

Predestination of the Elect of God

by Dr. Francis Turretin

Ought predestination *to be* publicly taught and preached? We affirm.

Some of the brethren of France in the time of Augustine started this question. Since, in his books against the Pelagians, he had inserted and inculcated many things concerning predestination, so as in this way to defend the truth against their impious doctrines, many were disturbed by it (as appears from the two letters of Prosper, a disciple of Augustine, and of Hilary, the presbyter*; cf. "Letters 225 and 226 to Augustine" [FC 32:119-29 and 129-391]). The reason was not that they judged it to be at all false, but because they thought the preaching of it was dangerous and invidious, better to be suppressed than brought into prominence.

There are some of the same opinion at the present day. Wearied with the contentions arising from this doctrine in almost every age, they think that it is best for the peace of the church and the tranquility of conscience to let these questions alone (since by them scruples are suggested and doubts generated which are calculated to weaken the faith of the weak and to drive men to desperation or into carnal security). But this opinion is more honest than true and cannot be readily received by those who have known the richest fruits of consolation and sanctification to redound to believers from this doctrine properly understood. Hence we think that this doctrine should be neither wholly suppressed from a preposterous modesty nor curiously pried into by a rash presumption.

Rather it should be taught soberly and prudently from the word of God so that two dangerous rocks may be avoided: on the one hand, that of "affected ignorance" which wishes to see nothing and blinds itself purposely in things revealed; on the other hand, that of "unwarrantable curiosity" which busies itself to see and understand everything even in mysteries. They strike upon the first who (sinning in defect) think that we should abstain from the proposition of this doctrine; and upon the latter who (sinning in excess) wish to make everything in this mystery scrupulously accurate (exonychizein) and hold that nothing should be left undiscovered (anexereunifton) in it. Against both, we maintain (with the orthodox) that predestination can be taught with profit, provided this is done soberly from the word of God.

The reasons are (1) Christ and the apostles frequently taught it (as appears from the Gospel, Matthew 11:20, 25; 13:11; 25:34; Luke 10:20; 12:32; John 8:47; 15:16 and in other places; and from the epistles of Paul (the whole of Rom. 9 and Rom. 8:29, 30; Eph. 1:4, 5; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Thess. 5:9; 2 Thess. 2:13). Nor otherwise do Peter, James and John express themselves who speak repeatedly of this mystery whenever occasion offered. Now if it was proper for them to teach it, why is it not proper for us to learn it? Why should God teach what would have been better (arrifton) unspoken (ameinon)? Why did he wish to proclaim those things which it would be better not to know? Do we wish to be more prudent than God or to prescribe rules to him?

(2) It is one of the primary gospel doctrines a foundations of our faith. It cannot be ignored without great injury to the church and to believers. For it is the fountain of our gratitude to God, the root of humility, the foundation and most firm anchor of confidence in all temptations, the fulcrum of the sweetest consolation and the most powerful spur (incitamentum) to piety and holiness.

(3) The importunity of the adversaries (who have corrupted this primary head of faith by deadly errors and infamous calumnies which they are accustomed to heap upon our doctrine) imposes upon us the necessity of handling it so that the truth may be fairly exhibited and freed from the most false and iniquitous criminations of evilly disposed men. As if we introduced a fatal and

Stoical necessity; as if we would extinguish all religion in the minds of men by it, to soothe them on the bed of security and profanity or hurl them into the abyss of despair; as if we made God cruel, hypocritical and the author of sin-I shudder to relate it. Now as all these things are perfectly false, they ought unquestionably to be refuted by a sober and healthy exhibition doctrine from the word of God.

Although wicked men often abuse this doctrine (improperly understood), its lawful use towards the pious ought not therefore to be denied (unless we wish to have more regard for wicked men than believers). (2) If, on account of the abuse of some persons, we should abstain from the proposition of this mystery, we must equally abstain from most of the mysteries of the Christian religion which the wicked abuse or laugh at and satirize (such as the mystery of the Trinity, the incarnation, the resurrection and the like). (3) The calumnies launched against the doctrine of Paul by the false apostles could not cause him to suppress it; yea, he thoroughly discussed it in his inspired way so that he might shut the mouths of adversaries. Why then should we refrain from its presentation? Let us only follow in the footsteps of Paul and, with him, speak and be silent.

If some abuse this doctrine either to licentiousness or to desperation, this happens not perse from the doctrine itself, but accidentally, from the vice of men who most wickedly wrest it to their own destruction. Indeed there is no doctrine from which more powerful incitements to piety can be drawn and richer streams of confidence and consolation flow (as will be seen in the proper place).

The mystery of predestination is too sublime to be comprehended by us as to the why (*to diod*) (as he is rash who would attempt to find out or to assign the reasons and the causes of it). But this does not hinder it from being taught in Scripture as to the fact (*to hoti*) and from being firmly held by us. To things therefore must be distinguished here: the one, what God has revealed in his word; the other, what he has concealed. The former we cannot despise (unless rashly). "The secret things," says Scripture, 'belong unto God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children' (Dr. 29:29). To neglect things revealed argues ingratitude, but to search into things concealed argues pride. "We must not therefore deny what is plain because we cannot comprehend what is hidden," as Augustine expresses it (On *the Gift of Perseverance* 37 [NPNF1, 5:540; PL 45.10161]).

The fathers before Augustine spoke more sparingly concerning this mystery not because they judged it best to ignore it, but because there was no occasion presented for discussing it more largely (the Pelagian heresy not having as yet sprung up). Indeed it is true that they sometimes expressed themselves without sufficient caution. Nevertheless Augustine (On *the Gift of Perseverance*) proves that they did not pass over this truth in utter silence (for who could be ignorant of that which is so clearly set forth in sacred Scriptures?) –the testimony of Abrose, Cyprian and Gregory Nazianzus being adduced for this purpose.

While we think that predestination should be taught, we do not further suppose that human curiosity should be enlarged, but believe there is need here of be taught, but believe there is a need here for great sobriety and prudence; both that we may remain within the bounds prescribed by Scripture, not endeavoring to be wise beyond what is written (*par'ho geg-raptai*), and that we may prudently have a regard for the persons, places and times to regulate the proposition of it. For it ought not to be delivered immediately and in the first instance, but gradually and slowly. Nor ought it to be delivered equally as to all its parts, for some ought to be more frequently inculcated as more useful and better suited to the consolation of the pious (as the doctrine of election), but others ought to be handled more sparingly (as reprobation). Nor ought it to be set forth so much to the people in the church as to the initiated (*tois mystais*) in the school. Again, predestination must be considered not so much a priori as a posteriori. Not that we may descend from causes to effects, but ascend from effects to causes. Not that we should curiously unroll "the book of life" in order to see if our names are written therein (which is forbidden to us), but that we should diligently consult "the book of conscience" which we are not only permitted, but also commanded

to do, that we may know whether the seal of God is stamped upon our hearts and whether the fruits of election (viz., faith and repentance) may be found in us (which is the safest way of proceeding to the saving knowledge of that doctrine). In one word, all curious and fruitless questions must be avoided here, and what Paul calls 'foolish and unlearned questions' (*apaidetous zetesis kai aperantous*, 2 Tim. 2:23)-which usually engender strifes and contentions. Our only object should be to increase our faith, not to feed curiosity; to labor for edification, not to strive for our glory.

Question: In what sense are the words 'predestination,' *prognseos*, *ekloges* and *protheseos* used in this mystery?

Since the Scriptures (whose genuine signification throws great light upon the knowledge of the thing itself) use various words in explaining this mystery, we must premise certain things concerning them.

First the word 'predestination' occurs here, and it must not be passed over lightly. For although the word *proorismou* does not exist in the Scriptures, yet the verb

from which it comes is often read (Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29, 30 Ephesians 1:5) Moreover to predestinate (or *proorizein* from the force of the verb) signifies to determine something concerning things before they take place and to direct them to a certain end.

However, it is understood by authors in three ways. (1) More widely for every decree of God about creatures and most especially about intelligent creatures in order to their ultimate end. Thus it is frequently employed by the fathers for providence itself. (2) More specially for the counsel of God concerning men as fallen either to be saved by grace or to be damned by justice (which is commonly called 'election' and 'reprobation'). (3) Most specially for the decree of election, which is called 'the predestination of the saints.' Again according to the latter, it can be taken in two senses (*schesis*): not only for the destination to the end, but particularly for the "destination to the means" (in which sense it is used by Paul when he says that God predestinated those whom he foreknew to be "conformed to the image of his Son," Rom. 8:29, 30). Here it is plain that predestination is distinguished from foreknowledge and refers most especially to the end. Thus after saying that God hath chosen us in Christ, the having predestinated us unto the adoption of children' (*proorisas ian*, Eph. 1:5) to mark the destination of means ordained for obtaining the salvation destined by election.

About this word, moreover, it is asked whether it is to be referred only to election or whether it embraces reprobation also. This controversy was formerly vehemently urged in the matter of Gottschalk in the ninth century, John Erigena Scotus maintaining that it suited election alone (*De Divina Praedestinatione liber** [PL 122.355,440]). On the other hand, Gottschalk, the Lyonians and Remigius, the bishop (in their name), extended it to reprobation. The same question now lies between us and the papists. For the papists (to whom the term reprobation is hateful) contend that it must be used in the first sense. Hence they are accustomed to call reprobates not predestinated, but "foreknown"; and do not subordinate but oppose reprobation to predestination (as Bellarmine, Gregory de Valentia and Pighius, *De libero hominis arbitrio* 8.2 [1642], p. 137). With them even some of the orthodox appear to agree, though not with the same object in view. But we (although willing to confess that the term predestination is according to Scripture usage often restricted to election; yet not only from the proper signification of the word but also from Scripture usage and received custom) that think it is rightly extended to reprobation so as to embrace both parts of the divine counsel (election and reprobation), in which sense it is taken by us here.

The reasons are: (1) the Scripture extends the word *proorizein* to the wicked acts of those reprobates who procured the crucifixion of Christ-"the son of man goeth kata to horismenon" (Luke 22:22; Acts 4:28) Herod and Pontius Pilate did nothing but what the hand of God *proorise* to be done." Nor ought the objection to be made that it does not treat of their reprobation, but of the ordination of the crucifixion to a good end. These things are not to be opposed, but composed. The crucifixion of Christ (which is to us the means of salvation) was to the crucifiers the means of damnation (which depended on the most just decree of God).

Second, the Scripture uses equivalent phrases when it says that certain persons are appointed to wrath (1 Thess. 5:9; 1 Peter 2:8), fitted to destruction (Rom. 9:22), ordained to condemnation (Jude 4), made unto dishonor (Romans 9:21) and for the day of evil (Proverbs 16:4). If reprobation is described in these phrases, why can it not be expressed by the word "predestination"? Third, because the definition of predestination (viz., the ordination of a thing to its end by means before it comes to pass) is no less suitable to reprobation than to election. Fourth, the fathers frequently thus speak: "We confess the elect to life and the predestination of the wicked to death" (Council of Valence, Mansi, 15:4). "He fulfills what he wills, properly using even evil things as if the very best to the damnation of those whom he has justly predestinated to punishment" (Augustine, Enchiridion 26 [100] [FC 3:454; PL 40.2791; cf. also his "Treatise on the Merits and the Forgiveness of Sins," 2.26 [171 [NPNFI, 5:551; CG 21.24 [FC 24:387-941; Fulgentius, Ad Monimum I [PL 65.153-781). "Predestination is twofold: either of the elect to rest or of the reprobate to death" (Isidore of Seville, Sententiarum Libri tres 2.6 [PL 83.6061).

Although in truth predestination is sometimes taken strictly in the Scriptures for the predestination of saints or the election to life, it does not follow that it cannot be used more broadly. Nor if the objects of reprobation and election are opposite are the acts themselves, therefore (on the part of God), mutually opposed to one another. Indeed, they can proceed from the same course acting most freely.

The second word which occurs more frequently is *prognosis*. Paul speaks of it more than once: "whom he did foreknow" (*hous proegno*), Rom. 8:29; "he hath not cast away his people which *proegna*" (Rom. 11:2); and they are called elect "according to foreknowledge" (*kata prognosin*, 1 Peter 1:2). Because the ancient and more modern Pelagians falsely abuse this word to establish the foresight of faith and works, we must observe that *prognosin* can be taken in two ways: either theoretically or practically. In the former way, it is taken for God's simple knowledge of future things, which is called prescience and belongs to the intellect. In the latter, it is taken for the practical love and decree which God formed concerning the salvation of particular persons and pertains to the will. In this sense, knowledge is often put for delight and approbation (Psalm 1:6; John 10:14; 2 Timothy 2:19). Thus *ginoskein* signifies not only to know but also to know and to judge concerning a thing (as the *Plebiscitum* is not the knowledge of the people, but the sentence-from the verb *scisco*, which means "to decree and determine"). Therefore when the Scripture uses the word *prognoseos* in the doctrine of predestination, it is not in the former sense for the bare foreknowledge of God by which he foresaw the faith or works of men. (1) Because by that, He foreknew those also whom he reprobated, while here it treats of the foreknowledge proper to the effect. (2) Bare foreknowledge is not the cause of things, nor does it impose method or order upon them, but finds it out (as happens here in the chain of salvation). (3) Because nothing could be foreseen by God but what he himself had granted and which would so follow predestination as the effect, not indeed precede it as a cause, as will be proved hereafter. But it is taken in the latter sense for "practical foreknowledge" (i.e., the love and election of God) that we may not suppose it to be without reason (alolon), although the reasons of his wisdom may escape us (in which manner Christ is said to have been foreknown [proegnsmenos], i.e., foreordained by God "before the foundation of the world," 1 Pet. 1:20).

Again, in that benevolence and practical foreknowledge of God we distinguish: (1) the love and benevolence with which he pursues us; (2) the decree itself by which he determined to unfold his love to us by the communication of salvation. Hence it happens that prognosis is at one time

taken broader for both (viz., love and election, as in Rom. 8:29 and Rom. 11:2); at another, more strictly for love and favor which is the fountain and foundation of election. Thus Peter speaks of it when he says that believers are "elect according to the foreknowledge" (*kata prognosin*), i.e. the love of God (1 Peter 1:2).

Third, we must explain the word *ekloges* ("election") which now and then occurs, but not always with the same signification. Sometimes it denotes a call to some political or sacred office (as Saul is "elected" [1 Samuel 10:24]; Judas "elected", viz., to the Apostleship, John 6:70). Sometimes it designates an external election and separation of a certain people to the covenant of God (in which sense the people of Israel are said to be elected of God, Deut. 4:37). But here it is taken objectively for the elect themselves (as *ekloge epetychen*- "the election" [i.e., the elect] "hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded," Romans 11:7); or formally for the act of God electing (which is called *ekloge charitos*, Romans 9:11). Again the latter may be considered either in the antecedent decree (as it were from eternity) or in the subsequent execution (as it takes place only in time by calling). Christ refers to this in John 15:16: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you"; and "Ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world" (v. 19). Augustine joins both forms (schesis): "We are elected before the foundation of the world by that predestination in which God foresaw his future things would take place; we are chosen out of the world however by that calling by which God fulfills what he has predestinated" (On the Predestination of the Saints).

Election then by the force of the word is stricter than predestination. For all can be predestinated, but all cannot be elected because he who elects does not take all, but chooses some out of many. The election of some necessarily implies the passing and rejecting of others: "Many are called," said Christ, "but few chosen" (Matthew 20:16); and Paul, "The election hath obtained, and the rest were blinded" (Romans 11:7). Hence Paul uses the verb *heilto* to designate election, which implies the separation of some from others: "God from the beginning *heilto*, i.e., hath taken out and separated you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth: (2 Thess. 2:13).

Fourth, *prothesis* is often used by Paul in the matter of election to denote that this counsel of God is not an empty and inefficacious act of willing, but the constant, determined and immutable purpose of God (Romans 8:28; 9:11; Ephesians 1:11). For the word is of the highest efficacy (as the old grammarians tell us) and is called distinctly by Paul *prothesis tou ta energountos*—"the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Ephesians 1:11). Sometimes it is applied to election as *prothesis kat' eklogen*—"the purpose of God according to election" (Romans 9:11); and we are said "to be predestinated" (*kata prothesin*, Ephesians 1:11). Sometimes it is joined with calling—"who are the called according to his purpose" (*tois kata prothesin kletois*, Romans 8:28). For both election and calling depend and are built upon this purpose of God.

Now although these words are often employed promiscuously, yet they are frequently distinguished; not without reason are they used by the Holy Spirit to denote the various conditions (*scheseis*) of that decree which could not so fitly be explained by a single word. For the decree can be conceived in relation to the principle from which it arises, or to the object about which it is concerned, or to the means by which it is fulfilled. With regard to the former, *protheseos* or *eudokias* (which denotes the counsel and good pleasure of God) is mentioned as the first cause of that work. With regard to the next, it is called *prognosis* or *ekloge* (which is occupied with the separation of certain persons from others unto salvation). With regard to the last, the word *proorismou* is used according to which God prepared the means necessary to the obtainment of salvation. *Prothesis* refers to the end; *prognosis* refers to the objects; *proorismos* to the means; *prodiesis* to the certainty of the event; *prognosis* and *ekloge* to the singleness and distinction of persons; *proorismos* to the order of means. Thus election is certain and immutable by *prothesin*; determinate and definite by *prognosin*; and ordinate by *proorismos*.

These three degrees (if we may so speak to answer to three acts in the temporal execution: for as we will be glorified with the Father, redeemed by the Son and called through the Holy Spirit, so the Father determined from eternity to glorify us with himself. This is *prothesis*. He elected us in his Son. This is prognosis. He predestinated us to grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (who seals the image of the Son in us through his holiness and the suffering on the cross). This is *proorismos*. For as the Father sends the Son, the Son with the Father sends the Holy Spirit. And vice versa, the Holy Spirit leads us to the Son, and the Son at length conducts us to the Father.

The words by which the predestination of the members is described are employed also to express the predestination of the head. For concerning him equally *prothesis* is predicated when Paul says *hon proetheto hilastion* (Rom. 3:25); *prognosis* where we have *proegnesmenos* (1 Pet. 1:20); and *proorismos*, not only when he is said to be *horistheis* to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4), but also when his death is said to have happened by the determinate counsel of God and by his predestination, who *proorise* to be done whatever was done by Herod and Pontius Pilate (Acts 2:23).