# FORMULA OF CONCORD. EPITOME.

# XI. GOD'S ETERNAL FOREKNOWLEDGE AND ELECTION

<sup>1</sup> No public dissension has developed among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession concerning this article. But since it is such a comforting article when it is correctly treated, we have included an explanation of it in this document, lest as some future date offensive dissension concerning it might be introduced into the church.

### AFFIRMATIVE

#### PURE AND TRUE DOCTRINE CONCERNING THIS ARTICLE

- <sup>2</sup> **1.** To start with, the distinction between the foreknowledge and the eternal election of God is to be diligently noted.
- <sup>3</sup> **2.** God's foreknowledge in nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen, as it is written, "There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days" (Daniel 2:28).
- <sup>4</sup> **3.** This foreknowledge extends alike over good people and evil people. But it is not a cause of evil or of sin which compels anyone to do something wrong; the original source of this is the devil and man's wicked and perverse will. Neither is it the cause of man's perdition; for this man himself is responsible. God's foreknowledge merely controls the evil and imposes a limit on its duration, so that in spite of its intrinsic wickedness it must minister to the salvation of his elect.
- <sup>5</sup> **4.** Predestination or the eternal election of God, however, is concerned only with the pious children of God in whom he is well pleased. It is a cause of their salvation, for he alone brings it about and ordains everything that belongs to it. Our salvation is so firmly established upon it that the "gates of Hades cannot prevail against" it (John 10:28; Matt. 16:18).
- <sup>6</sup> **5.** We are not to investigate this predestination in the secret counsel of God, but it is to be looked for in his Word, where he has revealed it.
- <sup>7</sup> **6.** The Word of God, however, leads us to Christ, who is "the book of life" in which all who are to be eternally saved are inscribed and elected, as it is written, "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4).
- <sup>8</sup> **7.** This Christ calls all sinners to himself and promises them refreshment. He earnestly desires that all men should come to him and let themselves be helped. <sup>8</sup> To these he offers himself in his Word, and it is his will that they hear the Word and do not stop their ears or despise it. In addition he promises the power and operation of the Holy Spirit and divine assistance for steadfastness and eternal life.
- <sup>9</sup> **8.** Therefore we should not judge this election of ours to eternal life on the basis either of reason or God's law. This would either lead us into a reckless, dissolute, Epicurean life, or drive men to despair and waken dangerous thoughts in their hearts. As long as men follow their reason, they can hardly escape such reflections as this: "If God has elected me to salvation I cannot be damned, do as I will." Or, "If I am not elected to eternal life, whatever good I do is of no avail; everything is in vain in that case."
- <sup>10</sup> **9.** We must learn about Christ from the Holy Gospel alone, which clearly testifies that "God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all" (Rom. 11:32), and that he does not want anyone to perish (Ezek. 33:11; 18:23), but that everyone should repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:6; 1 John 2:2).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Phil. 4:3: Rev. 3:5: 20:15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Matt. 9:2, 9, 13, 22, 29, 35, 37; 11:28.

<sup>11</sup>**10.** The doctrine of God's eternal election is profitable and comforting to the person who concerns himself with the revealed will of God and observes the order which St. Paul follows in the Epistle to the Romans. He there directs men first to repent, to acknowledge their sins, to believe in Christ, and to obey God, and only then does he speak of the mystery of God's eternal election.

12 **11.** The passage, "Many are called, but few are chosen," does not mean that God does not desire to save everyone. The cause of condemnation is that men either do not hear the Word of God at all but willfully despise it, harden their ears and their hearts, and thus bar the ordinary way for the Holy Spirit, so that he cannot work in them; or, if they do hear the Word, they cast it to the wind and pay no attention to it. The fault does not lie in God or his election, but in their own wickedness.<sup>1</sup>

13 **12.** The Christian is to concern himself with the doctrine of the eternal election of God only in so far as it is revealed in the Word of God, which shows us Christ as the "book of life." Through the proclamation of the Holy Gospel, Christ opens and reveals this book for us, as it is written, "Those he predestined, he also called." In Christ we should seek the eternal election of the Father, who has decreed in his eternal counsel that he would save no one except those who acknowledge his Son, Christ, and truly believe on him. The Christian should banish all other opinions since they do not proceed from God but are inspired by the evil foe in an attempt to weaken for us or to rob us entirely of the glorious comfort which this salutary doctrine gives us, namely, that we know that we have been elected to eternal life out of pure grace in Christ without any merit of our own, and that no one can pluck us out of his hand. God assures us of this gracious election not only in mere words, but also with his oath, and has sealed it with his holy sacraments, of which we can remind ourselves and with which we can comfort ourselves in our greatest temptations and thus extinguish the flaming darts of the devil.

<sup>14</sup> **13.** Furthermore, we are to put forth every effort to live according to the will of God and "to confirm our call," as St. Peter says.<sup>3</sup> Especially are we to abide by the revealed Word which cannot and will not deceive us.

<sup>15</sup> **14.** This brief exposition of the doctrine of God's eternal election gives God his glory entirely and completely, because he out of pure grace alone, without any merit of ours, saves us "according to the purpose" of his will.<sup>4</sup> Nor will this doctrine ever give anyone occasion either to despair or to lead a reckless and godless life.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Matt. 20:16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>2 Pet. 2:2ff.: Luke 11:49. 52: Heb. 12:25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Rom. 8:30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> 2 Pet. 1:10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Eph. 1:11.

#### **ANTITHESES**

### FALSE DOCTRINE CONCERNING THIS ARTICLE

- <sup>16</sup> Accordingly we believe and maintain that if anybody teaches the doctrine of the gracious election of God to eternal life in such a way that disconsolate Christians can find no comfort in this doctrine but are driven to doubt and despair, or in such a way that the impenitent are strengthened in their self-will, he is not teaching the doctrine according to the Word and will of God, but in accord with his reason and under the direction of the devil, since everything in Scripture, as St. Paul testifies, was written for our instruction that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Therefore we reject the following errors:
- <sup>17</sup> **1.** The doctrine that God does not want all men to come to repentance and to believe the Gospel.<sup>5</sup>
- <sup>18</sup> **2.** Furthermore, the doctrine that God is not serious about wanting all men to come to him when he calls us to him.
- <sup>19</sup> **3.** Furthermore, that God does not want everybody to be saved, but that merely by an arbitrary counsel, purpose, and will, without regard for their sin, God has predestined certain people to damnation so that they cannot be saved.<sup>6</sup>
- <sup>20</sup> **4.** Likewise that it is not only the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ, but that there is also within us a cause of God's election, on account of which he has elected us to eternal life.
- <sup>21</sup> These are all blasphemous and terrible errors, for they rob Christians of all the comfort that they have in the holy Gospel and in the use of the holy sacraments. Hence they should not be tolerated in God's church.
- <sup>22</sup> This is a brief and simple explanation of the various articles which for a time the theologians of the Augsburg Confession have been discussing and teaching in mutually contradictory terms. From it, under the guidance of the Word of God and the plain Catechism, every simple Christian can understand what is right and what is wrong, since we have not only set forth the pure doctrine but have also exposed the contrary errors. In this way the offensive controversies that have developed receive a basic settlement.

May the almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ grant us the grace of his Holy Spirit that we may all be of one heart in him and constantly abide in this Christian and Godpleasing concord. Amen.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> This is directed against the Calvinistic "special vocation." Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 21, 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> The Calvinistic doctrine of the double election was developed most fully by supralapsarian Theodore Beza; cf. Gallic Confession (1561), XII.