

WHY THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION MATTERS

*Exploring The Nineteenth-Century Predestination Controversy And Its
Implications Upon The Church And Pastoral Office Today*

By
Rev. Matt Richard

Table of Contents

Introduction: Predestination, Why Bother?

The Nineteenth-Century Predestination Controversy

Identifying the Theology in Conflict

A Theological Excursus: Four Analyses

 Analysis #1: Two Questions, Not One

 Analysis #2: The Mixing of Law and Gospel

 Analysis #3: Predestination Belongs to the Gospel, Not the Law

 Analysis #4: Nothing New

Why Predestination Matters: The Theological Implications upon the Church and Pastoral Office

 The Impasse

 The Solution to the Impasse: Prevenient Grace

 The Implications of the Open Door to Synergism

Conclusion: Comfort and Assurance; Why We Should Bother With Predestination

Appendix

Bibliography

Introduction: Predestination, Why Bother?

A Facebook friend once asserted to me that the historical controversies, as well as the present ongoing debates, over the doctrine of predestination are nothing more than opposing sides stirring up trouble by arguing over linguistic nuances; hence, to become engaged in the controversy over predestination is to be pulled into a futile theological war. Is this friend right? While I truly wish I could agree with my friend for the sake of simplicity, I am afraid that he is grossly mistaken on this point. To the naked eye it may seem like a meaningless debate over linguistics or doctrinal emphasis; however, as we will see in the following pages, this debate is over two very different theological positions, views that have profound implications upon the church and pastoral office today.

The Nineteenth-Century Predestination Controversy

In exploring the doctrine of predestination from a Lutheran perspective one might assume that a logical place to begin would be the theological controversies of the sixteenth-century. It is interesting to note that the doctrine of predestination is discussed within the Lutheran Confessions (e.g., Formula of Concord XI); however, unlike so much of the articles within *The Book of Concord*, article XI of the Formula is not written in response to a public offense arising within the sphere of sixteenth-century Lutheranism. The introduction to article XI states,

On this article there has been no public conflict among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession. However, because it is an article of comfort when properly treated, it is also explained in this document so that no offensive dispute may arise in the future.¹

As stated in article XI, the authors of the Formula knew that this article on predestination/election would be needed at some point in the future. That future event would be the nineteenth-century predestination controversy among American Lutherans.

While the nineteenth-century controversy over predestination had several events leading up to its full manifestation,² the most visible eruption of this controversy happened in 1872 between C.F.W. Walther of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and Prof. Gottfried Fritschel of the Iowa Synod.³ This great literary exchange between Walther and Fritschel fueled, launched, and garnered a controversy of considerable proportions where pamphlets, sermons, articles, and the like were circulated.⁴

Over the next several decades this conflict continued. As time continued, lines were drawn in the sand as the Iowa Synod and Ohio Synod took very strong stances against Walther and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Despite the strong stances of the Iowa Synod and Ohio Synod, the LCMS found support from both the Minnesota and Wisconsin Synod. Thus, the

¹ Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, ed, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 517.

² On page 316 of *The Lutherans in North America*, edited by E. Clifford Nelson (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), we read, "The views expressed by Walther had been set forth by him in an article as early as 1863, by John A. Huegli in 1868 at a meeting of the Northern District of the Missouri Synod..."

³ Carl S. Meyer, "The Missouri Synod and Other Lutherans Before 1918," in *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*, edited by Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 267.

⁴ Ibid, 267-268.

Iowa Synod and the Ohio Synod were on one side with Missouri, Wisconsin, and Minnesota on the other.

There was another party that did not find residence in either side but was caught in the middle and that was the Norwegian Synod. As time went on though, the Norwegian Synod eventually withdrew its close relationship from Missouri. Even those in the Norwegian Synod, who agreed with the Missouri position, advocated for a withdrawal in the hope that it would lead toward restoration and peace.⁵

Polemically speaking things also took a turn for the worse as large generalizations were placed upon each side. Walther was accused by his opponents of being a crypto-Calvinist, whereas the Ohioans were accused of being synergistic and semi-pelagian. Both sides were obviously heightened with intensity hoping to steer their sphere of Lutheranism away from what they believed to be the extremes of Catholicism/Synergism on one side and Calvinism/Double Predestination on the other side.⁶

Within the Norwegian Synod a group of individuals called, 'The Anti-Missourian Brotherhood,' began functioning as a separate entity and eventually formed its own private seminary in conjunction with St. Olaf College.⁷ Needless to say, the very name of this group shows the degree and intensity that this predestination debate had come to. The

⁵ E. Clifford Nelson, ed. *The Lutherans in North America: Revised Edition*, 322.

⁶ *Ibid*, 317.

⁷ Dale E. Varburg, *Faith and Fellowship: A Look at Lutheran Brethren Theology 1900-2000* (Fergus Falls, MN: Faith & Fellowship Press, 2000), 36.

predestination debate would continue for the next three decades into the early 20th century resulting in church splits, withdrawals, and formations of new church bodies.

While the previous paragraphs show the fruits of the debate, the next logical question is, 'What was the debate and tension specifically about?'

Identifying The Theology In Conflict

As is often the case, triangulation, the drama triangle, hurt feelings, and egos can cloud the main issues in a controversy. It was certainly no different with the nineteenth-century predestination controversy where the human element of strong personalities and politics distracted from the main issue. Thus, it is important to gently remove the noise from the controversy in order to see that the main issue at hand was between the two following positions: A) Election 'in view of' faith; B) Election 'for' faith.

In an essay that was originally published in 1881 by Concordia Publishing House, C.F.W. Walther also peels the layers back in order to address the root of the issue. In the essay Walther sets forth what he sees as the chief controverted point in the conflict,

It consists simply in the following twofold question: 1st, whether God from eternity, before the foundations of the world were laid, out of pure mercy and only for the sake of the most holy merit of Christ, elected and ordained the chosen children of God to salvation and whatever pertains to it, consequently also to faith, repentance, and conversion; or 2nd, whether in His election God took into consideration anything good in man, namely the foreseen conduct of man, the foreseen non-resistance, and the foreseen preserving faith, and thus elected certain persons to salvation in consideration of, with respect to, on account of, or in questions we affirm, while our opponents deny it, but the second question we deny, while our opponents affirm it.⁸

⁸ C.F.W. Walther, *The Controversy Concerning Predestination* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1881)

In the book, *Moving Frontiers*, there is an outline of the Ohio Synod's take on the controversy. The outline was printed on the front and back covers of an untitled 21 page pamphlet. The pamphlet does not have an author, date, or publisher even though it was apparently written in the 1880s. The outline has been broken down into the following chart.⁹

Ohio Synod	Missouri Synod
As God in time saves men through faith in Christ, so did He in eternity choose those to eternal life whom He foresaw clothed in Jesus' righteousness through faith.	God elected in eternity some persons from the lost human race, all alike in sin, without reference to their faith or unbelief, that they might come to faith and heaven.
God's mercy and Jesus' merits alone moved Him to make this choice.	God was moved to do this alone by His mercy and Jesus' merits.
Faith in Christ was the rule according to which God elected men.	This selection of individuals is the cause of the faith and of the salvation of the elect only.
Just as faith enters into the justification, so it entered into the election of the sinner.	The office of the Word and all that follows are but the way and means of executing God's purpose over the elect.
Whether seen by God in eternity or viewed in time, faith is wrought in the elect solely through the virtue of the ordinary means of grace appointed for all men.	This appointment infallibly secures the salvation of the elect even taking away the most stubborn resistance to the grace of God.
God elects and leads the elect to heaven in the same way He earnestly desired to elect all men and lead them to heaven.	As this appointment extends only over the elect, they alone can be saved.

As Walther's assessment on the situation is compared to Ohio's assessment on the situation, it is nice to see that both sides understood each other's positions fairly well. In other words, they were debating upon the same field of play. Too often debates are formed where each side is defending and arguing for a position when they are not even on the same playing field. Metaphorically, one side can be swinging a bat on a baseball field and the other side can

⁹ Carl S. Meyer, "The Missouri Synod and Other Lutherans Before 1918," in *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*, edited by Carl S. Meyer, 275-276.

be kicking a ball into a net on a soccer field (e.g., two different fields; two different debates). However, in this case it is fairly evident that both sides are indeed operating from a common platform, a perspective of the placement of faith in regard to predestination. Otherwise stated, is predestination the cause of faith (LCMS) or is faith the cause of predestination (Iowa & Ohio)?

A Theological Excursus: Four Analyses

Analysis #1: Two Questions, Not One

Why are some saved and not others? This is one of the questions that was and continues to be at the center of controversy surrounding the doctrine of predestination. However, it must be noted that the stated question is not a single question, but two separate questions. For example: 1) Why are some saved? 2) Why are others not saved? Thus, both of these questions demand 'two' separate answers.

Even though there are two separate questions, it must be maintained that there is still a real and perceivable relationship between these two inquiries. However, what is the relationship between these two questions? Answer, they have a correlative relationship. In other words, the relationship between the question 'why some are saved' and the question 'why are others not saved' is an example of a correlative relationship due to both of these questions talking about the eternal salvation of a person. However, it is a mistake to believe that there is a 'causative relationship' between the two questions (i.e., to presume/perceive that if God saves some that this 'causes' him to reject others).

Walther maintained the correlative relationship between the two questions by answering these questions in attributing 100% credit to God in regard to man's salvation and 100% of the blame to mankind in regard to man's perishing. He did this with 'two

separate' theses (i.e., answers), not just 'one' thesis. He provided two theses in a document accepted in 1882 by the Missouri Synod titled, Thirteen Theses on Predestination. Otherwise stated, thesis #10 and thesis #4 answered the questions 'why some are saved' and 'why others are not.'¹⁰ Thus, Walther maintains the correlative nature of both of these questions, while rejecting the causative relationship.

Analysis #2: The Mixing of Law and Gospel

In Walther's most famous work, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, he reflects on the predestination controversy in regard to Law and Gospel. In thesis IV he argues that the problem with the 'election in view of faith position' is that it confuses Law and Gospel. He states,

A person teaching that "faith is a condition which the Gospel stipulates" makes the promises of the Gospel conditioned promises like those of the Law and removes the distinction between the Law and the Gospel. The Law promises no good thing except on condition that a person comply perfectly with its demands, while the Gospel promises

¹⁰ Thesis #10: We believe, teach and confess, that the cause which moved God to elect, is alone His grace and the merit of Jesus Christ, and not anything good foreseen by God in the elect, not even faith foreseen in them by God; and we therefore reject and condemn the opposite doctrines of the Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians and Synergists as blasphemous, dreadful errors which subvert the Gospel and therewith the whole Christian religion.

Thesis #4: We believe, teach and confess, that no one perishes because God was not willing that he be saved, passed him by with His grace, and because he had not also offered him the grace of perseverance and was not willing to bestow the same upon him. But all men that perish, perish because of their own fault, because of their unbelief and because they contumaciously resisted the Word and grace unto their end. The cause of this contempt of the Word is not God's foreknowledge (vel praescientia vel praedestination,) but man's perverted will which rejects or perverts the means and the instrument of the Holy Spirit, which God offers unto it through the call, and it resists the Holy Spirit who would be efficacious and operate through the Word, as Christ says: Matth. 23:37, How often would I have gathered you together, and ye would not. Therefore we reject and condemn the contrary Calvinistic doctrine with all our heart.

everything unconditionally as a free gift. In short, the promises of grace demand nothing of man.¹¹

Therefore, what is at stake, according to Walther, is the Gospel itself. Through the 'election in view of faith position' demands are introduced into the Gospel, thus conditioning it, which leads to the Gospel being absorbed into the narrative and function of the Law. This leads to the following content in analysis #3.

Analysis #3: Predestination Belongs To The Gospel, Not The Law

The doctrine of predestination belongs to the Gospel, not the Law. Whenever the scripture uses the term of election, some 70 times, it is applied only to the believing Christian. Therefore, if the hearer finds himself reacting negatively to the doctrine of predestination or if he finds himself in doubt, his ears are not hearing predestination correctly. If the hearer is reacting negatively he is most assuredly hearing the doctrine of predestination through the lens of Law, not Gospel. Martin Luther comments on the doctrine of election in the Epistle of Romans saying,

In chapters nine, ten, and eleven the apostle teaches about the eternal predestination of God. He tells how it originally comes about that a person will believe or not, will become rid of his sins or not. He does so in order that our becoming pious be taken entirely out of our own hands and placed into the hand of God. And indeed it is supremely necessary that this be done; for we are so weak and unstable that if the matter depended on us, surely not a single person would be saved, but the devil would certainly overpower all. Since, however, God is certain that His predestination cannot fail and no one can defeat His purpose, our hope against sin remains. . . .

Following the order of this Epistle: first be concerned about Christ and the Gospel, in order to recognize your sin and His grace; then fight against your sins. . . . Adam must

¹¹ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel: Kindle Edition* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), LOC 5135.

first be quite dead before a man is able to bear this subject and to drink this strong wine.¹²

Essentially what Luther is stating is that the old Adam needs to be killed, for the old Adam will not be able to hear about predestination as Gospel gift. Rather than hearing comfort, the old Adam will most definitely hear the doctrines of predestination as a threat to his dominion and attempts at preserving the notion of free will. Yes, the old Adam takes a tremendously comforting doctrine such as predestination and turns it into something that threatens man.

Oh, the perverse tactics of the old man!¹³

Analysis #4: Nothing New

In the final theological excursus it is worth noting that Walther clings to the Formula of Concord in responding and supporting his position on predestination. It could be said that Walther's Thirteen Theses were founded upon and flow out of Article XI of the Formula. Listen to paragraph 8 of the XI Article of the Formula,

God's eternal election not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect but is also a cause of our salvation and whatever pertains to it, on the basis of the gracious will and good pleasure of God in Christ Jesus. As this cause, it creates, effects, aids, and promotes our salvation.¹⁴

¹² Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology Volume I Absolution to Giving*. edited by Ewald Plass (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 1959), 455-456.

¹³ Walther also covers the difficult of a person trying to understand predestination in a state of unbelief in his essay, *The Controversy Concerning Predestination* (Published in 1881 by Concordia Publishing House of St. Louis, MO). He states, "Dear reader, are you already in faith, or not? If you have not the faith, then I must advise you once more, as I have already done in the preface: do not at present meddle with the mysterious doctrine of election at all! In this your condition of unbelief, you require to be taught the first letters of the divine word."

¹⁴ Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 642.

Thus, it could be said that Walther was not introducing any new theology, but was rather confirming the historic doctrine of predestination as set forth by Article XI of the Formula of Concord.¹⁵

Why Predestination Matters: The Theological Implications Upon The Church And Pastoral Office

There have been informal arguments within Lutheran circles that the debate over predestination was over issues of meaningless mystery, things that were simply out of the realm of mankind, and that it was essentially a pointless debate with no real/practical implications. Is this assertion true? No, this assertion is most definitely false. The reason being, the doctrine of election is not an autonomous doctrine. Rather the theology contained in the doctrine of predestination impacts one's understanding of faith; thus, one's understanding of faith impacts one's doctrine of soteriology (i.e., conversion theology); thus, one's doctrine of soteriology impacts how one views the means of grace; thus, the one's view of the means of grace impacts how one views the role of the pastor and the purpose of the church. Otherwise stated, the doctrine of election has dramatic consequences not only to a theological system but it also has practical implications extending to ministry within the church. Churches and individuals who stand in the two different predestination shadows of Missouri and Ohio/Iowa may yield two totally different theological presuppositions about church and ministry.

¹⁵ Note: See the Appendix for the Epitome of the Formula of Concord: Article XI

The Impasse

There is an impasse with universal justifying grace (1 John 2:2), original sin (Ephesians 2:1), and God's election of individuals (Romans 8:29-30). Because of this gridlock, temptation arises to harmonize and alleviate the tension through the placement and/or role of faith in conversion. It must be stated though that Martin Luther understood this impasse, but never tried to harmonize the teachings. "He feared that he would be forced to make concessions that would violate Biblical truth."¹⁶ Thus, both the placement and role of faith in conversion were not only important items of debate within the nineteenth-century predestination controversy but the placement and role of faith in conversion are also important to one's theological system. In other words, the placement and role of faith in the midst of the impasse has the ability to shift and/or move these tectonic doctrines, thus changing one's theological system, which then yields consequences upon the role of the pastoral office and the nature of the church.

The Solution To The Impasse: Preventive Grace

As a result of this impasse, "Missouri stressed man's total passivity and conversion as the occurrence of an instant."¹⁷ Those within the Norwegian Synod that opposed Missouri though, "contended for the possibility of man's response through preventive grace and regarded conversion more broadly, as beginning with the sinner's awakening and culminating in regeneration. . . . The anti-Missourians affirmed that God's offer of grace extended to all and that anyone who came within the Holy Spirit's influence was, through God's empowering grace,

¹⁶ Don Matzat, *Martin Luther and the Doctrine of Predestination* (unpublished essay)

¹⁷ E. Clifford Nelson, ed. *The Lutherans in North America: Revised Edition*, 323.

able to respond in faith.”¹⁸ May it be noted that the solution to the impasse within the anti-Missourians was the doctrine of prevenient grace.

While it would be unfair to ascribe the theology of prevenient grace to all parties that opposed Missouri in the predestination controversy, it is worthwhile to notice that this theology of conversion did arise within parts of the opposition group. Furthermore, while prevenient grace can be commended for trying to avoid the heresy of Pelagianism and Calvinism’s doctrine of double predestination, it must be criticized for opening a small door to Roman Catholic synergism. Whether intentionally or not, prevenient grace is inadvertently handled much like a miniature version of the Roman Catholic’s view of ‘infused righteousness.’ In other words, prevenient grace is viewed like a small dose of righteousness that is infused into the person thus enabling them to cooperate and chose salvation that is extended to them.¹⁹

Secondly, even though the view of prevenient grace gives credit to God, it actually subtly turns faith and repentance from God’s work, into a work of man. In other words, instead of repentance and faith being something that happens to mankind as a result of the Law and Gospel (i.e. gifts), both repentance and faith become a work of man. Repentance and faith

¹⁸ Ibid, 323-324.

¹⁹ This infusion of grace into the person can also bring about the perception that a person is declared righteous by God due to the divine nature of Christ taking up residence in his or her heart. It is indeed true that the Triune God dwells in the believer. The scriptures do testify that the blessing and fruit of salvation is God at work ‘in’ the life of the believer. However, this inward working is sanctification, not justification. The error of believing that justification is something that happens inside of a human being is the error that sixteenth-century theologian Andreas Osiander taught. Rather, justification takes place outside of a person, in the person of Christ. Faith receives the extra nos gift. Faith in the Gospel points us away from self, to Christ. This salvation is something that God does to, for and upon a person.

become something that mankind initiates as a result of the preparatory grace (i.e. miniature infused grace). In other words, in this view repentance and faith are ascribed to the realm of mankind's response, what man is required to do in response to the preparatory grace. Thus, a man-centered synergistic narrative is ever so slightly introduced into the conversion narrative.

The Implications Of An Open Door To Synergism

As it is seen from the previous paragraphs, one's view of predestination impacts one's view of soteriology. While prevenient grace attempts to uphold original sin and God's grace, the slightest amount of synergism is unfortunately introduced. While it could be argued that synergism is not introduced in prevenient grace, it is completely fair to say that prevenient grace at least leaves the door open to possible synergism. Even a door that is slightly left open or even left unlocked to synergism should not be ignored or dismissed. Rather this is something of utmost concern, for even the slightest amount of synergism in conversion impacts other doctrines; we cannot underestimate the old Adam's synergistic abilities for he will wreak havoc on everything he can get his hands on. Francis Pieper states, "Synergism actually degrades the means of grace into mere means to spur man to furnish the thing that will allegedly induce God to grant forgiveness of sins to man."²⁰ This means that synergism diminishes the sacramental character of both baptism and communion. The loss of sacramental character does not stop with the sacraments, but a loss in sacramental character also impacts the preached word degenerating it, "into information about which the continuously existing old

²⁰ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics: Volume 3* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 1953), 123.

being is supposed to do something.”²¹ This degeneration continues to spread unavoidably stripping the pastoral office. Rather than giving an extra nos authoritative report from God’s Word, a sacramentally degenerated message becomes one where the pastoral office focuses on telling church members to, yield more, pray more, love unbelievers more, read the scriptures more, serve more in the church, be a better husband and a better father. The loss of the sacramental character shifts the church’s narrative ‘from’ God doing the verbs towards His bride (i.e., the church) ‘to’ the bride doing the verbs to towards God. Without the sacramental character, God becomes the direct object and the church becomes the subject of the narrative. Without sacramental emphasis in the church, the storyline turns inward and parishioners will unfortunately develop the following narrative, ‘I wonder how I am doing in my life, my submitting, my devotional work, my prayers, my zeal, and my sermon application?’ Even though these are good virtues, the narrative is turned internal to ‘self’ which then produces the fruits of despair or pride (i.e., I can’t do it; I am doing it). Those that despair will give up on the church and leave. Those that are prideful will lose the understanding that they are hungry beggars coming to church to receive the free warm bread. Rather they will end up going to church denying both their need of the free bread and the gift of the warm bread, yet wanting recipes and pointer on how to make the bread themselves. Otherwise stated, due to pride they will lose the understanding of their sinfulness and the need to go to church to hear the Gospel Word and to be gifted the forgiveness of sins in the Sacraments, but will go to church to be

²¹ Gerhard Ford, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 149.

encouraged in their pursuit of being more moral, achieving an anthropocentric goal, and actualizing their purpose.

Conclusion: Comfort and Assurance; Why We Should Bother With Predestination

So, why did Walther and the Missourians stand so firm behind the doctrine of predestination as expressed in the Formula of Concord Article XI? Why should we hold to the doctrine of predestination and esteem it as a worthy doctrine? Why should we not be eager to cast a negative opinion upon the doctrine of predestination or totally dismiss it in light of the historical controversy surrounding this dogma? Obviously the theological implications of the previous sections help in answering this. However, there is another reason why it is important to maintain and insist on the doctrine of predestination, and that is, the doctrine of predestination is a tremendously comforting doctrine that grants assurance upon assurance to believers.

Yes, the doctrine of predestination is a doctrine of comfort, not doubt. It is a doctrine that is set forth to Christians in the midst of trials and temptations in order to grant assurance. Listen to Martin Luther comment on the comfort that comes from this doctrine,

Our election is not based on worthiness and merit on our part. If it rested on such a foundation the devil could make it uncertain and overthrow it every moment. It rests in God's hand and is based on His mercy, which is unwavering and eternal. For this reason it is also called the election of God; and that is why it is certain and cannot fail. When, therefore, you sin and unworthiness assail you and the thought occurs to you that you are not elected by God, that the number of the elect is small but the mass of the godless large, and you are frightened at the terrible instances of divine wrath and judgment, then do not argue at length why God does this or that as He does and why He does not act differently even though He does and why He does not act differently even though He

is well able to do so. Nor venture to explore the depth of divine election with your reason. Otherwise you will certainly go wrong. You will either despair or become reckless. Rather hold to the promise of the Gospel. This will teach you that Christ, God's Son, came into the world in order to bless all the nations on earth, that is, to redeem them from sin and earth, to justify and save them. This He has done at God's command and in accordance with the gracious will of God, His heavenly Father, who "so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).²²

Furthermore, may our election in Christ drive us to assuredly confess,

I frankly confess that, for myself, even if it could be, I should not want 'free-will' to be given to me, nor anything to be left in my own hands to enable me to endeavor after salvation; not merely because in face of so many dangers, and adversities, and assaults of devils, I could not stand my ground and hold fast my 'free-will'; because, even were there no dangers, adversities, or devils, I should still be forced to labor with no guarantee of success, and to beat my fists at the air. If I lived and worked to all eternity, my conscience would never reach comfortable certainty as to how much it must do to satisfy God. Whatever work I had done, there would still be a nagging doubt as to whether it pleased God, or whether He required something more. The experience of all who seek righteousness by works proves that; and I learned it well enough myself over a period of many years, to my own great hurt. But now that God has taken my salvation out of the control of my own will, and put it under the control of His, and promised to save me, not according to my working or running, but according to His own grace and mercy, I have the comfortable certainty that He is also great and powerful, so that no devils or opposition can break Him or pluck me from Him.²³

Certainly no one can pluck us from Him; this is the comfort that comes from divine predestination; this is the assurance that our pulpits need to proclaim; and this is the gift that Walther, and others, wanted the Lutheran church to possess.

The doctrine of predestination matters.

²² Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology Volume I Absolution to Giving*. edited by Ewald Plass, 457.

²³ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*. Translated by J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnstone. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell Publishing, 1957), 313-314.

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

*“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.²⁴

— *The Apostle Paul, 55 A.D.*

²⁴ Romans 8:30-39

Appendix: The Epitome of the Formula of Concord: Article XI

Source: <http://www.bookofconcord.org/fc-ep.php#XI>. Election.

Concerning this article no public dissension has occurred among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession. But since it is a consolatory article, if treated properly, and lest offensive disputations concerning the same be instituted in the future, it is also explained in this writing.

Affirmative Theses. The Pure and True Doctrine concerning This Article.

1. To begin with [First of all], the distinction between praesentia et praedestinatio, that is, between God's foreknowledge and His eternal election, ought to be accurately observed.
2. For the foreknowledge of God is nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen, as it is written Dan. 2:28: There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days.
3. This foreknowledge extends alike over the godly and the wicked, but it is not the cause of evil, neither of sin, namely, of doing what is wrong (which originally arises from the devil and the wicked, perverse will of man), nor of their ruin [that men perish], for which they themselves are responsible [which they must ascribe to themselves]; but it only regulates it, and fixes a limit to it [how far it should progress and] how long it should last, and all this to the end that it should serve His elect for their salvation, notwithstanding that it is evil in itself.
4. The predestination or eternal election of God, however, extends only over the godly, beloved children of God, being a cause of their salvation, which He also provides, as well as disposes what belongs thereto. Upon this [predestination of God] our salvation is founded so firmly that the gates of hell cannot overcome it. John 10:28; Matt. 16:18.
5. This [predestination of God] is not to be investigated in the secret counsel of God, but to be sought in the Word of God, where it is also revealed.
6. But the Word of God leads us to Christ, who is the Book of Life, in whom all are written and elected that are to be saved in eternity, as it is written Eph. 1:4: He hath chosen us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world.
7. This Christ calls to Himself all sinners and promises them rest, and He is in earnest [seriously wills] that all men should come to Him and suffer themselves to be helped, to whom He offers Himself in His Word, and wishes them to hear it and not to stop their ears or [neglect and] despise the Word. Moreover, He promises the power and working of the Holy Ghost, and divine assistance for perseverance and eternal salvation [that we may remain steadfast in the faith and attain eternal salvation].
8. Therefore we should judge concerning this our election to eternal life neither from reason nor from the Law of God, which lead us either into a reckless, dissolute, Epicurean life or into despair, and excite pernicious thoughts in the hearts of men, for they cannot, as long as they follow their reason, successfully refrain from thinking: If God has elected me to salvation, I cannot be condemned, no matter what I do; and again: If I am not elected to eternal life, it is of no avail what good I do; it is all [all my efforts are] in vain anyway.
9. But it [the true judgment concerning predestination] must be learned alone from the holy Gospel concerning Christ, in which it is clearly testified that God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all, and that He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and believe in the Lord Christ. Rom. 11:32; Ezek. 18:23; 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2.
10. Whoever, now, is thus concerned about the revealed will of God, and proceeds according to the order which St. Paul has observed in the Epistle to the Romans, who first directs men to repentance, to knowledge of sins, to faith in Christ, to divine obedience, before he speaks of the mystery of the eternal election of God, to him this doctrine [concerning God's predestination] is useful and consolatory.
11. However, that many are called and few chosen, Matt. 22:14, does not mean that God is not willing to save everybody; but the reason is that they either do not at all hear God's Word, but wilfully despise it, stop their ears and harden their hearts, and in this manner foreclose the ordinary way to the Holy Ghost, so that He cannot perform His work in them, or, when they have heard it, make light of it again and do not heed it, for which [that they perish] not God or His election, but their wickedness, is responsible. [2 Pet. 2:1ff ; Luke 11:49. 52; Heb. 12:25f.]
12. Thus far a Christian should occupy himself [in meditation] with the article concerning the eternal

election of God, as it has been revealed in God's Word, which presents to us Christ as the Book of Life, which He opens and reveals to us by the preaching of the holy Gospel, as it is written Rom. 8:30: Whom He did predestinate, them He also called. In Him we are to seek the eternal election of the Father, who has determined in His eternal divine counsel that He would save no one except those who know His Son Christ and truly believe on Him. Other thoughts are to be [entirely] banished [from the minds of the godly], as they proceed not from God, but from the suggestion of the Evil Foe, whereby he attempts to weaken or entirely to remove from us the glorious consolation which we have in this salutary doctrine, namely, that we know [assuredly] that out of pure grace, without any merit of our own, we have been elected in Christ to eternal life, and that no one can pluck us out of His hand; as He has not only promised this gracious election with mere words, but has also certified it with an oath and sealed it with the holy Sacraments, which we can [ought to] call to mind in our most severe temptations, and take comfort in them, and therewith quench the fiery darts of the devil.

13. Besides, we should use the greatest diligence to live according to the will of God, and, as St. Peter admonishes, 2 Pet. 1:10, make our calling sure, and especially adhere to [not recede a finger's breadth from] the revealed Word: that can and will not fail us.

14. By this brief explanation of the eternal election of God His glory is entirely and fully given to God, that out of pure mercy alone, without all merit of ours, He saves us according to the purpose of His will; besides, also, no cause is given any one for despondency or a vulgar, wild life [no opportunity is afforded either for those more severe agitations of mind and faintheartedness or for Epicureanism].

Negative Theses False Doctrine concerning This Article.

Accordingly, we believe and hold: When any teach the doctrine concerning the gracious election of God to eternal life in such a manner that troubled Christians cannot comfort themselves therewith, but are thereby led to despondency or despair, or the impenitent are strengthened in their wantonness,

that such doctrine is treated [wickedly and erroneously] not according to the Word and will of God, but according to reason and the instigation of the cursed Satan. For, as the apostle testifies, Rom. 15:4, whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope. Therefore we reject the following errors:

1. As when it is taught that God is unwilling that all men repent and believe the Gospel.
2. Also, that when God calls us to Himself, He is not in earnest that all men should come to Him.
3. Also, that God is unwilling that every one should be saved, but that some, without regard to their sins, from the mere counsel, purpose, and will of God, are ordained to condemnation so that they cannot be saved.
4. Also, that not only the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ, but also in us there is a cause of God's election, on account of which God has elected us to everlasting life.

All these are blasphemous and dreadful erroneous doctrines, whereby all the comfort which they have in the holy Gospel and the use of the holy Sacraments is taken from Christians, and therefore should not be tolerated in the Church of God.

This is the brief and simple explanation of the controverted articles, which for a time have been debated and taught controversially among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession. Hence every simple Christian, according to the guidance of God's Word and his simple Catechism, can perceive what is right or wrong, since not only the pure doctrine has been stated, but also the erroneous contrary doctrine has been repudiated and rejected, and thus the offensive divisions that have occurred are thoroughly settled [and decided].

May Almighty God and the Father of our Lord Jesus grant the grace of His Holy Ghost that we all may be one in Him, and constantly abide in this Christian unity, which is well pleasing to Him! Amen.

Bibliography

- Forde, Gerhard. *Theology is for Proclamation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990.
- Kolb, Robert and Timothy Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000.
- Luther, Martin. *The Bondage of the Will*. Translated by J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnstone. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell Publishing, 1957.
- Luther, Martin. *What Luther Says: An Anthology Volume I Absolution to Giving*. Edited by Ewald Plass. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 1959.
- Matzat, Don. *Martin Luther and the Doctrine of Predestination* (unpublished essay)
- Meyer, Carl S. ed. *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1964.
- Nelson, E. Clifford, ed. *The Lutherans in North America: Revised Edition*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980.
- Pieper, Francis. *Christian Dogmatics: Volume 3*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 1953.
- Varburg, Dale E. *Faith and Fellowship: A Look at Lutheran Brethren Theology 1900-2000*. Fergus Falls, MN: Faith & Fellowship Press, 2000.
- Walther, C.F.W. *The Controversy Concerning Predestination*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1881.
- Walther, C.F.W. *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel: Kindle Edition*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986.