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# THE SIGNIFICANCE AND USE OF THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

THE question of the doctrine of Predestination is standing, almost after a century of neglect, again in the front line of interest. Since the incoming of rationalism and liberalism, Theological science did not deal with this doctrine; instead of this, there was introduced into Theology the opinion of the justification by man himself, of the ability of man to do good, of perfectness by evolution and progress. Now, with the fall of modern spiritual tendencies, the Churches of the Reformation are returning to their own Confessions built on the foundation of the Word of God.

It is a sign of renewal of the Reformed Church and Reformed Theology, that this doctrine is emphasized to a greater extent than it was before. A number of theological works have been published recently, discussing this most important question,<sup>1</sup> and books have been translated which are fundamental to this.<sup>2</sup> With this, Reformed Theology returns to its ancient heritage, much abused, often neglected, but seen now in its real light.

Beside Theology, this doctrine is important for the modern man too. It is easy to understand that, in a time when man is disappointed with the world, once looked upon as his own domain, with its explanations, with human theories, he is looking for an interpretation which is above all human opinion and understanding. Values which have been looked on as absolute ones: human goodness, human personality, power, science, religion, are breaking down in the great world-judgment, and that is raising up the unquestionable power of God, Who is keeping firmly His decree.<sup>3</sup> There is unveiled the sight of a judgment, begun in the House of God. There are only two possibilities in the present situation of the world, either to

<sup>1</sup> Boettner Loraine, *The Ref. Doctrine of Predestination*, The Ref. Press. Publications of the *Sovereign Grace Union*, The Ref. Press.

<sup>2</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, translated by H. Cole. Eerdmann, 1931. The same work of Luther was published in German too in the translation of Justus Jonas and with concluding remarks of Gogarten. Kaiser, München, 1924. Calvin's *Calvinism*, Eerdmann. Zanchius, *Absolute Predestination*, translated by Augustus Toplady, Sovereign Gr. Union, 1930.

<sup>3</sup> *Religion in der Geschichte u. Gegenwart*, 1,377-78 pp.

despair, if we look on the world as in the power of demoniac forces, or to believe firmly that the Will of God is standing, as it stood ever, above the world, and in the present crisis He is carrying out His eternal decree. This fact makes the question important for us : what is the significance and use of the doctrine of Predestination in the work of the Church ?

## I

## THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION IN THE PREACHING

1. It has often been put as a question *whether it is necessary and fitting* to preach this doctrine in the Church ? Is it not to be considered only as a kind of solemn theory familiar only to the theologians, which holds a place of honour in the system of Theological science but which is not for everyday use ? This supposition was fostered not only by the misunderstanding according to which Theological science and Theological system were looked upon as something far off from everyday life, as something which is only for Theologians, as for the average Christian it is enough to know the precepts of the Church in order to be saved. This opinion derives obviously from the thought of the Roman Church and so it came into men's minds. We must state that this opinion is totally false and therefore must be eliminated.

But this opinion was also held for a different reason and this is shown by the fact that almost all the scholars dealing with the problem of Predestination took up this question. Augustine in his book entitled *De bono perseverantiae* emphasizes that this doctrine must not be concealed but openly confessed.<sup>1</sup> The same thought we find in the work of Luther writing against Erasmus, the latter having expressed his opinion that there are questions in connection with that of free will which should not be discussed. Luther's answer is, that the question of Predestination is the most important article which it is necessary for a Christian to know because, "if we know nothing of these things, we shall know nothing whatever of Christian matters".<sup>2</sup> The question is fully discussed by Zanchius<sup>3</sup> ; it is mentioned

<sup>1</sup> Zanchius, *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination*, London, 1930, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, London, 1932, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Zanchius, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-153.

by Calvin<sup>1</sup> and by almost all the Theologians and preachers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries<sup>2</sup>; and it is taken up in the explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism by Ursinus.<sup>3</sup> The reason why many of the scholars refrained from preaching about this doctrine (Erasmus, Thomas Aquinas and others) mostly was that they were afraid that by so doing the power of God would be a subject of criticism by human understanding; that this criticism and pride would take up objections against the decrees of God and that the thought of assurance of salvation would create in the soul either superfluous conceit or desperation. All these fears have been completely refuted by those who hold the preaching of this doctrine to be necessary and the Heidelberg Catechism lays the axe at the root of all those objections in answering the question: "Does not this doctrine make men careless and profane?" with these words: "No. For neither can it be, but they which are incorporated into Christ through faith should bring forth the fruits of thankfulness."<sup>4</sup>

We must therefore make the statement that the doctrine of Predestination should not be left out of the matter of preaching. Notwithstanding this, we see that in the last century this doctrine was neglected by preachers. The reason of this was that movement of Theological science which based the Christian life on individual human initiative and fixed its aim in Christian personality. According to its homiletical theory this Theology was afraid to preach doctrines and dogmas and in place of them put motives and experiences. It refrained from speaking about God's decrees, His wrath and His electing grace; its aim was rather to direct its audience so as to find their way amidst the various problems and views of everyday life. It is true, therefore, that the impoverishment and narrowness of preaching was the real reason of the fact that this doctrine was left out or remained only for solemn and rare occasions as a subject of the preaching. We cannot find reason for this in the doctrine itself as if it went beyond the thought of personal safety and as if it were a means of drawing consequences for the individual or for each other's life.<sup>5</sup> This tendency of preaching is characterized by a statement of

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Institutiones*, III, 21, pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Among the Hungarians. Kereszszegi, *Sermons about the Articles of the Faith*, 1630. Debreczeni Ember Pál, *Garizim and Ebal*, 1702. Bod Péter, *Explanation of the Epistle of Jude*, 1760.

<sup>3</sup> Ursinus, *The Summe of Christian Religion*, London, 1611, p. 593.

<sup>4</sup> Heidelberg Catechism. Question 64.

<sup>5</sup> Niebergall, *Praktische Theologie*, II, p. 373.

the excellent Professor Fr. Niebergall in a quotation from Kaftan which warns the preacher against lifting up the audience very often to the height of the thought of Election because "in the height the air is too thin".<sup>1</sup> The result of this theory was that preaching lost its reformatory character and consequently made concessions to the modern spirit. We must say, therefore, that the doctrine of Predestination cannot be left out of preaching without making it shallow and, in treating instead of it general problems on the moral social and world-view line, depriving it of its own essence. A preaching which tries to leave out this fundamental problem of our faith cannot be called a Reformed one.

The following reasons prove that the doctrine of Predestination is an essential subject of Reformed preaching. *Firstly*, we are doubtless *obliged* to speak about God's election because we have no right to omit anything of the message God is telling through us to His Church. If we are convinced that preaching is the duty of delivering the eternal Word of God then the subject of it is not dependent on us but on God, Who tells us when and what He is going to declare. On the contrary, if we look on preaching as the communication of some information about man or about the world, or some demands of the Church, and that we have the right to choose among them when and what to say, in this case naturally we ourselves are those who dispose of the subject of the message. But in such a case we do not deal with the Word of God but only with the word of man. God's Word is one; His will is one; it is always the same and we cannot dispose of it. We are only the trumpet through which He is speaking. The Word of God is not a conglomerate of different doctrines; it is not a heap of information; it is a Will which starts with the election before the world was created and ends with the last judgment and the return of Christ; and all the questions of the Christian life and of the world can be understood on the foundation of this message. We have no right to conceal the fact that God is the sovereign Lord of the Universe; that there is no salvation except in Christ; that Christ returns and judges the world. Neither have we the right to conceal that God has a decree about election even if we had ourselves doubts or a different opinion about it.<sup>2</sup> If we conceal this, we lie, we

<sup>1</sup> Niebergall, *op. cit.*, p. 374.

<sup>2</sup> Zanchius, *Predestination*, p. 123. Boettner, *The Ref. Doctrine*, p. 347.

mistake God's Word for our own fantasies or our human belief and we disown the prophetic commission of which the chief feature is that God's truth is speaking through it.<sup>1</sup>

The *second* reason which makes it necessary to preach Predestination is contained in the Second Helvetic Confession in the saying: "it is necessary to teach and to consider *the great love of the Father* which was bestowed upon us and further it is necessary to hear the call of the Gospel daily preached to us by the Lord."<sup>2</sup> That is, everything which the Lord is telling us about Himself and about His promises is wholly fruitless if we omit the preaching of election. The Christian life itself rests on an uncertain foundation without this faith. We are unable to know God truly and His love in Christ; neither can there arise in our soul a true obedience and love, nor can the saints be persevering and faithful amidst their miseries.<sup>3</sup>

The *third* reason is mentioned by Luther in his criticism of Erasmus. Luther thinks the preaching of Predestination useful on two grounds: the first is *the humbling of our pride* that we may know ourselves and that we may long for the grace which is alone possible if we are convinced that we are unable to help ourselves, and that our salvation depends wholly on God. The second reason is *Christian faith* itself: "that faith is in things not seen." Therefore by faith can we "comprehend how that same God can be merciful and just, who carries the appearance of so much wrath and iniquity".<sup>4</sup> This shows that without the faith of Predestination the Christian life is ready to fall either into despair or into a shallow self-confidence. This is the reason why every Theologian calls attention to the immeasurable comfort given by this faith.

*Finally*, it is necessary to preach the Predestination because preaching is *the means* by which God lets the elect know of His grace.<sup>5</sup> God is speaking in preaching to His own ones and this is the way He is calling them. If we do not preach this call the elect cannot come to the knowledge of the grace which is the only foundation of their life. This means that the preacher who neglects this duty is guilty of not having warned the people about the judgment; or, even if he did so, he left the wicked in a vain

<sup>1</sup> Bihop Ravasz, *Látások könyve (Book of Visions)*, Budapest, p. 292.

<sup>2</sup> *II Helvetica Confessio*, X, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Zanchius, *Predestination*, pp. 137-148.

<sup>4</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 71.

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, *Institutiones*, III, 27, p. 7.

self-confidence or took them into a hopeless despair, who felt the heaviness of judgment and would escape it.

We must emphasize, however, that this preaching must be made with care or, better said, with awe.<sup>1</sup> This sacred and lofty doctrine must not be used as a means of artificial tricks of rhetorical affectation, of ruling above the Household of God, or be made a subject of shallow debates or thoughtless criticism. The task of this preaching is to make everybody shrink before the judgment of God upon sin, and that the elect should be comforted thereby. Calvin refers to this very beautifully in the Genevan Catechism when showing that the Apostolic Confession does not speak about hell, only about eternal life because in this Confession is mentioned only what is useful for the consolation of the faithful minds.<sup>2</sup> So the preaching of Predestination speaks more fully about election than about reprobation because preaching is addressed to the faithful and not to the reprobate.

2. The second question is, how the preaching itself and especially the conception about its essence is *determined and influenced* by this doctrine, how Predestination appears as the subject of preaching and what information we can get according this doctrine about the destiny of the same.

The Church cannot stand without Predestination ; this is the true foundation and makes the existence of the Church possible. Moreover, preaching cannot be without Church because the congregation is addressed by the Word only in the Church. This shows the deep connection between this doctrine and preaching. But this connection is a direct one. Preaching becomes the Word of God only if it sounds in the congregation of the elect. "In the Church we see the miracle", says Barth, "that the Word of God through preaching becomes truly the Word of God namely so that those who attend it are so in Christ, that among them takes place the fact of God's free grace, His call, His election."<sup>3</sup> The Church is the Church not because in her are the sons of Abraham, because they are connected by some worldly claim, duty or interest : it is the Church because in it there are the sons of promise who accepted in their election the unchangeable decree of God and who hear this promise daily in the preaching. This promise which makes them

<sup>1</sup> Zanchius, *Predestination*, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Genevan Catechism*, part I.

<sup>3</sup> Barth, Karl, *Römerbrief*, p. 327.

true members of the Church, *klétoi hagioi* (Romans i. 7) is manifested for them in preaching without which they can know nothing about it.<sup>1</sup> That is why in the preaching not man but God is speaking because this promise, this declaration can be made by nobody except God who only knows about it. Therefore every human word is hopeless in preaching, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned” (I Corinthians ii. 14). Only he can be the witness of this great secret (for secret it is till the Holy Ghost unveils it to the soul) who in preaching will do nothing except to deliver the sound Word of God. Only he can understand the impossibility that man, who is under the curse of sin, is called by God as His own. Any other way, claim or possibility for man to come near to God or for preaching to bring man before God is useless: the way of pious actions, of mystical ecstasy, or the ways of social and intellectual ascent, save the only one: the direct call of God. In preaching God calls, brings before Himself those who are unable to turn aside from Him because they most surely know that the call is addressed to them. So there is no call without preaching and this is the reason why every Theological system, and every Church which stands on the doctrine of Predestination exalts the preaching of the Word. On the other side disobedience and contempt towards the Word of God is in the Bible considered as a sign of reprobation since the children of God are admonished by it to obedience. Jesus told the Jews that they did not recognize in His Word the Word of God and looked for worldly signs and promises instead of the sole sign and promise: because they were not counted among the true seed of Abraham among the children of God. We see, therefore, here that the fact of Predestination is given to the believer for obedience through the preaching of the Gospel.

Calvin often reminds us that preaching is not the only means with which God is giving His electing grace. To those who have part in the election through the preaching comes the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit, which gives the inward call, and this is the “infallible pledge of salvation”.<sup>2</sup> This pledge is given only to the believer; and it completes the testimony through preaching, as Calvin puts it: “Hoc testimonium non in

<sup>1</sup> Calvini Joannis in *Novum Testamentum Commentarii*, Berolini, 1834, vol. V, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Institutiones*, III, 24, p. 2.



sola externa praedicatione consistit, sed adiunctam habet efficaciam Spiritus: quia de electis agitur, quos Deus non voce tantum compellat, sed intus etiam trahit.”<sup>1</sup> On the one hand this important truth saves us from the mistake of claiming a saving power for preaching on its human side; on the contrary it gives us a statement about the free and sovereign will of God Who is speaking through the human word; and on the other hand it shows us that this testifying and sealing work of the Holy Spirit does not work without the Word of God. Therefore, says Calvin: “nám quemadmodum in exitialem abyssum se ingurgitant qui ut de sua electione fiant certiores aeternum Dei consilium sine verbo praecontantur, ita qui recte atque ordine ipsam investigant qualiter in verbo continetur, eximium inde referunt consolationis fructum.”<sup>2</sup> This shows clearly that the preaching—as human word—is useless except God verifies for the elect its message with the inward call of the Holy Spirit, but it shows also the dignity of preaching without which the testimony of the Holy Spirit cannot come to us.

Let us ask now how we look at Predestination *as the subject of preaching*. We already saw that this doctrine can be by no means left out of the subject of preaching if we are going to preach the true Word of God. God’s saving work which we are obliged to declare has its start in the sovereign will of God who decided the life and future destiny of man. This decision means that because of His eternal decree man is put under the curse of sin from which some are saved by redemption, others are left condemned. On this is founded the whole system of Christian faith, also that “good tidings” which we know as the actual subject of preaching. Without this decree the whole Christian life is illusive and the call to convert is useless because those who on the ground of their election did not get the gift of conversion are unable to be converted and so to get salvation. Without this electing and saving grace and without, therefore, this decree the new life we are preaching about is a result of a kind of human effort which the more it is depended on the more hopeless it becomes. To it suits Luther’s word about free will that “it is then the worst when it is the best, the more it endeavours, the worse it becomes and the worse it is.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Commentarii*, V, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Institutiones*, III, 24, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 331.

Preaching therefore loses its subject, its true foundation, if it shuts itself off from the doctrine of Predestination, and it is left nothing but to proclaim a humanistical moral teaching, to speak about a human future made by man for himself by his own will and power. Since every human work, effort and future are under the wrath and judgment of God, such a preaching only increases this wrath falsely concealing from man the reality of this judgment and strengthening man with the cobweb-threads of his faith in himself.

Finally, the faith of the Predestination gives us *hope in the destiny of the preaching*. We have to take into account here not only the question how the Word is preached, but also the other one : how the Word is heard and obeyed.

The *first* fact here is that the preaching of the Word is *not the only sign of election*. God often orders that His Word must be preached to everybody. We only refer to the orders given to the prophets in which they are admonished that they have no right to conceal the message as we see in the case of Jonah, or to bring it to others whom it is directed to, and we can refer to the missionary order of our Lord which speaks of an unlimited preaching of the Word. Therefore, we have no right to use preaching according to our consideration nor to give that which is holy unto the dogs or cast the pearls before swine, nor have we right to refuse to hand on what is said through us. Preaching being the means of God to call the elect, it is the prophet's fault if the message is not heard because of his negligence. God made the prophet a watchman in the house of God's elect and put a trumpet to his mouth in order to give warning when the danger of judgment is near. If the people are not warned and perish they are taken away in their iniquity but their blood will be required at the watchman's hand (Ezekiel xxxiii.). It is not the duty of the preacher to state or to investigate whether the elect are among the hearers or are not, or how many are elected. His task is only to preach the message entrusted to him in order that those about whom God has arranged in His decree may hear the call. In this respect the preaching is a means of awakening faith, for faith cometh by hearing (Romans x. 17). Only that man may preach, who was sent ; and the Word speaks only to those to whom it was addressed. But all these things are hidden from the preacher.

This point shows us clearly the *responsibility of the preacher*.

Faith being the gift of God, the preacher is not assured that all to whom he is preaching shall hear the Word; his duty is only to give the message without any human addition. It will be heard by those who get the gift of grace, but it will not be heard by those to whom God did not yet bring the "pleasant season" of grace. "And they, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear (for they are a rebellious house) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them" (Ezekiel ii. 5). The success of preaching does not depend, therefore, on human skill or effort with which we try to secure results for our work, nor can this success be acclaimed by many outward human signs of conversion; it depends entirely on God's will as to whom He is speaking to on that occasion and who hear His Word because of His grace. So the destiny of preaching is fully taken out of man's hands. All human effort is unable to secure its effect, nay, all such efforts which try to make valid God's Word with human skill, are standing as grievous sinful hindrances to the message. Preaching is an indispensable means to bring God's Word to everybody; but at the same time it is unable to exercise any influence whatever on the destiny of the soul. This is true of every kind of preaching, even of that of the apostles, because "their preaching and salutation was not able to make anybody the son of peace, otherwise all who heard their preaching and salutation became sons of peace".<sup>1</sup>

The *second* point which is to be seen here is that although the Word is preached to everybody—even to the wicked—God chooses among the hearers those to whom He is speaking. This selection of souls happens through the *inward testimony of the Holy Spirit*. There is, therefore, a general vocation when by preaching all are called, although among them there are many for whom the Word declares not the promise of salvation but a judgment of condemnation.<sup>2</sup> Beside this there is the special call for the believer, which call is sealed in their soul by the Holy Spirit. This fact has an important consequence for the destiny of preaching.<sup>3</sup>

For the wicked the Word shows the judgment waiting for them. But as the secret who belong to the elect, is concealed from us, the preaching can never undertake to point out who

<sup>1</sup> Debreczeni Ember Pál, *Garizim and Ebal*, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Institutiones*, III, 24, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Institutiones*, III, 24, p. 2.

got the Word for salvation and who got it for judgment. Although there are some outward signs of being among the elect, as zeal for the Word, good works, obedience towards the will of God, etc., in the elect themselves there are so many weaknesses that they often fall and always have to fight against temptations; and on the other hand the evil one is so able to appear as the angel of light and to lead us astray with pious words and good deeds, that we are unable, even not allowed to try, to give a sure judgment. This shows that the destiny of preaching, even if we look on the outward signs of election, is not in our hand but in God's own and only He is able to control this effect.

Beside this, preaching has *to beware of despair* as regards its success. It is true, on one hand, that it is useful and necessary to doubt it as to our part, knowing that without the work of God's omnipotent Holy Spirit (because of the weakness of our preaching), nobody can hear the call. But on the other hand, in spite of every resistance or deafness towards the Word, we have to keep in mind that anybody who is called cannot help to start on the way of God, because nobody can resist Him. God is able to use even the seemingly unsuccessful preaching to fulfil through it His sacred decree, and relieving it by His Spirit of its weaknesses, to make it effectual: if this preaching is humble enough not to know of anything else, except the true message of God. Not our word, not our preaching, but God's Word is irresistible. The uncertainty and despair about the success of preaching is always a sign of unbelief and always shows that we obtrude ourselves on the means of God, instead of giving way to the Word. We can escape this temptation only by faith in God's electing grace which "is able of the stones to raise up children unto Abraham". Not only against the erroneous, not only against the contemners of the Word, but also against unnecessary anxiety is given "the true seal of His foundation", which is, however, not in our hands but in His: "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Timothy ii. 19).

So instead of despair because of the seemingly unsuccessfulness of preaching, the preacher has to look with solid faith to the promise that God not only knows but also calls them that are His children, and that those to whom the Word is preached shall accept it with joy. The preacher's duty is to look with hope on them whom he is preaching to and to pray for them, that they may be each of them among the called. Without

this hope, preaching is unthinkable. So faith in Predestination gives to preaching that eschatological aspect, according to which the effect of the preaching is fulfilled not in the present, not among the changing circumstances of the present world, not in this life, so full of temptations and falls, but in eternity, when God's secret decree will be revealed, and the secret of many hearts will be unveiled, yes, even of hearts of which the preacher here often thought that they are indifferent to the Word. The faith of Predestination makes, therefore, preaching possible and hopeful in its beginning and in its end. In its beginning, because preaching would be hopeless if we could not be convinced that in the congregation there are many to whom God is willing to speak His message, and for whom the hearing of the Word will be fruitful, not by their own human will, but by God's election. In its end, because our preaching has its fulfilment not in itself, nor in changing human effects, but because through it God is gathering His elect into His barn and through the transitory sound of our words God's merciful Will is fulfilled, when, at the end of times He draweth to Himself those for whom His kingdom is prepared. Without the faith of Predestination preaching as well as its hearing would be uncertain.

*Finally*, we have to make some few remarks on *the use of this doctrine in preaching*. In recent Homiletics we find very few preachers who have been engaged in the discussion of this subject. Two temptations can be observed here. One of them is that if we intend to keep this doctrine in its loftiness and severity, our preaching easily becomes a theological discussion, an explanation of a doctrine, and the soul who longed for God's message, addressed to him in the sermon, goes away disappointed. He heard weighty thoughts, he got great truths, but he did not find the real Word, which God was saying even to him and even on that occasion. The sermon should never be abstract exposition, otherwise it ceases to be the preaching of the Gospel, euangelion, good tidings, a message about grace, a testimony of God's gracious deeds, which leads us to thankful obedience. The second temptation comes even when we are going to avoid the first one. On the principle that the task of preaching is to give something which is fitted to move the soul, modern preaching is apt to lay aside solid expositions and so often misinterprets this doctrine. In the effort to bring it near to the soul, this doctrine often will be dissolved in human conceptions, parables, illustrations and

events, or it is simply laid aside with the opinion that it is impossible to preach it. Both of these temptations have the same fault. Both are starting on the ground that the doctrine and not the faith of Predestination is to be preached.

We have to keep in mind that in preaching, our subject must not be *the doctrine but the faith of Predestination*. We have to declare the claim which is addressed to the elect: the law of obedience and holy life. We have to preach that nobody is able to go to God by his own power and that our religiousness is not a means to get mercy before God. This faith speaks against every human initiative in the Christian life, preaches God's judgment against sin, and grace as the only source of salvation. This faith cannot be only a rare, holiday subject of our preaching, of occasions when we have to explain the doctrine of our Church compared with those of others, for this faith is not a holiday-robe, nor a uniform, which we put on when such occasions come. There is not a word in the Bible which is not connected with the thought and the fact of election, each word can be understood only if we explain it as a testimony of the free electing grace of God. The faith of Predestination makes our preaching truly a reformed Christian one.

## II

### PREDESTINATION AND EDUCATION

1. When we made the statement that the faith of Predestination is essential for preaching, we already settled the question about education too if we regard education as a means of preaching of the Word. But as education has some special problems, so we have to ask, what does this doctrine mean for the work of education?

The opinion according to which education is *a work without any supposition*, naturally cannot admit a consequence of this doctrine bearing on this work. We are able to speak about Predestination in this connection only if we admit that education springs out of some conditions which render its work possible. The humanistic systems found the start of the work of education simply in the hand of the individual or of society. They think that because of the different powers and abilities resident in the individual, it is necessary for the child to be educated, in order

to be able to use its powers and to develop its abilities and so to get into full humanity. There are pedagogical systems in which the starting-point is society, for which it is important that the child, belonging to it by its birth, could adopt everything necessary for it and for the society, to be a useful member of the same. All these systems explain education out of regard to individual or social interests.

Idealistic pedagogics looks somewhat higher, and starts with the work of education on ideals and values and holding the opinion that education is the developing of those superhuman tasks and values which slumber in the child's soul. This system of values, called either culture or personality, even Christian personality, is founded on a human warrant, and education founded on such a system, gets its justification in a human recognition. All these systems take into consideration only conditions on the side of the child. The only question they put is this : to what extent is the child fit either to develop its abilities, or to fulfil its tasks in society or to accept the values set before it ? Irrespective of the answer to these questions, as to the future and destiny of education all these systems hold an optimistic point of view, looking at the question only on the side of the child. This education thinks itself able to set its own aim, to fix its method and means and it has the hope that it will be able to succeed in its work, at least to the extent that a human aim can be attained among unfavourable circumstances. Till the question of the possibility of education is put on the side of its aim and essence, instead of on the side of the child, we are unaware of the fact that there are more difficult questions than that of individual initiative, questions which jeopardize the whole work.

Looking at Christian education as an obligation and as a form of preaching of the Word of God, which sets before us a task enjoined on, independent of, and standing far beyond us ; if we take seriously the thought, inseparable from all true education, that it depends not on us but on God, that it is indeed to realize the unrealizable ; in this case we have surely to ask, what are *the conditions of education*, whether it is possible at all, what certainty have we that our work will not be useless ? If education's starting-point and its end are the aims of the individual life or the life of a community, it does not need anything else save some knowledge about the child and about outward circumstances ; it can be contented if it examines the possibilities and

settles accounts how it can fulfil its task.<sup>1</sup> But if the foundation of education is a charge by God and He intends to do something with it, and the whole work is in His hands, then all those examinations and all this knowledge are insignificant in spite of those conditions which are contained in and put up for us in this charge. Therefore the question, what assurance has education in its work, what can assure us that this work is our duty and that its foundation is not our will but the order of God?—this question is essential for education.

The principal conditions of education can be found in three points and these render this work not only possible, but necessary and obligatory for us. Each of these points shows us that the work of education goes back beyond every human initiative and that it is in the hands of God.

The *first* of these points is *Predestination*, on which education is founded. It is founded on Predestination because the Word can be preached only to those to whom God is willing to speak it. So without Predestination, education too—as preaching—is a hopeless and useless undertaking. This faith in education means we are convinced that the child is standing before us not of its own will or ambition, but it is entrusted to us by God, as the heir of the promise, given to the elect. This election which conquered through the redemption over sin and death is giving possibility and guarantee about the fact that God is willing that the child should share in the gift of the Word, that the child belongs to Christ and is pardoned through His death. As Calvin says, the order of Christ, “Suffer the little children to come unto me” means, “testatur se velle pueros admittere et tandem in ulnas receptos non modo complectitur, sed manuum impositione benedicit: unde colligimus ad hanc quoque aetatem extendi eius gratiam.”<sup>2</sup> Without this election there can be no education, because there is no commission. The whole work of education goes back to this grace and the question of method is, how can we apply our work to the work of God which is going on through the Holy Spirit in the elect, so even in the child’s soul?<sup>3</sup>

The fact of Predestination is brought before us in *baptism*. This is the second condition of education, which influences the

<sup>1</sup> Merz, *Voraussetzungen der ev. Erziehung*, Zwischen d. Zeiten, 1930, p. 474.

Calvin, *Commentarii*, II, p. 161.

Pfennigsdorf, *Prakt. Theologie*, pp. 245-46.



destiny of the same. Baptism is the sign and seal of election, showing that we are pardoned by God through the blood of Jesus Christ; moreover, that the Holy Spirit renews us and consecrates us as the members of Christ.<sup>1</sup> The Shorter Catechism signifies more closely the connection between election and baptism when saying that baptism “doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the Covenant of Grace, and our engagement to be the Lord’s.”<sup>2</sup> Baptism therefore secures us that the child is a member of the Church of God to which the elect belong, that God gives to the child who is baptized, not only the hearing of the Word, but He is also going to renew it with His Spirit, as Calvin says: “renovari Dei Spiritu pro aetatis modulo, donec, per gradus suo tempore quae in illis occulta est, virtus augetur, et palam refulgeat.”<sup>3</sup> The fact of baptism therefore, as that of Predestination, takes the child and the whole work of education again out of the hands of man and puts it in the hands of God, looking back instead of to a human condition, to the divine foundation. “Baptism means that in a position when our will does not matter, without being asked about our opinion, we are declared Christians, that is, people belonging to God. We are taken prisoners by God and for God. Before we could think or speak, through a visible action, through God’s decision, have been declared His property. This is baptism.”<sup>4</sup> So we have to say that education without baptism would be a work without any commission, any possibility, only a human undertaking.

Predestination and baptism, however, do not claim the child as a separate individual, but in the community of the saints of God: in the Church. In the Church, which is standing herself on the foundation of the fact of Predestination and baptism, we find the third condition which makes education possible and sure. All these three belong together, and this fact is never to be forgotten in education, because to separate them makes Church and education wholly illusive. As in the Church education is as well a means of the preaching of the Word as any other work of hers, education is impossible without the Church. Christian education cannot look upon the child otherwise but as a member

<sup>1</sup> Heidelberg Catechism, Question 70.

<sup>2</sup> Shorter Catechism, Question 94.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Commentarii*, II, 161. *Institutiones*, IV, 16, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Thurneysen, *Das Wort Gottes u. die Kirche*, p. 72.

of the elect, of the community in which people are put by God through Christ in order to lead them to the hearing of the Word and to obedience towards it. If we tear the child out of the Church, we make it homeless, lonely ; we deprive it of the place where it has to serve God, and we hand it over to illusive human connections.

Therefore the orders of God contained in His Word, and acknowledged in the *Confessions of the Church*, emphasize that it is the duty of the Church, which is keeping up the means ordered by God<sup>1</sup> for awakening faith and to strengthen it, to help the children by spreading the holy knowledge to grow up on the bosom of the Church.<sup>2</sup> We are admonished in these Confessions that it is our duty to teach the children in the law of God.<sup>3</sup> Our Confessions oblige the parents to bring them up in the fear of the Lord,<sup>4</sup> and they declare that the schools belong to the body of the Church.<sup>5</sup> These precepts cannot be looked on as mere human arrangements, but as such in which on one hand the Church and those commissioned by her are declared responsible for the work of education, on the other hand this work through these orders is rendered possible. These orders make it clear that God through them, by His electing grace, assures us of the possibility of education. So education is the work of God, Who is leading, through His holy Spirit and His Word preached in the Church, those whom He elected for Himself.

2. If we saw that all the conditions of education go back to the faith of Predestination, this fact has its consequences also which follow on *its aim*. The most of the present educational systems find their aim in human ideas of culture, personality, and are characterized by an optimism in which they ascribe to themselves an infinite possibility. They are guilty of absolutizing man, in trying to erase the opposition between God and man, Creator and creature,<sup>6</sup> and they are guilty of vindicating themselves as able to settle the aim of human life, and thinking themselves able to realize it.

This opinion is wholly contrary to the Word of God and to the doctrine of the Reformation. This doctrine looks not on

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Institutiones*, IV, 1, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Institutiones*, IV, 1, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *II Helvetic Confession*, XXV, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *II Helv. Conf.*, XIX, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Heidelb. Catechism, Qu. 103.

<sup>6</sup> Gogarten, Nachwort to the German edition of Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 352.

man as a creative human personality, but as a creature who is under sin. Man is unable to settle an aim for his life, for every such aim is sinful and wicked in the eyes of God. Freedom, claimed by and for this personality, is not only contrary to reality but is indeed a slavery because in it man gives himself over to the bondage to his own human opinion instead of the service of God. Pedagogics on the ground of the Reformed faith throws away the false aim of human liberty, of a creative human personality, and goes back to the reality of the Will of God. It declares that education is possible only if we accept the suzerainty of God and subject ourselves to it ; that the aim of education can be settled only according to the Word of God and it must acknowledge His decree about the child.

Education, therefore, seeks *the aim* of its work *in the calling* put before man by God. In going back to that which God says about man, instead of what man says about God, this aim gets rid of every human opinion and is going to be realized. About the calling of man, we are taught by the Word that man was created after the likeness of God, this likeness being marred by sin God redeemed through Jesus Christ those whom He elected before the foundation of the world and about whom His will is, that they shall become perfect at the end of the times. This is the calling put before the elect, for whom this aim is not a hopeless ideal, but a task, guaranteed by God Himself. This calling is, without the faith of Predestination, either an unceasing tormenting task which we can never fulfil, or, if we suppose that the work of grace is some way contributing to it, an incalculable wonder, about the success of which neither the teacher nor the child can be ever sure. This calling is given not in human ideals, but it is shown in Christ, in Whom the Word—which shows our calling—was made flesh, in Whom we are born anew and Who is formed in us by the Spirit. It is not the teacher who is working out his likeness in the child through his “creative personality”, but God Who is forming in the child through His Spirit the likeness of Christ. “Christum in nobis formari et nos in Christo, idem est ; nascimur enim, ut simus novae in ipso creaturae et ipse vicissim nascitur in nobis, ut vivamus eius vitam. . . . Proprium quidem Dei est spiritualiter gignere et parere : sed quia instrumentis ad id utitur, ministro et praedicatione, quod suum est, illis ascribit : propterea quod cum hominis opera coniungit Spiritus sui virtutem. Semper retineamus illam

distinctionem, quod, quum Deo minister opponitur, nihil est, ac nihil potest, sed organum est inutile : ceterum, quia efficaciter Spiritus sanctus per ipsum operatur, transfertur etiam ad ipsum laus et titulus agendi. . . . Ergo, si aliquid esse volunt ministri, Christum, non se ipsos formare studeant."<sup>1</sup>

This calling with its message is sounding again in the Church, of which the child is a member, because of election. In the Church is going on the work of education ; she is responsible for leading and directing it.

3. The third question in regard to education, which is connected with the faith of Predestination, is *the problem of the child*. Modern pedagogics looks at the child from a humanistic point of view, with an optimism, which is like its optimism in the question of the aim. This opinion, according to which the child is able to acknowledge and to realize the aim of education, practically renders impossible the real recognition of the child, inasmuch as it lays stress upon questions of secondary importance about its physical, psychical and social situation.

Reformed pedagogics seeks to get to know the child in its true reality. This knowledge is necessary because without it education is unable to see clearly with whom it is working. This knowledge about the reality of the child can be got out of the Word. All the methods which psychology and sociology in their different conceptions are using for scientific researches about the child, are able to show only the outward of its features, but they are unable to fathom the real depths of the soul.<sup>2</sup> This can be known only by the Word of God, only by that which God is saying about the child. This saying declares that the child's soul is determined by two facts : the one, that it is under sin and therefore under the judgment of God, the second that it is a participant of redemption through Christ. These two facts, the reality of sin and the reality of grace, are decisive for our knowledge about the child. The first means that we cannot speak about a regular "development" of the child as if it was able to abandon its bad habits, to grow out of its faults and to reach the perfectness aimed at. We have to perceive sin as a hindrance not to be neglected, which is the source of all other difficulties, because of which we can look on the destiny of the

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Commentarii*, VI, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> This point of view of course does not think the psychological and sociological study of the child unnecessary, as it shows fine success in our days ; it only emphasizes the fact, that such studies are unable to throw a true light upon the soul in its reality.

child and of our work only with despair. The second, the reality of redemption, means that we must not look on the child as hopeless, as lost, but as on the child of God who was made such by Predestination, and proved as such in baptism.

In education we have to know that the child is in God's hands, who is carrying out His eternal decree on it. In the promise given to it is contained the triumph of the grace which is going to renew it through the Holy Spirit. ". . . universalem esse propagationem et peccati, et damnationem in semine Adae: omnes igitur ad unum sub hac maledictione includi, sive ex fidelibus, sive ex impiis descendant: neque enim fideles liberos generant secundum carnem quatenus Spiritu sunt regenerati."<sup>1</sup> Not education makes some of them believers and leaves others unbelievers, but the eternal decree which was conceived in the heart of God before the creation of the world and was fulfilled in their destiny.<sup>2</sup>

The faith of Predestination is so necessary for education. Without this faith we have to think, either that it is the task of the child to obtain by its own means the grace of God, and in this case its whole life and our work would be hopeless and vain, knowing that it is unable to do it; or that grace is given at random and by accident, in which case the whole life would be a prey of uncertainty. This faith assures us that, instead of an overflowing human optimism, the child is in the hands of God and He will work out His ownership of it through His grace.

### III

#### THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION IN THE PASTORAL WORK

I. Not only preaching and education, but also the *cure of souls*, pastoral theology is unthinkable without the doctrine of Predestination. Modern theology devoted considerable energy and time to examine the souls with which pastoral theology has to deal. On the one side it surveyed the psychological conditions and circumstances which determine the life, situation and inward problems of man and was looking for the means with which it could answer these questions. In doing this, it made use of the different forms of Psychology, even Psycho-analysis, thinking that in this way it will be able to look into the

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Commentaries*, V, p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Ravasz, *Tudom kinek bittem*. (*I know, whom I have believed*), p. 178.

depths of the difficulties of the soul and to answer them. On the other side we see the effort to clear up the circumstances which influence the outward life of the soul, making use of different kinds of sociological researches, examining the chief features of the children, youth, workmen and countryfolk, etc. This line of modern pastoral theology, although giving a number of valuable facts for knowing the problems of individual souls, as well as those of different social classes, after all easily falls a victim to the mistake that Christian life is composed of such outward facts, and that, if we know those facts it is enough for the cure of souls. This conception looks on Christian life not in its organic unity but seems to think that it is in reality nothing else than to accept some suggestions, to take up some motives, or to take a stand towards the influences of social situations and powers, and it looks on pastoral theology as a task to reach out help and counsel in these different cases.

This conception of the Christian life and consequently of the pastoral work practically pushes out of the centre the sole fundamental question of the soul: that of its relation to the Word of God, inasmuch as it restricts this relation to human opinions, individual experiences and points of view in social questions. It makes Christian life dependent on man and therefore unstable, pastoral work a mere casuistry, deluding itself with the opinion that it is able to give answers to any question.

Confronting with this opinion the doctrine of Predestination, we see that this doctrine makes clear that the central problem of the soul is not how to get some religious experiences, how to form a point of view in questions, but rather the problem of its relation with God. The Christian soul therefore gets its true certainty in Predestination, finds its assurance amidst the uncertain individual impressions in the electing grace of God. What are the gifts which we can get from this doctrine for pastoral work?

Predestination shows *firstly* to the minister that he should look *on souls* not as thrown out into the world, as victims of uncertainty of their own experiences, but as they are in the hands of God. Their faith is not their own, the good works are not fulfilled by themselves, nor are the battles, sufferings and doubts their own: in all of these they "are kept through the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Peter i. 5). Our work does not deal with persons under age in the sense that we have

to direct and guide them continually or else their salvation is in danger. This conception is taken from the Roman Church. On the contrary, our work is unable to provide or to secure anybody's salvation; we are working among souls who are already under grace and concerning whom we have hope that God gives them the salvation promised them in His Word. To preach this Word, to seek the message to be addressed to them together, is our duty. But neither can we look on them as perfect, as being able to achieve salvation for themselves, and only needing to be informed in social and individual questions. This conception makes our work unnecessary; it makes man the source of his own salvation, it identifies the grace of God with human convictions and opinions, and looks on the Christian life as a conglomerate of different, independent points of view. Pastoral work would then be in this way an adviser's office, where everybody can get useful information fitting to the circumstances, the work of the congregation would be made a splendid charitable society or a soul-clinic, giving to anybody bread, work, good advice as required, but the sole, true, great need of the soul would remain unanswered. Both of these conceptions misunderstand the soul of man. The work of a mere evangelizing method is unable to lead them further, once awakened, on the paths of Christian life; the other is unable to awaken them to their right relation to God. Only if we stand on the basis of Predestination are we able to look on them as they are, saved sinners, of whom we are ourselves, but who are called to grace and to whom we are obliged to preach this call and to seek together with them the realization of this call in service and work.<sup>1</sup>

With this thought, *the connection* between pastoral work and the Church is made also clear. The more modern theology looked on this work as a means to cure individual souls, to inform people about questions of the present world, the more so as it forgot that this work has to deal with members of a Church. This way many questions were left out: as that of the connection of the congregation with the Church invisible, the relation between the Church and her members, the duty and right of the members as hearers of the Word and so on. The consequence of this was that the question, put in the Heidelberg Catechism this way: what assures me that I am the member of the Church,

<sup>1</sup> Boettner, *The Ref. Doctrine*, p. 331.

changed to : what assures me about my salvation, as if salvation was a question of the individual only and stood not in the closest relation with the Church. Here again we see the doctrine of Predestination as a sign of the fact that the individual soul is elected, and has its obligations in the community of the Church ; and that the field of pastoral work is not only the eventual questions, relations, difficulties of the soul. The minister is not an expert, a physician of the soul, rendering first aid with his own methods and by his own ability ; he is a mandatory of the Church, working with the means given by God. His duty is not to hand over the results of his own psychology or philosophy, or his studies, or his convictions, but to show the power, message, gifts and tasks, given by God through the Church. So in the light of the doctrine of Predestination is the minister able to know his congregation in its reality, to know the souls in their true relation with God and to lead them to the understanding and obeying of the Word of God.

2. The *second* question is : what does the doctrine of Predestination mean *in the cure of the individual soul and of the congregation* ? As to the individual we have to examine here what answer we get from this doctrine for the difficulties of the soul. The first answer is that faith in election is *the true foundation* of the Christian life. The chief difficulty here is, namely, that Christian life is often built by man upon some kind of human decision or actions, either beside man, like an outward devotion to the doctrines of the Church or relation to the same, or in man, like good works, an endeavour to do good, an effort after personal religious experiences. In such cases the duty of pastoral work is to point out that the foundation of the Christian life is not a feeling, nor an experience, nor any human action, but the grace of God, which is beside us and above us. The faith of Predestination takes Christian life out of our possession because of which I can speak about election as about an impossibility, which was carried out by God, through which He presented salvation to me and made me a propriety of Himself.<sup>1</sup> "This 'to me' and 'me' cannot be explained by anything, this stands totally in the air, this is the absolute vertical wonder. Every claim of right, from which we try to deduct this fact, is to misunderstand totally the election, to misunderstand the calling of God."<sup>2</sup> This fact has a great significance in pastoral work, whenever one

<sup>1</sup> Boettner, *The Ref. Doctrine*, pp. 332-33.

<sup>2</sup> Barth, *Römerbrief*, p. 35.



is ready to make faith—which is a miracle of grace<sup>1</sup>—a kind of human property, merit, or product. This fact is wholly inconsistent with the opinion, according to which conversion is the work of man, or a work of man also with the pietistical conception of conversion or the effort to convert others. Against the over-estimation of personal faith says Calvin, “notandum est quod salutis nostrae firmitas non in nobis sed in arcana Dei locatur. Quamquam enim custoditur salus nostra per fidem . . . altius tamen conscendere oportet, ideo nos in tuto esse quia nos Pater Filio suo dedit et Filius ipse nihil quod sibi datum est, perituum affirmat.”<sup>2</sup> To the soul, seeking the possibility of conversion in itself, conceited of its own perfectness, or brought into inward restlessness and despair because of this, pastoral work has to point out the fact that man is unable to provide for, or preserve his calling, which is an action of the grace of God Who gives an intimation of it in conversion and faith. That is the reason that Calvin calls humbleness “radix pietatis”,<sup>3</sup> for this is necessary for us to be able to give up every claim of merit, or of any initiative of our own.

One of the vital questions of Christian life to-day is that of *assurance*. After ages when the Christian life was for many persons an average practice of piety, and its problem was more what man thinks about God than what God is thinking about man: to-day, amidst the difficulties of life man is seeing more clearly that his life is not in his own hands, religion as a Church doctrine began to lose its credit and man began to ask whether God, with whom he made such an easy account, is ready to accept it? So arises in many souls with a startling solemnity a new question about the assurance of salvation. And although in our age souls are more like a group of frightened people, terrified by the approaching storm, than the “little flock” of Christ, who know their Shepherd and wait for Him: the cure of souls has to take every opportunity to show to the struggling souls the way of salvation.

The faith of Predestination shows that it is important for every soul to put the question about the certainty of salvation, because this question arises from the feeling of our own powerlessness and God’s absolute majesty. “The fact that our salvation

<sup>1</sup> Boettner, *The Ref. Doctrine*, p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Commentarii*, II, p. 274.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione*.

is in the hands of God, and we are unable to do anything to provide it—for whom would not it be a scandal, and who would not be offended with it”, says Luther, and he goes on in this way: “I myself have been offended more than once, even unto the deepest abyss of desperation; nay, so far as even to wish that I had never been born a man; that is, before I was brought to know how healthful that desperation was and it was unto grace. Here it is that there has been so much toiling and labouring, to excuse the goodness of God and to accuse the will of man.”<sup>1</sup> Every question of the assurance of salvation thus begins with a resignation as to our power before this can give place to the thought of certainty. Of such a blessed despair can arise the work of grace which makes us sure of the decision of God.<sup>2</sup>

As from reckless self-conceit, so also from *the temptation of hopelessness* the faith of Predestination is able to save us. It is a great consolation for us to know that our salvation is not in our own hands, but God decided about it at a time when we “being not yet born, neither have done any good or evil” (Romans ix. 11). With this faith we are released from those painful doubts which often worry us and we can look on the unchangeable promise of God. So pastoral work has here the duty to prevent with this message every kind of illusionism in the Christian life, which is a real sickness of the soul, especially to-day, when the uncertainty of the earthly life surrounds man. It is our duty to show that “high above the earthly life, over every height, the prayer of our High Priest is burning and flowing for us, the Son is praying to the Father, the Father presents the faithful to the Son and He takes him in His sufferings. He is wrestling for him, and with a victorious joy shouts his name into the Holy of Holies.”<sup>3</sup> In struggling for this certainty our actions, or feeling, are not decisive but only the signs given by God. The inward testimony of the Holy Spirit: the faith, the peace of the soul, longing for the eternal life, hatred to the sin, true contrition—these are the signs which are the gifts of the Spirit, and not the products of our own soul’s activity.<sup>4</sup> The faith of Predestination gives us an answer to our questions and doubts: in the unchangeableness of God.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> Boettner, *The Ref. Doctrine*, p. 329.

<sup>3</sup> Ravasz, *Tudom kinek bittem*, p. 220.

<sup>4</sup> Robertson, *Sermons, Everyman’s Library*, vol. IV, p. 122. Kereaszegi, *Sermons*, p. 495.

<sup>5</sup> Ursinus, *The Summe of Christian Religion*, pp. 603-4.

Even amid our temptations the faith of Predestination is the only strength of the soul. In the battle with sin this faith gives assurance in showing us that we are fighting not alone, in unveiling and enlightening the fact of sin, in showing its reality, its sinfulness and its contradiction with the will of God. The temptations call our attention to our weakness and lead us to the experience that we are unable to avoid them in our own strength. Human will is like a man having both his arms bound—says Luther—not that his captivity might be derided, but that he might be convinced of his false presumption of liberty and power and might be brought to know his misery.<sup>1</sup>

Among the difficulties of the Christian life the most troubling are those of *outward difficulties*. These questions—to-day very often—wake up on the one hand many doubts about the providence of God, about the destiny of man, but on the other hand they usefully shake that outward security in which man felt himself.<sup>2</sup> In connection with these miseries and troubles of life, all the preachers of Predestination—especially Calvin himself—showed that the elect are ready to put their life in the hands of God, and they have—even through this faith—the peacefulness which enables them to endure the difficulties of life. “. . . quidquid eveniat, standum nobis in hac fide esse, Deum, qui nos semel amore suo complexus est, nunquam abiicere nostri curam.”<sup>3</sup> But there is another side of this question, and that is that the faith of Predestination puts the value of life in the right place for us. This shows that the reason of the difficulties is in most cases that we think the earthly life as the highest value, and death as the greatest loss. In contradiction to this opinion faith directs our eyes towards our heavenly inheritance and places us in the service of the Kingdom of God. Even in the present age it is an important duty of pastoral work to direct attention to the service of eternal aim of man.

Another difficult problem of pastoral cure is the fact, that, after years of faithful and keen interest in the Word of God, many of the Christian souls take at once an opposite direction to, or slowly separate themselves from, the practice of Christian life, become indifferent or even antagonistic toward the Word and at the same time toward the Church. Especially among the youth

<sup>1</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine*, p. 328.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Commentarii*, V, p. 129.

in the fourteenth to fifteenth and in the twentieth years of age can this fact be observed ; often it appears a heavy fight, with complaints about indifferentism, about the uselessness of prayer, sometimes the soul gets in doubt about his salvation and becomes wholly apathetic.

Here, too, the faith of Predestination reaches out a help to the pastoral work, namely on two sides. On the one side it gives to the soul the conviction that God often puts His elect ones among difficulties, conflicts and sorrows, without leaving them to perish. " And even if we should grant that some of the elect are held in error through the whole of their life ; yet must they, of necessity, return into the way of truth, before their death " says Luther.<sup>1</sup> One of the great theologians of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the eighteenth century refers to the fact that often the soul is in despair, because it does not find the signs of election in itself and answers this difficulty this way : " You, who are complaining that you do not find in yourself the sure signs of Election and who are tormenting yourselves because of this, you have already got the seal of an elected man, because he who is feeling and deploring his poverty in spirit is blessed, he will be comforted, and his is already the kingdom of heaven. Such a complaining poor soul has to attend with a great perseverance to the Word of God, of which faith is born and by which it is fostered."<sup>2</sup>

On the other side it is often the case that such errors and conflicts arise because the Word was preached without the faith of Predestination and so the soul often gets lost in a labyrinth of questions, and goes astray among them, because there is no foundation on which it can build. Without this faith, the Gospel is either a heap of experiences, religious impressions, often contradicting each other, and always bound to outward circumstances in their strengthening and weakening ; or it is a law whose precepts are accepted at first with enthusiasm and heroic vows, but afterwards, when judgment by the law becomes obvious, it creates a feeling of helplessness or even of revolt. In the first case, these experiences that speak not of God's absolute will, high above us, but about our impressions : it is no wonder that in want of an objective element such a Word fades under the changes of human opinions and feelings. In the second case,

<sup>1</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Debreczeni Ember Pál, *Gerizim and Ebal*, pp. 101-102.

this law, preached without the electing grace of God, either becomes one law among others, and the soul, naturally rebellious, shakes its chains off, or becomes a cause of utter desperation when it sees that this law can never be fulfilled. On the foundation of Predestination, pastoral work puts, instead of the individual impressions, the preserving and ruling will of God ; instead of prescriptions of a law, obedience by faith and thankfulness.

*Lastly*, the faith of Predestination gives *the eschatological outlook* of the Christian life for the pastoral work. Without this outlook Christian life would end with disappointment and failure. The great wall between faith and life—a source of pain and sorrow for so many true Christians—is abolished or explained by the faith that God's work in us is not at the goal, but it is always on the way while we are living in this world, but His holy Will is that this work should be accomplished in eternity, and of this the faith of election can convince us.<sup>1</sup> To-day this eschatological outlook of the Christian life is very important, for only this can explain and make enduring the fragmentariness, needs and misery of the earthly life. And to-day pastoral work has to direct the attention of souls to eternal life and the glorious fulfilment of the Kingdom of God, the faith of which is founded on faith in Predestination.

3. Let us have a glance at the question what Predestination means beyond the cure of individual soul *for the work in the congregation*. The essence of congregation is characterized by the fact that it is not a worldly community, but a part of the Church Invisible, the life of which will be accomplished in eternity. The congregation is the communion of elected saints who are working together in the service of God on the earth. This conception renders impossible any aim in the congregation, save to work for the glory of God ; any human aim darkens this holy task and therefore such human aims are sin and an offence before God. No human endeavour, no human activity may have a place in the work of the congregation, save the work which God is doing in souls through His Spirit. Secondly, the faith of Predestination shows that the members of the congregation are elected saints, who are obliged to witness for grace through their life, through the fruits of thankfulness, with obedience and purity. In the Church, therefore, everybody's work is needed, nobody may remain inactive, unconscious,

<sup>1</sup> Barth, *Vom christlichen Leben*.

insensible to salvation and towards the will of God, or contemptuous of His grace. This makes it, on the one hand, obligatory on every member not only to attend to this work but to do it himself: that is, the congregation is not a group of pupils in their minority led by others, but a community of active working members. On the other hand this involves the Christian Church discipline, which is a means in the congregation to guide the life of its members. Church discipline is unthinkable except on the ground of the Predestination; without this, it will be either libertinism, which passes over sin and is indifferent towards it, or a "black police" which looks only on the outward order and tries to convert people with human means.

So the faith of Predestination makes our preaching, education and pastoral work to stand on the foundation of the Word, and gives them the characteristic features of a Reformed work. With this faith we are able to commit all our work, and the souls entrusted to us, into the hands of God, Who is the Lord of the harvest. To do our work in the hope of His eternal decree is a blessed duty, although difficult and painful, as it was a hopeless duty, unbearable if we kept the destiny of souls in our own hands. To know that in spite of our fragmentary and erring work He is keeping in His mercy every soul elected by Him, whom no man taketh from Him, and to look to the end of this work, to the glorious future fulfilment of every promise, this is the consolation of the faith of Predestination for the minister of the Word.

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