


# Electing grace? Friedrich Schleiermacher on the doctrine of election

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Friedrich Schleiermacher's (1768–1834) theological essay on the doctrine of election – in which he claims to stand squarely within the Reformed tradition – was an attempt to aid church unification in the 19th century Prussian church of which he was a member and a minister. In this essay Schleiermacher resists a narrow focus on individual election and particularly on how election was worked out in the direction of double predestination. The gift of God's electing grace is worked out historically and is therefore Christological and communal. He argues that God's will is neither twofold nor divisible – into two parts, concerning the elect and the reprobate – but one, indivisible, unconditional decree governed by the logic of electing grace. This article explores Schleiermacher's doctrine of election as part of a 250th commemoration of Schleiermacher's birth, and suggests how Schleiermacher's essay on election may contribute to theological interpretations and portrayals of the doctrine of election today.

**Keywords:** Friedrich Schleiermacher; Election; Predestination; Salvation; Grace.

## Introduction

It is a strange and tragic thing when the very mention of Friedrich Schleiermacher's name opens up a Pandora's box of theological accusations: at the very least the lingering suspicion that the offending party harbours any kind of sympathy for liberal theology (or worse!, may be a closet liberal theologian themselves); that the Bible is neither respected nor regarded as God's Word; that key Christological doctrines – such as the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ – are compromised theologically by non-literal interpretations; and that Schleiermacher – the Judas of Christian theology and betrayer of the Reformed tradition (Nicol & Jorgensen 2012:1) – may be read and appreciated by theologians today.

It is strange because Schleiermacher is one of the Reformed tradition's 'own', and, at least in my reading of his dogmatic work, works extremely hard to work innovatively and imaginatively within the tradition, not outside of and definitely not as its enemy. It is tragic because Schleiermacher is a rich well from which we can draw but whose hidden treasures require no small effort to read and make sense of within the broader scope of his very rigorous thinking and (sometimes tiring!) style of argumentation. It is strange and tragic that within public church debates Schleiermacher's very name has often become shorthand for 'heresy'.

It is therefore well worth reading Schleiermacher – not only as part of the 250th commemoration of his life and work but also as a supporter of church unification in his day and public theologian who sought to engage the Reformed tradition with theological integrity. One small example may illustrate the theological potential and richness of his theological work, and possible convergences and overlap with questions of our day, today. In this contribution the author focuses on his essay on the doctrine of election to illustrate this small but important point.

## Schleiermacher on election – overlooked?

Schleiermacher's essay on election – and the possible theological richness that it may offer – has not exactly received extensive theological attention.<sup>1</sup> If anything, Schleiermacher's contribution to theological reflection on election is evidently not widely known. Matthias Gockel points out that Karl Barth, for example, regarded Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith* as his 'masterpiece', but completely overlooked the essay on election that preceded the publication of *The Christian Faith*

1. One of the noteworthy exceptions to this analysis is the book by Gockel (2006) titled *Barth & Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison*, which is discussed in greater detail throughout this article.

**Note:** Engaging Schleiermacher today: South African perspectives, sub-edited by Rian Venter (University of the Free State).

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(Gockel 2006:3).<sup>2</sup> In South Africa, Reformed theologians did not spare any more thought to this essay. Willie Jonker's book on the doctrine of election, for example – titled *Uit Vrye Guns Alleen (From Free Grace Alone)* – includes one reference to Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher's theological contribution to modern reflections on election is described as contributing or strengthening idealistic identity thinking about individual human freedom (cf. Jonker 1989:106).<sup>3</sup>

However, exactly this view of Schleiermacher's doctrine of election – that it is concerned only with the individual's fate – represents a 'serious distortion of Schleiermacher's thinking', argues Gockel (2006:5); and he points out that here we find a notable convergence between Barth and Schleiermacher, who both critique 'the individualistic approach to the traditional doctrine' (Gockel 2006:4). A number of theologians – including Eberhard Jüngel and Colin Gunton – have studied the relationship between Schleiermacher and Barth, which the present author has not attempted to do in this article. It is, however, worth noting Gockel's (2006:10) remark – in *his* overview of such studies – that '[i]t hardly needs to be said that Schleiermacher should no longer be read through Barth's eyes'.

Such comparative studies point out not only this shared critique but also shared theological concerns – including the concern to emphasise 'the indispensability of God's grace' (Gockel 2006:10). Matthias Gockel notes that ironically it is exactly *Schleiermacher* that could have helped Barth in the 1920s when he reflected on the doctrine of election himself; since 'he would have noticed how close it came to his own theocentric revision' if he had 'paid closer attention to Schleiermacher's reconstruction of the doctrine' – particularly Schleiermacher's early essay on election (Gockel 2006:10). It is, for instance, Emil Brunner that argued that Barth was, on this point, 'quite close... to Schleiermacher' (Gockel 2006:7).

Moreover, it is clear that the (mis)understanding that Schleiermacher is somehow opposed to the Reformed tradition's view of election does not stem from Schleiermacher

2. Gockel (2006) refers specifically to the fact that Barth (1982:184 in particular) omits any discussion of this essay from his lectures on Schleiermacher, published in English with the title *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen Wintersemester 1923/1924*. Gockel (2006:3) points out that in Barth's historical overview of interpretations of the doctrine of election – and in particular what he regards as 'errors of the traditional doctrine' – Barth mentions the name of Schleiermacher but leaves out any mention of Schleiermacher's (2016) dogmatics, *The Christian Faith*, or own earlier essay on election (Schleiermacher 2012). Barth only engages Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion, in Response to its Cultured Despisers* (cf. Gockel 2006:3). As Gockel explains (2006:3), Barth 'evidently thought that its [*The Christian Faith's*] doctrine of election was not important enough to warrant discussion'.

3. Jonker (1989) writes about Schleiermacher's portrayal of election as being heavily influenced by the 19th century modernism, wherein the focus falls to what he calls 'idealistic identity thinking': 'In die 19de eeu was die invloed van die modernisme te sterk dat daar werklik betekenisvolle weë in 'n leerstuk soos die uitverkiesing bewandel kon word. Die regsinne teoloë was oor die algemeen op die verdediging of het die ortodokse posities uit reaksie geradikaliseer, en die liberales was in die ban van wysgerige idees wat feitlik deurgaans in die weg gestaan het van egte begrip vir die Bybelse boodskap. So word die uitverkiesingsleer by Schleiermacher opgeneem in 'n breë visie op die voorsienigheid van God...[en word dit] binne die kader van die idealistiese identiteitsdenke hanteer' (Jonker 1989:106). Yet this – an individualistic interpretation of the doctrine of election – is exactly what Schleiermacher himself consistently argues against! Here Jonker (1989) echoes Barth's broad critique of Schleiermacher as a proponent of 'religious individualism' in modern theology, which is also then applied to his doctrine of election – without an in-depth engagement with his own writing on election (cf. Gockel 2006:3).

himself.<sup>4</sup> In his essay on election Schleiermacher aligns himself fully with key figures in the Reformed tradition; and he is particularly concerned about including Augustine and Calvin in his essay on the doctrine of election (Vander Schel 2015:334; cf. Schleiermacher 2012:41). From the very beginning of his essay – and already the very second sentence of his essay – he appeals to Augustine and Calvin (as well as Luther and Paul); he aligns himself with them, as classic figures within what he regards as a Reformed view of the doctrine of election (Schleiermacher 2012:21). Schleiermacher goes to great lengths to defend the Reformed tradition – or the 'Augustinian-Calvin logic' – against Lutheran critique, more ever, and replies in a detailed manner to Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, whom he took for a spokesperson of the Lutheran group in the unifying Prussian, Evangelical Church.

This early essay was published in 1819 in *Theologische Zeitschrift*, and Schleiermacher himself – in a letter to his friend Ludwig Gottfried Blanc – called this essay 'a kind of precursor to my dogmatics' (Gockel 2004:301; footnote 1). Throughout Schleiermacher's mature theological work, election plays a 'subtle yet central role', notes Vander Schel (2015:334). The essay on election was taken up in Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*, which was published shortly after the essay appeared (first edition in 1821/1822; second edition in 1830/1831) (Tice 2012:ix). More specifically, Schleiermacher's (2016:766–796; §§117–120) essay is taken up in four propositions in his dogmatics.<sup>5</sup>

In the second edition of his dogmatics, Schleiermacher (2016:§§115–125; see also §§126–172) (cf. Tice 2012:ix) jointly discusses the doctrine of election and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. There are, however, also a number of other doctrinal loci upon which Schleiermacher's (2016:716; §§107–109) doctrine of election relies, including the doctrine of justification.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately the doctrine of election is deeply embedded in related loci, and where the doctrine of election is located within a dogmatic work already indicates which logic and rhetorical intentions may be at work within the fibre of this doctrine. Consider, for example, the key theological concepts that Schleiermacher opts for in his written work on election. Schleiermacher (2016:771; §118.1) argues, for instance, that the doctrine of election is a good news, because in it 'the complete surety

4. Root (1990:106) has pointed out that '[a]ny evaluation of Schleiermacher's treatment of the central doctrinal loci must also assess Schleiermacher as the child of Calvin and Augustine'. The description of Schleiermacher as the 'father of liberal theology' or 'father of modern theology' has (too) often obscured how deeply reliant he is on the Reformed tradition, and in particular figures such as Calvin and Luther, in his own thinking (Thorsell 2016:158). Often it is his discontinuity with this tradition, not his continuity, which is highlighted.

5. Schleiermacher (2016:771; §108.1; footnote 1) makes his reliance upon his earlier essay very clear in the dogmatics itself, for in *The Christian Faith* he refers himself – and this earlier essay publication – very specifically!

6. See the article on Schleiermacher's view of justification and election by Dawn DeVries and Brian Gerrish (2005), entitled 'Providence and grace'. See also a related publication, titled 'Contaminated by Grace? Salvation, Sociability, and the Church as Collective Life', which forms part of a book titled *Beyond Tolerance: Schleiermacher on Friendship, Sociability, and Lived Religion* (cf. Marais 2019). In this chapter, I focus on an analysis of (another) three related propositions in Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*, namely §§89–91.

of the divine decree of our blessedness is given to us... [it] makes for blessedness'.<sup>7</sup>

A systematic theological analysis of Schleiermacher's doctrine of election would be incomplete without some consideration of how it was meant to affect Schleiermacher's audience. He was, after all, a master rhetorician. Schleiermacher chose his words with care. We could ask, for instance, what Schleiermacher wanted his essay to do within the church public of which he was a part. We ought to consider who were his opponent(s), and why did he feel necessary to write his very first 'significant foray into theological debate on any particular dogmatic issue' (Thorsell 2016:155) on election, of all things! What was happening at the time? How did election become a point of contention? Why did he write an essay on election at all?

## A grammar of grace – In the doctrine of election?

American Schleiermacher scholars – including Tice (2012:ix; who was also deeply involved in the new recent English translation of *The Christian Faith*) and Vander Schel (2015:334) – have pointed out the importance of taking Schleiermacher's rhetorical and pastoral intentions into account when interpreting this essay on election in particular. They point out that especially two dynamics need to be reckoned with when reading this essay: (1) that the Reformed and Lutheran churches were in a process of unifying at the time; and (2) that it is within this complicated process that the Reformed theologian Schleiermacher was responding to the Lutheran theologian Bretschneider – who published a number of 'aphorisms' concerning the unifying churches (Tice 2012:ix; Vander Schel 2015:334). Schleiermacher's essay was a direct response to Bretschneider's essay (titled *Aphorisms on the Union of both Protestant Churches in Germany*); both essays were published in 1819 (Thorsell 2016:157).<sup>8</sup>

We would misread the essay on election if we miss Schleiermacher's intention with the essay, notes Tice (2012:ix), namely 'to support the movement toward church union between churches of Lutheran and Reformed heritage'. This is even reflected in the Lutheran opponent he chooses to respond to – the influential Lutheran theologian Bretschneider was also a supporter of church unity (Thorsell 2016:155).<sup>9</sup>

7. The translators and editors of *The Christian Faith* include the following information on their translation choice for the concept 'blessedness' (Schleiermacher 2016:771–772; footnote 3): 'In German, *begnadigen* (from *Gnade*, grace) means to bless. In much theology of his day and since, *begnadigen* means to pardon; but it does not mean this in his usage, hence the translation "that makes for our blessedness" here. Further, the term "blessedness" just below, and frequent in his discourse, translates *Seligkeit*. The Luther Bible translates the Greek word *σωτηρία* with *Seligkeit*... Intermittently Luther translates *σωτηρία* with *Heil*... Whereas in English "salvation" translates the Greek in such passages, "blessing" also translates other Hebrew and Greek words in the English Bible. For the most part, Schleiermacher chose the words *begnadigen* (blessed by grace) and *Seligkeit* to refer to the state of blessedness... or righteousness... or sanctification (*Heiligung*). All of these states stand for what is given and achieved by grace. (He reserved *Heil* for "salvation".) Such divine action always includes God's forgiveness of sin, but Schleiermacher tends to find serious lacks in strictly transactional, judicial, or penitential interpretations of what God is said to do or to require, either with respect to Christ or with respect to the Christian life'.

8. Bretschneider was 'the Lutheran superintendent at Gotha' (Schleiermacher 2016:155) and 'next to Schleiermacher the most influential dogmatic theologian of his time' (Vander Schel 2013:33).

9. Schleiermacher could have opted for a response to the Lutheran theologian Claus Harms, who was opposed to church unification between Reformed and Lutheran,

Thorsell (2016:156) has noted that both the essay and *The Christian Faith*, published 2 years after the essay on election, were intended to provide 'a common theological framework for this unified church'. The 'recently unified Reformed-Lutheran Church' of Schleiermacher's day was unified in 1817 by the decree of Friedrich Wilhelm III; and Schleiermacher refers to this church as 'the Evangelical Church' (Thorsell 2016:156).

Yet 2 years after this decree was issued, in 1819, 'the nature and durability of the united church were still in doubt', notes Thorsell (2016:156). Whereas the royal decree had 'mandated union', it had been left to the churches themselves – and congregations in particular, such as the congregation in Berlin where Schleiermacher was a minister – to figure out the practical details and implications of this unification (Thorsell 2016:156). There were, however, not only practical matters to sort out but also two doctrinal matters that caused division (between Reformed and Lutheran believers in this unified church), namely (1) the Lord's supper, and (2) election (Thorsell 2016:156).

Schleiermacher's essay on the doctrine of election was intended to address this second point of contention; and the way in which he sought to address the controversy around election was by revising and resituating an Augustinian-Calvinian logic in his interpretation of election, and thereby to help disentangle difficult theological issues that may hinder church unity (Thorsell 2016:156). Schleiermacher's rhetorical intention with the essay was therefore pastoral and very much practical, as much as it was polemical (in responding to Bretschneider) and theological. Schleiermacher writes as an apologist for the Reformed tradition (Thorsell 2016:156), in response to a number of accusations that the 'distinguished Lutheran theologian' Bretschneider (Schleiermacher 2012:49) levels against it.

Schleiermacher's calculating use of rhetoric is evident in a theological and rhetorical reading of his early essay on election, including already in the structure of his essay. That this essay was intended to mediate between Lutheran and Reformed groups, while also defending Reformed theology's place in a newly unified church, is evident throughout – up to the very end of his essay, where the very last section of this essay is aptly titled 'Election and Church Union!' (Schleiermacher 2012:79–81). In short, Thorsell (2016:155) describes Schleiermacher's essay as '[a]n exercise in constitutive rhetoric'.<sup>10</sup> Yet the doctrine of election was not

in which case Schleiermacher would have had to deal with Lutheran opposition regarding election but also on church union (Thorsell 2016:157; footnote 13). In Thorsell's words (2016): 'By choosing Bretschneider for a response, Schleiermacher tactically presented himself as defender of the Reformed perspective against a Lutheran who also supported the union. Both authors addressed the united church and both put forward alternate but hardly dissonant views of the future of that church... Both addressed this united (yet still quite divided!) church to resolve outstanding tensions. Their solutions diverged but their goal was identical. Without dismissing their theological differences, these essays were political tracts calling the unified church toward unity despite daunting but not irresolvable issues' (2016:157–158).

10. He describes this as a rhetoric that imposes 'a collective ideal and identity upon addressees, constituting them with corporate attributes interests and obligations' (Thorsell 2016:156; footnote 8). A 'constitutive rhetoric' therefore has a very clear goal or purpose, namely to create social cohesion and to foster unity and unification.



only to serve a very practical purpose. It is itself already illustrative of the kind of theological grammar that Schleiermacher opts for, namely a grammar of grace. Consider, for instance, the following editorial remark in *The Christian Faith* (Schleiermacher 2016), wherein the editors explain this in greater detail:

[For Schleiermacher] divine grace is... to be received as a gift to which we cannot contribute except in our own free and active response. The meeting of the two forces in conversion and all the rest of the Christian life is seen to be reciprocal in this way. God is seen to will, act, thus to initiate by God's own gift of grace, and then, by that same grace, even to cooperate with us in our own activity – in a relationship of community and communication with us in that subsequent activity. (p. 716; footnote 24)

This grammar of grace is exactly what Schleiermacher employs in his essay on election. Vander Schel (2015) describes this as follows:

This early work presents an innovative study... to defend the primacy of divine grace... Yet more than offering a creative revision of this challenging Reformed teaching, Schleiermacher's treatment of election signals the novel correlation of grace, history, and soteriology that lies at the heart of his dogmatic work. (p. 334)

It is worth noting that the logic of God's gifting of electing grace is, for Schleiermacher, not an outside, overwhelming force that comes to us as an alien force, but an inside, compelling force that lures us into living good lives from the depths of our humanity (Vander Schel 2015:335–336). Election therein becomes not the inbreaking of grace (from beyond) but an outgrowing of grace (from within). It is grace that anchors his dogmatic thought. As Lamm (2008:137) would point out, it is the theological logic of grace that would ultimately play a decisive role in his magisterial *The Christian Faith* – indeed, 'the *Glaubenslehre* could be said to be a *Gnadenlehre*'.

## Assurance of salvation, election – and double predestination?

Exactly because the doctrine of election has to do with grace, it may be a source of assurance of our salvation, instead of a source of disquiet and anxiety. This, too, Schleiermacher (2012:40) borrows from Calvin: Reformed Christianity is, after all, a 'practical Christianity' which reassures us that it is the work of the Holy Spirit, not human beings, that gives assurance of salvation. The source of our assurance is 'the Spirit of God [who] bears witness that this person is a child of God' (Schleiermacher 2012:35). Yet how is any assurance of salvation possible if God's eternal decree allots blessedness (*Seligkeit*) to some and damnation (*Verdammniß*) to others?

The dilemma that he has to deal with is the relationship between Reformed and Lutheran views of grace (and therefore his very second section, of this essay, appeals to Luther and Lutheranism) (Schleiermacher 2012:25–27); and particularly the soteriological trajectory of election, and – quite practically,

even ethically – what this implies for the future of this newly unified church that he is so concerned about (Gockel 2006:16–18). The debate on the doctrine of election always necessitates a choice between 'an Augustinian view of grace' and 'a Pelagian view of grace'; and, as Gockel (2006:21) remarks, Schleiermacher chooses the former. In short, Schleiermacher positions himself as 'the child of Calvin and Augustine' (Root 1990:109), and he assumes 'the mantle of his theological forebears' as worked out in the Augustinian–Calvinian doctrine of election (Thorsell 2016:158). Ultimately, Schleiermacher regards his contribution as standing in the tradition of not only Calvin and Augustine but also of Paul – for it is Paul that 'has led the way in this investigation' (Schleiermacher 2016:770; §117.4).

For Schleiermacher there could be no division between the person and work of Christ. This insight – that election theology is nothing less than Christology – is a strand of Reformed theology that Schleiermacher finds in Calvin. For Schleiermacher, 'Christ the Elect' is the hermeneutical key to interpreting the doctrine of election (Gorony 2008:115). Not through one's own power, but only by divine grace do we receive electing grace – indeed, throughout 'the entire third book of the *Institutes* this doctrine is nothing other than that of the ways and means whereby the divine grace in Christ is to be received' (Schleiermacher 2012:36). In other words, and quite contrary to misconceptions that Schleiermacher individualises salvation, it is exactly in the outworking of God's grace in history that Schleiermacher is interested (Vander Schel 2015:334). In Christ grace-in-history is inaugurated; there is a deep concern for the historical and communal working out of grace (Vander Schel 2015:336). In Vander Schel's (2015:336) words: 'The influence of Christ reveals a decisive new beginning in human history'.<sup>11</sup> Indeed (Schleiermacher 2012):

[T]he Calvinian theory asserts the measures God adopts to restore moral freedom are intended only for some and not for all: now, in order to avoid any mistakes we shall immediately change this plural to a singular, for the church knows only the one measure taken by God for the restoration of human beings, namely, through Jesus Christ. (p. 43)

Schleiermacher's most original contribution to theological reflection on election – argues Gockel (2004:309; 2006:26) – stems from this insight, namely that God's work is indivisible, which means God's will is indivisible, and which is therefore described as 'one divine decree' of 'a single divine will'. God's will cannot be divided and internally juxtaposed – God's will does not consist of two halves or two wills respectively – but reflects an all-encompassing (single) will to grace (Gockel 2006:27). This remains a key concern for him throughout the essay, from beginning to end, for the very last words of his essay reads as follows (Schleiermacher 2012:81): '[I]f God has not foreseen all things, God cannot have foreseen anything'.

11. Salvation, or election, is grounded 'in the relationship between the natural order... and God's decree of redemption through Christ', argues Schleiermacher (2016:770). Indeed, God's presence in history is the appearance of Christ, the redeemer; and it is in Christ that 'the central turning point in human history' is marked (Vander Schel 2015:337).

For Schleiermacher, election cannot and does not rest on God's arbitrariness (*grundlose Willkür*) but on God's discretion (*Gutdünken*) (Gockel 2004:311). There are no multiple redemptive activities that proceed from God, but 'a single divine redemptive activity' that proceeds from Christ (Vander Schel 2015:337). It is in this single decree – a decree bent soteriologically in order to express God's economy of salvation – that all is levelled, argues Thorsell (2016:160). Whether creation and salvation, or election and reprobation; for Schleiermacher, all work of God is bound into and bound by the integrity and inner coherence of the God who 'decrees a redeemed world' (Thorsell 2016:160–162).<sup>12</sup> This God's divine attributes are not in tension or in competition with one another – God's mercy is not set up against God's justice (Thorsell 2016:161). Instead, God's (single) decree 'must condition all things' (Thorsell 2016:161).<sup>13</sup>

There are important (and deliberate) pastoral implications of Schleiermacher's grammar of grace, as specifically worked out in this early essay. As he points out – and is by implication accused of by Bretschneider – his theological treatise on election is much more than 'an exercise in speculative philosophy' (Schleiermacher 2012:39). A key point turns on the direction in which the logic of God's electing grace is historically extended. Schleiermacher takes issue with the extension – by later interpreters of Augustine and Calvin, not Augustine or Calvin themselves – of the Reformed tradition in the direction of double predestination, wherein individuals are grouped into the elect and the reprobate. It is unmistakable – from a reading of this essay – that Schleiermacher opts for election against double predestination. The very first section of his essay makes this point in its heading already, titled 'Election: From Controversy to Consolation' (Schleiermacher 2012:21). The doctrine of election is meant to console, to comfort, to help, to repair, to heal – not to frighten, to intimidate, to manipulate. For this reason he deals with election in a soteriological manner, as an outworking of the 'inner power' of redemption (Schleiermacher 2012:48). How the doctrine of election affects us, interests him. In Schleiermacher's (2012) own words:

In considering how greatly one's own efforts could be either supported or impeded by circumstances and one's temptations could be either averted or heightened, depending on the nature of one's temperament, one can... fall into that desolate despair

12.The rhetorical intention with Schleiermacher's argument for a single, divine decree was also positioned 'To rebut the Manichean tendency that Schleiermacher perceived in the Lutheran theology of his day. Should anything occur that was not willed by God – as for instance, the condemnation of unbelievers... [God's will is limited] by something that 'would stand over against God'. This limiting factor would be outside of God and constitute Manichean-like dualism' (Thorsell 2016:160–161). Schleiermacher's rebuttal of (Lutheran) Manicheanism was intended to underscore the point that nothing – no power, not even human free will – competes with God's free will. Thorsell (2016:160; footnote 29) points out that this rebuttal was not received well by Bretschneider, 'for we see the latter still dealing with the issue four years after Schleiermacher's death'.

13.Here, notes Thorsell (2016:162; footnote 40), Schleiermacher departs from the Synod of Dordrecht. Whereas the Canons of Dord 'explicitly deny that God is the author of sin' and 'implicitly include the means as part of the decree', Schleiermacher (2016:162) argues that there is no place for evil within God's decree, in that 'evil exists as features of incompleteness... destined to pass'. In Schleiermacher's words (2012:69): 'in relation to God, human evil does not exist at all... human evil could exist for us in such a way that it exists neither through God nor for God... However, that of which God cannot be the author – namely, the opposite of what is good – really does not exist... [And] the necessity for redemption rests on that which really exists, and, at the same time this necessity passes from that of which God could not be the author, into that of which God alone can be the author, namely, into what is good'.

that does indeed understand that everything lies in God's hands yet which still does not have the heart to trust God on account of the fact that blessedness can be granted to human beings only by grace. (p. 39)

Schleiermacher (2012:24) focuses on the tension between election and predestination in particular because he thinks that it has very serious consequences for the newly unified church's ecclesiology and soteriology. He is horrified by the theological accommodation, within the doctrine of election, of eternal damnation – he also says explicitly that he has focused on the reign of God and the state of blessedness, rather than on the matter of eternal damnation – and describes the term 'reprobate' quite literally as a '*horribile* term' (Schleiermacher 2012:24). He writes about two possible theological routes for dealing with the dilemma of God's non-election (a possibility that he does not deny outright but nevertheless calls a 'thorn'): either accepting an eternity of blessedness or punishments of hell, or turning to what he calls 'ultimate universal reconciliation' (and, he adds, 'restoration of all that have been lost') (Schleiermacher 2012:78). He does not attempt to take in a middle position – as he thinks his theological opponent Bretschneider tries to do (Vander Schel 2015:335)<sup>14</sup> – but positions himself clearly and unequivocally. In Schleiermacher's (2012) own words:

Now, concerning me, I would gladly take the latter road in that it is easier for my feeling to bear not only the thought of people without faith dying but also the thought of those who are already forgiven at this point and all of those who are blessed but for whom blessedness would nevertheless have to be disturbed by the thought of those who have forever been excluded. Alternatively, could they perchance be blessed at all if they would have to lose compassion for everything that belongs to their species? At that juncture, however, it seems to me that this latter notion is as well supported in scripture as is the former notion, which if anything new could be said, still cannot be further enlarged upon here. What is more, the latter, preferable notion can only be brought to a certain degree of clarity, whereas the more closely the former notion is examined, the greater are the difficulties that seem to accumulate. Only in taking this latter route, moreover, does one's understanding find rest, supposing that it is able to consider the original and unfolded diversity of all human beings together with the dependence of all on divine grace, the divine power of redemption together with what can arise from the resistance of human beings, and, finally, the misery of those who have no faith together with the Word of grace that has laid hold of their remembrance... I would confess to holding this view. (pp. 78–79)

For Schleiermacher, election does not necessarily – and certainly not automatically – translate into double predestination. He quotes John Calvin's description of double predestination as 'a dreadful decree' (Schleiermacher 2012:30). The necessary systematic and theological links or movement from election to double predestination, in which some are destined for election (and grace) and some are destined for damnation (and reprobation), are highly

14.Thorsell (2016:157) explains that Bretschneider's suggestion for dealing with the two doctrinal matters plaguing the newly unified or unifying church was for 'the Reformed party [to surrender] its doctrine of election and the Lutheran party [to surrender] Luther's idiosyncratic teaching on the Lord's table'.

disputable and contested.<sup>15</sup> It is neither a fact nor a necessary conclusion to which the Synod of Dordrecht comes, he argues, and he denounces the conclusions that Dord comes up with in no uncertain terms (Thorsell 2016:155).<sup>16</sup> It is only in the assurance of our blessedness that our understanding of election 'finds rest' (Schleiermacher 2012:78).

## Conclusion

Here we have only, so far, dealt with one of Schleiermacher's very first serious publications in dogmatic theology, as it was first published as an academic essay and later embedded in his dogmatics (Gockel 2006:16). The introductory remarks of the translators of Schleiermacher's essay on election are a fitting summary of Schleiermacher's (2012) view:

Unlike many heirs of modernity Schleiermacher refuses to think of the individual in abstraction from humanity. The taxonomy of choice in the parlance of Schleiermacher is that God chooses human community on which our individuality is staked... It is Schleiermacher's emphasis on election as the action of God which might be decidedly uncomfortable for many moderns insofar as we continue to render choice as the instantiation of the subject and hesitate to respond to the clarion call of the Reformation, inviting us to render to God the most important and precious of all things: choice itself... [*For Schleiermacher,*] God elects to redeem, and redemption effects a change. God's election does not render the human agent a patient but instead makes an agent of the patient. [*And finally,* Schleiermacher, like many of his interlocutors, sees election as a corollary of the doctrine of justification. Election is about the divine declaration that transforms the individual human as well as humanity. (p. 20)

Perhaps we may therefore need to engage Schleiermacher theologically more, not less; especially in these days, in which the doctrine of election is again up for discussion<sup>17</sup> and serious theological reflection is again engaging the intersections between justification, justice, sanctification, grace, salvation and election. And perhaps this will require taking Schleiermacher seriously not only as a philosopher but also as a theologian.<sup>18</sup>

15. Both Reformed and Lutheran parties are faced with a crossroad when considering the possibility of eternal damnation, as worked out in double predestination, argues Schleiermacher (2012:78). And when faced with this crossroad, according to Schleiermacher (2012), they will either: 'Take the road of accepting an eternity and endlessness of the punishments of hell, together with the incomprehensibility of the divine ordinances; or in order to surmount at the same time any conflict between divine justice and divine love, they turn to the notion of an ultimate universal reconciliation and restoration of all that have been lost. Whatever road is taken, the difference at the point of death, then, between the person of faith and the person not of faith is simply the difference between being taken up into the reign of Christ earlier and later' (p. 78).

16. 'Schleiermacher's defense of the unconditional view of election catches his readers by surprise for his lack of hesitation about throwing the conclusions of the Synod of Dordrecht... "under the bus"' (Thorsell 2016:155). See also Brian Gerrish's (1980) informative article in this regard, entitled 'Schleiermacher and the reformation'.

17. For instance, the 2018 Annie Kinkead Warfield Lesings (19–22 March) was presented at Princeton Theological Seminary by Prof Dirk J. Smit, on the doctrine of election. The theme of the lectures were: 'Hope for Even the Most Wretched? Speaking of Election'. More information is available from <https://www.ptsem.edu/events/annie-kinkead-warfield-lectures> (viewed: 10 September 2019). The lectures were recorded and can be listened from <https://soundcloud.com/princeton-seminary/s/2018-annie-kinkead-warfield-lectures> (viewed: 10 September 2019).

18. Gockel's (2006:11; footnote 38) remarks in a footnote, for instance, that Schleiermacher is very often read as a philosopher but not often enough as a theologian; and that he finds it 'puzzling how little scholarly work on *The Christian*

Nevertheless, how we think and how we speak about election has direct and practical implications on our church life – in Schleiermacher's day, in the middle of church unification; but also in our day, when we consider who is included and excluded in the church. Schleiermacher understood this very well, since he too was concerned about the unity of the church.

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Faith, especially in Germany, has been devoted to Schleiermacher's relation to the Reformed tradition'. Perhaps the same is true in South Africa.

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