

# Mission of the Church & God's Eternal Foreknowledge [Predestination] and Election

## INTRODUCTION

It is almost as if the Lutheran Reformers had our day in mind when they wrote: "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."<sup>1</sup> Today, there is disagreement among Lutherans, yes, even in our Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, regarding this article, and it is for this reason that the ACELC is including this brief introduction and what follows under the Teaching Materials tab of our website.

This need for clarification came to our attention at the Convening Conference of the ACELC on March 3, 2011. Specifically, during our open question time one of the participants came to the microphone and stated (in summary): "**In A Fraternal Admonition, #8 on page 8 (The Church's Mission and Her Evangelistic Task), there is confusion regarding how the doctrine of election is related to mission.**" Following is the paragraph in question.

- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions insist that God knows His elect, and that not one of these will be lost. Today some in the LCMS teach that it is indeed possible to increase the population of heaven, and therefore decrease the population of hell, if we are doing our evangelistic task properly. We reject the toleration of this error.

In light of this need for clarification, a resolution was passed at the 2012 ACELC Business Meeting to do two things. First, provide a link under our Teaching Materials tab titled: "**Mission of the Church & God's Eternal Foreknowledge [Predestination] and Election,**" which opens to this brief explanation and is followed by a copy of Article XI from the Epitome of the Lutheran Confession. Second, and this is still in process, we are evaluating studies on this important topic which can be used in congregations, winkles, pastor's conferences, and district conventions. We plan to provide several such studies which will be found at this website in the near future. For now, we suggest reading and study of Article XI from the Epitome and Solid Declaration.

## XI. OF GOD'S ETERNAL FOREKNOWLEDGE [PREDESTINATION] AND ELECTION.

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**1]** 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.

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1 Lutheran Church. Missouri Synod. (1996). *Concordia Triglotta—English: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (electronic ed.) (831). Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House. (italics added for emphasis)

## AFFIRMATIVA.

### The Pure and True Doctrine concerning This Article.

**2]** 1. To begin with [First of all], the distinction between *praescientia et praedestinatio*, that is, between God's foreknowledge and His eternal election, ought to be accurately observed.

**3]** 2. For the foreknowledge of God is nothing else than that God knows <sup>p 833</sup> 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.*

**4]** 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.

**5]** 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.

**6]** 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.

**7]** 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.*

**8]** 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].

**9]** 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.

**10]** 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.

**11]** 10. Whoever, now, is thus concerned about the revealed will of God, p 835 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.

**12]** 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.]

**13]** 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.

**14]** 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.

**15]** 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].

## **ANTITHESIS or NEGATIVA.** p 837

### **False Doctrine concerning This Article.**

**16]** 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:

**17]** 1. As when it is taught that God is unwilling that all men repent and believe the Gospel.

**18]** 2. Also, that when God calls us to Himself, He is not in earnest that all men should come to Him.

**19]** 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.

**20]** 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.

**21]** 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.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lutheran Church. Missouri Synod. (1996). *Concordia Triglotta—English: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (electronic ed.) (831–837). Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House.