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Eduardo Echeverria, *Divine Election: A Catholic Orientation in Dogmatic and Ecumenical Perspective* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 322 pp., \$37.00, paperback (ISBN 978-1-62-564992-8).

In this historical and systematic-theological work Echeverria discusses the doctrine of election within the boundaries of Tridentine orthodoxy. He is inspired not only by such Catholics as Matthias Joseph Scheeben and Hans Urs von Balthasar but also by Reformed theologians: John Calvin, Herman Bavinck, Karl Barth, and Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer, devoting a chapter to each of these discussion partners. The discussion with the Reformed understanding of election from an orthodox Catholic perspective makes this book fascinating.

Where the discussion leads to harmonizing claims, the book is less convincing, however. For instance, Echeverria claims that Karl Barth sides with Trent's rejection of the heresy of double predestination (26). Though the work is primarily systematic-theological, one would expect a more historical approach to the sources. The authors' views are presented as eternal truths rather than explained from the historical contexts.

The book still offers many helpful insights, including the tentative analysis that Calvin is a soft determinist, at least in his view on humankind before the fall. This is one of the most problematic aspects of Calvin's theology, because the Reformer is far from consistent and clear in his views on human freedom. Ultimately the issue is about the doctrine of God and not anthropology, as Calvin expresses that God's will is "the cause of all things that are. For if it has any cause, something must precede it, to which it is, as it were, bound" (*Institutes* 3.23.2). It is a pity that exactly this quote in the book is incorrect, because Echeverria deletes the essential phrase that any external cause would bind God (11). If God's will or sovereign good pleasure is bound to his foreknowledge of something external, then God is determined by this foreknowledge.

This ties in immediately with the *status quaestionis* discussed in this book, namely, whether or not the efficaciousness of grace ultimately depends on human consent, the traditional point of disagreement between Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Arminians on the one hand and the Reformed on the other hand.

Echeverria explains that he finds the Reformed view problematic because (a) it excludes the liberty of fallen human beings to choose between good and evil, and (b) it implies a double predestination, which even in its softest forms essentially parallels election and rejection or reprobation and makes God the author of sin. Reformed theology has dealt with both issues by redefining true human freedom and by highlighting the essential difference between election and reprobation, but apparently this is not convincing for the author.

Instead he adheres to the opposite view, namely, that salvation ultimately depends also on human consent. Echeverria tries hard to soften that dependence of God's saving grace on human beings, and time and again he rejects Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism, turning to the sixteenth-century theories of middle knowledge (Molinism) and *concursus* (congruism) to give a very sophisticated account of how God's knowledge relates to human freedom after all.

There is little in his account that is incompatible with the Reformed perspective. Indeed, God knows how any possible rational being would freely act in any possible situation. God does not force the human will against its inclination, but concurs with it. We are not pieces of wood and stone.

In Echeverria's view, however, sufficient grace becomes efficient, not only by the assent of the free will, which would be Pelagianism, but also by the foreordained circumstances under which God surely foreknows that the individual will believe. The problem is that his 'not only, but also' can be turned around: the difference lies not only in the congruity of grace and circumstances, but also in the assent of the free will. Even that is fine from the perspective of the Reformed doctrines of grace, provided that this consent of the free will is the infallible effect of the efficient grace of God and that it thus is impossible for the elect not to believe.

But that Reformed understanding of what Echeverria calls 'Molinism cum Congruism' is incompatible with Trent. The Decrees of Trent and the Canons of Dort simply exclude each other. The underlying difference is also a matter of spirituality. The sophisticated solution of Echeverria, however sympathetic it may be, still leaves a Reformed Christian with the uneasy feeling that salvation is unattainable because it ultimately depends on the human consent that can never be expected from rebellious sinners.

However interesting and historically and confessionally important these discussions might be, the question regarding their relevance is legitimate in the present cultural situation. There is very much on which orthodox Roman Catholics and orthodox Reformed Catholics agree. Probably they should combine forces in showing how human liberty depends on God our Creator in a materialistic and naturalistic culture that seems to exclude such liberty because "we are our brains."

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