INSTITUTES

OF

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

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BOOK THIRD.

THE MODE OF OBTAINING THE GRACE OF CHRIST. THE BENEFITS IT CONFERS, AND THE EFFECTS RESULTING FROM IT.

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CHAPTER XXII.

THIS DOCTRINE CONFIRMED BY PROOFS FROM SCRIPTURE.

The divisions of this chapter are,—I. A confirmation of the orthodox doctrine in opposition to two classes of individuals. This confirmation founded on a careful exposition of our Saviour’s words, and passages in the writings of Paul, sec. 1-7. II. A refutation of some objections taken from ancient writers, Thomas Aquinas, and more modern writers, sec. 8-10. III. Of reprobation, which is founded entirely on the right­eous will of God, sec. 11.

*Sections.*

1. Some imagine that God elects or reprobates according to a fore­knowledge of merit. Others make it a charge against God that he elects some and passes by others. Both refuted, 1. By invincible arguments; 2. By the testimony of Augustine.

2. Who are elected, when, in whom, to what, for what reason.

3. The reason is the good pleasure of God, which so reigns in election that no works, either past or future, are taken into consideration. This proved by notable declarations of our Saviour and passages of Paul.

4. Proved by a striking discussion in the Epistle to the Romans. Its scope and method explained. The advocates of foreknowledge refuted by the Apostle, when he maintains that election is spe­cial and wholly of grace.

5. Evasion refuted. A summary and analysis of the Apostle’s dis­cussion.

6. An exception, with three answers to it. The efficacy of gratui­tous election extends only to believers, who are said to be elected according to foreknowledge. This foreknowledge or prescience is not speculative but active.

7. This proved from the words of Christ. Conclusion of the answer, and solution of the objection with regard to Judas.

8. An objection taken from the ancient fathers. Answer from Augus­tine, from Ambrose, as quoted by Augustine, and an invincible argument by an Apostle. Summary of this argument.

9. Objection from Thomas Aquinas. Answer.

10. Objection of more modern writers. Answers. Passages in which there is a semblance of contradiction reconciled. Why many called and few chosen. An objection founded on mutual con­sent between the word and faith. Solution confirmed by the words of Paul, Augustine, and Bernard. A clear declaration by our Saviour.

11. The view to be taken of reprobation. It is founded on the right­eous will of God.

1. Many controvert all the positions which we have laid down, especially the gratuitous election of believers, which, however, cannot be overthrown. For they commonly ima­gine that God distinguishes between men according to the merits which he foresees that each individual is to have, giving the adoption of sons to those whom he foreknows will not be unworthy of his grace, and dooming those to destruc­tion whose dispositions he perceives will be prone to mischief and wickedness. Thus by interposing foreknowledge as a veil, they not only obscure election, but pretend to give it a different origin. Nor is this the commonly received opinion of the vulgar merely, for it has in all ages had great support­ers, (see sec. 8.) This I candidly confess, lest any one should expect greatly to prejudice our cause by opposing it with their names. The truth of God is here too certain to be shaken, too clear to be overborne by human authority. Others, who are neither versed in Scripture, nor entitled to any weight, assail sound doctrine with a petulance and im­probity which it is impossible to tolerate.[[1]](#footnote-1) Because God of his mere good pleasure electing some passes by others, they raise a plea against him. But if the fact is certain, what can they gain by quarrelling with God? We teach nothing but what experience proves to be true, viz., that God has always been at liberty to bestow his grace on whom he would. Not to ask in what respect the posterity of Abraham excelled others, if it be not in a worth, the cause of which has no existence out of God, let them tell why men are better than oxen or asses. God might have made them dogs when he formed them in his own image. Will they allow the lower animals to expostulate with God, as if the inferiority of their condition were unjust? It is certainly not more equitable that men should enjoy the privilege which they have not acquired by any merit, than that he should variously distribute favours as seems to him meet. If they pass to the case of individuals where inequality is more offensive to them, they ought at least, in regard to the example of our Saviour, to be restrained by feelings of awe from talking so confidently of this sublime mystery. He is conceived a mortal man of the seed of David; what, I would ask them, are the virtues by which he deserved to become in the very womb, the head of angels, the only begotten Son of God, the image and glory of the Father, the light, righteousness, and salvation of the world? It is wisely observed by Augustine,[[2]](#footnote-2) that in the very head of the Church we have a bright mirror of free election, lest it should give any trouble to us the members, viz., that he did not become the Son of God by living righteously, but was freely presented with this great honour, that he might after­wards make others partakers of his gifts. Should any one here ask, why others are not what he was, or why we are all at so great a distance from him, why we are all corrupt while he is purity, he would not only betray his madness, but his effrontery also. But if they are bent on depriving God of the free right of electing and reprobating, let them at the same time take away what has been given to Christ. It will now be proper to attend to what Scripture declares con­cerning each. When Paul declares that we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, (Eph. i. 4,) he certainly shows that no regard is had to our own worth; for it is just as if he had said, Since in the whole seed of Adam our heavenly Father found nothing worthy of his election, he turned his eye upon his own Anointed, that he might select as members of his body those whom he was to assume into the fellowship of life. Let believers, then, give full effect to this reason, viz., that we were in Christ adopted unto the heavenly inheritance, because in ourselves we were incapable of such excellence. This he elsewhere observes in another passage, in which he exhorts the Colossians to give thanks that they had been made meet to be partakers of the inherit­ance of the saints, (Col. i. 12.) If election precedes that divine grace by which we are made fit to obtain immortal life, what can God find in us to induce him to elect us? What I mean is still more clearly explained in another pass­age: God, says he, “hath chosen us in him before the founda­tion of the world, that we might be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,” (Eph. i. 4, 5.) Here he opposes the good pleasure of God to our merits of every description.

2. That the proof may be more complete, it is of import­ance to attend to the separate clauses of that passage. When they are connected together they leave no doubt. From giving them the name of elect, it is clear that he is address­ing believers, as indeed he shortly after declares. It is, therefore, a complete perversion of the name to confine it to the age in which the gospel was published. By saying they were elected before the foundation of the world, he takes away all reference to worth. For what ground of distinction was there between persons who as yet existed not, and persons who were afterwards like them to exist in Adam? But if they were elected in Christ, it follows not only that each was elected on some extrinsic ground, but that some were placed on a different footing from others, since we see that all are not members of Christ. In the addi­tional statement that they were elected that they might be holy, the apostle openly refutes the error of those who de­duce election from prescience, since he declares that what­ever virtue appears in men is the result of election. Then, if a higher cause is asked, Paul answers that God so predes­tined, and predestined according to the good pleasure of his will. By these words, he overturns all the grounds of election which men imagine to exist in themselves. For he shows that whatever favours God bestows in reference to the spiritual life flow from this one fountain, because God chose whom he would, and before they were born had the grace which he designed to bestow upon them set apart for their use.

3. Wherever this good pleasure of God reigns, no good works are taken into account. The Apostle, indeed, does not follow out the antithesis, but it is to be understood, as he himself explains it in another passage, “Who hath called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,” (1 Tim. ii. 9.) We have already shown that the additional words, “that we might be holy,” remove every doubt. If you say that he foresaw they would be holy, and therefore elected them, you invert the order of Paul. You may, therefore, safely infer, If he elected us that we might be holy, he did not elect us because he foresaw that we would be holy. The two things are evidently inconsistent, viz., that the pious owe it to election that they are holy, and yet attain to election by means of works. There is no force in the cavil to which they are ever recurring, that the Lord does not bestow election in recom­pense of preceding, but bestows it in consideration of future merits. For when it is said that believers were elected that they might be holy, it is at the same time intimated that the holiness which was to be in them has its origin in election. And how can it be consistently said, that things derived from election are the cause of election? The very thing which the Apostle had said, he seems afterwards to confirm by add­ing, “According to his good pleasure which he hath pur­posed in himself,” (Eph. i. 9;) for the expression that God “purposed in himself,” is the same as if it had been said, that in forming his decree he considered nothing external to himself; and, accordingly, it is immediately subjoined, that the whole object contemplated in our election is, that “we should be to the praise of his glory.” Assuredly divine grace would not deserve all the praise of election, were not election gratuitous; and it would not be gratuitous, did God in elect­ing any individual pay regard to his future works. Hence, what Christ said to his disciples is found to be universally applicable to all believers, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,” (John xv. 16.) Here he not only excludes past merits, but declares that they had nothing in themselves for which they could be chosen, except in so far as his mercy anticipated. And how are we to understand the words of Paul, “Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recom­pensed unto him again?” (Rom. xi. 35.) His meaning obviously is, that men are altogether indebted to the pre­venting goodness of God, there being nothing in them, either past or future, to conciliate his favour.

4. In the Epistle to the Romans, (Rom. ix. 6,) in which he again treats this subject more reconditely and at greater length, he declares that “they are not all Israel which are of Israel for though all were blessed in respect of hereditary right, yet all did not equally obtain the succession. The whole discussion was occasioned by the pride and vain-glorying of the Jews, who, by claiming the name of the Church for themselves, would have made the faith of the Gospel depend­ent on their pleasure; just as in the present day the Papists would fain under this pretext substitute themselves in place of God. Paul, while he concedes that in respect of the covenant they were the holy offspring of Abraham, yet con­tends that the greater part of them were strangers to it, and that not only because they were degenerate, and so had become bastards instead of sons, but because the principal point to be considered was the special election of God, by which alone his adoption was ratified. If the piety of some established them in the hope of salvation, and the revolt of others was the sole cause of their being rejected, it would have been foolish and absurd in Paul to carry his readers back to a secret election. But if the will of God (no cause of which external to him either appears or is to be looked for) distinguishes some from others, so that all the sons of Israel are not true Israelites, it is vain for any one to seek the origin of his condition in himself. He afterwards prose­cutes the subject at greater length, by contrasting the cases of Jacob and Esau. Both being sons of Abraham, both having been at the same time in the womb of their mother, there was something very strange in the change by which the honour of the birthright was transferred to Jacob, and yet Paul declares that the change was an attestation to the election of the one and the reprobation of the other.

The question considered is the origin and cause of election. The advocates of foreknowledge insist that it is to be found in the virtues and vices of men. For they take the short and easy method of asserting, that God showed in the person of Jacob, that he elects those who are worthy of his grace; and in the person of Esau, that he rejects those whom he foresees to be unworthy. Such is their confident assertion; but what does Paul say? “For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the pur­pose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; it was said unto her, [Rebecca,] The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated,” (Rom. ix. 11‒13.) If fore­knowledge had anything to do with this distinction of the brothers, the mention of time would have been out of place. Granting that Jacob was elected for a worth to be obtained by future virtues, to what end did Paul say that he was not yet born? Nor would there have been any occasion for adding, that as yet he had done no good, because the answer was always ready, that nothing is hid from God, and that therefore the piety of Jacob was present before him. If Works procure favour, a value ought to have been put upon them before Jacob was born, just as if he had been of full age. But in explaining the difficulty, the Apostle goes on to show, that the adoption of Jacob proceeded not on works but on the calling of God. In works he makes no mention of past or future, but distinctly opposes them to the calling of God, intimating, that when place is given to the one the other is overthrown; as if he had said, The only thing to be considered is what pleased God, not what men furnished of themselves. Lastly, it is certain that all the causes which men are wont to devise as external to the secret counsel of God, are excluded by the use of the terms *purpose* and *election.*

5. Why should men attempt to darken these statements by assigning some place in election to past or future works? This is altogether to evade what the Apostle contends for, viz., that the distinction between the brothers is not founded on any ground of works, but on the mere calling of God, inasmuch as it was fixed before the children were born. Had there been any solidity in this subtlety, it would not have escaped the notice of the Apostle, but being perfectly aware that God foresaw no good in man, save that which he had already previously determined to bestow by means of his election, he does not employ a preposterous arrangement which would make good works antecedent to their cause. We learn from the Apostle’s words, that the salvation of believers is founded entirely on the decree of divine election, that the privilege is procured not by works but free calling. We have also a specimen of the thing itself set before us. Esau and Jacob are brothers, begotten of the same parents, within the same womb, not yet born. In them all things are equal, and yet the judgment of God with regard to them is different. He adopts the one and rejects the other. The only right of precedence was that of primogeniture; but that is disregarded, and the younger is preferred to the elder. Nay, in the case of others, God seems to have disregarded primo­geniture for the express purpose of excluding the flesh from all ground of boasting. Rejecting Ishmael he gives his favour to Isaac, postponing Manasseh he honours Ephraim.

6. Should any one object that these minute and inferior favours do not enable us to decide with regard to the future life, that it is not to be supposed that he who received the honour of primogeniture was thereby adopted to the inheritance of heaven; (many objectors do not even spare Paul, but accuse him of having in the quotation of these passages wrested Scripture from its proper meaning;) I answer as before, that the Apostle has not erred through inconsidera­tion, or spontaneously misapplied the passages of Scripture; but he saw (what these men cannot be brought to consider) that God purposed under an earthly sign to declare the spiri­tual election of Jacob, which otherwise lay hidden at his in­accessible tribunal. For unless we refer the primogeniture bestowed upon him to the future world, the form of blessing would be altogether vain and ridiculous, inasmuch as he gained nothing by it but a multitude of toils and annoyances, exile, sharp sorrows, and bitter cares. Therefore, when Paul knew beyond a doubt that by the external, God manifested the spiritual and unfading blessings, which he had prepared for his servant in his kingdom, he hesitated not in proving the latter to draw an argument from the former. For we must remem­ber that the land of Canaan was given in pledge of the heaven­ly inheritance; and that therefore there cannot be a doubt that Jacob was like the angels ingrafted into the body of Christ, that he might be a partaker of the same life. Jacob, therefore, is chosen, while Esau is rejected; the predestina­tion of God makes a distinction where none existed in respect of merit. If you ask the reason the Apostle gives it, “For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have com­passion,” (Rom. ix. 15.) And what, pray, does this mean? It is just a clear declaration by the Lord that he finds nothing in men themselves to induce him to show kindness, that it is owing entirely to his own mercy, and, accordingly, that their salvation is his own work. Since God places your salvation in himself alone, why should you descend to yourself? Since he assigns you his own mercy alone, why will you recur to your own merits? Since he confines your thoughts to his own mercy, why do you turn partly to the view of your own works?

We must therefore come to that smaller number whom Paul elsewhere describes as foreknown of God, (Rom. xi. 2;) not foreknown, as these men imagine, by idle, inactive contem­plation, but in the sense which it often bears. For surely when Peter says that Christ was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,” (Acts ii. 23,) he does not represent God as contemplating merely, but as actually ac­complishing our salvation. Thus also Peter, in saying that the believers to whom he writes are elect “according to the foreknowledge of God,” (1 Pet. i. 2,) properly expresses that secret predestination by which God has sealed those whom he has been pleased to adopt as sons. In using the term *purpose* as synonymous with a term which uniformly denotes what is called a fixed determination, he undoubt­edly shows that God, in being the author of our salvation, does not go beyond himself. In this sense he says in the same chapter, that Christ as “a lamb” “was foreordained before the creation of the world,” (1 Pet. i. 19, 20.) What could have been more frigid or absurd than to have repre­sented God as looking from the height of heaven to see whence the salvation of the human race was to come? By a people foreknown, Peter means the same thing as Paul does by a remnant selected from a multitude falsely assuming the name of God. In another passage, to suppress the vain boasting of those who, while only covered with a mask, claim for themselves in the view of the world a first place among the godly, Paul says, “The Lord knoweth them that are his,” (2 Tim. ii. 19.) In short, by that term he designates two classes of people, the one consisting of the whole race of Abraham, the other a people separated from that race, and though hidden from human view, yet open to the eye of God. And there is no doubt that he took the passage from Moses, who declares that God would be merciful to whomsoever he pleased, (although he was speaking of an elect people whose condition was apparently equal;) just as if he had said, that in a common adoption was included a special grace which he bestows on some as a holier treasure, and that there is nothing in the common covenant to prevent this number from being exempted from the common order. God being pleased in this matter to act as a free dispenser and disposer, distinctly declares, that the only ground on which he will show mercy to one rather than to another is his sovereign pleasure; for when mercy is bestowed on him who asks it, though he indeed does not suffer a refusal, he, however, either anticipates or partly acquires a favour, the whole merit of which God claims for himself.

7. Now, let the supreme Judge and Master decide on the whole case. Seeing such obduracy in his hearers, that his words fell upon the multitude almost without fruit, he to remove this stumbling-block exclaims, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing,” (John vi. 37, 39.) Observe that the donation of the Father is the first step in our delivery into the charge and protection of Christ. Some one, perhaps, will here turn round and object, that those only peculiarly belong to the Father who make a voluntary surrender by faith. But the only thing which Christ maintains is, that though the defections of vast multitudes should shake the world, yet the counsel of God would stand firm, more stable than heaven itself, that his election would never fail. The elect are said to have belonged to the Father before he bestowed them on his only begotten Son. It is asked if they were his by nature? Nay, they were aliens, but he makes them his by delivering them. The words of Christ are too clear to be rendered obscure by any of the mists of cavilling. “No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” “Every man, therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me,” (John vi. 44, 45.) Did all promiscuously bend the knee to Christ, election would be common; whereas now in the small number of believers a manifest diversity appears. Accord­ingly our Saviour, shortly after declaring that the disciples who were given to him were the common property of the Father, adds, “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine,” (John xvii. 9.) Hence it is that the whole world no longer belongs to its Creator, except in so far as grace rescues from malediction, divine wrath, and eternal death, some, not many, who would otherwise perish, while he leaves the world to the destruc­tion to which it is doomed. Meanwhile, though Christ interpose as a Mediator, yet he claims the right of electing in common with the Father, “I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen,” (John xiii. 18.) If it is asked whence he hath chosen them, he answers in another passage, “Out of the world which he excludes from his prayers when he commits his disciples to the Father, (John xv. 19.) We must, indeed, hold, when he affirms that he knows whom he has chosen, first, that some individuals of the human race are denoted; and, secondly, that they are not distinguished by the quality of their virtues, but by a heavenly decree. Hence it follows, that since Christ makes himself the author of elec­tion, none excel by their own strength or industry. In elsewhere numbering Judas among the elect, though he was a devil, (John vi. 70,) he refers only to the apostolical office, which, though a bright manifestation of divine favour, (as Paul so often acknowledges it to be in his own person,) does not, however, contain within itself the hope of eternal salvation. Judas, therefore, when he discharged the office of Apostle perfidiously, might have been worse than a devil; but not one of those whom Christ has once ingrafted into his body will he ever permit to perish, for in securing their salvation, he will perform what he has promised; that is, exert a divine power greater than all, (John x. 28.) For when he says, “Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition,” (John xvii. 12,) the expression, though there is a catachresis in it, is not at all ambiguous. The sum is, that God by gratuitous adoption forms those whom he wishes to have for sons; but that the intrinsic cause is in himself, because he is contented with his secret pleasure.

8. But Ambrose, Origen, and Jerome, were of opinion, that God dispenses his grace among men according to the use which he foresees that each will make of it. It may be added, that Augustine also was for some time of this opinion; but after he had made greater progress in the knowledge of Scripture, he not only retracted it as evidently false, but powerfully confut­ed it, (August. Retract. Lib. i. c. 13.) Nay, even after the re­tractation, glancing at the Pelagians who still persisted in that error, he says, “Who does not wonder that the Apostle failed to make this most acute observation? For after stating a most startling proposition concerning those who were not yet born, and afterwards putting the question to himself by way of objection, ‘What then? Is there unrighteousness with God?’ he had an opportunity of answering, that God foresaw the merits of both, he does not say so, but has recourse to the justice and mercy of God,” (August. Epist. 106, ad Sixtum.) And in another passage, after excluding all merit before elec­tion, he says, “Here, certainly, there is no place for the vain argument of those who defend the foreknowledge of God against the grace of God, and accordingly maintain that we were elected before the foundation of the world, because God foreknew that we would be good, not that he himself would make us good. This is not the language of him who says, ‘Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,’ (John xv. 16.) For had he chosen us because he foreknew that we would be good, he would at the same time also have foreknown that we were to choose him,” (August, in Joann, viii.; see also what follows to the same effect.) Let the testimony of Augustine prevail with those who willingly acquiesce in the authority of the Fathers: although Augus­tine allows not that he differs from the others,[[3]](#footnote-3) but shows by clear evidence that the difference which the Pelagians invi­diously objected to him is unfounded. For he quotes from Ambrose, (Lib. de Prædest. Sanct. cap. 19,) “Christ calls whom he pities.” Again, “Had he pleased he could have made them devout instead of undevout; but God calls whom he deigns to call, and makes religious whom he will.” Were we disposed to frame an entire volume out of Augustine, it were easy to show the reader that I have no occasion to use any other words than his: but I am unwilling to burden him with a prolix statement. But assuming that the fathers did not speak thus, let us attend to the thing itself. A difficult question had been raised, viz., Did God do justly in bestowing his grace on certain individuals? Paul might have disencumbered himself of this question at once by saying, that God had respect to works. Why does he not do so? Why does he rather continue to use a language which leaves him exposed to the same difficulty? Why, but just because it would not have been right to say it? There was no oblivious­ness on the part of the Holy Spirit, who was speaking by his mouth. He, therefore, answers without ambiguity, that God favours his elect, because he is pleased to do so, and shows mercy because he is pleased to do so. For the words, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and show mercy on whom I will show mercy,” (Exod, xxxiii. 19,) are the same in effect as if it had been said, God is moved to mercy by no other reason than that he is pleased to show mercy. Augustine’s declaration, therefore, remains true. The grace of God does not find, but makes persons fit to be chosen.

9. Nor let us be detained by the subtlety of Thomas, that the foreknowledge of merit is the cause of predestination, not, indeed, in respect of the predestinating act, but that on our part it may in some sense be so called, namely, in respect of a particular estimate of predestination; as when it is said, that God predestinates man to glory according to his merit, inasmuch as he decreed to bestow upon him the grace by which he merits glory. For while the Lord would have us to see nothing more in election than his mere goodness, for any one to desire to see more is preposterous affectation. But were we to make a trial of subtlety, it would not be diffi­cult to refute the sophistry of Thomas. He maintains that the elect are in a manner predestinated to glory on account of their merits, because God predestines to give them the grace by which they merit glory. What if I should, on the contrary, object that predestination to grace is subservient to election unto life, and follows as its handmaid; that grace is predestined to those to whom the possession of glory was previously assigned, the Lord being pleased to bring his sons by election to justification? For it will hence follow that the predestination to glory is the cause of the predestin­ation to grace, and not the converse. But let us have done with these disputes as superfluous among those who think that there is enough of wisdom for them in the word of God. For it has been truly said by an old ecclesiastical writer, Those who ascribe the election of God to merits, are wise above what they ought to be, (Ambros. de Vocat. Gentium, Lib. i. c. 2.)

10. Some object that God would be inconsistent with himself, in inviting all without distinction while he elects only a few. Thus, according to them, the universality of the promise destroys the distinction of special grace. Some moderate men speak in this way, not so much for the pur­pose of suppressing the truth, as to get quit of puzzling questions, and curb excessive curiosity. The intention is laudable, but the design is by no means to be approved, dissimulation being at no time excusable. In those again who display their petulance, we see only a vile cavil or a disgraceful error. The mode in which Scripture reconciles the two things, viz., that by external preaching all are called to faith and repentance, and that yet the Spirit of faith and repentance is not given to all, I have already explained, and will again shortly repeat. But the point which they assume I deny as false in two respects: for he who threatens that when it shall rain on one city there will be drought in another, (Amos iv. 7;) and declares in another passage, that there will be a famine of the word, (Amos viii. 11,) does not lay himself under a fixed obligation to call all equally. And he who, forbidding Paul to preach in Asia, and leading him away from Bithynia, carries him over to Macedonia, (Acts xvi. 6,) shows that it belongs to him to distribute the treasure in what way he pleases. But it is by Isaiah he more clearly demonstrates how he destines the promises of salvation specially to the elect, (Isa. viii. 16;) for he declares that his disciples would consist of them only, and not indiscriminately of the whole human race. Whence it is evident that the doctrine of salvation, which is said to be set apart for the sons of the Church only, is abused when it is represented as effectually available to all. For the present let it suffice to observe, that though the word of the gospel is addressed generally to all, yet the gift of faith is rare. Isaiah assigns the cause when he says, that the arm of the Lord is not revealed to all, (Isa. liii. 1.) Had he said, that the gospel is malignantly and perversely contemned, because many obstinately refuse to hear, there might perhaps be some colour for this universal call. It is not the purpose of the Prophet, however, to extenuate the guilt of men, when he states the source of their blindness to be, that God deigns not to reveal his arm to them; he only reminds us that since faith is a special gift, it is in vain that external doctrine sounds in the ear. But I would fain know from those doctors whether it is mere preaching or faith that makes men sons of God. Certainly when it is said, “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name,” (John i. 12,) a confused mass is not set before us, but a special order is assigned to believers, who are “born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

But it is said, there is a mutual agreement between faith and the word. That must be wherever there is faith. But it is no new thing for the seed to fall among thorns or in stony places; not only because the majority appear in fact to be rebellious against God, but because all are not gifted with eyes and ears. How, then, can it consistently be said, that God calls while he knows that the called will not come? Let Augustine answer for me: “Would you dispute with me? Wonder with me, and exclaim, O the depth! Let us both agree in dread, lest we perish in error,” (August, de Verb. Apost. Serm. xi.) Moreover, if election is, as Paul declares, the parent of faith, I retort the argument, and maintain that faith is not general, since election is special. For it is easily inferred from the series of causes and effects, when Paul says, that the Father “hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,” (Eph. i. 3, 4,) that these riches are not common to all, be­cause God has chosen only whom he would. And the reason why in another passage he commends the faith of the elect is, to prevent any one from supposing that he acquires faith of his own nature; since to God alone belongs the glory of freely illuminating those whom he had previously chosen, (Tit. i. 1.) For it is well said by Bernard, “His friends hear apart when he says to them, Fear not, little flock: to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom. Who are these? Those whom he foreknew and predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son. He has made known his great and secret counsel. The Lord knoweth them that are his, but that which was known to God was manifested to men; nor, indeed, does he deign to give a participation in this great mystery to any but those whom he foreknew and predestinated to be his own,” (Bernard, ad Thomam Praspos. Benerlæ. Epist. 107.) Shortly after he concludes, “The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him; from everlasting through predesti­nation, to everlasting through glorification: the one knows no beginning, the other no end.” But why cite Bernard as a witness, when we hear from the lips of our Master, “Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God”? (John vi. 46.) By these words he intimates that all who are not regenerated by God are amazed at the bright­ness of his countenance. And, indeed, faith is aptly con­joined with election, provided it hold the second place. This order is clearly expressed by our Saviour in these words, “This is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing;” “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life,” (John vi. 39, 40.) If he would have all to be saved, he would appoint his Son their guardian, and would ingraft them all into his body by the sacred bond of faith. It is now clear that faith is a singular pledge of paternal love, treasured up for the sons whom he has adopted. Hence Christ elsewhere says, that the sheep follow the shepherd because they know his voice, but that they will not follow a stranger, because they know not the voice of strangers, (John x. 4.) But whence that distinction, unless that their ears have been divinely bored? For no man makes himself a sheep, but is formed by heavenly grace. And why does the Lord declare that our salvation will always be sure and certain, but just because it is guarded by the invincible power of God? (John x. 29.) Accordingly, he concludes that unbelievers are not of his sheep, (John x. 16.) The reason is, because they are not of the number of those who, as the Lord promised by Isaiah, were to be his disciples. Moreover, as the passages which I have quoted imply per­severance, they are also attestations to the inflexible con­stancy of election.

11. We come now to the reprobate, to whom the Apostle at the same time refers, (Rom. ix. 13.) For as Jacob, who as yet had merited nothing by good works, is assumed into favour; so Esau, while as yet unpolluted by any crime, is hated. If we turn our view to works, we do injustice to the Apostle, as if he had failed to see the very thing which is clear to us. Moreover, there is complete proof of his not having seen it, since he expressly insists that when as yet they had done neither good nor evil, the one was elected, the other rejected, in order to prove that the foundation of divine predestination is not in works. Then after starting the objection, Is God unjust? instead of employing what would have been the surest and plainest defence of his justice, viz., that God had recompensed Esau according to his wickedness, he is contented with a different solution, viz., that the reprobate are expressly raised up, in order that the glory of God may thereby be displayed. At last, he con­cludes that God hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth, (Rom. ix. 18.) You see how he refers both to the mere pleasure of God. There­fore, if we cannot assign any reason for his bestowing mercy on his people, but just that it so pleases him, neither can we have any reason for his reprobating others but his will. When God is said to visit in mercy or harden whom he will, men are reminded that they are not to seek for any cause beyond his will.

1. French, “Il y en a d’aucuns, lesquels n’estans exercés en l’Ecriture ne sont dignes d’aucun credit ne reputation; et toutes fois sont plus hardis et temeraires à diffamer la doctrine qui leur est incognue; et ainsi ce n’est pas raison que leur arrogance soit supportee.”—There are some who, not being exercised in Scripture, are not worthy of any credit or reputa­tion, and yet are more bold and presumptuous in defaming the doctrine which is unknown to them, and hence their arrogance is insupportable. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. August, de Corrept. et Gratia ad Valent, c. 15. Hom. de Bono Perseveran. c. 8. Item, de Verbis Apost. Serm. viii [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Latin, “a reliquis;” French, “les autre Docteurs anciens;”—the other ancient Doctors. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)