

THE OBJECT
OF
PREDESTINATION

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NINTH QUESTION: THE OBJECT OF PREDESTINATION

Whether the object of predestination was man creatable, or capable of falling; or whether as created and fallen. The former we deny; the latter we affirm.

I. After having spoken of the predestination of angels, we come to that of men. The first question has respect to its question. object, about which we must treat a little more distinctly because the opinions even of orthodox themselves vary.

II. The question is not simply "what" the object of predestination was (as to nature). For it is evident that here we speak of the human race, not the angelic (of which we spoke before). Rather the question is "of what kind" it was (with regard to quality, i.e., how man was considered in the mind of God predestinating and with what qualities he was clothed; whether those before the creation and fall or after).

III. The opinions of theologians can be reduced to three classes. Some ascend beyond the fall (*supra lapsum*) and are hence called *supralapsarians*. They think that the object of predestination was man either not as yet created or at least not yet fallen. Others descend below the fall (*infra lapsum*) and hold that man not only as fallen, but also as redeemed through Christ (and either believing or unbelieving) was the object of predestination. Others, holding a middle ground, stop in the fall (*in lapsu*) and maintain that man as fallen was considered by God predestinating. We will treat the second opinion later; now we will examine the first and third.

IV. At the outset, we must take notice that whatever the disagreement of theologians may be on this subject, yet the foundation of faith remains secure on both sides and that they are equally opposed to the deadly error of Pelagians and semi-Pelagians. Both they who ascend higher in this matter and include the creation or the fall of man in the decree of predestination, and they who suppose both all agree in this: that men were considered by God as equal (not unequal) and such that their choice depended upon God alone (from which foundation all heretics depart).

V. Not without warrant, a reconciliation of this double opinion is attempted by some from the broader or stricter use of the word "predestination." By the former, it is taken generally for every decree of God about man in order to his ultimate end (in which sense it undoubtedly embraces the decree concerning the creation of man and the permission of his fall). By the latter, it is taken specially for God's counsel concerning the salvation of men from his mercy and their damnation from his justice (in which manner it is resolved into election and reprobation and has for its object man as fallen). Yet because that former signification is not of Scripture use (and confounds the works of nature and grace, the order of creation and redemption), we more willingly acquiesce in the latter opinion (which the Synod of Dort wisely sanctioned from the word of God) as the more true and better suited to tranquilize the conscience and repress the cavils of adversaries. And if anyone doubts that this was the opinion of the Synod, the words of Article 6 will prove it: "the decree of election and reprobation revealed in the word of God" is said to be "the profound, equally merciful and equally just choice of men lost" ("Primum Caput: De Divina Praedestinationes," 6 in Acta Synodi Nationalis . . . Dordrecht [1619-20], 1:279). And in Article 7, election is defined as "the immutable purpose of God, by which, before the foundations of the world were laid, he chose, out of the whole human race, fallen by their own fault from their primeval integrity into sin and destruction, according to the most free good pleasure of his own will, and of mere grace, a certain number of men, neither better nor worthier than others, but lying in the same misery with the rest, to salvation in Christ" (ibid., p. 280).

VI. That the state of the question may be perceived better, observe:

(1) that it is not inquired whether the creation of man and the permission of the fall come under the decree of God (for it is acknowledged on both sides that this as well as that was determined by God). But the question is whether they stand in the relation (*in signo rationis*) of the mean with respect to the decree of salvation and damnation, and whether God in the sign of reason is to be considered as having thought about the salvation and destruction of men before he thought of their creation and fall.

VII. (2) Again the question is not whether in predestination the reason of sin comes into consideration. They who ascend above the fall (*supra lapsum*), do not deny that it is here regarded consequently, so that no one will be

condemned except for sin, and no one saved who has not been miserable and lost. Rather the question is whether sin holds itself antecedently to predestination as to its being foreseen, so that man was considered by God predestinating only as fallen (which we maintain).

VIII. (3) The question is not whether sin holds the relation of the impulsive cause with respect to predestination. For they who stop in the fall acknowledge that it cannot be called the cause, not even with respect to reprobation (because then all would be reprobated), much less with respect to election. Rather the question is only whether it has the relation of quality or preceding condition requisite in the object. For these two differ widely: What kind of a person was predestinated; and Why or on account of what? The former marks the quality and condition of the object, while the latter indicates the cause. So the question returns to this—whether to God predestinating, man was presented not only as creatable or created (but not fallen), but also as fallen; not as to real being, but as to known and intentional being, so that although the fall was not the cause, yet it might have been the condition and quality prerequisite in the object? The learned men with whom we now treat deny this; we affirm it.

IX. The reasons are:

(1) a non-entity cannot be the object of predestination. Now man creatable (or capable of falling) is simply a nonentity because by creation he was brought from non-being to being. The reason of the major appears from this: that the salvation and destruction which are intended by predestination are the ends which are introduced into the subject (which moreover is supposed already to exist). Nor ought it to be objected here that the object of the creation (or of the decree of creation) was a nonentity; for such also might equally have been the object of predestination. For the nature of creation is widely different. It speaks of the production of the thing. It does not suppose its object from that of predestination (which is concerned with an object already made) and does not make it simply to be, but to be in this or that manner. Therefore as the decree concerning the creation of man ought to have for its object man creatable (to which it was destined), so the decree concerning the salvation or damnation of man ought to regard man as fallen (because redemption or destruction was destined for him). Moreover, every subject is conceived to be before its adjuncts.

X. (2) Either all creatable men were the object of predestination or only some of them. Yet neither can be said: not the former because there were innumerable possible men who never were to be created and, consequently, neither to be saved, nor damned; not the latter because if only some from all those creatable, they were not indefinitely foreknown, but definitely as about to be (for no other reason can be given why the other creatables were not predestinated than because they were not about to be). To no purpose is the retort that all creatable men were not absolutely the object of predestination because all would not be creatable in time. For besides the absurdity of saying they were creatable (if they could not be created), no reason can be brought why as many as were creatable did not fall under the object of predestination (if man creatable as such was its object). Therefore that a discrimination may be found between those who could be presented to God predestinating or not, we must descend to the decree of creation and suppose them as really to be created and not only as creatable.

XI. (3) The object of the divine predestination ought to be either one eligible through mercy or reprobable through justice. This cannot be said of man creatable and liable to fall, but only man as created and fallen. Nor is there any force here in the distinction between "elicit and imperate acts:" as if man was not eligible or reprobable as to imperate acts (i.e., as to actual mercy), but properly as to elicit acts (i.e., as to the intention of pitying and of punishing). For it assumes that the elicit acts extend more widely than the imperate (since the latter are the effects of the former), and that the effects of the mercy or justice of God can be destined to creatures, neither miserable nor guilty (which is repugnant to the nature of these respective attributes which suppose an object clothed with certain qualities).

XII. (4) If predestination regards man as creatable or apt to fall, the creation and fall were the means of predestination; but this cannot be said with propriety.

(a) The Scripture never speaks of them as such, but as the antecedent conditions while it passes from predestination to calling.

(b) The mean has a necessary connection with the end, so that the mean being posited, the end ought necessarily to follow in its time. But neither the creation nor the fall has any such connection, either with election or with reprobation, for men might be created and fall and yet not be elected.

(c) The means ought to be of the same order and dispensation; but the creation and fall belong to the natural order and dispensation of providence while salvation and damnation belong to the supernatural order of predestination.

(d) If they were means, God entered into the counsel of saving and destroying man before he had decreed anything about his futurity and fall (which is absurd).

XIII. To no purpose would you say that God could not arrive at the manifestation of his glory in the way of justice and mercy, unless on the position of the creation and fall (and therefore both can have the relation of means). For although sin and creation are required antecedently to the illustration of mercy and justice, it does not follow that they were means, but only the requisite conditions. All those things (without which we cannot accomplish something) are not necessarily means. Thus existence and ductility are supposed in clay as the condition for making vessels for honor or for dishonor, but it is not the mean. Disease in the sick is the previous condition without which he is not cured, but it is not the mean by which he is cured.

XIV. (5) This opinion is easily misrepresented (*eudiablos*), as if God reprobated men before they were reprobable through sin, and destined the innocent to punishment before any criminality was foreseen in them. It would mean not that he willed to damn them because they were sinners, but that he permitted them to become sinners in order that they might be punished. And it would imply he determined to create that he might destroy them.

XV. Hence it appears that they speak far more safely and truly who, in assigning the object of predestination, do not ascend beyond the fall. The Scripture certainly leads us to this. It says that we are chosen out of the world; therefore not as creatable or capable of falling only, but as fallen and in the corrupt mass: "Because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (Jn. 15:19). Nor does he escape who says that eternal predestination is not meant here, but calling (which is made in time). These are not to be opposed, but brought together. For from what mass in time God calls a man, the same he elected him from eternity. The kind of man that was considered by him in the execution of the decree, such he ought to be considered by him in the decree itself. For that

cause, it was not necessary that there should be the same order of intention and execution, but only that there should be the same object of calling and election. From this, it may be gathered that man as a sinner was elected because he is called as such.

XVI. Next, the election of men is made in Christ (Eph. 1:4) Therefore, it regards man as fallen because they cannot be elected in Christ except as to be redeemed and sanctified in him. Therefore they are chosen as sinners and miserable. Nor ought it to be replied that to be "chosen in Christ" is nothing else than to be chosen "by Christ" (not as Redeemer, but as God) to denote not the means, but the principal cause of election. For although it is not to be denied that Christ, as God, is the author of our election, yet it is plain that it cannot be so understood in this place.

(1) We are said to be chosen in Christ in the same way as we are said to be blessed and redeemed in him (Eph. 1:3, 7). But this ought to be understood of Christ not as God simply, but as Redeemer.

(2) It is confirmed by the parallel passage where grace is said to have been given us in Christ before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9)—surely not as God simply, but as Mediator

(3) The whole order of things in the chapter (in which are recounted the saving benefits of God bestowed upon us through Christ) proves that it treats of Christ under that aspect (*schesei*). Nor does Beza himself disavow this (although wedded to the first opinion). He holds that "in him" means "to be adopted in him" (Annotationum Maiorum in Noveum Testamentum [1594], Pars Altera, p. 349 on Eph. 1:4). Since then no one can be elected to the salvation to be obtained by Christ except as lost and miserable, the object of this election must necessarily be man as fallen.

XVII. Third, the mass of which Paul speaks (Rom. 9:21) is the object of predestination. However it is no other than a "corrupt mass."

(1) That mass is meant from which are made the vessels of mercy and the vessels of wrath; the former to honor, the latter to dishonor (Rom. 9:21-23)—for wrath and mercy necessarily suppose sin and misery.

(2) That mass is meant from which were taken Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau who are proposed as examples either of gratuitous election or of just and free rejection. But such is the corrupt mass because it speaks of twins

conceived in the womb (Rom. 9:11) and consequently sinners.

(3) That mass is meant lying in which men can be hated of God, as Esau. But such ought to be the corrupt mass because God could not hate a pure and innocent creature.

(4) That mass is meant from which Pharaoh was raised by God to manifest his power in his destruction, but no one would say that Pharaoh was raised from a pure mass. Such is the opinion of Augustine who calls it "the mass of perdition" (Enchiridion 25 [99*] and 28 [107] [FC 3:450-53, 460; PL 40.278, 282]). "Because that whole mass was condemned, justice renders the due contumely, grace gives the undue honor"; and afterwards, "they were made of that mass, which, on account of the sin of one, God deservedly and justly condemned" (Augustine, Letter 194, "To Sixtus" [FC 30:304, 315; PL 33.876, 882]). He asserts the same thing in Against Tun Letters of the Pelagians 2 (NPNFI, 5:391-401) and Against Julian 5.7 (FC 35:269-75).

XVIII. It is vainly alleged:

(1) that the pure mass is here meant because the children had done nothing good or evil (Rom. 9:11). The answer is that they are not said absolutely to have done nothing good or evil (since it treats of them as conceived in the womb, therefore already sinners), but in comparison with each other (i.e., having done nothing good or evil by which they might be distinguished from each other). Jacob did nothing good on account of which he should be elected in preference to Esau. Esau did nothing evil before Jacob on account of which he should be reprobated, for they were equal as to all things. So that the distinction of one from the other could arise from nothing else than the good pleasure (*eudokia*) of God: "that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth" Romans 9:11. 2) It is vainly alleged that the mass from which vessels are made to dishonor is meant; thus not corrupt, but pure because man would be already a vessel of dishonor. The answer is that *atimia* here does not denote sin, but the punishment of sin (as honor indicates the crown of glory for which man is prepared). So to be "made a vessel unto dishonor" is not to be created for destruction but to be reprobated and prepared for destruction (which agrees with no one but the sinner). Paul does not say of the vessels of wrath that God prepared (*katertisen*) then (as he says of the vessels of grace), but that they were prepared (*katertismena*) for destruction because God finds some as

vessels fitted for destruction by their own fault; others he makes vessels of grace by his mercy.

(3) It is vainly alleged that the mass, not of sin, but of clay from which Adam was formed, is intended. The answer is that whatever reference Paul had in the comparison of the potter (whether to Jer. 18:6 or Is. 45:9), no other than the corrupt mass can be meant because from no other clay could vessels of mercy and of wrath be made by God. Nor does the comparison have any other object than to show the highest liberty of God in the election to reprobation of men.

(4) It is vainly alleged that the corrupt mass cannot be meant because then all the objections proposed by Paul (Rom. 9:14, 19) would easily be removed. The answer is we deny it. For the objections always remain in election and reprobation when made, since no reason can be given why he should elect or reprobate this rather than that one. No answer can be given other than that of the apostle, "O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20).

(5) It is vainly alleged that thus Adam and Eve would be excluded from predestination because they were not formed from the corrupt mass. The answer is that we deny it. That formation is not to be understood physically by creation, but ethically by predestination. In this manner, our first parents themselves could also be formed from the corrupt mass because as miserable and sinners they were elected to salvation, not indeed in the mass of original sin originated (which exists only in their posterity), but of original sin originating (with which they were infected).

XIX. Fourth, the manifestation of God's glory by the demonstration of his mercy in the elect and of his justice in the reprobate was the end of predestination according to the apostle (Romans 9:22-23). But this requires the condition of sin in the object, for neither mercy can be exercised without previous misery, nor justice without previous sin. If God has predestined man to glory before the fall, it would have been a work of immense goodness indeed, but could not be properly called mercy (which regards not only the note-worthy, but the unworthy and the one meriting the contrary). So if God had reprobated man free from all sin, it would have been a work of absolute and autocratic (*autokratorikon*) power, but not a work of justice. For he mercifully frees and justly condemns man, as Augustine says. Therefore he

ought to consider the fall both in election and in reprobation. To no purpose does the very subtle Twisse take exception saying that the exercise of mercy and justice (effectively considered) supposes men to be miserable and guilty, but not equally the intention of pitying. Otherwise it would follow from the equality that since the object of salvation is the believer, he is also the object of eternal destination (which no one but an Arminian would say). For whether mercy and justice are considered effectively (by reason of their exercise and the external act in man) or affectively (by reason of the internal act of God), they demand the same object. Although predestination places nothing (as they say) in the predestinated (and so the purpose of pitying is not mercy itself effectively considered communicated to the creature), it does not follow that it is not an act of mercy (which accordingly ought to suppose misery and the fall); just as a prince, who decrees to pardon the criminal, by that very thing exercises an act of mercy towards him, although he has not as yet in fact made known to him the absolving sentence. Nor does the learned man's reason from equality avail concerning the decree of salvation because the previous condition is confounded with the subsequent mean. The former (as is the fall) ought indeed to precede as much in intention as in execution; but the latter (as is faith with respect to salvation) ought indeed to precede the execution-not equally in intention, but rather as the means, it ought to follow the intention of the end. So the sick man is the object of the physician's deliberation about his cure, but in that he cannot be considered as already purged because purgation is the means for obtaining the cure.

XX. Thus the end of predestination with respect to man (to wit, salvation and damnation) supposes necessarily creation and fall in the object. The means also prove that very thing: in election in Christ, calling, justification, sanctification (which demand the previous condition of the fall and sin, for Christ is the Savior from sin, Mt. 1:21). Calling is of sinners, justification of the guilty, sanctification of the unholy. And in reprobation the means are the abandonment in sin, separation from Christ, retention of sin, blinding and hardening (which apply only to the sinner).

XXI. The creation and fall are not ordered as means by themselves subordinate to the end of predestination, but solution. are the condition prerequisite in the object(as existence and ductility in clay are not the means which the potter strews under his purpose of preparing vessels for honor and dishonor, but only the condition or quality prerequisite in the object and the

cause *sine qua non*). For unless man were created and fallen, it could not come into execution.

XXII. Although predestination did not precede the decree to create man and permit his fall, it does not follow that God made man with an uncertain end. For if God did not have the manifestation of mercy and justice in salvation and damnation as an end, it must not straightway be said that he had no end at all. Why may God not have willed to manifest his glory in both by the exercise of other attributes (i.e., of power, wisdom and goodness) although he might not have looked to his mercy and justice because their object had not as yet been constituted? Therefore the end on account of which God decreed to create man and to permit his fall was not the manifestation of his justice and mercy in their salvation and damnation from the decree of predestination (which in the order of nature and in the sign of reason [*in signo rationis*] is posterior to it [unless we wish God to have first thought about refitting his work before he thought about constructing it; and about the cure of the sick before he determined anything about the disease]). Rather it was the communication and (as it were) the spreading out (*ektasis*) of the power, wisdom and goodness of the Creator which shone forth both in the creation of man (Ps. 8:5, 6) and in his fall in different ways (which was the last within the bounds of nature and in such an order of things). But after sin had corrupted and disturbed this order entirely, God (who elicits light from darkness and good from evil) instituted the work of redemption for no other end than to display more magnificently and (as it were) in the highest degree in another order of things, the same attributes and together with them his mercy and justice. To this end the means serve, not creation (which belongs to another kind and order), not the fall (which was only the occasion and end from which God began the counsel of salvation), but the covenant of grace, the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit, redemption, calling, etc. (which belong not to the order of nature, but to the higher supernatural order of grace).

XXIII. The common axiom which supralapsarians like to use here (and with which Twisse makes himself hoarse and on which alone he seems to build up the artfully constructed fabric of his disputation on this argument) is: "That which is last in execution, ought to be first in intention." Now the illustration of God's glory through mercy in the salvation of the elect and through justice in the damnation of the reprobate (as the last in execution, therefore it ought

to be the first in intention) admits of various limitations. First, it holds good, indeed, as to the ultimate end, but not as to the subalternate ends. Otherwise it would follow as well that what is next to the last in execution is the second in intention, and what is next to that is the third and so on.

In the execution, he

- (1) creates,
- (2) permits the fall,
- (3) redeems,
- (4) calls, sanctifies and glorifies.

Thus it behooved God first to intend the glorification and redemption of man before he thought about his production or the permission of his fall (which everyone sees to be absurd). Now the illustration of mercy and justice in the salvation and damnation of men is not the ultimate end simply and absolutely (as to the government of man in general), but in a certain respect and relatively (as to the government of the fallen). For the ultimate end (as I have said already) was the manifestation of God's glory in common by the creation and fall of man. Hence the decree of election is called the first in intention, not absolutely (as if it was the first of all the decrees in order, even before the creation and fall), but both in the class of decrees concerning the salvation of sinful man and with respect to the means subordinate to it. Second, it holds good only in the same order of things and where a necessary and essential subordination of things occurs. They, with whom we treat, do not disavow this but maintain that it only holds good in things subordinated by nature. But no necessary connection and subordination can exist between the creation and fall and redemption. Rather all must see between them rather a gap and great abyss (*mega chuuma*) (on account of sin) which has broken up the order of creation and given place to the economy of redemption. Sin is against nature. It is not the means either with respect to salvation (unless accidentally, i.e., the occasion) or with respect to damnation (for damnation is on account of sin, not sin on account of damnation). Therefore God's ways in nature and grace, and his economies of providence and predestination must not be confounded here. Since the end is different, the means must also necessarily be so. Therefore the axiom can have place in the same order-as what is last in execution in the order of nature or of grace, is also first in intention. However it does not hold good concerning disparates where a leap

is made from one dispensation to another, from the natural order of providence to the supernatural order of predestination (as is the case here).

XXIV. Moreover that subordination is so to be conceived as not to be understood subjectively and on the part of God. Since all things are decreed by one and a most simple act (which embraces the end and means together), not so much subordination has place here as coordination. By coordination, these various objects are presented together and at once to the divine mind and constitute only one decree. Rather that subordination is to be conceived only objectively and on our part, inasmuch as for more easily understanding, we conceive of them subordinately according to the varied relations (*schesis*) and dependence which the things decreed mutually have to each other (which, however, are united in God).

XXV. God did not make the wicked as wicked by a physical production, instilling a bad quality into him. Rather whom he apprehended as wicked by his own fault "he made" (i.e., "ordained" by a moral and judicial destination) for "the day of evil" (i.e. for the day of calamity and destruction). To this condemnation Jude says the wicked are ordained. The word *poiein* is often used in the Scriptures for ordination.

XXVI. Although the object of predestination is determined to be man as fallen, it does not follow that predestination is made only in time. Fallen man is understood as to his known and foreseen being, not as to his real being. Also the prescience of the fall and its permissive decree is no less eternal than the predestination itself.

XXVII. Although God is said to have raised Pharaoh up for this same purpose that he might show his power in him (Rom. 9:17), it does not follow in his reprobation that he was considered before his creation and fall. He does not speak of the first creation, but of his production from an unclean seed or his elevation to the kingdom which God brought about by his providence, that in him (whom he foresaw would be rebellious, and hardened by his miracles and plagued by his just judgment) he might have the material upon which to exercise power in his destruction.

XXVIII. Although the apostle speaks of the absolute power and right of God in the predestination of men by the comparison of the potter (Rom. 9:21, 22), it does not follow that it preceded the creation and fall of man. For that most free power and absolute right of God sufficiently appears in the executed

reprobation of fallen men, since that separation of men from each other can have no other cause than his good pleasure alone.

XXIX. Although the creation and fall come under the decree of God and so can be said to be predestinated, the word "predestination" being taken broadly for every decree of God concerning the creature; yet no less properly does predestination taken strictly begin from the fall because in this sense the decree of creation and the fall belong to providence, not to predestination.

XXX. That Calvin followed the opinion received in our churches about the object of predestination can be most clearly gathered from many passages, but most especially from his book *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (trans. J.K.S. Reid, 1961). "When the subject of predestination comes up," he says, "I have always taught and still teach that we should constantly begin with this, that all the reprobate who died and were condemned in Adam are rightly left in death" (ibid., p. 121). And afterwards, "It is fit to treat sparingly of this question not only because it is abstruse and hidden in the more secret recesses of God's sanctuary; but because an idle curiosity is not to be encouraged; of which that too lofty speculation is at the same time the pupil and nurse. The other part, that from the condemned posterity of Adam, God chooses whom he pleases, and reprobates whom he will, as it is far better fitted for the exercise of faith, so it can be handled with the greater fruit. On this doctrine which contains in itself the corruption and guilt of human nature I more willingly insist, as it not only conduces more to piety, but is also more theological" (ibid., p. 125; cf. ICR 3.22.1 and 7, pp. 932-34, 940-41). "If all have been taken from a corrupt mass, it is no wonder that they are subject to condemnation" (ICR 3.23.3, pp. 950-51). So too he thinks that Paul speaks of a corrupt mass where, among other things, he says, "it is true that the proximate cause of reprobation is because all are cursed in Adam" (New Testament Commentary on Romans and Thessalonians [trans. R. Mackenzie, 1961], p. 200 on Rom. 9:11). In this judgment of the celebrated theologian (answering to Article 12 of the French Confession [Cochrane, pp. 148-49] as also to the decree of the Synod of Dort), we entirely acquiesce and think it should be acquiesced in by all who are pleased with prudent knowledge.

XXXI. Besides these two opinions about the object of predestination, there is a third held by those who maintain that not only man as fallen and corrupted

by sin, but men also as redeemed by Christ (and either believing or disbelieving in him) was considered by God predestinating. This was the opinion of the semi-Pelagians and is now held by the Arminians and all those who maintain that Christ is the foundation of election, and foreseen faith its cause (or, at least, the preceding condition). But because this question is involved in that which will come up hereafter (concerning the foundation and impulsive cause of election), we add nothing about it now. For if it can once be proved that neither Christ nor faith precede election, but are included in it as a means and effects, by that very thing it will be demonstrated that man as redeemed and, as believing or unbelieving, cannot be the object of predestination.