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Election, Barth, and the French Connection, 2nd Edition: How Pierre Maury Gave a “Decisive Impetus” to Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Election

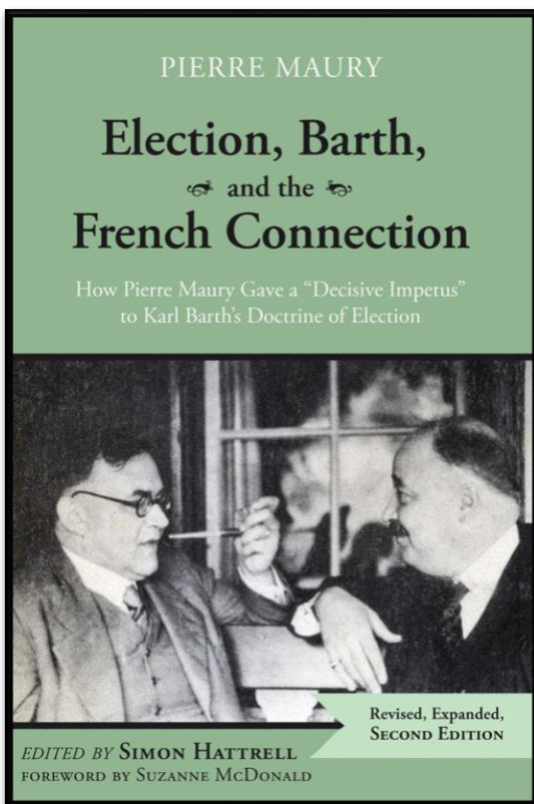
By Pierre Maury, Edited by Simon Hattrell

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New Title by Pierre Maury, Edited by Simon Hattrell
Election, Barth, and the French Connection, 2nd Edition: How Pierre Maury Gave a “Decisive Impetus” to Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Election



Karl Barth’s famous account of the doctrine of election in his mammoth Dogmatics has been described as the heart of his theology—a great hymn to the grace of God in Christ. Discover the person who initially stimulated Barth’s mammoth reworking of the “classical” view of the doctrine—pastor/theologian Pierre Maury (1890–1956). Their close friendship and especially a seminal paper Maury gave in 1936 entitled “Election and Faith” helped stimulate Barth’s reflection. Discover some never-before-translated works of Maury as well as a revision of a previously published piece on predestination. In this revised and expanded second edition, seven theologians reflect on the significance of these works for us today from historical, textual, pastoral, and theological standpoints, and seek to draw conclusions for us in our contemporary setting.

Simon Hattrell served as a missionary in France in the 1970s and 1980s, was Principal of the Tasmanian College of Ministries in Hobart, Tasmania, in the 1990s, and in his retirement has helped coordinate distance theological education and training for the Anglican Diocese of Tasmania.



1. Who was Pierre Maury?

A French Pastor/Theologian and brilliant preacher who served in the French armed forces in both world wars, a larger than life character, who left a huge mark on French Protestantism and the church world-wide. As you read you will discover Maury's theological friendship with Karl Barth. His personality and influence shine through. Barth credited this amazing man with giving him 'a decisive impetus' in his famous reconstruction of the doctrine of election. Many authors have taken into account Pierre Maury's seminal influence on Barth's doctrine of election, but in the English speaking world he is often neither known nor appreciated for who he was in his own right, despite the fact that he was awarded honorary doctorates by the universities of Budapest, St Andrews and Chicago.

See this brief overview of his life: <http://www.museeprotestant.org/en/notice/pierre-maury-1890-1956-2/>

2. Ever wondered what the connection between election and faith is?

The story of how an obscure French Pastor/Theologian, who greatly influenced Karl Barth, may not seem to be a particularly gripping read! This volume throws the spotlight on a paper given at a conference in Geneva in 1936, which has never been translated into English before. In Barth studies much has been made of the significance of Pierre Maury's paper on 'Election and faith'. It was hastily thrown together in a couple of days by a very busy Pastor/Preacher. It is astonishing how God can use an address on a thorny issue to stir a brilliant theologian to recast his approach to an issue that has dominated the theological landscape down through the centuries.

3. Pierre Maury asks what is the significance for our destiny of the sovereign precedence of God (the fact that he appears to consider some more important than others). Does this not irrevocably determine that destiny?

Grapple with this and more questions in this book. You may not find all the answers. After all, who has? In this collection of some of Maury's addresses and writings we discover what he gave to Barth not just in terms of a fresh insight into a Christological focus in the doctrine of election but to explore how an amazing friendship helped to foster a different approach to what has been described as a "vast dogmatic minefield". As Daniel Migliore in his *Faith Seeking Understanding*, (87, Eerdmans, 2004) said "Few doctrines in the history of Christian theology have been as misunderstood and distorted, and few have caused as much controversy and distress, as the doctrine of the eternal decrees of God, or double predestination." The three works of Pierre Maury in this book are outstanding examples of original, biblically-grounded exposition in the Reformed theological tradition, in which Maury seeks to be faithful to Calvin but is not bound by him.

Helmut Gollwitzer, whom Barth mentored, once echoed similar sentiments. He spoke of there being "no mistaking Barth's Reformed origin. He never conceals his particular gratitude to the much slandered and misunderstood Calvin. But it would be foolish for this reason to describe him as a Reformed or Calvinistic theologian in the narrower sense. Confessional definiteness does not mean confessional constriction".

See here a description of Barth's Calvin lectures as published by Eerdmans: <http://www.eerdmans.com/Products/0696/the-theology-of-john-calvin.aspx>

Barth said in the preface to CD III/4 that "Confessional traditions exist in order that we may go through them (not once but continually) but not in order that we may return to them and take up our abode in them".

4. Maury asks whether God chooses between his creatures. Can we solve this riddle of the universe?

Maury believed that "It is always difficult and it is also always a formidable task to speak of election, or predestination, or double predestination. It seems that we can only do it in order to defend it or attack it. Around it we see theological disputes, objections, indignations, and mockeries, or knowledgeable constructions of a far too humanly based logic. Concerning this subject, which evokes sovereign freedom, the incomprehensible mystery of God, all human freedoms confront each other, as well as all human wisdoms which assert themselves, and at the end of the day, not the ultimate decision without appeal, of the Lord, but the weak preferences of our reasonings. Considered thus, election is a labyrinth, as Calvin said, a labyrinth with no exit". Grapple with these issues in this collection of papers from a Pastor/Theologian, who left a huge mark on his generation. The accompanying seven interpretative essays will also help you engage with some of the most pertinent historical, theological, textual and pastoral issues in our contemporary setting.

5. Does God have favorites at the expense of others?

The Bible seems to say so. Pierre Maury says that this subject is strictly the mystery of God, that is the God whom no eye has seen, whom none can see without dying. He also asks 'what would we be able to say about a subject where it is our elusive reality that is at stake: that is to say, our human destiny, not as we see it, but such as is our lot, our ultimate reality, that which is beyond all explanations and which bears the true name of life or death? We did not give ourselves life nor will we be able to avoid death. We have not chosen to live; we cannot choose to not die. It is therefore not a question here of our choice, the one that we make, but the choice of which we are the object, that which is made (or not made) of us. These are those insurmountable limits, which are imposed on us, which election calls to mind. Because this is about God—and not the idea of God—because this is about us—and not our ideas, our feelings, even our theology—we would not know how to speak of election as just some other interesting topic of discussion. It is never something to satisfy our curiosity. As Calvin said, "The curious will find no way out of the labyrinth, they will only find an occasion for dread or blasphemy." And he adds that predestination is "a reason to worship, worship of the high wisdom of God more than understanding of things that God wanted to be hidden and of which he has withheld knowledge."

6. Are there those to whom God does not give preferential treatment?

Maury believed that we find ourselves in yet another classic impasse. God is not just if he does not treat everyone in the same way, if he does not respect the rights of man, which are the same for all. In other words, what is the significance of rejection, of damnation, in a doctrine of the God of love?

An Excerpt from *Election, Barth, and the French Connection, 2nd Edition: How Pierre Maury Gave a “Decisive Impetus” to Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Election*

Below is an extract from the revised translation of Maury’s 1936 paper Election and Faith.

.....Who else but he (God) could tell us that we really need election, that is to say, that we really are lost? When we look at ourselves, when we count up, by ourselves, our virtues and our failures, we would not know how to come up to such a rigorous standard, to the necessity of such a complete gift; we would still think we have some merit in the eyes of God. In Christ, that is to say, before his cross, there is only one truth, that is that he dies because of us. This is because we do not love God; this is the cause of our election, not we ourselves, because we too say: Here’s the heir, come on, let us kill him! Before the cross, before this sole place in the world, all virtues die, because we see clearly there that it is these virtues as much as vices which cause the death of the Holy and Righteous One. Before the cross we know—and we know it for ourselves—who are the elect and what election truly is: election of enemies of God, of the torturers of Christ. The elect will always be taken from among those who surround the cross, from amongst those who cry out “Crucify!” and amongst those who remained quiet, amongst those who did nothing, those who could do nothing. “It was necessary that the Son of Man be rejected.” Before the cross, too, we understand this paradox: the price of free election. For if election does not cost us anything, for God it cost his Son. For God to extend grace is to give everything, to give everything for us who cannot give him anything. There is in this word grace, which we often use very lightly, a frightening aspect. In the cross of Christ we find the mortal pains of the choice that God has made concerning us. Grace, the sheer gift of election, is the agony of Gethsemane; it is the suffering undergone right up to the harrowing cry, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” This is heaven closed. This is the Son who is no longer with the Father, because the Father is no longer with the Son. And this is, in heaven, the Father who has truly given his Son, totally abandoning him for us who had abandoned him to death. This is the night of the ninth hour. What does this darkness mean? Revelation says: punishment. And the Son believes it. Punishment, God’s wrath. The only one who will understand grace in election is the same one who understands that it is fulfilled in Christ dying, smitten by God, deserted by men. The only one who will understand how election extends grace is the one who, before the cross, does not come with arguments or with good works, with religious emotion or objections, but who stands there speechless because they have nothing to say, nothing to do, nothing to put forward. I know very well that it is not easy to trust. Here too, it is easier to argue or be unbelieving, easier to line up our questions or to say Was it really necessary for this substitution to take place? Let us put aside all these easy solutions so that this cross is not rendered powerless. All our denials will have no hope of changing the word of the Son of God himself: “The Son of man must be crucified!”

Praise for *Election, Barth, and the French Connection, 2nd Edition: How Pierre Maury Gave a “Decisive Impetus” to Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Election*

“It has been a delight to read, and equally, a joy to reflect on what is contained here. What Maury does so ably is to disempower and dismantle the idea of the absolute decree outside of, or apart from, Christ.”

—**John Rietveld, Christian Coaching Institute, Australia**

“This book will be a considerable service to those who find the work of Barth a source of endless inspiration and challenge. But it also puts before a wider theological public the opportunity for a second look at a doctrine far too readily consigned to the mistakes of Christian history.”

—**Christiaan Mostert, University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia**

“From where did Karl Barth ever get the outrageous idea that predestination is the sum and essence of the good news? One place is the work of the lesser-known French pastor-theologian Pierre Maury. This revised and expanded edition re-introduces readers of English to Maury’s fresh and stimulating thinking on this doctrine, and the accompanying essays helpfully locate the significance of such in Barth’s work, and invite fresh opportunities for doing theology after Barth.”

—**Jason Goroncy, University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia**

