

ZWINGLI AND THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

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Abstract

Whereas the early reformers – Martin Luther, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli - all made important contributions to the doctrine of predestination, less emphasis has been placed on the work of Zwingli on the same by scholars because Zwingli's thought on the doctrine developed much more later than it was seen with Luther and Calvin. This paper seeks to cover this gap by drawing attention to Zwingli's contributions to the doctrine of predestination. Taking a historical and theological interpretive approach, the paper traces Zwingli's perspectives on the doctrine of predestination, pointing out that Zwingli's thought on predestination is subsumed under the providence of God. He argues that God knows all things and He is sovereign, and to this extent, God already knows those who will yield to the doctrine of grace by believing in Him and those who will reject God's grace and would go into perdition. Contrary to Luther, Zwingli argues that while faith is important in the process of salvation, salvation indeed is contingent upon election because those who come to faith have been foreordained to be saved. He argues further that election is the basis of having people in the Church. For him, the Church is a company of the elects and no one can be in the Church if they have not been foreordained by God, and God can even elect pagans into the company.

While Zwingli makes notable contributions to the Church through his thoughts on the doctrine of predestination, he fails largely to explain how the elect gentiles would be saved. More importantly, his argument is prone to universalism, since it could ultimately be interpreted that everyone would eventually be saved. In spite of their weaknesses, Zwingli's contributions to the doctrine of predestination, though widely neglected by scholars compared to the works of Luther and Calvin Zwingli's contributions to the doctrine of predestination, are enormous and help in evangelicals' understanding of the authority and inerrancy of scriptures as well as the doctrine of the original sin. Zwingli's theology and teaching on predestination should be considered as a further area of study by scholars interested in the doctrine of predestination and original sin.

Key words: predestination, election, original sin, providence, salvation

Introduction

Although Ulrich Zwingli played a dominant role in the Reformation, his thoughts or contributions to the development of theology have been grossly neglected by scholars, compared to reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. W.P. Stephens rightly corroborates this fact when he stated that, "Zwingli's part in the Reformation has been overshadowed, and the study of his theology limited, in comparison with that of Luther

and Calvin, to whom two communions of the church look back as spiritual fathers.”¹ Indeed, in most writings on the Reformation, more attention has been given to the works of Martin Luther and John Calvin than the activities or contributions of Zwingli. One of such areas the negligence is easily noticeable is in the doctrine of predestination. There seem not to be a lot of writings on the contributions of Zwingli to the development of the doctrine of predestination. Instead, Calvin has been given primacy of place when it comes to the development of the concept from the Reformation period at the expense of other reformers who wrote on the subject.

Zwingli’s teaching on predestination did not attract high attention among scholars compared to that of Calvin and Luther because he did not give much attention to the topic of predestination until his meeting with Luther at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529.² At the Marburg Colloquy, Zwingli preached a sermon on predestination and providence, which was later expanded to form the basis of his treatise *De providentia*. While Luther’s teaching on predestination was anchored on the doctrine of absolute predestination as espoused in his work on the *Bondage of the Will*, Zwingli’s thought was hinged on the notion of absolute sovereignty of God from where he drew the inference of the dependence of the human will.³ For Calvin, predestination was central to his theology, to the extent that later Calvinism had to defend those teachings as what distinguished Lutheran and reformed traditions.⁴ More importantly, there were convergence points in Luther and Calvin’s teachings on the doctrine of election, which made their work to receive more attention among scholars. On the other hand, Zwingli was considered to be more of a philosopher than a theologian from the assessment of his work, *De Providentia*. Essentially, his late development of a mature doctrine of predestination made his theological thought and articulation of less attraction to scholars, compared to the works of Luther and Calvin.

In light of this background, this paper seeks to take a critical look at the doctrine of predestination as perceived by Zwingli. In so doing, it will allude to Luther and Calvin’s understanding of the same and how the concept of predestination is considered among theologians today.

Definition

There are two perspectives to the doctrine of predestination. On the one hand, it is possible to consider it in a broad sense, while it can be narrowed down on the other hand. In its broad sense, it is the Christians doctrine that teaches that, “the triune God

¹W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (New York: Oxford, 1986), 1.

² F. A. James III, “Neglected Sources of the Reformation Doctrine of Predestination Ulrich Zwingli and Peter Martyr Vermigli,” <https://www.monergism.com/neglected-sources-reformation-doctrine-predestination-ulrich-zwingli-and-peter-vernigli/> accessed 30 November, 2023.

³ F. A. James III, “Neglected Sources of the Reformation Doctrine of Predestination.”

⁴ F.A. James III. “Neglected Sources of the Reformation Doctrine of Predestination.”

foreordains everything that happens in the world (Eph. 1: 22).”⁵ This could be understood to mean that everything that happens in the world is planned and executed by God in His infinite wisdom. By extension, it could be said that both good and evil are preordained by God.⁶

In its narrow sense, predestination teaches that, “God has chosen a body of people for himself that they should be brought into eternal fellowship with him while at the same time he has ordained that the rest of humanity go their own way, which is the way of sin, to ultimate punishment.”⁷ This implies that God from eternity has chosen some to be saved and some to be consigned to hell or destruction. This, indeed, has been the source of great controversy to the entire doctrine of predestination. How can one defend the goodness and mercy of God if He has deliberately selected some people to enjoy “eternal fellowship,” while He has deliberately slammed the door on others?⁸ This could be extended further by questioning the very purpose of missions if God has already chosen those whom He will save and those that will not be saved.⁹ Suffice it to say here, that predestination is a biblical doctrine that teaches that God foreordains all things and that He has elected some people from among the various peoples of the world to enter into His kingdom and enjoy eternal fellowship with Him. It is connected with the doctrine of divine providence and sovereignty and popularized by the Apostle Paul in his teachings in Romans 8:29.

A Biographical Sketch

Zwingli was born at Wildhaus, Switzerland on January 1, 1484.¹⁰ His father was a farmer and chief magistrate of Wildhaus, a fact that contributed to his (Zwingli’s) influence in the process of the Reformation in Switzerland. As Gonzalez writes, Zwingli,

⁵W.S. Reid, “Predestination,” in *The Concise Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell, abridged by Peter Toon (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 395.

⁶Notice that while God knows about everything that takes place in the world and nothing truly happens without His foreknowledge, God is not evil and no evil can be found in Him. The existence of evil in the world can be explained from the aspect of human disobedience and the fallen nature of man.

⁷Reid, “Predestination,” 395. Also see M. J. Langford, “Predestination,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 461.

⁸Reid, “Predestination,” 395.

⁹This theme will further be discussed in the section on evaluation of the concept.

¹⁰G.R. Porter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1978), 1. Commenting on the preciseness of this date, Porter notes that while it was difficult to state the exact day a person was born in the ancient time the special day Zwingli was born makes it unique and very easy to confirm and understand.

“after learning his first letters from an uncle, he studied in Basel and Bern, where humanism was thriving at the time.” More importantly, one can see the significance of humanist ideals in the life of Zwingli when one considers his tribute to Thomas Wytttenbach, whom he notes taught him on, “the authority of Scripture, the death of Christ as the only price of forgiveness, and worthlessness of indulgences.”¹¹ Zwingli later studied at the University of Vienna and returned to Basel. He obtained his masters degree in 1506 after which he became a priest in the village of Glarus.¹²

Zwingli was greatly fascinated by the teachings of Erasmus, which he first came in contact with through his teachers. Following this encounter, Erasmus became his idol and he developed an insatiable desire for humanities. Although he became a theologian of repute, Cairns observes that Zwingli took little interest in theology at the beginning.¹³ In his early years of ministry, he served the Pope faithfully in the years between 1506 and 1516. From 1518, however, things started to change. As a pastor in Einselden (1516-1518), Zwingli started to show objections to some of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly on issues relating to the indulgences and the black image of the Virgin Mary. Zwingli condemned such with sarcasm in a manner akin to Erasmus’ condemnation of the Catholic doctrines.¹⁴

It must be mentioned that part of the continuous influence of Erasmus on Zwingli was in the area of biblical languages. Zwingli was proficient in Greek, and at the time that Erasmus published his first New Testament Bible, he copied and memorized all the letters of Paul. Through such studies which became apparent in his preaching, he had a towering influence on his parishioners. By 1518, he had come to similar conclusions with Luther. He became antagonistic to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and the exploitation of innocent church members under the guise of religion culminating in his

¹¹Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day* (Peabody: Prince, 2004), 46. Also see, Willinston Walker, Richard A. Norris et al., *A History of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (New York: Scribner, 1985), 442.

¹²Willinston et al, *A History of the Christian Church*, 443.

¹³E. E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, rev. and expanded (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 294.

¹⁴Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*, 294. Also see, W. Meyer, “Ulrich Zwingli,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15772a.htm>/accessed 15 November 2023.

convincing the government to send out a seller of indulgences from the city of Zurich.¹⁵

Following this, Gonzalez observes that Francis I, an ally of the Pope, requested all the cantons in Switzerland to send a mercenary contingent to go and fight against Charles V. Zwingli opposed this idea and was successful at the initial stage. All the cantons sent their delegates, except Zurich. The Pope objected to this and insisted that Zurich owed its allegiance to the Pope and should send its contingent. Zurich later sent its contingent but the result was the beginning of a faceoff with the Pope.¹⁶ At the same time, this coincided with the events in Germany, where Luther's reformation and opposition to the papacy was at its nascent stage. It was not difficult, therefore, to label Zwingli a heretic, just as Luther. It is significant to point out here that even though Zwingli was tagged together with Luther, Zwingli himself declared later that his reformation was anchored on a right understanding and interpretation of Scripture. In other words, while Luther was persuaded by personal convictions, Zwingli was persuaded by the fact of the authority of Scriptures.¹⁷ One could say in essence from such conclusions that Zwingli's effort was a parallel movement that found congruence in the reformation of Germany.

Zwingli's teaching and activities culminated in a debate between him and John Faber in 1523. Prior to this time, Zwingli prepared sixty-seven articles, which emphasized the subjects of authority of Scripture, the headship of Jesus Christ of the Church and the rights of clerical marriage.¹⁸ The city declared Zwingli the winner of the debate and this was followed by sweeping ecclesiastical reforms in Zurich so that by 1525, Zurich had become a reformed city following the abolition of mass that year.¹⁹

It needs be mentioned that from 1522, Zwingli began to experience some cracks in the wall of his reformation movement. He won the admiration of a group of young

¹⁵Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 48.

¹⁶Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 49.

¹⁷Gonzalez attests to this difference between Luther and Zwingli in their reformation efforts. The point nevertheless, is that in spite of such differences, both were headed towards a course that was to change the outlook of the church forever. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 443.

¹⁸Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*, 294-95.

¹⁹Among the actions that amount to ecclesiastical reform pointed out above are abolition of fees for baptisms and burials, the release of monks and nuns to marry, banishment of images and relics while ultimate authority of the city resided in the Christian community. A similar development took place in the city of Bern under the auspices of Zwingli, leading to the adoption of reformation ideals in that city in 1528. See Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*, 294-95.

men who studied the Bible with him in the original language. The young men became convinced through their studies that baptism should be for only believers. Zwingli initially accepted this important principle, but later reneged on it, perhaps because of his desire to please the city council that provided support for his reformation efforts. The consequence of Zwingli's vacillation was the decision of the young men to part ways with their master, leading to the beginning of the Anabaptist movement.²⁰ Besides, Zwingli lost the friendship of Luther over the issue of the sacrament, following the Marburg disputations of 1529.²¹ From that time, Zwingli developed his brand of reformation separate from that of Luther. Zwingli's reformation soon spread to several cantons in Switzerland, leading to the formation of the synod of Swiss evangelical churches. While several cantons were won by the reformers, older cantons remained conservative and held to their beliefs.²² War broke out eventually between the cantons loyal to the Pope and the protestant cantons in 1529, but it was resolved with the peace of Kappel. Protestants were tolerated in the country, but the truce did not last long as another war broke out in 1531, owing to Zwingli's introduction of reforms by means of force. Zwingli died in battle in 1531, but by that time, a foundation had been laid for the reformed churches.²³ Before his death, Zwingli secretly married Anna Reinhard in 1522, and not until 1524, did they become married publicly.²⁴ More importantly, he betrayed and joined in the persecution of the young men he supposedly mentored.

Zwingli and the Doctrine of Predestination

This section focuses on how Zwingli espouses the doctrine of predestination. This is done in relation to his discussion on the providence and sovereignty of God, since these can hardly be separated in the theology of Zwingli. Before this is discussed, it is

²⁰The young men are Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock and Felix Manz. For details, see William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 14-15.

²¹Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*, 295.

²²Conservatism here is defined in terms of commitment of the people to the Catholic ideals and not as it would be understood in modern time.

²³Robert C. Walton, "Zwingli: Founding Father of the Reformed Churches," in *Leaders of the Reformation*, ed. Richard L. DeMolen (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1984), 69 confirms the significance of the works of Zwingli in the reformation process and founding of the reformed churches.

²⁴Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*, 295.

considered essential, first, to provide a brief overview of the doctrine of predestination.

An Overview of the Doctrine of Predestination

In line with the principle of *ad fonts* adopted by the reformers, the doctrine of predestination did not develop with the reformers but can be traced back to the patristic period. As pointed out earlier, the doctrine of predestination is rooted in the Scripture.²⁵ Both the Old and the New Testaments emphasize the doctrine of election. In the former, it is set off by God's choice of the nation Israel as direct recipients of God's grace, not because of its deeds but because of God's mercy, favour and sovereignty (Deut. 7:7-8; Isa. 41:8-9 and Ezek. 20:5).²⁶ This has the implication that God chooses whomsoever he wishes from all the nations of the earth in order to bless Israel. While Israelites are the elect of God, not all of them are chosen, but the faithful ones among them who are known as the remnant of God (Isa. 1:9, 10:21-22; Jer. 23:3, 31:7).²⁷ The implication is that those who are not elected by God are the sinners and are consequently rejected. Such people would be consigned to eternal damnation. Reid states further that the Old Testament concept is further amplified in the New Testament and there is no attempt to alter such.²⁸ There is no doubt that such continuity exists as part of confirmation that the Old and the New Testaments are inseparable. Christ mentions the fact that he was the mediator that the Old Testament talks about and that, "to him the father had given his elect people (Mark 1:15; Luke 4:21; John 5:39, 10:14-15)."²⁹ A better understanding of this concept is seen in Paul, particularly in his teaching on the subject in Romans 8:29-30, thus:

o[ti ou]j proe,gnw kai. prow,risen summo,rfouj th/j eivko,noj tou/ ui`ou/ aurtou/
eivj to. ei=nai aurtou.n prwto,tokon evn polloi/j avdelfoi/j\
sou]j de. prow,risen tou,touj kai. evka,lesen\ kai. ou]j evka,lesen tou,touj kai.
evdikai,wsen\ ou]j de. evdikai,wsen tou,touj kai. evdo,xasen

For those whom He foreknew, he also predestined to become conformed to the

²⁵Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 1994), 44. *Ad fonts* is a Latin term meaning "back to the sources." The reformers were propelled by the desire to reenact the Christianity of the apostolic period, a return to Scriptures and the traditions of the early church fathers.

²⁶Reid, "Predestination," 396.

²⁷Reid, "Predestination," 396.

²⁸Reid, "Predestination," 396.

²⁹Reid, "Predestination," 396.

image of His son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom he predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, he also glorified.

Two words are very important here for the purpose of this paper. First is *proō*, risen (predestined), which has the connotation of a prior action. It suggests marking out something with a boundary and it is expressed in the aorist indicative, which suggests an action that has taken place in the past or a completed action.³⁰ The second word that needs attention is *proēgnō* (he foreknew). This has the connotation of prior knowledge, “to fix regard upon,”³¹ indicating an action taken in the past and completed, since the word once again is expressed in the aorist tense. A further consideration of the text down Romans 11 depicts the “lostness” and hopelessness of humanity because of sin, but God in His mercy has graciously chosen some to share the benefit of His saving grace, while others are not, based on His preordained intention or plan.

This concept continues to generate controversy. In the early church, there were attempts to explicate the doctrine of predestination, but there was no full development of the doctrine until the time of Augustine. Augustine, combining his personal experience and the teachings of Pelagius, responded that humanity sinned through the sin of Adam and it was not possible for humankind to do good because he has been badly corrupted. In this circumstance, it is impossible for man to be delivered unless he cooperates with God. As Erickson puts it, Augustine argues, “God so works in relationship to our wills that we freely choose what He wills, that we freely choose the good. God being omniscient knows precisely what He wills”³² Augustine suggests from the above that humankind cannot do anything except that which God prompts him to do. Those who come to salvation in the Lord do so because they have been predestined or chosen before hand by God.

The concept of predestination was picked up during the medieval period, notably by Thomas Aquinas and Anselm. Anselm observes that it is impossible for man not to sin

³⁰Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 331.

³¹Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, 331.

³²Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed.(Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 924.

without divine grace. He, therefore, concludes that man had become so depraved that rectitude of sin becomes impossible, since human beings cannot exercise their free will without God. This suggests that humanity finds grace only through divine providence and sovereignty. The import is that those who are saved are specially chosen and prepared to receive God's grace in that manner and God has known such people in His omniscience even before the foundations of the earth.³³ It is worthy of note, however, that Aquinas, in his explanation, notes that meritorious works lay at the root of predestination. Thus, Aquinas projects a more liberal idea of free will in his explication of the concept, compared to what is found in Augustine.³⁴ After Aquinas, there continues to be controversies and various positions on the concept of predestination, but the major thing to be drawn from here deals with the idea that God knows all things and all possibilities, but chooses for humanity what He considers the best alternative of them all at every point in time. This idea continued to generate debate until the Reformation and the three *dramatis personae* of the Reformation, namely; Luther, Calvin and Zwingli, all having something to say on this although with some slight differences. Luther reenacts the Augustinian explication, while Calvin even goes further to espouse the idea of double predestination. Calvin notes in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that salvation is reserved for some while for others it is not. In this wise, he contends that the gospel is not preached to everyone, and among those to whom it is preached, it "does not always meet the same response."³⁵

Calvin considers this to be part of the mystery of God and it cannot be totally understood by man. Calvin, quoting Paul from Romans 8 and the words of Jesus in John 10, asserts that God has specially elected some people unto salvation and some unto eternal punishment. That which happens to humanity takes place because God ordains it in His predeterminate counsel. In order to buttress his point, Calvin also reverts to

³³For details, see, M. J. Langford, "Predestination," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983),460. Also see, Thomas Aquinas, *Providence and Predestination: Truth Questions 5 & 6*, translated from the definitive Leonine text with an introduction by Robert W. Mylligan (Chicago: West Baden, 1953; reprint, Henry Regnery Co., 1961), 13.

³⁴"Liberal" should not be interpreted in its modern day meaning but refers to greater freedom assigned to human beings in the process of salvation that is seen through Aquinas' teaching on meritorious acts compared to Augustine's idea that humanity hardly has any role in the process of his grace.

³⁵John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. Tony Lane and Hilary Osborne (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 213.

Augustine as a legitimate support for his position.³⁶ Calvin, by far, seems to be the one whom people have written so much about on the doctrine of predestination, but Zwingli, Calvin's contemporary and co-reformer, also plays an important role in the doctrine of predestination.

Zwingli's Thought

Zwingli's thought on predestination cannot be separated from his teachings on the providence and sovereignty of God. Stephens points to this fact when he observes that, "the close relation between providence and predestination is made explicit by Zwingli. In a commentary he asserts, 'For the whole business of predestination . . . rests upon the matter of providence.'" ³⁷ It should be noted that the doctrine of election is not well pronounced in the early works of Zwingli; rather, most of his allusions to predestination are subsumed under his teaching on the providence of God.³⁸ This even reflects in his response to Erasmus' letter on *Man's Freedom and Free Will*. In this response, Stephen says that Zwingli wrote in context of the larger idea of providence than the narrow concept of predestination. It was not until 1529 that predestination began to take a clearer approach in his writings. In his discussion on original sin, Zwingli asserts that, "the bliss of everlasting life and the pain of everlasting death are altogether matters of free election or rejection by the divine will."³⁹

For him, nothing is hidden from God, and God controls all things either through direct or secondary causes. He argues that to deny that God predestines some unto salvation and some unto damnation amounts to a rejection of what even pagans understood to be the truth. He comes to this conclusion essentially because of his conviction that it is the "logical consequence of the nature of God."⁴⁰ In his understanding, two qualities of God, that is omnipotence and omniscience, are germane to this conclusion. Since both natures are found in God, then it is logical to conclude that he could do all things; and when His sovereign authority is added to these attributes, then it becomes more difficult for anyone to question why God acts in a particular way. To

³⁶John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. Tony Lane and Hilary Osborne, 214-15.

³⁷W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 97.

³⁸W.P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli*, 97.

³⁹W.P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli*, 99.

⁴⁰Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 51.

this end, he suggests that God ordained the fall and He chooses to save whosoever he wants. Walton agrees with this idea when he asserts that for Zwingli, “God was the source of all being and was by nature the highest good both in essence (*esse*) and action (*actio*).”⁴¹ Zwingli argues further that it is not impossible for God to elect some pagans into His eternal blessedness.⁴² The implication is that the doctrine of salvation by works finds no place in the theology of Zwingli. In that way, those who claim to be part of the kingdom of God must demonstrate such through their external actions and a life that has been changed. There is no doubt that God is sovereign over His creation nor can one dispute the assertion that God can choose some pagans to be part of His eternal kingdom. The problem inherent in this idea is that when not properly taught and understood, it can lead to universalism, which is implicit in Zwingli’s teaching.

Unlike Luther, Zwingli’s understanding of the law and the gospel is intertwined with his doctrine of predestination. He contends that the will of God is the same, which has been revealed in His will. He believes that the purpose of the gospel is salvific. God allows the gospel so that humanity may come to the reality of its disobedience and seek restoration through the message of the gospel. Zwingli believes that the gospel would produce repentance and forgiveness of sins for those who hear and yield to God. Yet, the underlying factor is that those who hear and yield are so prompted because God has elected that they will be saved even before the creation of the world.⁴³ He argues by appealing to the writings of the apostles to the extent that they were sure of the fact that those who believe would be saved and those who do not would face eternal punishment.⁴⁴

Unlike Luther, Zwingli pushed the issue of election beyond faith. By his understanding, those who have faith believe because they have been elected to have faith. It follows in this circumstance that those who have no faith find themselves in that situation because they have not been elected and in essence would be destroyed.⁴⁵ Zwingli believes that election is absolutely dependent upon the free will of God and is independent of the foreknowledge of human faith. Zwingli felt that Aquinas’ teaching on

⁴¹Walton, “Zwingli: Founding Father of the Reformed Churches,” 87.

⁴²Walton, “Zwingli: Founding Father of the Reformed Churches,” 87.

⁴³Stephens, *The Theology of Zwingli*, 99.

⁴⁴Stephens, *The Theology of Zwingli*, 101.

⁴⁵Stephens, *The Theology of Zwingli*, 101.

predestination “endangers God’s goodness and omnipotence.”⁴⁶ For him, depending on Aquinas’ teaching could mean that God foresaw that Judas would be a traitor, but was unable to change the situation.⁴⁷ Faith, which is the condition for justification in the teaching of Zwingli, is a gift from God. In this circumstance, he advocates the idea that salvation is by no means the effort of man because even the vehicle that God uses to bring this about comes to humanity as a gift from God, who bestows salvation. Thus, Zwingli concludes that election, in the real sense of it, is the means of justification rather than faith. Faith, for him, “Follows election as a symbol.”⁴⁸

Zwingli’s thought on the doctrine of predestination also reflects in his ecclesiology. He asserts that the Church is the company of the elect. In this case, the Church is made up of those who have been predestined to belong to the kingdom of God. It is both visible and invisible. To be part of the Church means that such a person is elected to eternal salvation. It should be noted, however, that Zwingli believes as well that there could be in the church those who are yet to be saved. But the Church stands out as the representation of God’s glory on earth.⁴⁹

The doctrine of election plays a dominant role in Zwingli’s disputation with the Anabaptists. Zwingli argues that it was out of God’s sovereign will that He elects children into his kingdom, and under such circumstance, he sees nothing wrong with baptism of infants. As a matter of fact, a major bone of contention between Zwingli and the Anabaptists centered on the issue of infant baptism.⁵⁰ In addition, Zwingli argues that children who die are elects. This suggests that such infants would inherit the kingdom of God. While this is difficult to argue, there is no biblical basis for such argument. In his conclusion, Zwingli argues that election is above baptism, faith and preaching, but all

⁴⁶Samuel M. Jackson, *Huldreich Zwingli: The Reformer of German Switzerland 1484-1531* (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1901), 382.

⁴⁷Jackson, *Huldreich Zwingli: The Reformer of German Switzerland 1484-1531*, 382

⁴⁸Notice that Zwingli did not teach that faith is irrelevant to salvation rather he argues from a technical view point that faith itself is not what one attains through one’s personal ability, but it comes by God’s grace. Nevertheless, such does not come without the person’s responsibility. One who is saved has also demonstrated certain responsibilities by responding to the invitation to grace and faith. See Jackson, *Huldreich Zwingli: The Reformer of German Switzerland 1484-1531*, 383.

⁴⁹Stephens, *The Theology of Zwingli*, 262.

⁵⁰W. Estep, *The Story of the Anabaptist*,

these are submerged in Christ, for there can be no election outside of Christ.⁵¹ The basic element contained in his understanding of this concept is the idea that faith brought about by election is the source of salvation and not merit or free will.

Critical Evaluation

This section briefly considers the strengths and weaknesses of Zwingli's doctrine of predestination.

Strengths

First, Zwingli contributes immensely to the doctrine of predestination in the sense that he emphasizes the doctrine of election as hinged on the idea of God's sovereignty. It depicts God as having complete and total authority over his creation. In this circumstance, one is brought to the understanding that salvation cannot be achieved by merit. It counters the prevailing Catholic teachings of his time that salvation could be obtained through personal merit. Salvation, as can be seen from the foregoing, is absolutely a prerogative of God and cannot be attained by humankind, except through faith.

Second, this idea leads to the understanding that the redemptive work of Christ on the cross and its attendant blessings come to the believer through faith in Christ. He makes it clear from his argument and belief in the doctrine of predestination that the Eucharist provides no salvation, but it is an observation of a memorial unto God.

Again, Zwingli demonstrates for the evangelicals today, the need for total dependence on God and His grace. The doctrine of predestination leads believers to a state of surrender and total humility to the power of the Holy Spirit because it brings the believer to the understanding that he/she has nothing that has not been given by God in His omnipotence. Again, predestination shows that the only thing human beings can do in situations of difficulties is to depend on God because He is the source of grace and sustenance.

One of the things that emerge from Zwingli's doctrine of predestination is that God constantly demonstrates His love and mercy towards human beings. God demonstrates His love by electing humanity to share in His glory. In addition,

⁵¹Stephens, *The Theology of Zwingli*, 102.

predestination makes it possible for human beings to understand the problem of evil. The point is that believers need to understand that the presence of evil in the world is under the control of God as the sovereign over all creation. God allows such things because they will result in ultimate good for them who believe in Him. The concept of providence of God and predestination help us to understand such things.

Weaknesses

While appreciating the good contributions of Zwingli's doctrine of predestination, one must not forget that certain defects are found in his doctrine of predestination. One of the defects is that while he traces salvation to Christ alone, he notes, however, that God's act in the election of those who come to faith in Him is a demonstration of His goodness and whom He wills, but the election and drawing of the believer to Himself is purely an act of justice.

According to Stephens, the albatross for Zwingli is that he fails to point out the kind of faith "elect Gentiles had."⁵² The major problem here lies in his assertion that God is able to give to the Gentiles faith to accept Christ, even if they do not hear the gospel.⁵³ This is very dangerous in the sense that it can lead to universalism. Acts 4:12 states that there is no other name under heaven through which a man can be saved except through the name of Jesus. The gospel of Jesus Christ is crucial to salvation. No one can come to the Father except through the gospel of Christ. To accept Zwingli's assertion would mean that it is unnecessary for anyone to believe in Christ if salvation would come without necessarily believing in Him.

Also, Zwingli's argument for infant baptism because they are elect is fraught with danger. Baptism does not replace repentance and salvation. What assurance is there to prove that infants so affected have truly believed when they are yet to come to the age of accountability? Baptism is not salvation, and in this line, one cannot but agree with the Anabaptists that baptism is for believers only.

In addition, Zwingli, in some cases, argues for sonship apart from faith. The Bible teaches that human beings are adopted into God's family when they believe in the saving

⁵²Stephens, *The Theology of Zwingli*, 102.

⁵³Stephens, *The Theology of Zwingli*, 102.

grace of the Lord. Justification comes only by faith in Christ (Rom 1:17, 8:1). It becomes indefensible then to posit that one can be elected without faith in Christ. This amounts to serious contradiction in the theology of Zwingli who argues somewhere else for salvation through Christ alone.

Findings

Without doubt, Zwingli plays a vital role in the reformation of the Church. His commitment to the authority of Scripture provides a good advantage to evangelical understanding of Christianity today. The idea of the authority of Scripture helps evangelicals in the understanding that the locus of interpretation lies in the Scripture, which is God breathed and inerrant. With this, evangelicals have come to the conclusion that the Bible is the final authority in matters of faith and practice.

In addition, Zwingli's teachings confirm the fact that the doctrine of predestination plays a vital role in one's understanding of the concept of original sin and the Eucharist. The problem, nevertheless, is that it has tendencies towards universalism. Above all, this shows that against the towering image of Luther and Calvin as prime movers of Reformation, Zwingli also is a factor to reckon with and his contributions cannot be neglected in the evangelical circles today. Indeed, one cannot but agree with Walton that, "Zwingli was the father of the Reformed churches."⁵⁴ It could be said without equivocation then that while much attention has been given to the works of Calvin on the doctrine of predestination, Zwingli's contributions have been neglected or ignored, partly because Zwingli started the espousal of his thought on the doctrine of predestination early, compared to Calvin and Luther. The point is that theologians interested in the doctrine today should look beyond Calvin and also dig up from the treasure mine of Zwingli's writings on the subject matter. This, indeed, is a challenge to theologians today.

Conclusion

Of the three key reformers - Luther, Calvin and Zwingli - scholars have paid less attention to the theology of Zwingli, especially the doctrine of predestination. Zwingli's

⁵⁴Walton, "Zwingli: Founding Father of the Reformed Churches," 69.

thought on predestination has received less attention because of the late development of his thought in this line, and because his teaching on predestination has been greatly subsumed under his teachings on the doctrine of election and providence in contrast to those of Luther and Calvin. In addition, scholars have considered Zwingli's work as being more in the field of philosophy than theology as though he had done less in the development of theology. Contrary to this, however, a closer look at Zwingli's work shows an immense contribution to modern evangelical theology with respect to the authority of Scripture and the sovereignty of God. While Zwingli's theology of predestination has a major weakness of tendency towards universalism, he has contributed greatly to the evangelicals' understanding of the doctrine of predestination, and scholars should seek to have a deeper study the theology of Ulrich Zwingli.

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