

Theological Opinions **of the Consistory of the COELC**

VII

On Election “Onto Faith” and “In View of Faith”

Adopted in October 2019

Regarding the doctrine of election there has been a controversy over two terms: “onto faith” and “in view of faith”. Throughout this controversy, both terms have been used in ways that are contrary to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Some have understood the term “onto faith” in a Calvinistic way, believing that God’s grace is irresistible and that God elects in a bare (or naked) manner in which people are saved or not saved regardless of the situation (double predestination). On the other hand, some have understood the term “in view of faith” in a Synergistic way, believing that God elects those whom He foresees will not resist or reject His grace. We reject both of these understandings of election, as they are contrary to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

We do, however, acknowledge that both terms can be used in a way that is in agreement with Scripture and the Confessions. We acknowledge that the term “onto faith” is the view expressed by the Reformers and the Lutheran Confessions, and was used and understood in a correct manner. We also acknowledge that the term “in view of faith” has been used in an appropriate manner, such as when the words “Election in View of Faith” are used to combat the position of “Election Regardless of Faith”¹.

Regarding the term “Election in view of Faith”, this term has previously been in a manner that is not contrary to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confession. However, while not necessarily Synergistic, the term has often been used Synergistically and can lead to a Synergistic understanding. In addition the term is found neither in the Scriptures nor in the Lutheran Confessions. Therefore, it would be best for this term to be avoided.

Regarding the “Election onto Faith”, it is correct to speak of election in this manner since both the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions trace the present and future salvation of believers and all that pertains thereto, to God’s eternal act of predestination. On occasion this term has been used in Calvinistic ways, that is, of an altogether arbitrary act of God, as if the Means of Grace were irrelevant to salvation. It is therefore important to clarify ones use of the term “onto faith” to reflect an understanding that God’s elective purpose is accomplished solely through the Means of Grace, by which faith is wrought in the hearts of men, and that it is by this faith alone that man is declared righteous. That is to say that man is justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and that this justifying faith is obtained only through the Means of Grace, that is, the Word and Sacraments. (AC IV & V)

¹ For example “Election in View of Faith” was used in combating Samuel Huber’s “Universal Election” and the Calvinist’s “Exclusion of Faith from Election”. In this context “Election in View of Faith” meant that one cannot be part of the elect without faith.

Affirmative:

1. We believe, teach and confess that God elects onto faith (Acts 13:38). That is to say, *“The eternal election of God not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but is also, from the gracious will and pleasure of God in Christ Jesus, a cause which procures, works, helps, and promotes our salvation and what pertains thereto; and upon this our salvation is so founded that ‘the gates of hell cannot prevail against it’ (Matt. 16:18), as is written in John 10:28: ‘Neither shall any man pluck My sheep out of My hand’; and again in Acts 13:48: ‘And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.’”* (FCSD XI.8)
2. We believe, teach and confess that while God’s grace is Universal (John 3:16; 4:42; 1 John 2:2; 4:10), not all are elected for *“many are called, by few are chosen”* (Matt. 22:14).
3. We believe, teach and confess that God does not elect onto damnation (Ezek. 18:23,33; 33:11), but instead desires for all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4).
4. We believe, teach and confess that God’s grace can be resisted (Matt. 23:37; Acts 7:51).
5. We believe, teach and confess that God’s election is not bare or naked, but that God has preordained:
*“1. That the human race has been truly redeemed and reconciled with God through Christ, who has merited with His innocent obedience, suffering, and death both the righteousness that avails before God (Rom. 1:17, 3:21-26, 2 Cor. 5:21) and eternal life.
2. That this merit and the benefits of Christ are to be offered, given, and distributed to us through His Word and Sacraments.
3. That God wills to be effective and active in us with His Holy Spirit through the Word, when it is preached, heard, and meditated on, to convert our hearts to true repentance, and to enlighten them in true faith.
4. That He wills to make righteous all those who in true repentance accept Christ by faith, and He wills to receive them into grace as children and heirs of eternal life.
5. That He wills to sanctify in love those who He has justified, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 1:4.
6. That He wills to protect them in their great weakness against the devil, the world, and the flesh, to guide and lead them in His ways, to lift them up when they fall, and to comfort and preserve them in crosses and trials.
7. That He wills to strengthen and increase in them the good work that He has begun in them and to preserve them to the end, when they abide in God’s Word, pray diligently, preserve in God’s goodness, and faithfully see the gifts they have received.
8. That He wills, finally, to save and glorify forever in eternal life those whom He has elected, called, and justified.”* (FCSD XI. 15-22)
6. We believe, teach and confess that man is elected unto eternal life by God, not for the sake of faith, but through and in faith, for *“God has chosen you from the beginning unto salvation in the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”* (2 Thess. 2:13).
7. We believe, teach and confess that faith comes originally from the eternal foreordination of God, and is not produced by us, but solely by the grace of God in us.

8. We believe, teach and confess that God elects, not on account of any pre-existing good condition of man, but by grace alone. For before God calls us to salvation we are dead in our trespasses (Eph. 2:1-5), enemies of God (Rom. 5:10) and cannot come to God or chose Him (SC Creed.6).
9. We believe, teach and confess that God elects based upon His loving and merciful grace alone and not because any foreseen or foreknown good condition in man that would accept His grace. For no such good condition exists in man, for man is totally depraved and wicked apart from Christ (Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Eccl. 9:3; Jer. 17:9)
10. We believe, teach and confess that all those who by the grace of God alone, for Christ's sake, through the Means of Grace, are brought to faith, are justified, sanctified, and preserved in faith here in time, have already from eternity been endowed by God with faith, justification, sanctification, and preservation in faith. (Eph. 1:3-7; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:28-30; 2 Tim. 1:9; Matt. 24:22-24)

Negative:

1. We reject and condemn the understanding of "Election onto Faith" to mean that God's grace is irresistible and that man is forced to believe.
2. We reject and condemn the Huberian view of "Universal Election" in which all have been elected and justified regardless of faith.
3. We reject and condemn the Calvinist view of "Double Predestination" in which faith is excluded from election.
4. We reject and condemn the view that election is done in a bare (or naked) manner. *"No one should consider this eternal election or God's preordination to eternal life merely as the secret, inscrutable will or counsel of God, as if it had nothing more to it and nothing more to consider than that God perceived beforehand who and how many would be saved, and who and how many would be damned. Nor should it be conceived of as a military muster, in which God said, "this one shall be saved, that one shall be damned; this one will remain faithful, that one will not remain faithful."* (FCSD XI.9)
5. We reject and condemn the understanding of "Election in view of Faith" to mean that God has chosen the elect based upon their ability not to resist His grace.
6. We reject and condemn the understanding of "Election in view of Faith" to mean that God has chosen the elect based on some pre-existing good condition of man or some pre-existing willingness to be saved.
7. We reject and condemn the view that God elects based upon man's foreseen acceptance of grace by faith.
8. We reject and condemn the view that the believer elects God by faith before God elects them, or that they give God a reason why He should elect them.
9. We reject and condemn all erroneous doctrines which attempt to explain the mystery of election, either in a Calvinistic or Synergistic way. On the contrary, we must maintain both the views of "Universal Grace" over against Calvinism and "Grace Alone" over against Synergism.

Usage of Terminology:

1. We believe, teach and confess that the Scriptures tell us not to divide or dispute over terminology (2 Tim. 2:14). Therefore, as long as they are used in a manner that is in agreement with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, we do not reject or condemn those who use the terms “Election onto Faith” and “Election in view of Faith”.
2. We acknowledge that it is right and proper, and in keeping with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, to use the term “Election onto Faith” (Acts 13:48).
3. We acknowledge that it is right and proper, and in keeping with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, to use the term “Election in view of Faith”. (Rom. 8:29-30; 1 Pet. 1:1-2)
4. We acknowledge that it is right and proper to say, “God has chosen those of whom He foresaw that they would believe and remain in the faith.”²(Rom. 8:29-30; 1 Pet. 1:1-2). However, it is incorrect and improper to say, “God has chosen some because He foresaw that they would believe and remain in the faith, or because of their faith.”
5. We acknowledge that the term “Election in view of Faith” can be used to mean that a faith-less person, that is one who dies without faith, cannot be, or have ever been, one of the elect.
6. We acknowledge that the term “Election in view of Faith” can be used to mean that faith belongs in the order of election and is not – as the Calvinists teach – to be excluded from election. In this sense foreseen faith is to be regarded not as a previous condition, but only as a part of the divine order of election (FCSD XI.15-22).
7. We believe, teach and confess that the Scriptures tell us to reject and condemn all false teachings that teach contrary to the Word of God (Gal. 1:8-9). Therefore, if anyone uses the terms “Election onto Faith” or “Election in view of Faith” in a manner that is contrary to the Scriptures or the Lutheran Confessions – such as Calvinism, Huberianism or Synergism – then such teaching is to be rejected and condemned.

² C.F.W. Walther 1863, quoted by Franz Pieper in *Conversion and Election*.