


Predestination and ‘pre-activation’: A theological reflection on this famous, yet often disputed doctrine. Does not this doctrine make people careless and profane?



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In the first part of this article, the classic as well as modern interpretations of the doctrine on predestination (Augustine, Calvin, Dort/Barth, Smit, Van der Walt) is investigated, while in the second part, I try to answer the question whether this (sometimes sharply criticised) doctrine does not make men careless and profane. Or does this doctrine rather stimulate and activate individual, ecclesiastical and social activities in the societal, political and economic spheres of life? The Heidelberg Catechism asks the question whether the doctrine of justification (grace alone) ‘does not make men careless and profane?’, but answers ‘by no means’. Does the same apply to the doctrine of predestination? Should we not complement the doctrine of predestination with the concept of ‘pre-activation’?

Keywords: predestination; election; ‘pre-activation’; good works; Christology.

Introduction

The doctrine of predestination is a contested doctrine for various reasons. Viewed superficially, it seems to deny all human responsibility and decision-making, because God predestined all things, but is that a correct definition of predestination? Did God really predestine all things: salvation and damnation, good things and bad things; yes, even sin? Isn’t that a very blurred perspective on what predestination really means? Most of these questions will return for reflection when we try to explain this extraordinary doctrine.

Augustine and Calvin are blamed for putting this doctrine in the centre of the Christian faith and theology, with the result that the question is asked: Does this doctrine not make men careless and profane?¹ Does it not reduce the human being into an irrational and impotent animal? And the most important of all: Does it not change the living God of love into a harsh God of determinism?

Added to all these questions, attention will be drawn on the fact that most of the church fathers that preceded Augustine, focussed more on the responsibility and the freedom of the human person, than on the eternal council of God.

Firstly, the classic understanding of this dogma will be investigated; then I will focus on some new approaches towards it and in the end try to answer the question whether this doctrine does not make a person careless, passive and profane.

Classic interpretation

It has been mentioned that most of the influential Greek and Latin Church fathers in the period, which precedes Augustine, emphasised the freedom of the will, but they have done so in reaction to the deterministic fatalism of the Gnostics and Manicheists (Berkhof 1990:468–471; Van den Brink & Van der Kooi 2013:629–635; Van Genderen & Velema 1992:210; Weber 1972:462). This does not mean, however, that the Greek fathers have had a mild view on sin, because for them the doctrine on sin and grace was also fundamental (Van de Beek 2014:254–256).

Aurelius Augustine

In opposition to this overrating of human free will, Augustine emphasised God’s grace and was the first to develop the doctrine of predestination. His accentuation on God’s foreordination and free

1. See Pretorius (2017:16) for the effect of what he experienced as Calvin’s (disputed) doctrine on election in his youth.

grace is developed in his disputes with Pelagius (Pelagianism) and Julian (Semi-Pelagianism).² Augustine took election to be an act of the will of God prior to any prevision of the future conduct of humans (see Pannenberg 1993:440). Augustine totally rejected Pelagius' view that even after the Fall, a person has the ability and the choice not to sin. Augustine argued that nobody is saved unless it is (only) through the grace of God, and nobody is lost than through his own iniquities. God chose us from eternity not *because* we believe, but so that we *will* believe (Van Wyk 2018:48). Augustine is a bit hesitant about the lost and prefer to say that God 'by-passed' them instead of 'rejected' them. Biblical references which were used to substantiate his *views*, were Romans 9, Ephesians 1 and (many times) 1 Corinthians 4:7: 'What do you possess that was not given to you?' (See Polman w.d.:193–201).

In Augustine's approach, predestination and 'pre-activation' go hand in hand. We cannot do any good work unless it is God that activates our will and then cooperates when we will.

It is interesting to note that Augustine's doctrine on predestination continued in the theology of Thomas Aquinas. 'Whatever in man prepares him for eternal life', Aquinas (1989) says:

[I]s already an effect of predestination; even the very first preparation for grace needs God's help ... The reason for the effects of predestination taken as a whole is God's goodness, the final goal and first agent of everything. (p. 59; see further Polman n.d.:208–217)³

Also the church reformer, Martin Luther, in his disputes with Erasmus, continued the line of thought developed by Augustine: A person is saved by grace alone and predestined by God.⁴ In his book, *De seruo arbitrio* (1525), Luther opposed Erasmus with a doctrine on predestination, taking the omnipotence of God *as starting point*.⁵

John Calvin

It is interesting to follow Calvin's development of the predestination doctrine. In the first print of the *Institutions* (1536), this doctrine is not dealt with separately (see also

2. See Van Wyk (2018:47–49) with many source references (also see Weber 1972:470–472).

3. After completion of this article, I discover the book review of Henk van der Belt (2018) on the book of E. Echeverria. He finds the discussion of the Reformed understanding of election by an orthodox Catholic fascinating. The main question discussed by Echeverria is whether or not the efficaciousness of grace ultimately depends on human consent – the traditional point of disagreement between Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Armenians, on the one hand, and the Reformed on the other hand. Echeverria finds the Reformed view problematic, because in the first place, it excludes the liberty of fallen human beings to choose between good and evil, and in the second place, it implies a double predestination which parallels election and rejection or reprobation and makes God the author of sin. For Echeverria, sufficient grace becomes efficient not only by assent of the free will, which would be Pelagianism, but also by the foreordained circumstances which God surely foreknows that the individual will believe. However, this sympathetic approach leaves a Reformed Christian with the uneasy feeling that salvation is unattainable, because it ultimately depends on human consent.

4. In his book, *Geloof sonder sekerhede*, Van Niekerk (2005:76–111) tries to re-evaluate the discussion between Erasmus and Luther.

5. According to Pannenberg, Luther argues that we are to seek God's eternal election in Jesus Christ and not behind him in a hidden decree of God (Pannenberg 1993:446). It seems that Natie van Wyk (2019:1–5) is not comfortable with my portrayal of the relation between faith and works. His criticism is against the danger of equating faith and morality – a remark which deserves careful consideration.

De Gruchy 1991:125–135; 2013; Neuser 2009:312–323). In the successive volumes, he reflected on it, especially in Book 1 which deals with the doctrine of God. In the last edition (1559), he shifted it to Book 3 which explains the work of the Holy Spirit (Calvyn n.d., *Inst.* 3.21–24), but the question remains whether this shift has had any effect on the contents of his argument. He strictly follows a 'double predestination', that is, one of foreordination unto salvation and one unto damnation (Calvyn n.d., *Inst.* 3.23.1) – the last described as *decretum horribile* (Calvyn n.d., *Inst.* 3.23.7). In Calvin's approach there are many pastoral sentences and he would emphasise that God's election for those who are saved, is characterised by the fact that it took place 'through our union *with Christ*' even before the world was made (Eph 1:4). There is no predestination without Christ. Christ lies at the heart of what is called predestination.⁶ However, Calvin's approach gave rise to the distinction which was called 'supralapsarism' (God's eternal decision was taken 'before' the Fall) and 'infralapsarism' (God's eternal decision was taken 'after' the Fall), but the meaningfulness of this distinction was questioned by many theologians.

For Calvin it is important to use a Christological approach, in order to understand the predestination. He would never send a person to the hidden council of God waiting for their salvation, but direct to Jesus Christ in which our salvation is revealed, which otherwise would be hidden in God (see Van Genderen & Velema 1992:217). With this approach, Calvin correctly emphasises Christ as the centre of the biblical message of salvation (Berkouwer 1955:150; Van Genderen & Velema 1992:218; Weber 1972:472–475).

In his summary of the predestination doctrine found in Calvin, Neuser (2009:318–321) also draws attention on Calvin's important sermon of 1551, in which a reference of God's eternal counsel prior to the foundation of the world is dropped and not even mentioned. It seems that Calvin taught 'two doctrines' on predestination: in the sermon, we have election by grace, and in the *Institutes*, we find a double predestination. According to Neuser, this approach does result in a contradiction, although the imaginary of the sermon is more convincing to the reader.

It is interesting to note that Calvin, in his approach to church unity, does not include the doctrine of predestination as non-negotiable to reach church unity (Nijenhuis 1959:220). Nijenhuis (1959:282) also draws attention on the interesting fact that Calvin only explicitly mentions three fundamental Christian dogmas, namely that there is only one God; that Christ is God and Son of God, and that our salvation rests on the mercy of God (Calvyn n.d., *Inst.* 4.1.12); and that, although Calvin adds 'such things', he does not *explicitly* refer to predestination as a fundamental dogma.

In Calvin's work ethics, there is an exceptional coincidence of God's graceful justification and a person's good works.

6. Vosloo (2017:185) refers to the fact that Heiko Oberman has argued that the puzzling doctrine of predestination was born out of Calvin's experience of exile; it is the mighty bulwark of the Christian faithful against the fear that they will be unable to hold out against the pressure of persecution.

He could even say that it is very true that we are not justified through our works, but also not without them (Calvyn n.d., *Inst.* 3.16.1). Calvin's work ethics is largely developed from the perception of a God who calls us to do good works to the honour of God; the God who predestined and 'pre-activated' us to serve the coming of his heavenly kingdom (see Van Wyk 1984a on this topic; also see Van Wyk 1993:21–27).

Canons of Dort

A very important document, which was stimulated by the disputes between two Dutch professors, Arminius and Gomaris, resulted in the Canons of Dort (CoD) (1618–1619). Not that the doctrine of predestination was forgotten in the Belgic Confession (1561) and Heidelberg Catechism (1563).⁷ It appears in article 16 of the Belgic Confession, but in an *infralapsarian* formulation: God elected in Christ of mere goodness without consideration of a person's work, on the one hand, and on the other hand, left others in the fall and perdition in which they have involved themselves. The Catechism follows the same line of thought (21:54) (see Jonker 1994:123–151). The CoD expose that the fact that some receive the gift of faith from God while others do not receive it, 'proceeds from God's eternal decree' (1.6). The cause of the guilt of the unbelievers, however, cannot be sought in God, but in man himself (1.5, 1.15; 3/4.9). A certain number of persons are redeemed 'in Christ' whom God, from eternity, appointed as the Mediator and Head of the elect and the foundation of salvation (1.7). Others are by-passed in the eternal decree, namely those whom God decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have wilfully plunged themselves (1.15).

Some theologians find the presentation and formulation of the CoD too abstract and scholastic although the intension of the CoD cannot be queried, namely the grace of God in Jesus Christ (see Botha 1972; Jonker 1994:146–147).

New voices⁸

The doctrine of predestination sometimes gave rise to interpretations in which Christ plays no role, and where a form of radical determinism dominates the whole approach. It is then formulated in such a way that God changes into a cruel and brutal person who dominates life and death, time and eternity in a despotic, fatalistic and arbitrary way. I will now turn to some of the new voices who tried to re-interpret this doctrine in a more friendly and Christological way.

Karl Barth

I start with the approach of the Swiss theologian, Karl Barth. For Barth, the doctrine of predestination is 'the grace in the grace', which is a summary of the gospel. For him, Christ is at the centre of this doctrine (Barth 1959; see Durand 2018:124–130; Graafland 1987; Pannenberg 1993:451–455;

7. It is intriguing to note that most of the Reformed confessions followed an *infralapsarian* approach (Van Genderen & Velema 1992:219). We find in the Bible an election from eternity, but we do not read of a rejection from eternity; there is a 'book of life', but not a 'book of death' (Van Genderen & Velema 1992:221).

8. See Van Genderen and Velema (1992:215–216) for new voices in the Netherlands (Woelderink 1951).

Polman n.d.:217–227; Weber 1972:484–486). The God who revealed himself to us, is the God who turned to us in Jesus Christ. The election belongs to the heart of God's doctrine, for it shows us who and how God is. Christ is on the one side the *subject*, and on the other side, the object of God's decision on election. He is both the choosing God as well as the chosen human (Barth 1959:101–157). Jesus Christ is also both the chosen human and the rejected human. Barth seems to move in the direction of a 'reconciliation of all' (*apokatastasis*) (see Origen), although he denied this idea.

The most important criticism on Barth's approach, is the perception that the human answer on God's offer of salvation seems to totally disappear in God's overwhelming choice for man (Van den Brink & Van der Kooi 2013:635; see further Berkouwer 1955:150–199; Polman n.d.:217–227).

Dirkie Smit

I continue with a short portrayal of the views of Dirkie Smit,⁹ Stellenbosch professor, but now associated with the University of Princeton in the USA.

Smit dealt with the question of the relation between the doctrine of election and public life. Do we speak in public life in such a way about the doctrine of election that it brings hope for the *desperate*? Van der Westhuizen (2018) states:

We should not revive old debates and defend positions from our past, but risk finding new ways so that today's people once again in their own way feel the doctrine of election vibrating in themselves. (p. 16)

Smit strives to read the doctrine of election in a new way, and refers to Bavinck who argued that this doctrine is a source of 'inexpressible rich hope' for the believers as well as non-believers. This doctrine speaks about grace and therefore it also speaks about hope for the lost.

This approach has implications for the public life. All people are objects of God's grace. Nobody has the right to believe that he or she is lost. There *is* hope for even the most lost person, and therefore we should not believe that anybody is lost and not an object of God's grace. Van der Westhuizen (2018) comments:

It matters whether (we) use election language to boast about (our) own status and special calling in history and society or whether (we) use it – like Bavinck – as source of hope for even the most wretched in (our) own eyes. (p. 16)

Smit focuses on 'the all', as Van der Westhuizen (2018) explains:

Our continuous debates about God's 'all' – our misunderstandings and failures and refusals – might have been amusing, if only they did not carry such disastrous consequences, if only they did not matter so much, to so many, including the outsiders, the others, the 'they' who are not 'us', including those who may be wretched in our eyes. (p. 16)

9. The Warfield lecture of Smit of 2018 was not yet published when this article was written, and therefore I have to rely on a summary of it by Henco van der Westhuizen (2018) which appeared in the *Kerkbode*.

The doctrine of election let us imagine a world that is other than the one we know, and this can be done in prayer and adoration.

The big question is, however, the following: 'Does the public life of Christians give evidence of God's gracious election?' 'Do our lives give evidence of God's commitment to the God of election?' 'Should we not seek to imagine ways to welcome others, so that no-one is excluded and no-one loses hope?'

From this exposition it is clear that Smit made a meaningful attempt to describe the sometimes intimidating dogma of predestination in a sympathetic way, which illustrates a God of love and hope.

Bennie van der Walt

Another person who raises some questions in this regard, is the South African theologian-philosopher, Bennie van der Walt, from Potchefstroom. He wrote four articles on the origin and contents of the Canons of Dort (1618–1619). Because he is a member of the so-called 'conservative' Reformed Churches of South Africa, I will deal with his views in more detail.

In the first article, he investigates the phenomenon of reformed Scholasticism (about 1550–1700) as it occurred at the Synod of Dort (Van der Walt 2011b:505–536). According to him, the central problem with which Dort dealt is the relationship between God and human beings as expressed in the themes of divine election and reprobation. He clarifies his views by examining the views of Gomarus (Calvinist) and Arminius (Remonstrant) philosophically. According to Van der Walt, neither viewpoints were accepted at Dort, but their theologies reflect the dominant scholastic philosophy of the time. The whole analysis of Van der Walt is carried out in the context of the Christian philosophy of D.H.Th. Vollenhoven. Van der Walt (2011b:515) discovered a wrong direction and wrong type of philosophy in the Canons and the unsolved problem of the relationship between God and man. This does not mean that there are not genuine biblical perspectives in the Canons (Van der Walt 2011b:530), but we are in need of a new confession with a much broader scope (p. 534).¹⁰

In a second article, Van der Walt (2011a:269–288) investigates the relationship between God and the human being in Gomarus and Arminius, which he regarded as the central issue at the Synod of Dort. According to Van der Walt, the Canons did not reach an altogether satisfactory solution on this question. As background, a general philosophical characterisation of reformed scholastic thinking is provided which is described as synthesis philosophy, because it combined biblical revelation with extra-biblical ideas from Greek and Hellenistic philosophy. Pre-Christian ideas were read into parts of Scripture (*eisegesis*) and afterwards explained from the Bible (*exegesis*). Furthermore, a synthesis was achieved by way of a nature-grace dualism, which in turn,

10. Already in 1974, Van Wyk (1974:22–33) asked for a new confession.

resulted in a distinction between reason and faith, philosophy and theology. In a second section, the underlying philosophical viewpoints of Gomarus and Arminius are investigated, which show how little they differ from each other. They were, however, proponents of different anthropologies: Gomarus an intellectualist and Arminius an empiricist. Van der Walt concluded that the conflict between the Reformed and Arminian positions was not primarily a clash between what the Bible discloses (the Reformed side) and the unbiblical heresy (the Arminians), but a clash between two different forms of, especially, Aristotelian influenced philosophies which were superimposed onto the Scriptures. Dort did not succeed in reaching a satisfactory standpoint on the relation between God and man (Van der Walt 2011a:286).

A third article (Van der Walt 2012b), closely follows the results reached so far. It focusses on the influence of Aristotelian-scholastic philosophy on the Canons. Again the central problem at Dort is identified as the relationship between God and the human being. A detailed analysis of the Canons is also provided, which indicates the presence of scholastic philosophy in general, and a decretal theology built on a synthetic interpretation of especially Aristotelian philosophy. Van der Walt (using the results of the important study of Sinnema 1985)¹¹ concludes that Dort did not solve the problem of the relation between divine sovereignty and human responsibility – a problem to which Christian philosophy could be meaningfully applied. He (Van der Walt 2012b:107) concludes with a desire to draft a new relevant and inspirational confession for today.

A fourth article (Van der Walt 2012a) investigates the Aristotelian-philosophical influences at the Synod of Dort, and the liberating perspective of a Reformation philosophy on divine sovereignty and human responsibility. According to Van der Walt, the clash at Dort was the result of different interpretations of the philosophy of the pre-Christian Greek philosopher, Aristotle, which were sanctioned through the methods of *eisegesis-exegesis* and nature-grace. The article investigates why the theologians at Dort find the Aristotelian philosophy very attractive when looking for a solution to the problem of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. In the first part, the author provides a summary of the philosophy of Aristotle, which includes Aristotle's hierarchical ontology, his view of God (*deusim mutabilis*), his causal determined ontology and his syllogistic reasoning. According to Van der Walt, Gomarus' philosophical conceptions, underlying his philosophy, is in every aspect identical to (parts of) Aristotle's philosophy as is the case with Arminius' final conceptions. The significant conclusion is that the real controversy at Dort was not that between the (correct or wrong) interpretation of the Bible of the two opposing parties, but a struggle between different interpretations of the pagan philosopher Aristotle, possibly based on different phases of his thinking. The second section of the article is an attempt to find a genuine Reformational answer to the relationship between God and mankind. The author argues that this answer is to be found in the Christian philosophy of Vollenhoven of which he gave a

11. This source was mainly used on the basis of information found at Bennie van der Walt.

summary. He ends with the suggestion of new creeds or testimonies which do not focus on dogmatic controversies, but on human responsibilities in God's worldwide kingdom in different spheres of life (Van der Walt 2012a:193).

The conclusion reached by Van der Walt, boils down to the fact that the CoD are based on Aristotelian philosophy, instead of biblical foundations. But the following very important question stays unanswered: Do theologians need *philosophical* presuppositions to develop a *theological* doctrine?

So far as the 'new voices' are concerned. A detailed critical account of them were not given, but they are discussed to show the discomfort that is experienced with some of the formulations in CoD. I will now turn to what can be described as the heart of the dogma of predestination, and that is Christ.

Predestination *en Christō*

There are many interpretations with regard to predestination unto salvation and damnation – the so-called double predestination – as well as the theme of infra- and supralapsarism, but I am not going to touch on all of them.

The concept of predestination or foreordination in the Bible is evident (see Berkouwer 1955:150–100; Jonker 1988:121–131; Van Genderen & Velema 1992:202–210; Venema 1992:202).

The Old Testament speaks of God's chosen people, Israel, but the initiative always lies with God: *He* is the elector. Although there are references to individuals who are selected (or rejected),¹² the emphasis is on the people of Israel, the people of the covenant. They must be a light for the nations (Is 2:2–4; 60:3; see Pannenberg 1993:442–443, 455).¹³ The election does not eliminate active responsibility from the side of Israel, but includes it – they must continue doing the will of the Lord God.

The New Testament elaborates on the views found in the Old Testament.¹⁴ God elects people for a specific activity, but also for eternal life (see Ac 13:48). A key text in this regard is the first verses in Ephesians 1 where we read:

Even before the world was made, God has already chose us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we would be holy and without fault before him. (v. 4 – Good News Bible [GNB])

The *question* which introduces itself here is the relation between time and eternity: On the one hand, the text refers to an election 'before the world was made' (see also Eph 3:11; 1 Pt 1:20), and on the other hand, to be (literally) 'in Christ', a historical person. Some seek the solution in the fact that Paul refers here to the 'pre-existent Christ' (see Ridderbos 1966:387;

12. See Schrenk (1985:516): Only rarely does the divine choice refer to individuals.

13. The thought of national election finds clear formulation in Deuteronomy 14:2 and is based on God's love and grace (Schrenk 1985:517–518). Election means election for a mission: The elect people is to bear witness to the nations that God is God (Is 42:1; 43:10; Schrenk 1985:518).

14. According to Pannenberg (1993:458), Schleiermacher was the first to break with the individualism in the doctrine of election traced back to Augustine, with his view of the church as the primary object of election and of individuals as its secondarily objects.

Robberts 1963:44), while Venema (1965:52–63) focusses more on the election as an act of God in history. It is clear, however, that the *en Christō* forms an indispensable element in the understanding of predestination. God's election is not a deterministic act of an apathetic and distant God, but an act of grace by an empathetic God of love (see Ridderbos 1966:390). We may say: Eternity and time unite in Christ.

When we interpret Ephesians 1:4, we have to keep in mind that we have to do with a God who stands 'above' time. God is timeless (Ps 90:4; 2 Pt 3:8) and therefore, when Paul speaks about God's election 'before the world was made', it is a metaphor, for nothing in history is unknown to God. Therefore, the reference to *en Christō* is so important, because God's election finds its realisation in history, in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. In 1 Peter 1:20 we read the following: 'He [*Christ*] had been chosen by God before the creation of the world and was revealed in these last days for our sake' (GNB). A person must believe in the historical Jesus Christ who was crucified and resurrected for his or her salvation. This believe, however, is a gift of God's grace so that we 'may have a life of good deeds, which God has already prepared for us' (Eph 2:10). God elected us unto salvation as well as to do good works. Predestination and 'pre-activation' are closely related. It is correctly stated that the centre and mystery of the biblical message on election may be called *the election in Christ* (Berkouwer 1955:55; Van Genderen & Velema 1992:218).

Earlier on, I have referred to Calvin, whom as we know, is blamed for his 'deterministic' approach to the doctrine of predestination, but we must never forget his very pastoral and sympathetic words where he says that he does not send people to God's secret election to expect from there salvation, but that he commands them to go straight away to Christ in whom our salvation is portrayed. It would otherwise be hidden in God – as is already indicated. Even for Calvin, the key answer on predestination is to be found in Jesus Christ without whom this dogma becomes a terrifying and 'horrible' doctrine.

I shortly attend now to the question of a double predestination. The Reformed tradition always acknowledged an universal proposal of grace, but a particular acceptance of it (Polman n.d.:238). From this does not follow that all people are being saved, which invokes the question whether the lost are also predestined to be lost. What is interesting is that the Bible many times refers to an election of the saved, but nowhere to an election of the lost, which would mean an eternal reprobation (Jonker 1988:142; Van Genderen & Velema 1992:221; see Bavinck 1928:355–357).¹⁵ The greatest problem with the so-called double predestination is that it miscalculates the goodness of God (Jonker 1988:143). We may say that the reprobation does not happen outside the will of God, but it does not function in the same way as the election unto salvation (Jonker 1988:146). It is interesting to look in this

15. See Schrenk (1985:519): 'The NT does not bring *eklēgesthai* into contrast with reprobation.'

regard to the formulation of Article 16 of the Belgic Confession: God is *just* 'in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves'. Man, and not God, must be blamed for his fall into sin and his being lost forever, as Polman (1965) argues:

The Bible knows no prehistoric decision which determines all things [*causally*], but, a graceful election by God in Christ before the beginning of the world and reprobation in the midst of history. (p. 190)

Predestination and creation

A topic which does not always receive the necessary attention, is the relation between predestination and creation. It is without doubt that, if predestination has to do with the ultimate outcome of God's creation, with the completion of his Kingdom and with the new heaven and the new earth, there must be a relation between predestination and creation. Predestination is meaningless if there is no place for the predestined people to stay.

Furthermore, God is not only concerned with human beings, but also with the animal world – he is concerned with the whole earth. It is true that animals are not dealt with in the same way as human beings who are created to the image of God, but they belong to the creation of God with which he is on the way to renewal – although through a final judgement. The Old Testament refers to the fact that God does not only care for human beings, but also for animals (Ps 147:9; Jl 1:20). After the great city Nineveh repented on the preaching of the prophet Jonah, not only humans were saved, but also animals (Jnh 3:7; 4:11). The prophet Isaiah portrays the Messianic Kingdom in a vivid manner where the relation between man and animal as well as animal and animal totally changes: Wolves and sheep will live together in peace; leopards will lie down with young goats; calves and lion cubs will feed together and little children will take care of them; cows and bears will eat together and their calves and cubs will lie down in peace; lions will eat straw as cattle do and even a baby will not be harmed if it plays near a poisonous snake (Is 11:6–8 – GNB).

Animals also play a role in the New Testament eschatology. Besides the 24 elders (the church), seated around the throne of God, were also 4 'living creatures' which symbolise and represent the whole of creation, including the animal world. It is inconceivable that God's predestined children will someday live in a new creation with no plants and animals.

In conclusion it may be said that the predestined believers will someday continue their eternal life on a predestined universe.

Predestination and 'pre-activation'

The heading asks the question whether the doctrine of predestination does not make men careless and profane. Isn't it easy to argue as follows: I am sure that I am a child of God; that I believe in Christ; that I am elected; that I cannot be

lost – so why worry? I can live a life which I may dictate and regulate according to my own will. The answer to this question is of course an emphatic *no!* In many places in Scripture, the relation between predestination and 'pre-activation' (human action) is inseparable and closely united. In Ephesians 1:4 Paul says that we are chosen by God before the world were made 'so that we would be holy and without fault before him'. He continues in Ephesians 2:8–10 that we are saved through faith in Christ, and that God 'has created us for a life of good deeds, which He has already prepared for us'. We find the same message in the teaching of Jesus Christ: 'You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures' (Jn 15:16 – GNB). A fruit-bearing life of love – *that* is the purpose of election. Predestination motivates and stimulates Christian action. Predestination finds its realisation in 'pre-activation'.

Of course Paul is referring in Ephesians to the *church* of Christ, but this implies to every member of the church. It further implies not only the so-called 'churchly things', but also the personal and social life of each church member and believer *outside* the church. Christians are called upon to live a 'good life' not only in the church, but also (I can almost say: foremost) outside the church in the open world with its social, political and economic problems. At the time when Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians (round about AD 61–63), the church was a small minority in the great Roman Empire, sometimes heavily persecuted. However, nowadays the situation has changed in many countries where Christians form the majority (in South Africa 80%). We also experience freedom of religion, and all these things make it much easier for the church and for Christians to influence society in a positive way.

The question now arises what we should understand of the concept *good deeds*.

The first instruction that Christ has given to his disciples – his church – was to preach the good news of salvation to all nations (Mt 28:19–20). Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ will be saved (Ac 16:31). To this outgoing task of the church, which is correctly emphasised today, we should not forget its inward calling, which we find in Christ's last words to Peter: 'Take care of my lambs' and 'take care of my sheep' (Jn 21:15–16). It does not make sense to preach the gospel and to start a new congregation, which is then neglected to disintegrate. Paul therefore took great care to appoint elders in all new congregations to keep watch over the flock of Christ, and to be shepherds of the church (Ac 20:28–29).

The church of Christ – and individual Christians – has also a prophetic task in society today (see Küng 1991; 2012). Of the many that could be mentioned, I only focus on what I suspect are the most important.

First to mention is the permanent threat of a nuclear war. There are enough nuclear weapons in the weapon arsenals of the world today to destroy all life on earth several times. We may argue that since what happened to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, no world leader will ever consider a nuclear

war, because such a war will destroy its own end and there will be no winner after such a war. However, the situation in the world becomes more and more precarious in light of the upcoming extremist and radical Muslim movements, especially ISIS. They will not hesitate to use the most devastating weapons when they deem it necessary to promote their aim. In such a world, the people of God, the church of Christ, has a prophetic task to witness for peace (Rm 12:18; 14:17; see Van Wyk [1974] 1984b). 'Happy are those who work for peace; for God will call them his children', Christ said (Mt 5:9 – GNB). This prophetic witness should reach the parliaments in each country and also the United Nations Organisation. Ecumenical movements, such as the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches, could play an important role in this regard.

Another great task of the church today is to address the ecological crisis, which is rolling on like a non-stoppable tsunami.¹⁶ The first task which the Lord God has given to humans, was to cultivate the Garden of Eden and 'to guard' it (Gn 2:15). Man must guard the creation, not destroy it, which is precisely what is happening today. In his sensational book, *Losing earth*, Rich (2019) tells us about the existence of scientific evidence for global warming for decades while it was politically denied, and the eventual damage that will occur as a result of this. Scientists tell us that by the year 2030, and most definitely by 2050, we may expect a total collapse of the whole world environment, caused by the water, air and environmental pollution as well as earth calefaction. Of course the world population of 7.2 milliard and the ongoing development – and exploitation – add much to this ecological crisis. Countries do not succeed in finding a balance between *developments* on the one hand, and *conservation* on the other hand. This means that there is no safe place on earth and that people moving from the one country to another are misleading themselves, because their 'solution' will only be temporary. A predestined church has a predestined obligation to speak up against the exploitation of the earth which belongs to the Lord (Ps 24:1), and to supply married couples with the necessary moral education for responsible family planning (see Moltmann 2012:147–167).

In 2012, the *Gereformeerde Kerke Suid-Afrika* (GKSA) took an extremely important decision with regard to the problem of ecological pollution, which needs much more attention and application. The GKSA is one of the first churches in South Africa who took a decision on this matter and who warned and witnessed against the misuse of God's creation (Acta GKSA 2012:512–513).¹⁷

There are more problems which could be discussed, such as how to promote economic justice and what is the best political system in a multi-cultural country (liberal or plural democracy), and how the church should react on these matters, but space does not allow us to touch on them. Let me just say that economic justice is a must from a Christian

16. For a short summary of the recent discussions, see Tempelhoff (2019:3): 'Volgens wetenskaplikes is die klimaatkrisis die grootste uitdaging waarmee die mens nog te doen gehad het.'

17. I had the privilege in supplying important material to the Synod for the final decision.

perspective, and that rich people can never do enough to uplift the poor and the jobless. Maybe we should opt for a system between socialism and capitalism, namely social democracy. As far as politics are concerned, there are strong indications that, in a multi-cultural country, a plural democracy (majority rule and minority representation) offers a better option than a liberal democracy (one man one vote; the winner takes all). Whatever may be, justice is the concept that the church of Christ should stand for, cry for and witness for. When everyone will do what is right (just), there will be peace and security on earth (Is 32:17; see Vorster 2004).

Conclusion

Predestination is a graceful act of God in which he includes a faithful response of a person, but in such a way that Christ, the Saviour, stays at the heart of that action and in which also the renewing work of the Spirit of God plays a key role (see Phlp 2:12–13).

Predestination is also focussed on the whole of creation and the renewal of the whole world, including animals. Although it is, in the last instance an act of God, the activities of people are not excluded, but included in God's plan of the coming and fulfilment of the kingdom of God (Rv 21:24, 26). The predestined are predestined unto salvation and unto a new life of good works to the honour of God; a life where God will be everything to everyone (1 Cor 15:28 – Revised Standard Version [RSV]).

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Author's contributions

I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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