

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

## The Doctrine of Election in Historical Perspective

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WE do not aim in this chapter to give a complete survey of the history of the doctrine of election. We only want to speak of one perspective that urges itself upon us when we become engrossed in its history and that in all variations of the thought of the centuries proves that “there is nothing new under the sun.” For we see that in the great number of problems that present themselves to us there is one that comes to the foreground repeatedly. It can be thus formulated: Where falls the decision of man’s redemption? Does it fall exclusively in God Himself, in His electing act, or does it fall—albeit against the background of the generative grace of God—in man’s free will? Does our redemption depend on God’s decision or does it depend on ours?

Many answers have been given in the course of the centuries. These answers have usually not been a choice of one or the other possibility but an attempt to avoid this choice by trying to establish a synthesis between the divine and the human decisions. On the one hand, God’s grace cannot be denied, God cannot be made dependent in the granting of salvation on man’s decision; but on the other hand, the significance of man’s decision—his belief or unbelief—is to be fully honored, and should not be allowed to be obscured by the overpowering character of God’s working all things by Himself.

The effort has usually been made to bring God’s grace and man’s freedom (*liberum arbitrium*) into harmony and a balanced relationship with each other, in order to establish a synthesis, so that there is no danger that the exclusiveness of one or the other brings serious consequences to a living faith. For if the decision of man’s salvation were thought to be dependent exclusively on God, man’s decision and choice would become insignificant, and fatalism and determinism would result. Or at least we should be left with a concept of the exclusiveness of God’s activity whereby man’s endeavor would sink into nothingness. If, however, the decision were laid in man, God’s grace would come into question. Indeed, would it be possible to maintain it as real grace, as His merciful act? Would not grace be deprived of its merciful aspect if it were overshadowed by the final active deed, the free choice, of man? And would not God’s grace then take on the aspect of an offer of grace—to be accepted or declined—rather than that of a gift granted by the free, sovereign Giver? To avoid these extremes a synthesis was sought in which both God’s grace and man’s decision were given a full place.

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This theme of a synthesis runs like a red thread through the history of the doctrine of election. It is the theme of harmony, of cooperation. Of course, within the limits of this solution it is still possible to establish all sorts of variations, depending on whether the grace of God or the decision of man is accentuated. But no matter how radical these variations may be, they always lie within the circle of synergism, which occupied such an important place in Protestant as well as in Roman Catholic theology. There are, for instance, the synergistic polemics in Lutheran theology of the sixteenth century, the polemics of the Remonstrants in the Reformed churches of the same time, and the quarrel between the Molinists and Thomists, in which the relationship between God's grace and man's freedom played such an important role.<sup>1</sup>

The question regarding this relationship between God's grace and man's decision arose already in 418 when at the Council of Carthage Pelagianism was condemned because it was based on man's free nature and it emphasized man's decision to such a degree that God's grace did not actually go beyond the granting of that free nature. Pelagianism is based on an "exaggeration of the forces of free will"<sup>2</sup> and on "the essence of freedom as the opportunity to choose between good and evil."<sup>3</sup> In Pelagianism the Church saw grace deprived of its primary significance, of its decisive value. It was still spoken of, but it had actually been abandoned.<sup>4</sup> In such a view, grace was no longer absolutely necessary, and the Church at the Council of Carthage confessed its belief in the necessity of grace.<sup>5</sup> It is not that grace makes it easier to do God's will, but that without grace it is impossible to do God's will. Christ does not say, "Without me it is more difficult to do this"; He says, "Without me you can do nothing."<sup>6</sup> That word "nothing" conveys that there is a certain absoluteness in this emphasis on the necessity of grace.

The Council of Orange (529) condemned not only Pelagianism but also semi-Pelagianism, a condemnation to which the Roman Catholic Church still adheres for the reason that even semi-Pelagianism thinks too depreciatively of the necessity of God's grace. To be sure, semi-Pelagianism rejected Pelagianism and did not teach an inviolate *liberum arbitrium*, but it still maintained a belief in a free will—although a weakened free will (*infirmitas liberi arbitrii*). It taught that man retains his free will, but because it has been weakened by sin it is in need of God's helping grace, so that a cooperation between God's

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<sup>1</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *Conflict with Rome* (ET, 1958), Chap. IV, and *Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (ET, 1956), Chap. VII.

<sup>2</sup> *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, XII, 1, 675.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 683.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 684. See K. Steur, *De Vrije Wil* (1935), pp. 11ff.

<sup>5</sup> See Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, pp. 101ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105. "Sine me difficilius potestis facere" — "sine me nihil potestis facere."

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grace and man's freedom is necessary.<sup>7</sup> Rome rejects this doctrine because she does not think the necessity of grace is sufficiently confessed by it.

At the Council of Orange Scripture was again quoted to show clearly the necessity of grace. Not only Christ's statement that we can do nothing without Him, but also God's words in Isaiah were cited, "I am inquired of by them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not" (Isa. 65:1).<sup>8</sup> This very citation from Isaiah seems to exclude any possibility of synthesis because the simple relationship between seeking and finding is here incurred by the sovereignty of God's grace. One wonders how it is possible that Rome still adheres to the decision of 529 and nevertheless rejects the Reformation because it accentuates too much the *sola gratia*. We cannot now, however, go into this question. We only want to emphasize that the Church of Rome—in spite of its polemic struggle with the Reformation—adheres to the necessity of grace. According to Trent, the "power of nature" is not able to bring about redemption. The starting point of justification lies with grace.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church confesses the free will of man, defends it emphatically against the Reformation and places it over against the *sola gratia*. Grace is necessary and active, but man must cooperate with it and affirm it. Grace comes first (*praeveniens*), but it is not irresistible. "Scripture never teaches that grace works all things by itself in the sense that man's free will can contribute nothing to the salvation of man. Both factors work in such interrelation that neither of the two will encroach upon the other."<sup>10</sup> The Roman Catholic Church wants to emphasize that in relation to salvation man cannot be completely passive and it supports its position by quoting Scripture passages that call man to activity. From this position arises the problem of whether grace is, or is not, decisive in character.

In the polemics between Thomism and Molinism the point at issue was "the origin of this infallibly certain connection between active grace and the result that is willed by God."<sup>11</sup> According to Molinism grace works by way of man's free will only, while Thomism holds that grace works in its own power. In support of this latter view the Council of 529 may well be quoted, in its definite statement that God does not wait<sup>12</sup> for man's decision.

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<sup>7</sup> See Seeberg, *Dogmatische Geschichte*, II, 572.

<sup>8</sup> Denzinger, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>9</sup> The "*exordium justificationis*" (Denzinger, *op. cit.*, p. 797). Cf., "*nisi in Christo renascentur, numquam justificarentur*" (*ibid.*, p. 795).

<sup>10</sup> F. Diekamp, *Katholische Dogmatik nach den Grundsätzen des heiligen Thomas*, II, 452.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 457.

<sup>12</sup> Denzinger, *op. cit.*, p. 177: "*expectare*." Here reference is made to a place that contradicts "await," namely, Prov. 8:35. According to the LXX, this says: "*praeparatur voluntas a Domino*." Leaving aside the

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It is strange, however, that criticism of the Thomistic view was always based on the argument that with saving grace overshadowing the natural free will of man, his free will could no longer be maintained,<sup>13</sup> and that Trent's position could no longer be valid since it taught that man's will is a decisive factor.<sup>14</sup> This places us in the midst of the tensions of synergism. Over against the "either ... or" a "both ... and" is placed which forms the core of synergism and this turns out to be of decisive significance for a correct understanding of the election of God.

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However, it is not only in Roman Catholicism that synergism plays a role. The Reformation, too, was confronted with a profound problem when it sought the connection between the function of man's freedom and responsibility, and the doctrine of election. The Reformation met with questions similar to those in Roman Catholic theology.

We think especially of the Remonstrants in their opposition to the Reformed doctrine of election. They wanted to account for the significance of man's freedom and activity and to emphasize that man's activity could not be meddled with. We meet here a striking parallel to the problems of the Roman Catholic Church, and we may well question whether we are not dealing here with a religious problem of great significance. Is that perhaps the reason why after the Synod of Dort there was room for some sympathy between the Lutherans and the Remonstrants? Did both perhaps feel that in the process of salvation—in order to escape fatalism—man's share could not be overlooked? Is it possible that this common position indicates the inescapability of synergism?<sup>15</sup>

In Lutheran theology the problem appears especially in the development of Melancthon's thinking. As did Luther, he at first declined all synthesis or cooperation between the acts of God and of man, and based conversion exclusively on the deciding grace of God.<sup>16</sup> Later, however, Melancthon began to emphasize the factor of man's free

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meaning of Prov. 8:35, it can be said that the Council of 529 wanted to accentuate the prevenient character of grace as it appears in the N.T., e.g., 1 Cor. 2:9.

<sup>13</sup> See Diekamp, *op. cit.*, II, 408.

<sup>14</sup> "*Posse dissentire, si velit*," Sess. 6. Can. 4. This canon is especially illustrative because it treats the *liberum arbitrium*, but then "*a Deo motum et excitatum*," and so *cooperatio* comes to the fore. See Denzinger, *op. cit.*, p. 814.

<sup>15</sup> See J. Loosjes, *Luthers en Remonstranten in de Tijd van de Dordtse Synode* (1926), p. 24: "As far as rejection of the doctrine of election was concerned, the Lutherans agreed fully with the Remonstrants, so much so that a well-meant warning to all Lutheran Christians in Bohemia, printed by the strongly Lutheran faculty at Wittenberg, said that at the Synod of Dort, where the argument about election occurred, 'the Arminians defended our view.' " And Episcopius, although he did not want to merge with the Lutherans, said, "We Remonstrants nevertheless agree with the Lutherans concerning the doctrine of predestination" (*Ibid.*, p. 29). Cf. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, II, 318 (ET, *The Doctrine of God*, 1951).

<sup>16</sup> See G. Kawerau, "Synergismus," in P.R.E..

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will “and with that he began to reflect on the relation between the human will and offered grace.”<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, in his *Loci Communes* (1535), he speaks of three causes of salvation—Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the will of man who does not reject Scripture but accepts it.<sup>18</sup> In this reflection on the human will<sup>19</sup> a direct interrelationship among the questions regarding predestination becomes visible. For the issue with Melanchthon is the how and where of the decision of man’s salvation. The issue is Melanchthon’s rejection of any interpretation of human decision in which the superiority of God’s predestination and sole activity would leave no room for any activity on man’s part. This development in Melanchthon is clear in that he at first rejected the anthropological aspects (*liberum arbitrium*) in justification and predestination (the two terms by which the sovereignty of grace is necessarily indicated), but later resisted any viewpoint which made man “passive” and ruled out his responsibility. The Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and man’s will—this was Melanchthon’s combination, a combination which has well been called “suspect.”<sup>20</sup>

To be sure, Melanchthon did not intend to give up the sovereignty of grace, or the *sola gratia* of justification, but he came nevertheless to this co-ordination whereby a synergistic equalization could no longer be avoided.<sup>21</sup> The predestination that Luther accepted was not completely disregarded; rather, it lost its prominence through this co-ordination. Such a loss, according to Melanchthon, cannot be avoided, for when one person believes while the other does not, the reason for this difference must be “within us.”<sup>22</sup> Melanchthon’s defense against determinism is understandable, but we must agree with Kawerau when he writes, “As commendable as the practical direction was which Melanchthon by this doctrine gave, it was nevertheless in error since by the combination of the three causes he combined the divine and human activity in such a way that salvation comes to pass by the addition of a human activity to God’s. This resulted in synergism....”<sup>23</sup>

This synergism also appears in Pfeffinger’s development of Melanchthon’s theology. Man is not completely passive in the process of conversion. According to Pfeffinger, too,

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>18</sup> “*Verbum, Spiritus Sanctus et humana voluntas assentiens nec repugnans Verbo Dei.*”

<sup>19</sup> Melanchthon also cites Chrysostom: “*hodie helkoon ton boulomenon helkei.*” About this statement, see Calvin’s *Institutes*, II, iii, 10: “We must, therefore, repudiate the oft-repeated sentiment of Chrysostom, Whom he draws, he draws willingly”; insinuating that the Lord only stretches out his hand, and waits to see whether we will be pleased to take his aid.”

<sup>20</sup> H. E. Weber, *Reformation, Orthodoxie und Rationalismu* (1937), I, 166.

<sup>21</sup> See for the attempt to protect Melanchthon against the criticism of synergism, Weber, *op. cit.*, I, 161.

<sup>22</sup> “*Necesse est in nobis esse aliquam discriminis causam.*” See *P.R.E.*, p. 230.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

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there must be a “cause” within men for their different reactions to hearing the gospel.<sup>24</sup> This does not mean that Amsdorf is correct when he calls Pffeffinger a Pelagian. Pffeffinger did not attempt to deduce man’s salvation from his nature. He wanted an organic synergism resulting thus in this mode of cooperation and in bringing about a certain change of viewpoint of election. A pastoral emphasis on man’s responsibility does not imply criticism of the monergism of grace,<sup>25</sup> but Melancthon’s “three causes” certainly do imply this.

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This short resume indicates how radical the problem of synergism is with reference to the doctrine of election. Synergism does not confront us with a different problem than the one of sovereign election. It is concerned with the same question; it inquires into the prime cause of man’s salvation. Synergism does not merely attempt to give a solution to the problem of the cooperation between God and man in time, so that it is without significance for the doctrine of election. That this is not the case is indicated by the fact that synergism has an immediate repercussion on the doctrine of election.

This is especially apparent in the enormous significance which the idea of prescience, *praescientia* (or *praevisio*) has acquired in the doctrine of election. We may say that synergism wants to direct our attention to the real cooperation between God and man in time, but that this view, projected back into the counsel of God, leads—must lead—to the idea of prescience. Many attempts have been made to solve the questions around the doctrine of election with this idea. Prescience has been placed between God’s election and man’s final destiny, for example, by distinguishing between the *voluntas antecedens* and the *voluntas consequens* in election, thereby placing between the two wills man’s freedom to choose and his reaction to the offer of salvation as foreknown and foreseen by God, thus forming the basis for the *voluntas consequens*.

The *voluntas antecedens* is of a universal character, it is a general decision of God— whoever believes is saved. And by way of the human link in this chain, namely, man’s decision—in the *praescientia*—the initial decision of God is followed by the particular decision of granting salvation.<sup>26</sup> What happens in time—the human reaction—becomes the condition under which election occurs and is realized. Conrad Vorstius put it clearly and without disguise. According to him, election and rejection must be interpreted in such a manner that God “always regards these two preceding conditions, faith and unbelief” and “thus faith always precedes the election to salvation, while unbelief

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281: “Sequitur ergo in nobis esse aliquam causam, cur alii assentiantur alii non assentiantur.”

<sup>25</sup> Weber, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Bavinck, *op. cit.*, II, 330.

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precedes the election to rejection.”<sup>27</sup> The idea of condition constitutes the link between a universal decision and its realization. This is the projection of synergism into the counsel of God.

We often encounter this influential idea. We find it in Molinism, with the Remonstrants, and with many Lutherans. But at the same time it is clear that the idea of prescience casts shadows on the sovereignty of God’s election and is a flagrant contradiction of the nature of Christian faith.<sup>28</sup>

Calvin saw this. He knew synergism for what it is. He rejected the *praescientia* as an explanatory device. He did not deny God’s knowing beforehand (*Inst.* III, xxi, 5), for God sees in fact all things as present before Him and His knowledge is extended over all of history and over all of creation. But the question is whether predestination may and can be made dependent on this as its cause and basis. Calvin found this relationship of dependence present in Ambrosius, Origen, Jerome, and “almost all church fathers” (*ibid.*, xxiii, 6). They taught that God distributed His grace among men depending on His “foreknowledge” of who would use it correctly (*ibid.*, xxii, 8).

Augustine, too, supposedly taught the idea of prescience, but he rejected it after gaining more knowledge of Scripture. Then he called it vain reasoning to defend God’s foreknowledge over against His grace and to say “that we were elected before the foundation of the world, because God foreknew that we would be good, not that he himself would make us good” (*ibid.*)<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> C. Vorstius, *Doodsteek gegeven aan de absolute praedestinatie, die voor of na den val Adams gesteld wordt* (1676), pp. 9, 10.

<sup>28</sup> We find a recent example in Gaston Déluz’ *Predestination et Liberté* (1942): “The decree of election is universal in its elaboration but not necessarily in its realization” (p. 114). He speaks consistently of “the condition of election” in these words: “Faith is the condition without which election cannot be realized” (p. 109). “God has posed a condition. This condition is faith” (p. 110). Déluz attempts to distinguish this interpretation from the one of foreknowledge but he cannot really escape it. He describes the *praescientia* in these words: “According to these authors predestination is based on the foundation of an ideal and conditional ordinance: God declares that He will grant salvation to those who believe. This conditional decree has a universal validity” (p. 113). And he adds—therein is supposed to lie the difference—that God does not leave it at that, for through the help of the Spirit He makes us fulfill the condition, a conception which certainly does not guarantee the correct relation between election and faith.

*Inst. The Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin. Translated by Henry Beveridge, published in 1845 by the Calvin Translation Society and reprinted by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

<sup>29</sup> For St. Augustine, see *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*, XIX, 38, where St. Augustine refers to John 15:16, “*Non vos me elegistis, sed ego vos elegi; nec fides ipsa praecedit. Non enim quia credimus, sed ut credamus elegit nos.*” See also X, 19. In spite of the clarity of St. Augustine’s word about *praedestinatio* and *praescientia* it has several times been attempted to interpret him in the direction of *praescientia* and *praevision*. See about this, K. Barth, *Die Freiheit der Entscheidung im Denken Augustins* (1935), p. 162.

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The reason for Calvin's opposition is clear—this *praescientia* implies justification by works. “For if you say, Because he foresaw they would be holy, therefore he chose them, you will invert the order of Paul. We may safely infer, then, If he chose us that we should be holy, his foresight of our future holiness was not the cause of his choice” (*ibid.*, xxii, 3). According to Calvin, the idea of prescience does not solve any problem. He referred to Valla, who taught that life and death are more the outcome of God's will than of His prescience. God sees beforehand, “but since he foresees the things which are to happen, simply because he has decreed that they are so to happen, it is vain to debate about prescience, while it is clear that all events take place by his sovereign appointment” (*ibid.*, xxiii, 6). Furthermore, we could ask why God did not counteract the evil which he foresaw (*ibid.*).

Calvin resists the idea of prescience just as he resists the interpretation of God's providence as “bare permission.”<sup>30</sup> He sees in it an attack against God's greatness. It supposes a waiting God whose judgment and final act depend on and follow upon man's acceptance and decision, so that the final and principal decision falls with man; it teaches self-destination instead of divine destination (*Inst.* I, xviii, 1). It is the same defense which we meet later with Kuyper<sup>31</sup> and others, and which is summed up by Bavinck in words that convey that replacing predestination with the idea of prescience is emphatically contradicted by Scripture, religious experience, and theological thinking.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See my *The Providence of God* (ET, 1952), Chap. V. This often comes concretely to the fore in Calvin's writings, most centrally in connection with God's counsel and the cross of Christ where the simple idea of prescience is not sufficient to answer all questions. “And, in truth, if Christ was not crucified by the will of God, whence is our redemption?” (*Inst.* I, xviii, 3).

*Inst. The Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin. Translated by Henry Beveridge, published in 1845 by the Calvin Translation Society and reprinted by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

<sup>31</sup> For instance, A. Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, Lcus I, part III, 7, p. 340, in connection with the *scientia medio* of the Jesuits, and the Arminian *fides praevisa*, and Locus III, part V, 4, p. 481, about God's decision and the *praevisio rerum*. Kuyper rejects the thought that the *praescientia* could contribute to the *theodicee* (p. 116). See also his criticism of the distinction between *decretum generale antecedens* and *decretum particulare consequentia*, a combination of the conditional decision and the Arminian *praevisa fides*.

<sup>32</sup> Bavinck, *op. cit.*, II, 339. There is no *praescientia nuda* because the *praescientia* comprises the predestination (p. 340). These problems can be studied in connection with the *universalismus hypotheticus* in Amyraldism. Important for more than one reason is the article by J. Moltmann, “Prädestination und Heilsgeschichte bei Moyse Amyrant. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der reformierten Theologie zwischen Orthodoxie und Aufklärung” in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* (1953/54), pp. 207, 303. Moltmann received his degree in 1951 in Göttingen on the dissertation, *Gnadenbund und Gnadenwahl* (unprinted), of which the article mentioned is a part. See especially the words by Camero (quoted by Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p. 284): “*Petrus credens efficit ut Christus, qui tantum moriebatur conditionaliter pro Petro antequam crederet, incipiat esse mortuus revera absolute pro Petro postquam in Christo credidit.*” In the center of hypothetical universalism and of the doctrine of predestination in all its forms, the emphasis is the place and function of faith. In order to avoid the results of the function of faith as it occurs in Amyraldism, Camero declares: “*Est enim*



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Nevertheless, the influence of synergism was and remained so great that—reprojected into the doctrine of *praescientia*—it repeatedly invaded the Church and theology. Bavinck goes so far as to call this solution “general,” for it is accepted by the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Remonstrant, Anabaptist, and Methodist churches.<sup>33</sup> In one way or another attempts have been made to clarify election as the sovereign act of God and to make transparent its relation to man’s act and decision, a relation which must be a synthesis.<sup>34</sup>

So far we have spoken of synergism with reference to the doctrine of election. It is clear, however, that although synergism always functions in connection with salvation, the idea of prescience can also be connected with man’s other possible decision, the decision of unbelief. It has even happened that prescience was rejected with respect to salvation while it was accepted in connection with man’s choice of unbelief. This brings us to a position quite different from that of Vorstius, the Remonstrants, and many others. For Reformed conviction about *sola fide—sola gratia* rejects the idea of prescience in the sense of *praevisio fidei*. The Reformed theologians were too convinced of the instrumental character of faith to make election dependent on that faith and to base election on a foreseen faith, i.e., the quality of that faith as the *habitus* of man which—at least in God’s sight and knowledge—would have to precede election. For in that case this faith would have been detached from its real relationship to salvation, and would have become the foundation or cause of election.

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*fides, quae morti Christi reddit efficaciam, non ulla quae ei insit dignitate aut merito, sed quia Deus voluit nos inseri per eam Christo capiti*” (quoted by Moltmann, p. 284). It is clear that already on the basis of this concept of faith the system “of the conciliation between Arminianism and Gomarism” (E. Haag, quoted by Moltmann, p. 284) should fail, while the whole idea of prescience inserts an un-Reformed view of the function of faith into the doctrine of election.

<sup>33</sup> Bavinck, *op. cit.*, II, 339. Illustrative is the development in the Anglo-Saxon world. See, among others, the Confession of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (1883) and the changes prior to that in the Westminster Confession on the point of election (see Müller, *Bekennnisschriften*, pp. lxx and 928ff.). For the problems in general see: E. J. Bicknell, *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (1935), especially pp. 250ff.

<sup>34</sup> The polemic over prescience is exegetically often linked up with the interpretation of Romans: “For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained ...” (Rom. 8:29). See also (in connection with Christ) 1 Peter 1:20; and on Israel, Rom. 11:2. In his exegesis of Rom. 8:29 Calvin discusses again the concept of *praescientia* and rejects it as unsuitable. For Calvin this *praescientia* is undetachably connected with human “dignity,” while St. Paul, he thinks, is concerned with referring us to God’s counsel and thus rules out all dignity on the part of man. See Zahn’s criticism of the “untenable concept” that God “knew beforehand that they will hearken in belief to the call to salvation, and will remain faithful to their belief until the end, from which then further follows that God has predestined these individuals to salvation of whom He foresaw the obedience in faith, in contrast to others whom He also has called through the same gospel” (*Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer*, 1910, p. 418). See also his criticism about “mere knowing” (p. 419).

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But there have been those who thought it possible to speak of prescience concerning the decision of unbelief, but not concerning that of faith. We find the best example of this in the Formula of Concord which makes a sharp distinction between predestination and prescience. Predestination is only brought to bear on God's children, elected to life eternal. It is impossible to think here of election based on prescience. Election (predestination) is not a foreknowledge of the salvation of the elect "but through God's gracious will and pleasure in Jesus Christ is also a cause of our salvation, and creates, works, helps and furthers all that belongs to it on which our salvation, therefore, is founded."<sup>35</sup> This election does not find its basis at all in our piety or virtue,<sup>36</sup> and it is impossible to speak of prescience as the foundation of election.

A problem does not arise until the decision to unbelief becomes real. For if there is unbelief, it is not by God's will but by our own fault. "For all preparation for damnation comes from the devil and from men, from sin and not at all from God who does not want one person to be damned: how, then, would He prepare a man for damnation?"<sup>37</sup>

That is the reason why here the idea of prescience enters in whereby God "foresees and foreknows evil also, but not as though it were His gracious will that it should happen."<sup>38</sup> In this prescience God also limits evil. The situation is different here from the one which relates election to faith. With reference to the decision to choose unbelief the Formula of Concord quotes Hosea 13:9: "It is thy destruction, O Israel, that thou art against me, against thy help."<sup>39</sup>

The object of the Formula of Concord is clear. It wants to reject the parallelism between election-rejection and faith-unbelief. The Lutheran Confession wants to speak pastorally in this rejection, and to emphasize the consolation of election. We are reminded here of Bullinger who also completely rejected the idea of prescience with reference to election but employed it with reference to evil. Both Bullinger and the Formula of Concord want to show that election lies anchored in Christ, and is apart from any merit on man's part.

But the decision to unbelief evoked other questions. The Formula of Concord says of man's resistance that man "obstructs the Holy Spirit so that the Spirit cannot work in

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<sup>35</sup> J. T. Müller, *Die symbolischen Bücher der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (1928), p. 705, with reference to Acts 13:48.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 720.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 721.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 705.

<sup>39</sup> In addition to Hos. 13:9, reference is made to Ps. 5:4, "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness." The text of Hos. 13:9 is often quoted in connection with this problem.

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him,"<sup>40</sup> and therefore we cannot but speak of prescience instead of predestination. This confronts us with the profound problem of this Lutheran Confession.

In this connection, and not incorrectly, Schlink put the questions: "Does not the Holy Spirit always meet with man's resistance?... Must not enslaved man resist the Holy Spirit until he is conquered and on the last day is entirely renewed?" And, most important, "Is maybe this rejection of a double predestination in the distinction between election out of grace and foreknowledge, in spite of all hesitancy and respect regarding the mystery of divine election, the beginning of a rational solution to its problems as it afterwards came to light in Lutheran orthodoxy?"<sup>41</sup>

It is interesting that in later Lutheran orthodoxy the idea of prescience regained more general significance, especially again in connection with the doctrine of election, although it remained limited to its relationship to unbelief and guilt in the Formula of Concord. It seems that wherever the idea of prescience has gained admittance as a solution, it has grown in power and has finally broken through the boundaries to which it was at first confined. It could be asked whether such danger was perhaps already implicit in the Formula of Concord. For when it is said that God with respect to the elect "*clementer praescivit, ad salutem elegit et decrevit ...*,"<sup>42</sup> then it cannot be said that the preceding "*praescivit*" is intended to be a decisive explanation of the "*elegit et decrevit*" that follows.<sup>43</sup> However, it was not apriori certain that this was fully understood and would be understood in the future in analogy to Romans 8:29. It was at least possible that later on it would be broken down into the distinction between "knowing" and "election" and thus end up with the *voluntas universalis antecedens* (over all men), which then was followed, via foreknowledge, by the *voluntas consequens* in connection with the faith which had been foreseen by God.<sup>44</sup>

At any rate, we see in the development of Lutheran orthodoxy the imperialism of the prescience play its role. Schmid thinks that this Lutheran view means (in connection with election and faith) that according to the concept of the *voluntas universalis* salvation is intended for everyone, but that the decision of salvation concerns only part of mankind.<sup>45</sup> The basis for that is found in the *voluntas specialis* by which only those receive salvation who accept it. God knows beforehand, from eternity, "who these will be, and this

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<sup>40</sup> J. T. Müller, *op. cit.*, p. 555.

<sup>41</sup> E. Schlink, *Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften*, p. 392.

<sup>42</sup> J. T. Müller, *op. cit.*, p. 708.

<sup>43</sup> I think that Barth goes too far when he says that the preceding word *praescivit* already indicates the direction "in which the composers intended to develop this thought further."

<sup>44</sup> Schlink, *op. cit.*, pp. 392ff.

<sup>45</sup> H. Schmid, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (1893), pp. 193ff.

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foreseeing is then the basis upon which the counsel of God, encompassing only a certain number of people, is an eternal counsel."<sup>46</sup>

It should not surprise us that Lutheran orthodoxy attempts to show that the *sola gratia* is not endangered by man's decision and that faith does not become something of merit. This is done by means of a correlation-concept which is supposed to solve the difficulty. But the manner in which the correlation is treated in this impasse can no longer be helpful because the real correlation is abolished by the ideas of prescience and condition.<sup>47</sup>

The transition from the idea of a limited foreknowledge, in connection only with unbelief and guilt, to the later idea of foreknowledge, once again in connection with the *praevisa fides*, is clear and informative. We may disregard the historical question whether Samuel Huber was justified in appealing to the Formula of Concord to defend his universalism. It is a fact that the problem of the *praescientia* plays an important part in Lutheran theology. Gerhard says that Christ is the *causa electionis* but "*etiam fidei intuitum decreto electionis esse includendum*."<sup>48</sup> Faith must enter in here and that can only happen if only those are elected of whom God has foreseen that they would truly believe and would persevere in that belief till the end.<sup>49</sup>

Gerhard did not see faith as a *causa meritoria* or *efficiens electionis*.<sup>50</sup> God has not elected us "*propter fidem*"; He elects us "*intuitu fidei*" in Christ. That is the reason why Gerhard argued against Zanchius, who had declared that when Scripture speaks of election, it does not add one single condition.<sup>51</sup>

When it is said that election does not find its basis in man's works and therefore not in his foreseen faith, Gerhard answers that we do not teach that it does, but "*intuitum fidei ingredi electionis decretum*." And in this Gerhard sees a radical difference.<sup>52</sup> That is the systematization of the synergistic influence, which has been recognized by Lutheran theologians in later times, among others by Althaus. "Under the influence of Melancthon the old Lutheran orthodoxy abandons unconditional predestination."<sup>53</sup> Althaus does not even hesitate to refer to Molinism as a parallel, with only this difference that Molinism speaks of merit and Lutheran theology speaks of foreseen faith. No matter

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>47</sup> So, for instance, Quenstedt (in Schmid, *op. cit.*, p. 207). See also P. Althaus, *Die Christliche Wahrheit*, II (1948), p. 434.

<sup>48</sup> E. V. Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, II, 86ff.

<sup>49</sup> "*Quos — vere credituros et in fide usque ad vitae finem permansuros praevidit*" (*ibid.*, p. 86).

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>51</sup> "*Numquam addit conditionem ullam, ergo praeter Scripturam non est addenda quaedam conditio*," (*ibid.*).

<sup>52</sup> "*Inter quas propositiones magna est differentia*" (*ibid.*, p. 90).

<sup>53</sup> Althaus, *Die Christliche Wahrheit*, II, 433.

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how much Althaus criticizes Calvinism, he also criticizes the Lutheran notion of the priority of prescience in predestination.<sup>54</sup>

In such a notion God's decision is made dependent on man's decision. The initiative and the majesty of God's grace is overshadowed. Even if we reject the idea of God being a mere spectator in man's decision, once we yield to the priority of man's decision, we are no longer competent to resist the pressure of the idea that God is a mere onlooker. *Sola gratia* and foreknowledge must be connected in a synthesis. It is the synthesis of synergism in which the significance of the doctrine of election is violated.

In no form of synergism is it possible to escape the conclusion that man owes his salvation not solely to God but also to himself. Still more accurately, he may thank himself—by virtue of his decision to believe—that salvation actually and effectively becomes his in time and eternity. To be sure, synergism is constantly seeking to avoid this conclusion, and it is seldom expressed in so many words that salvation really depends partly on man.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, this conclusion cannot in the long run be avoided and it is clear that we actually are confronted here with the real problem of synergism as it results in a certain amount of human self-conceit.

For if synergism is accepted as a serious solution, man's share in this cooperation must receive attention. For that reason synergism confronts us with a serious religious problem, one that touches on all aspects of the Christian life. For is it possible that this self-consciousness, unavoidable in connection with man's cooperation, still leaves room for a full recognition of God's sovereign grace? Is not grace, as God's decree and gift, limited and obscured by such cooperation and self-consciousness?

These important questions find their illustration in a significant statement by Bavinck. In dealing with the doctrine of God's counsel he speaks of Pelagianism as opposing the sovereign grace of God and adds that "in doctrine one may be Pelagian, but in the practice of the Christian life, especially in prayer, every Christian is Augustinian, for then he declines all glory and gives all the honor to God alone."<sup>56</sup> Bavinck gives here a remarkable, existential application to his argument in connection with man's prayer. There is in it something of Luther's "*coram Deo*," man before God. Bavinck wants to show that the main concern lies not with a number of logical conclusions drawn from a certain point of view, but that Pelagianism takes an irreligious position which comes into conflict

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434.

<sup>55</sup> An example of this is found in C. J. de Vogel, *Ecclesia Catholica*, pp. 34ff. "Eternal salvation certainly depends on us. And God's forgiveness, given to us out of sovereign grace in our acceptance as children depends definitely on us." Note the combination of this "depending on us" and "out of sovereign grace."

<sup>56</sup> Bavinck, *op. cit.*, II, 339. See A. Kuyper, *Calvinisme en Revisie* (1891), pp. 23–24, for exactly the same trend of thought.

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with the nature of true Christian faith and prayer. Obviously he means that Pelagianism implies a view of man which is incompatible with Christian prayer. According to Bavinck it is contrary to the nature of true prayer that man meet God with this feeling of self-consciousness and self-esteem, and with the focus—partial though it may be—on himself, which receives its theological expression in Pelagianism, but also in semi-Pelagianism and in synergism. Such self-esteem is possible in the prayer of the Pharisee but not in the prayer of the publican. Man does mention himself in his prayer, but only as the object of God’s mercy. The share of man is his recognition of the one-sidedness of grace, its sovereignty and lack of indebtedness.

With synergism the situation is different, for here one cannot—even if one wants to—escape the contradiction between true prayer and self-esteem. It has been posed that there is a cooperation in grace which, although it is a factor in salvation, does not evoke inordinate self-esteem. This is the same distinction as the one encountered in the doctrine of the meritoriousness of good works, i.e., between merit and achievement by one’s own power.<sup>57</sup>

But if we take synergism seriously, then it has never been explained where the difference lies. Nor is it clear why man’s decision may and should not be honored—even in his self-esteem—once synergism has been accepted. It is precisely at this point that synergism displays its irreligious character. For it indicates more or less emphatically the function of man as constituent in salvation without fully realizing that the essence of true faith is precisely that faith does not know such a function, but knows only God’s sovereign grace. For that reason synergism must have its effects on the confession of the doctrine of election. It will always make it an election based on foreknowledge, i.e., the *praevisa fides*, and so a conditional election, whereby the “high tension” of God’s sovereign election is reduced to the level of human decision.

We are the more struck by the frequent occurrence of the synergistic motif in the history of the Church when we remember that synergism always entails the problem we have just discussed. Yet it is encountered nowhere in Scripture. For if anything is clear in Scripture, it is that it nowhere presents the idea of a human-divine complementary relationship. Scripture speaks of the call to faith, conversion, and sanctification, but it never speaks of component factors, functioning side by side, as synergism must and does.

Roman Catholic criticism of the Reformation often says that the Reformation teaches a monergism of grace, an exclusive activity on God’s part against which all human

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<sup>57</sup> See J. v. d. Steegt, *Geef Rekenschap* (1955), p. 53. He says that the Protestant confuses the meaning of the word “merit” and that he sees therein a depreciation of faith. Against that he poses that merit does not disparage grace, “for it is precisely through grace that the works of the believer are meritorious.”

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endeavor becomes mere nothingness,<sup>58</sup> a divine superiority in which human decisions are no longer of any consequence. But this characterization is unjust and incorrect. The Reformed position is different, opposed as it is to a cooperation which manifests itself in the idea that God's and man's acts are complementary. It is exactly such a complementary relationship that perverts the correlation between faith and grace.

It is understandable that the polemics often concentrated around Paul's admonition: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12, 13). Paul speaks here of divine as well as human activity, and it is clear that it is not sufficient to call this a paradox, because man's act is connected with the divine act with the word *for*. It is also clear that that word excludes the idea of a complementary relationship and of cooperation. With respect to this and other Scriptural references Calvin argued against "the advocates of free will" who take up those words "as if [they] implied that we are kept partly by the power of God, partly by our own, whereas the very keeping of which the Apostle speaks is itself from heaven" (*Inst.* II, v. 11).

Hulsbosch thinks that Calvin made a mistake here. He, too, with the Roman Catholic Church, emphasizes the word *for* and he adds that "we definitely decline the concept of salvation as coming partly from man and partly from God and we acknowledge with Calvin that our preservation comes from heaven."<sup>59</sup> One could expect that this implies a radical rejection of synergism. But another look shows the opposite to be true, for Hulsbosch seeks the solution for the criticism against the partial activity of man in the concept of the free will. "There is a freedom which man loses in sin, the freedom to direct himself in his own power to God, for all of him is inclined toward evil; alongside of that there is the anthropological freedom of will which is man's own and which cannot be taken away from him."<sup>60</sup> According to Hulsbosch, it is this free will as a human element, an anthropological given, which is "accounted for in grace" and which the Reformation does not even consider.<sup>61</sup>

The Roman Catholic interest in man's activity repeatedly brings synergism to the foreground. It takes the place of the Reformed involvement of salvation with faith. In this involvement faith is really human activity, but it is utterly impossible to speak of this as

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<sup>58</sup> See especially E. Przywara, *Ringens der Gegenwart* (1929) II, 543ff.

*Inst. The Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin. Translated by Henry Beveridge, published in 1845 by the Calvin Translation Society and reprinted by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

<sup>59</sup> A. Hulsbosch, "De genade in het nieuwe testament" in *Genade en Kerk* (1953), p. 75.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

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co-ordination, as a both-this-and-that arrangement, whatever the form into which it is cast.

Reformed theology has been correct in quoting Philippians 2 in answer to this partially-by-God-partially-by-man interpretation. This *eudokia* in Scripture must always be understood as an absolute gift, as God's gift "free and independent of all human influence."<sup>62</sup>

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. It is here, within this real realm of possibility, that man's act receives its form, such a form that the nature of his act excludes cooperation; and a relation, altogether different from the one between grace and freedom, becomes visible. This relation has nothing to do with a Reformed dislike for the ontic, as Hulsbosch—as well as Van der Pol—suggests, as if everything develops along ethical-religious lines in contrast to the real aspects of human nature.<sup>63</sup> This contrast is not part of Reformed thought. Rather, religion is no stranger to reality and does not stand antipodal over against the ontic. That does not mean, however, that interest in the anthropological freedom of will may ever become a factor for solving the questions that arise in a discussion on the process of salvation. In the room, the possibility, for man's act, the outlook on the *eudokia* is preserved.

In the light of the evidence of Scripture, Hulsbosch acknowledges with Calvin that "our salvation comes from heaven"<sup>64</sup> This acknowledgment has its legitimate basis in the Reformed rejection of synergism, and it is not accidental that Calvin in his defense against the preachers of free will quoted not only the *for* of Philippians 2, but also 1 John 5:18, which says that "he that was begotten of God keepeth himself" (*Inst.* II, v, 2). Nor is it surprising that the Reformation—as its confessions show—was very much impressed by Christ's word, "Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).

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<sup>62</sup> Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, II, 739. Also in Gal. 1:15 the *eudokein* reflects the idea of sovereignty. See Luke 12:32, Luke 2:14 and the whole article by Kittel.

<sup>63</sup> Hulsbosch, *op. cit.*, p. 77. Hulsbosch thinks he sees a parallel with the Reformed doctrine of incarnation in which Christ's divine nature does not enter into His human nature.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

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Now that we have discussed this striking perspective in the history of doctrine that became visible in the doctrine of election and in the order of salvation that is based on it, we want to point out that in this synergism may be seen a theological formulation of the opposition to the sovereignty of God's grace. To be sure, there is not—except in a few instances such as Pelagianism,<sup>65</sup> which is generally rejected—a denial of election and the necessity of grace. But within the synergistic idea of cooperation the sovereignty of election and grace is in danger.

It is difficult to comprehend the frequency of the synergistic motif when we see how often both Old Testament and New Testament warn against obscuring God's electing grace. We think, for instance, of the warnings against the self-praise of Israel, against Pharisaism and Judaism. Each of these aberrations does not in the first place concern a moral shortage, a formal disobedience, but a stumbling over the *skandalon* of grace. On the other hand, Scripture makes perfectly clear where the origin and preservation of our salvation lies. How can the solution of synergism—also in its interest in the anthropological freedom of will—maintain itself over against the unequivocal words of Christ spoken in a moment of crisis for His people: “No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him” (John 6:44)?

The word *draw* which Christ uses here has always attracted much attention. Kittel says that when it refers to man it has the meaning of *to compel*, of *irresistible superiority*, as in James 2:6 where the rich *drag* the poor before the judge, and as Paul and Silas are *dragged* into the market place in Acts 16:19.

Criticism of synergism has often—and not incorrectly—proceeded from the radical, the unequivocal nature of this word *draw*. And indeed, the word touches the core of the doctrine of election. The history of the doctrine shows that the danger of a deterministic interpretation of the word was often feared. But this fear often led to a tempering of the altogether merciful and sovereign superiority of the divine act of election, and to the

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<sup>65</sup> In Pelagianism we find the clearest idea of free will. It is true that not all grace goes unrecognized in a complete humanism that expects everything from man himself. But this “grace” (in man's own nature, in the law of Moses, and in the example of Christ) does not really close the road to self-esteem because grace and man's nature are practically identical. Pelagianism—usually criticized for its radicalism—can therefore always regain its influence, in its more moderate form, in a practical form of religion in which man has the decision in his own hands. Bicknell writes concerning England: “Pelagianism, however, is very common today. It flourishes especially upon its own native soil. The ordinary respectable Englishman is often a Pelagian at heart, though he has never heard of Pelagius. Apparently he has very little idea of God's intense holiness and the absolute consecration and self-sacrifice that God requires of him. He confuses the standard of Christ with the standard of decent society” (*A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles*, p. 250). It seems unfair to reproach England alone. Where sovereign grace is no longer understood, a view of life prevails of which Pelagianism can be called the theological formulation.

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establishing of the “counterpoise”—man’s freedom to decide—which was to be a component factor in bringing about man’s salvation. Thus, the “room,” the possibility, for man’s activity had to be created.

We certainly do not lose sight of this idea of “room” in the gospel.<sup>66</sup> As a matter of fact, it is emphatically pointed out to us in John 6:37: “All that which the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” See also John 6:44. But he who would draw the conclusion here of synergism and the concept of cooperation forgets how much that “coming” rests upon and finds its cause in the “being drawn” and “being given.”<sup>67</sup> This indeed is the marvelous and inscrutable work of the Holy Spirit, that in and through this superiority man really comes, is placed, in this realm of possibility, in this freedom. This “drawing” of the Father is not at all an act that rules out all human activity; rather, says Kittel, it rules out all that is coercive and magical. It is the profound reality described in the joyful words of Jeremiah: “O Jehovah, thou hast persuaded me, and I was persuaded; thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed” (Jer. 20:7).

There is a superiority which is not that of a mechanical causality or of a coercion that obstructs man’s activity; it is the personal superiority of love and grace, which in man’s experience is making room for him to act by not destroying his freedom. And within this “room,” the “thou” of Jeremiah is understood as the exclusive and profound source of all salvation.

It is good to observe that Christ employs the word *draw* when human resistance against His gospel seems at its strongest (John 6:41, 42). In that situation Christ knew that “everyone that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me” (John 6:45).

To hear, to learn, to be drawn, to be given, and *then* to come—that is the evangelical incursion of all synergism. It is the reference to God’s electing grace (cf. John 3:27), which

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<sup>66</sup> Compare with this frequent Roman Catholic criticism of the Reformation the words by Barth about the fear-complex: “As if God were a stranger to His creature, an opponent, perhaps even an enemy; as if the more the creature could find a space of his own which he could keep securely barricaded against God the better it would be for the liberty and justice, honor and dignity of man; the more this space were diminished, the worse it would be; and were it taken from him completely it would be still worse” (*Kirchliche Dogmatik*, III, 3, 166). “As if man’s freedom could be endangered by God, as if it would be good to protect oneself against such intrusion under the safe shelter of some form of synergism!” (*ibid.*).

<sup>67</sup> Not only the word *to drag* deserves attention but also *to give*, since it occurs as a central word in Scripture, e.g., God’s *giving* (of Christ’s works), John 5:36; the *gift* of faith, Eph. 2:8; the *gift* of grace in Jesus Christ, Rom. 5:16; etc. See further Kittel, *op. cit.*, II, 168ff., and Christ’s *giving* as in Matt. 20:28, Mark 10:45.

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in faith and experience is understood, not as a coercion and an annihilating superiority which takes away man's very breath, but as divine liberation.

This absoluteness of giving, drawing, and learning we meet not only in John, but also in the radical and exclusive testimony of Paul when he says, for instance, that “no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). The message of Scripture repeatedly accentuates that human inability. The impotence of man is not something pessimism has discovered; it is most literally described in Scripture (cf. John 3:27, 1 Cor. 2:14, Rom. 8:5, 6, 7, 8). The Jews thought themselves to be free but they were to be free only after having been liberated by Christ. Until then, they live in slavery, in spite of all their activity. Their activity is not irrelevant. Rather, their activity proves that they are *willing* slaves. Paul says that men present themselves as servants to iniquity (Rom. 6:16), as the servants of sin (Rom. 6:16), and as servants of lust and sensual pleasure (Titus 3:3). It was the time that man lived in bondage to gods that were no gods (Gal. 4:8), man went his own way, in his so-called freedom, unconscious of his slavery but nonetheless subject to it in all of his existence. “No man can come to me, except the Father draw him.”

It is not difficult to realize that synergism usually originated as a defense against and reaction to fatalism and determinism. But the fact that a defense is necessary does not make synergism legitimate. Scripture fully honors man's activity; it calls for it and stimulates it, but never makes it part of a synergistic synthesis. The relationship between the source of salvation in God and the decision of man can never be presented as a coordinate relationship, no matter how refined and ingeniously construed it may be. Rather, the sphere of human activity and decision is, and remains bound to be, the exclusive and gracious act of God. in which faith finds rest. This activity of man—crowned by beatifications (cf. Matt. 11:6, 16:17, 15:28)—is nevertheless subject to the gift of grace.

In the light of the gospel it is foolish to let man's acts and decision shrink to nothingness in a system of monergism. But it is the nature of the relationship between God's grace and man's act that is at stake. In the struggle of the Church to understand this relationship the influence of the Scriptures repeatedly made itself felt. When the Formula of Concord rejected Melanchthon's synergism, it did mention “cooperation,”<sup>68</sup> but at the same time it immediately limited this cooperation and made it free of synergistic motifs. To be sure, man does not receive grace in vain, but the Formula of Concord rejects the notion “that converted man worked alongside of, cooperated with, the Holy Spirit the way two horses pull a cart together.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> J. T. Müller, *op. cit.*, p. 604.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

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We realize that there are many who essentially adhere to the synergistic concept but nevertheless say they agree with this rejection because it is a rejection of an oversimplified formulation. Hulsbosch certainly will not recognize such a sharing of activity as his view. He thinks in terms of a “mystery” rather than a “distribution of work.” But no matter how refined synergism is, the force of the opposition cannot be weakened and undermined.

Paradoxical as it may sound, one can truly speak of cooperation only when synergism has been completely denounced. Only then will it be possible to prevent tension between sanctification and justification; and only then will sanctification not lead to the self-conceit which can be correlated with the merit of good works. Only when we reject synergism—also in the form of prescience—shall we be able to obtain the correct religious insight into the sovereignty of God’s merciful election. As we shall later see, in Scripture the election of God is always characterized by its own special formulation—it does not come out of works but out of grace. It is wholly on the basis of His calling, Paul writes (Rom. 9:11), and this holy calling is “not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:9).

The doctrine of election has often been called the heart of the Church. There are some who see in it rather a menace for the Church because speculative thinking can so easily overshadow it and rob it of its comfort. But we shall not hesitate to continue to speak of the *cor ecclesiae*. For we are not concerned with the keystone of the structure of our speculation, but with the “lovingkindness” and the “tender mercies” of Psalm 33 and Psalm 25.

This is not the presentation of a kind, humanized God, removed from the fullness of divine revelation; but of the true grace that appeared in Christ Jesus. This is no monergism in the sense that all life around this gift is empty and meaningless. On the contrary, Scripture bears testimony in doxological terms to the grace that brings salvation (Titus 2:11) through Him who gave Himself to set us free. (Titus 2:14).

Nowhere in Scripture does election take on the character of an abstraction. The point in electing grace is God’s “tender mercy and lovingkindness” which *by faith* is understood as a miracle, as a light shining in the darkness, as the sovereignty of God. The doctrine of election is a continual reminder that all human glory, all self-conceit is impossible.

That is the reason the doctrine of election has repeatedly become the focal point of contention in Church and theology. Now and then it may have been put aside as a speculative doctrine, as a menace to the consolation of salvation and to the simplicity of faith, but it has repeatedly returned to the foreground to ask all our attention. And this is not a matter of a Reformed peculiarity which somehow can be understood as a desire for

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a metaphysical system of cosmology in which everything is derived from God.<sup>70</sup> Nor should it be understood as the courage to draw dire consequences from an apriori concept of God<sup>71</sup> or from the pessimistic view of man who in his state of damnation can do nothing but bend silently and submissively to the hidden God.<sup>72</sup> If all that—or some of it—were true, we could scarcely speak of the doctrine of election as the heart of the Church. We suggest that in the midst of the polemics that surround election—synergism in all its aspects—we can still discover how the heart of the Church is involved because the heart of God is involved.

This explains why election has not been discussed apathetically as if it were the same as fate. It explains why so much opposition could arise against this *skandalon*. To be sure, that opposition could also rise against caricatures. But our concern is that there has been opposition to electing grace, to the grace which—for all time—frustrates all human vanity and yet evokes a gratitude akin to adoration.

He who is not altogether unfamiliar with the questions that have come up in the course of a long history and with the dangers that have threatened the doctrine of election will understand that we must direct our attention to two questions that have been decisive in guiding the thinking of many theologians. First of all, many have questioned whether in considering the electing God we do not discover arbitrariness in God (see Chap. 3). And when—except at the periphery of the Church and theology—this question is answered in the negative, another question comes up. It concerns the relationship between election and mystery (see Chap. 4), a question which has always come to the fore in connection with the certainty of salvation. Along these two roads we want to approach the election in Christ (see Chap. 5), the center and the mystery of the Biblical message of election.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Bijbels Kerkelijk Woordenboek*, “De Kerk,” p. 309: “Only the Reformed still adhere to predestination”; cf. *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, IV<sup>2</sup>, 1375, on “Prädestination”: “It could only have developed on Reformed soil.”

<sup>71</sup> See about Calvinism: J. de Zwaan, *Jezus, Paulus en Rome* (1927), p. 27: “That vertigo before God, that feeling of God’s infinite majesty vibrates as keynote through the harmonies of Calvin’s logic. Calvin is really a theologian of feeling. The feeling of nothingness in the face of the Infinite dominates everything he says,” while “the God of his thinking is different from the God and Father of Jesus Christ.”

<sup>72</sup> Cf. M. Beversluis, *De Dwalingen van het Calvinisme* (1906), p. 7: “This root of the Reformed teaching, or Calvinism, is the doctrine of man’s damnableness.”

<sup>73</sup> Berkouwer, G. C. (1960). *Divine Election* (pp. 28–52). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.