

Predestination

Biblical and Theological Paths

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The Biblical Roots of the Doctrine of Predestination

The interest in predestination shown by Christian theologians through the centuries would not have surprised the New Testament authors. As Simon Gathercole points out, ‘most early Jewish and Christian groups held, in varying degrees, that God foreordained the lives of all people and in some cases the existence of all things as well’.¹ Although Gathercole has the synoptic Gospels in view, the Apostle Paul is most often identified with theologies of predestination. Paul does not deny human freedom, but he insists upon the power of God working in and through our lives. Commenting on Philippians 2:12–13, ‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure’, John Barclay remarks, ‘On the one hand, his letters are full of statements which state or presuppose that human beings are capable and effective agents, responsible for their own actions. . . . On the other hand, he speaks as if God’s agency is effective everywhere, even in cases where humans are said to work.’² As Barclay goes on to suggest, it is useful to examine Paul’s Second Temple context before turning to debates in the later Church about Paul’s meaning.

¹ Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 287.

² John M. G. Barclay, ‘Introduction’, in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, ed. John M. G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 1–2; see also in this volume Barclay, ‘“By the Grace of God I Am What I Am”: Grace and Agency in Philo and Paul’, 140–57, where Barclay argues for the priority of grace for Paul. For the combination of election and human choice in Paul and other Second Temple authors, see also the brief survey in Ben Witherington III, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism and Wesleyanism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 59–61.

This chapter examines recent scholarship on providence and predestination in various currents of Second Temple Judaism and undertakes a broad survey of the biblical witness, with particular attention to contemporary debate regarding whether Romans contains a doctrine of predestination. I suggest that later theological controversies over predestination arise from Scripture itself, rather than from overzealous theologians.

FROM JOSEPHUS TO PAUL

Commenting on the writings of Josephus (ad 37–100)—priest, Pharisee, military commander, Jewish apologist, and historian—N. T. Wright observes that ‘Josephus attempted to explain that whatever happens, happens according to the divine will’.³ Wright goes on to criticize this view, on the grounds that it does not sufficiently take into account election and covenant, through which God acts ‘decisively within his creation, to eliminate evil from it and to restore order, justice and peace’.⁴ For Wright, if everything happens according to God’s will, then God’s covenantal action in Israel cannot be as unique as it in fact is; ‘providence’ replaces God’s historical agency with a more abstract, philosophical account of God’s involvement in the world. Jews of the first century ad, Wright argues (with a critical eye towards the reconstruction of Judaism offered by E. P. Sanders), relied not upon an abstract ‘providence’ but upon God’s free covenantal, historical agency in and through Israel.

On these grounds, Wright distrusts Josephus’s contention that first-century Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes differed, among other things, about providence. In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus states that for the Essenes, ‘all things are best ascribed to God’.⁵ Josephus presents the

³ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 251.

⁴ Ibid. 251–2. Wright argues that for first-century Jews, ‘Providence by itself is not enough to explain the way in which belief in one god, the creator, and recognition of the radical nature of evil, can be held together. The aspect of Jewish monotheism which attempts this task, and which Josephus significantly downplays, is the third vital element within this basic belief: election and the covenant’ (p. 251).

⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, in *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), Book 18, ch. 1, §5 (18), p. 477.

position of the Pharisees and the Sadducees on providence in his *The Wars of the Jews*: the Pharisees ‘ascribe all to fate [or providence], and to God, and yet allow that to act what is right, or the contrary, is principally in the power of men, although fate does cooperate in every action’, while the Sadducees reject the notion of providence and hold ‘that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil’.⁶ In accord with their doctrines of providence, the Essenes and Pharisees believe that humans receive rewards and punishments after death, whereas the Sadducees consider this life to be all there is.

While Wright affirms that first-century Jews believed that ‘Israel’s god, the creator, works in and through what may be called “natural events”’,⁷ he suggests that Josephus here turns Essenes, Pharisees, and Sadducees into ‘Greek-styled philosophical schools’ debating philosophical abstractions, whereas the real division between the three groups consisted in different understandings of God’s historical agency.⁸ Wright therefore aims ‘to see through this disguise to the socio-political reality behind it’.⁹ According to Wright, what Josephus seeks to hide from his Roman readers is the tumultuous political debate about how, or whether, Jews should prepare for God’s liberation of Israel. Wright thus translates Josephus’s language about providence into three theo-political positions regarding what to expect from the covenantal God:

The Essenes proclaimed by their very mode of existence that, though they longed for the liberation of Israel, they were simply going to wait and allow Israel’s god to bring it to pass in his own time. The Sadducees proclaimed by their very existence that they believed in seizing and maintaining political power for themselves. . . . Reasoning in parallel, we may take it that the Pharisees’ belief was as follows: Israel’s god will act; but loyal Jews may well be required as the agents and instruments of that divine action. This fits completely with all the other evidence we

⁶ Josephus, *The Wars of the Lord*, in *The Works of Josephus*, Book 2, ch. 8, §14 (162–5), p. 608.

⁷ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 250. He adds, “Though there are “strong” biblical statements of divine involvement in everything that happens, good and bad alike (e.g. Isaiah 45.7; Amos 3.6), this is a difficult doctrine to maintain, and we find “softer” versions in the idea, for instance, that Israel’s god uses and directs the actions of wicked persons within his own purposes (e.g. Isaiah 10.5–15)’ (ibid. 251).

⁸ Ibid. 200. See also the similar reading of Ken Penner, ‘The Fate of Josephus’s *Antiquitates Judaicae* 13.171–3: Ancient Judean Philosophy in Context’, *The Journal of Biblical Studies* 1 (2001) (electronic journal, www.journalofbiblicalstudies.org).

⁹ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 200.

have studied, and indeed hints at the further debate within Pharisaism itself, with Hillel (and Gamaliel, as in Acts 5.33–9) inclining more in the direction of leaving the issue to Israel's god, and Shammai (and Saul of Tarsus) wanting to act as the means of that divine intervention.¹⁰

In Wright's view, Josephus's comments on providence belong to his effort to make first-century Judaism palatable to the Roman intelligentsia. As Wright puts it (indebted to Martin Hengel), 'Behind Josephus' unthreatening depiction of philosophical debate there stands the world of first-century political and revolutionary struggle.'¹¹

Certainly first-century Jews did not envision a 'providence' which lacked, at its centre, God's personal action in and through Israel. Even so, could they have arrived at the philosophical disagreements sketched in a Greek-influenced manner by Josephus? John Barclay remarks in this regard that 'Josephus' comments on the differences of opinion among Jewish "philosophies" on fate and free will (*Ant.* 13.172–3; 18.12–18), while over-simplified, certainly encourage us to expect that the debates among Jews were both significant and complex'.¹² For his part, Francis Watson points out the tension in 4 Ezra (dated to the late first century ad¹³) between on the one hand 'Zion eschatology' or 'national eschatology', concerned with the restoration of Israel, and on the other 'a new concern with transcendent individual destiny as determined by the law'.¹⁴ According to Watson, the figure of Ezra in 4 Ezra is concerned primarily with the latter. Ezra

¹⁰ Ibid. 200–1.

¹¹ Ibid. 201. Wright cites Martin Hengel's *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod until 70 A.D.*, trans. David Smith (German 1961; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989).

¹² Barclay, 'Introduction', in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, 4. See Gabriele Boccaccini, 'Inner-Jewish Debate on the Tension between Divine and Human Agency in Second Temple Judaism', in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, 9–26.

¹³ For the late first-century dating of 4 Ezra, see Michael E. Stone's introduction to 2 Esdras—a book which the Latin Vulgate, after the Council of Trent, included as a non-canonical appendix under the title 4 Esdras, and which contains the text of 4 Ezra—in *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, ed. Wayne A. Meeks (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 1768–9. According to Stone, 4 Ezra was written for a Jewish audience, but had much more impact upon Christian communities.

¹⁴ Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2004), 484–5. See also Watson's earlier comment—quite close to Wright's concerns—that 'Josephus's tendency to clothe Jewish thought in Greek dress is evident throughout his depictions of the three (or four) Jewish "philosophies"' (ibid. 350).

recognizes to his great dismay that given the exacting tenets of the Law, God will save very few individuals, including few Jews. How could the Creator, who gives the Law out of love for Israel, elect so few for salvation?

Not the restoration of Zion, but the salvation of individual Jews, thus takes centre stage in Ezra's third vision or dialogue with the angel Uriel (2 Esdras 6:38–9:25).¹⁵ Ezra takes the side of the multitude condemned to everlasting torment, and he suggests that it would have been better for the great majority of people had God never created them. At the least, says Ezra, God could have prevented Adam from sinning and bringing about the destruction of so many others. Ezra challenges the Lord: 'If then you will suddenly and quickly destroy what with so great labor was fashioned by your command, to what purpose was it made?' (2 Esdras 8:14). This is even more the case, Ezra points out, with the people of Israel.

Ezra recognizes that God's plan of election cannot be frustrated. Yet in 4 Ezra's view, as in the Pharisees' view (according to Josephus's description), humans have freedom in this life to rebel against God and thereby to go against God's original intention. The angel Uriel affirms that 'the Most High did not intend that anyone should be destroyed; but those who were created have themselves defiled the name of him who made them' (2 Esdras 8:59–60). From the mass of human beings who were defiled, God elects some, the choicest fruit of the vineyard. Watson rightly reads the third dialogue of 4 Ezra as 'a dramatic, tense confrontation between two theological positions which respectively assert the ultimacy of the divine justice or of the divine mercy, with no attempt at a resolution'.¹⁶

Watson also notes that Paul and the Qumran pesherist on Habakkuk 2:4 share basic convictions about divine predestination. Although Paul and the pesherist disagree about the value of Torah observance,

¹⁵ See *ibid.* 486.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 503. With regard to Paul's letter to the Romans, Watson argues, 'By the end of Romans 11, however, Paul has reached a position that goes far beyond even Ezra in its absolutizing of the divine mercy: just as humankind is universally subject to sin, so too it is universally the object of God's mercy. Like the author of 4 Ezra, Paul can comprehend both opposing points of view, incorporating them into a single theological discourse—although without finally resolving the question how they are to be reconciled' (p. 504). On the relationship of 4 Ezra and Romans, see also Bruce W. Longenecker, *Eschatology and the Covenant: A Comparison of 4 Ezra and Romans 11* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991). Watson disagrees with Longenecker's view that Uriel persuades Ezra.

nonetheless for both ‘the eschatological conflict over scriptural interpretation is traced back to the mystery of the divine predestination, as attested in scripture (cf. Rom. 9.6–33)’.¹⁷ In this light, Qumran’s Sermon on the Two Spirits (1QS 3:13–4:24) merits attention. In his recent essay on ‘Predestination and Free Will in the Theology of the Dead Sea Scrolls’, Philip Alexander points out that the Sermon on the Two Spirits approaches the topic of divine and human agency in a markedly propositional, philosophical manner.¹⁸ Reading the Sermon in light of the other Qumran documents, Alexander finds throughout a ‘strong predestinarianism’.¹⁹ The Sermon begins by describing God as the provident source and sustainer of everything that exists. In the created universe, good and evil principles battle against each other, so that human beings must choose to live either according to the Spirit of Truth or the Spirit of Falsehood. God purifies with his Spirit of Truth the human beings whom he wills to save. Alexander comments, ‘The choice in which Spirit to walk ultimately does not lie with man but with God (see esp. 4.22)’.²⁰ God elects some to salvation and actively hands over others to damnation.

Alexander suggests that the author of the Sermon held that God does not everlastingly punish the damned, but instead annihilates them. In the two Spirits, he sees evidence of the influence, through the Persians, of the ‘earlier, gathic stage of Iranian dualism’.²¹ The Sermon is much more rigorously predestinarian than is later Rabbinic thought. Comparing the Sermon to the later Rabbinic teaching in *Pirque’Avot* 3:16, “‘all is foreseen (*safui*), but freedom of choice (*reshut*) is given; and the world is judged by grace (*tub*), yet all is according to the preponderance of one’s deeds (*rob ha-ma’aseh*)”’, he notes that the Sermon affirms

¹⁷ Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 125. See also Magen Broshi, ‘Predestination in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls’, in *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 235–46.

¹⁸ See Philip S. Alexander, ‘Predestination and Free Will in the Theology of the Dead Sea Scrolls’, in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, ed. John M. G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 27–49, at 27. See also Armin Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination: Weisheitliche Urordnung und Prädestination in den Textfunden von Qumran* (Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1995), 121–70; F. Nötscher, ‘Schicksalsglaube in Qumran und Umwelt’, *Biblische Zeitschrift* (neue Folge) 3 (1959): 205–34 and 4 (1960): 98–121.

¹⁹ Alexander, ‘Predestination and Free Will in the Theology of the Dead Sea Scrolls’, 49.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 31.

²¹ *Ibid.* 34.

much more strictly God's causality of all things.²² Indeed, as he goes on to point out, Qumran's view on God's predestination has significant affinities with that which Josephus ascribes to the Essenes.²³ Commenting on Damascus Document 2:2–13, which teaches that God causes the sin of those whom he hates, Alexander observes that 'God's causation of the damnation of the wicked is apparently formulated here in utterly uncompromising terms'.²⁴

Many first-century Jews, then, recognized the primacy of divine agency. Once such divine agency is factored in—both as regards Israel's self-understanding and as regards the Christian witness to Jesus' Resurrection—then not only divine providence, but also a providential reading of the canonical Scriptures, becomes possible. Whereas the Bible otherwise appears to be simply a set of competing texts, an affirmation of providence allows for what Christopher Seitz calls a 'canonical portrayal that is providentially under his [God's] care'.²⁵ Seitz points out that the biblical canon 'has often been ignored as a broker of history'.²⁶ In seeking to identify the history behind the biblical texts, scholars have not sufficiently entertained the idea that the canon itself is a providentially governed interpretation of history.

When the Bible is viewed as a providential whole, what might we say about its witness to providence and predestination?²⁷ It would require a book in itself to detail the Old Testament's witness to providence and election, articulated in Deuteronomistic covenantal theology and worked out by the prophets in the crucible of exile—a providence whose universal scope is confirmed in the lives of such

²² Ibid. 37.

²³ See *ibid.* 42, where Alexander is discussing Song 5 of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice. As he summarizes Song 5's teaching, 'Before he created the world, and set history in motion, God planned how it would be, and it will follow that plan to the letter.'

²⁴ Ibid. 43.

²⁵ Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 134, cf. 24, 46.

²⁶ Ibid. 197.

²⁷ For discussion see R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 100–1; Leo Scheffczyk, *Creation and Providence* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 3–46; Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 77–86. See also Ephraim Radner, 'Sublimity and Providence: The Spiritual Discipline of Figural Reading', *Ex Auditu* 18 (2002): 155–70.

figures as Tobit, Esther, Judith, Daniel, and (mysteriously) Job.²⁸ The Old Testament presents God as the Creator and Lord of history, who elects Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and who ‘will be glorified in Israel’ (Isaiah 45:23). Genesis proclaims that ‘God created the heavens and the earth’ (Gen. 1:1)²⁹ and suggests that God foreknows the events of history, including the slavery in Egypt of Abraham’s descendents and their return to the promised land that will occur when the ‘iniquity of the Amorites’ is ‘complete’ (Gen. 15:16). God urges his people to repent of their sins and be saved: ‘As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?’ (Ezek. 33:11). As Wisdom of Solomon says of God, ‘[Y]ou are merciful to all, for you can do all things, and you overlook men’s sins, that they may repent. For you love all things that exist, and you loathe none of the things which you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it. . . . You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord who love the living’ (Wisd. 11:23–4, 26).³⁰

God lays claim to the whole of history, not only of individuals and the nations but of the whole cosmos. Isaiah teaches that God is provident over all: “Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: “I am the Lord, who made all things, who stretched out the heavens alone, who spread out the earth—Who was with me?—who frustrates the omens of liars, and makes fools of diviners; who turns wise men back, and makes their knowledge foolish”’ (Isaiah 44:24–5).³¹ God creates all and knows all; God knows the future that is unknown even to ‘diviners’ and ‘wise men’. As the psalmist says of God, his Creator: ‘Your

²⁸ See also Francesca Aran Murphy’s discussion of David and divine providence, in her ‘Providence in 1 Samuel’, in *The Providence of God: Deus Habet Consilium*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy and Philip G. Ziegler (London: T. & T. Clark, 2009), 57–74.

²⁹ For the distinction between ‘material’ and ‘functional’ creation (the latter being the meaning of the original author), see John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 38–46.

³⁰ See Leo J. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of the Wisdom Literature* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 312. See also, for suggestion of the Hellenistic influence, Pope Benedict XVI, ‘Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections’ (The Regensburg Lecture), in Appendix I to James V. Schall, SJ, *The Regensburg Lecture* (South Bend, IN: St Augustine’s Press, 2007), 130–48, at 136.

³¹ On Isaiah 44:24–8, see Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40–66* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 74.

eyes beheld my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them' (Ps. 139:16). This God restores Israel and Jerusalem, and he is also the one 'who says to the deep, "Be dry, I will dry up your rivers"; who says of Cyrus, "He is shepherd, and he shall fulfil all my purpose"' (Isaiah 44:27–8). His providence is all-encompassing. Even Job, who complains that God abandons the innocent sufferer, bears witness to the mystery of God's providence at the end of his sufferings, after God has spoken to him and he has 'seen' God. A repentant Job says to God, 'I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. . . . I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know' (Job 42:2–3).³²

Covenantally elected by God to receive his Torah, Israel is the privileged object and agent of God's providence. Reassuring his people Israel, the Creator God tells them, 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine' (Isaiah 43:1). God will preserve his people through all trials. God chooses his people as 'my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exod. 19:5–6).³³ Regarding the book of Genesis, Jon Levenson rightly underscores the 'prominent dimension . . . of God's mysteriously singling out one son from his brothers for a special destiny, to be reenacted in the experience of the ongoing community'.³⁴ As Levenson concludes, God's will to choose some, without choosing others, for a special relationship with God cannot be expunged from biblical faith: 'The divine Father is not an egalitarian.'³⁵ Yet

³² See J. Gerald Janzen, *Job* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1985), 248–52.

³³ For historical-critical commentary, see Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville, KY: The Westminster Press, 1974), 360–1, 366–7.

³⁴ Jon D. Levenson, 'Is Brueggemann Really a Pluralist?' *Harvard Theological Review* 93 (2000): 265–94, at 284. For Levenson's views see also his 'The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism', in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 143–69; Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Cf. Joel N. Lohr's excellent summary of Levenson's position in Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen: Conceptions of Election in the Pentateuch and Jewish-Christian Interpretation* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 71–90.

³⁵ Levenson, 'Is Brueggemann Really a Pluralist?', at 284. See also Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 251. In his *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), Joel S. Kaminsky argues that the Hebrew Bible teaches that 'the righteous

God's covenantal election has the blessing of all nations in view, as already suggested by God's promise to Abraham that 'by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves' (Gen. 12:3).³⁶

In teaching that Christ Jesus fulfils God's promises and covenants with Israel, the New Testament writings present providence and election as a Christocentric reality of mercy. As the prologue of the Gospel of John describes the mission of the incarnate Word, '[T]o all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God' (John 1:12–13). Because human adoption as 'children of God' comes about by the power of God, Jesus instructs his disciples, 'You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide' (John 14:16). Only God can give us the 'eternal life' that consists in knowing the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit (John 17:3).

Human rebellion does not thwart this divine purpose, as Peter and John make clear in the Book of Acts. Praising God for the spread of the gospel, they recall that 'in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place' (Acts 4:27–8).³⁷ Just as the persecution of Jesus by both Gentiles and Jews could not negate God's saving will, so also the persecution faced by the apostles cannot obstruct the gospel's spread. In the Gospel of John, Jesus explains that his will (and his Father's) cannot

non-elect are not only not damned, but are also recipients of God's blessing' (p. 189) and urges that 'Paul's propensity to assimilate the non-believing Jew to the non-chosen sibling in the Genesis stories (Rom. 9:6–18; Gal. 4:21–5:1) and then to read such stories as endorsing the notion that the non-chosen sibling has been utterly rejected by God might be canonically tempered' (pp. 190–1). Kaminsky recognizes, however, that God's election of Israel bestows special blessings upon Israel, blessings not shared by the Amalekites, for example (even though persons outside Israel can share in God's love).

³⁶ For a contrary reading of Genesis 12:1–3, see Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis*, chapter 8. In his *Chosen and Unchosen*, Lohr focuses on the status of the unchosen, in particular how they might benefit from Israel's obedience to Torah; yet his conclusion—which does not treat the New Testament—is highly ambiguous as regards the electing God.

³⁷ On the language used here, see Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 208.

be frustrated: 'I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand' (John 10:28–9; cf. John 17:2 and 17:12). In a similar fashion Jesus affirms the priority of the divine action, 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day' (John 6:44; cf. 6:65).³⁸

God's gracious drawing of humans to communion with him in Christ and the Holy Spirit is cause for rejoicing. Such rejoicing finds its exemplar in St Paul: 'We know then that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren' (Rom. 8:28–9). Can God's gracious plan be frustrated? Certainly those who renounce their faith will be 'cut off' and those who renew their faith will be 'grafted in' (Rom. 11:22–3). Yet Paul indicates that God's gracious plan cannot ultimately be thwarted: 'And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us?' (Rom. 8:30–1).³⁹ God 'accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will' (Eph. 1:11). Paul's statements accord with the affirmation of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew regarding providence: 'Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered' (Matt. 10:29–30).⁴⁰

³⁸ See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 328–9, especially n. 116. For a contrary view, see the line of thought running through Ben Witherington III's *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995). Witherington assumes that the doctrine of eternal predestination or election must be deterministic.

³⁹ For the view that Paul considers God's eternal plan to be frustratable, see M. John Farrelly, OSB, *Predestination, Grace, and Free Will* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1964), 69–70.

⁴⁰ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., compare Matthew 10:29 to *Genesis Rabba's* midrash on Genesis 33:18: 'Not even a bird is caught without the will of heaven; how much less the soul of a son of man.' See Davies and Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. II: *Commentary on Matthew VIII–XVIII* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 208. Arguing that Matthew 10:30 'is probably an interpolation made by the compiler of Q or by some trident of that source' (ibid.), Davies and Allison suggest that Matthew 10:29–31 was redacted so as to resolve—unsuccessfully in their view—the problems that 10:26–31 raise.

Jesus' assurance in the Gospel of Matthew follows directly after more disquieting words: 'do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell' (Matt. 10:28). Paul too is aware of a difficulty: not all Israel has accepted the Messiah, a failure that Paul finds to be in accord with Isaiah's prophecy. John's Gospel too suggests that God permits the loss of some. Jesus sharply distinguishes between Judas and the other eleven disciples: 'While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled' (John 17:12). One notes a similarity with Paul's suggestion that God creates 'vessels of wrath made for destruction' (Rom. 9:22).

Both the New and the Old Testaments affirm human freedom and responsibility. Jesus teaches in this regard, 'The Son of man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born' (Matt. 26:24).⁴¹ The same note of human responsibility occurs in the Lord's response to Cain's anger over the scorning of his offering. The Lord emphasizes that Cain is free to do the good: "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen. 4:6-7).⁴² Even so, human freedom does not negate the Lord's governance over history. With full confidence in the outcome, the Lord commands Abraham, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And 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' (Gen. 12:1-2). The Lord, not Abraham, will accomplish this. Yet the Lord also tests Abraham and requires that he exercise his freedom rightly (Gen. 22).⁴³

Paul affirms that God 'works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose' (Rom. 8:28), and that God

⁴¹ Davies and Allison observe that this 'verse has often been part of discussions regarding sovereignty and predestination' (Davies and Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. III, *Commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 462, n. 54). On everlasting punishment according to Scripture, see Pierre Grelot, 'Le Retribution individuelle. Dossier biblique', *Revue Thomiste* 107 (2007): 179-220.

⁴² See Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis*, 92-101.

⁴³ See *ibid.*, chapter 10: 'Genesis 22: Abraham—Model or Monster?'

‘chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him’ (Eph. 1:4). Without negating the participation of human freedom, God from eternity chooses or elects his people. As Paul observes, ‘He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved’ (Eph. 1:5–6).⁴⁴ One finds here a canonical continuation of the Old Testament, in which the reason for God’s election is his love. As Moses says of the people of Israel, ‘It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you’ (Deut. 7:7; cf. Deut. 4:37, 1 Tim. 1:15–16).⁴⁵ The First Letter of John succinctly affirms, ‘We love, because he first loved us’ (1 John 4:19).⁴⁶

PREDESTINATION IN ROMANS

As a test case I wish to explore Romans 8–11, in which many have found a particularly clear doctrine of predestination. In Romans 8:28–30, St Paul writes,

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren.

⁴⁴ Rudolph Schnackenburg comments on Ephesians 1:3–14, ‘Election occurs with the aim that “we should be holy and blameless before him” (v. 4). The revelation of the mystery leads to the realisation in the fullness of time (v. 10a) of what God had already decided’ (Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Commentary*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991, 47). Schnackenburg goes on to say, ‘Our election by God “before the foundation of the world” which is then explained in v. 5 as preordination (*προορίσας*) would still remain within the framework of Jewish ideas of predestination were it not for the reference to Christ. . . . The semantic field “election”, “pre-recognition”, “predestination”, (divine) “intention” (*πρόθεσις*) is also to be found in Paul (cf. especially Rom. 8.28c–9; 9.11; 1 Cor. 2.7) but never connected with the thought that we are chosen and predestined “in Christ”. In this statement, peculiar to Eph., what is under discussion is not simply our predestination in God’s thought but rather our election in the pre-existent Christ’ (p. 53).

⁴⁵ See Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 102.

⁴⁶ Schnackenburg describes this as the ‘prevenient love of God’, noting that ‘first’ here has a comparative sense: see Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles*, trans. Reginald and Ilse Fuller (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 225.

And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Paul emphasizes that God's work of predestining and calling 'according to his purpose' has glorification in view. God's merciful redemptive work cannot be thwarted: 'If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?' (Rom. 8:31–3). As Paul says, nothing can separate 'God's elect' from the work of justification and glorification that God is undertaking for 'those whom he predestined'. No created reality can thwart God's plan that is now being worked out in Christ for God's elect: 'For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:38–9).

In Romans 9, Paul seeks to show from within Israel's story that election depends solely upon God, and not upon any human factor, including physical descent from Abraham.⁴⁷ Commenting on 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated' (Mal. 1:2–3; Rom. 9:13), Paul writes, 'What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" [Exod. 33:19]. So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy' (Rom. 9:14–16). Does this mean that *all* humans are 'predestined' and 'called' so as to be 'justified' and 'glorified'? In this regard Ross Wagner observes, 'God's freedom to be merciful has, for Paul, another side: namely, God's freedom *not* to show mercy, but to turn human rebellion to his own purposes, as in the case of Pharaoh (Rom. 9:17).'⁴⁸ As the example of the exodus shows, God's 'purposes' are merciful: God's action accomplishes the

⁴⁷ For discussion, see J. Ross Wagner, *Herald of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul in Concert in the Letter to the Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 50–1.

⁴⁸ Wagner, *Herald of the Good News*, 53. See also William A. Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses: Explaining the Lord's Actions in the Exodus Plague Narratives* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006); Stephen L. Cook, *Conversations with Scripture: 2 Isaiah* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2008), 27–8. Both Ford and Cook argue that YHWH's actions seek to change human perspectives on reality from anthropocentric to theocentric, without denying human free will.

redemption of his people Israel, who proclaim to the world his saving 'name'.⁴⁹

If God does not show mercy to Pharaoh, however, can Pharaoh be at fault for his rejection of God's mercy? Alluding to Isaiah 29:16/45:9 ('Shall the potter be regarded as the clay' / 'Woe to him who strives with his Maker, an earthen vessel with the potter!'), Paul affirms the justice of God: 'You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me thus?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?' (Rom. 9:19–21). This should not be read in an individualistic fashion. In Isaiah 29:16, the image of the potter and the clay stands as a prophetic warning to those in Israel who no longer trust God's wisdom and power.⁵⁰ The prophet Isaiah teaches that only a remnant of Israelites, whose trust in God does not waver, will be spared. A similar mistrust of God's wisdom and power comes under critique in Isaiah 45:9, where the image of the potter underscores the intimate relationship of the Creator God to his people Israel that characterizes what Wagner calls 'the language of election'.⁵¹

How does Paul's reference to those who are 'predestined' reflect the 'language of election'? Wagner notes that 'Paul is not engaged in speculation about God's power over creation in the abstract; rather, he is wrestling here, as throughout Romans, with God's particular relationship to Israel as their creator and with the paradox of Israel's continued resistance to God's purposes for them'.⁵² But this emphasis on particularity also involves universal claims about God, including 'God's wisdom as creator' and God's 'sovereign freedom to form vessels for honor and vessels for dishonor alike'.⁵³ Are these universal claims in tension with God's particular relationship with his people

⁴⁹ On this point see N. T. Wright's commentary on Romans 9, in Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. X: *Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 393–770, at 634–44. Wright traces how Paul here retells Israel's story, from the patriarchs to the exodus to the exile (and the prophets' witness) to the return from exile in the Messiah Jesus.

⁵⁰ See Wagner, *Herald of the Good News*, 62.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 66. Wagner notes a parallel use of Isaiah's image of the potter and the clay in the Dead Sea Scrolls, 1QS 11.22.

⁵² Wagner, *Herald of the Good News*, 71.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Israel? Paul does not think so, because God's election of Israel is the election of 'the children of the promise' (Rom. 9:8), and this promise is now being gloriously fulfilled in Christ Jesus in 'the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles' (Rom. 9:23-4). As Isaiah foretold, 'For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return' (Isa. 10:22; cf. Rom. 9:27).

Without doubting God's wisdom or mercy, Paul highlights the difficulty that he feels. As Paul says, 'I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race' (Rom. 9:1-3). Why does Paul care so much for his fellow Jews, when at the same time he affirms strongly that God's will, rather than any human element (including physical descent from Abraham), determines election? He does so because of the role that the people of Israel possess in God's plan of mercy: 'They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever' (Rom. 9:4-5).

Paul emphasizes that God's people Israel, according to the flesh, retain their 'zeal for God' (Rom. 10:2) and have not been repudiated by God. In this sense they cannot be written off simply as 'vessels of wrath made for destruction'. Rather, as Paul says, 'God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew' (Rom. 11:2). Paul's words contain a tension, however. Recall that 'those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son' (Rom. 8:29). Who, then, are God's 'people whom he foreknew', who have not been rejected by God? Paul suggests that these people are the 'remnant, chosen by grace' (Rom. 11:5), who like himself are Israelites who have faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul explains regarding the other Israelites according to the flesh for whom he prays so fervently, 'What then? Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened' (Rom. 11:7).⁵⁴

⁵⁴ For further discussion see Pablo T. Gadenz, *Called from the Jews and the Gentiles: Pauline Ecclesiology in Romans 9-11* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

Even so, Paul cannot allow Israel according to the flesh to be scorned. While they are opponents of the gospel, nonetheless ‘as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable’ (Rom. 11:28–9). Similarly, the disobedience of the Israelites, like the disobedience of the Gentiles, will not be able to thwart God’s merciful plan. Why does God allow their disobedience (or even ‘harden’ them)? The pattern has already been revealed in the ‘hardening’ that brought about the exodus.⁵⁵ As Paul says, ‘God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all’ (Rom. 11:32).

If God has established his plan so as to ‘have mercy upon all’, does this mean that there are no ‘vessels of wrath’ and that all will be saved? Has God ‘predestined’ everyone to the justice of ‘God’s elect’? This question calls for a broader dialogue with contemporary biblical scholars on Romans and predestination.

Predestination and ‘Proorizein’

The Catholic exegete Brendan Byrne argues against associating Romans 8:29–30 with any later doctrine of the predestination of individuals in Christ. Translating ‘proorizein’ as ‘preordain’, Byrne remarks, “The language of “election” and “preordination” here does not imply a doctrine of predestination in the classical sense of a divine fixing of individual human lives in a set direction towards salvation or damnation.”⁵⁶ What then does such language, found also in Qumran and elsewhere, mean? Byrne argues that Paul’s discussion in Romans 8:29 applies ‘the biblical privilege of election communally to the Christian community

⁵⁵ See Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, 639, 677. Wright suggests that Paul’s words should be read in apocalyptic terms rather than in terms of philosophical theology: ‘Paul is drawing on the Jewish tradition that runs like this: when God delays outstanding judgment, those who do not use this time of delay to repent and turn back to him will be hardened, so that their final judgment, when it comes, will be seen to be just. This apocalyptic context of “hardening” is vital; ignoring it leads interpreters either into abstract discussions of predestination and reprobation or into the idea of a temporal “hardening,” which is then reversed. As the analogy with Pharaoh in 9:17–18 indicates, this “hardening” is not something that comes for a while, during which something else happens, and which is then removed. The “hardening,” rather, is what happens during a temporary suspension of the judgment that would otherwise have fallen, to allow time for some to escape’ (p. 677).

⁵⁶ Brendan Byrne, SJ, *Romans* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 272.

made up of Jews and Gentiles'.⁵⁷ The whole Church has been 'preordained' in the same sense in which Israel, whose Messiah Jesus is, received the 'privilege of election'; on this view the Church carries forward the privileges of Israel. Far from a doctrine of individual predestination, then, Paul's 'perspective is positive and inclusive, rather than exclusive, indicating God's will to bring all to the fullness of humanity. Whether or not some individuals fail to be included is not at issue.'⁵⁸

If Byrne is correct, however, why does Paul go on to address potential criticisms of God's justice, and to speak of 'vessels of wrath made for destruction'? By 'vessels of wrath made for destruction', does he mean the 'part of Israel' on whom 'a hardening has come'? In this regard, consider how Paul understands his own history. He began as an opponent of the followers of Jesus: 'For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers' (Gal. 1:13–14). The God who 'foreknew' and 'predestined' those 'who are called according to his purpose' (Rom. 8:28–9), however, changed Paul's life: 'he who had set me apart before I was born . . . called me through his grace, [and] was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles' (Gal. 1:15–16). Paul himself is acutely aware that he has been 'set apart' and 'called', whereas many of his fellow Jews seem not to have been 'called'.

It thus seems a great stretch to argue, as Byrne does, that for Paul '[w]hether or not some individuals fail to be included is not at issue'.⁵⁹ Paul holds that the difference between himself and his former Jewish friends and collaborators is rooted in God's calling Paul 'through his grace', and Paul has 'great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart' (Rom. 9:2) about those who have yet to be included. He also looks forward to the day of his fellow Jews' 'full inclusion' (Rom. 11:12), when 'all Israel will be saved' (Rom. 11:26) and God will have 'mercy upon all' (Rom. 11:32).

Is Paul advocating a universalist doctrine here? To Byrne, it seems more likely that Paul is speaking in language associated with the promise of the restoration of Israel. In Byrne's words, Paul anticipates

⁵⁷ Ibid. ⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid. See also the discussion in Steven C. Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow? A Comprehensive Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 84–5.

the day 'when the full complement of Israel (*plērōma*) is finally restored'.⁶⁰ That this 'full complement' will not include every Jew is indicated by Paul's statement, 'Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them' (Rom. 11:14). Commenting upon Romans 11:32, 'For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all', Byrne explains his view of Pauline universalism:

The 'all' (*tous pantas*) that appears twice in this sentence resumes the universalistic note that has run throughout the letter (1:16, 18; 2:9–11; 3:9, 19–20, 22–23; 4:11, 16; 5:12–21; 9:24–26; 10:11–12). As in the case of these other references, Paul does not have primarily in view all human beings taken in an individual sense; the sense is communal: 'all—that is, Jews as well as Gentiles'.⁶¹

I agree with this point, and yet this emphasis on the communal sense returns us to Paul's 'great sorrow and unceasing anguish' regarding some of his brethren.

Another Catholic exegete, Joseph Fitzmyer, argues that Paul intends to say that at different stages of salvation history God's mercy is manifested particularly in the Jews or in the Gentiles, but that God has in view '[u]niversal salvation', God's 'plan of salvation for all human beings'.⁶² Perhaps for this reason, Fitzmyer does not share Byrne's hesitations about 'predestination'. He holds that the verb 'proorizein' signifies "'decide beforehand, predestine'", and he compares 'Pauline predestination' to Qumran's 1QS 3:15–16, which reads, 'From the God of knowledge comes all that is and will be; before they exist, he has established their entire plan, and when they come to be as is determined for them, it is according to his glorious design that they fulfill their task.'⁶³ The only distinction that Fitzmyer makes between Paul's understanding of predestination and Qumran's is that Paul holds that human beings, created in the image of God, are to be 'conformed to the image of his Son' (Rom. 8:29). For Fitzmyer, then, Paul's version of predestination is Christological and universal. By contrast, Byrne considers Paul's use of '*tous pantas*' to be

⁶⁰ Byrne, *Romans*, 338.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 353.

⁶² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 628–9.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 525.

‘universalistic’ in the sense of including Jews and Gentiles but not in the sense of ‘universal salvation’.

Like Byrne, the Protestant exegete Douglas Moo rejects the view that Paul affirms universal salvation. Commenting on Romans 11:26, ‘all Israel will be saved’, Moo remarks, ‘A few scholars have insisted that this [Paul’s use of the word “all”] must indicate the salvation of every single Jew. But Paul writes “all Israel,” not “every Israelite”—and the difference is an important one.’⁶⁴ Rather than having in view each individual Israelite, Paul is considering Israel corporately (Moo is unsure whether Paul means that salvation will come to ‘all Israel’ with respect to the Israel that exists over the generations, or whether Paul is referring to ‘all Israel’ with respect to the Israel that exists at the time when she receives salvation).⁶⁵

How does Moo read ‘For those whom he foreknew he also predestined’ (Rom. 8:29)? He considers the possibility that Paul intends to suggest that God’s foreknowledge of good human actions serves as the basis for God’s ‘predestination’. But he argues that Paul’s use of ‘foreknew’ has instead to do with ‘the divine initiative in the outworking of God’s purpose’.⁶⁶ He also emphasizes that Paul is speaking here not of every human being but only of ‘those who love’ God (Rom. 8:28): ‘it is only *some* individuals—those who, having been “foreknown,” were also “predestined,” “called,” “justified,” and “glorified”—who are the objects of this activity.’⁶⁷ Given this emphasis, Moo translates the verb ‘*proorizein*’ as ‘pre-determine’ or ‘pre-destine’. Rather than adopting a double-predestination doctrine, however, Moo concludes that ‘Paul thinks here of God’s predestining us to future glory, that glory which Christ enjoys’.⁶⁸

N. T. Wright’s commentary also merits attention. Reading *proorizein* as ‘foreordain’ in the sense of ‘God’s plan from the start . . . to create a Christ-shaped family’, N. T. Wright argues that God’s whole people will be saved by the ‘sheer mercy’ of God’s grace in Christ and the Holy Spirit—but not every single Jew or every single Gentile.⁶⁹ Wright’s

⁶⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 722, cf. 736.

⁶⁵ Cf. Joel S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

⁶⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 533.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 535.

⁶⁹ N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, 601, 694, cf. 687, 696.

presentation of God's gracious plan emphasizes the 'utter gift character' of our salvation.⁷⁰ Appealing to the non-competitiveness of divine and human action, he explains that the 'free initiative of God' and 'divine sovereignty' that undergird predestinarian thinking do not mean that Paul (or for that matter any of the New Testament authors) is 'a determinist, believing in a blind plan that determines everything, so that human freedom, responsibility, obedience, and love itself are after all a sham'.⁷¹

In Wright, as in Moo, we find the classical understanding of predestination: God's eternal plan to bring about the salvation of his people through his grace in Christ and the Holy Spirit, operating in and through our freedom.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that the New Testament, reinterpreting and extending the Old Testament's doctrine of election, teaches a doctrine of predestination. God's election of 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16) has Christ Jesus at its centre: God 'chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the

⁷⁰ See also Wright's 'Faith, Virtue, Justification, and the Journey to Freedom', in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, ed. J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe, and A. Katherine Grieb (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 472–97, at 488.

⁷¹ Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, 602. By contrast, Ben Witherington considers predestination to be necessarily deterministic, and he rules out election from eternity on the grounds that such a doctrine opposes Paul's emphasis on our free love for God. Translating 'proorizein' as 'destined beforehand', he denies that Paul is 'talking about a pretemporal election plan of God where the outcome is predetermined because of God's sovereign hand'. See Ben Witherington III (with Darlene Hyatt), *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 228. For similar readings of predestinarian texts, see also Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 234–5; Witherington, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 158, 270; Witherington, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology*, 62–86, 139, 254.

Beloved' (Eph. 1:4–6). God's election is not an aloof decree, but rather is the eternal plan of the historical missions of the Son and Spirit for building up the people of God. This plan, in God's providence, encompasses even 'the hairs of your head' (Matt. 10:30).

The revelation of God's merciful election of his people in Christ Jesus fills Paul with tremendous joy. Christ is 'the first-born among many brethren', all of whom are 'predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son' (Rom. 8:29). Human sin does not defeat or frustrate God's salvific plan: nothing 'will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:39). But why then does Paul immediately add that he has 'unceasing anguish in my heart' (Rom. 9:2) because not all Jews have accepted Jesus as the Messiah? If, as the history of election shows, election 'depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy' (Rom. 9:16), why does God not seem to have this mercy towards every rational creature? How can the same Paul who rejoices that God 'did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' (Rom. 8:32)—an unlimited love—turn around and add that some rational creatures are like 'vessels of wrath made for destruction' (Rom. 9:22)? Why does not God predestine all rational creatures in Christ Jesus, so that all are 'vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory' (Rom. 9:23)?⁷² If 'God is love' (1 John 4:16), and if 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son' (John 3:16), then why does God allow the 'son of perdition' (John 17:12) to be lost?

In answer, I suggest throughout this book that Scripture presents its theological interpreters with the challenge of holding together two affirmations about God's eternal plan: God's eternal creative and redemptive love for his rational creatures has no deficiency, limitation, or stinginess; and yet from eternity God's plan of election

⁷² Concerns of this kind lead Witherington to argue that Romans 8:28–30 must be 'about the perseverance of the saints, not about the election of some to be saints out of a mass of unredeemed humanity, the choice being determined purely on the basis of God's fiat. That latter notion makes a nonsense of the very concept which is said to be determining this whole matter, namely love—not only God's love for believers, but the believer's love for God. It is "those who love God" who are called according to purpose and whom God foreknew, and that purpose they must embrace freely and fully in love' (Witherington, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology*, 76). This solution, however, is too quick to resolve the tension in Romans.

allows some of his rational creatures freely to remain in their sins. Upholding both of these affirmations, without allowing one to trump the other (and thus accepting the 'unsearchable' and 'inscrutable' character of the mystery (Rom. 11:33)), is, I think, the measure of a proper doctrine of predestination.