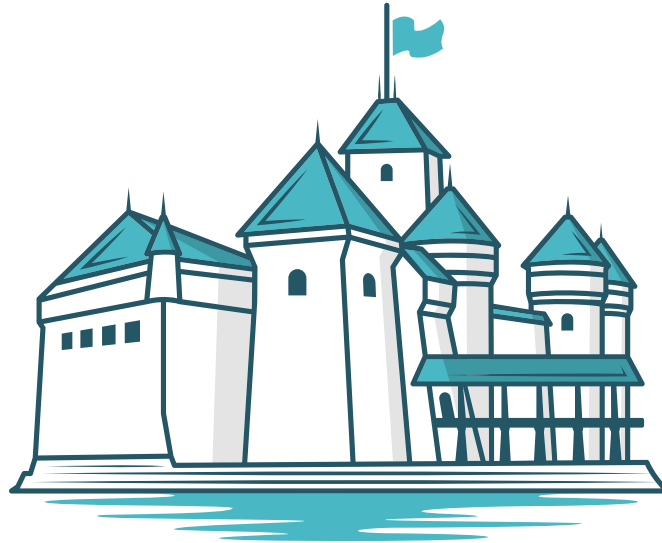




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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.
—Psalm 27:5*

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Thus was all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation finished: and the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did they. And they brought the tabernacle unto Moses, the tent, and all his furniture, his taches, his boards, his bars, and his pillars, and his sockets, and the covering of rams' skins dyed red, and the covering of badgers' skins, and the vail of the covering, the ark of the testimony, and the staves thereof, and the mercy seat, the table, and all the vessels thereof, and the shewbread, the pure candlestick, with the lamps thereof, even with the lamps to be set in order, and all the vessels thereof, and the oil for light, and the golden altar, and the anointing oil, and the sweet incense, and the hanging for the tabernacle door, the brasen altar, and his grate of brass, his staves, and all his vessels, the laver and his foot, the hangings of the court, his pillars, and his sockets, and the hanging for the court gate, his cords, and his pins, and all the vessels of the service of the tabernacle, for the tent of the congregation, the cloths of service to do service in the holy place, and the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and his sons' garments, to minister in the priest's office. According to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so the children of Israel made all the work. And Moses did look upon all the work, and, behold, they had done it as the LORD had commanded, even so had they done it: and Moses blessed them.

—Exodus 39:32–43

Moses Blessed Them

Finally, the work of the tabernacle was finished. For the last ten months, Israel had been encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai. For the last seven months, Bezaleel and Aholiab and all the wise-hearted men and women of Israel had been laboring to build the various parts of the tabernacle and its furniture and to fashion the garments of the high priest and the other priests. Now all the cutting, fitting, joining, gilding, sewing, dyeing, embroidering, and engraving were finished. The children of Israel brought the completed materials to Moses.

What a wealth of material they presented! Great rolls of beautiful fabrics; stack upon stack of heavy, gleaming silver footings; lustrous golden furniture and an imposing brazen altar; pristine and costly garments; great gilded pillars for the tabernacle's interior and great silver-banded pillars of dark acacia wood for the court; fragrant oil and incense; cords and hooks and pins and all manner of connectors; pans and censers and plates and

all manner of serving-ware. The list of materials staggers the imagination. All this the children of Israel brought to Moses for him to inspect.

Oh yes, Moses must inspect the material in all its minute detail. God had told Moses, "See... that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount" (Heb. 8:5). Now "Moses did look upon all the work" (Ex. 39:43) to see to it that it had been done as God had instructed. No detail must be left unexamined, for all must be done according to the ordinance of the Lord. And what did Moses find in his inspection? "Behold, they had done it as the LORD had commanded, even so had they done it" (v. 43).

Having found all the materials of the tabernacle to be in order, Moses blessed the children of Israel. What unfathomable grace of God there is in Moses' blessing of the children of Israel! For a blessing is a good word that bestows good things from the good God. For example, when the Levites blessed the people, God bestowed upon the people that

which the words of the blessing said: “The LORD bless thee, and keep thee” (Num. 6:24). Or when the apostle blessed the church, Christ bestowed upon his bride that which was spoken: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (II Cor. 13:14). So also Moses blessed the children of Israel, and they were blessed indeed! On behalf of the God who dwelled among them, Moses declared to the children of Israel the rich gifts of salvation that their God graciously would lavish upon them.

But what was the content of Moses’ blessing upon the children of Israel? Ah, that we know as well, and it is wonderfully comforting for the true Israel of God in our wilderness. We know the content of Moses’ blessing upon Israel because we know the content of Moses’ prayer for Israel. Psalm 90 is “A Prayer of Moses the man of God” (heading). What was the significance of all the pieces of God’s dwelling place spread before Moses? “LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations” (Ps. 90:1). How could the pieces of God’s dwelling place that the children of Israel had made be established? “Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it” (v. 17).

What a gracious prayer! What a gracious blessing! For the people about whom Moses prayed were the greatest sinners on earth. We, who are the fulfillment of Israel, are the greatest sinners on earth!

Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. (Ps. 90:8–9)

Moses’ blessing of the children of Israel was not due to the people’s work. Far from it! Moses blessed sinners. Moses blessed those who deserved to perish under the consuming wrath of God. But God is gracious and merciful and longsuffering. In his everlasting grace God did not send Moses to curse his people but to bless them! And God sent Moses to bless them with the richest declaration of his covenant fellowship: God was Israel’s dwelling place in all generations, and God would establish his house among them.

How could God bless such sinful people as Israel? How can he bless such sinful people as us? In his mercy. Which is to say, in Jesus Christ. “O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days” (Ps. 90:14). In his everlasting mercy he chose his elect people in Jesus Christ. In his everlasting mercy he promised his elect people Jesus Christ. In his everlasting mercy he sent Jesus Christ in the fullness of time. In his everlasting mercy he cursed Jesus Christ for the sins of his people. In his everlasting mercy he raised Jesus Christ from the dead as the infallible testimony of his people’s righteousness. In his everlasting mercy he blesses his people with the blessing of Jesus Christ. And in his everlasting mercy he comes in all his gracious beauty to dwell with his people and to make himself their eternal abode. In Jesus Christ God’s people are blessed indeed!

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations...Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it. (Ps. 90:1, 16–17)

“And Moses blessed them” (Ex. 39:43).

—AL



REFORMATION DAY LECTURE

MARTIN LUTHER'S "Theology of the Cross"

Friday, October 30, 2026 · 7:00 p.m.

Martin Luther is most remembered for his 95 Theses, nailed to the church door in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. But though his 95 Theses may be Luther's most famous contribution to the Reformation, he made his most profound contribution six months later at the Heidelberg Disputation on April 26, 1518. With the eyes of Europe and the church upon him to see if he would soften his 95 Theses, Luther ran even further into the Reformation with his "Theology of the Cross." It electrified the audience. Not only did Luther not soften his 95 Theses, but he advanced beyond them by leaps and bounds. Luther's "Theology of the Cross" was unlike anything the wisdom of man had heard before. Europe staggered; the church was scandalized; the best and brightest men mobilized against it. Still today, Luther's "Theology of the Cross" appears to be great folly to the wisdom of man. Ah, yes—it appears to be great folly to the wisdom of man; but the "Theology of the Cross" is a sweet comfort to the mind of faith. For the "Theology of the Cross" is simply the gospel of our Savior applied to the doctrine and life of his church.

What is Luther's "Theology of the Cross"? It is not so much a doctrine to be set alongside other doctrines. Rather, the "Theology of the Cross" is a way of thinking. It is the way for faith to think like God and not like man. For God did not glorify himself in the palace of a king but in the sweat and blood and death and curse and scandal of the cross. When the church grasps this by faith, then she understands all of theology and all of life.

This Reformation Day weekend, we would be very pleased if you would join us for a lecture on Martin Luther's "Theology of the Cross."

DATE	Friday, October 30, 2026
TIME	7:00 p.m.
SPEAKER	Rev. Andrew Lanning
TOPIC	Martin Luther's "Theology of the Cross"
PROGRAM	Lecture, followed by Q&A and refreshments
VENUE	Pavilion Christian School 9181 Kenowa Ave. SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49534
HOST	Remnant Reformed Church

HOSTED BY REMNANT REFORMED CHURCH
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BOOK REVIEW

Reformed Theology, volume 1. David J. Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2026. 444 pages, hardcover, \$59.95. [Reviewed by Rev. Andrew Lanning]

More on Infralapsarianism and Supralapsarianism

At the risk of belaboring the point—this review of Professor Engelsma’s position might be more words than Engelsma wrote in *Reformed Theology* about his position—there is one more thing that we could say yet about the debate between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism.¹ Engelsma’s concern in his new presentation of the logical order of God’s decrees is that God be known as gracious in election and righteous in reprobation.

Of supralapsarianism, a weakness is that it has God electing and reprobating men who appear in the decree as unfallen, as sinless. This detracts from the grace of election and has God hating unfallen men—contrary to all Scripture...

Reformed ministers today must preach neither traditional supralapsarianism nor traditional infralapsarianism, but Scripture on the primacy of Christ and on the election of grace, as well as the reprobation of those who appear in the counsel as guilty sinners. (202)

But in response to Engelsma’s concern, is God’s grace only truly gracious in the face of sin? And is God’s righteous condemnation only truly righteous in the face of sin? Is not, rather, God’s showing mercy to whom he will gracious exactly because God *willed* to show them mercy? And is not God’s righteous condemnation of whom he will righteous exactly because God *willed* to harden them? In other words, the graciousness or the righteousness of the decree does not rest in the objects of the decree but in the subject of the decree. To say the same thing, the graciousness or the righteousness of the

decree does not rest in the character of the clay but in the will of the potter. When the sovereign potter wills to make out of the same clay some vessels of mercy and some vessels of wrath, has not the potter been gracious to the vessels of mercy and righteous to the vessels of wrath? The potter’s grace or righteousness does not also require that the clay first be sinful clay, does it?

These questions amount to a criticism of Engelsma’s position in *Reformed Theology*, but it is a reserved criticism. The matters we are dealing with are the deep things of God, and we may go only so far as we are given in the scriptures by the illumination of the Spirit. In the scriptures Christ is first in God’s counsel, as Engelsma says: “He is the Elect” (203). Amen and amen! Also in the scriptures the sheer sovereignty of God in making of one lump vessels unto honor makes known his gracious riches, while the sheer sovereignty of God in making of the same lump vessels unto dishonor makes known his righteous wrath. Hoeksema’s super-supralapsarianism (or Christoproterianism) does not have to be rejected as if it compromised God’s gracious election or righteous reprobation. In fact, there are probably more answers than any of us have yet grasped in what Hoeksema calls his “organic conception of things.”

But we would like to modify this supralapsarian view in such a way that it is in harmony with our organic conception of things. We must emphasize not so much what is first or last in the decree of God, but rather place ourselves before the questions: What in those decrees is conceived as purpose and what as means? What is the main object in those decrees, and what is subordinate and subservient to that main object?²

¹ See Andrew Lanning, review of *Reformed Theology*, volume 1, by David J. Engelsma, *Reformed Pavilion* 4, no. 24 (September 19, 2026): 7–10.

² Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 1:236.

But that is as deep as I am able to swim at present. The Spirit has the last word in this discussion. May he illuminate us to understand.

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory? (Rom. 9:21–23)

Engelsma's Stirring Decretal Theology

Engelsma's discussion of infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism is part of his larger treatment of God's counsel. Engelsma's treatment of God's counsel is a stirring section of *Reformed Theology* (189–204). In a passage that is at the same time a rousing call to arms and a balm of comfort for the believer, Engelsma stands fast in the matter of decretal theology. The term *decretal theology* describes that method of theology that understands all doctrine in the light of God's eternal decrees. Decretal theology does not merely teach that all things in the church and in the universe have their source in God's decree, which is true; but decretal theology especially seeks to "do theology"—understand doctrine, explain doctrine, and defend doctrine—in the light of God's decree and from the point of view of God's sovereign counsel. For example, non-decretal theology might view the fall of Adam as a great tragedy that spoiled God's glorious creation and required God to try to salvage something through Jesus Christ. But decretal theology views the fall of Adam as part of God's eternal purpose to glorify himself in Christ. Although the fall of Adam was tremendously wicked on the part of man, it was no tragedy to God. In fact, God decreed the fall! In fact, God governed the fall! And that without God's being the author of the sin of the fall. For God's eternal will and purpose had always been the salvation of his elect church through the unfathomably deep way of sin and grace; that is, God's will and purpose had always been the eternally deep way of Jesus Christ. Readers

of *Reformed Pavilion* might be familiar with the term *election theology*, which has been used among us in recent years in the same sense as the older term *decretal theology*.

Decretal theology is under attack. Attacks on decretal theology pay lip service to the fact that God is a decreeing God, but they minimize the importance and efficacy of God's decree and elevate the importance and efficacy of man's work and responsibility. God may have his decree, but the important thing for salvation is what man will do.

Decretal theology is often slandered as being a form of rationalism. That is, the opponents of decretal theology claim that instead of following God's revelation in scripture, decretal theology imposes man's reason on God's word. Supposedly, decretal theology takes God's counsel as its starting point and then, heedless of what scripture says, proceeds to deduce all other doctrines from its arbitrary starting point. This slander is often unleashed against decretal theology when its opponents are teaching Arminian conditions. For example, the doctrine of the well-meant offer of the gospel teaches that God wills the damnation of the reprobate but at the same time wills the salvation of the reprobate on the condition that they accept the gospel. When decretal theology points out that the well-meant offer divides God between two wills, Arminian theology cries out, "Rationalism!"

Decretal theology is also sometimes slandered as being a form of Gnosticism. Gnosticism is that philosophy that claims that long before an evil god created the world, there was an eternal emanation of good beings called eons. The task of man on this earth is to discover the secret knowledge of these eons, which will allow him to return to them by ascending above this evil world and its evil god. The opponents of decretal theology claim that decretal theology shares the same morbid fascination with what God was doing in eternity as the Gnostics have with the eternal emanation of the eons. The slander continues that, rather than dealing with what God requires in time and history, decretal theology chases the secret knowledge of the eternal. This slander is unleashed against decretal theology

when its opponents are teaching Arminian conditions. For example, there is the popular teaching that man's prior activities and works are the means of God's subsequent activity of forgiving man's sin. When decretal theology points out that man's works do not justify him because the elects' sins were already entirely forgiven in Christ in eternity, Arminian theology cries out, "Gnosticism!" and "Secret knowledge!"

The charge that decretal theology is either rationalism or Gnosticism is a slander. Decretal theology does not ignore scripture, nor does it chase the secrets that God has not revealed in his word. Rather, decretal theology alone is faithful to scripture. For the great truth of the scriptures is that God is God. The great truth of the scriptures is that God is sovereign over all things in heaven and on earth. From beginning to end scripture testifies of God's sovereignty. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away" (Rev. 20:11). Scripture reveals that all that happens in this world has its source in the sovereign God's eternal counsel and good pleasure. "Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3). God's eternal will and good pleasure is not a rationalistic, Gnostic, arbitrary starting point for theology. Rather, God's eternal good pleasure is the scripture's starting point for theology. "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

And now behold what is the heart and kernel of God's eternal will and good pleasure: Jesus Christ! Jesus is "the firstborn of every creature" (Col. 1:15). All things were created "for him" (v. 16). Jesus "is before all things, and by him all things consist" (v. 17). Jesus "is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (v. 18). And why? Because of God's eternal counsel and good pleasure! "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (v. 19).

No, decretal theology is not an arbitrary, rationalistic, scripture-ignoring, Gnostic theology. Rather, decretal theology is scripture's theology!

And decretal theology sees all the truth in the light of Jesus Christ, the eternal will and good pleasure of God!

In *Reformed Theology* Engelsma takes the field to defend decretal theology against its many opponents. In defending decretal theology Engelsma mans a lonely post, for some of the sharpest critics of decretal theology are in the Reformed camp. About "God's counsel, centrally God's counsel of predestination," Engelsma writes,

This aspect of theology sets Reformed theology apart from Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Arminian evangelicalism. At this point, too, the apostatizing Reformed churches manifest their unfaithfulness to the truth of God. I do not now refer to this or that error regarding predestination, but to the rejection of "decretal theology" itself. (189–90)

Over against the rejection of decretal theology, Engelsma expounds this grand view of Psalm 115:3:

History depends upon God's counsel, and upon God's counsel alone: "He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." This confession of the counsel of God sounds the death knell of Arminian theology, according to which God does in the work of salvation whatsoever the sinner himself pleases. The context of this verse distinguishes the true God from idols exactly in this, that whereas God carries out his counsel, idols lack an active, sovereign counsel, but are dependent upon their human maker. (191)

And because God is sovereign, his counsel is also sovereign and unconditional. "As sovereign, God's counsel is unconditional. Neither in whole nor in any part does it depend upon man" (192).

In defending decretal theology Engelsma may man a lonely post. But decretal theology is the truth of the word of God, and one is never truly alone when he stands upon the truth. And, as Engelsma resoundingly reminds his readers, decretal theology is the position of the Reformed confessions. Let the child of God hear decretal theology's call to arms, and let him be comforted in its gospel.

Knowledge of the counsel by the church is significant. This knowledge glorifies God. It comforts the church in the turmoil and especially persecution of the present age... “Decretal theology” is under fierce attack within the Reformed churches today, but this is the doctrine of the Reformed creeds. (192)

Engelsma on Hoeksema’s Decretal Theology

Engelsma learned his decretal theology from Herman Hoeksema, as Engelsma readily acknowledges regarding all his theology in the opening words of his book.

I acknowledge my indebtedness in this work of dogmatics to Herman Hoeksema (1886–1965). This becomes evident, not only in the numerous quotations from his *Reformed Dogmatics*, but also in the overall content of these volumes. This indebtedness is not only due to my having studied under Hoeksema at the Protestant Reformed Seminary for three years, but also to my considered judgment that the Reformed theology of Hoeksema is sound, that it is for the most part the doctrine of holy Scripture and the Reformed creeds, and that it is the great need of Reformed churches in the twenty-first century. (xi)

In setting forth his decretal theology, Engelsma makes two comments on Hoeksema’s decretal theology that are noteworthy. First, Engelsma calls attention to Hoeksema’s contention that all things that God has decreed are real and substantial in God’s decree. That is, God’s decree is not a lifeless blueprint of the things that shall someday be real in time and history; rather, all things eternally exist and are real in God’s decree. Yes, the things of God’s decree are also revealed in the unfolding of history; but the unfolding of history is only the revelation of those things that already exist as real in God’s eternal counsel. In concrete terms, this means that Jesus was crucified in eternity in God’s counsel and that the sins of God’s people have been eternally forgiven in his blood. Yes, the cross was planted on Calvary; but the Lamb was

slain from the foundation of the world. Engelsma judges Hoeksema’s contention to be biblical.

Worth considering is the actual reality of all things decreed by virtue of being decreed. This is the insistence of Hoeksema in his definition: “The counsel of God is the eternal reality of all things in God’s conception.” This is biblical: “The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). This comes out in Hoeksema’s definition of the counsel: “Of which the creatures are *but* the revelation in time and space” (emphasis mine [DJE]). (190)

What makes this passage striking is that Engelsma and Hoeksema carried on a friendly debate throughout the years about the reality of the things in God’s counsel. Hoeksema stated his position this way: God’s counsel is more real than history. Engelsma countered this way: but the cross was nevertheless planted on Calvary. This friendly debate even became the final question from teacher Hoeksema to student Engelsma at Engelsma’s synodical examination prior to his graduation from seminary.³ Those who have heard about this exchange between the two great theologians of the Protestant Reformed Churches have likely pondered it at length. Is there a sense in which God’s counsel is more real than history? Or is history in every sense as real as God’s counsel? Or is it a mistake altogether to pit the reality of the one against that of the other? And what are the implications of taking this, that, or the next position?

However, in *Reformed Theology* Engelsma does not mention the friendly debate with his mentor. A dogmatics book would probably not be the right place to mention it, anyway. But Engelsma has also done his readers a favor by not allowing that debate to overshadow the fact that both he and Hoeksema are agreed that the decrees of God’s counsel have substance and reality simply by virtue of their being decreed. Both Hoeksema and Engelsma agree that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. And in that truth of the reality of the things decreed, there is a well of comfort for the child of God.

³ See David J. Engelsma, *I Remember Herman Hoeksema* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2020), 91–96.

For in the midst of all his loss and dying in this life, the child of God has the assurance that his glorification with Christ is as real and as accomplished as his present suffering with Christ. In the counsel of God, which is untouchable by any foe, the child of God is already predestinated, called, justified, and glorified (Rom. 8:29–30). Yes, the glorification of the child of God must yet be unfolded in time and history. But his glorification is nevertheless as certain as if it had already happened. For just as the Lamb of God is slain from the foundation of the world, so the child of God is glorified with the Lamb from the foundation of the world. This is no small comfort for the believer who awakens each day to his cross.

The second notable thing about Engelsma's treatment of Hoeksema's decretal theology is that Engelsma rightly criticizes Hoeksema's definition of election as a weak definition. Hoeksema was by no means weak on the doctrine of election. In fact, the slanderous charge against Hoeksema throughout his ministry was that he was too strong on the doctrine of election. For example, because Hoeksema taught God's particular grace for the elect alone and denied a supposed common grace for all men, the Christian Reformed Church said that Hoeksema was given to one-sidedness. No, Hoeksema was not weak on the doctrine of election. But, inexplicably and perplexingly, Hoeksema's definition of election in his *Reformed Dogmatics* is deficient. Though it contains much that is beautiful and true, it also leaves something out, as Engelsma points out:

Hoeksema gives, in my judgment, a weak definition of election:

Election may be defined as the eternal and sovereign decree of God to lead the church as the body of Christ, with all its individual members, each in his own position, to eternal salvation and glory.

In his definition there is no expression of choice or appointment. (193)

In place of Hoeksema's definition, Engelsma offers the definition of the Canons of Dordt in head 1, article 7. However, Engelsma rightly criticizes even this, not for its content but for the faulty English translation that we have.

This translation into English of the Latin original of Canons 1.7 is also erroneous. It has the article that defines election confessing that "redemption" is "in Christ," whereas the Latin original has election being "in Christ": *elegit in Christo*. (194)

Incidentally, Engelsma's comments in this passage have helped the undersigned see that the corrected translation of Canons 1.7 that appeared in *Reformed Pavilion* last year needs correction as well. After all is said and done, then, here is the Reformed definition of election:

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath chosen in Christ a definite number of particular persons to salvation.

(To be continued)

—AL

