

# Present Truth magazine

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Proclaiming the Good News of the forgiveness of sin and eternal life by God's unmerited grace alone through faith alone in the sinless life and atoning death of Jesus Christ our Lord alone.

*Sola Gratia*.....Only By Grace  
*Sola Fide*.....Only By Faith  
*Solo Christo*.....Only By Christ  
*Sola Scriptura*.....Only By Scripture

**Volume 45**

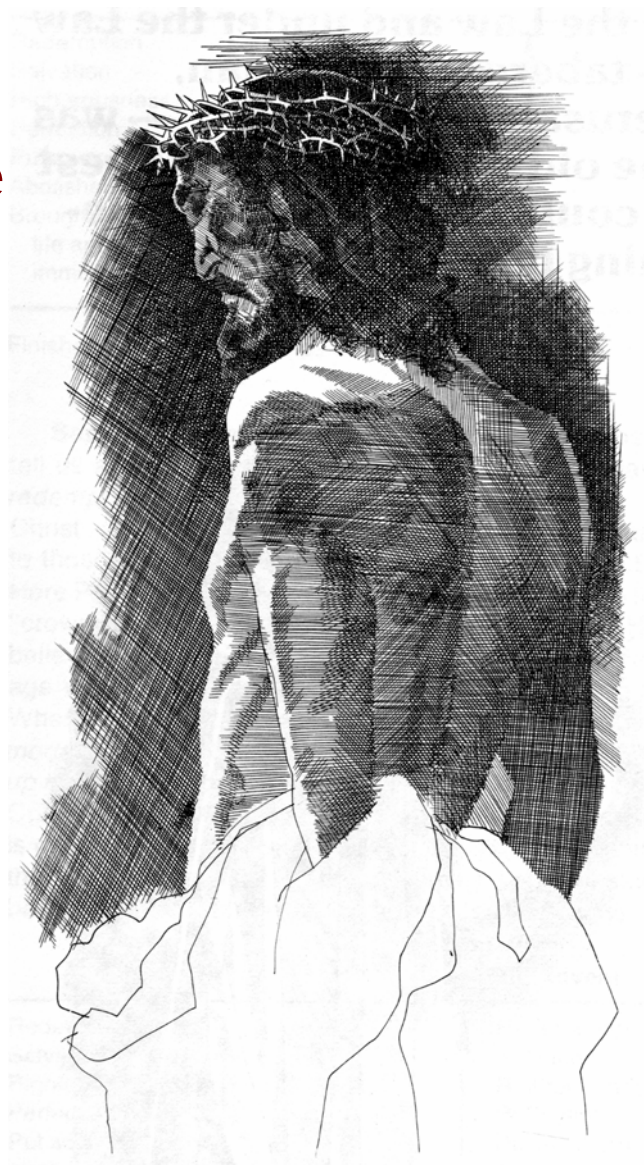
## Jesus Christ, the "Elect" of God

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### Excellent

This is to commend you most highly for the excellent chapters 9-13 on “Christ, the Meaning of All Scripture, Life and History” in volume 41.5 of *Present Truth Magazine*. Most timely and courageous, besides being scriptural, was your treatment of the gospel as judgment on reigning views of the doctrines of God, the Bible, man, salvation, ethics and last things.

Robert L. Whitelaw  
College Professor  
Virginia

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### Terrible Incongruity

I was incredulous when I set eyes upon “The Historical Framework of the Gospel” in your volume 43 issue, and I can scarcely believe that the statements in it are those of anyone who is committed to “the time-honored verities of the Christian faith.”

I cannot help but point out the terrible incongruity of blaming Protestant rationalism for liberalism. Liberalism, if it began anywhere, began as an Enlightenment reaction *against* rationalism, and you have only to read Rousseau’s *Emile* or Voltaire to see how curdling was the hatred of the religious liberal for rationalism. Schliermacher, after all, took as his hero, not Beza or Turretin, but the heart-happy pietist, Zinzendorf. And I tremble now to see you recommending the subjectivism of pietism’s offspring, such as Cullman, Ladd and Wright.

Allen C. Guelzo  
Reformed Seminary Lecturer  
Pennsylvania

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### “Reasoning Together”

In your volume 43 issue you sounded a warning against evangelicals’ making biblical inerrancy the “watershed” of Christian orthodoxy. I wholeheartedly agree with you that the message of Scripture, not the doctrine of biblical inspiration, should be seen as what really unites or divides us. I also have very, very much appreciated your emphasis on the salvation-historical structure of divine revelation. But inasmuch as your journal does hold to the authority of Scripture for all doctrine and practice, it seems to me that the debate going on in this area presently in (American) evangelical circles is not one you can afford to avoid. (Men who have done some good “spade-work” in this area, from a perspective somewhat similar to your own, are Clark Pinnock of Canada and Donald Bloesch here in the States.)

Regarding your use of Karl Barth: Despite Barth’s lack of popularity among English-speaking evangelicals, he is a true heir and exponent of biblical and Reformation theology. He has really helped the Christian church in the areas of epistemology, Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity. However, because of the shift he made in the ‘30’s from “dialectical theology” (the so-called neo-orthodox “theology of encounter”) to the Christocentric theology of his *Church Dogmatics*, I believe he is much misunderstood by American Christians. In the preface to the first volume of *Church Dogmatics*, Barth eschews his older “existentialist” orientation and progressively moves toward an objectivistic soteriology (which, by the way, seems to be very similar to your own). Barth goes too far, I think, in averring that we are “in Christ” by dint of the cross and resurrection per se, even apart from or prior to faith in Him. But in *Church Dogmatics* IV:3(b) Barth distinguishes between two forms of union with Christ: ontological (which is fact for all men) and relational (which is only true of those awakened to faith). It is because of the distinction Barth draws between these two forms of union, and because he holds to the necessity of relational faith in Christ (as awakened by the Spirit through the gospel) as the only means of access to the fullness of salvation, that Barth should not be called a universalist (as, I recall, some of your readers asserted after your issue on “Election”). In

fairness to Barth, he did not live long enough to write the projected volume 5 on “The Doctrine of Redemption,” which would have dealt with the return of Christ, the final judgment, and the new heavens and new earth. Meanwhile, Donald Bloesch, a student of Barth’s, has worked out a “Barthian” understanding of hell as the ongoing relational rejection (in eternity) of one’s ontological union with Christ. For Bloesch it is precisely God’s refusal to stop loving us in Christ that makes hell “punishment” and “suffering” for the impenitent sinner. (Please see Bloesch’s second volume of *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* [Harper and Row], in the chapter “Heaven and Hell”—The Twofold Outcome.)

Regarding your emphasis that the ground of our acceptance with God is entirely “outside of us”: This is true if by that is meant that atonement for sins is something to which men and women as individuals cannot and need not contribute by their own effort (not even by “the decision of faith,” though as you and Mr. Paxton point out, that decision is essential to our appropriation of Christ’s atonement for us). However, since Jesus Christ is both God and man—and representative man, the “Son of Man,” at that—then we must be careful lest we exclude the significance of Christ’s humanity in the work of divine atonement. “Man” is, in a sense, involved in the securing of justification, then, “in” his Head and Representative, Jesus Christ. The point is, however, that “man’s part” has already been taken care of, once and for all, and can neither be increased nor diminished by our own individual actions or omissions. This, if I understand it rightly, is Barth’s interpretation of Anselm’s view. God alone actually initiates redemption, but it needs to be accomplished in and through mankind as the recipient. And so the latter is part of Christ’s work “for us” as well.

Two separate comments on the doctrine of regeneration in the “order of salvation”:

1. If humanity’s “rebirth” is to be located first and foremost in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, then there is an important sense in which the work of the Holy Spirit—through preaching and also, perhaps, through baptism—(which calls us to faith in Him) may be called “regenerative,” even though initial regeneration of the believer is not yet established until the actual surrender of faith. In this limited sense, then, insofar as the work of the Spirit (to lead us to relational faith in and union with the risen Christ) must precede faith itself, one may speak of (the beginnings of) regeneration preceding justification. However, you are absolutely correct in your repeated emphasis that justification is grounded in the finished work of the cross itself and not in the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. Both regeneration and justification are based on the work of Christ “for us.”

2. Theological consideration of regeneration and justification would seem to me to belong together in the same way that you have called us to consider man’s creaturehood and personhood together. Such a treatment might help to eliminate certain imbalances and false dilemmas in both of these doctrines.

I hope that these “reasonings” prove sound, in the main, and helpful and thought-provoking even where you disagree. Yours is presently my favorite Christian journal.

Lance A. Wonders  
Presbyterian Student Pastor  
Iowa

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### **Dangerous Trait**

Thank you very much for Geoffrey Paxton’s article, “The Gospel and Testimonies,” in volume 42 of *Present Truth Magazine*. Paxton has isolated a dangerous trait of evangelical Christianity. I went to a denominational college where there was tremendous, subtle pressure to be able to give the kind of testimony Paxton describes. There was great peer pressure to be the kind of Christian that the peer group had decided was a “good” Christian. The model we were to follow was one made by others—not by Christ. And if we didn’t testify to a message for God today—as if we might say, “My good buddy God told me ...,” then we were not spiritual and were quickly informed that prayers would be made for us. Well, we can thank God for the prayers, though I fear they may have been misdirected.

The reasons that the “my-Lord-spoke-to-me-this-morning” testimony is dangerous are many. Paxton rightly noted the danger of the super-Christian model. The testimony model Paxton describes is dangerous also because it is so hard to shed. Our relationship to and with God is geared to “hearing a message for today” instead of seeking a transforming of our minds. I know that it is a hard model to break from and not feel guilty about how “unspiritual” we are. Life then becomes a negative soul-searching or spiritual navel-gazing.

Paxton has helped me to deal with the move from the old model to a new model. Thank you for this article, which is strengthening me in the faith.

Terrance R. Trites  
Canada

### Complicated

Sir: In responding to a letter in volume 42 of your magazine, you said that your magazine “is written for those who are used to reading serious theology.” Perhaps your journal’s purpose needs to be reformed so as to include those readers who are not indoctrinated in theological jargon. A journal can be intellectual without being intellectually complicated. Some of the best journals I have ever digested were those that were *intellectually simple*. If your journal’s messages bypass the simple but intellectually-minded, your noble efforts will have been in vain. And if your attempts are directed toward the clerics and theologically-minded only, you are simply adding to the already complicated and confused mess the clergy and theologians have created. If ever there is to be a healthy reformation, it will make its genesis among “laymen” (I detest the term).

Buff Scott, Jr.  
Iowa

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### Comprehensible

Sir / I was raised in a Christian home and educated in Christian schools, and I found that so much of the terminology regarding religion, Bible study, etc., was utterly confusing. Even the Bible teachers seemed unable to state things in a clear and comprehensible manner. Your publication has been like a light in a dark room. Texts that I have always read with a “perfectionistic” slant are now seen in a new, clear and powerfully Christ-centered way. I can really see and understand why Christ is to be our joy and our song! Thank you for standing for Bible truths. We have so much need of this.

Carolyn Ottman  
Washington

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### Common Sense

Sir / I feel that *Present Truth Magazine* is probably the best religious journal I've ever seen. It doesn't present the gospel in the form of fairy stories, as some church publications do, making grown adults feel like pre-schoolers, nor does it go over the heads of most people, making them feel like ignorant slobs. *Present Truth Magazine* uses common sense and talks to normal adults like normal adults, and it uses Scripture to back up what it says—something other religious publications hardly ever do.

David L. Maze  
Oklahoma

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### Acceptance in Christ

I am writing to tell you how much your journal has helped me to see that my righteousness before God is in Jesus and not in myself.

I have been involved for the past three years in a community of over two hundred people in Western Europe which goes by the name of Lutheran. However, this is in name only. Their practice is most definitely Catholic. They speak much of “bridal love” and of leaving justification for the deeper life of sanctification, upon which they base their acceptance with God. When I began to discover all this, I began to read in God's Word—especially in Romans—and the Lord showed me the error of it all. Praise His name, I am now back in America, studying His Word at a Bible training center.

Interestingly enough, I had read one issue of your journal just before I left for Europe and the community there. It was an issue in which you had endeavored to show how Greek thought has penetrated the church. In it you mentioned the term “bridal-love” metaphors. As I read that, there was a moment of doubt about the step I was about to take. But I went ahead and left for Europe and three years of unbelievable inner turmoil.

I can't thank the Lord enough for freeing me from that situation. I now know that my acceptance with God is in a Person, who stands before the Father in heaven as my great High Priest. This is more glorious to me than any subjective experience anyone could offer.

You are doing a wonderful work. Thank you!

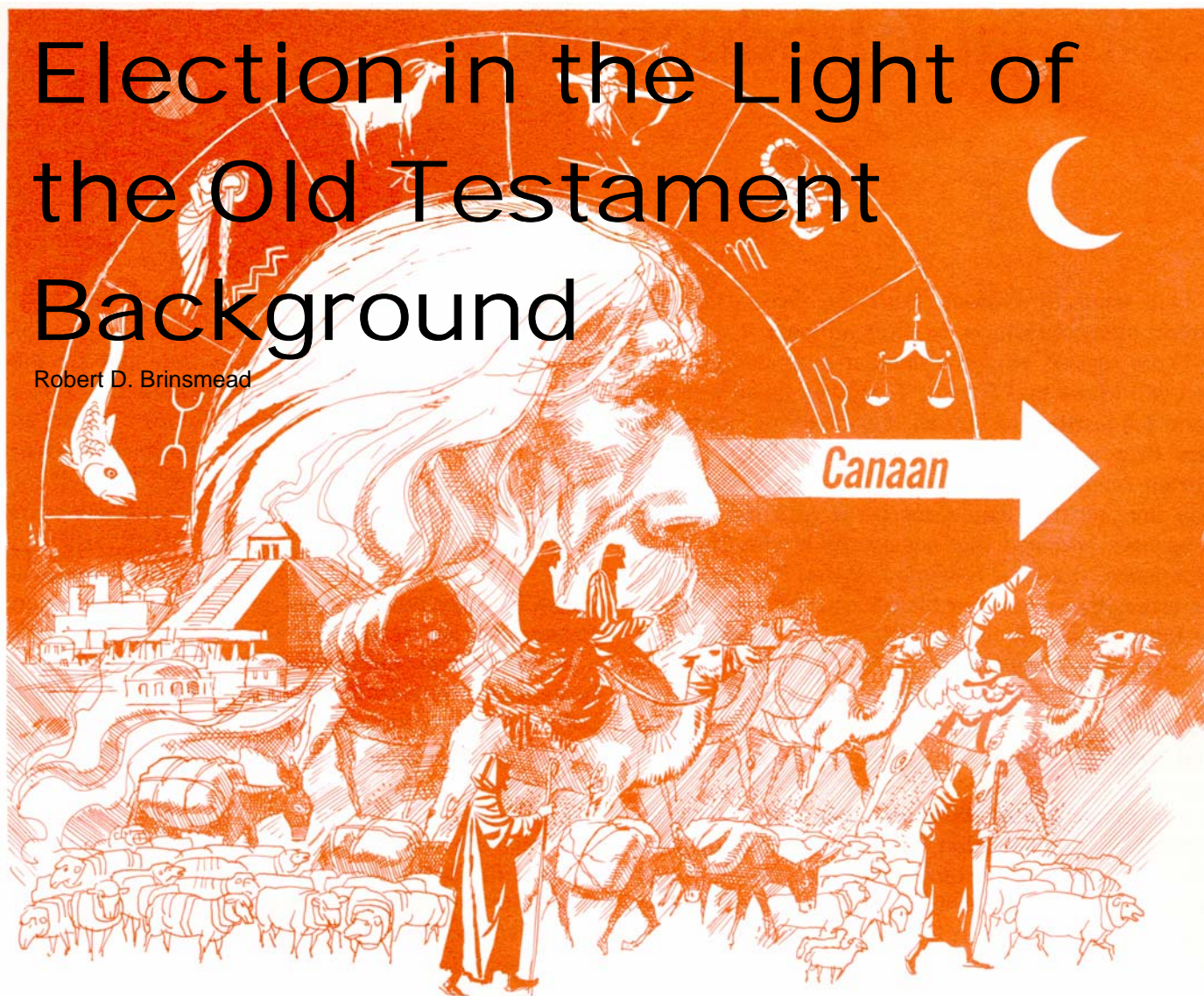
Rick Speck,  
Tennessee

## Editorial Introduction

We had wondered whether our Reformed readers were asleep until we published our previous issue on election (volume 27). Having recovered from a barrage of letters with their weighty arguments – and having learned thereby – we now send out another issue on election. We imagine that many valiant Calvinists will respond to this challenge.

# Election in the Light of the Old Testament Background

Robert D. Brinsmead



Election has often been a formidable subject in the Christian community. It has generated much controversy within the church and much misunderstanding outside the church. The classical Augustinian and Reformed doctrine is largely based on Romans 9-11. Saint Paul introduces his theology of election with the following words:

I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

Not only that, but Rebecca's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For He says to Moses,

"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display My power in you and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden.

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists His will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, 'Why did You make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? – Rom. 9:1-21.

As the apostle proceeds with the theme of election, it becomes apparent that election is vitally connected with God's program of salvation history recorded in the Old Testament. Paul is not introducing some new doctrine but is building on an Old Testament theme. His citations from the second volume of Isaiah demonstrate that the New Testament doctrine of election has its roots in the Old Testament and especially in Isaiah.

All the great New Testament words and concepts have a definite Old Testament background. If they are to be correctly understood, they must not be isolated from that background. In the history of Christian theology the doctrine of election has sometimes been divorced from its Old Testament background. Wrenched from the framework of salvation history, it has been set in a speculative, rationalistic and individualistic framework. Whenever this has happened, a hard-fisted, deterministic view of God's sovereignty has cast a somber shadow over His graciousness toward all men in Jesus Christ.

## **Election in the Second Volume of Isaiah**

The second volume of Isaiah is certainly the greatest theological book in the Old Testament. It has a well-developed theology of Creation, providence, redemption, God's sovereignty, salvation history, human depravity, God's righteousness, the judgment, the kingdom of God, the person and work of the Messiah and, of course, the concept of election. No wonder Isaiah is quoted more frequently in the New Testament than any other Old Testament book.

Isaiah election refers chiefly to Israel and the Messiah. Abraham and Cyrus are also mentioned. But Abraham is merely the father of Israel, and Cyrus is an obvious type of the Messianic King.

**Israel.** With respect to the election of Israel, Isaiah says:

"But you, O Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen,  
you descendants of Abraham My friend... – Isa. 41:8.

But now, this is what the Lord says – He who created you, O Jacob,  
He who formed you, O Israel:  
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name; you are Mine."  
— Isa. 43:1.

"But now listen, O Jacob, My servant, Israel, whom I have chosen.  
This is what the Lord says – He who made you, who formed you in the womb,  
and who will help you:  
Do not be afraid, O Jacob, My servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen."  
— Isa. 44:1-2.

"For the sake of Jacob My servant, of Israel My chosen,  
I call you by name  
and bestow on you a title of honor  
though you do not acknowledge Me."  
— Isa. 45:4.

"Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called:  
I am He;  
I am the first and I am the last."  
— Isa. 48:12.

"I have put My words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of My  
hand —I who set the heavens in place,  
who laid the foundations of the earth, and who say to Zion, 'You are My people.'"  
—Isa. 51:16.

Election means God's choice or preference. The Jews are therefore known as "the chosen people."

**Messiah.** With respect to the election of the Messiah, the Lord declares through Isaiah:

"Here is My Servant, whom I uphold, My chosen One in whom I delight;  
I will put My Spirit on Him and He will bring justice to the nations."  
— Isa. 42:1.

"Come together, all of you, and listen:  
Which of the idols has foretold these things?  
The Lord's chosen Ally will carry out His purpose against Babylon;  
His arm will be against the Babylonians.  
I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called Him.  
I will bring Him,  
and He will succeed in His mission."  
—Isa. 48:14-15.<sup>1</sup>

Listen to Me, you islands;  
hear this you distant nations:  
Before I was born the Lord called Me;  
from My birth He has made mention of My name.  
He made My mouth like a sharpened sword,  
in the shadow of His hand He hid Me;  
He made Me into a polished arrow and concealed Me in His quiver.  
He said to Me, "You are My Servant,  
Israel, in whom I will display My splendor."  
But I said, "I have labored to no purpose;  
I have spent My strength in vain and for nothing.  
Yet what is due Me is in the Lord's hand,  
and My reward is with My God."

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<sup>1</sup> Although Cyrus may be in view in this scripture, the prophet uses him as a type of Christ.

And now the Lord says – He who formed Me in the womb to be His Servant  
to bring Jacob back to Him and gather Israel to Himself,  
for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord and My God has been My strength – He says:  
"It is too small a thing for You to be My Servant to restore the tribes of Jacob  
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.  
I will also make You a light for the Gentiles,  
that You may bring My salvation to the ends of the earth."  
— Isa. 49:1-6.

In this passage the Messiah is also called Israel. This title refers both to the chosen people and to the chosen One. In Isaiah there is an interesting interplay between these two elect entities. Both are called the elect. Both are called "the servant of Yahweh." And both are the subject of Isaiah's great servant songs. If we are to grasp the biblical concept of redemption through substitution and representation, we must not lose sight of the fact that Jesus stands before God as Israel. The Many are justified in the suffering of One (Isa. 53:11). And the Many are constituted children in the election of One.

We might cite another Isaiahic text on the election of Christ:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me.  
— Isa. 61:1.

Anointing signifies election. Samuel anointed David because God had elected him to be king. Cyrus was anointed to punish Babylon and to release the Jews. Hazael was anointed or elected to punish idolatrous Israel.

Election means to be chosen by God for a specific role. It indicates preference. In Romans 9:13 Paul cites Malachi: "Jacob [in context, Israel as a nation] I loved, but Esau [representing the nation of Edom] I hated." When we remember that Jesus could also talk about hating father and mother as a condition for being His disciple, we realize that we are dealing with idiomatic speech which designates *preference*. Christ must be preferred above all earthly kin. So, to fulfill a *particular role* in salvation history, Jacob is *preferred* and Esau is not *preferred*.

## The Reason for Election

God's love prompted Him to elect Israel. Love has its own reason.

Because He loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, He brought you out of Egypt by His Presence and His great strength. – Deut. 4:37.

The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. – Deut. 7:7, 8.

After the Lord your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people. – Deut. 9:4-6.

Yet the Lord set His affection on your forefathers and loved them, and He chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. – Deut. 10:15.

Election is absolutely unmerited. Israel was not elected on the ground of her past or future faith or on the ground of her past or future greatness. Election proceeds from the unmerited love of God.

Yet we need to choose our words *carefully* at this point. Some have used the expression "unconditional election." If this expression simply means "unmerited election," then we could have no objection. But the history of theology shows that "unconditional election" is sometimes understood to mean more than this. Some systems of thought have used the term "unconditional election" to mean that people can remain the elect of God despite unbelief, disobedience or open apostasy and rebellion. But the history of the Jews and the solemn warnings of John the Baptist and Jesus demonstrate that the Jews could find no security in being descendants of Abraham unless they did the works of Abraham. And as Paul clearly teaches in Romans 11, unbelief caused the Jews to be "broken off." As Peter declared, anyone who would not listen to God's new Moses – the Messiah – would "be completely cut off from among his people" (Acts 3:23). The fatal mistake of the Jews was that they came to believe that their election as God's special people was "unconditional." The warnings of all the prophets, including John the Baptist and Jesus, could not break the spell of their fatuous conceit that they were God's people and would remain His people regardless.

## The Purpose of Election

As far as the Old Testament doctrine of election is concerned, the emphasis is certainly not on election to individual salvation in the world to come. We cannot say that the element of individual salvation in the world to come does not appear in the New Testament, but we do need to keep the New Testament doctrine in the perspective of the Old Testament background.

The first eleven chapters of the Bible deal with the nations. Then the record moves to Abraham and the Jews. God elected Abraham. What was God's purpose in choosing Abraham out of all the nations?

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

— Gen.12:1-3.

This final statement that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" is repeated in Genesis 22, 26 and 28. The theme is taken up in the second volume of Isaiah and then brought to its fulfillment in the New Testament (see Gal. 3:8).

God's choice of Abraham did not mean that He intended to discard all others. God chose Abraham as a means of blessing the others. The election of one was for the blessing of many. The corollary of the election of one party is not the rejection (much less the inevitable damnation) of the other party.

Let us consider God's purpose in the election of Israel at Sinai:

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine. – Ex. 19:4-5. KJV.

In this passage God is not saying that in *choosing* Israel He is going to *discard* His interest in the world. He chooses Israel because the whole world is His. He has a *saving purpose* which is as wide as the world. Israel is chosen to be His instrument in that saving purpose.

God further declared to Israel, "You will be for Me a kingdom of priests." (Ex. 19:6). The primary office of the priesthood was not to offer sacrifice but to *teach* the oracles of God.

God delivered Israel from Egypt in order that Egypt might know that Yahweh was the Lord (see Ex. 7: 4-5). By His mighty act of election God wanted His name to be "proclaimed in all the earth." (Ex. 9:16).

As the fame of the Exodus event spread among the nations, many feared and quaked. But Rahab, though only a sinful heathen, heard and believed. "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient [perished not with them that believed not – KJV]" (Heb. 11:31). Why were the inhabitants of Jericho destroyed? Because they were arbitrarily marked as non-elect? No! They perished because they did not believe even though God's name had been proclaimed to them.

In placing the Jews in Palestine, God placed them at the crossroads of the ancient world. They were situated between the two great centers of ancient civilization –Mesopotamia to the north and Egypt to the south. God purposed to bless Israel as He blessed Abraham, so that all nations could be blessed.

Sing to the Lord a new song;  
sing to the Lord, all the earth.  
Sing to the Lord, praise His name;  
proclaim His salvation day after day.  
Declare His glory among the nations,  
His marvelous deeds among all peoples....  
Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns."  
— Ps. 96:1-3, 10.

Praise the Lord, all you nations;  
extol Him, all you peoples.  
For great is His love toward us,  
and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.  
Praise the Lord.  
— Ps. 117.

The Jews erred because they misunderstood the purpose of election. They interpreted election selfishly as if it were their privilege to sit down in isolation and contemplate their good fortune. They thought that God's choice of them meant His rejection of all others. And they compounded their error by assuming that their election was unconditional.

When God declared His name in His judgments on Egypt, some Egyptians believed and departed from Egypt with the Israelites. Election does not mean partiality or favoritism. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:32). "The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him" (Rom. 10:12). The election of Israel did not mean the inevitable *exclusion* of Egypt from God's saving intent. This is made clear in the following prophecy of Isaiah:

In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the heart of Egypt, and a monument to the Lord at its border. It will be a sign and witness to the Lord Almighty in the land of Egypt. When they cry out to the Lord because of their oppressors, He will send them a savior and defender, and He will rescue them. So the Lord will make Himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the Lord. They will worship with sacrifices and grain offerings; they will make vows to the Lord and keep them. The Lord will strike Egypt with a plague; He will strike them and heal them. They will turn to the Lord, and He will respond to their pleas and heal them.

In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt My people, Assyria My handiwork, and Israel My inheritance." — Isa. 19:19-25.

So also, when Paul cites Malachi 1:2-3 ("Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" Rom. 9:13), he is not declaring that Edom is outside God's saving intent. Just as Isaiah speaks of Egypt as being embraced in God's purpose, so Amos includes Edom in God's saving purpose (Amos 9:11-12).

Israel, however, did not understand or accept the divine purpose in her election. Elijah thought that because Israel failed, God's covenant purpose was in jeopardy. But Isaiah, like Paul after him, saw further than Elijah. Isaiah was able to see that even the stumbling of Israel was taken up in the purpose of God. The seventy-year captivity was proof of that, for God did with His people in captivity what they failed to do in their prosperity. Through His dealings with His people, His name was declared among the nations both in captivity and restoration.

God wanted to bring salvation to the Gentiles through Israel's faithfulness. But when Israel refused to be faithful, God could *still* bring salvation to the Gentiles through her failure. This is the divine mystery of God's sovereignty which Paul perceives in Romans 11 – a mystery of saving love – which leads him to conclude his presentation of election with a hymn of praise:

For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all.  
Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!  
"Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been His counselor?"  
"Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay him?"  
For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.  
To Him be the glory forever! Amen. – Rom. 11:32-36.

It is in the context of captivity to Babylon and the coming deliverance that Isaiah reminds Israel of her election. And in this he states more clearly and fully the purpose of her election:

"And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it.  
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.....

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and His arm rules for Him.  
See, His reward is with Him, and His recompense accompanies Him. – Isa. 40:5, 10.

"You are My witnesses," declares the Lord, "and My servant whom I have chosen,  
so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He.  
Before Me no god was formed, nor will there be one after Me." . . .

. . . the people I formed for Myself that they may proclaim My praise . . .

"I have revealed and saved and proclaimed – I, and not some foreign god among you.  
You are My witnesses," declares the Lord, "that I am God." — Isa. 43:10, 21, 12.

"Do not tremble, do not be afraid.  
Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?  
You are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me?  
No, there is no other Rock; I know not one. – Isa. 44:8.

"Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations.  
Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood,  
who pray to gods that cannot save.  
Declare what is to be, present it – let them take counsel together.  
Who foretold this long ago,  
who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord?  
And there is no God apart from Me,  
a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but Me.  
"Turn to Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth;  
for I am God, and there is no other." — Isa. 45:20-22.

Israel – blind and sinful – was to be a witness of God's saving power to the intent that all nations might hear about it. Isaiah says more about the salvation of the nations than does any other Bible prophet. And it is in the context of the deliverance of God's people from their captivity:

"Surely you will summon nations you know not,  
and nations that do not know you will hasten to you,  
because of the Lord your God,  
the Holy One of Israel,  
for He has endowed you with splendor." — Isa. 55:5.

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.  
See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples,  
but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you.  
Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn...."  
"Surely the islands look to Me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish,  
bringing your sons from afar, with their silver and gold,  
to the honor of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,  
for He has endowed you with splendor." — Isa. 60:1-3, 9.

. . . and provide for those who grieve in Zion –  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord  
for the display of His splendor. — Isa. 61:3.

"I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations – to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of My fame or seen My glory. They will proclaim My glory among the nations." — Isa. 6:19.

Beside these beautiful scriptures we might place Zechariah 8:23:

Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you. – KJV.

Along with this theme of election Isaiah dwells on the servant theme. Israel was elected as Yahweh's servant. The Lord did not desire their service for Himself but for the benefit of the nations. The Jews often thought that the nations existed for their benefit, though they were called of God to serve the nations. One nation was elect for the blessing of all. Isaiah merely enlarges on the purpose of God's covenant with Abraham, a purpose that the chosen people generally failed to grasp. Joseph is a good example of the purpose of election. God chose him in order that he might save his brothers. This was the election of the one for the salvation of the many.

## God's Purpose Realized in the Messiah

Did Israel, the seed of Abraham, fail to fulfill God's purpose? In an important sense, no! Isaiah turns his vision from the nation of Israel to the Messiah. He is the true Seed of Abraham, the true Israel and the true Remnant. In this faithful, suffering Servant, God fulfills His covenantal purpose.

"Here is My Servant, whom I uphold, My chosen One in whom I delight;  
I will put My Spirit on Him and He will bring justice to the nations...  
He will not falter or be discouraged till He establishes justice on earth.  
In His law the islands will put their hope."...  
"I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness; I will take hold of Your hand.  
I will keep You and will make You to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles."  
— Isa. 42:1, 4, 6.

He says:

"It is too small a thing for You to be My Servant  
to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept.  
I will also make You a light for the Gentiles,  
that You may bring My salvation to the ends of the earth." — Isa. 49:6.

See, My Servant will act wisely;  
He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.  
So will He sprinkle many nations,  
and kings will shut their mouths because of Him.  
For what they were not told, they will see,  
and what they have not heard, they will understand.  
— Isa. 52:13,15.

But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed....  
After the suffering of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied;  
by His knowledge My righteous Servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities.  
Therefore I will give Him a portion among the great,  
and He will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because He poured out His life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
For He bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors. —Isa. 53:5, 11-12.

In Jesus we see the principle of election perfectly exemplified – the election of One for the blessing of many." "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

The outline of salvation history recorded in the Bible begins with the nations. Then it narrows to Abraham. It narrows still further, because Abraham had two sons, and Isaac alone was elect. Isaac himself had two sons, but only Jacob was elected to carry forward the covenantal purpose of God. Then the prophets make clear that the whole nation of Israel will not be included in the elect community. Only a remnant will survive. "When the crucial test came, the faithful remnant was reduced to one person, the Son of Man who entered death single-handed and rose again as his people's representative."<sup>2</sup> Very often those who talk about "particular election" do not make God's election particular enough. The first Christian sermon ever preached announced God's election of one Man to be both Lord and Christ (Acts 2). Here is the Seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16) in whom all nations are blessed. God's plan has triumphed gloriously in His faithful Servant. There can be no failure with the sovereign Lord. His word will not return unto Him without accomplishing its purpose (Isa. 55:11).

In Romans 9-11 Paul addresses himself to the question, Does the stumbling of the Jewish nation as a result of their rejection of the gospel mean that God's covenantal purpose has failed? The answer is no, and for two reasons:

1. What God failed to do through national Israel He did through Jesus Christ, who was ultimately the real Israel of God. Jesus Christ is the goal of the Old Testament. God has achieved His goal in Jesus Christ. Therefore God's plan is a glorious success even if none of the Jews would believe.

2. Far from frustrating God, the stumbling of Israel is taken up into the divine strategy for the world. Paul shows that God uses their fall for the salvation of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11). God's dealing with the Jews illustrates that there is no such thing as unconditional election. "They were broken off because of unbelief" (Rom. 11:20). When the elect nation stumbles and falls, God puts aside the elect and then does the unthinkable. He elects the non-elect, that is, the Gentiles. To show that this is God's prerogative, Paul cites the words of Isaiah:

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<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), p. 62.

"I revealed Myself to those who did not ask for Me;  
I was found by those who did not seek Me.  
To a nation that did not call on My name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'  
All day long I have held out My hands to an obstinate people,  
who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations." — Isa. 65:1-2.

Just as the election of the Jews did not mean the inevitable damnation of the Gentiles, so the election of the Gentiles into God's new Israel through Jesus Christ does not mean the inevitable damnation of the Jews.

Again I ask, Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! — Rom. 11:11-12.

Just as the Jews were elected so that God could bless the Gentiles, now the Gentiles are elected so that God may bless the Jews. The election of Gentiles through Jesus Christ into the redeemed community is unmerited, but it is not unconditional.

I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?...

If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.

Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?—Rom. 11:13-15, 17-24.

Election is no good cause for arrogance. In the first place, it is unmerited. The gospel makes it clear that God's election is grounded in Jesus Christ. "He is before all things, and in Him all things [including election] hold together" (Col. 1:17). One Man has died and has risen again, and one Man alone pleases God. When the Spirit gives us faith in hearing the gospel, we are thereby "baptized" or incorporated into Christ. All that He has done and all that He is counted as ours in the merciful reckoning of God. Has Christ died? So have we. He is elect. So are we. We are all this because of Him. We are elected "in Him" (Eph. 1:4). We can therefore take all God's promises to the elect, like the great promises found in Isaiah 40-66, and apply them to ourselves solely because Christ has become the faithful Servant on our behalf and has merited all this blessedness for us.

In the second place, election calls for humility because it is not unconditional. While we cannot enter God's kingdom by virtue of either our faith or obedience, our willful unbelief or disobedience can cause us to be cut off.

Thus, if we have come to faith, we are in Christ and therefore elect, but we cannot take any credit for this. Election is all of grace. Christ says, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). Salvation is wholly due to the divine initiative. While we cannot take any credit for the privilege of election, we must accept its personal responsibility. "Do not be arrogant, but be afraid" (Rom. 11:20). Through the elect, God still desires to bless all nations. "You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14). "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). The revelator declares:

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe, language and people. – Rev. 14:6.

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." — Rev. 7:9, 10.

The Bible ends where it begins – not with the favored few, but with the nations.

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. . . . The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. .

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.—Rev. 21:23-24, 26; 22:2.

To fail in our responsibility to be a blessing to others means that we, like the unbelieving Jews, become like that barren fig tree which merely cumbered the ground. It must be cut down. Jesus also said, "He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit" (John 15:2).

The servant of Yahweh, brought to view in Isaiah, could only accomplish the covenantal purpose of God through suffering (Isa. 53). To be elect through union with Christ means to be elected to suffering.

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him. — Phil. 1:29.

I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death. — Phil. 3:10.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. — I Peter 4:12.

The elect should not be surprised when they are called to suffer but should rather expect it. When God called Paul, He said, "This man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for My name" (Acts 9:15, 16). Fellowship with Christ means fellowship in His sufferings.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory. – Rom. 8:17.

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# Scriptural Election: The Third Way

by Robert J. Hillman

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In a day of unprecedented opportunity for proclamation, preaching ought not to be put under restraint by a somber doctrine of predestination which limits the offer of salvation. Nor should it be hindered by an anthropocentric form of the doctrine which reduces the power of the gospel by obscuring the principle of *sola gratia*.

A pervasive silence has settled over the reformed and non-reformed churches on the subject of election. There is, it seems, an intuitive feeling that predestination in its classical form is not "good news." If, however, some form of this doctrine is an essential element of the *kerygma*, then the church's preaching must be the weaker for this omission.

Differences of opinion on election may often be due to misunderstanding and prejudice. The ecumenical climate of our day, however, may afford opportunity for discussion of key issues in a non-polemical atmosphere. Various parts of the Body of Christ may be able to contribute insights that will enable the whole church to understand its own election better and to proclaim the full gospel of God's Chosen One. There are a number of reformed theologians who have been able to begin a process of disentangling reformed theology from its rationalistic framework.<sup>1</sup> This is of particular importance for the whole church. The result is a doctrine of election in its dynamic biblical context.

I wish to present a number of theses which I believe will restore the biblical doctrine of predestination to the pulpit.

## **Thesis 1: Preaching the "whole counsel of God" involves preaching election.**

Scripture contains everything necessary for salvation in Christ (2 Tim 3:14-17). Because of this, Christian preaching consists of proclaiming the whole sweep of biblical truth, especially as it relates to the revelation in Christ.

One cannot deal with the main themes of the Old Testament without being confronted very early by the doctrine of election in the call of Abraham and the choice of Israel. Nor can one do justice to the main themes of John's Gospel, Romans or Ephesians without dealing with this doctrine. In fact, the election of Christ dominates the whole of Scripture. It is particularly evident in the Gospels. Election is an integral part of the biblical revelation and a necessary element in the scriptural doctrine of salvation in Christ. Preaching which aims at declaring "the whole counsel of God" may not pass it by.

## **Thesis 2: The preaching of election must remain within the "boundaries of faith."**

If a large section of the church preaches less than the whole counsel of God, another section of the church believes (if it cannot preach!) more than the counsel of God.

Seeing clearly that the Bible teaches a doctrine of election which leaves God as the initiator of salvation, scholastic reformed theology added to this revelation a whole series of logical implications. Often seeking to reduce the workings of God to a single principle of absolute sovereignty, predestination was hardened into a realistic doctrine referring to the arbitrary decisions of the hidden, omnipotent God. The "single decree" had little relation to the revelation in Christ. The doctrine was moved from soteriology, as in Calvin, to the doctrine of God. Predestination became a rational doctrine of absolute sovereignty having

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., G. C. Berkouwer, James Daane, and Karl Barth.

little association with Israel, the election of Christ, or the election of the church, but dealing with the eternal decree as it determined the destiny of individuals.

This decretal theology reinterpreted the whole of the biblical material on predestination and related themes (e.g., the atonement) in terms of this rationalistic doctrine. In some cases the sense of urgency in evangelism was lost. Lack of assurance was often reflected in poor attendance at the Lord's Table. The emphasis was on deterministic sovereignty and on the quest to discover whether or not the individual was "of the elect."

The reformed churches need to return to the exposition of the plain meaning of Scripture in its dynamic context. Rationalism has often taken these churches beyond the boundaries of faith so that election is conceived of as a self-evident presupposition. They need to return to Scripture so that this doctrine may be presented in its living religious context. It will then bring comfort and challenge, elicit praise, and inspire Christian living and Christian preaching. Drawing afresh from the well of Scripture means to live and theologize within the boundaries of faith.

The practical question arises, however: where are the boundaries of faith? To enunciate the concept of boundary is not automatically to solve all the problems of predestination. "The boundary-concept is not a simple solution that can be employed as if it were *a priori* clear to everyone."<sup>2</sup> The important thing here is our total comprehension of the biblical message. Any propositional formulation which flies against the essential message of Scripture is to be forsaken in favor of "the marvelous and inexhaustible liveliness which is so typical of the message Scripture brings and in which we hear the message of the sovereignly electing God."<sup>3</sup>

### **Thesis 3: The doctrine of election must be proclaimed in the biblical context of the election of Israel.**

Clearly the Old Testament is about Israel, God's chosen son through whom he will bless the whole world. Old Testament election was "God's electing Israel *on his way to the others*"<sup>4</sup>

The preaching of the church must take this dominant Old Testament theme seriously. Preaching must not confine itself to the New Testament, but must present the New Testament material against its Old Testament background. The New Testament church ate from Israel's table and we must too.

No biblical teaching can confine itself to a crass individualism. God's concern is certainly for persons, but it is in the context of the people of God through whom he would bless all men.

We see in Romans 8-11 that God's elective purpose for Israel still stands, despite unbelief. It is indeed through unbelief that the Gentiles come to faith. Biblical preaching of election must continue to proclaim Israel's election.

### **Thesis 4: Election must be viewed primarily as election in Christ.**

Israel waited for its Messiah, God's Chosen One:

I have set my king  
on Zion, my holy hill.  
I will tell of the decree of the Lord:  
He said to me, You are my son, today I have begotten you.  
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,  
and the ends of the earth your possession. (Ps 2:6-8)

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<sup>2</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election, Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960) 23.

<sup>3</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, 23.

<sup>4</sup> H. Pietersma, "Predestination II," *Reformed Journal* 17 No.1 (1967)18.

The perimeter of God's elect people can be thought of as widening from Abraham to Israel, narrowing to the Remnant, and eventually becoming One Man, the seed of Abraham. The ultimate purpose is that the perimeter should widen again: "I will make the nations your heritage."

The Lord's servant in Isaiah is probably to be interpreted as Israel *and* the Messiah. The voice which declares Jesus at his baptism to be God's Son uses words from the first Messianic Psalm and the first Servant Passage of Isaiah (Matt 3:17; Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1). He commences his ministry in Nazareth by reading from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news." Then he declares: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:18f.). Matthew declares that he fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah: "Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased" (Matt 12:18). On the Mount of Transfiguration a voice declares from the cloud: "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!" (Luke 9:35).

More important still are the many references to Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament types and prophecies. He is the chosen King of Israel, born in the city of David, declared by the Magi to be King of the Jews (Matt 2:2, 6). Significantly, he dies under the three-language inscription "King of the Jews."

He is God's chosen prophet (Deut 18:15; Acts 3:22), who declares the word of God (Matt 17:5). He is the embodiment of all that Israel was chosen to be. He goes to the Cross as Israel, the Servant of the Lord, and yet, as Israel's substitute (Isa 53).

The election of Israel and the election of Jesus are related through fulfillment. The New Testament emphasizes continuity through fulfillment. We must also relate the church's election and the election of individuals to his election. There is only one election; the election of Christ. Election apart from him is meaningless. The election of Israel anticipates his election and finds its fulfillment in it. Individual election and the election of the church are not independent of him or of his election. Election is *in him*.

Paul writes:

[God] chose us *in him* [Christ] before the foundation of the world . . . He destined us . . . *through Jesus Christ* . . . *In him* we have redemption. . . . [The mystery of his will has been revealed] according to his purpose which he set forth *in Christ*... to unite all things *in him*... *In him*... we who first hoped *in Christ* have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. *In him* you also . . . were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:4-13).

The first step in moving away from a rationalistic concept of predestination is taken when we begin to interpret this doctrine in terms of the election of Christ. No longer will predestination be a threat to the faithful, having its source in the arbitrary decision of an absolute sovereign power. The election of which we speak is that which has been *revealed* in Jesus Christ. The God who has chosen us we know and love as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, his Chosen One.

Christian preaching is the proclamation of Christ. Until and unless election is conceived of as basically Christological then our preaching of election will be less than Christian.

## **Thesis 5: The church must be seen as the object of God's election *in Christ*.**

Election in the Old Testament has to do with the election (creation) of a nation: "It would appear then, that election, as we first encounter it in the Old Testament is national not merely individual. . . . In the New Testament, this form of election is not atomized and undone but fulfilled."<sup>5</sup>

Christians today need to be delivered from excessive individualism, discover their election in community, and discover the church as God's elect.

This elect community is never independent of Christ. Its cohesion depends on its election in him. It is the *body of Christ*.

<sup>5</sup> James Daane, *The Freedom of God: A Study of Election and Pulpit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 104.

Peter calls his readers to "Come to Him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious'... and 'a stone that will make men stumble'.... because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do." In contrast, "you are a chosen race [*genos* like Israel?], a royal priesthood, a holy nation [*ethnos*], God's own people [*laos*].... Once you were no people but now you are God's people." (1 Pet 2:4-10). These words echo Exodus 19:5f.: "... if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all people... a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

In Romans 8, Paul describes the purpose of predestination in terms of Christ becoming the "first-born among many *brethren*" (v 29). Predestination created the church, the community of the brethren. Scholastic decretal theology does little with the concept of the church's election. Berkhof does not mention it<sup>6</sup> in and no section is devoted to it in Boettner's *Doctrine of Predestination*.<sup>7</sup>

Expository preaching is the preaching of the church to the church as well as to the world. This preaching must not omit the doctrine of election both in explanation and proclamation, for it is this dynamic truth which has created the church, and it is its continued proclamation which assists in building up the body of Christ.

## **Thesis 6: The preaching of election "in Christ" relates to the individual as well as the church.**

Preaching is weakened if it loses its personal element and its individual challenge. There ought to be no tension between Christian and church, individual and community: "The *pro me* has its place in the fellowship, as it does in the Psalms of the Old Testament and in the creed of the Church."<sup>8</sup> It is interesting that here again Berkouwer brings us back to the election in Christ: "Because He is the elect cornerstone (1 Pet 2:6) there is an elect people. The one is no longer without the other, and yet the life of the individual does not dissolve into the community. That is why the election in Christ can never be placed in an individualistic or collectivistic framework."<sup>9</sup>

Barth strongly affirms the order of election to be: Christ, Israel and the church, the individual. Nevertheless he states: "There are no predestined families and no predestined nations – even the Israelite nation is simply the first (transitory) form of the community – nor is there a predestined humanity. There are only predestined men predestined in Jesus Christ and by way of the community."<sup>10</sup>

The gospel of the elected Christ who unites persons to one another in his body speaks to the individual, then, in terms of grace and assurance. The concept of election, according to Barth, means that grace is truly grace.<sup>11</sup> The Christian (in community) also gains assurance from the preaching of election. Election in Christ assures the believer of God's gracious attitude to him.

True biblical preaching is intensely personal but it never panders to individualism. Preaching which avoids the personal application has lost the dimension of *directness*. It is adrift on a sea of generality and has become irrelevant. The Church is a fellowship of individual persons bound together by the Christ who has elected them and in whom their authentic individuality and their true corporateness find their meaning.

<sup>6</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946).

<sup>7</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (5th ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941).

<sup>8</sup> Berkouwer, 309.

<sup>9</sup> Berkouwer, 310.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/2 The Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957) 313.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Barth, 10.

## **Thesis 7: Preaching on election must emphasize sanctification and witness as the goals of predestination.**

We must understand sanctification as Christ-likeness. In Romans 8, believers are "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (v 29). Ephesians says we are predestined to be his sons (1:5). Paul goes on: "We who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory" (v 12). In 2 Thessalonians we read: "God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit . . ." (2:13). "Election," says Maury, "is *always* a call to obedience, thanksgiving, and brotherly love."<sup>12</sup>

Election therefore is an intensely practical doctrine. It is not a matter for speculation. It does not belong to the realm of theory but of practice. It is not a philosophical doctrine belonging to the area of rational thought, but a religious teaching having immense practical application. Biblical election is profoundly Christological. It not only has its origin in Christ, it has its goal in him. It is "from him" and "for him." Election then is not an end in itself. The goal is Christ. Salvation produces service. Justification issues in sanctification. He has chosen us "in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph. 1:4).

God's overarching purpose is that he may have mercy on all (Rom. 11:32). Israel was chosen that through her, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Christ was chosen to be "the light of the world". The church was brought into being to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. "Election envisions the salvation of the world."<sup>13</sup>

The elect were chosen that they might be authentic witnesses to Jesus the Christ. Through life and lip they proclaim the unsearchable riches of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light.

## **Thesis 8: The *general* offer of salvation which is preached along with election must be a *genuine* offer.**

In Romans 9-11, election relates to universal grace; "that he might have mercy on all" (11:32). Barth is correct when he says election's "function is to bear basic testimony to eternal, free and unchanging grace as the beginning of all the ways and works of God."<sup>14</sup> Any doctrine of election, therefore, which casts a shadow over God's love and limits its universal scope is to be unequivocally rejected as unbiblical. The theology which particularizes God's love such that the offer of salvation is only for the elect (as distinct from the reprobate) is a caricature of biblical love. In such theology, the general offer of salvation and the general preaching of the gospel are meaningless.

It is easy to see why a rationalistic interpretation of election raises a question mark over the general offer of salvation. Daane puts it well: "Grace has a redemptive bias. Logic has no bias."<sup>15</sup> If God loves only the divine image in man, rather than as the Bible emphasizes, the sinner, then mercy becomes something which God shows toward himself. This "divine soliloquy" is in fact a deviation from the gospel understanding of the love of the Father for the prodigal.

Throughout Scripture, God is love in his relationships with all men (e.g., Deut 10:18; Matt. 5:45; 1 John 2:2). This universal love issues in a universal, genuine offer of salvation which is real and which suffers from no hesitancy and no withholding on God's part. (See e.g., Isa 45:22). Once this love is limited, the basic motive for mission, evangelism, and preaching is reduced. And this limiting can result from positing a *qualitative* difference in God's love toward the elect and the non-elect. Harold Dekker in a very significant article says: "God's love is love. It cannot be something else."<sup>16</sup> Such distinctions are foreign

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Maury, *Predestination and Other Papers* (Richmond: John Knox, 1960) 68.

<sup>13</sup> Harry Boer, "Suggestions for a Theology of Election," *Reformed Journal* 15 No.1 (1965) 5.

<sup>14</sup> Barth, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Daane, 200.

<sup>16</sup> Harold Dekker, "God so loved – All men!," *Reformed Journal* 12 No.11 (1962) 6.

to the whole tenor of biblical divine unlimited love.

The central affirmation of Scripture is: "God is love." The outworking of this love is expressed in the gospel: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." We must not limit the *nature* of God which is love, nor the *expression* of that love in Christ, but we must proclaim both in fullness.

## **Thesis 9: The concept of "limited atonement" ought to be abandoned as it places an unbiblical restriction on preaching.**

Although the doctrine of limited atonement takes the fact of unbelief seriously and seeks to do justice to the eternal destruction of unbelievers and to the sovereignty of God, it compromises the gospel by paring it down to suit the facts. It is a glaring example of rationalism which makes logical deductions from Scripture to suit the observed "facts." The death of Christ, which is especially for the church is rationalistically conceived as being only for the church. To be sure, the efficacy of Christ's death is generally thought of as being unlimited in the sense that it is *sufficient* for all, but *efficient* for those who believe (i.e., the elect). We have no quarrel with this formulation except that it does not say enough. We wish to say that the statement "Christ died for all" says more than something about the merit of Christ. It speaks about his *motive* as well. Dekker is correct when he says that the doctrine of limited atonement is contrary to the church's confession: "God is love" – for limited atonement ultimately limits love.<sup>17</sup>

We may believe that when Paul spoke of Christ dying for all he placed no restriction whatever on our Lord's atonement. The Wesleyan protest against rational predestination was not unfounded. The universal significance of Christ's atonement was a constant theme in Methodism's triumphant hymns. It is not surprising that this aspect of the Wesley's teaching was preachable. If we can sing Christian truth we can preach it. Further, limited atonement is a "textless doctrine." No biblical text either explicitly or in its intention supports it. It is the creation of a rationalistic dogmatic. On the contrary, Scripture often emphasizes the *pro omnibus* of Christ's death (Isa 53:6; Matt 20:28; John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim 2:6; 1 John 2:2; Heb. 2:9). We must insist that the "for all-ness" of Christ's death is an integral part of the kerygmatic teaching. It must be proclaimed without limitation: "Christ died for all and Christ died for you!"

The problem is not minimized by confining the "limit" to the atoning aspect of the death of Christ. It is to move further into abstraction, for Christ himself, and not some limited aspect of his work, is our atonement.<sup>18</sup> As Harry Boer has expressed it: "Christ is offered in that gospel. The whole Christ, with all His benefits. He is not offered to sinners who repent. He is not offered to the elect. He is offered to sinners, period."<sup>19</sup>

We must unhesitatingly affirm that there is no contradiction between "Christ died for the church" and "Christ died for the world". We do not have to select one or the other, "they cannot contradict each other, because they belong to different contexts."<sup>20</sup>

Paul urges that prayers be made for all men. "This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God *our* Savior, who desires *all men* to be saved. ... For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men [all men?], the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom *for all... For this I was appointed a preacher...*" (1 Tim 2:1-7). The plain meaning is that Christ died for all without exception. *This* was an essential element in the preached message.

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<sup>17</sup> Dekker, 5f.

<sup>18</sup> James Daane, "The Five Points of 1966," *Reformed Journal* 16 No.5 (1966) 16f.

<sup>19</sup> Harry Boer, "For Whom did Christ die?" *Reformed Journal* 16 No.5 (1966) 19.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Pietersma, "Predestination and the Trinity," *Reformed Journal* 17 No.9 (1967) 11.

## Thesis 10: The doctrine of reprobation, running parallel to that of election to life, must be rejected as contrary to the gospel.

Boettner speaks of "an eternal, divine decree which, antecedently to any difference or desert in men themselves, separates the human race into two portions and ordains one to everlasting life and the other to everlasting death."<sup>21</sup> Election to eternal life is clearly scriptural but we must insist that there is no corresponding predestination, *eodem modo*, to damnation. Jesus is God's elect *par excellence*. There is, however, no corresponding parallel rejection. Decretal theology has developed its doctrine of reprobation as a logical construct partly because it has focused its attention almost entirely on individual election. It has no unified doctrine of election incorporating election of Israel, Christ, and the church. Thus a corresponding rejection of Israel, Christ and the church is not a problem. The unified doctrine of biblical election calls reprobation into question because it removes decretal theology's beloved symmetry.

Christ is the reason why men are saved but not the reason why some are lost. Maury speaks of reprobation as being full of false windows, like those painted on facades in order to achieve an apparent symmetry.<sup>22</sup>

Whereas Scripture speaks of the "book of life" it never suggests there is a "book of death." Simplistic parallelism does not come from Scripture but has its origin in "a metaphysical determinism which leaves no room for variations and differences but which subsumes everything under the one causality of God."<sup>23</sup> To make a symmetrical and transparent doctrine of double predestination is to make God the author of unbelief and therefore of sin. Such is blasphemy.

The emphasis of Scripture is that God's rejection is the answer to man's sin not the cause of it. (An example is Romans 11, where the "trespass" (v 11) is apparently the reason for the "hardening" (v 7)). This is God's response in history to willful and blameable unbelief. It is not the result of an arbitrary decree. *It is punishment, not fate*. It is true that this unbelief does not frustrate the plan of God. This is most clearly seen in the death of Christ which was at once the diabolical deed of wickedness and the action of the sovereign Father. It can be said that what happens against God's will does not happen apart from it. However the relationship between the two is not one of simple causality.

The rejection of symmetrical double predestination is necessary if we are to preach the gospel without restraint and if we are to retain the scriptural emphasis on the truth of grace that God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world (John 3:17). We must insist that the divine purpose in sending Christ was redemptive even as it was in the choice of Israel. In fact, there is nothing which approaches symmetry on the side of judgment: He did not come to condemn the world. Berkouwer is therefore correct when he says, "The Gospel can be understood and preached only if balance, symmetry and parallelism are excluded."<sup>24</sup>

The preaching of judgment is an important element in the *kerygma*. However Berkouwer is right, I believe, when he says, "The *kerygma* does not require the preaching of rejection alongside that of judgment."<sup>25</sup> Every attempt to bring forth a healthy offspring from a marriage between election and reprobation is futile. The child is still-born.

Harry Boer sees the doctrine of reprobation as ambiguous and so not lending itself to being taught or preached: "I am not aware that it occupies any meaningful place either in the pulpit or in the pastoral work of our ministers. . . . Reprobation does not seem to be a doctrine by which the church lives."<sup>26</sup>

Nor will a balanced antinomy satisfy Scripture. It is not sufficient to speak of God leaving the reprobate in his common misery. In the last analysis there is little to distinguish this from a full-orbed decree of God.

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<sup>21</sup> Boettner, 83.

<sup>22</sup> Maury, 61.

<sup>23</sup> Berkouwer, 178.

<sup>24</sup> Berkouwer, 202.

<sup>25</sup> Berkouwer, 243.

<sup>26</sup> Harry Boer, "The Doctrine of Reprobation and the Preaching of the Gospel," *Reformed Journal* 15 No.3 (1965) 13f.

Boer is correct when he says: "It would seem to be clear that prior and subsequent protestations of the Canons [of Dort] that the guilt of unbelief inheres in man alone can no longer claim an unqualified and unequivocal character."<sup>27</sup>

I have argued that the teaching of "limited atonement" is a textless doctrine. We may say the same of reprobation: "There is not, to my knowledge, any text in the Bible indicating a single and eternal will to damnation in the Almighty."<sup>28</sup> Christian preaching is based on the *text* of Scripture. Reprobation is therefore excluded from the preaching of the whole counsel of God.

## Thesis 11: In the preaching of election, history must be taken seriously.

We must affirm: "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). However we must not conceive of election simply in terms of an eternal decree. It has an historical dimension. The life and death of the Chosen One, the call of Israel and the Church, and the faith of the elect all take place in history. A rationalism which passes lightly over history strikes at the very root of the Christian faith which is rooted in the soil of history. And preaching must not be a mere recitation of naked theological truth. It must be presented in the context of personal historical revelation.

How is God related to the world? "God's relationship to the world", says Daane, "is neither that of his eternality in its relationship to time, nor of time in its relationship to eternity. The clue to the nature of God's relationship to the temporal world lies in his *creation* of a world time." He adds: "The peculiar weakness of decretal theology appears in the fact that it has no room for transition, for movement, for a 'history'."<sup>29</sup>

One of the characteristics of grace is freedom. Israel overlooked God's freedom when it viewed election in static terms. They regarded God's grace as assured because they were the elect nation. God was thus under obligation. He was imprisoned in a concept of necessity. Israel wished to disregard unfaithfulness in the historical situation. When certain Jews were presuming upon their status as God's elect race Jesus told them that God was able to make sons of Abraham out of the stones. The *initiative* remains with God. *Man* is under obligation, the obligation of faith. The Bible is the account of God's personal, gracious, and free dealings with unworthy man in the dynamic context of history. God is never a prisoner of his own decree.

The doctrine of the single decree does not allow us to take history seriously.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Daane argues, it cannot absorb biblical eschatology. Nor has it been able to develop a doctrine of the election of Israel, of the church, and of Jesus.<sup>31</sup>

Decretal theology's denial that anything can occur in time which is contrary to the eternal decree is to make a rationalistic speculation which is quite contrary to the whole religious tenor of the Scriptures which take sin so seriously.

This preoccupation with the single decree robs history of significance because everything "happens" in eternity. History is *statically* conceived and there is no concept of God working out his purposes in his world and bringing them to their eschatological fulfillment in Christ.

The kind of rationalism which came to the fore in seventeenth-century scholasticism made God the cause of all things. This tended to rob history of its reality and goal and reduce events to equal significance. The God of the Bible, however, is related to the world through creation, providence, and recreation. He is thus related to *his* world in its historical movement and not just as first cause.

<sup>27</sup> Boer, "The Doctrine of Reprobation," 14f.

<sup>28</sup> Maury, 58.

<sup>29</sup> Daane, *The Freedom of God*, 64.

<sup>30</sup> Daane likens rationalistic evangelicalism's concept of history to a kind of cosmic telephone conveying the eternal message but not part of it (*The Freedom of God*, 75). This of course is irreconcilable with the biblical doctrine of incarnation.

<sup>31</sup> Daane, *The Freedom of God*, 72.

We must not evaporate the waters of history with the sun of eternity. Nor must we create a discrepancy between what happened in eternity and what happens in time. God's historical act in time (the Christ event) and his calling through the gospel are linked to God's decision in eternity not through a rational concept of causality and necessity but through the merciful intention of the Father-God.

This raises the question of the status of the words "before [*pro*] the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Once we have liberated ourselves from a rationalistic schema which entirely separates eternity from time, we are free to see that Paul is not speaking of absolute sovereignty here, but of infinite grace with its determined purpose. This passage is a hymn of praise to the God of grace:

"Blessed [*eulogetos*] be the God . . . who has blessed [*eulogesas*] us in Christ with every spiritual blessing [*eulogia*]... even as he chose us in him... He destined us in love... to the praise of his glorious grace [*charitos*] which he freely bestowed [*echaritosen*] on us... according to the riches of his grace. . . ." Ephesians 1:3-11 is a single Greek sentence with many complex thoughts. Basically, however, it is a doxology to the God of grace who works out his gracious purposes in history. Pietersma argues that eternity does not refer to an unknown beyond or to an unalterable decree as such "but to the whence (and the whereto) of our salvation."<sup>32</sup>

In the last analysis it is the doctrine of the Trinity which is at stake here. The eternal decree in its rationalistic formulation is a threat to the doctrine of the Trinity, especially to the Father-Son relationship. It is a threat to election "in Christ." The all-inclusive eternal decree minimizes the truth that Christ has entered history, i.e., that he has come in the flesh (1 John 4:2). History and, therefore, the historical Christ are rendered insignificant and the Persons of the Trinity lose their distinctiveness in the all-inclusive all-significant eternal decree. In contrast, authentic preaching, which is itself an event in history, centers on the eternal Word (John 1:1) which dwelt among us in time and space (John 1:14).

## **Thesis 12: The doctrine of the single eternal decree in its classical formulation is unable to deal with the reality of sin.**

If everything that happens has its origin in the decree, then unbelief and sin have their origin in God. This conclusion is denied by decretal theology. It is argued that the ultimate cause and source of sin (God) is not the author of sin. We may ask with Daane: "Why the ultimate cause and source is not its ultimate author or even its secondary author, and how there can be ultimate causation of sin without any responsibility, are not explained."<sup>33</sup>

In Scripture God is seen as totally opposed to sin. To be sure, God is able to make the sinful actions of man serve his eschatological purposes. But this is far removed from any assertion that they are initiated by God (in any sense) in an eternal decree: God "*brings* light out of darkness, *turns* death into life, and *creates* beauty out of chaos. But these are acts of divine *accomplishment*. Life and death, war and peace, chaos and beauty are not decreed by God in the same manner...."<sup>34</sup>

One of the main objections which may be leveled against the single decree, especially in its supralapsarian formulation,<sup>35</sup> is its rejection of the thought that God responds to the events of history, especially to the fall and sin of man. The man who reads Scripture from a religious point of view, unrestricted by rationalistic presuppositions, gains the distinct impression that the Father *responds* to the wayward prodigal. That God is not free to be moved with pity for the sinner, one feels, is at variance with the essential message of the gospel.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Pietersma, "Predestination," *Reformed Journal* 16 No. 10 (1966) 22.

<sup>33</sup> Daane, *The Freedom of God*, 80.

<sup>34</sup> Daane, *The Freedom of God*, 85.

<sup>35</sup> *Supra* – above; *lapsare* – to lapse, fall. Election is logically prior to the fall as far as God's purpose is concerned. Cf. *infralapsarianism* (*infra* – below); election is consequent upon the fall as far as the divine purpose is concerned.

We thus see that one of the basic defects of the single decree is its all-inclusiveness. Boettner states:

His decree . . . extends not merely to the course of the physical world but to every event in human history from the creation to the judgment, and includes all the activities of saints and angels in heaven and of reprobates and demons in hell....Everything outside of God himself is included in this all-embracing decree....<sup>36</sup>

Barth argues that we cannot deduce election from one basic principle of naked sovereignty.<sup>37</sup> Election soon deteriorates into determinism (despite our resorting to antinomy to save the sovereign God from authorship of sin) if it is removed from soteriology (where Calvin placed it) into the doctrine of God.

Unable to deal adequately with sin, decretal theology is thus unable to deal adequately with salvation. For salvation in Scripture is presented as the response of the Father's heart to the sin of man. It is provided for us in his elect Son who became sin for us in a definite and real historical incarnation. He thus conquered sin to which he was utterly opposed (Heb. 9:26).

### **Thesis 13: Any doctrine of predestination which makes God arbitrary in his judgments is unbiblical.**

There is no arbitrariness in God's election:

It does not turn out to be an election – as realization of God's plan – of obscure arbitrariness, changeable and irrational, accidental and inaccessible, but an election which, while resting in God's freedom and sovereignty, is clear, irrefutable, and consistent in content and definiteness.<sup>38</sup>

On the other hand, a theology which subjects everything to the "single decree" of absolute sovereignty makes God arbitrary. The acts of divine will have no certain relation to the nature of God and stand in isolation from his character as revealed in Jesus Christ.

The revelation of God in Christ assures us that God is reliable rather than arbitrary, that he is dependable and consistent. He works "all things according to the counsel of his will," but he has revealed his essential plan to man in Christ. With him there is "no shadow of turning."

Thus God's power may not be separated from his justice and holiness, nor from his love. The stability and trustworthiness of all God's actions are keynotes of biblical revelation. Omnipotence *in abstracto* is quite foreign to Scripture. Man is not the victim of the fickle whims of an arbitrary amoral dictator, but the object of the purposeful, consistent and dependable love of the Father.

### **Thesis 14: The rationalistic concept which centers on the hiddenness of God in his eternal decree rather than on the revelation of God in Christ is biblically inadequate.**

A theology which focuses on the *deus absconditus* rather than on the *deus revelatus* in Christ may easily cast a shadow over the doctrine of election. The church must never think that what has not been revealed may contradict, and so prove a threat to what is revealed.

Scripture declares: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever" (Deut 29:29). Even with the added light of the New Covenant we "see through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12). There are the "secret things" and the "revealed things," but there can be no tension between them.

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<sup>36</sup> Boettner, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Barth, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Berkouwer, 70

The light that is revealed is not in the least threatened by that which remains obscured, for the hidden God is the same God who has revealed himself in Christ. God dwells in "unapproachable light" (1 Tim 6:16). But it is *light*. We do not therefore respond to God's election with a mysterious shrug of the shoulders.<sup>39</sup> Inscrutable election is in reality, fatalism.

Mystery in the doctrine of election must be freed from an all-prevailing obscurity, not by peering beyond the boundaries of faith, but by fixing the gaze on Jesus Christ.

## **Thesis 15: The doctrine of election which opens the door to universalism is to be rejected.**

If we emphasize "election in Christ" and deny reprobation are we not thereby opting for some kind of universalism? Karl Barth is often regarded as having taken this route. Barth ties the universal love of God (with its genuine offer of salvation) to the election of God in a relationship of equality and states: "This, then, is the message with which the elect community . . . has to approach every man – the promise, that he, too, is an elect man." The only truly rejected man is Jesus Christ and by "permitting the life of a rejected man to be the life of his own Son God has made such a life objectively impossible for all others."<sup>40</sup> The rejected are taken up into the rejected Christ who is "not reprobate but eternally loved and justified and sanctified by God." Thus the rejected man can only *have been* rejected. He cannot *be* rejected.<sup>41</sup>

There is tension throughout Barth's treatment of election. Grace is sovereign but faith is necessary. God's "determination is that, as the rejected man which he is, he should hear the proclamation of truth and come to faith."<sup>42</sup>

It is Barth's state of suspense on the question of universalism which is such a threat to the preaching of the gospel. The urgency of the gospel is now not so urgent. "Necessary faith" is perhaps not quite "necessary." In the end grace will conquer all – even unbelief. "Grace alone through faith alone" is overturned. Grace is alone.

Brunner, on the whole, agrees with Barth's presentation of election. However on some points he is strongly critical. While acknowledging that Barth rejects *apokatastasis*, he argues that Barth went much *further* than affirming this. He actually affirms that "through Jesus Christ, all, believers and unbelievers, are saved from the wrath of God and participate in redemption through Jesus Christ." Brunner objects to the concept of Jesus Christ as the *only* rejected one. He sees this as throwing on the "scrap heap the idea of a final divine Judgment, and the doctrine that a man may be 'lost'." He believes that in so doing Barth is in absolute opposition not only to the whole church tradition, "but – and this alone is the final objection to it – to the clear teaching of the New Testament."<sup>43</sup>

I cannot help feeling that Barth has fallen into the same trap into which the decretal theologians fell and which Barth himself wants to avoid. Brunner expresses it well: Augustinian decretal theology

was a speculation: Natural Theology on the basis of a statement which had a Biblical core. Karl Barth takes the opposite line. From the fact that according to the teaching of Scripture – Jesus Christ is the divine offer of salvation for all, he concludes that in consequence all are saved; this, too, is Natural Theology on the basis of a statement which has a Biblical core.<sup>44</sup>

Men are like people who appear to be perishing at sea. However in reality they are in shallow water where they cannot drown. Only they do not know it. In the last analysis one cannot see why preaching

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<sup>39</sup> Barth, 104.

<sup>40</sup> Barth, 318, 346.

<sup>41</sup> Barth, 451, 453.

<sup>42</sup> Barth, 458.

<sup>43</sup> Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God, Dogmatics I* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946) 348-349.

<sup>44</sup> Brunner, 350f.

according to Barth is not simply announcing that we have been reconciled to God without calling men to be reconciled.

## **Thesis 16: Preaching which makes the decision of man primary over the election of God is a humanistic compromise of the gospel of grace.**

Jesus said unequivocally: "You have not chosen me but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). An Arminian emphasis on human initiative reverses this plain statement and places *priority* on man's autonomy rather than on the grace of the Father-God. The sheer space given by the New Testament to dealing with those teachings which are contrary to *sola gratia* should convince us that human nature tends to highlight not only man's merits but also the value of his decisions.

To reject Arminian "decisionism" on the grounds of its deference to humanism does not lead us to a single alternative based on human rationalistic logic. That would be to exchange one humanism for another. There is a third way; it is the way of grace through faith as it is dynamically revealed in the Christ of the Scriptures. "By grace" makes both preacher and congregation dependent on divine initiative in election and calling. It makes the preacher a messenger rather than an innovator and saves the sinner (preacher as well as hearer) from despair. However salvation comes "*through faith*." Both preaching and listening are full of significance. Preaching is not merely an announcement. It demands a genuine response. It is "*through faith*" so that faith is not a work, nor a human component in salvation. It is *trust*. That is, the object of faith, Christ, is of primary concern. And faith is simply "the open hand which receives the free gift" – itself the gift of grace.

Only thus can we avoid the humanism of both decretal and Arminian theologies.

## **Thesis 17: To be biblical, election must promote the glory of God.**

In Romans 8-11 the biblical doctrine of election which emphasizes God's gracious purpose for all men elicits praise: "To him be glory for ever. Amen" (11:36). Only salvation which is *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *solus Christus* will be *solī Deo gloria*.

Humanistic liberalism which focuses on man rather than on God as the initiator in salvation does not motivate spontaneous praise. The logically harmonious form of double predestination which bases itself on a concept of necessity "loses all need for the language of grace"<sup>45</sup> and therefore for the response of praise. Praise is lost in the language of logic and in the humanism of synergism. In both, all mystery is removed. And without mystery there is no praise. The element of wonder has departed for everything has become transparent.

The proclamation of the Christocentric election of the church motivates praise. We see this in Ephesians 1-3 where Paul throughout relates "every spiritual blessing" to Christ (e.g., 1:3) and where he mounts to a mighty conclusion with the doxology: Unto "Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen."

Election, then, belongs to the *life* of the church and therefore to its *worship*. It prompts spontaneous praise. Having its origin in God it has its end also in him; it is "from" him and "unto" him. This is the "ebb and flow" of all vital proclamation. Coming from God it comes to man through preaching. It returns to its source in praise.

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<sup>45</sup> Daane, *The Freedom of God*, 173.

## Thesis 18: The doctrine of election should enhance preaching and inspire evangelism.

An elective dogma which absolutizes the divine sovereignty and the eternal decree and which so emphasizes the divine prerogative that the human response is rendered meaningless or insignificant, calls into question the purpose and function of preaching. Preaching then labors under the pressure of causality. As we have seen, simplistic double predestination greatly limits preaching, for the offer of salvation to all is an empty one; symmetry casts its shadow over the *kerygma*.<sup>46</sup>

Wherever the identification of the elect became a *sine qua non* of proclamation (rather than mere *explanation*) it was inevitable that the identification had to be established *independently of the gospel*. As we have seen, this is an impossibility. Preaching was thus severely restricted by its presuppositions.

Scholasticism of the post-reformation era, unlike Calvin's theology, was refined in the rarified atmosphere of the theological schools rather than in the context of congregational life. Thus it often had a deadening effect on the pulpit.<sup>47</sup> Preachers, often awed by the theologians, succumbed to the refined rationalism which restated the reformation doctrine as tidily as logic knew how. It became neat and lifeless.

On the other hand, far from restricting preaching, the biblical doctrine of election enhances it for it is the basis of the gospel of grace. Without election there would be no Christian preaching. It is thoroughly consistent for Paul, therefore, to have placed his important words concerning preaching (Rom. 10:14-15) in the context of his treatment of election and grace. Biblical election is no theorem, it is joyful proclamation.

As we have seen, Jesus Christ himself is at the center of the biblical doctrine of election. As Maury has stressed, we preach Christ, for he is the source and goal of all true preaching.<sup>48</sup>

## Thesis 19: The electing God remains free and never becomes a prisoner of necessity.

Whenever God's single decree becomes eternal in the strict sense of the word such that God becomes equated with the decree and his will is his very essence (and elect people become *necessary*), then the freedom of God is lost.

Whenever God is viewed as absolutely immutable, never affected by anything outside himself (the Unmoved Mover), then God becomes a prisoner of his own attributes.

Whenever God is seen as the cause and explanation of all things in an absolute sense, then the freedom is lost because the link between cause and effect becomes a *necessary* one.

According to Daane, wherever God is thought of as exhaustively rational there is no room for the freedom of God in any positive sense. Nor is there any room for God's *will*.<sup>49</sup> We must assert that God was free to create the world *or not*, to redeem it *or not*. His actions are not merely the outcome of his essence. God cannot be imprisoned within his attributes so that in his electing (or non-electing) he could do no other.

Daane is no doubt correct when he speaks of the use here of a secularized theological method which, in seeking to protect the sovereignty of God, puts God at the mercy of an iron-clad necessity of cause and effect. "God's sovereignty is freedom to do with his own what he will."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Berkouwer, 223.

<sup>47</sup> Daane, *The Freedom of God*, 152.

<sup>48</sup> Maury, 69.

<sup>49</sup> Daane, *The Freedom of God*, 161.

<sup>50</sup> James Daane, "Christ's Atonement and God's Sovereignty," *Reformed Journal* 15 No.4 (1965)16-17.

We must not interpret divine freedom, says Barth, merely as a definition and attribute of a supreme form of electing posited as absolute, but rather as the "freedom of the One who loves in freedom."<sup>51</sup> What kind of love is it which is "necessary"? Love surely ceases to be love when it ceases to be free.

God is under no *obligation*, either to himself or us, to elect us. The freedom of God is not merely apparent. The sovereign Father elects because he is love and not because he is obliged to do so. He elects to salvation because of his *character*. God loves because God is love. The *expression* of this love is not restricted by rational necessity or by any other obligation.

## **Thesis 20: The biblical doctrine of election is foundational for *sola gratia*.**

The offence of the gospel itself with its *solus Christus* and *sola gratia* often leads to a rejection of the biblical doctrine of predestination. The natural man is offended by this gospel of grace which rejects his works as meritorious.

Any attempts to separate *sola gratia* from election is doomed to lead us away from the New Testament witness. Thus the identifying of foreknowledge (*prognosis*) with predestination (from *proorizo*) is a humanistic interpretation of Scripture. Prescience, with its projection of synergism into the counsel of God, implies that salvation comes from man as well as God.<sup>52</sup> The biblical doctrine of election, however, never detracts from *sola gratia*, but establishes and guarantees it.

## **Thesis 21: The doctrine of election ought to strengthen assurance of salvation.**

There was something tragically at fault in those reformed churches of the post-reformation era in which a mere handful of a large membership attended communion. The very doctrine which ought to have been ground for assurance created widespread uncertainty. It was inevitable, however, that a rationalistic decretal theology should cast a shadow over the very willingness of God to save. God became Absolute Power and election became an ominous threat to salvation rather than a window to the Father's saving heart. The result was tormenting uncertainty.

Nowhere in Scripture is there any tension between election and certainty. The election of decretal theology, however, brings a menacing threat to sensitive believers.

The churchman seeks a sense of certainty: Does he belong to the *numerus praedestinatorum*? This question cannot be answered apart from the good news of salvation. The gospel itself is the source of assurance, for it affirms God's determination to save all who have faith. Predestination can only be a threat to assurance of salvation if it is severed from the gospel and from the preaching of Christ.

In this connection, Calvin speaks of a "bottomless whirlpool," "innumerable and inextricable snares" and "an abyss of sightless darkness." It is fatal, he says, to enquire into the eternal decree without the Word.<sup>53</sup> This involves us in looking to Christ, for if we are in communion with Christ, we have proof sufficiently strong that we are written in the Book of Life.<sup>54</sup>

Not nagging uncertainty but full assurance is the product of the biblical teaching on election: "In the very foreground of our existence in history we can and should cleave wholly and with full assurance to him because in the eternal background of history . . . the old decree which was passed . . . was the decision which was executed by him."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Barth, 25.

<sup>52</sup> See Berkouwer, 35, 42.

<sup>53</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Library of Christian Classics; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960)111 xxiv 4.

<sup>54</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* III xxiv 5.

<sup>55</sup> Barth, 115.

We must also notice that assurance is impossible apart from the biblical doctrine of *sola fide*: "I write this to you who *believe* in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). But as we have seen, the biblical doctrine of election establishes the doctrine of *sola fide*.

It is also impossible to walk the way of certainty apart from sanctification (1 John 3:14). The works of sanctification, which are also the works (fruit) of faith, are not the ground of salvation but its evidence. Thus "faith alone" is not overthrown by the works of assurance. Assurance does not come by peering into the hidden decree of God, but by observing (by faith) the evidence of salvation in the works of faith and love.

The biblical doctrines of assurance and sanctification, then, are closely associated with the doctrine of election in Christ: "He (Christ) was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake. Through *him you have confidence in God... Having purified your souls* by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly" (1 Pet 1:20f). Election in Christ, assurance in God, and sanctification in the Spirit are never far removed from one another.

## **Thesis 22: The biblical doctrine of election does not render the human response meaningless.**

Any doctrine which gives such priority to divine sovereignty that the human response is made unnecessary, unreal, or the product of sheer determinism drives a wedge between *sola gratia* and *sola fide*. Preaching loses its urgency and may be rendered altogether superfluous.

It is not easy to define the relationship between grace and faith. Berkouwer writes: "To be sure, there is a connection between the divine and the human act. The divine act makes room, leaves open the possibility for man's act. That possibility is not absorbed or destroyed by divine superiority, *but created, called forth, by it*. And within that 'room', that possibility, God's work is honored according to his sovereign pleasure."<sup>56</sup> This response of man excludes cooperation and synergism. But it also excludes determinism and fatalism.

Scripture certainly stresses the divine initiative: "No one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44. See also v 37). Nevertheless Jesus adds: "Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes has eternal life" (v 47). What Scripture presents together, we must not separate. Grace is certainly primary – it is *by grace through* faith that we are saved. However faith is *necessary* for salvation.

Thus election must be thought of in terms of the Trinity. Not even election in Christ can be abstracted from the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit who creates and draws forth a genuine response in the believer to the preaching of the Word.

## **Thesis 23: We must affirm that God creates what he elects rather than that he selects out of what exists.**

Israel is *called* into existence. Election is tied to *promise* and the seed of Israel is not the product of selection but of creation. God *created* what he elected. Election is the creation of something out of its opposite – possibility out of impossibility. It is a matter of creation rather than a parallel to rejection.

The focus in our doctrine of election, therefore, must not be on selection. Election is a *creative act*. In biblical thought Israel, Christ, and the Church are not "existing realities that God selectively chooses out of a number of extant Israels, Christs, or churches. . . . They are created by the dynamics of election, for they are what they are only by virtue of their election."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Berkouwer, 46. Italics mine.

<sup>57</sup> Daane, *The Freedom of God*, 150.

Emphasis on a selective decree takes the attention away from the biblical emphasis on the Last Judgment and robs preaching of one of its powerful motives. In the teaching of Jesus, the division always occurs in the Last Day, not before creation (Matt 25:32). Selective election deprives preaching of its eschatological dimension and becomes a *fait accompli* rather than an incentive for repentance. Decretal theology is facing in exactly the opposite direction from biblical theology!

Maury argues that predestination has often become the doctrine of the *predestined* rather than the doctrine of the God who *predestines*. It is anthropological rather than theological doctrine. He says "it is turned into an agonizing business of pre-selection, since it takes place not at the Last Judgment, as has been proclaimed, but before all existence. . ."<sup>58</sup> But the God who predestines is the Father-Creator who elects his children in his only Son, who creates his church out of nothing, who calls all men to be saved and to flee from the wrath to come.

## Conclusion

In the words of G. C. Berkouwer: "Scripture showed us that in the doctrine of God's election the issue is not a *decretum absolutum*, abstracted from Jesus Christ, neither a *necessitas rerum* which cannot be changed under any circumstances, nor a dark and irrational power of the *potentia absoluta*. Rather Scripture points in its doxologies and songs in praise of the free election of God to the deep, unfathomable source of salvation in Jesus Christ."<sup>59</sup>

We have seen that preaching has often labored under a caricatured doctrine of election; indeed sometimes it has been quite a monstrous one. The pulpit must free itself on the one hand from a rationalized and an externalized dogmatic system of deterministic causality, and on the other, from the pretentiousness of a humanistic Pelagianism.

Rationalism and humanism have had a debilitating effect on the pulpit. A revival of expository preaching would allow election to be proclaimed in its dynamic biblical context. There is also a need for non-polemical ecumenical dialogue between reformed and non-reformed churches, especially between those which seek a deeper scriptural understanding of the faith.

Throughout we have seen that Scripture rescues us from the necessity of deciding for rationalistic election or Arminian decisionism. What I have called the Third Way of Election is open to us. It is well summarized by Barth: "The doctrine of election is the sum of the Gospel because of all the words that can be said or heard it is the best: that God elects man; that God is for man too, the One who loves in freedom. It is grounded in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. .

Its function is to bear basic testimony to eternal, free and unchanging grace as the beginning of all the ways and works of God."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Maury, 37.

<sup>59</sup> Berkouwer, 172.

<sup>60</sup> Barth, 3.