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Introduction

ACCORDING TO ITS ORIGIN, election denotes the epitome of divine favor: the bestowing of God's grace initially on the Israelites. As a result of a shift in perspective from God's determining will for a nation in this world to his foreordination of the eschatological fate of individuals election came to be perceived as a dark enigma, a decree associated with the hidden God even before creation. Now predestination was interpreted in the context of a neutral stocktaking that positioned believers and non-believers side by side and tried to explain the empirical observation that some have faith and others do not by way of election or non-election. At that stage, the relationship between God and human beings came to be seen as a causal relationship according to the motto "nothing happens without a reason."

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) was the first Western theologian to systematize predestination and present it as a doctrine. He employed the notion of omnipotent divine causality to explain the principle of election that God elects whom he wants to elect. Christian mainstream has generally followed Augustine's understanding of predestination as divine foreordination that separates human beings into those that will ultimately be saved and those that will not. Augustine himself stopped short of endorsing the notion of foreordained perdition, and instead referred to the reprobate as those passed over by election. A millennium later, the two major exponents of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564) then unequivocally endorsed double predestination: the divine decree to both salvation and perdition.

During the Reformation, the notion of predestination served as reassurance for the struggling and persecuted Protestant congregations that their very existence was due to a divine decree, and not to human

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decisions, and that, as a consequence, human impotence would be unable to cause it to fail. The Reformed tradition then tended to adhere to Calvin's original teaching, albeit with some variations and indeed exceptions, whereas the Lutheran mainstream¹ moved away from Luther's original interpretation to a diametrically opposed position. Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) introduced the humanist ideal into the debate. His emphasis on free will and ethical improvement eventually drove a wedge between those who followed Luther's original teaching and those who sided with Melanchthon. The former retained Luther's focus on the divine decree and the irresistibility of grace, whereas the latter focused on human beings, on freedom of the will, and on personal responsibility. As a result, the strict causal relationship between God and human beings, which Luther had insisted on, was weakened to make room for the power of the human will to accept or reject faith. Lutheran orthodoxy favored Melanchthon's understanding and came to champion a single divine decree to salvation.

In the early nineteenth century, the Reformed theologian Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834) decisively reworked the theory of predestination. He championed the notion of universal restoration, yet he was careful to propound it as a proper doctrine of faith. Upholding the causal relationship between God and human beings endorsed by Luther and by the Calvinists, he nevertheless moved away from the traditional perspective that ultimately distinguishes the elect from the reprobate. His solution to the ancient dilemma of the separation into two groups consisted in explaining that separation as a temporary state of development. Allowing for the *post mortem* working of grace, he argued that the kingdom of God would be completed eschatologically through the universal restoration of all human beings.

This study explores the historical and ecumenical situation in which Schleiermacher's views on predestination took shape. It provides a close examination of the confessional and doctrinal sources Schleiermacher employed and a detailed discussion of his major texts on predestination. It attempts a critical assessment of these works and locates Schleiermacher's interpretation in its systematic-theological context as well as in the universalist tradition. As such, it focuses on original sources and contemporary responses to Schleiermacher's position. No evaluation of the critique of Schleiermacher's interpretation of predestination by the representatives of neo-orthodoxy, such as Emil Brunner, or of dialectical theology, in

1. There were variations and exceptions in the Lutheran tradition as well.

particular Karl Barth,² is attempted here. Instead, this study is intended to provide a critical assessment of Schleiermacher's interpretation of predestination in its original context.

The first section of this study explores the historical background as well as the theological, ecumenical, and political situation in which Schleiermacher's thinking on predestination took shape. To this end, it first provides an overview of the confessional developments in Western Europe from the Reformation to the early seventeenth century. It then focuses on Schleiermacher's part in the negotiations and debates that brought about the Prussian Church Union of 1817, one of the first unions of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in the German states. Predestination was one of the issues that had traditionally separated the two Protestant Churches. Schleiermacher argued in favor of preserving doctrinal differences and debating them in academic circles while insisting that such differences should simply be ignored for practical purposes such as joint communion celebrations. He thus had to defend his position on two fronts: against those who opposed any kind of church union and against those who demanded that a doctrinal agreement between Lutherans and Reformed, if not in fact a unitary confession, precede any implementation of a church union. To illustrate those positions, this study analyzes the published correspondence between Schleiermacher and two leading Lutheran theologians, the anti-unionist Christoph Friedrich von Ammon (1766–1850) and the pro-unionist Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider (1776–1848), who advocated doctrinal clarification in advance of union negotiations.

Against this background, the second section of this study examines Schleiermacher's development of the theory of election. It pays particular attention to the confessional and doctrinal texts he cited and referenced as his sources in his main publications on election, and to the treatment and positioning of the theory of predestination in those texts. Historical and biographical details regarding the symbolic books and their authors are provided to contextualize those sources.

This study then discusses Schleiermacher's two main texts on predestination: the essay "On the Doctrine of Election," first published in 1819, and the relevant propositions in the second edition of 1830 of his major dogmatics, *Christian Faith*. The essay, Schleiermacher's first publication on a dogmatic subject, was a direct response to a publication

2. For an exemplary comparison of Schleiermacher's and Barth's understanding, see most recently Matthias Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election*, 2006.

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by Bretschneider. In it, Schleiermacher sets out to uphold the Calvinist doctrine against the Lutheran orthodox one, explicitly declaring himself a defender of Calvin in this matter. In about 30,000 words, he argued for the stringency of the Calvinist position while striving to counter the Lutherans' concerns regarding foreordained perdition. In a volte-face, he then reconceptualized predestination as universal restoration and proceeded to advocate that interpretation, hoping that this compromise would prove to be attractive to both Lutherans and Reformed. The analysis of Schleiermacher's essay is followed by a synopsis of different aspects of predestination held by Calvinists, Lutherans, and Schleiermacher in form of a table of comparison. An examination of the reception of Schleiermacher's essay both by his contemporaries and by some recent reviewers concludes that chapter.

Next, the propositions relating to election in Schleiermacher's main theological work, *Christian Faith*, and their position within the structure of that work as a whole are considered. Here, within a purely systematic-theological context and unconstrained by issues surrounding the Prussian Church Union, Schleiermacher still advocates the ultimate election of all to salvation, but he is reluctant to posit universal restoration as a proper doctrine. His discussion of election is embedded within the doctrine of pneumatology, which, in turn, constitutes part of the doctrine of ecclesiology.

The last chapter in Part II examines a number of Schleiermacher's sermons with a view to a comparison of his homiletic with his doctrinal output on election. The series of homilies he preached on Acts in 1820 provide the focus for discussion, because they were closest to his essay on election not only with regard to subject matter but also in terms of their time of production. A number of other relevant sermons, in particular but not exclusively on Acts, are also considered.

The last section of this study considers Schleiermacher's account of election in its systematic context. It first explores his treatment and positioning of those doctrines that are most closely related to predestination: providence, hamartiology, soteriology, and eschatology, and their relation to predestination. Schleiermacher's understanding of divine providence, in which human choices are imbedded in divine causality, his interpretation of the original state of perfection and his rejection of the fall, his emphasis on the role of Christ in election and redemption, and his exposition of the consummation of the church all bear direct relevance to his universalist theory of election. This discussion is followed by an account of the notion

of universalism, its difficulties and advantages compared to particularist versions of predestination, and an attempt to position Schleiermacher in a typology of universalism.

The study closes with an evaluation of Schleiermacher's break with the traditional understanding of particular election. Against the Lutherans, he retained the Calvinist notion of an unconditional decree. In this context, a number of contemporary Lutheran publications are examined to clarify the Lutherans reservations and concerns regarding the Reformed doctrine of double predestination, whose unease is explained by their different understanding of human beings before God, or theological anthropology. Against the Reformed tradition, Schleiermacher dismisses the double decree as incompatible with Christian pious self-consciousness. His account of predestination posits a single, divine, all-encompassing decree to the creation and redemption of the entire human race.

Schleiermacher's family background was Reformed, he was ordained into the German Reformed Church and employed explicitly as a Reformed preacher and teacher. However, the German Reformed Church was never strictly Calvinist, and in some ways, for instance with regard to church government, it was closer to Lutheranism than to Calvinism. The German Reformed never endorsed the doctrine of double predestination. Their main symbolic book, the *Heidelberg Catechism* of 1563, makes no mention of the doctrine of predestination, and therefore plays no part in Schleiermacher's publications on the subject. One of the questions underpinning this study relates to Schleiermacher's outspoken endorsement of the Calvinist stance in a theological and political debate in which Calvinism was not even at stake, and the question for whom he actually spoke. A related issue is the success or otherwise of his attempt to convince his opponents of the validity of universal restoration.

This study makes use of a variety of texts in English, German and Latin; where translations into English were available I have employed them and referenced the translators accordingly. All other translations are my own; they are not particularly marked.

I use the term "Protestant" throughout to convey the German term *evangelisch*, which is coterminous with *protestantisch*. This choice is informed solely by the intention to avoid the ambiguity of the English term "evangelical," which has the additional connotation of "fundamentalist." A similar ambiguity does not exist in German, which distinguishes between the terms *evangelisch* and *evangelikal*.