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Election: A Pentecostal Reflection

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Abstract

Calvin's idea that election is a divine decree from eternity that determines who will be damned and who will be glorified contains no gospel for a large swath of humanity and leaves unanswered on what basis we in the church can be certain of our own salvation. Since Pentecostalism is committed to bringing the gospel to all flesh (to the ends of the earth), Calvinism undercuts our movement. Karl Barth offers us a valuable alternative, since for him Christ is God's "decree" of election for all of humanity, for the ends of the earth (Ps 2:7-8). Rather than humanity being divided eternally between the damned and the glorified, Christ as the elect one is damned and glorified for all of humanity, for the ends of the earth. One need look no further than the Incarnation, the Cross, the Resurrection, and Pentecost to understand the gospel of God's election of Christ and of our election (by the Spirit and by faith) in him and for him.

Key Words: Barth, Calvinism, Christology, election, Israel, Pentecostalism, predestination

Election is the doctrine of the divine *choosing* of humanity in Christ to be recipients of grace. It is anchored in eternity but also revealed in time, particularly in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. It is closely connected to predestination (or the divine foreordination) and divine calling to be received in faith, for election is both a promise and a gift. In short, those chosen (elect) are part of a foreordained plan (predestined) and incorporated by faith into Christ the elect one as well as the covenant of the elect people through divine calling.

In this chapter, I wish to discuss election largely in dialogue with Karl Barth. Of course, my goal will be attentiveness to Scripture. I choose Barth as a dialogue partner because I have found him helpful in my reading of Scripture on this issue. Barth is by far the dominant voice of twentieth-century theology. He wrote from within the Swiss Calvinist tradition but famously took issue with John Calvin's theology of election and, in so doing, brought the entire issue beyond the older Calvinist/Arminian debate. Interestingly, Barth spent most of his professional career teaching in Basel, Switzerland, where Calvin wrote the first draft of his magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. I had the privilege of doing my doctorate in theology at the university there under two professors who had studied under Barth. At Basel, I read both Calvin and Barth and was struck by the alternatives they both presented me with. I was most taken

with Barth's argument, and that impression never left me. Writing this chapter thus plays a small role in bringing my own theology of election to expression. Such is needed. The problem is that many Pentecostal students flirt with Calvin's doctrine of election without realising how his view of the matter undercuts their Christocentric, missional, and pneumatological priorities.

Many among my readers are accustomed to thinking of election as settled in eternity and fixed for all time. Both sides of the classic Calvinist/Arminian debate assume this. The only difference between the two has been that Calvin based eternal election on the mysterious divine good pleasure, while Arminius based it on God's foreknowledge of what we will do. Barth transcended that entire debate by basing election on *Jesus Christ*, who he viewed as elect in eternity *as well as in time* (as the incarnate, crucified, and risen one), so as to share his election with us all. In the pages that follow, I explore this alternative way of thinking.

The Key Point

I start by getting right to the core of Barth's criticism of Calvin's view of election. Calvin viewed election as a double decree made by God in eternity past in which God determined who would be saved and who would be damned. Calvin put it this way in Book 3, chapter 21, section 5 of his *Institutes*: "all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others."¹ In other words, for Calvin, *some are created for damnation and some for glory*. Barth took issue with Calvin's view of election by shifting the focus of the doctrine to *Jesus Christ*. Rather than election determining who will be damned and who will be glorified, *Barth viewed election as residing in Christ, who overcame damnation so as to be glorified for the sake of all*. Election for Barth is indeed about damnation and glory but also about the damned and the glorified *Jesus Christ!* Christ is the favoured Son elected as such in eternity past as the one in whom all others will find their election as favoured brothers and sisters. They will find their election in him because he revealed his election and offered it to humanity *in time* by taking on flesh to overcome our damnation and rise to glory on our behalf. In taking on flesh, he bound himself to all humanity. In overcoming our condemnation and sorrows at the Cross, he bound himself to us in suffering. In rising again, he bound himself to us in glory. As the first-born Son of "all of creation" (Col 1:15),² Christ binds himself to all of humanity to inaugurate a new humanity in him. *This is how he opens his election as the favoured Son to us in time, through his incarnation, death, and resurrection (and his outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh)*. He binds himself to us as the elect Son for all time so that in him we may be elect brothers and sisters.

If we say to him, "but I've rejected God," then he will reply, "but I've overcome that rejection and its condemnation so that you can join me as favoured

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, ed. John T. McNeill (Westminster John Knox, 2006), Book 3, ch. 21, sec. 5.

² All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

sons and daughters, destined for glory!” In Volume II, Part 2 of his famous *Church Dogmatics*, Barth wrote, “In Jesus Christ God in His free grace determines Himself for sinful man and sinful man for Himself. He therefore takes upon Himself the rejection of man, with all its consequences, and elects man to participation in His own glory.”³ Barth writes more elaborately,

If the teachers of predestination were right when they spoke always of a duality, of election and reprobation, of predestination to salvation or perdition, to life or death, then we may say already that in the election of Jesus Christ which is the eternal will of God, God has ascribed to man the former (election, salvation and life); and to Himself He has ascribed the latter (reprobation, perdition and death).⁴

The crucified and risen Christ as God’s election of humanity for all time means that rejection is not what God wills for humanity, for he takes this rejection and its condemnation upon himself and carries it away in Christ so as to elect humanity to glory in Christ’s resurrection. The key here is that Barth does not reduce the divine action at the Cross as merely one divine action alongside another (condemning or passing over those not meant to be included in grace). *No, for Barth the Cross reveals God at his very essence. The suffering God of the Cross who carries away the condemnation of all of humanity is for Barth the only God there is.* This assumption is at the core of Barth’s theological revolution, which came to powerful expression later in theologians like Kazoh Kitamori and Jürgen Moltmann.

So, election in eternity past is for Barth nothing other than God’s reconciling the *world* to himself, not counting their sins against them in Christ (2 Cor 5:19). There is no election except this because there is no other God but this. Indeed, God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 33:11). God “wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4), not willing for any to perish (2 Pet 3:9). “For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone” (Lam 3:33). God so loved the world that he gave them his Son so that in him they will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Human rejection of God does indeed thrust one into alienation from the election located eternally and both revealed and established in time in Christ, placing one under the shadow of the divine displeasure (and grieving!). Election involves this alienation from life as its “shadow side” (Barth), *but* Christ bore this shadow side and overcame it for the sake of our inclusion in life. In my view, this shift from an eternal “double decree” to *Christ in time* when it comes to election makes the most sense of what Athanasius called the “scope” of the biblical message. *And it shows why election comes to us as a gospel – one meant for all.*

Election and the Gospel: The Crisis of Uncertainty

Barth insists that election is Jesus Christ; he is the elect one who opens his election to others. Election at its core thus has a single and not a dual purpose in relation to humanity, not to condemn some and show mercy to others *but only to*

³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, The Doctrine of God, vol. II, part 2, trans. G. W. Bromiley et al. (T&T Clark, 1957), 94.

⁴ The parentheses were added for clarity. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 162-63.

overcome the condemnation so as to show mercy to all. As such, election tells us something fundamental and profound about the *nature of God*. Election and predestination are not just God's will for humanity but also, even more basically, God's eternal self-willing, self-determination concerning who he is eternally as God; namely, the God who wills to be God only as humanity's covenant partner in Christ. As Barth writes, "God's election of man is a predestination not merely of man but of Himself."⁵ Thus, the crucial question that Barth's understanding of election opens up is *not* why some get saved and others do not, but rather, *who is this God who elects?* What does his electing tell us about him? Does the God of election will darkness for some and light for others?

In Calvin's view, a large swath of humanity is eternally delivered over to condemnation with no divine intention that they should be saved. Such is the case, even if a Calvinist prefers to speak of the hopelessly condemned as simply "passed over" to somehow serve the mission to the elect. I do not see how the "passing over" language essentially changes Calvin's assumed double decree of condemnation for some and salvation for others. God is the final judge. God will still end up decreeing condemnation for all those he has passed over. So, what's the difference from Calvin's double decree if God's passing over the non-elect still results in God's condemning them? In the end, are not large swaths of humanity still excluded from grace as a result of this divine passing over, with no other path *meant for them* (thus, possible for them) except damnation? Is not God's love for sinners in this case significantly limited? It surely is. If in eternity past God only loved a select group of humans and willed to save only *them*, then the love of God is limited in scope *and intention*. Divine sovereignty is affirmed in a way that eclipses divine love. The results are devastating according to Barth.

Even if mercy for those elected to glory is God's primary motive, according to Calvin's doctrine of election, it is not God's only motive. God has a dark side for Calvin. How can we then say that "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5) and that the Word of the Father who reveals him is "the true light that gives light to everyone" (John 1:9) under Calvin's view of election? God must only be light for Barth because God's self-giving on the Cross is *all defining* for revealing who God is at his essence and in the ultimate depths of his being! There is no other side to God than this one. A leading Barth scholar, Bruce McCormack, thus summarises Barth's theology of election in contrast to Calvin's by pointing to the divine "ontology" or essence as determined by the mercy of the Cross extended to all:

Calvin's mistake was not simply that he understood predestination to entail a pre-temporal division of the human race into two camps. That is only his most conspicuous error. But the root of the difference between Calvin and Barth lies at a much deeper level – at the level of divine ontology. The electing God, Barth argues, is not an unknown "x". He is a God whose very being – already in eternity

⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.

– is determined, defined, by what he reveals himself to be in Jesus Christ; viz. a God of love and mercy towards the whole human race.⁶

Let us recall here T. F. Torrance's famous remark: "There is no God behind the back of Jesus Christ."⁷ Barth would have agreed with that comment when it came to election. Calvin does indeed involve Christ in election but not as Barth does, not in a way that makes him the locus of election.⁸ Bear in mind this difference between Calvin and Barth, for it will be crucial to what follows.

The issue at stake in Calvin's doctrine of election is not only who God is but who *we* are. If God eternally wills grace for some and damnation for others, on which side of this dualism do *I* stand? Are the "signs" of my election found in my experience of faith adequate to secure my hope that I stand on the gracious side of God's eternal will? There are many who genuinely struggle over this question, even to the point of despairing. There would certainly be no salvific grace willed for those eternally damned (or "passed over"). No gospel, no realistic hope exists for them. Am I decreed to reside among the hopeless? Is my faith genuine? How do I know? Faith must rest on a certainty beyond itself, *and that something must be meant for all for me to know for sure it is meant for me*. In other words, even if my faith is weak, I know that I am saved if I cling to the promise of God's love for *all sinners* in Christ. *The Cross is my only refuge, and I know this because of the promise that its mercy is intended for all*. If election is revealed and even extended at the Cross and the Resurrection, I have a secure foundation for my faith.

I know I am included in this promise because of this "all," but if there is no such promise to which all can cling, then I am left seeking to hear an "inner witness" in the deepest recesses of my soul in order to find security. I do not wish to downplay the importance of this witness, but is this not meant to point me to the Cross and the Resurrection, where Christ gave his life to save all of humanity? What is that inner witness without this objective and universally valid truth, this gospel, upon which it rests? And if those eternally damned or otherwise excluded from grace happen to find their way into a Christian church, there is nothing of any consequence that the elect (whoever they are) would have to say to them, not because these visitors choose not to believe (which can arguably change), but because God has excluded them, *which cannot change*.

⁶ Bruce McCormack, "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 97-98.

⁷ T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (T&T Clark, 2001), 243-44.

⁸ It is not quite accurate to say that with his election doctrine Calvin makes God an unknowable "x" behind the back of Christ. For Calvin, Christ (with the Father) is behind the election decree. See Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Baker, 2008), 35. And Barth does concede that Calvin called Christ the "mirror of election" in his classic *Institutes*, 3.24.5. None of this comes close, however, to the place Barth grants Christ when it comes to election. Barth rightly faults Calvin for not following through on his mirror analogy. Calvin clearly does not make Christ the elected for all time who opens his election to others.

We would have no gospel for them, no gospel meant by God for them! Election has in this case lost its gospel, at least in relation to a large portion of the human race. And who would with certainty have the right to speak this gospel, since no one could know for sure if *they* have been included in the promise? As Karl Barth rightly exclaims, “What an abyss of uncertainty is opened up!”⁹ *For Barth, only if the Word of the Father becomes flesh and is crucified out of mercy for sinners – defining God at his very essence – is our hope secured.* If the grace won for sinners at the Cross defines God at his very essence, then there is no room for another divine intention that wills condemnation rather than grace for humanity. And a gospel that is only meant for some is no gospel at all. These insights are key to Barth’s theology of election.

The Christological Centre

More must be said about the Christological centre of election. Barth’s Christological method in his theology of election starts with the universal nature of those texts that reveal God’s claim on humanity in Christ incarnate, crucified, and risen and then reads back from there to God’s elect will in the eternal past. What is willed in eternity concerning Christ and election anticipates what happens in time, and what happens in time grants us the only clear lens for discerning the divine will in the eternal past. For example, if in time, God sends his Son into flesh that none should perish because “he so loved the world” (John 3:16), then we are disallowed from assuming that there is a divine decree in eternity past that divides the world between those God wills to perish and those God wills to have life.

Other texts assume a universal atonement as well. The crucified Christ is first-born from the dead *of the entire creation* (Col 1:15-18). “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Christ “tasted death for everyone” (Heb 2:9). He “gave himself as a ransom for all people” (1 Tim 2:6). God was “reconciling the *world* to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them” (2 Cor 5:19).¹⁰ Barth assumes with good reason that the eternal Son self-determined in eternity to extend grace to all at the Cross and the empty tomb. There simply is no other elect Son than this one. No other election than the one revealed at the Incarnation and the Cross, where God carries away the sin and death of humanity. It is the eternal Word of the Father from eternity past who becomes flesh in time to reveal the Father and the Father’s will; indeed, to reveal himself as the Father’s will for all time (John 1:1-5, 14-18). The crucified and risen Son fulfils the words of the prophets by being the exact image of *God’s very being*, radiating his glory from a cross that atones for sinners (Heb 1:1-3).

Barth assumes for good reason that the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection imply far-reaching claims concerning God’s eternal will to reclaim

⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 65.

¹⁰ Such texts do not mean that at the Cross the entire world was reconciled to God. The Cross is God’s action towards us in mercy, removing the barriers between us. God’s reconciling move *towards us* now requires a response *from us*.

humanity in Christ. Note Colossians 1:15-18 where Christ is the “first-born” (from the dead) of the “whole creation.” Take note of this text:

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn *of all creation*. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

The first-born Son of *all creation* is also the first-born *from the dead*. Most translations rightly translate the preposition as “of” rather than “over” all creation, capturing the sense of the text that Christ as the first-born from the dead actually inaugurates (and does not just reign over) the new creation. He takes on flesh so as to be in himself essential to the new creation, “of it” and not just “over it.” At his resurrection he is installed as the elect Son in whom all of creation is elected to glory (Rom 1:3-4; Acts 13:32-34). *All of creation! There goes Calvin’s idea that many are created for damnation. There is just no way of making all of creation anything less than all of humanity.*

Israel was called God’s “first-born son” at the Exodus (Exod 4:22), *but they were this implicitly in and for their coming Messiah and for the sake of all peoples*. Paul tells us that the “seed of Abraham” meant to fulfil election actually ends up being Christ: “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ” (Gal 3:16). Christ said, “before Abraham was, I am!” And Abraham rejoiced to see his day (John 8:56-58).

Abraham moved the heart of God in Genesis 22 by offering up his child of promise to be sacrificed, and Paul later said that Abraham’s faith believed in the resurrection of the dead (Rom 4:17). Abraham’s election functions as a parable of the election of the Son of God who was offered up (sacrificed) by the heavenly Father and raised up by him to save all of humanity. The Messiah as the “first-born son” extends grace to all of humanity, which was God’s intention from the beginning (“and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed,” Gen 22:18). The target is not just select individuals from among all peoples. As all of Israel was called to sonship at the Exodus (Hos 11:1), so is all of humanity called to sonship in the exodus of the first-born Son of God from death to life in resurrection as the first-born of all creation! *The Messiah thus universalises an election that seemed at first to be limited to some*. What God is thought to will in eternity must be discerned from what Christ reveals in time.

This strategy of going from some to all others is typical of places in history where God appears to choose some over others. At some point we learn in the biblical narrative that the “some” were elected for the sake of the others! The Messiah’s redemptive work universalises the boundary of election in time. In fact, he will be the last Adam who inaugurates the new creation that will bear his glorious image (1 Cor 15:44-48). Even when God is selecting some for the sake of others, he is working behind the scenes already to call these others to himself. Notice what Paul reveals of God’s work among the nations over the history of their existence through planned kairos moments (opportune moments fraught with spiritual meaning) that were meant to turn all people towards God, to seek

after him, and perhaps find him, for they were all created from Adam to be God's offspring in ways that exceed their existence as natural creatures of God (Acts 17:26-28).

The lesson of history is that the success of election rests exclusively on Christ, the last Adam of the human race. Both Israel and the nations fail at fulfilling it. Israel as a nation was elected to bear witness to the nations of the glory of God: "... and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed" (Gen 22:18), but they failed to answer the call to do this: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from me" (Hos 11:1-2). They distressed their God and grieved the Spirit during their Exodus and its aftermath (Isa 63:9-10), but the *promise* of their election stood firm because it rested in their Messiah and was sure to be fulfilled through and in *him*. He is the one who will be given the "ends of the earth" (all nations) as his "possession" or his elect brothers and sisters; so expansive and universal is his work. Note what Psalm 2:7-8 says about the Lord's elect decree for all time and for all people: "I will proclaim the LORD's decree: He said to me, 'You are my son; *today* I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your *possession*'." This text is clearly messianic. It is also an election text. *Notice that the "decree" behind election is a specific event in time ("today I have become your Father")* and the moment is implied as the enthronement of the crucified and risen Messiah, whose reign will reach the ends of the earth, making the ends of the earth (*all nations*) his "possession." This is election language, for Israel was called God's "possession" in Deuteronomy 7:6. *Now the nations become God's possession in the risen Messiah!* In resurrection, the Messiah opens his election beyond Israel to the pagan nations! And this is part of the promise of election given to Israel! Israel is indeed elect in their Messiah to bless the nations (Gen 22:18). Even though Israel will fail at this, their crucified and risen Messiah will accomplish it for all!

This insight lies behind the New Testament conviction that the Messiah is *appointed* the favoured Son for all at his resurrection and exaltation. Note the quotation from Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:32-35, which quotes this text as fulfilled at Christ's resurrection:

We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: "You are my son; today I have become your father." God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, "I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David." So it is also stated elsewhere: "You will not let your holy one see decay."

See also Romans 1:3-4, where Christ is "appointed" the Son of God in power at his resurrection according to the Spirit of holiness: "... and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord." Notice that in the above text from Acts 13, Christ not only fulfils Israel's promise of election but that of Adam's seed among all others. The Messiah's flesh does not see decay (v. 35)! The curse of Adam in Genesis 3:19 is that he will return to the dust as a sign of his alienation from the source of life. Christ's flesh, however, does not decay and return to the

dust; he rises to glory for all of Adam's seed! Election occurs in history in the elect Jesus Christ, who proves to be the last Adam in whom the human race is summed up beyond Adam's natural image to bear the "heavenly" or immortal image of the exalted Son of God (1 Cor 15:44-48). Christ bears the Spirit already as the "chosen one" at the Jordan (John 1:33-34) (is conceived by the Spirit as the holy Son of God in the womb, Luke 1:35!). But it is when he is appointed the Son in power at the Resurrection "according to the Spirit of holiness" (Rom 1:4) that his election is actualised in him. When he pours forth the Spirit upon all flesh to bless the nations, the universal reach of election attains its fulfilment. He is in time the elect God-Man in order, as God, to open his election to all others. He is the elect man and electing God in the same person. This is where election is actualised for all time; this is where it succeeds and is based – not simply in an eternal decree but in time, in the union of the divine Son to flesh so as to open election to all flesh in him. As the famous T. F. Torrance writes, "Election is identical with the life and existence and work of Jesus Christ, and what he does is election going into action."¹¹ Christ as the eternal Word of the Father is not the mere instrument of election but is election itself. There is no divine choice or decree that is not included in this Word (Christ) and revealed in him.

Israel's elected mission to bless the nations is indeed to be fulfilled by Christ, their Messiah. Signs of favouritism or limitation in the expanse of God's calling is over the breadth of the biblical narrative overtaken by the universal thrust of Christ's work and shown to be a strategic move in God's plan to show grace to all. "Jacob I loved; Esau I hated" (Rom 9:13)? Later we see that God favoured Jacob (who stood for Israel) for the sake of the disfavoured nations, including Esau and his lineage among the Edomites! Paul concludes his entire discourse on election from Romans chapters 9-11: "For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all" (Rom 11:32). This is what we learn from the Messiah who bore human flesh and bore the Spirit to win election for all at the Cross and the Resurrection and then pour forth the Spirit on all to incorporate all into himself. The Edomites will suffer for their disobedience (as Israel did!), but God will use this to teach grace. The key idea here is that in Romans 11:32 God is not predestining disobedience for some and mercy for others! He is not handing over some to condemnation and others to mercy! He hands *all* over to condemnation so that he may show mercy on them *all*. And he shows mercy on them all by bearing and overcoming their condemnation on their behalf on the Cross so as to be appointed as the elect one for all time for their sakes. For example, in Romans 1:24, God hands the Gentiles over to their rebellious ways, but this condemnation is not the final word, fixed for all time. In Romans 4:25, God hands his elect Son over to a cross for their transgressions and then raises him for their justification.

By the way, any first-century Jew would have understood Jacob and Esau in Romans 9:13 to be symbolic of nations, Jacob as Israel and Esau standing for the Edomites. So it was from the beginning: "two nations are in your womb," God

¹¹ T. F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ* (IVP Academic, 2014), 183. Torrance is a leading theologian and proponent of Barth's theology.

says to their mother before they were born (Gen 25:23). The favour shown to Jacob before his birth as stated by Paul in Romans 9:11-13 refers to Israel's election as well as to Jacob's election as occurring before he was born in God's prior promise made to Abraham in Genesis 22, rather than as a timeless decree, unknown to the Old Testament. The universal reach of favour shown to Israel, which was for the sake of all people, is fully revealed when the Son is decreed in resurrection to be the favoured Son for the sake of all (in fulfilment of Ps 2:7, followed by 2:8, which depicts the enthroned Messiah as gaining the nations as his possession). He will extend his election to include all peoples, to the ends of the earth according to Ps 2:8 and Acts 1:8, for he is the first-born from the dead of the entire creation (Col 1:15-18). In the Acts narrative, the mission of the Spirit becomes this expanding boundary of the Son's election beyond Israel (see Acts 1:8). *What this means is the favour shown to Jacob while disfavour rested on Esau was not the final word of history!* In the context of the larger biblical narrative, Jacob is favoured for the sake of Esau's lineage, for the sake of all nations! Forget not the conclusion of Paul's discourse on election: "For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all" (Rom 11:32). Jacob and Esau!

The lesson of history taught by the story of election? "For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all" (Rom 11:32). In him, both Israel and the nations become God's elect "possession" (Deut 7:6; Ps 2:7-8; Acts 1:8; 17:26-28), to the Jew first and then to the Gentile (Rom 1:16). The Gentiles are included because as Adam's seed they too are predetermined to be God's "offspring" (Acts 17:26-28), even more, brothers and sisters of the elect first-born Son of the entire creation (Col 1:15-18).

But the nations strayed from God. They are indeed like the outcast younger son in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 who went to the far country to disown their Creator and deny their election as sons and daughters of God, orphaning themselves in the process. Israel was elect as their "elder brother," so to speak, to love God where they had failed to do so (Deut 6:4-5) and to go to the far country to bring them home. But Israel as a whole only ends up joining them in their sin!

It will be the elect Messiah of Israel (the last Adam) who will become the faithful Jew, the faithful elder brother of the human race, the faithful elect man (who is also the electing God), who extends his election to all others. He goes on the Cross to the far country of humanity's denial of their God-intended election, the promise and the call of it. He overcomes their damnation to attain glory for them, for them all. Their God-intended election in him remains valid for all time, for it is enacted and decreed for all time in his resurrection from the dead. "I will proclaim the LORD's decree: He said to me, 'You are my son; *today* I have become your father'" (Ps 2:7). Will we hear that decree given to us in time, given to us in the gospel of the crucified and risen Christ? Will we embrace it in faith? Only then can our election become "concretely actual and visible," to use Barth's words.¹² *As Christ actualised his eternal election in time by bearing flesh and*

¹² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 326.

dying and rising again, so must we, except we do so by faith and being adopted into his election, dying and rising in him!

In fact, the elect Messiah and Son of God is treasured in eternity by his Father. The utter delight that the Father has in his Son is spoken over him after the Son takes on flesh to fulfil the Father's mission of mercy and love on behalf of the human race (Luke 3:22). He bears the Spirit at the Jordan as the elect Son according to John 1:33-34, which also notes that the Spirit "remains" with him for a future fulfilment, the resurrection from the dead, his appointment to elect sonship. He will as the Christ of Pentecost pour forth the Spirit on all flesh to open his election actualised in resurrection to all others. As the ancient prophecy of Isaiah notes: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my *chosen one* in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations" (Isa 42:1). Notice in this messianic prophecy that Christ is the *elect of the Father*, the one in whom the Father delights.

Notice also that the elect Son bears the Spirit given to him out of his Father's love and delight in him. This is of course an eternal reality, for the Father loved the Son before the foundation of the world (John 17:24). But notice also that Isaiah 42:1 refers to a fulfilment in time. The elect one will in the power of this Spirit open the benefits of his election ("justice" or right relation with the Father) to all nations! Cornelius's Gentile household is accepted of God and cleansed as those who received the Spirit due to what Christ had done (Acts 15:8-9). The Spirit is the Spirit of adoption into Christ's elect sonship (Rom 8:15). As Christ's elect sonship is fully actualised in his humanity at his resurrection, so is ours (v. 23). Election conforms us to Christ's image (v. 29).

Election as realised in time in Jesus Christ is key to Barth's theological revolution. When Calvin taught that God elected us based on God's good pleasure, he failed to see that God elected us rather based exclusively on his delight in his Son. When Arminius taught that God elected us based on divine foreknowledge of our faith, he failed to see that God elected us rather based exclusively on the faithfulness of Christ! The faithful Christ is the elect man for all time, for all of humanity. We are only elect in and from him! This "Christ alone" aspect of election in the Son as taught by Barth is the needed correction of Calvinism and Arminianism! In Barth's view, human faithfulness does actualise eternal election in time, but the human faithfulness of Jesus Christ is alone its realisation and fulfilment! Yes, our election derives from Christ's. How else can it be by grace alone?

Many who read this might be surprised to learn that election occurs in time as well as eternity. This is because it's based on Christ. In fact, election as willed by God in eternity past anticipates its fulfilment in time! Time is the arena of election! Do not be so surprised by this! The fact is that election occurring in the eternal past is completely absent from the Old Testament. It is unknown to Israel's Scriptures, which was the Bible of both Jesus and Paul! Yes, there are divine promises made and fulfilled, but within the realm of history. One receives the impression from the Old Testament that there is a divine plan being worked out, but that is still a far cry from Calvin's eternal decree. The reality of election as established and extended to people in time is clearly the only understanding of election given in the Old Testament. Kurt Koch notes, for example, that

election in the Old Testament is “a concrete historical act on God’s part that forms the starting point and basis of the salvation history of God and his people.”¹³ More significantly, in a highly important book-length discussion of this issue, Sigurd Grindheim shows as well that in the Old Testament, “election is never explicitly associated with a time before or at creation. Election is a historical event located in the time frame of the patriarchs (Isa. 41:8; 51:1-3; Ps. 105:6; 135:4; Neh. 9:7) or the Exodus/wilderness wanderings (Deut. 4:37; 7:6-7; 10:15; Ezek. 20:5; Hos. 11:1; 13:4-5).”¹⁴ Pannenberg builds on the nature of election as a historical event in the Old Testament to maintain that election also occurs in time in the New Testament, where Christ is more explicitly the focus of God’s act of election, which he extends to others. It is Christ united to flesh, anointed, crucified, risen, and exalted, who is appointed the elect and favoured Son in time in fulfilment of God’s eternal self-determination to be the God revealed in a salvation history centred on Christ. Election indeed becomes in the New Testament a decision, made in the eternal past not only because God is eternal, but most particularly because the centre of election is the eternal Son. Because election has the Son as its centre, what he does in time to actualise that election in his flesh for all flesh becomes key to its eternal fulfilment.

Divine Intention and Human Response

Election is a person, Jesus Christ. He is the elect Son incarnate and the electing God in one. Election as an event between God and humanity is fulfilled in him. Election is thus an objective promise that calls others to faith, to find their election in Jesus also. This is why we speak of election as something to be received and actualised by faith as our own. It was always God’s will that we do this, since God chose Christ for our sakes (and Christ opens his election to us in time). God intends in eternity as well as in time that all of humanity actualise election by adoption into Christ’s sonship by faith and by way of the Spirit. Though God intends in electing Christ a universal outcome among humanity, Scripture indicates that this will sadly not be the case. The difference between the universal divine intention behind election and the more limited outcome is revealed especially in Romans 9:1-6:

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, *those of my own race*, the people of Israel. *Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory*, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. *Theirs are the patriarchs*, and from them is traced the *human ancestry* of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. But it is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all who are of Israel are Israel (emphasis mine).

¹³ Kurt Koch, “Zur Geschichte der Erwählungsvorstellung in Israel,” ZAW 67 (1955): 212 (205-26); quoted in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Eerdmans, 1998), 442.

¹⁴ Sigurd Grindheim, *The Crux of Election* (WUNT 2. Reihe 202; Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 8.

I want to highlight the fact that in the above text, election is intended for all of Israel. Paul uses the term “Israel” throughout Romans 9 to 11 to mean those descended from Abraham, so that term is being applied by Paul to the unbelievers mentioned above. There is no way of evading the fact that the unbelievers mentioned above still belong to “Israel” and thus to God’s elect purpose, even though they betrayed it. Even adoption to sonship and the divine glory (9:4), key to election’s fulfilment in the Messiah, was intended for them, *all of them!* But not all end up actualising that election by faith.

First, the reference point of this text is natural Israel (“those of my own race,” “the human ancestry of the Messiah”). These are the people willed by God to be elect, not a select number within Israel but Israel, descended from Abraham and meant to bless the nations through their witness. The people mentioned above are *unbelieving Israel*, but they are still targeted by God for an elect purpose, as all Israelites were. *If this were not the case, then Paul’s grieving over their unbelief would be inexplicable.* Paul grieves throughout this passage because they had not claimed the blessings of election by faith *that belonged to them as children of the promise given to Abraham* (“I have great sorrow and anguish in my heart,” 9:2). Paul explains their source of exclusion at the end of the passage (v. 6): not all who belong to natural Israel are “true” Israel by faith, but it’s not the word of promise that failed; they failed to receive it in faith.

At the end of the chapter, Paul elaborates on the reason for their exclusion from that which was meant for them, and it is not the divine decision that is the cause. In fact, at the beginning of the chapter Paul reflects the heart of Christ in grieving over their loss! The reason for their stumbling was that they sought after righteousness by the law rather than faith. “What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal” (Rom 9:30-31). What was their goal? Answering the call of election that came to them in the Exodus and its aftermath! “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from me” (Hos 11:1-2). Paul later says that only a faithful remnant within Israel “the elect among them” did claim these blessings because they did so by faith (Rom 11:7, 20) rather than by the law, which was disqualifying (9:30-32). They did not realise the election meant for them, but that does not mean that the promise of election was not meant for them and that they did not have a real opportunity to claim it for themselves.

The idea that the unbelieving Jews of Romans 9:1-5 were never intended by God to belong to election because they were never true Israelites selected in eternity to convert will not work as an interpretive strategy. The wording in the above passage contradicts this interpretation. The blessings of election in the Messiah “belonged” to them all (*Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory*, 9:4), not in the sense that they were entitled to it but because God willed in eternity to save them, along with the rest of humanity. Why else would Paul grieve so deeply over their disbelief if this were not so? Moreover, they still are Israelites by way of their lineage from Abraham, which, though not of decisive significance, still matters. God planned for Israel born of Abraham’s lineage to bless the nations with their witness. As James Dunn rightly notes,

“Paul’s anguish arises precisely from the fact that his people are Israelites.”¹⁵ The term “Israel” was not a title of honour that belonged *only* to faithful Israel in the ancient world but was regularly and commonly part of Jewish self-understanding. Dunn writes again: “If any name characterised Jewish self-understanding it was ‘Israel’,” adding, “Whatever is made of Paul’s talk of ‘Israel’ in v 6, it should not be forgotten that he prefaces the whole discussion with the firm statement ‘the Jews are *Israelites*’.”¹⁶ More specifically, descended from Abraham, they are children of the “promise of election” from and in their Messiah, but they never responded to that promise by faith, and so they became spiritually excluded from it. *They lost the spiritual essence of who they are as Israelites, but that does not mean that as Israelites descended from Abraham, they were not intended by God to have this essence.* They needed to attain it (be adopted into it) by faith, Abraham’s faith, faith in the Messiah whose day Abraham rejoiced to see. Paul was saying something like, “These are people of Israel but who have not proved true to the name.” Since Israel was elect as the people of the promise, people of the word of prophecy that called them, straying from this word caused them in a real sense to *lose who they are*. “It is not as though God’s word had failed” (Rom 9:6). The faithful remnant, “the elect among them,” actualised their election by faith (11:7). Yet, as Israel descended from Abraham, the blessings of election in their Messiah are still meant by God to belong to them, even though they had not actualised these blessings by faith.

Second, strikingly, the blessings of election that “belonged” to unbelieving Israel included the “adoption to sonship.” The attempt to apply an alternate (pre-Christian or non-salvific) meaning to this term “adoption to sonship” as used in

Romans 9:4 to evade the implication that election was meant for unbelieving Israel simply will not work. No such alternate meaning for the term exists in the Bible. As Dunn notes, “adoption to sonship” is nowhere used of Israel in the Old Testament, and it “occurs nowhere in the LXX or in other Jewish writings of the period.”¹⁷ Paul was obviously expanding a Christian term to include what God intended for unbelieving Israel! Paul’s deep grieving over these fellow Israelites who had rejected their Messiah and the adoption to sonship in him that was meant for them reveals the gravity of the situation and deep sense of loss that Paul felt. Paul grieved so deeply over unbelieving Israel that he was willing to be condemned himself if it meant they would be saved as a result. Paul understood well the heart of the God of election, the suffering God of the Cross, who, in predetermining his Son to crucifixion and resurrection, willed adoption to sonship for all of humanity, including rebellious Israel. Does this mean they will all be saved? God also required faith for entry into Christ’s elect sonship. Adoption into Christ in the Spirit requires faith.

Third, *the divine glory is also said in 9:4 to “belong” to unbelieving Israel!* It won’t do to attempt to limit this “glory” to Israel’s experience of God on Mount Sinai, thereby detaching it as well from anything applicable to election in Christ. *Eschatological glory*, such as we would associate with the risen Messiah, is

¹⁵ James Dunn, *Romans*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Eerdmans, 1988), 526.

¹⁶ Dunn, *Romans*, 526.

¹⁷ Dunn, *Romans*, 526.

indeed promised to Israel in the Old Testament (Isa 35:2; 40:5; 59:19; 60:1-3; 66:18-19). The glory of the new creation will manifest the glory of the exalted Christ, and Paul says in Romans 9:4 that this too belonged to unbelieving Israel! *The eschatological glory promised to the nation of Israel (and connected to their Messiah) is a promise given through their witness to all peoples!* For example, one text referenced in the parentheses above that promises eschatological glory to Israel is Isaiah 60:1-3. Take note of this text: “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” One finds an obvious connection between this text and the “glory” and “light” of God shining through the Lamb, who will light up the heavenly city and the new creation (Rev 21:24). The following verse (21:25) says, “The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.” To say that this glory of God promised to Israel *belongs to unbelieving Israel* is astounding. *Obviously, God intended election for them even though they receive it by faith, and most of them never will. This implication of Romans 9:1-5 undercuts Calvin’s theology of election.*

Significantly, Romans 9:1-6 appears right after the climactic passage of the previous chapter, Romans 8:29-30, which mentions both the adoption to sonship and the glory as predestined of Christians in Christ the elect one! It is instructive to read Romans 8:29-30 facing the horizon on 9:1-6. “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” The major elements of finding one’s election in Christ are in these texts: foreknowing (or foreloving), predestining (or foreordaining), calling, conformity to Christ’s image, adoption into Christ’s sonship, justification, and glory. First, what strikes me as I look at 8:29-30 in the light of 9:1-6 is that the elements of election listed in 8:29-30 (foreloving, predestining, adoption to sonship, calling, justification, glorification) in the light of 9:1-5 are not a causal chain of events guaranteed to unfold in a life predetermined by God. That interpretation of 8:29-30 makes 9:1-6 completely inexplicable. In the light of 9:1-6, these events listed in 8:29-30 are elements of one’s personal conformity to Christ by faith, intended and enabled by God for everyone. The lack of faith explains the fact that adoption to sonship and divine (eschatological) glory that “belonged” to unbelieving Israel were nevertheless unattained by them because they sought it by works of the law rather than faith (Rom 9:30-32; 11:7).

Second, it is also important to point out that the elements of election listed in Romans 8:29-30 are actualised in time by Christ the elect one who elects us in opening election to us. They are elements actualised by him for our sakes before they ever become ours by faith and they become ours in our imaging of *him* (8:29). *He* is the one who is foreknown (or foreloved) of his Father; *he* is predetermined by God to take on flesh for our salvation, thereby actualising his election in time for us; *he* is called and anointed at the Jordan, vindicated (justified) as the favoured Son at the Resurrection, as well as glorified and exalted to the throne in that event. After all, recalling 8:29-30, *he* is the “*first-*

born Son from the dead” unto eschatological glory so that we can be reborn unto *his* glory, adopted into *his* sonship, by faith (Col 1:15-18)!

Here is where Romans 9:1-5 is different from Romans 8:29-30. The former deals with unbelieving Israel while the latter with those who love God (8:28) and are united to Christ *in faith*. It is one thing for Christ to lay claim to all flesh in incarnation; it is another for him to attain union with all flesh via the Spirit and by faith. It is one thing for Christ to bind himself to those who suffer at the Cross; it is another to receive his suffering as a gift and to suffer with him and for him by faith. It is one thing for Christ to claim sinners for glory in resurrection, it is another for us to experience and hope in this glory by faith. It is one thing for us to “belong” to adoption to sonship and eschatological glory in terms of the divine intention in electing the Son on our behalf; it is another to actualise this adoption in the Spirit by faith and to await resurrection, at which time our adoption will be finalised in glory (vv. 15, 23). There is belonging in terms of the divine intention, and there is belonging by faith! The belonging of Romans 9:1-5 is by implication limited to the divine intention involved in Christ’s self-giving in time. The belonging depicted in Romans 8:29-30 involves our intent too by faith, for the recipients of this text are those who love God (v. 28).

The “those” of Rom 8:29-30 (“for those God foreknew . . .,” v. 29) has its point of reference beyond Christ among those who love God (v. 28). They are the ones being comforted with the assurance that God has always loved them in the beloved Son and has determined to bring them through their suffering to glory (cf. vv. 18-23). The text is forward looking, anchoring divine love in the past to grant the assurance needed to face the future. It is all about the glory and the way it fills the entirety of our journey through this world with meaning, overcoming the threat of futility and meaninglessness (vv. 18-20). So, Paul says in effect, those he foreloves he brings through suffering to glory. Those he foreloves he does not forsake. The “those” here is used as an open-ended term, like “all those,” since being foreloved by God is obviously not limited to those who will respond by loving him. “For God so loved the *world* that he gave his only Son that whosoever believes would not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). This insight is required by the larger context of 8:29-30 that includes 9:1-5, where Paul weeps with the heart of God for those who have spurned God’s love, many for the rest of their lives. Notice in Romans 11:11 that God uses unbelieving Israel’s transgression of rejecting their Messiah (especially by handing him over to the Romans to be put to death) to offer grace to the Gentiles, in part to make unbelieving Israel “jealous.” God is not above using something analogous to familial jealousy to lure unbelieving Israel back home. Such love God has for those who reject grace!

The divine intention to choose all of humanity in Christ is granted clear treatment in Ephesians 1. Take note of 1:4-8:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding.

The first verse of the above passage (v. 4) makes the astounding statement not very typical of Scripture that the Father “chose us in him before the creation of the world.” Barth stresses regarding this text what it does not say. It does not say that God chose us “with Christ” but rather “in him” implying complete dependence on his election for our own. Christ is pictured here as the one in whom we find our election. Barth writes, “In that He (as God) wills himself (as man) he also wills them. And so they are elect ‘in Him’ in and with his own election.”¹⁸ In other words, in the election of Jesus Christ, all of us are elected. The eternal Son weds himself to humanity by incarnating in Jesus (self-determined to do so in eternity) so that in this human life, in incarnation, death, and resurrection, he could open his eternal election to all of humanity. As human, the eternal Son is the elect man, but as divine he is also the electing God because he opens his election to us in time. The point here is that, though the text speaks of us as chosen, it also does so in a way that makes our election dependent on his, even derived from his. This insight should not be hard to understand. In the very next verse, Paul writes that we are within this election “predestined to adoption to sonship” (v. 5). Paul’s notion of adoption is entirely dependent on Christ’s sonship. He is the beloved and favoured Son by nature and we by adoption as his brothers and sisters. Our status as siblings of Christ depends entirely on what Christ has done to incorporate us into himself and into his relationship with the Father. If we are “chosen in him,” which is further described as being “predestined to adoption to sonship,” then the entire trend of thought means that we have no status apart from Christ and gain everything in and from him.

Notice also the uninterrupted transition from eternity to time in these two verses (Eph 1:4-5). The election “in him” (meaning “in Christ”) becomes in the following verse a predestination “through Jesus Christ.” The following verses depict blessings of election received in time (adoption, grace lavishly imparted, redemption, wisdom). Then comes the *telos* or goal of it all in verse 10: “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.” This unity tells us how Paul envisions the goal of election, namely, the creating of a new humanity united in Christ their head and elder brother. Adam, who bound us to mortality and condemnation, is now replaced by the last Adam, who destines us to a new family united in him and bound for glory (cf. 1 Cor 15:44-48). That eschatological unity is brought up again by Paul in the very next chapter where Christ himself is the “peace” uniting Jew and Gentile into one body: “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace” (Eph 2:14-15).

Returning to Ephesians 1, one can notice the movement of Paul’s thought from Jew to Gentile. Directly after the climactic verse of 1:10, Paul elaborates on the united humanity of the last Adam as consisting of Jew and Gentile. Speaking of the Jews first, he writes:

¹⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 116-17.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit (1:11-13).

Paul refers to the sealing with the Spirit again in Ephesians 4:30, adding the warning not to grieve the Spirit. This warning seems to hark back to Isaiah 63:10 where Israel was said to grieve the Spirit during the Exodus and its aftermath. Likewise, the new humanity in its journey towards eschatological unity in its head is to follow the leading of the Spirit!

The emphasis on the uniting of Jew and Gentile in Ephesians 1 and 2 implies for me that the election and predestination referred to in 1:4-5 hovers at the level of a corporate reality rather than an individual one such as you have in Romans 8:29-30. The predestined plan was to choose not only Israel but the Gentiles also in Christ to be his brothers and sisters by way of adoption. Even in chapter 2, where Paul talks about the uniting of Jew and Gentile in Christ (he himself in his very person as the elect of God being their peace!), one gets the feel that he is still talking about a corporate plan concerning a new humanity effecting the life, shape, and mission of the church. Granted, individual Jews and Gentiles all find a place in this predestined plan to unite Jew and Gentile in Christ. And I have no problem saying that all of humanity is predestined in the election of the predestined Jesus Christ (God predestines us in predestining him!). In a very important study on the ancient Greek term προορίζω, meaning to predestine, Robert Sloan points out that the use of the word in the ancient world outside of the New Testament did not refer to eternity past and merely meant to foreordain something. What is meant more specifically in the use of the word, including in the New Testament, depended entirely on the context.¹⁹ In my view, we are all foreordained to election in Christ's foreordination. Can God foreordain people to election in Christ, and they end up not realising it by faith? Just read Romans 9:1-5! But is not what God foreordains guaranteed to be fulfilled? Yes, and it has been, in Christ! And it will be also in the new humanity adopted and glorified in him. But there will still be losses. One of the major problems I have with Calvinism is its assumption that all that God intends will occur in time. There are plenty of Scriptures to show that this is sadly not the case. Read again Romans 9:1-5 and then weep with Paul over so many destinies willed by God that are not fulfilled in time.

Calvinists tend to read an eternal decree into some texts that do not require it. For example, Acts 13:48 states of the Gentiles who attended one of Paul's meetings, "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and *all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*" The text seems to celebrate the fact that *all* of the Gentiles present believed. Would the Calvinist have us believe that all of the Gentiles present just happened to have been

¹⁹ Robert Sloan, "To Predestine (προορίζω): The Use of a Pauline Term in Extrabiblical Tradition," in *Good News in History: Essays in Honor of Bo Reiche*, ed. I. Miller (Scholars, 1993), 127-36.

selected in eternity to be among those chosen for salvation? There is nothing in the context that would lead us to believe that the “appointment” is an eternal decree. The fact is that Acts puts its weight elsewhere. People are led in Acts to certain key moments in their journeys with God that God arranges and that often yield positive results. One calls to mind the Ethiopian eunuch’s not-so coincidental crossing of paths with Philip in Acts 8, the meeting between Peter and Cornelius’s household arranged by God in Acts 10 (where all in that household were also saved), or the “appointed times” (*kairos* moments) that lead many among the nations to seek God and find him in Acts 17:26-28. So also, God arranged a divine “appointment” unto salvation for these Gentiles who were led in their search for God to Paul in Acts 13. However, the word “appointed” in Acts 13:48 can also mean “destined.” Joseph Fitzmyer thus translates the key phrase of the verse this way: “All who believed were destined to eternal life.”²⁰ In either case, turning this text into an eternal decree is entirely unnecessary. Take also for example John 6:39 and 44, where Christ refers with gratitude to all those the Father has “given him” or “drawn to him.” It is thought that this is done by an eternal decree or predestination, though there is not a word in the context to justify such a far-flung conclusion. In fact, John 1:9 refers to the Word of the Father as the light that is meant for “everyone.” Why could not Jesus simply be referring to those from Israel (the faithful remnant) who emerged from Old Testament faith with hearts that were open to the lead of the Father through the Spirit towards Jesus as the light of God intended for all?

Last, some texts do have an eternal point of reference. We can refer for example to the “Lamb’s book of life” (Rev 21:27) “written from the foundation of the world” (17:8). First, it seems that this book is symbolic of God’s recognition that his Lamb bears his name for the sake of others, as the Lamb given for the salvation of the world. If God pre-loved and chose humanity in the eternal Son as the one who is eternally self-identified as the Lamb that is slain and raised out of mercy towards sinners, the point is confirmed that election occurs most decisively on the Cross and the Resurrection, where God overcomes our condemnation in order to elect us to glory. Revelation 17:8 and 13:8 mean that Barth was right, and Calvin was wrong. Indeed, it’s not our book but the Lamb’s. It’s his name in its title and not ours. Our names are included only under his and are there because he has willed from a cross to share his election with us all.

Second, it is “written” from the foundation of the world, parallel with the Lamb himself being slain from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8).²¹ The eternal Son’s self-identification with the crucified Christ reflects God’s eternal

²⁰ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (Yale University Press, 1998), 522.

²¹ Robert Mounce in his commentary on Revelation for the New International Commentary on the New Testament (Eerdmans, 1998), 252, rightly notes concerning 13:8 that the most natural reading in the Greek refers “from the creation of the world” to the slain Lamb rather than his book of life. He observes that some translations refer the creation of the world to the book of life because of 17:8, which does do this. But, as Mounce also points out, the author of Revelation can use the phrase “from the creation of the world” to refer to more than one point of reference!

will for life rather than death. Third, there is thus no death list in this book, only an intention of life. Fourth, why not suppose that *all names* are initially included? Revelation 3:5 says of those who overcome and remain faithful unto the end: “I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life.” *Notice how not being blotted out of the book is conditioned by enduring in one’s choice of life until the end.* This must mean that names can be blotted out if they don’t endure or never come to accept life eternal. This point is telling. It means that there are names in this book that God knows will not endure in their choice of life or who in their lives do not come to choose life. The “book” ends up being “edited” in the eschaton so that only those who end up choosing life remain in the final version. One is reminded also of the people of God depicted in Romans 11 as a tree that gives life to its branches. Those who forsake life are cut off (v. 20). The difference with the book-of-life metaphor is that there is no mention of names being added as people are added in the tree-of-life metaphor. The “book” must have started out with everyone included! Again, Christ’s death is in numerous places of the New Testament depicted as intended for all. As I said above, which bears repeating here, the idea that the Lamb or Son was crucified and raised to save the entire world is well attested in Scripture. He is first-born from the dead *of the entire creation* (Col 1:15-18). For God so loved the *world* that he gave his Son *to give them life* (John 3:16). “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Christ “tasted death for everyone” (Heb 2:9). He “gave himself as a ransom for all people” (1 Tim 2:6). God was “reconciling the *world* to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them” (2 Cor 5:19).²² The Lamb’s book of life would have to be meant for all if it is true to its subject matter.

The entire issue of divine predestination is thorny. God’s predestining something would indeed be guaranteed in its fulfilment if the context has to do with the Christ-event or biblical prophecy, but does this apply to all the events of history? God uses all things towards his foreordained ends, but does this mean that all things are foreordained? I don’t think so, for that would make God the origin of evil, an unthinkable thought for a God who is only light and in whom there is not darkness (1 John 1:5). For example, God predestines adoption to sonship for the new humanity united eschatologically in Christ in Ephesians 1:5-10. This is guaranteed to happen, but the context implies that the guarantee applies fundamentally to Christ and only to us “in him.” We are speaking here of a foreordained plan that will not include all for whom it is meant. There are losses, even for God. When it comes to the meaning of the term “predestination,” context is everything. I only have space to offer a few remarks here.

First, there is no question to my mind that God knows in eternity all that will happen in time. “His understanding knows no limit” (Ps 147:5). But foreknowledge (not meaning here foreloving) in and of itself is not causation or predetermination. So, how do we understand divine providence in relation to the vicissitudes of history? I cannot go so far as to agree with Martin Buber’s famous remark that history is a conversation between God and humanity that is far from

²² See my qualification of these texts given in footnote 10.

settled.²³ In a sense, this conversation has been settled in the union between God and humanity that took place in the Incarnation and life of the divine Word of the Father in human flesh (John 1:14). Christ as a man spent his entire life saying “yes” to his heavenly Father and the leading of the Spirit (and to his own self-determination as the eternal Word of the Father). This was all done in response to the Father’s “yes” to him, and, for his sake, to us! The whole purpose of election is to conform all of humanity to that “yes”! God works in history, even using our disobedience to fulfil his plan (read Rom 9-11), so that there is no way

humanity can end up thwarting God’s foreordained purposes (“no purpose of yours can be thwarted,” Job 42:2). He works in our lives to use all things (even the terribly negative things) to conform us to his Son’s image and to bring us as part of the new humanity to glory (Rom 8:28). The same can be said of history.

God permits rebellion but also opposes it, which is what God shows us concerning himself in the story of Jesus. God permits suffering but also joins us in it, bearing up under it on our behalf, and offering both the victory and the grace to endure until all is made right in the new creation. In history, God provides signs of that coming new creation through miracles. But we are not yet at the new creation! We are still travelling there through the desert. We as elect Israel fulfilled are involved in a grand exodus behind the elect Son towards the Promised Land. His glory will be ours one day, but not yet.

Rather than say God causes all things to happen, I prefer to say that God works in all things to accomplish his purposes, the chief of which is conformity to Christ’s glorious image. *So rather than assume that everything that happens is foreordained of God, the challenge becomes to discern in all things that happen what God’s foreordained purpose is in it.* We are chosen in Christ to be “holy and blameless in his sight” (Eph 1:4) (presumably in the eschaton). Election has conformity to Christ’s image in the new humanity as its goal. When the glory of this fulfilment comes, the suffering of this age will not be worth mentioning (Rom 8:18). This is not to say that there are not salvation historical events that are planned and foretold. There are! But affirming this does not necessitate saying that God micromanages and determines all that happens in history. The sovereign God guides, superintends, and acts in time in ways that exceed all that we can ask or think (Eph 3:20).

Through it all, humanity is granted space to act, not as puppets on strings, but as persons granted the dignity of choice. Yes, we are bound by sin to the point where we cannot of our own strength rise to God’s standard of holiness or the glory of new creation. We must be born into it by faith. Faith is a choice enabled by grace – a choice God will not make for us. We are not to receive this grace in vain without cooperating with it towards its God-intended end (cooperating with grace from within grace) (2 Cor 6:1). The Calvinist idea that we are simply awakened by the divine determination to the born-again life from spiritual death, understood as a total lack of capacity for God, is not scriptural. First, spiritual death is alienation from communion with God and not necessarily a total lack of spiritual consciousness. How are we to understand God’s leading the nations

²³ Martin Buber, “Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and Historical Hour,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* (March 1, 1957): 14.

through *kairos* moments to seek him (Acts 17:26-28)? Moreover, a capacity to cooperate with grace as enabled (not forced) by grace is not salvation by works. There is no merit to be attributed to us if the initial and thorough enablement comes from God and is based ultimately on the merits of Christ for our worthiness.

Hardening and Divine Forbearance

Our final topic is this: what about those who are hardened in Scripture? Hardening happens in Romans to both Gentile and Jew – to all who have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23) and refuse to repent. Even unbelieving Israel, to whom belonged the adoption to sonship and the glory, were hardened (cf. 9:4, 30-32; 11:7). When one is handed over to grace, only those who yield experience positive results. The same fire that softens butter hardens bricks. But God does not abandon those being hardened; he will rather use their hardship to soften their resolve to resist. Paul starts Romans by noting that God handed the Gentiles over to a depraved mind (1:24-28). Yet God does not abandon them in doing so, for he handed his own Son over to a cross so they may yet be justified and glorified in him (4:25). God does not abandon hardened Israel either. Paul speaks of God’s patience with stubborn Israel as well, hoping for their repentance (2:4). Indeed, what is hardening other than God handing us over to grace to either be softened or hardened? If the latter, God hands us over as well to our stubborn ways to the point where we genuinely suffer under it: “So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices” (Ps 81:12). This state is not meant to be permanent but rather to bring us through the suffering of our own decisions as a means of leading us to repentance. God handed Israel over to spiritual deafness or blindness, “otherwise they may turn and be healed” (Isa 6:10). No easy and quick conversions are willed by God, for though such may have temporary results, like some plants in the parable of the sower that end up not taking adequate root, these results may not endure. God wants to lead them through a path of suffering, bearing with them with the result of producing a lasting repentance. So, when Isaiah asks God how long Israel will be hardened or suffer spiritual blindness and deafness, God answers, “Until the cities lie ruined” (Isa 6:11; see 6:9-11). Clearly the hardening was not meant to be permanent. In Isaiah 1:8-7 (written after chapter 6 just quoted), God implores them now to repent because they’ve suffered enough: “Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? ... Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire” (Isa 1:5-7)!

As noted above, God handed the Gentiles over to their rejection in Romans 1:24-28 but then handed Christ over to a cross to save them (4:25). The same may be said of Israel. As noted above, Paul grieved over unbelieving Israel in Romans 9:1-5. Though they belonged to the adoption to sonship and the glory, they had not attained it, for they sought to do so by the law rather than by faith (vv. 30-31). They ended up “stumbling over the stumbling stone” (v. 32). In Romans 11:7, Paul says unbelieving Israel was hardened. Paul then proceeds to quote a most irritated David concerning Israel’s hardening: “May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever” (v. 10). Are these

hardened Jews meant to remain excluded forever? Not so! The Paul who lamented so grievously over unbelieving Israel in Romans 9:1-5 was not willing to give up on them. Paul ends up correcting David in the very next verse: “Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!” (vv. 11-12). The reference to stumbling here harks back to unbelieving Israel in 9:30-31 and 9:1-5. Note what Paul is saying here! Israel as a nation transgressed by handing their Messiah over to the Romans to be crucified, but God always planned to use this transgression to bring salvation to the Gentiles and to reveal the divine glory on the earth! In other words, God planned to use Israel’s *disobedience* to fulfil Israel’s mission to bring salvation to the Gentiles! Israel will fulfil their mission through their Messiah who used their disobedience to do it! But God did not abandon unbelieving Israel in the process. His mercy to the Gentiles was always meant to make Israel “jealous” or to make them long to rediscover their adoption in their Messiah as his younger brothers and sisters, along with their newfound Gentile siblings. And notice how unbelieving Israel (most of whom will remain such for life) is pictured as an unfaithful spouse whom God wishes to make jealous by turning with grace to the Gentiles! Does this not imply that God foreloved *and* destined (foreordained) even those who will not come to believe? In that light, Romans 9:1-5 gives us quite a theological lens through which to read 8:29-30!

Only in this light is one meant to understand what Paul says two chapters earlier in Romans 9 about the pottery being prepared for “common use” (the end of which is destruction) and “special use” (the end of which is glory) (Rom 9:21). Paul adds there that God showed patience with the pottery headed for destruction to show glory to others:

What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (9:22-24).

Some have read this text as though God may preserve those eternally damned and without any possibility of hope in the world to show mercy to those eternally elect for glory, but there is not a word in Romans to justify this interpretation. In fact, this is clearly not Paul’s meaning. Look again at what Paul says in Romans 11:11-12. God bore with hardened Israel even though they strayed to the point of handing their Messiah over to the Romans to be crucified. The reason was to use these Israelite vessels being prepared for destruction (due to their sin, not God’s election!) to bring “riches to the world” or to show mercy to vessels being prepared in advance for glory (mainly Gentiles). But these Israelites are not eternally damned or destined to end in destruction! Paul is clear on this point. Hardened Israel was meant to be made “jealous” so that they may one day return! Earlier in Romans, Paul tells the Jews not to despise God’s forbearance, for it is meant to lead them to repentance (2:4). In the end, all vessels are of common use

headed for destruction, but God wishes that they all become vessels meant for glory (11:32).

The same could be said of Pharaoh as well, for he was hardened too according to Romans 9:17-18. Note Barth's statement about the *genuinely* gracious forbearance shown Pharaoh by God. Barth starts by quoting God's words to Pharaoh in Exodus 9:15f, the text that Paul had before him when writing about Pharaoh's hardening in Romans 9:17-18, and then Barth adds his own comments (in parentheses):

I could by now have stretched forth my hand and smitten you and your people with pestilence; and you would have been cut off from the earth; but for this cause have I upheld you (Paul read in his Greek text – have I 'raised you up') that you might know my power (LXX and Paul: 'that I might show my power in you') and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth (Ex. 9:15f). God lets one warning miracle after another to take place before his eyes. Pharaoh does not fail to acknowledge on occasion his sin and guilt (Ex. 9:27 and 10:16). Neither does he fail to appeal to Moses to intercede on his behalf (8:8, 28; 9:28; 10:17). And Moses does in fact repeatedly pray for him (8:12, 30; 9:33; 10:18); repeatedly his punishment is, in fact, stopped before it gets to the length of his annihilation.²⁴

Pharaoh is granted a *real* chance to repent. God was not merely using him as a pawn and nothing more. Grace is held out to those who are hardened. Such is true concerning hardened Israel, as well as hardened "pagans" like Pharaoh. Indeed, in Romans 9-11, Paul concludes his lengthy discourse on election from Romans 9 to 11 by noting that God has relegated *all* to disobedience – Pharaoh and Israel, Esau and Jacob, Gentile and Jew, those in the mainstream of God's salvific activity and those who resisted or happened to exist on its boundaries – that he may have mercy on all (Rom 11:32). For all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, being justified by grace through faith (3:23-24). ALL! All have sinned and all may be justified, but only by grace through faith.

Pentecostal Postscript

All of this makes the Spirit, through the church as the environment of Christ, the "expanding boundary" of election as a promise proclaimed in the world, leading up to its eternal fulfilment in the new creation. It is in the witness of the Spirit to Christ that the promise of election in Christ the favoured Son goes forth and can be "obtained" by grace through faith. It was under the anointing of the Spirit that the eternal Son became flesh (Luke 1:35) and was in flesh the chosen Son, for after witnessing the Spirit descend on Christ at the Jordan, John the Baptist says, "I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One" (John 1:34; cf. Luke 3:22). Additionally, it is under the anointing of the Spirit that we receive election and its benefits in union with Christ, for we are "sealed" (incorporated and confirmed) as God's "possession" (election language, 1 Pet 2:9) in Christ by the reception of the down payment of the Spirit by faith (Eph 1:12-13). We actualise our election by faith and *in the Spirit*. I speak of the Spirit of adoption by which we join Christ under God's eternal favour (Rom 8:15). In Christ and in the Spirit,

²⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 220.

the gospel of this election confronts us with pure grace and light. This election contains no rejection and no darkness, except that which is laid on Christ so that election may confront the human race as pure gospel and nothing more. The overflowing of the Spirit is the expanding and ever more diverse boundary of election in the world of which the Spirit-empowered church bears witness. One day, all nations will walk by the light and glory of the Lamb of God (Rev 21:22-26). The self-electing God will be God forever in covenant relation and communion with humanity, for such was God's willed election from eternity.

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Response to “Election: A Pentecostal Reflection” by Frank Macchia

Chiong Xiao Ting

Introduction

Historically, the doctrine of election and predestination are not topics in which Pentecostals typically engage. Pentecostal revivals since Azusa Street are often characterised by outward signs, wonders, intense encounters with the Holy Spirit, and a strong focus on mission. Unfortunately, the emphasis on “experience” and “mission” has resulted in an anti-intellectualist attitude among Pentecostals, especially in the earlier decades of the twentieth century. Hence, many Pentecostals have chosen to shun the theological discussion on election and simply left it to the Calvinist theologians.

The theory of predestination has traditionally revolved around the argument of God’s sovereignty versus human free will. This debate surfaced in the seventeenth century between the followers of John Calvin and Jacob Arminius and persisted till the time of John Wesley in the eighteenth century. Wesley stood strongly against Calvinism and further developed the doctrine of Arminianism.¹ The Holiness Movement in Methodism was a precursor to the Pentecostal revival in the 1900s; thus, it was not surprising that Pentecostals naturally adopted the Wesleyan–Arminian stance when it came to the doctrine of election.²

The Resurgence of Calvinism

In 2006, journalist Collin Hansen wrote an article in *Christianity Today* titled “Young, Restless, Reformed,” remarking, “Calvinism is making a comeback – and shaking up the church.”³ He observed a renaissance of Calvinist theology, especially among youth in university campuses. In a 2009 article, *Time* ranked the New Calvinism movement as top three on the list of “10 Ideas Changing the

¹ Wesley Center Online, “The Life of John Wesley by John Telford—Chapter 9,” accessed October 25, 2025, <https://wesley.nnu.edu/?id=91>.

² The Assemblies of God, “A Response to Reformed Theology,” accessed October 25, 2025, <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Reformed-Theology>.

³ Collin Hansen, “Young, Restless, Reformed,” *Christianity Today*, September 2006, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2006/09/young-restless-reformed/>.

World Right Now.”⁴ According to renowned Calvinist pastor John Piper, one of the characteristics of this New Calvinism movement is a “significant number of charismatics,” likely including Pentecostals as well.⁵ The pertinent question here is: how important is the doctrine of election to Pentecostals? Does it matter if we are Calvinists, Arminians, both, or neither? In his paper, Frank Macchia is emphatically saying yes, it matters, and we must not be content with merely accepting the theories of others; instead, a Pentecostal doctrine of election is essential and needful.

In his introduction, Macchia makes a provocative statement: “The problem is that many Pentecostal students flirt with Calvin’s doctrine of election without realising how his view of the matter undercuts their Christocentric, missional, and pneumatological priorities.”⁶ Using this statement as a framework, I hope to address the risks that Calvinism may pose to our Christological, pneumatological, and missional beliefs as Pentecostals.

Calvinism’s Negative Impact on our Christology

At first glance, Calvin’s doctrine of election is ostensibly Christocentric. After all, he affirms that “we were chosen in Christ” (Eph 1:4) and can only be “adopted unto the heavenly inheritance” in Christ because we are incapable of this ourselves.⁷ He maintains that Christ is not just the Mediator of our salvation but also the “author” and “foundation” of our “calling and election.”⁸ However, Chris Green rightly notes that the Bezan–Calvinist supralapsarianism undermines the centrality of Christ, when some are already elected for salvation even before the election of Christ as Saviour according to an eternal hidden decree – it “effectively removes Christ from the foundation of election.”⁹ Inevitably, Christ will be relegated to merely an “instrument” of election.¹⁰ Drawing from Karl Barth, Macchia says it aptly: “There is no divine choice or decree that is not included in this Word (Christ) and revealed in Him!”¹¹

Second, Calvin claims that all who are adopted by God are elected only in Christ, and not in themselves. The elect can only be loved in Christ, and not apart from Christ.¹² Moreover, Calvin also maintains that there are those “whom [God]

⁴ David Van Biema, “The New Calvinism,” *Time*, March 12, 2009, https://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779_1884782_1884760,00.html.

⁵ John Piper, “What’s New about ‘New Calvinism’?” April 14, 2014, accessed October 25, 2025, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/whats-new-about-new-calvinism>.

⁶ Frank Macchia, “Election: A Pentecostal Reflection,” in *Asian Voices Amplified*, ed. Kong Hee et al. (Regnum, 2026), 130.

⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (MobileReference.com, 2009), 1431, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1476.

⁹ Chris Green, “Let It Be: Predestination, Salvation, and Divine/Human Agency,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 23 (2014): 178.

¹⁰ Green, “Let It Be,” 178.

¹¹ Macchia, “Election,” 137.

¹² Calvin, *Institutes*, 1485.

is pleased to embrace in love” and those with whom “he is pleased to display his wrath.”¹³ This poses the greatest challenge to Pentecostal Christology, because Pentecostals believe that Jesus came precisely to reveal the triune God as the God of love (cf. Matt 3:17; John 3:16; 1 John 4:8). As Macchia correctly emphasises, “this election contains no rejection and no darkness, except that which is laid on Christ so that election may confront the human race as pure gospel, and nothing more.”¹⁴ This gospel is a gospel of pure love, and God has not chosen to love some and not others. Paul describes this clearly in Romans 5:8, noting that Christ died for us even “while we were still sinners,” demonstrating God’s love for all humankind. Above all else, this is our greatest point of contention with Calvinism, which is why Pentecostals simply cannot accept its election doctrine. Thus, Calvinism negatively impacts our Christology by relegating Christ and redefining his loving mission.

Calvinism’s Negative Impact on our Pneumatology

For Pentecostals, the Day of Pentecost is a pivotal event because, on that day, the Holy Spirit was poured out on all flesh (Acts 2:17). The implication for us is that the Spirit is present and working everywhere, not just in the lives of the “elect” as Calvin defines it. For Calvin, when the Word is preached, God only allows the Spirit to work in the lives of the elect, bringing about “illumination.”¹⁵ However, for the reprobate, God “withholds from them the effectual agency of His Spirit.”¹⁶ This is an extremely constricted view of the work of the Spirit, which runs counter to our core convictions as Pentecostals. We believe that the Spirit is active in the church, outside the church, in creation, in society, even moving among other religions, as Amos Yong and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen suggest.¹⁷ Macchia asserts that, from Pentecost, the Spirit now overflows; instead of restricting himself to a select few, he is ever expanding and diversifying the boundary of election in the world.¹⁸ On the contrary, Calvinism places a limit on our pneumatology and the work of the Spirit in this world.

Calvinism’s Negative Impact on Mission

Calvin’s doctrine of predestination has often been criticised as the reason behind lethargy in missions and evangelism. However, Calvin does advocate for the preaching of the Word as he believes that, for the elect, the Spirit will allow the

¹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1504.

¹⁴ Macchia, “Election,” 154.

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1490.

¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1481.

¹⁷ This subject was addressed by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen in the Europe–Asia Pentecostal Summit 2025 held at City Harvest Church Singapore. See Dr. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Pentecostals & the Struggle of Discerning the Holy Spirit among Religions,” Global Pentecostal Voices YouTube Channel, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQct0rnvBd0>; Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Baker Publishing Group, 2005), 235, Kindle.

¹⁸ Macchia, “Election,” 138, 152.

preached Word to “take deep root in their hearts.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, hyper-Calvinists deny the “free offer of the gospel” and they reject the fact that those who hear the gospel have a duty to repent, hence undermining the importance of preaching and giving invitations for people to respond to Christ.²⁰

This was challenged by moderate Calvinist preachers and theologians, like Andrew Fuller and William Carey, and their shift from hyper-Calvinism resulted in the birth of the modern missionary movement in the late eighteenth century.²¹ Consequently, Calvinists disagree that their election theory discourages evangelism and missions.

Nonetheless, it is undeniable that following their logic of limited atonement, preaching the gospel still seems redundant since God has already predestined some to salvation and others to damnation. However, Fuller maintains that it is the duty of every minister to preach the gospel and the responsibility of the listeners to respond to it.²² The question, then, is how can the theory of limited atonement square with the universal call to preach the gospel?

Piper offers an intriguing take on missions and evangelism. In his book *Let the Nations be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, he writes, “The task of missions may not be merely to win as many individuals as possible from the most responsive people groups of the world but rather to win individuals from all the people groups of the world.”²³ He goes on to suggest that “God’s call for missions in Scripture cannot be defined in terms of crossing cultures to maximise the total number of individuals saved”; instead, God’s will is for every people group to be reached and the elect to be called out for Christ.²⁴ This is how he defines the missionary task of the church.

Pentecostals agree with Piper only to the extent that God wants to win every people group. At City Harvest, this conviction moves our mission teams to the remotest parts of Indonesia, the Philippines, and India, so that the gospel can be shared with as many Unreached People Groups (UPGs) as possible. However, for us, reaching people groups and reaching individuals are not mutually exclusive. We preach the gospel to UPGs *and* individuals alike – through acts of compassion, friendship evangelism, healing ministries, and outreach campaigns – seeking to win every soul possible. We believe the gospel is for the whole world, and that all *by faith* are included in Christ’s election. Accordingly, for the sake of Pentecostal mission, we must reject the election theory of Calvinism, which limits the scope of salvation and the universality of the Spirit’s work.

¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1490.

²⁰ C. D. Daniel, “Hyper-Calvinism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, 2nd ed., ed. Martin Davie et al. (InterVarsity Press, 2016), 810-12, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²¹ Don Fanning, “Calvinism and Missions,” *Themes of Theology that Impacts Mission* 7 (2009): 7, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgm_theo/7.

²² Michael A. G. Haykin, “Why Andrew Fuller Matters,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 91, no. 2 (2020): 167, <https://doi.org/10.1163/27725472-09102005>.

²³ John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Baker Academic, 2010), 178, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁴ Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!*, 178.

Conclusion

Considering all the above, it is evident that Pentecostals cannot be Calvinists. In fact, “flirting” with Calvinism can undermine our Christological, pneumatological, and missional objectives. However, by situating the topic of election in Barth’s theory, Macchia has gone beyond the traditional Calvinist–Arminian debate, arguing that election is a promise – given to us through grace, fulfilled in Christ, and only actualised by faith. This is truly the election story of the Scriptures, not merely one that concerns God’s sovereignty and human free will. In doing so, Macchia has insightfully developed a doctrine of election for us Pentecostals.

On the other hand, as much as we disagree with Calvinism’s theory of election, we have much to learn from our Reformed brothers and sisters – especially in their passion for scholastic theology. The *Christianity Today* article, mentioned earlier, observes a rising trend of young people embracing Calvinism. The reason for this is the hunger for deeper and more rigorous theological conversations. Evidently, Calvinists are meeting a need in the church, especially among the next generation. This is why what we are doing here at the Asia Pentecostal Summit is so important. Although Pentecostals love experiences and encounters with the Holy Spirit, there is a similar cry for theological depth and sound biblical doctrines. Without setting ourselves against Calvinists, I propose that Pentecostals, too, can meet this need in the church. I am grateful to the many professors and scholars here who have pioneered the development of Pentecostal theology. I believe what we are witnessing now is but the first trickle of a mighty river – a coming revival of Pentecostal theology in our generation that will impact all of Asia and beyond.

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