

What Lutherans Believe

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Election, Predestination, and Free Will – LEADER’S GUIDE

Read: Ephesians 1:3-14

Election is the teaching that God chooses His people. Translated from the Greek ἐκλεκτός when referring to God’s people, this word is most often rendered in English as “favorite”, “chosen”, “elect”.

“The Elect” are picked out or chosen by God to obtain salvation through Christ.

In the Septuagint, this word is used when the Messiah is called "elect", as appointed by God to the most exalted office conceivable.

It can also refer more broadly to God’s choice or selection, i.e. the best of its kind or class, most excellence or preeminent (especially when applied to individual Christians.)

A sampling of Bible verses:

Matthew 24:22 (also Mark 13:20)

And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

Matthew 24:24 (also Mark 13:22)

For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

Matthew 24:31 (also Mark 13:27)

And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Luke 18:7

And will not God give justice to His elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?

Romans 8:33

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Romans 9:11

...though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls....

Romans 11:7

What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened....

Romans 11:28

As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.

2 Timothy 2:10

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Titus 1:1

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness....

1 Peter 1:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia....

2 Peter 1:10

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

The concept of election is probably one of the most difficult questions in Christian theology, and one that every believer eventually should understand. So unsurprisingly, Christian churches through the centuries have developed extensive writing and teaching on the subject. There is quite a bit of overlap between teachings that differ in detail, so we'll pay close attention to those areas that are distinct, or do not easily overlap.

Those distinctions between teachings on election are related primarily to the relationship between an individual's personal faith, and God's election of that believer.

The two most popular views are:

- **Calvinist:** God's choice of a person *results* in their personal faith in Christ
- **Arminian:** God chooses a person *because* they put their faith in Christ

Unsurprisingly there are multiple variations of each of these that can be found if you take the time to dig into what is actually taught and confessed by different Christian churches.

The **Arminian** view is rooted in the belief that God loves all people and wants everyone to be saved, and so Jesus died on the cross to make the salvation of all people possible. Arminians believe that the Holy Spirit is needed to convert people, and He acts by restoring people's free will by which they can choose to embrace or reject the gospel, so that if a person is lost, it is because they did not choose to turn to God. However, those who believe may later choose to walk away from God and so fall away from the faith and forfeit salvation. Sometimes called "decision theology", the Arminian view holds that the Christian is cooperative in his salvation. While God makes it possible by giving the person free will to believe or reject God, ultimately the decision of the believer leads to their salvation or condemnation.

The implications of this inform these churches rejection of infant baptism, the belief in an "age of accountability", etc., because the Christian must have the capacity to cooperate in their salvation by their choices and works.

The **Calvinist** view, on the other hand, starts God's absolute sovereignty over all things and humanity's bondage to sin. Man is so sinful that God acts on man's behalf (grace) so that He enables the sinner to turn to Christ in faith. The Calvinist believes that God chooses to enable some people to respond in faith to the gospel, and therefore Jesus died to actually save *those specific people*. If a person is lost, *it is because God did not choose them*. This is sometimes labeled "double predestination" – some are predestined to faith, and others are predestined to unbelief. If a person is truly converted, they will keep the faith because of God's grace, which empowers them to persevere. The Calvinist rejects the notion of free will when it comes to believing – or not believing – in God.

But wait, which one these is Lutheran? What is our doctrine of election?

Neither of them!

Like Calvinists, we reject the notion of man having absolute free will to accept or reject God. We embrace election as God's choice of His people for salvation, which is the driving force behind the principle of "sola gratia" – by *grace alone*.

We also embrace God's desire that all people be saved and affirm that Christ died in order that all people might be saved, which some label as *universal grace*. We also believe that a person can walk away from the faith and forfeit salvation.

If a person is saved, it is because **God** chose them; if a person is lost, it is because of **their own sin**. Sometimes called "single predestination", we believe and teach that according to scripture, God chooses some for salvation, but God *does not* "choose" the others for damnation.

That leaves us with an unsettling question: Why does God choose some, and allow others to fall away? We cannot say; scripture does not reveal this. It is, therefore, a mystery.

John 6:37

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

John 6:44

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

Acts 13:48

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Romans 9:6-29

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I

will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion,[a] but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”

²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea,

“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’
and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”

²⁶

“And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’
there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”

²⁷ And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel[b] be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, ²⁸ for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” ²⁹ And as Isaiah predicted,

“If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom
and become like Gomorrah.”

1 Timothy 2:4-6

...who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man[a] Christ Jesus,⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

1 Timothy 4:10

For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

2 Peter 2:1

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Matthew 23:37

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

1 John 2:2

He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 Timothy 1:19-20

...holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith,²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Lutheran doctrine:

- Affirms the scriptural teaching of God's election of His saints to salvation
- Acknowledges God's desire for all people to be saved
- Acknowledges that man has free will to "shipwreck" his salvation, but not free will to decide whether or not to accept faith in Jesus Christ
- Believes that atonement for sins and election stand side by side in scripture without demanding the universality of atonement (e.g., the Unitarian Universalist view), or that God's desire to atone necessarily limits His decision to elect

In summary, Lutherans believe what the Bible says, and also acknowledge that there are aspects of this which are mysterious, and can only be left to God's sovereignty, which we are not always equipped to understand in full.

From https://www.issuesetcarchive.org/issues_site/resource/archives/scaer2.htm

The Doctrine of Election: A Lutheran Note

By David P. Scaer

An excerpt from *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology* (Kantzer and Gundry, editors)

(Chapter 9)

Several months ago a colleague remarked in a chapel sermon that in his memory he had been the only one who had ever preached a sermon on the doctrine of election. With all due respect for his position and perhaps with less respect for his memory and analytical abilities, I was slightly taken aback by his assertion. First of all it is questionable whether sermons can ever be merely popular styled discussions of isolated doctrines. Secondly the discussion of any one doctrine is always done in conjunction with other doctrines comprising the Christian doctrinal corpus. Doctrines never have autonomous existences strung out like beads on a necklace, lying side by side in Nestorian isolation, whose only unifying theme is the string that runs through their center holding them together. Christian doctrines are more like pieces of cake, all made and baked from the same dough, though their places on the circumference of the plate are different and distinct. Whether a sermon deals with God, (1) Christ, salvation, atonement, or eschatology, it will also be a sermon on the election, even though the explicit word may not be used. The doctrine of election is a divisive doctrine among conservative evangelical Christians. It has been notably divisive among Reformed Protestants, i.e., those who are not professing Lutherans. Nevertheless it was the doctrine of election in the last century that split Lutherans in the United States right down the middle and it more than any other doctrine is responsible for the manifold divisions in Lutheranism in America that last to this day.(2) This splintered division remains, though the causes for it have changed.

Among non-Lutherans there are clearly recognizable opposing views on election, without denying that there are variations within these views. Simply put, one sees God as the sole or major determinative factor both in salvation and damnation and the other sees man as decisive, at least in the sense of making some type of contribution. On the drawing board Lutheran theology occupies the halfway house holding that God alone is responsible for the salvation of the redeemed and that each man alone is responsible for his own damnation. This view may be described as single predestination, though this terminology is not common. If this is indeed a mediating position within Protestantism, it is purely accidental without any deliberate premeditation or the slightest desire to occupy a politically comfortable position in order to reconcile opposing views. For some it appears as philosophically the most unsatisfactory. Lutherans come to their view because it best satisfies the biblical data and it finds a firm basis in the great Reformation principles which recognizes the total depravity of man and more especially the magnificence of God's grace in the salvation of man, the *sola gratia*. The doctrines of the total depravity and the *sola gratia* stand in such a delicate juxtaposition that the slightest imbalance can introduce fatalism or synergism. While Lutherans in the *Formula of Concord*, the last of the historic Lutheran Confessions, set forth the biblical support for their doctrine of election, they had indeed set their position forth in the *Augsburg Confession* in the articles on original sin and justification. (3) Man is so perverse that left to his own desires he despises the things of God. Only a divine act of grace can rescue man from continued and final exclusion from salvation. What man sees as grace working in his life bringing him to faith is from God's viewpoint a deliberate choice and decision made in eternity.

Election is only the side of the coin from grace. What is viewed as grace in time is viewed as election from the perspective of eternity. Therefore to preach grace alone is to preach the election. (4) The doctrine of election can only be known through the special revelation now contained in the Holy Scriptures, and to inquire about it outside of this revelation is wrong. The personal knowledge of individual election is proclaimed to the believer in any sermon proclaiming God's universal love for sinners on account of Jesus Christ.

The Protestant Reformation principle is *sola gratia* with the *sola* underlined and italicized for ineradicable permanency. Without the *sola*, the *gratia* is no longer *gratia*. Even the *sola fide* principle only reinforces the *sola gratia* and can only be regarded a description of man's passive nature in coming to salvation. Faith cannot be regarded as a contributory factor. Knowledge of the doctrine of election is intended only for those who have already come to faith and should not be proclaimed to unbelievers. (5) The doctrine of election belongs at the end and not the beginning of spectrum. (6) The sinner who has come to faith in Christ eventually may become aware of certain factors in his life and a definite progression. No matter how hard the personal struggle was by which he resisted the Holy Spirit, he realizes that it was by grace and grace alone that he was saved. He can never say that he chose God. It was not really his decision, but a decision of the triune God. The Father of the Lord Jesus Christ by his Holy Spirit working through baptism and the preached word has brought that sinner to faith. At that moment he can say with St. Paul: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost. (7) Or he can say with Luther: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts and kept me in the one true faith." (8) There is nothing in the Christian's life which cannot be credited solely to God's grace revealed by the Holy Spirit in the Word and sacraments. God by a deliberate act of election in Christ is responsible for the awakening from the death of sin to a new life in Christ just as he is responsible for the glorification of our dead bodies on the day of resurrection. (9) The doctrine of election takes grace back one step before our conception and birth and states that the initiation for grace in the life of the Christian rests with God in eternity. (10) Any suggestion that the initiative rests with man within time detracts from God's glory, robs the cross of its power, and finally embezzles from grace that one quality that makes it grace – the initiative and the completion rest with God alone. (11)

From a historical perspective it is not difficult to see how Luther came to accept an extreme and radical understanding of grace in his own personal life and then later in his theology. His long and anxious search for salvation by works was only resolved by his discovery that the gospel was the free offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. God's grace was seen as all-embracing in the Christian's life from election in eternity to resurrection. Even the suggestion of the slightest human contribution, especially in the area of the human will, could only be considered a relapse into the synergism and semi-Pelagianism in the Church of Rome from which Luther extricated himself. At the beginning of the Reformation Luther set forth his position in *The Bondage of Will* against Erasmus's *The Freedom of the Will*. (12) After Luther had died, his co-worker Philipp Melancthon, who belonged at least in part to the humanistic tradition of Erasmus, suggested that the human will was a type of contributory factor in personal salvation. Melancthon was the first of many who claimed the name Lutheran for themselves, but who were not fully committed to the doctrines of grace and election as set forth by Luther and the officially recognized Lutheran Confessions. (13)

Formula of Concord, XI, both in the "Epitome" and "Solid Declaration" sets forth the classical Lutheran understanding of the election. It is unique in that it is the only article which does not speak to a specific controversy within the Lutheran Church at that time, (14) though Melancthon's synergism and Calvin's double predestination teaching were clearly regarded as dangers. The authors of the *Formula* with near prophetic vision saw the doctrine on election as a bone of contention in the future because of certain apparent internal complexity. God alone was recognized as the sole cause of salvation, but without in any way being responsible for sin and evil. (15) The doctrine of election also was set forth along with Lutheran understandings of the Word and sacraments, justification, and sin. Yes, the redeemed are chosen and elected by a special decision of God, but this election is revealed only in the gospel whether that gospel is preached or tied down to sacramental action. (16) It is wrong to pry into God's mysteries at this point. It is also wrong to suggest that the elect have performed something meritorious to earn God's special favor (17) or that they are less sinful than others or even to suggest that God loves those who are eventually damned less than He loves those who are redeemed. (18) It may not be said that the will of the damned is more obstinate. When the doctrine of election is sundered from the question of the sinner's justification before God, we are no longer dealing with the Christian doctrine of the election but with the arbitrary and capricious decisions of a deity whose greatest delight is to make a show of His omnipotence even if it is at the expense of hapless, helpless, hopeless sinners. The doctrine of election is revealed not because God needs more glory, but rather that the troubled sinner may know that his salvation does not depend upon his own whimsical choice which today may accept Jesus but tomorrow may reject him. The assurance of salvation rests not with the individual but with God's choice in eternity. (19)

Formula of Concord, XI, brings a wide range of biblical data into the presentation of election. Ephesians 1:4, 5 is cited to demonstrate that election applies only to the redeemed and not the damned. "On the other hand, the eternal election of God or God's predestination to salvation does not extend over both the godly and the ungodly, but only over the children of God, who have been elected and predestined to eternal life 'before the foundation of the world was laid,' as St. Paul says 'Even as he chose us in him, he destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ' (Eph.1:4, 5)." (20) The *Formula* holds that personal knowledge of one's own election comes through the gospel proclamation. Within the context of the word and faith, Christian certainty of election exists. "This is revealed to us, however, as Paul says, 'Those whom God has foreknown, elected and decreed, he has also called.'" (21) In setting forth the doctrine of election to salvation, the *Formula* specifically rejects the idea "that God does not desire to save everyone" (22) or that "God has predestined certain people to damnation so that they cannot be saved."

Alongside of the *sola gratia* principle is the equally important *gratia universalis* principle. Just as grace has its cause in God alone, so also God intends that all men should benefit from his grace. Grace is as universal as is sin; this is the message of Romans 8:28ff. Lutheran theology finds it impossible for several reasons to posit an evil will in God. There is the problem of whether two opposing wills can exist side by side in God. If Satan's house falls because it is divided against itself, certainly a schizophrenic deity would also suffer from this malfunctioning. Secondly, the God who conquers evil through the atoning death of his Son cannot be the cause of sin, damnation, or any other evil without finally being found to be in a miserable, pitiable contradiction with himself. Why should God destroy with the death of his Son that for which he alone is responsible? The *Formula* explicitly says, "The source and cause of evil is not God's foreknowledge (since God neither creates nor works evil, nor does

he help it along and promote it), but rather the wicked and perverse will of the devil and of men, as it is written, 'Israel, thou hast plunged thyself into misfortune, but in me alone is thy salvation' (Hos 13:9). (23)

The explicit Lutheran rejection of a predestination to damnation means that Lutheran theology is firmly committed to the concept of *gratia universalis* and a universal atonement. For these views the *Formula* finds wide biblical support: John 3:16, "For God so loved the world"; John 1:29, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world"; John 1:7 and 2:22 where the blood of Jesus is described as "the propitiation for the sins of the world." (24)

Behind the doctrine of universal salvation and universal atonement is the doctrine of the incarnation itself. We confess with St. Paul that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." Christ's death has an infinite worth not because of a decree of the Father, but rather because his human nature was thoroughly and completely permeated by the divine nature. (25) The death of Christ was the death of God. His death placed in the scales of justice placed the entire world in a favorable position, tipping those scales in the favor of every man. Now this atonement has made it possible for God to be gracious to everyone. There is more forgiveness than there is sin. (26) The *Formula* cites Romans 11:32, "God has included all men under disobedience so that he might have mercy on all," and 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance." (27)

In maintaining the doctrine of the election of the redeemed to salvation, the *Formula* is absolutely adamant in opposing any suggestion that God's universal message of salvation is not sincerely intended. (28)

The reason why "many are called and few are chosen" is not that in his call, which takes place through the Word, God intended to say, "Externally I do indeed through the Word call all of you, to whom I give my Word, into My kingdom, but down in My heart I am not thinking of all, but only of a certain few. . . ." In this it would be taught that God, who is eternal Truth, contradicts himself. Yet God himself punishes men for such wickedness when they say one thing and think and intend something different in their hearts (Ps 5:10, 11; 12:3, 4).

If the *Formula*, XI, the article on election in the Lutheran Confessions is a tribute to *sola gratia*, it is at the same time a firm testimony to *gratia universalis*. The invitation to salvation is sincere. The parable of the invitation to the wedding of the king's son is cited. The refusal to accept the invitation does not rest with God but with men. "The majority despise the Word and refuse to come to the wedding." Here the *Formula* must be cited as its own witness. (29)

The reason for such contempt of the Word is not God's foreknowledge but man's own perverse will, which rejects or perverts the means and instrument of the Holy Spirit which God offers to him through the calls and resists the Holy Spirit who wills to be efficaciously active through the Word, as Christ says, "How often would I have gathered you together and you would not!" (Matt 23:37).

In more specific theological language St. Paul says that the atonement is universal in stating that Christ "gave himself as a ransom for all (*antilutron hyper panton*)" (1 Tim 2:6) and that God desires the salvation of all in stating that "God will have all men to be saved (*hos pantas anthropous thelei sothenai*)" (1 Tim 2:4). (30) This gracious will of God to save all men even includes those who are eventually damned and not the elect only. Even those who build roads to hell for others are embraced

by the atonement and universal salvation. The false prophets who are described as the bearers of destructive heresies are said to deny "the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1). The Epistle to the Romans which stands with Ephesians as the great manifesto on the election speaks of God enduring with much patience those who will eventually be damned (Rom 9:22, 23).

In Lutheran theology the *sola gratia* and *gratia universalis* stand in tension. It recognizes that God is the only cause of the salvation of the redeemed and that this divine cause has its origin in eternity and is called election. At the same time God embraces all men in his redeeming love and desires their salvation. Those who are eventually damned have only themselves to blame. Lutheran theology does not recognize any theory of God's bypassing the damned. But this in no way permits or suggests that those who are elected are morally or intellectually superior to those who are finally damned. The dilemma, if it is indeed a dilemma, is summarized in a short Latin phrase of four words: *Cur alii non?* "Why some and not others?" Paraphrased it would read, "Why are some chosen and others not?" This is the mystery which Lutheran theology chooses to believe, but not resolve.⁽³¹⁾ The failure to resolve is not because it fears such ventures, but the two other alternatives require a negation of significant portions of the divine revelation. The anguish over the question of predestination and universal grace is comparable to Paul's anguish over God's rejection of the Jews and the acceptance of the Gentiles. He would even give himself over to wrath if his fellow countrymen could be saved. But he stops at the door of the mystery and refuses to enter. God's riches, wisdom, and knowledge are too deep for human comprehension (Rom 11:29-36).

Christians can only marvel at the mysteries but cannot explain them. With the doctrine of election we have to face the questions of redemption and damnation. The problem cannot be better summarized than in the theologically accurate words of Jesus: "O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I (*ethelesa*) have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and ye would not (*ouk ethelesata*)?" (Matt 23:37). God is the cause and the only cause of salvation and man is the sole cause of his own damnation.

In Lutheran theology the doctrine of election is never that prominent, but its principles are derived from its doctrine of God, Christ, Word, sacraments, salvation, and church. It attempts to steer a difficult but clear course through the dangers of synergism and double predestination. It refuses to understand the atonement in light of election as do the Calvinists and refuses to understand the election in light of the atonement as do the Wesleyans. For Lutherans the election is limited to those who are eventually saved, and the atonement embraces all men.

Perhaps the doctrine of election can best be described graphically. It is only for the Christian who here in time through his faith focuses back past through time into eternity and recognizes that in one eternal moment God destined him for salvation. Beyond this it is better for the Christian not to ask and if he asks, then realize that God has here a mystery whose solution has not been revealed. When a Lutheran goes to church, he has no trouble singing hymns praising God's universal redemption and his predestination. He can sing John Wesley's translation of Zinzendorf's "Jesus Thy Blood and Righteousness" where in the fifth verse are these words:

Lord, I believe were sinners more
Than sands upon the ocean shore,
Thou hast for all a ransom paid,
For all a full atonement made.

The Lutheran can also sing with the Congregationalist Calvinist Josiah Conder:

Lord, 'tis not that I did choose Thee;
That, I know, could never be;
For this heart would still refuse Thee
Had Thy grace not chosen me.

Martin Luther himself catches the authentic Lutheran spirit which sees the doctrine of election from a personal, individualistic, and almost existential spirit.

But God beheld my wretched state
Before the world's foundation
And, mindful of His mercies great,
He planned my soul's salvation.
A father's heart He turned to me,
Sought my redemption fervently;
He gave His dearest treasure.(32)

Within the cross and only within the cross does the doctrine of election have its foundation and its goal.

Notes

- 1) The concept of God in Calvinism differs from that of Lutheranism. Typical of traditionally oriented Calvinistic dogmatics is the discussion of God's sovereignty in a prominent place. In his anticipated four-volume popular dogmatics James Montgomery Boice entitles the first volume *The Sovereign God, Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978). The discussion of God's sovereignty takes up as many pages (149-59) as does his triune essence (137-47). Robert D. Preus in his discussion of doctrine of God in the 16th- and 17th-century Lutheran dogmatists lists fourteen attributes for God and makes no mention of sovereignty. *The Theology of Post Reformation Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 2. 5-6. There is no discussion of sovereignty in Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953), probably most widely used doctrinal theology among conservative English-speaking Lutherans.
- 2) F. Meuser, *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1958) 62-72.
- 3) Augustana II. "That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers' wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God."
Augustana IV. "It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. . . . "All translations of the Lutheran Confessions are taken from *The Book of Concord*, ed. T. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), hence referred to as Tappert.

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- 4) Francis Pieper, perhaps the most influential dogmatician of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, speaks in a similar way, calling the doctrine of election a confirmation of the *sola gratia*. *Dogmatics*, 492-3.
- 5) *Ibid.*, 490-1.
- 6) It is debatable where the doctrine of election should be discussed in connection with the doctrine of God. In traditional Reformed theology the subject is discussed in connection with God or his divine decrees. Cf. L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Fourth Revised and Enlarged Edition, 1965) 109-25. Lutheran theology places it with grace, soteriology, and church. Pieper, *Dogmatics*, 473.
- 7) 1 Cor 12:3.
- 8) Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*, "Explanation to the Apostles' Creed," Tappert, 345.
- 9) Without doubt God also knows and has determined for each person the time and hour of his call and conversion. But since he has not revealed this to us, we must obey his command and operate constantly with the Word, while we leave the time and hour to God" (Acts 1:7). "Formula of Concord" (FC), "Solid Declaration" (SD), XI, 56, Tappert, 625. See also 623-4.
- 10) "If we stay with this and hold ourselves thereto, it is indeed a useful, salutary, and comforting doctrine, for it mightily substantiates the article that we are justified and saved without our works and merit, purely by grace and solely for Christ's sake." *Ibid.*, 623.
- 11) The Lutheran doctrine is deliberately anti-synergistic. "It is therefore false and wrong when men teach that the cause of our election is not only the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ, but that there is also within us a cause of God's election on account of which God has elected us to eternal life." *Ibid.*, 631.
- 12) For a discussion of Luther's position on predestination, see Harry Buis, *Historic Protestantism and Predestination* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1958) 28-61. Buis is convinced that "Martin Luther held to the doctrine of predestination as strongly as did Calvin" (p. 2). Buis is convinced that Luther held to a double predestination (p. 48). Buis was writing to show that Calvin's concepts have had wide acceptance in Christianity. The citation brought up to demonstrate that Luther held to double predestination speaks of God's eternal love and hatred. This is not the same as God's predestination and causing evil.
- 13) Philipp Melancthon, co-worker of Luther and author of three of the historic Lutheran Confessions – Augsburg Confession, Apology, and the Treatise – offered a position on the Lord's Supper which Calvin could accept. Though he is often considered as one of the founders of the Reformed faith especially for his 1541 edition of the Augsburg Confession, his final position was synergistic as even Buis admits. *Ibid.*, 81.
- 14) Tappert, 616.
- 15) "The source and cause of evil is not God's foreknowledge (since God neither creates nor works evil, nor does he help it along or promote it" , Tappert, 617.
- 16) *Ibid.*, 622-3.
- 17) See n. 11.
- 18) "Hence if we want to consider our eternal election to salvation profitably, we must by all means cling rigidly and firmly to the fact that as the proclamation of repentance extends over all men (Luke 24:47), so also does the Gospel promise." Tappert, 620.
- 19) See n. 10.
- 20) Tappert, 617.
- 21) *Ibid.*, 620.

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- 22) Ibid., 497.
- 23) Ibid., 617.
- 24) Ibid., 620.
- 25) David P. Scaer, "The Nature and Extent of the Atonement in Lutheran Theology," *BETS*, X (4) 179-87.
- 26) Lutheran and Reformed Christologies significantly differ. The *Formula of Concord* quotes Luther to the end that the divinity of the God-Man Jesus Christ tips the balances of justice in man's favor. Tappert, 599.
- 27) Ibid., 620-1.
- 28) Ibid., 622.
- 29) Ibid., 623.
- 30) Though there have been attempts to mitigate Calvin's concept of a double predestination, the concept of a universal atonement is still not accepted. Scriptural references to "all" are reinterpreted to fit this concept of limited atonement.
- 31) For a discussion of this see Pieper, *Dogmatics*, 501-3. Two other Latin phrases also express the dilemma: *Cur non omnes?* (Why are not all saved?) and *Cur alii prae aliis?* (Why are some saved before others?) Buis is disturbed that the *Formula* does not resolve the dilemma in favor of the double predestination of the Reformed, stating that even though *Formula* explicitly denies synergism, the synergistic position of Melanchthon is really the one which the confession endorses. "For example, the *Formula of Concord* (1580) [sic!] was contradictory on this point. It supposedly opposed the teachings of Melanchthon and denied synergism. Yet it denied irresistible grace and affirmed the universality of the offer of the Gospel. The position of the *Formula of Concord* amounted to conditional predestination which became the accepted Lutheran doctrine in the seventeenth century. It stated that predestination is the will of God that all who believe are saved. It said that the foreknowledge deals with the good and the evil, but that predestination deals only with salvation. Thus the large wing of the Protestant Church which is composed of the various bodies of Lutherans came to hold a position denying absolute predestination in spite of the fact that their great leader, Martin Luther had been a strong advocate of such predestination." Buis, *Historic Protestantism*, 82. Buis is correct in seeing that the Lutheran dogmatists, perhaps unwarily, did introduce a concept of conditional election with their concept of *intuitu fide*, i.e., God chose those who would believe, and that this view infiltrated Lutheranism. He is wrong in his assessment that the *Formula* does not hold an absolute election of the redeemed. His few words indicate that the real source of his problem lies elsewhere, i.e., in his denial of the doctrines of universal grace and the ability of man to reject the gospel as it comes through Word and sacraments.
- 32) These translations are taken from *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941), Hymn Nos. 37, 371, 377.
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