

# Who Shall Ascend?

## *Predestination and Divine Election*

**T**HE joy of the Early Church was not in the delusion that their Salvation was an accomplished fact, the error of modern Evangelicals (and, apparently, Conciliar Catholics), but that they were in “the way of salvation,” whereas those outside the communion of the faithful were not. In what, exactly, were the Christians rejoicing? In the fact that they had received the “adoption of sons of God” (Gal. 4:5). This is most beautifully expressed by St. Paul to the Ephesians. We remind you again: Read these words as addressed to Catholics, converts to the Catholic Church, whose relatives and friends thought they had been seduced into an outlandish Jewish cult, who did their best to bring them back to their senses. (We are aware that we have considered these verses above; your attention here is invited to verses which bear witness to the Doctrine of Predestination, which must be seen as subsidiary to the Doctrine of Exclusive Salvation.)

*Ephes. 1:3* - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who *hath blessed* us with spiritual blessings in Heavenly places, in Christ:

4 - As he *chose* us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in his sight in charity.

5 - Who hath *predestinated* us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto himself: according to the purpose of his will:

6 - Unto the praise of the glory of his grace, in which he hath *graced* us in his beloved son.

7 - In whom we *have redemption* through his blood, the remission of sins, according to the riches of his grace,

8 - Which hath superabounded in us in all wisdom and prudence,

9 - That he *might make known* unto us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in him.

10 - In the dispensation of the fullness of times, to *re-establish all things* in Christ that are in Heaven and on Earth, in him.

From these words we may draw the following conclusions:

1. With respect to the salvation of souls, we must recognize that all is achieved by divine initiative. We have *italicised the verbs* which describe the actions of God on our behalf.
2. Nothing could be more obvious than that St. Paul is exulting over the fact that the Almighty has selected certain ones out of the host of humanity for the “adoption of children.”
3. St Paul’s realization is of “the great mystery,” that whereas in the Old Testament NO ONE could attain Heaven, now, “in these days,” “in the fullness of time,” certain persons are able to do so, not only from among the Jews, but from among the Gentiles also. It is this fact that makes the age “the fullness of time.”

Reflexively, we react by saying: But what about the rest? How is it just of God to choose some and to reject others? There can be but one answer to such a question, though admittedly it does not satisfy us, for it is not fully comprehensible, not, that is, as comprehensible as we would like. The answer is that those have been chosen, who were foreknown to accept their election. If others are rejected, it is because quite freely they reject the grace which would be for their peace.

4. If, therefore, anyone is chosen, the choice must begin in and with God, for no one can do anything for himself, unless God chooses him and enables him.

5. The joy of the predestinated, therefore, is that, of His infinite mercy, God has chosen us, through Jesus Christ . . . according to His good pleasure, in Whom He means “to re-establish all things in Christ.” It is the holy Doctrine of Exclusive Salvation coupled with the mystery of Divine Election which explains the sustained, unremitting joyfulness of the Sacred Liturgy. In the Old Testament, the Israelites exulted over the fact that their God was true, whereas those of the Gentile nations were false, non-existent, dead objects of wood and clay and stone. They jubilated further over their own predilection: the true God had chosen them and guaranteed them His special favor, unending protection, and eventual salvation; and everlasting kingdom and innumerable progeny. The word, salvation, in the Old Testament meant earthly peace and security, divine protection, so that life on Earth could be lived without enslavement to heathen enemies or loss of national identity.

In Christ, the joy of the ancient Promise is made full and offered to men of all races and languages and tribes and nations. But more important, Christ our Saviour reveals that the ancient Promise had dimensions only vaguely conceived by the Israelites. He makes his promises not to the whole human race, but to the Elect among the nations, Jews and Gentiles both. In the New Testament, salvation is revealed to be everlasting if in the immediate vision of the most Blessed Trinity in Heaven. The jubilation of the early Christians which inspired the Sacred Liturgy is the assurance that there is life after death, that most men will suffer eternally because of their perverseness, but they, who have been called through the preaching of the Apostles and their co-workers, will not be lost due to their sins, which they could not deny, but will be saved through the Spirit, the Water and the Blood (1 Jn.5:8), the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth, Baptism and the Eucharist. St. Paul is unmistakable in his insistence that only those who enter the Church have hope of salvation. He insists that before faith and Baptism, whether for Jew, for Greek, there is only damnation (Cor.1:18). He says that even in his day, the Word had already filled the Earth (Rom. 10:18). The reason the word travelled so quickly was its absoluteness, its urgent warning, and its message of hope. The message was utterly simple: I say unto you that unless you repent and accept Baptism and believe in Christ, you shall perish. What he was saying and what he was understood to mean was

that all who might wish to be saved must become Christians, by joining the Church, believe and live the Gospel, whole and entire, pure and unadulterated.

Saint Paul tells the people that they should not be petty and frivolous, as were the pagans around them, and such as they had formerly been. Their conversation (i. e., their preoccupation and orientation) should be toward Heaven (Phil. 3:20). They should give themselves up to constant prayer (I Thes. 5:17). Their primary prayer should be one of thanksgiving (Col. 1:12), thanksgiving over their predestination to salvation.

And, as we have said, the Liturgy which grew out of the Early Church reflects this spirit of exultant gratitude. The spiritual elation expressed in the psalms of David and the other inspired singers of the Old Testament was raised to a much more sublime dimension in the New. Thus do the songs of Israelite joy become the canticles of the Christian Church, sung in the catacombs, in the Coliseum and arenas of martyrdom, and in the monasteries of the East and West.

The idea of salvation outside the Church is opposed to the Doctrine of Predestination. This Doctrine means that from all eternity God has known who were His own. It is for the salvation of these, His Elect, that Providence has directed, does direct, and will always direct, the affairs of men and the events of history. Nothing, absolutely nothing, that happens, has not been taken into account by the Infinite God, and woven into that tapestry in which is written the History of the salvation of His saints. Central in this providential over-lordship is the Church itself, which is the sacred implement which God devised for the rescuing of His beloved ones from the damnation Decreed for those who would not. (Mt. 23:37)

The Doctrine of Divine Election means that only certain individuals will be saved. They will be saved primarily because, in the inscrutable omniscience of God, only certain individuals out of all the human family will respond to the grace of salvation. In essence, this Doctrine refers to what in terms of human understanding and vision is before and after, the past, the present, and the future, but what in God is certain knowledge and unpreventable fact, divine action and human response. Saint Paul summarized this doctrine with these words in his *Letter to the Romans*:

8:28 - And we know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good, to such as, according to his purpose, are called to be saints.

8:29 - For whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son; that he might be the firstborn amongst many brethren.

8:30 - And whom he predestinated, them he also called. And whom he called, them he also justified. And whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Calvin and others have made the mistake of believing that these words mean that predestination excludes human choice and dispenses from true virtue. Catholic doctrine explains simply that the foreknowledge of God precedes the giving of grace. It means, further, that, since without grace there can be no merit, and without merit no salvation, those who will be saved must be foreknown as saved by God if they are to receive the graces necessary for salvation. Among the discourses of Christ, we find the following refrain: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mt. 11:15, 13:9, 43). Jesus was aware that in the crowds He addressed were some who would be saved. They would be saved because they would find faith in Him by the power of the Spirit, through Whom they would recognize the divine truth which He spoke. Moreover, again by the power of the Spirit within them, these would respond to the truth which they recognized with the assent of faith and the grasping of joyful love. Others who listened to Christ heard exactly the same words, but did not have the "ears to which to hear;" that is, they would not accept the grace to believe the truth which Christ expounded; for these latter, it had neither comprehensibility nor urgency nor appeal. It might be better to say its meaning was both comprehended and its demand recognized. The reason Christ's words were not accepted by most of His hearers was that they were unwilling to submit to its demands.

This doctrine means that "he that hath, to him shall be given, and he shall abound: but he that hath not, from him shall be taken away that also which he hath" (Mt. 13:12). It might be stated in this way: he who is willing to act for the sake of his own salvation, will receive all that he needs in the way of grace to be saved, and more than enough - "good measure and pressed down and shaken together and running over into your bosom" (Lk. 6:38). As God has always known which man would act thus, He has determined from eternity to save him.

This mystery was a familiar doctrine to the Jews of the first generation of the Church, because it was prefigured in the predilection of God for the Israelite nation.

Those who say that there is salvation outside the Church (no matter how they say it) do not comprehend that those who are in the Church have been brought into it by the Father, through Christ the Savior, in fulfilment of his eternal design to save them. The only reason that God does not succeed in getting others into the Church must be found in the reluctant will of those who do not enter it. If God can arrange for you to be in the Church, by the very same Providence He can arrange for anyone else who desires or is willing to enter it. There is absolutely no obstacle to the invincible God's achieving His designs except the intractable wills of His children. Nothing prevents his using the skies for his billboard, and the clouds for lettering, or the rolling thunder for the proclamation of his words. (Indeed, for believers, He does just this: "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of his hands" (Ps. 18:1). But for atheists the heavens have no message at all.) If poverty were the reason some do not believe, He could load them down with diamonds; if youth were the reason, He could make sure they grew to a hoary old age. If it were merely the want of information, he could put a library on their doorstep, or a dozen missionaries in their front room. Were it for a want of brains, he could give every man an I. Q. of three hundred; it would cost him nothing.

The idea that someone died before he was able to receive Baptism suggests that God was unable to control events, so as to give the person time to enter the Church. If time made any difference, God could and would keep any person on Earth a hundred, or a thousand, or ten thousand years.

"O Wisdom . . . You orderest all things mightily and sweetly . . ."  
(From the liturgy of Advent).

Thus, what is the meaning of this election? That from all eternity God has ordered the events of history, so that His Elect might have the grace of salvation. And how do they know of this election? By the fact that they are in the Church, through no merit of their own. They know of no reason why God should bestow this grace, the knowledge of the truth, and the willingness and power to believe it, upon them, while others, who seem more worthy, go without it.

As regards his elect, not only has God determined to bestow necessary grace, but also, all his actions in the world must be seen as part of his salvific plan. In a word, nothing that He does is unrelated to the salvation of his beloved sheep. Human history, apart from the glory of Holy Church, and the salvation of the elect, and the punishment of the wicked, has little importance for Almighty God. Yet, all these purposes are only a part of the manifestation of his glory.

Those who speak of it have the problem of reconciling the mystery of predestination with the idea of “baptism of desire.” From all eternity, Almighty God has known the fate of every soul. In His Providence, He has arranged for the entrance into the Church of certain millions of persons, and has seen to it that they receive the grace of faith, the Sacrament of Baptism, the grace of repentance, the forgiveness of their sins, and all the other requisites of salvation. According to the Attenuators, in the case of “non-Catholic saints,” and of those who died before they might receive baptism, God was simply unable to see to these necessities. Untoward and unforeseen circumstances arose which prevented his providing these other millions with the means of salvation. Theirs is a story of supreme irony, that although the God of omniscience and omnipotence mastered the history of all nations and the course of every life, angelic and human, in the case of certain ones, his timing was off by just a few days, or hours, or minutes. It was his earlier intention to make sure that they received baptism of water; He had it all planned out; but alas! On the particular day of their demise, his schedule was so full, that He simply could not get to them; for which reason, in that it was his fault, He is bound to provide an alternative instrumentality: “baptism of desire” is his substitute for the real thing!

“That every mouth be stopped” (Rom.3:19). The Diluters of the Doctrine of Exclusive Salvation do not perceive the Pelagian tenor of their position, that some may be saved outside the Church through nothing but their good will. It is exactly because this is impossible and, more important, offensive to God, that the notion must be rejected. We say impossible, because no man can save himself. The fact that every man must receive baptism, and thus enter the Church means that he is dependent upon God to make it possible for him to receive the Sacrament, and further, through this sacrament, it is Christ who acts to purge the sinner of his sins, and engraft him into his Mystical Body. No individual can do this by himself. He is

dependent upon another to pour the water and say the words, and he is dependent upon God to provide this minister, and to make the sacramental sign effective of grace. It is thus so that none may attribute his salvation to his own doing.

Pride is the chief vice of man, as it was and is of the demons of Hell. It is pride more than any other fault that blinds men to the truth, that obstructs faith, and hardens their hearts to conversion from sin. As was said above, it is not a want of information, nor is it a lack of enough time to do what they must, nor is it a want of someone to teach them, nor the abstruseness of revealed truth, nor the confusion created by the welter of heresies which grow like cockle amidst the wheat (Mt. 13:25 cf.), and which prevent men from coming to the knowledge of the truth. The root problem is pride, which gives birth to the refusal to believe; because with the truth comes the imperative of obedience. The primordial disposition of all the damned is the same: "I will not serve."

The Doctrine of Predestination is that Almighty God from all eternity both knew and determined who would be saved, that is, who would allow Him to save them. He would be the cause of their salvation and, as there is no power that can even faintly obstruct or withstand Him, there is no power which can prevent his saving whom He wishes, except, of course, the man himself. The means which He established to accomplish this act of salvation is the Catholic Church. It is through this sacred instrument that He fulfils His eternal determination with respect to the souls of the elect. Therefore it is altogether unreasonable to suggest that, in the case of some, the Church is not this instrument.

Knowing who are "his own," God orders all things toward drawing them into the flock of his Church (Jn. 10:3), the Bark of Peter (Lk. 5:3). No matter what else God is doing invisibly and sovereignly within the affairs of man, his chief work is saving those who will be saved, those who will respond to his Voice, that is, his truth. For those outside the Church, there is actual grace, which has the chief purpose of gently but surely bringing them to repentance and faith and Baptism. The mystery of predestination is in the fact that the Almighty knows the hearts of all his children, and He knows which ones among them will, by whatever stratagem He employs with them, whatever fisherman's trick He might use to catch them, result in their happy sequestration. For those whom He knows will eventually be His, nothing is too much for Him to do; to "land" them He will humble Himself to a beggar, or

pour out all His wealth. But these are the “few” of the Gospel (Mt. 20:16). These few are those who receive the word with joy and bear fruit, some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, and some a hundred-fold - these last being His great saints (Mt. 13:38).

The “many” are those whom God knows will not be saved no matter what He does; on the contrary, they are the dogs and swine whom He describes thus: “Give not that which is holy to dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turning upon you, they tear you” (Mt. 7:6). Though He loves all men, the Lord does not love all men equally, because He knows their hearts. The hearts of the “many” He will never win permanently, and nothing that He might do will secure them to Himself. The Liberal Gainsayers imagine that they are more loving and understand God better than the Church, and that if He would simply make a greater effort, supply them with more information, He could win “the many” also.

The Doctrine of Exclusive Salvation is the Church’s way of informing us that there is no acceptable excuse for any person on Earth not becoming a Catholic. The Doctrine of Divine Election teaches us that at least some, a mere handful in comparison with all those for whom Christ died, will accept the grace - the graces, for there is an endless stream of them - of salvation.

Among the realizations which the Lord Jesus wept and bled for in the Garden of Gethsemani is this: No matter what He might do to save them, the “many” will hate Him for it; they will take all his material, earthly gifts, and devour them like pigs, and ever clamor for more. But of gratitude and repentance, of faith and love, they will have nothing. These accursed souls are personified in Judas, who had received nothing but kindness and honour and enlightenment from Christ. Let the Deniers give an explanation why Judas did not just walk away from Christ, or tell Him that he had lost interest, that he liked the feel of money, and had decided to open a clothing store. No, he must sell his Master, Whom for months he had seen as the sweetest, most thoughtful, most patient, and wisest of all the men of his experience.

The “many” are personified in Pilate, whom our Lord tried sincerely to save, while He proceeded to thwart Pilate’s lame efforts to save Him. But Pilate, like ninety-nine percent (or thereabouts) of those in public office, determinedly thrust away the grace. It would have been perfectly easy for him to save Jesus and his own soul (the Savior of the

world stood right before him, subject to him! - as He does to every man, in the Church), but he chose to do everything the wrong (and harder) way.

The “many” are personified in the scribes and Pharisees, the priests, and Annas and Caiphas, who knew perfectly well, as Nicodemus said, that Christ had come “a teacher from God,” (Jn. 3:2). They knew that His miracles were authentic, that His character was blameless, that His teaching was irresistible and holy, that He was a luminous exemplar of every man of religion. “He saved others; himself he cannot save” (Mt. 27:42 and Mk. 15:31) they said, thus admitting the former truth, while closing their eyes to any explanation for the latter. The truth was clearly before them, as the truth of the Catholic Church is before the men of the world of this and every other generation, but they were determined to reject Christ, and in order to justify their doing so, they must convince themselves and everyone around them, that He wasn’t what He appeared to be. Furthermore, they will not be content simply to let Jesus go. They must kill Him; and not kill Him merely, but kill Him cruelly and ignominiously. They must somehow vent their resentment of his grace and his majesty and his holiness against Him, to teach Him that they would bow to NO ONE, save each other. They will take their revenge against Him, Whose very divinity they could not deny, Whose resurrection they could not disprove. *Mutatis mutandis*, the very same can be said of all those who have rejected the Church, from that day to this one. If they would only make an effort, it would be no problem to them, but they will not. And the Lord Jesus, there in the Garden, saw that they would not, and it sorely grieved His Sacred Heart to foresee it.

### *The Mystical Body of Christ*

And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things, he may hold the primacy: because in him, it hath well-pleased the Father, that all fullness should dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, making peace through the blood of his cross, both as to the things on Earth, and the things that are in Heaven. - (Col. 1:18-20)

Catholics believe that as Jesus Christ lived his natural life on Earth two thousand years ago in a Body drawn from Mary, so He lives his Mystical Life today in a Body drawn from the human race in general - called the Catholic Church - that her words are his, her actions are his,

her life is his (with certain restrictions and exceptions), as surely as were the words, actions, and life recorded in the Gospels: it is for this reason that they give to the Church the assent of their faith, believing that in doing so they are rendering it to God himself. She is not merely his vice regent on Earth, not merely his representative, not merely even his Bride: in a real sense she is Himself, that in this manner, as well as in another which is not our business at present, He fulfils his promise to be with his disciples all days, even to the consummation of the world. To enlarge, it may be said that God expressed Himself in terms of a single life in the Gospels, and of a corporate life in the Church. The written Gospel is the record of a past life; the Church is the living Gospel and record of a present life. Here He “looks through the lattice” (Prov. 7:6). Visible to all who have eyes: here He reproduces, in century after century and country after country, the events and crises of the life lived in Judaea. Here He works out and fills up, on the canvas of the world’s history, that outline laid down two thousand years ago: He is born here, lives, suffers, dies, and eternally rises again on the third day. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).

Before passing on to considered the possibility of this position, as well as a very startling analogy supplied to us by recent scientific research, it is suggestive to consider how extraordinarily strong is the support given by the scriptures to the Catholic claim that the idea which I have described was the idea of Jesus Christ Himself and of his contemporary disciples.

The position could hardly be put more explicitly than in the words, “I am the vine, you the branches” (Jn. 15:5), or, “He that heareth you, heareth Me: He that despiseth you, despiseth Me” (Lk. 10:16). Or, “as My Father sent me, even so send I you” (Jn.20:21).

For the only distinction possible to draw between the Vine and the branches lies in saying that the Vine stands for the whole and the branches for its parts. The branches are not an imitation of the vine, or representatives of the vine: they are not merely attached to it, as candles on a Christmas tree: they are its expression, its result, and sharers of its life. The two are in the most direct sense identical. The Vine gives unity to the branches, the branches give expression and effectiveness to the energy of the vine; they are nothing without it: it remains merely a Divine Idea without them. You cannot, that is, apprehend the Vine at all in any real sense as vine except through the branches; so, again, in passage after passage of St. Paul’s meaningless,

or at the best wild and furious exaggerations, unless this identity of Christ and his Church is assumed to have been in the writer's mind. Again and again, souls living in union with Christ are named His Body when considered as a whole, or as members when considered separately; they are said to possess the "mind of Christ;" they are described in a mysterious phrase, lucid only in the Catholic interpretation, as filling up what is "wanting of the sufferings of Christ" (Col. 14) - they carry out, that is to say, on the stage of the world's history, the agony and death recorded in the Gospels, extending before the history - the bloody sweat, the nails, and the scourge seen in Gethsemane and Calvary. The instruments of the martyr's passion are the instruments of His. It is impossible, I think, for those who at any age regard the New Testament as an adequate record of the intentions and words of Christ and his friends, to deny that the idea which I have attempted to describe was the idea of the Founder of Christianity, as understood by those who heard Him speak.