



CHRISTIANITY TODAY

PUBLISHED FORTNIGHTLY

Christ's Finality: A Lost Vision?

F. CAWLEY

The Richness of the Ascension

ROBERT H. LAUER

NAE Convention Report

PETER DE VISSER

EDITORIAL:

Missions at New Delhi

ECUMENICAL SYMPOSIUM

A New Crisis in Missions?

A MAJOR REVIEW

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THIS ISSUE EXCEEDS 172,500 COPIES

★ On the opposite page begins the longest essay yet carried in a single issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY. It focuses attention on a new book, off the press this week, which discloses far-reaching influences now divergently shaping the philosophy of the Christian mission around the world. Discussion of contemporary mission strategy promises to dominate the theological horizon as a prelude to the World Council of Churches' assembly in New Delhi in the late fall. The editorial on page 24, "Missions at Delhi," is a companion piece to the 11-page article, "A New Crisis in Foreign Missions?"

★ How meaningful is the distinction between "conservative" and "progressive"? The Dutch theologian Dr. G. C. Berkouwer explores this dilemma on page 48.

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Basic Christian Doctrines: 8.

Predestination

For Christian faith, predestination is a vision of the King in the glory of his grace, and a warning against transposing the revelation of the majesty of his mercy into any concatenated scheme of human logic. It proclaims the freeness of God's saving grace in Christ, without making of his will an arbitrary fatalism. The ways of him who predestines are past our tracing out, and the mystery thereof bids us worship where we cannot fathom.

Historically, Augustine of Hippo formulated triple predestination, that is: general predestination or providence which magnifies God's wisdom in governing all things, special predestination or election in which his free grace is seen in the choice of his people, and preterition or reprobation by which he passes by and leaves other sinners to the due desert of their guilt for the manifestation of his power and justice.

In the English Bible, the verb predestinate occurs in the eighth of Romans and in the first chapter of Ephesians. The Apostle introduces us to this high theme from the viewpoint of a pastor and in the context of a congregation, rather than as a logician of a philosophical school. In this setting we confront not abstract decrees set and established in the distant past, but the living God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ predestining and gathering to himself his family, adopting them in the Son of his love, and leading them to the praise of the glory of his unspeakable grace. Thus considered, predestination is *personal*, *Christo-centric*, and *gracious*. This revelation of the living God who personally predestines delivers us from an impersonal petrification of predestination. Its center in Christ gives us the assurance of faith and saves the believer from that deadly labyrinth which swallows up the speculative thinker. And its sheer grace protects from Pelagianism and Pharisaism and fills the heart with gratitude. The rhythm of grace and gratitude, of *God for us* and consequently of *us for God*, is the Christian life.

¶ *Predestination is the personal decision of the God who elects.* The most important thing in the Apostle's statements on predestination in Romans and in Ephesians is that it is God who chooses. The doctrine is not primarily predestina-

tion but God who predestines; the decrees are only after God's decreeing. In Ephesians 1:3, it is God who is showering his blessings upon us. In verse 4, the Greek verb is a middle which indicates God selecting for himself, as an old patriarch might look over his heirs—including his in-laws, adopted children, and grandchildren—and say to them all: You are just the ones mother and I chose for ourselves to make up this our whole family. Since God's choosing was before the foundation of the world, when he alone existed, this can be nothing but God's own act. The fifth verse continues the stress on the decision and action of the divine personality by declaring it to be according to the good pleasure of his own will.

In Romans 8, God is working all things for good to those who are called according to his own purposes. The golden chain which ties together the acts of God from their foundation in his eternal purpose to their consummation in his making us sinners like unto the image of his Son is nothing else than just *God himself*. He loved us, he foreknew us, he predestined us, he called us, he justified us, he glorified us. It is God who is for us. It is God who justifies. In the hands of Paul, as of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Edwards, this teaching brings God into the center of the picture—God the Person who wills, who decides, who acts for us, even for our salvation.

A speculative consideration of the eternal decrees may well issue in a mode of thinking that treats them as abstractions apart from God and thereby de-personalizes them. And when either decree or grace is construed without God himself, then the quest for a personal element lights upon man, and what started as God's free grace ends as man's decisive will. Eternal predestination according to decrees established before the foundation of the world may be turned into a form of "orthodox" deism. On the other hand, the sovereignty of God meant for Luther and Calvin God in action here and now, His hand at the helm even in the most violent storm. God has not gone fishing, or golfing, or to an Ethiopian banquet. He is not asleep. He is not otiose. He is *activissimus*. We are not following the Reformers when we

treat God as an absentee deity. Their God was the God of Elijah.

Indeed, the thought of God who personally wills, decides, and acts is close to the heart of the Gospel. It rings in the finite verbs in the Creed. It shines in the great passives by which John Wesley describes the strange warming of his own heart. It is a genuine part of the restudy of the *kerygma* which is blessing the Church today.

Again, this God who personally predestines, acts in his love. In mercy he chose for adoption into his family of children even us rebellious sinners. The man who wrote Romans and Ephesians describes himself as the chief of sinners. In Ephesians 1:5 the choice to be God's children is according to the purpose of His own will, with which the phrase *in love* may well be linked. Or, if that phrase belongs to verse 4, nevertheless in Ephesians 2:4 the riches of God's saving mercy rest upon "his great love wherewith he loved us." In Romans, the verb predestinate occurs in the context of God working all things for good, of both the ascended Christ and the Holy Spirit interceding for the saints, and of the purpose of God bringing them into the fellowship and likeness of Jesus Christ. In Ephesians, the God who blesses his people with every spiritual blessing according to his choosing of them before he made the worlds is none other than *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The God who predestines is the God before whom Jesus lived, in whom he trusted, to whom he prayed 'Abba,' and to whose right hand as Lord and Christ he has been exalted that he may actively accomplish the loving program of eternal election in the history of world affairs and carry the host of his redeemed into the gates of the New Jerusalem.

¶ *Predestination is in Jesus Christ.* According to Romans 8, we are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son that He may be the firstborn among many brethren, and we know that God is for us by his not withholding his own Son. According to Ephesians 1:3, Christ is the ground and reason of the divine blessing, in 1:4 he is the meritorious cause of our election, in verse 5 through his mediation our adoption is realized, and in verse 6 the grace of God is re-

vealed and bestowed. Salvation is the act of the Holy God doing justice to his own righteousness at any cost to himself. In Christ we have redemption through his blood—the forgiveness of sins through his giving of himself for us.

Augustine turned away from that Neo-Platonic scheme, in which the “lower parts” of God and the “higher parts” of man somehow make contact, to Jesus Christ who as man is the way and as God is the goal of man’s pilgrimage. Staupitz told Luther to find himself in the wounds of Christ and then predestination would be to him inexpressibly sweet. To the request of a troubled woman, Luther replied, “Hear the Incarnate Son. He offers thee Himself as Predestination.”

Likewise Calvin exhorts men “to flee straight to Christ in whom the salvation is set forth for us which otherwise would have lain hidden in God.” That we may call boldly on God as our Father “our beginning is not at all to be made from God’s determination concerning us before the creation of the world, but from the revelation of his fatherly love to us in Christ and Christ’s daily preaching to us by the Gospel” (*Consensus Genevensis*). Calvin prays that we may be “led to Christ only as the fountain of election,” even as truly God he is “the author of election” and as truly man he is “the brightest example of election.” And, “it is beyond all controversy, that no man is loved by God but in Christ; He is the Beloved Son in Whom the love of the Father perpetually rests, and then diffuses itself to us so that we are accepted in the Beloved” (*Institutes*, III.xxii.7; III.xxii.1; III.ii.32).

One may compare this with the declarations of neo-orthodoxy in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* (I, pp. 179-181) to the effect that election is in *Christo* in the sense that Christ is the Chooser; that it is *per Christum* in that he is the Chosen One who imparts salvation to those committed to him, the Head who communicates to his members; and that it is *propter Christum* because he takes upon his shoulders our condemnation and bears for us the damnation we deserve.

The neo-orthodox, however, extend this last point further than do the classical Augustinians. Indeed, their view of Christ as taking reprobation for the whole human race would seem to leave no place for any discriminatory choice by God. When all is said and done, there remains the biblical picture of God who chooses, God who elects, God who predestines in Christ and for his sake saves

a great host that no man can number including the last, the least, and the lowest of those who take refuge under his wings; but he does not save those who continue to love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil, nor those for whom the preaching of the Gospel is a savor of death unto death, nor those who despise the riches of his goodness, longsuffering, and forbearance, and fail to consider that the goodness of God leads to repentance. When the cities of his day rejected Jesus, he rejoiced in the Father’s sovereign discrimination and continued to sound forth his gracious invitation: “Come unto me, and find rest for your souls.”

¶ *Predestination is the election of free grace.* The Lord of the hosts whom he predestines to be his children in Jesus Christ is the God of grace. In Ephesians, predestination is rooted in and magnifies the sheer grace of God.

Ephesians begins as it ends with grace. God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. All these flow from his gracious choosing. He predestines according to his loving purpose to the praise of the glory of his grace which he has graciously bestowed upon us in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins according to the riches of his grace which he has lavished upon us.

There is no place here for human conceits. God did not bestow his electing love upon us before the foundation of the world because of any fancied “infinite value of the human soul.” We had no value; indeed, we had no existence. God who alone was before creation is the God of love, of pure grace. The riches of his mercy were bestowed upon us on account of his great love where-with he loved us. There was no goodness nor worthiness in us to cause him to choose us. Rather were we hateful and hating one another when the kindness and love of God toward men appeared in Christ. God so loved the world, which slew the babies of Bethlehem and crucified Jesus, that he gave for it his only begotten Son. In Ephesians it is quite definite that God foresaw us and must needs have seen us only in Christ in order to choose such rebellious sinners to be holy and without blame before him in love.

Grace means that God is for us, yes, for us even when we were against him. In sheer grace he chose to create men who were capable of denying the love which bears them. The unfathomable depths of that grace are revealed in God’s

giving for this rebellious race the Son of his bosom. It is Christ coming into the world to save sinners, to identify himself with us, to pick up the ticket for our responsibilities, to give himself on the Cross as the ransom price for our deliverance—the propitiation which diverted from us the divine wrath.

Those who come to Christ were already God’s sons in his heart while they were yet in themselves enemies. Again and again, that grace is made conspicuous. The risen Christ intervenes to confront his chief opponent and turn him into his trusted friend. Grace is Christ’s love for Saul of Tarsus, even when Saul was persecuting him in the treatment he was meting out to Jesus’ brethren. Thus grace is prevenient, it comes first, before any response by the sinner. We were dead in trespasses and sins, but God made us alive and raised us up together with Christ. Thus were we born “not of the will of man but of God,” born of the Spirit who works faith in us and thereby unites us to Christ in our effectual calling.

Grace is the heart and center of the Gospel. It is the expression of the electing love of God and the parent of faith. It issues in the inward work of the Holy Spirit illuminating our hearts to appropriate the love of God revealed in Christ dying for the ungodly. It is this love reaching out to forgive the guilty. It is not that we loved him but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. It is the forgiveness which justifies the ungodly through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It is the Father’s welcome to the prodigal which gives him a place in the family of God by adoption and by regeneration.

Because it is *sola gratia*, therefore it can only be *sola fide*. Grace leads to faith, to unwavering trust of the heart in Him who has given himself to us as our Father and our Saviour in Jesus Christ. Faith wrought by the grace of the Spirit lays aside trust in self, denies all self-confidence, renounces any thought of merit even in our faith, and entrusts the believer as a helpless, undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving sinner wholly to the goodness, mercy, love, kindness, grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

¶ *Bibliography:* Augustine, *Predestination*; J. Calvin, *Institutes*; K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2.

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