

Introduction

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures.

(Luke 24:27)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DOCTRINES OF ELECTION AND ATONEMENT is key to understanding the Christian faith, and the person and saving work of Jesus Christ. However, despite their centrality, these doctrines are not undisputed in the history of the Church, nor is there a unanimous view regarding the Church's teaching of them.

I. The Pastoral Motivations of this Study and the Nature of the Problem

The teaching and preaching of the cross has always played a central role in the life and growth of the Church. The question 'Am I one of the elect?' strikes at the heart of the issue of personal salvation and captures the essence of what it means to be a human being made in the image of God. However, when it comes to the issues of *how* Jesus achieved salvation and *who* gains from his death ('Who did Christ die for?') believers disagree amongst themselves, as do academics. Questions such as 'What do these doctrines say?' 'What is their biblical justification?' 'What is their relationship?' and 'What do they mean to me?' are often raised by scholars, clergy, and laity alike.

The doctrine of election (or rather, the concept of predestination) has always been a point of disagreement in the history of the Church from the Reformation onwards. Those who espouse a limited atonement must wrestle with the implication of the Calvinist theory of double predestination, that a God who loves all humankind predestines some of his creatures to hell. On the other hand, those who espouse a universal atonement must explain the

2 Election, Atonement, and the Holy Spirit

apparently clear statements by Jesus in the Gospels that, for some, hell and the “gnashing of teeth”¹ will be a reality.

These two ways of viewing the doctrine of election are linked with two particular views on the atonement: rather than asking ‘Why or for whom did Jesus die?’ a more specific question is raised—‘Did Jesus die for the sins of the entire world or only for the sins of certain chosen individuals?’ This is the question of universal or limited atonement. The questions of election and atonement thus seem to be very closely related to each other and are in fact interdependent.

The doctrine of double predestination is linked with limited atonement and the doctrine of universal election with universal salvation (universalism). The argument is as follows: if Christ died for the sins of the entire world then it logically follows that all people must be saved. Many people seem to be content with this answer. God loves the whole world—the Bible even indicates that God wants all to be saved (see 1 Tim 2:4). So, if God loves the whole world, Christ must surely have died for the sins of the whole world and hence all are saved. Others, however, question this, saying that this is not in accord with the New Testament account of the afterlife. Since, they argue, the Bible clearly talks about a punishment of the sinner in hell, then Christ can only have died for the sins of the elect. Only those people who were predestined for heaven are the ones for whom Jesus bore the sins on the cross. Otherwise the cross would be rendered insufficient (because, as they argue, some people do go to hell) and the logical conclusion of this would be that God wanted to save all people but was defeated in his objective, which seems an absurd proposition. They therefore argue for a ‘limited atonement,’ a doctrine that explains that on the cross Christ bore the sins only of the elect. In this way they try to safeguard the 100 percent effectiveness of the cross. They argue that although this does not indicate any limitation of the infinite value and power of Christ’s atonement, nevertheless “while the value of the atonement was sufficient to save all mankind, it was efficient to save only the elect.”² All the sins Jesus bore were for those who would definitely go to heaven and thus none of his sin bearing was in vain.

2. The Task of the Study

This book is tasked with resolving the logical problem of the relationship between election and atonement. In doing so, three principal themes will

1. Matt 8:12; 13:42; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30 and Luke 13:28.
2. Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 152.

emerge: (1) sin bearing; (2) the relationship between God's being *ad intra* and God's works *ad extra* (the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity); and (3) divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

1. Those understandings of election and atonement that advance double predestination or universalism would benefit from a fresh exegesis on cultic Old Testament texts. I seek to demonstrate that these understandings both rest on a false premise, that is, a wrong understanding of sin bearing. Following Barth's typological approach but not his conclusions, it will be shown that Christ did not bear sins in the way the Azazel-goat did (by bearing them upon itself and thus taking divine punishment). Instead, we will see that Christ was a sin offering and did not, therefore, bear sin on the cross. This understanding will offer a doctrine of universal atonement that frees the doctrine of limited atonement from its otherwise logical conclusion, that some of the sins that Christ bore on the cross were borne in vain. I will show that it is possible to argue for a universal atonement (Christ died for the entire world) without it logically having to conclude with a universal salvation (not all are saved) and that it is possible to take seriously the passages about God desiring all of humanity to be saved without rejecting the passages about the judgment upon sinners.

2. The dissatisfaction many people have with certain atonement models raises questions such as 'How can a loving God pour out his wrath upon the sinless Jesus?' and 'How can a loving Father punish his Son?' In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). If Jesus in *person* reveals the Father then his *actions* must unveil the being-in-act of the veiled God. Therefore, the immanent and economic Trinity must be congruent, and God's being *ad intra* must match his works *ad extra*. This raises the questions of how we should interpret the death of Jesus in history and what this reveals about the nature of God. This book asks how God is being revealed through his being and actions and will demonstrate that the death of Jesus on the cross must be seen as God's most loving act. It is on the cross that the love of the Father for humanity is most fully revealed as that of the *Deus pro nobis*.

3. My re-examination of the relationship between election and atonement, in relation to Christ's obedience and suffering and his cross and resurrection,³ seeks to emphasize both divine sovereignty and human

3. Richard McLauchlan, "Poems from Holy Saturday," writes "that any account of the Christian narrative that cancels or forgets the suffering of the Passion is a false one," 96. He highlights the importance of Holy Saturday as a vantage point from which these sufferings may be appropriately viewed. Drawing on the work of Alan E. Lewis, McLauchlan claims that any account of the Christian three day Passion narrative, which is too keen to read the story solely from the perspective of Easter Sunday runs

4 Election, Atonement, and the Holy Spirit

responsibility. This examination looks to avoid falling into the extremes of either limited atonement or universalism. By distinguishing between a penultimate and ultimate Word of God, one risks creating another kind of a *Deus absconditus*, which is what Karl Barth so fervently tried to avoid and correct in his reading of Calvin. Though God has to have the final word in salvation, I shall seek to show that the final decision over humanity is seen on the cross, in the *Deus revelatus*. God is love, and human responsibility demands a corresponding human decision in faith and obedience, to accept the offer achieved by Christ in order to participate in the triune God by the mediated presence of the Spirit.

3. The Method of Study

Our primary dialogue partner in this book is Karl Barth. Although not always agreeing with Barth and at places challenging some of his biblical interpretations, this book engages with his *Church Dogmatics* (hereafter *CD*) in order to reflect on the doctrines of election and atonement. It looks at how these doctrines appear in the *CD* and examines them systematically and exegetically. For Barth, the doctrine of election is the “sum of the Gospel”—it reveals God’s love for humanity and in this way, reveals *who* God is.⁴ In addition, the doctrine of atonement tells us *what* God does, the outcome of God’s love for humanity, since “in his works He is Himself revealed as the One He is.”⁵ What Barth is essentially describing is the unity of Christ’s person (being) and work (activity) and he therefore sees the doctrines of election and atonement as intimately related.

Barth’s re-working of the doctrine of election is considered to be one of the most important innovations in twentieth-century theology. However, as Bruce McCormack has argued, in Barth’s theology the doctrine of election has replaced the traditional Protestant notion of double imputation and because of this, forensicism has become “the frame of reference that

the risk of a ‘cheap triumphalism’ which neglects the terrible events which preceded this day of joy. Although Christ’s suffering is central to the doctrine of atonement in this study, I have chosen to highlight the relation between the doctrines of election and atonement, focusing in on the cross and resurrection. However, we ought not to forget the importance of the silent second day of the Christian *Triduum*, and the reader should keep this in mind as we proceed through this study. For further insights on this important day between these two events see von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord Vol. VII*, esp. pp. 228–35; *The Von Balthasar Reader*, esp. pp. 148ff; and *Mysterium Paschale*, esp. ch. 4, and Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*.

4. *CD* II/2, 3.

5. *CD* II/1, 260.

is basic to the whole of his soteriology.⁶ Barth's doctrine of the atonement (expressed predominantly through judicial terminology) is therefore more forensic than the traditional understanding due to the character and role of his doctrine of election. Barth was responsible for initiating a unique christological revision in theology and his *CD* opened up a new understanding of the doctrine of election, avoiding the dilemma of the 'horrible decree' of God selecting some people for heaven and others for hell. Nevertheless, I seek to show that Barth did not draw some of the implications of his ideas about election and atonement through to their logical conclusions.

Barth understands exegesis to be superordinate [*vorgeordnet*] to dogmatics and he therefore emphasizes that "*die Exegese, die Norm ist für die Dogmatik.*"⁷ This study is grounded in Barth's own insistence that "*Dogmatik daher beständig durch die Exegese zu korrigieren [ist]*"⁸ and takes up Barth's challenge in the small-print of §35.2, where he encourages his readers to test his systematic thought through a close engagement with his exegesis rather than simply criticizing his doctrinal claims.⁹ I will argue that Barth's version of forensicism creates a number of problems. This book will deal with these problems with particular reference to *CD* II/2 and *CD* IV/1, and offer an alternative exegesis of cultic texts (Lev 14 and 16) to test Barth's claims. While many commentators acknowledge Barth's innovation in this area, few have attempted to offer a correction "from within" Barth by using his own method.¹⁰ This book aims to build upon Barth's method and apply a 'correction' to some of his thought, working through and moving beyond Barth. These exegetical adjustments to his doctrine of atonement will be predominately developed with the help of the atonement theory of the Tübingen School and the interpretation of Jewish scholars of these cultic texts. This re-working of Barth's thought will seek to demonstrate that the 'sum of the Gospel' does not merely comprise the doctrine of election but requires election to be taken *together* with the doctrine of atonement; both doctrines communicate that from eternity and in history God is the loving *deus pro nobis*.

Barth's *CD* has been compared to a musical composition resting on the *leitmotif* of the story of the God-man Jesus Christ and the covenantal fellowship between God and humanity in and through his atoning work on the cross. Hans Urs von Balthasar famously likened Karl Barth's entire *CD* to

6. McCormack, "Justitia Aliena," 192.

7. Barth, "II. Dogmatik und Exegese," 153.

8. *Ibid.*

9. See *CD* II/2, 366.

10. Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, 93.

6 Election, Atonement, and the Holy Spirit

a theological symphony.¹¹ Mirroring much eighteenth-century symphonic structure, the *Church Dogmatics* is permeated by the binary of God's *Yes* and God's *No*. In fact, Barth's entire doctrine of election can be seen to follow a sonata form of introduction, exposition, development and recapitulation:¹² §32 introduces the doctrine of election; §33 gives an exposition of the basic theme and content of the doctrine in a binary structure, election (Dur/major) and rejection (Moll/minor) in Jesus Christ; §34 develops this further with the help of new examples (Israel and Church); and §35 recapitulates this in the light of what has already been said about the binary theme of election and rejection with regards the individual. Where the composer uses "counterpoint, changes in harmony, key, rhythm to keep the movement interesting, the theological composer uses references to the same theme in older treatments, arguments with contemporaries, surprising implications, ethical consequences, all to the same end, developing the themes while sustaining interest."¹³ This is particularly evident in the exegetical small-print of §34 and §35. Barth's doctrine of reconciliation shows a similar binary structure, though this might initially seem elusive due to the length and detail of the section in the *CD* dealing with this. §57–58 introduce the doctrine; §59–63 (*CD IV/1*) and §64–68 (*CD IV/2*) represent a long section in which exposition (humiliation and exaltation) and development (Holy Spirit and the community) are intertwined; and finally §69–73 (*CD IV/3*) brings together and recapitulates the basic themes of humiliation and exaltation from the middle perspective of the Mediator, united in Jesus Christ.

Like Schubert's eighth symphony, however, Barth's *CD* remains 'unfinished': at Barth's death only a fragment of *CD IV/4* had been published and the planned final volume on redemption was never written.¹⁴ One might suppose that these musical parallels in structure and thematic development might be accidental. However, Barth's love for classical music, in particular Mozart, is well documented, and a portrait of the Austrian composer still hangs in his study at the same level as a portrait of the Genevan theologian, Calvin. Von Balthasar suggests that not only was Mozart's music beloved by Barth, but that it also informed his theology and shaped the style of the *CD*. "One will do well to keep in mind Mozart's melodies while reading Barth's *Dogmatics* and Mozart's basic style when searching for Barth's basic intention. It is in this way that one should read, for example, those pieces

11. See von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 59.

12. See Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance*, 112.

13. Gill, "Barth and Mozart," 409.

14. See *CD IV/4*, Preface.

that seem like the powerful finale of a symphony: the end of Barth's doctrine of election."¹⁵

4. An Outline of the Study

As mentioned earlier, the overall task of this book is to give an exposition of Barth's doctrines of election and atonement and to investigate the systematic implications of his exegetical justification of the doctrines, focusing particular attention on Barth's typological exegesis. I shall challenge Barth's exegesis and seek to show that (in contrast to Barth) a cultic rather than a forensic interpretation should be emphasized when looking at the death of Christ. The structure of the argument has a circular (or rather a chiasmic) movement, taking the reader from God's being in eternity to his action in history, and back to eternity. It is divided into five chapters:

Chapter 1 begins by highlighting the important influence of Pierre Maury on Barth's thinking on election, a christocentric approach which Barth incorporates into his 'system,' making it part of his own theological method. After dealing with the pastoral concerns about election in theologies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the personal questions of salvation and Barth's negation of a *decretum absolutum*, the chapter then shows how Barth has relocated the doctrine of election within the doctrine of God, highlighting his actualistic ontology. Before giving an exposition of Barth's doctrine of election, we discuss the basis of the doctrine, God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. There follows an examination of Barth's use and radical transformation of Calvin's doctrine of double predestination in *CD II/2*. Barth's christological shift is to make Jesus both the electing God and the elected human being, the subject as well as the object of election. This exemplifies the binary structure seen in God's *Yes* and *No*, the positive election and negative rejection on the cross, and reveals the underlying question of this book: whether Jesus can be both the elect and rejected of God. The implications of Barth's view of election, and further criticism of this view, will be discussed and answered in the subsequent chapters. The following section gives an exposition of Barth's typological exegesis of the cultic texts of Leviticus 14 and 16 found in the small-print of §35, and emphasizes that Barth's exegesis—in which he identifies all four animals as a type of Christ, symbolizing his election and rejection—is in line with the exegesis of some of the Church Fathers. The chapter ends with Barth's challenge to the reader to surpass his argument.

15. Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 28.

Chapter 2 takes up Barth's exegetical challenge and applies it to his doctrine of election, proposing a correction from within using Barth's own methodology, thus correcting Barth with Barth. Here the concept of *Existenzstellvertretung* (a vicarious offering of one's life as an equivalent substitution for the forfeited life of another) is used as a paradigm to explain the significance of cultic atonement and to provide a plumb line to assist us in our engagement with Barth. After looking at the verb *kipper*, the sacrificial rites, the role of the blood and the Day of Atonement in which the various rituals converge, the notion of sin removal is explicated. Our conclusion is that it is not the first goat, the sin offering (*hattā't*), that bears sin, but only the second goat (for Azazel) that bears the iniquities of Israel into the wilderness. Chapter 2 then revisits Barth's typological exegesis and gives an explanation as to why Jesus should only be identified with the first goat, the sin offering, and therefore should be seen solely as the elect and not the rejected. We will see that this has further implications for Barth's dialectical method.

Chapter 3 discusses themes that arise in *CD III*—the covenant, humanity and *das Nichtige*—and uses them as three lenses to focus our investigation upon specific questions. The covenant is discussed because chapter 4 will argue that the goal of the atonement is the re-establishing of the covenantal fellowship with God, and thus it will challenge the notion of Jesus being a covenant-breaker. An examination of Barth's treatment of humanity is important because this will address questions raised in previous chapters regarding Christ's human nature in relation to humanity's human nature. It will also help to understand the death of Christ with regard to his hypostatic union, which will be discussed in chapter 4. In §50, where Barth deals with *das Nichtige*, we read about Barth's ontology, of being and non-being, and the dialectic of *Yes* and *No*. Here Barth gives further insights into his understanding of the negative aspect of election, the cross. All the material discussed and all the questions raised in this chapter will be considered in the next. However, rather than taking these questions consecutively, they will there be used as focal points to challenge Barth's view of atonement.

Chapter 4 begins with a short exposition of the view of the atonement taken by the early Church and an evaluation of the *Christus Victor* and Christ as Victim models. It then highlights Barth's Reformed background to the doctrine of atonement and identifies some problematic aspects in Calvin's view of this doctrine. Next, Barth's doctrine of the atonement in *CD IV/1*, including his understanding of the Anselmian question *Cur Deus Homo?*, is expounded with special emphasis on §59.2 'The Judge Judged in Our Place.' We will discuss the forensic fourfold *pro nobis* (including Barth's small-print, where he spells out his ideas on this topic in cultic terms). Our

conclusion will be that a cultic understanding of the atonement should be preferred over a forensic one. After a section on the accurate understanding of sin and sin removal, in which we conclude that Jesus did not *bear* sin, but conquered it on the cross, the last section of chapter 4 contrasts Barth's view of the atonement with the concept of *Existenzstellvertretung*; I seek to show that 2 Corinthians 5:21 is in fact not "unbearable," as Barth claims, but that Christ's death on the cross reveals not only that God is love, but also that God's action is love. Hence our conclusion is that Jesus is not punished on the cross by bearing sin and enduring the wrath of the Father, but that as the active Judge he himself condemns sin in the flesh. Therefore the atonement should not be seen as a punishment or abandonment of the Son by the Father, but as a Trinitarian event in which Father and Son, rather than being opposed to one another, work perichoretically together for the salvation of humanity.

Chapter 5 finishes with concluding thoughts on the doctrines of election and atonement and the Holy Spirit's role in Christ's saving work on the cross. Since the outcome of our exegesis is that Jesus is only the elect and not the rejected, we will discuss the questions of rejection and *apokatastasis* at the end of the book, together with the pastoral implications of Barth's risking the creation of a new *Deus absconditus*. Furthermore, we will discuss the relationship between the notion of bearing sin and the Spirit's role in the atonement, and how humanity is given a new immortal resurrection body to fellowship with God. The work of the previous chapters highlighted the fact that God has spoken only a *Yes* over Jesus Christ, the only true elect, and that rejection is spoken against sin *through* Christ (and we therefore concluded that Christ does not bear sin). The final section of chapter 5 will then explore the consequences of those who do not make a corresponding human decision by faith and accept Christ's saving work but reject the objective work of Christ. The questions that we are seeking to answer are: how does humanity participate in the subjective work of the eternal Spirit, and which individuals are involved in this?

The conclusion will seek to demonstrate that since Jesus Christ is not the passive 'Judge Judged in Our Place' but the active 'Judge Judging' sin and thus rejection is not the Father's *No* over against the Son, but the *No* of the Father through the obedient Son against sin, that this understanding gives a fuller Trinitarian understanding of the atonement, more in harmony with the understanding of a corresponding work of immanent and economic Trinity.