In its simplest and most comprehensive form the dogma of predestination consists, then, in the assertion that the divine predestination is the election of Jesus Christ. But the concept of election has a double reference — to the elector and the elected. And so, too, the name of Jesus Christ (predestination) has within itself the double reference: the One called by this name is both very God and very man. Thus the simplest form of the dogma may be divided at once into the two assertions that Jesus Christ is the electing God, and that He is also elected man.

In so far as He is the electing God, we must obviously — and above all — ascribe to Him the active determination of electing. It is not that He does not elect as man, i.e., elect God in faith. But this election can only follow His prior election, and that means that it follows the divine electing which is the basic and proper determination of His existence.

In so far as He is man, the passive determination of election is also and necessarily proper to Him. It is true, of course, that even as God He is elected: the Elect of His Father. But because as the Son of the Father, He has no need of any special election, we must add at once that He is the Son of God elected in His oneness with man, and in fulfillment of God's covenant with man. Primarily, then, electing is the divine determination of the existence of Jesus Christ, and election (being elected) the human.

The eternal will of God in the election of Jesus Christ is His will to give Himself for the sake of man as created by Him and fallen from Him. According to the Bible this was what took place in the incarnation of the Son of God, in His death and passion, in His resurrection from the dead. We must think of this as the content of the eternal divine predestination. The election of grace in the beginning of all things is God's self-giving in His eternal purpose. His self-giving: God gave — not only as an actual event but as something eternally foreordained — God gave His only begotten Son. God sent forth His own Word. And in so doing, He gave Himself up. He hazarded himself. He did not do this for nothing, but for man as
created by Him and fallen away from Him. This is God's eternal will. And our next task is to arrive at a radical understanding of the fact and extent that this will, as recognized and expressed in the history of doctrine, is a twofold will, containing within itself both a Yes and a No. We must consider how and how far the eternal predestination is a quality, a predestinatio gemina.

For if God Himself became man, this man, what else can this mean but that He declared Himself guilty of the contradiction against Himself in which man was involved, that He submitted Himself to the law of creation by which such a contradiction could be accompanied only by loss and destruction, that He made Himself the object of the wrath and judgment to which man had brought Himself; that He took upon Himself the rejection which man had deserved; that He tasted Himself the damnation, death and hell which ought to have been the portion of fallen man.

When we say that God elected as His own portion the negative side of the divine predestination, the reckoning with man's weakness and sin and inevitable punishment, we say implicitly that this portion is not man's portion. In so far, then, as predestination does contain a No, it is not a No spoken against man. In so far as it is directed to perdition and death, it is not directed to the perdition and death of man. Rejection cannot again become the portion of man. The exchange which took place at Golgotha, when God chose as His throne the malefactor's cross, when the Son of God bore what the son of man ought to have borne, took place once and for all in fulfilment of God's eternal will, and it can never be reversed. There is no condemnation — literally none — for those that are in Christ Jesus. For this reason, faith in the divine election as such as per se means faith in the non-rejection of man, or disbelief in his rejection. Man is not rejected. In God's eternal purpose it is God Himself who is rejected in His Son. The self-giving of God consists, the giving and sending of His Son is fulfilled, in the fact that He is rejected in order that we might not be rejected. Predestination means that from all eternity God has determined upon man's acquittal at His own cost.

Comment

Barth here offers a radical reworking of the Reformed concept of predestinatio gemina ("double predestination"). According to Barth, God elected to take from us the negative aspects of divine judgment. God rejects Christ in order that we might not be rejected. The negative side of predestination, which ought Barth suggests, properly to have fallen upon sinful humanity, is instead directed toward Christ as the electing God and elected human being. God willed to bear the "rejection and condemnation and death" which are the inevitable consequences of sin. Thus "rejection cannot again become the portion or affair of humanity." Christ bore what sinful humanity ought to have borne, in order that they need never bear it again. Barth thus eliminates any notion of a "predestination to condemnation" on the
part of humanity. The only one who is predestined to condemnation is Jesus Christ who "from all eternity willed to suffer for us." The consequences of this approach are clear. Despite all appearances to the contrary, humanity cannot be condemned. In the end, grace will triumph, even over unbelief. Barth's doctrine of predestination eliminates the possibility of the rejection of humanity. In that Christ has borne the penalty and pain of rejection by God, this can never again become the portion of humanity. Taken together with his characteristic emphasis upon the "triumph of grace," Barth's doctrine of predestination points to the universal restoration and salvation of humanity—a position which has occasioned a degree of criticism from others who would otherwise be sympathetic to his general position.

Questions for Study

1. "In so far, then, as predestination does contain a No, it is not a No spoken against man." Locate this passage within the text. What does Barth mean by this?

2. How does Barth's interpretation of predestination compare with the older Reformed tradition, as seen in Calvin (6.33), Beza (6.37), and the Westminster Confession (6.39)?

6.46 Emil Brunner on Barth's Doctrine of Election

Brunner here reacts against Barth's doctrine of election, by declaring that it amounts to an irresistible imposition of salvation upon humanity. Note especially his analogy of the people in a boat in shallow water. The people in that boat may think that they are in danger of drowning; in reality, they are in no danger at all. See also 6.12, 6.20, 6.27, 6.33, 6.37, 6.39, 6.45.

The monumental presentation of the doctrine of predestination, and that of election in particular, which we find in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics, justifies us in making our own critical estimation of it, in part because it is the most comprehensive discussion of the question in modern theology, but especially because some totally new ideas have been introduced into the discussion of the whole question...

The second main article of his doctrine can be expressed as follows: Jesus Christ is the only elect human being. In order to develop this statement further, Barth is obliged to make a third statement: Jesus is "the eternally elect human being," "the
pre-existing God-man who, as such, is the eternal ground of all election."

No special proof is required to show that the Bible contains no such doctrine, or that no theologian has ever formulated any theory of this kind. If the eternal pre-existence of the God-man were a fact, then the incarnation could no longer be an event. It would no longer be the great miracle of Christmas. In the New Testament, what is new is that the eternal Son of God became a human being, and that thereafter, through his resurrection and ascension, humanity has received a share of his heavenly glory. Yet according to Barth, all of this is now anticipated, as it were; it is torn out of the sphere of history and set within the pre-temporal sphere, in the pre-existence of the Logos....

Karl Barth has been charged with teaching universalism. When he denies this, he is not actually wrong. He knows too much about the not especially illustrious theologians who have maintained this doctrine of Apokatastasis in Christian history to be prepared to have himself counted among their number.... Rather, Barth goes much further. For none of them dared to maintain that through Jesus Christ, everyone – whether believer or non-believer – are saved from the wrath of God and share in redemption through Jesus Christ. But this is precisely what Barth teaches.... Hell has been blotted out, and condemnation and judgement eliminated. This is not a conclusion I have drawn from Barth’s statements, but something he has stated himself....

There is no doubt that many people today will be glad to hear such a doctrine, and will rejoice that a theologian has finally dared to consign the idea of a final divine judgement, or that someone would finally be “lost,” to the rubbish tip. But they cannot dispute one point: that Barth, in making this statement, is in total opposition to the Christian tradition, as well as – and this is of decisive importance – to the clear teaching of the New Testament....

Karl Barth, in his transference to the salvation offered to faith to unbelievers, departs from the ground of the biblical revelation, in order to draw a logical conclusion which he finds illuminating. But what is the result? First of all, the result is that the real decision takes place in the objective sphere alone, and not in the subjective sphere. The decision has thus been taken in Jesus Christ – for everyone. It does not matter whether they know it or not, or believe it or not. The main point is that they are saved. They resemble people who seem to be about to sink in a stormy sea. Yet in reality, they are not in a sea in which sinking is a possibility, but in shallow waters in which it is impossible to drown. Only they do not know this. Hence the transition from unbelief to faith is not a transition from “being lost” to “being saved.” This transition cannot happen, as it is no longer possible to be lost.

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Comment

Brunner’s critique of Barth’s doctrine of election is widely cited in the literature, and has the immense advantage of being easy to understand. Brunner’s fundamen-
tal point is that, if Barth is right, nobody can fail to be saved. So it is ultimately not meaningful to talk about "being saved," in that nobody can avoid being saved. Brunner's analysis involves an exploration of the consequences of Barth's reinterpretation of the Reformed concept of praedestinationemina ("double predestination"), and the use of a good analogy to press his point home. Barth's views on this issue should be read before engaging with Brunner's critique (6.45).

Questions for Study

1. Summarize, in your own words, Brunner's critique of Barth's position. What are the key points that Brunner makes against Barth?

2. Set out the point that Brunner makes with his analogy of the boat in shallow water.