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### Election of Grace A Comforting Doctrine

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**ELECTION OF GRACE  
A COMFORTING DOCTRINE**

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**A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary  
Department of Systematic Theology**

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**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity**

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**by  
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December 1944**

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## OUTLINE

### I. Election deprived of its comfort. (Problem of the "Deus absconditus" and the "Deus revelatus.")

#### A. Reason always wants to inquire into the "Deus absconditus."

1. Because it cannot explain the "Gur alii, alii non?"
2. Because it tries to and thinks it must be sure of its own salvation on the basis of the hidden God.

#### B. The result of this:

1. Either they place contradictory wills in God (Calvinists).
2. Or they place the difference in man (Synergists).
  - a. In either case they make God a liar.
  - b. In either case they do not solve the problem.
  - c. In either case they lead either to carnal security or to despair.

#### C. The right approach.

1. To hold with Scripture that the hidden and revealed God agree and do not contradict each other.
2. To accept both the hidden and revealed God.
3. Not to inquire into the "Deus absconditus" any further. Otherwise we confound Law and Gospel and make Election a Law.

### II. When based on the revealed God and His Word Election is comforting.

#### A. What does the revealed Word say of Election?

1. It was an Election in eternity.
2. This decree is effective.
3. This decree includes the whole life of the Christian.
4. This decree concerns itself with certain persons.
5. The final purpose of this decree is the eternal glory of the elect.
6. This decree is based on God's goodness (good-will) and grace.
7. This decree is based on Christ and His work.
8. Thus Election must not be considered "nude".
9. What of the "Decree of Reprobation"?
10. Here is no room for carnal security.

#### B. The certainty of our election is our comfort.

1. We must be certain of our election. Scripture takes that for granted.
2. We gain this certainty through the Word, the Gospel, through Christ, the Book of Life.
3. It is a certainty of faith (not absolute or conditional).
4. Objection: we cannot know whether we belong to the elect
  - a. Because Scripture and experience teach us that we can and many do fall away.
  - b. Because even Christians still have their flesh, the world, and Satan about them.

#### C. Thus the purpose of Election is fulfilled.

1. We have the comfort of the continued existence of the Church.
2. We have the comfort of our own blessed end and eternal life.

#### D. Therefore put aside all speculation and make your calling and election sure.

"In der Disputation von der Versch-  
ung ist's nuetzlich und das Beste,  
unten an Christo anfahren, so findet  
und hoert man den Vater; denn alle,  
die oben angefangen haben, die ha-  
ben den Hals gestuerzt." Luther.

"Deshalb lasz dies dein erstes An-  
liegen sein, dasz du dieses Kind er-  
greifen moegest; das lasz dir auf's  
hoechste unbefohlen sein; den, der  
von der Jungfrau Maria geboren ist,  
und der auch zugleich Gottes Sohn  
ist, druecke fest an dein Herz. Wenn  
du diesen ergriffen hast, so bist du  
sicher und wohlverwahrt gegen alle  
listigen Nachstellungen und gefuehr-  
lichen Anschlaege des Teufels."  
Luther.

## I.

Martin Luther, in what many consider his "magnum opus", his "De Servo Arbitrio", has drawn a fine line of distinction between two aspects of God, which he calls the "Deus absconditus" (hidden God) and the "Deus revelatus" (revealed God); "the majestic, glorious God in whom we live and move and have our being, and God manifest in Christ; God's unsearchable judgments and ways past finding out, and His merciful promises in the Gospel."<sup>1</sup>

Luther was disputing with the learned Erasmus on the problem of Free-Will. This was indeed an important problem, for when Erasmus attacked him, Luther exclaimed: "Mihi iugulum petisti!" For here Erasmus was levelling his guns at the very foundation of Christianity. If the Free-Will of man in spiritual matters must be maintained, then the Semi-Pelagian doctrine of the Roman Church was acquitted and Luther would have to stand condemned.

However, Luther was not to be confounded by the grand display of Erasman dialectic. On his side stood Scripture. And although Erasmus had marshalled hundreds of Scripture passages to his side in an effort to prove that Scripture contradicts itself, Luther took these same passages and showed that, though some may seem contradictory, yet they are in reality complementary.

Luther had learned his theology in the school of the Holy Spirit. He had learned the great Christian art of putting aside all logic and all reason and letting Scripture have the floor to speak for itself. He recognized that Scripture itself distinguishes between the

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1. F. Bente, "Historical Introduction" of the "Triglot Concordia", p.209.

"Deus absconditus" and "revelatus".

In this dispute Erasmus was playing with that eternal mystery of Election, which the Formula of Concord states in the words: "God gives His Word at one place, but not at another; removes it from one place, and allows it to remain at another; also, that one is hardened, blinded, given over to a reprobate mind, while another, who is indeed in the same guilt, is converted again." <sup>2</sup> "Cur alii, alii non?" or "Cur alii prae aliis?" is the way our dogmatists have framed this question. It is one which has bothered men for centuries; it has confounded the wise of this world. Men have tried to solve this difficulty, and that is why they have been confounded. So already Augustine; so Erasmus, and Melancthon, and Calvin, and the whole host of their followers. They have hunted for a solution, at least an explanation, and invariably they have ended in catastrophe.

This basic question of "Cur alii prae aliis?" was certainly at the basis of Erasmus' whole ~~theory~~ <sup>defense of</sup> Free-Will. For if he could establish the Free-Will of man, then we have a solution to this question; then man is ultimately responsible for his salvation or damnation.

Erasmus is not dead yet. His followers today are legion. All who will not let Scripture stand alone, who think it must be supported and defended, yes, even supplemented, by their reason, who cannot distinguish between the hidden and revealed God, are his followers. <sup>3</sup>

2. "Triglot Concordia", "Formula of Concord", Art.XI, 1081, 57.

3. The disturbing thing is that in our own church we have already heard voices expressing the opinion that Election should not be preached because such a doctrine is not beneficial, but rather harmful, to the people. These people are also under the spell of their reason, though they may not know it and will vehemently deny it. But they are not distinguishing between the "Deus absconditus" and "revelatus". If they would simply adhere to the revealed God, the doctrine of Election could not but be the most beneficial, the most comforting for Christians. We pray that such men may be led to a better understanding of the revealed God and His revealed doctrine. Luther at one time was also

Just why is it that men so often stumble and fall at this point with the doctrine of Election? Why is it that they always resort to their reason? Of course, the basic reason is that they are sinful creatures who rebel at the revealed Word of God, who want nothing to do with that Word as long as it goes beyond their understanding. But we do not doubt that many of these men are well-meaning, are conscientiously seeking a solution for this problem. Their trouble consists in this that they, perhaps unwittingly, are not satisfied with revelation; their reason even sees in revelation contradictions which, they think, are entirely incompatible with the essence of God. And so, instead of merely staying with the revealed Word, or the revealed God, as Luther calls Him, they think that they have to inquire into the hidden God, not realizing that as soon as they do this they are in a worse dilemma.

Their position is made more difficult for two reasons. First of all, they have absolutely no source from which to gain any knowledge of the hidden God. Otherwise He would not be "absconditus". Now, how can we think of, try to understand, and form any opinions about a person who is unknown, who has never been seen, never been revealed. And so what happens? These men take their reason as source for their knowledge of the hidden God. And now comes the second reason why their position is made more difficult. For after forming opinions and conclusions of the hidden God on the basis of their reason, we find that they are diametrically opposed to what God has said of Himself in revelation. And which of the two is then placed at the head as superior? Madam Reason herself!

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3 cont'd: greatly disturbed by this doctrine. "I am well acquainted with this malady, having lain in this hospital sick unto eternal death." From a letter of Luther, dated April 30, 1531, quoted in Bente, op.cit., p. 222.



Let us view several examples to see how this works. Scripture says that all men are dead in trespasses and sins, are all under equal guilt and that no one can do anything to help himself out of the situation. God does give eternal salvation to some men, and He does it out of pure grace. That is revelation. But now man enters and questions the justice of this procedure and, therefore, the justice of God. Justice is one of the essential attributes of God, but here, they think, God is showing favorites, He is not just. They say further that the whole world exists solely by the power of God; everything that happens, happens only because God is there to grant His preserving power. Then they, not being able to think as clearly as Luther, go a step farther and say that God is therefore also the cause of evil. <sup>4</sup> And so God is accused not only of injustice and favoritism, but also of being a liar and a deceiver; for on the one hand He says He wants all men to be saved, and on the other He Himself causes and finally brings about the evil works and ultimate damnation of those that are lost. Thus they accuse God of Dualism and contradictory wills. <sup>5</sup>

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4. Luther explains this clearly in his "De Servo Arbitrio", Cole-Vaughan-Atherton edition, p. 224: "Just as it is with a man driving a horse lame on one foot, or lame on two feet; he drives him just so as the horse himself is; that is, the horse moves badly. But what can the man do? He is driving along this kind of horse together with sound horses; he, indeed, goes badly, and the rest well, and the rest well; but it cannot be otherwise, unless the horse be made sound. Here then you see, that, when God works in, and by, evil men, the evils themselves are inwrought, but yet, God cannot do evil, although He thus works the evils by evil men; because, being good Himself He cannot do evil; but He uses evil instruments, which cannot escape the sway and motion of His Omnipotence. The fault, therefore, is in the instruments, which God allows not to remain actionless; seeing that evils are done as God Himself moves."

5. Luther himself has been accused of teaching a dualism and ascribing contradictory wills to God. Dr. Engelder answers that charge in a series of articles entitled "A Course in Lutheran Theology" in "Concordia Theological Monthly", vol. IX. He says on pp. 576-579: "And do not make the mistake of thinking that what Luther says concerning the "Deus absconditus" and concerning the "Deus revelatus" is assigning contra-

And so reason has done its negative work; it has objected to the "Deus revelatus". But now it has to offer a solution. Discarding the revealed Word, they invent doctrines such as Erasmus, Melancthon, and others had: that salvation is not entirely by grace, that man has a Free-Will in spiritual matters, that he can either accept or reject salvation. Now, they think, we have defended God's justice. Whether they actually have is another question. If they have, they have done so at the expense of the revealed Word and, if carried through to its logical conclusions, at the expense of their own salvation.

Calvin and his followers, in wrestling with this question of "Cur alii prae aliis?", have also based their solution on the hidden God. They have as their material principle the absolute sovereignty of God. That is the center and basis of their whole theology, and all other doctrines must revolve about that. <sup>6</sup>

5 cont'd: dictory wills to God. Do not keep on saying that 'the distinction between the "Deus revelatus" and the "Deus absconditus" as Luther develops it seems too dualistic,' and that you are therefore compelled to reject this part of the theology of Luther. Rather follow Luther's earnest admonition; accept both series of statements of Scripture and do not try to harmonize them. It may seem to you that there are two different persons speaking and that one is saying the opposite of what the other is saying - God is contradicting Himself..... And now impertinent reason begins to argue and say that both statements cannot be true and that the statements covering the "Deus absconditus" must be deleted from "De Servo Arbitrio" and from Scripture; there must be no dualism!- Theology governed by blind reason is a wretched theology..... If we adopt the theology that is afraid of contradictions, we shall have to eliminate from Lutheran theology the important chapter on the distinction between the Law and Gospel. According to the Law God's wrath is directed against every human being. According to the Gospel there is nothing but love in the heart of God. Is, then, the supreme rule divided between two opposing wills, virtually two opposing persons?..... The pride of reason also needs to be humbled... And nothing humbles and crushes the pride of reason so much as this doctrine concerning the "Deus absconditus"..... The second reason why we thank Luther for making so much of the teaching concerning the "Deus absconditus" is because this teaching is, like all doctrines of Scripture, full of comfort."

6. I. Boettner, "The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination", p. 96: "This doctrine of eternal and unconditional election has sometimes been called the 'heart' of the Reformed faith. It emphasizes the sovereignty of God in salvation."

The Calvinists look at God "a priori", and, consequently, they find their solutions to such mysteries in the absolute and hidden God. So in the mystery of election Calvin says: "Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which He had determined in Himself what He would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny; but eternal life is foreordained for some and eternal death for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say he is predestinated either to life or to death." <sup>7</sup> And Berkhof puts it thus: "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." <sup>8</sup>

As was intimated before already, there are, among conservative Christian theologians, two general answers to the great question which is basic to election: "Cur alii, alii non?" On the one hand are the Calvinists and their kind who want to solve the problem by placing the difference in God. Their doctrine means that they place contradictory wills in God, even though they may want to deny it vehemently. God did not want to save all, though He says that He did. Therefore God elected only those whom He wanted to save; the rest came under the decree of reprobation. For Calvin predestination was only the application of God's general providence. <sup>9</sup> Included in God's decree of predestination was

7. "Institutiones", Book III, ch.XXI, sec.5, quoted by Boettner, *ibid.*, pp.14-15. The Calvinists have acquired a pretty fair ability in using their reason to inquire into the hidden God. So this statement is typical of their theological methods, from Boettner, *ibid.*, p.95: "If the doctrine of Total Inability or Original Sin be admitted, the doctrine of unconditional Election follows by the most inescapable logic."

8. Berkhof, "Systematic Theology", pp.117-118.

9/ Even Augustine had this doctrine of a double election, besides teaching

that Christ should die only for the elect (limited atonement) and that God would later effectively call and convert only those who were elected; the rest of mankind He would pass by; the Gospel, even if they would hear it, would not be a power of God unto them. <sup>10</sup>

This is what has been called "Predestinarianism," a rank denial of the "gratia universalis" <sup>11</sup> Now, what is that but the outright denial of the revealed Word and substituting in its place a doctrine invented by man? So God it is who is responsible for this mystery. By an absolute decree He simply predestined some to salvation and others to damnation. He did that, not out of love to mankind, but solely for the advancement of His glory, that His sovereignty might show forth all the more brightly. <sup>12</sup>

But let the Calvinists speak for themselves. Here is what some of their leading theologians and some of their confessions say. Calvin

9 cont'd: an irresistible and predestinating grace. Says Neve in his "History of Christian Thought", I, 147: "But why do not all who are called yield to grace? Augustine answers this question by the doctrine of predestination. From eternity some men have been predestined to salvation, while others have been predestined to punishment..... To the question, why He chooses some and leaves others to their fate, the only answer is, 'I so will', at which the creature must humbly bow before his creator." This teaching of Augustine was abhorred and rejected by many in his day. And though many held with him in his conflict against Pelagianism, they would not go with him on this point. Finally Semi-Pelagianism evolved as opposed to Augustine's teaching.

10. We realize there is a difference between Infralapsarianism and Supralapsarianism. But essentially their teachings are the same. Walther, "Die 'Absolute' Predestination", in "Lehre und Wehre", v. 26, p. 295, brings out the distinction between the two: "Die Supralapsarier lehren, dasz Christus nur fuer die Erwaelhten gestorben sei und genuggetan habe, dasz daher die Erwaelhung nicht auf Christi Versoehnung, sondern umgekehrt, dasz die Versoehnung auf die Erwaelhung gegruendet und nur zur Ausfuehrung des schon vorausgegangenen absoluten Ratschlusses der Erwaelhung geschehen sei.... Die Infralapsarier aber lehren, dasz Christi Verdienst zwar hinreichend sei auch fuer die Verworfenen, so dasz sie dadurch selig werden koennten, wenn sie daran glaubten, dasz aber Gott ihnen diesen Glauben nicht geben wolle und die Erloesung fuer sie nicht beabsichtigt sei."

11. Engelder, op.cit., p. 804: "The denial of universal grace is the most essential feature of Calvinism, predestinarianism. You cannot be a Calvinist if you believe and teach that God would have all men to be saved.

says: "Predestination, by which God adopts some to the hope of life, and adjudges others to eternal death,... is involved in many cavils.... We maintain, that both belong to God..... Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which He has determined in Himself what He would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny; but eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others..... God creates whom He chooses to be His children by gratuitous adoption; that the cause of this is wholly in Himself; because He exclusively regards His own secret determination..... When God is said to harden or show mercy to whom He pleases, men are taught by this declaration to seek no cause beside His will."<sup>13</sup> Thus Calvin considers election absolutely, as a matter; the sole cause of man's salvation is his election. God did not take into account the work of Christ in the election. It was entirely absolute, "nude".<sup>14</sup>

Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva, said: "Adam had indeed of his own accord fallen into these calamities, yet, nevertheless, not only according to the prescience, but also according to the ordination and decree of God..... There never has been, or is, or will be a time,

12. Berkhof, op.cit., p.115, states this clearly: "The purpose of this election is twofold:....(2) The final aim is the glory of God. Even the salvation of men is subordinate to this."

13. H. T. Kerr, "A Compend of Calvin's Institutes", pp. 128-132.

14. Berkhop, op.cit., p. 114, says: "The decree of election is an expression of the sovereign will of God, His divine good pleasure. This means among other things that Christ as Mediator is not the impelling, moving, or meritorious cause of election, as some have asserted; He may be called the mediate cause of the realization of election, and the meritorious cause of the salvation unto which believers are elected, but He is not the moving or meritorious cause of election itself. This is impossible, since He is Himself an object of predestination and election, and because, when He took the mediatorial work upon Him in the Counsel of Redemption, there was already a fixed number that was given Him/

when God has wished, wishes, or will wish to have compassion on every individual person. 15

In the "Westminster Confession" of 1647 we read: "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated to everlasting life, and others are foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished..... The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by and ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice." 16

The "Canons of the Synod of Dort" state: "It is the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the New Covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to Him by the Father." 17

Boettner follows in the footsteps of his spiritual fathers when he says: "The doctrine of absolute 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..... The decisive factor in the life of each is to be found only in God's will." 18

15. Bente, op. cit., p.198, quotes it.

16. Quoted in Boettner, op. cit., p.84.

17. Quoted by Bente, op. cit., p. 199.

18. Boettner, op. cit., p. 104.

To be logical they should say that God is the cause and author of sin. Boettner comes close to it, though in the next phrase he tries to deny it. "God is ultimately responsible for the hardening of the heart in that He permits it to occur, and the inspired writer in graphic language simply says that God does it; but never are we to understand that God is the immediate and efficient cause." <sup>19</sup> The Calvinists have now successfully defended God's justice. Boettner: "The condemnation of the non-elect is designed primarily to furnish an eternal exhibition, before men and angels, of God's hatred for sin; or, in other words, it is to be an eternal manifestation of the justice of God." <sup>20</sup>

Quotations could be multiplied which say essentially the same things. But this suffices to show what the result of rational inquiry is. By trying to be consistent and logical, they make God the cause of both salvation and damnation. And thus, to the question: "Cur alii, alii non?" they simply reply: "Oh, that's God's fault!"

However, there is a second conclusion to which men come when they attempt to answer this mystery. Whereas the Calvinists place the difference in God, the Roman Catholics (Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians), Synergists, and all who hold Free-Will place the difference into man. They let the "gratia universalis" stand, but they overthrow the "sola gratia" by saying that there must be a difference in man that some are saved while others are lost. Therefore, in part it must also be due to something in man why God elected him to life. Man is thus at least a partial cause of his own election. This doctrine has had its devotees in all ages, for it is a doctrine which is especially suitable to man's egotistic nature.

19. Boettner, *ibid.*, p. 112.

20. Boettner, *ibid.*, p. 121.

The Pelagians ~~may~~ be excluded from this discussion. The last evidences of Christianity have disappeared from their tenets. They make salvation entirely the responsibility and work of man. And in the final analysis they do not solve the problem. If their position were tenable, then why is it that some have the power to work out their salvation whereas others do not? They are still confronted with a dilemma.

Semi-Pelagianism was defended by Erasmus. It does not want to discard the grace of God entirely, but it holds that man can decide for or against salvation; if he decides for it he can do some few good things which in turn earn for him the grace of God (*gratia infusa*), whereby he is enabled to work out his own salvation. This is very closely related to the synergism <sup>which disturbed</sup> of the Lutheran Church. They hold that man has some good qualities left, or a lack of an evil nature, without guilt or less guilty than others. This better quality helps one man to become a Christian, while another, who is in a worse condition, cannot be converted. God foresaw in eternity who would be better, who would have less guilt, or who would cooperate with Him, who would perform certain good works (and be that work faith), and those He elected in view of these good qualities in them.

The difference between Semi-Pelagianism and synergism is hardly one of essence but only one of degree. The same can be said of the difference between these two and Pelagianism. Dr. Engelder says: "But is not Erasmianism, compared with Pelagianism, rather innocuous and somewhat tolerable? In some respects it is worse..... Why should the synergist think that, because his system requires only a farthing, it is so much better than Pelagianism? That one farthing accomplishes as much, and counts for as much, as the half dollar of the Semi-Pelagians and the dollar of the Pelagians." 21



And Luther says of the difference between the proponents of Free-Will (Semi-Pelagianism) and the Pelagians: "They (Semi-Pelagians) are worse than the Pelagians themselves; and that on two accounts. First, the Pelagians plainly, candidly, and ingeniously, assert the 'merit of worthiness', thus calling a boat a boat and a fig a fig; and teaching what they really think. Whereas, our Free-Will friends, while they think and teach the same thing, yet mock us with lying words and false appearances, as though they dissented from the Pelagians; when the fact is quite the contrary. So that, with respect to their hypocrisy, they seem to be the Pelagians' strongest opposers, but with the respect to the reality of the matter, and their heart-tent, they are twice-dipped Pelagians. And next, under this hypocrisy, they estimate and purchase the grace of God at a much lower rate than the Pelagians themselves. For these assert that it is not a certain little something in us by which we attain unto grace, but whole, full, perfect, great, and many, devoted efforts and works. Whereas our friends declare, that it is a certain little something, almost a nothing, by which we deserve grace." <sup>22</sup>

Of the synergists Melancthon, that tragic figure in the Reformation, was the first. Even before Luther's death he began to leave Luther in the doctrines of Conversion and Election. He was constantly willing to give ground with the hope that a compromise might be effected with Rome. After Luther's death he defected entirely. The conflicts with the Calvinists also tended to divorce him from the Scriptural view and to push him into the camp of the synergists as directly opposed to Calvinism. He felt that there was only one possible escape from the doctrine of an absolute necessity, only one position which would not aggrandise God of being the cause of evil and damnation. And so,

<sup>22</sup>. Luther, "De Servo Arbitrio", pp.354-355.

disregarding all passages teaching the "sola gratia", he taught, as Seeberg says: "Grace alone saves, but it saves by imparting to man the freedom to decide for himself..... God elects all men who desire to believe." <sup>23</sup> ~~with him~~ <sup>He emphasized</sup> ~~originated~~ the famous term: "facultas applicandi se ad gratiam." In his "Loc'i" are found these statements: "The cause lies in men why some give their assent to the promises of grace while others do not..... Three causes concur in a person's conversion: the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the will of man, which gives assent to the Word and does not resist..... Free will in man is the ability to prepare oneself for grace." <sup>24</sup>

But synergism did not die with Melancthon. It continued through the centuries until it also raised its head violently in America, in the great Predestinarian Controversy in the late seventies and early eighties of the last century. This phase of synergism stressed mainly the "intuitu fidei," that God elected man in view of his faith, a term borrowed from some of the older dogmatists. By this teaching of election "intuitu fidei" they made faith nothing more than a work, so that in the last analysis man must be saved by a work, whether you call it that or not.

An especially insidious type of synergism has been invented by Laternann. Dr. Engelder describes his teaching very briefly: "Then came Laternann who camouflaged the Erasmian and Melancthonian heresy, which operated with 'natural powers', by ascribing conversion to 'powers offered and imparted by grace,' and he and his associates gained an incredible number of disciples." <sup>25</sup>

By far the greater part of Protestantism today (with the exception

23. Bente, op. cit., p. 197.

24. Quoted in Walther, "Law and Gospel", p.264.

25. Engelder, op. cit., p.406.

of Calvinism), and especially also Lutheranism, is synergistic or Semi-Pelagian. Again I quote Dr. Engelder: "E. Brunner declares: 'The thought of the present day, whether consciously or not, is thoroughly Pelagian.' So also L. Berkhof: 'The prevalent conception of it (sin) is fundamentally Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian. Moxon judges the statement that "we are all Semi-Pelagians today" is not very far from the truth, "since it is in close harmony with the tendency of modern thought.'" Referring to Lutheran theology Hoenecke says: 'The modern theologians are for the greater part synergists. Many of these have taken up with synergism because of their mistaken notion that it offers the only escape from the predestinarianism of Calvin. But they are more careful than the older synergists to disguise their synergism and Pelagianism.'" 26

It is tragic that men have thus forsaken the revealed Word of God. They have refused to see what Luther showed them: that we must distinguish between the "Deus absconditus" and the "Deus revelatus", that there is a chasm between the two which cannot be bridged by human reason, that they are not, however, for that reason contradictory and irreconcilable, that the two must stand side by side, and that each has His place and purpose. Their refusal to recognize this has led to tragic results.

For one thing they make God a liar, whether they want to or not. For all of them are in some way or another opposing God's Word. If they are right, then God must be wrong, and then God is no longer God.

The Calvinists make God a liar by denying the "gratia universalis," the synergists by denying the "sola gratia". And because of an error in this one respect they logically also fall into other errors and make God a liar there too. In fact, their entire theology has the wrong

26. Engelder, *ibid.*, p. 407.

approach, the wrong outlook. For the "corpus doctrine" is really a "corpus." You cannot mutilate one limb without in some way affecting the whole body.

What is more astounding is that, though they hunt for solutions to these problems and mysteries which ~~are~~<sup>seem</sup> logical and satisfying to the reason, and though they claim to have found such solutions, they in reality have solved nothing but have only created new problems which are just as deep and just as impossible of solution. So Calvinism. If the reason why some are saved and others are lost lies in the eternal decree of God, what caused God to be disposed differently towards some than towards others? And they have no answer. Then why not stay with the first mystery instead of trying to solve it and only forming another one!

The same with synergism. If the reason why some are saved while others are lost is due to a difference in men, where does this difference originate? What factor determines this difference? Again they have no answer. Then why not remain with the first mystery instead of trying to solve it and only forming another one!

But this is not the worst. What makes these aberrations from the truth all the more tragic is the effect which they have on the hearts and lives of the people who are influenced by them. Anyone who hears either of these two theories, and is a thinking person who draws the logical conclusions which must be drawn in order to remain consistent, will be led either to carnal security or to despair.

When the Calvinists say that in eternity God absolutely and unconditionally elected some to salvation and others to damnation, when Calvin himself even makes the statement that the ratio is eight to two, eighty per-cent were predestined to death and only twenty per-cent of mankind to life <sup>27</sup>, when Calvin also says of this doctrine:

<sup>27</sup>. Calvin, "Institutiones", III, 24, 12.

"Decretum quidem horribile" <sup>28</sup>, then what can be expected of the conscientious Calvinist? Hearing this preached he will shudder and despair because the chances are so small that he is one of these elect. And a despairing person does not believe and therefore cannot be saved. <sup>29</sup> If he has, however, overcome the thoughts of despair and has convinced himself of his election, then he will say to himself (and rightly so): "I am predestined to life; that predestination is unconditional and absolute; it is impossible for me to fall away, I must be saved; ergo, I can live as I please and do as I please, my salvation is assured." And Calvin has sent another soul to hell.

On the other hand, when the synergists and Semi-Pelagians preach that there is also something good in us on account of which God elected us, many will become self-satisfied, for man by nature likes such preaching; he believes in his own inherent goodness. And so, trusting in himself, he is led to a false security that God is satisfied with him. However, such preaching may also have a different effect. If a person really knows himself and his heart he will find himself in much the same position as Luther before his enlightenment. He realizes that there is nothing good in him, that he is rejected of God. All his working and striving will not satisfy; he knows that he cannot become good enough to reach the absolute perfection which God demands. If the synergists preach that God elected in view of faith, this person immediately replies that his faith is not good enough, that it is

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<sup>28</sup>. Calvin, *ibid.*, III, 23, 7.

<sup>29</sup>. It is true that the Calvinists warn against despair and claim that that is not to be the result of their teaching. Says Boettner, *op.cit.*, p.126: "No one has the right to judge himself reprobate in this life, and hence to grow desperate; for final disobedience (the only infallible sign of reprobation) cannot be discovered until death. No unconverted person in this life knows for certain that God will not yet convert him and save him, even though he is aware that no such change has yet taken place. Hence he has not the right to number himself definitely among the non-elect." But that does not quiet the troubled conscience. That

still so weak, or perhaps that he is not even sure whether he has the true faith. No man can know what God foreknew or foresaw in eternity with regard to him. It is for this reason that Luther said that he would not want Free-will if he could have it. "As to myself, I openly confess, that I should not wish 'Free-will' to be granted me, even if it could be so, nor anything else to be left in my own hands, whereby I might endeavor something towards my own salvation. And that, not merely because in so many opposing dangers, and so many assaulting devils, I could not stand and hold it fast, (in which state no man could be saved, seeing that one devil is stronger than all men); but because, even though there were no dangers, no conflicts, no devils, I should be compelled to labour under a continual uncertainty, and to beat the air only. Nor would my conscience, even if I should live and work to all eternity, ever come to a settled certainty, how much it ought to do in order to satisfy God. For whatever work should be done, there would still remain a scrupling, whether or not it pleased God, or whether He required anything more; as is proved in the experience of all judiciaries, and as I myself learned to my bitter cost, through so many years of my own experience." 30

After seeing what human reason does with the mystery of election, let us now see how we are to view this doctrine in order to gain certainty and comfort from it. How did Luther gain such a triumphant faith in this matter?

First of all we must hold with Luther that the "Deus absconditus" and the "Deus revelatus" agree and do not contradict each other, in

29 cont'd: does not give certainty and comfort yet. They state it negatively; we are not to number ourselves among the reprobate definitely, but such a doctrine at least forces us to do it indefinitely. I am not to say definitely that I belong to the non-elect, but the chances are that I do; therefore I am uncertain.

30. Luther, op.cit., p. 384.

spite of the fact that they may seem to be contradictory. Scripture teaches that God elects and saves men solely because of and by His grace through the work and merit of Christ; that man of himself is lost and has no power or ability whatsoever in spiritual matters. It tells us that God also wants all men to be saved, that He does not desire the death of the wicked, but that those who remain in their wickedness are not His responsibility, that they are lost by their own fault. So God tells Israel: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." (Hoséa 13, 9). It is also the will of God that those who destroy themselves should be condemned to eternal torments. That is the "voluntas Dei consequens."

In order to grasp these truths we must look at God in two ways; first as a truly merciful and gracious God, and then as a truly just and wrathful God. Both are true. And they are not contradictory, not exclusive terms. Both stand side by side, and both belong to the essence of God. The latter is Law while the former is Gospel. Dr. Engelder, in discussing Luther's position, says: "According to the Law God's wrath is directed against every human being. According to the Gospel there is nothing but love in the heart of God. Is, then, the supreme rule divided between two opposing wills, virtually two opposing persons?" <sup>51</sup> Certainly we would not want to exclude everything from theology which presents a mystery and which to us is seemingly contradictory. Then the Christian theology would no longer exist.

This does by no means imply that we are teaching a Manichean Dualism with a Principle of Good and one of Evil. God can in no way be accused of evil. Luther brings this point out: "But whoever wishes

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Engelder, op. cit., p. 577.

to understand these things let him think thus:- that God works evil in us, that is, by us, not from the fault of God, but from the fault of evil in us:- that is, as we are evil by nature, God, who is truly good, carrying us along by His own action, according to the nature of His Omnipotence, cannot do otherwise than do evil by us, as instruments, though He Himself is good; though by His wisdom, He overrules the evil well, to His own glory and to our salvation." <sup>32</sup>

We ~~should~~ need but one Word of God to show that dualism as an explanation of this mystery is excluded. In the third chapter of Lamentations we read of people who must suffer for their sins and transgressions. Who was the cause of this evil? Lamentations 3,37-39: "Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good. Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?"

What must we then say with regard to this mystery? When we find that an effort at a rational explanation leads either to a Calvinistic corruption of universal grace or to the synergistic corruption of the "sola gratia", there is only one thing to do. <sup>33</sup> We must remain in the center and permit both to stand, believing that the hidden God is not in conflict with the revealed God and that the hidden will of God does not at all invalidate His gracious will as revealed in the Gospel. One thing is certain: God, as far as He is hidden, cannot serve as a norm for our faith and life. For that we must remain solely

<sup>32</sup>. Luther, op.cit., p.227.

<sup>33</sup>. Dr. Engelder shows that we are here not betwixt and between: "There is no such dilemma - either synergism or determinism. 'Tertium datur!' Man is converted by grace alone, but that does not involve the thought that man is coerced into conversion. Grace creates the willingness. Grace does not destroy our personality..... And, generalizing, one need be neither a synergist nor a Calvinist; you can be a Biblicalist - if you are willing to sacrifice your rationalism on the altar of Scripture." Op. cit., p. 884.



and alone with God as He has revealed Himself.

This does not mean that we should forget about this hidden God. The teaching of the "Deus absconditus" also has its purpose. But it first of all belongs to the Law. Says Dr. Engelder: "The pride of reason also needs to be humbled... And nothing humbles and crushes the pride of reason so much as this doctrine concerning the "Deus absconditus"..... The second reason why we thank Luther for making so much of the teaching concerning the "Deus absconditus" is because this teaching is, like all doctrines of Scripture, full of comfort." <sup>34</sup>

Yes, if we love both the "gratia universalis" and the "sola gratia" (and as Lutherans we certainly do), then we cannot afford to inquire into the hidden will of God. We must here hold our hand before our mouth and exclaim with Paul: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again. For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen." (Rom.11,33-36). And with David, Psalm 36,6: "Thy judgments are a great deep." How can finite man hope to understand the infinite God? "Canst thou by searching find our God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" (Job 11,7). How can we ever compare with God? Isaiah recognized this: "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and

<sup>34</sup>. Engelder, *ibid.*, pp.178-179.

taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?"(Isaiah 40,12-14).

Luther had passed the final examination in his ability to do this. He says: "We are to argue in one way concerning the Will of God preached, revealed, and offered unto us; and in another way concerning God Himself not preached, not revealed, not offered unto us, and worshipped by us..... Thus, He (God) does not 'will the death of the sinner,' that is, in His Word; but He wills it by that will inscrutable. But in the present case we are to consider His Word only, and to leave that will inscrutable." <sup>35</sup> In his Commentary on Genesis Luther said: "We must not inquire concerning the predestination of the hidden God, but acquiesce in that which is revealed by the call and the ministry of the Word. For there you can be certain regarding your faith and salvation." <sup>36</sup> And also in his Commentary on Genesis he has this statement: "Willst du nun der Verzweiflung, der Feindschaft und Laesterung Gottes entfliehen, so lasz die Speculation und hohe Gedanken von dem verborgenen Gott fahren, und hoere auf, dessen vergeblich zu begehren und darnach zu streben, dasz du das Angesicht oder die Herrlichkeit Gottes sehen wolltest; sonst wirst du fuer und fuer im Unglauben und Verdammnisz haengen bleiben und verloren werden. Denn wer da zweifelt, der glaubt nicht, und wer nicht glaubt, wird verdammt werden." <sup>37</sup>

Indeed, if man were able to search out and comprehend the mysteries of God, what kind of a God would that be? Certainly not a God worthy of our adoration. In fact, He would no longer be divine.

Though we cannot fathom this mystery now, in eternity the "Deus absconditus" will be revealed to us. Luther explained this fact clearly

35. Luther, op. cit., pp. 171. 173.

36. Quoted by Behte, op. cit., p. 224.

37. Luther, St. Louis Edition, II, 178.

by speaking of the three lights, "the light of nature, the light of grace, and the light of glory; which is the common, and a very good distinction. By the light of nature it is insolvable how it can be just, that the good man should be afflicted and the wicked should prosper: but this is solved by the light of grace. By the light of grace it is insolvable, how God can damn him, who, by his own powers, can do nothing but sin and become guilty. Both the light of nature and the light of grace here say, that the fault is not in the miserable man, but in the unjust God: nor can they judge otherwise of that God, who crowns the wicked man freely without any merit, and yet crowns not, but damns another, who is perhaps less, or at least not more wicked. But the light of glory speaks otherwise.- That will shew, that God, to whom alone belongeth the judgment of incomprehensible righteousness, is of righteousness most perfect and most manifest; in order that we may, in the meantime, believe it, being admonished and confirmed by that example of the light of grace, which solves that, which is as great a miracle to the light of nature!" 38

The ability to put away all speculation, to accept only what has been revealed, and to permit mysteries to stand has been called "das theologische Schlussexamen." 39 And Dr. Engelder says: "No man can qualify as a Lutheran theologian who is still trying to find a uniform cause for the different result, salvation in one case, perdition in the other. Dr. Pieper says: 'I mistrust every theologian who is not able to hold his tongue here. He is apt to commit great follies.'" 40

This is so important a matter because, if we are not content with revelation but must always inquire into the hidden God, then we are

38. Luther, *op.cit.*, p.389.

39. Pieper, "Christliche Dogmatik", III,569.

40. Engelder, *op. cit.*, p. 571.

always destroying the Gospel and always making a Law of it; and then theology is no longer Christian. So also with Election. Everyone who has speculated with this doctrine and has tried to supplement it has ended up, not with the Gospel, but with the Law. And then election has been robbed of its purpose, namely to comfort the Christians.

X Election is made a Law by all who identify it with God's general foreknowledge, His prescience, as the Calvinists, and also the synergists with their "intuitu fidei", do. For no man has a revelation of what God foresaw in eternity with regard to him. When man thinks of his election thus he can only fear and tremble. All comfort is removed, and Election is a Law.

X Again, they make a Law of Election who in any way limit the universal grace. If we are to view our election with profit we must do so in the light of God's universal grace. However, Remove that and how can I be sure that God ever loved me? In fact, I will be led to the conclusion that I do not belong to those whom God loved, I am not a recipient of His grace.

X In the third place Election is made a Law when the "sola gratia" is denied. If there is to be some cause in us also why we were elected, then I will come to the conclusion that such a cause is not found in me. It may be found in others, but I know my heart, how evil and sinful it is. Therefore God could not have elected me, because I was not good enough. That is Law!

We are, therefore, in our study of Election bound to the revealed Word of God and, specifically, to the Gospel. For it is in the Gospel alone where the correct doctrine of Election is presented. Only the correct doctrine can give us certainty and assurance of our election. And only when we have gained this certainty of our election is this

doctrine of any value to us whatsoever; only then do we receive from it the comfort which God intended for us.

## II.

Scripture is the sole source for this doctrine. That is clear from the previous discussion. But it may have seemed that Scripture must not present Election very clearly if so many have erred with regard to it. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Scripture teaches Election frequently, thoroughly, clearly, and simply. "Auch die Lehre von der Gnadenwahl wird uns in der Schrift in deutlichen, unmissverstaendlichen Worten vorgelegt. Das 'Was' sagt uns die Schrift, wenn sie uns auch das 'Wie' und 'Warum' verschweigt. Waere es nicht schrecklich, wollten wir, weil wir das 'Wie' und 'Warum' nicht kennen, auch das 'Was' wegwerfen? Des 'Was' halten wir fest und glauben es, wenn wir es auch nicht reimen koennen." <sup>41</sup> And therefore we dare not neglect to preach this doctrine, for otherwise we are not preaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20,27), and we are robbing the Christians of the most comforting doctrine of Scripture. <sup>42</sup>

In order to be able to preach the doctrine of Election as God wants us to preach it we must not only abide by the revealed Word as our source, but we must also be thoroughly acquainted with what this Word says concerning Election. And because this doctrine is so easily corrupted, perhaps more so than others, we must be especially careful that we are perfectly clear as to what Scripture teaches and that everything that we say about it has Scriptural foundation.

Let us now see how Scripture does present this doctrine. And having seen how all other presentations of it can impossibly give comfort but lead rather to carnal security or despair, we will then see how the

41. Stoeckhardt, "Schriftbeweis fuer die Lehre von der Gnadenwahl," in "Lehre und Wehre," v.26, p.180.

42. Cp. also the 13th of the Thirteen Theses of 1881.

teaching of Scripture is indeed a blessed and a comforting doctrine. That fact alone will establish the Scriptural presentation as the only correct one. "Formula of Concord": "Since all Scripture, given by inspiration of God, is to serve, not for security and impenitence, but for 'reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,' 2 Tim.3,16; also, since everything in God's Word has been prescribed to us, not that we should thereby be driven to despair, but that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope,' Rom.15,4, therefore it is without any doubt in no way the sound sense or right use of the doctrine concerning the eternal foreknowledge of God that either impenitence or despair should be occasioned or strengthened thereby. Accordingly, the Scriptures teach this doctrine in no other way than to direct us thereby to the Word, Eph.1,13; 1 Cor.1,7; exhort to repentance, 2 Tim.3,16; urge to godliness, Eph.1,14; John 15,3; strengthen faith and assure us of our salvation, Eph.1,13; John 10,27 f.; 2 Thess.2,13 f."<sup>43</sup>

On the basis of Scripture Dr. Pieper defines Election thus: "Die ewige Erwählung ist die Handlung Gottes an den Christen, wodurch Gott sie von Ewigkeit aus Gnaden um Christi willen mit Berufung, Bekehrung, Rechtfertigung, Heiligung und Behaltung bedacht hat."<sup>44</sup> Dr. A.L.Graebner defines it thus: "The decree of predestination is an eternal act of God, who for His goodness' sake, and because of the merit of the fore-ordained Redeemer of all mankind, purposed to lead into everlasting life, by the way and means of salvation designated for all mankind, a certain number of certain persons, and to procure, work, and promote what would pertain to their final salvation..... The entire work of leading those who shall constitute the Church triumphant from a state

43. Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Art. XI,12.

44. Pieper, op.cit., III, 536.

of sin and wrath and spiritual death, through a state of faith and grace and spiritual life, to a state of glory and eternal life, is the divine execution of the eternal decree whereby God, before the foundation of the world, and prompted only by His grace in Christ Jesus, purposed to call, enlighten, and sanctify, keep and preserve, by the means of grace, according to the counsel of His will, all those whom, by eternal election of grace in Christ, the Redeemer of the world, He had chosen from fallen mankind and predestinated to eternal glory." 45

In the passages of Scripture which speak of Election one of the first things we notice is that this decree of Election took place in eternity. Hardly anyone will dispute this; but it is an important factor. Paul tells the Ephesians (1,4): "According as He hath chosen us in Him πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου." And Ephesians 3,11: "κατὰ πρόθεσιν τῶν αἰώνων." Also 2 Thess.2,13: "From the beginning," and 2 Tim.1,9: "Before the world began." Election is a decree which always has been and, therefore, always will be, unchangeable and infinite.

In the second place, we find that this decree of God had inherent in it the power to do, and it did do, that which it decreed. In other words, it was an effective decree. Paul says in Romans 8,28-29: "To them who are called (κλητοῖς) according to His purpose (κατὰ πρόθεσιν)." God purposed to do something. What did He purpose? Paul describes this πρόθεσιν with the word προγνωσκῆναι (foreknowledge; Luther: "Zuvorerkennen"), and that includes in itself the προορίζειν, the foreordaining or predestinating. Now, this "foreknow" includes more than what men understand with the term today. It is not only a knowledge, but what the older dogmatists described as a "nosse cum affectu et effectu."

Pieper: "Nicht blos ein Wissen um etwas, sondern auch ein solches Notiznehmen, wodurch ein Gemeinschaftsverhaeltnis, ein Sicherverbinden mit Sachen oder Personen, ein Erfassen derselben gesetzt ist." <sup>46</sup> And Stoeckhardt says: "Und nun nimmt der Apostel gleichsam diese dreigliedrige Kette und haengt sie an ein erstes und oberstes Glied ein, welches gleichsam in einen Felsengrund eingeschmiedet ist..... Mit dem Anfang, der 'prognosis' und dem 'procurisimos eis doxan,' ist auch Mitte, das 'kalein' und 'dikaion', und Ende, das 'doxazein' notwendig gesetzt..... Dasz die Berufung, Rechtfertigung, Verherrlichung der Erwaehlten Folge und Ausflusz der ewigen Wahl und Praedestination Gottes ist, haben wir aus der Beziehung des 30. Verses zum 29. Vers ersehen. Das bestaetigt sich uns, wenn wir nun weiter den ganzen Zusammenhang v.28-30. in's Auge fassen. Die v.29. 30. enthaltene Aussage ist Beweis fuer die v.28. aufgestellte Behauptung. Dieser Beweis ist aber nur dann gueltig und kraeftig, wenn wir v.29. und v.30., das, was von dem ewigen Tun, und das, was von dem zeitlichen Tun Gottes gesagt wird, in das genannte Verhaeltnisz, in das Verhaeltnisz von Grund und Folge, zu einander setzen..... Nur wenn Berufung, Rechtfertigung, usw., sicher und notwendig aus der ewigen Versoehung folgt und flieszt, bleibt diese 'gueldene Kette' ein Ganzes, ein unzerreiszbares Ganzes, in das sich auch Kreuz und Leiden einflieht, geschweige, dasz es durch letzteres zerrissen wuerde. Der Trost der angefochtenen Christen, die 'doxa', die gewisse Herrlichkeit, fiel dahin, wenn Gott das, was er ueber sie in Ewigkeit beschlossen, eben ihre Verherrlichung, nicht auch sicher und notwendig in der Zeit, eben durch Berufung, Rechtfertigung, auch durch die Anfechtung hindurch, hinausfuhrte/" <sup>47</sup>

46. Pieper, op.cit., III, 351-352.

47. Stoeckhardt, op.cit., pp.273, 274, 277. For a further discussion of this cf. also Stoeckhardt, "Roemerbrief", pp.339 ff.



Thirdly, we see from Scripture that this eternal decree includes in itself the whole life of a Christian, every phase of that life, even the smallest and most insignificant. It does not only pertain to one part of the Christian's life, as, e.g., his final glorification. Paul ascribes everything in the Christian's life to election when he says (Eph.1,3-5): "Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children." And in Romans 8,28-30 Paul exhorts the Christians to remain faithful in all trials and tribulations. Why? Because they have been predestinated, predestinated also unto these crosses and trials whereby they would be purified and their dross would be removed, and, therefore, everything "must work together for good to them that love God." He depicts this beautiful "catena aurea": their calling, justification, and glorification, all inseparably connected to the first link of foreordination which is based upon His πρόθεσις. Therefore, our whole life, from our call to our final glorification, every phase of that life, is dependent on God's predestination. You cannot destroy a single link of that chain without destroying the whole chain. Remove either the call, or justification, or glorification, and then there is no predestination. And remove predestination and there can be no glorification. This chain is so strong that not one link can be broken. Therefore Paul also uses the term ἐπέσασεν the aorist, although glorification still lies in the future. "Das ist dem Apostel so gewisz und ausgemacht, dasz er von dem in der Zukunft winkenden endlichen Sieg garnicht als von etwas Zukuenftigem, sondern ebenfalls von einer

Tatsache redet, die schon so gut wie vollendet ist." 48

Next it becomes evident that this eternal decree of God concerned itself with certain persons and a definite number of persons. It is, therefore, not to be identified with God's universal grace so that it included all men, as Huber taught, nor is it to be identified with God's general foreknowledge which governs all His creatures, as the Calvinists say. It includes only the Christians. Paul speaks to the Ephesians as elect and includes himself: *ἡμεῖς*. It is, therefore, a particular election; God had particular people in mind: you and me. Acts 13,48: "And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Matthew 22,14: "Many are called, but few are chosen." 2 Tim.2,19: "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His." John 13,18: "I know whom I have chosen."

Fifthly: The ultimate purpose why God elected these persons was their final and eternal glorification. He was interested in restoring man to that original state from which he had fallen. This He made certain through the election. Acts 13,48: "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed." And 2 Tim.2,10: "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Neither can this ultimate purpose of God be foiled. The elect must be saved; they cannot be lost. For our Savior says, John 10,27-28: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." And of the elect during the last days He says: "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened..... For there shall arise false Christs, and

48. A.L.Graebner, "Die Lehre von der Gnadenwahl, eine reiche Quelle des Trostes", in "Lehre und Wehre", v.26, p.245.

false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." (Matth.24,22.24.). But it is not possible; it is the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom. This is a truth which gives us courage and strength amid the greatest dangers. It was because of this that Luther could say that he would go to Worms even if there were as many devils there as tiles on the house-tops. It was because of this that he could stand up before Pope and Emperor, yes, before the devil himself, and sing his mighty Battle Hymn of the Reformation. And it is because of this same fact that we can stand up amid the assaults of all our enemies and still come forth victorious. "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

In the sixth place: This decree of Election is based solely and alone on God's goodness and grace. It is entirely God's work, initiated and carried out by Him. In fact, this doctrine of Election most wonderfully substantiates the Scriptural "sola gratia". Thus there can be nothing in us, nothing outside of God Himself which moved Him to elect us. This goodness, good-will (εὐδοκία), or grace of God is the "causa impulsiva" of our election. Says Stoeckhardt: "In 'eudokia' kreuzen sich zwei Begriffe, es bezeichnet einen festen Beschluss (wie schon im Classischen), zugleich aber einen gnadenreichen Beschluss Gottes. Es ist das Lateinische 'beneplacitum'. Luther hat es ganz treffend mit 'Wohlgefallen' wiedergegeben."<sup>49</sup> It is for this reason that Election is called an Election of grace, "eine Gnadenwahl." Truly, the doctrine of Election substantiates and serves the "sola gratia." 2 Tim.1,9: "Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us

<sup>49</sup> Stoeckhardt, op.cit., p.229.

in Christ Jesus before the world began." And Romans 11,5-6: "Even so at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." And the "Formula of Concord": "Therefore it is false and wrong when it is taught that not alone the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ, but that also in us there is a cause of God's election, on account of which God has chosen us to eternal life. For not only before we had done anything good, but also before we were born, yea, even before the foundations of the world were laid, He elected us in Christ; and that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger; as it is written concerning this matter, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated, Romans 9,11 ff.; Gen.25,23; Mal.1,2 f." 50

Seventhly: God elected us through our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Because of Him and His work He loved us and was able to show His grace to us. And so the whole atoning work of Christ also belonged to this eternal decree. Through Him God purposed and decreed to make us accepted, to make us His sons, to give us the inheritance. Ephesians 1,4: "According as He hath chosen us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world." Christ is the "causa meritoria" of our election. Again, Ephesians 5,11: "According to the eternal purpose, which He purposed in Christ Jesus, our Lord." And 2 Tim.1,9: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

50. Formula of Concord, "Thorough Declaration", Art.XI,88.

From this it is evident that we must not and cannot view our election as absolute or "nude", as if God had simply mustered a group of people, or as if He has simply put His hand into the mass of humanity and pulled out a few. No, rather, God elected us in view of and for the sake of Jesus Christ with the intent that His eternal decree would be carried out in that way which has been defined in Scripture as the way of salvation. That includes, first of all, Christ's work for us; then also our call by the Spirit through the Word, our conversion, our justification, our sanctification (this includes the use of the means of grace, our overcoming of temptations, our ability to bear all our crosses, etc.), our preservation in the faith through the means of grace, and finally our eternal glorification.

This indicates the place already which faith occupies in this doctrine. In the Calvinistic system faith follows election, in synergism it precedes election. But in Lutheran theology it is not cause but means of election; through it God purposed to make us His children and in this way to execute His decree. Pieper: "Der vom Heiligen Geist gewirkte Glaube ist Mittel der Erwählung."<sup>51</sup> In this sense faith must not be thought of as before nor after our election. However, viewed in a different way, the faith which we now have is to be considered as a result of election. Acts 13,48: "And as many as were ordained to everlasting life believed." Chemnitz says: "Die Wahl Gottes folget nicht nach unserem Glauben und Gerechtigkeit, sondern gehet vorher als eine Ursache dessen alles."<sup>52</sup> And Augustine very aptly says in his book on the Predestination of the Saints, chapter 17: "Gott habe die Glaubigen auserwählt, aber damit sie es seien, nicht weil sie

51. Pieper, op.cit., III,549.

52. Quoted in Pieper, op.cit., III,550.

es schon waren; die Menschen glauben nicht, damit sie erwählt werden, sondern werden vielmehr erwählt, damit sie glauben;' Cap.19: 'Nicht weil wir geglaubt haben, sondern damit wir glauben, hat er uns erwählt, auf dasz man nicht sage, dasz wir ihn zuvor erwählt haben.' 53

Scripture is very emphatic in telling us that we must not view our election absolutely. II Thess.2,13-14: "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth, whereunto He called you by our Gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." All of this belongs to God's eternal Election. Therefore the Formula of Concord rightly says: "Therefore, if we wish to think or speak correctly and profitably concerning eternal election, or the predestination and ordination of the children of God to eternal life, we should accustom ourselves not to speculate concerning the bare, secret, concealed, inscrutable foreknowledge of God, but how the counsel, purpose, and ordination of God in Christ Jesus, who is the true Book of Life, is revealed to us through the Word, namely, that the entire doctrine concerning the purpose, counsel, will, and ordination of God pertaining to our redemption, call, justification, and salvation should be taken together; as Paul treats and has explained this article Rom.8,29 f.; Eph.1,4 f., as also Christ in the parable, Matth.22,1 ff.;" And then the Formula continues and gives the famous "Eight Points", showing how we are to view this eternal decree of election: "God in His purpose and counsel ordained: 1. That the human race is truly redeemed and reconciled with God through Christ, who, by His faultless obedience, suffering, and death, has merited for us the righteousness which avails before God, and eternal life. 2. That such merit

53. Walther, "Die 'Absolute' Predestination", in "Lehre und Wehre", v.26, p.298. Cp. also Stoekhardt, "Schriftbeweis fuer die Lehre von der Gnadenwahl," Lehre und Wehre, v.26, p.239.

and benefits of Christ shall be presented, offered, and distributed to us through His Word and Sacraments. 3. That by His Holy Ghost through the Word, when it is preached, heard, and pondered, He will be efficacious and active in us, convert hearts to true repentance, and preserve them in the true faith. 4. That He will justify all those who in true repentance receive Christ by a true faith, and will receive them into grace, the adoption of sons, and the inheritance of eternal life. 5. That He will also sanctify in love those who are thus justified, as St. Paul says, Eph.1,4. 6. That He also will protect them in their great weakness against the devil, the world, and the flesh, and rule and lead them in His ways, raise them again, when they stumble, comfort them under the cross and in temptation, and preserve them. 7. That He will also strengthen, increase, and support to the end the good work which He has begun in them, if they adhere to God's Word, pray diligently, abide in God's goodness, and faithfully use the gifts received. 8. That finally He will eternally save and glorify in life eternal those whom He has elected, called, and justified." 54

Pieper points out an analogy to this correct view of our election, namely, that of the "terminus vitae." 55 In Job 14,5 we read: "His days are determined, the number of his months are with thee; Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass." But neither can this truth be considered absolutely or "nude". No one would think of stopping to pray or to work or to eat, thinking that the time of his death is set absolutely and he can do nothing to change it. That would be deterministic, true Calvinism carried to its extreme. But Scripture knows no determinism. God has given us the means whereby we are to sustain life, and He included the use of these means when He set the "terminus" of our life; and so it is also

54. Formula of Concord, "Thorough Declaration", Art.XI,13-22.

55. Pieper, op. cit., III,540.

with Election.

The Calvinists, who view the doctrine of Election "nude", must also have a correlative doctrine, namely, the Election to Damnation or the Decree of Reprobation. Berkhof says to prove this doctrine: "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."<sup>56</sup> The only trouble with this argument is that Scripture and God are not subject to the logic of finite man. In this case the logic of God is different from that of man, because Scripture knows nothing of a Decree of Reprobation. The difficulty which the Calvinists meet is caused by the fact that they assume the sovereignty of God to be their material principle, and all other doctrines must fit into that. If that is assumed, then the Decree of Reprobation would of necessity follow. One of their "sedes doctrinae" is Romans 9,22-23: "What if God, willing to shew His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory." However, the Calvinists are forced to interpret this to fit into their whole theological scheme. Therefore they cannot understand that, whereas it says of the vessels of mercy that they were "afore prepared unto glory," it does not say that of the vessels of wrath, neither that they were "prepared," nor that this was done "afore." And notice that the word for "prepare" is ἠρτοίμασεν, an active verb; God prepared them. But the word for "fitted" is καταρτίσκειν, a middle participle,<sup>56a</sup> denoting not an action of some outside subject, but rather denoting a reflexive action; they fitted themselves for destruction. It also seems that they forget to

56. Berkhof, op.cit., pp.117-118.

56a. Stoeckhardt, "Roemerbrief," p.458, shows conclusively that it cannot be taken as a passive.



look at another word: πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ. God was merciful to them; He had borne them patiently; but they insisted on fitting themselves for destruction. Of course, aside from this, the Calvinists simply disregard or explain away all passages referring to God's universal grace.

The fact that Scripture knows nothing of such a predestination to damnation is a comfort for us. For if such a doctrine were taught, then the Calvinists would certainly also be right in viewing election as absolute and unconditional. Then where would our comfort be? Then we could only despair. But since Scripture has no such doctrine is also proof that it expects us to view our election, not absolutely, but in the light of God's promises, yes, in the light of the whole Gospel.

Certainly, with the teaching of Scripture on Election all possible thoughts of carnal security are excluded. If someone does become carnally secure the fault is not to be sought in the doctrine but rather in the hardness of that person's heart. For if a person would claim that if he is eternally elect he will be saved, but if he is not elect he will be lost, regardless of what he does or believes, then we must answer: Scripture teaches no such doctrine of election. God will never force or coerce His elect. Rather, 2 Thess. 2, 13 tells us that God elected us ἐν ἀγαπῇ πνεύματος καὶ πίστει ἀληθείας. A carnally secure heart is a sure sign that a person <sup>cannot comfort himself with Election.</sup> ~~is not~~ elect.

However, the Scripture doctrine of Election should give and does give Christians the certainty of their election. Every person should be certain of his election and should be able to say: I know that God elected me and that I will receive the crown of life. This is not, however, to be confused with carnal security.

Rome denies that anyone can be certain of his election and anathematizes all who teach such a certainty. In the "Canons and Decrees of

the Council of Trent" we read: "No one, moreover, so long as he is in this mortal life, ought so far to presume as regards the secret mystery of divine predestination, as to determine for certain that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate;... for except by special revelation, it cannot be known whom God hath chosen unto himself." <sup>57</sup> And again: "If anyone saith, that a man, who is born again and justified, is bound of faith to believe that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate; let him be anathema." <sup>58</sup> This again brings to light the "monstrum incertudinis" and shows the true character of Antichrist.

God's Word does not speak that way. No, in its entire presentation of this doctrine it takes for granted that we are to be sure of our election; so <sup>certain are God's promises.</sup> self-evident is it. St. Paul tells the Ephesians (1,4): "God hath chosen us" (ἔξελε ἔσπε ἡμᾶς, the aorist). And to the Thessalonians he says (2 Thess.2,13!): "God hath from the beginning chosen you" (ἔειλετο ὑμᾶς, again the aorist). And in 1 Thess.1,5 he says: "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election" (εἰδοτες... τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν). This is what Pieper calls "das theologische Schlussexamen."

We gain this certainty of our election in only one way: through the Word, by which the Holy Spirit instills this certainty in our heart. <sup>59</sup>

57. "Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent", Waterworth edition, Session VI, chapter 12.

58. Ibid., Session VI, chapter XVI, canon 15.

59. The Holy Spirit indeed plays an important part here. The "Formula of Concord, Art.XI,73-74, describes His work as follows: "And since the Holy Spirit dwells in the elect, who have become believers, as in His temple, and is not idle in them, but impels the children of God to obedience to God's commands, believers, likewise, should not be idle, and much less resist the impulse of God's Spirit, but should exercise themselves in all Christian virtues, in all godliness, modesty, temperance, patience, brotherly love, and give all diligence to make their calling and election sure, in order that they may doubt the less concerning it, the more they experience the power and strength of the Spirit within them. For the Spirit bears witness to the elect that they are God's children, Rom.8,16. And although they sometimes fall into temptation so grievous that they imagine they perceive no more power of the indwelling Spirit of God, and say with David, Ps.31,22: 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before

Specifically this means that only the Gospel, the vicarious atonement of Christ and the manifestation that He loved us and valued us so highly that He willingly gave Himself for us, can impart this certainty. This is what Staupitz advised Luther to do: "Dr. Staupitz pflegte mich mit diesen Worten zu troesten und sagte zu mir also: Lieber, warum plagst du dich also mit diesen Speculationen und hohen Gedanken; schau an die Wunden Christi, und sein Blut, das er fuer dich vergossen hat, daraus wird die Versehung hervorscheinen." <sup>60</sup> And again: "Die Disputation von der Versehung soll man gaenzlich flieden, und Staupitz sagte: Wenn du von der Versehung disputieren willst, so fange an den Wunden Christi an, und sie wird aufhoeren..... Wir muessen in dem Worte bleiben, in welchem Gott uns offenbart und die Seligkeit dargeboten wird, wenn wir ihm glauben..... In Christo aber sind alle Schatze verborgen, ohne ihn sind alle verschlossen." <sup>61</sup> Luther later gave the same advice: "Deshalb lasz dies dein erstes Anliegen sein, dasz du dieses Kind ergreifen moegest; das lasz dir auf's hoechste anbefohlen sein; den, der von der Jungfrau Maria geboren ist, und der auch zugleich Gottes Sohn ist, druecke fest an dein Herz. Wenn du diesen ergriffen hast, so bist du sicher und wohlverwahrt gegen alle listigen Nachstellungen und gefaehrlichen Anschlaege des Teufels." <sup>62</sup> And speaking of the Epistle to the Romans in his "Vorrede zum Roemerbrief" he says: "Du aber folge dieser Epistel in ihrer Ordnung, bekuenmere dich zuvor mit Christo und dem Evangelio, dasz du deine Suende und seine Gnade erkennenst, darnach mit der Suende streitest, wie hier das 1., 2., 3., 4., 5., 6., 7., 8. Capitel

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59 cont'd: Thine eyes,' yet they should, without regard to what they experience in themselves, again say with David, as is written 'ibidem', in the words immediately following: 'Nevertheless Thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto Thee.'

60. Luther, St. Louis Edition, II,181.

61. Ibid., XXII,832.

62. Ibid., VI,186.

gelehrt haben. Darnach, wenn du in das achte kommen bist, unter das Kreuz und Leiden, das wird dich recht lehren die Versehung im 9., 10. und 11. Capitel, wie troestlich sie sei. Denn ohne Leiden, Kreuz und Todesnoete kann man die Versehung nicht ohne Schaden und heimlichen Zorn wider Gott handeln. Darum musz Adam zuvor wohl todt sein, ehe er dies Ding leide, und den starken Wein trinke." 63

Pieper says the same: "Dagegen kann die ewige Erwaehlung sicher aus dem Evangelium erkannt werden. Das Evangelium hat naemlich diesen Inhalt, dasz die Gnade Gottes in Christo alle Suender ohne Ausnahme angeht, und dasz die Gnade wirklich Gnade und durch nichts in Menschen bedingt ist. Hoert und glaubt dies ein Mensch, so kann er nicht umhin, versichert zu sein, dasz um Christi willen in Gottes Herzen nicht Zorn, sondern eitel heisse Liebe gegen ihn, den Suender, wohne. Haelt daher ein armer Suender ohne Seitenblick auf das Gesetz seinen Glauben auf das Evangelium gerichtet, so glaubt er 'eo ipso' seine ewige Erwaehlung. Kurz, die Erkenntnis der ewigen Erwaehlung faellt mit dem Glauben an das Evangelium zusammen." 64

This is the way Scripture itself directs us to become sure of our election. It always directs the sinner to Christ. So at our Lord's Transfiguration the Father said (Matth.17,5): "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." And our Savior Himself says (Matth.11,28): "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And John 6,37: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." It is also in this way that Paul preached the certainty of Election. In the eighth chapter of Romans, after speaking of their eternal election, he then applies that truth (Rom.8,32-34):

63. Ibid., XIV,107-108.

64. Pieper, op. cit., III,546.

"He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that dies, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." And now, because of this fact and knowing this: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (v.40). And his answer is: "Nothing!"

Walther brings out the fact that the entire Trinity points us to Christ in order thereby to make us certain of our election: "Wie beweist du denn, dasz die ganze heilige Dreifaltigkeit alle Menschen auf Christum weis't, in dem sie des Vaters ewige Wahl suchen sollen? Mit drei Gruenden: denn 1. das ist von Ewigkeit bei dem Vater beschlossen: wen er wolle selig machen, den wolle er durch Christum selig machen. Wie er selber spricht: 'Niemand kommt zum Vater, denn durch mich.' (Joh.14,6). Und abermals: 'Ich bin die Tuer; so jemand durch mich eingehet, der wird selig werden.' (Joh.10,9). 2. Christus aber, als der eingeborne Sohn Gottes, der in des Vaters Schoosz ist, hat uns des Vaters Willen, und also auch unsere ewige Wahl zum ewigen Leben verkuendiget; naemlich da er sagt: 'Tut Busze und glaebet dem Evangelio, denn das Reich Gottes ist nahe herbeikommen.' (Mark.1,15). Item, er sagt: 'Das ist der Wille desz, der mich gesandt hat, dasz, wer den Sohn siehet und glaebet an ihn, habe das ewige Leben.' (Joh.6,40). Und abermals: 'Also hat Gott die Welt geliebet' usw. (Joh. 3,16). Diese Predigt, will der Vater, dasz alle Menschen hoeren, und zu Christo kommen sollen, die auch Christus nicht von sich treibet, wie geschrieben stehet: 'Wer zu mir kommet, den werde ich nicht hinausstoszen.' (Joh.6,37). 3. Und auf dasz wir zu Christo moegen kommen, wirket der Heilige Geist durch das Gehoer des Worts den wahrhaftigen Glauben, wie der Apostel zeuget, da er spricht: 'So koemmt nun der Glaube aus dem Ge-

hoer Gottes Worts' (Roem.10,17), wann dasselbige lauter und rein geprediget wird." <sup>65</sup> And to the question: "Was sollen daher alle diejenigen, welche selig werden wollen, nach dieser Lehre Christi tun, anstatt sich mit Gottes heimlichem Rat zu plagen?", he gives the answer: "Sie sollen von ihren Sunden abstecken, Busze tun, seiner Verheissung glauben, und sich ganz und gar auf ihn verlassen; und weil wir das aus eigenen Kraef-ten von uns selbst nicht vermoegen, will solches, naemlich Busze und Glauben, der Heilige Geist in uns wirken durch's Wort und durch die Sacramente. Und dasz wir solches moegen vollfuehren, darin verharren und bestaendig bleiben, sollen wir Gott um seine Gnade anrufen, die er uns in der heiligen Taufe zugesagt hat, und nicht zweifeln, er werde uns dieselbige, vermoege seiner Verheissung, mitteilen, wie er versprochen hat Luk.11,11 ff.: 'Wo bittet unter euch ein Sohn den Vater um Brodt usw.'" <sup>66</sup>

Now, when God, who cannot lie, directs us to Christ, He certainly means what He says. "And this call of God, which is made through the preaching of the Word, we should not regard as juggelry, but know that thereby God reveals His will, that in those whom He thus calls He will work through the Word, that they may be enlightened, converted, and saved. For the Word, whereby we are called, is a ministration of the Spirit, or whereby the Spirit is given, 2 Cor.3,8, and a power of God unto salvation, Rom.1,16. And since the Holy Ghost wishes to be efficacious through the Word, and to strengthen and give power and ability, it is God's will that we should receive the Word, believe and obey it." <sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, we can be certain that the doctrine of Election as presented in Scripture and our confessions is the only correct one, because every phase of this doctrine redounds solely to the glory of God,

65. Walther, "Die Lehre von der Gnadenwahl in Frage und Antwort", question 81.

66. Ibid., question 83.

67. Formula of Concord, "Thorough Declaration", Art.XI,29.

and gives comfort to the sinner. It is an axiom that every doctrine must give comfort and certainty. A doctrine which leads to doubt or despair or carnal security is "eo ipso" false. The correct doctrine alone gives man the assurance of his election.

The question arises: What kind of a certainty is this which the Christians have of their election? The Calvinists, on the one hand, have defined it as an absolute certainty, based on the theory that the Election is unalterable and that a person, having once felt subjectively that he was elect, cannot fall from grace. This theory is based on the distinction between "common" and "special" grace; common grace being offered to the non-elect, special grace only to the elect when the Holy Ghost works immediately and irresistibly. This, however, is not an absolute certainty because it is based on the emotions. Such a certainty we cannot accept. It is a certainty which, in the last analysis, is no certainty.

On the other hand, some say this is a conditional certainty. But this term has also been misunderstood and misused, especially by the synergists. Thereby they mean that it is a certainty which is based or dependent upon man's attitude and actions. This is due to their refusal to accept the "sola gratia." Such a conditional certainty we cannot accept. This, too, in the last analysis, is no certainty.

Because both of these terms have been misused we avoid them and rather define it as a certainty of faith, because, after all, faith consists also in the certainty of election; faith is certainty, and in so far they are identical. "Adäquat wird die Gewissheit als Glaubensgewissheit bezeichnet, weil sie im Glauben an das Evangelium besteht und deshalb im Einklang mit der Natur des Glaubens nicht eine halbe,

sondern eine voellige Gewiszheit ist. Diese normale Glaubensgewiszheit wird Roemer 8,31-39 beschrieben, welche Beschreibung mit den Worten schlieszt: 'Ich bin gewisz, dasz weder Tod noch Leben, weder Engel noch Fuerstentum noch Gewalt, weder Gegenwaertiges noch Zukuenftiges, weder Hohes noch Tiefes noch keine andere Kreatur mag uns scheiden von der Liebe Gottes, die in Christo Jesu ist, unserm Herrn.'<sup>68</sup> It is a certainty which is based upon the infinite and unchangeable promises of God, who has said: "The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand..... For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? And His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" (Isaiah 14,24.27).

However, we do, and every Christian will at times, raise some objections against the certainty of his or her election. Let it be stated first that all such doubts about the certainty of our election grow out of the natural, sinful heart, having been planted there by the devil. Men may call such a certain and triumphant faith pride, that one thinks too highly of himself; they may say that it is modesty not to claim too much but to be indefinite about our election and salvation. But that is a false modesty. No Christian is proud, thinks much of himself, when he is certain of his election and ultimate salvation. In fact, the more certain he is, the less he thinks of himself, because his sure faith is based not on anything subjective, within himself, but on an objective foundation, upon his Savior and His eternal promises which cannot change. That is the glorious thing about this certainty.

But every Christian is still subject to the temptations of the

<sup>68</sup>. Pieper, op.cit., III,549.



devil. And the devil is going to whisper to him that he cannot be sure of his election because Scripture itself warns against falling away from the faith, and it gives numerous examples of people who did fall from the faith. Our experience also corroborates that. Then we must answer: Let us not confuse Law and Gospel. Pieper: "Die Warnungen vor Abfall und der Hinweis auf die Zeitgläubigen sind vollkommen ernst gemeint. Sie gehoeren aber zum Gesetz und gelten den Christen nicht nach dem neuen Menschen, sofern sie in Suendenerkenntnis nach Gnade, Seligkeit und Erwählung fragen, sondern nach dem alten Menschen, sofern ihr Interesse sich von Gnade und Seligkeit ab- und dieser Welt zuwendet. Die Besorgnis, die Zeitgläubigen moechten eine Unwahrheit geglaubt haben, wenn im Gnadenevangelium auch die Erhaltung im Glauben zugesagt und somit auch die ewige Erwählung offenbart werde, ist unbegründet. Der angenommene Fall kommt nicht vor. Wer Gottes Gnadenzusage in bezug auf die Erhaltung glaubt, faellt nicht ab. Das ist eine in der Schrift geoffenbarte Tatsache." <sup>69</sup> Walther gives a similar answer in his "Die Lehre von der Gnadenwahl in Frage und Antwort": "Muessen wir aber nicht an unserer Erwählung und Seligkeit darum zweifeln, weil wir ja fallen koennen? Nein; weil unsere Wahl zum ewigen Leben nicht unsere Froemdigkeit oder Tugend, sondern allein auf Christus Verdienst und gnaedigen Willen und Wesen unwandelbar ist: derhalben, wann seine Kinder aus dem Gehorsam treten und straucheln, laeszt er sie durch's Wort wieder zur Busze rufen und will der Heilige Geist dadurch in ihnen zur Bekehrung kraeftig sein, und, wenn sie in wahrer Busze durch rechten Glauben, sich wieder zu ihm bekehren, will er das alte Vaterherz immer erzeiger allen denen, die sich ob seinem Wort fuerchten und von Herzen wieder zu ihm

<sup>69</sup>. Pieper, *ibid.*, III, 548.

bekahren, wie geschrieben stehet, Jer.3,1." <sup>70</sup> And Luther says of those passages in Scripture which warn us against falling away: "Die Sprueche von der Versuehung, welche das Ansehen haben, als schrecken sie uns, sollen allein das ausrichten und dazu dienen, dasz sie uns anzeigen die Schwachheit unsrer Kraefte und Unvermoegen, und zum Gebet vermehren. Wenn wir das tun, so sind wir versehen." <sup>71</sup>

Still some object. When they are reminded that Paul says no one "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (Rom.8,39), they will say: It is true that God does everything on His part to preserve us in our faith, but still we cannot comfort ourselves with that fact, because even the converted man is still opposed by the devil, the world, and his flesh. And so finally it depends upon how well he can withstand them. This objection is another proof that Satan is constantly trying to direct the attention of the Christian upon himself away from his Savior. Scripture does not speak thus. The assurance which the Apostle has, and which he expresses in Romans 8, consists in just this that, in spite of his own weakness and shortcomings, God will protect him, God will give him the power to overcome the onslaughts of the devil, the world, and his flesh, God "will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor.10,13). "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything us of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor.3,5). God said: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor.12,9). "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the

<sup>70</sup>. Walther, op.cit., question 87.

<sup>71</sup>. Luther, St. Louis Edition, XXII, 992.

day of Jesus Christ" (Phil.1,6). That is the way in which Scripture talks. Our salvation has been taken out of our own hands and placed into the hand of God, who does all. Luther: "But now, since God has put my salvation out of the way of my will, and has taken it under His own, and has promised to save me, not according to my working or manner of life, but according to His own grace and mercy, I rest fully assured and persuaded that He is faithful, and will not lie, and moreover great and powerful, so that no devils, no adversities can destroy Him, or pluck me out of His hand." <sup>72</sup> It removes every semblance of uncertainty for us. Then why do we insist on making that uncertain which God has made certain? <sup>73</sup>

It is from this certainty of our election that we gain the greatest comfort which we can find in Scripture. Yes, that very certainty is our comfort. We can call it the most comforting doctrine because every other comfort is either derived from it or is in some way intimately connected with it. Being sure of our election there is nothing which can trouble us or cause us to despair.

We have the comfort, first of all, that, because of the eternal Election, the Holy Christian Church will exist to the end of days. At times it seems as if the Church will disappear. So it was at the time of Elijah, who thought that he alone was left who still worshipped the Lord. But the Lord showed him that there still were seven thousand who

<sup>72</sup>. Luther, "De Servo Arbitrio", p.364.

<sup>73</sup>. It is gratifying that in our present union efforts with the American Lutheran Church, we have reached a unity in this doctrine, that everyone accepts what Scripture says. The new "Doctrinal Affirmation" of our Synod and the American Lutheran Church says on page 13: "By election of grace we mean this truth, that all those who by the grace of God alone, for Christ's sake, through the means of grace, are brought to faith, are justified, sanctified, and preserved in faith here in time, that all these have already from eternity been endowed by God with faith, justification, sanctification, and preservation in faith, and this for the same reason, namely, by grace alone, for Christ's sake, and by way of the means of grace." In its entire presentation it correctly views Election "a posteriori" instead of "a priori."

had not bowed the knee to Baal. So it was also during the Middle Ages. But the Lord always kept His remnant until Luther came and the Church of God was again triumphant. And so it shall be to the end of time. For "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matth. 16, 18), because it is built on Christ, the Corner-stone. The Church is composed of individuals, of God's elect. Now, since God has shown me that I am one of the elect, I therefore am a member of His Church Universal. I am one of the stones in this building, one of the members of His body. Not one of these stones, not one of these members can be removed. The whole building is "fitly framed together" (Eph. 2, 21). Therefore the Christian Church exists today, and it will always exist. Pieper: "Die ewige Erwählung steht im Kausalverhältniß zur christlichen Kirche." <sup>74</sup> And Stoeckhardt puts it very aptly: "Den neuerrnen Ansehen nach sind die Kinder Gottes, die gläubigen Christen durch die ganze Welt hin zerstreut, hier einer, dort einer, hier ein kleines Häuflein, dort ein grösserer Haufen. Die meisten sind einander unbekannt. Und es scheint ein reiner Zufall zu sein, dass dieser oder jener arme Sünder sich zu Gott bekehrt und ein Kind Gottes wird. Doch das Ding hat noch eine andere Seite, auf welche der Apostel hier eben nachdrücklich hinweist. Dieser Zerstreung, Zerstückelung liegt Einheit, diesem scheinbaren Zufall, diesen scheinbar zufälligen Combinationen liegt Plan, Ordnung, System zu Grunde. Die ueber die Erde hin zerstreuten Kinder Gottes bilden eine Einheit, eine grosse Familie, sind das Hausgesinde Gottes. Und das hat Gott von Ewigkeit her so gewollt, geplant und geordnet. Der ewige Rathschluss der Erwählung zur Kindschaft besteht nicht nur darin, dass Gott einzelne verlorene und verlaufene Seelen aus der grossen Masse herausgepickt hat, sondern Gott hat sich ein ganzes Volk aus der Welt

74. Pieper, op.cit., III, 558.

auserlesen. Er hat die Einzelnen gleichsam als Posten einer Summa angesehen und hat die ganze Summa in und mit den einzelnen Posten in der Ewigkeit schon festgestellt. Mit anderen Worten: er hat sich eine ewige Kirche erkoren. Ja, hier setzt der Begriff 'Kirche' ein. Der Apostel beschreibt hier schon, wenn auch noch nicht den Namen, so doch der Sache nach die Kirche Gottes. Die Kirche ist ihrem Wesen und Begriff nach nichts Anderes, als 'ecclesia', Zusammenfassung, Versammlung, 'congregatio', 'communio'. Es ist die Versammlung, Gemeinschaft der Kinder Gottes oder der Heiligen. Cap.1,1. Und nun noch naeher bestimmt: der Costus der auserwählten Kinder. Das war der ewige Liebesgedanke und Liebeswille Gottes: ein groszer Bund von Gotteskindern. Ja schon vor Grundlegung der Welt, ehe Gott die Welt geschaffen, hat er seine Kirche, seine Gemeinde constituirt. Und was ist das nun fuer ein groszer Trost fuer einen Christen, besonders wenn seine Vereinsamung, seine unscheinbare, verachtete Stellung in der Welt ihn schwer niederdrueckt, dasz er sich sagen darf und soll: ich bin ein Glied und Posten eines groszen Ganzen, des Volkes Gottes auf Erden, ein Glied der Kirche Gottes, ja, ein Glied der ewigen Kirche, welche in Ewigkeit ihr Fundament hat und die daher bleibt und steht und zusammenhaelt, auch dann noch, wenn diese sichtbare Welt in tausend Stuecke bricht." 75

And, because of the eternal Election, we have the comfort and sure hope that we will persevere in our faith, that we will have a blessed end, and that we will be heirs of eternal life. That is, after all, the reason why God revealed this doctrine to us, "that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom.15,4).

In conclusion then, in order that this doctrine of our eternal

75. Stoeckhardt, "Was lehrt der Epheserbrief von der Einen, Heiligen, christlichen Kirche?", in "Lehre und Wehre", v.47, pp.100-101.

election in Christ may become more and more comforting for us while our doubts with regard to it decrease, we should take to heart that exhortation of Scripture (2 Peter 1,10): "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Walther: "Warum sollen die Glaubigen, die sich der Lehre von der Gnadenwahl zum Trost annehmen koennen und sollen, nicht zueszig sein, sondern in allen christlichen Tugenden sich ueben? Damit sie desto weniger daran zweifeln, je mehr sie des Geistes Kraft und Staerke in ihnen selbst befinden? Denn der Geist Gottes den Auserwählten Zeugnis gibt, dass sie Gottes Kinder sind." <sup>76</sup> We are to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so the certainty of our election will grow, and its evidences in us will become more and more apparent. Our constant prayer should be that God would grant us this. Through the faithful use of the means of grace which He has given us, the Word and the Sacraments, the positive certainty and comfort of our election will increase. May He keep us from all disputing and rationalizing with regard to this blessed truth and give us a simple, child-like faith to accept His Word, though it is a mystery to us.

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76. Walther, op.cit., question 85.

"SOLI DEO GLORIA"

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