

THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY.

VOL. XV.

APRIL, 1911.

No. 2.

WALTHER THE LUTHERAN.

“The Lutheran Church of this country mourns the departure of a spiritual father. . . . A very particular mission to the Lutheran Church of this century had been entrusted by God to this man”¹⁾—pensively the eye rests on these simple, yet far-reaching statements, which suggest two splendid *Richtlinien* for reflection: Walther and the Lutheran Church of America; Walther and the Lutheran Church of the Nineteenth Century.

The words quoted were uttered on May 15, 1887, at Walther's bier, when the remains of the great American Lutheran were about to be transferred from Concordia Seminary, whose President and best-known professor he had been, to “old Trinity,” the Lutheran mother-church of St. Louis, whose beloved *pastor primarius* he had been up to the hour of his death. The speaker, Walther's pastor, was a man not given to excessive praising or idolizing of men. The statements which he made regarding his famous parishioner were a sober estimate of Walther's worth, and they were spoken reverently and in the fear of God. In the same spirit we study these words, now that the centenary of Walther's birth is upon us, and seek to verify their scope and applicableness.

The Walther memorial of this year is to witness no hero-worship on the part of Missourians, no fulsome eulogies, no injudicious and unreflecting exaltation of human achieve-

1) *Lutheraner* 1887, p. 85.

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION ACCORDING TO Eph. 1, 3—14.

(From Stoeckhardt's Commentary.)

The passage which we have just explained is a *locus classicus* for the doctrine of the election of grace. Accordingly, we shall present once more, in a brief conspectus, the main points of the teaching regarding the eternal election of God which the apostle has here laid before us. We shall arrange them under a number of *capita doctrinae*, by grouping together equivalent terms and statements. To this end, we reproduce an article from *Lehre und Wehre* 1905, pp. 481 ff.

1. A few introductory remarks, to begin with. The doctrine of the election of grace is one of the clear doctrines of Scripture. There is sufficient light shed on it even by this one principal *sedes doctrinae* in Eph. 1, 3—14. The elements which constitute the essence of the eternal election stand forth in this text in sharp and distinct outlines. As far as God was pleased to reveal it to us, the eternal decree of election is here presented in simple and unequivocal terms. Occasionally we meet with a few expressions that might be controverted, as,

e. g., ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα, or ἐκκληρώθημεν; still, these expressions, whichever way they are explained, do not detract from the general understanding which this passage affords. The meaning which, in our opinion, is contained in ἐκκληρώθημεν, is attested by the unequivocal expression ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς. The interpretation which we have given to ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα is expressed, beyond a question, in the term περιποίησις, “a peculiar people” (“*Eigentumsvolk*”). The fact that the doctrine of the election of grace has actually become controverted to a great extent, both in former days and especially in our time, surely is no proof that in this instance we have before us an obscure or semi-obscure chapter of doctrine, — a chapter which, in the last analysis, is a mere problem of theology. If this were true, we should have to relegate also the article of the Holy Supper and of the divinity of Christ to the category of problems in theology. For these, too, have ever been greatly contested articles of doctrine. Theologians who have emancipated their reason from Scripture have attempted to doctor the divine mysteries, grafting some notion of theirs upon this passage and clipping something from another. These attempts do not render the respective declarations of Scripture obscure. Such a procedure can confuse only unstable and venturesome minds, but it cannot disarrange to simple minds the plain sense and understanding of the words of Scripture. To cite an instance, the manner in which the expressions ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς, or ἐν αὐτῷ, in v. 4, or πρόθεσις θεοῦ, in v. 11, are being manipulated does not throw these words which the Holy Ghost has taught into the shade, but sets them out in a strong light. These efforts show to what artifices persons must resort, in order to dodge the plain meaning of words.

2. The doctrine of the election of grace is a doctrine intended for Christians. In Eph. 1 Paul speaks to Christians and with Christians; such expressions as ἡμεῖς, ἡμᾶς embrace himself and all Christians. This doctrine cannot be grasped and understood, except by penitent and believing Christians who are sanctified by the Spirit of God, and are seeking those

things which are above. Thus, the primary doctrines of sin, of the wrath of God, of justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith, of sanctification, are treated in advance of the doctrine of election in the Epistle to the Romans, that *Compendium doctrinae Paulinae*. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, which was addressed to Christians tried and true, to whom Paul had for three years proclaimed the entire counsel of God, the apostle presupposes among his readers the knowledge and the salutary understanding of these principal articles of the Christian doctrine. When dealing with persons who have not become Christians as yet, and whom we desire to convert to Christianity, we speak to them of other matters, not of the election of grace. The doctrine of the election of grace is designed for Christians, and its intended purpose is to advance and stablish Christians in their faith. It is a doctrine abounding in comfort. The entire passage Eph. 1, 3—14 is a doxology, a glorification of the blessings of God. All that we read in this passage is sweet Gospel. Elsewhere, *e. g.*, in Rom. 8, 2 Thess. 2, 1 Pet. 1, the doctrine of the eternal election is applied for the comfort of Christians under the cross, in their sufferings and afflictions. In the Epistle to the Ephesians the apostle does not allude to the sufferings of Christians. At all times, in good as well as in evil days, Christians are in need of the comfort and strengthening which this doctrine affords them.

3. In Eph. 1 the apostle occupies the present standpoint of his Christian readers. He reminds them of the blessing which they possess at present, and from these blessings he directs their glance backward to the antemundane fountain from which those blessings have flowed. He identifies himself and his fellow-Christians with the elect.

1) As regards the identification of Christians with the elect, and of the elect with Christians, I refer to the following passage in my Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,

1) This paragraph is a footnote in the original. We have embodied it in the article proper because of its importance.

pp. 403. 404: "Throughout the Epistles of the apostles these terms, 'the called,' 'the saints,' 'the beloved,' 'the elect,' are used promiscuously. In our Lutheran Confessions such designations as 'the elect,' 'the Christians,' 'the children of God,' are used as interchangeable terms. When Scripture speaks of the elect, of those whom God has foreknown and predestinated, we are to think of believing Christians and are to embrace ourselves in the number of the elect. And when Scripture speaks of the Christians, of the believing children of God, we are to identify them with the elect. True, only those are elect who persevere in faith unto the end and are ultimately glorified. However, throughout the Scriptures the believing Christians are viewed and described as persons whose abiding characteristic is faith, and who obtain the end of faith, the salvation of their souls. Accordingly, in his explanation of the Third Article of the Creed, Luther defines the Christian Church, or the communion of saints, or believers, as 'entire Christendom,' whom the Holy Ghost 'calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and preserves with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.' True, we know from experience that many who had obtained faith apostatize sooner or later. Moreover, Scripture issues earnest warnings against defection from the faith, and speaks of time-believers. However, what we are to think of time-believers is written on another page in our Bible; that is a truth by itself which we are not to mingle with the declarations of Scripture concerning the election of the children of God unto everlasting life. For these declarations treat only of such persons as believe and are saved." Comp. *Lehre und Wehre* 1905, pp. 199—201: "It is apparent from the passages of Scripture and of the Confessions which were adduced above, and from many similar passages, what kind of persons are meant by the terms 'believers,' 'all believers,' viz., those whose permanent characteristic is faith, who are now in a state of faith and believe unto the end, the *finaliter credentes*. Those who for a time fall from faith and return to faith again are not specially considered in these passages. *Apropos*, when the

entire life even of these persons, from the moment of their conversion to the hour of their death, is to be passed upon in a summary judgment, they, too, must receive the predicate 'believers.' For, since they are reconverted, their former defections are remembered no more. When Scripture says: 'He that believeth, *πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων*, shall be saved,' it is plain that the expression *πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων* signifies the abiding relation and conduct of these persons toward Christ,—that relation in which they are still found when the final sentence is proclaimed which decides either a person's eternal life or death. When we confess that God 'will on the last day raise me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life,' we refer to those who are living in a state of faith and pass through faith still believing. Aye, the term 'believers,' when unqualified, both in Scripture and our Confessions, denotes the *finaliter credentes*. This idiomatic use of the term appears not only in the particular statements of Scripture afore cited, in which eternal life is attributed to believers in curt and direct terms, but it pervades the entire Scriptures. Wherever Scripture describes the believing Christians, it characterizes them as persons who live and die in faith. In the exordium of his First Epistle the Apostle Peter embraces himself and all believing Christians in one comprehensive statement, when he says: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope.' Proceeding, he characterizes the regenerate, the believers, as persons who are kept by the power of God in faith, whose faith is tried and tested by the fire of tribulation, and who receive the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls. According to Rom. 8, 15. 16, the believing Christians are children of God, who cry 'Abba, Father,' and with whose spirit the Spirit itself beareth witness that they are the children of God. Yea, 'ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus,' Gal. 3, 26. However, it is just to these children of God, to all the children of God, that the state-

ment applies: 'If children, then heirs,' Rom. 8, 17, 'heirs according to the promise,' Gal. 3, 29. In the terminology of Scripture the children of God are simply those who are now in a filial relation to God and will later obtain the inheritance of children. And the abstract term 'faith' is used in the same sense as the concrete 'believer.' Wherever Scripture commends faith, wherever it testifies that we are justified and saved by faith, it conceives of faith, just as of the righteousness of faith, as a *continuum*, as something which endures until faith passes into sight, and eternal bliss follows justification. This idiomatic use of the terms has passed over into ecclesiastical parlance. The passage in the Form of Concord which says that 'God has considered in His eternal counsel the conversion, justification, and salvation of every Christian,' defines a Christian as a person who is converted, is righteous before God, and is saved. In the Third Article of the Christian Creed we confess that the Church is the communion of saints, or of believers. This means, according to Luther's explanation, all Christendom throughout the earth, whom the Holy Ghost calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. Aye, also preservation in faith belongs to the concept of faith, of being a Christian, and of the Church. Indeed, Scripture speaks also of time-believers, who believe for a season and then fall away,—fall away finally and are lost, Luke 8, 13. And we shall allow no appeal to the consistency of reasoning to prompt us to the statement that the faith of time-believers is a specious faith. Time-believers actually believe; they are inwardly in touch with the Lord while they are believers. Aye, there are men who have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come, and yet fall away, Hebr. 6, 5. 6. This is a fact established by Scripture. However, it is contrary to Scripture to divide 'believers' into two classes: such as believe unto the end and are saved, and such as believe for a time, and then fall away and are lost. It is wrong to compute the number of believers thus: 1. the *finaliter credentes*; 2. the

time-believers; total: all believers. It is vulgar rationalism, and a bad attempt at conciliation, to gather the believing children of God, strictly and emphatically so called, and the time-believers into one concept, and, as is being done, to construct the idea of faith from a study of the time-believers, and in the very premises to posit the possibility of a defection as part of the concept of faith. True, every believing Christian still is in the flesh, and hence must be careful not to indulge his flesh and thus lose the Spirit. But the believer, in so far as he is a believer, knows of no defection. It is to the believer an impossible thought to imagine that his faith could ever cease. True faith is assurance, assurance of present and future salvation, an assurance which never fails. We do indeed lay to heart what Scripture says concerning the time-believers. We take them as a warning example. But we absolutely refuse to take the time-believers as our teachers and guides who are to show us what constitutes faith and how we are to believe. Those theologians who, when speaking of faith and salvation, always enter the time-believers as an element in their argumentation, should, indeed, have a care, lest they rob those whom they are teaching of the true understanding of what saving faith is. No, indeed! it is not so, that the time-believers are necessarily included in the general concept of faith. Hence the time-believers do not belong to the elect."

Thus the apostle teaches us how to view the eternal election of God *a posteriori*. Scripture, indeed, speaks elsewhere, in unqualified terms and in an objective view of the matter, of the elect whom God predestinated, of the elect as being few in number, while there are many who are called. However, wherever the apostles instruct Christians regarding the mystery of eternity, they apply what they say to those whom they are teaching. This direct and practical manner of considering the subject keeps us from useless and dangerous speculations. If you wish to think and speak correctly concerning the election of grace, you must learn, from close

observation of Scripture, also the *modus loquendi* and the correct method. There is a different ring, and there is a different impression created, whether you say that God, before the foundation of the world, has elected us unto faith, unto the adoption of sons, unto salvation; or whether you point to some undefined persons, concerning whom God decreed in eternity that He would bring them unto faith and save them.

So much it was necessary to say, in a general way, concerning the character of the doctrine which this passage invites us to consider. As regards our election, Paul now submits for our meditation on Eph. 1 the following comforting and edifying facts of our faith.

4. God has chosen us before the foundation of the world. In this statement God is the subject, and we Christians,—we who are now Christians,—are the object of the divine election. Paul knows only of an election of persons, not of an election of means. The appointment of the means of salvation, of the means of grace, is a procedure entirely different from the choosing of the elect. The election of grace is an election of persons, and that, of individuals (*“Personenwahl und Einzelwahl”*). A godly proportion of our modern theologians reject the election of individuals, and represent the divine election as pertaining only to the Church *in genere*. However, what else is the Christian Church than the entire Christendom throughout the world, the sum total of all believing Christians? Now, all that is predicable of the total number of Christians is predicable of the individual Christians composing that number. God has chosen us, *ἡμᾶς*. With this term the apostle refers to himself and his Christian readers, to all his fellow-Christians; and he would have each individual Christian to consider himself embraced in this word *ἡμᾶς*. Election is an individualizing act. In electing, God has referred to me, aye, even to me in particular, to me individually, to me *in concreto*, to me personally. God has chosen us before the foundation of the world. Election *κατ-*

ἐξοχῆν is an antemundane, eternal act of God, hence, an act of the will, a counsel, a decree, of God. Before the world was, before we existed, God, even the great, eternal God, the Lord of heaven and earth, has bestowed His attention on us, — on me, — humble and poor creatures that we are. In His reflections, in His eternal counsel and decree, He has picked us — me — from out of the world, out of the *massa perditā*, and has ordained that we are to belong to Him, that we are to be His own. What a comfort for us Christians, who are strangers in the world and often regard ourselves as a negligible cipher in this world!

5. Furthermore, Eph. 1 defines for us more closely the contents and purpose of our election. The relation into which we have been placed to God by the eternal election is called the adoption of children. God has predestinated us unto the adoption of children, *viz.*, that we were to become the children of God through Christ. Our relation to God was to be, not that of creatures, nor that of slaves or servants, nor that of friends and confidants, but that of children. He was to be our Father, and we His dear children. And being His children, we were to have our conversation before Him, holy and blamelessly, in love. God desired to be glorified among men, even here in time, by us as His children who are showing forth the praises of God to the world. Predestination unto the adoption of children, however, embraces also predestination unto the inheritance of children. Even before the foundation of the world our Heavenly Father has decreed and conveyed to us all that He possesses as the original owner, the bliss and glory of heaven. And in predestinating us unto the adoption of children and everlasting life God has at the same time, from the beginning, ordained in what manner He would bring us — me — unto justifying and saving faith, and preserve us therein. Moreover, He has preordained and prearranged all the changes of fortune in our lives in such a manner, that they must serve the attainment of the highest purpose of life, *viz.*, faith, our adoption as children, and salvation. What

love, what honor our Father in heaven has conferred on us by choosing us, before we had our being, to be His children, and by preordaining all that is included in the adoption of children!

6. We are not worthy of such love and honor. Verily, there is in us no lovable and attractive trait that could prompt, and did prompt, God to elect us. We belong by nature to the degenerate and corrupt race of men, who are an abomination to God. The reason why God, by His eternal election, chose us from out of this race of men and predestinated us that we should be His own, is not furnished in any way by our disposition or character, by our acts and conduct. This entire passage Eph. 1, 3—14 does not offer the least ground for assuming that, in electing us, God somehow took into consideration our conduct. On the contrary, these expressions: *ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς, ἐκλήρωθήμεν, εὐδοκία, πρόθεσις*, bar every consideration of this kind. For these expressions represent the eternal act of the will of God as a free act, the motive for which is found exclusively in God Himself. We have been predestinated unto the adoption of children and the inheritance of everlasting life according to the good pleasure of His will, simply because it pleased God to do so. We have been predestinated to the praise of the glory of His grace, because God wished to show forth in us the glory of His grace. What prompted and moved God to elect us, us, — me, — is His grace and mercy. And that, His grace in Christ. God has elected us by Christ, whom He has foreordained before the foundation of the world to be the Redeemer of sinful men. In the eyes of God the merit of Christ has from the beginning covered our unworthiness, and has attracted to us unworthy beings the attention and good pleasure of God. These are the only causes of our eternal election: the mercy of God and the merits of Christ; the former is the *causa impulsiva*, the latter the *causa meritoria*. Verily, our eternal election rests on a firm and immovable foundation. We shall not permit ourselves to doubt it when observing how unworthy we are of being elected.

7. By grace, for Christ's sake, God has before the foundation of the world elected us, me, every single one of us, unto the adoption of children and unto everlasting life. The election of grace is an election of individuals. However, the individuals whom God has elected form a whole, *τὰ πάντα*, a people, a peculiar people, *περιποίησις*. Compared to the world, the *massa perditā*, from out of which they have been elected, the elect are few in number. Still, we are not to picture to ourselves the eternal election as an act by which God picked from the wreck and ruin of the world a paltry few who are saved; but we are ever to keep before our spiritual eye the great and "noble company" of the elect children. The elect, — as many as there are, and ever were, of them in the world, — when viewed in their totality, as God views them, are seen to be a great and respectable people. This was the aim of the eternal counsel and plan of the love of God: to raise up out of the human race a great family of children of God, united and compacted in Christ, in whom they were chosen; a family on whom rests the entire good pleasure of the Father in heaven which rests on the eternal Son of His love; a family of many generations of children, *πατριάι*, Eph. 3, 15, gathered from all nations of the earth, and showing forth, in union with the various generations of God in heaven, the holy angels, the praises of God forever and ever; yea, we add, on the strength of Eph. 3, 9. 10: an eternal Church, the *kosmos* of God and its race of men, in whom there is ultimately realized, after the destruction of the apostate world of men who refused to be saved, the purpose of God's creation, the will and good pleasure of Him who has made all things. What an honor for us to be members of this great family of God! In the communion of the elect we find abundant comfort and compensation for the contempt and repulsion which we meet in the world.

8. The eternal choice or election of God is further described in Eph. 1 by significant expressions, especially such as state the infallibility of the election. God has predesti-

nated us unto the adoption of children, and to the inheritance of children as well. However, the predestination of God is irrevocable, more so than the laws of the Medes and Persians. We are predestinated "after the counsel of His own will." God took counsel with Himself in eternity. He considered the matter and after mature deliberation reached the conclusion that we, we in particular, I myself and my fellow-Christians, were to become His children and heirs of everlasting life. Now, of the counsel of the Lord we read: "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations," Ps. 33, 11. We have been predestinated *κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ*. However, *εὐδοκία*, the good pleasure of God, as Polykarp Leyser remarks, is such that even the gates of hell and myriads of devils cannot thwart it. We have been predestinated "according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." Man does not, and cannot, execute all that he proposes. It is a divine prerogative to execute and to realize all that He has proposed. Thus, the purpose of the election, too, cannot fail. And what a great comfort it is to us Christians to know our adoption and salvation has not been committed to our hands, "out of which it might easily be taken and snatched, owing to the weakness and malice of our flesh and the guile and power of the devil and the world," but that God has taken our adoption and salvation into His almighty hand, and "has well secured it in His eternal purpose which cannot fail or be thwarted." God has fixed in advance the number, the sum total of the elect, *τὰ πάντα, τὸ πλήρωμα*. And hence, not a single one can drop out of this number. Verily, then, a Christian must be glad and assured of his salvation. Such assurance of salvation is, indeed, a characteristic feature of Christian faith. Thus the comfort derived from our election serves for our edification in our most holy faith.

9. God has even now, for a good part, carried out His eternal purpose. In Eph. 1 the apostle points emphatically to the execution of the eternal counsel of God. Even to Adam,

later to Abraham and Israel, God gave the promise, and by the promise He quickened the elect from the race of Adam and Abraham to faith, to the hope of the future Christ. But God is employed in the gathering of the elect children especially in the present eon, in the time of the New Testament. He has now sent the Gospel of Christ, and many Gentiles have so far heard and believed the Gospel of their salvation and thus become the children of God. The entire work of the Church, the preaching of the Gospel, serves this purpose and has this effect, *viz.*, to gather the elect from all the ends of the earth. We, too, have heard and believed the Gospel of our salvation, and have obtained the adoption of children. The entire course of our life hitherto was a pedagogical effort of God, which aimed at our faith and adoption. We have known Christ, and in Christ we have the redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins; in Him we have a God who is reconciled to us, we have God for our Father. Moreover, God has blessed us with all wisdom and prudence, and thus enabled us to lead a godly life. This, however, is the exact blessing which He designed for us in eternity.

10. Accordingly, God will continue until the end to carry out His eternal counsel and purpose regarding us and our elect fellow-Christians, in order that we may reach the final goal of our predestination. We were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, the earnest of our future inheritance. The Holy Spirit secures to God those who are His, whom He has chosen from the beginning, and He preserves our souls and keeps them steadfast in the Word and faith until the day of redemption. The inheritance of children cannot and will not fail us. The Lord will surely deliver us from all evil, remove us entirely from this world, and preserve us unto His heavenly kingdom. With all the elect of God, with the entire congregation of the saints of God made perfect, we shall then behold the glory of God and praise Him forever and ever, because He has so gloriously carried out what He purposed to do in eternity.

When a Christian has finished reading the passage Eph. 1, 3—14, has pondered and taken to heart its comforting contents, and has appropriated them, he joins the apostle in giving thanks to God and the Father of Jesus Christ for all the temporal and eternal blessings of which he has been reminded in this passage, and he experiences no desire and inclination to make the mystery of eternity the subject of conjectures and speculations. Still, a question or two will arise which he cannot entirely push aside. When the eternal choice and election, which is particular in concept and essence, has been presented to him, he is apt to inquire, What is my fate? Do I belong to the elect? How can I know and be assured that I am elect? These are the inquiries of anxious souls who are concerned about their salvation, inquiries which flow from a sense of our need of salvation. We may expect *a priori* that Scripture, which teaches and offers us all that pertains to our salvation, will answer these questions. We find these questions actually answered in Eph. 1. The apostle in this passage speaks of the elect whom God has chosen, however, not merely in a general way, but he employs such terms as “we,” “us,” “you,” thus showing that he regards and designates the Christians as the elect. Hence, if a person can say, I am a Christian, he is to know and believe that he is elect. However, Paul in Eph. 1 explains at greater length wherein Christianity consists, and what we are and possess as Christians. These marks of Christianity, then, are also marks and tests of our election. The 11th Article of the Form of Concord in an extensive section treats the question how the individual Christian may know and be assured that he is one of the elect, and in this connection it refers to Eph. 1 as showing that God does not lead, and has not decreed to lead, His elect to salvation by any other way than the well-known universal way of salvation. To those whom God has elected in eternity He has the Word, the Gospel, proclaimed, proclaimed here in time; these He leads to faith, pardons and justifies them through faith; for just these people have been predestinated to the adoption of sons and to a holy and blameless conver-

sation in love. Accordingly, every Christian may and should draw this conclusion and say: I am, indeed, a poor sinner, deserving of no mercy, but I believe in Jesus Christ, who has redeemed me with His blood, and in whom I obtain grace and the forgiveness of sins. Through Christ I am a child of God, and though in much weakness, I now follow after holiness; I am walking so as to please God, my Heavenly Father, in every respect. Hence, I belong to the elect; for just these features are the marks of the elect. The entire present state of a Christian is a realization of God's eternal decree of election, a consequence and effect of election. This thought runs through the entire passage Eph. 1, 3—14. Thus I am justified in reasoning from the effect to the cause. The aforementioned manifestations of Christianity, repentance, faith, sanctification, are, indeed, of a subjective nature. In seasons of severe affliction the entire inward life of faith is shaken. And it is at such times that the inner marks of election become faint. Just that is the character of such spiritual trials as afflict seriously minded Christians, *viz.*, that they are on the point of questioning their own faith, that they begin to doubt whether their faith is of the genuine kind, that the consciousness of their child-state becomes dimmed, and that they are fearful lest their obedience and devotion are an utter sham and fraud. However, granted that the *notae internae electionis* are not always available, still the apostle in Eph. 1 points out also a *nota externa*, the Word of Truth, the Gospel of our salvation, which is exalted to the height of heaven above all vacillations and moods of the human heart, above all subjective occurrences and experiences, feelings and sensations, of a Christian. Accordingly, those whom God has chosen in eternity have the Gospel presented to them for that very reason. It is a special blessing of God which the apostle mentions in the words ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον, alongside of and prior to πιστεύσαντες; and this blessing flows from the eternal election of God. Hence, following the apostle's direction, I may and must draw this conclusion: Here is the Gospel of Christ with its precious promises, the universal promises of

grace, which are meant for every one that hears them, hence, for me also. And this Gospel is the Gospel of my salvation, which gives also to me the assurance that I shall be saved. What the Gospel promises is most certainly true. The Gospel is the Word of Truth. I hear the Gospel, the Word of Truth, with my ears. I hear, and I can read with mine own eyes, that God would have me to be saved. Consequently, it is beyond doubt that I, too, am elect.

A different kind of question which arises when men, also when Christians meditate the election of God, is this, What is the fate of the rest? We are not better than others; others are not worse than ourselves. Why did God elect us—me—rather than others? *Cur nos prae aliis?* This question does not arise from the desire to be saved, but from curiosity. It is a presumptuous question. And such presumptuous questions are not answered by Scripture, which reveals to us only what is useful for us to know, and what tends to our salvation. The information which the apostle offers in Eph. 1, 3—14 refers exclusively to Christians; it treats only of the elect and of the salvation of the elect, and does not say a word of the rest and of the fate of the rest. And in another place, Rom. 9—11, the apostle absolutely forbids Christians to try to discover the *discretio personarum*, and he counts the *causa discriminis* as one of the things which God has purposely concealed from us. Humble Christians promptly accept this direction, and suppress all presumptuous questions as soon as they arise in them. All manner of reflections and inferences are connected with the question: *Cur nos prae aliis?* Those who give the reins to their own thoughts at this point may reason thus: We are to be persuaded that it is a result and effect of the eternal election that we Christians believe the Gospel, that we have become the children of God by faith, and have been sealed with the Holy Spirit who keeps us from falling away. It follows, then, that, if others do not believe the Gospel, or fall away from faith, and are finally lost, the eternal background is lacking in their case; God, in electing, has passed them by. If God had elected them, they would

also believe and be saved. It is reason in its rude and carnal state which draws such conclusions, and with dirty hands manipulates and maltreats divine mysteries. Passages of Scripture, like Eph. 1, which treat of the election of grace, do not offer the slightest foothold for such reflections; they speak only of the election of grace, of the eternal divine decree which has for its objects the elect children of God, and they do not even remotely point to some decree of God, or to some omission on the part of God, which might be considered the *causa adaequata* of unbelief and of the damnation of many who are lost. And in other places Scripture teaches expressly that unbelief, defection, damnation have their cause in man himself, are incurred by man's own guilt, and that God has neglected or omitted no effort to save even those who will not be saved.

2) True, a discrepancy remains to our reasonable view of the matter between the statements of Scripture regarding the cause of salvation and the cause of damnation, inasmuch as Scripture ascribes the former to God alone, the latter to man alone. To our reasonable view a discrepancy remains between the particular election of grace and the universal gracious will of God; but this discrepancy is not *contradictio in adjecto*, since the election of grace and the gracious will of God are essentially different concepts. Our reason is ever inclined to draw this inference that those who are finally saved did not resist the Word and Spirit of God as determinedly as others, or that God did not will the salvation of those who are finally lost as earnestly as He willed the salvation of the elect. Every attempt to logically compose this difference leads either to Calvinism or synergism. As far as our salvation, and our need of salvation, is concerned, it is sufficient if we hold, without an attempt at curtailment, both sides of the truth, and leave it to God to conciliate this difference. True theology halts at the limits of the divine revelation.

Verily, a Christian who meditates on the grace of God, —

2) Footnote in the original.

also the eternal grace, — which has been bestowed on him, will not permit his look into the abyss of the divine mercy to become dimmed and obscured by useless questions and musings by which neither he nor others are profited. He will, rather, thank God for the salvation which has been brought to him, and he will leave God to do and deal with others as He sees fit.

There is, indeed, a pertinent question that may be raised as regards the salvation or damnation of men. There is a pertinent question that concerns the fate of our fellowmen. The question which is of primary importance, and most readily suggests itself, is concerning the salvation of our own soul, our standing with God, our relation to God, and God's relation to us. When facing God, we are not concerned about the rest and their relation to Him. But a person who is concerned about the salvation of his own soul seriously considers the salvation of his fellowmen after his own affairs with God have been adjusted. And when we have to do with men who do not know the way of peace, we do not speak to them of the election of grace and do not speculate about election or non-election. A missionary, every Christian, has a call to do mission work; he has something better to engage him than unprofitable questions on which he may speculate without ever solving them. We speak to the lost children whom we would like to save of Jesus Christ, the Savior of all men, also of the chiefest sinners. We assure them in the name of God that God would have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his evil way and live. Repent, therefore, and believe the Gospel! Moreover, we know that these words have the power to convert sinners and to soften hard hearts. And if a person absolutely will not hear us, we declare to him, It is your own fault, if you are lost; you do not deem yourself worthy of eternal life. This earnest warning and reproof may cause him to reflect and reconsider his attitude before it is too late. Those, now, who are struck and won over by such pleading, warning, and reproof we greet as brethren elect with us, and rejoice over

the increase which the household of God of which we are members has experienced through their return. Hence, the election of grace, and faith in our eternal election, do not hinder us in carrying out the duty which we owe to our neighbor, in executing our Christian calling on earth. The comfort derived from the election of grace, our assurance of salvation, is no reason why we should be inactive and resign ourselves to idle security. On the contrary, any person who for his part is certain of salvation, who believes with his whole heart that God has elected him unto salvation before the foundation of the world, will employ every day of his life, and all his strength, in aiding others to obtain salvation. The election of grace enables us to rightly understand what the grace of God is; and the more firmly we become grounded in the grace of God and in our knowledge of divine grace, the more able, proficient, and willing we become to praise and commend the grace of God to others and to proclaim to our fellowmen the universal gracious will of God.
