

NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A DISAPPEARING PEOPLE:
THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION AND PREDESTINATION
FROM IRENAEUS TO AUGUSTINE

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CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations	4
Chapter 1. Introduction	8
Chapter 2. Irenaeus	25
Chapter 3. Tertullian	43
Chapter 4. Origen	66
Chapter 5. Eusebius	89
Chapter 6. Athanasius	110
Chapter 7. Ambrose	125
Chapter 8. Augustine	146
Chapter 9. Conclusions	173
Bibliography	195

Abbreviations for Frequently Cited Thesis Sources

Note that all italics in the quotations both in the body and the footnotes of this paper are the author's unless otherwise noted. Note also that all of the author's quotations from the Bible follow the New Revised Standard Version (*The Holy Bible*. New York: Oxford: 1989).

General Sources:

- ACW* *Ancient Christian Writers*, nom. 1-58. Johannes Quasten, Joseph C. Plumpe, Dennis D. McManus, et al, eds. Westminster, Maryland: Newman Bookshop, 1946; New York: Newman Press, 2000.
- ANF* *A Select Library of Ante-Nicene Fathers*, reprint in 10 vols. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994.
- FoC* *Fathers of the Church*, vv 1-104. Ludwig Schopp, Roy J. DeFerrari, Bernard M. Peebles, Hermigild Dressler, Thomas P. Halton, et al, eds. New York: Cima Publishing, 1947; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002.
- NPNF* *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vols. I-VIII, reprint. P. Schaff, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956f.

Person-specific Sources:

Irenaeus

- AH* *Adversus Haereses (Detection and Overthrow of the Pretended but False Gnosis*, usually called *Against Heresies*). English source: *St. Irenaeus of Lyons Against the Heresies*, trans. Dominic J. Unger, volume 1, book 1. No. 55 in *ACW*, New York: Paulist Press, 1992. Latin source: Adelin Rousseau, B. Hemmerdinger, L. Doutrelaeu, et Ch. Mercier, eds. *Irénée de Lyon: Contre Les Hérésies*, Livre IV, tome II. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1965.
- DA* *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Teaching*, also called *The Proof of the Apostolic Teaching*. English Source: Joseph P. Smith, *Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, *ACW* series no. 16., Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1952.

Tertullian

- AJ* *Adversus Iudaeos (Against the Jews)*. English source: *ANF* v3. Latin source: *Tertulliani Opera*. Pars II: Opera Montanistica. Turnholti: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1954.
- AM* *Adversus Marcionem (Against Marcion)*. English and Latin source: Ernest Evans, ed. and trans., *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem*, books 1-3, Oxford: Clarendon, 1972.
- AN* *To the Nations (Ad Nationes)*. English source: *ANF* v3.
- Ap* *Apolegeticum (Apology)*. English source: *Tertullian: Apologetical Works* in *FoC* volume 10, trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950. Latin source: Tertullian. *Apology, De spectaculis*, Eng trans. by T. R. Glover, with Minucius Felix, *Works*, Eng trans. by Gerald H. Rendall, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1966.
- B* *On Baptism (De Baptismo)*. English source: *ANF* v3.

P *On Repentance (De Paenitentia)*. English source: *ANF* v3.

Origen

CC *Contra Celsum (Against Celsus)*. English source: *Contra Celsum*. Henry Chadwick, trans. and ed., Cambridge: University Press, 1965. Greek source: Origène, *Contre Celsem*, 5 vols., introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par Marcel Borret, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967-1976.

CJ *In Commentario Iohanni (Commentary on John)*. English sources: *Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Books 1-10* in *FoC*, volume 80, Ronald E. Heine, trans., Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989; and *Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Books 13-32, FoC*, volume 89, Ronald E. Heine, trans., Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993. Greek source: *The Commentary of Origen on S. John's Gospel*, A. E. Brooke, ed., Cambridge: UP, 1896 (Tom. 19, 20, 28, 32).

FP *On First Principles (De Principiis)*. English source: *On First Principles*. G. W. Butterworth, trans., based on Koetschau's text of the *De principiis*, Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1973, c1966.

Eusebius of Caesarea

DG *The Demonstration of the Gospel, or The Proof of the Gospel*. W. J. Ferrar, ed., New York: Macmillan, 1920.

EH *The Ecclesiastical History*. English and Greek source: Kirsopp Lake and John Ernest Leonard Oulton, translators and edd., 2 vol., Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1949, 1953.

Athanasius

OIV *Oratio de incarnatione Verbi (On the Incarnation of the Word, part 2 of Adversam gentes duo libri)*. English and Greek source: Thomson, Robert W., ed. *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

OCA *Orationes contra Arianos (Against the Arians)*. English source: *NPNF* s2v4. Greek source: William Bright, *The Orations of St. Athanasius against the Arians*, 2d ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884.

OCG *Oratio contra Gentes (Against the Nations, part 1 of Adversam gentes duo libri)*. English and Greek source: Thomson, Robert W., ed. *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

Ambrose

CA *Cain and Abel*. English source: *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*. Volume 42 in *FoC*, John J. Savage, trans., New York: Fathers of the Church, 1961.

ET *On Emperor Theodosius*. English source: *Funeral Orations*, volume 22 in *FoC*, Leo P. McCauley, John J. Sullivan, Martin R. McGuire, and Roy J. DeFerrari, transs., New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953.

EV *On Emperor Valentinian*. English source: *Funeral Orations*, volume 22 in *FoC*, Leo P. McCauley, John J. Sullivan, Martin R. McGuire, and Roy J. DeFerrari, transs., New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953.

HBS *On His Brother Satyrus*. English source: *Funeral Orations*, volume 22 in *FoC*, Leo P. McCauley, John J. Sullivan, Martin R. McGuire, and Roy J. DeFerrari, transs., New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953.

- HS* *On the Holy Spirit*. English source: volume 44 of *FoC*, Roy J. DeFerrari, trans., Washington, DC: Catholic U of America P, 1963.
- Hx* *Hexameron*. English source: *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, Volume 42 in *FoC*, John J. Savage, trans., New York: Fathers of the Church, 1961.
- IoS* *Isaac, or the Soul*. English source: *Seven Exegetical Works*. *FoC* vol. 65., Michael P. McHugh, trans., Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America P, 1971.
- J* *Joseph*. English source: *Seven Exegetical Works*, *FoC* vol. 65., Michael P. McHugh, trans., Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America P, 1971.
- JHL* *Jacob and the Happy Life*. English source: *Seven Exegetical Works*, *FoC* vol. 65., Michael P. McHugh, trans., Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America P, 1971.
- L* *Letters*. English source: Volume 26 in *FoC*. Sister Mary Melchior Beyenka, O.P., trans. New York: Fathers of the Church, 1954.
- M* *On the Mysteries*. English source: volume 44 of *FoC*, Roy J. DeFerrari, trans., Washington, DC: Catholic U of America P, 1963.
- Pn* *De Paenitentia (On Repentance)*. English source: Latin source: *La Pénitence*. Roger Gryson, trans., ed. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1971.
- Pr* *Paradise*. English source: *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, Volume 42 in *FoC*, John J. Savage, trans., New York: Fathers of the Church, 1961.
- Pt* *The Patriarchs*. English source: *Seven Exegetical Works*, *FoC* vol. 65., Michael P. McHugh, trans., Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America P, 1971.
- PJD* *Prayer of Job and David*. English source: *Seven Exegetical Works*. *FoC* vol. 65., Michael P. McHugh, trans., Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America P, 1971.
- S* *The Sacraments*. English source: volume 44 of *FoC*, Roy J. DeFerrari, trans., Washington, DC: Catholic U of America P, 1963.
- SIL* *The Sacrament of the Incarnation of our Lord*. English source: volume 44 of *FoC*, Roy J. DeFerrari, trans., Washington, DC: Catholic U of America P, 1963.

Augustine

- AAJ* *Against the Jews*. English source: *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, Marie Ligouri, trans. Roy J. DeFerrari, ed. New York: Fathers of the Church, 1955.
- CDP* *On the City of God against the Pagans (De Civitate Dei contra Paganos)*. English sources: *The City of God*. Volumes 8, 14, and 24 in *FoC*, Gerald G. Walsh, Demetrius B. Zema, and Daniel J. Honan, trans., introduction by Étienne Gilson, New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950-54; *The City of God against the Pagans*, R. W. Dyson, trans., Cambridge UP, 1998.
- EnP* *Commentaries on the Psalms (Ennarationes in Psalmos)*. Cited in Eugène Portalié, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1960).
- GFC* *Grace and Free Choice (De gratia et libero arbitrio)* English source: John E. Rotelle, ed., and Roland J. Teske, Roland J, trans., *Answer to the Pelagians, IV*, New York: New City Press, 1999.
- GM* *On Genesis against the Manichaeans*. Cited in Eugène Portalié, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1960).

- GP *The Gift of Perseverance (De dono perseverantiae)*. English source: John E. Rotelle, ed., and Roland J. Teske, Roland J, trans., *Answer to the Pelagians, IV*, New York: New City Press, 1999.
- JE *Commentary on the Gospel of John (In Joannis Evangelium)*.
- L *Letters*. English source: *Select Letters*, James Houston Baxter, trans., Loeb Classical Library series, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1930.
- LA *De Libero Arbitrio (On the Free Will)*. English and Latin source: *De Libero Arbitrio: The Free Choice of the Will*. Francis E. Tourscher, ed. and trans. Philadelphia: Peter Reilly Co., 1937.
- OJ *Against Julian (Opus imperfectum contra Julianum)*. Cited in Eugène Portalié, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1960).
- PER *Expositio quaraundum propositionum ex Epistola ad Romanos (Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans)*. English and Latin source: *Augustine on Romans: Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans and Unfinished Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Paula Fredriksen Landes, trans., SBL: Texts and Translations, Early Christian Literature Series 6 no. 23, Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1982.
- PS *The Predestination of the Saints (De praedestinatione sanctorum)*. English source: John E. Rotelle, ed., and Roland J. Teske, Roland J, trans., *Answer to the Pelagians, IV*, New York: New City Press, 1999.
- R *Retractions (Retractiones)*. English source: *Retractions*, M. Inez Bogan, trans. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1968.
- RG *Rebuke and Grace (De correptione et gratia)*. English source: John E. Rotelle, ed., and Roland J. Teske, Roland J, trans., *Answer to the Pelagians, IV*, New York: New City Press, 1999.
- RIE *Epistolae ad Romanae inchoata expositio (Unfinished Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans)*. English and Latin source: *Augustine on Romans: Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans and Unfinished Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Paula Fredriksen Landes, trans., SBL: Texts and Translations, Early Christian Literature Series 6 no. 23, Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1982.
- TS *On Various Questions to Simplician, or To Simplician (De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum)*. English source: John H. S. Burleigh, ed. and trans., *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953.

Chapter 1. Introduction

A Century of Disorientation and Reorientation

More perhaps has been written on the doctrine of election in the twentieth century than in all other centuries combined. This century has witnessed election coming to the forefront of theological exploration. What are the reasons for this? For one, it cannot be attributed to disinterest on the part of our theological predecessors in the faith. Some of the most heralded theologians of the Church's history spent significant energy in reflecting and writing on election, especially in the West. To such a list belong the likes of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Arminius, Wesley, Edwards, as well as a vast number of thinkers who trace their theological roots back through such persons.

Though pluralism is certainly not a new phenomenon in the world, intense encounters among potentially conflicting religions and world-views may help to explain the situation in part. In such a milieu, coming to grips with self-understanding, both as persons and as traditions, proves vital. A doctrine of election penetrates to the core of religious self-understanding, i.e. the conception of the relationship between God and people.

Without question, Karl Barth has led the way for Christians in the exploration of election in the twentieth century. In his groundbreaking commentary, *The Epistle to the Romans*, published originally in 1918, he worked through a fresh reappropriation of the great Augustinian and Calvinist heritage in regard to election. His emphasis on revelation and a theology of crisis led to a strong reassertion of this classical doctrine of election and predestination. He continued to process the doctrine in regular rewrites and revisions of the original commentary on Romans as well as in the genesis of the *Shorter Commentary on Romans* in a lecture series given in 1941-42.

With the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth's theology of election and predestination underwent a radical transformation. This mammoth series began publication in the German in 1936, and in 1942 came the volume that dealt explicitly and thoroughly with the doctrine of election.¹ In this volume he knowingly and almost regrettingly departs from the classical articulation, making the pivotal move to discuss the doctrine within a primarily corporate framework (stemming from his Christocentric commitments) and only then speaking to its significance for individuals. Election refers first and foremost to God's choosing of a people in and through Christ.

Franz Rosenzweig, arguably the most significant Jewish theologian of the twentieth century, was a German Jew and older contemporary of Barth. Encountered with the same kind of liberalizing commitments of his day, Rosenzweig also came to take God as the starting point for faithful theological endeavor, reemphasizing the centrality of revelation in the theological enterprise. His *Star of Redemption*, published in 1919, placed revelation at the center of his theological discussion.² In that same work, Rosenzweig also held tenaciously to the importance of election.³ Like Barth, he saw the close relationship between revelation and election. Yet, unlike the early Barth, Rosenzweig developed the significance of election within a decidedly corporate framework as descriptive of the identity of the people of God as a whole, which, for Rosenzweig,

¹ The ET for *CD* 1.1 came in 1956. *CD* 2.2, treating thoroughly of the doctrine of election, came in 1957. Cf. Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of God, Volume II, Part 2 of Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957).

² Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans from 2d edition of 1930 by William W. Halo (Notre Dame, IN: 1985). That God is the truth is the starting point for theological reflection, which establishes that any authentic knowledge of God comes as revelation from God (388). Therefore, God, in God's very essence, is the God who reveals (manifests) himself. Even creation and redemption are "revealed in revelation" (316).

³ As the elect servant of God, the Jewish people as a whole is the unique "carrier of revelation" (Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 316) and the "people of the revelation" (319). Revelation belongs to the Jew alone (405). The three "feasts of revelation" include the Passover, the revelation of the Ten Commandments, and the Feast of Booths in the wilderness (316). The Torah, finally, is the "book of revelation" (312). David Novak notes that Rosenzweig's doctrine of the direct election of Israel by God is "his greatest significance for contemporary Jewish thought." Cf. David Novak, *The Election of Israel: the Idea of the Chosen People* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 79. Furthermore, "Rosenzweig's insistence on this point comes out in his very first essay in Jewish theology, *Atheistische Theologie*," dated 1914 (Novak 79n1).

meant the Jewish people.⁴ In terms of the reformulation of a fundamentally corporate and historical framework of election, Rosenzweig preceded Barth by over twenty years.⁵

The Jewish understanding of election had apparently kept with this corporate sense for most of history. In the seventeenth century, the Jewish-born enlightenment philosopher Baruch Spinoza had turned election upside-down, so to speak. It was not that God had elected the Jewish people but rather that the Jewish people had elected God.⁶ Election thereby became ultimately descriptive of human religion. In the late nineteenth century, Hermann Cohen reacted sharply to Spinoza.⁷ Cohen argued for election as primarily descriptive of God, which provided a basis for upholding the authority of the Torah. Cohen did not completely retrieve a corporate understanding of election however, but instead made election a handmaid to the cause of revelation. The Torah was given to a people, but not all of this people were elect. Rather, election applied only to those persons who lived out the moral ideal of the Torah.⁸ In the early

⁴ This comes clear in Rosenzweig's description of the Church (*ecclesia*) as essentially individualistic in its self-understanding, populated by individuals in their common labor of bearing witness to Christ, who is, after all, an individual (*Star* 343). For the Jewish people, the individual is not definitive for the identity of the community. Rather, 'God's People' or 'congregation' is the "self-contained whole into which the individuals have dissolved" (Ibid.). "In the *ecclesia*, however, the individual is and remains an individual, and only its resolve is common and becomes—*res publica*" (Ibid.). This pointed criticism will find a full-orbed response from the sentiments of the Church Fathers elaborated in this thesis, both in terms of the fundamentally corporate self-understanding of the Church as God's chosen people and in terms of the Church's distinction from the prevailing political ideology of the Graeco-Roman empire.

⁵ Paul M. van Buren confirms this conclusion. Cf. Paul M. van Buren, *Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality, Part II of A Christian Theology of the People Israel* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 117. Also noteworthy, the German OT theologian Ludwig Köhler offered another kind of reformulation of election prior to Barth. His *Old Testament Theology*, published in the German in 1935 (ET in 1957; A. S. Todd, trans. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), critiqued the myopic portrayals in systematic theology by illumining the multifaceted character and use of the language of election in the Old Testament. In this strain, he also maintained that election did not signify something indestructible, since rejection went hand in hand with election and since election provided the very basis for rejection. This points to a possible influence on the way that Barth brought together both election and rejection, placing these twin realities within a Christological home, so that Christ is pictured simultaneously as the Elect One of God and the One Rejected by God.

⁶ Spinoza portrays Jewish election as essentially a metaphor for the people's own unique polity (David Novak, *Election*, 29). It implies "seeing one's own way of life that one has chosen for oneself as being consistent with 'the predetermined order of nature'" So says Novak, *Election of Israel*, 89-90, in which he quotes from Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*, chp 3.

⁷ Novak, 144.

⁸ Novak, 74.

twentieth century, therefore, Rosenzweig came to retrieve the classical and corporate doctrine of election, providing a final corrective to Cohen's critique of Spinoza.

The parallel histories of Jewish and Christian theology intersected in another way in the twentieth century, with similar dramatic effect on the doctrine of election. When the news came that over six million Jews had suffered annihilation in the concentration camps of World War II, the floodgates opened and a huge resurgence in interest in the doctrine began to swell. Drawing on recent reformulations, a new generation of theologians surfaced, giving renewed attention to the doctrine of election and predestination. H. H. Rowley offered a reappraisal from Scripture with his *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*, first published in 1950.⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, the missionary bishop-theologian of the Church of South India, explored the doctrine for its missional and ecclesial implications in *The Household of God*, published in 1953, as well as in a variety of later works.¹⁰ The Jewish-Christian Jakob Jocz began the first in his impassioned succession of writings on election and the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. *A Theology of Election: Israel and the Church* came in 1958, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ: A Study in the Controversy between Church and Synagogue* in 1962, and *The Covenant: a Theology of Human Destiny* in 1968.¹¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg rounds out the significant developments in the century with his history-affirming stand on election in *Human Nature, Election, and History*, published in 1977.¹²

⁹ H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950). Rowley's portrayal begins where Ludwig Köhler (cf. above) had left off, taking his insights and expanding them into a full-orbed Biblical theology of election.

¹⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (New York: Friendship Press, 1953); see also *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

¹¹ Jakob Jocz, *A Theology of Election: Israel and the Church* (New York: MacMillan, 1958); *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ: A Study in the Controversy between Church and Synagogue* (London: SPCK, 1962); *The Covenant: a Theology of Human Destiny* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968).

¹² Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Human Nature, Election, and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977).

The Character of Christian Reformulations

This introduction is not intended to provide a full summary of developments in the Christian doctrine of election in the twentieth century; some highlights for the purpose of this paper must suffice. Karl Barth's contributions in themselves are many. Only a few, drawn from his extended exposition in the *Church Dogmatics*, can be enumerated here. For one, Barth took the unusual step of discussing the doctrine of election as a subspecies of the doctrine of God and not of the doctrine of creation or reconciliation. The ramifications of this are far-reaching. It gives the doctrine a significant place on the theological radar. It also completely reframes how the doctrine is understood. Election no longer stands as a systematic corollary of salvation, as if its significance were confined to this concern. Because election happens within God's very being, it becomes theological subject matter prior to expressions of God's faithfulness in creation and reconciliation. Second, Barth refocuses the doctrine Christologically. He begins with Christ as the Electing God and the Elected Man. Christ shares in the Father's eternal purpose and effects this election in his Incarnation and the election of the Church in him. Christ simultaneously fulfills the human side of election through his obedient life, death, and resurrection, paradoxically representing and mediating in himself both the election and the rejection of humanity. Third, this Christological reframing led Barth to assert, against almost the entirety of Western Christian tradition, that election pertained first of all to the people of God and only thereafter to individuals. That is, election refers to God's activity first of all on a corporate sphere and only then is it properly understood on an individual level. Fourth, and final, Christ's location at the crux of salvation-history, and his all-encompassing mediation and representation of the election of God's people, led Barth to speak of an essential historical unity in election with two sides, Israel and the Church. Election is not limited to the Church, nor did the election of Israel discontinue with the birth of the Church. Rather, the twofold form of the community represents alternate facets of God's election: the one is delivered from merited judgment, the other receives unmerited mercy; the one hears the promises of God, the other believes those promises; the one represents the old man (elected humanity) as dead with a view to being raised, the other represents the new man

who embodies and anticipates the world in its coming form.¹³ Neither does Barth idealize the Church, since its obedience, as well as that of Israel, falls short of God's intent, which is only fulfilled by Christ.

While Barth stands as the towering figure of the century, the other four mentioned have also made distinct contributions. Even before Barth's decidedly corporate refocusing of the doctrine, H. H. Rowley offered a Biblical theology of election that remained rooted in the understanding of election given in the Old Testament itself.¹⁴ Where Barth's contribution comes in rereading election through the lens of Christ, Rowley's comes in rereading the New Testament and historical doctrine of election through Biblical theology, particularly that of the Old Testament. Rowley maintains that election pertains to the people as a whole, and individuals gain their identity and standing from their participation in the elect community. He binds election and covenant together, portraying them as two sides of the same reality. Election comes as a gift and so without conditions. But the gift presupposes a responsibility, included in the covenant. The goal of God's call and covenant is not fundamentally the salvation of the individual but rather a much larger purpose. Rowley summarizes this under three heads. The covenant placed upon God's people the obligation of: 1) receiving and cherishing the revelation of God, 2) reflecting the will and character of God in their life together, and 3) mediating to all peoples the law of her God.¹⁵ Neglecting or disdain the covenant implies facing judgment and the possibility of forfeiting the benefits and even the standing as part of God's elect. This applies both to individuals and to the people as a whole. Election in the Scriptures is fraught with warning, and obedience and disobedience have very real consequences. This does not imply a permanent rejection, but depends on an ongoing response to the covenant. At the same time, God's purpose in election remains steadfast and God proves ever faithful to God's chosen people. This gracious and universal purpose comes to its fullest expression in the election of the Church. Election now extends decidedly beyond Israel according to the flesh so as to include Gentiles in the fellowship

¹³ Geoffrey Bromiley's summary proves helpful here in *An Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 84-98.

¹⁴ Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 161-164.

of God's people, which extension comes about with the advent of Christ. Even before Christ, the Church was prefigured in those individual Gentiles who shared in Israel's faith and entered into its heritage and calling. The election of the Church stands as a continuation of the election of Israel. That certain Jews refused to believe in Christ, thereby forfeiting their election, did not imply an end of Israel's election but rather a new day in God's purpose in election.

As a bishop-theologian in the Church of South India, an astute observer and critic of thought and culture, and a key figure in the history of the World Council of Churches, Lesslie Newbigin developed the doctrine of election especially in terms of its missional, apologetic, and ecumenical significance.¹⁶ Along with Barth, he laid emphasis on the priority of Christ's election. There is no election except that which is in and through Christ, in all of his historical particularity. The historical Church, therefore, derives its election from Christ, and the individual, from the Church. An individual's access to election happens by entering into the Church through the womb of its baptismal waters. The apostolic ministry, in its ministry of Word and Sacrament, serves as God's instrument of election, symbolizing the election of the whole community and bringing others into membership in God's household.¹⁷ The Church is not divided within itself between the elect and non-elect, and neither do the elect nor the Church refer to eternal realities. Rather, the Church, both as a historical and geographical whole and in each of its particular instantiations, bears the identity of election. The historicity and particularity of God's people, and God's revelation through that people, argues for the truthfulness of the Christian faith. While certain other religions (e.g. Hinduism) are predicated on escaping from history, the Judeo-Christian faith attests to God's faithfulness to the world in and through the particular history of a chosen people. Neither revelation nor salvation happens outside of history. They always come in flesh and blood. Receiving election, therefore, only happens through the neighbor, through God's choosing of a person to witness to another. By the same token, one cannot presume upon God and the benefits of election without fulfilling the responsibilities involved, namely, witnessing to God's loving desire to reconcile all persons and all things to Godself. One cannot live as elect without

¹⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 113. "The instrument of His choosing is precisely the apostolic ministry of the Church."

participating in open and mutual dialogue with non-Christians, the presently non-elect. If we close in on ourselves, we forfeit our call as God's elect. God does not elect us to enjoy salvation by ourselves, but rather so that we may be the instruments of salvation and election to others. This same mystery of interdependence and witness highlights the give and take of Israel and the Church in salvation-history. God elects Israel for the sake of the Gentiles. The inclusion of the Gentiles in election did not signify the rejection of the Jews, since some Jews belong to the remnant of faith. Rather, the Jews became hardened in order that the Gospel would go forth among the Gentiles, only later to come back to the Jews, so that "all Israel would be saved."¹⁸ In other words, Israel will finally partake of election through the witness of the so-called non-elect, the Gentile believing community. Throughout history, the election of a people happens for the sake of others and for the whole creation.

As a Hebrew-Christian and skilled Biblical linguist and exegete, Jakob Jocz has sought to illumine and bridge the differences between Judaism and Christianity as co-members of God's chosen people.¹⁹ Jocz follows Barth by allowing Christ to define election. As the Jewish Messiah and the Savior of the World, Jesus Christ mediates the election of Israel and the Church. The Church's election stands as a continuation of Israel's. The Mosaic covenant may no longer be in operation, but it remains in effect *de jure*. It stands fulfilled by Christ's covenant, in which even Israel will be included. Election applies to both groups, but not in an all-encompassing way. Israel according to the flesh is not fully the Israel of God. The Christian Church is not fully the people of God. Where either has elements of unfaithfulness, it denies its own identity and so becomes "Not my people." A tension persists in every facet of election. The Old Testament and Rabbinic Judaism have portrayed election as a collective reality. Many have portrayed it as an individual reality, since the Church is populated by means of believing individuals, rather than by an ethnicity or nationality. At the same time, election does not exist apart from the community, for the Church only exists where two or three are gathered, in the community where Christ makes

¹⁸ Romans 11.26.

¹⁹ Jakob Jocz, *A Theology of Election: Israel and the Church; The Jewish People and Jesus Christ: A Study in the Controversy between Church and Synagogue*.

his presence known. Even the Church is not fundamentally a voluntaristic society or association but a family and fellowship that derives its life from Christ and the presence of the Spirit. Election comes as a gift to the community and to persons, and yet it always expects and requires the response of trust and obedience, and for this reason not all persons in Israel or the Church belong to the true elect. The true Church belongs to the realm of eternity but also happens as an Event in history. Yet the presence of good and bad elements within the Church does not deny its historical character. The mystery of God's people confronts us with a dialectic between time and eternity, between personal and corporate election, and between rejection and election.

As perhaps the preeminent contemporary theologian of history, Wolfhart Pannenberg explores the doctrine of election in terms of history and brings the historical doctrine of election into critical relief.²⁰ The Scriptures portray election as pertaining to a historical and covenantal people. Election does not happen outside of history but precisely within the particularities and relationships of history and society. Here the "classical doctrine" of election, as Pannenberg calls it, turned election inside out. Election became the operating principle of predestination, rather than seeing predestination as an assertion of the universal significance of the particularity of God's people and even Christ himself. The revelation of God comes to us only in history, and so the predestination of Christ teaches us to look to Jesus Christ in all of his historical and cultural particularity as the definitive picture of God. Election implicates a particular, covenant people for the ultimate purpose of establishing a universal order of peace and justice in this world. Because it is historical and missional, it carries a strong sense of responsibility and accountability. Even after being chosen, persons may forfeit their election. Yet even in failure, one may find restoration by calling upon the "faithfulness, self-identity, and perseverance of God."²¹ Election remains ever inclusive, reflected most especially in the inclusion of the Gentiles in Israel's calling. Gentile Christians, however, described the election of the Church so as to exclude Israel from that calling. This went hand in hand with the Church's ultimate appropriation of an individualistic framework for interpreting election, which had its roots in post-exilic Judaism

²⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Human Nature, Election, and History*.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

under the influence of Persian and Greek thought. With Eusebius, the political significance of election settled into the Empire as Church and State became fused. After the sack of Rome in 410, Augustine re-envisioned election. He brought the individual sense to its outcome and the “classical doctrine” to its fullest expression, distinguishing between the elect and the non-elect within the Church itself. The elect became a number of individuals, eternally predestined for salvation, not necessarily identical to the ecclesial community as such. At the same time, Augustine preserved a sense of the Church as the people of God, the incarnation of the eternal kingdom and city of God, over against the incarnation of the city of man presently embodied in the now obviously transitory Roman Empire. Election thereby pertains narrowly to the Church as an institution, without broader significance for the political and social context in which the Church lives. Taking it up to the present, Pannenberg approves of the tendency for Western Christian nations to understand themselves and their history in terms of election and covenant. Indeed, nations inherently require a religious justification for their historical existence, and the Christian philosophy of history encapsulated in election and covenant offers the most helpful and redemptive path.²² With this understanding, the nation can face “external” criticism in the framework of living in accountability to its mission and calling to be faithful to the covenant for which it was established.

Other Christian theologians have explored the doctrine, but mostly in the terms and frameworks developed by these five previous figures, or in ways characteristic of their traditions. Denis Baly,²³ G. C. Berkouwer,²⁴ André Lacocque,²⁵ Paul Jewett,²⁶ and Paul M. van Buren²⁷ certainly

²² Ibid., 71-93.

²³ Denis Baly, *Chosen Peoples* (Philadelphia: The Christian Education Press, 1956).

²⁴ G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960).

²⁵ André Lacocque, *But as for Me: The Question of Election in the Life of God's People Today* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973).

²⁶ Paul K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

²⁷ van Buren stands as perhaps the most exemplary Christian theologian today in providing needed illumination to the relationship between Israel and the Church. His three volume series on the subject is entitled, *A Theology of Jewish-Christian Reality*. Part I is called *Discerning the Way* (San Francisco: Harper, 1980), Part II, *A Christian Theology of the People Israel* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), and Part III, *Christ in Context* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988). He brings together many of the significant

deserve mention here among others. By no surprise, reformulations have also arisen in the last half of the twentieth century from Jewish theologians, following in the wake of Franz Rosenzweig. Some notables include Michael Wyschogrod in *The Body of Faith: Judaism as Corporeal Election* in 1983²⁸ and David Novak in *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People* in 1995.²⁹ Both especially press for the recovery of a corporate and physical understanding of the election of the Jewish people.

The Background of the Argument

A number of factors have led to the desire to explore the patristic doctrine of election. For one, a huge rift has opened between Biblical theology and historical theology in this area. After many years of thinking about election and predestination for the most part in terms of something eternal and individual, we are now hearing from very significant voices that the Biblical doctrine is most fundamentally corporate and historical. If this is how the Scriptures describe election and predestination, then there is a very significant shift in the historical doctrine, apparently located sometime between the first century and the fifth century.

Even some of the best minds in the field have only minimized and covered over this disparity. G. C. Berkouwer and Paul Jewett, in their treatments of election and predestination, almost totally ignore the doctrine prior to the person of Augustine.³⁰ Berkouwer intends to set the doctrine in its historical context, but skips right over three hundred years of history to the controversy between

contributions on election from both Christian and Jewish sides, including the thought of Barth, Jocz, and Rosenzweig. His synthesis proves both fascinating and challenging.

²⁸ *The Body of Faith: Judaism as Corporeal Election* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983).

²⁹ Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: Judaism as Corporeal Election* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983); Novak *op cit.*

³⁰ One exception is William John Hausmann, *Karl Barth's Doctrine of Election* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1969), 16. Hausmann cites G. S. Faber (33), *pace* E. Brunner, to maintain that there was a doctrine of election prior to Augustine, and that the Catholic Church did not hold Augustine's peculiar views of Election and Reprobation. Augustine discovered a system on his own which was entirely different from that of the Church. The reference to Faber occurs in George Stanley Faber, *The Primitive Doctrine of Election* (New York: Charles Henry, 1840).

Augustine and Pelagius.³¹ Paul Jewett offers a summary of the history of the doctrine and ends up dismissing the early patristic doctrine as primarily a defense of human free will against Stoic determinism.³² The Biblical and Pauline doctrine of election and predestination was eventually recovered by Augustine, who passed it on to his heritage in Western Christianity. Pre-Augustinian Fathers seem to be faulted and ignored because they do not subscribe to an Augustinian interpretation of election and predestination³³ as well as of Paul and the New Testament for that matter.

Contention, perhaps more than anything else, has characterized the relationship between the Reformed or Calvinist tradition and the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition. Debates over the doctrine of election and predestination, and its implications for the human will, have often occupied these struggles. To make their case, Reformed theologians have appealed to the genius of Calvin, and before him, Augustine. But as we will see, Augustine pictured election and predestination in ways that ran directly counter to what was held by Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, and even Ambrose. If Augustine's doctrine of election and predestination has some fundamental flaws, then the nature of the debate suddenly changes.

Only time will tell how the contemporary doctrine will develop in the exchange between these two traditions. Perhaps the two will continue to diverge, owing to two very different sets of

³¹ Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 28-29.

³² Jewett, *Election and Predestination*, 5-7.

³³ Cf. Luke L. Keefer, "Paul K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination*," *Evangelical Journal* 4.2 (Fall 1986), 88-93. Keefer notes the inattention to the pre-Augustinian doctrine as an obvious oversight of the book. Later historic expressions of the doctrine, for example in James Arminius and John Wesley, are similarly dismissed. Keefer ultimately criticizes Jewett for subordinating honest Biblical and historical theology to a particular systematic theological agenda. As one example, Jewett avows that the corporate understanding predominates in the Bible but spends the remainder of the book discussing election and predestination in terms of the individual. Trying to uphold the heritage of Calvin, Jewett develops the doctrine along primarily individualistic lines. Calvin maintains that God does "not effectually elect all" of Israel but rather a remnant, interpreting the corporate and historical significance of election in terms of God's covenant with Israel. While attending to the corporate conceptuality of the Scripture, Calvin ultimately interprets election as referring to the eternal destiny of particular individuals, thereby guaranteeing that "they are never cut off from salvation" (*Institutes* 3.21.7). He affirms that the individual participates in the benefits of the corporate covenant, but that is to side step the fundamental issue, the corporate identity of the elect.

presuppositions. Yet, perhaps they will begin to find some common ground, not readily apparent before, in the early Christian doctrine of election and predestination. Once the historical doctrine receives a thorough and honest look from both sides, some significant ecumenical possibilities arise. The ecumenical implications also extend to the divisions between Protestants and Catholics, Eastern and Western Christianity, as well as Christianity and Judaism.

A number of recent reformulations of the doctrine have come through persons of admittedly Reformed backgrounds, with Barth as the chief example. At the same time, Barth has leveled one of the most pointed criticisms and challenges that the Reformed tradition has ever faced regarding the doctrine of election and predestination. While disagreement persists, Barth has received acceptance in a number of circles as an exemplary thinker and theological leader and representative for the Reformed tradition. This suggests that even traditions themselves may change, and that the integrity of a tradition does not consist in a historical set of precise and distinguishing doctrinal statements so much as in a nexus of perspectives through which the Biblical and historical Christian faith may come to life in a given context. Certainly the emphasis on the sovereignty of God, the sinfulness of humanity, and the utter gift of salvation have made for significant contributions from Reformed Christian thought, upheld with like fervency by the Lutheran tradition.

Sadly, the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition has often found itself in a case of mistaken identity,³⁴ placed in a position and a debate that goes all the way back to the fifth century and in the heated exchange between Augustine and Pelagius. Because persons conceived of election and

³⁴ W. J. Hausmann, drawing on the appraisal of Karl Barth, gives a complete misrepresentation of Arminian theology of election and predestination (Hausmann 11-12). If he had consulted Arminius, or Wesley for that matter, he would not have identified the tradition with the belief that “there is no conception of God as the electing God and man as the elect. It makes a man’s salvation dependent upon his will rather than upon God’s” (12). This claim may prove to be as spurious as the view that the early Church Fathers had no conception of the electing God. Arminianism may actually prove closer than Calvinism in some respects to the understanding of election and predestination held by almost all of the Church Fathers prior to Augustine. Additionally, in response to Hausmann’s criticism, not all who identify themselves with a certain tradition necessarily provide an accurate exposition of the foundational beliefs of that tradition. Criticisms can catch fire on the kindling brush at the perimeter of any tradition. Specific authors and references within a tradition, and especially its key representatives, should be a part of any attempt to substantiate claims and criticisms about that tradition.

predestination in a way that differed in some respect from the Augustinian heritage, they were quickly labeled as Pelagian or semi-Pelagian, no matter how staunchly they maintained that salvation comes by grace, while also arguing for the place of authentic human response in receiving salvation. Accuracy of language certainly has an important role in theology, but preoccupation with waging war over niceties and minutiae is not only fruitless but also reprehensible. If agreement exists over the essential reality of salvation by grace, then there remains no viable reason for wholesale dismissals of traditions and persons as less than Christian. Granted, disagreements may arise over exactly how this takes shape in a person's life. Differences among traditions have their place, but they must not become an occasion for prideful assertion of one's self and one's tradition over that of others. If we are about the business of truth, then we must be ready to see the shortcomings in our own positions and tradition as well as those of others.

If the doctrine of election signifies something fundamentally corporate and historical, then both Calvinists and Wesleyans have to do some reevaluation. Some in the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition have downplayed the doctrine of election and predestination because it apparently threatened human choice in the enterprise of salvation. Both Jacob Arminius and John Wesley, however, as founding figures in this tradition, mined the Scriptural and historic doctrine for its positive contributions to Christian belief, including its role in assurance of salvation and salvation's gracious character as having its source in God's initiative. That God chose us in Christ before we ever chose God proves a very comforting doctrine when despairing of one's own sinfulness before God. But even more than that, election gets at the heart of our self-understanding as the Church, the people of God. For this reason, the doctrine must work its way into our preaching, teaching, worship, and our self-awareness as a people called to share in the mission of God in the world, no matter what tradition we find ourselves in.

Retrieving Our Roots

Scholarship in general has proven scarce in the area of the pre-Augustinian doctrine of election and predestination. A number of books and journal articles touch on specific persons and facets of the doctrine, both directly and indirectly, but none of these paint a comprehensive picture of the doctrine in the earlier Fathers of the Church. Even the five major contemporaries mentioned above, while radically reframing the doctrine, cite very little in the way of positive historical precedent among pre-Augustinian Church Fathers for their reformulations. In his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth cites Augustine as well as Calvin profusely and positively, but for the most part he saw himself as treading new ground in recovering the Biblical understanding of election as fundamentally corporate. Had these great thinkers looked a little deeper into the history of the Church, they may have found some very significant precedents for their reformulations. They may also have found other nuanced or “new” perspectives that did not immediately come to mind.

The most recent and perhaps only comprehensive treatment of the early patristic doctrine of election dates back to 1840, with extended treatment of George Stanley Faber’s *The Primitive Doctrine of Election*.³⁵ Offering a catalog of numerous and extended translations of passages in Greek and Latin Fathers, Faber brings his skill in language and research to make his case. He covers textual evidence from Ignatius and the *Shepherd of Hermas* up to the corpus of Augustine, and a wide spectrum in between, organizing the evidence according to topic. After surveying the field, he concludes that both the Calvinists and Arminians have missed it. So have those who construe election as signifying the unique standing of a nation before God. These have fallen short in their portrayals of the election of the Church and the individual. Election does not pertain to a select number of individuals within the Church, as Augustine maintained. Neither does it pertain primarily to the individual in view of that person’s faith or obedience. *The majority of the early Fathers understood election as belonging to the Church as a whole.*³⁶ “The Church and the

³⁵ George Stanley Faber, *The Primitive Doctrine of Election* (New York: Charles Henry, 1840).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 210-211.

Elect are perfectly coincident and commensurate.”³⁷ One becomes elect through incorporation into the Church. Election is identified with the Church as the historic and corporate people of God, reflected in the corporate calling of the Gentiles to share in the election of Israel. A person may forfeit one’s standing among the elect.³⁸ Faber takes the premise that the most primitive doctrine represents the true, original, and pure belief of the Church. He believes that he has found it, hidden underneath the sediment of all the historical debate, in the first four centuries of Church history. On this basis, he criticizes any departure from this original stance, which doubtless includes most of his contemporaries in Western Christianity.

In some ways, this thesis will seek to validate Faber’s conclusions and extend them by drawing on the reformulating perspectives of twentieth century theologians. In the span from Irenaeus to Augustine, the character of the doctrine of election changed dramatically. *The broad contours of the doctrine from the second to the fifth centuries involve a decided shift from a fundamentally corporate conception to a fundamentally individual conception, from the election of the Church as a visible whole to the election of a hidden few, from election as the context of salvation to election as identified with salvation and destiny, from a fundamentally temporal and historical framework to a fundamentally eternal and ahistorical framework, from predestination being subsumed under election to election being subsumed under predestination, from an inclusive yet particular people to an exclusive aggregate, from the supposition of the historic and continuing election of Israel to the implicit denial of the election of Israel as a people, and finally from the Church as God’s chosen nation to the Roman Empire as taking over or at least sharing in the political dimension of the Church’s election.* One could hardly conceive of a more substantial shift.

At the same time, the development did not follow an absolutely unilinear path. In certain respects, each person differs and expresses the doctrine in a particular way. For this reason, each

³⁷ Ibid., 209.

³⁸ Ibid., 213.

church father belongs in his proper context. The person-by-person approach serves to complement the overall argument and the topical approach that Faber took, allowing for a broader and contextualized handle on the development of the doctrine.

Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, Eusebius, Ambrose and Augustine will speak with us in turn about election and predestination. After conferring with them, we will proceed in the conclusion to a critical summary of the development of the early patristic doctrine. This will also include a dialogue between patristic and contemporary theology, with its attendant implications for theology and practice in the contemporary life of the Church.

Chapter 2. Irenaeus

Argument

While combating the influence of the Gnostics, Stoics, and Marcion, Irenaeus explores election within a predominantly Jewish-Christian theological framework, emphasizing its material, corporate, and historical character. Though God's covenant with Israel has been surpassed, God's purpose in election continues in the eschatological community comprised of Jews and Gentiles, representing the unity of God's people through history as well as the unity of God. The Church's eschatological positioning and its rootedness in the people and nation of Israel issue in a social and political identity completely distinct from the Roman Empire.

Introduction

An Eastern immigrant to the West and possible spiritual grandson of the apostle John, Irenaeus of Lyons demonstrates a close familiarity with the events and perspectives with which the New Testament deals. Some describe him as more thoroughly Hebrew and Johannine than Pauline,³⁹ apparently in contradistinction to the strong Pauline inheritance of Western Christianity as embodied by Augustine. At the same time, in light of the current reappraisal of the Jewishness of the apostle to the Gentiles, Irenaeus may prove quite Pauline in his Jewish sympathies.

Because of these factors, the Marcionite proposal of cutting the Gospel loose from its moorings and discarding the Scriptures of the Old Testament did nothing but infuriate Irenaeus and drive him to an impassioned defense. *Against Heresies* covers a lot of territory, but it is directed most sharply toward the heresy spawned by Marcion. To divide the Testaments was equivalent to

³⁹ John Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus* (London: Epworth Press, 1948), 117. "S. Irenaeus is more Jewish Christian and Johannine than Pauline. Irenaeus is Jewish Christian, but is Pauline also. There is no contradiction in this, for S. Paul himself was certainly an Hebraic Christian in his fundamental view of God and of the religious life of man, though he was not a Judaizer."

dividing God, which was precisely Marcion's point. Irenaeus responds that the God of Old and New Testaments is One and the Same God, which is more than amply attested to by the Testaments themselves. His concerns encompassed the defense of the unity of God, the unity of the Scriptures, the unity of God's redemptive purpose, and so also the unity of the people of God.

Marcionism had been leavened by Gnosticism. Gnosticism, in turn, proved an able ally of Stoicism in the siege against Christianity. Both inside and outside the Church, Irenaeus felt the pressure of criticism from these philosophies. From the Gnostic side, this material world was passing away anyway, our bodies included. This impelled them to transcend the contingencies of this world and participate in the realm of the real, the spiritual. Stoics, on the other hand, denied both free will and the existence of contingencies. They questioned how Christians could claim to be enlightened (chosen/predestined) and yet preoccupy themselves with such a narrow and worrisome (particular) brand of morality. The effect of both, in Irenaeus' mind, was to detract from the importance of a life of concrete obedience corresponding to the material character of redemption in the Incarnation of Christ.⁴⁰ These concerns set the stage for the development of Irenaeus' theology of election and predestination.

Election and Time

Irenaeus' proximity to the New Testament world and worldview most certainly shaped his understanding of time and history. Human history encapsulates a succession of ages defined by God's covenant initiatives with humankind. Four dispensations in history reflect four covenants: pre-flood, post-flood, post-law, and Christ.⁴¹ The advent of Christ marks the beginning of the final age, and his return will bring it to its consummation. He speaks readily of now living in "end of times,"⁴² the "end of days,"⁴³ the "last times,"⁴⁴ and the "end of this age."⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *AH* 1.6.2.

⁴¹ Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 132.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴³ *DA* 89, drawing on Isa. 43.18-21.

⁴⁴ *AH* 3.11.9, 4.38.1.

And yet, history is not over. The history of redemption has been fulfilled and will be consummated, but history itself continues and will continue to unfold, even when God is all in all. The redemption of creation in no way signifies an end to those aspects that characterize it as creation, e.g. time and the relating of rational-physical beings in time. In this context, he has room for a millennialist conception of the return of Christ. This period of a thousand years will begin when Christ returns and renders judgment on all humankind.⁴⁶

Election and the Calling of the Gentiles

With the background in place, we may go on to examine the foundations of the edifice which is Irenaeus' doctrine of election and predestination. Throughout his writings the phrase, "the calling of the Gentiles," comes up repeatedly. Irenaeus uses it so often that it could almost be described as a technical phrase in his vocabulary. He uses the exact phrase at least nine times in the *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, along with a number of variations,⁴⁷ not to mention other occasions in the *Against Heresies*. Even though it is used so frequently, it also has a degree of flexibility. "The calling of the Gentiles" can be used side by side if not interchangeably with concepts like "adoption," "justification," and the transition from "old to new covenant."⁴⁸ As we peruse the writings of later Fathers, we will find them picking up and employing this term in like manner. As we survey its use, however, we should not fail to sense that the word "calling" itself is laden

⁴⁵ DA 21.

⁴⁶ Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus*, 282.

⁴⁷ E.g. DA 94, "So through *the new calling* a change of heart comes about in the Gentiles, through the Word of God, when He became incarnate and tabernacled with men, as also His disciple John says: and His Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (citing John 1.14).

⁴⁸ DA 91, "these promises were to be inherited by *the calling from the Gentiles*, in whom also *the new testament* was opened." Cp. DA 8, "God is indeed such, that is, creator of heaven and earth and the whole world, and maker of angels and men, and Lord of all, who upholds all things, and by whom everything is sustained; merciful, compassionate and most tender, good, just, God of all, both of Jews and of Gentiles and of the faithful. But to the faithful He is as a Father, for in the end of times He has *opened the testament of adoption of sons*."

with significance for the doctrine of election. The words in Greek and in Latin are inextricably linked through their commonality both in usage and in form.⁴⁹

The term itself has dramatic eschatological and so also historical connotations. When discussing “the calling of the Gentiles,” Irenaeus frequently speaks about the “last days.” The Gentiles have been specially invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb, called to join in the current of God’s salvific activity. This calling came at a divinely appointed *kairos* in history, namely at the coming of the bridegroom himself.⁵⁰ Its seal and confirmation came in the personal advent of the Spirit on the newly gathered community, fashioning them into the chosen and prophetic people of

⁴⁹ Since Irenaeus wrote in Greek, but his writings have come down to us predominantly in Latin translations, a thorough treatment of the semantic similarities between the two word groups is called for. The connections also prove helpful in light of the various languages used by later Church Fathers. Though we do not have space here for a word study of all the concepts pertaining to election and predestination, it will suffice to draw the connection between the concept of being chosen or elected and the concept of being called.

As for the Greek, Jesus’ saying in Matthew, “Many are called (κλητοί), but few are chosen (ἐκλεκτοί),” (Mt. 22.14) provides but one example of the close relation both in form and use in the New Testament writings. The terms are used almost interchangeably in places like II Pt. 1.10, “confirm your call and election (ὑμῶν τὴν κλήσιν καὶ ἐκλογήν)” and Rev. 17.14, “those with him [the Lamb] are called and chosen and faithful (κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί).” “God’s gifts and calling are irrevocable” (Rm. 11.29; see also Rm. 11.28) reflects the permanence of God’s choice of the people Israel, even if presently represented only by a “remnant” (Rm. 11.5). The people of God in general, as well as particular congregations, are said both to be called (Rm. 1.6-7, 8.28-30, 9.24, 26, 1 Cor. 1.9, 24, Eph. 4.1, 4, 2 Tim. 1.9, Heb. 3.1, I Pt. 1.15, 2.9, 5.10, II Pt. 1.3, 1 Jn. 3.1) and chosen/elected (Mt. 24.22, 24, 24.31, Lk. 18.7, Rm. 8.33, Eph. 1.4, Col. 3.12, 1 Th. 1.4, 2 Th. 2.13, 2 Tim. 2.10, Tit 1.1, I Pt. 1.2, 2.9). The entire tenor of Jesus’ ministry affirms the identity of Israel as the chosen people of God, seen especially in his exchange with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well in John 4. Yet, Jesus also seems to call into being a new or renewed Israel, appointing the twelve apostles as patriarchs of the eschatological people of God. The invitation to participate in this people of a new covenant extends not only to the disciples (Mt. 4.21, 20.25, Mk. 1.20, 3.13, 6.7, 8.1, Lk. 6.3, 14, 9.1, Jn. 13.18, 15.16, 19, Acts 1.2, 10.41), but also to the children (Mt. 18.2, Lk. 18.16) and crowds (Mt. 15.10, Mk. 7.14), and this ministry of invitation and instruction extended even to Gentiles (Jn. 4). Jesus initiated this movement in his earthly ministry and extended it in the ministry of his apostles.

The same kind of close association also characterizes the Latin terms. *Vocare* not only carries the sense of beckoning but also of naming or establishing identity. *Advocare*, to summon, therefore reflects something of the identity of a people. *Legere* and *eligere*, to choose and to select, are rooted in the Greek verb λέγω, to call or to call out, which is further connected to the identity of God’s people as an ἐκκλησία, an assembly of the called. The close connection in the usage of the concepts of election and calling in the Latin idiom may be seen in some of the Latin writings of Tertullian, such as *To the Nations* and the *Apology* (cf. following chapter). Calling, choosing, and establishing identity are interwoven in the semantics of Latin as well as of Greek.

⁵⁰ *AH* 4.20.12.

God.⁵¹ The “calling of the Gentiles” comes as a decisive event in God’s economy of election,⁵² both confirming and fulfilling the historical election of the people Israel.

Election and History

Irenaeus takes great joy in continually⁵³ illustrating how the event of the “calling of the Gentiles” is described throughout the Jewish Scriptures. We must recognize that for Irenaeus, as for the Fathers who came after him, the “calling of the Gentiles” is key to interpreting the significance of myriad statements, events, and relationships in the history of Israel. One great example comes in chapter twenty-one of the *Proof*.

But the blessing of Japheth was as follows: ‘May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the house of Sem, and Cham be his servant’; and this blossomed forth in the *end of this age*, in the manifestation of the Lord to the Gentiles *of the calling*, when God *extended to them His call* and ‘their sound went forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.’ So ‘enlarge’ refers to the *calling of the Gentiles*, that is to say, the Church, and he ‘dwells in the house of Sem,’ that is to say, in the heritage of the patriarchs, *in Christ Jesus receiving the birthright*.⁵⁴

⁵¹ E.g. *DA* 89, quoting Isaiah, “‘Remember not the former things...I will make a way in the desert, and rivers in dry land, to give drink to my chosen race and to my people, whom I have made my own, to tell my prowess.’ And ‘desert’ and ‘dry land’ is what *the calling of the Gentiles* was previously, for the Word neither passed among them, nor gave them to drink the Holy Spirit, who prepared the new way of godliness and justice. *And He has poured forth rivers in abundance, to disseminate the Holy Spirit upon earth, as He had promised through the prophets to pour forth the Spirit on the face of the earth in the end of days*” (quoting Isa. 43.18-21).

⁵² The conceptuality of a divine economy comes across in the use of terms like “administration” (*AH* 4.4.2) and “dispensation” (*AH* 4.15.2), both pointing to God’s covenant arrangements with Israel and the Church. The apostles participate in the fulfillment of the economy of election by “dispensing and administering” the Holy Spirit given them (*DA* 41).

⁵³ For a few examples of the prophetic foreshadowings of the calling of the Gentiles see: Moses’ marriage to an Ethiopian woman (*AH* 4.20.12); Rahab’s inclusion (*AH* 4.20.12, cf. Josh. 2.1-21). In the book of Deuteronomy, says Irenaeus, “many prophecies are written about our Lord Jesus Christ and about the people and about *the calling of the Gentiles* and about the kingdom” (*DA* 28). Dennis Minns sums it up well, “He could scarcely encounter a reference to Gentiles or prostitutes in either Testament without discovering there an allegorical allusion to the Church of the Gentiles--aliens, sinners, worshippers of stones, turned by God into the children of Abraham and heirs to the promises made to him.” Cf. Denis Minns, *Irenaeus* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 106.

⁵⁴ Quoting from Gen. 9.27 and Rom. 10.18.

Election pertains to the historical people of Israel and reaches its fulfillment in the historical inclusion of the Gentiles. The Scriptural prophecies regarding the fulfillment of election do not point to an abstract and eternal reality but to a decisive historical event.

Election and Christ

That previous quotation leads directly into another key facet of Irenaeus' doctrine of election. The calling of the Gentiles came to its fulfillment and establishment in the personal and historical advent of Jesus Christ. Irenaeus understood the Scripture and even history itself in terms of promise and fulfillment. All of the Scriptures which spoke of the "calling of the Gentiles" pointed to a coming event, but they also pointed to the person of Jesus Christ, who alone stands as the one who fulfills God's purpose of election. Irenaeus speaks in a bold and straightforward manner about this.

Christ did not accomplish this as one among many tasks. It was not something extrinsic to his identity or external to his person. Rather, the Incarnation served as the very means by which God's purpose and promises were fulfilled. "For Christ did this by being born of the Virgin who came of Abraham's seed, and setting up as lights in the world those who believe in Him, justifying the Gentiles through the same faith with Abraham."⁵⁵ Thus the promise to make his descendants "as numerous as the stars in the sky" came about, through the calling of the Gentiles, creating their lives anew to be brilliant celestial beacons of God's glory.

If the fulfillment comes in the Incarnation, it stands clearly as both a physical and historical event. Thus "was His triumph of our redemption, and His fulfillment of the promise to the patriarchs, and His doing away with the primal disobedience: the Son of God became a son of David and a son of Abraham."⁵⁶ The Son of God when taking flesh entered into a very specific time, place, and lineage in human history, both confirming and fulfilling God's promise to the patriarchs.

⁵⁵ *DA* 35, drawing on Gen. 15.5.

⁵⁶ *DA* 37.

Recapitulation stands as the defining doctrine of the Irenaean theological system, so it has been said. It is no different for his doctrine of election, as it comes together with his understanding of the fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose through the Incarnation. Jesus Christ, in all the historical-particularity of the Incarnation and resurrection, recapitulates the history of Israel as the chosen people of God, summing it all up in his person, and ushering forth a new era and a redefined chosen people in the history of the world.⁵⁷

One passage in particular exemplifies this understanding. It is doubly fascinating because it anticipates by nearly eighteen centuries the designation used by Karl Barth of "Christ: The Electing God."

But because *the one who chose the patriarchs is the selfsame Word of God*, who often visited them through the prophetic Spirit, *who gathered us from all over through his own coming*, which things in fact were spoken about, said this: 'Many from the East and the West will come and recline alongside Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens; however, the sons of the kingdom will go into the outer places of darkness: where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' If therefore these who believe in him through the proclamation of the Apostles throughout the East and the West will recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens, participating with them in the banquet, one and the same God is demonstrated, *who chose certain patriarchs, indeed visited the people, and indeed called the Gentiles.*⁵⁸

Christ does not merely serve as an instrument in God's purpose in election. He is, as the Divine Word, the God who did it all. Along with the Father, the Son chose for himself a people. He walked among them on various occasions, and finally, in the fullness of time, personally fulfilled this entire history through his visitation (Incarnation), suffering, death, and resurrection. In his own person he brought about the calling of the Gentiles through his rejection at the hands of the chosen people and thereby opened wide the gates into the kingdom of God. In his glorious

⁵⁷ *AH 4.38.1*, "And for this cause our Lord, in these last times, when He had summed up all things into Himself, came to us, not as He might have come, but as we were capable of beholding Him."

⁵⁸ *AH 4.36.8*, translation mine.

resurrection existence, he stands as the mediator and goal of election, for those who belong to him are the chosen people of God.⁵⁹

Election and the Apostolic Ministry

While Christ alone fulfilled and established the election of God's people, the administration of this plan also involved those who proclaimed the Gospel, namely, those who represented the apostolic ministry of the Church. Chapter 41 of the *Proof* offers a delightfully perceptive summary of his thought here. After being chosen and taught by Christ, then given the Holy Spirit, the apostles were

sent by Him into the whole world and *carried out the calling of the Gentiles*, showing mankind the way of life, turning them back from idols and from fornication and from selfish pride, purifying their souls and their bodies through the baptism of water and of the Holy Spirit; dispensing and administering to the faithful the Holy Spirit they had received from the Lord... And by these dispositions *they established the Churches*. By faith and charity and hope they *realized that calling of the Gentiles*, according to the mercy extended to them by God, which was heralded by the prophets, making it known through the work of their ministry, and *receiving them into the promise made to the patriarchs*, so that, to those who believed and loved the Lord, and in return for holiness and justice and patience, the God of all would bring, through resurrection from the dead, the life everlasting which He had promised, through Him who died and was raised, Jesus Christ.⁶⁰

Irenaeus' running list of qualifiers only serves to highlight the beauty, fullness, and profundity of his thought. It is sufficient to point out some of the connections uniquely drawn here. The "calling of the Gentiles" was brought about by Christ through his Incarnation, but the effect of this is yet to unfold. Here the apostles enter the picture. As those chosen by Christ and given the Spirit, they bring forth the fruit of Christ's labor. In Christ, all had been invited to the banquet of the kingdom of God. But it remained with the apostles, anointed and led by the Holy Spirit, to proclaim this invitation to the peoples who had previously been separate from God's covenant

⁵⁹ Irenaeus does not explicitly speak of Christ as the "mediator of election," but it is certainly implicit in that Christ alone recapitulated the election of Israel so as to include even Gentiles who would come to him in faith. He understands even the inheritance of resurrection through Christ as an expression of the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to Abraham to give him descendants "as numerous as the stars" (*AH* 5.32.1-2).

⁶⁰ *DA* 41.

and excluded from God's people. Even their ministry was predicted by the prophets of old. It was all part of God's great plan for the fullness of time.⁶¹

Election and Initiation

The above passage also illumines how election and initiation go hand in hand, symbolized foremost in the apostolic ministry of the Church. Through the apostolic ministry of Word and Sacrament, God's intent to include the Gentiles comes to fruition:

showing mankind the way of life, turning them back from idols and from fornication and from selfish pride, purifying their souls and their bodies through the baptism of water and of the Holy Spirit; dispensing and administering to the faithful the Holy Spirit they had received from the Lord.

The election to sonship first and foremost signifies incorporation *into Christ*. For God "established us as sons by incorporating us into his only begotten Son."⁶² But incorporation into Christ happens only through being incorporated *into the Church* as the Body of Christ.

Discussing the theology of Irenaeus, Dennis Minns puts it this way, "This adoption to sonship of God is achieved by incorporation into Christ as the second Adam, for it is not as individuals that human beings are fashioned in the image and likeness of God, but precisely as members of the Church, members of that body of which Christ is the head."⁶³

As with various other aspects of his thought, Irenaeus conceives of election corporately and Christologically, and both of these facets complement each other. It is because election is established and rooted uniquely in the person of Christ that the Church as the Body of Christ

⁶¹ Later in that same chapter of the *DA* 41, Irenaeus speaks of the apostolic ministry as "the fruit of the blessing of Japheth, *in the calling of the Gentiles*, revealed through the Church, in constant obedience to receive the 'dwelling in the house of Sem' according to God's promise. "Their harvest work manifested the stunning truth that God had now purchased the field of the people of the Gentiles, redeeming them from bondage through the sacrifice of Christ. In Irenaeus' estimation, the OT spoke of the apostolic ministry as an integral part of the work of Christ in the realization of the "calling of the Gentiles." The Biblical reference is Gen. 9.27.

⁶² *AH* 4.41.2-3, quoted in Minns, *Irenaeus*, 112.

⁶³ Minns 110, citing *AH* 3.16.6, 3.19.3, 4.25.3, 4.37.7, 5.18.2.

derives its identity as elect. Election belongs to individuals in their identity as related members of Christ's Body, not in isolation from each other. A person's standing as elect is not directly imparted by God on a direct, ahistorical and ethereal (Gnostic) plane but is always and ever mediated; mediated first and foremost by Christ, and thereupon by the Church.

The apostolic ministry symbolizes and administers the Church's election by receiving persons into the Church and sealing them with the gift of the Spirit. A person comes to participate in God's election by being incorporated into the Church, which specifically involves initiation climaxing in baptism.⁶⁴

Election and Boundaries

Election has an exclusive side in the sense that it does not belong to all persons, but rather to the Church. That is, its exclusive character derives from the historical particularity of God's purpose in fashioning a people. Besides that, election rings with an inclusive tone. God has invited all persons to join in the wedding supper of the Lamb, though many refuse the invitation. God's merciful invitation extends to all persons, regardless of their sinful and idolatrous backgrounds.

Election and Predestination

Predestination does not play a strong role explicitly in Irenaeus' thought. He certainly understood election as implying the pre-existing intent of God, reflected in prophecies regarding the calling of the Gentiles. For Irenaeus, the proper object of this pre-existing intent of God is always the Church as the people of God. As Minns maintains, it is in the "Church" as the "Kingdom of the Son" that "*the promises made to Abraham will finally be fulfilled, and in order to enjoy them one must be adopted to sonship not only of Abraham, but of God himself.*"⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Minns 112-13, citing *AH* 1.21.1, 3.17.3, 4.14.2, 5.18.2.

⁶⁵ Minns 110, citing *AH* 5.32.2.

Election and Conditionality

The election of God's people as a whole does not change. It remains complete, sure and steadfast. But this also pertains to a group made up of historical persons who live within the particularities and contingencies of human existence.⁶⁶ In respect to individuals, election proves conditional, conditional on the initial and ongoing response of faith and obedience to Christ implied in human free will.⁶⁷ A person attains to salvation only by the grace of God, through Christ's sacrifice of reconciliation. Even the ongoing preservation of the human free will happens as a function of God's providential care.⁶⁸ Given this, certain persons and groups may forfeit their standing among the elect on account of their disobedience. The Jews who rejected the coming of the Son of God stand as but one example.⁶⁹ This characterizes the general situation in regard to inheriting election. A person may voluntarily reject God's initiatives of grace, even after being incorporated into the body of the elect.⁷⁰

Election and Purpose

This dialectic between unconditional and conditional has implications for the purpose of election. Election does not assume the final salvation of the persons who presently comprise the membership of the Church. It signifies adoption but it does not give an unconditional guarantee

⁶⁶ For Irenaeus, denying the contingency of human existence would be equivalent to falling prey to the determinism of the Stoics and exchanging a history of covenant for a history of Fate.

⁶⁷ Even what we believe is truly a matter involving our own choice. "Not merely in works, but also in faith, has God preserved the will of man free and under his own control, saying 'According to thy faith be it unto thee' (Matt 9:29); thus showing that there is a faith specially belonging to man, since he has an opinion specially his own" (AH 4.37.5).

⁶⁸ In AH 5.27.1, Irenaeus speaks in the same breath of "each person having a choice of his own" and of the God who "exercises a providence over all."

⁶⁹ AH 4.15.2.

⁷⁰ "For it is in man's power to disobey God, and to forfeit what is good; but [such conduct] brings no small amount of injury and mischief" (AH 4.37.4). Sons may willfully disinherit their inheritance (AH 4.41.3). So also the lost sons of God, which implies all persons, may return to their inheritance (Minns 112). "The light does never enslave any one by necessity; nor again does God exercise compulsion upon any one unwilling to accept the exercise of His skill...those persons, therefore, *who have apostatized from the light given by the Father*, and transgressed the law of liberty, have done so through their own fault, since they have been created free agents, and possessed of power over themselves" (AH 4.39.3).

of a person's destiny or destination. Election is not merely a subspecies or means of individual salvation. Election takes expression in the covenant relationship between God and God's people. As such, it serves to demonstrate the character of God and thereby to bless humanity and all of creation. In this vein Irenaeus assigns the law of Moses a positive value as "showing forth the wisdom of God."⁷¹ The unity of Old and New Testament, the unity of God's people through history, and of election itself, all witness to the goodness and glory of the one true God.

Election, Israel and the Church

As demonstrated, Irenaeus' doctrine of election rests squarely upon an eschatological comprehension of time and history, following the rubric of historical promise and fulfillment. It also rests upon what Christ has done, and what people have done with him, in history. This provides for a nuanced view of election in regard to Israel and the Church. On the one hand, the fulfillment of election does not imply anything new: it remains God's choice of a people for the purpose of inhabiting them, bringing revelation and blessing to the ends of the earth. On the other hand, a shift has taken place. Whereas election belonged exclusively to the Jews, now it belongs to Jews and Gentiles, and more specifically, to those who pay their allegiance to the king of the Jews and of all creation, Jesus Christ. Jesus' Jewishness served to confirm the election of the Jewish people, while his rejection, death, and resurrection portended the inclusion of the nations.⁷²

It was not that God rejected the Jewish people, but rather that the Jewish people rejected their Messiah, thereby forfeiting their share in election. This did not imply the guilt of every member of the society but rather served as an assertion of history.⁷³ Rather than accepting Jesus as their

⁷¹ Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 157.

⁷² Cf. below, *DA* 64.

⁷³ Irenaeus offers a balanced and accurate portrayal of the death of Christ, apparently owing to his historical nearness to the events. It stands out for its historical accuracy as well as its evenhanded and insightful description. "For Herod, king of the Jews, and Pontius Pilate, procurator of Claudius Caesar, came together and condemned Him to be crucified; for Herod was frightened lest he be ousted by Him from the kingship, as if He were going to be some earthly king, while Pilate was constrained by Herod and

king, the Jewish people instigated the death of their Messiah. Their works had ceased to bear fruit in earnest. They had ceased to be useful in the purpose for which God had called them.⁷⁴ They had killed the Son of the owner of the vineyard. Now God was leasing the vineyard to tenants who would faithfully discharge that responsibility. The Jews did not cease to exist as God's chosen people, but their continuance in and ultimate inheritance of election depended on their response to the Messiah.

In this sense, Irenaeus pictures history as a role-reversal between Israel and the Gentiles. Jacob and Esau of Romans 9 do not refer to different individuals or aggregates bound for salvation or reprobation. They symbolize historical peoples, signifying the reversal of fortune that happened when the Gentiles laid hold of the faith and blessing of God's chosen people.⁷⁵ Moses himself spoke of how God's people would become jealous of "that which is no people" and angry at a "foolish nation."⁷⁶ Even the alternating condition of the fleece of Gideon symbolized this reversal.⁷⁷

For Irenaeus, this did not come out of anti-Semitic prejudice but out of a firm conviction in the Incarnation. The new covenant was established when God took flesh and walked among us. It was established by the Word of God in person, and for this reason uniquely bears the feature of permanence. The Torah was indeed the revelation and commandment of God, but now that God's revelation and commandment had been revealed fully in the person of Christ, it had

by the Jews around to deliver Him, unwillingly, to death, on the grounds that not to do so would be to go against Caesar by liberating a man who was given the title of king" (*DA* 74).

⁷⁴ *AH* 4.4.1, "she (Jerusalem) was deservedly forsaken, and those things which had formerly brought forth fruit abundantly were taken away; for from these, according to the flesh, were Christ and the apostles enabled to bring forth fruit. But now these are no longer useful for bringing forth fruit. For all things which have a beginning in time must of course have an end in time also."

⁷⁵ Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus*, 225-26.

⁷⁶ *DA* 95, "You have made me jealous with what were no gods...and I will make you jealous with that which is no people, and will anger you with a foolish nation." "Moses also says in Deuteronomy that the Gentiles are to become the head, and an unbelieving people the tail" (Deut. 28.44).

⁷⁷ *AH* 3.17.3. In *AH* 4.36, Irenaeus offers seven successive parables regarding the relationship of Israel and the Church that often portrays the Gentile Church as supplanting the people of Israel (Minns 107).

relinquished its place of prestige and ultimacy in regard to knowing and keeping covenant with God.

This is all to say that there is only one election, but there are two covenants.⁷⁸ The old arrangement had not only been surpassed, but also entirely abolished. The fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple bore witness to this transition in God's economy. Though it may be difficult for some to swallow, the truth is that in some sense the old covenant has come to an end, as well as the law that defined it.⁷⁹ Persons may continue to observe it, but this in itself did not express the fullness of God's purpose. Nor was this a failure of God's purpose, for it had been God's intent from the beginning for the old covenant to be temporary and to be surpassed in the new covenant.

This does not lead Irenaeus to assert that the Jewish people are in any way excluded from God's purpose in election. Irenaeus' debate in the first place was not with Jews but rather with those who denied "any continuity between the Old Covenant and the New and who denied that the same God was revealed in both."⁸⁰ When Irenaeus lumps Marcion in with the Gnostics as representative of the same essential threat,⁸¹ it argues for an approach to Scripture and history that embraces and essentially affirms the faith and election of ancient Israel.⁸² The election of Israel, and the inclusion of the Church in this election through Christ, may have proved the clearest testimony of the essential continuity between ancient Judaism and Christianity.

⁷⁸ "There were indeed two testaments among the two peoples" (*AH* 4.32.2).

⁷⁹ *AH* 4.4.2 indicates an end of the ancient "legislation" when "the new covenant is revealed. For God does all things by measure and in order; nothing is unmeasured with Him, because nothing is out of order...the administration of them (the Jews) was temporary."

⁸⁰ Minns 105.

⁸¹ Cf. *AH* chp. 9 for his "refutation of the Gnostic use of the Scriptures" and chp. 22 for the "deviations of the heretics from the ancient faith."

⁸² "The church to Irenaeus was the New Israel, and the True Israel, the prophetic and priestly people of God. A leading polemic interest of *Adversus Haereses* is the vindication against Marcion of the identity of the God of the Old and of the New Covenants, the continuity of the Jewish and Christian Faiths, and the authenticity of the Old Testament as Holy Scripture. The doctrine of the New Israel fitted in admirably with this polemic,...(comprising a) profound part of his religious faith, and a valuable element in his constructive work" (Lawson 252).

Gentile believers are forever connected to Israel on account of Christ. Salvation is of the Jews. Judaism holds an undeniable historical connection to the coming of God as fulfilled in Christ. Irenaeus had much to say positively of our Jewish forebears. Again, even this was rooted Christologically, in the doctrine of the Incarnation and the recognition of the Jewishness of Jesus.

All these testimonies concerning His descent according to the flesh tell explicitly and clearly both His race, and the place where He was going to be born, so that men should not seek Him who was born Son of God among the Gentiles, or anywhere else, but in Bethlehem of Judea, from Abraham and from the seed of David.⁸³

The particularity of Christ and of the people of Israel roots the Christian faith in history. So indeed, the “calling of the Gentiles” indicated that God’s election and the historic faith of Abraham had been brought to their fulfillment in God’s purpose. God’s ancient promise had been fully delivered on, encompassing the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles. To this effect Irenaeus says that Abraham was

the Father of all those who would follow the Word of God as wanderers in this world, that is, of believers from amongst the circumcised and believers from amongst the uncircumcised, just as Christ is the cornerstone, sustaining all things, and gathering in the one faith of Abraham those from both covenants who are ready to make up God’s building.⁸⁴

God’s choice of the Jewish people was not merely a precursor to and preparation for the inclusion of non-Jews. God’s purpose in election was always to fashion a people for God’s own glory, which has come to its ultimate fulfillment in the making of “one man” out of “the two.” Jesus did not come to turn away his own people, but to save them. The Son of God was indeed present throughout the history of Israel offering salvation. The salvation now offered is both the continuation and fulfillment of that long-standing gift.⁸⁵

⁸³ *DA* 64.

⁸⁴ *AH* 4.25.1.

⁸⁵ *DA* 51, “The Son of God was pre-existent...Lord of all men, and Savior of those who believe in Him, Jews and others.” The “others” that come to mind are the proselytes to Judaism like Ruth, Rahab, or Naaman.

Election and Nationality

Bringing together Biblical prophecy and the calling of the Gentiles, Irenaeus makes a habit of referring to the Church as a nation and a people. This people that “was no people” in Deuteronomy⁸⁶ have now become the people of God, as Hosea indicated,⁸⁷ with Peter following suit.⁸⁸ By the same turn, God’s people Israel have become “Not my people.” Adolf von Harnack takes this as the signal that Irenaeus effectively brings the history of Israel to a close.⁸⁹ According to this interpretation, the Church replaces historical Israel as the chosen nation of God.

According to John Lawson, however, Irenaeus fundamentally upholds the election of the nation of Israel in all its particularity. “God’s way of speaking to the whole world is by preparing for Himself a Peculiar People...The world’s true religion is therefore inseparably linked with the life of a particular holy nation, living in a certain Holy Land, and rejoicing in a purified cultus.”⁹⁰ Irenaeus thus stands in “essential conformity with this Biblical tradition.”⁹¹

The Gentile Church does not replace the election of Israel. Rather, the Gentiles as a people are beckoned by God to be included in the ongoing election of Israel. The chosen nation continues, though in a different form. God’s people now constitute a new commonwealth that bridges the boundaries of culture and language.

The eschatological people of God may not presently have a land of their own or established structures of worship, but to it belongs the inheritance of the entire restored creation and an

⁸⁶ *DA* 95, quoting Deut. 32.21.

⁸⁷ *DA* 93, quoting Hosea 1.9-10.

⁸⁸ I Peter 2.10.

⁸⁹ Cf. Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Volume Two, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1958), 310, commenting on Irenaeus’ description of the downfall of Jerusalem in *AH* 4.4.

⁹⁰ Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus*, 253.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 254.

everlasting priesthood through Christ. The historical particularity of past and future frame the identity of the eschatological community, so establishing its history as a fundamental unity. Identity and restoration do not reside outside of history and creation but rather in the warp and woof of history and creation. This eschatological position and identity of the Church distinguishes it from the nations in which it lived, including the Roman Empire. The language of I Peter regarding a “holy people, a chosen nation,”⁹² accurately depicts the political character of God’s assembly both in the history of Israel and in the eschatological interim.

Election and Ethics

Irenaeus upholds the Christian moral enterprise in a variety of ways, including his doctrine of creation, free will and the goodness of God.⁹³ His understanding of election also has moral implications. Standing ultimately in continuity with Israel, the Church inherits the Jewish Scriptures and benefits from its wisdom, though it may diverge in regard to certain practices. The unique identity of the Church guides its members to maintain their allegiance to God’s eschatological kingdom and not to be assimilated into the practices and beliefs of the pagans and heretics.

Election and Mission

With the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* and the treatise *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus directed his apologetic witness both to Christians and to non-Christians. By refuting Marcion, Irenaeus sought to maintain the integrity of the Christian faith as reflective of the ongoing covenantal history of God and God’s people. This thrust, therefore, also held appeal for Jewish readers. By affirming the election of Israel and the inclusion of the Gentiles in this election, Irenaeus gave proper respect to the history and heritage of Judaism. At the same time, by illustrating the end of the old covenant and attesting to the dawning of a new covenant, he made

⁹² I Peter 2.9.

⁹³ Lawson 218.

an appeal to Jewish persons to realize their ultimate identity and calling in the eschatological fellowship of the Church.

Conclusion

Election belongs to the Church as God's eschatological people, brought into being through the coming of Christ and the instrumentality of the apostles. This election does not replace but fulfills and continues the election of the people Israel. Picking up on the conceptuality and Jewish-Christian worldview of the Scriptures, he maintains the historical, corporate, and material character of election throughout. While we have yet to hear the testimony of later Fathers on the doctrine of election and predestination, Irenaeus has provided a rich and compelling account, certainly one that runs counter to the suppositions that have dominated most of the history of Western Christianity. As we will see, later Fathers of the Church benefited considerably from his perspectives.

Chapter 3. Tertullian

Argument

Much like Irenaeus, Tertullian pictures election and predestination as fundamentally historical, corporate, covenantal, and eschatological. From the perspective of history, Israel and the Church both stand as God's chosen people, but the eschatological shift in the coming of Christ implies that election now pertains most especially to the Church. Election furnishes the Church with a identity that distinguishes it socially, politically, and religiously from the Roman Empire.

Introduction

As a Westerner living a generation or two after Irenaeus, Tertullian represents very similar concerns. Yet one could also say that Tertullian went beyond the work of Irenaeus in various respects. Like Irenaeus, he sets out to defend the Christian faith from the heretics, but to that he adds direct treatises to the Emperor and Senate themselves and also the Jews.⁹⁴ That is to say that Tertullian had a four-fold audience. Heretics, Romans, Jews, and fellow Christians all stood as recipients of his counsel. Tertullian had close contact both with the Jewish community and with persecution from the Roman Empire.⁹⁵ These situations called for clear and courageous speech.

At the same time, Tertullian focuses his efforts in ways similar to Irenaeus. His work against Marcion stands as his most thorough *apologia*, as was the case for Irenaeus. Tertullian felt the influence of Gnostic and Stoic elements in society, but apparently he felt nothing was stronger than the threat of the Marcionism to the Church. Even his criticisms of Gnosticism and Stoicism were expressed as criticism against Marcion. With all of his rhetorical bite, Tertullian asked,

⁹⁴ Justin Martyr had also geared his writings to such a variety of audiences. A comparison of his doctrine of election with that of Tertullian would certainly prove intriguing, particularly in the perspective of the apologetic and missionary use and value of the doctrine.

⁹⁵ Perhaps it would be fair to suggest that Tertullian's *apologia* toward the Jews came out of a sense of injustice and inequality in Rome's treatment of Jews and Christians. Judaism had formal tolerance in Roman law and society. Christians had nothing of the sort and were fighting an uphill battle to defend the truth and the non-threatening character of the faith.

“What new god is there, except a false one?”⁹⁶ By denying the Scriptures of the Old Testament, Marcion was sloughing off the entire history of God’s people, disconnecting the Church from its heritage in ancient Israel, and ultimately denying the unity of God. For this reason, Tertullian’s discussion of election seems ever concerned about the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. He stresses both the continuity and the discontinuity, for even in the discontinuity is the fundamental continuity revealed, which is the continuity of election itself.

Election and Time

Tertullian takes cues from the Scriptures for his language regarding time and history. Roman society was host to a variety of beliefs in regard to time, everything from linear time to a ceaseless repetition of cycles. Tertullian chose to speak of time and history in terms of “ages”⁹⁷ and “dispensations,”⁹⁸ almost even in a technical sense. On one occasion he asserts that “God...is the Lord of that very succession of times which constitutes an age.”⁹⁹ This goes hand in hand with an understanding of time and history that is covenantal and eschatological. Promise and fulfillment are borne out in the crucible of human life and history.

The eschatological sense plays large in his thought. He speaks not only of the “fullness of the times”¹⁰⁰ but even of “the end of the times,”¹⁰¹ the “last days,”¹⁰² and the “last interim of the

⁹⁶ *AM* 1.8.

⁹⁷ *AJ* 1.5.

⁹⁸ Israel and the Church represent two successive periods in salvation-history, foreordained by God. “Both dispensations, therefore, emanate from that same God by whom, as we have found, they were both sketched out beforehand” (*AM* 5.4).

⁹⁹ *AM* 4.35.

¹⁰⁰ *AM* 4.14. The Church hastens swiftly “towards the fullness of the times; with speed, because unlogged by the weights of the ancient law.”

¹⁰¹ *AM* 4.35.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, where he quoted both Isaiah 2.2, “It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain (of the house) of the Lord shall be manifested,” and Joel 3.28 as given in Acts 2.17, “and in the last days I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.”

age.”¹⁰³ The coming of Christ signifies the dawning of the *eschaton* in human history. It will be consummated at its “Western horizon” with the second coming of Christ. For these in-between times, the Spirit has been poured out on the Church, on all flesh, both men and women. As with Irenaeus, Tertullian maintained the veracity of a coming millennial reign of Christ as the commencement of the consummation of all things.¹⁰⁴

Election and the Calling of the Gentiles

In regard to God’s election, something absolutely pivotal and decisive happened at a divinely appointed *kairos* in time. With the coming of Christ, and in the fullness of time, no longer did God confine election to the people of the Jews. One passage sums this up beautifully.

*In the method of his dispensation He limited charity first to the Jews, but afterwards extended it to the whole race of mankind. So long, therefore, as the mystery of His government was confined to Israel, He properly commanded that pity should be shown only to a man’s brethren; but when Christ had given to Him ‘the Gentiles for His heritage, and the ends of the earth for His possession,’ then began to be accomplished what was said by Hosea: ‘Ye are not my people, who were my people; ye have not obtained mercy, who once obtained mercy’—that is, the (Jewish) nation. Thenceforth Christ extended to all men the law of His Father’s compassion, excepting none from His mercy, as He omitted none in His invitation. So that, whatever was the ampler scope of His teaching, He received it all in His heritage of the nations.*¹⁰⁵

Tertullian makes ready use of the passage of Hosea as paradigmatic of the shift in election to include the Gentiles. But on top of that, his variety of expression reflects how this has occupied his attention for some time. “Charity,” “heritage,” “mercy,” “compassion,” “invitation,”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Apparently reflecting on the New Law given in the Sermon on the Mount, Tertullian says that the “last interim of the age (was) fitted for the divine compassion” (*AJ* 1.5).

¹⁰⁴ Edwin A. Quain writes in the introduction to Tertullian’s *On the Soul*, “This Millenarianism was a survival of the materialistic Jewish ideas as to an earthly Messiah-King as it had affected a certain number of Christians until it was attacked by Origen and effectively destroyed by St. Augustine.” One wonders whether such a “materialistic” view is more alien to the Judeo-Christian faith than the “spiritualistic” and history-denying views of the Gnostics. Cf. *Tertullian: Apologetical Works* in *FoC* v10, trans Rudolph Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950), 170.

¹⁰⁵ The Scripture is from memory, representing an inversion of Peter’s paraphrase (1 Peter 2.10) of Hosea (1.10). The passage comes from *AM* 4.16.

¹⁰⁶ “Invitation” echoes Irenaeus’ central theme of the “calling of the Gentiles,” with both concepts thoroughly rooted in Jesus’ parable of the wedding feast of the king’s son.

“teaching,” “law,” “government,” and “possession” show that election is understood within a complex of ideas, all shaped by the framework of the historical promise and fulfillment of God’s purpose in election. A few observations follow: 1) the language of dispensation portrays history in terms of an economy of redemption that has come to its fulfillment; 2) the shift in election came at a decisive moment in salvation-history, in tandem with the Christ event itself; 3) as we will explore more thoroughly below, Christ serves as the singular instrument of the extension of God’s election and dominion to the Gentiles; 4) and God omits “none in His invitation,” indicating that all persons may potentially be joined to God’s elect.

We may also notice in the above quotation that Tertullian does not identify the nations, against Israel, as God’s elect people. Rather, the Gentiles have been corporately invited to be joined to the elect. The “elect” constitute a historical corporality, namely the Church, now comprised of Jews and Gentiles. This does reflect something absolutely new in history, since prior to this the people of Israel alone comprised the elect. Tertullian thinks much of this point, since he adamantly defends it in his work *Against Marcion*. One passage gives the main argument.

For look at the entire course of *His call* up to the present time from its beginning, how it is [now] *addressed to the nations who are in these last days approaching* to God the Creator, and not to proselytes, whose *election was rather an event of the earliest days*. Verily the apostles have annulled that belief of yours.¹⁰⁷

Marcion had denied “that there was any prophesy of national or Gentile conversion; it was only the conversion of individual proselytes that he held.”¹⁰⁸ Marcion’s argument, of course, came out of a desire to put a wedge between Christianity and Judaism.¹⁰⁹ He sought to portray Jewish history as unchanged, and so also membership in Judaism as unchanged. This leads to a portrayal of Gentile election (membership in Israel) as essentially individualistic. Marcion also puts the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the sphere of timelessness, which essentially invalidates the revelation of God in previous periods. To argue for a historically decisive shift in

¹⁰⁷ *AM* 3.21.

¹⁰⁸ So says Peter Holmes, translator of *Against Marcion* in *ANF* 3.339n8.

¹⁰⁹ To Marcion we owe the concept of “Judaism,” as used in his denial of this religion as the religion of eternal God. At least for Christians, “Israel” may prove the more amiable reference in regard to affirming the historical identity of the ancient people of God.

election, as Tertullian did, would be to maintain the fundamental continuity between ancient Israel and the Church and so to uphold the fact that the God of the Christians and the Jews was one and the same.

This continuity is maintained in the rubric of historical promise and fulfillment and underlined in the witness of the prophets regarding the fulfillment of election. This becomes evident from the outset of his work *Against the Jews*.¹¹⁰ Such was prophesied in God's promise to Abraham to be a blessing to the nations and also in God's promise to Rebecca about giving birth to two nations, "two peoples and two nations were about to proceed,"¹¹¹ and, "Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be divided from thy bowels; and people shall overcome people, and the greater shall serve the less."¹¹² Christians, of course, comprise the latter people and the Jews, the former, which signifies Christians as the present inheritors of the promise. Thus begins a long list of references to the Jewish Scriptures, which are understood as a whole as prophetic in character, as predictive and descriptive of the fulfillment of election which was to occur.¹¹³

Election and History

Tertullian believes that history itself is on the side of Christians in defending the fulfillment and transition of election to include the Gentiles. The transition in election that came with the advent

¹¹⁰ *AJ* 1.

¹¹¹ Gen 21.5 with 25.7, 26.

¹¹² Gen 25.21-23.

¹¹³ E.g. *AJ* 1.4, "In any case, we have the same God as a promiser and faithful sponsor, who promised Abraham, how all nations of the earth would be blessed through his seed, and how from the womb of Rebecca two peoples and two lineages would proceed" (translation mine). Cf. also *AJ* 12, quoting Psalm 2.7-8, "My Son are Thou; today have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I will give Thee Gentiles as Thine heritage, and as Thy possession the bounds of the earth;" and quoting Isa. 18.6-7, "Behold, I have given thee for a covenant of my family, for a light of Gentiles, that Thou mayst open the eyes of the blind." Also see *AM* 3.21 (quoting Isa. 2.2-3); *AM* 4.14, "He was *about to call from the ends of the earth—that is, the Gentiles*: 'Behold, they shall come swiftly with speed.' (Isa. 5.26) swiftly, because hastening towards *the fullness of the times*; with speed, because unclogged by the weights of the ancient law." *AM* 3.20 says that the OT prophecies about the Davidic dynasty pertain to Christ, for the Father has appointed Him "for a testimony to the nations...a prince and commander to the nations...It is Christ whom all nations now invoke, which knew Him not; Christ to whom all races now betake themselves, whom they were ignorant of before." The proof from prophecy formula points not only to Christ but also to the fulfillment of election that Christ has brought in the calling of the Gentiles.

of Christ did not happen in abstraction from the nation and history of the Jewish people. Rather, it came about through the rejection of Christ by his own people. Thereafter, the very history of the Jewish people testifies that election no longer belongs to them exclusively. Furthermore, the prophets spoke of the misery the Jews would face if they rejected God's Messiah.¹¹⁴ Their defeat by the Romans, the destruction of the temple, and their miserable predicament among the nations stems directly from having "sinned against God in the person of Christ."¹¹⁵ One passage sums it up well.¹¹⁶

Since therefore the Jews *were predicted as destined to suffer these calamities on Christ's account*, and we find that they have suffered them and see them sent into dispersion and abiding in it, manifest it is that it is *on Christ's account that these things have befallen the Jews*, the sense of the Scriptures harmonizing with the issue of events and of the order of the times.¹¹⁷

In addition to this "proof from misery," Tertullian also attests to a different basis of proof. Jews have only to look around the Empire at the end of the second century to see how the knowledge of the Only True God has spread and taken hold among the nations of the world as a proof of the Messiah's coming and the fulfillment of the prophecies of the last days. What better to prove the "calling of the Gentiles" than to point to the way in which the Gentiles have answered this call?

This even is enough [proof]: [that] *the nations are able to be admitted to the law of God*, so that Israel may no longer boast, as for instance how the nations are accounted 'a drop in the bucket' or 'dust from the floor.'¹¹⁸

Congregations of Gentiles devotedly read the Jewish Scriptures. What more proof was necessary? For Tertullian, the ancient prophecies and the recent turn of events did not point to an abstract or eternal reality or ideal but to a decided shift in salvation history in the constituency of God's people. This substantiates Tertullian's perspective of election as fundamentally historical and corporate in significance.

¹¹⁴ *Ap* 21.5-6.

¹¹⁵ *Ap* 26.3.

¹¹⁶ *AJ* 1.3-4, translation mine.

¹¹⁷ *AJ* 13. The language of "destined," and its corporate reference to Judaism as a whole, will come up later in this chapter.

¹¹⁸ *AJ* 1.3, translation mine.

Election and Christ

That the shift of election to include the Gentiles coincided with the Christ-event does not merely signify a coincidence or accident in the history of redemption. Christ stands alone as the one who brings election to its fulfillment. He brings it to its fulfillment through his Incarnation. He is the Word of God through Whom the Father chose a people for a possession.¹¹⁹ Now this Word has come in the flesh. As the Son of God and Israel's true king, Christ is the one through whom the Father reconstitutes the elect, opening wide the door of membership to the Gentiles.

At the same time, election is not merely the work of the Father through the instrumentality of Christ. It is also the work of the Son in union and cooperation with the Father. A previously quoted passage speaks pointedly of Christ's share in the electing work of the Father.

But *when Christ had given to Him* 'the Gentiles for His heritage, and the ends of the earth for His possession,' then began to be accomplished what was said by Hosea: 'Ye are not my people, who were my people; ye have not obtained mercy, who once obtained mercy'—that is, the (Jewish) nation. Thenceforth *Christ extended to all men* the law of His Father's compassion, *excepting none from His mercy*, as *He omitted none in His invitation*. So that, *whatever was the ampler scope of His teaching, He received it all in His heritage of the nations*.¹²⁰

Christ carries out his role in the economy of redemption, claiming the Gentiles as part of God's people. It is Christ who mercifully extends the invitation of election, mirroring and enacting the merciful design of the Father. He also speaks of the inclusion of the Gentiles as the result of Christ's priestly suffering: "all nations *being called* to His kingdom, from the fact that God set up that kingdom from the tree (of the cross)."¹²¹ Tertullian even speaks of Christ choosing a people.¹²²

¹¹⁹ *Ap* 21.10.

¹²⁰ *AM* 4.16.

¹²¹ *AM* 3.21.

¹²² *AM* 4.16.

As fully man and fully God, Christ mediates election in his very person and coming. The historical and particular character of God's redemption in Christ attests to the historical and particular character of election itself.

Election and the Apostolic Ministry

Jesus' ministry reflects and embodies the electing initiative of the Father as he chooses disciples for himself, disciples who in fact belong to the Father.¹²³ This initiative directed toward Jews and Gentiles continues through the apostolic church. In this vein, Tertullian invites us to

take notice even now of the *inception and progress of his vocation to the Gentiles*, who since the last days are coming to God the Creator, that it was not addressed to proselytes, whose promotion dates rather from the earliest days. For *this faith of ours was introduced by the apostles*.¹²⁴

“Introduced” has as much to do with enactment as content in regard to the establishment of the Church and the shift of election to include the Gentiles. In their very ministry among Jews and Gentiles, the apostles carried out the economy of election in its fulfillment.

Election and Initiation

Election and predestination apply to the Church as a corporate entity and not to individuals in isolation from each other. Election is inseparable from the invitation to and the establishing of a people, a historical community. In Tertullian's words, “*He gathered together a people for Himself*, and fostered them with many liberal dispensations of his bounty, and, after so often finding them most ungrateful, ever exhorted them to repentance and sent out the voices of the universal company of the prophets to prophesy.”¹²⁵ Individuals belong to the community, but

¹²³ Following the precedent of the gospels (Mt. 10.22, Lk. 11.27, Jn. 15.15, 17.6, 17.26), Tertullian affirms that the Father was made known to those to whom the Son chose to reveal him (*AM* 4.26).

¹²⁴ Evans, *AM* 3.21.

¹²⁵ *P* 2.

they do not define the community. Rather the community is defined by God, whose redemptive movements involve the people as a whole.

Yet, as election depends on invitation and gathering, so also it presumes the response of those invited. A person may well be invited but cannot be a member of the elect unless a person responds and is gathered together with God's people. Because of this, there remains a sense of urgency with those who are invited to respond. In these latter times, this urgent call comes to the Gentiles.

Seize the opportunity of unexpected felicity: that you, who sometime were in God's sight nothing but 'a drop of a bucket,' (Isa 45.15) and 'dust of the threshing-floor,' (Dan 2.35), and 'a potter's vessel,' (Ps 2.9), may thenceforward become that 'tree which is sown beside the waters, is perennial in leaves, bears fruit at its own time,' (Ps 1), and 'shall not see fire,' (Jer 17.8, Mt. 3.10), nor 'axe' (Matt 3.10).¹²⁶

The call comes corporately to the plural "you" of the Gentiles, with the goal of their being gathered into the corporality of God's chosen people. At the same time, the urgent call applies to individuals, who have the responsibility of responding to God's invitation. It is an urgent invitation for particular persons to give themselves in faith to God and become part of God's people, making the transition from membership in the "drop in the bucket" to membership in "the tree which is sown beside the waters." In other words, one must voluntarily become part of the Church in order to participate in God's election.

For Tertullian, initiation into the Church presumes faith, consists in repentance, and climaxes in baptism. In his words, "That baptismal washing is a sealing of faith, which faith is begun and is commended by the faith of repentance...For the first baptism of a learner is this, a perfect fear...Otherwise, if it is after the baptismal waters that we cease sinning, it is of necessity, not of free-will, that we put on innocence."¹²⁷ For Tertullian, repentance, faith, free will, baptism, and initiation all go hand in hand. Baptism provides the exclusive means whereby a person may

¹²⁶ P 4.

¹²⁷ P 6.

become part of God's people, whether this happens through the baptism of water or through the confessor's baptism of blood.

Since baptism presumes the exercise of free will in faith and repentance, then joining the elect depends on our response. We do not constitute ourselves as elect; only God by grace does this, and God does this corporately. But we do, according to the gracious initiative of God's invitation, respond and come to be part of the "possession of God," marked and sealed as God's own by the gift of the Spirit in the sacrament of baptism.

Election and Boundaries

That election refers to a historical people communicates its two-sided boundary. It remains exclusive in the sense of pertaining to a particular people through history, who together exclusively live in intimate, covenant relationship God, receiving God's special care and discipline, as well as God's unique self-revelation. Though God's election in the Church includes Gentiles, this historical particularity still characterizes God's eschatological people, just as it did in the case of ancient Israel. Those Gentiles who persist in their idolatrous and immoral ways have no share in election. At the same time, the election of a people also points to its inclusive character, defined by Jesus Christ himself. For he has "extended to all men the law of His Father's compassion, excepting none from His mercy, as He omitted none in His invitation."¹²⁸ Any and all are invited to be brought into the sphere of God's election, which happens through the ecclesial process of sacramental initiation.

Election and Predestination

Tertullian *does* make use of the Scriptural terminology of predestination. Yet predestination for him does not take the individual person and his salvation as its primary referent. God's script is portrayed as unfolding on a much broader scope.

¹²⁸ AM 4.16.

*Both dispensations, therefore, emanate from that same God by whom, as we have found, they were both sketched out beforehand.*¹²⁹

God, of course...is the Lord of that very succession of times which constitutes an age; who also *ordained*, as ‘signs’ of time, suns and moons and constellations and stars; who furthermore both *predetermined and predicted that the revelation of His Son should be postponed to the end of the times.*¹³⁰

God has “sketched out” the plan involving the “dispensations” of Israel and the Church, corresponding to the existence of Old and New Covenants.¹³¹ God’s predestination pertains to the identity of the elect, corporately conceived as twin peoples of “both dispensations.” On top of this, God “predetermined” and “predicted” the time when his Son would be revealed, even orchestrating celestial events to bear witness. As we have it in Tertullian’s writings, God’s activity of predestination pertains to the unfolding of salvation-history and not to the destiny of the individual.

Furthermore, God was unwilling that the fall should happen.¹³² The fall was not predetermined or foreordained by God, as if God was that necessity by which everything is determined. If humans were created (or foreordained) for evil, there would be no true freedom and hence no true accountability. God did have foreknowledge of the fall, and in this foreknowledge made provision for the redemption of humanity, initiated in the historical election of Israel, and brought to its fulfillment in the coming of Christ and in that people born of his coming.

¹²⁹ AM 5.4.

¹³⁰ AM 4.35, quoting from Isaiah 2.2, “It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain (of the house) of the Lord shall be manifested” and Joel 3.28 as quoted in Acts 2.17, “and in the last days I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.”

¹³¹ One may speculate that Tertullian’s avoidance of discussing predestination in terms of individual destiny arises out of: 1) its absence from Scripture, understood through a fundamentally corporate orientation, and/or 2) its close affinity to the determinism of the Stoics and the arrogant self-preoccupation of the Gnostics.

¹³² AM 2.6.

Election and Conditionality

Free will forms an integral part of embracing God's invitation, and this embrace has inescapable moral ramifications. Free moral response is absolutely necessary for entry and continuance in God's elect. Tertullian believes that repentance paves the way of initiation and also that it defines the journey of the Christian life. In other words, one's ongoing identity as elect depends on living faithfully under God's discipline as embodied in the corporate life of the Church.

This gives the doctrine of election some teeth. There are real and significant consequences to our obedience and disobedience, and our way of life is indeed determinative of our destination. In this vein, Tertullian maintains that being baptized and being numbered among God's elect does not guarantee final salvation. One may spurn God's discipline and, like Esau, ultimately lose the benefits of one's heritage among the elect. Again, this happens in the context of the Church as the elect of God. Excommunication is fraught with such finality precisely because it means exclusion from God's elect.¹³³

Furthermore, God does indeed fulfill his redemptive purpose through election, but that does not in any way excuse the elect from judgment. God "bestows His blessings alike on wicked men and on His own elect," and it is on the basis of our response to these gifts that God will judge each and every person.¹³⁴ In fact, God is already at work rendering judgment in the world, though the final judgment be reserved for a certain day. God has not divided out the saved from the damned in eternity. Rather, this is what God is presently doing and will do fully on the day to come. Again, Tertullian would not deny God's foreknowledge, but he would disagree sharply with any

¹³³ This helps to explain why the membership of those who had denied Christ in persecution was such a huge issue for the Church in Tertullian's time. Readmitting such persons seemed to deny the identity and integrity of the Church as the Body of Christ. At the very least, it had to be treated as the most grievous of sins and coupled with the most stringent penance. This may offer some implications: 1) the Church persists in a state of moral compromise wherever Church discipline and excommunication are not practiced, and 2) election cannot be rightly understood or embodied by the Church without the practices of church discipline and excommunication.

¹³⁴ *To Scapula* chp. 2 in *ANF* v3.

view that God determines the destiny of an individual person in advance without regard to that person's faith or way of life.¹³⁵

This was in fact the position of Marcion when he accused the creator God of the Old Testament of being "capricious" by changing his mind and judgment. An all-knowing and all-powerful God would have no need of making one judgment and then another, because it would all be known and decided on in eternity. Tertullian maintains that God is the good and just judge of *our* world and *our* time.

If truly then you want to think God capricious concerning persons when he disapproves of those approved at another time, or improvident when he approves of once disapproved—as if his own judgment neither condemns the former things nor ignores the future things—yet [recognize that] nothing so good or just comes than [that] based on present merits, and on this basis to reject or to choose. Saul was chosen, but he had not yet despised the prophet Samuel. Solomon is rejected, but now becomes possessed by foreign women and subjected to the idols of the Moabites and Sidonians. What should [God] do so as not to be reprimanded by the Marcionites? Should [God] now condemn in advance those doing well presently on occasion of future wrongs? But of a good God it would not be fitting to condemn in advance those who are not yet meriting it. Or again, those now sinning should [God] not pardon on the occasion of former good-doings? But of a just judge it would not be fitting to give pardon to crimes, since former good deeds are now cancelled.¹³⁶

Tertullian's doctrine of election allows no assurance of salvation without a reverent commitment to obedience or a fear of condemnation without a hope founded on God's gracious and just providential actions in the course of time. The previous quotation portrays God as dynamically handling each decision and occasion in a person's life, offering judgment to the unrepentant and forgiveness to the repentant.¹³⁷ God ever governs creation with justice and goodness in tandem. This sets the stage for the unfolding of God's redemptive purpose and intent, which is the

¹³⁵ More fundamentally, without any regard to Christ and the Church. Tertullian does not portray election and predestination individualistically and so cannot be made an easy target of the anti-Pelagian critique. For it is not faith or works that constitute one as elect, but rather God, who through Christ has constituted the Church as the elect, to which we come and in which we continue through faith and in obedience to God.

¹³⁶ *AM* 2.23, translation mine.

¹³⁷ Whereas the freedom of God has been defended in terms of God's prerogative outside of time to choose some for salvation as others for reprobation, here the freedom of God is enacted in time and so communicates the sobering truth that our way of life has serious and even eternal consequences in the light of God's present and final judgment.

restoration of fallen humanity. Humans bear responsibility for our actions and will face the consequences of our way of life.

At the same time, it would not be fair to Tertullian to suggest that election entirely depends on the response of the human will or that it has its source there. Tertullian ends up articulating a very nuanced understanding of credo-baptism. “Let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ. Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the ‘remission of sins?’”¹³⁸ While he maintains that baptism is the ordained sacrament of initiation and regeneration, he still finds room to see unbaptized children as members of the family of faith. “When either of the parents was sanctified, the children could be born holy, as much from the privilege of Christian birth as from the conferring of Christian baptism.”¹³⁹ This does not mean that all infants are automatically chosen and saved by God, for “every soul is considered as having been born in Adam until it has been reborn in Christ.”¹⁴⁰ God may not have any grandchildren, but all of God’s children are part of one household, one family of faith, one body, to which even those members belong who are too young to fully understand and fully respond in faith, even prior to their baptism.

Election and Purpose

God’s providential movements are tuned to the redemption of all humanity. The repentance and salvation of Nineveh¹⁴¹ provides a clear example not only of the authenticity of human will and the just judgment of God but also of the redemptive love that God has for all creation.

Furthermore, this redemption does not happen outside of the scope of the religious practice of God’s people but rather through it. For, “from the Jews had the prophets come and to the Jews

¹³⁸ *B* 18.

¹³⁹ *Ap* 39.4.

¹⁴⁰ *Ap* 40.1.

¹⁴¹ *AM* 2.24.

they had always spoken, as to the race of God in accord with the favor shown to their Fathers.”¹⁴² The holy writings that authentically bear witness to the true and living God belong to the people and history of the Jews. The Jews were the unique recipients of the favor of God, instruments of God’s purpose of blessing, revelation, and redemption to the nations. God’s people not only pointed to the true God but also “laid down” the way in which that God “is to be believed and worshipped.”¹⁴³ The people of God, including the institutions that gave shape to its corporate life, stood as the mediator of the knowledge of God to the rest of the world, both in the case of Israel and the Church. Because this redemption takes place in life and is inherently moral it comes through the provision of the law and the discipline of the community along with the proclamation of the Gospel.¹⁴⁴ Our free will is all for naught unless life is “spent under the discipline of God, which alone at last teaches men the proper liberty of their will and action in faith, as in the fear of God.”¹⁴⁵

Out of this background, Tertullian asserts that the nations do not in fact know God. The true God remains to the Gentiles the “Unknown God” of which Paul speaks. This God has not been inactive, even in the history of the Romans.¹⁴⁶ Yet God is known in a unique and exclusive way through the witness of God’s chosen people. In some places, Tertullian notes, the Scriptures deny

¹⁴² *Ap* 18.6. Cf. also *Ap* 21.4, “At all times the Jews were in the midst of the grace of God, even in that remarkable justice and fidelity of the original founders. Wherefore, for them flourished a race with greatness and an exalted kingdom and such blessings, so that (they were attended) by the voices of God, by whom they were taught, regarding which they were forewarned about being deserving of God and not offending God” (translation mine).

¹⁴³ *Ap* 23.11.

¹⁴⁴ While certainly representative of legalist tendencies, Tertullian does perform the service of upholding the goodness of God’s law, remaining close in this way to the fullness of the Jewish-Christian heritage. While there seem to be some shining stars in Christian history, like Calvin, who manage to hold together the grace of God and the importance of the law, they are few in number. Perhaps Tertullian merits a place in this group. That is not to say that his rigid views did not have detrimental effects, such as the influence of his “severely practical” view of unity on the later split between “Catholic” and North African Donatist Christianity in the days of Augustine himself. Cf. Gerald Lewis Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God: Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 96.

¹⁴⁵ *AM* 4.16.

¹⁴⁶ Tertullian’s various descriptions of the presence of the *Logos* in Roman history and society both in *Against Praxeas* and *To Scapula* speak of this.

that even God's own people know God.¹⁴⁷ This is certainly not the norm for God's people but rather indicates a breach or turning away from the requirements of covenant relationship with God. God's purpose in election remains ever steadfast, aimed at revelation and redemption extending to all people through the agency of a chosen people.

Election, Israel and the Church

While election remains ever sure, there is a decisive end to God's covenant with the Jews. The previous arrangement has been fulfilled, surpassed, and supplanted by God's new arrangement in the Messiah. Tertullian speaks of this in a variety of ways, pointing to a "new testament" or "covenant" and to its Lord who is the "priest of new sacrifices," the "purger of a new circumcision," the "observer of the eternal Sabbath," the "announcer of God's new and incorruptible kingdom," and the "eternal ruler of the eternal kingdom."¹⁴⁸ Prior to this stack of wonders, Tertullian identifies the impermanence of various aspects of Judaism, e.g. its sacrificial system or temple worship, the exclusivity of its claim to the law, etc. God's new covenant and reconstituted people, with its true worship, its new law, and its new lawgiver, fulfill these incomplete aspects of Judaism.

With the transition in election has come a role-reversal in regard to the nation of Israel and the Church. Again we turn to *Against the Jews*.

Therefore, although his own people, the race of the Jews, would be prior in time and greater through the grace of the prime dignity in the law, ours was considered the lesser according to the age of time. But finally, in the last interim of the age fitted for the knowledge of the divine compassion, far from the doubt following the edict of divine expression previously that for the greater people, which is Judaism, it was necessary to endure as the lesser, while the lesser people, which is Christianity, would ascend to be the greater. For even following the divine Scriptures of memory, the people of the Jews, which is older, being forsaken by God, abandoned itself to idols, and being divinely forsaken it was

¹⁴⁷ If God's own people on certain occasions did "not know him," then how evident it is that the nations have not known the true and living God, deduces Tertullian.

¹⁴⁸ *AJ* 6.

dedicated to images...Therefore even the lesser people, which is the later, ascended to be the greater people, while the grace of divine dignity followed, from which Israel is repudiated.¹⁴⁹

Not only were the Jews prior in time but also in dignity, as recipients of the divine favor encapsulated in the law-giving. But now the situation has turned upside-down. The lesser has become the greater, having received God's special favor given to the chosen people. Esau and Jacob provide the metaphor for understanding the role-reversal. The one has despised the birthright. The other through the zeal of faith has come to inherit the blessing.

Tertullian here gives a precarious rendering of the history of Israel. The alleged idolatry apparently refers to recent history and not to the time preceding the exile. Perhaps idolatry implied not receiving the image of God as it had come in Christ, but that is to speculate. However problematic the historical facts, Tertullian avers that the Jewish people have been "forsaken" and "repudiated" by God, apparently because of their rejection of God in Christ.¹⁵⁰ As for Irenaeus, this does not apply to every last Jew. The Jewish people have been rejected insofar as they reject their own birthright in the rejection of their true founder and king. Tertullian was not merely setting up a caricature of the Jews to tear down. His dialogue *Against the Jews* points to a real and ongoing debate in the background.¹⁵¹ Efforts are made to customize the literature to be actually persuasive, e.g. he uses the term "Christ" not as a proper name but rather as a Jewish title.¹⁵² Thereafter, he rhetorically questions the Jewish conversational partner about whether the coming of the Messiah refers to a past event or a future hope.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ *AJ* 1.5-6,8, translation mine.

¹⁵⁰ Jean Daniélou notes how Tertullian and much of early Latin Christianity remained connected to Jewish-Christianity in the West, while yet eventually departing sharply from it. The pseudo-Cyprian *Adversus Iudaeos*, which Daniélou dates in the second century, for instance, departed sharply from the decidedly positive Jewish sentiments of *V Esdras* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Cf. Jean Daniélou, *The Origins of Latin Christianity*, John Austin Baker, ed. David Smith and John Austin Baker, trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 25.

¹⁵¹ Simon, *Verus Israel*, 140.

¹⁵² *AJ* chp. 7.

¹⁵³ That the Jews of Jesus' time understood their fellow Jew as a "perverter and overthrower of Judaism" (*AM* 3.6) points to the Jewish rejection of their Messiah.

Marcion, as mentioned above, sought to separate Christianity entirely from Judaism. Tertullian defends the fundamental continuity between Christianity and Judaism by means of election, that Christianity stands in the lineage of God's choosing of Israel. That election has shifted from Israel to the Church, then, actually argues for this continuity. Tertullian leverages Paul's letter to the Ephesians to this end, defending the unity of the God of Jews and Christians and the unity of the election of Jews and Christians all in one piece.

Without what God and without what Christ were these Gentiles? Surely, *without Him to whom the commonwealth of Israel belonged, and the covenants and the promise...*so now in Christ the Gentiles have been made nigh to these blessings, *brought so very nigh to the commonwealth of Israel, which comprises the religion of the divine Creator, and to the covenants and the promise, yea to their very God Himself...*So now 'he is our peace, who has made the two one'—that is, *the Jewish nation and the Gentile world.*¹⁵⁴

Though there may be two covenants, it also needs to be maintained that from the One God has come but one faith, one religion, one election, inclusive of both Jews and Gentiles, and in a historical perspective, inclusive of both ancient Israel and the eschatological Israel of the Church. That election has shifted does not mean that the Jews are rejected from the election and covenants of God,¹⁵⁵ but rather that election is no longer defined by an ethnic identity or nationality. Election belongs to the eschatological ethnicity and nationality of the Church, a citizenship that transcends nations and languages, into which all may come who pledge themselves in faith to its Head. This argues that any understanding of election must come to terms with the fundamental continuity between ancient Israel and the Church and that any attempt to bifurcate them ends ultimately in heresy.

Election and Nationality

In the face of persecution in Roman society, Tertullian sets out to defend the Christian faith and the Church.¹⁵⁶ He does not defend the Christian faith as a legitimate member among the various

¹⁵⁴ *AM* 5.17.

¹⁵⁵ As Paul so staunchly maintains in Romans 9-11.

¹⁵⁶ Indeed, one cannot truly defend the faith without also defending the Church. Because Christianity is inherently public truth and not a privatized (Gnostic) form of self-medication or self-

Roman cults or philosophies, but as that chosen Body consisting of the worshippers of the One True God.¹⁵⁷ That is, he does not squeeze the Christian faith into a social religion of the Empire but commends the faith as that which condemns every other antithetical form of religion as false and blasphemous. While Rome and its Emperor thought of themselves as a divinely favored people in human history, Tertullian denies and disproves this by the very fact that Christians, as followers of the true God, are persecuted in this society. It is the Church, that most ancient of societies, with roots extending back to the patriarchs of the Jews, who constitute the chosen people of God. While Rome presumed to have the market cornered on rationality, symbolized in the “genius” of the Emperor, Tertullian continued Justin Martyr’s defense of Christ as the true Logos of God, rationality incarnate, with the Church as those who represent the true rationality.¹⁵⁸

From the perspective of Graeco-Roman culture, there was something disturbing about the Christian religion. First, it had very recent origins in history, and anything new could not be true. Second, it had a tenuous relationship with the communities of the Jewish Diaspora, both identifying with this religious oddity and disassociating itself from it. The Jews certainly had their share of persecution and misunderstanding over the course of Roman history. Though official tolerance had been extended to Judaism, this connection still left Christianity in jeopardy of similar kinds of persecution and misunderstanding. Third, its followers made exclusive sounding claims to the truth and kept themselves from participation in the religions and philosophies that comprised the cells so integral to the functioning of the corpus of the *res publica*.

salvation, the Church must always stand at the center of one’s exposition and defense of the Christian faith. Times of persecution seem to bring out this connection most clearly.

¹⁵⁷ *Ap* 21.6-7. “The holy voices which warned them of this fate all insisted always on the same points: that the day would come in the last cycles of time when God would select for Himself worshippers from every race and people and place—worshippers much more faithful, to whom He would transfer His favor in fuller measure because they were receptive of a fuller doctrine. Consequently, there came the One whom God had foretold would come to renew and shed light upon that doctrine; namely, Christ, the Son of God. It was proclaimed beforehand that the Lord and Master of this grace and doctrine, the Enlightener and Guide of the human race, would be the Son of God.” The Church follows in and fulfills the vocation of Israel in this. It all belongs to one continuous line of God’s choosing of a particular people, for “It was the creator who long ago shut up against the Gentiles that door at which the Jews long ago were knocking” (*AM* 4.26).

¹⁵⁸ *Ap* 21.10.

One of the most popular insults for Christianity that summed up these tensions was “the third race.” The Romans, obviously, comprised the first, Jews the second, and now Christians the third. “Third race” points the finger at Christianity as the newcomer on the religious scene. It also signified that Christianity had earned itself the place of a cultural oddity akin to Judaism, since Judaism itself as the “second race” had never quite fitted into the Empire.¹⁵⁹ Finally, to assign the name of “race” to Christianity’s followers while they lived in the Roman Empire hints at the sense of exclusivity exuding from their fellowship, which goes hand in hand with their identification with Judaism.¹⁶⁰

In his *De Nationes*, Tertullian presumes this disparaging title as a commonplace.¹⁶¹ As an expert debater, he does not disown the title wholly but turns it to his purpose. At first he makes a quick, stinging jab at the conventions of the culture. He asks, “What about the eunuchs who are so readily accepted in Roman society? Are they not a third race, neither male nor female?”¹⁶² Then he prepares to unleash in earnest.

First, Christianity has precedent and rootage in history surpassing that of the Empire itself. Tertullian even goes so far as to offer a counterpart Roman genealogy that stretches back to the time of the patriarchs of all the nations and details how the people of Israel came from the twelve sons of the patriarch Jacob.¹⁶³ Christian history spans the entire history of the people of Israel and fulfills that history in itself. It is not “third” in order of occurrence but “first,” first on the scene and truly also the first in rank.¹⁶⁴ This points to Christianity’s fundamental identity as the

¹⁵⁹ AN 1.9.

¹⁶⁰ Romans have room in their religious conceptuality for a third category, mythic, and gods of foreigners, into which the Christian God fits. Cf. AN 2.9.

¹⁶¹ AN 1.16.

¹⁶² To paraphrase AN 1.20.

¹⁶³ AN 2.9. This was to communicate that God’s election of a people spanned as far back as any Roman account and also that the Roman people even then were witnesses that God had chosen the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

¹⁶⁴ AN 1.8, “Take care, however, lest those whom you call the third race should obtain the first rank, since there is no nation indeed which is not Christian. Whatever nation, therefore, was the first, is

people through whom God would bring about God's redemptive and revelatory purpose in the world. In this, Christianity predates creation itself, so to speak.

Second, the tie to Judaism is not something to be denied simply on account of the potential for misunderstanding and even persecution. Rather, it has a prized place at the core of the Christian self-identity as God's chosen people. In this sense, Christianity is indeed a "third race," following in the lineage of promise and blessing that extends back to Abraham himself. This reaches its fulfillment in Christ, who brings the full revelation of God and deposits it through the apostles in the Church as the eschatological temple of God,¹⁶⁵ the Body of Christ.

Third, like the Jews, Christians may have seemed peculiarly exclusive in their corporate life and beliefs. Tertullian clarifies the criticism here, for Christianity is not being accused of being a nation like the Jews were.¹⁶⁶ They are not a nation, and so neither a political threat, in the way that the Romans conceived of the nation of Israel. Christians are not attempting to establish or defend a rebel state within the Empire. Yet he also asserts that there is "no nation that is not Christian," apparently because of the presence of Christians among all nations.¹⁶⁷ Perhaps it came out of Tertullian's conviction that election had been extended to the Gentiles, evidenced by the membership being drawn from among these nations. It certainly did not imply that any nation belonging to this *saeculum* served a unique role as the chosen people of God.

nevertheless Christian now. It is ridiculous folly which makes you say we are the latest race, and then specifically call us the third." The "no nation" assertion seems to refer to the presence of Christians in all the nations of the world. "Beware" seemingly means here to beware lest the Christian religion come to gain widespread recognition and prominence. Yet again, it may also refer to the eschatological reversal, when the nations of the world would be brought low, while God's people would be exalted.

¹⁶⁵ In this way the Church fulfills one among various incomplete aspects of Israel (*AJ* 6).

¹⁶⁶ *AN* 1.8, "But it is in respect of our religion, not of our nation, that we are supposed to be the third." Here Tertullian denies Christianity's existence as a nation to counter the sense of Christianity as a political danger. But elsewhere it is customary for Tertullian to speak of Christianity as a nation in terms of its corporate identity as the fulfillment of the nation of Israel.

¹⁶⁷ *AN* 2.8.

Election and Ethics

While the identity of God's people remains distinct from Rome, the truth is that Christians number among the most devoted supporters of the Empire. Christians render the most effectual service possible by making prayers on behalf of the Emperor, senate, country, and indeed, even for their enemies.¹⁶⁸ The Empire may target Christians as the enemy, but Christians do not therefore make the Empire their target, as if they were looking for a kingdom in this world.¹⁶⁹ No, quite the contrary. For the Church "knows that she plays the role of an alien on earth, that among strangers she readily discovers enemies, but she has her origin, abode, hope, recompense, and honor in heaven."¹⁷⁰ Like Israel in the Babylonian exile, the Church has no lasting home in this Empire and this age. For Tertullian, this implied election. For he knew as well as any Jew that you cannot be an exilic people unless you are first of all a chosen people.

Election and Mission

One of Tertullian's contributions, and certainly one that was developed in part by Irenaeus, is the missionary thrust of the doctrine of election. It is used in conversation with the heretics, the Jews, and the Romans. For both the heretics and the Romans, it highlights the fundamental continuity that exists between ancient Israel and the Church as comprising the One Chosen People of the One True God. It is a word of conviction to the Romans who think themselves a divinely favored people with a divinely orchestrated history. For the Jews, it identifies a common history and identity as those chosen by God for the purpose of God's revelation and redemption to the nations. Yet against this background, it makes the appeal that the fulfillment has come in Christ, that the Church embodies the fulfillment of God's purpose and revelation in the kingdom, and

¹⁶⁸ *Ap* 31.2.

¹⁶⁹ No, the kingdom Christians are looking for was established by God through the man who hung on a tree, from whom God's invitation went forth to "all nations." Cf. *AM* 3.21. "Nor is there aught more entirely foreign to us than affairs of state. We acknowledge one all-embracing commonwealth, the world" (*Ap* 38).

¹⁷⁰ *Ap* 1.2. So begins the work with a stark affirmation of the Church as the chosen and exilic people of God.

that unbelieving Jews should be reconciled to God and to their newfound brothers in the faith of Abraham.

Conclusion

Between Irenaeus and Tertullian stands a great deal of commonality in regard to the doctrine of election and predestination. He pictures election within a framework that proves corporate, historical, eschatological, and covenantal. It fully acknowledges the election of Israel, yet points to the Church as the continuation of that election under the kingship of Christ. Election sets the Church apart from the Empire and its myriad religions as a distinct people representing the worship of the Only True God. A profound level of consistency appears among at least two of the early Fathers of the Church.

Chapter 4. Origen

Argument

For the most part, Origen offers the same portrayal of election as did Irenaeus and Tertullian. Election refers to God's activity as happening within a corporate, historical, ecclesial and eschatological sphere, neither equated with individual destiny nor threatening human free will. Historically, both Israel and the Church stand as God's chosen people, and the eschatological shift in the coming of Christ implies that election now belongs to the Church rather than ethnic Israel. Election distinguishes the identity of the Church religiously and politically from the nations in which it lives.

Introduction

By Origen's time, cultural opposition to Christianity, both from within and without, had a history. In the background of Origen's Christology, we can hear Tertullian's confrontation with Praxeas. Behind his defense of the unity of the Scriptures, we hear Irenaeus' critique of the Marcionite heresy. Finally, behind his defense of free will, we hear the now traditional defense against the influence of Stoic philosophy.

In some ways in Origen's time, this history was reaching new heights. Representing Roman religion and culture, Celsus leveled perhaps the most thorough intellectual criticism of the Christian faith, and the Jewish faith as well, that the world had seen to date. This pretender of a religion was not only a novelty but also a potential threat to Roman culture and society, particularly in its exclusive claim to know and worship the only true God. Origen stood in a great tradition of upholding the Christian faith, and he assumed the responsibility of defending it against the most forceful assaults of his day.

Origen's life and teaching in Alexandria, and later in Palestine, also point to some major contextual factors. In keeping with the influence of Philo, Origen sculpted his method of Scriptural interpretation, making allegory a part of the movement of interpretation from the literal to the spiritual and on to the ethical significance. Yet Philo stands as just one representative of the living tradition of Judaism to which Origen was exposed. Origen learned to read Hebrew from a Jewish teacher, while also taking in traditional Jewish interpretations and methods of exegesis. He likely had contact with Jews in Alexandria, where the Jewish community was growing anew in population and influence after a time of severe persecution.¹⁷¹ This contact increased with the move to Caesarea, Palestine, which was both a stronghold of Christianity, with a bishop's seat and theological school, and an important center of rabbinic learning.¹⁷² Additionally, Origen had personal knowledge of Jewish converts to Christianity as well as Jewish Christian groups like the Ebionites.

Election and Time

Even in his understanding of time, the complexity of Origen's relationship with Graeco-Roman thought begins to appear. Following Plato, Origen conceived of creation first and foremost as non-material, which had the effect of turning the future into an abstraction. Some elements of a cyclical conceptuality surfaced in his speculations about the future of God with God's creation. Even after the consummation, there remained the possibility that God's creatures would turn from God. What this potentially leads to is a vision of the future as a repetitive cycle of the movements of rebellion and redemption.¹⁷³ At the same time, these conceptions arose out of the concern to provide an alternative to the determinism of the Stoics, in which the human will was a non-entity in the light of fate and destiny.

¹⁷¹ N. R. M. DeLange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-century Palestine* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1976), 9.

¹⁷² Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: a Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425)*, H. McKeating, trans (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), 198.

¹⁷³ Henri Crouzel, "Christian Platonism in Origen and Augustine," *Origeniana Tertia: The Third International Colloquium for Origen Studies* (Visigalli-Pasetti, Arti Grafiche: Roma, 1985), 224.

What prevented Origen from buying completely into Graeco-Roman philosophical conceptions of time and history was his thoroughgoing conviction that the transcendent God was in the business of visiting this world. God's visitation gave shape and significance to time and history. This happened fully in the advent of the incarnate Word, but it had been going on from the beginning of creation, which happened through the Word. This Word also called into existence a people of promise and walked among them, which is why their prophets could say, "Thus says the Lord." Time was the sphere of God's revelatory activity and the locus of God's visitation. This, among other considerations, led Origen to conceive of time as linear, a succession of moments and ages, which implies the meaningfulness of human decisions as well as history itself.

Given this complex conceptuality of time, did Origen understand election as fundamentally temporal or repetitive? Both. Election pertains to God's dealings with a particular people in time and history, which continues indefinitely. By the same token, since human freedom, like time itself, extends indefinitely, the membership of God's elect may change indefinitely as well.

Election and the Calling of the Gentiles

Reading with lenses of promise and fulfillment, and drawing on the interpretative tools of typology and allegory, Origen sees Christ and the Church written large across the entire face of the Old Testament. Even in the accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, Origen sees the promises of the Jewish Scriptures being fulfilled. One intriguing and lengthy passage offers a superb doorway into the complexity of Origen's thought on the fulfillment of election, which will be divided here into three sections.

And when he departed from there (now I mean from the Jews), he entered the country near the desert of which it is said, 'Many are the children of the desolate, more than of her who has a husband, to whom it is also said, 'Rejoice, O barren one, who does not give birth; sing forth and shout, you who do not suffer birth pangs.' The city near the desert, which Jesus entered when he no longer walked boldly among the Jews, is Ephraim.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ *CJ* 28.211.

As Jesus walked outside of the borders of Judah, he was bringing about the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah's words.¹⁷⁵ His travels into the "desert" of Ephraim and beyond symbolized the day of God's blessing coming upon the forsaken people of these lands. By departing from the Jews and entering the lands of the half-breeds and the other Gentiles, and bringing these people the good news of the kingdom, Jesus was bringing God's election to its fulfillment. The day had finally dawned when all nations would know the fruits of God's blessing to Abraham.

For after the people from 'forgetfulness' were left behind has come the 'fruitfulness' of the Gentiles, when God turned the rivers in Israel into desert, and the springs of water there into thirst, and their fruitful land into waste, on account of the evils of those who were living in it. But the desert of the Gentiles [God] turned into pools of water and their waterless land into springs of water. And [God] there *established those who hungered, and they founded a city for a habitation, the Church*. From here God sowed fields, according to the seed which fell upon the clean and good earth, producing a hundredfold, and God planted vineyards. For the Lord's disciples are branches, who also produced the fruit of harvest. And God blessed them and they were multiplied exceedingly.¹⁷⁶

Here Origen describes the eschatological role reversal between Judaism and the Christian Church, couched in the imagery and prophecy of Psalm 106, and also drawing on imagery from the Gospels. "Forgetfulness" refers to the significance of the name Manasseh, while Ephraim signifies "fruitfulness."¹⁷⁷ The reversal of expected blessing in the lives of these twins plays out on the stage of human history between ethnic Israel and the eschatological Israel.

[God then] helped the poor people from the Gentiles out of poverty, and he *established his family* like a flock of sheep whom the upright angels will see and rejoice at, and all iniquity shall stop her mouth' (Ps 106.41-42). 'Jesus,' therefore, 'no longer walks openly among the Jews, but has departed from there into the country' of the whole world, 'near the desert' of the Church, 'into the city which is called Ephraim,' that is, 'fruitful,' 'and there he has remained with his disciples.' And to this moment, Jesus is with his disciples near the desert in the city called Ephraim, for he is present in 'fruitfulness.'¹⁷⁸

Jesus' movement from the Jews into "the country of the whole world," and his assistance offered to the Gentiles when he "established his family," point to the fulfillment of election. Election

¹⁷⁵ Isa. 54.1.

¹⁷⁶ *CJ* 28.212-215, translation mine.

¹⁷⁷ The "barren one" may point back to Rachel, the mother of Joseph, the Father of Ephraim, who here represents the late-born Gentiles as recipients of the promise.

¹⁷⁸ *CJ* 28.211-222.

now belongs not merely to the Jewish people but to all who would follow the original and eschatological patriarch of God's people.

To make a few summary observations: 1) the fulfillment of election bleeds through the canvas of the poetic imagery of the prophetic literature; 2) the transition of election to include the Gentiles signifies the dawning of its fulfillment; 3) this fulfillment happens in and through the advent of God's Messiah; 4) election refers directly to the Church as that corporate people and family "established" by God; 5) finally, the erection of this city and the cultivation of this vineyard involves the employment of the first disciples, who lay an "expert foundation" for the city and bring forth "the fruit of harvest." The brushstrokes of this passage are set against the dominant relief of an understanding of election that is Christological, eschatological, corporate and historical.

Election and History

For Origen, election belonged to a historical people and reached its fulfillment in the eschatological advent of Christ and establishment of the Church. In this, he portrays election as fundamentally historical. Additionally, the very unfolding of history after the coming of Christ served as a demonstration of the fulfillment of election. This has two sides: 1) the devastation and affliction that the Jewish nation and people faced as a result of rejecting their Messiah, and 2) the obviously divine blessing accompanying the ministry of the Church in days subsequent.¹⁷⁹

Election and Christ

To the previously quoted passage we must add a few more to outline the way that Origen describes election as fulfilled by Christ and carried out by the apostolic ministry. Referring to Israel's benediction of his fourth-born son in Gen. 49.10, that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him, and the obedience of

¹⁷⁹ CC 7.26, 8.69.

the peoples is his,” Origen states, “This seems plainly to have been fulfilled in the multitude of those who from different Gentile nations have through Christ believed in God.” Christ brings God’s election of a people to fulfillment by extending the scepter of God’s reign to the nations. The “expectation of the nations” to be included in God’s people was and is “in Christ,” by Origen’s estimation.¹⁸⁰ Christ’s role in election does not take place outside of history but has everything to do with the historical-particularity of his person. In his lineage and in his ministry that pressed beyond the boundaries of ethnic Israel, he brought election to its fulfillment.

Election and the Apostolic Ministry

Origen envisioned the fulfillment of election to include the Gentiles as a single event, consisting both in the advent of Christ and in the establishment of the Church through the apostolic ministry. Hence, God “chose” a “foolish nation” “through the advent of Christ Jesus and his disciples.”¹⁸¹ Taken in the historical sense of reference to the historical inception of the Church as God’s chosen people, this makes perfect sense. The disciples are key players in God’s economy, and yet the whole thing hinges on Christ for its occurrence and significance.¹⁸² Again, the historical role of Christ, as well as the apostles, in election testifies to its fundamentally historical character.

Election and Initiation

What does Origen believe about the election of persons as individuals and how individuals come to be part of God’s elect? That Origen’s doctrine of election is conceived in a corporate and historical sense as referring to Israel and the Church suggests that one comes to be numbered

¹⁸⁰ *FP* 4.1.3.

¹⁸¹ *FP* 4.1.4.

¹⁸² Indeed, Christ is first of all the manifestation of the glory of God. And as the one in whom “dwells all the fullness of the deity,” Christ shares this glory with the Church that he established in his advent. The coming of God’s glory to dwell among men is a permanent and irreversible event in the divine economy. And so before Origen speaks of the Church as the “temple” and “dwelling” place of the “glory” of God, he must refer this first of all to Christ. “(S)o the first born of all creation, being the image and the glory of God, is properly said to be the temple bearing the image of God in respect to his body or the Church” (Origen *CJ* 10.264).

among the elect through the vehicles of evangelism, response, and initiation climaxing in baptism. One continues among the elect by persisting in faithful obedience. Origen's extensively developed defense of the authentic role of human free will in salvation also lends support to this conclusion.

Election and Boundaries

As did Irenaeus and Tertullian, Origen pictured election as simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. As we will see below, Origen vigorously defended the historical particularity of Judaism as the chosen recipients of God's favor and revelation, which continues in the Church. Election confirms the unique identity of a people through history, excluding other groups, like the Roman Empire, from this membership. At the same time, election remains thoroughly inclusive in its membership, since it belongs to a historical people into which people may voluntarily be incorporated through the process of initiation.

Election and Predestination

Election, therefore, comes as a gift to the individual and has its true and ultimate source in God as the one who constitutes the Church as elect. This is a far cry from maintaining that God predestines and predetermines persons as isolated individuals for salvation or reprobation. Origen heard sentiments similar to these his own time, and they struck his ears as decidedly Gnostic and Stoic in orientation.¹⁸³ That they were such did not prevent them from infiltrating the Church, particularly in the interpretations forwarded by Heracleon of the school of Valentinus.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Cf. quotation and argument below.

¹⁸⁴ Heracleon, according to Origen, was "a pupil of Valentinus," and according to Clement of Alexandria, the most famous of the Valentinian school. Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus connect "him with the Ptolemaeus and the Italian branch of the school of Valentinianism" (Heine, Origen's *CJ*, intro par 38).

When commenting on the fourth chapter of John's gospel, Origen spends considerable time refuting the opinions of Heracleon on the very topic of election. Heracleon interpreted the Samaritan woman who came "out of the city" as an allegory of "the incorruptible nature of the Elect which is simple and single."¹⁸⁵ This one woman was apparently drawn out of the city and to Christ by virtue of the "nature" that God had created in her. She was destined to come to the One who had implanted this nature within her. If election is by nature, it is both unavoidable and unchangeable. Conversely, election by nature implies that God did not create this same nature in everyone.¹⁸⁶ There are apparently persons tucked among the nations who are handpicked by God for enlightenment and salvation, while the rest live in inescapable darkness.

In response to this overtly Gnostic and potentially Stoic understanding of the elect, Origen goes back to the concrete historical identity of all persons as the "scattered children of God."¹⁸⁷ Origen admits that the Gentiles, as part of the "scattered children of God," can be described as "the spiritual," not in the sense of those who are already spiritual by the fact of an implanted nature, but in the sense of those who have been and will come to be numbered among "the spiritual." In other words, "the spiritual" is a corporate reference and not a reference to individuals conceived in isolation from the Church as the people of God. If one goes back to the baptismal theology characteristic of Origen's day, baptism denoted the moment of enlightenment in that the Spirit was given as a person came into the Church. To be "spiritual" was to be baptized into the Church as the fellowship and abode of the Spirit, signified in the chrismation of the new Christian.

¹⁸⁵ *CJ* 28.179-183.

¹⁸⁶ Origen very expressly disagrees with those who "think there are natures" (*CJ* 28.179).

¹⁸⁷ *CJ* 28.179-185. This is the thrust of these paragraphs. One place that seems to support this view, but can be quite puzzling, is: "See if you can conceive of the scattered children of God who are other than the nation as those who were already righteous in God when these words were spoken, being either the patriarchs, or the prophets, or some other elect people of God who had previously died, or even those who were already healthy at that time" (28.183). Owing to its length and complexity, this sentence can be read in a variety of ways. "Healthy" seems to refer to living people in general, and not to a spiritual category. In the light of the passage about the Samaritans coming to Christ and of Origen's intent elsewhere to defend Gentiles in general as the "scattered children of God," this seems to be a rhetorical statement that prompts us to acknowledge that the Samaritans together (and not just the one woman) are symbolic of all people as being part of the scattered children of God. Origen speaks specifically and directly of the Gentiles as the "scattered children of God" several times here, drawing on Jn. 11.51-52, that Jesus died not only for the nation, "but also to gather together in one the scattered children of God."

Origen did not develop a positive understanding of predestination itself. Each time that he came across the idea that individual destinies were predetermined, whether by God or by our sins,¹⁸⁸ he rejected it. Against this Stoic-sounding assertion of the fate of all things, he issued a defense of free will. Though he does not seem to speak of predestination positively, he certainly affirmed that the election of Israel and the Church pertained to the providential plan of God for humanity and all creation.¹⁸⁹ Speaking of providence in favor of predestination in effect upheld the conditionality of history and human existence itself.

Election and Conditionality

The status of an individual as elect depends in part on the decision of that person, not that person conceived as a disconnected center of volition but the person as the willing recipient of the saving initiatives of God, embodied in the life of the Church.¹⁹⁰ By the same token, given the freedom of the human will, some within the Church may deny and ultimately forfeit their standing among the elect, which presumably takes effect in the practice of excommunication, but this does not deny that they once did number among the elect. Conversely, those who were once “children of wrath,” like the zealous young Rabbi of Tarsus, can forsake their evil ways and come to stand among the fellowship of the Messiah and even become an apostle.¹⁹¹ Origen thus distinguishes

¹⁸⁸ Constantine N. Tsirpanlis, “Origen on Free Will, Grace, Predestination, Apocatastasis, and their Ecclesiological Implications,” *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 9.23 (1990), 110.

¹⁸⁹ In *CC* 7.26, God’s providence brings an end to the “practices of the Jews.” In relation to individuals, providence refers to the operating principle of “impartial retribution” established by God for the cosmos (*FP* 2.9.8). This providential judgment happens to souls even prior to their embodiment. Yet it does not determine the choice or destiny of those souls but only renders judgment “corresponding to the variation in their movements and the fixed purpose of their minds” (*FP* 2.9.6). The human will alone is to blame for its own ruin (*FP* 3.1.17).

¹⁹⁰ The role of God’s grace in salvation will be discussed in more detail in the following sections on human free will.

¹⁹¹ He speaks of the apostle Paul in this fashion in *CJ* 20.290. Origen does not at this point discuss election in terms of God’s handpicking of certain persons to carry out the apostolic ministry of the Church. Presumably that election expresses and is predicated upon the corporate election of the Church, the body of Christ, in which the calling of persons to specific vocations takes place through the gifts of spiritual discernment and sending. This does not deny that God by the Spirit calls persons in special and particular ways, but rather that this does not take place outside of the life of the Church as the corporate elect of God, which would be as true of the NT as it was in the OT.

election from salvation. Salvation comes as the fruit of faithful participation in election, but election is not equated with nor does it guarantee final salvation.

Behind Origen's disgust with any concept of elect natures stood his conviction of the essential equality of all persons. Simply put, God "created all his creatures equal and alike, for the simple reason that there was in him no cause that could give rise to variety and diversity."¹⁹² The variety and diversity that we find in creation, therefore, is owing to the exercise of the free will given by God to rational creatures, even before these creatures ever existed physically.¹⁹³ Origen followed the Platonic line of thinking that souls, human or otherwise, pre-exist physical bodies. The decisions that "we" make as spiritual beings before "we" ever come into this world affect the created order and even the conditions in which we are born, e.g. whether into a family of Christians or in a country where people have never heard the Gospel.

This speculation arose out of Origen's concern to maintain both the justice of God and the responsibility of human beings. How could a just God allow certain people to live where the Gospel had never been preached while others reaped its benefits from birth? Somewhere the playing field had to be level, if not in the physical world then in the world of the pre-existence of the soul. Therefore, if people were born into a diversity of situations, it had to be because of decisions that they had made before they were ever born.

While this melding of Platonic and Christian concerns does not sit well today, it should be remembered that Origen was attempting to carry out a defense of the Christian faith against Stoicism and that he offered this speculation as a hypothesis.¹⁹⁴ To construe the world as essentially deterministic implied both that human free will was a farce and that even evil owed its existence to God. For the Stoics, the goodness of God is beside the point. For Jews and

¹⁹² *FP* 2.9.6. One presumes that Origen is speaking here of humans and possibly angels as rational beings and not about God's other creatures.

¹⁹³ "For the soul always possesses free will, both when in the body and when out of the body; and the will's freedom always moves in the direction either of good or of evil" (*FP* 3.3.5).

¹⁹⁴ The thesis advisor, T. A. Noble, alerted me to this.

Christians, on the other hand, the goodness of God is precisely the point. Origen seeks to defend the goodness of God by stressing the responsibility of God's creatures for evil, even prior to physical existence.¹⁹⁵ To maintain that certain isolated individuals are effectively predestined to salvation or reprobation before they ever make a movement toward good or evil would be to trade the benevolent God of the Scriptures for one cast in the Stoic mold of ultimate indifference.

At the end, Origen's zealous defense of free will comes full circle. Where he started with a dilemma, here he concludes with another dilemma. Because the human and divine will exist side by side, one never eclipsing the other, the future of creation to some degree remains unclear. He does not deny that Christ will come again and that God "will be all in all." Rather, he theorizes that in the age to come, humans will continue to have an authentically free will, so that it would remain a possibility for a person to fall from grace even then.

Before Origen can be falsely and anachronistically labeled as Pelagian,¹⁹⁶ the central features of his doctrine of election must be recalled. For all of his attention to the human will, Origen never states nor implies that the election of the Church depends on the choice of one or several individuals. God alone brings about the election of the Church, and God does this through the advent of Jesus Christ and of the Spirit on the followers of Christ. In other words, God alone effects election in that God alone constitutes the Church. A person may come to live among God's elect in part due to that person's choice, but this choice rests on the fact that God has

¹⁹⁵ If one attributes physical disasters and diseases to evil and concedes that these aspects of creation were present before human beings ever came on the scene, Origen's solution seems like a pretty decent option.

¹⁹⁶ Origen upholds salvation as having its source completely and solely in the gracious initiative of God. The following succession of affirmations of God's grace comes in but one section of the *De Principiis* (3.19). "So also in the journey of our life it is we who must expend labor and zeal and supply diligent toil, but the salvation which is the fruit of our labor we must look to receive from God." He likens the situation to a ship being saved from disaster. Everyone onboard plays a part in making it safely home, but no one would refrain from attributing his or her survival to the hand of God. Likewise, the farmer labors in the field, but it is God who causes the plant to blossom and bear fruit unto eternal life. The perfection that God provides for in this world similarly "is not effected while we rest and do nothing, nor on the other hand is its completion to be attributed to us, but rather to God, who performs the greater part of it." So also the "poor in heart" should, "when they reach perfection remember that they have obtained their blessedness not so much by their own virtues as by the grace and mercy of God." God alone is deserving of the credit and praise for the fruit of salvation in our lives; though it requires our willing and active response, election and salvation remain entirely a gift.

already chosen the Church as his elect people and that God's saving initiatives in the Gospel precede every human decision. Within a fundamentally corporate and historical understanding of the Church as God's chosen people, election and free will stand in simple harmony.

Election and Purpose

In one passage in his *Commentary on John*, Origen expresses regret that he cannot here give a full and separate treatment of the concepts of the "Church," the "house of God," and "Jerusalem."¹⁹⁷ Each had its own nuanced significance in the corpus of Scripture. Yet, this points back to the fact that these concepts were in some sense interchangeable as interpenetrating metaphors. All of them point to the mysterious and awesome truth that God has come to dwell in God's people.

In John 4, Jesus offers "Jerusalem" as the authentic locus of the worship of the LORD in distinction from Mt. Gerazim. Origen interprets the chosen city as a reference to the city and temple that Jesus was establishing through his own life, death, and resurrection—namely, the Church. It is this temple "built of living stones (which)...is the place of the holy priesthood, the place where spiritual sacrifices are offered to God by people who are spiritual and who have understood the spiritual law."¹⁹⁸ Once the fullness of time has come for a person, it becomes evident that Jerusalem is no longer the place where "true worship and perfect piety" is offered but rather in the community of those persons who by faith are fully equipped to serve God.¹⁹⁹

God had dwelt among the people of Israel, but now God has set apart the Church as the dwelling place of the divine. The symbolism of the Church as a temple in Ephesians 2.20-22 and I Peter 2.4-10 points to the close association which Origen makes between election and the Church. It is the Church, the body of Christ, the community of the Spirit, which constitutes "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own possession" (I Peter 2.9). The Church is populated by

¹⁹⁷ *CJ* 10.296.

¹⁹⁸ *CJ* 13.84.

¹⁹⁹ *CJ* 13.85.

those who are gathered together in obedience to the call of God, those who are obedient to the Word of God. The true children of Abraham and of the promise are those who obey the word of God,²⁰⁰ even including those first foreigners in Samaria who heard the message of Jesus “for themselves” and “believed” that this man was “truly the Savior of the world.”²⁰¹ Though the terms may be interchangeable, e.g. elect, Church, body of Christ, temple of God, Jerusalem, children of Abraham, children of God, they all point to the fact that God has chosen a people for Godself, a people whose membership is characterized by faithful obedience to the Gospel.

Origen does not make a distinction within the Church between the elect and the non-elect, even as he speaks about the elect as those who hear and obey God’s word. Rather, he presumes that this faith and obedience characterizes the Church as a whole. For Origen, to be chosen is “to be of God,” born as children of God through the implanted seed of the Word of God.²⁰² Those on the other hand who do not hear the Word of God are not children of God. Put in its proper *Sitz im Leben* of corporate worship, this identifies the membership of the Church, those who attend to God’s preached Word, as the elect. Those who reject the Gospel, and the Church with it, stand outside of the stream of election. The Church as a whole carries out the purpose of election as the place of God’s habitation, the eschatological temple of God.

Election, Israel and the Church

Origen brings his own creativity and perspective to this area, while basically following the lead of Irenaeus and Tertullian. His three core convictions are: 1) God chose the historical people of Israel as a whole; 2) this election reaches its fulfillment in Christ, who extends election to include the Gentiles, thus establishing the Church as the eschatological people of God, comprised of Jews and Gentiles; and so 3) the members of Israel only continue in their election as they embrace their Messiah and their newfound sisters and brothers in the faith of Abraham.

²⁰⁰ *CJ* 13.346.

²⁰¹ John 4:42.

²⁰² *CJ* 20.308-309.

The Election of Israel

Origen gives an impassioned defense of the particularity of Jewish election as it had been dismissed by Celsus in his *True Doctrine*. In regard to the Jewish claim to have been chosen by God, Celsus had this to say: “Nor is it likely that they are in favor with God and are loved any more than other folk, and that angels are sent to them alone, as though indeed they had been assigned some land of the blessed.”²⁰³ Origen counters.

This race is shown to have been in favor with God from the fact that the supreme God is called the God of the Hebrews even by people alien to our faith. And because they were in favor with God so long as they were not forsaken, though they were few in number, they continued to be protected by divine power, so that not even in the time of Alexander of Macedon did they suffer anything at his hands, in spite of the fact that because of certain agreements and oaths they would not take up arms against Darius. They say also that at that time the high-priest put on his sacerdotal vestment and that Alexander bowed before him, saying that he had had a vision of a man in this very dress who proclaimed to him that he would bring the whole of Asia under his rule.²⁰⁴

The testimony about the Jews’ favored relationship with God abounds even according to the protocol followed by a foreign leader. Celsus also raises doubts about the wisdom and antiquity of the Jewish tradition.²⁰⁵ The Romans could line up all of the philosophical might of the ancient Greeks in their defense. What could the Jews offer?

[And now even if Celsus should not like it, there are] those who understand a greater wisdom, [namely,] the Jews, not only [more] than the crowds but even of the teaching philosophers, because those who philosophize with serious words in philosophy fall down over the idols and the demons, but the [least] of the Jews looks to God alone [who is] over all, and rightly so as much as for this reason they highly esteem themselves, while they walk away from the fellowship of others as polluted and godless. Would that there had not been sin with them to transgress the law when at first they killed the prophets and finally when they plotted against Jesus, so that we might have a pattern of the city of heaven, which even Plato sought to describe, though I do not know if he was able [to do] this as much as Moses

²⁰³ As accounted in *CC* 5.50.

²⁰⁴ *CC* 5.50. The legendary story about Alexander comes from Josephus, *Antiq.* XI, 8, 3-5, 317-39.

²⁰⁵ In the Roman mind, a religion that was a novelty or an innovation was by definition false. For something to be true, it had to be ancient. E. P. Sanders, ed., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition, Vol. 1: The Shaping of Christianity in the second and third Centuries* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 122.

was able and those with him, when training ‘a race which was chosen’ and ‘a holy nation,’ being kept for God with words free from all superstitions!²⁰⁶

Origen did not need to look beyond the zealous monotheism of the common Jew to prove the wisdom of this people and so also the ignorance of the polytheistic Romans. Though the Romans had their philosophers who pictured God as One and taught others the way of virtue, they still could not compare with the heavenly character of life that God prescribed through Moses. In fact, if the Jews had not rejected God’s messengers and God’s Messiah, this world would have hosted a truly heavenly country. Origen zealously defended the particularity of God’s historical and corporate election of the Jewish people, for it is out of the roots of this particular history that the election of the Church draws its life.²⁰⁷

The Church as God’s Eschatological People

The defense of Israel’s history was at heart a defense of the identity of the only true God.

He is God from the first creation and foundation of the world, the God of all righteous men (the patriarchs)... This God, in these last days, according to the previous announcements made through his prophets, sent the Lord Jesus Christ, *first for the purpose of calling Israel, and secondly, after the unbelief of the people of Israel, of calling the Gentiles also*. This just and good God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, himself gave the law, the prophets and the Gospels, and he is God both of the apostles and also of the Old and New Testaments.²⁰⁸

The thrust here remains on unity, first the unity of God, and secondly the unity of God’s purpose in electing a people. Though God’s purpose in election stands as a unity, there is also a strong sense of discontinuity between the bodies of Judaism and Christianity. The note of discontinuity plays a stronger role once Origen turns his focus from the critique of Celsus to the writing of the *De Principiis*, in which the Judaizing threat is at the forefront of his attention. The discontinuity

²⁰⁶ *CC* 5.43, translation mine. To this Origen adds that Celsus would not have spoken so presumptuously if he “had known *who belong to God*, and that *they alone are wise*, and *who are those alien to Him*, and that all men are bad who do not in any way incline toward the acquisition of virtue” (*CC* 8.10).

²⁰⁷ Other passages to this effect include: *CJ* 2.143, “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, also of Elias, Simeon, and of all the Hebrews; who is the light of all men, including the Gentiles”; and *CJ* 13.106, in which he reprimands the heterodox (i.e. Marcionites) as they “deny the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Fathers of the Jews.” Identifying God with the particular history and heritage of the patriarchs served as a defense of the unity of God and the unity of God’s purpose in election.

²⁰⁸ Origen, *FP* bk 1, pref, par 4.

between then contemporary Judaism and Christianity had its source in divergent views about what constituted fulfillment.

In this vein, Origen encountered some who attempted to construe the unity of election on strictly Jewish terms. In other words, the advent of Christ provided for the fulfillment of Jewish hopes as conceived in an exclusive, materialistic, and nationalistic way. According to Origen, this is the sentiment of the

poor-minded Ebionites (men whose very name comes from the poverty of their mind, for in Hebrew *ebion* is the word for poor), so as to suppose that Christ came especially to the Israelites after the flesh.²⁰⁹

To this line of thought Origen responds.

The divine writings declare that a certain nation on the earth was chosen by God, and they call this nation by many names...Israel, Jacob²¹⁰...[yet] there is also another Israel, which is not 'after the flesh' but after the spirit.²¹¹

Origen affirms God's concrete and historical choice of the Jewish people in history, but argues that this has now been extended to include the Gentiles. Origen employs the concept of Israel "according to the spirit," drawing on the apostle Paul's distinction in Romans 9:6-7, for "it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God."²¹² In light of what has happened in the coming of Christ, one can no longer merely identify God's purpose in election with the Jewish people, as if nothing has changed. Those Jews who did and who continue to reject God's Messiah forfeit their standing as the elect children of God. Election is not based on ethnicity but on membership in the family headed by Christ. These are the true children of Abraham and heirs of God's promises. Origen also frames the argument with the analogy of the ark of God's presence.

Accordingly we Christians say that while they surely experienced favor with God and were loved more than any others, yet this care and grace changed to us when Jesus transferred the power at work among the Jews to those Gentiles who believed in him. That is why, although the Romans have wanted to do much against the Christians to prevent their further

²⁰⁹ *FP* 4.3.8.

²¹⁰ Referring to the northern and southern kingdoms.

²¹¹ *FP* 4.3.6.

²¹² *FP* 4.3.8, citing Romans 9.8. Though "Israel according to the spirit" does not appear in the Scriptures, one may argue that the idea is tacitly present.

existence, they have not been able to achieve this. For the hand of God was fighting for them and wanted to scatter the word of God from one corner in the land of Judea to the whole of mankind.²¹³

From the framework of this fundamental continuity, Origen distinguishes the note of discontinuity arising out of the fulfillment of God's purpose in election. Whereas God's presence once tabernacled among the Jews, it had now come to abide in the fellowship of the incarnate Lord of glory. And so whereas the enemies of the ark had defeated their own cause, so now the Romans have been powerless to bring about the demise of the Church and have in fact through their opposition have helped to scatter the seed of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The language of election saturates this passage, and this "favor" and "care" and "grace" and "power at work" has moved from ethnic Israel to that corporate "us," the Church, the body of Christ.²¹⁴

The Present Status of Israel

The most fundamental source of the divergence of these bodies lies in the response of some of the Jewish people to Christ. It is because "most of the Israelites have not submitted to his teaching, (that) those who belonged to the Gentiles have been called."²¹⁵ His interpretation of Romans 9-11 in the *De Principiis* stands as one of most poignant acknowledgements of the discontinuity.

Those who were formed by God to be Israelites in this age...(and have) fallen away...will in the age to come, for their unbelief, be changed...into vessels of dishonor,...(while) the Egyptian or Idumaeen vessels (who) have embraced the faith and conduct of the Israelites shall 'enter into the Church of the Lord' and exist as 'vessels of honor.'²¹⁶

²¹³ *CC* 5.50.

²¹⁴ The language resounds in other places, for one, *Contra Celsum* 6.80, in which Origen argues that the Scriptures demonstrate "the care of God for the Jews and for their ancient and sacred society, and that because of their fall salvation has come to the Gentiles, and that 'their fall is the riches of the world and their loss the riches of the Gentiles, until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in,' that after this 'all Israel,' of the meaning of which Celsus has no comprehension, 'may be saved'" (citing Rom 11.11-12, 25-6).

²¹⁵ *FP* 4.3.10.

²¹⁶ *FP* 3.1.23. Origen seems to be speaking here in the "eschatological future," for these Gentile "vessels of dishonor" have in fact already come to find a home in the Church, while the Israelites according to the flesh, the "vessels of honor," have seen the glory depart from their fellowship. On top of that, the positions of "honor" and "dishonor" refer specifically to people groups, Gentile Christians and non-Christian Jews, and not to the respective conditions of individuals as predetermined for salvation or reprobation, a novel interpretation of Romans 9 that came into the mainstream primarily through the thought of Augustine, as will be explored later.

It was not that God had rejected the Jewish people, but that the Jewish people had rejected God in Christ. For, “the promises are made on condition that the law is kept and that men live in accordance with it. If the Jews, who received the promises upon these conditions, have neither land nor home left, the reason for that is to be found in all their transgressions of the law and especially in their crime against Jesus.”²¹⁷

However troublesome and devastating to the Jewish mind and identity, this was part of God’s great plan. “But the providence which long ago gave the law, but now has given the Gospel of Jesus Christ, did not wish that the practices of the Jews should continue, and so destroyed their city and temple and the service of God in the temple offered by means of sacrifices and the prescribed worship.”²¹⁸ Consequently, the Jews ““were diminished and afflicted by the oppression of evils and sorrow, and contempt was poured forth upon those who, because of Abraham, were princes, and he made them wander in a place that was untravelled and out of the way.””²¹⁹ Deprived yet again “of a land of their own,” this time by the Romans, the Jewish people came again to live as exiles scattered among the nations.

Those of privileged birth will find their share in the heritage forfeited, while those of lesser birth will come to partake of God’s inheritance among the saints. There is a strong discontinuity in that those Jews who walk in disobedience to Christ are presently traveling the road leading to dishonor.²²⁰ Yet there is also a sense of indefiniteness and so also of hope regarding the destination of the Jewish people, for they may yet turn to their true King and Lord. It also suggests that the Jews have not permanently forfeited their share in God’s inheritance, but merely that, if they maintain their present course, they will end up forfeiting this.

²¹⁷ *CC* 8.69.

²¹⁸ *CC* 7.26.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, here quoting Ps. 106.39-40.

²²⁰ Whether dishonor means final condemnation or merely severe discipline may be debated.

Following the prophetic language and imagery, Origen does depict the status of Jews and Gentiles as having reversed with the coming of Christ. But this did not imply any kind of anti-Semitic prejudice. In his close connection with Palestinian- and Jewish-Christianity, Origen was cognizant of the Jewish identity of the first apostles, of Jewish-Christians in his own time, and of the strong positive contributions of Judaism to the thought and practice of the Church. He would not have sought instruction in Hebrew language and Jewish interpretation from a rabbi had this respectful realization been lacking. At the same time, he fully recognized that a proud identity and heritage could prevent Jews from embracing their Messiah. At the heart his convictions were Christian and his passion evangelistic rather than combative.

For these reasons and others, Origen often speaks of present and future election in a way that specifically includes the Jews. The vision of unity comes clear in his *Commentary on John*, where he asserts that Jesus did not die only for the nation, “but also to gather together in one the scattered children of God.”²²¹ Deliverance from exilic existence in the *diaspora* sounded like good news to the Jews, and this implied fellowship with the Gentile newcomers to the faith of Abraham. Following the words of Paul in Romans 11, “(O)n the great day of the Lord, once death has been conquered,” the “*whole house of Israel* shall be raised up.”²²² Perhaps most clearly, Origen writes that the Lord will ascend into the heavenly Jerusalem “conducting those of the circumcision and those of the Gentiles who believe.”²²³ His vision of God’s future is not tainted with the hate born of arrogant prejudice but tempered with the conviction of the centrality of the Messiah for all history.

Election and Nationality

Especially in Celsus’ critique of Christianity, Origen encounters the claims of Rome’s ultimacy not only in terms of the expanse of the Empire and its military might, but also in its unique and

²²¹ 28.179-185, drawing on Jn. 11.51-52.

²²² *CJ* 10.229, drawing on Romans 11.26.

²²³ *CJ* 10.182.

lofty place in history according to the design of providence. *Lex et Societas Romanae* embodied and reflected the very order of nature itself. The Emperor stood as the representative of this genius, this insight into reality itself, which providence had bestowed upon this society. Hence *pietas*, in the Ciceronian sense of devotion to the *res publica*, came to expression in the worship of the Emperor. The plurality and variety of its gods and religions only served to complement this underlying belief and thereby contributed to the fundamental unity of the Empire.

To put it lightly, Origen had problems with these claims of ultimacy. They were not merely arrogant and misguided but even blasphemous in their denial of the true and living God. By opposing the Church, the Romans were actually opposing God. Against this, Origen puts forward the Christian faith and society as the depository of truth as revealed by God and engages Celsus in intellectual combat.

The Romans have their law, but the law given by Christ is far superior, and with its roots in the Mosaic law, far older than its Roman counterpart. Where Celsus criticizes the stories of the Jewish Scriptures as myths, Origen turns the criticism around, maintaining that the stories of Graeco-Roman tradition are the real myths. The miracles that accompanied the Hebrew children attest to this, as well as the miraculous manner in which the Church came to be founded. For “Christians came to exist as a society in an amazing way and at the beginning were led more by the miracles than by the words of exhortation to abandon their traditional ways and to choose customs foreign to those of their ancestors.”²²⁴ That this society was populated through the agency of “unlettered apostles,” as they spoke with bold persuasiveness, adds to beauty and offensiveness of the public scandal of the Christian witness.

Neither did Origen accord any unique significance to the history of Rome. Instead, he defended the significance of Israel as the chosen people of God. This set up for the testimony that the Christian Church stands as the living embodiment of the fulfillment of this providential history. Ancient Israel was indeed a divinely instituted society, called into being by God. But when God

²²⁴ CC 8.47.

came in the flesh to walk among us, God Godself “established” the “society,”²²⁵ “family,”²²⁶ and “country”²²⁷ of the Church. This society or body gains its life from its crucified and living Lord, and for this reason constitutes a divine society in an absolutely unique sense.

Election and Ethics

For this reason, Christians could not offer worship to the Emperor, for they belonged to the Eternal Word and Wisdom of God who had taken flesh in these last days. The divine society had its authorities and administrators, like the Romans. But even these who uphold the law of God are in a sense exempted from the law of Roman society.

And if those who are chosen as rulers in the Church rule well over God’s country (I mean the Church), or if they rule in accordance with the commands of God, they do not on this account defile any of the appointed civic laws.²²⁸

Neither could their devotion to the *res publica* ever interfere with their devotion to this society, which came clear in the Christian refusal to participate militarily in the Empire. They did this not to subvert the Empire intentionally as a rebellious movement. Origen here distances the Church from the elements of political sedition present in the Roman memory in the history of the Jews. Christians opt for non-participation in this way because their Lord and

lawgiver...has forbidden entirely the taking of human life. He taught that it was never right for his disciples to go so far against a man, even if he should be very wicked; for he did not consider it compatible with his inspired legislation to allow the taking of human life in any form at all.²²⁹

Christians are engaged in warfare, but a warfare that is far more significant than the campaigns against the barbarian insurgencies.

²²⁵ *CJ* 28.24. *CC* 8.47.

²²⁶ *CJ* 28.217-222.

²²⁷ *CC* 8.75.

²²⁸ *CC* 8.75.

²²⁹ *CC* 3.7.

Christians also should be fighting as priests and worshippers of God, keeping their right hands pure and by their prayers to God striving for those who fight in a righteous cause and for the Emperor who reigns righteously, in order that everything which is opposed and hostile to those who act rightly may be destroyed...And though we do not become fellow-soldiers with him, even if he presses for this, yet we are fighting for him and composing a special army of piety through our intercessions to God.²³⁰

Therefore, though Christians refuse to participate in war as a form of murder, they number among the most devoted members of the Roman society. Christians do live as recipients of the benefits offered by the Empire, such as security and protection. Yet these do not come ultimately from the Empire but from God. Roman society was ultimately predicated on blasphemy and founded on violence, and Christians, though many of them at one time found their identity as part of this society, had to draw limits to their participation lest they deny their identity as members of the body politic established and headed by the very Son of God.

Election and Mission

On the whole, Origen offers a passionate defense of Judaism against Celsus and also a respectful yet unambiguously Christian portrayal for the Jews of the fulfillment of election. Both of these combine to form a very strong apologetic and even evangelistic thrust to his writing. Roman opponents of Christianity would hear about a faith and a particular history filled with the miraculous intervention of God stretching in a nearly continuous line back to ancient times. Any reverence for the God of the Hebrews would potentially lead them into the Christian fellowship in its fully inclusive character as well as its Jewish heritage. Jews, on the other hand, would see an effort to bridge the rift of misunderstanding and prejudice that had already persisted for over a hundred years. Christians may stand apart from Judaism, but maybe the Christians did have something valid to offer. After all, they did at least read the Torah and confess the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. All of this points to election as a thoroughly missionary doctrine. It provides the means by which Christians witness to outsiders about the divine origin of the Church's existence and history, tracing the footsteps of God back to ancient Israel. When Origen maintains that his *Contra Celsum* is "not written at all for true Christians, but either for those

²³⁰ CC 8.73.

entirely without experience of faith in Christ, or for those whom the apostle calls ‘weak in faith,’²³¹ he evinces his task of exegesis and apologetics with an intent to evangelism and initiation into the Christian faith.

Conclusion

Despite his “contemplative idiosyncrasies” about pre-existing souls and the possibility of falling from grace after the consummation, Origen reflected on election in a way that is closely in touch with history, with the intellectual challenges of his day, and with Judaism. Because of this sensitivity, his writings carried a decidedly evangelistic appeal to a variety of audiences. Furthermore, the main features of his doctrine stood in striking congruity with those of Irenaeus and Tertullian.²³² Though free will occupied an important place in his thought, Origen did not limit his discussion of election to a debate between free will and determinism. Rather, he explored it in its proper framework as a fundamentally corporate and historical reality rooted in Christology, eschatology, and ecclesiology. It remains rooted in Judaism but is not presently contained in Judaism, but rather in the eschatological community that God has established through the coming of Christ.

²³¹ CC pref.5.

²³² Though Origen’s “spiritual” vision of the beginning and the consummation of human life and creation is certainly a far cry from the strongly anti-Gnostic, material restoration understanding maintained especially by Irenaeus.

Chapter 5. Eusebius

Argument

With Eusebius, the integrity of the early Christian doctrine of election was fundamentally compromised. Falling prey to Platonic dualism and an over-realized eschatology, he pictured election as simultaneously historical yet ahistorical, temporal yet eternal, corporate yet not corporate. Neither the Church nor ancient Israel could be identified with the elect as a whole. At the same time, the Roman Empire began to take over the social and political side of election.

Introduction

Eusebius represents a new era, so to speak, in the history of the Church, and so also in the doctrine of election and predestination. A number of factors account for this. First, Eusebius witnessed an absolutely dramatic shift in the place of the Christian faith in the Roman Empire. Second, the one who achieved and embodied this transition, Constantine, was a personal friend of Eusebius. These two factors account for much. Besides these it suffices to mention the respect that Eusebius had for Origen, his goal to defend Christianity against the Neo-Platonic critique of Porphyry, as well as his preoccupation with ecclesiastical identity (e.g. apostolic succession) and controversies (e.g. Council of Nicaea).

Election and Time

Eusebius picked up on the eschatological inheritance of Christian tradition, but his conceptuality of time had elements that were simultaneously eschatological and progressive-dispensational. His eschatological vantage point derived both from the interpretative rubric of promise and

fulfillment as well as the centrality of Christ in human and cosmic history.²³³ At the same time, history continued to progress according to a succession of dispensations. Eusebius kept with the two main ages as conceived by his predecessors: that of Israel and that of the Church. On the other hand, he went further by dividing the latter age into two distinct dispensations: that of the persecuted Church and that of the victorious Church. In other words, something epochal occurred when Constantine returned to Rome, victorious from the conquest of Maxentius, converted to the cause of the Christ who had given him success. This bright victory for the Empire included the dawning of a new day of victory for the Church.

The first age pertained to God's election of Israel. Eusebius does not recount this dispensation in his *Ecclesiastical History*, figuring that the Scriptures did an adequate job. Eusebius does take as subject matter the second age, made up of two dispensations. The very first paragraph of the *History* introduces the "first dispensation" of this second age which came with the advent of Christ.²³⁴ Detailing the events of this "dispensation" fills most of the ten books of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*.

The transition from the age of Israel to that of Christ and the Church involved quite a shake up. Eusebius mentions several dilemmas converging in this moment in history. In Rome's effort to quell sedition and establish *pax*, a Gentile ruler, Herod, was placed over the Jews.²³⁵ This led to a state of complete disarray in the politics of Israel and its temple. For several generations, Israel was no longer governed by one from the lineage of Judah but rather by an appointee from the Gentile foreigners. Even the selection of the chief priests happened in this set of circumstances so abhorrent to the Jews.

²³³ This was the dominant Christian concept of history in that time, and Eusebius demonstrates it by the mere fact of writing a history that took the coming of Christ and the apostolic testimony to Christ as the inception of a new era in human history, the "economy of Jesus Christ." Cf. *EH* 1.1.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *EH* 1.6.

At the same time, this tumult arose as much from the infidelity of the Jews as from the oppression of the Romans. The conflict came to a head in the crucifixion of Christ at the instigation of the Jewish people. Though Eusebius affirms and celebrates the resurrection of Christ, he also believed that the horrific event of the crucifixion initiated and characterized the dispensation of the Church's persecution at Jewish as well as Gentile hands that would continue for a few hundred years.²³⁶ The unjust execution of James the Just at the hands of the Jews stands as but one example in a long list of martyrdoms detailed by Eusebius.²³⁷

From beginning to the end, this "first dispensation" of the Church was characterized by the darkness of persecution and opposition to the Christian faith. There were reprieves but no lasting peace. It was not only the Jews but also communities of Jewish Christians who had fled the holy land at the Roman demolition of temple and city in 70AD.²³⁸ For the tragic details, Eusebius points the reader to Josephus' account.²³⁹ Christians faced persecution both with and at the hands of the Jews throughout this period, in addition to the opposition stemming from non-Jewish Romans, heretics, intellectual opponents, and the Emperors themselves.

As the time neared for the coming of a new dispensation, some of the events of the previous transition began to recapitulate. That is, just as the Jews had faced a time of increased opposition and displacement just prior to the dispensation of the persecuted Church, so the Church faced heightened opposition just prior to the dawning of a new dispensation, that of the victorious Church.

Then again to these places the godly came to flee, and again the fields and again the deserts, the glens and even the mountains received the servants of Christ. And when these things happened, the way was successful for the impious man, and into his mind was thrown to shake up another persecution against all. He had power to accomplish his purpose and

²³⁶ Indeed, the divine Word was "assaulted" not only during the advent of Christ but also in the lives of those who bore his revelation. *EH* 1.1.

²³⁷ Even Josephus himself mentioned the death of this leader in early Christianity, as noted by Eusebius. Cf. *EH* 2.23.

²³⁸ *EH* 3.6.

²³⁹ *EH* 3.6. Regarding Book 5 of Josephus' *History*, Eusebius says to take and "go through the tragedy of what was then done."

there was not a hindrance for him not to make room in the effort. [He would have succeeded] except that God, the Champion of his household's souls, quickly catching what about to occur, as in a dark depth and most murky night, caused to shine forth suddenly a great luminary and savior for all, hand-leading with a lofty arm his servant Constantine through these things. To him, therefore, God conferred as a gift from heaven above the trophies of victory, the fruit of godliness. God laid low the wicked with all their counselors and friends, prone under the feet of Constantine.²⁴⁰

The passage seethes with allusions to the consummation of the times. The exile of the “servants of Christ” away from the city is reminiscent of Jesus’ apocalyptic prophesy in Mark 14. The “impious man” whom Constantine defeats in battle, apparently Maxentius, represents in Scripture the leader of Satan’s opposition in Revelation. The pieces are coming into place for God to initiate the final victory and vengeance for his people.

And so God seemingly does, through “his servant Constantine.” He is reminiscent of Cyrus “the servant” of God in Isaiah, but the language also stems in part from monarchical Psalms like Psalm 2 and the kind of victory that God would bring the people of Israel as in Psalm 47:3, “He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet.” That Constantine bears the title of “luminary” and “savior” adds to the almost messianic imagery. Here was a mighty warrior-king, like David of old. Here finally was a hero for God’s downtrodden followers, to bring them out of the dark night of persecution.

Eusebius had tremendous reverence for the lives of the Church’s martyrs and the faithfulness of its witness in times of persecution. Yet, this fascination added to the bewildering effect of a sudden transition, a transition from outright opposition to tolerance and support coming from none other than the Emperor of Rome himself. To Eusebius’ eyes, this appeared as nothing less than the dawning of a new day in the history of God’s economy of redemption, and, for that reason, cause for jubilation.

And indeed following with the word that appoints the new song through this, let us cry out, since indeed after such things and those dark spectacles have we been counted worthy now to behold such outcomes and to celebrate in panegyric such things. Before us there were many righteous and martyrs of God who longed to look upon these things, and did not see, and to hear, but did not hear. On the one hand, those who hastened with this speed obtained

²⁴⁰ *EH* 10.8.18 - 10.9.1, translation mine.

much better things in the heavens themselves, and in the paradise of divine luxury were they snatched up. On the other, we who confess these things as greater than what should exist in view of us marvel over the grace of the great-gift of the Author. We are amazed, fittingly devoting ourselves in the power of our entire soul and confessing the truth in accordance with the written predictions...Finally now a bright and translucent day, with clouds never overshadowing it, with new rays of heavenly light, shines down anew upon the entire earth for the Churches of Christ.²⁴¹

In addition to the suddenness with which it came, the apparent permanence of the transition also contributed to the sense that the consummation had arrived, even if it was just beginning to unfold. The Edict of Milan wrote tolerance of the Christian religion into the official law of the Empire. Christians watched and worked in wonder as magnificent structures were erected all the way from Jerusalem to Constantinople to Rome, officially commissioned by no less than the Emperor and his mother. And while the Christian religion was being built up, the cause of the traditional religions of Rome was beginning to be torn down. He promoted Christians to offices of government and forbade all government officials to offer sacrifice for their adherence to pagan worship.²⁴² Constantine and his lineage had come to possess undisputed reign, and Eusebius anticipated that this would continue indefinitely.²⁴³ All of these factors added to the impression that a new and lasting era of victory had finally come for God's people. The implications of this run all the way through his thought on election, especially in regard to the identity of the Roman Empire as God's chosen people, which will be covered in detail toward the end of the section.

Election and the Calling of the Gentiles

Eusebius mentions the "calling of the Gentiles" several times at the very commencement of his *Demonstration of the Gospel*, thus showing its centrality in his understanding of the Christian faith.²⁴⁴ The *Demonstration* was precisely that, a demonstration of the basic Rule of Faith of early Christianity.²⁴⁵ For Eusebius, the confession of the historical faith in all its particularity

²⁴¹ *EH* 10.1.4-5, 8, translation mine.

²⁴² *EH* 2.44.

²⁴³ "[T]he kingdom that belonged to them was preserved steadfast and undisputed for Constantine and his sons alone" (*EH* 10.9).

²⁴⁴ *DG* 1.2-3, 6.

²⁴⁵ *DG* xvi.

provides the core content of any Christian understanding of history. The historicity of the faith is implied both in terms of promise and fulfillment and in terms of the historical consequences of the advent of Christ. Election, covenant, and the calling of the Gentiles, therefore, are not addendums to the faith but rather necessary components in the exposition of what was most central to the Christian faith.

This fulfillment in the “calling of the Gentiles” and the establishment of a new covenant appeared over and again in the prophecies of the Old Testament. God’s intent from all time, seen especially in the promise given to Abraham, was to bless all nations with the revelation of God.²⁴⁶ This intent happened through the choosing of a particular people, Abraham’s lineage of promise, the Jews. Yet the horizon of election extended beyond the Jews to all the peoples of the world. So the path was paved even under the Old Covenant for the dawning of a New Covenant. Jeremiah had referred to a covenant quite unlike that given through Moses.²⁴⁷ Moses himself knew of what was to come and spoke of the one through whom God’s law would come to the nations.²⁴⁸ With Christ, the law of God would be fulfilled and universalized so as to enable its observance by persons from every nation, and not just a particular nation.

In the *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius notes how both Philo and Josephus describe the abundantly obvious misery that the Jewish people and nation faced in the years following the crucifixion of Christ.²⁴⁹ Though the Church had faced ongoing opposition by the Jews, their oppressors also had found themselves in a terrible predicament of oppression. Eusebius lines up with his patristic forebears in affirming that history itself testified to a dramatic shift for the Jewish people that accompanied the calling of the Gentiles. So far, Eusebius gives evidence of an understanding of election rooted in history.

²⁴⁶ *DG* 1.6.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *DG* 1.2-3.

²⁴⁹ *EH* 2.5-6.

Election and History

As a dedicated historian, Eusebius attended to the particularities of the Church's history all the way back to first century Palestine, often drawing on the voluminous historical accounts of Josephus. However, according to the assessment of Robert Wilken, Eusebius was often guilty of writing history that was not genuine history.²⁵⁰ The true Church is portrayed as a changeless lineage of truth and holiness, with members who never fell victim to sin, wrong, or political ambition. This body of saints continued their part in the "eternal conflict between the truth of God and its opponents." As we will see below, this body of saints comprised God's elect.

At times Eusebius does seem to reflect a corporate sensibility in regard to the Church as an elect body. His portrayal of the Church as a temple, composed by all of its members, suggests this. The "common Church" of Christians is nothing less than "a living temple" who "construct the temple of heavenly types in symbolic fashion" or "through symbols."²⁵¹ This could be taken as a defense of a corporate theology of the Church and the elect who do not depend on any building for their ongoing existence. At the same time, it has Platonic overtones in that the temple of God has its ultimate reality in an eternal realm, which is merely symbolized by the life of the historical Church.

In one passage, Eusebius seems to speak of election in a decidedly historical and corporate fashion, in terms of the calling of the Gentiles.

Thus the 'remnant according to the election of grace,' and that which is called in the prophecy, 'the remnant that is left to the people,' has proclaimed this sign of the Lord to all the Gentiles, and has joined to God as one people, that is drawn to Him, the souls of the

²⁵⁰ Robert Louis Wilken, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 1971), 73.

²⁵¹ *EH* 10.1-2.

Gentiles that are brought out of destruction to the knowledge of the Lord, a people which from the four corners of the earth even now is welded together by the power of Christ.²⁵²

The calling and inclusion of the Gentiles happens in the moment of the dawning of the eschaton, and they are joined to God “as one people.” Even so, Eusebius finally believes that neither Israel nor the Church as a whole can be equated with the elect, which implies that the chosen do not make up a visible, corporate, and historical people. The breakdown happens in the predication of an almost ontological division between the called and the chosen, applying Jesus’ words in Matthew 22.14, “Many are called, but few are chosen,” as a distinction within the Church as well as Israel.²⁵³ Calling implies potentiality while chosen implies an actuality, to be finally revealed at the consummation.

Election and Christ

Eusebius does follow the precedent set by previous Church Fathers to speak of Christ’s significance for election within a historical framework. This gains expression in the pairing of Christ with the calling of the Gentiles, both in the *Ecclesiastical History* as well as the *Demonstration of the Gospel*.

According to which time of ruling came the clear advent of Christ, thus the long-expected salvation and the *calling of the Gentiles* followed in keeping with prophecy.²⁵⁴

The hope of the *calling of the Gentiles* was nothing else but the Christ of God, looked for as the Savior, not only of the Jews, but of the whole Gentile world.²⁵⁵

The calling of the Gentiles happens in direct consequence of the coming of Christ. Christ does hold the distinguished place at the center of Eusebius’ timeline of history. With Christ comes the eschatological shift that brings about the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s people. Eusebius

²⁵² *DG* 2.3

²⁵³ *DG* 1.1, 2.3.

²⁵⁴ *EH* 1.6.

²⁵⁵ *DG* 2.1. See also 2.3.

does not have much to say directly in regard to Christ's role as the mediator of election. One exception sees the elect as "those who dwell in the wood" of the stump of Jesse.²⁵⁶ The elect derive their life and identity from the nourishing vine of Jesus Christ himself.

Election and the Apostolic Ministry

Eusebius does not speak to the role of the apostles in the historical event of the calling of the Gentiles as did previous Fathers. The significance of the apostolic ministry materializes in its representation of the elect. The purity of the succession of apostolic ministry reflects the ongoing preservation of the pure faith and the purity of the elect themselves. In this, the succession within the Roman bishopric seemed to play a central role, apparently as representative of the purity of the entire Church and its faith.²⁵⁷ Eusebius may also have understood the participation of the laity in election as derivative from the election of an apostolic lineage, centered in Rome. The true saints, characterized by "good" and "right devotion," pay respect to the tradition of holy men who thus represent the purity of the Church and its faith.²⁵⁸ That the ongoing source of election abided in the capital of the Empire may also point to the idea of the Empire bearing the identity of God's chosen nation, people, society, or culture.

Election and Initiation

Eusebius participated in the initiation process himself as an instructor and curriculum developer. His two-fold series, the *Preparation of the Gospel* and *Demonstration of the Gospel*, provide catechetical instruction respectively on the prolegomena and the basic content for understanding the Christian faith. Even in the case of Constantine, Eusebius affirmed the vital role of Scriptural teaching in embracing the Christian faith.²⁵⁹ However, with Eusebius the connection between

²⁵⁶ *DG* 2.3.

²⁵⁷ *EH* 7.18.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *EH* 10.32.

catechesis, baptism, and being Christian unravels, namely in the person of the Emperor. Constantine was permitted to postpone baptism until immediately before death, on account of the necessarily messy obligations of Roman governance. Yet this did not prevent Eusebius from adamantly defending the identity of the Emperor as a Christian. His priestly participation in the annual Roman sacrifice did not exclude him from the Church. He had become August Emperor precisely because he “feigned idolatry.”²⁶⁰ Neither did the continuance of coinage with the inscription “the unconquerable Sun” around his image. Such allowances betray the Christianity of the Emperor as an ideological adherence, not a conversion. They also betray a fundamental compromise in the Christian practice of initiation, and so also in the role of initiation as the means of becoming elect.

Election and Boundaries

In his pseudo-historical approach, Eusebius preserves a perspective of election as simultaneously inclusive and exclusive in a lopsided way. As the historical society of the elect, the Church presumably confers election on those who are incorporated into her life through the apostolic, sacramental ministry. At the same time, because only certain persons within the Church comprise the “true elect,”²⁶¹ initiation itself gives no guarantee of one’s standing. Election also refers to the choosing of a historical people to be recipients of the revelation of the One True God. This suggests an exclusive sense to election in the particularity of the historical existence of a people. However, only the “true Israel” within the Church, those who are obedient to God’s Word, actually receives the revelation of God.²⁶² By envisioning the elect from an eternal and abstract vantage point, Eusebius suggests that membership in this constituency is ultimately closed and exclusive.

²⁶⁰ *EH* 1.16,17.

²⁶¹ *DG* 2.3.

²⁶² *DG* 4.7.

Election and Predestination

In his concern for history, Eusebius did have a strong sense of God's providential guidance. This extended from the coming of Christ to the lives of the apostles and onward. It embraced the history of Israel as preparation for the full revelation of God and God's salvation. This implies an understanding of predestination, for the God who planned and foreknew these things also brought them about in due time. Yet, for whatever reason, Eusebius did not treat of predestination directly as a topic central to his interests.²⁶³ Yet, in many ways, he paves the way for a different way of understanding predestination, one infatuated with the identity and destiny of individuals. The elect now consist in an aggregate of individuals whose true identity resides in a Platonic eternity, not in a corporate and historical people. Thus election refers to eternal destiny more than to present identity.

Election and Conditionality

Paradoxically, election here stands as both conditional and unconditional. When Eusebius identifies the elect with those who are obedient to God, it implies an integral role of human decision in receiving and continuing in election. That Eusebius does not, like Augustine later, develop a nuanced account of how the choice for God is brought about by God, seems to confirm this. On the other hand, since election applies to a hidden few within Israel or the Church (especially in reference to the purity of the patriarchs and the apostolic lineage of truth), human zeal may not secure salvation in the end, showing such persons to be among the non-elect.

²⁶³ He did speak of the providential will of God, but he tied this to God's creating and sustaining of the world and not to the fixing of human destinies. Cf. *DG* 4.2. "And the fact that He wills it, is the sole cause of all things that exist coming into being and continuing to be. For it comes of His will, and He wills it, because He happens to be good by nature... And what He wills, He can effect. Wherefore, having both the will and the power, He has ordained for Himself, without let or hindrance, everything beautiful and useful both in the visible and invisible world."

Election and Purpose

God chose Israel and the Church to be bearers of the revelation of the One True God, yet this applies only to the “true Israel” who are obedient to the revelation, which apparently happens on an internal and ethereal level.²⁶⁴ This applies as much to the Church as to ancient Israel. This revelation apparently issues in blessing for the world, bringing the truth of God to light. Yet the blessing of the true knowledge of God is ultimately restricted to the hidden few of the “true Israel.”

Election, Israel and the Church

At the outset of his *Demonstration*, Eusebius maintains that his intent is not to polemicize the Jews.²⁶⁵ That the Church fulfills the ancient prophecies given to Israel actually confirms the truthfulness of the Jewish faith, according to its role in the economy of history. In this respect, Eusebius has regard for the particularity of Israel’s history. It is through this particularity that the Church traces its roots and validates its historical claims as more than mere myth.

On the other side, the ongoing existence of Judaism seemed to have no place in history. The calling of the Gentiles led not only to the end of the previous covenant and the fall of Jerusalem but also to “the total collapse and ruin of the whole Jewish race.”²⁶⁶ The Jews did live on, but in terms of their religious significance, they were a people of the past.

As Eusebius begins his *Ecclesiastical History* with the “economy” of Jesus Christ, he pictures the age of the Jews more as a background than as part of the narrative of the history of the Church itself.²⁶⁷ In the *Demonstration*, the history of the Jewish people leading up to Christ serves as a

²⁶⁴ *DG* 4.7.

²⁶⁵ *DG* 1.1.

²⁶⁶ *DG* 2.1.

²⁶⁷ *EH* 1.1.

preparation of what was to come.²⁶⁸ In the framework of salvation-history, the history of the Jews was not valued in its own right but only instrumentally in view of the coming dispensation of the Church.

This had everything to do with the historically neutered account of God's people through history. All of Israel had been called, but not all of Israel belonged to the ranks of the chosen; again, only those who lived in obedience to God. These persons ran together to form a continuous yet hidden stream of the faithful through history. This obedient "remnant" of individuals experience the favor of God. They are the true predecessors of the true followers of Christ. Neither Israel nor the Church retains its corporate identity as God's elect. When speaking about the namesake of the ancient people, Eusebius says that Israel's victory belongs to all of

his true sons and their descendants, and their forefathers, all prophets and men of God. Do not suppose, I beg you, that the multitude of the Jews are thus referred to, but only those of the distant past who were made perfect in virtue and piety, ... (committed to) the worship of God Most High alone.²⁶⁹

This expression of pseudo-history also gained expression in Eusebius' defense of the Christian faith against the charge of being a historical novelty in comparison to Judaism. Against this, he held the Christian faith to be "none other than the first, most ancient, and most original of all religions, discovered by Abraham and his followers, God's beloved."²⁷⁰ In light of his view about a limited number of the elect within Israel, this serves to play down if not altogether negate the historical identity of the Jewish people as God's chosen.

The idea of the pre-existent church (e.g. "the aged woman") appeared at least as early as the *Shepherd of Hermas*,²⁷¹ but this surfaced out of a context of upholding the historical and

²⁶⁸ This served as the defining framework for searching and interpreting the OT, with the purpose of giving a demonstration of how the "prophets" of old described in advance the coming and person of Christ (DG 1.intro).

²⁶⁹ DG 4.7. He also says that Christ was given "that part of humanity denominated Jacob and Israel, that is to say, the whole division which has vision and piety" (DG 4.8).

²⁷⁰ Wilken, *Myth of Christian Beginnings*, 61.

²⁷¹ Cf. Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, John Austin Baker, ed. and trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 294-295, citing *Shepherd Vis.* I.2.2, II.4.1, III.3.3-4.1.

corporate identity of Israel as the chosen people. This early Christian theme that illumined the place of the Church in God's pre-existing intent now becomes descriptive of the Christian religion and all history, displacing and marginalizing the value of the historical religion and identity of the Jewish people.

Working with this view of election, Eusebius does retain a view of the unity of God's people in their election. He seemed to catch a hint of the scandal in early Christianity to bring together both Jewish and Gentile believers in the Church. But the dominant theme of his composition is defined by the concept of a "remnant." He refrains from speaking about the tree of Gentile believers being grafted into the tree of Israel. Instead, he speaks of the "elect" as "those who dwell in the wood" of the stump of Jesse,²⁷² those who have pledged themselves in faith to the Messianic son of David. The constituency of election condenses from two peoples brought together in Christ into an aggregate of individuals who attach themselves to Christ.

Neither Israel nor the Church could be equated with the elect. The unity of God's elect people, therefore, seemed to lay precisely in their hiddenness and not in their corporate life, in eternity and not in history, in God's future and not in present life. With the divisions tearing at the innards of the Church in his day, it is understandable that he would not have lent credibility to God's people as a visible unity but rather as an eternal unity that would only be revealed at the return of Christ. Unity was integral to the nature of the Church, but the sight of this reality was for another day. It was in part for this reason that the unity maintained in the *pax Romana* held so much attraction for Eusebius. Through the conversion of the Emperor, the Church could begin to realize the unity that otherwise so easily escaped it, drawing on the power and influence of the authorities of this world, if need be.

²⁷² DG 2.3.

Election and Nationality

As he strode into Rome in celebration of his victory, Constantine gave due praise and thanks to the God who had given him victory. He had conquered by the sign of the cross. He then proceeded to show his “inborn piety” by setting up a trophy of the Savior’s passion which rested “in the hand of his own statue.”²⁷³ Rome had been freed by Christ! But more, Christ had been acclaimed by the emperor of Rome himself. With Constantine’s conversion a new age had come, full of peace and restoration for the Church and prosperity for Rome as its people rejoiced and “thanked God the universal King as they had been thus taught.”²⁷⁴ With a converted Emperor, the cessation of persecution, and legislation against idolatry, the Roman State had become truly Christian.

The significance of this transition of the times hinged in part on the understanding of the religious significance of the Empire and the Emperor himself. The Emperor embodied the genius of the Roman Empire and people, representing in his person Rome’s unique insight into nature itself. This had formed the basis for Celsus’ critique of the Christian claims of having exclusive covenant knowledge of the only true God. It also fed directly into the importance of Emperor worship. But now the symbol of Rome’s privileged insight into reality itself had been converted. Because the Empire was represented in its Emperor, it was implicit that the entire Empire had also been converted in this sense. It may have required time its effects to unfold, but the identity of the Empire had suddenly and fundamentally changed

By the estimation of Eusebius, the Empire as Christian State had been fundamentally realized. Though Eusebius believed in free will, and that people should be free to choose Christianity, he also believed flocks of people would join the Christian ranks because of the Emperor’s allegiance. Knowing the forthcoming popularity of the Christian religion, Constantine mandated that Churches enlarge their buildings “as though it were expected that, now the madness of

²⁷³ *EH* 9.10-11.

²⁷⁴ *EH* 10.9.7.

polytheism was wholly removed, pretty nearly all mankind would henceforth attach themselves to the service of God.”²⁷⁵

The first expression of this transition came in the interpretation of the Empire as an antitype of the nation of Israel. Just as God had given the descendants of Abraham a land of their own, dedicated to the worship of God, so the land of the Roman Empire came to be seen as set apart for the purposes and worship of the Christian God. The OT had witnessed to the integral tie between land and people in God’s election. From its inception, the Church by and large had anticipated an eschatological realization of this promise when Christ would come to allot to his people their inheritance in the new heaven and the new earth. Now, before their eyes, Christians in the Empire beheld the face of the land changing, which caused them to wonder whether the kingdom was right at the door.²⁷⁶

The victory of Christianity led immediately and directly to the re-establishment of Israel as a holy land and as the center of Christian pilgrimage and devotion. The ground which the Hebrews had possessed and then lost was also the ground on which the incarnate God had walked. It symbolized the history of God’s redemptive purpose with the Jews that led ultimately to the coming of the God-man. Eusebius foresaw this shift in piety among the people and began laying the foundations for a Christian theology of the holy land.²⁷⁷ Eusebius provided theological support for the establishment of Christian holy places and a holy land, anticipating the wave of impending devotees. Jerusalem and Palestine quickly came to a place of prominence through Constantine’s “lavish endowments to build Churches, the discovery of the tomb of Christ, the

²⁷⁵ *EH* 2.45.

²⁷⁶ The apocalyptic imagery in *EH* 10.8.18 - 10.9.1 suggests just this. The drama of the end-times seemed to be playing out before Eusebius’ eyes as he watched the opposition to Christianity gather only to be summarily defeated, leading to a new era of peace. Eusebius’ quite possibly interpreted this as the inception of the millennial reign that would last until Christ himself returned. In the meantime, the conquering Emperor stood as a singular representative of the one to come.

²⁷⁷ Robert Louis Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), 81.

building of the Anastasis, Helen's fervor for the holy places, the construction of Churches at Bethlehem, on the Mount of Olives, and at Mamre."²⁷⁸

The newly established cultic centers for Christian devotion connected the Church as well as the Empire to its now Christian past. The impassioned spread of a cultus as such was nothing new in Roman history. The Romans already had a long-standing history of such practices, including pilgrimage to holy places (e.g. the Oracle of Apollos at Delphi) and cultic centers (e.g. of Venus at Cythera). It was part of the landscape and tradition of the Empire. By establishing these Christian centers of devotion, Rome was now claiming the history of Israel as its own, finally realizing its own calling in the scheme of providence. Where God's people lacked a nation and place of their own for several hundred years, now the Empire and the world itself was theirs to possess.

This surge of devotion issued in a wave of sentiment that exalted the land of Palestine and the churches there established. This threatened now prominent claims of Rome as the center of the Christian faith and as the link to the apostolic tradition of the Church.²⁷⁹ Eusebius stood as one who helped to shore up Rome's position by giving the historian's stamp to the story of the coming of Peter and Paul to establish the Church there in Rome.²⁸⁰ Rome stood as the center of the now Christian Empire, and, at least among Christians in the West, continued to stand as the center of the Church. Rome's continued centrality, as well as the designation of Roman-ruled Palestine as a "holy land," lends support to the view of the Empire itself as the newly established nation of God. That is to say that the re-visioning of Israel as a holy land did not ultimately threaten but confirm the identity of the Empire as a chosen people in a chosen land.

²⁷⁸ Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought*, 100.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, esp chp 4.

²⁸⁰ In Rome, Alexander was the "fifth to succeed Peter and Paul" (*EH* 4.1).

Election and Ethics

Establishment required a different kind of ethics than the Church had previously been accustomed to. In customary conciliatory fashion, Eusebius provided justification for the existence of two distinct groups within the Christian faithful. He arrives at the conclusion that two distinct forms of the Christian life exist. One is perfect and heavenly-minded:

like some celestial beings they gaze upon human life, performing the duty of a priesthood to Almighty God for the whole race...with right principles of true holiness, and of a soul purified in disposition, and above all with virtuous deeds and words...the perfect form.²⁸¹

The other, “more humble” and “more human”:

permits men to join in pure nuptials and to produce children, to undertake government, to give orders to soldiers fighting for right; it allows them to have minds for farming, for trade, and the other more secular interests, as well as for religion: and it is for them that times of retreat and instruction, and days for hearing sacred things are set apart.²⁸²

The establishment of the Church and its enmeshment with Roman society necessitated a kind of dual citizenship on its members. The dominant ethic that had once required non-participation, now uprooted from its eschatological and exilic home, transformed into an ethic of responsible participation, with the already present witness of celibate priests, ascetics and desert monks as a helpful, balancing counter-cultural element in the whole mix.

Election and Mission

Rome’s standing as elect also came out in the sense of having a mission and purpose in God’s economy. For many generations, Rome had despised the frequent intrusions of the clans who had threatened their borders. Rome represented civilization, and its enemies were regularly characterized as uncivilized barbarians. In this, Rome already had a mission to spread as far and wide as possible the peace and civilization intrinsic to its genius. Now, the content of this mission came to be embodied in the Christian Gospel.

²⁸¹ *DG* 1.8.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

Rome's history of being prepared for the Gospel, as early Christian apologists had affirmed, was now seen as a preparation for the sake of the whole world. Eusebius highlights the extension of the *pax Romana* to the event of the birth of Christ,²⁸³ as if God had prepared a setting of peace so as to allow the fledging Church to grow and take wing.²⁸⁴ From Rome, it was hoped, all the barbarian tribes would be evangelized. It was both a stepping stone and a set-apart instrument in God's economy for the realization of the Christian mission to spread the Gospel to the "ends of the earth." With the backing and support of an Empire, this suddenly appeared as a much more feasible task. Though missionaries had evangelized among the "barbarians" for years, a new day in Christian missions had come.

The establishment of Rome as a Christian State also held the promise of unity for the Church. Ecclesial controversy and division had reached a high point in the fourth century, expressed especially in the Christological debate between Arius and Athanasius. As a friend of the newly Christian Emperor, Eusebius supported Constantine in his intervention to invoke and facilitate the council at Nicaea. Both Eusebius and Constantine leaned toward the side of Arius but understood their task to be the cause of peace and unity in the Church.²⁸⁵ It was the recognized duty of the Emperor to exercise oversight in the religion of the Empire, particularly in the cult of the Sun. Now the converted Caesar started rendering a kind of priestly oversight in the affairs of the Church, calling the first ever "universal" Christian council, and basically standing as a representative of the unity of the Church in the same way that he had stood as the symbol of the unity of the Empire. The promise of unity in the Church was now appearing through the work of

²⁸³ *EH* 1.6. In Rome's effort to quell sedition and establish *Pax*, a Gentile ruler, Herod, was placed over the Jews.

²⁸⁴ Aryeh Kofsky, *Eusebius of Caesarea against Paganism* (Brill: Leiden, 2000), 280. When the *Pax Romana* had "effaced national barriers and promoted political unity, the Logos appeared to humanity, heralding the divine truth." Eusebius therefore "pens a hymn of praise to the *Pax Romana*, brought about by divine providence."

²⁸⁵ Cf. introduction, xi, in Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine*, Hugh Jackson Lawlor and John Ernest Leonard Oulton, translators and edd. (London: SPCK, 1928).

God's servant, Constantine. The vision of a united and all-encompassing Empire provided a context in which the catholicity of the Church could be realized, both in thought and in actuality.

Conclusion

The dramatic change that happened with Eusebius' doctrine of election and predestination had everything to do with his departure from a staunchly eschatological conception of time and history. Eusebius did recognize the fundamentally eschatological shape of history as its centered on the historical advent of Christ. The Church indeed lived between the horizons of the comings of Christ. However, he downplayed eschatology by adding his distinction of dispensations within the in-between times. In other words, he gave too much of the "already" and not enough of the "not-yet" in identifying present circumstances as the realization of God's kingdom on earth. He cannot be charged with succumbing to a totally realized eschatology, but with him the Judeo-Christian doctrinal framework of eschatology loses its crispness and so also its efficacy for rendering a faithful theology of election and the Church. In some ways, early Christian belief in the millennial reign of Christ anticipated such a claim. But the responsibility for identifying the events of his day as the initiation of this millennial reign, however, belongs solely to Eusebius and his contemporaries.

Without the protection afforded by a strong eschatology, Eusebius fell victim to the numbing influence of Platonic dualism. Origen's emphasis on the non-material character of fulfillment played into this. But only with Eusebius does the Church come to signify a timeless and changeless reality; and as with the Church, so it goes with the constituency of God's people known as the elect. As a reference to a changeless collective of persons whose identity resides in a Platonic future, election becomes a convenient category for identifying a preferred identity and agenda for the Church, excluding any non-conformist elements.

Eusebius also performed the disservice of helping to fuse the identities of God's elect people and the *populus Romanus*. Put more bluntly, Eusebius traded the birthright of the Church to the

Roman Empire. To be sure, up to this point the Church, taking cues from its Lord, had never claimed that its Kingdom was “of this world.” But now the eschatological hope of the kingdom that bound the people of God together gave way to an over-realized dispensational eschatology that simultaneously envisioned Rome as an elect nation and stripped the Church of its distinct corporate and historical political identity.

Chapter 6. Athanasius

Argument

Through his intense Christological focus, Athanasius retains the doctrine of election in its fundamentally corporate, historical, and eschatological shape. He equates the Church with the elect while also upholding the integrity of ancient Israel as the elect people of God. He refrains from assigning the Roman Empire a share in this unique identity so closely tied to God's historical self-revelation.

Introduction

Athanasius does not develop the doctrine of election and predestination thoroughly, but it is tucked inside his various writings in a number of brief but insightful statements. Ever in the background stands his Christological debate with Arius. It is therefore fascinating but not altogether too surprising to find that Athanasius speaks about election not merely in the context of Christology but also for the sake of Christology.

Election and Time

Athanasius does not appear to spend a significant amount of time developing a doctrine of time and history in its own right. Gleanings and implications will have to suffice. Because Scripture was, to a large degree, his mother tongue, Athanasius' statements about time and history are often found inside of quotation marks, so to speak. At the same time, there are underlying convictions about God and creation, stemming in part from conversation with Greek theism, that provide a basic framework for understanding time and history.

God alone exists eternally and inhabits the realm of eternity, and this “alone” most definitely includes God the Son. Creation is not in any sense co-eternal with God, and even time itself falls under this category as a feature of the created order.²⁸⁶ Neither is Athanasius so caught up with Plato as to postulate eternity as true time. Both time and history belong to the sphere of the created order, and God alone transcends them.²⁸⁷

At the same time, time and history hold surpassing significance since they, as part of the created order, stand as the receptacle of God’s gracious intervention in creation. This includes all of history and reaches its fulfillment in the singular event of the Word of God becoming forever joined with humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the significance of history centers on the advent of the incarnate God.²⁸⁸ Like Irenaeus, the Incarnation identifies the eternal intent and purpose of God to restore the now fallen creation and impart life and immortality to all those who have believed in God through Christ. The centrality and particularity of the Incarnation suggests that Athanasius holds to a decidedly eschatological understanding of time and history. The rubric of historical promise and fulfillment that Athanasius picks up from his predecessors also lends support to this view. The Judeo-Christian tradition, and not Graeco-Roman philosophies, provided the normative context in which Athanasius conceived of time and history.

²⁸⁶ Athanasius could be seen here as building in part on the Scriptures, which did at times speak about God’s existence “prior” to creation, whether one refers to Genesis 1, with God existing in the beginning prior to the bringing forth of a created order out of chaos, or to Psalm 90:2, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God,” or to the Son of God in John 17.5, “So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed,” or to Jude’s benediction, “to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever.” The Jewish mind certainly found it difficult if not impossible to conceive of anything “outside” of time.

²⁸⁷ Which is why Athanasius postulates as a question the mystery of how Christ was “founded before the world,” taking on himself the “economy which was for our sake,” so that we received the predestined inheritance of salvation properly “before the world,” though it has “reached us” “afterwards in time.” Cf. *OCA* 2.76. The section on predestination in Athanasius will explore this in greater detail.

²⁸⁸ Evidenced in the fulfillment in God’s economy of revelation (*OIV* sec. 40) and election, bringing about the calling of the Gentiles (*OIV* sec 25.9-15; *OCA* 1.59).

Election and the Calling of the Gentiles

In his *De Incarnatione*, Athanasius explicates Ephesians 2 in regard to the calling of the Gentiles. In the fullness of time, Christ brought about the reconciliation of the two historical peoples of Jews and Gentiles in his own body, symbolized even in the manner of his death. This implicitly issues in a new historical and corporate reality, the Church, that Body made up of Jews and Gentiles, which has its dying-and-living source in the very body of Christ.

Therefore, if the death of the Lord is a ransom for all, and by this death the barrier of division is done away with, and *the calling extends to the Gentiles*, how did he *beckon* us, except *by being crucified*? For only on the cross does one die with hands stretched out. Therefore, even this was fitting for the Lord to endure, *even to stretch out his hands, so that he might draw both the ancient people and those from the Gentiles, that he might join the two in himself.*²⁸⁹

Election and History

That this calling occurs in a singular *kairos* in history points to the fundamentally historical character of election. The historical fellowship of reconciliation comes into existence in direct consequence of the historical event of Christ's death and resurrection. Additionally, God's calling has significance on a fundamentally corporate rather than individual sphere. Individuals implicitly embody and partake of the benefits of the election and reconciliation given to the whole people of God.

Election and Christ

Christ appears every time Athanasius speaks about the election of God's people, as will be seen throughout the section. For this section, it suffices to mention one passage that ties Christ and the

²⁸⁹ *OIV* sec 25.9-15, translation mine. The reference of *palaion* is obvious, but it may take various nuances, including "ancient," "former," "previous," "old," "obsolete," "earlier." In the Scriptures, the term may describe the "old" covenant, the Word who was discerned in "former" times, and also to persons outside of Christ as members of the Adamic humanity.

The choice of "*ginomai*," here translated "extends," in reference to God bringing about the calling of the Gentiles, is significant. It reflects a historical sense, referring to an event in time and space, and yet it also reflects the sense of a beginning, referring to a reality that God has just brought into existence.

Church together around the metaphor of the temple of God. While he does not here use the language of calling and election, the metaphor itself implies the absolutely unique identity of Christ as the bearer and representative of God's revelation, an identity subsequently extended to the Church in its living communion with him. Instead of that temple of the city of Jerusalem, Athanasius argues that

‘We are the temple of God.’...They sought to destroy that true and living Temple which He was, that Habitation which was made by His union with ourselves...’Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up’ (John 2.19)...[Now] the Church stands firm and immovable, for it is ‘founded on a rock,’ and ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’ (Matt. 16.18).²⁹⁰

Christ stands as the exclusive mediator of the Church's election in his glorified resurrection existence. At the same time, his mediation also points to an accomplished task in history, namely his death and resurrection. Christ's carries out his role as mediator in all the historical particularity of his crucified and resurrected person.

Election and the Apostolic Ministry

The law which was ‘spoken through angels’ and ‘has made no one perfect’ was begging the sojourn of the Word, as Paul said. But [now] the sojourn of the Word ‘has perfected the work’ of the Father. Formerly it stood that ‘from Adam until Moses death reigned;’ but the advent of the Word ‘destroyed death;’ and no longer is it that ‘as in Adam all die; but in Christ all shall be made alive.’ Formerly, from Dan unto Beersheba the law was proclaimed and only ‘in Judea was God known.’ But now ‘their voice has gone out into all the earth,’ and ‘all the earth has been filled with the knowledge of God,’ and so the disciples ‘taught all the nations,’ and now what was written has been fulfilled, ‘All will be taught of God.’ Formerly, the things revealed were a type, but now the truth has been manifested.²⁹¹

The “advent” and “sojourn” of the Word have dramatically changed the revelatory landscape of the world. Christ brings the economy of revelation to its fulfillment, in answer to the prophetic pleas of the Old Testament. This event of the fulfillment of God's revelation includes the ministry of the first apostles, who brought this to all the Gentile nations of the world, also in answer to prophecy. The fulfillment of revelation implies the fulfillment of election. As the revelation came in a particular expression (Torah) to a particular people (Israel) in a particular

²⁹⁰ OCA 4.34.

²⁹¹ OCA 1.59, translation mine.

land (“from Dan unto Beersheba”), so now it comes to its fulfillment in a particular expression (the Incarnation of the Word), given to a particular people (the Church represented in the first disciples), spreading across the whole earth. As with Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen, Athanasius pictures the significance of the apostolic ministry as part of the revelatory event itself, pointing to the fundamentally historical and corporate character of election.

Election and Initiation

That Athanasius’ treatment of election pertains to corporate-historical entities, i.e. Israel and the Church, also argues that election does not happen outside of time and history, but precisely in the particularities of time and history. Furthermore, the historicity of the Church’s life argues that partaking of election and salvation depends on entering into the community of the people of God. Election belongs to the Church, and salvation is the fruit of living faithfully as part of this community. That Christ stands as the historical mediator of election also suggests this. A person comes to stand as part of God’s elect by being incorporated into Christ and his Body which is the Church. This affirms that election is always mediated, mediated first and foremost by Christ, and then by the Church. God does not extend election to persons apart from the particularities of historical events and relationships.

Election and Boundaries

Athanasius preserves a balanced view of election as simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. The exclusive character stems from the particularity of God’s revelation and choice of a people to receive that revelation. The inclusive character also arises as an expression of the historical and particular life of God’s people, since persons may enter into God’s election by being incorporated into this community.

Election and Predestination

According to the framework and argument of this thesis, predestination stands properly as a subcategory of election and not vice versa. This is not to say that the concept of election crowds out the significance of predestination. Rather, predestination stands as an important feature of the doctrine of election, and in so far as it suffers neglect, the doctrine of election suffers with it. Election stands as the broader and more encompassing reality as it refers to God's purpose in fashioning a particular people to share in God's redemptive and revelatory mission in respect to all creation. Predestination refers to God's activity of initiating and formulating God's purpose in election. Predestination certainly implies purpose. But this purpose is not encompassed by predestination conceived in itself but stands as a reference to election. In sum, predestination must be understood in and through the broader category of election.

This must be stressed at this point in the historical argument because with Athanasius we arrive at a closer aligning of predestination with salvation, with its potential for being misconstrued as individualistic in significance. Athanasius is not the first Father to treat of predestination as something to be developed positively in its own right, and not merely as an occasion to rehash the defense against Stoic determinism. Tertullian offers a very thoughtful development of predestination, ever referenced to the events and peoples of salvation-history.²⁹² It provides insight into the gracious source and character of our salvation. But more than our salvation, it points to God and God's loving and eternal purpose to restore humanity in and through Jesus Christ, which is the purpose of election.²⁹³ For Athanasius in particular, God's predestination of the Church in Christ serves as evidence of the co-divinity and co-eternality of the Son with the

²⁹² See above section on the corporate, Christological and salvation-historical treatment of predestination in Tertullian and the following references: *AJ* 13; *AM* 4.35, 5.4.

²⁹³ One could go back and forth over whether salvation or redemption is a broader category than election when referring to God's purpose. From the time of the fall, history bears witness to the purpose of God to redeem humanity and all creation. At the same time, redemption never happens apart from election. At least with reference to humanity, God does not redeem unless God also chooses, whether we look to the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, or the Church. God's concern and mission always looks beyond the scope of the Church as God's chosen people, but God's plan has always been to bless the world through the instrumentality of a chosen people. In this sense, God's purpose in redemption and in election is one and the same, though they may be developed along conceptually distinct lines.

Father.²⁹⁴ That is, predestination stands within a Christological context and serves a Christological purpose.

In short, then, what Athanasius has to say about predestination should be appreciated in its own regard, yet at the same time be put in the proper context. Augustine's reflections were a couple of generations off, and there was already a precedent for speaking about predestination in a corporate, cosmic, and Christocentric manner. Even when speaking about predestination, Athanasius placed it in the framework of elucidating the deity and place of Christ in God's economy. It should both confirm and augment his doctrine of election so far described. Let us turn to his words.

How then has he chosen us, before we came into existence, but that, as he says himself, in him we were represented beforehand? And how at all, before men were created, did he predestinate us unto adoption, but that the Son himself was 'founded before the world,' taking on him that economy which was for our sake? Or how, as the apostle goes on to say, have we 'an inheritance being predestinated,' but that the Lord himself was 'founded before the world,' inasmuch as he had a purpose, for our sakes, to take on himself through the flesh all that inheritance of judgment which lay against us, and we henceforth were made sons in him? And how did we receive it 'before the world was,' when we were not yet in being, but (came) afterwards in time, but that in Christ was stored the grace which has reached us? ... How then, or in whom, was it prepared before we came to be, save in the Lord who 'before the world' was founded for this purpose; that we, as built upon him, might partake, as well-compacted stones, the life and grace which is from him?²⁹⁵

Like an intricate jewel, this passage flairs with beauty every which way it turns. A round of glimpses must suffice. First, though predestination holds the focus, the language of "choosing" and of "predestining" are used interchangeably, alluding to the coherence and integrity of Athanasius' doctrine of election and predestination. Second, the phrasing remains thoroughly rhetorical, positing a succession of both questions and answers, both of which pertain to the realm of contemplative mystery. Third, the mystery consists in how God, before the very existence of

²⁹⁴ He may have agreed with Augustine's point that election and predestination portray salvation as God's gracious gift and not a human achievement, but that was not at all his focus. "He assumes and feels no need to argue that salvation is from first to last God's work." Cf. Stuart F. Clarke, "Lost and Found: Athanasius' Doctrine of Predestination," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29.5 (1976), 437. It follows that the significance of election and predestination may include but certainly is not limited to the confines of a debate regarding individual salvation by grace or achievement.

²⁹⁵ *OCA* 2.76.

the world, not to mention our own existence, brought about these wonderful gifts for us: being chosen, being adopted and made sons, having an inheritance in God's righteous kingdom rather than in judgment, with God's grace having already been prepared and even received by us.

Fourth, the core resolution to these mysteries consists in the fact that "in him we were represented." They were secured for us by Jesus Christ himself, who is both the eternal Son of God and our representative before the Father before all time. It is also clear that the Son shares in the Father's "purpose" in election, so that, while the Son is the mediator of election, he also equally is its formulator and initiator. In other words, another Father of the Church implicitly maintains, long before Karl Barth came on the scene, that "we were typified and represented in Christ, as the elect man," and also chosen and predestined by Christ, as the electing God.²⁹⁶ Furthermore, the benefits secured by Christ apply to us because somehow we have come to live "in him," in that sphere of existence "in Christ" of which the Apostle Paul so often speaks. Fifth, this fact, in addition to the plural language used throughout, implies that the benefits of election and predestination apply corporately and not to isolated individuals. It is as the Church, as the body of Christ, as the people who abide "in him," that we have been given these benefits. Sixth, there remains a sense in which these benefits were finally and ultimately wrought for us in time in the coming of Christ. The Lord took upon himself this "purpose," "economy" and responsibility before the creation of the world, but it follows that he has only realized, discharged and fulfilled this through his life, passion, death, and resurrection. Seventh, in addition, there also remains a sense of futurity or even contingency to the reception of these benefits. We indeed "received" it in Christ "before the world was," but after Christ brought his mission to its fulfillment, the stage

²⁹⁶ The quotation borrows from Stuart Clarke's phrasing, "Lost and Found: Athanasius' Doctrine of Predestination," 438-39. Of course, Athanasius does not come close to developing this as thoroughly as Barth does. Nevertheless, Christ is clearly described in this passage as the representative of the chosen people of God before all time and the one who, as equally God, shares in the formulation of the purpose of election. Barth was reading the same Scriptures as Athanasius, which portray the Son as the one who has shared eternally in the Father's redemptive purpose and which holds the assertion that God, "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love" (Eph 1.4). The very title of Messiah and the fact of being anointed as the Son of God by the Spirit also imply that Christ stands as the representative of Israel. That the elect people were reestablished as the Church in consequence of his death and resurrection further implies this representative function. Though the topic of the mediation of election was not thoroughly and explicitly developed in Scripture, it is implied in the whole movement of election of which the NT speaks. It may also be implied in how some of the early Fathers of the Church spoke about election and its fulfillment as "in Christ." Cf. Irenaeus *DA* 21; Tertullian *AM* 5.17; Origen, *FP* 4.1.3.

is set that we “might partake” the “life and grace which is from him” and be “reached” by grace, which remains contingent on whether we are “built upon him” as “well-compacted stones” to become part of the temple which is his body, the Church.²⁹⁷

While upholding the eternal deity of the Son and his eternal role in election, Athanasius refrains from collapsing the present into an abstract eternity. As he said in the passage just before the above one,

Though the grace which came to us from the Savior appeared, as the Apostle says, just now ... when he sojourned among us; yet this grace has been prepared even before we came into being, nay, before the foundation of the world.²⁹⁸

There remains a distinction between what the Son does for us in eternity and in time. The historicity of Christ retains its significance as the means by which God’s perennial purpose in election and predestination is brought to its fulfillment.

Though Athanasius also brings predestination and salvation together, his terminology does not equate salvation with eternal destiny. Being “chosen” and “adopted” children and recipients of God’s “grace” are features of present identity. Present identity anticipates a future inheritance, but being elect cannot be limited to such. Therefore we presently have an “inheritance” in the kingdom that God has prepared for us, not that we are in final possession of it, but that it has been promised and realized for us in Christ. The fundamentally corporate and historical character of election in other passages suggests that Athanasius does not have anything other than such an understanding in mind here as well. Nor does salvation here have the individual as its primary referent. Salvation pertains to the Church and is received by individuals apparently as the fruit of living faithfully according to God’s call.

²⁹⁷ Another glimpse may be mentioned. The language of election and predestination is also used in an almost interchangeable fashion with the language of: adoption, God’s gracious salvation, having an inheritance with Christ, and partaking of immortal life. It bears a direct relationship to the identity of God’s people and the benefits of which they partake in Christ.

²⁹⁸ *OCA* 2.75.

Election and Conditionality

For Athanasius, election and salvation refer directly to the work of God in Christ on our behalf, not on anything that we have done. We were elected, made sons and heirs of God, and given God's grace, in and through the Incarnation, according to the eternal counsel and predetermined purpose of God.

Athanasius does not speak about election this way in order to defend against an assault on the truth of salvation by grace. His context is not Augustine's later battle against Pelagius but rather his own present battle with Arius. He expands on election and predestination as a way of demonstrating and defending the co-equal and co-eternal being of the Son with the Father. The Son's unique role in the economy of election points to the deity that he shares with the Father. The reason his account of election smacks of the initiative of grace is that he portrays election as primarily Christological. Whether in the purpose of God "before the foundation of the world" or in his Incarnation, death, and resurrection, the Son of God has taken the initiative to claim us as his own and to forge into one both Jews and Gentiles.

This does not render our decisions and actions as historical persons unimportant. Our faith and obedience are vitally important as the means by which we enter and continue in the sphere of election and salvation, the Church. God's action and decision precedes and forms the foundation for our action and decision.²⁹⁹ Understood corporately, historically, temporally,³⁰⁰ and Christologically, free will is not threatened but rather confirmed as a vital, though not foundational, aspect of election and predestination.

²⁹⁹ Athanasius maintained that human rationality, including free will, characterized all persons, owing its existence to the providence of God. Cf. *OCG* sec. 44.

³⁰⁰ In the context of the meaningfulness of time and therefore also of human decisions.

Election and Purpose

As seen previously, election and revelation go hand in hand in the thought of Athanasius.³⁰¹ God calls a particular people to be the recipients and bearers of the revelation of the One True God to the world. Christ brings this economy to its fulfillment, represented and embodied in the life of the Church. The Church stands uniquely as that society through which God offers truth and salvation to a self-deceived and sinful world. Election goes hand in hand with God's purpose in revelation and redemption.

Election, Israel and the Church

In one concise passage in his Christological masterpiece, the *De incarnatione Verbi*, Athanasius stacks proof upon proof to show how history itself demonstrates that God's purpose in election has come to its fulfillment. Here again election is couched within the framework of a proof of the deity of Christ, this time directed to the unbelief of the Jews.

For a sign and a great proof of the coming of God the Word is this: no longer does Jerusalem stand, nor does a prophet arise, nor is vision revealed to them—and rightly so. If the Gentiles worshipped another god and did not confess the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses, they would have a just pretext to claim that God has not come. But if the Gentiles worship the God who gave the law to Moses and the promise to Abraham, and whose Word the Jews despised, why do they (the Jews) not recognize, or rather why do they willingly refuse to see that the Lord who was prophesied by the Scriptures has illuminated the world and has been made manifest bodily to it...For if it is the case, as we see that it is, that they have no king, nor prophet, nor Jerusalem, nor sacrifice, nor vision, but that the whole world is filled with the knowledge of God, and the Gentiles, leaving impiety, now take refuge in the God of Abraham through the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, it should be clear even to those who are extremely obstinate that Christ has come and that he now has illuminated absolutely all with his light and imparted the true and divine teaching about his Father.³⁰²

From Athanasius' perspective, the Jews are indeed the chosen people of God. All of the features of their religious and national identity attest to this. By the same token, the disappearance of all these signs indicates a historical end to their exclusion possession of this status. The holy city

³⁰¹ Cf. above section on *Election and the Apostolic Ministry* and the passage from the *OCA* 1.59.

³⁰² *OIV* sec. 40.

and its temple no longer stand. The visions and oracles of the prophets have ceased. The royal succession and the sacrificial system have been cut off. This tragic turn of events is due to nothing less than their refusal to recognize and embrace Jesus as the incarnate Word of God. Both the former standing of the Jewish people as elect and the decisive shift in this confirms that Athanasius saw election as fundamentally corporate and historical.

On the other side, people from all over the Gentile world have turned from their idolatries to pledge themselves in faith to the “God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.” No person is potentially excluded any longer from the saving light of the true knowledge of God. The very events of history following the advent of the Word bear witness to the fulfillment of God’s revelatory and redemptive purpose. Now the Church, as the recipient of the fullness of the divine self-revelation, stands as the chosen people of God. Election now pertains most directly to the Church as those gathered from all the nations according to God’s eschatological calling. The permanence of the Church as God’s covenant partner derives from the eternal union that Christ has forged between himself and his Body, the Church.³⁰³

Though the Jewish people as they persist in obstinance toward Christ forfeit their election, this does not imply an end to their historical existence. Athanasius speaks carefully about Judaism in this vein. He never says that the Jewish people or race have been destroyed, but just that the distinguishing elements of their national and religious identity have disappeared.³⁰⁴

Ultimately, Christ’s death does not serve to separate Jews and Gentiles but to unite them in one fellowship and one body. The very manner of his crucifixion, with arms spread out to embrace both Jews and Gentiles, attests to this unifying purpose.

³⁰³ *OCA* 4.34.

³⁰⁴ Contrary to the exaggerated language of Eusebius, who maintains that the calling of the Gentiles led to not only the end of the previous covenant and the fall of Jerusalem but also “the total collapse and ruin of the whole Jewish race” (*DG* 2.1). Besides the above passage in Athanasius, see also *OCA* 4.34. “And so the works of the Jews are now lost and gone, because they were only a shadow and a type of things to come.”

Therefore, if the death of the Lord is a ransom for all, and by this death the barrier of division is done away with, and *the calling extends to the Gentiles*, how did he *beckon* us, except *by being crucified*? For only on the cross does one die with hands stretched out. Therefore, even this was fitting for the Lord to endure, even *to stretch out his hands, so that he might draw both the ancient people and those from the Gentiles, that he might join the two in himself*.³⁰⁵

The Jews may have rejected God, but God has certainly not rejected the Jews. His death was truly for “all” people, even for those who may presently reject him, whether out of an exclusive and self-confident allegiance to the Torah or out of entrenchment in the sins and idols of the nations. Up unto this point in time, the Jews alone had been recipients of God’s election. But now the calling “extends to the Gentiles” to include them in the one universal and historic communion of God’s people. The fulfillment of election does not pit Gentile against Jew but rather leads both Gentile and Jew to see one another as objects of God’s redemptive initiative to fashion one people through whom God would be glorified in all the earth.

Election and Nationality

Athanasius had a considerably different experience with the Emperor and the highest authorities of the Church than Eusebius. He was forced to flee Alexandria on five separate occasions because of his opposition to Arian Christology, which had gained the support of emperors (Constantine and Constantius) as well as popes and archbishops.³⁰⁶ In truth, in the Christological debates it was not he that opposed the emperors and popes by opposing the Arians, but rather that the Emperors were opposing God by siding with the Arians. Though the argument from silence may prove tenuous, Athanasius does not appear to make mention of any particular significance of the Roman Empire in providence or history. The people of God alone occupy this privileged place. The Emperor may confess Christ, but that certainly does not make the Empire *per se* part of the Church.

³⁰⁵ *OIV* sec 25.9-15, translation mine.

³⁰⁶ Robert W. Thomson, ed., *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), xv-xvii.

To a large degree, Athanasius' political conceptuality has its home in his doctrine of revelation. God's self-revelation began with the choosing of Israel.

He assigned them, not to become gods for them but that through their actions the Gentiles might come to know God the creator of the universe, as has been explained. For the Jewish people had previously had fuller teaching, since they had knowledge of God not only from the works of creation but also from the Divine Scriptures.³⁰⁷

This "fuller teaching" stands in contrast to the incomplete teaching that the nations previously had, e.g. in their "monotheistic" philosophers. Revelation reaches its climax in the sojourn of the eternal Word, who reveals God to the world in an absolutely exclusive and unique way. The Body of Christ is the "temple" in which the glory of God now abides, making God sense-able to the world.³⁰⁸ God's election of a particular people for the purpose of revelation set Israel and the Church apart in history as surpassingly unique. Athanasius' political views begin and end in ecclesiology. The Church is the Church, and the world is the world, and the Empire belongs to the second category.³⁰⁹

Election and Mission

Though Athanasius concerned himself most especially with matters of ecclesiastical debate, he did demonstrate a concern for defending the faith from and commending it to outsiders, as seen especially in the *Contra Gentes*. His concern for upholding the uniqueness of God's self-revelation, conferred upon the Church, may reflect a desire to persuade outsiders to seriously weigh the claims of the Gospel. Additionally, his careful language and unified vision of Jews and Gentiles in Christ may have been geared to prevent losing the Jews as an audience for the gospel.

³⁰⁷ *OCG* sec. 45.

³⁰⁸ Cf. above, *OCA* 4.34.

³⁰⁹ In this way, Athanasius preserves the fundamental political convictions of the Church Fathers of earlier times. Granted, the apologists, writing in times of persecution, spoke about how God had worked in the history of the Roman and Greek Empires, but this was not a proof of Rome as unique in providential history or as chosen in any sense by God. That the Romans could look back in their history and society and find anticipations of the Gospel was rather a proof that God had been preparing all peoples, including the Romans, for the day when God would call persons from every nation to become a part of the chosen people.

Election and Ethics

That Athanasius in the *Contra Gentes* writes up a polemical catalog of the idolatries and heresies present in Roman society and does not mention any resolution to this suggests that he saw the Roman Empire as pagan as ever.³¹⁰ He may even have made a jab at the prospect of Rome's idols tumbling down on account of the reforms of the Emperors. For the incarnate Word alone "was able to teach about the Father, and to tear down the worship of idols."³¹¹ The evil of idolatry in the broader society apparently would not be overcome until the return of Christ himself. The commitment to the worship of the Only True God delineated an enduring divide between the Church and the nations of the world.

Conclusion

Athanasius' doctrine of election and predestination continues in the main features of the doctrine seen so far in Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen. He does develop the concept of predestination in a way that Irenaeus and Origen do not. At the same time, he portrays it as basically equivalent to election itself. As with Tertullian, predestination for Athanasius does not refer in a direct and unmediated way to the destinies of individuals but rather to what the Father and Son have planned in regard to the Church, through which God accomplishes the purpose of revelation and redemption, with Christ as the one who represents and fulfills the election of God's people. Overall, in his exposition of election and predestination, Athanasius plays the role of an outstanding defender and expositor of the faith of the Church, particularly in reference to the dignity of Jesus Christ.

³¹⁰ *CGA* Sec. 11-14.

³¹¹ *OIV* pg. 182, sec 20, lines 3-10, 25-37.

Chapter 7. Ambrose

Argument

Ambrose forges a middle ground of sorts between Eusebius and previous Fathers. He portrays election as fundamentally corporate and historical, rejecting the Eusebian Platonic framework for a Jewish-Christian one. By defending the primal antiquity of the Church, he seems to truncate the significance of Israel, yet he does make room for seeing Israel as the chosen people of God, even in the coming consummation. He affirmed the identity of the Empire as a Christian State, yet he manages to uphold the political and social integrity of the Church in its representation of the authority of Christ.

Introduction

In the year of Eusebius' death in 339, Ambrose came into the world, representing a new generation in the relationship between Church and State. Two factors about Ambrose bring considerable insight to the character of his life and also his doctrine of election and predestination. Like two parallel strings on an instrument in need of constant adjustment, these factors at times sound dissonant, yet at times they can produce a harmony.

His aristocratic heritage in Roman political circles stands as the first of these strings. His father was the prefect of Gaul before his early death. Ambrose himself was not only a friend of the Emperors of his time, Gratian and Theodosius, but also a spiritual counselor, leading the former to conversion and thoroughly testing the profession of the second. With the Emperors, Ambrose also stood as a partner in government, whether in his role as governor of the important province of Aemelia-Liguria³¹² or even while in his twenty-four year tenure as bishop of the prominent city

³¹² W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965, 1982), 178-79.

of Milan,³¹³ helping to bring stability to the Western side of the Empire with the capital now situated in Constantinople.

His heritage and conviction in regard to the authority of the Church and its apostolic ministry comprises the second string. Born of prominent aristocratic stock that was also thoroughly Christian, Ambrose found his identity first and foremost in the citizenship of the Church. The sentiment that Christ's authority outweighed that of the Emperor was common in the Western side of the Empire, and one which Ambrose decidedly shared. "Let Mother Rome demand whatever else she may desire. I owe love to a parent, but still more I owe obedience to the Author of salvation."³¹⁴ There is an appropriate filial piety for the State, but the question of loyalty must always have but one answer.

His education seemed to combine the best of both worlds. Though given the best in education, Ambrose had an early disdain for learning, with one notable exception in his skill with Greek, the language not only found in the New Testament but also in the courts of Roman government and aristocracy. From there his passion for knowledge seemed to develop in a very specific direction. At the relatively young age of thirty-four, he had already compiled a Latin condensation of the *Antiquities* of Josephus.³¹⁵ Philo the Jew stood among his favorites, as well as the Christians Hippolytus, Didymus, Origen, Basil, Eusebius, and Athanasius. Ambrose also stood in a tradition of cultivated oratory and drew on pagan philosophy including that of Plato, and among the Neo-Platonists, Plotinus and his disciple Porphyry.³¹⁶

³¹³ From 373 until his death in 397.

³¹⁴ *EV* par 20.

³¹⁵ Frend, *The Early Church*, 179.

³¹⁶ Michael P. McHugh, trans, in Ambrose of Milan, *Seven Exegetical Works in FoC* vol. 65 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America P, 1971), intro, 3.

Election and Time

Ambrose seems to keep with an eschatological-linear conception of time, owing both to his Western context and his use of Scriptural terminology. In his *De Paenitentia*, he speaks casually and confessionally of being previously given over “to this age,” signifying the “present, evil age” of Galatians 1.4.³¹⁷

Election and the Calling of the Gentiles

Ambrose kept with the early Christian tradition of seeing the Church present in the Jewish Scriptures and in the pre-existing intent of God. “There, there is the Church of God, in which God appears and speaks with His humble servants.”³¹⁸ Yet, unlike Eusebius, this insight did not lead Ambrose to portray the Church as an eternal religion that transcended and supplanted the ancient people of Israel. His numerous references in this area all point to the Christ-event and the historically decisive establishment of the Church. Ambrose renders the events surrounding the calling of the Gentiles as the typological references of a huge number of passages in Scripture.³¹⁹

First, let us note a few of the references to the coming of Christ and his calling of the Gentiles. That Isaac went to a far off land to take a bride for himself, so Christ crossed over to meet and woo the Gentiles to be united to his family.³²⁰ In Jacob’s blessing of Judah is prefigured the coming of Christ, his ascendancy over the nations, and the gathering together of the nations under his lordship.³²¹ In the wife of Nabal who came into the tent of David is symbolized the union of the Church of the Gentiles with its new husband, Christ.³²²

³¹⁷ *Pn* 2.8.

³¹⁸ *JHL* 2.7.33.

³¹⁹ Though W. H. C. Frend labels the exegetical method of Ambrose as allegorical, typological perhaps stands as a more accurate description. If allegory be understood as referring to an eternal truth, and typology to a historical foreshadowing, then the majority of his references prove typological in character.

³²⁰ *IoS* 3.7

³²¹ *Pt* 12.57-58.

³²² Ambrose, *Letter* 74.

On top of this, let us count the references to the opposition of the Synagogue to Christ and the Church. In Jacob's blessing of Reuben is identified in advance the disobedient "audacity of the firstborn people, not subject to God's law."³²³ Ahinoam, once married to Saul and later to David, foreshadows the way in which the Jewish people would leave the husband of their youth by turning away from Christ.³²⁴ In the hostility of Cain for Abel we have a prototype of the Synagogue's opposition to the Church.³²⁵

To this, let us add the references to a reversal of fortunes between Jewish and Gentile peoples. In Rebekah's womb the offspring of "two nations" dwells, Esau and Jacob as representative heads of peoples, Judaism and Christianity, who will find their standing switched in God's design.³²⁶ The reversal of blessing between Ephraim and Manasseh prefigures the latter birth but greater blessing of the Church, through whom the Father's line would prosper.³²⁷

Finally, let us throw in the references to the inclusion of Gentiles and the union of Jews and Gentiles in the Church. The twins Esau and Jacob live together in the womb also symbolize the union of Jew and Gentile, making Rebekah a symbol of the mother that is the Church.³²⁸ When Jacob reproached his sons for killing those who had violated their sister, he symbolized God's eventual plan and blessing that a mixed offspring would populate the Church.³²⁹ The young Jewish woman who told Naaman of a "prophet in Israel" represents the "congregation gathered

³²³ *Pt* 2.8.

³²⁴ Ambrose, *Letter* 74.

³²⁵ *CA* 1.2.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Pt* 1.5.

³²⁸ *Ibid.* This gesture of her "prophetic and apostolic soul" foreshadows the union of Jews and Gentiles to come which was stored up finally in the womb of Mary: "she joins two nations together by her faith and by prophecy and encloses them in her womb, so to speak."

³²⁹ *JHL* 2.7.32. Jacob "esteemed compassion with a forbearance that was moral, or he foresaw, with an understanding that was mystical, the mystery of the Church that would be gathered together from the nations."

out of the Gentiles” living in the midst of the Gentile captivity to idolatry.³³⁰ The foreign general who heeded her words and eventually found healing also foreshadows the “Church of God” that included Gentiles, who, after obeying, found themselves “washed from every defilement of sin.”³³¹

Election and History

Every single one of the above interpretations pertains to historical events and corporate realities, thus signifying the historical and corporate significance of election itself. God’s purpose in election points to the historical existence of a people as God’s chosen, finally brought to its fulfillment in the historical advent of Christ and the consequent calling and inclusion of the Gentiles, constituting the community of the Church as the eschatological chosen people of God. Election pertains expressly to the economy of salvation-history and not to God’s plan in regard to the eternal identity and destiny of individuals as such.

Election and Christ

Ambrose readily speaks of the role of Christ in election. The Son of God shares the Father’s purpose of election with the Father, and discharges this purpose through his historical advent, life, death, and resurrection. The Spirit also shares in the accomplishment of the purpose of election, as we will see in the role of the apostolic ministry. That is, election happens in the context of history while simultaneously pointing out the eternal relationships of unity and complementarity within the Trinity.

³³⁰ *M* chp 3.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

From cradle to grave, Christ's own life reflected the inclusion of the Gentiles, whether we look to the coming of the three sages from the orient or to the confession of the Roman centurion.³³² And yet, Christ is much more than a passive example of the inclusion of the Gentiles. He is the one in who brings God's historical choice of a people to its fulfillment in his own historical life, death, and resurrection. The historical roots of this fulfillment run deep in the history of the ancient people. The "unblemished line of succession' of judges and rulers from Judah persists 'until he come for whom it has been reserved,' reserved that *He may gather together the Church of God out of the assembly of all the nations and the devotion of the Gentile peoples.*"³³³ The patriarchal blessing of promise handed down to the children of Israel is now conferred upon the Gentiles by Christ, who has now freed the Gentiles "from the inheritance of the curse and presented them with the inheritance of the blessing."³³⁴ It was Christ who "*called the nations* to the grace of His resurrection,"³³⁵ in order that, "*by calling forth the Gentiles,* He might gain a kingdom for the Father out of a holy and devout worship."³³⁶

Election and the Apostolic Ministry

As Ambrose begins to discuss the role of the apostolic ministry, his Trinitarian conception of election begins to blossom. Father, Son, and Spirit all share in the perennial purpose of election, which each member has a role in effecting. The apostles participate in the fulfillment of election, which refers directly to the gathering of the Gentiles into the fold of the Church.

Not only is there one operation everywhere on the part of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, but also *one and the same will, one calling, and one giving of commands, which may be seen in the great and saving mystery of the Church.* For just as *the Father called the Gentiles to the Church,* saying: 'I shall call her my people, who was not my people, and her beloved, who was not beloved,' and elsewhere: 'My house shall be called the house of prayer

³³² "For this reason also the centurion said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God' (Matt. 27.54). The centurion recognizes a stranger, whereas the Levite does not know his own; the Gentile worships Him, the Hebrew denies him" (PJD 1.5.13).

³³³ Pt 4.21.

³³⁴ Pt 5.29.

³³⁵ Pt 6.30.

³³⁶ PJD 2.7.26.

for all nations,' so, too, does *the Lord Jesus say that Paul has been chosen to call forth and gather the Church*, as you have it said by the Lord Jesus to Ananias: 'Go, for this man is a vessel of election to me, to carry my name before the Gentiles.' (Acts 9.15) So, *just as God the Father called the Church, so Christ also called; and as Christ called, so the Spirit also called*, saying: 'Separate me Saul and Barnabas, for the work to which *I have called them*. Then *they fasting*,' he said, 'and praying, and imposing their hands upon them, sent them away. But they, being *sent by the Holy Spirit*, went to Saleucia.' (Acts 13.2-4) So Paul *received the apostolate at the command not only of Christ, but also of the Holy Spirit*, and he hastened to the gathering of the Gentiles. And not only Paul, but also Peter...³³⁷

The purpose of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in election is a unity. This unity is expressed in the co-operation within God to bring about the inclusion of the Gentiles, which directly implicates and involves an apostolic cohort. In this historically extended but decisive *kairos*, the Father, Son, and Spirit have all called "the Gentiles to the Church." As election has its source in the initiative of the Triune God, so the historical administration of this economy gains expression by extension in the lives of the chosen apostles.

The tone throughout is decidedly corporate and historical. Again, that God has fulfilled the purpose of election in a decisive *kairos* only makes sense if election is conceived as corporate and historical. Even though God's purpose in election is everlasting, the effecting of this purpose happens not outside of time in an abstracted sphere of eternity but precisely in the particularities of God's dealings with a historical people.

The apostles were chosen in order to share in the fulfillment of God's purpose in choosing a people.³³⁸ As *the* apostle to the Gentiles, Paul especially represents the fulfillment of election. Ambrose highlights this in several places.³³⁹ Yet the historical administration of election extends

³³⁷ As Peter was shown that the food of Gentile converts was not to be rejected any longer. *HS* 2.101-103.

³³⁸ When his sons call Jacob back from Egypt, it reflects the way that Jesus' first apostles would call Judaism to the new place where God's people would be established, the Church (*J* 14.82). Jacob being called from Egypt by his sons is analogous to the Church, and particularly the apostles, Peter, John and Paul, calling "the people of the Jews," who are "invited to pass to the people of God that was gathered together from the whole world."

³³⁹ Cf. above, *HS* bk 2 par 101-103. Cf. also *Pt* 12.57-58, where the blessing for Benjamin points to his descendent, Paul of Tarsus, who troubled his brother Jews, fed the kings of the Gentile nations, and became "a vessel of election." The servant of God's "commission" thus made known the "mystery among the Gentiles" which is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1.25-26). The title "vessel of election" also comes in *HS* bk 2 par 146. In *IoS* 4.31, he says, "The calling of Paul is the strength of the Church."

past the lives of the first generation of apostles. The calling of Paul and Barnabus suggests this, since they did not number among the original twelve.³⁴⁰ The Triune God discharges the economy of election in the context of the Church, highlighting the ecclesial setting of the doctrine. Father, Son, and Spirit effect the call of the apostolic ministers within the worshipping life of the community.³⁴¹

For this reason, Ambrose refers to the Spirit's activity in choosing apostolic ministers as the ongoing "inheritance of apostolic faith and devotion, which may be observed also in the Acts of the Apostles."³⁴² As God chose the sons of the tribe of Levi for the priesthood, so also God chooses the historically continuous apostolic ministry.³⁴³ Ambrose also sees the apostolic ministry prefigured in the patriarchal practice of bestowing the blessing of the promise to their descendants. As the patriarchs laid hands on their children to bless them and continue the lineage of the chosen, so the contemporary apostolic minister may say, "it is permitted me also to mark the servant with the sign of the Lord."³⁴⁴ Using the very gestures of blessing in the Church's liturgy, Ambrose sees himself as having the authority to claim persons as God's own and

"Strength," perhaps because like his ancestor Israel, who strongly "struggles with God," Paul kicked against the goads during his opposition to Christ. In other places, Paul is said to have been "chosen by Christ, and instructed by the Spirit" (*HS* bk 2 par 129). Paul may be inferred in the reference in *HS* bk 2 par 122 and is commissioned as the one who would symbolically carry out the election of the Gentiles in *HS* bk 2 par 146, quoting Acts 15.7, "My brethren, you know that in former days God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the Gospel."

³⁴⁰ Cf. passage cited above as well as *HS* bk 2 par 157. "Barnabus also believed, and because he believed, he obeyed. And so, being chosen by the authority of the Holy Sprit, which redounded for him unto every mark of honor, he was not unworthy of so great an association. For one grace shone on those whom one Spirit had chosen."

³⁴¹ Cf. passage cited above, in which Paul and Barnabus are "called" by Christ and "sent" after hands were laid upon them in the worshipping body in Antioch. Even the original apostles apparently received their calling in the context of the community of disciples. "Finally, God established apostles. Those whom God established in the Church, Christ chose and ordained as apostles, and He ordered them into the world saying: 'Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature, He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be condemned...' (Mark 16.15ff) Behold, the Father established the teachers; Christ also established them in the Churches" (*HS* bk 2 par 151).

³⁴² *HS* bk 2 par 155.

³⁴³ Ambrose, *Letter* 87.

³⁴⁴ *EV* 59. Where the standing of the Neo-Platonist initiate may have been doubted, Ambrose lays all doubts aside based on the authority represented and administered in his role as an apostolic minister.

members of the Church on the basis of their faith. The apostolic ministry did not come to a halt with the first generation. Rather, the apostolic ministry consists of a historical line of succession which continually symbolizes the election of the Church and administers the Spirit's work to incorporate persons in this election.

Election and Initiation

If election and predestination happen in singular reference to the Church, to the plural "we" of the people of God, how is it that individuals come to be "chosen" and "predestined" by God?

According to the above passage and Ambrose's other pertinent references, individuals *as such* are not the proper or direct objects of predestination. Rather, this identity comes in the context of participating in the life of the Church. It is by being incorporated into Christ's union with the Church that individuals partake of election and predestination and its benefits. This is complemented by Ambrose's sure conviction that Christ died for all persons.³⁴⁵ All persons are potentially elect, if only they come to Christ in humble confession and submit themselves to the discipline of living in Christian community.

For Ambrose, there is one way into the Church, and that way is baptism.³⁴⁶ Baptism presumes the person's commitment of faith and obedience, initial and ongoing surrender and repentance, which argues for a legitimate place for the human will in initially and continually receiving the gift of election and sonship in God's household. Baptism also portends the complete transformation of a person's identity, morality, and even citizenship. This is why Ambrose so adamantly maintained that a person could be baptized once and only once. "The reiteration by

³⁴⁵ Ambrose expressly distinguished himself from Novatian's early version of "limited atonement" by maintaining that God's desire was for *all persons* to come to the heavenly wedding banquet (*Pn* 1.7).

³⁴⁶ It may be argued against Ambrose that he gave the title of Christian to persons who had not yet been baptized, like Theodosius. As a person representing the apostolic ministry, and as a person well aware of the necessities of the political rule (e.g. warfare), he presumed the authority to claim these persons as members of the faith and of the kingdom.

any one of the Sacrament of baptism is not permitted.”³⁴⁷ Being baptized twice made about as much sense as being naturalized twice.

He also upheld the saving significance of baptism as the door of entry into the community of the saved. In comparison to the saintly Jews who were metaphorically baptized in the self-denying character of their life, Ambrose celebrates the greatness of the Church in which “all who ‘go down’ are saved.”³⁴⁸ Persons are not to worry over their individual salvation but accept the assurance that comes from living in partnership with the flesh of Christ in the Church.³⁴⁹ Having been baptized, Christians are urged to get on with the business of being the Church, living in earnest as “the possession of God.”³⁵⁰ A person comes to partake of election, predestination, and its benefits as one participates in the Church in its union with Christ.

Election and Boundaries

Election pertains to a particular, historical people. This implies both an inclusive and exclusive aspect to election, since persons are not automatically included, while they may be included if only they are incorporated into this body. In one respect, however, Ambrose compromises the exclusive side of the election of the Church. As did Eusebius, Ambrose affirms the Christian identity of the Emperors, first Gratian then Theodosius, even before they had received baptism. Provided that their faith and repentance proved earnest, they could enjoy the privilege of communion in the fellowship of the baptized.³⁵¹

³⁴⁷ *Pn* 2.3.

³⁴⁸ *S* 2.2.

³⁴⁹ Ambrose, *Letter* 85. See below.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ The apparent origin of allowing the unbaptized to participate in the eucharistic meal goes back to the genesis of Constantinian Christianity and the persons of the Emperors themselves.

Election and Predestination

Like Tertullian and Athanasius, Ambrose does speak of predestination positively as a contribution to Christian thought. And also like these two, he presupposes that *the Church as a historic and corporate whole is the object of this predestination in and through the person of Jesus Christ.*

In one of his letters, Ambrose offers a “brief summary” of the meaning of Ephesians. A large section of this, reproduced here, deals explicitly with election and predestination in terms of the Church.

Not only has a way to paradise been made anew for us through Christ, but also there has been won for us the honor of a throne in heaven *through our partnership with the flesh of Christ's Body.* You need no longer doubt the possibility of your ascension, knowing that your partnership with the flesh of Christ continues in the kingdom of heaven, knowing that through His Blood reconciliation was made for all things, those on earth and in heaven (for He came down in order to fulfill all things), and by His Apostles, Prophets, and priests *establishing the whole world and drawing together the Gentiles.* Now, the purpose of our hope is the love of Him, that we may grow up to Him in all things, because He is the Head of all things, and by the building up of love we all rise up to Him into one body, according to the measure of our work. We ought not despair of *the members being united to their Head,* especially since *from the beginning we have been predestined in Him through Jesus Christ to be the adopted sons of God, and He has ratified this predestination,* maintaining that which was foretold from the beginning, that ‘A man shall leave his Father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh,’ for *it is a mystery of Christ and of the Church.* Therefore, if the union of Adam and Eve is a great mystery in Christ and in the Church, it is certain that as Eve was bone of the bones of her husband, and flesh of his flesh, we also are members of Christ's Body, bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh. No other epistle has given utterance to so great a blessing upon the people of God as this in which the great witness of divine grace signified not only that we were blessed by God, but blessed with all blessing in the spirit and in the heavens, and *predestined to the adoption of sons, endowed also with grace in the Son of God;* by which we have been filled with the knowledge of the mystery of the eternal will... *Let us therefore be the possession of God,* let Him be our portion, for *in Him are the riches of His glory and of His inheritance...* With the removal of those enmities which formerly existed in the flesh, peace with the universe has been made in heavens, that men might be like angels on earth, *that Gentiles and Jews might be made one,* that *in one man might dwell the old and new man,* with the middle wall of partition removed, which once stood between them like a hostile barrier.³⁵²

³⁵² Ambrose, *Letter 85.*

Few words could do justice to the beauty of this passage, so the points will be made briefly. First, God's eternal predestination refers to the Church as a corporate and historical people, confirmed and demonstrated in the union between Jews and Gentiles. Second, the Church has been predestined *in Christ*, in the "partnership with the flesh of Christ's Body," in "union" with its "Head," and this union of Christ to the Church is symbolized in the union of marriage. Third, Christ is clearly portrayed as the mediator of election and predestination, which is the basis for the Church's mediation of election and predestination to its members.³⁵³ Neither is his role purely instrumental. Rather, the Son cooperates with the Father and the Spirit in bringing about election, and the Son Himself "ratifies this predestination" in his personal pledge of marital union to the Church.

Election and Conditionality

Though Ambrose does not draw a direct line of correlation between the human will and election and predestination, the two doctrines are complementary. First of all, he does not describe predestination in a way that would ever call into question the understanding of the integrity of the human will in its implications for morality, salvation, and even election. Rather, he maintains the defense against Stoic determinism as well as Manichaean dualism, maintaining that humanity in all of its physicality even after the fall is not inherently evil or constrained to sin.³⁵⁴ In regard to the individual, election comes only to those who willingly receive it. "Christ chooses for Himself the volunteer soldier; the devil buys for himself at auction the volunteer slave. He holds no man bound to the yoke of slavery unless such a one has first sold himself to him at the purchase price of his sins."³⁵⁵ Second, persons may forfeit their share in election. This is reminiscent especially of the Jews who have forfeited their standing as the chosen people insofar as they have rejected

³⁵³ The Church is the people, but the Church is bigger than its people, having a life greater than the sum total of its parts. The historical and corporate fellowship of God's people is God's creation and the unique dwelling place of the Spirit.

³⁵⁴ *JHL* 1.2-3.

³⁵⁵ *JHL* 1.3.10.

their Messiah. Yet this sobering truth applies to everyone in the fellowship of God's people, for prideful disobedience implies exclusion from the Church as the elect community.³⁵⁶

Election and Purpose

As all of God's purposes have reached their fulfillment in Christ, so the Body of Christ represents and embodies these purposes. As "man" is merely a "shadow" and the "law" was merely an "image" in regard to reflecting the character of God, the "truth" and "reality" have come in "Jesus."³⁵⁷ The Church, therefore, is "rich" in revelation, while the Jews are those "poor who blessed God" and now "borrow revelations from others."³⁵⁸ God offers the gift of salvation in the corporate life of the Church. The benefits of adoption and reconciliation from Christ's sacrifice are received in the context of the Church's "partnership with the body of Christ."³⁵⁹ God's choice of a people also implies the manifestation and extension of God's dominion, even if imperfectly.³⁶⁰

Election, Israel and the Church

Ambrose pictures the Church as both the continuation and succession of the election of ancient Israel. Succession, however, does not mean negation, for Ambrose upholds the historical significance of Israel as the chosen people. Continuation and succession form the two sides of the central theme of fulfillment.

³⁵⁶ As seen even in the case of his confrontation with Theodosius. Ambrose warned, "It is a serious matter to jeopardize your faith on behalf of the Jews" (Ambrose, *Letter 2*)

³⁵⁷ *HBS* 2.110.

³⁵⁸ *EV* 30.

³⁵⁹ Ambrose, *Letter 85*.

³⁶⁰ *PJD* 2.7.26. "By calling forth the Gentiles He might gain a kingdom for the Father out of a holy and devout worship." In his treatise *On Penitence*, Ambrose recognizes not only the fallibility not only of parishioners of the Church but also himself as a priest in the Church. He implores God to "suffer not him who when lost was called to the priesthood to be lost while now a priest." Translation mine from *La Pénitence*, Roger Gryson, trans. and ed. (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1971), sec. 73. Even in his sinfulness and that of the people, Ambrose still believed that the Church was indeed the chosen people of God and the embodiment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

God's purpose in election constitutes a fundamental unity throughout time. God has always had a chosen people through whom the revelation, redemption, and dominion of God would be manifested and extended. This comes to its fulfillment in the election of the Church, in which Jews and Gentiles are joined as one Body, extending God's purpose in election to the whole world.

By the same token, the Church also succeeds Israel in its identity as God's chosen people. As indicated in the above section on the calling of the Gentiles, Ambrose sees the Jewish rejection of their Messiah as a part of the fulfillment of God's purpose in election in the Church. This rejection continues in the life of Judaism. Apparently Ambrose had consulted Irenaeus on this, since he repeats the analogy of Gideon's changing fleece as representative of the role-reversal between Synagogue and Church.³⁶¹ Now the "whole world is moistened by the dew of faith, but the Jews indeed have lost their prophets and counselors." That election has shifted takes shape in history in how Gentiles are worshipping the God of the Jews while the Jewish religion is dry of all the revelatory initiatives of God.

Ambrose's polemic against the contemporary and historical Jewish people has its origin in the Jewish rejection of the Messiah. It is really a denial of the very identity of the Jewish people, for the Son of God is the answer to the message of hope given by the prophets. To scorn the Son, therefore, is to scorn no less than the "Holy Spirit...Isaiah...(and) Jeremiah."³⁶² If Israel would have continued in "her course of faith unshaking, [she] would have been counted worthy of great merit [and become] the virginal spouse of the Word."³⁶³ That she rejected the coming of her pledged bridegroom presents an occasion of great lament. Yet this slaughter does mysteriously yield a blessing. As Samson the Jew killed a lion and found honey inside, so the

³⁶¹ *HS* bk 1 par 7, following Irenaeus *AH* 3.17.3.

³⁶² *HS* bk 2 par 111. He reminds his readers that the cause of Jeremiah was taken up by none except "an Ethiopian, Abdemeleck, as Scripture testifies." This Gentile servant of the king (*NRSV* Ebedmeleck) represents the nations becoming chosen vessels of God, all the Gentile sinners, and the Church itself. If a Gentile act in like fashion, then "you too shall be chosen" (*HS* bk 2 par 122).

³⁶³ Ambrose, *Letter 74*, drawing on *Eccli.* 15.2.

Jewish people, after slaying their king, beheld in their midst the health-giving “heritage” and “remnant” of God, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, that would be saved “according to the election of grace.”³⁶⁴

Sometimes the polemic takes on the color of a prejudiced anti-Semitism. The Synagogue not only lives in darkness today, but even in “its brief and evil days” before the advent of Christ was “in very deep shade.”³⁶⁵ Ambrose takes the words of Christ against the religious authorities of Israel as a blanket statement against the Jews, calling them “sons of the Devil.”³⁶⁶ The Jews wear the mask of piety, but truly, one does not find any amount of prayer in a Jew.³⁶⁷ Certainly the political tensions of the time factored into this, with Judaism vying for recognition in the Empire that was now under basically Christian direction. Ambrose in turn responded shrewdly to the issue of a synagogue being built on property on which a Church had previously stood.³⁶⁸

At the same time, when the concern centers on upholding the antiquity and continuity of the Church in the revelatory purpose of God, Ambrose can just as easily laud his Jewish forebears. The Gentiles do indeed owe the Jews respect and gratitude as to their own ancestors, recognizing the many gifts of God that have come through them. Joseph’s tenure in Egypt’s government reflects the dignity of the Jewish people in history. “The Hebrew loaned to the nations; he did not receive knowledge from the people, but, instead, gave it. To him the Lord opened His treasury to bedew the Gentiles with the water of His speech and make them the prince of nations having no prince above them.”³⁶⁹ Though they had manipulated the law of God to their own ends so as even to reject Christ, the Jewish people had indeed received the very words of God.

³⁶⁴ *HS* bk 2 par 9. The “election of grace” terminology comes from Rom 11.5.

³⁶⁵ *Hx* 4.5, which is actually a gross overextension of the significance of John 8.44.

³⁶⁶ *SIL* chp 9.

³⁶⁷ While the “true Hebrew belongs entirely to God—everything which he has partakes of this freedom” (Ambrose, *Letter 20*).

³⁶⁸ For Theodosius to support this plan was equivalent to siding with the Jews.

³⁶⁹ *Pr* chp 4.

Sometimes the antiquity of the Church seems to negate the historical election of the people Israel. Against the fascination for Jewish rites in his time, Ambrose developed a strong defense of the surpassing divinity and even antiquity of the Christian sacraments. Basically stated, “the sacraments of the Christians are more divine and earlier than those of the Jews.”³⁷⁰ As with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, so Ambrose calls upon Melchizedek as the key witness in this case. This priest “without father or mother,” who administered an offering of bread and wine to Abraham and received his tithes, offers clear proof that the Christian sacraments existed long before the sacraments of the people of the promise. In truth, the “Lord Jesus” himself is the author of the sacraments.³⁷¹ In his coming, he has illumined and established the original and highest form of the sacramental worship of God. To return to the Jewish rites would be equivalent to taking a step backward in God’s economy, to participate in a shadow and not in the reality itself. That Christian sacraments predate the Jewish also infers that “the Christian people began before the people of the Jews began, but *we in predestination, they in name.*”³⁷² In another place Ambrose asserts that “the kingdom *was predestined* to be bestowed on the Church rather than on the Synagogue.”³⁷³

The Church has the privileged place as the original and older of the two peoples. Nevertheless, this antiquity does not point to the historically prior existence of the Church but rather to its identity as the full expression of God’s perennial intent. This does not negate the integrity of the historical election of the Jewish people. The continuity of election does not reside in the existence of an idealized form of God’s people through history but in the historical unfolding of God claiming a people. So he affirms that “by the first Testament the people of Israel were gained; by the second, the heathens and Gentiles.”³⁷⁴ The two covenants attest to a succession that reflects the fundamental continuity of God’s purpose in the election of a historical people.

³⁷⁰ *S bk 1 chp 4.*

³⁷¹ *S 4.4.*

³⁷² *S 4.3.*

³⁷³ *JHL 2.3.10.*

³⁷⁴ Ambrose, *Letter 50.*

Before anything, God's purpose in election is both redemptive and inclusive. That the Gentiles have been included does not negate but affirms the election of Israel, now centered in the eschatological and inclusive community of the Church. Those Jews that have rejected Christ, as in the case of Saul of Tarsus, have fallen victim to blindness. For the Jewish people considered as a whole this blindness does not lead ultimately to death but to restoration. While staunchly defending the election of the Church, Ambrose can still envision an end to Israel's blindness and its restoration under the Lordship of its Messiah. When Jacob journeys to meet his children in Egypt, Joseph lays his hands over the eyes of his Father. If one puts this in the context of contemplative history, Joseph's action was not to lay his father to rest but rather to bring healing to his vision, just as Ananias had done for the rabbi who had been encountered by Jesus on the road to Damascus. God "postponed its healing, so that the people that earlier did not think it should believe might be the last to believe and might lose the prerogative of earlier election."³⁷⁵ Apparently, this privileged "prerogative" denoted the choice of the Jews to refrain from embracing God's newly established arrangement in the election of the Church.

Somehow God will mysteriously bring about the restoration of the Jewish people as a whole, involving reconciliation with the Church as the younger brother in God's historic household. "And yet, even if they do not wish to be healed, the Lord keeps open the option of a return, so that those in Israel who were driven out by the blindness of their own hearts may come back through the fullness of the Church."³⁷⁶ The Jewish people will return to the Father's household and be joined to the heirs, so that "the world might be made subject to God."³⁷⁷ In spite of the persistence of some in unbelief and opposition toward the Church, Israel considered as a whole will finally inherit redemption. "According to this, even though those who have not believed are not redeemed, still the redemption of the people is granted as a special favor of God."³⁷⁸

³⁷⁵ *J* 14.85. At this point he quotes Romans 11.25-26, "A partial blindness only has befallen Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles should enter, and thus all Israel should be saved" Thus "it is that the deeds of the patriarchs are symbols of events to come."

³⁷⁶ *PJD* 5.12. A quotation of Romans 11.25-26 also occurs here.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ *PJD* 2.5.13.

Election and Nationality

Ambrose does partly follow Eusebius in conceiving Rome as a Christian State, with its political implications for election (e.g. the Roman Empire as a chosen nation, people, and land). Yet, whereas Eusebius for the most part surrenders the political dimension of the Church's election to Rome, Ambrose adamantly and repeatedly upholds this dimension as integral to the identity of the Church. Like Cicero, he sought to be a true statesman, but his idea of the Republic centered on the Church as the chosen people and divinely inhabited society of God.

The State was Christian, and its Christian identity rested in the representative figure of the Emperor. For this reason, Ambrose made a perpetual habit of defending the Emperor as Christian, whether or not he had been baptized. Theodosius, according to the oration of Ambrose at his funeral, exemplified Christianity. His war conduct was laudable. His piety was unmistakable. His devotion to Christ and the Church was commendable. He esteemed the pious witness of previous Christian Emperors like Constantine, as well as his mother Helena, as examples to the citizenry of Church and State. As a bishop representing the apostolic witness of the Church, Ambrose had the authority to claim for God those who gave themselves to Christ in faith. Gratian, Theodosius, and the popular Neo-Platonic philosopher Valentinus³⁷⁹ were persons thus claimed. All of this served to further the State in the conviction of its fundamentally Christian identity.

Though the Empire was Christian at present, for Ambrose this did not imply that this would always be the case. Because the Emperor symbolized in himself the people, worship, and genius of Rome, the fundamental religious identity of the Empire depended on his religious loyalty. If a pagan Emperor would have gained ascendancy, the days of the Christian Empire would have come to an abrupt halt. Similarly, if a professedly Christian Emperor refused to submit to the authority of the Church, this would have implied the effective end to the Christian State. The State had become fundamentally Christian, and the effects of this were spreading across the

³⁷⁹ Ambrose, *On Valentinus* 52.

Empire. And yet the State's Christianity unfolded contingently based on the Emperor's contingent allegiance, which basically meant repentance on demand.

As a statesman as well as a bishop and apostolic minister in the Church, therefore, Ambrose had a personal responsibility in regard to the faith of the Emperor. Ambrose saw himself as one of the Church's key representatives to the State, just as the Old Testament prophets had represented God to Israel's kings. Ambrose was an antitype of Nathan, and Theodosius of David. Implicitly, then, Rome now stood as an antitype of Israel.

For all this, Ambrose was shrewd enough to think and act in the realization that the Church was just as much of a political reality as the State. The Emperor could not presume to hold authority over the Church and its apostolic ministers. The Church alone bore the divine revelation and exercised the divine authority in the world, symbolized first and foremost in its ongoing apostolic ministry originating in the choice of the Son of God himself. Because the Emperor was a Christian, subject to the Lordship of Christ and the authority of Christ as embodied in the Church's ministry, then the Emperor had to submit to the authority of a bishop. If he refused, Theodosius put his very salvation in jeopardy.

Election and Mission

As with Eusebius, Ambrose envisioned the Empire as key to the unity and propagation of the Church.³⁸⁰ With the Emperors on the side of the Catholics, the threatening influence of Arianism and other heresies could be suppressed. The political unity and peace of the Roman Empire provided a central base from which the Gospel could go forth among the peoples of the world. In this, the cause of Church and Empire came into very close alignment. The Church depended heavily on the Empire not only for its safety, but also apparently for its ongoing existence and the extension of its mission.

³⁸⁰ See the thorough description offered by Étienne Gilson in the introduction to Augustine's *City of God*, in volume 8 in *FoC* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950-54), xxxvi.

Election and Ethics

For Ambrose, the ethics of citizenship in the Empire and in the Church stood apart but needed to come together, not on the terms of the Empire but on the terms of the Church. The ethics of dual citizenship gained expression especially in the person of the Emperor. The Emperor had to attend to political matters that implied sin, which excluded him from baptism until the time of his death, yet these messy affairs did not negate the genuineness of his faith and devotion.³⁸¹ Ambrose constantly pressed the agenda of integration, seeing loyalty to the Church as the highest virtue and commending it whenever he saw it in others.³⁸²

Conclusion

The overwhelming picture that we receive shows that the fundamentally corporate and historical sense of election was retained by Ambrose. In other words, the integrity of the Church as God's elect people is preserved all the way up to the time of Augustine. Eusebius can speak in this sense, but eventually his history gives way to a view of the Church and also election as a changeless and eternal reality, one ultimately divorced from time and history. Eusebius had used Christ's words, "Many are called, but few are chosen," to force a new wedge within the Church.³⁸³ This implied the distinction between the true elect and the apparently elect and that election was something realized in eternity rather than history. Ambrose spoke of God's calling

³⁸¹ In his funeral oration for Theodosius, Ambrose lauds the Emperor as the "exemplar of all Christian rulers. He is shown as the guardian of the Church, distinguished for piety and zeal; as the refuge and father of the poor and erring, magnanimous toward his enemies, faithful to his friends; and, finally, as the sinner, humbled, repentant, and forgiven." Cf. Roy J. DeFerrari in Ambrose's *On Emperor Theodosius*, Volume 22 in *FoC* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953), 305.

³⁸² With his singular submission as well as the disposition of his life, Theodosius himself reflected a surpassing love and loyalty for the Church. "When he was already being released from the body, [he] was more concerned about the condition of the Church than about his own trials. I have loved him, therefore, I confess...and I presume upon the Lord that He will receive the voice of my prayer, with which I accompany this pious soul" (Ambrose, *On Emperor Theodosius* 35). Constantine and Helena also reflected this kind of loyalty. The loyalty of the Neo-Platonist Valentinus also reflected this kind of virtue, for he could stand for the right even in the face of opposition from the Senate and crowds of pagans (Ambrose, *On Valentinus*, 52).

³⁸³ See previous chapter and *DG* 1.1, 2.3.

and election as reflective of a singular purpose to establish a particular people and to summon persons into this fellowship. In the light of historical theology, the doctrines of both are extremely important, which becomes especially apparent once the spotlight turns to Augustine.

Though anti-Semitism pervaded the thought of various Christian theologians of that time, including Ambrose himself, this did not for him involve the outright rejection of the significance of Israel's history. This would have meant yielding to the heresy of Marcion. Ambrose not only defends the integrity of the historical election of ancient Israel but also envisions the eventual restoration of the Jewish people. To use the description of Karl Barth, to the Jewish people yet pertains the "election of grace."

Finally, Ambrose demonstrates how the idea of the Christian State had taken firm root. He staunchly maintained the political integrity of the Church as God's chosen people, yet the Empire does share in the election of the Church, even if on a contingent basis. This built in contingency distinguishes Ambrose from Eusebius, but they basically belong to the same camp in their belief in a Christian State.

Chapter 8. Augustine

Argument

With Augustine, the Platonizing influence comes to its full expression. Combined with the increasingly individualistic concerns over salvation and destiny especially in Western Christianity, election now stands as fundamentally eternal and individual in reference. Election refers directly to individual destiny and to God's choice of the individual before all time. The Church is not truly the elect. Instead, the elect are presently hidden both inside and outside the Church. This holds true for the history of Israel as much as for the Church. Representing the City of Man, the Empire does not have a lasting place in election, but it can participate in this as it aligns itself with the City of God.

Introduction

Though Augustine has attained recognition in Western Christianity as the *père par excellence*, this should not detract from the task of a honest portrayal of the background of and influences on his theology. Augustine grew up in the home of a devout Catholic mother. Cicero's *Hortensius* started him on his lifelong philosophical pursuits.³⁸⁴ He eventually came to embrace Manichaeism, which traveled in North Africa under the disguise of Christianity. According to W. H. C. Frend, this move represented for Augustine more of a continuance in the Christian faith rather than a departure from it, since Manichaean teaching represented a "higher and more rational form of Christianity than the old wives' tales on which he had been brought up."³⁸⁵ Manichaeism, though officially forbidden, had gained a strong following in North Africa, swallowing the Gnostic and Marcionite communities previously established there.

³⁸⁴ Mary Clark, *Augustine* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 1994), 2.

³⁸⁵ W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 200.

After spending ten years of his young adulthood³⁸⁶ in allegiance to that group, Augustine relocated to Rome and soon found himself taken up with the Neo-Platonic philosophy of Plotinus and Porphyry. He struggled for three years over the question of final commitment to Catholic Christianity and was finally baptized on Easter of 387. He saw Neo-Platonism as the best philosophical system of his day and understood Christianity as basically compatible with it, and he also believed that only Christianity resolved the incomplete aspects of Neo-Platonism.³⁸⁷

Just prior to Augustine, some divergent perspectives had arisen regarding the doctrine of election and predestination. The anonymous Roman commentator on the Pauline epistles, known to us as Ambrosiaster, depicted predestination as contingent on the faith of the human person.³⁸⁸ John Chrysostom, on the other hand, asserted that predestination only applied to those who persevered in virtue. So faith is given “by God to those whom he foreknows will be worthy of it... (So when you hear) ‘I know to whom the Father hath given to believe,’ ... imagine not merely an arbitrary distribution, but that if any man hath rendered himself worthy to receive the gift, he hath received it.”³⁸⁹ Faith comes as God’s gift, while virtue describes the human responsibility in election. Both place election primarily within an individual framework.

In his early writings, Augustine basically represented the position of Ambrosiaster.³⁹⁰ Later, Augustine was exposed to the thought of the African Donatist theologian Tyconius on

³⁸⁶ 373 to 383, from age 19 to 29. Cf. Frend, *The Early Church*, 200.

³⁸⁷ John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 148. According to Mary Clark, Augustine at this time in his life was “more conscious of the harmony between Neoplatonism and Christianity than he will ever be in the future” (Clark, *Augustine*, 8). His high regard for Neo-Platonic philosophy, nevertheless, remained. In *The City of God*, for instance, one of his later works, he offers a number of critical reflections yet still manages to assert that Plato and Platonic philosophy are superior to all other kinds of philosophy, even moral philosophy, and that they come nearest the truth of Christianity (CDP 8.7-9).

³⁸⁸ Stuart Clarke, “Lost and Found: Athanasius’ Doctrine of Predestination,” 441, citing Eugène TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (London: Burns and Oates Ltd., 1970).

³⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the New Testament*, notes on Eph 1.4f, in *Library of the Fathers*, vol. 5 (inside, Vol. 6 on cover), W. J. Copeland, trans. (Oxford: John Henry Parker; London: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1840), p. 104. Cited in Clarke, “Lost and Found,” 441.

³⁹⁰ E.g. *De Libero Arbitrio* (LA, *On the Freedom of the Will*) and the *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex Epistola ad Romanos* (PER, *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans*). In LA 3.4, Augustine asserts that God’s foreknowledge, like the foreknowledge of any person, does not imply a causal

predestination,³⁹¹ which led him to reject other contemporary approaches as insufficient.

Tyconius had theorized that God's promises were not truly promises if they were conditional on something external, e.g. human faith or response. According to Tyconius, a "condition invalidates a promise."³⁹² This led to a hardening and a change in Augustine's thought on two fronts. First, from the human side of things, the election of the person changed from conditional, depending on faith conceived primarily as a human response, to unconditional, with God moving the will to faith.³⁹³ Second, from the eternal side of things, the will of God to save all persons came to be understood as the will of God to save *all kinds* of persons,³⁹⁴ identifying the absolute rather than the conditional will of God as the basis for human salvation.

necessity. His later formulation of the doctrine of the absolute will of God reflects a departure from this. In the *Propositions*, he asserts that God did not choose "works" but rather "chose faith" (*elegit fidem*) (*PER* 60.11). The gift of the Holy Spirit and the power to do good works comes to the one who believes. "God did not elect those doing good works, but those who believed, with the result that he enabled them to do good works" (*PER* 61.6). Faith "merits" the gift of the Spirit and issues in good works (*PER* 60.14-15). The elect are those whom God predestined whom "he knew would believe and would follow the call" (*PER* par 55). "God in his foreknowledge elects those who will believe and condemns the unbelieving (difficult issues are made clear only to spiritual and not to earthly men), neither electing nor condemning because of works, but granting to the faith of the one group the ability to do good works, and hardening the impiety of the other by deserting them, so that they do evil" (*PER* 62.15-16). In all of these passages, Augustine affirms that the election of grace comes to the person on the condition of faith, even while upholding the doctrine of salvation by grace throughout the work. Augustine admits that this was his early view when later writing his *Retractions* (22.2), commenting on *PER*, "I had not yet sought diligently enough or discovered up to this time what is the nature of 'the election of grace.'"

³⁹¹ Tyconius proved the exception to Augustine's rule of receiving knowledge of God and the soul through Scripture, certain Neo-Platonic philosophers like Plotinus, and through "Catholic" exegetes. In spite of his schismatic Donatist allegiance, Tyconius and his *Book of Rules* had a profound influence on Augustine's thought, being given great prominence in Augustine's *Christian Teaching* (3.30.42-3.37.56). Cf. John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*, 143n125.

³⁹² *Conditio infirmat promissionem... Promissio autem illa est quae nihil conditionis incurrit, sin minus nec promissio est firma nec fides integra.* Text in *Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature*, vol. 3., ed. J. Armitage Robinson (Cambridge UP, 1895), 22.

³⁹³ E.g. *TS* 2.2, "a man begins to receive grace from the moment when he begins to believe in God, being moved to faith by some internal or external admonition."

³⁹⁴ Eugène Portalié, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1960), 222-229. Though Portalié defends Augustine's thought on election and predestination as consistent throughout his life, he does admit of this transition.

Election and Time

One may discern two distinct basic streams of thought regarding time and history that converge in Augustine. First, his leaning toward the dualism of the Manichaeans and Neo-Platonists divided time and history from eternity. Along with the Eastern tradition of the Church, Augustine affirmed that time and history began properly with creation.³⁹⁵ That is, he depicted God as the transcendent creator so as not to confine God to time and history as a part of creation. Yet he went further to picture eternity as the reality (*res*) to which time and history pointed as signs (*signa*).³⁹⁶ This dualism also provided the interpretative key to unlock the two Testaments of the Scriptures. Old stood as the shadowy sign of the New, which meant that the New not only fulfilled but also encompassed the significance of the Old. Augustine attempts a synthesis of Neo-Platonic and Biblical worldviews. He put everything, “nature and grace, free will and necessity, being and becoming, in the all-encompassing scheme of time and eternity—or, rather, of eternity and time. Every other question—even the very nature of the church—had to be dealt with within that schema.”³⁹⁷

Second, Augustine did conceive of time and history as both linear and meaningful, in a qualified sense. Drawing on the terminology of the Scriptures and of the Church’s worship, Augustine explored the significance of the *saecula saeculorum*.³⁹⁸ These are “not the repetitions of identical ages but are a series in orderly succession running its course.”³⁹⁹ The eternal life of the saints disproves the Greek notion of rotating repetitions which had influenced Origen. “Not cycles, but sequence; not fate, but providence; not chaos, but order; not caprice, but pedagogy” identified the “mystery of historical continuity” by means of which God was carrying out “the education of the

³⁹⁵ CDP 11.6.

³⁹⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity: Time and History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986), 132. Augustine expounds this theme in the *De Doctrina Christiana*, consonant with the philosophy found in *De Magistro* 165.

³⁹⁷ Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity*, 89.

³⁹⁸ CDP 12.20.

³⁹⁹ CDP 281n.

human race...through certain epochs.”⁴⁰⁰ However, because ultimate reality inhered in eternity, rather than history, the significance of history played a secondary role in terms of its importance.

Election and the Calling of the Gentiles

In various places, Augustine portrays the calling of the Gentiles as a historical event with a corporate reference.⁴⁰¹ In the fullness of time, the “wild olive tree of the nations” was grafted in.⁴⁰² In his letter *To Simplician*, he speaks of the “fullness of the Gentiles” coming to be part of the elect.⁴⁰³ Up until then, only a limited number of Gentiles knew about the God of Israel, and even fewer pledged their faith and loyalty to this God. These believing Gentiles had “no one fixed place of sacrifices as the Jews had at Jerusalem.” With the coming of Christ, and his ministry of proclamation extended through the apostles, the Gentiles were made participants in “the sacrifice of praise, because God had given them the power to become sons of God.”⁴⁰⁴

Anna, the mother of Samuel, whose life portended the restoration of Israel’s priesthood, stands as a prefiguration of the Church, with which would come the transformation of the Jewish kingdom and priesthood.⁴⁰⁵ Jeremiah and Zephaniah both foreshadow the coming of Christ and the calling of the Gentiles.⁴⁰⁶ Daniel and Ezekiel adumbrate the fulfillment of God’s plan in Christ and His Church.⁴⁰⁷ The very discrepancy between God’s promises and the actual history of the earthly Jerusalem show that such promises envisage a different kingdom and another King, the One who has now in fact come.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁰ Pelikan, 50n111, 144.

⁴⁰¹ *CDP* 18.27.

⁴⁰² *PS* 16.33.

⁴⁰³ *TS* 2.19. This includes a reference to Paul’s paraphrase of a Hoseanic theme in Romans 9.25-26, “I will call that my people which was not my people...And it shall be, that in the place where it was said. Ye are not my people, there they shall be sons of the living God.”

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁵ *CDP* 17.4.

⁴⁰⁶ *CDP* 18.33.

⁴⁰⁷ *CDP* 18.34.

⁴⁰⁸ *CDP* 17.10.

Alongside of this, however, Augustine cannot help but find the prophecies as descriptive of an abstract and eternal reality. The splitting apart of the kingdom of Israel stands as a figure of the everlasting division between the carnal and spiritual Israel,⁴⁰⁹ a division as descriptive of the Church as the nation of Israel itself. “Only a remnant shall be saved” identifies the eternal elect as a limited number within Israel, which continues in the life of the Church.⁴¹⁰ Jacob and Esau become paradigmatic not of Israel and the Church on the whole, but of definite aggregates whom God has chosen or passed by.⁴¹¹ The question of justice in Romans 9-11 turns from God’s apparent rejection of Israel to whether God plays fickle favorites among individuals. Jacob and Esau also belong to the larger eternal realities of the City of God and City of Man, representing the elect and the reprobate. To this group also belong Cain and Abel,⁴¹² Eli and Samuel,⁴¹³ and Saul and David.⁴¹⁴

Election and History

One passage in *The City of God* illumines his sentiments here. With the calling of the Gentiles,

‘shall come those who are elected of the Lord out of all nations.’ For then, in truth, none but the elect will come, of whom the apostle says, ‘According as he hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world’ (Eph. 1.4). For the Master Builder Who said, ‘Many are called, but few are chosen’ (Matt. 22.14), did not say this of those who, being called, came in such a way as to be cast out from the feast (Matt. 22.11ff); rather, He intended to show us a house built up of the elect, which henceforth shall fear no ruin. Yet because the Churches are also full of those who will be separated by winnowing, as on the threshing-floor, the glory of this house does not yet appear as fully as it will in time to come, when everyone who is there will be there forever.⁴¹⁵

⁴⁰⁹ *CDP* 17.7.

⁴¹⁰ *TS* 2.19.

⁴¹¹ *TS* 2.3-16.

⁴¹² *AAJ* 7.9; *CDP* 15.7.2; *EnP* 77.9, 118.5.3.

⁴¹³ *CDP* 17.4.9, 5.1.

⁴¹⁴ *CDP* 17.7.4 and 8.1; *EnP* 51.1, 53.1, and 56.

⁴¹⁵ *CDP* 18.48

“None but” those individuals predestined by God from among the nations shall truly answer the calling of the Gentiles. Only these stand as the proper recipients of that call. God issues a different kind of call for those who will be cast out of the feast. The calling of the Gentiles, therefore, does imply the historical extension of God’s call beyond the borders of Israel. But in another sense, the constituency of election remains ever the same, namely, that limited number of persons whom God has predetermined for salvation. The citizenship of election no longer hinges on a divine *kairos* in history.

Augustine, however, does not completely ignore history in his tendency to mine everything allegorically for its eternal significance. The first words in his *Unfinished Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* sum up the significance of the epistle in that it describes how, “the grace of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ came to all men.”⁴¹⁶ In his *Expositio quaruandum propositionum ex Epistola ad Romanos*, Augustine very explicitly places the letter in the context of the debate happening between Jewish and Gentile believers in the Roman congregation.⁴¹⁷ The theme of the entire argument in Romans 9-11, he maintains, is that salvation and election have been extended to the Gentiles,⁴¹⁸ which implores the Jews to act with tolerance toward Gentile believers and for Gentiles to treat their Jewish kin with reverence and humility. Both must recognize that their election and salvation are not the result of who they are or what they have done but only of the grace of God.⁴¹⁹

Election and Christ

In Augustine’s doctrine the dominant role assumed by Christ is that of example. This went hand in hand with the purpose for which Augustine wrote most of his works on predestination, to uphold the truth that salvation was entirely and unequivocally by grace. As Athanasius had

⁴¹⁶ *RIE* 1.2.

⁴¹⁷ *PER* par 2.

⁴¹⁸ *PER* 64.1.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

spoken of predestination in order to illumine the doctrine of Christ, Augustine spoke of Christ in order to illumine the doctrine of predestination by grace. Christ himself is called the “clearest light of predestination and grace,” as well as the “manifestation of election.”⁴²⁰ There was nothing that the man Jesus did to procure his being united in the flesh with the Word of God. God took the initiative in effecting the union of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ.⁴²¹ The Incarnation demonstrates the gracious and sovereign initiative of God as clear as anything.

Yet Christ not only presents the foremost example of God’s grace in election but also lives as the mediator of this election. God “accomplishes all these things in them who made them to be vessels of mercy and who also chose them in his Son before the creation of the world through the election due to grace.”⁴²² He draws on the introduction to the Ephesian epistle, affirming that God predestined those who were elect in Christ.⁴²³ Additionally, the elect, as those who will partake of the fruit of the resurrection,⁴²⁴ come into their inheritance by means of Christ’s Incarnation.⁴²⁵ Augustine can also speak about Christ himself issuing the call to election, seen especially in his relationship to the apostles.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁰ *PS* 15.31. Calvin readily defers to Augustine’s description of Christ as the *clarissimum lumen praedestinationis et gratiae* (*Inst.* 2.17.1). Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 104; another term Augustine uses is the *manifestatio electionis*. Christ provides the concrete reference for understanding God’s election and predestination of individuals, showing that their election is not their own doing but the entirely the work of God. Within Augustine’s individualistic framework, election tends toward a Christology of historical example rather than historical mediator.

⁴²¹ *PS* 15.31. The Incarnation happened not as a recompense, but as an utter gift. Thus Augustine distances himself from Origen’s concept of the pre-physical moral decisions of the soul and its ramifications for one’s placement in physical life.

⁴²² *RG* 13.

⁴²³ *PS* 18.35.

⁴²⁴ *RG* 30. God’s union to man was wholly gratuitous. He lived a sinless life. The assumption of human flesh by him “was such that the nature of the man assumed by God in that way would admit in itself no impulse of an evil will.” Through the Incarnation, the goodness and innocency of God would be conferred in the remodeling of our human bodies after his pattern.

⁴²⁵ Frend finds a bitter taste to Augustine’s doctrine of the Incarnation in regard to election and salvation. “That the Incarnation had removed the gulf between God and man was small comfort, for only a few would benefit” (Frend 207).

⁴²⁶ *PS* 17.34.

Christ fulfills the role of mediator both in eternity and in time. The elect are chosen in the Son before the creation of the world. Yet this purpose reaches its fulfillment in and through the historical Incarnation. Yet, because Augustine yields to an individualistic understanding of election, it also appears that election in a sense is not mediated, at least from a historical perspective. Individuals are elected and predestined for salvation before the creation of the world, and nothing can change that fact. History implies the unfolding of God's eternal decision, overriding any notion of conditionality. Yet, if election is mediated within the particularities of history, then it does involve conditionality. Because the election of particular individuals has been determined in eternity, history loses any real significance in terms of the mediation of election. The implication follows that the Incarnation of Christ lacks decisive historical significance for predestination, serving a purely instrumental role in extending an eternal determination to particular individuals.

Election and the Apostolic Ministry

Like most of the previously mentioned Fathers, Augustine does speak to how the first apostles participated in the calling of the Gentiles. Their ministry among the Gentiles issued in "the sacrifice of praise, because God had given them the power to become sons of God."⁴²⁷ He also upheld the importance of the apostolic ministry as a sign of the historical continuity of the Church. This accounted for one aspect of the continuity of the Church symbolized in threefold manner as including the apostolic episcopate, apostolic tradition, and apostolic Scriptures.⁴²⁸ This underlined his understanding of the Church as that historical and visible society of the baptized obedient to the hierarchy,⁴²⁹ a vital notion in the concern for the realization of catholicity. Even so, the apostolic inheritance and historical continuity of the Church could not change its fundamental character in regard to election. When Augustine speaks about the Church in terms

⁴²⁷ *TS* 2.19.

⁴²⁸ Pelikan, 100.

⁴²⁹ Portalié, 235.

of the elect, he turns to consider the Church of the future, that eternal company of the saints, that people who will be “freed from all admixture of evil” in the consummation.⁴³⁰

Election and Initiation

That the identity of the elect resides in a Platonic eternity implies that election is commensurate with salvation, and that from an eternal perspective. Those who will ultimately be saved will be, are, and always have been the chosen of God. For Augustine, salvation is worked out most fundamentally in God’s dealings with the individual person, or with individual persons. This is not to deny the role or authority of the sacramental ministry of the Church, but merely to claim that God’s eternal determination to chose and save particular persons is primary. Since election happens in eternity, the Church does not mediate election to the individual so much as provide a key instrument in how God manifests this eternal determination in the individual’s life. Because there are children of the Church hidden among the infidels and false Christians in the bosom of the Church, it would not be accurate to make a direct correlation between the Church and the elect.⁴³¹

The Christian Church represents a religion, the only true religion at that, and yet God’s chosen people are different than a religion. They will of course participate in this religion. But it is not the religion that makes them chosen, but rather their identity as the chosen that gives life and meaning to the religion.⁴³²

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ *CDP* 1.35.

⁴³² After God, these individuals are the center of the religious universe, so to speak. The Church does not make them, rather they make up the Church. The contemporary view so pervasive in Western Christianity, that membership in the Church provides no basis in itself for salvation, and that one can have a personal relationship with Jesus with or without the Church, represents the natural outworking of this line of thought, so detrimental to the identity of the Church as the people of God.

As a catechetical teacher and curriculum developer (*De catechizandis rudibus*), Augustine did not deny the importance of initiation and incorporation into the life of the Church. God brought predestination to its realization in the lives of persons through the means of the proclamation of the Gospel, leading to faith and repentance, baptism, and on to final perseverance. Yet, sacramental incorporation in itself does not guarantee one's standing among the elect, or that one truly belongs to the Church thereby. The members of the Church represent distinct and hidden ways of belonging. "Sinners are only materially united to her without participating in her inner life. The just in her are vivified by the Holy Spirit."⁴³³ Sacramental initiation has its place, but only God knows the true elect who make up the true Church.

Election and Boundaries

In a sense, Augustine turns the boundaries of election inside out. The particularity of the life of a historically chosen people had implied an exclusive sense to election. But now, since the elect could no longer be identified with a particular historical group, the exclusive side of election begins to soften. In this vein Augustine begins to reflect that prophetic literature was not limited to the Jewish people, nor...

do I suppose that even the Jews dare to claim that, from the time when the line of Israel began, with the rejection of his elder brother, no one has ever belonged to God except the Israelites. To be sure, there was no other people who might truly be called the people of God; but the Jews nonetheless cannot deny that in other nations also there have been some men who belonged, not by earthly but by heavenly fellowship, to the true Israelites, the citizens of the supernal fatherland.⁴³⁴

On the other hand, the particularity of God's historical people had implied a permeable boundary in regard to people receiving or even forfeiting their election. But now, since the elect refer to particular individuals, predestined from all eternity, which unfolds flawlessly in the scheme of history, the inclusive side of election begins to harden. The life-giving cell of God's chosen people now closes its membrane to any newcomers. Persons may enter into the body of the

⁴³³ Portalié, 235.

⁴³⁴ *CDP* 18.48.

Church, but this does not mean that they truly belong. Abstracting election from time and history ends up completely inverting the character of its boundaries.

While this is true, Augustine also develops the doctrine in a pastoral way. For those who would presume upon God and their own standing before God, it presses a word of sober humility, since their sense may not in fact reflect what is eternally true. It also warns against entering into the place of God by declaring and condemning another person as eternally damned. Like the thief on the cross, the person who is apparently reprobate may, in the end, turn out to have a home in paradise. Because election is ultimately hidden from us and known only to God, there remains no room for presumptuous judgment.

Though this arrangement may sound quite fickle at times, Augustine does guard against the notion of God being capricious. Persons newly exposed to the Christian faith must not lose heart because they see no compelling evidence in their lives that they should be one of God's chosen ones. If a person desires to be elect, it already shows that God may be making that kind of call that issues in faith. Because God engenders faith and obedience in the elect, those who are to the best of their understanding living in faith and obedience have some basis to be assured and encouraged that they are heading down the path that leads to everlasting life. But this assurance must be tempered by a sober fear of God, for God alone knows the ultimate destiny of each one of us.

Election finally helps to bolster and embolden the shepherd of God's flock, equipping that person to carry out honest, pastoral discipline in the fellowship of the Church. A pastor-priest should not be afraid to confront wrongdoing wherever it is found. Though the pastor stands as the instrument of God in such situations, the outcome does not ultimately rest on that person's shoulders. If a person has sinned, but is truly chosen by God, then the rebuke will have the effect of calling that person back to her senses, leading to repentance and on to faithfulness of living.⁴³⁵ By the same token, if a Christian sins but is not truly chosen by God, then the rebuke will likely

⁴³⁵ *RG* 43.

have the effect of pushing the person away from the Church, revealing his true identity. On the other side, a person who is convicted and possibly confronted about sin would be well advised about such things. Humble repentance would portend salvation, while proud rebellion against the discipline of the Church would imply future condemnation.⁴³⁶

Election and Predestination

How does a person become elect? There is but one answer. A person becomes elect by the gracious choice of God in eternity. Nothing can change that fact. Augustine's doctrine of predestination arises out the concern to defend the doctrine of salvation by grace. He identifies the individual as the proper object of God's eternal determination. By doing this, salvation by grace quickly turns into determinism by grace. His doctrine of the will of God enters the picture in a hardened form so as to uphold the doctrine of salvation by grace. If this purpose of God were conditional on historical circumstance or human choice, it would imply that persons merit their own election and salvation. Additionally, if our election and salvation were conditional at all, God's will in these matters is implicitly either changeable or ineffectual. Augustine opts for the will of God as absolute.⁴³⁷ There may be a conditional side to the will of God,⁴³⁸ but not in regard to election and salvation, which is completely and exhaustively the gracious gift and work of God for and in the individual.

Election and Conditionality

⁴³⁶ There are advantages and disadvantages to looking at Church discipline in this particular way. On the one hand, it certain can ignite a sober boldness in persons to fulfill the pastoral task and to readily and humbly accept the discipline of God through the Church. On the other hand, if approached without tact and prayer, it could lead to the pastor being alienated from the people or certain persons being alienated from the congregation. Of course, if everything is determined in advance anyway, then the consequences of such actions do not seem to carry the same kind of weight.

⁴³⁷ God's ordinances include predestination. Berkouwer, following in the Augustinian tradition of the absolutizing of God's will here, says that "Scripture forbids the identification of the will of the ordinance with unactuality." Cf. 117-118

⁴³⁸ Portalié, 229.

Augustine's doctrine of the will has occasioned volumes of writing in the history of the Church. There is no need here even to attempt a thorough exposition of his doctrine. A brief summary for the sake of our purposes will suffice. Augustine saw himself as upholding the traditional Christian doctrine of free will throughout his life. He certainly used the language of free will throughout, both in his early polemic against Manichaeism, *On the Freedom of the Will*,⁴³⁹ and later as in one of his works for the monks at Hadrumetum and Marseilles, *On Grace and the Freedom of the Will*. The anti-Pelagian concern prompted him to lay stress on predestination, but this was never meant to deny the integrity of the human will in faith and obedience. Augustine's point was that if faith was an integral part of attaining salvation, then this also must be understood as the gracious gift of God. Even if his doctrine of free will proves inadequate, his emphasis on grace should not be criticized, since it gets at the very heart of the Gospel.

In various places, Augustine does maintain that the choice of election belongs to us as human beings. "All men can be saved, if they wish it."⁴⁴⁰ "It is absolutely true that all men can do this, if they wish, but their will is prepared by the Lord."⁴⁴¹ "It depends on you to become one of the elect."⁴⁴² "It is now in your power...to choose which of these two [elect or reprobate] you wish to be...Choose while there is time."⁴⁴³ "Who are the elect? You, if you wish."⁴⁴⁴ "Are you not yet attracted? Pray that you may be."⁴⁴⁵ "It is prepared for others. Become like others and it is prepared for you."⁴⁴⁶

⁴³⁹ Written as an appeal to old Manichaean friends, represented in the work by the figure of Euodia, Augustine uses Socratic dialogue to lead his hearers to the conclusion of the authenticity of the freedom of the human will as well as the power, providence and goodness of God. In this work, Augustine defends the freedom of the will as: abundantly evidenced in the Scriptures, presumed in the commandments of God, the basis for human morality, and so also for God's just judgment. Here Augustine continues in a long and established Christian tradition of defending against the fatalistic denial of human will and its destructive effects on morality.

⁴⁴⁰ Portalié, 218n129, from *GM* 1.3.6.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 218n130, from *R* 1.10.2.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 218n133, from *EnP* 120.11.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 218n134, from *EnP* 36.1.1.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 219n136, from *EnP* 73.5.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 219n137, from *JE* 26.6.2.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 219n138, from *EnP* 126.4.

However, Augustine sharply disagrees with those who assert that God chose us because God knew that we would be obedient and respond in faith to the Gospel. It is exactly the opposite. It is only because God chose us that we come to faith and obedience.⁴⁴⁷ Indeed, the originating cause of faith and obedience in the human will is God.⁴⁴⁸ Subsequent to the fall, the human will has free choice, but can only choose what is evil, and so is not free in the true sense of the word.⁴⁴⁹ Choosing the good is beyond its capacities. Yet God takes the gracious initiative to prepare the human will for faith. While God issues a call to faith and obedience through the preaching of the Gospel, the Spirit works internally to produce faith in the hearer. God effects this faith in those who are the elect. The elect are chosen not “because they believed, but in order that they may believe.”⁴⁵⁰

For Augustine the concerns of predestination by grace and the genuine freedom of the will are truly in harmony. They may at times appear to contradict each other,⁴⁵¹ and for this reason it basically comes down to a mystery, something beyond our ability to comprehend.⁴⁵²

Predestination is understood from an eternal or divine vantage point. Free will is understood from a temporal or human vantage point. In a sense, by separating these factors into two absolutely distinct spheres, the argument is unassailable.

⁴⁴⁷ In his *Institutes* (3.22.8), Calvin himself prefers to quote Augustine on these matters rather than say anything new.

⁴⁴⁸ Jewett, Paul K., *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 5-7.

⁴⁴⁹ Portalié, 222-225.

⁴⁵⁰ *PS* 17.34. Here Augustine employs one of his favorite Scriptures, John 15:16, “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” The election of the apostles reflects the manner in which God performs election in each and every case.

⁴⁵¹ According to John Rist, “*Voluntas* is not a decision making capacity within the person but the person himself.” Cf. “Augustine on Free Will and Predestination” in *Journal of Theological Studies* 20 (1969): 422. In light of this, Augustine’s description of God’s calling is but common sense. It furnishes a mode of explaining life. From another perspective, his description of the human will and the call of God smacks of determinism.

⁴⁵² “The power to will he has willed should be both his and ours, his because he calls us, ours because we follow when called,” *TS* 2.10.

However, the two are not kept apart in Augustine's thought, which explains why he falls victim to contradiction.⁴⁵³ The criticism of contradiction is not a new one in history. A number of persons detected it in Augustine's own day, which was the very occasion for the extended correspondence with the monks of Hadrumetum and Marseilles. According to Augustine, God does not merely provide for but "produces" "good will"⁴⁵⁴ in those individuals who are predestined. Those who are not predestined are denied the gift of true and persevering faith, being given over to their sin.⁴⁵⁵ Yet, "there is no cause that precedes the will,"⁴⁵⁶ and it "depends" on us "to become one of the elect."⁴⁵⁷ His melding of the doctrines of providence and predestination also adds to the contradiction. Free will characterizes all persons, referring to their freedom to sin.⁴⁵⁸ The will to do good comes only through the grace of regeneration. Where previous Fathers had tied the capacity of free will (both to do good and to do evil) to God's providential sustaining of all persons,⁴⁵⁹ Augustine identified it with a special grace given to the regenerate.⁴⁶⁰

Election and Purpose

⁴⁵³ It is precisely because predestination and free will are so intertwined that Augustine was forced to respond to charges of determinism. In his system, "[f]oreknowledge and predestination both become causative and inescapable, and some careful reinterpretation of the concept of free choice became necessary, if predestination is to retain morality" (Crouzel, "Christian Platonism," 225).

⁴⁵⁴ *GFC* 20. "If the divine scripture is examined with care, it shows that not only the wills of human beings which God himself produces out of evil ones and which, once made good by him, he directs toward good acts and toward eternal life, but also those wills which preserve the creature of the world are in the power of God so that he makes them turn where he wills and when he wills, either to offer benefits to some or to impose punishments on others, as he himself judges by his judgment which is, of course, most hidden, but undoubtedly most just."

⁴⁵⁵ To the chosen, God calls in such a way as they will respond to the call. To the reprobate, however, God calls in such a way as they will reject the call. Indeed, because the reprobate "cannot be moved by it and are not fitted to receive it, they can be said to be called but not chosen" (*TS* 2.13). "To be sure, no one resists his will. He aids whom he wills and he leaves whom he wills" (*TS* 2.17).

⁴⁵⁶ *LA* 3.17.

⁴⁵⁷ *EnP* 120.11.

⁴⁵⁸ Part of Augustine's portrayal continues the traditional Christian defense of the freedom of the will in terms of the goodness of God. Wrong decisions are attributable to us alone, while good ones are owing to God's work to prepare our will (Rist, *Augustine*, 187).

⁴⁵⁹ E.g. Irenaeus *AH* 5.27.1.

⁴⁶⁰ Portalié notes that Augustine upholds the human capacity "to choose between good and evil as one pleases (a power which we still have and without which, he says, man could not even sin)" (222-225). But this capacity does not truly apply to all persons, for "a man begins to receive grace from the moment when he begins to believe in God, being moved to faith by some internal or external admonition" (*TS* 2.2).

The question of “why” in regard to election and predestination in the end comes down to the will of God. The Potter of Romans 9 decides what to do with each individual vessel.⁴⁶¹ All that remains for humans is to trust in the hidden justice of God. Since all people are sinful, they do not deserve election or salvation anyway, so God can never be accused of injustice. There is no compelling reason within creation why God should choose anyone. God chooses because God is merciful. That God saves a limited number of persons is a reflection of the surpassing mercy of God. If God does not choose a person, giving instead the judgment he deserves, it reflects the justice of God.

On the one side, this reflects a God-centered view of things. Humans have no claim to God’s grace, which would deny the very character of grace. God remains free. On the other side, “free” thus portrayed can sound a lot like “indifferent.” Augustine’s sentiments are a blend of the Christian, Gnostic, and Stoic. It is Gnostic in that salvation belongs to an enlightened and hidden few, undermining the fundamentally public and corporate character of Christian life and witness. It proves Stoic in that this gruesome truth is to be accepted in uncomplaining indifference. The saved are not to protest that God will not effect salvation for those foreknown by God to be reprobate.⁴⁶² The reprobate similarly have no platform with God to ask, “Why have you made me this way?”⁴⁶³

Election, Israel and the Church

To interpret the significance and standing of Israel, Augustine begins with Christ’s words, “Many are called, but few are chosen,” as a description of the two-sided nature of the Church itself. Augustine sees this affirmed in various passages, including the prophecies of Hosea and Isaiah.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶¹ *TS* 2.19.

⁴⁶² *RG* 19, “without murmuring against God let them be content not to know along with us why God gives this to some and not to others.”

⁴⁶³ *TS* 2.16.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Throughout the history of Israel, though God issued a call to all of the people, only those who responded in faith, only those who were taught inwardly by God,⁴⁶⁵ were the chosen and beloved of God. Finally, the rejection of Christ by the Jews makes it evident that the Jewish people as a whole were not the chosen people of God. For how could the enemies of God be at the same time the chosen of God?⁴⁶⁶

In some places, Augustine seems to uphold the historical significance of the election of Israel, though in a qualified sense. Israel had a unique identity as the chosen people of God,⁴⁶⁷ a kingdom founded by God, and the religion representing the Only True God.⁴⁶⁸ They received permanent and continuous promises on the condition that the people obey God's law.⁴⁶⁹ Had the Jews not sinned against God,

misled by evil curiosity and by magic arts to worship alien gods and idols, and finally to kill Christ, they might have lived happily in that same kingdom... (but are) now scattered over the whole world... (while) all images, groves, shrines, and temples of the false gods are overthrown and the sacrifices forbidden.⁴⁷⁰

By failing to live up to its calling, Israel forfeited the promise and lost its kingdom, leading to a division in their people between membership in Church and Synagogue.⁴⁷¹ The inheritance of the promises now belongs to the Church.⁴⁷² Yet the Jews are not therefore excluded *per se* from election and salvation. Augustine points to the extreme proof, asserting that some of the Jews

⁴⁶⁵ This idea did not originate with Augustine, but goes back to the allegorical exegesis of Origen (*CJ* 13.346). Origen's thrust was quite different, however. Origen spoke of the elect as those who obeyed the Word in the context of distinguishing between the Church and Israel according to the flesh. In other words, the distinction applies as a consequence of the Christ-event. Augustine, on the other hand, employed it as a description of Israel before the Christ-event, referring to a limited number of persons within Israel.

⁴⁶⁶ *PS* 16.33.

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. above. *CDP* 18.48.

⁴⁶⁸ *CDP* 4.34.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ Pelikan 45n67-68, citing *CDP* 18.28, 17.10, 17.7.

⁴⁷² Pelikan 45n69, citing *CDP* 16.21.

who participated in the murder of Christ or the persecution of the Church have since become his followers.

Many of those who crucified God have shown, by their conversion, that they were chosen; chosen at the very moment of their conversion, if one speaks of the beginning of their salvation, but chosen since before the creation of the world, if one considers God's prescience.⁴⁷³

Like Eusebius, Augustine engages in a form of pseudo-history, expressed particularly in the idealized, parallel histories of the City of God and the City of Man. Israel and the Church in their historical succession represent the continuity of the City of God. These bodies represent and approximate the eternal City of God.⁴⁷⁴ The histories of other nations, including Rome, represent and approximate the City of Man. However, the City of God cannot be fully equated with either Israel or the Church, or the City of Man with other nations and peoples. Both are mixed societies, and both are interwoven only to be pulled apart at the consummation. In this sense, Israel and the Church may participate in the City of Man, and other nations and peoples may participate in the City of God. In regard to the relationship between Israel and the Church, Israel stands as both the inception and precursor to the Church as representing the City of God. Yet, in light of their rejection of Christ, the Jewish people by and large belong to the category of the City of Man.⁴⁷⁵

In what sense, if any, does Israel remain the chosen people of God? The Jewish people are somewhat of an anomaly for Augustine. He can speak of the calling of the Gentiles in a way that denies the ongoing status of Israel as elect. At times he makes it sound as if the Divine Gardener performed a complete replacement, implying also a permanent cutting off of the Jewish people. In his recounting of Romans 11.17, the word "some,"⁴⁷⁶ as a qualifier for the Jewish branches, disappears: "By the just severity of God, therefore, the unbelieving pride of the native branches is broken away from the living patriarchal root, and, by the grace of divine goodness, the faithful

⁴⁷³ Marcel DuBois, "Jews, Judaism and Israel in the Theology of Saint Augustine: How He Links the Jewish People and the Land of Zion," *Immanuel* 22/23 (1989), 183, quoting Augustine, *Letter* 149.20.

⁴⁷⁴ Étienne Gilson, *The City of God*, lxiii.

⁴⁷⁵ Some Jews, the "true Israelites," however, like Mary and the first apostles, were a part of the City of God. *CDP* 17.16, "This people of the Gentiles... added to those who are the true Israelites both by the flesh and by faith, are the City of God: the City which gave birth to Christ Himself according to the flesh, when it consisted of those Israelites only."

⁴⁷⁶ Present in all Greek MSS (τινεις) and the Vulgate (aliqui).

humility of the wild olive is engrafted.”⁴⁷⁷ In this strain, Augustine finds it amazing that the Synagogue has continued to exist even after the Incarnation.

What is the ongoing use of a people who were fashioned to prepare the way for the fulfillment and reality that now has come in the faith established by the incarnate Son of God? He can only conclude that even this, even the continuation of the Jewish people and religion in an incomplete form, had to be part of God’s plan. Moved by this conviction, Augustine disapproved of the slaughter of Jews in Alexandria in 425.⁴⁷⁸ In response to this tragedy, he argued that Jews should be free to practice their religion until their conversion, as Scripture predicted, just before the Second Coming of Christ.⁴⁷⁹ Even in spite of the rebellion that the Jews represented, there remained the hope of a future return to their true King, which seemed to imply the unification of Judaism and Christianity. Apparently Augustine could conceive of the rejection of the Jews as partial and temporary.

Election and Nationality

Far and away, the text of *The City of God* provides the most crucial source for discerning Augustine’s political thought. Both Cities are political realities, and yet these exist first of all as eternal forms or ideals.⁴⁸⁰ The City of God, established by God, gains expression in a community of self-giving love, mirroring the inner life of the Trinity. The City of Man, the alternative founded on human rebellion against God, persists in relationships based on self-interest and self-preservation.

⁴⁷⁷ *AAJ* chp 1.

⁴⁷⁸ Desmond O’Grady, *Beyond the Empire: Rome and the Church from Constantine to Charlemagne* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 79.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁰ Étienne Gilson, *The City of God*, lx.

The Church is the commonwealth of the Kingdom and the Incarnation of God's City on earth.⁴⁸¹ At the same time, the Church cannot be finally equated with the City of God but only approximates it, on account of the incongruity of its own life and witness. There are tares among the wheat of the Church, and only at the final judgment will these be rooted out. The City of God appears in those persons and situations where Christ actually reigns. The best we can hope for is occasional glimpses, since it is not something to be completely manifested in this world. The membership of God's eternal citizenry, though they live for a time on earth, are known only to God, who chose and predestined them for election and salvation before all time.

A second clue lies in his philosophical definition, following the *De Republica* of Cicero, of "a people" as "a multitude united by the recognition of a law and a community of interests."⁴⁸² This underpins his view of the Two Cities. All political organization is based some form of love, since a "people is an association of rational beings by a unanimous agreement upon those things which they love."⁴⁸³ It also provides for an essentially voluntaristic view of participation in a society, whether in regard to the society of the Church or the commonwealth of the Empire. The people of God, therefore, consist not so much in a corporate race or a nation as in a free association of persons based on the agreement of their respective wills.⁴⁸⁴

A third clue lies in his view of the Empire as a Christian State in light of his convictions about living in a "Christian era." Soon after his conversion, and for ten to fifteen years afterwards, Augustine joined in the celebration over the *tempora Christiana* that came with the victory of Christianity in the Empire.⁴⁸⁵ In his *Retractions*, he changes his mind.⁴⁸⁶ Such optimism truly

⁴⁸¹ Étienne Gilson, *The City of God*, lxiii.

⁴⁸² Étienne Gilson, *The City of God*, 1.

⁴⁸³ *CDP* 19.24.

⁴⁸⁴ Étienne Gilson, *The City of God*, lxv. The criticism of Rosenzweig and other Jewish theologians of the essentially individualistic self-understanding of the Church is simultaneously validated and dismissed here. This conceptuality came into prominence in Western Christianity through Augustine, but it did not characterize Christianity in its first four centuries.

⁴⁸⁵ Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970), 31.

⁴⁸⁶ Markus, *Saeculum*, 40-41.

reflected an “invalid objectification of the attitudes of a multitude of individuals.”⁴⁸⁷ His previous schematization of six historical dispensations had already implicitly denied this.⁴⁸⁸ Now he confirmed this intuition by designating the period between the Incarnation and the *parousia* as homogenous and precarious, at once the time of the building up of the Church and its persecution.

This went hand in hand with the argument in the *City of God*. God’s eternal City could not be identified with the Empire. This identity belonged to the Church as the enduring representation of God’s City. The City of Man corresponds to the secular State, but even this is qualified precisely because the State, too, may participate in the City of God.⁴⁸⁹ Insofar as Emperor and people lived a heavenly life, the City of God would be manifest in the politics of the State.⁴⁹⁰ Both Cities, therefore, are intertwined and will not be pulled apart until the consummation.⁴⁹¹ This puts the Empire in a pinch, since its ongoing survival no longer has a positive theological foundation, while its recommended course of action points in the direction of cooperation and support to be given to the Church.

A fourth clue arises in his controversy with Donatism. In response to the purist tendencies of this North African based group, Augustine pushed the theme of the catholicity of the Church as hard as ever, asking and commending the Emperor for suppressing this threat. Its penchant for separation undermined the vision of a Christian State as well as the unity of the Catholic Church as now centered in the tradition and authority of the Roman bishopric. By the estimation of W. H. C. Frend, in spite of Augustine’s early leanings toward the illegal religion of the Manichaeans,

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ “(T)he State, too, could be a reflection of divine purpose, lower indeed than the Church, for the discipline the State enforced on its inhabitants was the result of Original Sin, but sharing with the Church in forwarding God’s purposes. The good Emperor might still be he who served the Church best, but the Christian Empire which he now ruled had some of the qualities of the divine monarchy in so far as it was Christian.” Cf. Frend 207-08, citing N. H. Baynes, “The Political Aspects of St. Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*,” *Historical Association Pamphlet* 104, London, 1936.

⁴⁹⁰ Étienne Gilson, *The City of God*, lxxix.

⁴⁹¹ Étienne Gilson, *The City of God*, lxiv.

his patriotism and his conviction regarding the unity of the Catholic Church prevented him from taking his Two Cities philosophy to its natural outcome.⁴⁹²

Election and Ethics

Membership came in the strict mold of allegiance to one of the Two Cities.⁴⁹³ The imperative and choice was the same for everyone, whether for Church or for State, either for God or against God. This formed the basis for Augustine's commitment to the ideal of a Christian State. Because of this stance, Augustine also argued that though the Emperors desired to live fully according to the City of God, that certain matters became necessary in the concern for maintaining and defending an Empire, not to mention one's own throne and neck as Emperor. This went hand in hand with the dominant trend to postpone baptism for Church members involved in questionable or immoral actions or duties, so as to safeguard the benefits of baptism until a time nearer to the hour of death.

Augustine followed suit with Eusebius and Ambrose in upholding the legitimacy of Rome's Christian Emperors, as well as its citizens, to participate in war as an inescapable part of living in this world so as to preserve the State. He not only upheld the *status quo* in this regard, but also fought against its alternative in Donatism in the name of the catholicity of the Church.

Living in the time of Theodosius, he also took it for granted that the Emperor should hold the people accountable to Christian morality. Augustine helped to bridge the obvious differences and tensions by developing the concept of natural law, a set of universal principles that governed all things and were expressed most clearly in the teaching of Christ.⁴⁹⁴ Both elect and reprobate must

⁴⁹² Frend 199.

⁴⁹³ Étienne Gilson, *The City of God*, lxxx. No middle ground stands between these two distinct yet interpenetrating Cities to foster a mutually beneficial dialogue. This failure of imagination left the Church without resources to distinguish itself in appropriate, corporate ways from the surrounding culture. Without this cooling influence, Church and Empire became fused in the heated Christian zeal for the realization of God's kingdom on earth.

⁴⁹⁴ Étienne Gilson, *The City of God*, xlii.

face judgment on the basis of this universal law. There was no fundamental distinction between ecclesial ethics and imperial ethics, and so also no fundamental political distinction between the Church and the Empire. If the State abided by these virtues, it would ensure its continuance, seeing as how Christian virtues were inherently useful “to the good order and prosperity of the commonwealth.”⁴⁹⁵ Hidden as individual stalks of wheat in among the tares, there was no compelling morality that set the elect, and so also the Church, apart.

The Church, and particularly its priesthood, did play a unique role in their administration of the sacraments, which Augustine upheld as necessary and efficacious means of entering into the life of salvation. The dignity of the Empire did not compare, yet it nevertheless played a similar role to the Church in terms of ethics. Both groups by means of the natural law strove to curb the rampant effects of Original Sin and to carry out the just judgments of God. Truly, there was but one morality for all people.

Election and Mission

Apparently in the concern to witness against traditional Roman polytheism, Augustine maintains a traditional monotheistic defense with a twist. The Roman Empire was “ordained by the true God, who is the source of all power and by whose providence all things are ruled.”⁴⁹⁶ The nation owed its existence to God, and yet the implication also follows that Rome plays some kind of role in the unfolding of history according to God’s plan. He also pointed out how the freedom of the Jews from the seventy years of Babylonian captivity coincided with the liberation of the Romans from the monarchic domination.⁴⁹⁷ Moreover, the prophetic oracles spoke to the “calling of the Gentiles” at the same time as Assyria began to wane and Rome began to wax in human history.⁴⁹⁸ Rome’s history parallels that of Israel and answers the expectations raised by the prophets.

⁴⁹⁵ Étienne Gilson, *The City of God*, xlii.

⁴⁹⁶ *CDP* 5.21. He continues, “[God] granted to the Roman people an Empire, when He willed it and as large as He willed it.”

⁴⁹⁷ *CDP* 18.26.

⁴⁹⁸ *CDP* 18.27.

Whereas the early apologists like Justin and Tertullian had identified hidden testimony to the Gospel in the events and commonplaces of Rome's history, using it to leverage a message of conviction and a call to conversion, Augustine envisions Rome as the national and political continuation and fulfillment of the nation of Israel. Where Israel, as that nation devoted to the worship of the one true God, ceased to exist, God had prepared the Roman Empire to take up the slack, playing the role of host and advocate to the Church in its life and its mission to the surrounding barbarians. The extension of the faith would coincide with the extension of the Empire from here forward.

The unity of the Empire provided a means for the realization of the unity of the Christian religion itself. Racked by divisions and tensions among differing traditions, the Church seemed a far cry from the unity that Christ had prayed for. Augustine's support of the primacy of Rome's authority among the bishoprics and its tradition among the Church expressed such a longing. The Church, drawing on the cooperation of the State, may well employ coercive means to secure peace as a reasonable counter-measure to the terrible and destructive deceitfulness of the human heart.⁴⁹⁹ Securing Rome's backing to oppose and eventually defeat the separationist North African Donatists followed from this sentiment. Further, since the beauty of political unity in the Church seemed like a remote possibility, unity had to take the form of doctrinal agreement.⁵⁰⁰ Augustine had died by 430, just before the commencement of the Council of Ephesus in 431, yet not before sparking the fire that led to the eventual anti-Pelagian decision of the Synod of Orange in 529.

Conclusion

⁴⁹⁹ Frend 205. Religious liberty was understood as "liberty to err." "Man left to his own devices without the threat of Church and State coercion was bound to make the wrong choice. His doctrine of the Church was already preparing the way for a determinist doctrine of grace. It was leading him to use arguments which he had specifically rejected thirteen years before."

⁵⁰⁰ "The unity of the people of God was due to the very unity of its doctrine." Cf. Étienne Gilson, *The City of God*, lxix, citing Augustine, *CDP* 18.41-43.

In certain times and ways in his life and thinking, Augustine demonstrates a conceptual basis that allowed for the avoidance of determinism. God's will is not always absolute. The choice to become elect does reside with the individual. But these perspectives are ultimately exchanged for a currency foreign to the historic Christian faith. God's will is absolute and absolutely effectual in regard to the election and salvation of individuals. God not only enables but also indeed moves the human will to faith.

Certainly, in many ways Augustine was not the first person to hold some of these convictions. Eusebius and Ambrose both accepted the idea of the Christian State and in varying ways ascribed meaning to Rome's existence that previously belonged only to the Church. Eusebius had forged the distinction between the called and the chosen, applying the analogy to the Church itself.

Nevertheless, with Augustine this distortion comes to its fullest expression. Eusebius had mapped the Church against an eternalized and Platonic backdrop. Now Augustine did the same thing, not in terms of the Church⁵⁰¹ but in terms of the elect. Dualism runs rampant, breaking apart the concepts of "chosen" and "called" as well as "Israel" and even "freedom" into distinct spheres related respectively to what is true and what is merely apparent, to eternity and to material history. The primary role of the Church changes from that of mediator, which even Ambrose preserved, to instrument in the eternal scheme of election. The Incarnation of Christ no longer functions as a historical point of departure but as a means to eternal end in the unfolding of God's purpose of election.

⁵⁰¹ Indeed, his complaint of the Donatists was their penchant for rendering a purist version of the Church that denied the integrity and identity of Christians who did not follow their line of thinking and practice. Augustine identified this tendency as heretical, since it threatened to divide the Church. According to J. Patout Burns, it was precisely this controversy with the Donatists that prompted Augustine to change his early (late 300s) position on election as embracing the fundamental "impartiality" of God (maintained by his predecessors) to his later position (early 400s) of election as belonging to the secret (yet impartial) counsel of God about who would receive election/salvation. Cf. J. Patout Burns, "The Atmosphere of Election: Augustinianism as Common Sense," in *Doctrinal Diversity: Varieties of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1999), 182. This transition implied that the Donatists no longer had an exclusive nor even legitimate claim to being in possession of God's special favor (election) or even salvation at present. Election and salvation resided in a Platonic eternity and would become evident only at the future consummation as the bridge to eternity.

How would a fundamentally corporate and historical understanding have changed Augustine's exposition of election and predestination? It would likely not have taken away one bit from the message of grace. But grace would not so much provide a reductionist explanation of salvation and the human life as point to the historical advent of Christ and the gift of Godself to us in this historical coming, which has been extended through the gift of the Spirit and through the community of the body of Christ.

Quite possibly, it would also have alleviated the repugnant odor of determinism in his attempt to hold together individual, absolute predestination and human free will. The alternative would say that election first and foremost refers to Christ, who then through his historical advent and resurrection existence mediates it to the Church, which in turn mediates it to its members. Certainly, there would be room to speak about the work of the Spirit to draw persons to faith in Christ and into the body of Christ. But free will would not be at issue, since initiation and participation in the Church would never in itself challenge it. One would partake of election and predestination in material and historical, in other words, sacramental ways, predicated on the material and historical fulfillment of election and predestination already accomplished in and through the person of Christ.

“What if” and “why not” does not necessarily serve the purpose of historical theology well, though, since we are dealing with history. With honest attention to his context as well as his strengths and weaknesses, we need to accept Augustine for who he was and recognize the pervasive scope of his influence. As participants in the Christian tradition, and particularly for those in the Western Christian tradition, Augustine is a part of our history. He belongs to us, for better or for worse. Our exposition and reflection on the historical doctrine of election will need to take him into account. As we head into the summation of the patristic doctrine, then, we must be sure to give Augustine a place at the table, even if his sentiments do not win the day.

Chapter 9. Conclusions

Intent

This final section of the paper serves three main purposes. First, it will sum up the patristic findings under several main headings. Second, it will seek to bring these findings into historical perspective by drawing on the main reformulations in the twentieth century as well as the positions of theologians in other periods in the history of the Church. Third, it will work toward conclusions about the various facets of the historical doctrine, including matters ecclesial and practical, such as pastoral ministry, Reformed and Wesleyan-Arminian theological relations, Jewish and Christian relations, and Church and State relations.

Prolegomena: Toward a Philosophy of Historical Theology

Conclusions cannot be made responsibly without attending to presuppositions. Once our presuppositions are fitted into place, the form and direction of our thinking will follow. Our presuppositions must be open to examination and correction, if we desire to have a product that faithfully reflects the intent of our Creator as we have it in Christ.

The basic thesis of George Stanley Faber, in his *Primitive Doctrine of Election*, has held firm. Except for persons like Eusebius and Augustine, election represented something fundamentally corporate and historical, namely, the Church. In this respect, the early Fathers of the Church in general kept with the basically Jewish-Christian framework of election. They fully affirmed the corporate and historical election of Israel. Through the fulfillment brought about in and through the historical coming of Christ, election pertained to the Church as that eschatological fellowship comprised of Jews and Gentiles made one in Christ. If this indeed reflects the dominant understanding of election in the first three centuries of early Christianity, it would imply that the NT itself reflects this basic understanding, rather than the fundamentally individualistic and

Platonized understanding as represented in Eusebius and most especially in Augustine. It does not fit within the scope of this analysis to argue the connections between the early Fathers and the NT, but it would certainly forward a certain framework of interpretation for such heavily debated passages as Romans 9-11, Romans 8.28-30, as well as Matthew 22.14.

Faber also maintains that the earliest doctrine in the Church's history must necessarily reflect the true doctrine. In this view, the NT embodies an essentially pure and pristine period in the history of the Church. The whole of the truth, as received from Christ himself, lived on in the earliest days of the Church. Thereafter, the purity of the Church's doctrine eventually became tarnished, especially through the accretions of the cultures in which the Church struck out its existence. Among others, Adolf von Harnack portrays the history of the Church in this way.⁵⁰² The Gospel came as a pure and undefiled seed, deposited in the soil of Judaism. As the tree extended its branches across the land, its roots also extended to imbibe the beliefs of foreign cultures. This process of domination through assimilation, built into the genetic makeup of Christianity, inevitably led to the ascendancy of the Christian religion. By implication, the post-apostolic Church ever lives in a state of compromise. When it seeks to be true to its core identity, it makes an earnest attempt at retrieving the earliest faith and piety of the Church. This in effect undermines the entire enterprise of Christian historical theology. Doctrinal development implicitly represents a necessary compromise to the culture if not a complete degradation and accommodation.

The cure for this disease has to do with our doctrine of the Church in history. Does the earliest Church represent a pristine period and all others periods a compromise? Is true doctrine to be found in the Scriptures alone, and nowhere else in the history of the Church? The continuity of God's people as reflected in the history of Israel as well as in the enduring apostolic tradition of the Church would suggest otherwise. Neither does this imply, as it did for Eusebius, that the true Church persists as a pure remnant within the sphere of the Christian religion. From the disciples

⁵⁰² Cf. Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (New York: Harper, 1961).

of Jesus onward, the history of the Church is simultaneously a story of victory and defeat, of purity and of compromise, of righteousness and of sin. It is never simply one or the other. In every period of the Church, in different ways and in different settings, elements of faithfulness and infidelity are present. This extends to the theological enterprise carried on in the Church. Our formulations and reformulations are necessary because of the newness of the challenges we face as followers of Christ in our particular historical contexts. These may simultaneously possess elements of truth and of falsehood, of devotion and of pride, of benefit and of detriment to the life of God's people. What contributed in a positive way previously may prove harmful in our day, and vice versa.

Does this leave us with a theological worldview in which all thinkers and all sentiments are of equal value? To conclude thus would mean denying the place of God as the object and judge of our theological endeavors, to cast theology as a merely human discipline. Seeing as how no group or person, except Christ, has a corner on the mind of God, but that truth comes by the lively and free inspiration of the Spirit, we are not permitted to make exclusive claims to possessing theological truth in relation to other Christian groups and traditions. We must recognize the sources of authority for our theology and seek, with God's help, to remain faithful to those sources while ever engaging in a critical and mutually informing dialogue with the cultures and traditions in which we live. We cannot be faithful to our calling and grow stagnant in our thought and life. We cannot make excuses for changing and then glaze over the harmful aspects in our lives and traditions. Yet we must recognize the limitations we face, given the cultures and contexts in which we live. Here exists a very fine line. We must be willing to change even while continuing in the streams of traditions and cultures in which God has encountered us. Hopefully, this will provide an adequate framework for engaging the conclusions and implications of the argument as we have it so far.

Election, Time, History, and Constituency

In all the Church Fathers here examined, except for Eusebius and Augustine, election and predestination is understood from within an essentially corporate and historical context. It is fundamentally corporate rather than individual, historical rather than eternal. It refers directly to Israel and the Church as the uniquely chosen people of God through history. Indeed, Eusebius and Augustine occasionally sound like those previously confronted as heretics.

Marcion had criticized the apparently fickle notion of God rendering judgment within history. It would be absurd to say that an eternal God changed his mind and treatment of persons in relation to their changing dispositions.⁵⁰³ Tertullian saw judgment, as well as reward, as part of the ongoing, historical providence of God. God will render ultimate judgment, but this has yet to happen. Though Augustine may not explicitly state it, he does imply that the final judgment has already been determined. History reflects the unfolding of this eternal decision, rather than being the context in which God responds dynamically to human decisions while still working out God's overarching and perennial purpose.

Origen's opponent Heracleon believed the elect consisted implicitly of certain persons hidden in the Church and in the world.⁵⁰⁴ They are elect by virtue of the nature implanted within them by God. Though Augustine would disagree with the notion of "elect natures," his doctrine ends up taking basically the same shape. Election does not depend on the choice of the individual but on the eternal determination of God. Both conceptions of election portray history as the unfolding of this eternal determination, and both have the same result.

Is election and predestination to be understood fundamentally within the framework of time or of eternity? Tertullian and Athanasius relate predestination to God's purpose in salvation-history, rather than individual destiny, as Augustine does. All of the Fathers see some kind of perennial or eternal aspect to God's purpose in election. Yet eternity meant something quite different to most of the Fathers than it did to Eusebius and Augustine. As with the NT authors themselves,

⁵⁰³ Tertullian, *AM* 2.23.

⁵⁰⁴ *CJ* 28.179-185.

most of the early Fathers of the Church saw eternity not as timelessness but rather the extension of time back to the beginning and forward into the coming ages.⁵⁰⁵ With Athanasius and the Cappadocians came the apophatic move to delineate between God and time, since time was an aspect of creation. This anticipated the Platonic-Christian shift to picture eternity as true time, which simultaneously parallels all times as the “Eternal Now,” an idea as evident in Augustine as it later was in Karl Barth, who pictured Jesus Christ as simultaneous with all times.⁵⁰⁶

By extension, does theology commence from below, as Pannenberg suggests, in the particularities of time and history, or from above, in timeless certitudes about God? If the history of philosophy is the playing out of the differences of Plato and Aristotle, then the doctrine of election must be included in this as it tends to diverge into distinct camps. It could also be encapsulated in the difference between a fundamentally Jewish or Greek worldview. The Jewish character of theology as a corporate journey with the living God tends toward history as the starting point. The Greek character of theology as reflection on utter transcendence points us to eternity. Where do we begin? How do we come to know God? We must recognize our own human limitations in the matter, as well as the freedom and holy otherness of God. If human life and history is the sphere of the intervention of God, then God is known not merely through our minds but in the concrete particularities of life and history. Ironically enough, if we presume to provide an answer for the question of “where do we begin?” we buy into the modern presupposition that we can remove ourselves from the context in which we live and that we, as individuals, are the center of

⁵⁰⁵ Alan Padgett has done the work on tracing back the Platonic roots of the metaphysical conception of eternity, contrasting it to the understanding(s) of the Scriptures. Cf. Alan G. Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), pp. 35, 44, 144-145.

⁵⁰⁶ Barth sought diligently to avoid the classical Calvinist conception of election and predestination in terms of a static *decretum absolutum*. Colwell recounts Barth’s understanding, “Inasmuch as the decision of God has been actualized in Jesus Christ it is an active but not an arbitrary decision, a freely living but also a constant decision. But this decision of God is not to be identified as a static, timeless *decretum absolutum*, it is rather to be identified as the living event of Jesus Christ.” Cf. John Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality: Eternity and Election in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1989), 279. Alan Padgett, however, criticizes Barth’s portrayal here, noting the contradiction inherent in seeing Jesus Christ as simultaneous with all times, rather than in his Incarnation properly as historical and particular (Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time*, 144). In spite of his attempts to vivify the *decretum*, Barth ends up falling prey to abstraction or contradiction or both at this point. Within the Biblical and early Judeo-Christian conceptuality of eternity as endless time, election and predestination refer to the perennial purpose of God which comes to its realization precisely in the events of history.

truth and knowledge. The question is not, “where do we begin?” but rather, “how has God encountered us?” Though some may come to know God after prolonged intellectual turmoil, somewhere there is a faithful life and a well-placed voice through which we hear that the Gospel invitation is for us, even us. Would we attempt to climb to heaven through our intellect while God has crawled toward us in love? For who has come to know the living God except as God has come to that person in flesh and blood?

In the decades of the 1940s and 50s, Karl Barth, H. H. Rowley, and Lesslie Newbigin made the move to retrieve the fundamentally corporate character of election, grounding this reflection either in an OT theology of election, or Christology, or both. This represents a very drastic change in light of the span of time in Western Christianity during which the doctrinal conceptuality of Eusebius and Augustine has held sway. At the same time, not everyone in Western Christian history has bought completely into an Augustinian portrayal of election and predestination.

One of the more significant exceptions to the norm may be James Arminius. Seeking to exegete Scripture in keeping with Calvin himself, Arminius separated from the ossifying directions he detected in the Genevan theology of his day as it had started to pervade the Low Countries. He dedicated a huge amount of energy to exploring the doctrine of election and predestination and made a number of potential contributions. In terms of the decrees of God, he rejected the idea of God predestining persons in a direct or unmediated way. He held that *Christ* was, first and foremost, the object of predestination, with the secondary object as believers, signifying those persons who live in Christ.⁵⁰⁷ God thereafter predestines the means of grace by which persons may or may not decide to become believers. Only then is it proper to speak about God predestining certain individuals. Believers are understood as group or a class, and Arminius rejects the idea that God produces faith in those who are the predestined.⁵⁰⁸ Yet this does not

⁵⁰⁷ James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, James Nichols, trans. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1.585.

⁵⁰⁸ Arminius, *Works* 2.718-719.

imply that we earn or effect our own salvation, since God has taken the initiative in the coming of Christ and in extending the means of grace to us through which we may come to faith.⁵⁰⁹

Arminius also pictures election and predestination within history by holding to an infralapsarian rather than a supralapsarian position. Both election and salvation thus refer properly to what God does in reference to persons living in history after the fall.

At the same time, Arminius does not sever himself completely from the Augustinian heritage. He still tends to picture the elect in terms of those persons who will finally inherit salvation, equating election with salvation. In this vein, he expresses uncertainty about whether the elect can indeed fall away from grace, basically leaving open the question of the possibility of forfeiting election. He also follows the conventions of his day in thinking about election mainly from an eternal vantage point, though his intuition prompted him to reject the supralapsarian option as contrary to the goodness of God. Though Arminius did not wholly diverge from the Augustinian and Calvinist heritage, he managed to avoid the trap of determinism. This re-envisioning of election and predestination set a precedent for the Dutch Remonstrants, persisting into the Anglican and then Wesleyan tradition. Some persons within the Reformed tradition, like Richard Müller, have started to see the importance of Arminius in historical theology, as well as his close affinity to the Reformed tradition of his day.⁵¹⁰ Though the sharpness of Arminius does not equal the genius of Calvin, perhaps the time is ripe for both Calvinists and Wesleyans to explore his theology in its own right, and to let him invite both groups to a table of mutually informing and beneficial dialogue.

Stemming mainly from the contribution of Barth, Colin Gunton, likewise Reformed, has brought renewed attention to the contemporary doctrine of election and predestination. In one of his articles, he emphasizes the importance of avoiding deterministic portrayals of God's election.

⁵⁰⁹ Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Asbury Press, 1985), 351. The decree is absolute on God's side, in reference to believers as a class, and therefore conditional on the human side. Even so, the fulfilling condition is not meritorious, since it comes by grace.

⁵¹⁰ Richard A. Müller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

The doctrine signifies an “ecclesial matter” before “it is concerned with the individual believer: with what Israel and the Church are here for rather than the fate of the individuals within them.”⁵¹¹ He criticizes the preoccupation with a protological perspective (election before time or in eternity) rather than the needed eschatological perspective. He points out how several of these misconceptions have their original home in Augustine, who portrayed the elect and reprobate as “two classes within the Church, with the true, invisible Church being known only to God.”⁵¹² He then points immediately to a stream of voluntarism that developed in history in reaction to this, an “Arminianism stressing the free adherence of the believer and easily degenerating into a form of self-election.”⁵¹³ Astoundingly, while the assessment of the contemporary doctrine and Augustine’s role proves both confessional and accurate, the Arminian tradition becomes the primary example of the negative ramifications of the Augustinian revision. Additionally, any significant similarities between Arminian and Barthian or pre-Augustinian perspectives go overlooked. Granted, some persons within the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition may have neglected the doctrine of election and predestination in the concern to preserve the genuine place of free will against the determinism inherent in the Augustinian position. But for the most part, theologians in this tradition have addressed the initiative of God in our election and salvation, just in a different way than our Calvinist brothers and sisters.⁵¹⁴ This tradition does stand in need of reappropriating the Biblical and historical doctrine of election and predestination, especially for its corporate, historical, Christological and ecclesial implications. But so does the Calvinist tradition. To try to weigh the balances and find either one or the other guilty is vain and pointless. All of us have an opportunity to engage in serious theological reflection, and in doing so, we may find that this very doctrine that has got us into a tangle now reveals a thread by which the mess may be unraveled, if we have the desire and patience to see it through.

⁵¹¹ Colin Gunton, “Election and Predestination in the Post-Constantinian Church,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53.2 (2000), 218.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 214.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ The burden of proof in this rests with our Calvinist brothers who would deny that Arminians have any significant conceptuality of election and predestination at all.

Election, Christ, and the Apostolic Ministry

The Fathers are univocal in tying election and predestination to Christ. Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Ambrose expound in exquisite fashion on Christ's role as the mediator of election and predestination. Yet the Christological thrust has a strong place in the rest of the Fathers as well. Most understand the mediation of Christ as connected to his historical advent, underlining the historical-particularity of his person and God's redemption. While Eusebius and Augustine do tie the historical advent of Christ to the calling of the Gentiles, they end up ignoring Christ's role as the *historical* mediator of election. For them the elect are an aggregate, distinct from Israel and the Church, whose identity resides in a timeless Platonic realm. For the other Fathers, God's plan may be perennial or even predate creation itself, so to speak, but the realization of this plan stands as a decisive event of cosmic proportion *in history*, commensurate with the decisive and cosmic event of the Incarnation itself. To maintain that predestination and election are not only planned but also *effected* outside of history would be to deny the incarnational character of God's redemption and even to deny the centrality and significance of the Incarnation itself.

All of the Fathers saw the apostolic ministry as at least basically representative of the Church in its beliefs, history, and continuity. This led all of them to speak to the role of the apostolic ministry in the realization of the calling of the Gentiles. Yet, Eusebius and Augustine did not picture the Church as a whole as elect. Seeing the pure succession of the apostolic episcopate and tradition as inevitable members of the elect, Eusebius interprets these persons as symbolic of the identity of the elect within the Church. Augustine, on the other hand, did not believe that bishops and priests were necessarily pure or faithful to the tradition. For this reason, they fall into the same category as all members of the Church. They may be elect or they may not. Only the coming judgment will unveil their true identity.

How should we understand the role of the apostolic ministry in the life of God's people today?

Our theology should begin with the Church as the chosen people of God. In this, the apostolic ministry represents the election of the Church and administers this election through Word and Sacrament, including the sacrament of baptismal initiation. When we start with the Church, it becomes evident that election is not based on our righteousness and purity or lack thereof. God has chosen us in Christ to be his people, even in spite of all the inconsistencies and incongruities of our life and history. What was true of ancient Israel is also true of us.

The implications of this stretch from the local congregation to the entirety of Church history. God's people have killed others and even one another in the name of Christ. God's people have sought approval and acceptance from the dominant culture. God's people have been fearful and proud, hungry for power and prestige, deceitful and manipulative, unkind and godless, inhospitable and indifferent, yet for all that we are still God's people. God's people have disagreed over who the true people of God are, and yet we are still God's people.

Somewhere along the line we have to deal with the subject of how persons and perhaps even congregations (e.g. Revelation 3-4) and traditions can forfeit their standing among the elect. Apostasy and excommunication have been a part of Church history since Ananias and Saphira, and theirs was merely the sin of discretion and tightfistedness. Recognizing the forbearance of God, we should be very careful about drawing lines between the elect and the apostate and about excommunicating anyone from the Church. At the same time, we must resolutely proclaim the truth and judgment of God, not that we make this judgment, but that God's judgment is imminent and that its effects can already be felt in our lives and congregations. Yet even before this, we must come again to a place of deep contrition and lament over sin, both our own and the sin present among all of God's people. If we think ourselves excepted from this because "we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Election and Initiation

Throughout the Fathers, yet only partially in Eusebius and Augustine, election has related integrally to what may be called the catholic process of initiation, namely, catechism leading to baptism. Again, except implicitly with Eusebius and Augustine in their division of the Church into elect and non-elect, initiation stands as the means by which a person receives the identity of elect, since election is mediated through the Church.

If we picture the Church first of all as a voluntaristic society, populated by individuals who have been called and saved by God in isolation from each other, then the significance of election and sacramental initiation will escape us. In his defense of the “corporality” of Jewish election, Michael Wyschogrod points out how Christian election refers to something individual and philosophical, since membership is predicated on individual faith rather than a shared ethnicity.⁵¹⁵ He pokes fun at the anomaly of infant baptism in the Church, which Christians seem to overlook as carrying the same theological freight as circumcision.⁵¹⁶ Against this, the majority of early Church Fathers do picture Christian election in terms of a corporality, which has its source in the very body of Christ, is mediated by the Church as the Body of Christ, and into which persons are physically incorporated through the sacrament of baptism. The Jewish-Christian Jakob Jocz confirms this sense in interpreting election as representing the assembly, or better yet, the family of God.⁵¹⁷

Incorporation into the Church does not guarantee final salvation, though it does genuinely include a person in the identity of being elect. Beginning with a strong understanding of corporate election, it becomes apparent that there is no salvation outside of the fellowship of the Church. In this framework, the Body is primary rather than the individual. For persons in Western society, with our prejudice against institution and authority, this is difficult to swallow. Nevertheless, the

⁵¹⁵ Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: Judaism as Corporeal Election*, 42.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵¹⁷ Jocz, *A Theology of Election*, 25.

entire history of the Scriptures as well as the vast majority of Christian tradition has predominantly seen the Church and not the individual as primary in terms of God's dealings with the world. In the Wesleyan tradition, we do not tend to believe that baptism in itself effects regeneration, but that should not lead us to think that God does not or cannot bring regeneration through baptism. An anti-Catholic and anti-sacramental bias has prevented much of the Wesleyan tradition from maintaining the close connection between initiation and election, which in turns undermines the integrity of the Church both in thought and practice. Baptismal initiation arises not out of superstition or papism but rather out of a theological commitment to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

Recovering the centrality of baptism as the sacrament of initiation would go far in relieving the perennial sense of insecurity in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition that plagues especially its younger members. Since regeneration becomes narrowly identified with the personal decision to turn from sin, it implies that our salvation may be in jeopardy any time that we sin. We thereby become afraid of admitting any sin, since this would seem to deny our salvation. Election, however, opens us up to see ourselves in a much broader and more accurate perspective. Since God chooses us, expressed primarily in the sacramental gift of baptism, in which Christ claims us as his own, then our fundamental relationship and standing with God does not change merely in consequence of our sometimes inconsistent thoughts and actions, even when they are sinful. We still belong to God. This does not allow us to make excuses for sin nor sidestep the imperative of holy living but instead points to the fundamentally gracious context of election. We may run away from our identity and ultimately forfeit our inheritance, but this is a far cry from doubting one's identity on the basis of any thought or action that does not match up to God's standard. God's commitment to us proves far deeper and more powerful than our commitment to God. Election bespeaks the commitment of God to "sanctify us entirely" in the crucible of the common life of the Church, including its administration to us of the healing practices of confession and repentance. To believe in holiness, therefore, is to believe in God's commitment to make the Church a holy people.

Election, Purpose, Predestination, and Conditionality

Predestination certainly has implications for salvation, as seen in Tertullian, Athanasius, and Augustine. However, election among most of the Fathers treated here refers to a broader and more encompassing theological reality than predestination in itself, as well as one that is more central to the faith of the Scriptures. The reference and freight of predestination is the formation of God's purpose in election. The salvation or damnation of individuals is not the goal toward which everything moves or the center around which everything revolves. Election and predestination do not pertain to the determination of eternal destiny so much as to the particular-historical means by which the revelation and redemption of God may extend to all people and all creation.⁵¹⁸ God brings this purpose to its fulfillment in Christ, in which we are graciously included by faith. Being included and participating in God's purpose is nothing less than what we call salvation.

Understood in the framework of history, judgment is as much a part of the realization of God's righteous and redemptive purpose as salvation. When God judges, God is not bad, but just. When God saves, God is not merely good, but merciful. The portrayal of providence present among a number of early Fathers helps us to see and embrace this truth. The Augustinian heritage has also provided a vital witness to this throughout Western Christian history.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁸ Admittedly, Origen, as well as Augustine, pictured restoration in non-material terms, except for the affirmation of the resurrection of the body.

⁵¹⁹ Though Augustine does follow a basically individualistic line of thinking, he does offer a much needed perspective on election and salvation in terms of justice. Christians in the West have increasingly conceived of religious justice in terms of human rights. In this strain, God has an obligation to save us, if not for the mere fact that God created us. The truth is that we have no right to God's mercy and salvation. These come as free expressions of God's love for us. Judgment, both present and future, is not an infringement on human rights, but the expression of God's just governance over all creation, which should be a source of great hope. The world is not ultimately in our hands, thank God. Though often individualistic, Augustine does us the immense favor of communicating a God-centered view of creation and God's role in salvation/election and in judgment/condemnation. This further leads to his contributions in the way of pastoral theology, helping the Church's ministers to not tip-toe around the Church, as if the continuation of the people of God was in their hands rather than the hands of God.

Except for Eusebius and Augustine, the early Fathers of the Church maintain that election does not guarantee salvation. It can be forfeited. Election is not identical with salvation. Election is brought about by Christ and is conferred upon the Church as a whole. Through the prevenient grace of the Spirit's calling, coupled with the apostolic and evangelistic ministry of the Church, we are invited to participate in God's people and purpose. The initial and ongoing response to this offer belongs to us. In the sense of individual membership and participation, the invitation of election comes by grace but its acceptance does depend on the response of the person.

In light of early Christian as well as Jewish thought, Augustine makes a dangerous compromise with Greek thought. In the journal *Judaism*, William Braude asks, "Why did Church Councils back Augustine's return to the old Greek idea of necessity, of fate disguised as God's grace?"⁵²⁰ What seems to ultimately undermine Augustine's position on free will is his commitment to election and predestination conceived individualistically and supra-historically. The free response of the individual potentially would not have been threatened if he would have referred election and predestination primarily to a historical people.

Election, Israel, and the Church

The consistent view among the early Fathers, except for our two notorious saints, is that ancient Israel truly was the chosen people of God in the complete sense of the word. The elements of infidelity in the people did not negate their election, just as it does not negate the election of the Church. Yet, with the coming, rejection, and exaltation of the Messiah, something pivotal happened in the constituency of God's elect people. The Church, which soon became comprised largely of Gentiles, now bore the identity of God's chosen people.

⁵²⁰ William G. Braude, "The Church Fathers and the Synagogue," *Judaism* 9 (Sp 1960), 116. Philo himself, a significant influence on a number of Church Fathers, maintained the ground of human responsibility in a way "limited slightly" by divine ultimacy. Don A. Carson, "Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in Philo: Analysis and Method," *Novum Testamentum* 23 (Ap 1981): 148-164.

But what of the ongoing identity of Israel as the chosen people of God? The themes of calling, incorporation, and union of Gentiles with Jews played an enormous role in the witness of the early Church Fathers, which in effect upholds the ancient and ongoing identity of the Jewish people. This historical and corporate sense, however, waned considerably, particularly in Eusebius and Augustine. The themes of reversal and the passing on of the promise also surfaced regularly. In this stream, the ongoing identity of Israel as elect appears to have drawn to a close. The most dominant theme proves to be that of fulfillment. All of the previous themes found their home in this one, and this theme found its source and shape in the person and coming of the Messiah. Christ brought election to its fulfillment, making Jew and Gentile equal partners in the covenant he established. This fulfillment did not apply only to the Gentiles but also to the Jews, so that the response of particular Jews to their Messiah becomes determinative for their ultimate inheritance of the promise of election. Yet, though some Jews may have rejected God's Messiah, God has not finally rejected them. Since the Messiah sums up the history of Israel and affirms God's election and covenant with Israel, it would seem that Israel as a people continues in its unique identity as God's chosen. This becomes clear in the Church Fathers' understanding of a merely temporary repudiation of the Jews,⁵²¹ demonstrated by history itself. This period of

⁵²¹ It seems quite possible if not probable that many of the early Fathers understood the "repudiation" or "rejection" of Israel, since it was temporary, in a way akin to God's "rejection" of Israel in the exile. This would support the fundamental and continuing identity of the Jewish people as the chosen of God. In any case, this note of temporary rejection provides one instance where the wholesale dismissals of patristic theology as inescapably anti-Semitic crumble.

Paul M. van Buren has done tremendous pioneering work in rethinking the theological relationship of Israel and the Church. His portrayal of Church history as almost entirely anti-Semitic, however, proves to be an over-generalization. He follows von Harnack in maintaining that from Justin Martyr onward, Christians denied that the Jewish people stood in any "favored relationship with the God whom Jesus has revealed; whether they formerly did is doubtful; this, however, is certain, that God as cast them off, and that the whole Divine revelation, so far as there was any so far as there was any revelation prior to Christ (the majority believed in one and looked upon the Old Testament as Holy Scripture), had its end in the calling of a 'new nation' and spreading of the revelation of God through his Son" (Paul M. van Buren, *Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality, Part I*, 42, citing *Outlines of the History of Dogma* [Edwin Knox Mitchell, trans. Intro by Philip Rieff. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.]). Harnack's assessment has some truth to it, but it focuses myopically on the themes of rejection and reversal, making them descriptive of the entire relationship.

Van Buren also cites German theologian B. Klappert, who, in his *Israel und die Kirche* (1980), summarized the basic positions of Christian historical theology in regard to Israel. "He lists five different views of Israel, and they all lead to the conclusion that Israel has lost its special character as the elect people of God: (1) it is simply replaced by the church; (2) the remnant of Israel has been integrated (by conversion) into the church; (3) Israel is only the type of the church; (4) Israel is the exemplary foil of the church; and (5) Israel has no special character since Christ, being only part of the mass of humanity

hardening anticipated the final restoration of Israel to God through their Messiah and therefore Israel's reconciliation with their sisters and brothers in the faith and promised lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Our attempts at separating identity from history will not serve us well in this area. It may well be that the inability of early Church Fathers to do just this did not allow them to deny the election of Israel. For them, to uphold the election of ancient Israel was in some way to uphold the ongoing election of Israel.

Honest Christian self-reflection and confession has come in consequence of the horrific crimes against the Jewish people in the holocaust. Anti-Semitism has worked its way into the heart of Christian theology.⁵²² The early Fathers of the Church are certainly not exempted from this.⁵²³ Theologians Jewish and Jewish-Christian have reminded the Church about the ongoing identity of the Jewish people as chosen of God. History itself now suggests that the Jews cannot escape this identity and vocation as representing the Only True God. This prompts us as Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, to acknowledge the continuing election of the people of Israel.

How can the Church and Israel both be the chosen people of God? One potential resolution to this comes with the doctrine of eschatology. In an eschatological perspective, the Church does not

standing in need of justification" (van Buren, *Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality, Part II*, 10). Again, though it has some descriptive value, the portrayal proves dreadfully over-generalized and simplistic.

The theological relationship and conversation proved much more complex, both in content and in motivation. This finds support not only in this thesis but also in that of Miriam Taylor in her *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Scholarly Consensus* (New York: Brill, 1995). Judith M. Lieu argues in a similar vein in the context of the second century in her *Image and Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996). She notes that the motif of fulfillment does not necessarily indicate replacement, though it may sometimes sound like it (289), and that positive and creative aspects arose in the exchange as well as passive or hostile (286). The theological discussion of the historical, and so also the contemporary, relationship between Israel and the Church requires nuanced reflection and evaluation.

⁵²² This is the central argument of Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974). She offers a very convincing account of how this originated among the early Fathers of the Church. For all of the thorough research, however, it ignores Christian affirmations of the religion and tradition of Israel and lacks a nuanced accounting of the intent of early Christian writers.

⁵²³ Tertullian, Origen, and Augustine, for example, all speak about the Jews being rejected on account of idolatry. Perhaps they understood this as implied in the rejection of Christ as the Image of God. Perhaps it reflected a sense that the exile of Israel was being recapitulated. They do not make any of this clear, however, and so end up providing fuel for later anti-Semitic fires.

replace the people of Israel but rather reflects and embodies the fulfillment of God's election of Israel. The Church therefore exists alongside and in a sense above the Jewish people through history in terms of representing the fullness of God's intent in election, which will be realized for us as a shared whole at the return of the Messiah. "Above," in a Christian perspective, actually means "below," carrying out the Messianic vocation of service and sacrifice on behalf of all persons, including our separated sisters and brothers.

Recent reappraisals of the historic Jewish-Christian relationship have come on the heels of the holocaust, with the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches both making statements to the effect that the Jews continue to exist as the chosen people of God. These are most certainly a step in the right direction. At the same time, the witness of the early Fathers regarding election suggests that such reappraisals should be careful not to deny the ultimacy of Christian truth claims.⁵²⁴ Neither should they automatically buy into a rigid political agenda that aims at the full repossession of the ancient land of Israel. The Jewish people have a distinguished place in the Christian view of the coming restoration. Yet, from Origen's day (and even before) to ours, there persists a divergent view about what constitutes restoration. From a Christian perspective, to hope for the restoration of a material Jerusalem *in this age* is to miss the only legitimate source of hope that will come about when God creates "a new heaven and a new earth." One may retort that the Scriptures speak of the day in which "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11.26). But the operative question remains, will this restoration of the Jews happen on the terms of the old covenant or the new? The resounding answer from the early Fathers is the latter.

This point should not detract from the validity of supporting Jews and even the contemporary nation of Israel in terms of protecting a people from persecution and annihilation. But it takes the steam out of religious zeal that is predicated on a strict dispensationalist view of history that sees the complete restoration of the nation of Israel as the key piece in the puzzle to bring about the

⁵²⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 172.

return of the Messiah.⁵²⁵ The restoration of which the Scriptures ultimately speak pertains to the Jews as a whole finally turning to their true King, not to the complete restoration of a nation-state. Again, this should not be misconstrued as anti-Israeli sentiment but rather understood as a necessary refocusing of a Christian theological understanding of Israel and the land of Palestine.

Eschatology also outlines the position of God's people in the world today, whether Israel or the Church. We still live in anticipation of the great and final coming of the Messiah and the restoration that he will bring. In this interim of expectation, both Israel and the Church must come to grips with its essential identity as an exilic people. Both the Church and Israel have learned this lesson through history, albeit in different ways. God does allow us to be a landed people from time to time, but at the very core of our identity we are strangers and wanderers in this world, like our father Abraham. We do not have a "lasting home" so long as this world continues in its present form.⁵²⁶ Restoration will only finally come when the kingdom of this world becomes the "kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah."⁵²⁷ Perhaps such a perspective would prove helpful in the efforts of the nation of Israel to forge relationships of peaceable co-existence with its neighbors. Christians must ask themselves how they may stand in solidarity with their Jewish brothers and sisters. As fellow sojourners in this world, Christians and Jews ought to stand in whole-hearted solidarity with one another,⁵²⁸ though we may not know exactly what shape this will take from generation to generation.

⁵²⁵ Reflecting on the historical statements of the World Council of Churches, which has offered much in the way of a confessional reevaluation of the Christian understanding of Israel, Martin Stöhr maintains that such an "instrumental" view of the full restoration of Israel as the means to the coming of the Messiah proves just as harmful as the Israeli desire to completely possess the promised land. Cf. "People and Land," *Immanuel* 22/23 (1989), 58.

⁵²⁶ Cf. 2 Peter 3:13, "But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home."

⁵²⁷ Rev. 11.15.

⁵²⁸ Indeed, as Christians have increasingly observed, the predicament of the Jewish people in the holocaust reflects the suffering and death of our crucified Lord, and so also the identity and calling of the Church in this age. We have the reflection of our true identity in our Jewish brothers and sisters, which leads us directly to confession, not only for our complicity in the Holocaust but for our ongoing, historical avoidance of the cross as God's people. The way of the cross may point straight to the places where our Jewish sisters and brothers, and any of God's children, reconciled or estranged, are suffering.

Election, Nationality, Ethics, and Mission

The pre-Constantinian Fathers consistently distinguish the identity of the Church from the Empire, including the political and social aspects of election. The idea of the Christian State thereafter captured the imagination of theologians, except for perhaps Athanasius. Eusebius readily included the Empire in his understanding of a chosen people. Ambrose did the same, though he pressed hard for the integrity of the Church. Early on, Augustine bought completely into the idea of the Christian era that had come with the victory of the Church in the Roman Empire. But after the sack of Rome, he saw how problematic this was. Thereafter, he distinguished the Church from the Empire as reflective of two eternal, co-existing realities. Church and Empire belonged to their own categories, yet they still participated to a degree in the opposite reality. As the Empire participated in the City of God, it experienced the favor of God. As the Church participated in the City of Man, it encountered the wrath of God.

This leaves a variety of interpretations of the relationship between Church and State. Though we have a general agreement among pre-Constantinian Fathers, we should not therefore completely dismiss the ideas of post-Constantinian Fathers. In light of later Church history, the early Fathers are in substantial agreement with the Anabaptist commitment to non-participation and non-violence. A number of theologians across the board are currently forwarding a vision and interpretation of contemporary Christianity as living in a post-Constantinian era. Cultural Christianity is finally coming to an end, though it may be lashing out in the throes of death. The Church is returning to its identity as a peculiar people, distinct from the cultures in which we live. Since the social and political character of the Church has huge bearing on the integrity of its witness, faithfulness points to the need for separation from the violent and self-serving politics of the structures of this present age.

Robert Wilken offers a helpful counter-perspective to this view by recognizing that the Church does indeed live in a post-Constantinian age, that is, in the wake of the influence of Constantine.

Presumably it makes some difference for Christianity that Constantine reigned for 1500 years. Christianity is no longer and can never become again the tiny charismatic religious movement we identify with the first Christian communities. This is not to say that it cannot be charismatic, but charisma has to take quite a different form when Billy Graham serves as court preacher to the President of the United States and Terence Cardinal Cooke is the celebrated vicar of the Armed Forces. Things can never be quite the same once a scarlet-robed cardinal crowns a king, even if the cardinal may, at a later time, go into hiding because the king persecutes him. Christianity is different, because it passed through the Constantinian age. Whether one likes what resulted from the Constantinian epoch or not, the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire is a testimony to the conviction of ancient Christians that God is the God of all men and that his rule should extend to social, political, and cultural life...As a consequence of their dream of the unity of mankind in the worship of the one God, we live in a civilization that has been molded by Christian ideals and in churches shaped by the values of Western civilization. The 1500 years stand before us as a part of the historical record, and therefore as part of the definition of what it is to be Christian in the twentieth century.⁵²⁹

Even so, does this imply that the significance of the witness of the pre-Constantinian Church only pertains to periods and settings of persecution? In the concern to preserve the social and political benefits of a culturally Christian worldview, Denis Baly⁵³⁰ and Wolfhart Pannenberg⁵³¹ basically end up disregarding the witness of early Christianity. Christians should not divorce themselves from social and political involvement. Rather, they should both embody and promote a covenantal understanding of the political life of all nations. By understanding themselves as chosen and implicated in a covenant with God, nations will have a basis for receiving criticism as a form of accountability. Lesslie Newbigin agrees with this in part, seeing a Christian worldview as much more helpful than a Muslim worldview in regard to the peaceful co-existence of diverse peoples.⁵³² In terms of the character of the political world desired by many Christians today, this seems to carry a very strong appeal.

⁵²⁹ Wilken, *Myth*, 196.

⁵³⁰ Denis Baly, *Chosen Peoples*, 26. In Baly's view, the Church has a unique standing as the chosen people of God, but nations and educational institutions also may be spoken of as chosen. Christians, therefore, must be open to the ways in which God has need of them in the political sphere of the State.

⁵³¹ *Human Nature, Election, and History*, 74-82.

⁵³² Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 140.

Yet, does not the witness of the early Church have something to say to the character of Christian political identity in the context of the US or other countries that to some degree lay claim to a fundamentally Christian heritage and identity? Does context dictate our ethical and political vision as God's people? Is there no meaningful stance on the issues of Church and State relations except for resignation disguised as cooperation?

To attempt to deal with this tension faithfully, it seems necessary to take a two-fold approach. First, we must recognize the place and precedent of the witness of early Christianity in regard to non-violence and non-participation, seeing also that this is rooted in the political character of the life of Jesus and the earliest Christian community.⁵³³ Yet, and second, we must acknowledge the historical and contemporary makeup of the Church, as well as the contexts in which the Church lives. In keeping with God's election of the Church as a whole, the membership of the "true Church" cannot be limited to those who represent one particular ethical stance. The non-participating Church does not comprise the "true Church." Rather, this part of the Church is just as guilty of sin as any other part. The Church across the board is presently implicated in sin of some kind. Eusebius, Ambrose, and Augustine, and the Christians of their times are as truly Christian as were Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen, and the Christians of their times.

As the people of God, then, we must come back to our self-understanding as fundamentally rooted in the life of Christ in all of its historical-particularity. This hopefully will lead to an even-handed but passion-filled understanding of our place and vocation in history. The Church of the first three centuries provides an invaluable historical witness for us, demonstrating not only the possibility but also the necessity of the Church to have its own political and social integrity as the people of God so as to reflect the concrete crucified and resurrected life of Christ in its fellowship. Participating in the kingdom of God means that the Church has no business seeking after political power and influence. Seeking to secure its own safety and avoid persecution by means of political control is to deny the call of the cross. Where the Church has done this, it

⁵³³ John Howard Yoder convincingly argues this in *The Politics of Jesus*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

stands guilty of sin. Compromising Christian initiation and ethics in the case of Constantine and many others are examples of such wrongdoing.

In light of the context in which we live, it is not feasible nor necessarily helpful to insist that Christians immediately engage in an Exodus from the political and military structures of the world. Our foremost concern must be the integrity of the political life of the Church. In this concern, we must learn to absent ourselves in certain ways from places of power and control, and we must find the courage to exclude persons who refuse to submit to the ethics of the Kingdom, even if this refusal comes out of responsibility to a governmental position. Members and initiates of Christ's Body must refrain from participating in any kind of murder, including war. This is what it means to become followers of a crucified Messiah. To commit ourselves to non-participation in these ways is to participate publicly in the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God. The crusades may be a part of our history, but they are not the only part, and they should not set the agenda in our day for the social and political identity of the people that God has chosen in Christ. Christianity *does* exist as a tiny charismatic movement in certain parts of the world today. Perhaps the time is ripe to see the centrality of the testimony of the persecuted church in the redemptive drama of God, in keeping with the centrality of our Lord as the suffering servant of God.

What vision sets the agenda for God's people, the suffering Church or the crusading Church? Or, in what way are we called to discharge our vocation as the Church militant? If we set our sights on the former, we may put our lives at risk. We may find ourselves living a little out of control. But perhaps we do more harm to ourselves and to the world by living as if our Christian duty meant being in control, which will lead us to close our ears to the testimony of the early Church, as well as the persecuted Church around the world today. If the cross leads to resurrection, do we hear from these sisters and brothers the invitation to life?

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