Double Predestination

by

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"A horrible decree . . ." "Most ruthless statement . . ." "A terrible theological theory . . ." "An illegitimate inference of logic . . ." These and other similar epithets have been used frequently to articulate displeasure and revulsion at the Reformed doctrine of double predestination. Particularly abhorrent to many is the notion that God would predestinate (in any sense) the doom of the reprobate.

The "Double" of Predestination

The goal of this essay is not to provide a comprehensive analysis, exposition, or defense of the doctrine of election or predestination. Rather, the essay is limited to a concern for the "double" aspect of predestination with particular reference to the question of the relationship of God's sovereignty to reprobation or preterition.

The use of the qualifying term "double" has been somewhat confusing in discussions concerning predestination. The term apparently means one thing within the circle of Reformed theology and quite another outside that circle and at a popular level of theological discourse. The term "double" has been set in contrast with a notion of "single" predestination. It has also been used as a synonym for a symmetrical view of predestination which sees election and reprobation being worked out in a parallel mode of divine operation. Both usages involve a serious distortion of the Reformed view of double predestination.

Viewing double predestination as a distinction from single predestination may be seen in the work of Emil Brunner. Brunner argues that it is impossible to deduce the doctrine of double predestination from the Bible. He says:

> The Bible does not contain the doctrine of double predestination, although in a few isolated passages it seems to come close to it. The Bible teaches that all salvation is based on the eternal Election of God in Jesus Christ, and that this eternal Election springs wholly and entirely from God's sovereign freedom. But wherever this happens,

> there is no mention of a decree of rejection. The Bible teaches that alongside of the elect there are those who are not elect, who are "reprobate," and indeed that the former are the minority and the latter the majority; but in these passages the point at issue is not eternal election but "separation" or "selection" in judgment. Thus the Bible teaches that there will be a double outcome of world history, salvation and ruin, Heaven and hell. But while salvation is explicitly taught as derived from the eternal election, the further conclusion is not drawn that destruction is also based upon a corresponding decree of doom.[1]

Here Brunner argues passionately, though not coherently, for "single" predestination. There is a decree of election, but not of reprobation. Predestination has only one side — election. In this context, double predestination is "avoided" (or evaded) by the dialectical method. The dialectical method which sidesteps logical consistency has had a pervasive influence on contemporary discussions of double predestination. A growing antipathy to logic in theology is manifesting itself widely. Even G. C. Berkouwer seems allergic to the notion that logic should play a role in developing our understanding of election.

It is one thing to construct a theology of election (or any other kind of theology) purely on the basis of rational speculation. It is quite another to utilize logic in seeking a coherent understanding of biblical revelation. Brunner seems to abhor both.

Let us examine the "logic" of Brunner's position. He maintains that

(1) there is a divine decree of election that is eternal;

(2) that divine decree is particular in scope ("There are those who are not elect");

(3) yet there is no decree of reprobation.

Consider the implications. If God has predestined some but not all to election, does it not follow by what Luther called a "resistless logic" that some are not predestined to election? If, as Brunner maintains, *all* salvation is based upon the eternal election of God and not all men are elect from eternity, does that not mean that from eternity there are non-elect who most certainly will not be saved? Has not God chosen from eternity not to elect some people? If so, then we have an eternal choice of non-election which we

call reprobation. The inference is clear and necessary, yet some shrink from drawing it.

I once heard the case for "single" predestination articulated by a prominent Lutheran theologian in the above manner. He admitted to me that the conclusion of reprobation was logically inescapable, but he refused to draw the inference, holding steadfastly to "single" predestination. Such a notion of predestination is manifest nonsense.

Theoretically there are four possible kinds of consistent single predestination.

(1) Universal predestination to election (which Brunner does not hold);

(2) universal predestination to reprobation (which nobody holds);

(3) particular predestination to election with the option of salvation by self-initiative to those not elect (a qualified Arminianism) which Brunner emphatically rejects; and

(4) particular predestination to reprobation with the option of salvation by self-initiative to those not reprobate (which nobody holds).

The only other kind of single predestination is the dialectical kind, which is absurd. (I once witnessed a closed discussion of theology between H. M. Kuitert of the Netherlands and Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Seminary. Kuitert went into a lengthy discourse on theology, utilizing the method of the dialectic as he went. When he was finished, Dr. Van Til calmly replied: "Now tell me your theology *without the dialectic*, so I can understand it!" Kuitert was unable to do so. With Brunner's view of predestination the only way to avoid "double" predestination is with the use of "double-talk."

Thus, "single" predestination can be consistently maintained only within the framework of universalism or some sort of qualified Arminianism. If particular election is to be maintained and if the notion that all salvation is ultimately based upon that particular election is to be maintained, then we must speak of double predestination.

The much greater issue of "double" predestination is the issue over the relationship between election and reprobation with respect to the nature of the decrees and the nature of the divine outworking of the decrees. If "double" predestination means a symmetrical view of predestination, then we must reject the notion. But such a view of "double" predestination would be a caricature and a serious distortion of the Reformed doctrine of predestination.

The Double-Predestination Distortion

The distortion of double predestination looks like this: There is a symmetry that exists between election and reprobation. God WORKS in the same way and same manner with respect to the elect and to the reprobate. That is to say, from all eternity God decreed some to election and by divine initiative works faith in their hearts and brings them actively to salvation. By the same token, from all eternity God decrees some to sin and damnation (*destinare ad peccatum*) and actively intervenes to work sin in their lives, bringing them to damnation by divine initiative. In the case of the elect, regeneration is the monergistic work of God. In the case of the reprobate, sin and degeneration are the monergistic work of God. Stated another way, we can establish a parallelism of foreordination and predestination by means of a positive symmetry. We can call this a positive-positive view of predestination. This is, God positively and actively intervenes in the lives of the elect to bring them to salvation. In the same way God positively and actively intervenes in the life of the reprobate to bring him to sin.

This distortion of positive-positive predestination clearly makes God the author of sin who punishes a person for doing what God monergistically and irresistibly coerces man to do. Such a view is indeed a monstrous assault on the integrity of God. This is not the Reformed view of predestination, but a gross and inexcusable caricature of the doctrine. Such a view may be identified with what is often loosely described as hyper-Calvinism and involves a radical form of supralapsarianism. Such a view of predestination has been virtually universally and monolithically rejected by Reformed thinkers.

The Reformed View of Predestination

In sharp contrast to the caricature of double predestination seen in the positive-positive schema is the classic position of Reformed theology on predestination. In this view predestination is double in that it involves both election and reprobation but is not symmetrical with respect to the mode of divine activity. A strict parallelism of operation is denied. Rather we view predestination in terms of a positive-negative relationship.

In the Reformed view God from all eternity decrees some to election and positively intervenes in their lives to work regeneration and faith by a monergistic work of grace. To the non-elect God withholds this monergistic

work of grace, passing them by and leaving them to themselves. He does not monergistically work sin or unbelief in their lives. Even in the case of the "hardening" of the sinners' already recalcitrant hearts, God does not, as Luther stated, "work evil in us (for hardening is working evil) by creating fresh evil in us." Luther continued:

> When men hear us say that God works both good and evil in us, and that we are subject to God's working by mere passive necessity, they seem to imagine a man who is in himself good, and not evil, having an evil work wrought in him by God; for they do not sufficiently bear in mind how incessantly active God is in all His creatures, allowing none of them to keep holiday. He who would understand these matters, however, should think thus: God works evil in us (that is, by means of us) not through God's own fault, but by reason of our own defect. We being evil by nature, and God being good, when He impels us to act by His own acting upon us according to the nature of His omnipotence, good though He is in Himself, He cannot but do evil by our evil instrumentality; although, according to His wisdom, He makes good use of this evil for His own glory and for our salvation.[2]

Thus, the mode of operation in the lives of the elect is not parallel with that operation in the lives of the reprobate. God works regeneration monergistically but never sin. Sin falls within the category of providential concurrence.

Another significant difference between the activity of God with respect to the elect and the reprobate concerns God's justice. The decree and fulfillment of election provide mercy for the elect while the efficacy of reprobation provides justice for the reprobate. God shows mercy sovereignly and unconditionally to some, and gives justice to those passed over in election. That is to say, God grants the mercy of election to some and justice to others. No one is the victim of injustice. To fail to receive mercy is not to be treated unjustly. God is under no obligation to grant mercy to all — in fact He is under no obligation to grant mercy to any. He says, "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy" (Rom. 9). The divine prerogative to grant mercy voluntarily cannot be faulted. If God is required by some cosmic law apart from Himself to be merciful to all men, then we would have to conclude that justice demands mercy. If that is so, then mercy is no longer voluntary, but

required. If mercy is required, it is no longer mercy, but justice. What God does not do is sin by visiting injustice upon the reprobate. Only by considering election and reprobation as being asymmetrical in terms of a positive-negative schema can God be exonerated from injustice.

The Reformed Confessions

By a brief reconnaissance of Reformed confessions and by a brief roll-call of the theologians of the Reformed faith, we can readily see that double predestination has been consistently maintained along the lines of a positive-negative schema.

The Reformed Confession: 1536

> Our salvation is from God, but from ourselves there is nothing but sin and damnation. (Art. 9)

French Confession of Faith: 1559

> We believe that from this corruption and general condemnation in which all men are plunged, God, according to his eternal and immutable counsel, calleth those whom he hath chosen by his goodness and mercy alone in our Lord Jesus Christ, without consideration of their works, to display in them the riches of his mercy; leaving the rest in this same corruption and condemnation to show in them his justice. (Art. XII)

The Belgic Confession of Faith: 1561

> We believe that all the posterity of Adam, being thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of our first parents, God then did manifest himself such as he is; that is to say, MERCIFUL AND JUST: MERCIFUL, since he delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable council, of mere goodness hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without respect to their works: JUST, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves. (Art. XVI)

The Second Helvetic Confession: 1566

> Finally, as often as God in Scripture is said or seems to do something evil, it is not thereby said that man does not do evil, but that God permits it and does not prevent it, according to his just judgment, who could prevent it if he wished, or because he turns man's evil into

> good . . . St. Augustine writes in his Enchiridion: "What happens contrary to his will occurs, in a wonderful and ineffable way, not apart from his will. For it would not happen if he did not allow it. And yet he does not allow it unwillingly but willingly." (Art. VIII)

The Westminster Confession of Faith: 1643

> As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected . . . are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power. through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.
>
> The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as He pleaseth, for the glory of His Sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice. (Chap. III — Art. VI and VII)

These examples selected from confessional formulas of the Reformation indicate the care with which the doctrine of double predestination has been treated. The asymmetrical expression of the "double" aspect has been clearly maintained. This is in keeping with the care exhibited consistently throughout the history of the Church. The same kind of careful delineation can be seen in Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Zanchius, Turrettini, Edwards, Hodge, Warfield, Bavinck, Berkouwer, *et al*.

Foreordination to Reprobation

In spite of the distinction of positive-negative with respect to the mode of God's activity toward the elect and the reprobate, we are left with the thorny question of God predestinating the reprobate. If God in any sense predestines or foreordains reprobation, doesn't this make the rejection of Christ by the reprobate absolutely certain and inevitable? And if the reprobate's reprobation is certain in light of predestination, doesn't this make God responsible for the sin of the reprobate? We must answer the first question in the affirmative, and the second in the negative.

If God foreordains anything, it is absolutely certain that what He foreordains

will come to pass. The purpose of God can never be frustrated. Even God's foreknowledge or prescience makes future events certain with respect to time. That is to say, if God knows on Tuesday that I will drive to Pittsburgh on Friday, then there is no doubt that, come Friday, I will drive to Pittsburgh. Otherwise God's knowledge would have been in error. Yet, there is a significant difference between God's knowing that I would drive to Pittsburgh and God's ordaining that I would do so. Theoretically He could know of a future act without ordaining it, but He could not ordain it without knowing what it is that He is ordaining. But in either case, the future event would be certain with respect to time and the knowledge of God.

Luther, in discussing the traitorous act of Judas, says:

> Have I not put on record in many books that I am talking about necessity of immutability? I know that the Father begets willingly, and that Judas betrayed Christ willingly. My point is that this act of the will in Judas was certainly and infallibly bound to take place, if God foreknew it. That is to say (if my meaning is not yet grasped), I distinguish two necessities: one I call necessity of force (*necessitatem violentam*), referring to action; the other I call necessity of infallibility (*necessitatem infallibilem*), referring to time. Let him who hears me understand that I am speaking of the latter, not the former; that is, I am not discussing whether Judas became a traitor willingly or unwillingly, but whether it was infallibly bound to come to pass that Judas should willingly betray Christ at a time predetermined by God.[3]

We see then, that what God knows in advance comes to pass by necessity or infallibly or necessity of immutability. But what about His foreordaining or predestinating what comes to pass? If God foreordains reprobation does this not obliterate the distinction between positive-negative and involve a *necessity of force*? If God foreordains reprobation does this not mean that God forces, compels, or coerces the reprobate to sin? Again the answer must be negative.

If God, when He is decreeing reprobation, does so in consideration of the reprobate's being already fallen, then He does not coerce him to sin. To be reprobate is to be left in sin, not pushed or forced to sin. If the decree of reprobation were made without a view to the fall, then the objection to double predestination would be valid and God would be properly charged with being

the author of sin. But Reformed theologians have been careful to avoid such a blasphemous notion. Berkouwer states the boundaries of the discussion clearly:

> On the one hand, we want to maintain the freedom of God in election, and on the other hand, we want to avoid any conclusion which would make God the cause of sin and unbelief.[4]

God's decree of reprobation, given in light of the fall, is a decree to justice, not injustice. In this view the biblical *a priori* that God is neither the cause nor the author of sin is safeguarded. Turrettini says, "We have proved the object of predestination to be man considered as fallen, sin ought necessarily to be supposed as the condition in him who is reprobated, no less than him who is elected."[5] He writes elsewhere:

> The negative act includes two, both preterition, by which in the election of some as well to glory as to grace, he neglected and slighted others, which is evident from the event of election, and *negative desertion*, by which he left them in the corrupt mass and in their misery; which, however, is as to be understood,
>
> **1.** That they are not excepted from the laws of common providence, but remain subject to them, nor are immediately deprived of all God's favor, but only of the saving and vivifying which is the fruit of election,
>
> **2.** That preterition and desertion; not indeed from the nature of preterition and desertion itself, and the force of the denied grace itself, but from the nature of the corrupt free will, and the force of corruption in it; as he who does not cure the disease of a sick man, is not the cause per se of the disease, nor of the results flowing from it; so sins are *the consequents*, rather than *the effects* of reprobation, necessarily bringing about the futurition of the event, but yet not infusing nor producing the wickedness.[6]

The importance of viewing the decree of reprobation in light of the fall is seen in the on-going discussions between Reformed theologians concerning infra- and supra-lapsarianism. Both viewpoints include the fall in God's decree. Both view the decree of preterition in terms of divine permission. The real issue between the positions concerns the *logical order* of the decrees. In the supralapsarian view the decree of election and reprobation is logically prior to the decree to permit the fall. In the infralapsarian view the decree to

permit the fall is logically prior to the decree to election and reprobation.

Though this writer favors the infralapsarian view along the lines developed by Turrettini, it is important to note that both views see election and reprobation in light of the fall and avoid the awful conclusion that God is the author of sin. Both views protect the boundaries Berkouwer mentions.

Only in a positive-positive schema of predestination does *double-predestination* leave us with a capricious deity whose sovereign decrees manifest a divine tyranny. Reformed theology has consistently eschewed such a hyper-supralapsarianism. Opponents of Calvinism, however, persistently caricature the straw man of hyper-supralapsarianism, doing violence to the Reformed faith and assaulting the dignity of God's sovereignty.

We rejoice in the biblical clarity which reveals God's sovereignty in majestic terms. We rejoice in the knowledge of divine mercy and grace that go to such extremes to redeem the elect. We rejoice that God's glory and honor are manifested both in His mercy and in His justice.

Soli Deo Gloria.

CHAPTER NOTES:

[1] Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p. 326.

[2] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), p. 206.

[3] *Ibid*., p. 220.

[4] G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), p. 181.

[5] Francois Turrettini, *Theological institutes* (Typescript manuscript of lnstitutio Theologiae Elencticae, 3 vols., 1679-1685), trans. George Musgrave Giger. D.D., p. 98.

[6] *Ibid*., p. 97.

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