that means that we shall not know into whose hands we are committing ourselves when we believe in the divine predestination. So much depends upon our acknowledgment of the Son, of the Son of God, as the Subject of this predestination, because it is only in the Son that it is revealed to us as the predestination of God, and therefore of the Father and the Holy Spirit, because it is only as we believe in the Son that we can also believe in the Father and the Holy Spirit, and therefore in the one divine election. If Jesus Christ is only elected, and not also and primarily the Elector, what shall we really know at all of a divine electing and our election? But of Jesus Christ we know nothing more surely and definitely than this—that in free obedience to His Father He elected to be man, and as man, to do the will of God. If God elects us too, then it is in and with this election of Jesus Christ, in and with this free act of obedience on the part of His Son. It is He who is manifestly the concrete and manifest form of the divine decision—

the decision of Father, Son and Holy Spirit—in favour of the covenant to be established between Him and us. It is in Him that the eternal election becomes immediately and directly the promise of our own election as it is enacted in time, our calling, our summoning to faith, our assent to the divine intervention on our behalf, the revelation of ourselves as the sons of God and of God as our Father, the communication of the Holy Spirit who is none other than the Spirit of this act of obedience, the Spirit of obedience itself, and for us the Spirit of adoption. When we ask concerning the reality of the divine election, what can we do but look at the One who performs this act of obedience, who is Himself this act of obedience, who is Himself in the first instance the Subject of this election . . .

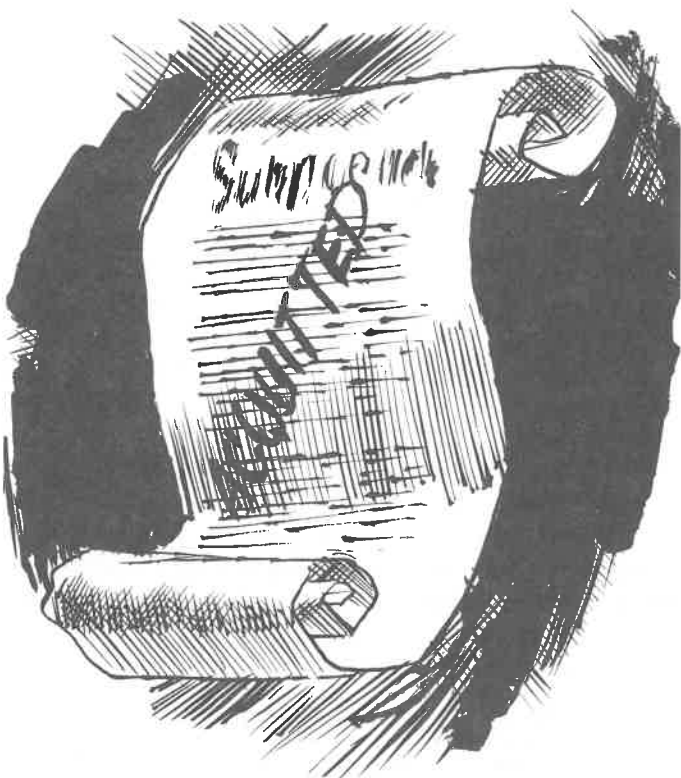
But the elected man Jesus was foreordained to suffer and to die. That is how His selection, and sending, and, as we have seen, His election, are understood in the New Testament. The free grace of God directed in Him towards the creature took on this form from the very first (from all eternity). According to Phil 2:6f. it is obedience unto death, even unto the death of the cross, to which the Son of God predestines Himself when He empties Himself of His divine form of being. And this predestining is the content of the divine decree at the beginning of all things. "The Word became flesh" (Jn. 1:14). This formulation of the message of Christmas already includes within itself the message of Good Friday. For "all flesh is as grass." The election of the man Jesus means, then, that a wrath is kindled, a sentence

If there is an election of others on the basis of the election of the man Jesus, we can see that that election is to be understood only as free grace.

pronounced and finally executed, a rejection actualised. It has been determined thus from all eternity. From all eternity judgment has been foreseen—even in the overflowing of God's inner glory, even in the ineffable condescension of God's embracing of the creature, even in the fulness of self-giving by which God Himself wills to become a creature. For teleologically the election of the man Jesus carries within itself the election of a creation which is good according to the positive will of God and of man as fashioned after the divine image and foreordained to the divine likeness (reflection). But this involves necessarily the rejection of Satan, the rebel angel who is the very sum and substance of the possibility which is not chosen by God (and which exists only in virtue of this negation); the very essence of the creature in its misunderstanding and misuse of its creation and destiny and in its desire to be as God, to be itself a god. Satan (and the whole kingdom of evil, i.e., the demonic, which has its basis in him) is the shadow which accompanies the light of the election of Jesus Christ (and in Him of the good creation in which man is in the divine image). And in the divine counsel the shadow itself is necessary as the object of rejection. To the reality of its existence and might and activity (only, of course, in the power of the divine negation, but to that extent grounded in the divine will and counsel) testimony is given by the fall of man, in which man appropriates to himself the satanic desire. When confronted by Satan and his kingdom, man in himself and as such has in his creaturely freedom no power to reject that which in His divine freedom God rejects. Face to face with temptation he cannot maintain the goodness of his creation in the divine image and foreordination to the divine likeness. This is done by the elected man Jesus (Mt. 4:1-11). In himself and as such man will always do as Adam did in Gen. 3. And for this reason, according to the will and counsel of God, man in himself and as such incurs the rejection which rests upon his temptation and corruption. He stands under the wrath which is God's only answer to the creature which abuses and dishonours its creatureliness. Exposed to the power of the divine negation, he is guilty of death. But it is this very man in himself and as such who in and with the election of the man Jesus is loved

of God from all eternity and elected to fellowship with Him: he who was powerless against the insinuations of the tempter and seducer; he who in his actual temptation and seduction became the enemy of God; he who incurred rejection and became guilty of death. In this one man Jesus, God puts at the head and in the place of all other men the One who has the same power as Himself to reject Satan and to maintain and not surrender the goodness of man's divine creation and destiny; the One who according to Mt. 4 actually does this, and does it for all who are elected in Him, for man in himself and as such who does not and cannot do it of himself. The rejection which all men incurred, the wrath of God under which all men lie, the death which all men must die, God in His love for men transfers from all eternity to Him in whom He loves and elects them, and whom He elects at their head and in their place. God from all eternity ordains this obedient One in order that He might bear the suffering which the disobedient have deserved and which for the sake of God's righteousness must necessarily be borne. Indeed, the very obedience which was exacted of Him and attained by Him was His willingness to take upon Himself the divine rejection of all others and to suffer that which they ought to have suffered. He is elected, and He maintains the goodness of man's divine creation and destiny, not for His own sake but for their sake, for the sake of man in himself and as such. He, the Elect, is appointed to check and defeat Satan on behalf of all those that are elected "in Him," on behalf of the descendants and confederates of Adam now beloved of God. And this checking and defeating of Satan must consist in His allowing the righteousness of God to proceed against Himself instead of them. For this reason, He is the Lamb slain, and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. For this reason, the *crucified* Jesus is the "image of the invisible God." If, then, there is an election of others on the basis of the election of this man Jesus, we can see that that election is to be understood only as free grace, and we can also see why this is so. The ones who "in Him," i.e., through Him, are elected and made partakers of His grace are those who could see in themselves only lost sinners "oppressed of the devil" (Ac. 10:38). If He did not stand at their head, if they were not elected "in Him," without Him and outside Him they would be for ever rejected. They have nothing which they can call their own except their transgression. Yet these transgressors are the ones on whose behalf the eternal love of God for Jesus Christ is willed and extended. They knew nothing of this love. They did not even desire it. But for His part the Elect who stands at the head of the rejected elects only the rejected. The Gospel tells us unequivocally in this connexion that "the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost" (Lk. 19:10), that the sick have need of Him and not the whole (Mk. 2:17), and that in heaven there is more joy over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons which have no need of repentance

(Lk. 15:7). Who is the Elect? He is always the one who "was dead and is alive again," who "was lost and is found" (Lk. 15:24). That the elected man Jesus had to suffer and die means no more and no less than that in becoming man God makes Himself responsible for man who became His enemy, and that He takes upon Himself all the consequences of man's action—his rejection and his death. This is what is involved in the self-giving of God. This is the radicalness of His grace. God must let righteousness reign, and He wills to do so. Against the aggression of the shadow-world of Satan which is negated by Him and which exists only in virtue of this negation, God must and will maintain the honour of His creation, the honour of man as created and ordained for Him, and His own honour. God cannot and will not acquiesce in the encroachment of this shadow-world upon the sphere of His positive will, an encroachment made with the fall of man. On the contrary, it must be His pleasure to see that Satan and all that has its source and origin in him are rejected. But this means that God must and will reject man as he is in himself. And He does so. But He does it in the person of the elected man Jesus. And in Him He loves man as he is in himself. He elects Jesus, then, at the head and in the place of all others. The wrath of God, the judgment and the penalty, fall, then, upon Him. And this means upon His own Son, upon Himself: upon Him, and not upon those whom He loves and elects "in Him;" upon Him, and not upon the disobedient. Why not upon the disobedient? Why this interposition of the just for the unjust by which in some



incomprehensible manner the eternal Judge becomes Himself the judged? Because His justice is a merciful and for this reason a perfect justice. Because the sin of the disobedient is also their need, and even while it affronts Him it also moves Him to pity. Because He knows quite well the basis of Satan's existence and the might and force with which sinners were overthrown and fell in the negative power of His own counsel and will. Because in the powerlessness of sinners against Satan He sees their guilt, but in their guilt He sees also their powerlessness. Because He knows quite well that those who had no strength to resist Satan are even less able to bear and suffer the rejection which those who hear Satan and obey him merit together with him. Because from all eternity He knows "whereof we are made" (Ps. 103:14). That is why He intervened on our behalf in His Son. That is why He did no less. He did not owe it to us to do it. For it was not He but we ourselves in our culpable weakness who delivered us up to Satan and to the divine wrath and rejection. And yet God does it because from all eternity He loves and elects us in His Son, because from all eternity He sees us in His Son as sinners to whom He is gracious. For all those, then, whom God elects in His Son, the essence of the free grace of God consists in the fact that in this same Jesus God who is the Judge takes the place of the judged, and they are fully acquitted, therefore, from sin and its guilt and penalty. Thus the wrath of God and the rejection of Satan and his kingdom no longer have any relevance for them. On the contrary, the wrath of God and the rejection of Satan, the free course of divine justice to which God Himself has subjected Himself on their behalf, has brought them to freedom. In the One in whom they are elected, that is to say, in the death which the Son of God has died for them, they themselves have died as sinners. And that means their radical sanctification, separation and purification for participation in a true creaturely independence, and more than that, for the divine sonship of the creature which is the grace for which from all eternity they are elected in the election of the man Jesus.

And now we must say, too, of the elected man Jesus (apart from the fact that He is what He is by grace, and that His grace consists in bringing many to freedom) that in His mercy God remains just as faithful to Him as He in His rediness to do God's will remains faithful to God. There is steadfastness on both sides. On God's side, it is the steadfastness of grace even in the judgment to which He condemns the Elect. It is the constancy of love even in the fire of the wrath which consumes Him. It is the steadfastness of election even in the midst of the rejection which overtakes Him. And on the side of the Elect, it is the steadfastness of obedience to God, and of calling only upon Him, and of confidence in the righteousness of His will. It is in the unity of this steadfastness both divine and human that we shall find the peculiar secret of the election of the man Jesus.



The Elect of God

Alan Richardson

In the OT the idea of election is met with in two connections, that of Israel and that of Yahweh's Anointed. Election in the Bible is a social conception, since it is comparatively rarely that we meet with the idea of the election of an individual, such as a prophet, for a special task (e.g. Jer. 1:4f.; contrast Isa. 44:2, 24; 49:1; Pss. 22:9f.; 71:6). In the NT St Paul after his conversion came to think of himself as having been separated from his mother's womb and called through God's grace to evangelize the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15f.). The primary biblical doctrine of election, however, is that of the election of Israel and of Israel's Messiah-King. These two conceptions flow into one another, because Israel as a whole is involved in the *persona* of the King or of the Messiah. The OT standpoint is carried over into the NT and determines the meaning of the concept of election in the NT.

From *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 271-281. Copyright© 1958 by Alan Richardson. Reprinted by permission of Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

The Old Testament standpoint is carried over into the New Testament and determines the meaning of the concept of election in the New Testament.

... the Torah itself embodies the prophetic conception of Israel's election for the service of God's universal purpose. 'Thou art an holy people unto Yahweh thy God: Yahweh thy God hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people (*laos periousios*¹) unto himself out of

¹The word 'peculiar' in EVV of this great passage is most unfortunate in view of its changed meaning; 'personal' might be better. The word *periousios* of LXX means 'of one's own special or personal possession'; it occurs in NT only at Titus 2:14, which is based on OT passages where the phrase occurs, e.g. Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2, etc.

all peoples . . . Yahweh did not set his love upon you nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all peoples: but because Yahweh loveth (*agapan*, LXX) you . . .’ (Deut. 7:6-8; cf. Ps. 135:4; Isa. 41:8f. and a great number of other passages). In the prophetic conception Israel is not elected for privilege, i.e. to be served by other nations, but in order to serve them (cf. Mark 10:45); she was redeemed from Egypt and made *laos hagnos Kurio* (Deut. 7:6) in order that she might serve God (7:11) and his purpose for the nations (e.g. Isa. 45:4-6). We may note that two modern objections to the idea of election at once disappear. First, the election of Israel does not involve the rejection of any other nation; Israel is chosen for the sake of the world’s salvation. We might ask (though the Bible does not) how God could have shown his character and purpose otherwise than by taking a weak and uncouth nation and demonstrating his grace and power through it. A second objection falls to the ground when it is recognized that election in the OT is to the service of God in this world and has nothing at all to do with salvation in the world to come. God’s choice of Israel and ‘hatred’ (i.e. non-choice) of Edom has nothing whatever to do with the exclusion of the Edomites from the blessedness of the Age to Come.

This prophetic conception of election had, however, been completely obscured in the rabbinic Judaism of our Lord’s day. Israel, it was held, was holy and would therefore always enjoy the favour of God (e.g. Pss. Sol. 9:17f.; 14:3), whereas sinners (i.e. Gentiles) were to be destroyed from before his face (12:7f.). So far were the rabbis from holding that Israel existed for the service of the nations that they now taught that the world was created for the sake of Israel (II [4] Esd. 6:55; 7:11; 9:13), and the question of the salvation of the Gentiles did not arise: ‘O Lord, . . . for our sakes thou madest this world. As for the other nations, which also come of Adam, thou hast said that they are nothing, and are like unto spittle . . . And now, O Lord, behold, these nations, which are reputed as nothing, be lords over us and devour us. If the world be made for our sakes, why do we not possess for an inheritance our world? how long shall this endure?’ (II [4] Esd. 6:55-59). The Jews of our Lord’s day believed that their covenant with God implied that they and they alone were the centre and object of all God’s activity in creation and redemption and that they had no responsibility for the ‘sinners of the Gentiles.’

Against this religion of pride and merit, the teaching of Jesus and his disciples, notably St Paul, represents a vigorous ‘protestant’ reformation, a reformation based upon a return to the *sola gratia* of Israel’s prophets and to their parallel doctrine of election for service. Indeed, the NT as a whole affirms the continued operation of the principle of election as embodied in the biblical history since the days of Jacob, Abraham, Noah and Seth; for now the most astounding instance of that

The prophetic conception of election had been completely obscured in the rabbinic Judaism of our Lord’s day.

The teaching of Jesus and His disciples, notably St. Paul, represents a vigorous “protestant” reformation, a reformation based upon a return to the “sola gratia” of Israel’s prophets and to their parallel doctrine of election for service.

principle's working has recently occurred. God has rejected the elect, Israel herself, and chosen a new covenant-people out of all the nations of the earth. St Paul in Rom. 9-11 seeks to explain this astonishing paradox: God has not reversed the principle which has all along operated in biblical history; indeed, he has given a signal demonstration of it in the coming of Christ and his Church. In times past God has chosen between the different descendants of Abraham. He chose the Israelites and rejected the Edomites, Ishmaelites, etc.; so now he rejects Israel *kata sarka* and chooses those other spiritual descendants of Abraham, who is the father of many nations (Gen. 17:5; Rom. 4:17f.; 9:6-13), for these other descendants 'walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham which he had in uncircumcision' (Rom. 4:12). This operation of the principle of election (or, to use Paul's own phrase, *he kat' eklogen prothesis*, 'the purpose of God according to election,' Rom. 9:11) is the very heart of the mystery that has been hidden from the foundation of the world but has now been revealed (Rom. 16:26; Eph. 3:1-12), viz. that the Gentiles are now being included in God's saving purpose, while the rejection of Israel is only for a season (Rom. 11:25-32). It is God who 'hardens' the heart, whether of Pharaoh, or of Israel, or of Gentile nations (Rom. 9:14-18), but he 'shuts up all unto disobedience' only in order that he might have mercy upon all (Rom. 11:32).

The clue to Rom. 9-11 and to what is sometimes (not very happily) called St Paul's philosophy of history is to be found in the phrase *he kat' eklogen prothesis tou Theou* (Rom. 9:11). It means 'God's purpose in history which operates by means of the principle of selection.'² In the later Paulines and in the Pastorals the word *prothesis* has become a technical term for the purpose that had existed in the mind of God since before the creation of the world, though the word is used occasionally in a non-technical sense in other parts of the NT (e.g. Acts 11:23; 27:13; the phrase *artoi tes protheseos* is a technical term for the 'shewbread,' Mark 2:26 and pars.; Heb. 9:2). The idea of divine purpose in this sense is expressed by *boule* in the Lucan writings (Luke 7:30; Acts 2:23; 4:28; 13:36; 20:27; cf. also Eph. 1:11; Heb. 6:17); the word means the foreordained counsel and purpose of God through the ages. So far as is known, no one before St Paul had used *prothesis* in this deep sense. The Christians are 'called according to God's *prothesis*' (Rom. 8:28), which was the operative principle of selection in the history of salvation (Rom. 9:11), and so they are now 'in Christ,' in whom they have been made a *kleros* or inheritance for God, 'having been foreordained according to the purpose (*prooristhentes kata*

²The word *ekloge* appears late in Jewish lit., its earliest use being in the Psalms of Solomon (e.g. 18:6). In NT it is found at Acts 9:15; Rom. 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28; I Thess. 1:4; II Pet. 1:10. It means 'election' in the sense of the 'principle of election' and is thus a new word for a well-known OT idea. It can also be used as an abstract noun standing for a concrete one, *eklektoi*, 'the chosen,' as at Rom. 11:7.

prothesin) of him who worketh all things after the *boule* of his will (*thelema*)' (Eph. 1:11; cf. the verb *prothithemai*, uniquely in this sense in Eph. 1:9: *kata ten eudokian autou, en proetheto en auto*; cf. Rom. 3:25). In Eph. 3:11 we read of God's 'purpose of the ages' (*prothesis ton aionon*) in Christ Jesus. In II Tim. 1:9 we read that God 'saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own *prothesis* and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times everlasting' (*pro chronon aionion*).

The conception of God's calling (*klesis*) and of Christians as 'called' is largely Pauline, but not quite exclusively so (see Matt. 22:14; Heb. 3:1; Jude 1; II Pet. 1:10; Rev. 17:14). The idea is based, of course, on God's call to Israel (cf. Hos. 11:1; Ps. 95:7; Heb. 3:15f.): Christians are called into a covenant-relation with God, as Israel of old had been called. The word *klesis* in the NT always means our 'calling' in this sense—never 'vocation' in the Reformation sense of one's calling in the world, even at I Cor. 7:20.³ In this sense all Christians are *kletoi* ('called'), a word which is thus in the NT virtually synonymous with *eklektoi* or *hagioi* (Rom. 1:6f.; I Cor. 1:2; Rev. 17:14; cf. II Pet. 1:10). St Paul seems to think of himself as having been specially or personally called to the status or office of an apostle (Rom. 1:1; I Cor. 1:1); perhaps a tendency developed to think of all the apostles as having been 'chosen before by God' (Acts 10:41; cf. the choice of Matthias by lot, Acts 1:24: 'Shew of these two the one whom thou hast chosen'). But broadly speaking there is no emphasis at all in the NT upon the individual's call, and certainly no suggestion that he ought to hear voices or undergo emotional experiences. The fact is that *klesis* is a social conception: it is significant that except in the special case of Paul in Rom. 1:1 and I Cor. 1:1 the word *kletos* is never found in the singular. Christians are corporately 'the called' and corporately 'the elect,' and they are these things, as we shall see, because they are one body in Christ, the Elect One.

A proper understanding of the NT doctrine of election in Christ will dispel the sombre and frightening mists of post-Reformation theories about predestination, double predestination, reprobation and the rest of the lingering errors of medievalism, from which the rise of biblical science has happily set us free. We must note that in Rom. 9-11 St Paul is still speaking about groups and nations, not about individuals. God is still Lord of the nations, and it is still entirely of God's will and grace that this nation or that is elected as the servant of his universal purpose: it is solely to achieve this purpose that 'he has mercy on whom he will and whom he will he hardeneth' (Rom. 9:15-18). Election refers to God's purpose in this world. It is true that the elected ones, if they do not fall away, will be saved in the world to come, but that is not the primary meaning of election. In the

³See Alan Richardson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Work*, 36.



Christians are corporately “the called” and corporately “the elect,” and they are these things because they are one body in Christ, the Elect One.

NT, as in the OT, election is a matter of service, not of privilege. Nothing is said or implied by the phrase *he kat' eklogen prothesis* (Rom. 9:11) about election to life in the Age to Come, and Calvin's gloss *dum alios ad salutem praedestinat, alios ad aeternam damnationem* is nowhere implied in the text.⁴ Furthermore, nothing is implied about the rejection of any individuals whatsoever. Even if corporately or as a nation ‘the Jews’ are rejected by the principle of *ekloge*, this does not imply that individual Jews are not being numbered by thousands amongst the *kletoi*, *hagioi*, *eklektoi* or *sozomenoi* (I Cor. 1:24, *tois kletois, loudaiois te kai Hellesi*). The NT does not teach that any human beings whatsoever have been created for reprobation, or that they are now irredeemably predestined to damnation. Indeed, it was against precisely such a view—the rabbinic notion of the rejection of the ‘other nations’—that the Christian movement was a protest.

⁴See Sanday and Headlam, *Romans* (ICC), 245, on Rom. 9:11, where an illuminating note will be found.

In the NT it is Jesus Christ who is the predestined one, the Elect of God (cf. the Lucan form of the utterance at the Transfiguration, *houtos estin ho huos mou ho eklelegmenos*, Luke 9:35; and cf. 23:35; I Pet. 2:4, *para de Theou eklekton*; 2:6, citing Isa. 28:16; and John 1:34, WH text, *houtos estin ho eklektos tou Theou*, which is, if not original, at least of great antiquity: cf. Isa. 42:1, *Israel ho eklektos mou*). The early Church believed that everything that had occurred in the story of the life, death and resurrection of Christ had happened according to ‘the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God’ (Acts 2:23; cf. Luke 22:22; Acts 3:18; 13:27). Herod and Pilate, Gentiles and Jews, had done precisely that which God's counsel (*boule*) had foreordained to come to pass (Acts 4:27f.). The Fourth Evangelist, indeed, goes so far as to make Jesus himself fully cognizant of this whole pre-determined *boule Theou* and thus able to foresee the course of the Passion in advance (John 12:32f.; 13:19, 27f.; 18:32); but this tendency is already well developed in the Synoptists. This insistence upon the pre-established plan of events is a characteristically biblical and Hebraic way of stressing the divine initiative in the whole Christ-event; though at first sight it might seem that the disaster which overwhelmed Christ was unforeseen by God and entirely beyond his control, the glorious, saving truth of the Gospel was that God himself had actually planned what had happened: God sent his Son to die for man's salvation. Hence Christ is *ho horismenos hupo tou Theou* (Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 1:4), and all who have to do with him in his Passion are drawn, as it were, into the fatal, pre-determined course of salvation-history—Herod, Pilate, Judas, Gentiles, Jews. But this does not mean that Herod and Pilate and Judas were mere puppets in the hand of God, with no personal choice or responsibility in the drama; the NT does not teach that anyone is pre-determined to commit

In the New Testament it is Jesus Christ who is the predestined one, the Elect of God.

a crime, chosen to be a murderer or a traitor. It means that, since human nature is what it is, it was inevitable that the Son of God, having taken flesh, should suffer at the hands of wicked men, and therefore that, if God willed the incarnation of his Son, he must also have willed his death: this is what the *horismene boule kai prognosis tou Theou* (Acts 2:23) means in relation to the Passion story. It is a characteristically Hebraic way of stating this truth to assert that God foreordained all the details of the drama in advance, like a playwright working out the fate of his *dramatis personae*.

The NT writers never raise questions about the compatibility of divine foreknowledge with human free will. Such problems are therefore not within the scope of our discussion, but we may perhaps assert the necessity of maintaining the reality both of divine foreknowledge and of human freedom. Jesus must have known well enough, as the Gospels assert that he did, that Judas was going to betray him: does this mean that Judas was predestined to the betrayal and had no choice in the matter? Of course not; the fact that my friend, who knows me well, can predict what I am likely to do in a given situation does not in the least mean that I am not free or am not fully responsible for my action. It was inevitable, in the circumstances of Christ's incarnate life, that he should have been rejected, betrayed, set at nought and put to death: it was not inevitable that any particular individual—Caiaphas, Judas, Herod, Pilate—should have been the instrument of the inevitable. Each participant in the action did what he did consciously and deliberately, knowing that he could have done otherwise. 'Pilate answered and said, What I have written I have written' (John 19:22). 'All the people answered and said, His blood be on us and on our children' (Matt. 27:25). 'Then Judas . . . repented . . . saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood' (Matt. 27:3f.). The mystery of determinism and freedom in human life is indeed beyond our comprehension, but we must acknowledge it as a fact. Statisticians can compute with astonishing accuracy how many people will commit suicide in London or New York next year: it would seem to be mysteriously predetermined that these unhappy events shall happen. But no one can predict *which* individuals will kill themselves; the categories of predestination, foreknowledge, and so on, are valid, as we have suggested, for the behaviour of groups, but do not apply to this or that individual person. Caiaphas, Judas, Herod and Pilate were in their actions free and uncoerced; and yet, such is the mystery of our corporate involvement in human relationships in their totality, each became a representative man, acting on behalf of fallen humanity at large. I cannot boast my moral superiority to them, because I know that 'in Adam' they were *my* representatives, they were myself rejecting, betraying and condemning the Christ. And yet, in the overruling providence of God's almighty love, their very rejection, betrayal and condemnation of Christ became the means

of the salvation of 'Adam,' who was recreated in God's image in the person of the crucified Son of God. Caiaphas had declared it expedient that one man should die for the people, that the whole nation perish not (John 11: 49f.). He did not know what he was saying, but those words in the mouth of the Jewish high priest bore an unintended prophetic truth: 'he prophesied,' says St John, 'that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad.' From that day forth they took counsel that they might put Jesus to death (John 11:51-53). The *horismene boule kai prognosis tou Theou* means this also, that man's sinfulness cannot frustrate God's plan of salvation, because even in exercising his freedom to choose evil man is still effecting the foredetermined purpose of God. In this sense even the crimes of Pilate and the rest were committed for the accomplishing of whatever God's hand and *boule* had foreordained should come to pass (Acts 4:28).

Because Christ is the Elect of God, we who are 'in Christ' are therefore *eklektoi*. It is probable that this conception of the Messiah as Elect and of Christians as elect in him owes its origin to Jewish apocalyptic thought. From ancient times the king was regarded as having been 'chosen' by God; indeed, the *anointing* of the king expresses God's choice (cf. I Sam. 16:1-13; I Kings 8: 16; Ps. 89:3, 19f., etc.). The Servant of Yahweh in Duetero-Isaiah is anointed with God's Spirit and is therefore 'the elect one' (Isa. 42:1, etc.). In apocalyptic circles the heavenly eschatological deliverer, the Anointed, was styled 'the Elect One' or 'My Elect One' (Enoch 39:6;



40:5; 45:3f.; 49:2, 4; 51:3, 5; 52:6, 9; 55:4; 61:4f., 8, 10). Here, as in the OT generally, the elect one is the one whom Yahweh favours and cherishes and whom he uses as the instrument of his purpose. He is the leader of all the rest of the elect, a great company in heaven, consisting of the patriarchs of old and of all faithful and righteous Jews of former generations, the righteous and holy ones, existing already in the presence of the Lord of Spirits (i.e. God). The Messiah in the Similitudes of Enoch is the king of this community of the elect. Indeed, in a sense the Messiah, the Elect One, represented in his own person the whole company of heaven, though the extent to which he may be said to be identified with them as their own corporate personality is a question upon which differences of opinion are possible.⁵ In such apocalyptic views the elect are regarded as divine, or at least superhuman beings; they are the 'holy ones' (Enoch 38:4; 39:4, etc.), a name which means divine or angelic beings in the OT (Deut. 33:2f.; Ps. 89:6; Job 5:1; 15:15; Zech. 14:5; Dan. 8:13). It is from such patterns of apocalyptic thought that the NT sayings about the Messiah and his holy ones are drawn (Matt. 24:30f.; 25:31; Mark 8:38; John 1:51; I Thess. 3:13, where *hagion* means 'holy ones' in the OT sense; 4:16; Jude 14). Three times in the Marcan Apocalypse Jesus refers to 'the elect': the days of the tribulations (Messianic woes) are to be shortened for the sake of 'the elect, whom he chose' (Mark 13:20): false Christs and prophets may deceive, if possible, the elect (13:22): the Son of Man shall 'send forth the angels and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven' (13:27). Jesus thinks of his apostles as sent out into all the world preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, issuing the invitation to the Messianic Supper, calling 'many' (i.e. all), preaching the gospel to 'all the nations' (13:10). The number of the 'called' is great; in ideal, at least, it is all mankind; but the response is only partial. He himself summed up the situation in the words *polloi gar eisin kletoi, oligoi de eklektoi* (Matt. 24:22). But God would vindicate his oppressed elect (Luke 18:7), and it was the purpose of God that the elect should be gathered to the Christ at



Because Christ is the Elect of God, we who are “in Christ” are therefore “eklektoi.”

⁵See N.A. Dahl, *Das Volk Gottes: eine Untersuchung zum Kirchenbewusstsein des Urchristentums*, Oslo, 1941; S. Mowinckel, *He that Cometh*, esp. 381, n.2, where he criticizes Dahl's view. On the whole subject see Mowinckel, *op. cit.*, 36-8, 63-7, 365f., 379-83.



If Christians are “the elect,” it is because they are “in Christ,” because they are baptized into the person of Him who alone may with complete propriety be called the Elect of God.

the harvest which the angel-reapers were about to begin (Mark 13:27). This is a metaphorical way of speaking of the missionary labours of the apostolic Church as it set out to preach the Gospel to all the nations.⁶

Election and Grace

The NT conception of ‘the elect’ is thus thoroughly eschatological. The Anointed One is ‘the Elect’: cf. Luke 23.35, *ho Christos tou Theou ho eklektos*. Christ, as the Elect, is even now in the latter days gathering together his elect into his body the Church. If Christians are ‘the elect,’ it is because they are ‘in Christ,’ because they are baptized into the person of him who alone may with complete propriety be called the Elect of God. In him their salvation is assured, and nothing can be laid to the charge of God’s elect (Rom. 8:33). The divine purpose from the foundation of the world was to re-create a new humanity in Christ. Thus, in Rom. 8.28-30 St Paul says that the whole Church corporately was in this sense ‘foreknown’ of God, who ordained beforehand that it should be conformed to the image of his Son: God’s ‘foreordaining’ came first, that is, his determination of the plan to create a new humanity who re-

sponded and were justified in Christ: those who are justified in Christ shall be ‘glorified’ in him at the parousia. If we read this passage as if it related to atomic individuals, we shall create difficulties which are wholly of our imagining; we will then have to ask why it was that God picked out some individuals, and not others, and ‘predestined’ them to salvation since the foundation of the world. Paul, of course, does not think of the Church as made up of a collection of individuals, but as a body: it is *the body* which is foreknown, foreordained, called, justified and is to be glorified. There is no suggestion here or elsewhere in the NT that some individuals are predestined to a mechanical salvation irrespectively of their own decision for Christ. It is stressed that, though God calls us, we must respond. There are no elect automatons in the Kingdom of God. God works in us, but we have our ‘work’ to do (Phil. 2.12f.). The mystery and paradox of grace is that grace does not do away with our free will or our responsibility for our own decisions; our will is never more truly free and never more completely *our* will than when it is wholly surrendered to God (I Cor. 15.10).⁷

The fact of election shews, on the one hand, the absolute sovereignty of God in the unconditional exercise of his freedom. Man has no ‘rights’ as over against the Creator, any more than an earthenware vessel has the right to dictate to the potter the use to which it shall be put (Rom. 9.20f., alluding to a frequent scriptural analogy: Isa. 29.16; 45.9; 64.8; Jer. 18.6; Wisd. 15.7; Eccus. 33.13). The potter makes his vessels for his own purposes, one for this use, another for that: so God chooses Moses as an instrument of his mercy or raises up Pharaoh as an instrument by means of which his name might be made known in all the earth (Rom. 9.15-18). God uses Moses, but he also uses Pharaoh, for the accomplishments of his purposes; the biblical way of putting this is to say that God himself ‘hardens’

⁶See *supra*, 26-9.

⁷See D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ*, 114-18.

Pharaoh's heart (Rom. 9.18; cf. Ex. 4.21; 7.3; 9.12, etc.). In the same way God has 'raised up' the Chaldeans (Hab. 1.6) and other nations or their rulers (e.g. Zech. 11.16; Jer. 27.41: the word *exegeirein* is virtually a technical expression: cf. Rom. 9.17; Ex. 9.16). God rules all history, so that even the deeds of the Assyrians ('the rod of mine anger,' Isa. 10.5) or the Chaldeans are themselves instrumental to his purpose. St Paul rejects the view that this means, since righteous Israel and wicked Assyria are both doing the will of God, that they are both on the same footing with God in respect of righteousness, and that God should therefore not find fault with either (Rom. 9.19-24). It means only that God's sovereign will is done, though unintentionally, even by wicked nations. God endures 'vessels of wrath' (such as imperialistic Assyria or Pharaoh) because they are, in spite of themselves, instruments by which his larger purpose of mercy will be achieved (Rom. 9.22-24). Again we may note that in this passage (Rom. 9.14-24) 'election' is set forth in terms of nations or their representative rulers (like Pharaoh) considered as the agents of God's purpose in history; the passage is not saying anything at all about ultimate salvation in the world to come, and the phrase 'vessels of wrath' does not refer to individuals predestined from the creation of the world to everlasting damnation; it means nations (or their rulers in their representative capacity) who are 'raised' up to execute God's righteous *orge* in this present age. St Paul, of course, certainly holds that individual Christians who were once numbered among the *eklektoi* can fall from this state of grace. He knows that only by *askesis* (cf. *askeo*, Acts 24.16), by spiritual discipline, can he himself keep his place in the race so that in the end he is not *adokimos*, 'reprobate' (I Cor. 9.23-27; cf. II Cor. 13.5-8; cf. Heb. 6.4-8; I John 5.16).⁸ There are indeed reprobates (II Tim. 3.8; Titus 1.16; cf. Jer. 6.30), but there are none who have been 'elected' for reprobation.

The fact of election shews also, on the other hand, the utter sovereignty of God's grace. Election may be defined as the action of God's grace in history; cf. Rom. 11.5, *kat' eklogen charitos*. All election is the result of the operation of God's grace, by which we are saved (Acts 15.11; Eph. 2.5, 8; II Tim. 1.9; Titus 2.11; 3.7; cf. Rom. 3.24). Election is not the result of the divine *orge* (cf. I Thess. 5.9), but only of the divine *charis*, which works in history to accomplish God's ultimate purpose of salvation: God 'saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace' (*kat' idian prothesin kai charin*) (II Tim. 1.9). Paul points to an actual, visible effect of the operation of the divine grace, working according to the principle of selection, in the existence of Jewish Chris-

⁸The word *adokimos* means 'rejected after testing'; cf. *dokimazo*, to test (e.g. I Cor. 3.13), to approve after testing (Rom. 1.28; 2.18; 14.22). The word reminds us that Christians, though justified, still await the last judgment; see *infra*, 341-4.



tians in the Church now (*en to nun kairo*): they constitute a *leimma*⁹ or 'remnant,' a token and pledge that Israel has not been finally rejected, but is still within the scope of God's ultimate saving purpose (Rom. 11.1-6). They correspond to the 7,000 in Israel who in Elijah's day had not bowed the knee to Baal (I Kings 19.18), and they were thus the pledge of Israel's future recovery and restoration to God's favour. Thus, in one of its principal NT meanings, *charis* is simply the power or activity of God at work in history for the salvation of mankind; this saving grace in history operates by the method of the selection of instruments (or, to use the Pauline word, 'vessels') by means of which—whether by obedience ('vessels of mercy') or by disobedience ('vessels of wrath')—God's universal design is accomplished. The special significance of the word *charis*, as thus used almost synonymously with 'the purpose of God according to election' (Rom. 9.11), is that it implies that God's choice of instruments has nothing to do with their merits, their *erga* (II Tim. 1.9; Rom. 11.5f.; cf. Rom. 4.4), but rests solely in his unconditioned freedom. God's salvation itself is unearned, a free gift; so also is the privilege of serving God's purpose as an elected vessel of his design. As St Augustine insists, *Gratia nisi gratis sit gratia non est*.

⁹Only at Rom. 11.5 in NT; not used in OT in the technical sense of 'remnant' (*to kataleiphthen*, not in NT, but cf. Rom. 11.4, *katelipon emauto heptakischillious andras . . .*).

Announcing

The 1977 *Present Truth* Summer Seminar

Yes. We're holding three week-long seminars next July, conducted by the Australian Forum team of Geoffrey J. Paxton and Robert D. Brinsmead. Paxton, an Anglican clergyman and well-known Australian lecturer, and Brinsmead, an independent evangelical scholar and editor of *Present Truth*, bring a wealth of knowledge and gospel insight to the great religious issues of our time.

Challenging lectures. Stimulating discussions. The Australian Forum is committed to restoring justification by faith to the center of the Christian message and showing its radical consequences for the church today. You can look forward to hard-hitting, interest-packed sessions that appeal to ministers and laymen alike. Plus, you'll enjoy warm Christian fellowship with other *Present Truth* readers.

Now is the time to start planning to attend the seminar nearest you.
Here are the locations and dates of the sessions:

Oakland June 30-July 6
Chicago July 11-July 17
Philadelphia July 21-July 27

Convenient meals and lodging will be available on location.

Write Now. Mail this coupon for more information on how you can attend.

Mail To: *Present Truth*, P.O. Box 1311, Fallbrook, CA 92028

- Yes. I'm interested in attending your 1977 Summer Seminar at:
(Check one) Oakland
 Chicago
 Philadelphia

Please send me pre-registration information.

My Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Come join us in a New Reformation.

**CHANGE
OF
ADDRESS**

Moving?

Please send your CHANGE OF ADDRESS four weeks in advance. Be sure to include both your old and new addresses. Type or print *clearly*. Mail to *Present Truth*, P.O. Box 1311, Fallbrook, California 92028, U.S.A.

Old Address

New Address

Name _____

Name _____

Old Address _____

New Address _____

PRESENT TRUTH
Post Office Box 1311
Fallbrook, California 92028
U.S.A.

Address Correction Requested