

Romans 8:30 is traditionally called (Ordo Salutis) the order of Salvation: 1 Predestination, 2 Divine Calling, 3 Justification, 4 Glorification. This morning let me concentrate on the first entity in the order - Predestination. I don't know whether you've ever heard a preacher preaching on it! I'll try, knowing that I may fail miserably.

Well, let me begin with a conversation between a black slave and his white master in America. This devout and pious Negro was asked by his godless master whether he thought that he (the master) was one of the elect, to which the old slave replied, 'I have never heard of an election without a candidate.'

Therefore, when we talk about predestination, we actually talk about God's election. These two words appear in Article 17 of the Anglican 39 Articles with the heading '*Of Predestination and Election.*' These two terms represent the same fact under different aspects. Predestination signifies the general intention of God to provide a plan of salvation, and has no direct reference to the individuals comprised in the plan. These terms are expressions that relate to the Divine acts before time.

When we talk about Predestination, we must understand the whole idea originates from St Augustine and, since then, it develops into different shapes and forms. In the medieval time, like Justification by Faith, Predestination is treated as an aspect of grace. Now why, in the medieval time, did the church have to be constantly highlighting Predestination? This is largely due to attack from outside. The libertarian thought of the Renaissance questions the validity of it because anyone who holds such idea denies the freedom of choice. Unfortunately, the church defended it rather unsuccessfully; what we inherited was largely a medieval doctrine, even though we attributed to John Calvin, the Geneva Reformer as the one who champions the new meaning of it.

One must say our Anglican understanding of Predestination, when compared with Calvin's, is something we should be proud to uphold. What I am going to speak about is not a biblical exegesis of the term, rather it is an exposition of Article 17. The key to the Doctrine of Predestination, as understood in the Article 17 lies in the two phrases: '*everlasting purpose*' and

*'chosen in Christ'*. Predestination, like justification, is salvation in Christ. Justification associates us with the righteousness of Christ manifest in his human life, predestination associates us with the eternal relation between the Son and the Father before all time. Who was the object of God's glad goodwill before the foundations of the world were laid? The one who could say, *'I will tell of the decree of the Lord, He said to me, 'You are my son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage.'* (Ps.2.7f).

When we speak of man's salvation as 'predestined', we are saying that the whole history of creation and salvation springs out of the eternal love which the Father bears to the Son, the love whereby he is resolved to give him a heritage to make him 'the first-born of many brethren' (Romans 8.29). The phrase 'chosen in Christ' is not to be understood as though we were chosen and he was merely the instrument by which our choosing was given effect. We are chosen in him, because he is the chosen one, the eternal object of the Father's good pleasure. Just as our justification means our participation in his righteousness, so our predestination, our election, means our participation in his position as the object of the Father's favour from eternity.

*'Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage.'* Says the Father to his Son. What we see in history is the fulfilment of that eternal promise. We sometimes say that Jesus is called 'elect' because he fulfils the election of Israel. It would be better to say that Israel is elect because it was allowed to anticipate the election of the Messiah. And for us, we are allowed to participate in the election of the Messiah.

At this point let us draw a contrast between Article 17 and the Westminster Confession on the issue of Predestination. There are three points in particular which distinguish the contents of the chapter of Predestination in the Westminster Confession from what we read in Article 17.

First, Westminster Confession understands Predestination as a part of the general content of the doctrine of God and creation, not as part of the doctrine of the Trinity and Salvation. In other words, this decree is seen to be an instance of the more general principles that apply to God's governance of the world.

Secondly, it teaches the so-called 'double decree', foreordination to death as well as predestination to life. Whatever happens, happens because God makes it happen; it must then follow that, if anybody goes to hell, he goes there because God has made him go there. This gives a somewhat ambiguous aspect to creation, which can no longer be understood entirely positively in terms of God's sheer gift of being and life.

Thirdly, it teaches that the predestining decree is individual and particular. Certain angels and men and women, *'particularly and unchangeably designed'*, are destined for these two ends. The drama of fall and salvation is understood as a 'means' to accomplish these individually determined ends. So one is saved or lost before one is a member either of Adam fallen or of Christ exalted.

Article 17 does not come at the beginning, with the doctrine of God and creation, but is among the doctrines of Salvation.

Secondly, the Article does not speak of the double decree. 'Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God,' it begins; and we naturally await a balancing sentence, 'Foreordination to death...' etc. But it never comes. The point at issue here is that the classic doctrine has undertaken to speak of God's eternal purposes independently of the revelation of God in Jesus. There is a curse, certainly, which God pronounces upon man's sin, and that means that there is the real possibility of God's pronouncing final judgment against any man; but even that curse and that judgment are a sign of God's goodwill towards the universe he has made, goodwill expressed as hostility to all that would unmake it. *'The Son of God, Jesus Christ, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes'* (2. Cor.1.19). Thus the Article says – and having said it, has said everything there is to say – that predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God.

But lastly, the Article identifies as the object of predestination 'those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind.'

The difference with the Westminster Confession is striking. It says that God first predestines *'angels and men, particularly and unchangeably designed'*, and then fore-ordains Christ as the 'means thereunto.' The Article, however, puts Christ at the heart of the eternal decree. The Article does not teach a particular predestination of named individuals; there is simply a decree to

save 'those chosen in Christ'. '*All that the Father gives me will come to me*' (John 6.37). Who they will be is not specified before the foundations of the earth. God has predestined a community, but not its individual members.

In Calvinistic doctrine, the individual and his destiny are rooted in eternity, while Christ and the community appear only in history to serve the outworking of the eternal decree. But, in Article 17, Christ and his community have their rooting in God's eternal decree, while the individual and his destiny appear only in history as the working out of that decree.

Anyone can become God's children if one truly believes in Jesus. But is it that simple, just believe in his name, one can become children of God? How does God do that? He sent His son to be God incarnate. In other words, all along, there exists a Father and Son relationship within the Godhead. Anyone who now associates himself or herself with Jesus participates in this Father and Son relationship. It is no doubt a mystery but it opens a way for humans to look at the inner life of God. From now on anyone can glimpse at the life God in and through Jesus the incarnate.