121 Choice or to choose (Eleccio uel eligere)

Choice or to choose. Man chooses. The choice of the Lord is fourfold. For it is of eternal predestination, Eph. 1[:4]: “He chose us before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in his sight in charity.”

¶ This predestination, one may say, is not from our merits. However, its effect presupposes and requires our merits. Wherefore, just as in Act. 9[:15], Paul predestined is said to be “A vessel of election,” because just as a vessel is prepared by its principal maker, who orders it, and by a minister, who uses it, it is cleaned, and made apt for the work, so it is concerning the elect through predestination. Judas was chosen according to present justice, according to that of John 6[:71]: “Have not I chosen you twelve,” but because finally his election was perverted through wicked works. Therefore, Christ said concerning him “and one of you is a devil” [John 6:71]. Therefore it is said in the canonical epistle of [2] Peter 1[:10]: “Brethren, labor the more, that by good works you may make sure your calling and election.” As is commonly the case, whoever is chosen, until he becomes confirmed, disposes himself to the state to which he was chosen and conforms himself to it as much as he can. But man is chosen by God so that he may live without sin. For “whomsoever the Lord shall choose, the same shall be holy,” just as it is said in Num. 16[:17]. And certainly if he transfers himself to a contrary act of state to which he is elected, such as if one chosen for a bishop transfers himself to the military and becomes irregular, thus if one is chosen by God transfers himself to a state repugnant to the state of grace by contracting with sin through expressed consent. Therefore he will be confirmed. Wherefore because Saul was chosen by the Lord, as is evident in [1] Kings 9[:2], he transferred himself to disobedience against God, as it is presented in 1 Kings 16[:23]. And Extra. *De electione et [electi potestate]*, c. *Publicato scrutinio,* the electors should not waver, but outside of the publication they can waver and copy each other.

¶ God alone is the chooser in this election and does not publish whom he chooses. There it is said above in judgment, first he chose us in himself and therefore he can on account of our demerits change the choice made of us. Wherefore Chrysostom says in the *Opus imperfectum super Matthaeum*, homily 7,[[1]](#endnote-1) he chose them not as if apostles, but because they could become apostles. Just as the artist if he would see gems not yet hewn he chooses them not for what they are, but for what they can become. Just so the Lord seeing those does not choose their works but their hearts.

Second, divine election is of present justification, John 15[:16]: “You have not chosen me: but I have chosen you,” and this election ought to be fearful of annexation lest it be excepted against him, Wis. 3[6]: “As gold in the furnace God has proved” the elect.

¶ Third is the exaltation of the temporal, Psal. [88:20]: “I have exalted one chosen out of my people.” And he has examined these things sufficiently through the zeal and honesty of the elect, 1 Pet. 2[:9]: “You are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood.” Wis. 3[:15], and how glorious, Matt. 13[:48]: He chose out the good “into vessels,” and in Psal. [64:5]: “Blessed is he whom you have chosen and taken to you: he shall dwell in your courts.”

¶ Concerning the choice which man has chosen, note that a man chooses another man sometimes for two reasons, for a superior and for a friend. The first of these ought to be done with the invoked grace of the Holy Spirit, as is treated in Extra, *De electione [et electi potestate],* c. *Cum inter [universas].[[2]](#endnote-2)* And the apostles chose Matthias with a prayer first of all saying, “You, Lord, who knows the hearts of all men, show whom you have chosen.”

¶ The figure of this is treated in 1 Kings 16[:5], when Samuel should elect David as king he said, “I am come to offer sacrifice to the Lord, be you sanctified, and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he sanctified the sons of Isai choosing them into the sacrifice. He was chosen so that he may be offered to the Lord and those choosing ought to be sanctified. Wherefore it sometimes happens that the grace of the Holy Spirit is so efficacious that as if with an unexpected process of law an unambiguous election is celebrated through inspiration. Just as an election is open because on account of where it is reached from the triple form of election: through scrutiny, through compromise, and through inspection. But the first two of the life, because they are indicated in that human diligence often fails. Wherefore 1 Kings 16[:7]: “The Lord said to Samuel,” when he should choose David as king, “Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature … nor do I judge according to the look of man,” etc.

From which it is evident that in a church election, the Lord does not wish that there would be an eye toward the quality of the blood, just as it was evident in the election of Matthias, Act. 1[:26], because the Lord looks into the heart. Wherefore Christ said, John 13[:18]: “I know whom I have chosen.” Wherefore as a sign that an election ought to be more reliant upon divine inspiration than human diligence, election in sacred scripture is said to be a raising up, Eccli. 10[:4]: “In his time he will raise up a profitable ruler.” A merchant of clothes sometimes chooses a garment for himself for wearing and otherwise for selling. For using he chooses something more useful, for selling something more desirable than worse. So for the utility of the church, one must always choose the better, but for pleasing the magnates of the earth sometimes one chooses one more acceptable to them who is sometimes less, namely, to raise up is to call one from death to life, but this is proper to God alone.

¶ The lion cub is born dead but is raised to life only at the call of his father, according to Isidore, book 12.[[3]](#endnote-3) Thus a person born as if dead is rarely of such great dignity, but at the voice of God the Father only is he worthy of being raised up, Gen. the last chapter [49:9]: “Juda is a lion's whelp … who shall rouse him?” *Wherefore* also 4 Kings 9[:2], Jehu was raised up to be king.

¶ It is said commonly by men that election is a creation and reasonably so, because if one elected is evil, he was taken from nothing, 1 Cor. 13[:2], it is said “If I have not charity, I am nothing.” If however it is a good election, it is well said what is proper to God alone, because only God makes the good and “whomsoever the Lord shall choose, the same shall be holy.” But it is concerning some in a college, just as concerning a false scribe, who before he is fully hired writes a beautiful letter, but after the hiring he writes worse and worse. So some in a college before they are promoted, they live well and honestly, but afterwards worse and worse. So, it happened concerning Saul, the first book of Kings [9:2] who in his beginnings “there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he,” but afterwards no one was worse than he.

Therefore, an evil end prohibits such a one, as is described in Bernard’s *Declamationes*,[[4]](#endnote-4) the diligent scout goes about, he follows, he devotes himself to the task, he pretends and dissimulates, he strives with hands and feet, if somehow he might receive the patrimony of the one crucified. Prov. 30[:28]: “The stellio supports itself on hands, and dwells in kings' houses.” The salamander is an animal in the world not having wings nor feathers. Thus such a one does not have the wings of contemplation nor the feathers of honest conversation, and however it is honored and dwells in the houses of kings. Such a one is also similar to the hippopotamus, about which Isidore speaks, book 12 of the *Etymologies*,[[5]](#endnote-5) which is a monster in the sea from which at night secretly he goes forth and consumes neighboring animals and lest they might perceive he walks backwards, thus the hypocrite who seems. But if he flees earthly honor he lives as if in the sea of penance. But hidden he goes forth as if backwards but if he does not wish for honor and yet he devours the houses of widows. Such ones are figured through the priests of Baal who ate nothing, but at night secretly through hidden little doors they entered and ate. On account of the thefts of these, for which they are unworthy to be promoted, the church is now sterile.

Wherefore Bernard,[[6]](#endnote-6) you see the whole zeal of the church for dignity not for sanctity. Therefore, the church is unfruitful, according to Aristotle, book 17, *De animalibus*,[[7]](#endnote-7) and the same says Isidore, book 12,[[8]](#endnote-8) that the mothers of all animals of prey quickly become sterile. And such fetuses are imperfect, blind and some are born unformed. Thus, those who strive to seize dignities, are dead, blind, and unformed. Such ones also are figured through Esau and Jacob who contended in the dead womb, Gen. 25[:25]. Literally both of them struggled to lead the way and seize the primogeniture. Such ones are compared to vipers, about which Isidore says, book 12,[[9]](#endnote-9) the young in the uterus not waiting for the maturity of birth, with corrosive lacerations of the mother, they erupt with force and with the death of the mother. Wherefore it is read in Gen. 38[:27], when Tamar had twins in her womb, it happened, that Zara extended his hand first to go out, but Phares exited first. According to Jerome,[[10]](#endnote-10) Zara is interpreted as rising and signifies one setting out and such a one although he extended his hand to good works, Phares however who is interpreted as division. The moral reason according to the teachers is because Zara did not go out because he had his hand tied by the midwife in sign that according to good conscience he ought not to give anything for dignity, Psal. [25:10]: “In whose hands are iniquities: their right hand is filled with gifts.” Phares also who is interpreted as violently came forth first because “the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent bear it away,” Matt. [11:12]. Note also that in history that brother supplanted brother. Thus it is almost in every such case, Jer. 9[:4]: “Let every man take heed of his neighbor, and let him not trust in any brother of his: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every friend will walk deceitfully.”

¶ Note also here that election is figured by birth. Wherefore Aesop[[11]](#endnote-11) pretended in his fables and Horace[[12]](#endnote-12) the poet touched in his poetry that the mountain which labored with a great groan, and every nation hearing this trembled, finally it brought forth a mouse. Wherefore Horace, “The mountains are in labor and there is brought forth a ridiculous mouse.”

¶ Thus sometimes the church, which is a mountain on the peak of mountains, which ought to give birth to a mountain, brings forth a mouse, Codex, *De episcopis et clericis,* l. *Si quemquem*,[[13]](#endnote-13) where it is said that such a one is chosen to be a bishop, who at whatever place has arrived with integrity of life you should purify others. Again, Isidore, *De summo bono*, book 3, c. 34,[[14]](#endnote-14) he who contends to seek the regimen of the priesthood, first let him discover in himself whether his life is fit for the honor. And Cassiodorus,[[15]](#endnote-15) an elect or a prelate ought to surpass his underlings, as much as the head surpasses the members, as much as the shepherd surpasses the flock, 1 Kings 10[:23] Saul stood taller than all the people from the shoulders and downwards and Samuel said certainly he saw one whom the Lord chose because there was not his like among the people. Therefore in him ought to flourish the sense of discretion, which is demonstrated by four characteristics: by faithfulness, by freedom, by truthfulness, and by unity. And in election there is not an esteem of persons, as for the first; nor a compulsion of souls, as for the second; but thus, a renown of the one to be chosen, as for the third; and an agreement of the electors, as for the fourth.

It is necessary in this that there be fidelity or esteem of the persons. Therefore it is said in 4 Kings 10[:3]: “Choose the best.” It is not said the richer, nor the more generous, but the best so that he may excel others in goodness just as he precedes in dignity, 1 Kings 10[:24]: “You see him whom the Lord hath chosen.” From the head accordingly sense and movement ought to descend into the members. The sense of discretion and the movement of good result.

¶ The evil disposition of the head harms the members. Therefore it is said in Job 34[:4]: “Let us choose to us judgment, and let us see among ourselves what is the best.”

Second, freedom is required so that there be no constraint of the voices, nor compulsion of the rewards, nor shaking of coins, nor offering of gifts, but that he be freely elected pleasing to God, not only to the world, or to men only, but many in this business are similar to the fool who would rather choose cheese because he loved to eat it, although it was not profitable for him, rather the contrary. Thus whoever wish to choose for themselves one similar, such as the proud a proud man, the avaricious an avaricious man, the dissolute a dissolute man. Therefore although the election ought to be free, however it ought to be discrete and not odious to God, Josh. 24[:15]: “You have your choice: choose this day that which pleases you, whom you would rather serve … but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord,” that is, that one who is more conformable to God.

Third, in an election let there be truth so that there be renown of the one to be chosen, for, some would rather choose persons unknown than known. Therefore, it happens for some just as the frogs[[16]](#endnote-16) who for their importunity rather chose for themselves a stork as a king than a frog, and for the lark they would rather choose a buzzard than a lark. Therefore it is said in Deut. 17[:15-17]: “You shall set him whom the Lord your God shall choose out of the number of your brethren,” etc., up to “immense sums.”

Fourth, unity is required, Osee 1[:11]: “The children of Israel shall be gathered together: and they shall appoint themselves one head.” Thus one that has that head is not headless because such a body would be monstrous.

¶ Again, the one to be chosen ought not to be crafty, [1 Cor. 1:26: “not many] wise,” lest perchance they fall into dishonesty with Juda, John 6[:71]: “Have not I chosen you twelve; and one of you is a devil?”

¶ Again, neither of their own accord thrusting themselves in, 1 Paral. 15[:11] it is said about Aminadab, brother of David, the Lord did not choose this one, lest perchance through disobedience he would fall in with Saul, who before was good, 1 Kings 9[:2]. Again, neither ambitious nor unleavened, Psal. [77:67]: “He chose not the tribe of Ephraim,” lest by chance they would fall into pride, just as happens concerning many superiors, Exod. 15[:4]: “His chosen captains are drowned in the Red Sea.”

¶ In the business of election two things should be considered: the result of the election and the condition of the one to be elected. The election of the pope ought to be virtuous because it ought to take place by some freedom of the spirit, so that in it there is no ambition for oneself, no carnal affection, no odious machination, but the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Act. 1[:24]: “You, Lord, who knows the hearts of all men, show whom you have chosen.” The condition of this elect ought to be agreeable, because he ought to be preeminent in virtues, just as was prefigured in Saul, 1 Kings 9[:2], because he was preeminent of the rest of the people and “from his shoulders and upward,” because in three things. In discerning in wisdom, in living in holiness, and in ruling with authority.

¶ Therefore in this act, three things ought to concur: right intention, canonical form, suitable harmony. Right intention is first, to elect one ideal to the glorification of God, to the conservation of the church, to the reformation of subordinates, and to the edification of the people. But three things sometimes impede this rectitude: ambitious appetite for himself, carnal affection for one’s neighbor, a remiss neglect for God.

¶ As far as the second which is the canonical form, it is to be known that first elections are to be known through signs, just as is evident in the election of Saul and David, Michi and Ambrose, then through lots with a prayer before, as is evident in Act. 1[:24]: “You, Lord, who knows the hearts of all men,” etc. But lots are abolished on account of frauds which can happen. The church provides from the fourfold form which happens through the scrutiny of inspiration or through the arbitration of compromise which three are treated in that decretal, Extra, *De electione [et electi potestate]*, c. *Quia propter.[[17]](#endnote-17)*

¶ And the fourth way is through the office of the overseer and making a superior if it were necessary. Necessity is proved by the public persons apt in dignities to elect lest to them common justice be committed to their partial affects be corrupted. Wherefore Solinus[[18]](#endnote-18) narrates that it was a custom among the Jews that no one having friends be elected, no one should nourish his own and despise others. Wherefore Augustine in *Questionibus Orosii*,[[19]](#endnote-19) the last question, that one should know he was sent by God who does not seek the office. Psal. [14:5]: Let it be “he that has not put out his money” so that he may acquire the episcopal honor. Of such a kind he ought to be elected as is evident in Gen. 41[:14]: Joseph was 30 years old when he first stood before Pharaoh. And Christ was 30 years old when he first preached, Luke 3[:23]. And when Saul first reigned, 1 Kings 13[:1]. And Ezechiel [1:3] when he first prophesied.

¶ Again, according to Seneca, book three, declamation 3,[[20]](#endnote-20) the law was among that Romans when the son was thirty years old, he divided the patrimony of his father.

¶ Again, note that that those Cherubim which Moses placed in the tabernacle by the command of the Lord had their faces turned to propitiation, Exod. 25[:18]. But those which King Solomon placed in the temple had their faces turned to the exterior of the house. For, 2 Paral. 3[:13], in figure when those which were placed by God sought propitiation of sins; those which truly were placed by man or by human diligence seek exterior things.

1. Pseudo-Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Matthaeum* Homilia 7 ex cap. 4 (PG 56:674): Et elegit eos, non quasi apostolos, sed quia apostoli poteranht fieri. Sicut art ifex si viderit gemmas pretiosas, et non dolatas, elegit illas, non quod sint, set quod fieri possunt; habens enim scientiam artis, bonum incompositum non contemnit: sic et Dominus videns illos, non opera eorum elegit, sed corda. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Decretales, X.1.6.18. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.2.5 (PL 82:434): Cum genuerint catulum, tribus diebus et tribus noctibus catulus dormire fertur; tunc deinde patris fremitu, vel rugitu veluti tremefactus cubilis locus, suscitare dicitur catulum dormientem.

When they give birth to a cub, it is thought to sleep for three days and nights, until the place where it sleeps is shaken by the roar of the father, which wakes it.

Cf. *Questiones in Genesin,* 31.18 (PL 83:279): Quod vero addidit, et ut catulus leonis, inde enim mortuus, unde et natus. Physici autem de catulo leonis scribunt, quod cum natus fuerit, tribus diebus et tribus noctibus dormit. Tunc deinde patris fremitu, vel rugitu, veluti tremefactus cubilis locus, suscitare dicitur catulum dormientem. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Bernard, cf. Gaufridus of Clairvaux, *Declamationes de Colloquio Simonis cum Jesu,* *Ex S. Bernardi sermonibus collectae* 13.14 (PL 184:445): Alius undique circuit sedulus explorator, blanditur, obsequitur, simulat et dissimulat, miseraque sibi suffragia mendicare non erubescit, manibus et pedibus repens, si quo modo tandem aliquando sese ingerere queat in patrimonium Crucifixi et bona Domini, quae sola ex omnibus hodie inveniuntur exposita. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.6.21 (PL 82:453): Hippopotamus vocatus, quod sit equo similis dorso, juba et hinnitu, rostro resupinato, aprinis dentibus, cauda tortuosa (ungulis bifidis). Die in aquis commoratur; nocte segetes depascitur, et hunc Nilus gignit. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Bernard, *De consideratione* 4.2.5 (PL 182:775): Vides omnem ecclesiasticum zelum fervere sola pro dignitate tuenda. Honori totum datur, sanctitati nihil, aut parum. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 6.1 558b22-27 (Barnes 1:880): Some birds are prolific, and prolific in either of two ways-either by laying often, as the pigeon, or by laying many eggs at a sitting, as the barn-door hen. All birds of prey, or birds with crooked talons, are unprolific, except the kestrel: this bird is the most prolific of birds of prey; as many as four eggs have been observed in the nest, and occasionally it lays even more. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.2.9 (PL 82:435): Nam cum in utero matris coaluere catuli, maturisque ad nascendum viribus pollent, odiunt temporum moras. Itaque oneratam fetibus vulvam tanquam obstantem partui unguibus lacerant, effundit illa partum, seu potius dimittit, dolore cogente. Ita postea corruptis et cicatricosis sedibus genitale semen infusum non haeret acceptum, sed irritum resilit. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.4.10 (PL 82:443): Vipera dicta, quod vi pariat. Nam cum venter ejus ad partum ingemuerit, catuli non exspectantes naturae maturam solutionem, corrosis ejus lateribus, vi erumpunt cum matris interitu. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Jerome, *Epistola* 123.13 (PL 22:1055): Quid loquar de Thamar, quae Zaram, et Pharez geminos fudit infantes? In quorum nativitate divisa maceria, duos populos separavit: et ligata manus coccino, conscientiam Judaeorum jam tunc Christi passione respersit. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. *Ysopet-Avionnet: The Latin and French Texts,* 62.19, ed. Kenneth McKenzie and William A. Oldfather (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1919), p. 191: Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Horace, *Art of Poetry* 139, (LCL 194:462): Parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Codex Justinianus, 1.3.30 Corpus Juris Civilis 2:22: Si quemquem vel in hac urbe regia vel in ceteris provinciis, quae toto orbe diffusae sunt, ad episcopatus gradum provehi deo auctore contigerit, puris hominum mentibus nuda electionis conscientia sincero omnium iudicio proferatur. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Isidore, *Sententiarum,* 3.34.3 (PL 83:706): Qui regimen sacerdotii contendit appetere, ante se discutiat si vita honori sit congrua; quod si non discrepat, humiliter ad id quod vocatur accedat. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Cassiodorus, cf. Alcuin, *De divinis officiis liber* 36 (PL 101:1236): Sicut enim illa turris caeteras domos excellebat, sic episcoporum et presbyterorum vita debet excellere vitam subjectorum: et sicut ille speculator nuntiabat adventum hostis, ut se praeviderent cives, sic episcopi et presbyteri debent annuntiare populis sibi subjectis adventum nequissimi hostis diaboli, ut se praevideant, ne ejus laqueo capiantur. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Cf. Aesop’s Fables # 44: Ranae olim clamore magno regem petierunt a Iove. Ridet Pater Deorum atque magnum truncum e caelo in paludem deiicit. Subito motu aquarum sonoque perterritae, mergunt et latent in limo. Forte una profert e stagno caput et, explorato rege, cunctas evocat. Illae, timore posito, adnatant; mox petulans turba in truncum insilit. Alium regem postulant, quoniam inutilis esset qui fuerat datus. Tum Iuppiter misit ciconiam. Ea uno die magnum ranarum numerum dilacerat, iugulat, vivas alias devorat. Reliquae, mersae, lugent, flent, orant ut ab hac calamitate liberentur. Sed Deum non movent querelae ac lacrimae. “Benignum,” inquit, “et placidum regem non tulistis; iam ferum et barbarum fertote!”

https://fablesofaesop.com/the-frogs-pick-a-king.html [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Decretales, X.1.6.42. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Solinus, cf. Ephesians 5:29: For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, as also Christ doth the church [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Orosius, *Ad Augustinum consultatio* 4 (PL 31:1216): remedia proferenda te electum, me missum esse cognoscerem. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 3.3 (LCL 463:398-399): Cum tricenario filio pater patrimonium dividat.

When a son reaches the age of thirty, his father must divide his property with him. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)