

Key Themes Week 3 Handout: Divine Election
Lecture by Dr Michael Oliver

Individual Election: Predestination

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” **Ephesians 1:3-6 (NRSV)**

“I, however, for my part, say that an infant born where it was not possible for him to be rescued through the baptism of Christ, having been overtaken by death, was thereby in such a state...because he could not have been otherwise...Justly, therefore, because of the condemnation which runs through the whole mass of humanity, he is not admitted into the kingdom of heaven.” **Augustine, “On Nature and Grace”**

“Even if no one were freed therefrom, there would be no just complaint against God. It is evident from this that it is a great grace that many are delivered and recognize, in those that are not delivered, that which they themselves deserved.” **Augustine, “On the Predestination of Saints”**

“Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which he has determined in himself, what he would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny; but eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say, he is predestinated either to life or to death.” **John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II: 176.**

“Many, indeed, as if they wished to avert odium from God, admit election in such a way as to deny that any one is reprobated. But this is puerile and absurd, because election itself could not exist without being opposed to reprobation. God is said to separate those whom he adopts to salvation. To say that others obtain by chance, or acquire by their own efforts, that which election alone confers on a few, will be worse than absurd. Whom God passes by, therefore, he reprobates, and from no other cause than his determination to exclude them from his inheritance which he predestines for his children.” **John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II: 199.**

Group Election: Chosen People

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” **Genesis 12:1-3 (NRSV)**

“God chose Abraham as his favorite and promised to make his descendants into a great nation.” **Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: God and the People of Israel*, 57.**

“When all is said and done, the option for the poor means an option for the God of the Reign as proclaimed by Jesus. The whole Bible, from the story of Cain and Abel onward, is marked by God’s love and predilection for the weak and abused of human history.” **Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Option for the Poor,” in *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, 27.**

“The offense taken by the non-poor is an indirect but effective proof of the fact that the Kingdom of God belongs to the poor simply because they are poor, and that God is revealed as essentially on the side of the poor simply because they are poor. God’s taking sides in this way seems to me to be a constant element of revelation. It is clearly shown by the choice God makes in support of some as opposed to and against others. The partiality that runs through the scriptures is therefore also a dialectical partiality. However obvious, we need to consider seriously how often scripture states what God and Jesus are against in order to show what they are for.” **Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 13.**

“If theological speech is based on the traditions of the Old Testament, then it must heed their unanimous testimony to Yahweh’s commitment to justice for the poor and weak. Accordingly it cannot avoid taking sides in politics, and the side that theology must take is disclosed in the side that Yahweh has already taken. Any other side, whether it be with the oppressors or the side of neutrality (which is nothing but a camouflaged identification with the rulers), is unbiblical. If theology does not side with the poor, then it cannot speak for Yahweh who is the God of the poor.” **James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 65.**

“The least in America are literally and symbolically present in black people. To say that Christ is black means that black people are God’s poor people whom Christ has come to liberate... the people of color are [God’s] elected poor in America.” **James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 125-126.**

Divine Self-Election: Process and Barth

“God’s choice...is to be a God who chooses to fulfill the divine subjective aim through the creativity of creatures. God’s aim to maximize value does not bind God to any specific course of action in pursuit of that goal...God has chosen to encourage the evolution of high levels of complexity, diversity, and even consciousness in the world. This strategy can lead to the creation of unique value through the vastly increased level of freedom of choice, but it can also result in wrong choices by the creatures that destroy value already achieved, prevent other creatures from achieving their goals and hence suppress the creation of value, and reverse the progress made by creatures as a whole toward God’s aim.” **Donna Bowman, *Divine Decision: A Process Doctrine of Election*, 149-150.**

“It is the name of Jesus Christ which, according to the divine self-revelation, forms the focus at which the two decisive beams of the truth forced upon us converge and unite: on the one hand the electing God and on the other elected man.” **Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II.2*, 59.**