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UNIO CUM CHRISTO®

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Currents in Reformed Theology



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Modern and Orthodox?

PAUL WELLS

It is beyond unfashionable today among young evangelicals involved in theology to aspire to orthodoxy. The famous statement made by Charles Hodge about old Princeton that “a new idea never originated in this seminary” is not something that appeals to bright young theologians, nor need it be taken at face value.¹ On the other hand, new, innovative, and adventurous ideas are top drawer, in line with the attitude of our day that the latest is the greatest, and the newest the best. Orthodoxy in theology, like conservatism in politics, is cold potatoes. But have we been sold down the river? The present popularity of Jordan Peterson on social media suggests a rising counter current.

In a year in which Karl Barth will be remembered fifty years after his death, and the Canons of Dort will be celebrated by the few on the fourth centenary of the European Synod held at Dordrecht in Holland in 1618–19, questions about orthodoxy and modernity are relevant. In particular, what about the legacy of Barth: was it a blessing or a curse, a renewal or a dismantling of historic Christianity? Opinions have been divided almost from the start in reply to this question, with Auguste Lecerf, Klaas Schilder, Louis Berkhof, and Cornelius Van Til on one side, and Pierre Maury, Thomas F. Torrance, Hendrikus Berkhof, and G. C. Berkouwer on the other. Nor is the question one that belongs to a past generation because of

¹ Hodge was not berating new ideas; far from it, as his successor Francis Patton pointed out. Hodge maintained that Princeton had not modified the great truths of Calvinism and the biblical certainty of the unchanging truth of God’s revelation, and this in contrast with the “new theologies” promoted at New Haven or Andover. Cf. Rudolph Nelson, *The Making and Unmaking of the Evangelical Mind: The Case of Edward Carnell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 42.

effervescence of interest and publications on Barth, stimulated by the like of Bruce McCormack, George Hunsinger, or the late John Webster. And so Barth continues to have magnetic attraction for young evangelicals who want to wear orthodoxy rather lightly and aspire to be on the cutting edge. James Barr stated a good while ago that Barthianism was an important theological bridge that allowed evangelicals to escape fundamentalism and cross over into mainstream.² Its perpetual attraction seems to lie in facilitating emigration to respectability from the boondocks. Today its kierkegaardian accents dovetail well with the ethos of the “post truth” generation.

Orthodox and Modern is how McCormack—incidentally Charles Hodge Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton and a leading Barth interpreter—entitles one of his books on the Basel theologian. His work is a fingerpost, and he states the problem quite well: “My own view is this,” he says in its introduction, “what Barth was doing, in the end, was seeking to understand what it means to be orthodox *under the conditions of modernity*.”³ In a previous work, McCormack indicated that Barth’s search was for a “critically realistic dialectical theology.”⁴ Can one be *critical* and *dialectical* while remaining *realistic*, *orthodox*, and Reformed to boot? The question stimulates great expectations that it is possible to be critical and dialectical in method, and at the same time maintain a theological realism (over against nominalism), orthodoxy, and Reformed doctrine. Barth’s criticisms of the Canons of Dort, Calvin’s doctrine of election, and the classical Reformed tradition illustrates that attempting to run with both the hare and the hounds may be a dialectic too far.

Questions of orthodoxy, particularly in a Reformed context, raise the issue of creeds and confessions and their status because the proper subject of theology is the church. Modernity can do little other than regard these ancient texts as “provisional statements” that are only “relatively binding” as to what constitutes orthodoxy. Orthodox teaching, says McCormack, is “that which conforms *perfectly* to the Word of God as attested in Holy Scripture.” Given that perfection is not of this world, “Dogma” for Barth, and his neo-orthodox disciples, is an eschatological concept, something unattainable, and “dogmas” as teachings pronounced by time-bound churches “are witnesses to *the* Dogma, and stand in a relation of greater or lesser approximation to it.”⁵

² James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1977), 213–34.

³ Bruce L. McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 17.

⁴ Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

⁵ McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 15–16.

Supposing that McCormack is articulating the Barthian position adequately, if not perfectly, three comments can be made. First, it might be doubted that orthodoxy ever made a pretense to conform *perfectly* to the Word of God. This introduces an uninvited quasi-mathematical condition, and one that has never been countenanced, into the act of confessing the faith. A creedal expression might be an adequate and acceptable analog of the Truth, without being *perfectly* so. In their linguistic expression, past statements may invite reformulation, but not because they are provisional or relative in their truth content. McCormack's provisionality rests on an exaggerated and abstract conception of perfection.

Secondly, we understand that *“the Dogma”* for Barthians is the living Word, the person of Christ himself, the Word of God, the second person of the Trinity. The incarnate Logos *ensarkos* is the only real revelation of God; the biblical witnesses, the prophets and apostles and their present actualizers in preaching, are not “revelation” in the strict sense, but spin-offs from it that may become revelatory. But it does not follow that it is enough to say that witnesses to *the Dogma* stand “in greater or lesser approximation” to it because even a greater approximation to *the Dogma* would not be true. The validity of witnesses in relation to *the Dogma* is a question of their truth or untruth, not one of approximation (which is not a biblical concept anyway). It is a modern fallacy to suppose that Truth as personal countermands truths about it.⁶

Finally, because confessions are only relatively binding, orthodoxy mutates rather than being a static fixed reality, as McCormack explains:

It would seem to be very hard to deny to anyone who affirms, as Barth does, the doctrine of the Trinity, a two-natures Christology, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection, the visible return of Christ, the immutability of God, and so on, the honorific⁷ of “orthodox.” And yet the issue is not quite so simple. The truth is that Barth has not simply taken over unchanged any doctrinal formulation of the ancient or the Reformation churches. He has reconstructed the whole of “orthodox” teaching from the ground up. It is not the case that he simply tinkered with the machinery.⁸

So Barth took the creeds seriously without following them slavishly, in “a confessionalism of the spirit and never of the letter.” With the aid of Kant and Hegel’s ontology, he was “willing to set forth an actualistic understanding

⁶ This is a consequence of what McCormack says elsewhere, that “Revelation is understood by Barth as an *act* of self-mediation in the execution of which God remains ontologically other than the chosen medium—and therefore hidden in it.” McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 12.

⁷ “Title” or something comparable seems to be missing here.

⁸ McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 16.

of divine and human being.”⁹ Now the question: If there is little doubt that Barth’s formulations are over the horizon from the letter of the classic confessions, how can it be demonstrated that they are compatible with their *spirit*, particularly when and if what Barth proposes runs in the face of what they say, and of biblical exegesis?¹⁰ And here is the problem: formally the words remain the same, but the content is “reconstructed” and becomes something different from the truth expressed in the confessions, “from the ground up.” At least this is a frank admission. The scarecrow is dressed up in an actualistic nineteenth-century frock coat with an idealistic German cut, but it is still a scarecrow. If we have doubts about its orthodoxy, we might equally entertain some questions about its modernity too, apart from the claim and the existentialistic dressing. In what sense can German idealistic thought forms from almost two centuries ago be claimed to be modern?

So runs McCormack’s apology for orthodoxy and modernity, but what was Barth trying to do? His intellectual achievement was enormous, unparalleled in twentieth-century theology, and the corpus of his work over sixty years is so vast that few can master it. Understandably, there are internal tensions and contradictions, and its recognized interpreters are not always agreed. With his “theology of crisis,” Barth dropped a bombshell on liberal theology and its progressive and ethical aspirations after the First World War, and he began reconstruction in the crater of the judgment of God left behind. He sought a way of appropriating the gospel that would challenge the assumptions of the liberalism of the Harnacks and create the conditions for the Word of God to confront conditions in a new world. It was a glorious project, an effort to put God’s act in Christ at the center again. However, in light of the admission that Barth changed “everything from the ground up,” the question remains, Was it orthodox in the sense of “right doctrine” and “right teaching,” and was it Reformed?

It therefore comes as no surprise that the Dort doctrine of election got the makeover treatment from Basel, with a little help from Barth’s friend Maury in Paris.¹¹ Over a few years around the start of the Second World War, after having written his main treatment of the doctrine of God, Barth

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ An illustration of the problem with regard to Chalcedon is found in McCormack’s “The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism,” in Bruce McCormack, ed., *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2008), 219–23. Cf. Michael A. Aiken, *Chalcedonian No More: A Reformed Critique of the Barthian Christology of Bruce L. McCormack* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015).

¹¹ McCormack, “Actuality of God,” 213, n. 59. Cf. Pierre Maury, *Predestination and Other Papers* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1960).

reformulated his doctrine of election in an existentialist sense. It is, as John Fesko states, “post-metaphysical, supralapsarian, christological (Christ as the subject and object of election) and universal.”¹² As the subject of election, Christ is the electing God, and as its object, Christ is the elect (and rejected) man.

A double consequence follows from the historicized wrap-up of election and rejection in Christ. First, it means that outside of Christ there is little worthwhile that can be said about God. Behind the incarnate Christ, there are no divine dealings or decrees of which Christ would be the simple executor. Because there is nothing other than this, Barth calls it the “primal decision.” In this decision, God’s grace is victorious, as all opposition is defeated with a resounding Yes. Nothingness, the menace of chaos against creation, the rebellion of sin and death, human knowledge, works for salvation, revelation apart from Christ, are all swept away, as well as any analogy between God and the world. In fact, in the primal decision in Christ, God decides to be the Trinitarian God who reveals himself in this act in Christ.¹³ It is “supralapsarian” because the Adam-Christ order is inverted, since man only exists because of the primal decision in Christ and for God’s grace. Reprobation is God’s judgment passed and ended in Christ, the chosen man. There may be hot debate over whether Barth was a through-and-through universalist, as were some of his disciples, such as Jacques Ellul. However, if Christ is the reprobate humanity in whom election is decided because of the triumph of God’s Yes, the consequence of universalism is difficult to avoid. If history is open-ended and the proclamation of the gospel is serious in light of man’s unbelief, then sin, evil, and reprobation are excluded “ontological impossibilities”; because of God’s decision for life, death is defeated in resurrection.

Secondly, if the formal vocabulary of theology is the same in appearance, everything of its content or “doctrine” is reconstructed in light of the decision of divine election.¹⁴ Berkouwer calls election “the central theme of Barth’s theology [coming] to expression in his triumphant and joyful doctrine” prior to the beginning of everything that is to be said about God’s dealings

¹² John V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2016), 197. Fesko’s analysis on pages 195–207 is well worth reading.

¹³ “Election is an event in God’s life in which he assigns to himself the being he will have for all eternity.” Bruce McCormack, “Grace and Being: The Role of God’s Gracious Election in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98, 100.

¹⁴ On this the reader can consult McCormack, “Grace and Being,” 92–110. Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 154–56.

with his creatures.¹⁵ Barth's perspective leads him into a position of opposition not only to Calvin, for Barth a lesser evil, but also to classical Reformed theology and Dort, a greater evil.¹⁶ The problem for Barth is not that Calvin and the Canons do not speak about election in Christ but that they do so insufficiently and in an abstract way. Christ is the "mirror of election," the mediator and executor of a preceding divine decree in which God sovereignly and freely decided, before the foundation of the world, to save some and not others. This deeper ground of election and reprobation behind the "in Christ" is where the decision was taken. The electing God of Calvin is a hidden God, and Christ is not the subject and the foundation of *election*, but is reduced to being simply the foundation of *salvation*, after the decision about election had been taken. The result of making Christ the executor of an absolute decree is to cause uncertainty, and it leads to a futile seeking of indications of our election in our experiences. For Barth, over against the theology of the hidden God, the foundation of election must be in Christ as the subject of election, in the concrete enactment and presentation of the divine decree, the incarnate Logos (*ensarkos*) in action.

McCormack points to the fact that over the matter of election Calvin and Barth are on a collision course, which does seem to be the case.¹⁷ Reformed orthodoxy and Barth are also on a collision course when Barth's doctrine of election strikes the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) out of God's eternal plan, as something which is behind Christ as the subject of election. This has all been extensively discussed and argued against elsewhere, and the point need not be belabored here.¹⁸

What is more important is that questions of the interpretation of Barth and Reformed theology are questions relating to the nature of the witness of Scripture. Calvin fully recognized that Ephesians 1:4–11 and other passages speak of election in Christ. The Canons of Dort (I.7) present grace as according to God's sovereign good pleasure of election in Christ, who is *also* from eternity "appointed the Mediator and head of the elect, and the

¹⁵ G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 89. Cf. John Webster, *Karl Barth* (London: Continuum, 2004), 88.

¹⁶ Klaas Runia, "Recent Reformed Criticism of the Canons," in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Synod of Dort*, ed. Peter Y. De Jong (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 161–65 gives a brief account of Barth's position.

¹⁷ McCormack, "Grace and Being," 98. However, the collision course is of Barth's making because, as Paul Helm quips, "there was a collision, but fortunately Calvin was not in the car at the time." Paul Helm, "John Calvin and the Hiddenness of God," in McCormack, ed., *Engaging the Doctrine of God*, 68.

¹⁸ Cf. Fesko, *Trinity and Covenant of Redemption*, 195–244. Cf. Helm, "John Calvin and the Hiddenness of God," 67–82.

foundation of salvation.”¹⁹ As Klaas Runia has commented, “the Canons do not see Christ only as the executor of the (previously decreed) election, but the election itself is in Christ.”²⁰ However, neither Calvin nor the Canons speak in a Barthian sense either of Christ as the subject of election, or of an absolute decree apart from the divine counsel in Christ, or of election and reprobation concerning Christ alone. It would also be difficult to argue biblically for a Trinity existing in relation to a primal decision that the *logos* be incarnate. The notion of primal decision itself is a conundrum and supposes an event that constitutes being in some way, over against an act expressing being. This notion is hardly problem free. If the winning touchdown in the Minnesota Vikings’ game against the New Orleans Saints came out of the blue, that supposes the existence of two teams on the field. The touchdown did not put the teams on the field. Similarly, the Trinity exists in a way that is *logically* prior to the decision of the Father for election in Christ and the obedience of the Son as the first elect-one among the many in him. Both exist as realities in God, incomprehensible and different though they may be, before the foundation of the world.

Is Barth orthodox? If “right doctrine” is to be measured by Scripture—and how else could it be measured?—then it is difficult to imagine the apostle Paul congratulating Barth on the historicizing and actualizing reinterpretation of his teaching. Is Barth Reformed? Runia admits that on certain decisive points Barth deviated from the theology of the Reformers and from Calvin, but following the lead of Berkouwer, he supposes that it cannot be denied that Barth belongs to the Reformed tradition.²¹ But can a theology that is not “right teaching,” and is adrift from biblical revelation, be Reformed? Surely not by any commonly accepted definition of what it means to be Reformed. Barth damns the Canons of Dort with faint praise, and then weighs in against them, particularly against I.7, because of an alleged *decretum absolutum* and an election of which Christ is not the subject.²² We may wish that the Canons had expressed the “unequal” character (the *non eodem modo*) of the decrees of election and reprobation more pointedly earlier in the day than in the conclusion—“Some have violated all truth, equity, and charity, in wishing to persuade the public ... that in the same manner in which the election is the fountain and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is

¹⁹ Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (1877; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 3:582.

²⁰ Runia, “Recent Reformed Criticisms,” 164.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

²² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), II.2, 94ff., 112ff.

the cause of unbelief and impiety.”²³ However, in the decree articulated in I.7, there is nothing unrighteous, unjust, arbitrary or derogatory to God’s goodness.²⁴ Could it be that Barth’s problem was his very modern embarrassment with any thought of judgment, rather than the alleged abstraction from Christ and the absolute decree, which seem rather to be problems manufactured by his interpretation of the Reformed tradition?

So how about orthodox and modern? What is the problem with Barth? It arises from the tension between an actualistic and a dialectical view of God that comes from the German idealism that forms the background to Barth’s thought, and is paradoxically self-contradictory. If “revelation is understood by Barth as an *act* of self-mediation in the execution of which God remains ontologically other than the chosen medium—and therefore hidden in it,”²⁵ then God and human reality are essentially antithetical and nonanalogous. No theology is better than its presuppositions, and in Barth’s configuration an event revelation will not secure knowledge of God any more than word revelation. If one acts, even “in Christ,” without the complementary theopneustic word revelation of Holy Scripture, God disappears into a constant becoming of historical and temporal relativity and remains unknown and beyond incomprehensible in the mutating world of phenomena. Because of this, Barth’s God is more of a hidden God than is the “hidden God” of the so-called static theology of the fathers and the Reformers.²⁶ If they managed to rescue the concrete truth of Scripture in spite of the weight of their philosophical baggage, in Barth’s theology, orthodoxy fades into space in smoke rings from his modern presuppositions.

Finally, let’s avoid the error of confusing orthodoxy and traditionalism. If orthodoxy and modernism in its various varieties do not make a happy couple, that should not force those who desire to be biblically orthodox into the arms of a traditionalism that hankers after the good old days that never were. Orthodoxy sends us back to *sola Scriptura*, the fount of right doctrine, whereas traditionalism tends to be accumulative, unreforming, and stuck in time warps. Orthodoxy has a biblical warrant; traditionalism has none. Better call Calvin!

²³ Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:596.

²⁴ Presenting an infralapsarian point of view, the Canons situate sin and unbelief in man and not in God (I.5), and speak of God’s leaving sinners in their sin (preterition, I.6), and of the just reprobation of God (I.18).

²⁵ See note 6 above.

²⁶ See Helm’s careful arguments on the hiddenness of God in Barth, “Calvin and the Hiddenness of God,” 79–82: “Barth’s own doctrine is certainly no improvement ... Barth’s God is truly buried away.”

The Heart of the Matter: Luther's Concept of Reformation

HERMAN J. SELDERHUIS

Abstract

Luther is often presented as a reformer of the church, but this paper demonstrates that the reformation of the church was a consequence of the real issue: a reformation of the relationship between God and man. Luther's spiritual biography and especially his debate with Erasmus make clear that to him the heart of the matter was how to define the relationship between the righteous God and sinful man and how to repair that relationship. Only from this perspective can the history and theology of the Reformation and its lasting relevance be understood.

Introduction¹

Ever since my childhood, I was used to blanching and becoming frightened whenever I simply heard the name of Christ mentioned. For I had not been taught anything else other than that I had to see him as a strict and wrathful judge.²

¹ This article is a revision of the lecture given by Dr. Herman Selderhuis on March 15, 2017, at Westminster Theological Seminary as the tenth annual Richard B. Gaffin Lecture on Theology, Culture, and Missions.

² Martin Luther, *Galatervorlesung* (1531), WA 40/1:298 (WA = Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luther Werke*, 120 vols. [Weimar, 1883–2009]). I refer only to Luther's writings and purposely leave all reference to secondary literature out. For more details on Luther's life and some secondary sources, see Herman Selderhuis, *Martin Luther: A Spiritual Biography* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

To understand Martin Luther's Reformation, we must follow him on his spiritual journey, which began with a fear of God that many had at the time. The big question that kept innumerable people, young and old, preoccupied was, Would you be able to do enough good for God, and were your sins, nonetheless, still higher in number than your good deeds? They struggled: Did you belong to those who were predestined or not? Would you ever go to heaven and not spend an interminable time in hell? Looking back, Luther said that to him Christ was often presented more as judge than as savior, and that kept people away from him.

Therefore it is scandalous that men under the papacy taught people to flee from Christ. I preferred that his name would not be mentioned within my hearing because they had instructed me in such a manner that I had to provide satisfaction for my sins and that on the last day Christ would say: "How well did you keep the Ten Commandments? What's your condition?" Whenever someone described him to me, I was terrified of him, just like I was of the devil, because I could not bear his judgment.³

This experience would become fundamental for Luther's reformational turn. The Reformation was first of all the reformation of the relationship between God and man. His initial goal was not a reformation of the church, nor was his program a fight against corrupt practices in the church. His only issue was what he defined as *theology*: God who justifies, and man who needs to be justified.⁴ In this respect, his theology cannot be understood without his biography. What follows will describe some crucial moments of Luther's life that make his fierce fight with Erasmus understandable.

I. Stotternheim

When he was in his early twenties, two important moments took place in Luther's life: his near death in a thunderstorm and his entrance into the monastery.

Luther was a student of law, but that did not satisfy him, and it had not provided him with what he was looking for. After a visit to his parents in Mansfeld on July 2, 1505, Martin returned to Erfurt. Near Stotternheim, about five miles from Erfurt, he was caught in a terrific thunderstorm. It thundered, and lightning flashed so violently that he feared for his life, and

³ Martin Luther, "Sermon on Psalm 110 (06.05.2535)," WA 41:197–98.

⁴ "... ut proprie si subiectum Theologiae homo reus et perditus et deus iustificans vel salvator." Luther, *Galatervorlesung* (1531), WA 40/2:328.

he was struck by a “fear of sudden death”⁵ and his unexpected and insufficiently prepared appearance before the Judge of heaven and earth. After lightning struck again close by, he invoked the aid of Saint Anna—who was seen as the mother of Mary—and promised her that he would become a monk if she rescued him from this horrible weather.

At least this is the way the story is usually presented. Does it fit with the facts?

It is perhaps more likely that Luther had gone home to tell his parents that he wanted to become a monk. In the thunderstorm, he made his commitment vow. According to Luther's own words thirty years later, he had begged, “Help me holy Anna; I want to become a monk.”⁶ As it was, Luther wanted to become a monk anyway. Therefore, it is not convincing to assume that soaking wet and deadly afraid in Stotternheim, he had come then and there to his decision. At an earlier date, he had also invoked the aid of Saint Anna to help him because he was considering holy orders so he could clear his guilt before God and because his death would have come at a very inopportune time. Apparently, Anna must have agreed with him because Luther's life was spared, which became for him a confirmation that he should enter the monastery. Why did he appeal to Anna and not to Mary? Anna was the patron saint of miners, and therefore we may presume that Luther had learned at home to call on her in emergencies. A year earlier, though, he had appealed to Mary when he accidentally stabbed himself with his dagger. At that time, he was on his way home, but now he had just left home. Had his trip home once again brought Anna closer to him? It is also entirely possible that Luther had not called out to Anna at all. The first time he mentioned her in the above circumstances was thirty years after the fact. Before that, he had never mentioned Anna.

Whatever the case may be, Luther survived and entered the monastery as he had pledged, committed because of the deep fear of dying without being properly prepared. Friends at that time compared this change to Paul's Damascus road conversion.⁷ For Luther, it was very clear that this was a heavenly call that resounded deep in his soul.⁸ In fact, this change in his life was not so radical; he had been preoccupied in seeking God for some time already. That is to say, he was seeking the God who could provide him with peace of heart and rest in conscience. In this context, he recounted that at a very young age he had already learned to search his heart and seriously confess his daily sins. This was such a burden for his conscience that he

⁵ Martin Luther, “*Devotis monasticis Martini Lutheri iudicium* (1521),” WA 8:573–74.

⁶ Martin Luther, WA TR 1, no. 461 [TR = *Tischreden*].

⁷ Crotus Rubianus, “Letter to Luther (10.16.1519),” WA BR, 1:543 [BR = *Briefe*].

⁸ Luther, “*Devotis monasticis* (1521),” WA 8:573–74.

almost collapsed.⁹ Luther sought God; he sought him everywhere. Thinking he could find him in the monastery was simply the next step in his quest, a life-changing step. He decided to exchange the rowdy table in the student pub for the silence and solitude of the monastic cell, a significant difference.

II. *Erfurt*

On July 16, when it was supposed to happen, Luther was received into the monastery. He had his choice of monasteries because Erfurt, like most towns, had a number of different monasteries. Luther chose the Augustinian monastery, where the monks lived in accordance with the rules set out by Augustine. The Augustinian monastery in Erfurt at this time had fifty residents and was known as an organization where a lot of time was devoted to Bible study. But they also spent considerable time begging, because the monastery survived on gifts. So Luther had to go on the streets regularly to collect money. He was now confronted with the question whether this would really allow him to accomplish the purpose of his quest.

The evening before he left his life as a student, he celebrated with a little party. He wanted to eat, drink, and make music with his friends one final time. He wrote that during that evening he played his lute for the last time. Before the party, he had also been able to sell some of his books. The heavy tomes of law studies, which according to him did not contain much of any value, claimed a good price.¹⁰ Getting rid of his books did not cause him any grief. He claimed that he only experienced joy in the study of the Holy Scriptures. The next day, however, he had to hand in all the money from the sale of his books and property to the monastery. That did not appear to be a problem for Luther because he was not attached to material things. Would he be able, however, to give himself completely? At dawn, his friends accompanied him to the entrance of the monastery, where they said goodbye. According to Luther, this was forever: “You see me now, but afterward never again.”¹¹ It would not turn out that way.

The day that he entered the monastery remained with Luther for the rest of his life. From the words that he spoke in 1539, it is clear that he continued to remember the anniversary of that date.

On July 16, the day of [Saint] Alexius, he said: “Today it is the anniversary of my entry into the monastery in Erfurt.” And he began to recount the story how he had made a

⁹ Luther, WA TR 1, no. 461.

¹⁰ Luther, WA TR 1, no. 11.

¹¹ Luther, WA TR 4, no. 4707.

vow almost fourteen days earlier when underway he was upset by a lightning bolt near Stotternheim, not far from Erfurt. In his fear, he had called out: "Help me holy Anna, I want to become a monk." At the time, however, God regarded my vow in Hebrew: Anna, that is to say, in grace, and not under the law.¹²

I regretted my vow, and many told me that I should not keep it. I persisted, however, and on the day before [Saint] Alexius, I invited my best friends to say goodbye so that they could accompany me to the monastery the next day. When they tried to hold me back, I said: "Today you will see me for the last time." With tears, they took me away. Also, my father was furious about the vow, but I stuck to my decision. I never considered leaving the monastery. I was completely dead to the world.¹³

Looking back, he said that he knew that God had wanted to use his entry into the monastery so he could learn about the many sins that were committed there¹⁴ and to discover the gospel of grace again. The latter would certainly have been more relevant for him, but learning about sins was not an issue in that monastery. The Augustinian monastery was recognized as being strict and pious. More than likely, his negative judgment was influenced by his attitude toward the time before his reformed period, a phenomenon prevalent among converts. Luther was plagued more by his own sins than by those of others. Nor did he enter the monastery in a quest of self-discovery—something monasteries were not meant for—but to seek and to find God's grace. In the normal induction procedure, the first question asked by the prior was: "What do you seek here?" and then the candidate monk had to answer: "God's grace and your grace." Luther's search was exclusively the former. "In the monastery, I never thought about women, money or possessions, but my heart trembled and pondered about the question how I could gain God's grace."¹⁵

Luther's search was to find the grace of God, and so the monastery was not so much a flight from the world as a dedication to God. In retrospect, it was a decision that he forced himself to make against the coercive pressures of everything and everyone: "I became a monk under pressure, and did so against the will of my father, my mother, God and the devil."¹⁶ He especially made this choice against the devil, because Luther made a discovery in the monastery that would cause the devil to lower his banner, as he wrote himself in "A Mighty Fortress."

¹² Luther refers to the meaning of the Hebrew word *hanna*, namely, grace.

¹³ Luther, WA TR 4, no. 4707.

¹⁴ Luther, "Devotis monasticis (1521)," WA 8:573.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Matthäus 18–24 in Predigten ausgelegt, 1537–1540*, WA 47:590.

¹⁶ Luther, WA TR 4, no. 4414.

III. Bible

Luther writes that when he became a member of the monastic community, the monks gave him a red leather-bound Bible. He familiarized himself so thoroughly with the contents that he knew exactly what was on each page, and if someone named a particular text, he knew exactly where it was.¹⁷ Luther “began to read the Bible and read it again and again.”¹⁸ He read his Bible from front to back and then would start anew. He would make summaries of each chapter so as to remember the content better. He made such tremendous growth in his Bible knowledge while in the monastery that later Carlstadt would praise him for this.¹⁹ While there, Luther learned that Bible reading is actually “listening to the Bible”: a text had to be read but also heard, again and again, as frequently as necessary until the reader had some understanding what the text said. This manner of Bible reading was called *lectio divina*, literally, godly reading. Reading and listening until one had heard God’s voice in the Word.

If you want to become a Christian, you must take the word of Christ, realizing that you will never be finished learning, and then with me, you will recognize that you still do not even know the ABC. If one was to boast, then I could certainly do that about myself because day and night I was busy studying the Bible, and yet I have remained a student. Every day I begin like someone in the primary school.²⁰

Luther needed the Bible in his search for God. He was searching for the heart, for the real essence of theology, searching out God as he really is, in addition to searching out who man really is and how God and man are related to each other. Luther searched in the Bible; he “knocked” on the texts; he shook them like a fruit tree and then listened to find words of comfort and reassurance to drive away his fears. But initially, Bible reading shocked him, especially the Psalms that he had to pray many times a day. He prayed the Psalms, but he did not understand them because the required prayers were not meant to help him understand the Psalms but to merit good works. In Psalm 71:2, the prayer is expressed: “In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me” (ESV). Luther could only see righteousness as judgment, condemnation, and a punishing justice. He even says that he hated Psalm 2:11 because we are told to serve the Lord with fear and trembling,²¹ as if not

¹⁷ Luther, WA TR 1, no. 116.

¹⁸ Luther, WA TR 3, no. 3767.

¹⁹ Luther, WA TR 2, no. 2512; WA TR 4, no. 5030.

²⁰ Martin Luther, “Sermon in Erfurt on John 5 (10.11.1529),” WA 29:583.

²¹ Martin Luther, “Enarratio Psalmi 2 (1532; published 1546),” WA 40/2:295.



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enough fear gripped Luther already! Praying the Psalms, and therefore the Bible itself, made life even more burdensome for Luther: “What I wouldn’t have given if someone had delivered me from the mass and the fear in my conscience, and had shown me the true meaning of a Psalm or one of the chapters in the Gospels. I would have crawled on my knees to Saint James [Santiago de Compostella].”²²

It is evident that Luther gradually and more frequently questioned the prevailing theology and some ecclesiastical practices. Through the reading of Augustine, among others, he progressively developed the insight that the human will is totally incapable of achieving anything in the context of eternal salvation; it completely depends on God’s righteousness. Almost hopelessly he searched in Paul for the meaning of God’s righteousness: “I hated that word, namely, ‘God’s righteousness,’ ... indeed, I did not love God, but I hated this righteous God who punishes sinners.”²³ He could not understand why God first condemned the sinner through the law and then also threatened him again in the gospel with righteousness. “I raged with an angry and thoroughly confused conscience, and unrestrained I went to Paul concerning this text, because I had a burning desire to know what the holy Paul would say about this.”²⁴ Not until he had thought day and night about the relationship between the two words “God” and “righteousness” did he come to a conviction that this relationship was radically different from what he had always been told: “The gospel reveals the righteousness of God, namely, the passive, through which God the merciful justifies us through faith, as is written: ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” He discovered that the concept “God’s righteousness” in Romans 1:17 did not mean that God *demands* righteousness, but that He *imparts* righteousness.²⁵ Hatred toward God immediately changed into love: “I felt like a completely newborn, and it was as if I had gone through the open gates into paradise itself.”²⁶

IV. Erasmus and Indulgences

Erasmus played a role in this development in that he brought the Greek New Testament to the market. This publication was revolutionary because the church had hitherto only used the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the

²² Martin Luther, “Sermon (05.14.1536),” WA 41:582.

²³ Martin Luther, “Vorrede zum ersten Bande der Gesamtausgaben seiner Lateinischen Schriften (Wittenberg, 1545),” WA 54:185.

²⁴ Ibid., WA 54:185.

²⁵ Ibid., WA 54:185–86.

²⁶ Ibid., WA 54:186.

Bible. It was this translation that was authoritative. As a humanist, Erasmus wanted to go back to the original source, and this original source of the New Testament was Greek. He also had the intention of bringing a new purer Latin translation to the market, but to show his new Latin text he published it beside the original Greek text. Indeed, when his publication appeared, it was clear that the translation that the church used did not properly correlate to the original text. Luther noticed this especially in John the Baptist's appeal. The church's translation spoke about penance as if it concerned following the rules for confession. But Erasmus's text spoke about repentance (*metanoia*) not as an act, but as an internal change. We must not simply do things differently; instead, something must happen that will change us within. Only then will we start doing things differently. Luther became convinced that the sequence of sanctification and righteousness had to be different. We are not righteous because we sanctify ourselves, but we sanctify ourselves because we have been justified.

Therefore, it is not the way Aristotle maintained, that we become righteous by doing righteous deeds. That remains only an appearance of righteousness, a sham. Only those who become righteous and who are righteous, do righteous acts. First, the person has to change; only then the works will follow.²⁷

The church taught that Christ's righteousness meant that Christ enabled us to become righteous. Luther's growing conviction was that the righteousness of Christ means that he has made us righteous. In essence, those statements are two very different things. People who try to live so that they are acceptable to God, "do not understand the righteousness of God, because that was given to us completely and freely in Christ." Whoever tries to do it himself shortchanges Christ. "If we, with our own efforts and torments, had to bring peace to our conscience—indeed, why did he actually die?"²⁸

His discovery brought him into conflict with the existing practice of indulgences. Luther had had problems with indulgences for a while already. In his first lectures on the Psalms in 1514, he had complained that the practice of indulgences made the road to heaven easy and made grace cheap.²⁹ At other times he expressed his concern about the whole trade in indulgences. How could money and guilt be connected with each other in such a destructive way? Luther maintained that people bought indulgences because they were afraid of punishment, while in fact, they should be afraid

²⁷ Luther, "Letter to Spalatin (10.19.1516)," WA BR 1:70.

²⁸ Luther, "Letter to Georg Spenlein (04.08.1516)," WA BR 1:35.

²⁹ Martin Luther, *Psalmenvorlesung, 1513–1515*, WA 3:416.

of sins.³⁰ Indulgences provided people with a false sense of security and strengthened self-interest so that they were not concerned with living to God's honor but only with escaping God's punishment. The indulgence issue gave people the wrong impression that punishment is the problem, whereas it is merely a consequence. The actual problem was not punishment from God, but guilt before God. One acquainted with the original intention of indulgences would know that they are only useful if one is truly remorseful. But—and this was Luther's new insight—if one is truly remorseful, one does not need an indulgence. Luther's problem was not that German money went to Rome, nor that it was used for building Saint Peter's, nor that people spent so much on indulgences even though they had so little to begin with. Rather, it involved something far more fundamental: people were being offered a kind of false insurance policy. Indulgences do not provide forgiveness of sins and do not help restore a relationship with God one iota. Indulgences do not produce the remorse and repentance required by God. Grace becomes a financial transaction; it is external and cheap, and it invites people to sin. Moreover, in light of Christ's work on the cross, it is questionable whether an indulgence is even necessary. With these questions, Luther undermined the foundations of a system that held enormous economic consequences for the church and made an emotional claim on people's consciences. He was not at all concerned about economics, but the burdening of the people's consciences was a significant concern for him, especially because his own conscience struggled so intensely with the questions of guilt and forgiveness.

Luther at first appeared completely unaware that this new insight would close the gates of Rome, and that his perspective would conflict with the church. In the first place, it concerned a personal discovery, but what this would mean for other believers, and the church as a whole, was beyond his awareness. Luther did not have an agenda for reformation, and "reformer" was not his career choice either. Nor did he set out to cause a breach with Rome. True, he wanted reforms in the church, but many with him and before him wanted the same, and that was not unique. Only when he received messages from Rome that they considered his ideas heretical did he become aware of the impending conflict. Luther wanted nothing other than a return to the Bible as the only norm. If this meant breaking with traditions, so be it. But Luther was not out to break with traditions either. His objective was not reformation, but renewed attention to the message that grace is sufficient. Now that he had found the proper relationship between the law and

³⁰ Martin Luther, "Sermons on Matthew (1517)," WA 1:141.

the gospel, that relationship was fundamental not only for him but for all of theology. "He who knows how properly to distinguish between the gospel and the law can thank God and realize that he is a theologian."³¹

V. Conflict

Like ominous thunder clouds, the confrontation between Luther and Erasmus hung in the air. Initially, it appeared as if these two giants would stand shoulder to shoulder for the same cause. Both wanted a return to the original sources, recognized the authority of the Scriptures, expressed their unvarnished criticism concerning the wrongs in the church, and were fed up with theologians who busied themselves with issues that were inconsequential for ordinary people. Early on, however, Luther noticed that there was a difference between Erasmus and himself. According to Luther, the Dutchman had insufficient appreciation for the sinfulness of people. "Every day I lose more joy in Erasmus Humanity appears to weigh more with him than the divine. Whenever you expect more from our human capacity, you judge differently than when you only want to know about grace."³² Nevertheless, Luther defended Erasmus when he was targeted for censure because of criticism he expressed against the church.

I always support him and give him highest praise as long as I can. And I try my utmost not to express myself on points on which I differ in opinion with him to avoid strengthening the negative attitude with my comments. But if I have to judge him, regardless of all the appreciation I have as theologian, and not as philologist; then we will find with Erasmus much that, according to me, is inappropriate for the knowledge of Christ.³³

On March 28, 1519, he wrote Erasmus a letter in the flattering language unique to the style of the humanists, congratulating him on the many gifts he had and commiserating with him for the fact that he had received so much criticism. Erasmus and he were being tarred with the same brush, according to Luther. Because his name was becoming more renowned and was connected with that of Erasmus, it appeared good to send him such a letter.³⁴ From his side, Erasmus was less and less happy with Luther because he himself was being blamed for instigating the Reformation. He distanced himself from the Wittenberger and did not want to be involved in the

³¹ Martin Luther, *Galatervorlesung* (1531), WA 40/1:207.

³² Luther, "Letter to Lang (03.01.1517)," WA BR, 1:90.

³³ Luther, "Letter to Spalatin (01.18.1518)," WA BR 1:133.

³⁴ Luther, "Letter to Erasmus (03.28.1519)," WA BR 1:361.

ecclesiastical conflict. It was said that Luther was the chicken that hatched from the egg that Erasmus had brooded. Erasmus wanted peace, but especially rest, and for his income he depended on people favorably predisposed to Rome. Gradually, and quite deliberately, he publicly distanced himself from all of it. Of course, Luther noticed that too.

What Erasmus's opinion is, or what he says his opinion is, you can read very clearly in his books, in both his first as well as his most recent ones. Though I notice his ruses everywhere, I act as if I don't get his stratagems. He puts on an act publicly as if he were not my enemy, though I have figured him out better than he thinks himself. He has done what he was meant to do: He introduced knowledge of the source languages to call people back from blasphemous studies. Perhaps he will die with Moses in the fields of Moab (Deut 34:5) because concerning godliness he has not come to a better understanding. I would love to see him ceasing to engage himself in commentaries on Scripture and stopping his paraphrases because he lacks all knowledge to do this. Thus he engages his readers in vain and prevents them from developing an understanding of Scripture. He has done enough to show what was bad, but he cannot let us see the good and bring us into the promised land.³⁵

For Erasmus, the time had come to make a definitive break with Luther, as King Henry VIII had advised. He did this by initiating a discussion to clarify that fundamentally he had nothing to do with Luther. He published a treatise in Latin concerning free will, an issue to be discussed at a scholarly level. The nature of this treatise involved thoughts for consideration rather than theses, as Erasmus had never dared to propose theses or points of view. Instead, for safety's sake, he approached the issues with questions. For several years already, Luther had opposed the opinion that after the fall people have free will. Erasmus stated that free will enables people to take hold of salvation, which God has prepared. In the monastery, Luther had become completely confused by the issue of free will. Erasmus, however, expected free will to enable people to live more Christianly. He thought Luther's view was dangerous because it would cause people to become easygoing. Luther, on the other hand, thought that Erasmus's view was dangerous because it could cause uncertainty for people. These views had to clash head on, but initially nothing happened. Luther's first reaction was in a sermon that he delivered on October 9, 1524, in which he described the powerlessness of a person's will,³⁶ using these well-known words: "You are a stallion, and the devil is your rider," a word that counted not only for Erasmus, but for every person. Only Christ can deliver us from that rider.

³⁵ Luther, "Letter to Oecolampadius (06.20.1524)," WA BR 3:96–97.

³⁶ Martin Luther, "Predigt am 20. Sonntag nach Trinitatis (10.09.1524)," WA 15:713–16.

By November 1, he had read only part of Erasmus's booklet,³⁷ but that had been enough to convince him that he needed to react to it. Generally, he was not in the habit of reading his opponents' works completely; he read until he knew enough to react, and the rest of the book he would use as toilet paper.³⁸ But Erasmus's booklet did not end up hanging beside Luther's toilet; he read it all. He did not like it and realized at the same time that this reaction would require a special effort: "It is indescribable how much I detest this little book [of Erasmus'] concerning free will, even after reading a few pages. It will be a difficult task to respond to such a learned book from such a learned man."³⁹ Furthermore, he had no desire to get into a discussion with Erasmus, and moreover, he had other pressing matters to deal with. In 1525 Luther had to deal with the Peasants' War, the conflict concerning the Lord's Supper, and his marriage. Nevertheless, after some time, he did react because he realized that this was an important issue. More importantly, he realized that it concerned the heart of the matter, as he stated at the conclusion of his book when he thanked Erasmus:

I want to praise you highly in this, and I am telling you openly, that in contrast to everyone else, you are the only one who has focused on the matter itself, on the main issue, and that you have not bothered me with other issues such as the papacy, purgatory, indulgences and more of those silly things concerning which almost everyone has dogged me. You are the only one who has seen the heart of the issue and truly tried to zero in on that vital spot—for that I want to thank you with all my heart.⁴⁰

Not until December 31, 1525, a year after Erasmus's booklet had been published, did Luther begin his reaction. The size of his reply shows that he took his time to consider his response. In this work, Luther worked out the distinction between a hidden God and the revealed God, of which he had spoken already in Heidelberg in 1518. At the outset, he stated that we do not have a free will, and concerning grace and eternal life we have absolutely nothing to say. God elects, God determines, God gives. And why he chooses to give faith to one person and not to another remains hidden to us. It is none of our business. We must only concern ourselves with the revealed God, the God who comes to us and says, "Believe the gospel, and you shall live in eternity." Predestination is a given in the Bible, but how it works only God knows. Whatever is beyond our understanding is none of our concern. We may hold fast to God's promises, and that is sufficient for anyone.

³⁷ Martin Luther, "Letter to Spalatin (11.01.1524)," WA BR 3:368.

³⁸ Luther, WA TR 2, no. 2086.

³⁹ Luther, "Letter to Spalatin (11.01.1524)," WA BR 3:368.

⁴⁰ Martin Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will* (1525), in WA 18:786–87.

How important this book was for him is seen by the fact that he said that everything he had published could be thrown into the fire as long as the *Larger Catechism* and *De servo arbitrio* were spared.⁴¹

The breach was definitive. Luther was disgusted with Erasmus's attitude and his opinions. "I hate Erasmus. I hate him with all my strength." To engage this man in a discussion was impossible. "Erasmus is an eel."⁴² That, according to Luther, you could see in him. "Erasmus is, such as his facial expressions show, a person full of scheming and evil who mocks God and religion."⁴³ Erasmus reacted dismissively and accused Luther of being impulsive and of being guilty of slanderous lies and ridiculous accusations. After that, the discussion remained quiet for a long time. Luther did not return to this topic either. As far as he was concerned, everything had been said, and moreover, this was hardly a topic for the pulpit. Luther considered Erasmus a man of smooth talk, a moralist who presented Christ as an example but did not see him as savior. In 1533, discussion between the two flared up once again.⁴⁴ But after Erasmus had defended himself one more time, no more was said. Two years after Erasmus's death, Luther gave his final judgment about him:

Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote many exceptional works. He had the intelligence for it and the time. There was nothing to prevent him; he had no official duties, did not preach, did not give lectures and did not have to be involved in business. He had a lifestyle without God, lived in complete self-assurance and thus he died, without asking in his final agony for a servant of God's Word or the service of the sacraments. God spare me that I, in my hour of death do not ask for a believing servant, indeed, that I would especially call the first available one, and praise God. Erasmus learned those things in Rome, but because of his distinction and his books, we must now be silent about it.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Luther's primary goal was neither a reformation of society, nor a revolution in natural sciences, a restructuring of political and social life in Europe, or a re-evaluation of marriage, family, and education. His goal was not even a reformation of the church, although he was much concerned about the state of the clergy and the abuse of power by the church and in the church. His primary—and existential—concern was the relationship between God and

⁴¹ Luther, "Letter to Wolfgang Capito (07.09.1537)," in WA BR 8:99.

⁴² Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will* (1525), WA 18:716.

⁴³ Luther, WA TR 2, no. 2420.

⁴⁴ Cf. Luther, "Letter to Nikolaus von Amsdorf (03.11.1534)," WA BR 7:27–40.

⁴⁵ Luther, WA TR 4, no. 4028.

man, and more specifically, the relationship between a holy God and a sinful man. In the 1545 foreword to the first edition of his collected works, he wrote that when he discovered what justification really means, it was as if the gate of paradise had been opened to him.⁴⁶ He describes this discovery as the key element in the Reformation. By 1545 he had seen what the Reformation had brought about. By the opening of the gates to heaven, he does not mean that Europe needed a new political system, or that monks and nuns should get married, or that human beings need freedom for self-development. He was convinced that all of a sudden he had understood a central Bible text and that man can be saved from God's judgment and eternal death by free and undeserved grace. That, for Luther, was the heart of the matter.

⁴⁶ "Hic me prorsus renatum esse sensi, et apertis portis in ipsam paradisum intrasse," Martin Luther, "Vorrede (1545)," WA 54:186.



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“Middle Knowledge”: Solution or Seduction?¹

HENRI A. G. BLOCHER

Abstract

In this article, Henri Blocher examines the status and function of “middle knowledge,” a proposed median between determinism and indeterminism, and one that satisfies our natural aspirations to freedom. The theses of Molina and Suarez in particular are carefully presented and evaluated, with reference to the thought of one of their recent capable advocates, William Lane Craig. The seduction of the “middle knowledge” thesis provides an opportunity for reflection and wisdom, and particularly for humility that bows the knee to the mystery of godliness.

In common parlance, the term *Calvinism* is used to reference John Calvin’s strong demonstration of sovereign, unconditional election—not that the French Reformer was the first (or the last!) to defend it, but because it was he who presented the most thorough and convincing biblical justification for it. He did not persuade everyone, however. Many Christians, including evangelicals, complain that Calvinism suppresses what they call free will, which, they maintain, is an inherent aspect of humanity. Attempts to find a way of reconciling free will and sovereignty, or an intermediary position between them to explain the choices made by grace—which always have the effect of watering down God’s sovereignty—are to be found throughout the history of theology.

¹ This article was translated from French by Alison Wells: “La ‘Science moyenne’: solution ou séduction?,” in *Contre vents et marées: Mélanges offerts à Pierre Berthoud et Paul Wells*, ed. Jean-Philippe Bru (Aix-en-Provence: Kerygma; Cléon d’Andran: Excelsis, 2014), 113–34.

The theory called “middle knowledge” may be the subtlest attempt to be made so far.² The key idea came, apparently, from a Portuguese theologian, Pedro du Fonseca (1565), but it was a former student of his, the Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535–1600), who coined the term and attached his name to the doctrine which is commonly called Molinism. In 1588 he brought out a voluminous work that made its mark at the time; the second edition in 1595 included arguments in reply to criticisms, particularly those made by the vigorous Dominican Domingo Bañez, an Augustinian Thomist. Its title can be translated *The Reconciliation of Free Choice with the Gifts of Grace, Divine Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination, and Reprobation*.³

Among the controversies this unleashed was a modified version of Molinism of which the chief proponent was another noteworthy Jesuit of the day, Francisco Suarez (1548–1617). Thereafter the general of the order made this version the official doctrine of the Society of Jesus. Suarez’s epitaph gives an idea of the high regard in which he was held:

Master (in the sense of doctor) of the whole world, (new) Aristotle in natural science, angelic Thomas (doctor) in divinity, Jerome for the Scriptures, Ambrose in the pulpit, Augustine in apologetics, Athanasius in explaining the faith, Bernard in honey-sweet piety, Gregory for handling of the Holy Books and the Word.⁴

That is quite a tribute!

The doctrine of middle knowledge was well received by the Remonstrants; Arminius took the trouble to examine it. The great theologians of orthodox reformed theology, however, sought to refute it. During the following centuries, it was largely forgotten in Protestantism; the theory slid into theological backwaters. Over the last few decades, however, it has come back into the limelight, thanks to American evangelicals. In his 1974 work, *The Nature of Necessity*, the reputed philosopher Alvin Plantinga brought it back into prominence, albeit with a new slant, without even realizing that it originated with Molina.⁵ Several others followed, among them eminent scholars such

² Paul Wells mentions this in particular in “L’élection divine: les enjeux,” *La Revue réformée* 59.5 (2008): 21–37.

³ Luis de Molina, *Liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis, divina praescientia, providentia, praedestinatione et reprobatione, concordia* (Antwerp: Joachim Trognæsius, 1595) available on Google.books. I will quote as it is presented there. I will not use the numbered subdivisions found in current academic works, as these are not used in the edition in question; the abridged title is *Concordia*. Unless otherwise indicated, I have translated myself any sources in a foreign language (usually titles).

⁴ Available (in Latin) in the online encyclopedia *Imago Mundi*.

⁵ Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); John D. Laing, “The Compatibility of Calvinism and Middle Knowledge,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47.3 (September 2004): 455, following what Plantinga said in his autobiographical comments.

as Alfred Freddoso, who translated the most relevant part of the *Concordia*, and the apologetic theologian-philosopher William Lane Craig, who has done an impressive job in defending *scientia media* in a host of publications, using his considerable conceptual agility and knife-sharp logic.⁶

"Indeed," writes Craig, "I would venture to say that it is the single most fruitful theological concept I have ever encountered."⁷ Craig is considered to be its leading advocate among theologians, even if he argues his case as a philosopher from an "analytic" approach, and though his logical algebra is inaccessible to the uninitiated. It is striking that most of the new Molinists are of a philosophical bent. Middle knowledge, according to Craig,

can go a long way toward reconciling Calvinist and Arminian views. ... Molina's successor Suarez came so close to Calvinism that it is scarcely possible to distinguish their doctrines of predestination; yet Suarez did not sacrifice human freedom.⁸

The debate about foreknowledge, which takes into account both middle knowledge and "open theism," has taken on such magnitude and represents such a challenge that "some claim it is the most heated controversy to hit evangelicalism since the inerrancy debate in the 1970s."⁹

This debate has barely had an airing in my native French Protestantism, and it seems opportune to give an overview of its theses and arguments, although I speak as a theologian rather than as a philosopher. I will introduce not only Molina himself, but also Craig's propositions as representative of the movement, then take the liberty of giving a final "pinch of spice" of my own, by adding a few general comments to my commentary.

⁶ From his doctoral research William L. Craig drew both *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez*, Studies in Intellectual History 7 (Leyden: Brill, 1988), and *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience*, Studies in Intellectual History 19 (Leyden: Brill, 1991; hereafter *Foreknowledge and Freedom*); this was made available to a wider readership in *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987; there is a later edition). Several articles or chapters are available, especially "Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?," in *A Case for Arminianism: The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1995), 141–64 (hereafter *Grace and Will*), and "The Middle Knowledge View," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 119–43 (hereafter *Four Views*).

⁷ Craig, *Four Views*, 125.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁹ Beilby and Eddy, introduction to *Four Views*, 9.

I. The Molinist Thesis

What is meant by *middle* knowledge? If it is a middle way, what are the extremes between which it seeks to navigate? Molina, Craig, and all those who adopt their way of thinking are as clear as one could wish. Molina's starting point is the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas—all his work is a commentary on the *Summa Theologica* (I.14.13). The Angelic Doctor distinguishes *two* forms of divine knowledge: the knowledge that is *necessary* only to God, belonging to his very nature, including the knowledge of all possible possibilities and of all their possible combinations, and the knowledge *free* of everything that will be and even that could have been, on the basis of his *decree*. (It is free in that it depends on the exercise of divine will.) Molina attributes to God a *third*, intermediary knowledge: *before* all exercise of his will (before and after refer to logical order), by his very nature, God knows from all eternity how free creatures would behave in any circumstance and that prescience, infallible like all divine prescience, plays a part in the deliberation of the decree. This is how Molina phrases his thesis:

It is suitable for us to distinguish a triple knowledge in God, its third form being therefore “middle knowledge,” by which God, in his own essence, owing to the power and the supremacy of his inscrutable wisdom, considers every instance of free will and what each, in its innate freedom, would do, placed in such or such a configuration of things, or again in an infinity of configurations, in which each could do the contrary, if so willed.¹⁰

According to necessary knowledge “natural” to God, God knows what a free agent *could* do; according to free knowledge God knows what the agent *will* do; according to middle knowledge, he knows what the free agent *would* do if¹¹

What is the problem Molina proposed to resolve? The very same one that Evodius raised for Augustine, as Plantinga so judiciously points out.¹² In Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* (3.2.4), Evodius is concerned by the question: if God knew in advance that man was going to fall, was the fall not necessary rather than free? Jonathan Edwards, Plantinga points out, came up with an argument of consummate skill, demonstrating that everything infallibly

¹⁰ Molina, *Concordia*, 227, disputatio 52.

¹¹ For a clear presentation, see Craig, *Four Views*, 120.

¹² Alvin Plantinga, “On Ockham’s Way Out,” in *The Analytical Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, ed. James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 258–59; repr. from *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984).

known in advance by God comes about by necessity.¹³ However, Molina and his followers are not prepared to relinquish either the infallible foreknowledge of God or the liberty of free will, understood as the effective power of opposites, as the possibility of saying *yes* and *no* at one and the same time, with only the will of the subject to determine it.¹⁴ Hence the strategic situation of middle knowledge, which is attacked on the left by those who deny total foreknowledge (the proponents of open theism) and on the right by Augustinians and Calvinists who have a different conception of freedom.

Molina was too rooted in tradition to challenge, even superficially, the article concerning divine foreknowledge; in occupying the middle way, he rather tends to enlarge its scope even more! It is worth noting the effort Craig puts into defending the traditional position in opposition to open theists. He is in no way rattled by Gregory Boyd in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*. He enters firmly into the controversy with philosopher William Hasker, a man of logical ability equal to his own.¹⁵ The wealth of biblical support is such¹⁶ that we can be fully satisfied with his firmness without any more being said on the subject.¹⁷

However, Molina and the Molinists are unwilling to let go of free will in any way. For them it is vital to maintain the concept that American writers call "libertarian," an adjective I hesitate to use myself because of its political connotations. We could call it "absolutist," as the choice to be free must be strictly independent (*ab-solutus*: un-tied). Or rather, a more accurate term

¹³ Ibid., 261, quoting Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will* (1745), section 12.

¹⁴ Craig gives an accurate account of Molina's position: "He held to a view of temporal necessity as strong as that of any fatalist, maintaining that if God believed *p*, there is no longer any possibility in either the divided or composite sense of God's believing $\sim p$; nevertheless, he held that it is within a free agent's power to bring it about that $\sim p$ " (*Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 196).

¹⁵ See the account in the excellent work of Travis James Campbell, "Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique," 10–13, *Monergism*, 2017, monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/MiddleKnowledge.pdf.

¹⁶ I mention the remarkable rebuttal of open theism by Clayton Diltz, "Is Divine Foreknowledge like a Box of Chocolates?," 26–43 (36–43 on the evidence of Isa 41ff.), www.brethren-assembly.com/Ebooks/OpenTheism.pdf.

¹⁷ Some leading French intellectuals, although not theologians, have attacked foreknowledge without being aware of "open theism," but with similar motives. Maurice Clavel affirmed, "Dieu qui nous aime et nous recherche et nous prie, nous, libres, pourquoi ne serait-il pas contraint d'improviser, puisque nous sommes imprévisibles?" (*Qui t'a fait homme?* "Recherches et expériences spirituelles—Libres dans l'Esprit," Conferences at Notre-Dame de Paris, November 30, 1975, 11). Pierre Chaunu protests against Calvin's "conception rigide de la totale prescience" (Pierre Chaunu, *La Violence de Dieu* [Paris: Laffont, 1992], 94); he also speaks of salvation as a "géniale improvisation" (ibid., 103, and *Ce que je crois* [Paris: Grasset, 1982], 183) and of creation as "un processus évolutif à haut risque" in which the creator himself is "fragile et vulnérable" (ibid.). Finally, he elaborates on free will and its "irréductible autonomie" (ibid., 246).

would be “indeterministic,” as this excludes any sense of determinism.¹⁸ Molina wrote *disputatio* upon *disputatio* above all to show free will to be such (in particular *disputationes* 23 and 24, although before that in 21 and 18 he examines the biblical passages used to argue against him). Even Cardinal Bellarmine himself complained about the relentless heaviness of his style!¹⁹ For an act to be free, “it is not enough for it to be spontaneous.”²⁰ If God predetermines something, liberty dies, and it is not sufficient to refer to a “dual causality.”²¹ That is true even of the freedom of the man Jesus himself.²²

Aids to receiving grace are not effective in and of themselves, but only through the cooperation of free will.²³ As with the case later against the Jansenists, the all-or-nothing argument tacitly assimilated the contrary opinion with “Luther’s heresy”: Bañez had better watch out!²⁴ Craig finds Molina clear sighted on what the Reformers opted for: “Luther and Calvin were prepared to grant to man only spontaneity of choice and voluntariness of will, not the ability to choose otherwise in the circumstances in which the agent finds himself.”²⁵ However, for Craig this capacity is essential: “This liberty of indifference is a fact of experience, is theologically presupposed by the existence of sin, and is taught by the Scriptures and the church fathers.”²⁶ He declares bluntly: “I assume here a libertarian view of freedom.”²⁷

When the question of evil comes up, the debate becomes even more intense. In several *disputationes* (31–34), Molina gives a theological and biblical demonstration that God is not the cause of sin, but that free will (not determined by God) is.²⁸ Craig shares the feeling that the other conception makes God the author of evil. He goes as far as to write, “The Augustinian-

¹⁸ Paul Helm uses it in his reply to Craig in *Four Views*, 156.

¹⁹ From Alfred J. Freddoso, preface to *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, by Luis de Molina, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), x.

²⁰ Molina, *Concordia*, 251, *disputatio* 53, *Membrum* 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 252. It can be argued that free will, when considered in itself, abstractly, *in sensu diviso*, is not determined, but it is determined concretely *in sensu composito*.

²² *Ibid.*, 269, *disputatio* 53, *Membrum* 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, 242, *disputatio* 53, *Membrum* 1.

²⁴ Bañez, an Augustinian Thomist, teaches that it is God in his grace who determines and inserts a “physical premonition” in human will. There is some ambiguity in the position of Thomas Aquinas, who often speaks like an Augustinian through and through. In his *Summa Theologiae* I–II.10.4, he maintains that God moves the will without determining it *ad unum*. Was that a lapsus or an extreme subtlety? On the part of the Angelic Doctor the latter would not be in the least surprising.

²⁵ Craig, *Grace and Will*, 142. With regard to the ambiguity I have just referred to in Thomas Aquinas, Craig finds the Reformers “at least more consistent than Aquinas” (*ibid.*, 162, n. 3).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 163, n. 21; cf. 154.

²⁷ Craig, *Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 329, n.5.

²⁸ This is also the thesis of *disputatio* 3 on the “Questionis XIX, Art. VI” added to Molina, *Concordia*, 283–88.

Calvinist view seems, in effect, to turn God into the devil."²⁹ It is regrettable that a theologian of Craig's stature should come to such a facile conclusion, one that appears so close to blasphemy.

How does middle knowledge reconcile foreknowledge and indeterminism? In that God knew (from all eternity) what a free agent *would* do in any given situation, God knows what he *will* do—without interfering in human choice—since he knows what will actually come to pass, and that depends on his decree. God saw/knew that Peter would deny him in the high priest's courtyard with the soldiers; he had decided to create a world in which this situation would come about. But how did he know what Peter or any other free agent would do? According to Molina, Craig tells us, it is because of the "super-comprehension" that God has of his creatures' will.³⁰ Molina waxes lyrical on this in a way he considers appropriate to the subject.

God understands, knows the determination of created free will before it exists, by the infinite and unlimited perfection of his intelligence, and by his supremely eminent understanding, in which free will is found on a level much more elevated than itself; therefore, God knows hypothetically, in this or that configuration of circumstances in which God wills to place it, toward which issue it will be freely inclined.³¹

Or again: "We affirm that the certainty of this middle knowledge accrues from the supremacy and the unlimited perfection of the divine intelligence by which it knows with certainty that which is in itself uncertain."³² Minor variations on this linguistic theme are used repeatedly.³³ At the same time, Molina insists on the biblical attestation for God's knowledge of the *counterfactuals* of freedom (as they are called today, meaning the choices that *would be* made if the conditions were to be present, though they never are and never will be). The two examples of this Molina quotes are God's reply to David in 1 Samuel 23:9–13 (if you stay in Keilah, the men of that town will surrender you to Saul) and Jesus's solemn words in Matthew 11:21–24 (if the mighty works done in Chorazin and Bethsaida had been done in Tyre and Sidon, those towns would have repented). Faced with such clear texts, to deny foreknowledge of future contingents linked to freedom would be folly (*insania*), a serious error as far as faith is concerned.³⁴

²⁹ Craig, *Four Views*, 135.

³⁰ Craig, *Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 238.

³¹ Molina, *Concordia*, 243, disputatio 53, Membrum 1.

³² *Ibid.*, 261, disputatio 53, Membrum 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 208, disputatio 49; 223, disputatio 51; 230, disputatio 52 (mentions an "infinite interval" of superiority); 231, 237, disputatio 52 (also using the word *acumen*).

³⁴ Molina, *Concordia*, 226–27, disputatio 52.

Suarez, in contrast to Molina (whom Craig prefers to follow),³⁵ in addition to extending middle knowledge to *divine* decisions, attempts to dispense with supercomprehension.³⁶ He bases his argument on the notion of bivalence: propositions of the counterfactuals of freedom are true or false; God already knew, before formulating his decree, all true propositions; he knew, therefore, the counterfactuals, the content of *scientia media*. Craig seems to lean in this direction, affirming that “God just knows every haecceity so intimately that He even knows when its exemplification would act out of character.”³⁷ On the subject of propositions, the advocates of middle knowledge try particularly hard to dismiss Edwards’s argument, which derives from the necessity of the past, this being unchangeable, and the necessity of a future that is known infallibly. Plantinga gets out of a sticky situation by appealing to Ockham. In considering facts of the past, it is important to differentiate between “hard and soft” facts. The latter are affected by future decisions: the prediction of a future event, which as a fact of the past, depends for its truth on the free choice that will be made.³⁸ Though somewhat critical, Craig goes along with Plantinga.³⁹ There is foreknowledge, since God knows all true propositions, but necessity does not stifle freedom, since the truth of propositions proceeds from independent free will.

Will opposition to Calvinism ever die down? To begin with, Suarez gave a new slant to middle knowledge that is different from Molina’s. Whereas the latter wanted above all to protect free will in speaking of foreknowledge, Suarez hangs on to the sovereignty of election and predestination despite the independence of free will. For him, God chooses those who will be saved, and *scientia media* enables him to bring about the situation in which the chosen will “freely” decide to believe. This situation includes aids to receiving grace, which are said to be *congruous*, that is, “adapted or fitting” to the person—according to what God knows by middle knowledge—so that the person will choose salvation. Hence the name “congruism” is given to this configuration. Suarez even goes against his own principles by admitting that God could *overcome* any opposition to the supposedly congruous

³⁵ Craig, *Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 275, 239.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 268. Haecceity, from the Latin *haecceitas*, from the demonstrative *haec*, “this,” is a concept introduced by Duns Scotus: he found that matter was not enough to (explain) individuation (in disagreement with Thomas Aquinas); haecceity ensures the identity of a particular individual as such.

³⁸ Plantinga, “On Ockham’s Way Out,” particularly 271–72 for *hard facts*.

³⁹ Craig, *Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 183–86. On 184 he criticizes the definition of temporal necessity in terms of the power of agents.

graces.⁴⁰ In that respect, he comes close to Augustinian thought! Recently some Calvinists have tended to look favorably on middle knowledge.⁴¹ As “compatibilists” they are convinced that creaturely freedom is compatible with “determinism,” and so are anti-Molinistic, but they believe that they can highlight the wisdom of the plan of God better by bringing *scientia media* into the picture.

II. A Brief Evaluation

Should middle knowledge be recognized as a *via media* or should it be exposed as a seductive blind alley?

If we are honest, we should admit how *attractive* the Molinist “solution” is. It above all seeks to protect free will; we must recognize that the notion of freedom in question seems clear to many, even to most, modern thinkers. It is spontaneously heartfelt. It comes “naturally” with the experience of decision-making (“Should I do this or that?”). It is thought to free us from the monstrous and frightful suspicion that God could be the author of evil. And middle knowledge allows this to be done without requiring the negation of the traditional biblical understanding of foreknowledge. It brings answers to a question that Arminians ask in vain: How can God know in advance what is not determined? The way Suarez sees things honors the sovereignty of God’s choice. It seems almost too good to be true.

Our first comment concerns the notion of freedom. In that this is not a characteristic unique to Molinism (though it is a major component), it will suffice to mention the Augustinian refutation of Pelagian or Arminian points of view. The witness of Scripture sounds so loud that there would have to be collective deafness or acoustic hallucinations for it not to be heard! Scripture teaches unequivocally that the “natural” man is in bondage, incapable of receiving the things of God (1 Cor 2:14), that faith itself is a gift of God, who works in us both the *will* to do and the *ability* to do (Eph 2:8; Phil 2:12). Molina strenuously enters the exegetical contest, but without managing to convince. One example will suffice: when commenting on Romans 9:11, the verse that stresses that the decision to elect precedes any human act (Esau and Jacob), Molina can only say,

⁴⁰ According to Craig, in *Grace and Will*, 160. This shows that Suarez is less attached to the indeterminism of free will than is Molina, even though his system defends it; that is maybe why he does not deny to God the middle knowledge of his own decisions.

⁴¹ Their points of view are discussed by Laing, “The Compatibility,” 459, 463–67, and Campbell, “A Reformed Critique,” 18–19. Also called into question are Terrence Tiessen, Bruce A. Ware, and John S. Feinberg. Campbell even finds John Frame ambiguous (*ibid.*, 18, n. 44).

I admit that it [the decision] is not formed from foreknown works, but it was not so without foreknowledge of the works which would be accomplished by the free will of one or the other, according to the hypothetical arrangement of things, circumstances, and the aids [of grace].⁴²

Quite apart from the biblical argument, this analysis of indeterministic notions of freedom highlights difficulties that have been pointed out long ago. Freedom without determination, called the freedom of indifference, becomes meaningless and is reduced to the absurd (e.g., Buridan's ass). When it is absolutized in this way, no distinction of degrees or nuances can be made: Jean-Paul Sartre had the courage to face this outcome, which invariably comes up against the fact that universal experience contradicts it. We will return later to the subject of the determination of the will.

The fine-sounding terms used to extol the greatness of God cannot hide the *limitations* inflicted on God's sovereignty. Molina attributes equal weight to divine will and human will (*partim, partim*), in a joint effort that puts them on the same level.⁴³ Craig, painstaking and frank as ever, declares that "God cannot annul the fact that if a free creature *were* to be placed in a certain set of circumstances, he *would* choose to do a certain act."⁴⁴ The "counterfactuals" known through middle knowledge that do not depend on the divine will "serve to delimit the range of possible worlds to worlds feasible for God."⁴⁵ Thus the concept of omnipotence needs some rethinking: "Not even the omnipotent God can simply decree which of these two counterfactuals is true."⁴⁶ Does God thereby become passive in relation to his creatures? "Despite Molinist protests, I think we shall have to admit that this is true,"⁴⁷ says Craig, without seeing the problems involved.⁴⁸ The contrast with biblical teaching is striking! We need quote only two verses, which are often passed over, where we read that Saul died because of his unfaithfulness and because "the LORD put him to death" (1 Chr 10:13–14).⁴⁹

⁴² Molina, *Concordia*, 267, disputatio 53, Membrum 4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 200, disputatio 47.

⁴⁴ Craig, *Grace and Will*, 148.

⁴⁵ Craig, *Four Views*, 122; cf. Craig, *Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 239.

⁴⁶ Craig, *Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 273.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 272. Diltz quotes another article by Craig, which brings out the limits the theory places on God (Diltz, "Divine Foreknowledge," 24ff.).

⁴⁸ Francis Turretin's fifth objection focuses on this aspect of doctrine (*Institutes* III.13.13): "This middle knowledge takes away the dominion of God over free acts because according to it the acts of the will are supposed to be antecedent to the decree and therefore have their futurity not from God, but from itself." Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), 1:215; *Institutio theologiae elencticae* (New York: Robert Carter, 1847), 1:195.

⁴⁹ Highlighted by Diltz, "Divine Foreknowledge," 23.

As far as the origin of evil is concerned, I have criticized elsewhere the attempt to solve the problem by appealing to independent freedom—which is a way of avoiding the humiliation of the “opaque mystery” that constitutes the absolute strangeness and uniqueness of evil.⁵⁰ The specific form that this solution takes on in the doctrine of middle knowledge is further weakened by maintaining foreknowledge. Paul Helm ventures a suggestion:

On the question of the authorship of evil, there's not a hairsbreadth between the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective and Craig's Molinism. According to Craig's description of Molinism, “God decreed to create just those circumstances and just those people who would freely do what God willed to happen” (p. 134). While this description does not entail that God is the author of sin (any more than the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective does), it does entail that God decreed all sinful acts to happen and decreed them precisely as they have happened. If this is so, the God of Molina and Arminius seems to be as implicated in the fact of evil as much (or as little) as the God of the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective.”⁵¹

In any case, the advantages for which middle knowledge prides itself melt away like snow in the sunshine.

Against the argument of Edwards, Craig protests that he “confuses certainty and necessity.”⁵² The infallibility of the foreknowledge of free acts does not lead to “fatalism”—in Craig's vocabulary, the term is used to stigmatize the Augustinian position.⁵³ On one point we can concede that Craig is right: to know something is not to bring it about. Calvin himself also agrees with this: “I will freely admit that foreknowledge alone imposes no necessity upon creatures, yet not all assent to this.”⁵⁴ But the question that Craig seems to pass over rather too quickly concerns what is presupposed by foreknowledge, and what it implies. He agrees that the truth of counterfactuals is borne out in how it corresponds with actual fact.⁵⁵ But what then is the reality grasped by middle knowledge (that X , in situation A would take decision a , $A \rightarrow a$, $B \rightarrow b$, or that Peter, in the court of the high priest, would deny Jesus) even before free will had even come into existence? Is being known not being determined? This difficulty constitutes the central debate between Molinists and their theological adversaries. Craig is well aware of it:

⁵⁰ Henri Blocher, *Evil and the Cross*, trans. David G. Preston (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 55–64, 128–30.

⁵¹ Helm's reply to Craig, *Four Views*, 159.

⁵² Craig, *Four Views*, 127.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 129–31, and Craig, *Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 162–71, and also the discussion that follows on Plantinga's article.

⁵⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes* 3.23.6, as quoted in Paul Helm, “The Augustinian-Calvinist View,” *Four Views*, 184, n. 21.

⁵⁵ Craig, *Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 259–60.

The most common objection urged against the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom is the so-called grounding objection. The basic complaint here is that there is nothing to make such counterfactuals true (since they are supposed to be true logically prior to God's creative decree and even now are usually contrary-to-fact): but without a ground of their truth, they cannot be true.⁵⁶

In other words: the supposed objects of middle knowledge have no title to existence before the divine decree, and the determination of a creatable indeterminate free will is a nonobject, therefore unknowable. Otherwise, there is a contradiction between the indeterminism affirmed in the creaturely choice and the determinism implied in *absolutely certain* foreknowledge. In the name of open theism, Boyd asks, rather pointedly, "How can we meaningfully say that agents could have done otherwise if all they shall ever do, and all they would have ever done in any possible world, is an unalterable fact an eternity before they even exist?"⁵⁷ Robert Reymond, a Calvinist, sums it up like this: "In sum, human indeterminism excludes divine middle knowledge" and refers to John Frame's bemused comment: "I cannot understand why so many ... sophisticated philosophers have failed to see this point."⁵⁸

The proper object of middle knowledge (if one even exists) has to be the *junction* between the hypothetical situation and the decision made by the free agent, between A and a , to make use of our symbols again ($A \rightarrow a$, $B \rightarrow b$, and so on). How can it be explained? The link is not effected by God, out of consideration for free will, and yet it is eternally certain that free will will embrace it, although free will does not yet exist even if God already knows it and can even inscribe it prophetically in time! What right do we have to assume or suppose this link? In affirming that a always follows A , would we not be introducing a kind of *necessity*, even a *natural* kind of necessity? Francis Turretin unmasked the fallacy of the example used by the Molinists, that God knows that should he decide to create fire it will produce heat (A : fire; a : heat): the natural agents are determined *ad unum* by their nature, but "the reason of natural agents determined in their nature to one thing is different from that of free agents, which can be inclined to one or the other of opposite things."⁵⁹

The proponents of indeterminism need to be reminded of this! Craig would like the link ($A \rightarrow a$, $B \rightarrow b$, in my presentation) to be neither efficiently

⁵⁶ Craig, *Four Views*, 140.

⁵⁷ Gregory A. Boyd's reply to Craig, *ibid.*, 146. Cf. 145: "It is metaphysically irrational." Campbell, "A Reformed Critique," 16, refers to William Hasker to support the view.

⁵⁸ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 189, n. 51, for the reference to Frame.

⁵⁹ Turretin, *Institutes* III.13.22; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:218.

caused nor a question of chance,⁶⁰ but isn't this a pipe dream? He unintentionally admits that a purely naturalistic, immanent, and contingent analysis of freedom gets "fatally" bogged down *either* in the *determinism* of causal series (causal conditions and motives) that asphyxiates liberty even if it explains choice exhaustively by allowing it to be predicted infallibly *or* in *chance* as the final condition, which strikes him as untenable. *Either A* gives *a* as cause leads to effect, and then what becomes of freedom? *Or alternatively A* does not give *a*, and anything can happen, as everything is subject to chance. Craig would like to escape this dilemma, but in created nature, there is not a third category. Turretin, on the other hand, had the insight that only the transcendence of divine determination affords escape from the fatal antinomy (which is not far from Cornelius Van Til's position in his transcendental criticism of apostate thought)⁶¹ and that this is the only way to avoid the dilemma. This unique determination, which is more innate than the most intimate aspect of freedom, transcends determinism and makes for freedom—a protection against blind fate. This determination does not precede the divine will but is consequent on it carrying out God's plan; it is, therefore, incompatible with middle knowledge.⁶²

Molina attributes considerable importance to biblical evidence found in 1 Samuel 23 and Matthew 11: God knows the choices that would be made by free agents in hypothetical situations which will never actually come about. He accuses his adversaries of "weakening and overturning [*enervare et evertere*] openly the words of Christ."⁶³ But this argument has feet of clay. On the one hand, the texts quoted can be understood differently: God's answer to David is speaking about dispositions that are already settled and a resolution that has already been taken by the people of Keilah, and the condemnation

⁶⁰ Craig, *Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 262.

⁶¹ Cf., e.g., Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969).

⁶² It seems to me that Reformed theologians drawn to middle knowledge are deficient in this sense of transcendence. Their compatibilism finds its justification mainly in the link between freedom and the person as a whole, with all the possibilities of causality that this includes; they speak about determinism. It would seem they fail to see that the blend of earthly factors, however accommodating and subtle they choose to think it might be, makes freedom into an illusion if it determines this freedom to a single choice, infallibly. This amounts to (a form of) mechanism, even if it is very finely tuned and complex. Freedom transcends all these factors taken together and does so by the transcendence of the divine working that informs and generates it, in which human beings have life, movement, and being. Because of the naturalistic connotations of the word *determinism*, I prefer to avoid it in this context and speak of divine, even theological, "determination." Along with G. C. Berkouwer, I would not willingly opt for "determinism or indeterminism." G. C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, trans. Lewis Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 158.

⁶³ Molina, *Concordia*, 249, disputatio 53, Membrum 2.

of Chorazin and Bethsaida is “a hyperbolic and proverbial kind of speech.”⁶⁴ Above all, nothing would permit this knowledge to be attributed to an earlier stage of the decree! God may predict the conditions of any given hypothetical situation because he knows that he determines it to be so!

It is possible for God to have included in his decree enough of the characteristics of the agents involved to give meaning to the counterfactual propositions concerning them. God knows both what the disposition of heart of the people of Tyre might be and how he would intervene from within this situation, should he decide to work miracles in their midst. The originality of Molinism is not that it attributes to God the knowledge of these counterfactuals, but that it places this knowledge *before* the exercise of divine will (*middle knowledge*).⁶⁵ Craig admits quite frankly, “It would be very difficult to demonstrate this [the Molinist thesis] directly either biblically or philosophically” and renders to Diego Alvarez what belongs to Diego Alvarez: this Dominican discerned that the real divergence concerns the relation to the decree, whether it be before or after.⁶⁶ In fact, only Augustinian-Calvinists can explain the knowledge of counterfactuals on the basis of the divine decree, whereas if Molinists want to do so, they are obliged to contradict their indeterminism!

Molina appeals to God’s divine supercomprehension and his infinite intelligence to explain the existence of middle knowledge. Not a word, however, is said about the *how*. Turretin saw the deficiency of this reference: “But how could infirmity of knowledge change the nature of things and see a thing as certainly to take place which is contingent?”⁶⁷ There is a time and a place for bowing before the mystery, but also many instances when the appeal to supposed mystery is a way of avoiding the issue. Molina accuses his adversaries, even Cajetan himself, of falling into the latter case and taking refuge there in an unworthy manner.⁶⁸ This criticism seems to have a boomerang effect.

Ah, but isn’t God outside of time? In his eternity there is neither past nor future: in considering everything as present, he sees the choices that his creatures will make; future contingents are simply not future for him. This is how some minds (second-class ones, I am afraid) think they can solve the problem. Molina shows a prudent reserve regarding this, something

⁶⁴ Turretin, *Institutes* III.13.16; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:217; cf. *Institutes* III.13.15 dealing with 1 Sam 23 and III.13.16–17 with other passages.

⁶⁵ Freddoso underlines this clearly; see his Introduction to *On Divine Foreknowledge*, 23.

⁶⁶ Craig, *Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 242.

⁶⁷ Turretin, *Institutes* III.13.12; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:215.

⁶⁸ Molina, *Concordia*, 253, disputatio 53, Membrum 2.

we should respect. Admittedly, he went along with his contemporaries in accepting the notion of the "pure present" of eternity, a notion we owe to Boethius, through whom the philosophical heritage of antiquity was transmitted to the Middle Ages. However, he distinguished the knowledge of future contingents *in their causes* and so avoided founding middle knowledge on the "presentness" of future contingents.⁶⁹

Craig rejects the idea that future events already exist, as it raises "insuperable philosophical and theological objections."⁷⁰ He advocates a conception of time that he calls "tensed," as this preserves the ultimate validity of the succession of events.⁷¹ To compare God contemplating the future to a tourist on the Eiffel Tower seeing cars advancing toward a crossroads before they reach it falsely spacializes time. To deny that succession (i.e., *before* and *after*) is real for God, if God is the measure of truth, relegates God to an *illusion* of the creature: what would remain of the meaning of human decision then? Here again, we appreciate Turretin's firmness: we cannot base middle knowledge on "the eternal existence of things by which they are said to be present to God; but since they could have no real being (*but only an intentional*) from eternity, they cannot be said to have existed from eternity otherwise than by reason of the decree in which they obtain their futurition."⁷²

Suarez, whom Craig seems to follow, prefers to base his argument on God's knowledge of *all* truths (even before his decree), including among these propositions concerning human choices in (hypothetical) situations, from *a* to *A*, *b* to *B*. But are they in fact among them? To the extent that Craig recognizes that truth depends on correlation with reality (in all possible worlds), the question inevitably arises. If the validity of the temporal succession is given, why not recognize that the truth of propositions concerning future free choice, according to the reality of time, remains *suspended* until the choice is actually made? They are *not yet* true propositions.⁷³ The only way they can become actual truths is if indeterminism is renounced, and they are made to depend (whether they be factual or counterfactual) on God's decree: then there is no doubt that God knows them. Suarez brings logic into play by *detaching* it from the reality involved; it could be that at this point there is affinity with twentieth-century analytical philosophy!

⁶⁹ Ibid., particularly 205–7, *disputationis* 48 and 49.

⁷⁰ Craig, *Four Views*, 133.

⁷¹ Ibid., and Craig, *Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 226–27.

⁷² Turretin (*Institutes* III.13.12) refers to Thomas, *Summa* I.14.13; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:215 (emphasis added).

⁷³ In this connection, the distinction between "soft and hard" past facts fails to convince me. Facts from the past—X predicted that S would do *a* in the future—are not modified when S makes a decision; the only thing to change is the unchangeable fact.

Molina and Craig claim that middle knowledge allows for divine deliberation, and so for the wisdom of his plan (or decree).⁷⁴ The appeal of this thought resides in the analogy with human ways of planning: in drawing up a plan, a strategist takes into account the foreseeable reactions of his adversaries and partners and conceivable situations. But, precisely, this thought presupposes that God, like a human strategist, is dealing with agents that he is not determining and that their very freedom limits his own action: he has to come to terms *with* them to draw up his plan. Such indeterminism seems indefensible. Without showing the workings of his decision, without subtly toying with the “opaque mystery,” we need simply to admire the wisdom of God in the glory of what he is, beheld in the mirror of his plan.

The difference of opinion on indeterminism, and on what makes for created freedom, cannot be avoided. In Molina and those who follow him I perceive a true and valuable insight: freedom is indeed incompatible with natural determinism. A programming akin to animal instincts would do away with it.⁷⁵ If worldly forces (including psychological ones) acting on me are effective to the point that my behavior can be predicted infallibly, then I am no longer free, and I am no longer responsible. The tragic misunderstanding arises when what is true of worldly powers is extended to the relation between man and God, an absolutely unique and foundational relation. Helm made this clear: “God’s relation to the universe that he has created and that he sustains and directs is a relation without parallel. It is unique, incomparable, sui generis.”⁷⁶

Craig’s response is so astounding it almost beggars belief: “I see no reason to think that God’s relations to creation are unparalleled and incomprehensible.”⁷⁷ The blind spot is illuminating! Paul Wells recalls Herman Bavinck’s evaluation of the claim to autonomy: it is deeply *irreligious*.⁷⁸ This implies no slur on the personal piety of non-Calvinist theologians, of course: Bavinck was talking about the underlying “motive” of theological formulation. He thought of religion as being respectful awe of the divine, a numinous sensitivity, a joyous trembling, the whole being bowing before the most-high and the most-holy God. He was also talking about the role

⁷⁴ Molina, *Concordia*, 208–9, disputatio 49; 244, disputatio 53, Membrum 1; Craig, *Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 243–44; cf. Craig, *Grace and Will*, 155.

⁷⁵ Molina, *Concordia*, 196, disputatio 47, on the origin of contingency.

⁷⁶ Helm, “The Augustinian-Calvinist View,” 167, cf. 168 and 178–79. He warns against assimilating divine determination to “intramundane models of causation, and particularly to general physical determinism” (180).

⁷⁷ Craig’s reply to Helm, *ibid.*, 202.

⁷⁸ Wells, “L’élection,” 32.

of theological formulation in doctrinal construction. Without such a fear of the Lord, there can be no sound theology.

III. *Seduction as an Occasion for Reflection*

The doctrine of middle knowledge supposes as its object a blend of indeterminism and determinism; those who promote it do not explain its constitution; their defense of free will comes from conferring on God a logic valid only for his creatures. How can such minds, some of which are far from being mediocre (the ability of Craig and Molina is not being called into question), have let themselves be led astray? No doubt this comes partly from the *desire* to be in tune with an idea of freedom held passionately by the current majority opinion, but apart from that? We should learn a few lessons from this phenomenon.

Humility can be advantageous! The example of the Molinists gives us a fair warning: well-known theologians who reason so correctly on many issues can also swallow huge errors without noticing their inconsistency. Having observed this in other theologians (for example, in the articulate work of Wolfhart Pannenberg), I desire to take the admonition for myself.

When the subject of the infinite comes up, as in Molina's work, it is easy to slip off course. It is a legitimate subject, although Scripture is surprisingly discreet (the contrast with later Judaism should serve as a warning). Blaise Pascal was genius enough to handle it well, at least as far as the essential is concerned. But it is a heady subject, and it makes heads spin. It can rob us of discernment. It is so easy to end up saying anything and everything on the subject. That should make us doubly careful.

Another factor weighs particularly heavily in the balance: the very quantity of material and the technicality of the debate. The inordinate reasoning of Molina or Craig, which is sometimes complex, *anesthetizes* the ability to discern truth from falsehood (Phil 1:9 uses the word *aisthēsis* for "discernment"). In reading volumes full of complicated reasoning, the reader's energy is exhausted by the effort of understanding, and there is none left for resisting! An author inspires respect and is held in high repute when his writing is laced with refined scholarship; even if the reader feels the slightest doubt, he dares neither voice it nor even think it. That is why it often takes several decades for new theories to be assessed adequately. Only then do their catastrophic weaknesses become evident: no one had dared to see that "the emperor has no clothes"! Overelaboration and academic complication are not generally used intentionally to pull the wool over the public's eyes:

the author himself would be the first victim, being responsible for upholding an untenable idea at the heart of his development.

Finally, the category of the *possible* is not negligible and should not be neglected. Scripture permits its usage, and no one can do without it. It is when it is handled in a noncritical way, as if its meaning and its importance were not to be called into question, that we should be wary. The distinction between the divided sense (*sensu diviso*) and the composite sense (*sensu composito*) is relevant to my question, but the authors go no further. When even tradition affirms that God knows all the possibles, what is their status? Are they “something” with a certain degree of existence? Monotheism excludes the possibility of making possibles into a sort of reality (a kind of environment) or an eternal counterpart to God. I am rather disconcerted by the assurance with which analytical philosophers play with “possible worlds.” Craig is bold enough to write, “But the Molinist is under no obligation to accept the currently fashionable possible worlds account.”⁷⁹ But he goes no further, and that flash of lucidity does not make the horizon clearer. The idea will have to be examined in greater depth and with closer attention—but that is another story, or rather another research project.

⁷⁹ Craig, *Foreknowledge and Freedom*, 256; cf. 263–67.

The Eternal “Subordination” of the Son of God?

GERALD BRAY

Abstract

The relationship between the Father and the Son in the Trinity can be described in terms of “eternal subordination,” but it is unhelpful to do so. The New Testament uses the language of subordination with respect to this relationship only in 1 Corinthians 15:28, and then with a very specific act in mind. The word also has Arian connotations that are best avoided. The submission of the Son to the Father is a voluntary act of mutual love, not something imposed or made inevitable by their personal identities. The divine analogy for the marital bond is that of Christ and the church, not of the Father and the Son.

I. *The Problem of Subordination and Arianism*

How to define the relationship of the persons of the Trinity one to another, and in particular the relationship of the Son to the Father, is one of the most fundamental questions of Christian theology. Since ancient times the individual persons have been identified by what are called their “relations of causality.” The Father is “unbegotten” because his identity is not derived from either of the other persons. The Son is “begotten” because he is related to the Father by “eternal generation,” and the Holy Spirit “proceeds” from the Father, the use of the present tense indicating that this procession is

eternal.¹ These terms are derived from the New Testament and are based to some extent on human analogies.² To speak of the first two persons of the Godhead as Father and Son is to presuppose an act of generation in which the former takes precedence, but although that has been the standard Christian view from the beginning, what it precisely means was the subject of bitter dispute in the fourth and fifth centuries.

At the heart of the classical argument was the nature of the relationship between the eternal and the temporal. All those involved in the dispute believed that God is eternal and that this definition applies to the Father without qualification. The problem was to decide whether the Son was also God in the fullest, eternal sense of the word, or whether he was something less than that. For the sake of simplicity, those who believed that the Son must be inferior to the Father because he was begotten from him are known today as Arians, taking their name from Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria (256–336). Arius was condemned at the first council of Nicaea in 325 for denying that the Son was “consubstantial” (*homoousios*) with the Father and therefore not fully God in his own right. Modern research has shown that what we call Arianism is a term that covers a range of different beliefs and that relatively little of what goes under that name can be traced back to Arius himself. Nevertheless, it seems that all “Arians” believed that the generation of the Son made him ontologically inferior to the Father, even though many of them were not disciples of Arius in any meaningful sense.³

All Arians rejected the term *homoousios* because to them it sounded as though it was making the Father and the Son indistinguishable from each other—the heresy known as modalism. They therefore sought to reinterpret it as *homoios* (“similar”), a word that would allow them to retain the belief that there is a special relationship between the Son and the Father without making them ontologically the same.⁴ The logic behind this approach is easy to appreciate. If there is only one eternal, uncreated, and unbegotten God, and that God is the Father, then the Son cannot be God in the same sense or to the same degree as the Father is. The Arians argued, however,

¹ In the Western tradition, he is defined as proceeding from the Son as well, but this has always been controversial and remains a barrier to full communion between the Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Roman Catholic and Protestant) churches.

² The key texts are John 1:14 for the Son and John 15:26 for the Holy Spirit.

³ For a survey of the different kinds of Arianism, see Gerald L. Bray, *God Has Spoken* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 232–46.

⁴ The word *homoiousios* (“of like substance”), was also proposed as a compromise, but only much later, and perceptive supporters of Nicaea realized that it was really no different from *homoousios*. See Richard P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 348–57.

that the Son could still be "divine," sharing many of the attributes of the Father and having special authority to act as the Father's agent in the work of salvation, without being "God-in-himself" (*autotheos*).⁵ From the Arian point of view, the Son's ontological inferiority to the Father had its advantages. For example, it made it possible for him to become incarnate as a man and to suffer and die on the cross, something which the purely divine Father could not have done.⁶ For the Arians, the Son was a being intermediate between the divine and the human, sharing elements of both without being defined by one or the other. Like human beings, the Son was a creature, but unlike us, his nature partook of the divine. They understood Christ's role as Mediator as being the divine man who brought God down to earth and made it possible for us to know him to some degree.

In the Arian scheme, the subordination of the Son to the Father was axiomatic, because there was a time when he had not existed. His generation was not (and could not be) eternal—there had to be a "before" and an "after," even if it took place before the foundation of the world. The main objection to this was that it is not possible to be divine without being God. There is only one God, who is the Creator of all things and who is not bound by time and space. To be a creature, as the Arians claimed that the Son was, was to be something less than God, and therefore not "divine" at all. Some creatures are naturally "higher" than others, but even the angels are not divine, even though they are spiritual beings. The New Testament itself tells us that the Son is far superior to any angel and is himself the Creator, not a creature.⁷ The Nicene insistence that the Son is consubstantial with the Father was therefore merely doing justice to this New Testament witness. The Nicaeans agreed with the Arians that a distinction had to be maintained between the Father and the Son, but they also argued, against the Arians, that the distinction between them could not be ontological. They were therefore forced to reinterpret the biblical language of causation in relational terms, a shift in theological thinking that made Arianism redundant.

In Nicene thinking, the persons of the Godhead relate to one another because they are alike, something that is also true of human parents and children. This likeness makes it appropriate to use a human analogy to describe the relationship between the first two persons of the Trinity, but it cannot be pressed too far. The Holy Spirit is also a person of the Godhead,

⁵ This term appears to have been invented by Origen (185?–254?), who used it of the Father alone.

⁶ It is not certain that Arius himself taught this, but his followers did, and it was central to their Christology.

⁷ Heb 1:5–14; John 1:1–3; and Col 1:15–17.

but he does not fit into the “family” picture conjured up by the language of generation. Nor is there a female principle in the Trinity—the Son has a father but not a mother.⁸

The transposition of the language of causality from the temporal to the eternal realm is clearly visible in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan (“Nicene”) Creed, where the Son is described as “eternally begotten of the Father,” an expression that is a logical contradiction.⁹ Giving birth is a process in time, which excludes an eternal generation in the literal sense. It must, therefore, be the description of a relationship that has always existed, but what kind of relationship is that? In particular, is the Son eternally subordinate to the Father, or is that subordination merely a temporary arrangement assumed for the sake of the Son’s incarnation and not intrinsic to the Trinitarian being of God? The proper definition of subordination was the theological problem that the Nicene party in the church had to address, and it continues to shape the debate about the “eternal subordination” of the Son today.

II. *The Eternal Son and the Incarnate Christ*

The only way that questions about the eternal relationship of the Son to the Father can be answered is by looking at how that relationship is revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul tells us that although the Son was in the form of God and saw nothing wrong in thinking of himself as equal to the Father, he humbled himself, taking the form of a servant and becoming a man.¹⁰ In his human life, the Son saw himself as doing the will of his Father, and he even told his disciples that the Father was greater than he was.¹¹ When the rich young ruler called him “good,” Jesus rebuked him, saying that only God is good, whatever he meant by that.¹² In his famous “high priestly” prayer, Jesus asks the Father to restore to him the glory that he shared with him before the beginning of the world, a clear statement both

⁸ There were a few Syriac theologians who claimed that the Holy Spirit is the “female” principle in God, mainly on the ground that the Semitic word for “Spirit” (*ruach* in Hebrew) is feminine, but they did not get very far with this idea, which has never been suggested anywhere else.

⁹ The date and provenance of this creed are both controversial. The first evidence we have of it comes from the council of Chalcedon in 451, when it was introduced as the creed of the first council of Nicaea in 325. That is certainly not the case, but it may have been composed at (or shortly after) the first council of Constantinople in 381. This, at least, is the most widely accepted, and in some sense the “official” view today. See John N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 1972), 296–367 for a full discussion of the subject.

¹⁰ Phil 2:6–8.

¹¹ John 14:28.

¹² Matt 19:17.

of his eternal status in the Godhead and of his temporary self-humiliation on earth that corresponds to what Paul wrote to the Philippians.¹³

The "high priestly" prayer¹⁴ is particularly revealing because it shows us how the relationship between the Father and the Son worked in the context of the latter's incarnation and the divine plan of redemption. Its understanding of these things may be analyzed as follows:

1. The Father sent the Son into the world with a specific task for him to perform.
2. The Father empowered the Son to give eternal life to those whom he had chosen for salvation.
3. The Father had chosen certain human beings and ordained that the Son would reveal him to them.
4. By glorifying the Son, the Father would validate the Son's glorification of the Father. Their glory is mutual and eternal, even if it was hidden in the Son during the time of his incarnation on earth.

It is therefore apparent that the Father was somehow the person "in charge" of the Son's incarnation, if we can put it like that. He ordained what the Son would do, empowered him to do it, and validated his work when it was done. In all these ways, the Son's commission was grounded in the Father's will. At the same time, however, this went far beyond anything that God had ever given to an angel or another human being. The Father gave his chosen people to the Son as his own possession, because to belong to the Son is to belong to the Father also. The Son was empowered to give them eternal life, which is a gift of God. Jesus could not have given anyone something that he did not possess himself, but there is no suggestion that he owed his eternal life to the Father. On the contrary, eternal life is defined as knowing both God the Father and Jesus Christ, something that might be a new experience for believers but that has always been true of the Son. To put it differently, the Son was not acting as an intermediary between God and man without being fully divine, but sharing his life as God with the men and women whom the Father had chosen and whom he had drawn to himself.

The conclusion that we must draw is that the commission given by the Father to the Son was not a command from a superior to an inferior, but a mutually agreed-upon plan of action that required complete equality between them for it to operate in the way that it was meant to. Why did the plan for the redemption of the world take this particular form? Is there

¹³ John 17:5.

¹⁴ John 17:1–26.

something intrinsic to the Father that makes him the overseer, or something in the Son that predisposes him to take the part of the suffering servant? Here we come back to the question with which we began. Is the subordination of the Son seen in his incarnation a temporal expression of his eternal relationship with the Father, or is it limited to his work on earth but inapplicable apart from that?

Here we are peering into a mystery that is beyond our understanding. That there are three persons in the Godhead is clear from the testimony of Scripture, and from the evidence we have of how they are identified, we can safely say that their individual identities go beyond mere role play. The Son would be begotten of the Father even if he had never come into the world, and so it would seem that the task he was called to perform on earth would have been appropriate for him whether it was needed or not. If we accept this way of thinking, when the human race fell into sin, the divine rescue operation took place in the way that it did because the relational structure within the Trinity was already in place—it was not invented for the occasion. But if we think of the persons as fundamentally equal, it is not immediately clear why they should have assumed the particular identities that they have. They come to us with their identities already determined, but whether this was a mutual decision on their part or intrinsic to their persons is impossible to say. Perhaps in some hypothetical eternity, they could have worked out their relationship differently, but that is beyond our understanding. We should not be surprised or disconcerted by this. After all, we know our parents as they appear to us and cannot imagine them otherwise, even though we are also aware that there was a time before they knew each other when their lives could have worked out differently. It is a possibility but irrelevant to our experience and virtually unimaginable to us. So it is with our understanding of God—what might have been possible is rendered meaningless by what has already occurred.

We can say that as far as we know, the pattern of relationships within the Godhead was a voluntary and mutually agreed-upon choice, made in eternity and appearing in time as permanently fixed. The best evidence for this is Philippians 2:7, where Paul tells us that the Son humbled himself. He was not forced into self-humiliation by the Father, nor was it the inevitable consequence of his Sonship. What the Son did he did of his own volition, surrendering to the Father's will, not because he had to, but because it was his will to do so. Our salvation is not enslavement to a divine will that we neither understand nor desire, but a joyous liberation into the freedom of the children of God, a freedom that we can enjoy because the Son and the Holy Spirit, in whom we are united with Christ, enjoy it already.

III. *The Language of Subordination*

Back to the question of what the subordination of the Son to the Father may possibly mean. If the Son is truly God, his relationship to the Father cannot be the result of some ontological inferiority that obliges him to defer to the Father's will. The Son's obedience has to be a voluntary act grounded in his eternal equality with the Father, which means that "subordination" is a choice that he has made, not an imposition that he has been forced to accept. But is "subordination" the right word for describing this relationship? Here we are faced with a linguistic question that requires careful analysis. Human language is never adequate to convey the reality of God; it always needs to be refined and reinterpreted if it is to do justice to something that transcends the created order, and for that reason it is never definitive. Theologians have always recognized that the language we use to talk about God is analogical and imperfect and that our task is to make the analogy as close to the reality as we can.

The Greek words used in the New Testament and in the early church to convey the concept of "order" derive from the root *tag-*. The simple verb form is *tassō*, and there are three nouns formed from it. One of these is the "active" noun *taxis*, and another is the "passive" noun *tagma*, both of which are used to mean "ordering," often in a military context, where they are equivalent to "formation" or "regiment."¹⁵ *Tagma* occurs only once in the New Testament, when Paul describes the resurrection as occurring "each in his own order [*tagma*]: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ."¹⁶ There is obviously a logical priority in Christ's resurrection, but although ours is dependent on it, there is no suggestion that it is inferior to his. *Taxis* occurs more often, but always in the context of worship. Paul uses it to refer to the order that he expects to prevail in Christian assemblies, but there is no notion of hierarchy implied by it.¹⁷ It is a somewhat different story when the word is applied to the priesthood, as it is on two separate occasions. Luke uses it to describe the temple service of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, who was ministering according to the established order or *rota*, as we might say.¹⁸ But the word occurs most often in Hebrews 5–7, where it is used to define and contrast the priesthood of Melchizedek with that of Aaron. Jesus Christ is described as "a priest

¹⁵ For an analysis of this, see Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2:1454–55, under the entry *tassō*.

¹⁶ 1 Cor 15:23.

¹⁷ 1 Cor 14:40; Col 2:5.

¹⁸ Luke 1:8.

forever, after the order [*taxis*] of Melchizedek,”¹⁹ but it is clear that he is in no way subordinate to the ancient Canaanite king. The word can only mean something like “category” or “type,” and not order in a hierarchical sense.

Tassō, compounded with *syn* (“with”) as the verb *syntassō*, appears three times in Matthew, where it is used when Jesus gave his disciples instructions to do something.²⁰ No doubt Jesus had the authority to do that, but the emphasis in the text is on following the detailed directions that he gave his disciples rather than on any power that he might have exercised over them.

When the meaning of “command” is meant, the construction with *tag-* is somewhat different. The noun used in that way is not *taxis* or *tagma* but a third form, *tagē*, which is comparatively rare and does not occur in the New Testament. More common are compounds like *epitagē* (“mandate”), which is used no fewer than seven times in the New Testament, all of them with reference to a divine command given to the Apostle Paul.²¹ There is also *hypotagē*, which means “subjection” and occurs four times in the New Testament, though always in connection with human relationships within the family and the church and not in connection with submission to God, except perhaps indirectly.²² However, the verb *hypotassō* is found no fewer than thirty-three times in the New Testament, always with the meaning of “submission” or “subjection.” Most of these occurrences have little or nothing to do with Christ, though some refer to the subjection of spiritual powers (angels or demons) to the prophets and apostles.²³ Most of the time, the word implies submission to a higher authority, including that of the state over its citizens.²⁴

For our present purposes, the most important uses of the verb concern subjection to (or by) Christ and the subjection expected of women to their husbands, which some have claimed is analogous to that of the Son to the Father. We shall return to that in due course, but first, we must look at the way in which the word is used with respect to Christ. The verb is used three times in Luke. When Joseph and Mary found Jesus engaging in theological debate with the scholars in the temple, they insisted that he should return home with them, and we are told that he was “submissive” (*hypotassomenos*)

¹⁹ Heb 5:6.

²⁰ Matt 21:6; 26:19; 27:10.

²¹ See Rom 16:26; 1 Cor 7:6, 25; 2 Cor 8:8; 1 Tim 1:1; and Titus 1:3; 2:15.

²² 2 Cor 9:13; Gal 2:5; 1 Tim 2:11; 3:4. However, there are no recorded instances of either *hypotaxis* or *hypotagma*, though presumably both constructions are possible, and they may have existed, even if they were not often used.

²³ See for example, Luke 10:17; 1 Cor 14:32.

²⁴ Rom 13:1; Titus 2:9; 3:1.

to their authority, as we would expect any child to be.²⁵ The other two occurrences are both in the story of the seventy-two disciples whom Jesus sent out to preach and who returned exclaiming that even the demons were subject to them when they spoke with his authority.²⁶ Elsewhere, Paul uses the same verb when he says that God "put all things under his feet," a quotation from Psalm 8:6 that is repeated at greater length in Hebrews.²⁷ In the second instance, the writer points out that although the Father has put everything in subjection to Christ and left nothing outside his control, the fulfillment of that mandate has not yet occurred, even though he has been crowned with glory and honor because of his sufferings.²⁸ The psalm is quoted yet again by Paul when speaking of the end of time and the final judgment:

For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him [Christ], then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.²⁹

The immediate context here, which is common with much early Christian literature, is that the created order is subject to the rule of Adam in the first instance and to the Son in the second. The understanding is that Adam, created in the image and likeness of God, was given dominion over the creatures, but because he disobeyed God, he was unable to fulfill his mandate. A new Adam, untainted by sin, was required and that new Adam was Jesus Christ, whose death brought an end to death and the power of sin. This process remains to be completed, but when it is, the Son will also be subjected to the Father, here designated simply as "God."

What does this tell us about the relationship between the Father and the Son? First of all, we learn that the Father has put everything except himself under the Son's rule and authority until the work of redemption is completed. When that happens, the Son will surrender his commission to the Father so that "God may be all in all." What this precisely means is not clear, but it does not suggest that the Son is eternally subject to the Father, if only because it is a prophecy of something that is still to come and not the expression of a permanent state of affairs. Furthermore, the subjection

²⁵ Luke 2:51.

²⁶ Luke 10:17, 20.

²⁷ Eph 1:22; Heb 2:8.

²⁸ Heb 2:9.

²⁹ 1 Cor 15:27–28.

envisaged is the integration of the saving work of Christ into the eternal life of God. The end result of that is not a theocracy in which the Father rules as an unchallenged dictator over everything and everybody, including his own Son, but a world in which God is everywhere present and in whom every creature finds its proper place and function. In that world, the place of the Son will be to sit at the Father's right hand, not to be put under his feet as the creation will be.

IV. *Defining the Father-Son Relationship*

The use of the language of subordination with respect to the eternal relationship of the Son to the Father can be traced back no further than the fourth-century Arian controversy. Eunomius of Cyzicus (d. 393) used it to claim that the Son is subordinate to the Father both in essence (*ousia*) and in mind (*gnōmē*), which is typical of Arianism.³⁰ The difficulty with the fourth-century evidence for the Son's subordination to the Father is that most of it is neither Arian nor "Nicene" as it would later be understood. Instead, it tries to weave between two extremes, of which Arianism was one. In opposition to it, there was a strong and growing tendency to insist that the Son is ontologically, or by nature, identical to the Father. He was not a creature, and in that sense, he was in no way inferior to the Father's being. The equality of the Son with the Father was counterbalanced by an equally strong desire to resist modalism, also known as Monarchianism and as Sabellianism, which reduced the persons of the Godhead to nothing more than different masks or functions of the one Deity. Typical of this approach was the so-called Macrostich creed of Antioch, which is distinguished from others of its kind by a lengthy theological explanation of its meaning.³¹ Composed in late 344 and taken to Milan, where it was read out at a council held the following year, the Macrostich expounded its fourth anathema, directed against those who deny the divinity of Christ, by saying, "We acknowledge that, although he is subordinate to his Father and God, yet because he was begotten of God before all ages, he is perfect God according to nature."

Driven by the need to establish a viable distinction between the Father and the Son, the Macrostich later adds in the commentary on its seventh

³⁰ Eunomius of Cyzicus, *Apologia* 26 (Patrologia Graeca, ed. J.-P. Migne [Paris, 1857–1886], 30:846B).

³¹ This creed was called "Macrostich" because of the long lines in which it was written. It is preserved in Athanasius, *De synodis* 26 (cf. *NPNF*² 4:462–64).

anathema, directed against those who claim that the Son is unbegotten or that the Father generated him of necessity and not by free choice,

We confess in them not two gods, but one dignity of Godhead and one exact harmony of dominion, the Father alone being head over the whole universe wholly, and over the Son himself, and the Son subordinated to the Father, but ruling over all things (apart from the Father) [in second place] after him through whom they have come into existence.

This line of thinking established itself gradually as being typical of what would become the orthodox party following the first council of Constantinople in 381.³² It meant that the language of subordination was detached from the being of God and interpreted exclusively in terms of what we would now call the personal relationship between the Father and the Son. Hilary of Poitiers, who lived through this period and was well placed to understand both the Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) approaches to the subject, said as much when he expounded the meaning of the names "Father" and "Son": "The Father is greater because He is Father, the Son is not the less because He is Son. The difference is one of the meaning of a name and not of a nature."³³

For Hilary, it was essential to give substance to the names of the persons of the Trinity to avoid accusations of modalism, and in the process "subordination" acquired an entirely new meaning. In relational terms, the subordination of the Son to the Father was a voluntary act on the part of someone who knew that he was the equal of the one to whom he was submitting and who was recognized and honored ("glorified") for that. It was emphatically not something imposed on the Son by virtue of his origin, either in ontological or in purely relational terms. To put it succinctly, the Son reveals who the Father is and does what the Father wants, but he is able to do this because he is ontologically equal to the Father and shares the Father's will both in creation and in redemption. He is relationally submissive to the Father without being ontologically subordinate to him.

Moreover, it is only in this way that the Son is able to reveal the Father adequately. If he were no more than an inspired man, or an angel, he might have conveyed a message from God in the way that prophets and angels did, but he would not have been able to represent the Father to the degree that would allow his disciples to claim that they had met with God. That is

³² For a brief survey of the available evidence, see Michael J. Ovey, *Your Will Be Done: Exploring Eternal Subordination, Divine Monarchy and Divine Humility* (London: Latimer Trust, 2016), 30–74.

³³ Hilary of Poitiers, *De synodis* 64 (NPNF² 9:21).

precisely what the Christian gospel was all about: “The Word became flesh ... and we have seen his glory.”³⁴

It follows from this that Jesus revealed the will of his Father in his ministry and teaching because he was completely identified with the will of the Father. There is, however, one instance where a gap opens up between the will of Jesus and that will of the Father. In the garden of Gethsemane on the night before his suffering and death, Jesus prayed to the Father that he might be spared the ultimate agony. In one sense, that comes as a surprise, since he knew perfectly well that it was for this reason that he had come into the world. But the Son had become a man, and for that reason it would not have been natural for him to have a death wish. Had Jesus wanted to die, he would not have been a normal human being, and his resistance is not only understandable but appropriate. However, we must also note that he sweated blood in his agony and in the end surrendered his human will to the divine will that he shared with the Father—“not as I will, but as you will.”³⁵ Even in his human nature, the submission of the Son to the Father was a voluntary act and not the inevitable result of some kind of subordination, even though his humanity was obviously inferior to his divinity.

In what way does the submission of the Son to the Father in the context of his incarnation reflect their eternal relationship within the Trinity? We know that the Son was an agent of creation and that everything in heaven and on earth was made not only “*by him*” but “*for him*.”³⁶ This role in creation strongly suggests that the Son is fully the Father’s equal and says nothing about subordination. It is certainly true that the Son defers to the Father, a point that comes across with particular clarity in John’s Gospel, but there is a sense in which we can also say that the Father defers to the Son. For example, Jesus promises his disciples that if they serve him faithfully, the Father will honor them, evidently assuming that this would happen without question.³⁷ So certain is Jesus of this that he even promises to send them the Comforter (the Holy Spirit), who proceeds from the Father, apparently without having to ask the Father’s permission.³⁸ Here we are probing into the mysteries of a relationship that is beyond our understanding, and we must be extremely careful about drawing unwarranted inferences from the meager source material that we have. Suffice it to say that no evidence would oblige us to come to a different conclusion and suggest that the Son

³⁴ John 1:14.

³⁵ Matt 26:39.

³⁶ Col 1:16–17; John 1:1–3.

³⁷ John 12:26.

³⁸ John 15:26.

is eternally subordinate to the Father in a way that would make it natural for the Father to tell him what to do, whether he was willing to do it or not. The missing ingredient in discussions of this kind is any serious consideration of the love that shapes the relationships of the persons of the Godhead to one another. The Father and the Son relate to each other in a spirit of love and self-giving, not in one of power and domination. It was natural for the Son to accomplish his Father's will, but it was equally natural for the Father to share that will with the Son, and not to impose it on him by virtue of some claimed superiority over him.

V. A Model for Other Relationships?

For most of Christian history, the relationship between the Father and the Son has been discussed quite apart from any implications it might have for other relationships, either within God himself or between God and his human creatures. It has always been agreed that it is not a model for understanding the relationship between the Father and the Holy Spirit, though it must also be said that that relationship has seldom if ever been explored in any depth. The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, making it possible for us to cry to God as "Abba! Father!" but does he himself address the first person of the Trinity in that way?³⁹ We do not know. What we can say is that the Holy Spirit is not a second Son, although he has come into the world to apply the Son's teaching to us. To that extent, he picks up where the incarnate Son left off, as Jesus told his disciples he would.⁴⁰

Jesus taught his disciples to pray to God as Father, and after his resurrection, he commissioned Mary Magdalene to tell them that he was about to ascend "to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God," drawing a parallel between his relationship to God the Father and theirs.⁴¹ But we also know that our relationship to God as Father is different from his because he is the Son by nature, whereas we are children by adoption, an adoption that has been made possible only because of what he has done for us. There may be a certain parallelism here, but as creatures and as redeemed sinners we are ontologically and morally subordinate to God in a way that does not apply to Jesus.

This fact has been understood and accepted for centuries, but in recent times the suggestion has been made that the relationship between male and

³⁹ Gal 4:6.

⁴⁰ John 16:4–15.

⁴¹ John 20:17.

female human beings, and in particular between husband and wife, is somehow a reflection of the Father-Son relationship in heaven. The question is of particular concern because at least some of those who posit a link between male-female relations in marriage and the Father-Son relationship within the Godhead do so in order to reinforce their belief that the wife is subordinate to her husband and so not really his equal. This approach seldom if ever mentions the fact that the headship attributed to Christ or the male is one that carries the obligation of sacrifice, which by most measurements is more demanding than mere submission. There may be a case for saying that the relationship of the Father and Son is similar in some ways to that between a husband and his wife, but if so, it is in the context of mutual submission based on fundamental equality and not on some super-imposed idea of innate subordination.

In truth, there is no genuine connection between these two different kinds of relationship, and it is best to keep them separate. Those who argue to the contrary point usually to 1 Corinthians 11:3, where Paul talks about the relationship between God (the Father), Christ, man and woman in terms of “headship,” but great caution is required here. The immediate context of Paul’s remarks was not the Trinity, but the dress code at worship services in Corinth. Apparently, women were leaving their heads uncovered, and this was causing some disquiet in the congregation. Paul treated the subject as follows:

1. Christ is the head of every man (male). A man who prays with his head covered dishonors it.
2. Man is the head of woman. A woman who prays with her head uncovered dishonors it.
3. God (presumably the Father) is the head of Christ.⁴²

It is on this basis that Paul goes on to explain his head-covering policy. A man is to leave his head uncovered because he is created in the image of God, which must not be hidden from view. A woman is to cover her head because she is created in the image of the male and must hide that so as not to detract from the glory that ought to be given to God. Head coverings are clearly of symbolic importance in testifying to the order of creation, but they are of limited practical significance. As Paul points out, men and women need each other, and both belong to God. There is no suggestion that men and women should behave in different ways—both prayed and

⁴² 1 Cor 11:3–15.

prophesied in the church. The difference between them was one of appearance, not of function, and Paul justified his position by an appeal to what most people thought was right. Others were expected to agree with him that men ought to have short hair and women longer hair, which was an ornament of beauty for them. Whether Paul’s argument ought to establish the norm for church practice today can be debated. However, any interpretation of these verses that suggests that there is a pattern of hierarchical subordination starting with God (the Father) at the top and working down through the Son to the man and then to the woman is reading more into the text than Paul intended.

The matter could probably be left there, but it has been complicated by claims about the “true” meaning of the Greek word *kephalē* (“head”). It has been noted, for example, that the Septuagint (LXX) usually translates the Hebrew word *rosh* (“head”) as *kephalē* when it is referring to the physical part of the body, but if it means “ruler” or “chief,” the Greek translators preferred the words *archē* or *archōn*. From this, some have concluded that the Greek word was not used in the sense of a hierarchical headship, even though the New Testament quite obviously states the contrary. Ephesians 1:22 is important here because, in addition to saying that the Father put everything under Christ’s feet, it adds that he made him “head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”⁴³ This idea is repeated elsewhere in Ephesians and Colossians, making it plain that the headship of Christ implies his rule over the church.⁴⁴ Of course, these references to Christ as Lord do not mean that every mention of the word *kephalē* has to be read in this way, and the complex construction of 1 Corinthians 11:3 suggests that in that verse it probably should not be. However, it should also be said that there is no support, either within or without Scripture, for the idea that *kephalē* in that verse means “source.” There is a perfectly good Greek word for “source” (*pēgē*), and it was used in theology, but not of the relationship between the Father and the Son or between man and woman.⁴⁵

Most likely, the word *kephalē* in 1 Corinthians 11:3 means “principle” or “point of reference.” Woman was taken from man, and her humanity must, therefore, be understood as an extension of his, but she was taken from man’s side, not from his head, and cannot be regarded as his body in the

⁴³ Eph 1:22–23.

⁴⁴ See Eph 4:15; 5:23; and Col 1:18; 2:19.

⁴⁵ Fourth-century theologians spoke of the Father as the *pēgē* of the divine being, and later tradition claimed that the Virgin Mary was the *zōodochos pēgē* (“life-giving source”) because she was the mother of the incarnate Christ, but neither of these usages makes any sense in 1 Cor 11:3.

way that the church is the body of Christ. Similarly, the man was modeled on Christ, the “heavenly man,” but he is in no sense an extension of Christ’s being. As for the relationship between the Son and the Father, the word “head” can only be metaphorical in meaning, and probably ought to be understood as saying that whatever the Son is and does must be interpreted in the context of his relationship with his Father. There is a chain of relationships here but not a hierarchy of power or authority, so to use this verse as justification for male domination is quite simply wrong.

At the same time, the New Testament often uses the verb *hypotassō* when explaining how a woman should submit to her husband, and there is a clear parallel with the way in which children should submit to their parents, slaves to their masters and citizens to the state authorities.⁴⁶ But the New Testament insists that this submission ought to be voluntary, even in the case of slaves obeying their masters. True obedience is not something that can be imposed by force or authority; it must come from the heart. Secondly, in the most crucial passage dealing with husband-wife relations, it is clear that the submission must be mutual and offered in a spirit of love and self-sacrifice.⁴⁷ If Christ is a model for human behavior, it is because he sacrificed himself for the church, which is his bride—and husbands are called to do the same for their wives. Far from being a charter for male domination, the text is the exact opposite. The husband is called to love his wife as himself, and in return, the wife is asked to respect her husband, but not told that she must be his slave!⁴⁸

What is clear from this is that there is no comparison between the way a man relates to his wife and the way the Father relates to his Son. The two cases are entirely different, not least because there is never any suggestion that the Father ought to sacrifice himself for the sake of Christ. That anyone should have thought otherwise and sought to make the Father-Son relationship in the Trinity a model for human marriage can only be regarded as an aberration that detracts from the true nature of marital submission.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ On wives being submissive to their husbands, see Eph 5:22; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5; and 1 Pet 3:1, 5. For other types of purely human submission, see Rom 13:1; Eph 5:21; Titus 2:9; and 1 Pet 2:18; 5:5.

⁴⁷ Eph 5:21–33.

⁴⁸ Eph 5:33.

⁴⁹ To that extent we can agree with Kevin Giles, *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), though Giles’s polemical and journalistic style is distasteful and many of his arguments are wrongheaded.

We can, therefore, conclude the following:

1. The relationship between the Father and the Son in the Trinity can be described in terms of "eternal subordination," but it is unhelpful to do so. The New Testament uses the language of subordination with respect to this relationship only in 1 Corinthians 15:28, and then with a very specific act in mind that cannot be described as "eternal." The word "subordination" also has Arian connotations that are best avoided. It has also come to reflect the abuse of power by earthly authorities, which makes it unsuitable for current use, even if it can be defined in a technically correct manner.
2. The submission of the Son to the Father is a voluntary act of mutual love, not something imposed or made inevitable by their personal identities. It reflects a kind of relationship that is revealed in but not confined to, the incarnation of the Son.
3. There is no connection between the relationship of the Father to the Son on the one hand and of husband and wife on the other. The divine analogy for the marital bond is that of Christ and the church, not of the Father and the Son.
4. There is an order within the Godhead, between God and man, and within the human race. All relationships that reflect this order ought to be rooted and grounded in a spirit of love and self-sacrifice, not one of fear and domination.

Evangelical Reformulations of the Doctrine of the Trinity and Calvin on the Full Equality of All Persons of the Trinity

DOUGLAS F. KELLY

Abstract

In the context of Evangelical reformulations of the Trinity in a new subordinationism, the article reasserts the traditional assertion of the full equality of all persons of the Trinity. To that end, the author expositis John Calvin's formulation of the Trinity and that of the church fathers, which anticipates Calvin's doctrine. Crucial to a proper understanding are the distinctions between essence and persons and between the ontological Trinity and each person's role in redemption. The historical survey concludes with B. B. Warfield's and Thomas F. Torrance's assessments of Calvin's contribution. Finally, three implications linked to our doctrine of God—knowledge, forgiveness, and love—are considered.

When presenting the doctrine of union with Christ, it is appropriate to take a careful look at who this Christ is with whom his people are in union. Some conservative evangelicals (nearly all in the Calvinist realm) have been giving a rather different account from the

mainline tradition of who the eternal Christ is, and I wish to call that new account into question. Traditionally one would have assumed that “evangelical conservatives” would be very “conservative” about the most basic doctrine of who God is: the Holy Trinity. But trends in recent years have shown that this may not necessarily be the case, especially at present. In particular, out of their concern to speak authoritatively to gender issues, not least male headship within Christian marriage, several evangelical conservative thinkers have been reworking the traditional doctrine of the Trinity in order to strengthen their case of male leadership.

1. Changes in Trinitarian Theology Proposed by Some Evangelical Conservatives

Some recent writings by evangelical conservatives have sought to anchor more firmly female submission to the male by reconsidering the ineffable relationships of the eternal persons of the Holy Trinity within the very substance of God. To do this, they have needed to reformulate the traditional understanding of the priority of the *ontological* Trinity over the *economical* Trinity.¹

I believe that this is a seriously misguided approach to the matter; one that would eternally subordinate the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father in order to provide strength for a particular view of gender roles within the human race: namely, that the female is to be submissive to the male within marriage.² This concern for submission of the female within marriage may well be valid, but this submission is not biblically based upon subordination of the second and third persons of the Trinity to the first, but rather should be properly based upon the order of creation (as in Gen 1 and 2, and 1 Cor 7, and 1 Pet 3), and particularly the love of the Son for his church, and how this exemplifies the way male and female are to act within marriage (as in Eph 5).

¹ These terms will be discussed more fully later, but basically, *ontological Trinity* refers to who the Triune God is within his own substance or being from all eternity, whereas *economical Trinity* refers to his coming down to us within the history of redemption. Orthodox believers have always held that the ontological Trinity has theological priority over the economical Trinity.

² Most (though not all) of these new formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity, which lean to some sort of eternal subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father, have been expressed on the Internet (or “blogosphere”) in 2016 and 2017. The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals listed a number of exchanges on this matter between May 22, 2015, and August 22, 2016; see “Highlights on the Trinity Debate,” Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, <http://www.alliancenet.org/trinity-debate>. Steven Wedgworth also helpfully summarizes many of these (sometimes heated) interchanges; see Steven Wedgworth, “Madness from the Gods?: Evangelicals, Complementarianism, and the Trinity,” *The Calvinist International*, 29 June 2016, <https://calvinistinternational.com>.

II. *Why Some of These Reformulations Are Not Helpful*

As Liam Golligher has pointed out, it is a serious step backward in terms of the biblical doctrine of the three eternally co-equal persons within the one being of God, as well as in terms of the historic teaching of the majority of the Christian theological tradition, to read back the submission of the female to the male into the eternal relationship within the Triune God. Who the one Triune God eternally is may not properly be harnessed to human gender concerns (even legitimate ones), for—by the law of unintended consequences—that provides a seriously defective view of the eternal being of the blessed Trinity.³

As far as I know, nearly all of those who have joined in this debate, even those who argue in favor of the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, as well as those who argue against it, would count themselves in the general rank of Calvinists. Indeed, one of the most distinguished of them, Wayne Grudem (who certainly holds to the full deity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), have stated that John Calvin allowed some kind of subordinationism within the Trinity. He refers to Richard Muller as saying this.⁴

However, Muller is too careful a Calvin scholar to imply that Calvin held to any kind of *eternal* subordination between Father and Son. Rather, Muller rightly notes that Calvin, following Scripture, held any relation of subordination of the Son to the Father to be only within the working out of the plan of salvation, in which the Son willingly agrees to become incarnate for the redemption of his people on earth, and as part of that self-lowering, gladly submits to the will of the Father (which is his will, and that of the Spirit) for the grand accomplishment of the salvation of the church. To use traditional terms, this subordination of Son to Father is *economic*, not *ontological*.

³ Liam Golligher posted two articles on June 3 and June 6, 2016; see Liam Golligher, “Is it Okay to Teach a Complementarianism Based on Eternal Subordination?,” and “Reinventing God,” *Housewife Theologian Blog*, <http://www.mortificationofspin.org>. His views were affirmed by Carl Trueman on June 7, 2016, in his post “Fahrenheit 381,” Postcards from Palookaville Blog, <http://www.alliancenet.org>. Their critiques of the subordinationism of these new formulations were challenged by Bruce Ware and Mike Ovey on June 11, 2016; see Bruce Ware, “God the Son—At Once Eternally God with His Father, and Eternally Son of the Father,” *Reformation* 21, 9 June 2016, <http://www.reformation21.org>; and Mike Ovey, “Should I Resign? On the Eternal Subordination of the Son,” *Credo Magazine*, 11 June 2016, <http://www.credomag.com>. Several others have written pro and con these positions since then, and I will not list them here.

⁴ Wayne Grudem, “Whose Position on the Trinity Is Really New?,” CBMW, 9 June 2016, <https://cbmw.org/public-square/whose-position-on-the-trinity-is-really-new/>. Cf. Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 4:80.

III. Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity

Since Calvin is acknowledged as a theological father by both eternal subordinationists and full egalitarians, it seems helpful to consider the great contribution made by Calvin to Trinitarian theology. In a word, any careful reading of Calvin will *not* suggest any eternal subordinationism within the one Being of God; rather, the contrary. If the innovators among the evangelical conservatives, who are reformulating their doctrine of the Trinity in terms of eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, would study carefully how their supposed leader, Calvin, actually taught his own doctrine of the Trinity, they could find a way out of their theological wanderings onto solid biblical ground.

1. Calvin's Distinction between God's Eternal Essence (or Substance) and Historical Personal Roles in the Order of Redemption

Calvin's fullest teaching on the Trinity is found in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1.13). The distinction he makes there between God's *substance* (or *essence*) and his personhood is paramount to his contribution to the church's clearer grasp of Trinitarian theology. We shall see that with Calvin, a true account of the subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father only pertains to the *economy*—to the outworking of the redemption of the church by the historical tasks of the three persons—not to the eternal inner being of God (the ontological Trinity), which is always shared in absolute equality by the three in their ineffable oneness of substance.

The Difference between Person and Essence

Therefore, Calvin's understanding of *person* and *substance* (*essence* or *being*) is basic to his doctrine of the Holy Trinity and constitutes his greatest contribution to his understanding of God, rooted in Scripture and many of the fathers. First, let us see how Calvin puts these two major concepts together: "When we profess to believe in one God, under the name of God is understood a single, simple essence, in which we comprehend three persons or hypostases."⁵ This statement expresses the whole truth of Scripture about the Trinity:

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:144 (1.13.20).

For nothing excludes the view that the whole essence of God is spiritual, in which are comprehended Father, Son, and Spirit. This is made plain from Scripture. For as we there hear God called Spirit, as also do we hear the Holy Spirit, seeing that the Spirit is a hypostasis of the whole essence, spoken of as of God and from God.⁶

Secondly, we note how Calvin defines *person* in relation to “essence,”

“Person,” therefore, I call a “subsistence” in God’s essence, which, while related to the others, is distinguished by an incommunicable quality. By that term “subsistence” we would understand something different from “essence.” For if the Word were simply God, and yet possessed no other characteristic mark, John would wrongly have said that the Word was always God [John 1:1]. When immediately after he adds that the Word was also God himself, he recalls us to the essence as a unity. But because he could not be with God without residing in the Father, hence emerges the idea of a subsistence, which, even though it has been joined with the essence by a common bond and cannot be separated from it, yet has a special mark, whereby it is distinguished by a special quality. This “relation” is here distinctly expressed: because where simple and indefinite mention is made of God, this name pertains no less to the Son and the Spirit than to the Father. But as soon as the Father is compared with the Son, the character of each distinguishes the one from the other. Thirdly, whatever is proper to each individually, I maintain to be incommunicable, because whatever is attributed to the Father as a distinguishing mark cannot agree with, or be transferred to the Son. Nor am I displeased with Tertullian’s definition ... that there is a kind of distribution or economy in God which has no effect on the unity of the essence.⁷

This clear distinction between person and substance (or essence) should show us that we do not seek to penetrate into God’s eternal essence in order to seek a role model for Christian males and females, but rather into the roles of the persons in the historical order of redemption. Calvin was no innovator here; he was following several leading Eastern and Western fathers of the church on the all-important distinction.

Calvin Follows Augustine in Thinking of God Both “Substance-wise” and “Relationship-wise”

Let us start with Saint Augustine in the West, whom Calvin quotes more than any other father. Augustine says that God can be spoken of both relationship-wise and substance-wise. He holds that if Father could be thought of apart from Son, and Son apart from Father (that is, only in relationship to themselves alone), they would, in effect, be different substances:

⁶ Ibid., 1:145 (1.13.20).

⁷ Ibid., 128 (1.13.6). Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 2.9.

But since the Father is only called so because he has a Son, and the Son is only called so because he has a Father, these things are not said substance-wise, as neither is said with reference to itself but only with reference to the other. ... Therefore, although being Father is different from being Son, there is no difference of substance, because they are not called these substance-wise but relationship-wise.⁸

The Distinction between Substance and Person in Eastern Fathers
This distinction was also the insight of major Eastern fathers, such as Gregory of Nazianzus and Epiphanius. Gregory explicates this crucial distinction between substance and person in *Oration* 40, where he shows that each of the three persons of the Trinity is fully God himself,

neither increased nor diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same; just as the beauty and the greatness of the heavens is one; the infinite conjunction of Three Infinite Ones. Each [is] God when considered in Himself; as the Father so the Son, as the Son so the Holy Ghost; the Three One God when contemplated together; Each [is] God because Consubstantial; one God because of the Monarchia.⁹

Gregory Shows That There Is No “Origin” within the Ontological Trinity
Gregory did not use the word *origin* within the Trinity.

I should like to call the Father the greater, because from him flows both the Equality and the Being of Equals (this will be granted on all hands), but I am afraid to use the word Origin, lest I make Him the Origin of Inferiors, and thus insult Him by precedence of honour. For the lowering of those Who are from Him is no glory to the Source.¹⁰

He holds that to subordinate any person of the three is to overthrow the Trinity:

For he [Arius] did not honour the Father, by dishonouring His offspring with his unequal degrees of Godhead. But we recognize one glory of the Father, the equality of the Only-begotten; and one glory of the Son, that of the Spirit. And we hold that to subordinate any of the Three, is to destroy the whole.¹¹

⁸ Augustine, *De Trinitate* 5.6. Augustine, *The Trinity*, 2nd ed., trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2012), 192.

⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 40.41 (NPNF² 7:375). “The Monarchy” was a term used by many church fathers to indicate “monotheism,” or the sovereignty of the one true God. Gregory’s position was that “the Monarchy” was held by the entire Trinity, not just the Father.

¹⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 40.43 (NPNF² 7:375–76).

¹¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 43.30 (NPNF² 7:405).

Gregory Considers “the Monarchy” to Reside in the Entire Trinity, Not Just the Father

Gregory taught that the unity of the Godhead is complete not just in the person of the Father, but in each person as well.

But when I say God, I mean, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. For Godhead is neither diffused beyond these, so as to bring in a mob of gods; nor yet is it bounded by a smaller compass than these, so as to condemn us for a poverty-stricken conception of Deity; either Judaizing to save the Monarchia, or falling into heathenism by the multitude of our gods.¹²

... acknowledging the Unity in the Essence and in the undivided worship, and the Trinity in the Hypostases or Persons (which term some prefer). ... [That they are same essence as God, but are distinguished by personal properties].¹³

Epiphanius Sees That the Persons of the Trinity Have Always Existed “Beyond Beginning and Beyond Time”

It is the same with Epiphanius, who held that each person of the Trinity is whole and perfect God.¹⁴ He affirmed that the being of the persons of the Trinity is “beyond beginning and beyond time” with no “before” or “after” in God. Epiphanius taught that the Monarchy refers to the entire Trinity, not just to the person of the Father: “In proclaiming the *Monarchia* we do not err, but confess the Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, one Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (Epiphanius, *Adversus haereses* 62.3).¹⁵

The teaching of Calvin was in full accord with that of Augustine, of Gregory of Nazianzus, and Epiphanius, and also of Cyril of Alexandria. In his controversy with Pierre Caroli, Calvin puts forth the teaching of Cyril (who was in line with Epiphanius and Gregory Nazianzus) that “the Father has nothing of himself which the Son does not have of himself” (Cyril of Alexandria, *De Trinitate* 3).¹⁶

Calvin clearly teaches against the theory that the Father “gave essence” to the Son and Spirit, as though they held a merely derived Deity. In arguing against Valentine Gentile, who held this position, Calvin answered,

¹² Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 38.8 (NPNF² 7:347).

¹³ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 42.16 (NPNF² 7:391).

¹⁴ Epiphanius, *Adversus haereses* 62.3ff. (PG 41:1053ff.).

¹⁵ As quoted in Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 120 (cf. PG 41:1053).

¹⁶ Referred to by Calvin in John Calvin, “*Adversus Petri Caroli Calumnias* (1545),” *Calvini opera* (Brunswick: Schwetschke, 1863–1900), 7:322.

For if we consider no one but the Father to be God, we definitely cast the Son down from this rank. Therefore whenever mention is made of deity, we ought by no means to admit any antithesis between Son and Father, as if the name of the true God applied to the latter alone. For of course the God who manifested himself to Isaiah [Isa. 6.1] was the true and only God, the God whom nevertheless John affirms to have been Christ (John 12:41).¹⁷

2. Calvin Teaches the Self-Existence of the Son

In a great clarifying moment of Trinitarian theology, Calvin attributes self-existence (*autousia*) to the Son. In so doing, he is directly following Epiphanius.¹⁸ Thus Calvin affirms the full deity of the Son and the Spirit (who are distinct persons from the Father), while at the same time affirming the absolute oneness and simplicity of the essence the three persons share in common from all eternity.

Unlike some modern evangelical conservatives who have sought to subordinate the deity of Son and Spirit to the Father, Calvin shows that the personal distinctions of the three generally refer to their personal relationships within the work of redemption, in which there is “economic order,” according to which the Father has priority. This order of personal relationship “takes nothing away from the deity of the Son and the Spirit.”¹⁹ Thereby, Calvin teaches that according to the Scriptures, “God is one in essence, and hence that the essence both of the Son and of the Spirit is unbegotten.... Thus God without particularization is unbegotten; and the Father also in respect to his person is unbegotten.”²⁰

In sum, Calvin shows that the three persons are distinct from one another (though not divided), in which Father is first, Son is second, and Spirit is third, in the order of revelatory and redeeming activity.²¹ The Father is the fountain of Deity, with respect, not to being, but to order.²² This means that sonship is a relation so that the Son differs from the Father only by this property of sonship (or being begotten), but as to his own being, it is the same essence as that of the Father.²³ Calvin writes,

¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 149 (1.13.23).

¹⁸ Epiphanius, *Adversus haereses* 69. Calvin, “Adversus Petri Caroli Calumnias (1545),” *CO* 7:322–23; cf. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives*, 65.

¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 144 (1.13.20).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 153 (1.13.25).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1.13.18.

²² *Ibid.*, 1.13.26.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1.13.6.

We confess that the Son since he is God, exists of himself, but not in respect of his Person; indeed, since he is the Son, we say that he exists from the Father. Thus his essence is without beginning; while the beginning of his person is God himself. Those orthodox writers who formerly spoke concerning the Trinity applied this name only to the persons.²⁴

This means that considered as to their one godness, they share absolutely and simply the same eternal essence as *autotheos* or self-existent, underived deity. Hence the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each *autotheos* or *a se esse*, because they are the one true and Triune God.²⁵ Each of them possesses the whole essence of the Godhead, and yet this does not make them more than one God, nor remove their personal distinctions.²⁶ “Hence it is quite clear that in God’s essence reside three persons in whom one God is known.”²⁷

This obviously means that the essence of God is totally beyond human conceptions of it. His being may reverently be thought of as something like a being which is always personal and never impersonal, so that for God to exist is always for him to exist within personal relationship, which constitutes no division of his being.²⁸

This is in the line of Athanasius, who taught that if the Son is whole and complete God, then he too is the origin or principle of being along with the Father.²⁹ That is, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit eternally coinhere in one another with “one Godhead and one Principle.”³⁰

IV. Two Twentieth-Century Trinitarian Theologians: Warfield and Torrance

Two great Trinitarian theologians of the twentieth century, B. B. Warfield and Thomas Torrance, saw that the major contribution of Calvin to the doctrine of the Trinity was in pointing out clearly the full deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. To accomplish this, Calvin had to reject some of the subordinationist statements of such fathers as Gregory of Nyssa and Basil the Great, who appear to have followed Origen in some limited respects. In

²⁴ Ibid., 154 (1.13.25).

²⁵ Ibid., 1.13.20.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 140 (1.13.16).

²⁸ Ibid., 1.13.17.

²⁹ Athanasius, *Orationes contra Arianos* 3.3–6 (NPNF² 4:395–97); *De Synodis* 49 (NPNF² 4:476).

³⁰ Athanasius, *Tomus ad Antiochenos* 5.5–11 (NPNF² 4:484–86); *Orationes contra Arianos* 2.33 (NPNF² 4:366).

doing so, Calvin followed some of the great church fathers already mentioned above. Warfield writes,

It was, therefore, a very great service to Christian theology which Calvin rendered when he firmly asserted for the second and third persons of the Trinity their *autotheotēs* ["self-existence" or "aseity"]. ... If we will glance over the history of the efforts of the Church to work out for itself an acceptable statement of the great mystery of the Trinity, we shall perceive that it is dominated from the beginning to the end by a single motive—to do full justice to the absolute deity of Christ. ... [Warfield then mentions the names of three of the greatest contributors to this effort: Tertullian, Augustine, and Calvin.] It is into this narrow circle of elect spirits that Calvin enters by the contribution he made to the right understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. That contribution is summed up in his clear, firm and unwavering assertion of the *autotheotēs* of the Son. By this assertion the *homoousiotēs* of the Nicene Fathers at last came to its full right, and became in its fullest sense the hinge of the doctrine.³¹

Similarly, Torrance shows that in a sense, Calvin overcame the lingering subordinationism of some (though *not* all—as we saw immediately above) of the Nicene fathers. According to Torrance,

Calvin's account of the manifold interpenetrating personal relations or subsistences within the one indivisible Godhead, [is] in many respects his most significant contribution to the doctrine of the Triunity of God. Here it becomes clear that his biblical approach has led him to offer a more unreserved account of the Deity of the Son and of the Spirit both in their distinguishing properties and in their consubstantial relations with God the Father than that offered by most of his theological predecessors.³²

V. Some Modern Evangelicals Have Seriously Neglected the Distinction between Essence and Person within the Godhead

With all due respect to some of my evangelical-conservative brethren, it seems to me that they have not taken adequate account of the all-important distinction between essence and person within the Godhead. Strangely, it is as though they have unwittingly sought to penetrate the essence of God in order to enforce the submission of women to men. But the implications of submission within the married order is rather based on the *economic* relations of the *persons* within the history of redemption, and I think that those who have sought to reformulate the doctrine of the Trinity would have done well to have kept that in mind.

³¹ B. B. Warfield, "The Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956), 273, 284.

³² Torrance, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Trinitarian Perspectives*, 54.

For instance, that fine evangelical theologian Grudem has—I think—tended to overlook this very important distinction in his formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. In his *Systematic Theology*, Grudem gives a generally helpful and sound exposition of the Holy Trinity, and the vast majority of his volume is to be highly commended. However, unlike the careful discernment made by Calvin between God's eternal essence and his historico-redemptive roles, Grudem seems to teach that the Son must be *eternally* subordinate to the Father, not just subordinate as the historic mediator.

Grudem holds that the Son is eternally subordinate in his person to the Father (and not just in his historical role). He writes, "For example, if the Son is not eternally subordinate to the Father in role, then the Father is not eternally 'Father' and the Son is not eternally 'Son.' This would mean that the Trinity has not eternally existed."³³

But surely Calvin and Augustine would answer that the absolute, eternal equality among all three persons of the blessed Trinity is given in the simplicity of the being of God, prior to historico-redemptive roles. We do not start with the redemptive roles of the three persons, and then read that back into the ineffably eternal existence of the very substance of God, and thereby claim that the Son has always been ontologically lower than the Father!

VI. Calvin Points Out a Better Way

Calvin's approach is clearer and more biblically sound in its Trinitarianism. He states, "It remains that the essence is wholly and perfectly common to Father and Son. If this is true, then there is indeed with respect to the essence no distinction of one from the other."³⁴ Warfield underlines why:

[Calvin's] conception involved, of course, a strongly emphasized distinction between the essence and the Personality. In essence the three Persons are numerically one: the whole essence belongs to each Person: the whole essence, of course, with all its properties, which are only its peculiarities as an essence and are inseparable from it just because they are not other substances but only qualities.³⁵

Calvin teaches that the substance (or essence) of God is absolutely and eternally shared and undivided; none of the three persons has either more or less of it:

³³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 251.

³⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 151 (1.13.23).

³⁵ Warfield, "The Doctrine of the Trinity," 243.

For since the essence of God is simple and undivided, and he contains all in himself, without portion or derivation, but in integral perfection, the Son will be improperly, even foolishly, called his “stamp” [referring to Heb 1:3]. But because the Father, although distinct in his proper nature, expresses himself wholly in the Son, for a very good reason is it said that he has made his hypostasis visible to the latter. In close agreement with this are the words immediately following, that the Son is “the splendor of his glory” [Heb. 1:3]. Surely we infer from the apostle’s words that the very hypostasis that shines forth in the Son is in the Father. From this we also easily ascertain the Son’s hypostasis, which distinguishes him from the Father.

The same reasoning applies to the Holy Spirit: for we shall presently prove that he is God, and yet it is necessary for him to be thought of as other than the Father. Indeed, this is not a distinction of essence, which it is unlawful to make manifold.³⁶

We may summarize Calvin’s theologically sophisticated account of the relationship between the absolute equality of the one substance of the Holy Trinity (i.e., the ontological Trinity), and the ordered role of the three persons within the history of redemption (i.e., the economic Trinity) in these words:

Therefore, whenever the name of God is mentioned without particularization, there are designated no less the Son and the Spirit than the Father; but where the Son is joined to the Father, then the relation of the two enters in; and so we distinguish among the persons. But because the peculiar qualities in the persons carry an order within them, e.g., in the Father is the beginning and the source, so often as mention is made of the Father and the Son together, or the Spirit, the name of *God* is peculiarly applied to the Father. In this way, unity of essence is retained, and a reasoned order is kept, which yet takes nothing away from the deity of the Son and the Spirit.³⁷

VII. *Why Do Such Controversies Really Matter?*

It is my hope that many of those who feel it necessary to reformulate the doctrine of the Holy Trinity will reconsider the all-important distinction made long ago by Calvin (who himself was following his theological masters such as Gregory of Nazianzus and Augustine) between the eternal simplicity and godhood of God and the roles he took on in the economy of redemption of his church. Why should they do so, and why does it really matter?

Carl Trueman put his finger on the crucial problem when he wrote,

Because, mark this, to have an eternally subordinate Son intrinsic to the Godhead creates the potential of three minds, wills and powers. What they have done is to take the passages referring to the economic Trinity and collapse them into the ontological Trinity.³⁸

³⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 122–23 (1.13.2).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 144 (1.13.20).

³⁸ Trueman, “Fahrenheit 381.”

But on the contrary, the true simplicity of God, the full and eternal equality of all three persons of the Holy Trinity, as is conveyed by the distinction between the ontological Trinity and the economic Trinity assures every believer of the identity between the knowledge of Jesus, the forgiveness of Jesus, and the love of Jesus and that of Almighty God.

1. *Knowledge of God*

One of the chief issues in the presentation of saving truth and of continuing pastoral care is the teaching that to know Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit is to know God himself! This is what Jesus said to Philip:

Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father; and the Father in me? ... or else believe me for the very works' sake. (John 14:8–11 kjv)

This knowledge of Christ being finally equivalent to direct knowledge of God is a central characteristic of the great promise conveyed by the new covenant, as Jeremiah foretold:

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jer 31:33–34)

When we know God, we abide in his presence through our Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, to know Jesus is to know God the Father directly. To be indwelt by the Holy Spirit is to have God himself within us. Because of the truth of the absolute equality of the three persons of the Trinity within the undivided substance of God from all eternity, to be in touch with any one of the three is to be in touch with them all at one and the same time. We are not asked to seek to move upwards from some subordinated person (or persons) to the highest person; we *already* possess this saving, transforming knowledge of the Father, when we believe in Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, who is one essence with Father and with Son. What a transforming assurance! This truth is safeguarded in the distinction between God's antecedent, eternal essence (or *ontological* Trinity) and his historical roles within the order of redemption (or *economical* Trinity).

2. *Forgiveness of God*

As Jeremiah has shown, to know God directly is to be confronted by our sin and guilt, and to have that sin and guilt purged away. The glory of the gospel is that the forgiveness by Jesus of people's sins is absolutely identical with the forgiveness of God the Father on his majestic throne!

How frequently the Gospel accounts show the horror of the scribes and Pharisees when they hear Jesus forgiving a sinner! But that is the joy of the gospel; it is the fulfillment of the new covenant! We see this when Jesus healed a man with palsy in Capernaum, who had been let down the roof into the room where Jesus was:

When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak these blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion. (Mark 2:5–12)

The Son of God who came to earth to save his people could forgive sins immediately, because he had always possessed the very essence of God as the eternal Son, thus possessing an authority that only one who exists in the substance of God could exercise. As he said in another context, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:17–18).

One of my theology professors many decades ago had served as a chaplain in the Allied Armies during some of the worst fighting in northern Italy during World War II. Near the end of a particularly gruesome battle in the snowy mountains, when the Allies were getting the worst of it, this faithful evangelical British chaplain knelt down beside a young English soldier, who was bleeding to death with no medical help in sight. The dying soldier said to the chaplain, who grasped his hand, “Padre, I was taken to Sunday School when I was a small boy, and learned about Jesus. I know I cannot live much longer, and here is what I wonder. Is the God whom I must soon see like Jesus, or is he different?” The evangelical chaplain assured that dying young man that the God he would soon meet was precisely the same as Jesus and that he could trust in him now and forever for forgiveness. (I can add here

that this theology professor, who taught me in the 1960s, was firmly convinced of the full equality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the undivided substance of the eternal Trinity. That faith informed both his pastoral practice and his theological teaching.)

3. *Love of God*

The love of Jesus to us, and the love of the Holy Spirit in us and to us, is identical with the love of God the Father Almighty. That is because there is no subordination of one to the other in the eternal essence or being of God. When you experience the love of the Son, it is the love of the Father; when you know the love of the Spirit, it is the love of the Father. Yes, in “the economy” there is a definite order (but not division) of persons, so that the Father is first, the Son is second, and the Holy Spirit is third, but in the eternal substance, it is the same knowledge, the same mercy, and the same love forevermore, for their being has always been one and the same!

God is love (1 John 4:8). The love of God sent the Son (John 3:16), and that love has “in the economy” been manifested in the Son (1 John 4:10), and in the Spirit (1 John 4:13). We are told that the Son, “having loved his own which were in the world, ... loved them unto the end” (John 13:1). The love of the Son was identical with that of the Father, for they have always been one in the undivided essence of God.

The love of the Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5, “because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given unto us”) is identical with the Father’s love, for they have always shared the very same eternal essence as the One Triune God. The love we know by the Spirit’s indwelling is not a lower (or subordinate) reality from the Father’s love; it is precisely the same, for they have always been, and will always be one in substance.

Paul says a very important thing about this in passing. In Romans 15:30, he makes a prayer request: “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.” This clearly means that the Spirit loves us! The *Father* loves us, the *Son* loves us, and the *Spirit* loves us! That is because the Triune God in his substantial oneness is love.

Gregory of Nazianzus writes of the profound significance of the oneness of substance of the three holy persons:

No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three I think of Him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of

That One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the Rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light.³⁹

We do not know what the essence of God is, but love is there! It is not three different loves; it is one and the same love, but shared in and expressed out of the one eternal essence in a way appropriate to each of the three divine persons. We could go on to say that there is actually only one divine consciousness within the ontological Trinity, but it is shared in differently by the three Persons, in accordance with their own peculiar characteristics. Thus, there is within the eternal substance of God, finally one consciousness, one will, one love, and one fount of mercy; but partaken of in distinctly different ways, according to the person, who always retains certain peculiar characteristics incommunicable to the others (to use the classical phrase of *incommunicability*).⁴⁰ As Saint Augustine wrote, God has “one will, one power, and one majesty.”⁴¹

Saint Athanasius, in his *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, has phrased it beautifully:

The Holy and Blessed Triad is indivisible and one in itself. When mention is made of the Father, there is included also his Word and the Spirit who is in the Son. If the Son is named, the Father is in the Son, and the Spirit is not outside the Word. For there is from the Father one grace which is fulfilled through the Son in the Holy Spirit; and there is one divine nature, and one God “who is over all and through all and in all.”⁴²

For the profoundly evangelical reasons of true knowledge of God, true forgiveness by God, and true love of God in the experience of salvation, I for one, am unwilling to back down from the biblical teaching, so well

³⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.41 (NPNF² 7:375).

⁴⁰ The classical theological tradition, formulated so well in the twelfth century by Richard of Saint Victor in his *De Trinitate*, defined the meaning of “person” to be “... intellectualis naturae incommunicabilis existentia” (4.16, 22, 24; PL 196:940, 945–47)—that is, “a person is the incommunicable existence of intellectual nature.” That means that the personal distinctions of the Father are not conveyed away and lost by his relationship to the Son, nor are the personal distinctions of the Son exhausted in his relationship to the Father, and similarly, the personal distinctions of the Holy Spirit are not conveyed away and lost as he is (in the words of Augustine) “the bond of charity linking Father and Son” (cf. Augustine, *The Trinity* 15.37). This concept of incommunicability is employed by Calvin in his definition of “person” in *Institutes* 1.13.6.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 22.15 (NPNF¹ 7:150).

⁴² Athanasius, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit*, trans. C. R. B. Shapland (London: Epworth, 1951), 93–94 (1.14).

expressed by Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzus, Augustine, and Calvin, that all three persons of the blessed Trinity are ever one in essence, though three in personhood, as they bring this transforming experience of God, in their own appropriate ways, to all the elect for all time and all eternity.

I hope that others who for some years have been reformulating their doctrine of the Trinity—and in so doing have been erasing important distinctions between God's eternal substance and his roles in the economy—will take a fresh look at Calvin and Augustine, with whom they believe they stand in some kind of continuity. Much good could come from it for those who follow their teaching!



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The Holy Spirit and the Church's Social Responsibility

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Abstract

This article responds to criticisms regarding pneumatology and the church's social responsibility that are often joined and directed at Reformed tradition and theology. We will argue that, as reflected by its confessional standards, the Reformed tradition inherits a comprehensive doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it also provides rich materials for Christian guidance and reflection on the church's social responsibility. Therefore, if local churches neglect their social responsibility, it must not be because of the lack of the church's teaching on its social responsibility; rather, the cause of this neglect has to be sought elsewhere.

This article deals with two frequently voiced criticisms. The first concerns the neglect of the Holy Spirit, while the second addresses the church's social responsibility. These two issues might seem to be quite unrelated, but in Reformed tradition and theology, as this article seeks to show, they are closely knitted together.

Before discussing this relationship further, we present the two questions.

With the rise of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has received more attention than before. At the same time, there have arisen criticisms of the treatment of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in church history, including in the Reformed tradition, for

having neglected the Holy Spirit in both theology and in the life of the church. These criticisms have encouraged careful explorations of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit within diverse Christian traditions, resulting in a more balanced evaluation of the Christian tradition's treatment of the Holy Spirit.¹ Although many great Reformed theologians—John Calvin, Gisbertus Voetius, Samuel Maresius, Campegius Vitringa Jr., John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Stephen Charnock, and Abraham Kuyper, to name a few—have devoted works to discussing the Holy Spirit, not much work has been done to study the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Reformed orthodoxy, including in its confessional documents.²

In the meanwhile, criticisms and reflections on the church's social responsibility are also of increasing interest worldwide. Amid social crises, political turmoil, economic decline, and civil unrest nowadays in almost all parts of the world, questions are raised about the role of the church in society. What role does the church play? Is she part of the problem, part of the solution, or both? What are the real contributions of the church in the life of society? Does the Bible provide guidance regarding how the church may express social responsibility? What roles do the theology and praxis of the church play in this matter? In the past few years various responses have been offered.³

Criticisms of Reformed pneumatology are often joined with criticisms of its theology of the church's social responsibility. Myung Yong Kim, for example, claims that “the eclipse of pneumatology in Reformed doctrine leads Reformed churches to ignore the work of the Holy Spirit,” which results in “the danger of a rigid church, with no mission and no diakonia.”⁴ He adds that in Reformed pneumatology, “the Holy Spirit is conceived of as the Spirit of salvation of individuals,” and for that reason “liberation from political oppression and freedom from economic poverty are seen as having no relation to the work of the Holy Spirit. The pneumatology in the Reformed tradition has no social, political dimension of liberation.”⁵

¹ For bibliographies and historiographies on this topic, see Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 11; Donald G. Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 48–50; Michael Welker, ed., *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), vii–xvii; F. LeRon Shults and Andrea Hollingsworth, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1–2.

² For a complete discussion, see Yuzo Adhinarta, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Major Reformed Confessions and Catechisms of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2012), 7–16.

³ I recommend here the following recent book; Jordan J. Ballor and Robert Joustra, eds., *The Church's Social Responsibility: Reflections on Evangelicalism and Social Justice* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2015).

⁴ MyungYong Kim, “Reformed Pneumatology and Pentecostal Pneumatology,” in *Reformed Theology: Ecumenicity and Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 174.

⁵ Kim, “Reformed Pneumatology and Pentecostal Pneumatology,” 175.

In this article, I will attempt to respond to both of Kim's criticisms from a confessional Reformed perspective.⁶ I will argue that as reflected in its confessional standards, the Reformed tradition inherits a comprehensive doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it also provides rich materials for Christian guidance and reflection on the church's social responsibility. Therefore, if local churches neglect their social responsibility, it is not because of the lack of teaching on this subject. The cause of this neglect has to be sought elsewhere.

I propose therefore to systematically expound what the Reformed confessional documents⁷ teach regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the church's social responsibility.⁸

I. The Holy Spirit as the Cause of Good Works

The Reformed confessions teach that the Holy Spirit does not cease to work at the conversion or profession of faith of individual believers. The Spirit continues to renew the lives of believers in the image of God, to sanctify them and lead them to obey God's law. As a result, believers produce good works throughout their lives. The Reformed confessions also teach in unison and maintain that true faith does not mitigate the significance of good works in the Christian life. Rather, through true faith, the Holy Spirit works to produce good works.

The Tetrapolitan Confession (1530) states clearly that the ability to do good works cannot be ascribed to human powers, but to the Holy Spirit. The children of God are "led by the Spirit of God, rather than that they act themselves (Rom 8:14)" in such a way that "whatsoever things [they] do well and holily are to be ascribed to none other than to this one only Spirit, the Giver of all virtues." All good things and works are, therefore, "the mere

⁶ I will use the confessional documents, especially the national confessions of faith and catechisms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as primary sources for the discussion.

⁷ In this article, "confessional documents" and "the Reformed confessions" are used to refer to those Reformed historic documents that proclaim the faith and life of the confessing churches. Considering the historical importance and the faith of national churches represented, the Reformed confessions and catechisms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may well serve as representatives to Reformed orthodoxy and even to Reformed churches today worldwide.

⁸ Karl Barth and Jan Rohls have each written on the theology of the Reformed confessions. Karl Barth, *Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, trans. Darrel L. Guder and Judith J. Guder (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*, trans. John Hoffmeyer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998). However, they do not provide sufficient discussion regarding pneumatology or they only touch on the issue of the church's social responsibility.

gifts of God, who favors and loves us of his own accord, and not for any merit of ours” (TC 5).⁹

Other confessions echo the same teaching about good works and the role of the Holy Spirit in them. The First Helvetic Confession (1536) confesses that believers do not obtain God’s grace and the true sanctification of the Spirit through their “merits or powers but through faith which is a pure gift of God.” From this faith spring innumerable good works, which are duly called “fruits of faith.” Believers, therefore, ought not to ascribe “the piety and the salvation obtained to such works, but only to the grace of God. ... Such a faith is the true and proper service with which a man is pleasing to God” (FHC 13).¹⁰

In both his catechisms, Calvin points out that faith is the gift of God through the Holy Spirit and that through faith believers are justified and sanctified.¹¹ Being sanctified, the hearts of believers “are cleansed from their corruption and are softened to obey unto righteousness,” to observe the law, and to do good works (CC 17).¹² In other words, as Calvin clearly remarks, faith “not only does not make us careless of good works, but is the root from which they are produced” (CCG 127).¹³ He also states, “Observance of the Law, therefore, is not a work that our power can accomplish, but it is a work of a spiritual power,” the power of the Spirit. Without being regenerated by the Holy Spirit, none can “begin to do the least of the commandments.” Commenting on the Apostles’ Creed concerning the Holy Spirit in his 1537 Catechism, Calvin aptly and passionately teaches that the Spirit “inflames our hearts with the fire and ardent love for God and for our neighbor. ... so that, if there are some good deeds in us, these are the fruits and the virtues of his grace” (CC 20: “I believe in the Holy Spirit”).¹⁴

The Scottish Confession of Faith (1560) confirms the Tetrapolitan Confession and maintains that by themselves humans “are not capable of thinking one good thought,” but God, who has begun the work in believers through his Spirit, continues to regenerate and sanctify them (SCF 12).¹⁵ The cause

⁹ Arthur Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 60.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹¹ Calvin’s Catechism (1537), chs. 15–17; the Catechism of the Church of Geneva (CCG; 1545), 112, in James T. Dennison Jr., ed. *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume 1, 1523–1552* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 367–70 and 483.

¹² *Ibid.*, 369.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 485. See also John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2: (3.14.8).

¹⁴ Dennison, ed., *Reformed Confessions*, 375–76; see also Calvin, *Institutes* 3.14.2, 20.

¹⁵ Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions*, 172.

of good works, therefore, is not our free will; instead, “the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, who dwells in our hearts by true faith, brings forth such works as God has prepared for us to walk in” (SCF 13).¹⁶

The Belgic Confession similarly attributes faith and the good works it produces to the hearing of God’s Word and the work of the Holy Spirit. The confession links the inseparability of justification and sanctification to the Holy Spirit working in both. The Spirit who produces in a believer justifying faith by the hearing of God’s Word is the same Spirit who “regenerates him and makes him a ‘new man,’ causing him to live the ‘new life’ and freeing him from the slavery of sin.” The confession contends that “far from making people cold toward living in a pious and holy way, this justifying faith, quite to the contrary, so works within them” that “it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being” (BC 24).¹⁷ As certain as good fruits come from good trees, loving the true God and neighbors should be among the distinguishing marks of Christians. The confession confesses that true Christians are distinguished by the work of the Holy Spirit manifest in their lives, namely by their “faith, and by their fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness.” So believers actively “love the true God and their neighbors, without turning to the right or left, and they crucify the flesh and its works,” and incessantly fight by the Spirit against great weakness that remains in them (BC 29).¹⁸

The Heidelberg Catechism fully agrees with the Belgic Confession and maintains that believers do good works because “Christ by his Spirit is also renewing us to be like himself, so that in all our living we may show that we are thankful to God for all he has done for us, and so that he may be praised through us” (HC 86).¹⁹ The Catechism defines good works as those which arise out of true faith, conform to God’s law, and are done for his glory. A work may be good and pleasing in the sight of God only if those three conditions are met. Therefore, good works are not those “based on what we

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Christian Reformed Church, *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988), 101.

¹⁸ Ibid., 108.

¹⁹ Ibid., 53. Zacharias Ursinus, the main author of the Heidelberg Catechism, states that good works are “the fruits of our regeneration by the Holy Spirit, which are always connected with our free justification” (Rom 8:30; 1 Cor 6:11). Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985), 465, 480. Caspar Olevianus, another major author of the Heidelberg Catechism, also sees good works as “fruits worthy of repentance.” Caspar Olevianus, *An Exposition of the Apostles’ Creed*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 129.

think is right or on established human tradition” (HC 91).²⁰ Good works are caused by the Holy Spirit, not by human thought or tradition. Therefore, the Catechism teaches that believers ought to pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit and “never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God’s image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection” (HC 115).²¹

A similar definition of good works can be found in Heinrich Bullinger’s Second Helvetic Confession (1566). Having affirmed faith as “a pure gift of God,” given to the elect “by the Holy Spirit by means of the preaching of the gospel and steadfast prayer,” the confession asserts that this faith is “efficacious and active through love (Gal 5:6)” (SHC 16).²² The same faith “keeps us in the service we owe to God and our neighbor ... brings forth good fruit of all kinds, and good works” (SHC 16).²³ The elect are “not created or regenerated through faith in order to be idle, but rather that without ceasing” they “should do those things which are good and useful,” as “a good tree brings forth good fruit” (SHC 16).²⁴ True “good works grow out of a living faith by the Holy Spirit and are done by the faithful according to the will or rule of God’s Word” (SHC 16).²⁵ Insofar as the good works are done by faith and approved by God, they are “done from God’s grace through the Holy Spirit” and are “pleasing to God” (SHC 16).²⁶

The Westminster Confession of Faith similarly proposes that the Holy Spirit is the root or the cause of good works, without whom none is able to do any good work (WCF 16.5).²⁷ As in the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession, the Confession gives three criteria of good works, that is, proceeding from a “purified” heart, “done in the right manner” according to the Word of God, and done “to a right end, the glory of God.” Therefore, all works done by the unregenerate are “sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God” (WCF 16.7).²⁸ It teaches that “good works, done in obedience to God’s commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith,” that is, the same Spirit-given faith by which the elect believe to be true whatever is revealed in the

²⁰ *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 54; see also Ursinus, *Commentary*, 476–78.

²¹ *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 67; see also Ursinus, *Commentary*, 479.

²² Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, 257–58.

²³ *Ibid.*, 258.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 259.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 258.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 260.

²⁷ *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646; repr., Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1990), 70–71.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

Word and accept Christ for justification (WCF 16.2).²⁹ It even explicitly states that the Holy Spirit subdues and enables the human will to “freely and cheerfully” do “the will of God,” which is “revealed in the law” and required to be done by all true believers (WCF 19.7).³⁰ All saints “have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man” (WCF 26.1).³¹

We see clearly that the Reformed confessions attribute good works to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the cause, initiator, and even the root from which good works spring. These good works are the results of a living faith graciously given and worked by the Holy Spirit. Since they are not caused by human abilities or wisdom, good works can only be defined by the work of the Holy Spirit. The confessional texts explicitly state the three criteria of good works, that is: out of true faith / proceeding from a purified heart, according to the law / the Word of God, and solely for the glory of God. Since the Holy Spirit is the sole cause of good works, the Reformed confessions bluntly reject all notions of a passive Christian life and of faith that does not actively produce good works. The Holy Spirit not only enables believers to do good works but also subdues and moves the will of believers to love the true God and their neighbors, and to undertake social and private responsibilities for the common good.

II. *Acts of Good Works as the Manifestation of Social Concern*

Having defined good works and affirmed the Holy Spirit as the cause, some Reformed confessions go on to describe good works profitable to neighbors, believers and unbelievers alike. Moreover, the confessions regard good works toward neighbors—namely, familial duty and care for the poor, the afflicted, and the oppressed—as Christian duties not only for individuals, but also for the church and civil magistracy as institutions.

One can find discussions of good works in the exposition of the Decalogue in the Reformed catechisms.³² In the Reformed catechisms, the teaching of the Decalogue, mainly the second table, exemplifies the concern for social issues of the Reformed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The

²⁹ Ibid., 68; see also WCF 14.1–2.

³⁰ Ibid., 84.

³¹ Ibid., 110–11.

³² In general, historic catechisms (including the Roman Catholic and Lutheran catechisms) written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries consist of four main parts: the expositions of the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Decalogue, and the Sacraments.

catechisms do not perceive the commandments as containing prohibitions of certain acts that might violate the interests of others or be detrimental to them. Rather, they teach that inherent in the negative commandments are positive moral obligations and duties toward others. Since the treatment of the fourth and seventh commandments in the Reformed catechisms often contains explicit references to the Holy Spirit, we will mention them first.

1. Keeping the Sabbath and Marriage Holy

Discussions concerning other aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit are present in the treatment of the fourth and seventh commandments in the Reformed catechisms, a case in point being Calvin's catechisms and the Heidelberg Catechism.³³ While the fourth commandment pertains to the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to keeping the Sabbath holy, the seventh pertains to holiness in matrimony.

Reformed catechisms teach that the main reason for the giving of the command to observe the Sabbath is that the people of God may increasingly submit their lives to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Inherent in the same commandment is concern for others, namely rest for servants. Even though the fourth commandment falls into the category of the first table of the Decalogue, which deals mainly with duty toward God, the Reformed catechisms acknowledge that concern for others is also present. That is, the catechisms simply follow and explain what Scripture itself teaches in Exodus 20:8–11 concerning the prohibition of labor for servants on the Sabbath.

In his catechisms Calvin states that the giving of the fourth commandment had three purposes: "To represent spiritual rest, in aid of ecclesiastical polity, and for the relief of servants."³⁴ While admitting that the Sabbath as "a shadow of a reality yet to be" has ceased in Christ, and therefore "superstitious observance of days must remain far from Christians," by spiritual rest Calvin means that "we meditate all our life on a perpetual sabbath from our works so that the Lord may operate in us by his spirit."³⁵ It is "to cease from our own works, that the Lord may work in us," to put "ourselves under His government."³⁶ "How is that done?" Calvin asks. It is by "mortifying our flesh, that is renouncing our own nature, so that God may govern us by

³³ Neither the Westminster Larger Catechism nor the Westminster Shorter Catechism give explicit reference to the Holy Spirit in their expositions of the fourth and seventh commandments; see WLC 115–21, 137–39 and WSC 57–62, 70–72, in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 204–9, 222–25, and 303–5, 306–7.

³⁴ CCG 171; see also CC 8.4.

³⁵ CC 8.4; see also Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.34.

³⁶ CCG 172, 184.

His Spirit.” And this is to be done continually, and certainly every day for the rest of believers’ lives.³⁷ One day, that is, the seventh day, is specially appointed because of human weakness, so that the people of God are reminded to meditate continually on the works of God, to listen to the Word of God preached and taught, to participate in the sacraments, to engage in public prayers, and to bear witness to their faith and religion, activities which are instituted or commanded by God for the church, his people, in which God himself works through his Spirit.³⁸ Furthermore, this commandment is also given “to provide for the relief of servants,” namely, to give a day for rest to those who are under the authority of others (CCG 180).³⁹ In other words, believers are commanded to avoid any form of oppression of others by imposing work when due rest is to be given them (CC 8.4).⁴⁰

The Heidelberg Catechism follows Calvin in explaining the meaning and application of the fourth commandment, although with a different arrangement. The fourth commandment is given to God’s people for two reasons. First, God wills that “the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained” so that believers may attend the assembly of God’s people. Second, God also wills them to cease their evil ways by letting God work in them “through his Spirit.” Implied in the first reason are opportunities “to learn what God’s Word teaches, to participate in the sacraments, to pray to God publicly, and to bring Christian offerings for the poor” (HC 103).⁴¹ The Catechism also affirms, as Calvin does, that the commandment primarily directs believers’ thoughts to the eternal Sabbath, which begins in this life.

If in the treatment of the fourth commandment the Reformed catechisms testify to the governing and leading of believers by the Holy Spirit, the treatment of the seventh commandment reveals another aspect of the work of the Spirit, namely, the indwelling of the Spirit. In their explication of the commandment, the catechisms teach that what underlies the command against all sort of unchastity and adultery is the view of a Christian, body and soul, as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

In his 1537 Catechism, Calvin discusses the seventh commandment exclusively in the context of marriage. Any kind of lewdness or immodesty or unfaithfulness within the bond of marriage violates the sacredness of holy matrimony instituted by God, violates the union between man and

³⁷ CCG 173–74, 178.

³⁸ CC 8.4; CCG 178–79, 183.

³⁹ Dennison, ed., *Reformed Confessions*, 492.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 362.

⁴¹ *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 61; see also, Ursinus, *The Commentary*, 557, 566; WCF 21.8.

woman that God himself binds by his authority, and thus is cursed.⁴² However, in his 1545 Catechism, Calvin discusses the commandment from its wider scope, applying it to both married and single. He teaches that from the commandment can be inferred that all fornication is cursed by God, assuming that the commandment applies to all, both married and single. The command to abstain from any form of unchastity rests on the fact that “our bodies and souls are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:15; 2 Cor. 6:16)” (CCG 203).⁴³ The command, however, does not “halt at the outward act,” namely physically or sexually abstaining from unchastity, but “requires the pure affection of the heart” (CCG 202).⁴⁴ Looking at individual believers holistically as temples of the Holy Spirit, Calvin asserts that believers ought to strive to live in holiness, to embody holiness in their everyday life, so as to “preserve [their bodies and souls] in uprightness,” not only “in deed, but also in desire, word and gesture” (CCG 203).⁴⁵

The explanation of the seventh commandment in the Heidelberg Catechism bears much resemblance to that in Calvin’s 1545 Catechism. “God condemns all unchastity”; therefore, all believers, married or single, should “thoroughly detest it” and “live decent and chaste lives” (HC 108).⁴⁶ God “forbids everything which incites unchastity, whether it be actions, looks, talk, thoughts, or desires,” because “we are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul, and God wants both to be kept clean and holy” (HC 109).⁴⁷

Although not explicitly mentioned here, social concerns are presupposed by the Reformed confessions. One ought to remember the overarching theological framework of the exposition of the seventh commandment, that is, the doctrine of good works. The Heidelberg Catechism might serve as an example here. Opening its third part on “Gratitude,” the Catechism contends that believers do good works *not* in order to earn salvation, which they already have by the merit of Christ, but primarily because God through his Spirit is working in them, renewing them. The Catechism then provides some arguments that further develop the significance of good works in the Christian life. With respect to God, good works are believers’ sincere expressions of gratitude to God for all that he has done for them, so that in all things, praises are due to God. With respect to themselves, good works may be fruits that assure believers of their faith. With respect to others, good

⁴² CC 8.7.

⁴³ Dennison, ed., *Reformed Confessions*, 494.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 64.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

works, or believers' "godly living," are a living testimony of the gospel by which "neighbors may be won over to Christ" (HC 86).⁴⁸ Therefore, we conclude that by keeping the Sabbath and marriage holy by the help and grace of the Holy Spirit, believers have positive social influence and even proclaim the gospel of Christ to those around them.

2. Care for the Common Good, the Poor, and the Afflicted

Although the Reformed confessions do not often give explicit references to the Holy Spirit when discussing the other commandments, especially those of the second table of the Decalogue, the Spirit is already presupposed to be the cause of good works by virtue of what has been laid out in general. The confessions teach that the church as the people of God is called to demonstrate love toward neighbors through the observance of the law.

In the Reformed confessions and catechisms, the manifestation of good works is discussed in different places. The catechisms generally discuss good works in their exposition of the Decalogue, which all confessing believers are obliged to follow. However, in some Reformed confessions, good works are also discussed in relation to the church and civil magistracy as institutions. This obligation duly rests on the shoulders of those who assume ecclesiastical functions or who undertake the role of magistrate in society.

In his catechisms, Calvin teaches that believers ought to have concern for the welfare of others indiscriminately, from parents and magistrates to the weak, poor, and afflicted. Believers are commanded to owe all reverence, obedience, and gratitude, and to render all possible services to fathers and mothers, and also to those who are above them, such as princes and magistrates, insofar as not transgressing the law of the Lord is concerned.⁴⁹ Believers also ought to see their neighbors as fellow human beings who are created in the image of God, "holy and sacred," so that any violation against them is a violation against the image of God in them.⁵⁰ For Calvin, God requires believers to "love their neighbours and seek their salvation, with true affection and without simulation" (CCG 199).⁵¹ Robberies, frauds, and false witness, by which the weak and the innocent are oppressed, deceived, and wounded, should be "very far from [God's] people."⁵²

The Heidelberg Catechism follows Calvin in displaying concrete love and concern for others in its teaching of the law of God. Individual believers

⁴⁸ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁹ CC 8.5; CCG 186, 194.

⁵⁰ CC 8.6.

⁵¹ Dennison, ed. *Reformed Confessions*, 494.

⁵² CC 8.8–9; CCG 205–12.

ought to “honor, love, and be loyal” to parents and all those in authority over them, as is proper (HC 104).⁵³ “God tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves ... to protect them from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies” (HC 107).⁵⁴ Believers ought to do whatever they can for their neighbor’s good and to work faithfully so that they “may share with those in need” (HC 111).⁵⁵ Moreover, believers are obliged to do what they “can to guard and advance” their “neighbor’s good name” (HC 112).⁵⁶

The Westminster Larger Catechism starts its discussion of the second tablet of Decalogue with an affirmation of the sum of the six commandments as the overarching moral principle toward fellow human beings. The Catechism clearly states that “our duty to man, is, to love our neighbour, and to do to others what we would have them do to us” (WLC 122; Matt 22:39; 7:12).⁵⁷ In this spirit the Catechism proceeds to explain the six commandments of the second tablet. Regarding the fifth commandment, the Catechism follows Calvin’s catechisms and the Heidelberg Catechism in affirming that it pertains not only to familial relationship between parents and children but also to relationships that involve others who are superior in age and gifts, and “especially such as, by God’s ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family, church or commonwealth” (WLC 124; cf. WSC 64).⁵⁸ It then asserts that mutual love ought to inspire and mark believers’ “performance of those duties which we mutually owe in our several relations, as inferiors, superiors, or equals” (WLC 126).⁵⁹ Similarly, the sixth commandment consists of duties to “preserve the life of ourselves, and others,” to comfort and succor “the distressed,” and to protect and defend “the innocent” (WLC 135).⁶⁰ Among the duties required in the eighth commandment is “an endeavour by all just and lawful means, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own” (WLC 141).⁶¹ The duties required in the ninth commandment include “the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbour,” as well as “a charitable esteem of our neighbours; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name;

⁵³ *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 62.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵⁷ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 209.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 210, 305.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 217, 220; cf. WSC 68.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 225, 227; cf. WSC 74.

sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities ... defending their innocence” (WLC 144).⁶² As for the tenth commandment, believers are required to have “such a charitable frame of the whole soul toward our neighbour, as that all our inward motions and affections touching him tend unto, and further all that good which is his” (WLC 147).⁶³

Whereas the Reformed catechisms address the acts of good works in their exposition of the Decalogue, some Reformed confessions discuss it in other places, such as the doctrine of good works and sanctification. The confessions also frame their discussions in relation not only to individual believers but also to ecclesiastical functions and the magistrates.

The Tetrapolitan Confession asserts that the duties to which a Christian should be chiefly devoted are those that profit one’s neighbors, with respect to both life eternal and the present life, that “they may want nothing required by bodily necessity” (TC 6).⁶⁴ For the confession, good works include acts that span across the boundaries of society, from the service of the family and the magistracy to ecclesiastical functions, to vocational callings of individuals (TC 6).⁶⁵ As far as human liberty is concerned, the confession urges every Christian to engage in vocational callings or professions “whereby he may confer the greatest advantage upon men” (TC 6).⁶⁶ In another place, the same confession also teaches that in discerning vocational calling, one should endeavor to “be of service to magistrate, parents, relatives and all others whom God has made nearest to him and brought to him for assistance, in what place, time or manner soever their profit demands,” according to ability and as God’s law requires (TC 12).⁶⁷

Discussing good works, the Scottish Confession asserts two kinds: “The one is done to the honour of God, the other to the profit of our neighbour, and both have the revealed will of God as their assurance.” Regarding the second kind, the confession offers a similar list to that in the Tetrapolitan Confession but with explicit concern for social justice, “to save the lives of the innocent, to repress tyranny, to defend the oppressed” (SCF 14).⁶⁸ The list undoubtedly implies acts referring to the commandments in the second tablet of the Decalogue. It also exhorts believers to engage in social justice issues in concrete ways.

⁶² Ibid., 230–31; cf. WSC 77.

⁶³ Ibid., 236; WSC 80.

⁶⁴ Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions*, 61.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 173.

The French Confession of Faith (1559) does not list acts that can be reckoned as good works as does the Tetrapolitan Confession. However, it provides a description of good works in terms of ecclesiastical functions. It maintains that the true church, governed according to the order established by Christ, should have

pastors, overseers, and deacons, so that true doctrine may have its course, that errors may be corrected and suppressed, and the poor and all who are in affliction may be helped in their necessities; and that assemblies may be held in the name of God, so that great and small may be edified. (FCF 29)⁶⁹

Similarly, in his confession, Bullinger does not give a list of acts when discussing faith and good works as in the Tetrapolitan and Scottish Confessions.⁷⁰ However, he shows explicit concerns for the sick, the poor, and the afflicted in various places, particularly in relation to the life of the church. Among the ecclesiastical offices, the office of bishop is dedicated primarily to the meeting of the needs of the church in the present life, to “administer the food and needs of the life of the Church” (SCF 18).⁷¹ A pastor is also assigned to care for the needs of the church with regard to both the present life and eternal life, to catechize young people, and to visit the sick. Pastors ought “to watch more carefully for the welfare of their flocks” who are sick and weakened by diseases of both soul and body, “let them visit the sick soon, and let them be called in good time by the sick Let them comfort and confirm them in the true faith, and then arm them against the dangerous suggestions of Satan” (SHC 25).⁷² Bullinger also teaches that the possessions of the church ought to be properly used for “the succor and relief of the poor.” “Schools and institutions which have been corrupted in doctrine, worship and morals must be reformed, and that the relief of the poor must be arranged dutifully, wisely, and in good faith” (SHC 28).⁷³

In describing the duties of magistrates, the confessions point out that magistrates are called according to God’s law to preserve and care for the welfare

⁶⁹ Ibid., 154.

⁷⁰ In his *Decades*, however, Bullinger does provide a list of acts through which good works and the application of the law are manifested. The list includes “the protection of widows and orphans, the delivering of the oppressed and afflicted, well-doing to all men, and doing hurt to no man” and the promotion of “good affections, holy wishes, with all holy and honest thoughts.” Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, trans. H. I., ed. Thomas Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849–1852), 3:354 (3.9).

⁷¹ Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions*, 270.

⁷² Ibid., 294.

⁷³ Ibid., 297–98.

of their subjects out of their love for neighbors. Christian magistrates or governments are what was in mind in the articles concerning magistracy.

The Tetrapolitan Confession teaches that next to ecclesiastical functions as the chief duty of a Christian is “the administration of the government,” because this vocation potentially confers the greatest advantage upon people (TC 6).⁷⁴ The First Helvetic Confession states that, receiving their powers “from God” alone, a government is not “to be tyrannical,” but “to protect and promote the true honor of God and the proper service of God.” A good government “should rule the people according to just, divine laws” (FHC 26).⁷⁵ The Scottish Confession similarly says that civil magistrates are “appointed and ordained by God” for the manifestation of God’s own glory and “the good and well being of all men.” It also states that magistrates are ordained to maintain justice and peace for the welfare of their subjects. They are “the judges and princes to whom God has given the sword for the praise and defence of good men and the punishment of all open evil doers” (SCF 24).⁷⁶

Likewise, the Westminster Confession holds that “civil magistrates” are ordained by God “to be under him over the people, for his own glory and the publick good” and that God has “armed them with the power of the sword, for the defence and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil-doers” (WCF 23.1).⁷⁷ This office gives opportunity to serve people for the advancement and preservation of their common good, by maintaining “piety, justice, and peace” (WCF 23.2).⁷⁸

Thus the Reformed confessions regard the observance of the law of God as concrete acts of good works linked to the work of the Holy Spirit. They also see good works toward neighbors—namely, familial duty, care for the poor, afflicted, and the oppressed—as Christian duties not only for individual believers, but also for the church and civil magistracy.

Conclusion

It may be concluded that as the Holy Spirit renews believers in the image of God, the same Spirit enables them to do good works, leading them to concrete acts toward their neighbors that fulfill the law of God and so display concern and love. The confessions teach that believers ought to be led by

⁷⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 110–11.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 182–83. See also SHC 30.3.

⁷⁷ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 100.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 101.

the Holy Spirit to care for and engage actively in the preservation and furtherance of others' well-being. This active engagement manifests itself in ecclesiastical ministries, in the preservation of order in the family and society, in the protection of and care for the poor, in the defense of the oppressed and afflicted, in the upholding of the sacredness of marriage along with chastity, sobriety, and temperance, in the promotion of honesty and justice, and in the cultivation of good affections toward others. Believers ought to care for and actively promote the well-being of others. This duty rests on the shoulders of individuals, as well as of ecclesiastical officers and magistrates.

In the Reformed tradition, as presented by its confessional documents, the teaching of the church's social responsibility is formulated in a constellation of pivotal doctrines such as soteriology (including faith, repentance, justification, sanctification, and good works), social ethics, ecclesiology, and church-civil magistracy. As such, it provides not only a solid and comprehensive doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but also rich materials for Christian guidance and reflection on the church's social responsibility. The doctrines presented in the confessions reflect a genuine concern for both orthodoxy (right teaching) and orthopraxis (right practice). The nature of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the confessions is not only apologetic, but also pedagogical, confessional, and pastoral. It serves as a standard of orthodoxy, expressing what the Reformed church believes and teaches, as well as a standard of piety and teaching, urging believers to go beyond their profession of faith to concrete acts of faith in their daily walk.

If some local churches neglect social responsibility, this cannot simply be explained as a lack of inherited teaching on the Holy Spirit and the church's social responsibility. The cause has to be sought elsewhere. It may be the neglect of the Holy Spirit and his works, the lack of desire to study doctrine, the decline of interest of doing God's will, or a shift in the church's understanding of its *raison d'être* and mission in the world. Whatever the cause, studying the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the church's social responsibility in the Reformed confessions might serve as the first step to becoming a living, missional church.

God the Lawgiver according to the Westminster Divine Burgess

STEPHEN J. CASSELLI

Abstract

In this essay, we will consider the way in which Anthony Burgess—and therefore, presumably, the Westminster Confession of Faith—grounds its doctrine of God’s law in an “experimental awareness of the exalted Lawgiver.” His and their understanding of the law is not abstract or philosophical, but rather theological and therefore personal. We will conclude with some brief comments on the implications of Burgess’s work for contemporary reflections about natural law in the Reformed theological community.

Ernest Kevan, in his survey of the doctrine of God’s law in Puritan theology, says, “The Puritans began their thinking on this subject, not with an abstract concept of ‘law,’ but with the experimental awareness of the exalted Lawgiver: behind the *lex* stood the legislator.”¹ This truth can certainly be demonstrated

¹ Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), 47. On the challenges related to the use of the term “Puritan,” see Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God’s Ambassadors: The Westminster Assembly and the Reformation of the English Pulpit, 1643–1653* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 11–16.

to be the case with the English divine Anthony Burgess in his understanding of the law of God. Burgess is not as well known today as are other members of the Westminster Assembly, but if the assembly minutes and his publications are any indication, he was highly respected among his peers.² In relationship to the Westminster Confession of Faith, his most important work was his lectures on the law of God published under the title *Vindiciae Legis: or, A Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants, from the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and More Especially, Antinomians*.³ A series of lectures delivered at Lawrence-Jury, London, during the period in which the Westminster Confession of Faith was being drafted, *Vindiciae Legis* presents us with a theology of the law of God at the apex of the English Puritan period from one who can rightly be described as working within the mainstream of orthodox teaching on this controversial locus of theology.

These lectures are of great value to students of the Westminster Confession because they provide a window into the biblical and theological rationale for what appears in its doctrinal affirmations. What we have in the Westminster Confession are summary statements drawn from what were often laborious debates among the divines at the assembly. In addition to the minutes now available, it is in the publications by the divines, often concurrent with the work of the Assembly, that we have fuller access to their thinking and debates.⁴ A work of polemical theology like *Vindiciae Legis* affords us the opportunity to observe a detailed exposition of and rationale for the brief statements found in the Confession of Faith. Rather than simply bringing our own preconceived notions to our reading and interpretation of this document, we should allow its original framers and their explanations to inform our understanding.

I. The Ontological Ground of Law in General

According to Burgess, the law of God as revealed in Scripture, both natural and moral, lives and moves and has its being in the character of God

² See Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed., *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1:52; hereafter MPWA; and Stephen J. Casselli, *Divine Rule Maintained: Anthony Burgess, Covenant Theology, and the Place of the Law in Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 149–52.

³ Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis: or, A Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants, from the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and More Especially, Antinomians*. In *XXX Lectures, Preached at Lawrence-Jury, London*, 2nd ed. corr. and augmented (London: James Young for Thomas Underhill, 1647; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), preface.

⁴ See <https://www.westminsterassembly.org/>.

himself. This perspective is made plain as Burgess expounds the relationship of Adam and Moses to the revealed law of God. These two figures and their respective relationships to the law of God serve as windows into his theology of the law more broadly. The law of God for Burgess is a revelation of the person of God both within man (in the image of God) and outside of him (in the created order).

He begins his lectures on the law with some reflections on 1 Timothy 1:8–9, focusing on the clause, “knowing the law is good if a man use it lawfully.” His burden in this opening lecture is to demonstrate how it can be said that the moral law is in fact good. The second point of his argument is that the law is good “in respect of the authority stamped upon it by God, whereby it becomes a rule unto us.”⁵ This goodness, in other words, is grounded in the divine origin of the moral law. He says, “Seeing the matter is intrinsically and eternally good, it cannot but be commanded by God.”⁶ He goes on to explain,

There are some things that are *justa*, because *Deus vult*; as in all positive things: and then there are other things just, and therefore God wills them, *though even they are also just, because they are consonant to that eternall justice and goodnesse in himself*: so that, indeed, it is so farre from being true, that the Law, which hath Gods authority stamp on it for a rule, and so is *mandatum*, should be abrogated, that it is impossible, *nè per Deum quidem*; for then God should deny his own justice and goodnesse.⁷

The deep theological presupposition that the goodness of the law is grounded in the character of the person of the lawgiver must not be missed at the outset of his discussion, as it governs the whole of his thinking moving forward. There is no consideration of an abstract concept of law to which both creator and creature are subject. Even those things that are “just and therefore God wills them,” are grounded in the good and just character of God himself.

II. *The Ontological Ground of Natural Law*

The theological starting point for Burgess’s thinking about law is again made clear when he turns next in his lectures to a discussion of “natural law.” His text is Romans 2:14–15, “For when the Gentiles which know not the law, do the things of the law by nature, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts.”

⁵ Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

In “clearing” this text he asks a series of questions, the third being, “In what sense they are said to doe the things of the law, and that by nature?”⁸ It becomes clear that he is not merely engaging here in a piece of moral philosophy. He denies that the “heathen” can do any work morally good. The reason for this is that “every action ought to have a supernaturall end, viz. the glory of God, which they did not aime at.”⁹ He goes on to clarify his reasoning when he says, “We do refuse that distinction of a *morall good*, and *theologicall*, because *every morall good ought to be theologicall*.”¹⁰ There can be no moral good which is not grounded theologically. God alone can determine the good. Only what is done to the glory of God can be truly called good. Thus, in Romans 2:14, “By *nature* therefore we may understand that naturall light of conscience, whereby they judged and performed some externall acts, though these were done by the help of God.”¹¹ Even for the external performance of some acts which apparently (or externally) conform to the law of God, the unbeliever is dependent upon the gracious help of God.

There is something, Burgess says, that we can properly call “natural law,” but there is no autonomous human law. He explains that “God onely is under no law.”¹² Because God is the fountain from which all human law flows, he cannot be said to be under law himself. All human law is a reflection of the natural law “written in their hearts” (Rom 2:15). Elsewhere he reasons that “although God have no superiour, and so cannot be bound by a Law above him, yet he is a Law to himself, so that he cannot but do wisely and righteously in all his waies.”¹³ Although in their sinful rebellion human beings may try to deny their created status, they continually, even if unknowingly, declare the law of God to be written in their hearts. They do so both “externally” and “internally,” according to Burgess. Man created in the image of God is not only subject to the “law of nature” but is morally cognizant of the fact that he is so subjected.

The moral law written in the heart is not totally defaced by the fall; neither is it only restored by regeneration. There is a continuing obligation and knowledge of the law in Adam (and the race) now as fallen. Burgess has a lengthy discussion of the moral law as it relates to the unbeliever.¹⁴ There he argues from Romans 2:14–15 that there are “common notions and maximes,

⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. (emphasis added).

¹¹ Ibid., 59–60.

¹² Ibid., 64.

¹³ Anthony Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted and Vindicated from the Errours of Many, and More Especially Papists and Socinians* (London: Thomas Underhill, 1654), 2:77.

¹⁴ Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 57–104.

which are ingrafted in all mens hearts.”¹⁵ He describes this light of nature in the unbeliever as “a relic or remnant of the image of God” and a “residue of the glorious image of God” which leaves all men inexcusable before God.¹⁶ Thus, even the unregenerate have a clear knowledge of God and their moral obligation to him, and yet this is no saving knowledge apart from the gospel. He is willing to admit that the bounds of this knowledge and obligation are not easily defined, but that they do exist is made plain in Scripture.¹⁷

He goes on to explain that externally unbelievers declare the works of the law written in their hearts in two ways: “1. By making good and wholesome lawes to govern men by; and 2. By their practice, at least of some of them, according to those lawes.”¹⁸ Internally they show the law written in their hearts “by their consciences, in the comfort or feare they [have] there.”¹⁹ Externally human beings often act in obedience to those humanly established laws which reflect their internal moral compass. This internal and external conformity to the law of God is a revelation of the person of God. The unbeliever has both internally and externally the revelation of the law of God speaking clearly to him, though he attempts to suppress that revelation continually. He explains further that they were “not without a Law ingrafted in their conscience, whereby they had common dictates about good and evil.”²⁰

He is quick to point out that this writing of the law in the heart is to be distinguished carefully from that spoken of as a work of grace in the redeemed. Commenting on Romans 2:14–15, he says,

You must not, with *Austine* [Augustine], compare this place with that gracious promise in *Jeremy* [Jeremiah], of God writing his law in the hearts of his people. There is therefore a two-fold *writing in the hearts of men*; the first, of knowledge and judgement, whereby they apprehend what is good and bad: the second is in the will and affections, by giving a propensity and delight, with some measure of strength, to do this upon good grounds.²¹

Elsewhere he says that men everywhere witness to the law of God in their hearts in making laws “whereby things intrinsically good are commanded, and intrinsically evil are prohibited”²² This law written on the heart is, as

¹⁵ Ibid., 62.

¹⁶ Ibid., 67, 72, 70.

¹⁷ Ibid., 62–64.

¹⁸ Ibid., 60.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ From Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, cited by Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 59.

²¹ Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 60.

²² Burgess, *True Doctrine of Justification*, 2:387.

Paul goes on to say, the foundation for the conscience in the unbeliever. Natural law understood biblically is a given in human beings created in God's image. However, it is also limited by the effects of the fall to "knowledge and judgement" or a sense of right and wrong, but the "will and affections" remain bound in sinful weakness. The presence of this natural law therefore, as Paul says in Romans 1:20, leaves people "without excuse" before their creator.

III. *The Ontological Ground of Moral Law*

Having treated that natural law revealed to all people in general revelation, Burgess then moves on to address the moral law of God revealed to his people in special revelation. Throughout *Vindiciae Legis* Burgess reflects on the moral law from two perspectives; the one he calls "mere rule," and the other "law as a covenant." One might expect that under the head "law as law" or "mere rule" he would mean a consideration of law in the abstract. That, however, is not what we find. Even in law "in itself," his theocentric reference point is clearly set forth and cannot be ignored. The two perspectives from which the law can be viewed reveal diverse attributes of the lawgiver, but neither perspective considers law apart from God. He simply cannot unhitch himself from his theological moorings. He is not able to conceive of the notion of law as being independent from the person of the lawgiver. The law considered as law primarily reveals the supreme authority of the divine will, while the law considered as covenant primarily reveals the gracious character of his person. These two points can be clearly demonstrated by a study of his discussion regarding the law given to both Adam and Moses, to which we now turn.

1. *The Law Given to Adam as Mere Rule*

The law considered as law in itself reveals the absolute dominion and power of the will of God. Adam is given a positive law in addition to the natural law of conscience to test his obedience to the dominion of the lawgiver because "there is a great deale of difference between good actions, that are done because God commands, and because of naturall conscience."²³ The probation of Genesis 2:16–17 is, among other things, a test of Adam's ability to discern the authority of God as the absolute commander. God tests Adam, "so the dominion and power which God had over him might be the more eminently held forth: and therefore *Adam* in this was not to consider the greatnesse or goodnesse of the matter, but the will of the commander."²⁴

²³ Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 106.

²⁴ Ibid.

The law considered as law manifests to Adam that God is “a sovereign Lord over him.”²⁵

The absolute character of the will of God is clearly revealed in the probation given to Adam. When God chooses to command, even when from the human perspective that command appears “arbitrary,” he alone has the power to order people to obey him. The first revelation of this supreme power to command is Genesis 2:17: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” In his consideration of this command as mere law, Burgess observes that “the object of this command is not a thing good or bad in its own nature, but indifferent, and only evil because prohibited.”²⁶ The explanation he then gives as to why God would arrange his relationship with the creature in this way is “that hereby Gods dominion and power over man might be the more acknowledged.”²⁷ This arrangement reveals to man the supreme authority of God over him as lawgiver. Or, as Burgess illustrates the point, “when God made this world as a great house, he puts man into it as his tenant; and by this tryall of obedience, he must acknowledge his Land-lord.”²⁸ The absolute nature of the will of God is established in consideration of his unique authority to command obedience from his creatures. He alone is the sovereign ruler of his creation.

2. Law Given to Adam as Covenant

When one considers the same law of God from a different perspective, from the perspective of the law as a covenant, we find a different set of attributes revealed therein. The character of God as a gracious, loving Father who cares tenderly for his children is made plain when one considers the covenantal context of the law given to Adam and later to Moses.²⁹ It is important to recognize that Burgess does not say some laws reveal God’s majesty and power while others reveal his grace and mercy. It is the same law considered from different perspectives that reveal various attributes of the one God. The law of God is like a precious stone reflecting the wisdom

²⁵ Ibid., 122.

²⁶ Ibid., 104.

²⁷ Ibid., 106.

²⁸ Ibid., 104.

²⁹ For discussion of the issues involved here, see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 2:117; John Murray, “Covenant Theology,” *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1982), 4:216–40; and “The Adamic Administration,” *Collected Writings*, 2:49; and David B. McWilliams, “The Covenant Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Recent Criticism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 109–24.

of the jeweler in many directions simultaneously. The diversity and unity of God are preserved in Burgess's reflections about the law of God.

The basic thrust of Burgess's concern is to demonstrate that the relationship between God and Adam prior to the fall was in no way merely legal in character. There is an obligation imposed upon Adam simply because he is created in the image of God. Law in this sense emanates from the character of God as supreme ruler, but that is not the only perspective from which Adam relates to God. Adam primarily relates to God as he condescends in his kindness to his creature. This is evident in the fact that although Burgess defends the traditional terminology of "covenant of works," he also calls the prelapsarian relationship a "covenant of friendship."³⁰ Furthermore, he makes it plain that the context in which God comes to Adam with a positive law is not merely as law-giving master but primarily "as a loving God."³¹ He goes on to say that "God, who entred into this Covenant with him, is to be considered as already pleased, and a friend with him, not as a reconciled Father through Christ."³² Thus, the prelapsarian relationship reveals the kindness and care of God, as well as his power and authority.

At the outset of his discussion of the covenantal aspect of the law given to Adam, Burgess says that the law as a law and the law as a covenant "arise from different grounds."³³ As we have already seen, the law as law arises from God as supreme ruler of the universe. The law considered as a covenant, however, "ariseth from the love and goodnesse of God, whereby he doth sweeten and mollifie that power of his, and ingageth himself to reward that obedience, which were otherwise due, though God should never recompence it."³⁴ It is this covenantal condescension on the part of God that reveals him to be "a loving God."³⁵ God's dealing with man in a covenant way is "a mercifull condescension on Gods part" which "confirmed our hope in him."³⁶

The covenantal arrangement is structured in such a way

*that God might hereby sweeten and indeare himself to us. For, whereas he might require all obedience from us, and annihilate us at last, or at least not vouchsafe heaven and everlasting happinesse; to shew how good and loving he is, he will reward that most bountifully, which is otherwise due to him.*³⁷

³⁰ Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 259.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

³² *Ibid.*, 129.

³³ *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Burgess urges the use of this truth upon his readers saying they ought

to admire with thankfulnesse Gods way of dealing with us his creatures, that he condescends to a promise-way, to a covenant-way. There is no naturall or Morall necessity that God should doe thus. We are his, and he might require an obedience, without any covenanting: but yet, to shew his love and goodnesse, he condescends to this way.³⁸

God's relating to Adam by way of both natural and positive law reveals the absolute character of his will and authority, and his condescending kindness and mercy. Herein one sees the brilliance of the simple statement found in the Westminster Confession of Faith 19.1, "God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works."³⁹ This statement covers a broad stretch of the theological landscape with striking brevity. "God gave to Adam a law," revealing his transcendent, absolute power; "as a covenant of works," revealing his filial love and kindness toward his creatures.

3. *The Law Given to Moses*

When God's covenant is dramatically renewed with Israel through Moses at Sinai, Burgess argues that the same complex of attributes is again revealed. When one considers the drama of Sinai, there is without question a revelation of the majesty and power of the lawgiver. The glory of the theophany at Sinai was such that "the people might be raised up to fear, and reverence the Law-giver."⁴⁰ The smoke and fire "was to shew the incomprehensible Majesty of God," and it "did signifie his glorious splendour."⁴¹ The absolute power and authority of the person and will of God are underscored in the Sinai theophany.

All, however, is not terror on the top of the mountain. In this same theophanic revelation of law, God again condescends graciously to his people, reaffirming the covenant of grace. In this covenant God gives himself to his people: "I will be your God, and you will be my people."⁴² Burgess argues that "God did not deale at this time [Sinai], as absolutely considered, but as their God and Father."⁴³ God is dealing at Sinai with a sinful people. He offers himself to them and calls them to be his own. Thus, Burgess asks,

³⁸ Ibid., 131.

³⁹ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 3:640.

⁴⁰ Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 156.

⁴¹ Ibid., 157.

⁴² See Deut 7:6; Jer 31:31–34; 24:7.

⁴³ Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 234.

“unlesse this were a covenant of grace, how could God be their God, who were sinners?”⁴⁴

That the law given to Moses was a covenant cannot be disputed, since it is expressly called such in the Scriptures (2 Kgs 18:12; Deut 17:2; 2 Chr 6:11; Jer 11:2–4; 2 Cor 3:6). The real properties of a covenant are also present, namely, mutual consent, stipulations of blessing and cursing, and the giving of a sign.⁴⁵ The only remaining question, he says, is the nature of this covenant: “Some (as you have heard) make it a Covenant of workes, others a mixt Covenant, some a subservient Covenant; but I am perswaded to goe with those who hold it to be a Covenant of grace.”⁴⁶ One can see that it is a covenant of grace and not works, he argues, if one reads Sinai in the broad context of the whole of Scripture:

The Law (as to this purpose) may be considered more largely, as that whole doctrine delivered on Mount Sinai, with the preface and promises adjoynd, and all things that may be reduced to it; or more strictly, as it is an abstracted rule of righteousness, holding forth life upon no termes, but perfect obedience. Now take it in the former sense, it was a Covenant of grace; take it in the later sense, as abstracted from *Moses* his administration of it, and so it was not of grace, but workes.⁴⁷

Burgess offers as further evidence of grace the fact that after Moses breaks the tables of the law, “God causeth the ten Commandments to be written again for them, implying that these may very well stand with a Covenant of grace.”⁴⁸

The law given to Moses is a covenant of grace that reveals the gracious character of God because it ultimately has Christ as its scope. Again, he says of the revelation at Sinai, “If you take these things absolutely they are lookt upon as mercies; yea, and applyed to Christ. And it is made a wonderfull mercy to them that God did thus familiarly reveale himselfe to them.”⁴⁹ He asks, “What is the meaning of the first Commandment, but to have one God in Christ our God by faith? ... Must not the meaning then be, to love, and delight in God, and to trust in him? But how can this be without faith through Christ?”⁵⁰ The whole ceremonial system, which is in Burgess’s mind reducible to the moral law, has a view to the revelation of Christ and

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 230–31.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 233.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 162.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 157.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 235.

grace: “Now we all know that the Sacrifices were evangelicall, and did hold forth remission of sinns through the blood of Christ.”⁵¹ Elsewhere, in speaking of Luke 16:16, which many believe to advocate the total abrogation of the law, he says, “The meaning is, that the Law, in respect of the typicall part of it, as it did shadow forth, and prefigure a Christ, so it was to cease. Therefore the Law and the Prophets are put together, as agreeing in one general thing, which is, to foretell of Christ, and to typifie him.”⁵²

It is very important to recognize that God in the giving of the law actually *intends* to show forth Christ. The law, “as it was given by *Moses*, it did directly and properly intend Christ.”⁵³ The law cannot be understood properly apart from this divine intention:

God when he gave the Law to the people of Israel, did intend that the sense of their impossibility to keep it, and infinite danger accrewing thereby to them, should make them desire and seek out for Christ. ... Whatsoever the Law commanded, promised, or threatened, it was to stir up the Israelites unto Christ. ... Christ was the scope and end of intention.⁵⁴

Jesus Christ is the end of the law in that “[in] Christ he hath brought about this intent of the Law, that we should be justified, and have life.”⁵⁵ The satisfaction of the law in the obedience of Christ (both active and passive) and the redemption accomplished thereby reveals the kindness, wisdom, and mercy of God. Speaking elsewhere of Christ’s keeping of the law, he says it was, “a mercifull condescension of the Law-giver by his goodnesse and wisdom to finde out an expedient, or happy temperament: So that the Law might be satisfied, yet man finde mercy.”⁵⁶ If this law is considered in its redemptive-historical/canonical context, or what he calls its “broad sense,” it clearly points to Jesus Christ and his benefits as a revelation of the grace and mercy of God. Thus, the revelation of law in Scripture can only be properly understood by a canonical reading of the whole of redemptive history. According to Burgess, it is only the revelation of Christ that provides the needed hermeneutical key for a clear understanding of the law in the Old Testament.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 223–24.

⁵³ Ibid., 272.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 266–67.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 270.

⁵⁶ Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification*, 2:84. In this same context he says that in the work of Christ “the wise God hath therefore so ordered it, that these should be eminent demonstrations both of his Mercy and Justice” (Burgess, *True Doctrine of Justification*, 2:85).

IV. *The Law of God and the Image of God*

Closely related to the law of God in Burgess's theology is the image of God in human beings. The relationship between law and image serves as the presupposition upon which he argues for the perpetuity of the moral law. For him the exposition of the image of God is found in the moral law of God, both of which are grounded in the being of God. His working assumption is that the moral law is nothing less than a transcript of the holiness of God himself.

Adam was created in the image of God, but how are we to understand that image? The definition of the image of God is, of course, no simple question in the history of theology. For Burgess the image of God in Adam and Eve before the fall is understood through the restoration of that image in redemption. Thus, he reasons back from Ephesians 4:24 that the image of God in Adam is "principally and chiefly ... placed in righteousness and holiness."⁵⁷ The righteousness and holiness in view here are not an abstract, amorphous morality lacking specificity. It is defined in the history of redemption by the Ten Commandments, as they are a transcript of the holiness of God himself. The law "shadowed forth the excellent and holy nature of God. ... Its nothing but an expression and draught of that great purity which is in his nature that pure and excellent image of Gods holiness."⁵⁸ Thus, regeneration is defined in terms of this holy law as well: "What is Regeneration, but the writing of the Morall Law in thy heart?"⁵⁹

This line of reasoning is made clearer in Burgess's work on the doctrine of justification. There he discusses at some length the righteousness of God and man in relation to the law. He explains that one way to define the righteousness of men is "conformity of the whole man to God's law."⁶⁰ Conformity to the law is holiness. He then relates this to Adam saying, "This righteousness *Adam* was created in, and is called the image of God."⁶¹ The image of God is defined by the revealed will of God contained in the law of God. He reasons that, "the will of God revealed is the ectypal or copy of that original, so that if we would judge whether an action be righteous, or a person righteous, we must gather it by his conformity to the Law of God."⁶² Elsewhere in the same work he describes the law as "an idea and

⁵⁷ Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 114.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 151–53.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 201, cf. 205.

⁶⁰ Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification*, 2:20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 2:21.

representation of the glorious nature of God.”⁶³ The image of God is righteousness and holiness defined by the revealed law of God, which is “summarily comprehended in the ten commandments.”⁶⁴

It is precisely this law that Adam had “written on the heart.” This expression is sometimes misunderstood to mean that Adam was given the Ten Commandments *in the particular form* in which they were later given to Moses at Sinai. However, as Patrick Fairbairn explains, this language

was a brief and popular style of speech, intimating that by the constitution of his spiritual nature, taken in connection with the circumstances in which he was placed, he was bound, and knew that he was bound, to act according to the spirit and tenor of what was afterwards formally set forth in the ten commandments.⁶⁵

It is in this light that we should understand the Westminster Confession’s statement in 19.2: “This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments.”⁶⁶ The Confession is not saying that the Ten Commandments were revealed to Adam in the garden *in the exact form they were given at Sinai*; rather, it is affirming that the principles later revealed in the Decalogue were written on the heart of Adam, which is a vital dimension of his being made in the image of God.

Man as image of God at creation is constituted to reflect the moral character of God summarized later in the Decalogue; which law, because it is grounded in the character of God, must be perpetually binding. This is the foundational assumption upon which he argues for the perpetuity of the moral law. Burgess concludes that the moral law in some form was always preached in the church of God. “The church of God,” he says, “never was, nor ever shall be without this law. . . . So that we may say, the Decalogue is *Adams*, and *Abrahams*, and *Noahs*, and *Christs*, and the *Apostles*, as well as of *Moses*.”⁶⁷ This law is “a perpetuall means and instrument which God hath used in his Church for information of duty, conviction of sin, and exhortation to all holiness.”⁶⁸ Thus, when it came to Moses, it was written “upon tables of stone, to shew the perpetuity, and stability of it.”⁶⁹ The image of God is to be interpreted in view of the later revelation of the moral

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2:180.

⁶⁴ Westminster Shorter Catechism 41 (Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:684).

⁶⁵ Patrick Fairbairn, *The Revelation of Law in Scripture* (1869; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1996), 46.

⁶⁶ Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:640.

⁶⁷ Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 150.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

law at Sinai. This factor grounds his argument for the perpetually binding character of the moral law.

V. *The Law of God and the Glory of God*

This perpetual moral law is a sustained revelation of the glory of God. Although there is no explicit discussion of the relationship between the glory of God and the Law of God in *Vindiciae Legis*, Burgess does at points make that connection plain. In speaking of the entire history of the giving of the law to Israel, he says that “God did put glory upon it.”⁷⁰ It becomes clear in what follows that by “glory” here he means the majesty, power, and authority of God that invokes fear in the people of God.⁷¹ Elsewhere he seems to equate glory simply with honor. In arguing for capital punishment under the new covenant, he says that although “we are indeed to labour for the meeknes and patience of a Christian, yet we are not to forget zeale for Gods glory.”⁷² Zeal for the glory of God is equated with enforcing the law of God and thus defending the honor of God among men. In arguing for the superior excellence of the ministry of the gospel over the law, he reasons, “God caused some materiall glory to shine upon *Moses*, while he gave the Law, hereby to procure the greater authority and majesty to the Law; but that glory which cometh by the Gospel is spirituall, and far more transcendent, bringing us at last into eternall glory.”⁷³ The visible manifestation of glory in the face of Moses when he received the law “doth signifie the glory and excellency of the Law, as in respect of Gods counsells and intentions.”⁷⁴ He goes on to make clear that the ultimate intention of God was to reveal the spiritual glories of Christ and his gospel. “The glory of the law,” Burgess says, “was Christ.... Christ was in some measure a glorious object in the administration of the Law.”⁷⁵ It is the inclusion of the Christ-directed intention of the law in the divine economy of redemption that gives it its glorious character. The law in its “broad sense” is a revelation of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 154.

⁷¹ Ibid., 154–58.

⁷² Ibid., 190.

⁷³ Ibid., 268.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 268–69.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 269.

Conclusions

For Burgess, the law of God is a comprehensive guide to the character of God. The moral law of God is a transcript of the holiness of God. It is in fact a portrait in which God has “painted out his own nature.” Considered as a covenant-law, either with Adam (written on his heart) or with Moses, the law is a revelation of the majestic transcendence and the condescending kindness of God. The law can be viewed from various perspectives (i.e., as mere rule or as a covenant). Read as mere rule, the moral law is a revelation of the sovereign power and exclusive authority of the will of God. Read as a covenant; it is a revelation of the personal, fatherly care of God for his people. Because the moral law is a transcript of the image of God, revealing the glory of God, it cannot be abrogated. To do away with this law God would have to violate his own character and destroy the very image of God in man. For Burgess, law is never an abstract principle. It is always personal because it is vitally dependent upon the person of the lawgiver.

In recent years, there has been a renewal of interest in and reflection upon the concept of natural law within the Reformed community.⁷⁶ There are a host of related biblical and theological issues that have been and are being addressed and debated. Here the relevance of Burgess’s lectures is transparent, for one dimension of this conversation is related to how the confessional standards of the Reformed churches understood the idea of natural law or “the light of nature” as it is denoted in the Westminster Confession.⁷⁷ Works like *Vindiciae Legis*, written by those who assisted in the drafting of the Confession, are an invaluable resource for a proper understanding and interpretation of that document and its language. We must be careful not to impose our own assumptions upon writers of the past but allow them to interpret their language and expressions for themselves.

Burgess’s lectures clarify, for example, that when the Westminster Standards speak of the light of nature, that light is never divorced from the God

⁷⁶ Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2006); Brian Estelle, John V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen, eds., *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009); Ryan C. McIlhenny, ed., *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging Two Kingdoms Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012).

⁷⁷ Westminster Confession of Faith 1.1, 6; 10.4; 20.4; 21.1. John V. Fesko and Guy M. Richard, “Natural Theology and the Westminster Confession of Faith,” in Ligon Duncan, ed., *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century* (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2009), 3:223–66.

of nature. The light or law of nature is the personal revelation-speech of the God who “enlightens every man” (John 1:9). Natural law is always seated in the context of the historical-revelational-redemptive purposes of God in the world and for his people. It speaks to human beings of the holy character of God and leaves all people “without excuse” for their rebellion (Rom 1:20) because in it human beings are being personally addressed by their creator. Thus, natural law is not merely the knowledge of right and wrong or abstract moral principles but the personal knowledge of God himself (Rom 1:21). It is the knowledge of God the lawgiver that is suppressed in unrighteousness, which is why all human beings are without excuse for their rebellion against him (Rom 1:20). Ignorance and blindness are culpable and self-imposed.

Therefore, we must be careful to guard against any notion of natural law as a neutral territory wherein believers and unbelievers share common values or judgments in our cultural endeavors, though at times there may be a surface agreement between them. It is undoubtedly true, as Burgess asserts, that the manifestation of the light of nature in the unbeliever is seen “1. By [their] making good and wholesome lawes to govern men by; and 2. By their practice, at least of some of them, according to those lawes.”⁷⁸ However, this is a manifestation of God’s common grace, as they are “done by the help of God.”⁷⁹ The reality of this common grace does not eradicate the suppression of truth in unrighteousness or the blindness of the unbelieving heart. Even in the realm of civil life, there are severe limitations on how far the redeemed and unredeemed can walk together. The Canons of Dort capture well what we find in the teaching of Burgess when they explain that

there is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in all people after the fall, by virtue of which they retain some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrate a certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. But this light of nature is far from enabling humans to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to him—so far, in fact, that they do not use it rightly *even in matters of nature and society*. (Third Main Point, Article 4, emphasis added)⁸⁰

In short, natural law or the light of nature in the Westminster Confession of Faith is natural revelation. If we lose sight of this foundational reference

⁷⁸ Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 60.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 59–60.

⁸⁰ “Canons of Dort,” Reformed Church in America, 2017, <https://rca.org/resources/canons-dort>. For a fuller outworking of these principles, see Daniel Strange, “Not Ashamed: The Sufficiency of Scripture for Public Theology,” *Themelios* 36.2 (2011): 238–60.

point, we can quickly fall into a conception of law as an abstraction independent of the creator and giver of it. Such an abstraction inevitably leads to a distortion of God's law as revealed in both Scripture and nature. As the Psalmist in Psalm 19 makes plain, general revelation and special revelation are interdependent. The person redeemed in Christ by the latter's fulfillment of the law is enabled by grace to sing with the Psalmist both that "the heavens declare the glory of God" (v. 1) and that "the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul" (v. 7). Natural law in the heavens and revealed law in the Scriptures are two verses of one great song of the creator God whose voice cannot ultimately be muted. All human beings hear and respond to God the lawgiver either with glad submission or in bitter rebellion. Only when God's law is received through Christ and his fulfillment of it are we able to say with the Psalmist, "Oh, how I love your law" (Ps 119:97).

Commending *Sola Scriptura*: The Holy Spirit, the Church, and Doctrine

DAVID B. GARNER

Abstract

In post-Reformation dogmatics, the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to the doctrine of Scripture has often received insufficient attention. Contemporary treatments have erred in different directions, subjugating the doctrine of Scripture to communal hermeneutics or individual experience. By contrast, the magisterial Reformers offer a vital doctrine of the Holy Spirit for the doctrine of Holy Scripture *in conjunction with* the stewardship of that Scripture by the Spirit-birther, confessing church. Drawing upon certain reformational insights, this paper will present a high doctrine of Scripture, in a manner that integrates the ministry of the Holy Spirit for illumination *with* the essential role of the Spirit within the confessing church for handling doctrine—particularly the doctrine of Scripture.

Introduction

In a lecture given at Westminster Theological Seminary in the late 1970s, J. I. Packer urged a holistic, interdisciplinary approach to the doctrine of Scripture.¹ In the throes of the so-called “Battle for the Bible”² at Fuller Theological Seminary and within the broader neo-evangelical movement,³ Packer discerned a stubborn abstracting in Scripture’s treatment, even in conservative theological circles. In particular, he pinpointed in seminary curricula a destructive wedge between the nature of Scripture and its interpretation.

In keeping with Packer’s complaint, it is fair to say the *doctrine* of Scripture generally finds itself relegated to systematic or historical theology classes, while the *interpretation* of Scripture gets attention in the biblical studies departments. Systematics considers Scripture’s DNA; biblical studies consider Scripture’s meaning. In many cases, the curricula and the faculty teaching course material present no obvious relationship between what Scripture is and how that identity shapes proper interpretation. Effectively, as Packer diagnosed, biblical ontology and biblical interpretation revolve in non-concentric orbits.

Nearly fifty years later, despite his admonition, the problem that Packer addressed persists. Contributing to this problem are the storms of literary and linguistic analyses and the avalanche of new interpretive theories that have smashed evangelical confidence in Scripture.⁴ Such deconstructionist and postmodern assaults on the doctrine of Scripture, combined with its frequent academic mishandling, drive us to wonder whether or not the reformational doctrine of *sola Scriptura* has a future—at least in Western-influenced evangelical scholarship.

To hone the issue more finely, throughout the lecture, Packer assumes the “church” bears the mantle of theological stewardship. Packer does not define the church *per se* but manifestly assumes that development and expression of the doctrine of Scripture—and of all doctrinal reflection—are the province of the visible church. While most evangelicals might share

¹ J. I. Packer, “Developing the Doctrine of Holy Scripture,” Westminster Media, Westminster Theological Seminary (Glenside, PA: exact date unknown); (<http://media1.wts.edu/media/audio/jp101-copyright.mp3>).

² This phrase was popularized by Harold Lindsell due to his volume by the same name; see Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

³ Out of this battle was birthed the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy; “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” Bible Research, February 2001, <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>.

⁴ See, e.g., David B. Garner, ed., *Did God Really Say? Affirming the Truthfulness and Trustworthiness of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012).

Packer's ecclesial spirit, it is difficult to pinpoint more than a nominal connection between the confessing church and the contemporary evangelical theological enterprise. Elastic evangelical conceptions of church have made the church/scholarship relationship amorphous, if not vacuous.

With only some exceptions, the theological academy operates with little ostensible connection to the visible, confessing church. It would be presumptuous to assert that scholars typically celebrate personal disconnection from a particular congregation or presbytery, but their theological labors commonly operate in isolation from any ecclesial body. And whether by serendipity, out of pragmatism, or due to past doctrinal controversy, many of their institutions evidence no present concern for churchly affiliation. Some even appear to hold principal opposition to it.

To be fair, opposition may not expose a latent aversion to the church itself,⁵ nor does it necessarily betray scholars' motivation for academic respectability—securing that “place at the table,” as John D’Elia has described the lifelong academic aspirations of George Eldon Ladd.⁶ To many, the absence of ecclesial ties benefits theology. The church's boundaries allegedly stifle creativity and thereby obstruct authentic theological development. Only scholarship unencumbered by these church strictures supposedly safeguards freedom and ensures progress. Severing strings to denominations or curbing the force of ecclesial confessions preserves objectivity, unleashes creativity, and therefore *advances* scholarship.

It is the concern of this essay to challenge the rightness and effectiveness of a church-free approach to theological scholarship. Does scholarly independence from the visible church actually yield the fruitful results that advocates of so-called academic freedom claim it does? Whatever the answer to that question, it appears that Packer's assumption about the church's active role in the work of theology fails to align with the actual practices of contemporary biblical and theological scholarship. Contemporary scholarship has suffered a divorce from the church. With no small consequence, the most threatening developments in the doctrine of Scripture have surfaced largely in the academy, where autonomous scholarship is not only the *modus operandi*, it is also viewed as the *sine qua non* of scholarship itself.

In response, looking through Reformation and post-Reformation lenses, I want to confront the handling of doctrine outside of the historic, confessing church. The point here is not to impugn any one scholar, and it surely

⁵ That is, such disconnection does not necessarily draw upon particular scholars' own lack of desire for functional ecclesial answerability.

⁶ John A. D’Elia, *A Place at the Table: George Eldon Ladd and the Rehabilitation of Evangelical Scholarship in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

is not to put into question the value of penetrating theological inquiry. To the contrary, the goal is to urge ongoing academic rigor in a manner that yields to the Holy Spirit and the ecclesial structures that he has put in place for the stewardship of Holy Scripture. As Reformation theologians asserted, the visible church bears the responsibility for theological preservation *and* theological advance.

Punctuating various points by drawing upon select Reformers (particularly John Calvin) and upon post-Reformation dogmaticians (particularly Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper), we will see that a return to such ecclesially framed scholarship is essential for a proper doctrine of Scripture, and indeed of all theological investigation. To that end, we chart our course according to the following map:

The *Objective* Gift: The Word of God and the Spirit

The *Subjective* Change: Regeneration and the Spirit

The *Collective* Responsibility: The Church and the Spirit.

I. *The Objective Gift: The Word of God and the Spirit*

For the Reformers, *sola Scriptura* entailed the conviction that *the Almighty God himself* is the Speaker in Scripture (Heb 1:1–2). The words of Scripture are the expressed (“breathed out”—2 Tim 3:16) Word of God, and as such, the Bible is “unswervingly true”⁷ and serves as the primary witness and the final court of appeal for all matters of faith and practice.⁸

Calvin writes, “We treat Scripture with the same reverence that we do God, because it is from God alone, and unmixed with anything human.” The uniqueness of the Christian faith is coupled with the uniqueness of Scripture. He continues, “Our religion is distinguished from all others in that the prophets have spoken not of themselves, but as instruments of the Holy Spirit.”⁹ Calvin summarily insists that the Holy Spirit “is the Author of the Scriptures: he cannot vary and differ from himself.”¹⁰

⁷ Gregory K. Beale, “Can the Bible Be Completely Inspired by God and Yet Still Contain Errors? A Response to Some ‘Evangelical’ Proposals,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 72 (2011): 1–22.

⁸ As the Westminster Confession of Faith 1.4 puts it, “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.”

⁹ John Calvin, *Readings in Christian Thought*, ed. Hugh T. Kerr (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 163.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:94–95 (1.9.2). He continues, “Hence he must

As the basis for affirming the consistent message of the Bible, the magisterial Reformers like Calvin tied Scripture to the Spirit—that is, Scripture’s authority resides in its spiritual (that is, Holy Spirit-ual) character. Scripture’s essence—including its sufficiency, perspicuity, and necessity—stems from the Spirit of God. Accordingly, as the Reformers insisted, every dimension of Scripture’s consideration belongs in a pneumatological framework; to whatever degree our consideration of Scripture departs from this Personal/Spiritual environment, we force Holy Writ from its identity, integrity, and indeed, its effectiveness.

With the Spirit’s personal ministry in view, Calvin maintains the absolute and final authority of Scripture for its interpretation. Because Scripture speaks with the voice of God, no external witness trumps the divine Word. No other place of appeal exists. In fact, to seek final answers elsewhere is to denigrate Scripture; it is to abandon the authority of the Spirit of God for another authority. It is to pursue another spirit. It is to deny that *God himself* has spoken. Thus, the historic and Reformation view of unqualified biblical authority, as John Woodbridge has proven in his thorough dismantling of the Rogers and McKim thesis,¹¹ has been the celebrated conviction of the people of God through the ages.

As important as is the *concept* of biblical authority, however, it must never be treated *impersonally*. The biblical ontology question is a personal question, and this personal question concerns the Speaker’s *design* for the revelation in the first place. In fact, Calvin and the Reformers uniformly express the nature of Scripture according to God’s own purpose in it. That is, God has spoken intentionally—he determines that his people *will* hear his voice.¹² God’s speech remains epistemologically and hermeneutically prior, but the Almighty intends his giving of revelation and its enscripturation to produce *understanding*. Scripture is divine in its own right, but its divinity entails its communicative efficacy.¹³

Since, as Packer reiterates in his lecture, the recipient is never peripheral to divine communication, the Reformers consistently wed the doctrine of

ever remain just as he once revealed himself there. This is no affront to him, unless perchance we consider it honorable for him to decline or degenerate from himself.”

¹¹ See John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

¹² Though beyond the scope of this essay, the doctrine of the covenant is core to understanding the nature of divine, enscripturated revelation. God relates to his people covenantally, and his revelation comes in that covenantal framework. See, e.g., Westminster Confession of Faith 7.1–2.

¹³ Scripture is powerful because it is true; it is not true because it is powerful. Efficacy presupposes divine authority, and divine personal authority ensures Scripture’s efficacy.

Scripture to the doctrine of regeneration. Comprehension by the recipient is *divinely* purposed and *Holy Spirit-ually* qualified.¹⁴ Put otherwise, we cannot think about a doctrine of Scripture apart from a doctrine of the Scripture's hearer. To separate Scripture's identity from its understanding is to perpetuate a destructive abstraction, and to miss the very heartbeat of biblical revelation.

II. *The Subjective Change: Regeneration and the Spirit*

Calvin openly affirms that “apart from the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Word can do nothing.”¹⁵ This assertion contradicts neither Scripture's divine essence nor its communicative effectiveness. Any impotence of Scripture does not derive from an inherent weakness in the text but from the spiritual incapacity of the reader. Calvin accordingly offers here the necessary corollary to Scripture's ontology.

Divine illumination of the Word of God is necessary because sin deafens ears to the voice of God and hardens hearts to the will of God. So Calvin concludes concerning 1 Corinthians 2:14 that “men's minds ... [are] in blindness until they are enlightened by the Spirit of God.” The Spirit brings “special discovery of heavenly wisdom which God vouchsafes to his sons alone.”¹⁶ So also, Martin Luther: “Neither would we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷

In short, Calvin, Luther, and the other Reformers situate biblical understanding in the realm of the Spirit. Understanding of Scripture is a Spirit-ual gift—an irreducible dimension of new life in Christ. Jesus puts it strikingly, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27 ESV). Knowledge *by* Christ precedes the following *of* Christ. That is, the work of the Spirit of Christ enables the hearer to recognize Christ's voice and eagerly to follow. The voice of Jesus is warmly familiar because he knows us. So, writes Martin Bucer, “The elect will recognise the voice of

¹⁴ William Tyndale wrote, “For as they [the Scriptures] came not by the will of man, so may they not be drawn or expounded after the will of man: but as they came by the Holy Ghost, so must they be expounded and understood by the Holy Ghost. The scripture is that wherewith God draweth us unto him. ... The scriptures spring out of God and flow unto Christ, and were given to lead us to Christ,” Recorded in Ralph Werrell, “Little Known Facts about William Tyndale's Theology: The Work of the Holy Spirit and the Covenant with Man,” *Churchman* 122.4 (2008): 315–16.

¹⁵ Calvin, *Readings*, 169.

¹⁶ John Calvin, “Commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:14,” *Calvin's Commentary on the Bible*, studylight.org, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/cal/1-corinthians-2.html>, 1840–57.

¹⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 4, *Reformation of Church and Dogma, 1300–1700* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), 167.

their shepherd.”¹⁸ Hearing and following the voice of Christ is a Spirit-given capacity.

Robert Reymond illustrates this principle by the dated but useful metaphor of tuning a radio. Until the Spirit dials the human heart to the signal of the divine voice, God’s Word sounds like static.¹⁹ Only by a channel change in the heart will the spiritual signal of the Word deliver its covenant-frequency modulation with the needed clarity. The sending signal is unchanged. The heart requires spiritual tuning, which brings the requisite change to the receiver.

Calvin similarly compares the unbelievers’ ears to those of a donkey at a symphony concert. The beast hears the sounds of the instruments but has no appreciation for the music’s majesty and sophisticated beauty. The concert offers nothing but noise to the “ass [who] is unqualified for understanding musical harmonies.”²⁰ By contrast, the believer hears with understanding and appreciation. What John Murray helpfully describes as the “noetic side” of regeneration,²¹ this *illumination of the Spirit*, tunes the heart and mind of the believer to discern the voice of the Christ and to delight in it, to receive and relish his symphony of gospel grace.²²

Thus, in his ministry of regeneration, the Spirit does not merely facilitate discernment of gospel truth; he also ignites the fires of conviction. Illumination of the Spirit produces a discerning and delighting disposition—what Geerhardus Vos describes as “sympathetic absorption”²³—toward the Word of God. Faith channels this Spirit-formed epistemic change.²⁴ For Calvin

¹⁸ Recorded in W. P. Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 134.

¹⁹ Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 81.

²⁰ John Calvin, *The Commentaries of John Calvin on the First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle, vol. 20 of Calvin’s Commentaries (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 82.

²¹ John Murray, “The Attestation of Scripture,” in *The Infallible Word*, 2nd ed., ed. Ned B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 51.

²² “But how do we know all this? I answer, the selfsame Spirit revealed both to the disciples and to the teacher (*doctorem*) that the author of the Scriptures is God. Neither Moses nor the prophets brought to us by chance the things we have received at their hands; they spoke as moved by God, and testified with confidence and courage that God’s very mouth had spoken. The same Spirit who made Moses and the prophets certain of their calling, has now testified to our own hearts that he used them as his servants for our instruction,” Calvin, *Readings*, 162–63.

²³ Geerhardus Vos, “The Wonderful Tree,” in *Grace and Glory: Sermons Preached in the Chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary* (1922; repr., Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 32.

²⁴ Illumination entails the embrace of faith (or to borrow Jonathan Edwards’s language, the change in our *affections*).

and his fellow Reformers, then, biblical understanding necessarily rises in a *soteriological* context; illumination comes by the Spirit, who applies the salvation of Christ. True understanding is saving understanding, and saving understanding is the province of those who possess the Spirit, or better, of those whom the Spirit possesses.²⁵

This soteriological emphasis is right as far as it goes, but such a construction still falls short of the full teaching of Scripture regarding the Spirit. As with the Reformers, we must advocate this critical soteriological and noetic point by wedding it to its essential *ecclesiological corollary*. The doctrines of regeneration and illumination, while personal concerns, are never private ones. Understanding of God's Word is a *corporate* matter. The Spirit poured out upon the believer is the Spirit poured upon *believers*. The Spirit of Truth is the Spirit who guides the *church* into all truth. The Spirit of the *Son* of God is the Spirit of the *sons* of God. Salvation produces the family of God, and therefore, illumination operates in the sphere of the visible church *as* church. The concept of private interpretation is as foreign to Scripture as is private, individualistic salvation.

What then is the role of the confessing church in hearing the Word of God and assuming the stewardship of doctrinal development in general and of the doctrine of Scripture in particular?

III. *The Collective Responsibility: The Church and the Spirit*

The first of the Ten Theses of Berne (1528) reads, "The holy, Christian Church, whose only Head is Christ, is born of the Word of God, abides in the same, and does not listen to the voice of a stranger."²⁶ In dogmatic terms, the church is a *creatura verbi*. The Word of God does not exist because of the church; rather, the church exists by the Spirit working with the Word of Christ. The church resides under Scripture, never over it.

According to the biblical design, Christ's church is neither a human creation nor a divinely created concatenation of individuals. The church is the family of God, united to Christ and to one another by a Spirit-wrought faith. The doctrine of union with Christ manifests in visible communion of the saints.

²⁵ The Westminster divines penned it tersely: "We acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word" (WCF 1.6).

²⁶ Arthur C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 49.

Understanding of Scripture is thereby not an individual or communal creation but a churchly act of Spirit-enabled receptivity. Spiritual illumination embeds *shared* truth in *the collective heart* of the people of God—visibly expressed in confessional solidarity, theological fidelity, corporate holiness, and hermeneutical unity. As the Reformers discerned and affirmed, such humble understanding arises only in the visible, confessing body of Christ. *And* such understanding comes not by mere reliance upon the collective wisdom of the interpreters but upon the Spirit in Scripture speaking to the family of God in one voice.

Though he clearly distanced himself in key ways from Cyprian and Rome's assumption of this church father's classic ecclesiastical assertions, Calvin unashamedly affirmed the central place of the visible church for gospel conversion, gospel provision, gospel preservation, and gospel advance. He openly employs Cyprian's metaphor:

But because it is now our intention to discuss of the visible church, let us learn even from her simple title of "mother" how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breasts, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels [Matt. 22:30]. Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives.²⁷

For Calvin, the visible church is the source *for our gospel care* and the residence *for our care of the gospel*. The visible church forms the home for spiritual nourishment and worship *and* provides the only rightful domicile for scholarship. Mother Church is the Christians' home and the Christians' school. In fact, as far as Calvin is concerned, all Christians are theologians, and all theologians must be *homeschooled*.

Following Calvin here, Kuyper writes, "The Holy Scripture and the Church ... are no foreign phenomena to each other, but the former should be looked upon as the *mother of the latter*."²⁸ Then he articulates the attendant theological stewardship implications embedded in this Word/church relationship: "It is self-evident that the transcendental action of the regeneration of the elect had to go hand in hand with the noetic action of the Word in order to give rise to the Church and to maintain it."²⁹ The church's vocation as "pillar and ground of truth" thus obligates the Body of Christ

²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:1016 (4.1.4).

²⁸ Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik DeVries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 572 (my emphasis).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

to believe and to study, to preserve and to protect, to teach and to propagate the apostolic faith.

James Bannerman in his classic (and recently retypeset and republished) volume articulates the Reformational doctrine of the church in contrast to its two contemporaneous and competing errors. On the one hand, Rome (“the Popish system,” as he calls it) sins against Scripture by denying the church the *limits* of its “proper and legitimate” authority. On the other hand, rationalism sins against Scripture by denying the church the *extent* of its “proper and legitimate” authority.³⁰ The Reformers did not reject the unbiblical authority of the Roman Catholic magisterium by espousing an opposite yet equally unbiblical approach—radical individualism or *sola Scriptura*, as Heiko Obermann puts it.³¹

Bavinck helpfully addresses how to avoid these two pitfalls by upholding the church’s proper relationship to Scripture. He is worth quoting at length here:

Scripture is the light of the church, the church the life of Scripture. Apart from the church, Scripture is an enigma and an offense. Without rebirth no one can know it. Those who do not participate in its life cannot understand its meaning and point of view. Conversely, the life of the church is a complete mystery unless Scripture sheds its light upon it. Scripture explains the church; the church understands Scripture. In the church Scripture confirms and seals its revelation, and in Scripture the Christian—and the church—learn to understand themselves in their relation to God and the world, in their past, present, and future.³²

Accordingly, with a view to the inextricability of Scripture from the church and the church from Scripture, development of doctrine, starting with reflections on *sola Scriptura*, is the purview of the visible church, not individual scholars or individualistic scholarship. With a view to the church’s ministerial and declarative stewardship of God’s Word, Kuyper helpfully summarizes, “The domain of the church can be described as the domain within which the Holy Scripture prevails and operates.”³³

³⁰ “The Popish system, under whatever modification it is held, essentially sins against Scriptural principles on the subject of ecclesiastical authority in religious truth, by denying its *proper and legitimate limits*. The Rationalistic system, under whatever modifications it is held, no less sins against Scriptural principles on the subject of ecclesiastical authority in religious truth, by denying its *proper and legitimate extent*.” James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline and Government of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), 303 (my emphasis; see pp. 247–303).

³¹ Heiko Obermann, *Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

³² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 1.384

³³ Kuyper, *Principles*, 572.

Summarily, the Spirit of Christ draws together, in an inseparable relationship, the inspiration of Scripture for the church (the objective), the illumination of believers to the Word (the subjective), and the Spirit-led theological stewardship of this illumined Word *by* and *for* the church (the collective). What conclusions must we draw then from this inseparable Spirit-created relationship between Word, illumination, and the church?

Let me offer two inclusive points concerning the *objective*, *subjective*, and *collective* ministry of the Spirit for doctrine in general and *sola Scriptura* in particular.

IV. Application One: The Visible Church and Theological Stewardship

Since the church is the “domain within which the Holy Scripture prevails and operates,” making God’s Word truly a “family Bible,” theological development must be rightly restored to Mother Church in her visible and confessional stewardship.

Theological reflection is never to be rogue speculation but instead a Spirit-ually discerning and therefore churchly accountable undertaking. Under the authority and guidance of the Spirit of the risen Christ, doctrinal development is a Spirit-given, Christ-centered churchly task. *Semper reformanda* flourishes only within this visible confessing body. I return again to Kuyper: “*The factor of the church* must be included in theological investigation.”³⁴ That is, the visible church shares historic theological confession as the key to its Spirit-given identity, even as it exercises the visible marks of preaching and the administration of the sacraments. It also does so in keeping with the faith openly confessed, as a manifestation of its Spirit-birther DNA.

Following the Reformation conception of the visible church’s stewardship of theology, we must, on the one side, drop the anchor of the confessing church within the academy, and on the other side, to prevent sailing astray, openly insist that the academy submit itself and its theological labors to the confessing church. Claims of individual reliance upon the Holy Spirit not only do not offer sufficient guidelines; such claims also effectively cast aspersions upon the Spirit who has faithfully illumined his people to Scripture over the course of the millennia. Disregard for the church’s confessions evidences modernist arrogance, even as it displays a functional denial of the value of the Spirit’s work in the life of the church through the centuries.

³⁴ Ibid., 575.

One clarification is in order here. Claims that the invisible church sufficiently preserves theology fail on their own terms. Invisible connections to the invisible church lack both veracity and value. How does an invisible identity yield anything other than impotent (and meaningless!) accountability? Accordingly, the stewardship of Scripture in each generation must occur in the context of the *visible* church, which openly confesses the faith given once for all to the saints—codified through the ages in the church’s historic confessional documents.

How do we return scholarship to the visible church’s domain? In brief, ordination requirements rise as the most obvious tool to secure the church’s role in theological research, writing, and theological study. Such reinstated churchly accountability could occur in numerous ways: denominationally run seminaries with licensure or ordination requirements for their faculty, nondenominational seminaries with licensure and ordination requirements of their faculty, *ad hoc* church oversight by ordained church officers of scholars doing biblical-theological research in a college or university setting, and the like. Any mechanism in which visible strings re-attach scholarship to the visible church would render welcome modifications.

To elevate this concern to its proper ecclesiastical import means that any scholar unwilling to subject his formulations to the visible church, even with the risk of his own ordination or employment, should be given credence *neither in the academy nor the church*. Theological scholars in our seminaries, universities, and colleges should eagerly operate with transparent accountability to the visible confessing church. Though many publishers might protest because they thrive on the provocative, a return to a churchly context for theological scholarship will reward the faithful over the flashy. Such a humble reorientation surely would honor the Head of the Church and his outpoured Spirit, even as it would rightly commend the doctrine drawn from the text of the Word of God.

V. Application Two: The Visible Church and Theological Advance

Though perhaps counterintuitive initially, churchly oversight of theological development, rightly considered, facilitates theological *advance*. To be sure, the church must muzzle unaccountable scholarship; scholarly endeavors need the church’s vigilant guardianship. But the Spirit-given role of the church is never merely defensive. Theological scholarship is not only wall erecting but also path building. Indeed, the church *must advance its understanding of Scripture* to each generation of the church that stands on its shoulders.

In surveying the development of theology in the history of the church, Murray writes, “there is a *progressive understanding* of the faith delivered to all the saints.” For Murray, this fact evidences the very teaching of Ephesians: “There is in the church the ceaseless activity of the Holy Spirit so that the church organically and corporately increases in the knowledge unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”³⁵ Theology is not static. Development, even in its expression of the nature of Scripture, is essential to the life of the church.

Cornelius Van Til’s insistence upon “receptive reconstruction”³⁶ in theological activity deserves mention here. Theology, by its very received essence, must avoid autonomous invention. Instead, it pursues understanding by humble reception—a receptivity in which each generation of the church moves more deeply into its understanding of Scripture. The ceaseless spiritual activity of receptive re-creativity is the great privilege and responsibility of the church of Jesus Christ. Measured pursuits of scholarship are not only interesting or even merely worthwhile; they are *essential*. And the church with its historic confessions provides the only legitimate context for these acts of stewardship.

The game of tennis helpfully illustrates here. Among other things, tennis requires strength, finesse, precision, and endurance. In tennis, the lines, the net, the racket, and the rules provide the context for skillful play and genuine innovation. Elimination of these rules would not engender creativity but would generate more chaos than John McEnroe ever did. Removal of boundaries would rob the sport of decency, proficiency, and demonstrable creativity.

By analogy, elimination of all boundaries in the theological enterprise eviscerates *any* and *all* advance of doctrine. As expert tennis players learn to do in sport, scholars must function within the well-tested historic and confessional borders and skillfully place their thoughts within biblically given boundaries as expressed in the church’s doctrinal confessions. Advancement almost always comes by precision within the lines rather than brashly crossing them.

For the lines to be moved or the rules to be changed in tennis would require the engagement of the whole Tennis Players’ Association, according to its collective institutional *gravitas*. Change to the rules must not and will not ensue by mere individual, even *expert* complaint—no matter how

³⁵ John Murray, *The Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976–82), 4:242–43 (emphasis added).

³⁶ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978), 126.

eloquent or loudly the complainant speaks. The game of tennis is larger than particular, even stunningly gifted, players.

Similarly, if the church determines that new theological assertions comport with the teaching of Scripture, the church may need to revise its confessional “boundaries.” But any such changes *must* occur within the context and according to the *gravitas* of the visible, confessing church. To put it in more overtly biblical language, the church’s confession must not change unless the visible church discerns the voice of her Master in the new formulations. Such changes will never be reactionary, flippant, or fast. Theological development may require confessional change, but such change should receive the ecclesiastical attention—time, debate, assertion, and correction—it is due.

The doctrine of Scripture begs this insistence in particular. To alter the church’s assertions about the doctrine of Scripture must not stem from one expert or even many so-called expert voices but only from those—*who by their open ties to the confessing church*—show themselves “sympathetically absorbed” in the gospel. When developments or corrections occur from those aligned by faith and the Spirit within the confessing church, theology progresses and the church thrives. The church then faithfully paves the way for future generations of saints, who too are entrusted with the mysteries of God. Advance comes by submission to God’s Word, and never by autonomous treatment of it.

Kuyper helpfully warns of the abandonment of this churchly charge for theological development:

In the service of the Holy Spirit, theology is called ever and anon to test the historic, confessional life of the Church by its source, and to this end to examine it after the norm of the Holy Scripture. By itself confessional life tends to petrify and to fall asleep, and it is theology that keeps the Church awake; that lends its aid in times of conflict with oft-recurring heresies; that rouses her self-consciousness anew to a giving of account, and in this way averts the danger of petrification.³⁷

How we practically return to a churchly orientation in the work of biblical and theological studies requires much more penetration than this essay can offer. The pathway forward does not appear straight or smooth. But any paths that alienate the academy from the church ensure disaster, whether by the church’s petrification through theological laziness or by the unaccountable progressivism of the academy.

³⁷ Kuyper, *Principles*, 593.

Conclusion

With these thoughts in mind, we return to a critical question: Does *sola Scriptura* have a future? The short answer is an overwhelming affirmative. Even if the church in the West fails to rise to her stewardship, God's purpose for his own Word ensures the glorious future of *sola Scriptura*. In the efficacy of the divine Word we can take full comfort: "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11).

But does *sola Scriptura* have a future in the West and in places where Western influence dominates theological discourse? Frankly, no—not if the academy continues to eclipse, ignore, or marginalize the visible church. On the other hand, if the visible church in the West recovers its stewardship of doctrine and the academy openly submits itself to the visible church, *sola Scriptura* will prove life giving to the people of God.

The question then is not whether *sola Scriptura* will survive. Instead, it is whether *sola Scriptura* will survive in our age and in our context. To ensure that it does, the church as a confessing body should rise to ensure that humble receptivity and theological fidelity prevails. The academy as a whole must openly embrace its handmaid function—where biblical and theological investigation operates *in service of the church*. The theologian must sustain open allegiance to the confessing church—the very body defined and created by the Word and the Spirit. To be clear and to summarize, the all-too-common non-ecclesial or anti-ecclesial context of theological scholarship—concerning the doctrine of Scripture in particular—can neither preserve nor advance doctrine effectively. Any development in theology, and of *sola Scriptura* in particular, will happen fruitfully only in step with Spirit-given contours and provisions—those given to the visible, confessing church of Jesus Christ.

Bavinck offers an insightful reinforcement coupled with a warning that usefully draws the present concern to a formidable and pastoral conclusion:

The church has been appointed and given the promise of the Spirit's guidance into all truth. Whoever isolates himself from the church, i.e., from Christianity as a whole, from the history of dogma in its entirety, loses the truth of the Christian faith. That person becomes a branch that is torn from the tree and shrivels, an organ that is separated from the body and therefore doomed to die. Only within the communion of the saints can the length and the breadth, the depth and the height, of the love of Christ be comprehended (Eph. 3:18).³⁸

³⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1.83.

The church as church must commend *sola Scriptura*, as this *principium unicum* surely lies at the very foundation of her grace-filled theological stewardship—now and for the future generations of the body of Christ.

The Distinctives of “Two Kingdom” Theology

JIM WEST

Abstract

In recent years the Reformed world has tackled a number of doctrinal issues, the most recent being the Two Kingdom theology, the epicenter being Westminster Theological Seminary in California. This theology is intensely practical, since it impacts the daily work of the Christians as pilgrims through God's world. The practicalities are depicted by the title of David VanDrunen's intriguing book and defense, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*. This article examines Two Kingdom theology, reviews the main issues, and proposes a constructive criticism.

I. Identifying Two Kingdom Theology

The premise of Two Kingdom theology is that there are two realms of Christ's rule: the secular, which is ruled by the moral law that is imprinted on the hearts of all men, and the spiritual, his church, which he rules by the written Word of God. While Christ exercises sovereignty over both realms, he rules each differently. In one sense, both realms are sharply divided, but in another, they are homogeneous because the moral standard that underlies the realms is virtually the same. While the standard for the kingdom outside the church is God's law “in the heart,” the norm for the church is “the law in the hand,” that is, God's inscripturated law summarized by the Ten Commandments. The law “in the heart” is considered sufficient to govern institutions exterior to the church, including all families and all civil governments.

Further, the church as an institution and Christians as individuals are not called to impose God's inscripturated laws on the secular kingdom (which Two Kingdom theologians call "the common kingdom," since it is composed of believers and unbelievers). The term "transformers" is often used as a soft epithet for those who attempt to impose these inscripturated laws, thus underscoring the dictum that Christians are not summoned to redeem culture as a whole. Transformation is applicable only to individuals who are members of the only transformed institution there is, the church.

The above is unlike One Kingdom theology, where there are broader and narrower dimensions of Christ's worldwide empire. The Two Kingdom theologian posits a redemptive kingdom, which is the church, and a common kingdom, where Christians and unbelievers live and work together. The One Kingdom theologian designates the church as the kingdom in the narrow sense and the whole cosmos in the broader perspective with the caveat that *God's inscripturated law* is the supreme standard for both in this kingdom. This contrasts with Two Kingdom theologians, who posit natural law in the common kingdom and the inscripturated in the spiritual. Arguing that Christianity has little to say about politics in the public forum and that it is basically an "apolitical faith," Darryl Hart challenges those who lobby for a greater cultural canvas to meditate upon Christ's famous words, "My kingdom is not of this world."¹ Hart claims that the kingdom outside the church can never be distinctively Christian "because Christianity was a religion without specific land, city, or place."² He writes that it is "essentially an otherworldly faith."³

What is more, Two Kingdom theologians maintain that their ideas faithfully mirror the teachings of John Calvin and his Reformation progeny so that the One Kingdom theology that characterizes many Calvinists (who are identified as "neo-Calvinists") is a recent and even radical departure from their Reformed forebears. To support their view, Two Kingdom writers have forged a unique Christology that sharply distinguishes the human and divine natures of Christ in his heavenly rule over all. They submit that Christ rules what is external to the church as God, but not as the *God-man*. They disbelieve that Christ *as Redeemer* rules any institution except his church. Accordingly, the Dominion Covenant/Cultural Mandate in Genesis 1:26–30 has been fulfilled in Christ, so that Christians are not surrogate "second Adams" engaged in a futile quest for cultural transformation.

¹ Darryl Hart, *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 12.

² *Ibid.*, 251.

³ *Ibid.*, 16.

We present these contrasts:

	One Kingdom Theology	Two Kingdom Theology
1.	The Dominion Covenant is binding.	Dominion is fulfilled in Christ and largely inapplicable.
2.	Christ rules over all as the God-man.	Christ rules only the church as the God-man.
3.	The Ten Commandments are intended for all.	The Ten Commandments are unique to the church.
4.	The Noachian covenant is Christological.	The Noachian covenant is a common grace kingdom.
5.	Christ calls Christians to transform culture.	Christians are pilgrims and not called to transform culture.
6.	Natural law is insufficient for the unregenerate.	Natural law is sufficient to govern the unregenerate.
7.	The creeds favor One Kingdom theology.	The creeds support Two Kingdom theology.
8.	Culture is religion externalized.	Culture is the sum total of broad activities in which humans act.
9.	The new heavens and new earth are “ <i>already-not yet</i> .”	The new heavens and new earth are “not yet.”

These contrasts are not always absolute, as there is room for some interpenetration. In fact, some Two Kingdom advocates favor an invasive role for the Second Table of the Sinai Law into the secular kingdom, usually beginning with the Fifth Commandment.⁴

II. *The Dominion Covenant*

The first contrast spotlights the Dominion Covenant/Cultural Mandate of Genesis 1:26–30, which is reiterated in Psalm 8:4–8 and applied to Christ in Hebrews 2:6–8: “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion ...’” (Gen 1:26).

Here God’s command is interpreted by Two Kingdom writers (most notably David VanDrunen) as severely injured by the fall so that the Cultural

⁴ The late Meredith G. Kline applied the neighborly commandments of the Decalogue to the state. In *Kingdom Prologue*, he wrote, “The State is forbidden to undertake the cultic function of the covenant community, nor can it execute the discipline of the covenant cultus. It cannot use its power and sanction to compel obedience to the first four commandments of the Decalogue.” Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (1981; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 111 (emphasis mine).

Mandate continues today, but only in the “modified form to Noah in Genesis 9.”⁵ The content of this “modified form” enlists dominion over the earth by procreational fruitfulness, and it licenses civil governments to inflict death upon murderers (Gen 9:6). The paring down of the Cultural Mandate is attributed to significant, post-fall factors, including the following:

First, the error of neo-Calvinism is that it “emphasizes the centrality of Christian cultural work as a means of building the kingdom of God and anticipating the new creation.”⁶ VanDrunen sees this as shifting the emphasis from the Great Commission to our cultural achievements. Nevertheless, he tries to balance the seesaw, writing that “cultural activity remains important for Christians, but it will come to an abrupt end, along with this present world as a whole, when Christ returns and cataclysmically ushers in the new heavens and the new earth.”⁷

Second, cultural activities not only fail to attain the world-to-come, but the products of our labors will not “survive into the new creation.”⁸

Third, VanDrunen writes that the unmodified demands of the first Dominion Covenant are not required of us because they have been fulfilled in Christ. Since Adam failed his probation, Christ assumed the role of a second Adam and thereby fulfilled its conditions to usher in the eternal kingdom, which will arrive simultaneously with the creation of “the new heavens and the new earth.” Thus, Dominion in its fullest will be realized at the parousia, when “the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Rev 11:15 NKJV).

Fourth, by urging the Cultural Mandate, we are downplaying justification by faith and frustrating God’s grace.⁹

Those opposed to the Two Kingdom worldview argue that *all* the duties of the Dominion Covenant are extant and even a substantive article of Christ’s missionary commission. For example, John Frame writes that Jesus did not abrogate the Cultural Mandate, but “restates it for his church in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20).”¹⁰ Further, “The Great Commission ... can be understood as a republication of the Cultural Mandate for the semi-eschatological age,”¹¹ even though in its broadest sense “the cultural mandate cannot be fulfilled until the Great Commission is fulfilled.”¹²

⁵ David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 23.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁸ Ibid., 71.

⁹ Ibid., 21, 50, 57–58.

¹⁰ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 862.

¹¹ Ibid., 310.

¹² Ibid.

As to the obsolescence of the Dominion Covenant, contrarians argue that there are two mountains that need to be scaled before it is given an honorable burial. First, if the redeemed do not share the dominion fulfilled in Christ, then how does this impact the image of God in man? Genesis 1:26–30 states that man was made in God's image and that dominion issues from this selfsame image. Although there is not a tit-for-tat equivalence between "image" and "dominion," man's role as God's vicegerent originates in his commission to subdue all the earth for God's glory. Dominion is so linked to the *imago Dei* that it would be nonfunctional if Christ did not share it with his redeemed people. Of course, it might be countered that because of Adam's first sin, the image became so distorted that man consecrated himself instead to satanic imitations like domination and exploitation. That may be true, except that the real issue is that Jesus's achieving dominion is much more than a future sharing to be apportioned during the *eschaton*. Scripture teaches that in all of Jesus's saving work, we are united with him, especially in his life, death, resurrection, and even his heavenly enthronement (Eph 2:6–7). Why, then, would dominion be deemed passé in God's "already-not yet" kingdom? Is not the present world *the beginning* of "the age to come" (Heb 2:5)? Geoffrey Wilson quotes Geerhardus Vos, who wrote that our salvation is so gloriously majestic that "God has subjected the inhabited world to the rule of His people. This was the original goal of creation, but it was effected only in Christ. With Christ, therefore, we have a new creation."¹³ Frail man who was made "a little lower than the angels" is now God's fully equipped vice-regent on earth, even though "present experience sadly proves that the full accomplishment of this divine decree is still awaited."¹⁴ Because Christ is the appointed heir of all things, Christians share his dominion. This is why John Trapp exhorted, "Be married to this heir, and have all!" (cf. Rom 8:17).¹⁵ It is precisely because we have union-and-communication that we enjoy dominion, too.

Second, if the Cultural Mandate is fulfilled so that Christians are forbidden to usher in the "new heavens and the new earth" by their cultural works, then how can we justify even the "modified" form, for would not the modifications (which also express dominion) continue to tempt the church to establish the kingdom by the labors of its hands? It is not clear why subduing the earth is forfeited, but the other cultural duties remain.

¹³ Geoffrey B. Wilson, *Hebrews* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 33.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁵ John Trapp, *Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 666 (on Heb 1:2).

III. *Two Kingdom Christology*

The Two Kingdom construct in the second contrast features a bizarre, somewhat irregular Christology that flirts with heterodoxy. Succinctly stated, while the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the exalted Lord of the cosmos, he rules only the church in the capacity of God *and man*. To be sure, Christ rules all events outside the church as sovereign Lord, except that he *circumvents his human nature* when wielding the reins of his cosmic government, separating his two natures. VanDrunen explains, “Christ rules the one kingdom as *eternal God, as the agent of creation and providence, and over all creatures*. Christ rules the other kingdom as *the incarnate God-man, as the agent of redemption, and over the church*.”¹⁶ Again, he writes, “After his incarnation Christ according to his divine nature continues to exist and work even outside of his human nature (the so-called *extra Calvinisticum*).”¹⁷ VanDrunen cites both Francis Turretin and Samuel Rutherford as significant precursors who believed that “the Son of God rules the temporal kingdom as an eternal member of the Divine Trinity but does not rule it in his capacity as the incarnate mediator/redeemer.”¹⁸

To their credit, Two Kingdom advocates *do* acknowledge that Christ is not a mere titular “King of kings and Lord of lords,” either in the church or the secular realm. On the contrary, the Son of God governs the city of man by the “natural law” stamped on all men’s hearts, although this governance is divorced from his person as the incarnate redeemer.¹⁹

One reason that the aforementioned Christology is “irregular” rests upon it being nowhere articulated in the Reformed creeds. Still, VanDrunen honors this Christology as “Reformed Orthodoxy,” even if it is a stranger to creedal Protestantism.

Many Scriptures such as Matthew 28:18 and Hebrews 2:5–9 are relevant to a rebuttal. In the first, Christ’s “All authority is given to Me in heaven and in earth” was the result of his triumphal resurrection, when God declared him “the Son of God with power” (Rom 1:4). This is when he officially

¹⁶ David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 177.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 430. *Extra Calvinisticum* means “Calvinistic beyond.” The thought is that Christ’s divine nature is not bottled up in his human nature so that his movements are restricted.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁹ VanDrunen *does* aver that institutions and communities that belong to the common kingdom are ruled “through the incarnate Lord Jesus.” VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 118. In his *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, however, he equates the limitation of Christ’s rule as the God-man over the church with “Reformed Orthodoxy”; see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 177–82.

assumed the mediatorial reins over his church and the whole creation, where he now exercises his rule as the God-man, the firstborn over all creation (Col 1:15–20). This means that no earthly institution, indeed, no fact at all, escaped his kingdom when he sat down at God’s right hand, upholding “all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:3). Louis Berkhof describes his exalted station:

This investiture was part of the exaltation of the God-man. It did not give Him any power or authority which He did not already possess as the Son of God; neither did it increase His territory. But the God-man, the Mediator, was now made the possessor of this authority, *and His human nature was made to share in the glory of his royal dominion*. Moreover, the government of the world was now made subservient to the interests of the Church of Jesus Christ.²⁰

IV. *Natural Law and the Ten Commandments*

The third contrast pinpoints the differing residences of God’s law. Two Kingdom authors teach that even unbelievers “do” the works of God’s law: “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts” (Rom 2:14–15a). Here Calvin is regularly subpoenaed, who testified,

Now, as it is evident that the law of God which we call moral, is nothing else than the testimony of natural law, and of conscience which God has engraven on the minds of men, the whole of this equity of which we now speak is prescribed in it. Hence it alone ought to be the aim, the rule, and the end of all laws. Wherever laws are formed after this rule, directed to this aim, and restricted to this end, there is no reason why they should be disapproved by us, however much they may differ from the Jewish law, or from each other.²¹

Calvin’s perspective of “natural law” also includes civil punishments, which he supports as the common law of the nations.²² Accordingly, he

²⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 411 (emphasis mine).

²¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 664 (4.20.16).

²² There is scarcely space to discuss Calvin’s position, even though Two Kingdom advocates admit that Calvin taught things that conflict with his natural law premises. For example, Calvin spoke of the state as “holy,” and even as “Christian,” whereas Two Kingdom champions view the kingdom outside the church as neither holy nor unholy, but secular. For a cogent presentation of Calvin’s transformationist views, see Timothy P. Palmer, “Calvin the Transformationist and the Kingship of Christ,” *Pro Rege* 35.3 (March 2007): 32–39. See also Cornelis P. Venema,

writes, “The Lord did not deliver it by the hand of Moses to be promulgated in all countries, and to be everywhere enforced.”²³ Hence Calvin (and Augustine and Martin Luther, etc.) are cited as authorities who believed that “the common law of the nations” is the “equity” of natural law, that is, “the work of the law written in their hearts” (Rom 2:15a). Hence the norm that governs the secular world and the church is essentially identical, except that their respective residences differ. One law is mediated through common grace, while the other is God’s law written on our hearts through the gift of regeneration (Jer 31:33). The former is “secular”; the latter is spiritual and ecclesiastical. (Two Kingdom advocates call this the “law-gospel” dichotomy, which means that the law governs the world but the gospel the church.) Thus, the Two Kingdom doctrine censures the church whenever she imposes God’s inscripturated laws upon the state; there is one exception—when the church makes a special request of the state or vice versa. The Westminster Confession of Faith 31.4 is cited for support:

Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition, in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.²⁴

V. The Noachian Covenant

The fourth contrast concerns the Noachian covenant in Genesis 6:8–9, where God allays man’s fears of future deluges. Indeed, he promises that he will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, and that “seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease”; that to mitigate violence, civil government would be established so that “whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image” (Gen 8:21–22; 9:6). The *lex talionis* (“law of retaliation”) of Genesis 9:6 is of colossal significance because it teaches that God ordained the state to ensure civil order throughout the post-deluge world. Two Kingdom advocates declare this to be a common-grace kingdom so that Christ rules two kingdoms, “the one through his providence and *common grace* in the world and the other through his miraculous *saving grace* in the church.”²⁵

“One Kingdom or Two?: An Evaluation of the ‘Two Kingdoms’ Doctrine as an Alternative to Neo-Calvinism,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 23 (2012): 77–129.

²³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 665 (4.20.16).

²⁴ Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983), 3:670.

²⁵ Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 115.

The compartmentalization of the two kingdoms is hard and fast, so there is little interplay. While the church is Christian, the state is common, non-Christian, and not even theocentric in the sense of the first four commandments of the Decalogue. In fact, Two Kingdom writers (influenced by the church in the Babylonian Captivity) regularly call the state “Babylon,” the net result being two “kingdoms apart.”²⁶ While some allow for a tidbit of interaction, others are committed to a totally secular state, where even God’s name in the public square is censured as “monstrous confusion.” Even though the Lord Jesus Christ rules both kingdoms, the church must neither invade nor seek to Christianize civil government because the state was designed to be true-blue “common.” What qualifies as interference is anything that violates the truism that the “Bible functions as the constitution for the covenant people, not for the secular state.”²⁷ Their doctrine is that the Noachian covenant created the state, and since it is nonredemptive and functions under common grace, it operates by natural law.

In Two Kingdom thinking, God’s covenant with Noah is non-Christological because its central focus is believers and unbelievers juxtaposed in a common kingdom. Scripture, however, teaches that the Noachian covenant is, in fact, Messianic, although not in ways that are readily observable. Henry Van Til clarifies the matter: “Common grace has no independent goal apart from the coming of the kingdom of God through Christ, the second Adam. Christ is the key to history and to culture.”²⁸

The legislative details of the Noachian covenant were revealed after Noah’s burnt offerings, which foreshadowed the holy gospel (Gen 8:20–22). Two Kingdom writers by contrast view this covenant as thoroughly nonredemptive and the mandate for a common kingdom. But we offer the following rebuttal:

First, the state is ordained by God so that when men assault the image of God in man “He deems Himself violated in their person.”²⁹ Civil authority, then, has theological grounds for inflicting the death penalty because his position is “the most sacred, and by far the most honourable, of all stations in mortal life.”³⁰

²⁶ For an irenic critique of the Two Kingdom position, see Ryan C. McIlhenny, ed., *Kingdoms Apart* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012).

²⁷ Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 127.

²⁸ Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959), 237.

²⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 294.

³⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 654 (4.20.4).

Second, the Noachian flood was a type of our being “saved by baptism” (1 Pet 3:20–21). Baptism is the antitype of the flood. God made a covenant with Noah to *save him and his family* from his wrath so that Noah’s salvation became a type of ours (Gen 6:18).³¹ The pre-announcement of the covenant in Gen 6:18, formally instituted in Genesis 9, is instructive because it

shows us that God’s covenant with Noah in ch. 9 is no ad hoc arrangement, hatched in God’s mind once the floodwaters had disappeared. Even before he unleashes his anger God announces his intention to save at least one human being. This sequence of grace and indignation has already appeared two times in Genesis. Before God banished Adam and Eve from the garden he clothed them. Before he exiled Cain he placed a mark on him to protect him. And here God announces his covenant even before he sends his flood.³²

Third, while the penultimate purpose of God’s covenant was to preserve creation, its grander aim was to prepare humankind for Christ’s advent, hence making its purposes both civil and redemptive.

We also underscore the role of Noah’s son, Shem, who was the ancestor of Christ (Luke 3:36), which confirms that God made his covenant with Noah “and your seed after you”—the word “seed” highlighting Shem’s line (Gen 9:9). The Noachian covenant, therefore, anticipates the Abrahamic with its emphasis upon Christ as the capital “S” Seed (Gen 17:7). All in all, Two Kingdom devotees need to re-address the Christological question more realistically so that none will cry like Mary Magdalene, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him” (John 20:13 NKJV).

VI. *Pilgrims, Not Transformers?*

Contrast five concerns the ethics of God’s people, whom Two Kingdom adherents call *pilgrims*. This pilgrim motif means that besides our resurrected bodies, we can take nothing out of this world. The Scriptures that broadcast “pilgrim-theology” are illustrated especially by Hebrews 11:8–16, where our spiritual ancestors “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (NKJV). Initially, it may seem—especially when the term is not

³¹ The tie between Gen 6:18 and Gen 9 is denied by VanDrunen, who sees two entirely different covenants: one for Noah and the other for creation. He also denies that Noah’s “burnt-offerings” after the Flood were redemptive; see VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 80.

³² Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 284.

qualified by “kings,” “salt,” and “light”—that a pilgrim is little more than a drifter or tourist who is summoned to “occupy” until Christ returns. Therefore “pilgrim” by itself might imply that our labors are inconsequential, perhaps even flaky. Michael Horton, however, explains,

This does not mean that they then are no longer citizens of the earthly city, but that they do not derive their ultimate comfort, satisfaction, or hope from it. Secular society is a gift of God before and after the fall, and it must be cultivated by Christians as well as their non-believing neighbors.³³

Again,

While a nation need not be governed by Christian rulers or Christian laws in order to be just, and Christian conviction does not necessarily demand a certain set of policies, individual believers are simultaneously members of both heavenly and earthly kingdoms and cannot divorce their citizenship in one from the other.³⁴

Horton also dubs our employments “callings,” signifying that the Christian’s work is God ordained. And most important of all, he assures us that as long as we

recognize that there is no everlasting rest from violence, oppression, injustice, and immorality through our own political or cultural works, we are free to pursue their *amelioration* with vigorous gratitude to God for his saving grace in Jesus Christ.³⁵

Still, Two Kingdom advocates insist that our cultural labors “can never be redemptive,” even though God’s people view cultural challenges with concern for their neighbors and to fulfill the neighbor-commandments of Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 22:39. They say nothing, however, about applying the first four commandments of the Decalogue.

Two Kingdom advocates are mostly correct about the caution required in the use of the soteriological word “transformer.” Consequently, other words are deemed more fitting, as Horton urges us *to ameliorate* crime but hedges about calling this activity transformational. His reasoning is fixed to the sharp distinction he makes between “law and gospel,” as God’s law in itself cannot redemptively transform. The best that the Christian can do is “clean house” by means of civic righteousness, but never redemptively because God’s law cannot quicken hearts and redeem institutions. Perhaps “transformer” best

³³ Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 123.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 126–27.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 128 (emphasis mine).

suits the preacher who witnesses new creations and sees old things passing away and all things becoming new (2 Cor 5:17). Preaching alone is transformational, not reformational. It is Pelagian to congratulate ourselves as “transformers” if our cultural efforts purposefully exclude the redeeming grace of God. Here, the Two Kingdom people have scored, for how can institutions be transformed when the message of the cross is on holiday?

The dilemma of “law” or “gospel” can be resolved by remembering that the real goal is to purify the Augean stables by “the law *in* the gospel.” An insight by James Buchanan is helpful:

The law points the eye of a convinced sinner to the cross; but the cross throws in upon his conscience a flood of light which sheds a reflex luster on the law. Hence we believe that the Gospel of Christ, and especially the doctrine of the cross of Christ, is the most powerful instrument for impressing the conscience of a sinner, and for turning his convictions into genuine contrition of heart. And this is because the Gospel, and especially the doctrine of the cross, contains in it the spirit and essence of the law; it recognizes and proceeds upon the moral principles of God’s government, and affords a new and most impressive manifestation of the holiness of the Lawgiver ... The cross,—the cross of a crucified Savior—is the most powerful, the most impressive demonstration of sin, and righteousness, and judgment. ... It is the law by which we obtain the knowledge of sin; but the law is magnified in the cross; and it is the *law in the cross* that carries home to every awakened conscience the most alarming convictions of guilt.³⁶

Here it is not the law apart from the cross or the cross apart from the law, but the “the law in the cross” that thoroughly transforms. Thus, the “law-gospel” choices proffered by Two Kingdom disciples are false choices.

As for Christians as pilgrims, Two Kingdom theologians are over accentuating the metaphor that depicts the journey of the Christian to God’s celestial city, which is but one among many, for Christians are “hyphenates,” living hyphenated lives as prophets, priests, and kings. As kings especially, the Christian by virtue of union-and-communion (and dominion) with Christ is called to subdue the earth in faith. Christian pilgrims occupy a domicile, working from a royal house, “the house of my pilgrimage” (Ps 119:54). Tellingly, Two Kingdom eschatology denies the reality of the “already” aspect of the “new heavens and new earth,” which is oft declared (Isa 11; 65). Eschatologically, “the new heavens and the new earth” are a present reality, although not yet in the full effervesce and glory of the flower. In this life, all things are becoming new to those who are in Christ. This is significant, for if the new heavens and new earth are present in the bud, then the

³⁶ James Buchanan, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 64–65.

kingdoms of this world are already becoming “the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev 11:15; Ps 2:8, 10–12). But in the Two Kingdom scheme, there is scarcely any “already” in the “already” and a lot of “not yet” in the “not yet.”

Two Kingdom advocates also claim there is much common ground shared between Christians and unbelievers, declaring “when it comes to childbirth, love making, disease, tragedies, earthquakes, and famines, there is no distinction between the Christian and non-Christian.”³⁷ While VanDrunen recognizes important “subjective” differences in the common kingdom, Horton’s presentation sometimes lowers the bar, for is there realistically no distinction in the “love-making” of the Christian and the unbeliever? In terms of common grace, surely the unbeliever is capable of love and does love (Luke 6:32–33). But the unbeliever does not love those who hate him, nor can he love as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it (Eph 5:25). And, in the light of Romans 8:28, does the Christian experience “tragedies”? Two Kingdom advocates, of course, know these things, but since their common kingdom is neither holy nor unholy, they passionately lobby for the “melting-pot” of the Noachian covenant. This conception is especially highlighted by substantive but differing views of culture, for while One Kingdom theologians define culture as religion externalized, or “lived religion,”³⁸ the Two Kingdom position is more superficial. VanDrunen simply defines culture as the “broad range of activities—scientific, artistic, economic, etc.—in which human beings engage.”³⁹ Such a definition lends itself to the depiction of religion as one cultural pillar among many instead of the cornerstone of all. This nonreligious definition of culture works to soften the antithesis in the interests of an assimilating commonality that creates the chimera of neutrality. Horton even writes that “Scripture does not ... address every area of moral concern” and urges us to join the quest for wisdom with unbelievers.⁴⁰ There is an adage that the same things done by Christians and unbelievers are *not* the same things (Prov 21:4; Heb 11:29). The danger is that the inflated common denominators in the common kingdom will so mesmerize believers that evangelism is chilled and schizophrenic Christians are created. A church that does not seek to transform can easily render itself so irrelevant that she becomes a parachurch herself.

³⁷ This is from Michael Horton’s lecture at Westminster Theological Seminary California on June 15–16, 2010.

³⁸ Van Til is quoting T. S. Eliot; see his *Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 35.

³⁹ VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 32.

⁴⁰ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 105.

VII. *Creedal Contrasts*

Contrast seven concerns differing interpretations of the Reformed creeds. For example, Horton maintains that in these creeds “one easily discerns a consensus around the biblical and Augustinian two-kingdoms doctrine.”⁴¹ He highlights the “confessional standards of Reformed and Presbyterian bodies,” appealing specifically to chapter 31 of the Westminster Confession of Faith.⁴²

Here we canvas the Reformed confessions to determine if they synchronize with the major tenants of the Two Kingdom doctrine. Zwingli’s Sixty-Seven Articles (1523) teach that “the temporal power ... does have power and confirmation in the doctrine and work of Christ” (Article 35).⁴³ Also, when rulers “are unfaithful and do not act according to the rule of Christ, they may be deposed in the name of God” (Article 42).⁴⁴ The Geneva Confession (1536) speaks of rulers as “holy” and as following “a Christian vocation” (Article 21).⁴⁵ The First Helvetic Confession (1536) charges civil magistrates to punish blasphemy “and to exercise all possible diligence to promote and to put into effect what a minister of the Church and a preacher of the Gospel teaches and sets up from God’s Word.” It also argues that civil government should rule the people with “just, divine laws” (Article 26).⁴⁶

The Scottish Confession of Faith (1560) speaks of the duties of rulers to “maintain true religion and to suppress all idolatry and superstition” (Chapter 24).⁴⁷ The First Confession of Basel (1534) declares that “every Christian government ... should do all in its power to see that God’s name is hallowed among its subjects, God’s kingdom extended, and His will observed by the assiduous extirpation of crimes” (Article 8).⁴⁸ The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) commands magistrates to be

truly God-fearing and religious; that is to say, when, according to the example of the most holy kings and princes of the people of the Lord, he promotes the preaching of the truth and sincere faith, roots out lies and all superstition, together with all

⁴¹ Ibid., 124.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Arthur C. Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 40.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 110–11.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 183.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 94.

impiety and idolatry, and defends the Church of God. ... the care of religion belongs especially to the holy magistrate. (Chapter 30)⁴⁹

This Confession also enjoins rulers to codify “good laws made according to the Word of God in his hands” (Chapter 30).⁵⁰ This Confession speaks of the “the Law of Nature” that “was at one time written in the hearts of men by the finger of God” (Rom 2:15) and of God’s finger also writing “the two Tables of Moses” (Chapter 12), but without affirming that “the Law of Nature” has replaced the inscripturated Ten Commandments as a rule of duty.⁵¹ Before it was later amended, the Belgic Confession of Faith (1561) proclaimed that kings must

protect the sacred ministry, and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of antichrist may be thus destroyed, and the kingdom of Christ promoted. They must therefore countenance the preaching of the word of the gospel every where. (Article 36)⁵²

Returning to the Westminster standards, the Larger Catechism says that the “moral law” is of “great use thereof, *as well as common to all men*” (WLC 94, emphasis mine).⁵³ And, this “moral law” that is “common to all,” is defined not as natural law but as what is “summarily comprehended in the ten commandments, which were delivered by the voice of God upon mount Sinai, and written by him in two tables of stone; and are recorded in the twentieth chapter of Exodus” (WLC 98).⁵⁴ We also note that the original Confession of 1647 allowed the civil ruler

to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. (WCF 23.3)⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Ibid., 299–300.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 300.

⁵¹ Ibid., 247.

⁵² Ibid., 217. This article was amended and enjoyed undisputed acceptance around 1580 in the Low Countries.

⁵³ *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1958; repr., Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1990), 179.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 181–82.

⁵⁵ Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3:653. The Confession’s statement about civil magistrates was amended in the American Church at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA in 1789, some 142 years after its acceptance.

That the civil standard for good government is God's inscripturated law is underscored by the Confession's declaration that to Israel "as a body politic, *he gave sundry judicial laws*, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other, now, further than the general equity thereof may require" (WCF 19.4, emphasis mine).⁵⁶ Clearly, if only the judicial laws have "expired," then the moral law expressed in the Ten Commandments remains the norm for both church and civil jurisprudence.

After tallying the confessional math, it would seem that Two Kingdom advocates need to lessen their dogmatism that God wants natural law to be the exclusive norm for institutions outside the church. To declare that all the Reformed creeds "easily" prove that natural law was the undisputed standard for civil life seems gratuitous and grates against the confessional data.

VIII. Two Kingdom Positives

The Two Kingdom viewpoint contains pluses that warrant appreciation. Most notably is the abiding authority of natural law and its role in the operations of unregenerates and institutions outside the pale of Christ's church. It is heartening that the choices before civil rulers are not restricted to autonomy or theonomy.⁵⁷ A third choice is available: the natural law that God has engraved into man's moral fabric at creation, which—although defaced by man's sin—is often performed. This is why Horton calls it "the canon of natural law," signifying that even the moral hunchbacks of this age implement it in their lives. This is comforting to know, especially if we—like Paul, who was shipwrecked on Malta—are terrorized by the thought of falling into the hands of barbarous chefs whose culinary specialty is missionary soup!

Still, significant problems bubble to the surface.

First, if natural law is a universal standard to which institutions outside the church must submit, then *all* the natural law should be included, especially the first four commandments. For God's Ten Commandments are a seamless robe in which even the neighbor-commandments of the Second Table are inextricably linked to the theocentricity of the First. If Two Kingdom advocates are correct about the Two Kingdom sympathies of Calvin and his ancestors, why is it "problematic" (as Two Kingdom writers claim) for a Christian magistrate to legislate the whole natural law, including the first four commandments? And, why is Calvin repeatedly called

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3:641.

⁵⁷ *Theonomy* here means "God's law."

“inconsistent” by Two Kingdom devotees when he praises Christian magistrates who codify Christian laws when most Two Kingdom supporters own that the boundaries between the First and Second Tables of even natural law are indivisible?⁵⁸

Second, if natural law is so “sufficient,” where was its sufficiency for our first parents before they sinned against God? Scripture teaches that our first parents were environed by both natural *and* word-revelation in the Garden. Clearly, Adam could not have lived unless the natural law was augmented by additional word-revelations from God’s voice in the Garden. He relied upon God to interpret the natural revelation (e.g., the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). Even man, when *not* in sin, needed much more than natural law.

Third, VanDrunen explains the interplay between natural law and civil/judicial law when commenting on “the general equity” of the Mosaic “judicials”:

The civil or judicial law of Moses has been abrogated at the coming of Christ, yet has continuing applicability insofar as it reflects the natural law. For Reformed orthodoxy, as for the Reformation and medieval traditions of the past, civil magistrates ought not impose the Mosaic civil laws *as such* upon contemporary societies. Yet at times they will implement Mosaic civil laws, not because they are Mosaic laws but because they are particular applications of the natural law still appropriate under present circumstances.⁵⁹

Here, the chasm between the One and Two Kingdom theologies may appear razor thin, since civil magistrates will occasionally implement Mosaic civil laws. But the chief issue concerns the perspicuity of natural law in the present context of man’s plunge into the dark mine of sin. Indeed, even the Old Testament people who were commanded to conform themselves to the Mosaic law were habitually apostate, as the Lord often bemoans (Ps 95; Acts 7:51–52; Heb 3:15–19; 8:8). How then can sinners under the less perspicuous influence of natural law discern the written Ten Commandments, given their inveterate blindness to God’s truth (Rom 1:18–32; 3:10–20; 8:7–8)?

The pitfall of natural law is its alliance with the “natural man,” which results in natural law becoming a veritable corrupt manuscript. Of course,

⁵⁸ This is particularly true of Meredith G. Kline, whose *Treaty of the Great King* anchors the Second Table to the First. For an excellent treatment of the relationship between the First Table and the Second of God’s Ten Commandments, see Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 113–30.

⁵⁹ VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 171.

it is not corrupt per se, but only so by the natural man's depraved glosses and annotations. Thus the Canons of Dort rightly taught that only "glimmerings of natural light" remain in fallen man (Matt 6:23).⁶⁰ Therefore, a corrupt canon has become the *Textus Receptus* (received text) of Two Kingdom lobbyists. Wisdom teaches that we should no more make natural law the unique standard of righteousness in the common kingdom than we would make Marcion's canon or the Samaritan Pentateuch the norm in God's spiritual kingdom.

Tellingly, Horton argues that natural law is sufficient to direct the civil magistrate, praising the Roman Caesars in Romans 13, and writing that "Even unbelievers can rule justly and prudently."⁶¹ Horton's point is well taken, especially when one considers that none of the Roman rulers and judges were even vaguely Christian; yet he makes no allowance for dross or anything beastly in their statutes; for if it is desirable to cultivate a just society, then why should the alloys of godless laws escape the expurgations of the written Ten Commandments? Here the Two Kingdom position inexplicably downplays the depth of man's depravity, which is realistically depicted in the Canons of Dort and even applied to natural law: "But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God, and to true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright *even in things natural and civil*" (Canons of Dort 3/4.4, emphasis mine).

IX. Clarifying the Kingdoms

An interesting inquiry is whether Two Kingdom theology is a "package deal"? Does the toppling of one domino spell the doom of the rest? One answer is that Two Kingdom adherents allow for some crossing over between the kingdoms, such as churches importuning the state with their humble petitions. Hence, it is possible that some of the main features of Two Kingdom theology will suffer further modification or even "die the death of a thousand qualifications."

This is illustrated by Two Kingdom apologists insisting that the state is common by virtue of the Noachian covenant. We have already heard the pronouncement that the Roman government of Paul's day was "just." But if just, then why not holy? And if not holy, then why not unholy? Does anything transcend the categories of holy and unholy? We are naive to deny that "he that is not with me is against me" and to forget that the word

⁶⁰ Canons of Dort 3/4.4; Schaff, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3:588.

⁶¹ Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 122.

“common” tends to camouflage the profound moral antitheses that exist in the common kingdom.

The response to a question posed to VanDrunen at a 2011 forum concerning the exact kingdom-slot of Westminster Seminary California reveals the vagaries of the Two Kingdom thesis. Since Westminster is not a school of a church denomination, the questioner wanted to know if the seminary was a member of the common kingdom or the spiritual kingdom? VanDrunen answered,

And so in essence I would look at this institution as a common kingdom institution that houses and hosts this very important work the church does through certain ministers set apart for the task ... It does not mean that we can always put every single plot of ground here in one kingdom or another. Sometimes it is more complex than that.

Again he explained,

I would say that a place like Westminster, in and of itself, is part of the common kingdom in that it does not have the promises of the eternal kingdom of God ... and has all the trappings of a business in a lot of ways.⁶²

This explanation would mean that ministers are trained in an unredeemed kingdom that is neither holy nor unholy, and that the seminary as a commercial business is not properly Christian, since its address is the common kingdom. This is one of many minuses that hamper the acceptance of the leading distinctives of Two Kingdom theology.

⁶² Ryan C. McIlhenny, “Christian Witness *As* Redeemed Culture,” in McIlhenny, *Kingdoms Apart*, 266–68.

Developments in Church Government in the Post-Reformation French Churches¹

PAUL WELLS

Abstract

The history of the Protestant Reformed churches in France in the century following the Wars of Religion, their trials and sufferings, is well documented. It is a tragic page in modern European history and retains the attention of commentators because rarely has a people group been persecuted so intensely for so long, to the point of virtual extinction. Less known, perhaps because of the linguistic barriers, is the development of church life and the theological struggles in the Protestant churches during that period. Recent publications contribute to rectify this lack. The present article is an introduction to some of the issues of the time which have perennial interest.

The period of the seventeenth century in France begins with the accession of Henry of Navarre to the throne upon his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1589. This event heralded the end of two decades of bloody wars of religion in France and the promulgation of an edict of tolerance for the French Huguenots in

¹ A lecture given at Kosin University, Busan, Korea, in October 2015.

1598, the Edict of Nantes, which was repealed by Louis XIV almost a century later in 1685.² During that period, Protestants enjoyed restricted but diminishing liberties, followed by growing civil oppression. The relative tolerance provided the necessary conditions for the establishment of regular church government and growth in the Reformed churches.³ They were submissive to royal authority in such a way that the French monarch initially avoided active opposition against them, which occasioned the Catholic dictum *soumis comme un Huguenot*, meaning “submissive like a Huguenot.”

I. A Tragic Fate

The Huguenots were most faithful supporters of the Bourbon monarchy. At the end of this period, at the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the renowned preacher Jean Claude, who was a great defender of the persecuted Huguenots, penned *The Grievances of Protestants Cruelly Oppressed in the Kingdom of France* (1686).⁴ His biblical defense against persecution was somewhat blunted because he was drawn into the waters of moderation and tolerance by his collaboration with Richard Simon and Pierre Bayle, who were among the early luminaries of free thinking.⁵

This period was a critical time for French Calvinists, one from which they never really recovered.⁶ In spite of the limited toleration granted by the Edict of Nantes, from that point on, it was a case of progressive strangulation of Reformed church life in France.⁷ It is estimated that by the time of the Revocation in 1685, not only tens of thousands of Huguenots had left France by emigration, but also some six hundred pastors. Between 1685 and

² Élisabeth Labrousse, *La révocation de l'Édit de Nantes* (Paris: Payot, 1990). The Revocation banned Protestant church activity from public life; church buildings (*temples*) were demolished, meetings forbidden, pastors obliged to recant or go into exile, and children to be baptized Catholic.

³ On the Edict of Nantes, Joseph Lecler, *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la Réforme* (1955; repr., Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), 514–18, translation, *Tolerance and the Reformation*, trans. T. Westow (London: Longmans, Green, 1960).

⁴ Jean Claude, *Les plaintes des Protestans, cruellement opprimez dans le Royaume de France* (Cologne: Pierre Marteau, 1686). Jean Claude was pastor at Nîmes, Montauban, and Charenton (in modern Paris) and died in exile at The Hague in 1687.

⁵ Richard Simon, author of one of the first critical approaches to the Old Testament (1685), was named a father of modern exegesis in the text presented by the Pontifical Biblical Commission to Pope John Paul II on April 23, 1993, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.” Pierre Bayle, a contemporary of John Locke, like the English philosopher, published a pioneering work on tolerance, *De la tolérance* in 1685.

⁶ Paul Wells, “Calvin and France: A Paradoxical Legacy,” in *Restoration through Redemption: John Calvin Revisited*, ed. Henk van den Belt (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 271–82.

⁷ Janine Garrison, *L'Édit de Nantes et sa révocation* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), 119–83.

1715, two hundred thousand more took the road to exile.⁸ Others recanted publicly, either really or superficially. In the following century, the free thinking of the Enlightenment did its work on the remnant.⁹ The result was that just before the Revolution in 1789 there were only 472 Protestant churches left (by comparison with over 1,200 churches estimated to have been planted by 1570), with diminished congregations in restricted enclaves and a mere 180 pastors, a good number of whom had by then followed the philosophers and espoused deism. France was lost to Calvinism; it has never been restored in an ecclesiastical sense and even today is restricted to the witness of isolated individuals or groups.

The Reformed synods during the time of limited tolerance were marked by the reception of the Synod of Dort, the conflict over the teaching of Moïse Amyraut at the school of Saumur in the Loire Valley, and the increasing hardship of church life under the rigor implemented by Louis XIV. Between the assassination of Henry IV by a Catholic extremist in 1610 and the Revolution in 1789, a mere four Bourbon kings reigned, and their power became ever greater until it began slipping away prior to 1789. Theirs was a durable continuity of sapping and repressive policies that undermined the Huguenots. This fact is often not sufficiently appreciated, with regard to both the way the Protestants suffered the politics of exclusion and the ways in which they reacted to them. What was happening at the time in England and Holland did not help either, and Louis XIV must have trembled at the thought of the fate of Charles I and the federalism developing in Holland.

II. *Synodical and Church Controversies*

Following the Edict of Nantes in 1598, synods met every three years until 1628. In the seventeenth century there could be no synod without royal authorization and the presence of a royal commissioner. After that and before the Revolution there were only four national synods—Charenton (Paris) in 1631 and 1644, Alençon in 1637, and finally the synod at Loudon in 1659—because the churches were increasingly persecuted and their activity restricted.

The main Protestant figures of the period were the Scot John Cameron and the Frenchmen Moïse Amyraut, Pierre Du Moulin, Jean Daillé, André

⁸ Marianne Carbonnier-Burkard, *Comprendre la révolte des Camisards* (Rennes: Ouest-France, 2008), 20.

⁹ On the collapse of the Reformed churches in France before the Revolution, Daniel Robert, *Les Églises réformées en France, 1800–1830* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), 16–20.

Rivet, Charles Drelincourt, Claude Pajon, Jean Claude, and Pierre Jurieu. In addition, the Genevan school influenced Bénédict Turretini (1588–1631) and his better-known nephew François of elenctic theology fame (1623–1687); Jean Diodati (1576–1649), who translated the Bible into Italian; and Bénédict Pictet, who wrote a three volume dogmatics (1696) and an influential two volume work on Christian ethics (1692).

The main theological issue at the time in the life of the synods was obviously the condemnation of Arminianism and the fear on the part of Du Moulin, Rivet, and their ilk that Amyraldianism, developed from the “universalism” of Cameron, who had enormous influence on his students, was a half-way house to synergism.¹⁰ Du Moulin wrote pointedly about the Arminians (“apes of the Pelagians”), and his *Anatomy of Arminianism* (1619) reveals his gifts as a theologian and polemicist.¹¹ The opponents of Amyraut feared that his two-stage view of the divine decree of salvation, with Christ dying hypothetically for all and subsequently being received through faith by those who believed the gospel, would inevitably collapse into Arminian prescience and the limitation of divine sovereignty in salvation.¹² They considered that this was ploughing a different furrow from that of Dort, particularly its third canon, which had been accepted by the Synod of Alès, with Pierre Du Moulin as moderator, in 1620. However, the theology taught at Saumur by Amyraut, La Place, and Louis Cappel, in the line of Cameron, retained its attraction throughout this period and was never formally condemned by a synod of the church as heresy. Unfortunately, Amyraut, no mean theologian, is generally only remembered in this context.¹³

Another synodical controversy, later than that surrounding the Saumur theology but not unrelated to it, concerned the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion and centered round the ideas of Claude Pajon. Pajon published little, but his ideas circulated widely and were much discussed, generating two rounds of controversy in 1665–1667 and 1676–1685. These issues did not reach synodical level, as no synods were authorized by the king during

¹⁰ Albert Gootjes, “John Cameron and the French Universalist Tradition,” in Martin I. Klauber, ed., *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches. From Henri IV to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2014), 169–96. My review of this book is in *Unio cum Christo* 1.1–2 (2015): 313–18.

¹¹ Martin I. Klauber, “Defender of the Faith or Reformed Rabelais? Pierre Du Moulin (1568–1658) and the Arminians,” in Klauber, *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, 217–36.

¹² On Amyraut and Amyraldianism see Richard Stauffer, *Moïse Amyraut: un précurseur français de l’œcuménisme* (Paris: Librairie Protestante, 1962); Alan C. Clifford, *Calvinus: Authentic Calvinism, a Clarification* (Norwich: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 1996).

¹³ Richard A. Muller, “Beyond Hypothetical Universalism: Moïse Amyraut on Faith, Reason, and Ethics,” in Klauber, *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, 198.

this time. Pajon went further than Amyraut, who proposed that if the Spirit works immediately on the intellect in conversion, he operates only mediately on the will, since his work passes through the intellect. Pajon seems to have denied an immediate operation of the Spirit on both the intellect and the will. His opponents, who included such influential figures as Jean Claude and Pierre Jurieu, deemed that Pajon's teaching implied difficulties not only with relation to man's fallen depravity but also with regard to providential *concursum* in conversion. Pajon was never condemned of heresy and avoided charges by making himself useful, directing his energies toward replying to the able Jansenist Pierre Nicole's work *Legitimate Arguments against the Calvinists* (1671).¹⁴

The various synodical polemics rumbling on as they did throughout the period weakened the Protestant churches' witness and took them away from the concrete political problems facing them in France, which were of dual nature: the continued opposition from nascent Romanism and its eloquent defenders, including the Jansenists, on the one hand, and the authoritarianism of the king on the other. Why did the French churches develop no form of resistance other than a passive respect for the monarchy before the disastrous Camisard uprisings in the Cévennes in the early eighteenth century?¹⁵ Why was no contrarian theory developed in France by the Calvinists, as was the case of Samuel Rutherford in Scotland in his *Lex Rex* (1644), or Louis Althusius of Holland in his *Politica* (1603), advocating that a tyrant can be dethroned and even put to death? This was not new, and there were also Gallic precedents. The "Monarchomachs" had contested the absolute power of monarchy, referring to the final section of Calvin's *Institutes* and Beza's *Right of Magistrates* for their ideas about a just and active opposition to tyranny.¹⁶ Were the synods of the French Reformed church too much in the slipstream of the Protestant nobility, and were its theologians too tied to what seemed acceptable and desirable to their leaders and protectors?

¹⁴ Albert Gootjes, "Politics, Rhetoric, and Exegesis: Claude Pajon (1626–1685) on Romans 8:7," in Klauber, *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, 296–306.

¹⁵ Maurice Longeiret, *Quand Dieu dirige l'histoire et la conduit à bonne fin* (Cléon d'Andran: Excelsis, 2013), 81–126, on the time known in French Protestantism as *le désert*.

¹⁶ Monarchomach meaning those who fight against the king. Théodore de Bèze, *Du droit des magistrats sur leurs sujets*, ed. Robert M. Kingdon (Geneva: Droz, 1971). As well as Beza they included François Hotman (1524–1590), Simon Goulart (1543–1628), Nicolas Barnaud (1538–1604), Philippe du Plessis-Mornay (1549–1623), and George Buchanan (1506–1582).

III. *The Origins of the Synodical System*

It has been said that French church polity is vital for the later development of Presbyterianism, since it was adopted and adapted by other national Reformed churches in Western Europe and beyond.¹⁷ Three factors contributed to the development of church polity in France in the seventeenth century: firstly, Calvin's view of government; secondly, his view of church order; and thirdly the Ecclesiastical Discipline [*La discipline ecclésiastique*] adopted by the French churches along with the La Rochelle Confession [*Confessio Gallicana*] in 1559. This discipline was added to the thirty-eight original articles of the Confession and had expanded to 252 articles by the synod of Loudon in 1659.¹⁸

In contrast with Martin Luther, whose views of church organization were more circumstantial, Calvin held that the organization of the church has a double character. It is immediately placed under the Lordship of Christ, not under any human hierarchy, and there is a definite pattern of church government prescribed by Scripture. In this Calvin applied Luther's two-kingdom theology, the rule of Christ in society and in the church, with greater consistency than did the German Reformer. On the level of civil government, Calvin argued for public representatives to resist a king's tyranny, when necessary, as the final chapter of his *Institutes* state:

For when popular magistrates have been appointed to curb the tyranny of kings ... So far am I from forbidding these officially to check the undue license of kings, that if they connive at kings when they tyrannise and insult over the humbler of the people, I affirm that their dissimulation is not free from nefarious perfidy, because they fraudulently betray the liberty of the people, while knowing that, by the ordinance of God, they are its appointed guardians.¹⁹

For Calvin, there is no direct human ruler in the church as in the civil government, because Christ reigns directly as king of his people. However,

¹⁷ Cf. Theodore G. van Raalte, "The French Reformed Synods of the Seventeenth Century," in Klauber, *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, 57–97.

¹⁸ The text of this discipline is now lost, but parts have been reconstructed. See Patrick Cabanel, *Histoire des Protestants en France: XVIe-XXIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2012), chap. 5. For an early English (and sometimes rather loose) translation of the discipline, see "The Discipline of the Reformed Churches of France," in John Quick, *Synodicon in Gallia Reformata: Or, the Acts, Decisions, Decrees, and Canons of Those Famous National Councils of the Reformed Churches in France* (London: Parkhurst & Robinson, 1692), xvi–lviii; online: <https://books.google.com/books?id=xhw-AAAaAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

¹⁹ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 675 (4.20.31).

under Christ, as under a human king in the national forum, there are those who exercise authority—the church is neither communistic nor anarchistic, but its order is assured by appointed officers. Calvin believed that this view of church order was indicated by Scripture and existed in the primitive church before being overlaid by the abuses of the Papacy.²⁰ Calvin recognized three offices: that of pastor (bishop, *episcopoi* were *presbyteroi*) or elder, of teacher, and of deacon.²¹ In regard to the matter of whether one person or instance should appoint a minister for a particular church, Calvin stated that to take away from the church or from the college of pastors the right of judging would profane the power of the church, the *jus divinum* (divine law). An elder or deacon is recognized by the qualifications of Scripture, approved by the church. This view is elaborated in article 29 of the La Rochelle Confession, which states,

We believe that the true Church should be governed according to the order established by our Lord Jesus Christ. That is, there should be pastors, elders (*surveillants*), and deacons, so that true doctrine may be upheld therein, errors corrected and suppressed, the poor and afflicted helped in their needs, the services (*assemblées*) held in the name of God, and that adults and also children be edified.²²

The question of special offices implies that of hierarchy in organization, particularly against the backdrop of the Romanistic pyramid structure of authority and its fundamental division of society into clergy and laity. It has sometimes been stated that an elaborate system of hierarchies existed in the French Reformed system.²³ However, if some form of hierarchical order exists, the fundamental principle of the La Rochelle Confession, and the Discipline following it, is antihierarchical, as expressed in article 30: “We believe that all true pastors, wherever they may be, have the same authority and equal power under one head, one sovereign, and one universal bishop: Jesus Christ. Consequently, we believe that no church shall claim any authority or dominion at all over any other.” Article 31 continues by stating, “No person may aspire to office in the church of their own authority, but this is to be done by election in so far as possible and God permits.”²⁴

²⁰ *Institutes* 4.2.3–4; 4.1.

²¹ Calvin’s attempt to harmonize the functions did not go very far, as pointed out by Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1990), 171.

²² *Confession de La Rochelle* (Aix-en-Provence: Kerygma, 1988), 54, translation mine.

²³ Cf. van Raalte, “The French Reformed Synods,” 57–61.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 83–87. This election is not a congregational vote, but the designation of future pastors by the provincial synods; local churches then call their pastors following the rule of the *Discipline* of 1559, chapter 1, articles 1 and 3.

Three affirmations are made in these articles: no minister occupies a position that is superior to another; no church or church institution has authority or power over another; and those serving the church must be elected, because their calling is recognized as coming from the Lord of the church. Each of these affirmations raises the antihierarchical principle to the level of *status confessionis*. Bernard Roussel states that article 1 of the 1559 Discipline rejects all organizational hierarchy: there are no officers or assemblies over each other and no higher and lower levels of authority other than that of the consistory over the congregation, which is a biblical order.²⁵

In French this organizational structure is called *le régime presbytéro-synodal* (the presbyterian-synodical system). This expression seeks to accent the fact that there is a complementarity between the principle of local diversity in the presbytery and collective unity in the synod. A delicate balance of power exists under the authority of Christ between the local congregation and the broader church, between the consistory (or presbytery) and the synod (or classis). Power exists first of all in the local congregation. Pierre Courthial comments:

According to the New Testament each local church is the fullness of the body of Christ in that place. There can therefore be no inequality, since each church is really the body of Christ in that place and the church in that place. If there were supremacy of one church over another, it would be like saying that one church was more the body of Christ than the other. So I believe it is correct to say that all churches are equal.²⁶

To express the unity of the church as one body, singular and plural, the Reformed church of France was originally not named by a substantive in the singular, but by the plural: the Reformed Churches in (not of) France, *les Églises réformées en France*, a designation that was only abandoned in the nineteenth century. The elaboration of the synodical system at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth was special in France, as Geneva itself had no synod. If the Genevan model was followed to a certain point, the French adapted it to the needs of a fast-growing church spread throughout a hostile nation.²⁷

²⁵ Van Raalte, "The French Reformed Synods," 59, quoting Bernard Roussel, "La 'Discipline' des Eglises réformées de France en 1559," in *De l'Humanisme aux Lumières, Bayle et le protestantisme: Mélanges en l'honneur d'Elisabeth Labrousse*, ed. Michelle Madeleine et al. (Paris: Universitas, 1966), 177.

²⁶ Pierre Courthial, *La Confession de Foi de La Rochelle: Commentaire* (Aix-en-Provence: Kerygma, 1979), 100.

²⁷ This is amply documented in Glenn S. Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism: The Development of Huguenot Ecclesiastical Institutions, 1557–1572* (Kirkville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2003), and Philip Benedict, *Christ's Church Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

The first French Discipline is close to Calvin's *Ordonnances ecclésiastiques* for the Genevan Church, just as liturgy in the French Reformed churches is close to Calvin's model of congregational response, in contrast with John Owen's later criticism of liturgy.²⁸ However, the French had to face a new and novel situation and in particular the question of the relation between the local church council and the synod. At the grassroots level the Discipline placed the government of the local church in a council of elders called the consistory. The church is congregationally governed, but not in the sense of *congregationalism*; later, in 1645, the Synod of Charenton warned against the congregationalism of independents arriving from England, who would not recognize the authority of synods.²⁹

The local elders, numbering five to ten, in each church, are elected by the community to oversee the preaching of the Word and order in church life. Pastors are chosen by the council of elders, but later, after 1571, they were also to be examined by the provincial synod. In the early years, most of the French pastors were formed at the academy in Geneva, before academies were established in several regions of France.³⁰ The synods assembled representatives of the churches, both pastors and laymen, on the principle of delegation, and acted as temporary organs of liaison between the local churches, with the aim of furthering the common interests of the churches and solving problems. The synod itself elected its *président*, later called moderator, whose duties, according to article 2 of the Discipline, were to be limited to the duration of the synod and were to terminate at its end. This measure was a defense against centralization and episcopacy, and also against the domination of powerful personalities. At the end of each synod, an organizing congregation was delegated for the following year, although during the century following 1559 only twenty-nine synods were able to convene.

The pastoral body, which grew to eight hundred by the middle of the seventeenth century, was very often composed of a strong representation of the intellectual elite, particularly in southern France, and during this

²⁸ John Owen, "Discourse on Liturgies," chap. 1, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965–1968), volume 16. Cf. Paul Wells, "Worshipful Worship," Lecture presented at the Rutherford House Systematic Theology Conference in Edinburgh, September 2015, publication forthcoming.

²⁹ Van Raalte, "The French Reformed Synods," 65.

³⁰ At the synod of Alès in 1620 the academies of Die, Montauban, Nîmes, Saumur, and Sedan were officially established. They were destroyed successively under Louis XIV: Nîmes in 1664, Sedan in 1681, Die in 1684, Saumur and Montauban (Puylaurens) in 1685. Pierre-Daniel Bourchenin, *Étude sur les académies protestantes en France aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles* (Paris: Grassart, 1882).

period, more than a third of them were sons of pastors. Originally there were no permanent church commissions or standing agencies. In 1563 at Lyon, France was divided into nine provinces, and the consistories of each province were to elect delegates to the national synod. From 1578 a system of appeals for doctrinal and other questions was developed.³¹

So within twenty or so years after the Edict of Nantes a system of church government emerged in France that was nonhierarchical but characterized by a pyramid system of delegation of authority:

Local church → Council of elders and consistory of local churches →
Provincial synod → National or general synod

At a later point *colloques* or colloquiums [the equivalent of the Dutch *classes*] were added as instances between the local consistories and the regional synods in order to deal with local and secondary issues, although their status was really outside the pyramid structure of Presbyterian delegation.³² An example of the workings of the local church is seen in the case of Nîmes in the Gard region, often called the capital of French Protestantism. Pierre Viret established churches in this area from 1562 onwards, and Theodore Beza attended the national synod there in 1572. “From 1561 to 1685, the Reformed church in Nîmes was governed by a consistory, an assembly of deacons and elders moderated by a pastor, and had the function of organizing worship and the overseeing the church, the instruction of the faithful, and the distribution of charitable aid.”³³

The organizational structure of the Presbyterian-synodal system has been called “democratic centralism.” It implies a centralized collectivity existing in complementary extension to the local instances of government, and a system of representation based on the election of delegates with equal representatives from the body of pastors and laymen. The influence of this system for the development of representative democracy in France and Western Europe is a subject of hot debate.³⁴ It has been noted that since the French Revolution the system of elected local councils, regional councils, departments, and parliament with a president is not foreign to the original structure of government in the Reformed churches in France.

³¹ Van Raalte, “The French Reformed Synods,” 75.

³² *Ibid.*, 69–70.

³³ Patrick Cabanel, ed., *Itinéraires Protestants en Languedoc, XVIe–XXe siècle: 2. Espace gardois* (Montpellier: Presses du Languedoc, 2000), 298.

³⁴ André Gounelle et al., *Démocratie et fonctionnement des Eglises* (Paris: Van Dieren, 2000).

All this granted, it should not be forgotten that church government, though under the authority of Christ as Lord, was not an end in itself and only existed to further the proclamation of the gospel. The main activity of the church being preaching, the quality of the pastoral body was always a concern and continually preoccupied the synods. Preaching and Protestantism became synonymous. To illustrate: between 1660 and 1680 there were four preaching services each Sunday in the Grand Temple at Nîmes, and certain parishioners who attended two or three of these had to be removed to make way for others. Sermons lasted an hour or more, and in the Temple at Charenton near Paris, which was the largest in France (3000 capacity), there was an hour glass that the pastor turned over to time himself at the start of his sermon. It has been estimated that between 1598 and 1685 more than two million sermons were preached in the 700 churches authorized by the Edict of Nantes. The most famous were published in collections by Jean Daillé, Charles Drelincourt, Pierre Du Moulin, Isaac Sarrau, and Jean Claude.³⁵

IV. *Synodical Life and Problems*

The main problems faced by the local instances and consistories were ethical issues—offences of moral laxity, feuds, frequenting papist services or dancing—and led to excommunication.³⁶ The local instances also took steps through diaconal work in assisting the poor or those suffering because of persecution. On the national level the problems were of another order. Provincial and national synods were called to deal with two sorts of issues: firstly, structural politics of church government, and secondly, theological polemics.

1. *The Politics of Church Government*

From early days a classic distinction was observed between *églises plantées* [church plants] and *églises dressées* [established churches]. In the first, the Word was preached and the sacraments distributed by a pastor without a church council having been established. In the second case, the church was placed under the authority of the council or consistory. When several

³⁵ References from Cabanel, *Histoire des Protestants en France*, chap. 5. A fine example of Huguenot preaching is analyzed by Michael A. G. Haykin in his article “The Glorious Seal of God”: Jean Claude (1619–1687), Ephesians 4:30 and Huguenot Pneumatology,” in Klauber, *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, 321–34. Cf. also Lucien Rimbault, *Pierre Du Moulin, 1568–1658: un pasteur classique à l’âge classique, étude de théologie pastorale sur des documents inédits* (Paris: Vrin, 1966).

³⁶ Cabanel, ed., *Itinéraires Protestants en Languedoc*, 298–300.

established congregations existed in the same area, the question of the authority of the consistory was raised. As early as 1562, the Synod of Orleans condemned a tract by a Jean-Baptiste Morély defending the idea that the entire congregation is called to elect the elders and pastors and exercise discipline. Morély in fact was advocating that authority lay with all church members to take decisions under the guidance of the Spirit, whereas he limited the power of the consistory to administrative matters.³⁷ At a subsequent synod in Paris three years later, a decision was taken that it is unbiblical to remit such elections to “*la voix du peuple*” (the suffrage of the people). This thesis was defended at length by Antoine de Chandieu at the request of the Paris synod in a major work, *Confirmation of the Ecclesiastical Discipline Practiced in the Reformed Churches in the Kingdom of France with a Reply to the Objections Proposed against It*.³⁸ This decision was confirmed by successive synods at La Rochelle, Nîmes, and Sainte-Foy, and has remained the theoretical position of the Reformed church in France ever since.³⁹ Both Calvin and Chandieu saw the Reformed consistory as being patterned after the Sanhedrin, and exegeted Matthew 18:16, “tell it to the church,” to mean the governing body, the Sanhedrin or the consistory, in line with the eldership pattern of the Old Testament. So from an early stage in the history of the French church, the government of the church was rooted squarely in the authority of the consistory or council, made up of elders and pastors. Even the much-respected general synods of the church had legitimacy not of themselves, but only as meetings of the delegated representatives of the churches. No intrusion of the civil magistrate was permitted in the life of the church, theoretically avoiding Erastianism.

The major concession made by the church under the Edict of Nantes was to recognize the right of the king to authorize or deny the meeting of a synod. This said, it must be added that the Reformed churches received the “King’s bounty,” a sum that increased in time, before becoming more and more infrequent. Distribution of this sum was a thorn in the side for the synods, for which the king also paid the bill. This royal grant allowed the king to impose greater strictures on the churches over the years. For instance, no

³⁷ Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement, 1564–1571* (Geneva: Droz, 1967), 37–148; Jean Rott, *Jean Morély et l’utopie d’une démocratie dans l’Eglise* (Geneva: Droz, 1993); Scott M. Manetsch, “Theodore Beza and the Crisis of Reformed Protestantism in France,” in Klauber, *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, 40–41.

³⁸ Antoine de Chandieu, *La Confirmation de la discipline ecclésiastique observée dans les églises réformées du royaume de France, avec la réponse aux objections proposées alencontre* (1566). Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of French Protestant Movement*, 77–82.

³⁹ François Méjane, *Discipline de l’Eglise Réformée de France* (Paris: Je sers, 1947), 18–20.

French delegate was permitted to attend the Synod of Dort, no foreigner could be a pastor in France, and letters from churches abroad to the synods had to be opened and read by the royal commissioner. Reduction of the king's bounty often meant that theological colleges could not be financed.⁴⁰

No human system of organization is free from functional friction; power remains power, even if it is delegated power. The problem that the French church structure had to deal with was that of two complementary authorities: the authority relationship between the local consistory and the congregation was not the same as that between the national or provincial synods and the local consistories. If the consistory "governs" the local church, it cannot be said that the synod "rules" or "governs" the provincial synods or the local consistories. The synod derives its authority in an indirect way from the agreement of churches to be in union with a federal principle, under a common confession. This point was much discussed in the French church and continues to be, down to the present.

The famous jurist Pierre Jurieu tackled the problem that had been rumbling on in his 1686 work *The True System [or Structure] of the Church*. Churches, says Jurieu,

assembled synods in which they made some rules and canons by the power of their federation. ... They voluntarily submitted to certain rules which they themselves made. ... The right that these synods have to censure and chastise those who break the order is founded upon the very will of those who are censured.⁴¹

This recognizes that although such synodical institutions are not contrary to the will of God, they exist by human voluntary consent and are not specifically instituted by him.

A downside of synodical life is therefore recognized, as well as two positive factors. Synods cannot claim more than a relative authority and can waver in their decisions and deliberations. Therefore, their actions are not above scrutiny and criticism. Positively, in the first instance, insofar as they are subject to Scripture they confess the faith of the churches as the bond of unity in witness to the truth and properly represent the will of the churches. Secondly, because they are human institutions, they can never legislate new doctrines or practices in the way that the Councils of the Roman Catholic Church might pretend to do. This carries a double consequence: congregations or individuals who introduce new teaching or practices in the church fall under the sanction of the synod, acting on behalf of all. Furthermore, if

⁴⁰ Van Raalte, "The French Reformed Synods," 80–83.

⁴¹ Pierre Jurieu, *Le vray systeme de l'Eglise*. Van Raalte, "The French Reformed Synods," 72.

a synod humanly errs in one of its decisions, it is legitimate for a local congregation to consider that the federal principle has been broken and separate for reasons of faithfulness to Scripture. It is for these reasons that the synod in 1601 adopted what has subsequently been the practice of French Reformed synods: reading and swearing on the Confession of faith and the Discipline at the opening of synodical meetings, “We promise to submit insofar as we judge it to be in accordance with God’s Word.”⁴² In this context the French expression *d’un commun accord*, meaning that decisions are taken “by mutual consent,” has been capital for the expression of the federative principle.

These considerations are important and capital for the situation of deviant Reformed churches today, including in France. When theological pluralism is imposed as a norm for church practice by synods on believing congregations, pluralism has itself become a creed that replaces the confession of the church and the *sola Scriptura*, and church authoritarianism becomes a principle demanding ultimate respect.⁴³

2. Theological Issues

The second area of synodical activity during the seventeenth century in the French Protestant churches was that of theological debate and censure related in particular to Roman Catholicism, Arminianism, and Amyraldian theology. These were issues of common concern, and questions raised in consistories and provincial synods went higher if they had not been dealt with there. During this period the main polemic was obviously against the Roman Church. The synod at Saint Maxant in 1609 divided the Roman problem into fourteen subjects and assigned topics for study to provincial synods. The synods commissioned writings about the persecutions of the church and also designated authors to write on certain issues. One pastor, Théophile La Milletière, was condemned by the synod of Charenton in 1644–45 for seeking reconciliation with the Roman Church and was excommunicated.⁴⁴

Three successive synods during a period of nine years, 1603–1612, examined the views of Johannes Piscator, a German theologian who denied the imputation of the active obedience of Christ and became a prominent

⁴² Ibid., 74.

⁴³ Cf. Paul Wells, “Le pluralisme, l’Ecriture et l’unité de l’Eglise” (1974), in *En tout occasion favorable ou non: Positions et propositions évangéliques* (Aix-en-Provence: Kerygma, 2014), 30–44.

⁴⁴ R. J. M. van de Schoor, *The Irenical Theology of Théophile Brachet de La Milletière, 1588–1665* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

Arminian. The synod of Privas (1612) drew up a form of prescription against his ideas that pastors were required to sign. Later synodical debate often centered around the strict Calvinistic position of the Sedan academy in the line of Dort, which was opposed to the Cameronian theology of the Saumur academy. There was ongoing debate about the Saumurian Josué De La Place's (Placeus) rejection of the immediate imputation of Adam's sin.⁴⁵ La Place argued that Calvin knew nothing of immediate imputation and replied in his *Disputatione de imputatione primi peccati Adami*, published at Saumur in 1655. Consequently, the synod of Loudon in 1659 withdrew the strictures. It was not until the *Helvetic Consensus* of 1675 that the Saumurian theology and "imputation mere and consequent" were condemned.⁴⁶ Amyraut himself came under examination at the synod of Alençon in 1637 and later at Charenton, and although the synod cautioned against certain theses, the explanations and promises given on the floor of the synod were received, and the right hand of fellowship was extended to Amyraut and Testard, in spite of protestations from foreign parts.

The major issue of the century was Arminianism and its derivatives, and polemic went on in the synods and out of them throughout the period, often centered around the reception of the Canons of Dort. Pierre Du Moulin, who was the principal adversary of both the Arminians and later the Amyraldians, published his *Anatome Arminianismi* at Leiden in 1619. He was elected moderator of the synod of Alès in 1620 and used his position to push through acceptance of the acts of Dort as a confessional standard alongside the La Rochelle Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. It appears that Du Moulin's influence was overbearing in obtaining this decision, as well as the instruction that all pastors should subscribe by oath to uphold this position. This roused some resentment against Du Moulin.⁴⁷ The following synod, which met in 1623, upheld the decision regarding the adoption of Dort, but removed the oath of subscription and reference to Dort, under pressure from the king, who objected to the subjecting of

⁴⁵ David L. Jenkins, *Saumur Redux: Josué de la Place and the Question of Adam's Sin* (Norfolk: Leaping Cat Press, 2008), presents the position of Placeus, but does not examine the back and forth of the theological polemic and the exegetical issues involved.

⁴⁶ Martin I. Klauber, "The Helvetic Formula Consensus (1675): An Introduction and Translation," *Trinity Journal* 11.1 (1990): 103–23. Canon XII of the Consensus states: "Accordingly we cannot, without harm to the Divine truth, agree with those who deny that Adam represented his posterity by God's intention, and that his sin is imputed, therefore, immediately to his posterity; and under this mediate and consequent imputation not only destroy the imputation of the first sin, but also expose the doctrine of hereditary corruption to grave danger."

⁴⁷ Particularly by Daniel Tilenus in his *Considérations sur les Canon et Serment des Églises Réformées, conclu et arrêté au Synode Nat. d'Alez és Cévennes* (Paris, 1622). Tilenus was forced out of the Sedan academy in 1620 and became an ally of Hugo Grotius.

French pastors to a decision taken in a foreign state. The synod also decided on a policy with regard to Arminians: only “dogmatizers” should be proceeded against in church courts, but for Arminians who were not militant in spreading their opinions, tolerance should be shown in an attempt to win them over to sound doctrine. If they showed no flexibility after three months’ dialogue, they should be debarred from the Lord’s Table.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Reformed church government came to be modeled in an exemplary way in France in the seventeenth century. The Presbyterianism proposed, with a church led by a council of elders, places authority under Christ in the leadership of the local church. This is close to the New Testament model for the local church, as described in the Acts and the Epistles. The unity of the church is expressed in the regular meeting of synods, although it may be doubted that the New Testament could justify anything more than occasional and punctual general meetings, rather than statutory annual assemblies. This structure has created stability in Reformed churches, regular ministry, and the exercise of discipline in practice.

In conclusion, regarding the seventeenth-century French church, two questions remain. Was the church in its government too attached to the Protestant upper crust and the intellectual elite, a fact particularly striking in some Protestant centers like Nîmes? Did this social factor hold back growth among the lower classes on the solid basis laid down by Calvin and then practically by Beza and Viret, who were both enthusiastic church planters? France in this century was largely unchurched in spite of Roman Catholic dominance, practice was weak, and the population generally was illiterate, and in many cases did not even speak the French language, instead speaking *patois*, local dialects that were incomprehensible from one region to the other. The Catholics set about a mission of evangelism in response to this situation. But over this period there was little vision for mission in the Protestant churches. Was this because of the growing oppression and their minority status, or was it an effect of their system of government, with its increasingly heavy organizational charges and acerbic ongoing internal debates? Did not these churches involve themselves too heavily in internal theological wrangling, while the world around them was slipping away from the Reformation? The stark fact remains that these churches not

⁴⁸ For details see Donald Sinnema, “The French Reformed Churches, Arminianism, and the Synod of Dort,” in Klauber, *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, 98–136.

only registered negative growth during the century, but also they were poorly armed to stand up against absolute monarchy when it arrived in the person of Louis XIV.

Is not this a question that remains, in many situations, for Presbyterian churches, the danger of overly accenting internal affairs and forgetting about the world around? The missional challenge is the one that stares us in the face today, particularly in the secularized West and elsewhere with the challenge of militant Islam or paganism.

Whose Rebellion? Reformed Resistance Theory in America: Part II

SARAH MORGAN SMITH AND MARK DAVID HALL

Abstract

Students of the American Founding routinely assert that America's civic leaders were influenced by secular Lockean political ideas, especially on the question of resistance to tyrannical authority. In the first part of this series, we showed that virtually all Reformed writers, from Calvin to the end of the Glorious Revolution, agreed that tyrants could be actively resisted. The only debated question was *who* could resist them. In this essay, we contend that the Reformed approach to active resistance had an important influence on how America's Founders responded to perceived tyrannical actions by Parliament and the Crown.

In the first part of this series, we showed that virtually all Reformed writers, from John Calvin to those writing at the end of the Glorious Revolution, agreed that tyrants could be actively resisted. The only debated question was *who* could resist them.¹ In his *Institutes*, Calvin seems to require that resistance be led by inferior magistrates, although there are good reasons to believe that by the end of his life he came to the conclusion that private citizens may actively resist tyrants. Later Calvinists, especially in the Anglo-American tradition, clearly embraced this latter position.

¹ Sarah Morgan Smith and Mark David Hall, "Whose Rebellion? Reformed Resistance Theory in America: Part I," *Unio cum Christo* 3.2 (October 2017): 169–84.

Following the Glorious Revolution, colonists in Britain's American territories no longer needed to worry about the potential threat to their liberties from a Catholic monarch. For a brief period, they were able to focus on the threats to Protestants elsewhere in Europe, most especially those being persecuted in France and the Palatinate. New Englanders received updates on the situation not only from personal correspondents overseas but also in the local press, which "regularly reported on the Camisard revolt and the Huguenot persecutions" with the explicit aim of providing those inclined to pray for the situation the information necessary to "order their prayers and praise."²

Such reports inspired not only the prayers but also the activism of at least some Reformed leaders such as Cotton Mather, who frequently employed his pen to publicize accounts of the sufferings of his coreligionists.³ In 1725, Mather drafted *Une grande voix du ciel à la France* (*A Loud Voice from Heaven to France*), an exhortatory pamphlet aimed not at Americans but rather at the persecuted French church.⁴ In his diary, Mather stated that he believed the tract to be "calculated for the Awakening of the people [in France]."⁵ Mather—who hoped to smuggle the book into the hands of the faithful via sympathetic acquaintances in Holland—urged persecuted Protestants in France to consider themselves as the agents of divine justice against their oppressor. In other words, the tract was essentially a call for these individuals to take it upon themselves to initiate a revolutionary action through which God might liberate his people from their popish persecutors.⁶ While it is unclear whether Mather's work ever reached any actually oppressed believers, his stance on the legitimacy of individual rebellion against tyrannical governments clearly had not changed in the intervening decades since he helped lead the overthrow of the Dominion of New England in 1689.

² Thomas Kidd, "'Let Hell and Rome Do Their Worst': World News, Anti-Catholicism, and International Protestantism in Early-Eighteenth Century Boston," *New England Quarterly* 76.2 (2003): 275, 277–79.

³ See list of publications in Howard C. Rice, "Cotton Mather Speaks to France: American Propaganda in the Age of Louis XIV," in *New England Quarterly* 16.2 (June 1943): 198–233.

⁴ Catharine Randall, *From a Far Country: Camisards and Huguenots in the Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 100.

⁵ Cotton Mather, *Diary*, Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, Seventh Series; quoted in Rice, "Cotton Mather Speaks to France," 198.

⁶ See Rice, "Cotton Mather Speaks to France," 198–233. See also, Catharine Randall, *From a Far Country*, 100.

I. *The Road to Independence*

In his well-known 1747 election day sermon, Congregationalist minister Charles Chauncy (1705–1787) approvingly referenced the overthrow of James II and Governor Andros. He noted that an

unhappy instance [of tyranny] was seen in the arbitrary reign of King James the second, in person at home, and by his representative [Dominion of New England Governor Edmund Andros] here; as a check to which, those entrusted with the guardianship of the nation's rights were spirited to take such measures, as issued in that revolution, and *established of the succession*, on which his present majesty's claim to the British throne is dependent.⁷

Parliament's actions against James II can easily be viewed as lesser magistrates checking a tyrant. His approval of the actions of Boston's "mob" (and later, of the *former* elected officials of the colony) against Governor Andros indicates that Chauncy supported private individuals actively resisting tyranny if inferior magistrates were not available or willing to do so.

In 1749, Congregationalist minister Jonathan Todd preached an election day sermon in Connecticut that addressed the relationship between civil rulers and the people. In it, he contended that the

Doctrine of Obedience & Subjection to Magistrates, hath doubtless been carried too far by those, who allow the People to make no Resistance, nor Self-Defence, under the most *arbitrary & illegal* Abuses of Power. ... Doubtless, when *the whole Head is sick*, and the Foundations of a State are removed, when the governing Powers become tyrannical & arbitrary, and usurp a Power that never was given them, and *evidently* go counter to the Instructions of that great *Lord*, by whom they rule, the Law of Self-Defence is in Force amongst a People, and they may judge, that GOD is to be Obeyed rather than *Man*.⁸

Given his rejection of passive resistance in the first part of the quoted passage, it is difficult to read the second as doing anything other than justifying the right of the people to actively resist a governing power that has become "tyrannical and arbitrary."

A year later, on the one-hundredth anniversary of the beheading of Charles I, Boston Congregationalist minister Jonathan Mayhew preached *A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher*

⁷ Daniel L. Dreisbach and Mark David Hall, *Sacred Rights of Conscience: Selected Readings on Religious Liberty and Church-State Relations in the American Founding* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2009), 187.

⁸ Jonathan Todd, *Civil Rulers the Minister of God, for Good to Men* (New London: Timothy Green, 1749), 32 (emphasis in original).

Powers. John Adams later wrote that anyone who wished to understand “the principles and feelings which produced the Revolution” should study “Dr. Mayhew’s sermon.”⁹ Mayhew not only offered a vigorous defense of the historical revolt against Charles I, but he also made a clear philosophical argument that Christians have a duty to actively resist a tyrannical government and addressed the question of who can properly resist tyrants. In this case, he emphasized that it was “Not by a private *junto*;—not by a small seditious *party*;—not by a *few desparadoes*, who, to mend their fortunes, would embroil the state;—but by the LORDS and COMMONS of *England*.”¹⁰ By answering his own question in this manner, Mayhew implies that a small group of private persons offering active resistance to Charles to advance their own interest would have been inappropriate. Like most Reformed thinkers, Mayhew seems to find comfort in the fact that lesser magistrates were in agreement regarding Charles (although support for the revolution and tyrannicide was not as widespread among members of Parliament as he appeared to believe).¹¹

Intriguingly, in a footnote five pages earlier, Mayhew engages in an extensive discussion of the purpose of government, which he believes is the “common good and safety of society.” He rejects the idea that the people are incapable of judging whether governments are appropriately pursuing this end, writing,

To say that subjects in general are not proper judges when their governors oppress them, and play the tyrant; and when they defend their rights, administer justice impartially, and promote the public welfare, is as great *treason* as ever man uttered they are the proper judges when they [princes] execute their trust as they ought to do it;—when their prince exercises an equitable and paternal authority over them;—when from a prince and common father, he exalts himself into a tyrant.¹²

⁹ John Adams to William Tudor, April 5, 1818, in *The Works of John Adams*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little, Brown, 1856), 10:301.

¹⁰ Jonathan Mayhew, *A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers* (Boston: D. Fowle, 1750), 44; available at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=etas>.

¹¹ Chauncy and Mayhew were theologically more liberal than their fellow Reformed ministers, but with respect to political theology they represent well views widely held by Calvinist clergy. On the latter point, see Alice M. Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution* (1928; repr., New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965); Keith L. Griffin, *Revolution and Religion: American Revolutionary War and the Reformed Clergy* (New York: Paragon House, 1994); and Martha Louise Counts, “The Political Views of the Eighteenth Century New England Clergy as Expressed in Their Election Sermons” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1956).

¹² Mayhew, *A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers*, 39. For yet another example of a Reformed minister authorizing active resistance to tyrannical government, see Samuel Phillips, *Political Rulers Authoriz’d and Influenc’d by God our Saviour, to Decree and Exercise Justice* (Boston: John Draper, 1750), 33.

Although he does not clearly state it, an obvious inference from this passage is that if the inferior magistrates do not actively resist a tyrant, the people themselves are capable of discerning when a ruler ceases to be a ruler and should be overthrown. This interpretation is substantiated when we compare it to Mayhew's more informal comments on the subject in his correspondence with the English scholar and philanthropist Thomas Hollis. Describing the colonists' reaction to the Stamp Act, Mayhew wrote,

So great is the detestation in which it is had, that I am satisfied it will never be carried into execution, unless it is done at the point of the sword, by a large army, or rather, by a number of considerable ones, at least one in each colony; there being about sixty thousand fighting men in this province only: and it is given out by many, that they will spend their last blood in this cause.¹³

Here and elsewhere in the correspondence, Mayhew questions the wisdom of the colonists' resolve to defend their rights even unto death, but not its justice or morality. Indeed, he almost seems to take for granted the legitimacy of such forcible resistance to political oppression. What is perhaps even more significant is that nowhere in his writings to Hollis does Mayhew comment upon the leadership of the patriot movement as particularly culpable for the choice to take up arms: throughout the correspondence, he refers simply to the people themselves as the agents of resistance.

Apart from these sorts of affirming references to the actions taken by their seventeenth-century predecessors, within the American context Reformed thinkers seem to have centered their rhetorical consideration of rebellion around the question of religious liberty. Even as some colonies became more Anglicized culturally and politically in the early- to mid-eighteenth century, Reformed leaders remained suspicious that Church of England missionary efforts in the colonies were covertly aimed at destroying their religious freedom. Much ink was spilled in defense of the right of the people to resist impositions upon their consciences, most particularly in the form of a Church of England establishment. Particularly eloquent was Elisha Williams, Congregationalist minister, rector of Yale College, and former tutor of Jonathan Edwards.¹⁴ Dissenters and others argued that because genuine faith could not be coerced, religious conformity had not only temporal but eternal consequences. Moreover, they pointed out that

¹³ See Bernhard Knollenberg, Thomas Hollis, and Jonathan Mayhew, "Thomas Hollis and Jonathan Mayhew: Their Correspondence, 1759–1766," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 69 (1947): 175. See also similar remarks on 178.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Elisha Williams, "The Essential Rights and Liberties of Protestants" (1744), in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730–1805*, ed. Ellis Sandoz, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), 1:55–65.

governments that attempted to usurp freedom of conscience were unlikely to flinch at usurping other liberties as well. Taken together, these assertions justified if not immediate resistance at least an increased vigilance; leaders across the colonies (but particularly in New England) exhorted their congregants to be wary of Crown policies that seemed to endorse the Church of England over other denominations.

The Stamp Act crisis of 1765 raised important constitutional issues about the proper scope of Parliament's power. In Massachusetts' election day sermon of that year, Congregationalist minister Andrew Eliot rejected the doctrine of "passive obedience and non-resistance in all cases," however cautiously:

I am sensible, it is difficult to state this point with precision; to determine where submission ends and resistance may lawfully take place, so as not to leave room for men of bad minds unreasonably to oppose government, and to destroy the peace of society. Most certainly people ought to bear much, before they engage in any attempts against those who are in authority; they ought to consider their rulers as frail and fallible men, who are liable to mistakes and faults, when their general aim is good and right; they should overlook their errors, and even their vices, if they are not such as tend directly to overturn the state, and to bring distress and ruin on the whole community. Better a particular person, yea many individuals should suffer, than to encourage civil broils and a public disturbance.¹⁵

Although "people ought to bear much," Eliot implies that there may come a time when the people have borne enough and may justly and actively resist tyranny. Later that year he condemned the violence of Boston mobs, and there is little doubt he preferred that active resistance be led by an inferior magistrate, but again the logic of his sermon points toward at least the possibility of private individuals acting against unjust rulers.¹⁶

In the face of elite and popular opposition, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act. But in a move seemingly designed to stoke the fears of a people on the lookout for tyranny, Parliament insisted in the Declaratory Act of 1766 that it had the right to legislate for the colonies "in all cases whatsoever."¹⁷ Calvinists (and others) found these words not only objectionable but heretical: God alone could claim absolute sovereignty over man.

¹⁵ Andrew Eliot, *A Sermon Preached before His Excellency Francis Bernard* (Boston: Green & Russell, 1765), 43–44.

¹⁶ Gary Lee Steward, "Justifying Revolution: The American Clergy's Argument for Political Resistance, 1763–1783" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 56. Steward's work contains a host of other examples of American clergy condoning active resistance by both inferior magistrates and the people.

¹⁷ Bruce Frohnen, ed., *The American Republic: Primary Sources* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 136.

Parliament's claim to absolute authority seems to have moved Mayhew more clearly toward a position in favor of individual resistance. In *The Snare Broken* (1766), he explicitly raises the question of private resistance:

I will not meddle with the thorny question, whether, or how far, it may be justifiable for private men, at certain extraordinary conjunctures, to take the administration of government in some respects into their own hands. Self-preservation being a great and primary law of nature, and to be considered as antecedent to all civil laws and institutions, which are subordinate and subservient to the other; the right of so doing, in some circumstances, cannot well be denied.¹⁸

While this is not precisely a call for arms, it is a reminder that it is in the nature of people to look to their own preservation and to resist those things (including governments) that threaten them to the best of their ability. Although Mayhew continued to shy away from articulating any specific threshold for individual rebellion, he clearly presented it as an undeniable, and thus legitimate, inherent right.

For some Reformed laymen, the coincidence of the crisis over parliamentary supremacy and attempts to establish an American episcopate during the 1760s brought matters to precisely this point of no return.¹⁹ In a series of newspaper essays that were circulated and reprinted in cities across the middle colonies, William Livingston in New York and another unknown writer in Pennsylvania exhorted their fellow colonists to resist the ecclesiastical establishment on the grounds that it was simply the first step toward utter tyranny.²⁰ Writing as *An American Whig* and as the *Sentinel* respectively, Livingston and the unknown author reminded their audience of the historical link between bishops and tyranny. Given this record, they argued that Americans would do well to recognize the proposed episcopal establishment as a ruse, the first step toward the gradual erosion of civil and

¹⁸ In Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons*, 1:263.

¹⁹ See generally Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mire and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689–1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

²⁰ The authorship of the *Sentinel* essays appears to be one of history's unsolved mysteries. For an account of the controversy, see "The Newspaper Controversy, 1768–1769," in Arthur Lyon Cross, *The Anglican Episcopate and the American Colonies* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1902), 195–214. Livingston's sensitivity to tyranny and views on resistance may have been influenced by his studies at Congregationalist Yale College and were certainly in keeping with his membership in one of New York City's Presbyterian congregations. Livingston is named as the representative of the congregation in their search for a new minister in a 1755 document, and he later served as their representative to a Society of Dissenters organized to protest the episcopal establishment. See "An Early Document Concerning the First Presbyterian Congregation of New York," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 1.3 (1902): 236–45 and Herbert L. Osgood, "The Society of Dissenters Founded at New York in 1769," *American Historical Review* 6.3 (1901): 498–507.

religious liberty. While the immediate actions of the government might seem innocent—might even seem to comport with the public interest—they were in truth merely the first steps toward despotism. If Americans complied with Parliament's demands in this matter, Livingston argued, the government would require greater and greater concessions "till the deluded people are gradually wormed out of their liberty, and at last find the shackles of slavery effectually rivetted."²¹ Although Livingston and his anonymous colleague did not actually advocate violence, their essays (which were collected and published in book form along with their opponents' rejoinders) provided a common set of religious arguments in favor of resistance in principle that any individual who became convinced of the immediate necessity of taking up arms might use to justify the decision.

At around this same time, Livingston also participated in the founding of the Society of Dissenters in New York. Comprised of representatives from the city's congregations, two Presbyterian and one Baptist, the Society's stated purpose was the preservation of the colonists' "civil and religious Liberty." Such an end "merits our most vigorous efforts," they continued, adding further that all men who valued freedom "will acknowledge it our indispensable Duty, by every lawful means to preserve it to ourselves and transmit it to Posterity."²² Chief among these means would be the formation of similar "such Societies, to correspond with each other on these interesting concerns; and thereby endeavour the preservation of our Common Liberty" in the other colonies. While the New York Society did not advocate for armed resistance outright, its appeal to the diverse dissenting population throughout the British colonies for mutual support and organization can be seen as a first step toward the creation of an institution with the ability to intercede between individuals and the government when needed. While it is unclear how long the organization continued its operations (its extant records begin in February 1769 and end in March of the same year, although references to it appear in contemporary newspapers through to September 1769), what is clear is that Livingston and his fellow organizers—who shared deeply Reformed religious convictions—had no qualms about organizing themselves and their fellow colonists into a sort of ad hoc body of lesser magistrates for the purposes of resisting a government they found oppressive.²³

²¹ *American Whig* [No. II], in *A Collection of Tracts from the Late News Papers, &c. Containing Particularly the American Whig, A Whip for the American Whig, with Some Other Pieces, on the Subject of the Residence of Protestant Bishops in the American Colonies, and in Answer to the Writers Who Opposed It, &c.* (New York: John Holt, 1768[–1769]), 6.

²² The draft of the letter is reprinted in Osgood, "Society of Dissenters," 504–7.

²³ *Ibid.*, 506. The circular letter was printed in the *New York Gazette* on July 24, 1769, and



An Attempt to Land a Bishop in America.

That *An American Whig*, the *Sentinel*, and the Society of Dissenters were part of a much broader attempt to marshal Reformed resistance theory against the actions of Parliament can be seen in an engraving done by an unknown artist from the same period entitled “An Attempt to Land a Bishop in America.”²⁴ The print vividly illustrates the mingling of religion and politics in colonial opposition to the proposed American episcopate: an

this was followed by “a few other references to the matter ... in contemporary newspapers, but nothing of special consequence.” See *ibid.*, 499.

²⁴ *An Attempt to Land a Bishop in America*. London, 1768. Engraving, artist unknown. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-13637.

enraged crowd of men is gathered along the shoreline, using a miscellany of placards, banners, and books bearing the names of prominent thinkers associated with liberty of conscience (including Sydney and Locke) to threaten a robed figure on board a docked vessel. In the face of their opposition, the erstwhile bishop exclaims (somewhat ironically): “Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace,” while simultaneously ducking a volume labeled “*Calvin’s Works*.” The artist’s choice of *Calvin’s Works* here as the first missile to hit the target indicates the degree to which the contemporary audience understood the role of Reformed resistance theorizing in supporting their opposition to the British imperial policy.

The Boston Massacre of March 5, 1770, brought about an escalation of rhetoric; among the many outraged responses to the incident was Congregationalist minister John Lathrop’s sermon, which boasted the sensational title *Innocent Blood Crying to God from the Streets of Boston*. Lathrop’s sermon was not only political but personal: one of the victims, James Caldwell, had been a member of his congregation at North Church. Nevertheless, he insisted that his response was not merely born of passion; rather, it reflected “sentiments adopted by all who are upon principle friends to the Glorious Revolution ... sentiments which brought our fathers into this new world.”²⁵ The connection between the colonists’ current oppression by the crown to their forefathers’ earlier flight from religious and civil tyranny gave Lathrop courage to assert boldly that resistance against all “persons disposed to rob men of that liberty which the God of nature designed his rational creatures should enjoy” was not only justifiable but laudable.²⁶ In a similar vein, John Tucker’s Massachusetts election day sermon the next year condemned mob violence and counseled patience, but he recognized that a time might come when the people must “unite the members of society as one body” to defend themselves.²⁷

The Coercive Acts of 1774, which among other things closed Boston harbor, further stoked concerns that Parliament was becoming tyrannical—and not just in Massachusetts. In Connecticut, Samuel Sherwood preached a powerful fast-day sermon concerning the importance of rulers acting in a just manner. When they do not, active resistance is justified, just as when “the British nation acted, as a body, in deposing king *James* the second, that tyrannical oppressive prince.”²⁸ While Sherwood did not call for active

²⁵ John Lathrop, *Innocent Blood* (Boston, 1770), iii.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ John Tucker, *A Sermon Preached at Cambridge* (Boston: Richard Draper, 1771), 29.

²⁸ Samuel Sherwood, *A Sermon Containing Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers* (New Haven: T. and S. Green, 1774), 28.

resistance, he did note approvingly that “the conduct of the several provinces thro’ the continent, in sending commissioners to meet in general congress, to secure the threatened liberties and properties of the people, may be justified on these principles.”²⁹ Such congresses became in a real sense the de facto lesser magistrates on both the colonial and intercolonial levels, particularly in light of the regular dissolution of colonial legislatures by unsympathetic royal governors. Comprised as they often were of men of largely Reformed commitments (especially in New England), we find it unsurprising that such groups adopted resolutions that reiterated standard Reformed resistance theorizing.

Consider the example of the Second Provincial Congress of Massachusetts. Although not a Calvinist body per se, the vast majority of its members were members of Reformed churches. In 1775, the body issued “An Address to the Inhabitants of Massachusetts Bay” proclaiming that “Resistance [to tyranny] is so far from being criminal, that it becomes the christian and social duty of each individual.”³⁰ Coming from what was arguably a body of “lesser magistrates,” the actions of the Congress could be viewed as conforming to the more conservative resistance theory of Calvin’s *Institutes*. However, taken literally, this text seems to support the *duty* of *individuals* to resist tyranny.

This turn in the rhetoric can also be seen in a sermon preached to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the Boston Massacre by Congregationalist minister Oliver Noble. Noble offered the character of Mordecai from the biblical story of Esther as an exemplar of godly behavior under political oppression.³¹ Acting only as a private citizen, Mordecai took the initiative “after seeking divine help and aid” to attempt to remonstrate with the king about the situation, using “the most probably means” available to him—in this case, the pleadings of Queen Esther on behalf of her people.³² This, Noble argued, was evidence that God intended every individual (man or woman) to use his or her own strength and resources to bring an end to political tyranny, rather than to submit to it passively. Indeed, he says elsewhere that as God intended for men to be free, anyone who “tamely submits

²⁹ Ibid., 31. In an appendix to Sherwood’s sermon (and printed with it), Connecticut Congregational minister Ebenezer Baldwin makes a similar argument (47–81).

³⁰ Quoted in Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 130.

³¹ Oliver Noble, *Some Strictures upon the Sacred Story Recorded in the Book of Esther* (Newburyport: E. Lunt & H. W. Tinges, 1775). Noble served as the chaplain to the Twelfth Massachusetts militia regiment when it was ordered to New York in 1776; see John James Currier, *History of Newburyport, Mass., 1764–1905* (Newburyport, 1909), 2:91.

³² Noble, *Some Strictures*, 13, 15.

to *Slavery*, like a foolish or wanton *Heir*, spends the PATRIMONY of his Heavenly Father's *giving*, and is a *rebel* to GOD and NATURE."³³ That this extended to violent rebellion was confirmed by the fact that the king's response to Mordecai and Esther was not to prevent the assault against the Jews, but rather, to consent to their right of self-defense.

Noble contended this was simply a confirmation of the "grant that every man has from the King of Heaven, 'to arise, and stand for his Life, to kill and destroy all that ASSAULT them.'"³⁴ Were his readers to miss the obvious connection to their contemporary situation, Noble added an explanatory note in which he simultaneously encouraged the people to respect public officials so long as they were "faithful [in the] discharge of the duties of their station," while also assuring them that "the moment they [public officials] become unconstitutional and inconsistent with Liberty, they are to be detested and opposed with firmness." To preempt arguments against resistance as uncharitable, Noble added, "Every kind of love should be absorbed in the love of Liberty, except the love of GOD, which, indeed, is connected with, and involved in it."³⁵ Yet in the same sermon, he also suggests that it would be more prudent of Americans to "by no means strike the first, but be ready to strike the second blow, to advantage."³⁶ To prepare both spiritually and materially for resistance was one thing; to actively resist, Noble seemed to imply, one had to be unquestionably under attack (as, indeed, Massachusetts was by this point).

Also in 1775, Jonathan Edwards Jr. preached a sermon to the "annual Freeman's Meeting for voting." In it, he utterly rejected the "doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance," and contended that "the whole spirit of scripture sustains ... that rulers are bound to rule in the fear of God and for the good of the people, and if they do not, then in resisting them we are doing God service."³⁷ Edwards was not advocating active resistance at this point, but there is no doubt that he thought it could be justifiable. Because he was preaching before his congregation (as opposed to a formal election day sermon before the General Assembly) the "we" quoted in the last sentence must refer to the free citizens of Connecticut, not inferior magistrates.

³³ Ibid., 19.

³⁴ Ibid., 20.

³⁵ Ibid., footnote 18.

³⁶ Ibid., 30.

³⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, D.D.*, ed. Tryon Edwards (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1854): 2:238, 244–45.

For a final example, and many more could be given, Samuel West, in his famous Massachusetts election sermon of May 29, 1776, observed that if magistrates become tyrannical, “they cease being magistrates, and the people, which gave them their authority, have a right to take it from them again.”³⁸ A few pages later, West made it clear that “the community is under the strongest obligation of duty both to GOD and to its own members to resist and oppose [tyrannical rulers].”³⁹

II. *There Were Many Reformed Ministers and Civic Leaders in the Founding Era*

Sydney Ahlstrom, in his magisterial history of religion in America, estimates that the Reformed tradition was “the religious heritage of three-fourths of the American people in 1776.”⁴⁰ Similarly, Yale historian Harry Stout states that prior to the War for Independence “the vast majority of colonists were Reformed or Calvinist.”⁴¹ Our extensive review of Founding era clergy and civic leaders shows that far from being outliers, Chauncy, Mayhew, West, and the other Calvinists discussed above represent well the consensus view among Calvinists that tyrants may justly be actively resisted. Because the opposition was led by inferior magistrates—i.e., colonial legislatures or intercolonial congresses—there was no need to debate whether private citizens could offer active resistance to Parliament and the Crown.

Not only were many of America’s civic leaders Calvinists, but they were also familiar with Reformed political literature. Princeton President John Witherspoon, for instance, owned Calvin’s *Institutes*, Beza’s *Rights of Magistrates* (1757), and Buchanan’s *The Law of Scottish Kingship* (1579).⁴² At the Constitutional Convention, Luther Martin read passages from “Locke & Vattel, and also Rutherford [presumably *Lex, Rex*]” to show that states, like people, are equal.⁴³ In 1766, George Buchanan’s *De Jure Regni: Or the Due Right of Government* was reprinted in Philadelphia—seven years

³⁸ Samuel West, *Sermon Preached before the Honorable Council, Massachusetts-Bay* (Boston: John Gill, 1776), 123.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴⁰ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 1:426.

⁴¹ Harry S. Stout, “Preaching the Insurrection,” *Christian History* 15 (1996): 17. Portions of this section are drawn from Mark David Hall, *Roger Sherman and the Creation of the American Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), chapters 1 and 2.

⁴² Jeffrey H. Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 81.

⁴³ Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911), 1:438.

before the *Second Treatise* was first printed in America. The Unitarian-leaning Congregationalist John Adams declared that John Poyntet's *Short Treatise on Politike Power* (1556) contains "all the essential principles of liberty, which were afterwards dilated on by Sidney and Locke." He also noted the significance of *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*.⁴⁴ Later in life, Adams wrote, "I love and revere the memories of Huss Wickliff Luther Calvin Zwinglius Melancton and all the other reformers how muchsoever I may differ from them all in many theological metaphysical & philosophical points. As you justly observe, without their great exertions & severe sufferings, the USA had never existed."⁴⁵ There is no shortage of evidence that civic leaders in the founding era were aware of Reformed political thinkers and their major doctrines.

In a 1775 speech urging reconciliation between Great Britain and the colonies, Edmund Burke warned his fellow members of Parliament that Americans "are Protestants; and of that kind which is the most adverse to all implicit submission of mind and opinion. This is a persuasion not only favorable to liberty, but built upon it."⁴⁶ A few months later, British Major Harry Rooke confiscated a presumably Calvinist book from prisoners taken at Bunker Hill and remarked, "It is your G-d Damned Religion of this Country that ruins the Country; Damn your religion."⁴⁷ Similarly, the Loyalist Peter Oliver railed against "Mr. Otis's black Regiment, *the dissenting Clergy*, who took so active a part in the Rebellion."⁴⁸ King George himself reportedly referred to the War for Independence as "a Presbyterian Rebellion," a sentiment echoed by a Hessian soldier who described it as "an Irish-Scotch Presbyterian rebellion."⁴⁹ In 1780, Anglican clergy in New York wrote, "Dissenters in general, and particularly Presbyterians and Congregationalists were the active Promoters of the Rebellion" because "from their infancy [they] imbibe Republican, levelling Principles."⁵⁰ The

⁴⁴ Adams, *Works of John Adams*, 6:4.

⁴⁵ John Adams to F. C. Schaeffer, November 25, 1821, in *The Founders on Religion: A Book of Quotations*, ed. James H. Hutson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 15–16.

⁴⁶ Edmund Burke, "On Moving His Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies," in Edmund Burke, *Conciliation with the Colonies*, ed. Cornelius Beach Bradley (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1895), 20.

⁴⁷ John Leach, "A Journal Kept by John Leach, During His Confinement by the British, in Boston Gaol, in 1775," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 19 (1865): 256.

⁴⁸ Douglass Adair and John A. Schutz, eds., *Peter Oliver's Origin and Progress of the American Rebellion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 41.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 173; Johann Heinrichs to Herr H., January 18, 1778, in "Extracts from the Letter Book of Captain Johann Heinrichs of the Hessian Jager Corps," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 22 (1898): 137.

⁵⁰ Clergy of New York, October 28, 1780, quoted in Patricia Bonomi, "'Hippocrates' Twins": Religion and Politics in the American Revolution," *History Teacher* 29.2 (February 1996): 142.

best historians have long recognized that there was an “almost unanimous and persistent critical attitude of the Congregational and Presbyterian ministers toward the British imperial policy.”⁵¹

III. *The Declaration of Independence*

The influence of Reformed political ideas on American patriots is sometimes overlooked because students of the era focus on the Declaration of Independence as *the* statement of why separation from Great Britain was justified. Moreover, they often read the document in light of the views of its primary drafter, Thomas Jefferson, an Anglican who was more influenced by the Enlightenment than virtually any other American. Yet the Declaration was the product of a community, a large percentage of which were Calvinists.

On June 11, 1776, Congress appointed Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman to a committee to draft a Declaration of Independence. Jefferson wrote the initial draft, but as Pauline Maier, has observed, “[i]n the end, the efforts of these five men produced a workable draft that the Congress itself, sitting as the Committee of the Whole, made into a distinguished document by an act of group editing that has to be one of the great marvels of history.”⁵² Late in life, Jefferson wrote to Henry Lee that when drafting the Declaration he did not set out to “find principles, or new arguments,” but that it was an “expression of the American mind” whose authority rests “on the harmonizing sentiments of the day.”⁵³ Even Jefferson recognized that it is a mistake to read the document in light of his private views; it must be interpreted in light of the community that drafted and approved it.

The final version of the Declaration begins:

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America, When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Baldwin, *The New England Clergy*, 91.

⁵² Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 98 and generally 97–153.

⁵³ Thomas Jefferson to Henry Lee, May 8, 1825, in Adrienne Koch and William Peden, *Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Random House, 1993), 656–57.

⁵⁴ Dreisbach and Hall, *Sacred Rights*, 220.

Significantly for our purposes, the Declaration is unclear about who or what, exactly, is declaring independence. The text begins by suggesting it is states—united, to be sure, but still “States.” But states as states are incapable of doing anything, so it is perhaps more useful to turn to the last paragraph, which makes it clear that “the representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled” are acting. By almost any measure, these representatives appointed by colonial assemblies and acting together in a national congress are the sort of “inferior magistrates” who may properly and actively resist tyrannical authority, according to the most conservative interpretation of Calvinist resistance theory.

And yet the Declaration’s first paragraph also suggests that it is “one people,” that is, the American people, who are declaring independence. The Declaration’s famous second paragraph expands upon the importance of the people for America’s experiment in self-government:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.⁵⁵

These words reflect arguments long made by patriots in New England, many of whom likely never read Locke and almost all of whom were serious Calvinists. Of course, their primary drafter, Jefferson, definitely read Locke and was most certainly not a Calvinist. Jefferson indisputably borrowed language from Locke, but for Roger Sherman and other Calvinist delegates, the famous paragraph quoted above predated Locke by years. There is little evidence that Sherman and the delegates with Reformed backgrounds—such as William Williams, Samuel Huntington, Oliver Wolcott, Josiah Bartlett, William Whipple, Matthew Thornton, John Hancock, Samuel Adams, John Adams, Robert Treat Paine, William Ellery, William Floyd, Philip Livingston, Richard Stockton, John Witherspoon, John Hart, Abraham Clark, James Smith, James Wilson, Thomas McKean, and Lyman Hall—viewed these ideas through a secular Lockean lens and every reason to think that they embraced them as consistent with their Reformed convictions.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Of course, some of these men were better informed and more consistent Calvinists than others, and we have not carefully explored the political writings of each and every one of these founders. We are familiar with many of them, however, and think there are very good reasons

Conclusion

In part one of this article, we suggested that early Reformed political thinkers were torn between doctrines that seemed to point logically toward justifying private people actively resisting tyrannical authority and a distrust of the people. In America, colonists had had almost two hundred years of experience governing themselves, especially in New England. Although Calvinists can never embrace an optimistic view of human nature, we suspect this long experience in self-governance encouraged civic and religious leaders, many of whom came from humble backgrounds, to have greater faith in the ability of people to govern themselves. These leaders were thus more willing to consider the possibility that even persons could justly offer active resistance to tyrannical authority.

Between 1765 and 1776 there was little discussion of *who* may properly resist tyrannical acts by England because by any measure active resistance was led by inferior magistrates—first, colonial legislatures, and then a national Congress consisting of representatives appointed by these legislatures. If there were Calvinists who believed that only inferior magistrates could actively resist tyranny, they would have been satisfied. This helps explain, we think, the virtually universal support Reformed/Calvinist clergy and elected officials gave to the Patriot cause. By way of contrast, Anglican clergy in America were split almost exactly fifty-fifty in their support or opposition to the Patriot cause.⁵⁷

After Westminster Seminary President Peter Lillback asked us to write an article on this topic for *Unio cum Christo*, we asked him if we could survey Westminster graduates on the question of who may appropriately and actively resist tyrants. He agreed to let us do so. Thirty-three individuals

to believe that they were directly or indirectly influenced by the Reformed political tradition.

⁵⁷ For further support of this proposition, see Hall, *Roger Sherman*, passim. With the exception of the Swiss-born Presbyterian John Joachim Zubly and a few Old Lights, we have found very few Reformed ministers in America who opposed the War for Independence. Randall M. Miller, ed., *"A Warm and Zealous Spirit": John J. Zubly and the American Revolution* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982); Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley: The Jersey Dutch and the Neutral Ground, 1775–1783* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), esp. 20–25; and Mark A. Noll, *Christians in the American Revolution* (Washington, DC: Christian University Press, 1977), 120–21. Unlike Calvinist clergy, Anglican ministers in America were more equally divided. Among those in America from 1775 to 1783, 128 were Loyalists, 130 were patriots, 71 fled, and the opinions of 59 are unknown. One might expect these men to be loyal to the king, who was, after all, the head of their church. Their country of origin may also have been a significant factor. In 1775, 141 Anglican ministers were born in America, 134 were born outside of what became the United States (primarily England and Scotland), and the birthplace of 36 is unknown. James B. Bell, *A War of Religion: Dissenters, Anglicans, and the American Revolution* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 240, 244.

responded to our survey, of which thirty-two identified their theological convictions as being “Reformed.” They split fifty-fifty on whether active resistance to tyrannical government must be led by inferior magistrates, or whether private people could offer such resistance. It is telling that *none* of the respondents denied that tyrannical government may be actively resisted, even though they were given this option as one of three choices.

We hesitate to generalize from a survey to which just thirty-three individuals responded, but we must say that we are not surprised by the results. Virtually every significant early Calvinist leader agreed that tyrannical authority could and should be actively resisted, the only debated question being who could resist it. Although the logic of the Reformation opens the door for private resistance, some Reformed leaders, who were often elites, were hesitant to travel down this road. Over time, more and more Calvinists permitted or even encouraged private citizens to resist tyranny, but there always remained those who believed that only inferior magistrates could properly lead such resistance.

Of course, these debates did not disappear with independence; they resurfaced from time to time, most notably before and during the American Civil War. But these controversies go well beyond the scope of our two essays. For our purposes, it is enough to conclude that anyone who hopes to have an accurate account of the causes of the American War for Independence simply cannot ignore the influence of the Calvinist political thought.

The Word Made Flesh: The Ligonier Statement on Christology¹

STEPHEN J. NICHOLS

Abstract

This article explains the origin and construction of *The Word Made Flesh: The Ligonier Statement on Christology*. The text of the statement and the articles of affirmation and denial are included, preceded by introductory comments on creeds and confessions and the aims of this statement.

Even within the pages of the New Testament, controversy is brewing over the person of Christ. John informs his readers that the antichrist is coming. In fact, he has already come. Who is the antichrist? The one who denies that Jesus has come in the flesh (1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-3). In addition to heresy, the apostolic church also needed much teaching and exhortation concerning the person and work of Christ. Consider Hebrews. From the opening verses onward, the author of Hebrews goes to great lengths to teach about the person and work of Christ.

Of course, this should come as no surprise, as the doctrines of the person and work of Christ are the very center and essence of the gospel, and the gospel is the very center and essence of the church and its mission in the world.

¹ Part of this introduction builds on the “Explanatory Essay,” Ligonier Ministries, 2016, <http://christologystatement.com/essay>.

I. On Creeds and Confessions

It should also come as no surprise that heresies related to the person of Christ dominate the early centuries of the church. Even a cursory glance at the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Definition of Chalcedon reveals the focus on Christ. The Apostles' Creed lays out in rhythmic and mnemonic fashion the essential details of Christ's life and work. The Nicene Creed declares that Jesus is truly God and truly man. The Definition of Chalcedon additionally declares how the two natures, deity and humanity, conjoin in one person, the hypostatic union. These declarations took aim directly at heresies ricocheting through the early church. These statements gave shape to orthodoxy and served to guard the good deposit of faith (2 Tim 1:8–14). They also served the church in her worship and liturgy. Herman Bavinck put it well when he said, "The confession concerning Christ has its practical application in the veneration extended to him, in the honor of adoration."² Taken together, these early Christological statements are a true gift to the church in all places and at all times.

While these statements hint at aspects of the work of Christ, they are dominated by a focus on the person of Christ. As heresies and false teaching swept across the church regarding the person of Christ, so too did heresy and false teaching regarding the work of Christ. This, of course, reached a crisis point on the eve of the Reformation. The church of Christendom, the Roman Catholic Church, had abandoned the Word of God as its final authority and, consequently, the gospel of God as its central mission and task.³

The Reformers and various Reformation movements wrote a genre different from creeds. They bequeathed to the church confessions and catechisms. These great Reformation texts served to steer the church back to the safe and true paths of Scripture and away from the errant paths of false teaching. These confessions continue to serve the denominations that uphold them and the broader evangelical church.

Yet, the person and work of Christ continued to come under attack. In the eighteenth century, Jonathan Edwards identified two enemies that had already wreaked havoc among old England Puritans and were about to do the same for New England Puritans: Arminianism and Arianism. Edwards was tragically right. By the 1800s, much of what had been confessional and theologically orthodox in New England had become Unitarian. Jesus

² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006) 316.

³ See Donald Macleod, "The Work of Christ," in *Reformation Theology*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 347–91.

ceased to be viewed as divine, as truly God. As the view of the person of Christ went astray, so did the work of Christ. Once the deity of Christ and two-nature Christology was lost, so too was the gospel.

J. Gresham Machen faced this attack directly in the first decades of the twentieth century. He devoted many pages in *Christianity and Liberalism* to debunking the liberal view of Jesus as “the fairest flower of humanity.”⁴ Machen countered by pointing out that any view of Christ that views him as less than infinite is infinitely less than true Christianity.

Moving into the twenty-first century, we find significant foes to orthodox Christology both within and without the church. Islam directly challenges the deity of Christ, among many other doctrines. Within the church, we find a general lack of confessional and creedal thinking about Christ. It has become rather fashionable, especially among North American evangelicals, to think of Christ rather casually. He is, as one popular writer called him, like the neighbor next door. “Jesus is our friend,” runs the slogan. That is true, of course. As the hymn puts it, Jesus is quite a friend to sinners. In fact, he is the singular friend sinners must have. What lacks in this casual approach are creedal definitions and categories for thinking biblically about the person of Christ. Without such sound thinking, we can easily misstate who Christ is and either misstate or diminish the work of Christ.

Whether we look at the first, fourth, fifth, sixteenth, or our own twenty-first century, it is easy to conclude that every generation of the church faces the challenge of proclaiming, defending, and contending for a faithful Christology. The church in all places and all ages has a high calling to teach and steward a faithful and orthodox view of the person and work of Christ. To that end, Ligonier Ministries sought to offer a new statement on Christology, along with articles of affirmation and denial. This new statement does not divert from the old paths but walks squarely within them. The unique contribution of the statement is this: the bringing together of the creedal expressions of the early church regarding the person of Christ with the confessional statements of the Reformers on the work of Christ.

The Ligonier Statement on Christology consists of two elements. The first is the statement. The second is twenty-six articles of affirmation and denial with Scripture proofs.

⁴ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), 96.

II. *The Statement*

The statement is a concise, even recitable, expression of the person and work of Christ that consists of six stanzas or sections. The first serves as a preface, with two key verbs: *confess* and *rejoice*. God has revealed both himself and his will in the pages of holy Scripture. Yet, there are still “secret things” that belong to him alone (Deut 29:29). We must always be mindful of our limitations in the task of theology, so the statement begins by confessing the *mystery* and *wonder* of the gospel. The primary focus of this statement is the incarnation, which is succinctly defined by the words *God made flesh*. The person of Christ immediately leads to the work of Christ, which calls for us to rejoice in Christ’s work of salvation.

The second stanza emphasizes the true deity of Christ, seeing him equally positioned among the persons of the triune Godhead. This stanza ends with a restatement of the Chalcedonian formula from the Definition of Chalcedon. Since the incarnation, Christ has been, and ever will be, two natures in one person.

The exposition of the incarnation occupies the third stanza, emphasizing Christ’s true humanity. He was born. He is Immanuel, which means “God with us” (Matt 1:23). Here we confess his death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and second coming. These are the historical facts of the incarnation.

The theological facts of the incarnation follow in the fourth section, drawing on the recovered insights from the time of the Reformation. For us, Jesus was perfectly obedient. He kept the law (active obedience) and paid the law’s penalty (passive obedience). He was the spotless lamb, making substitutionary atonement for us. He solved the most pressing problem confronting all of humanity: the wrath of the holy God. This stanza ends by declaring the doctrine of imputation. Our sins were imputed, or counted, to Christ, while his righteousness was imputed to us. We have peace with God solely and exclusively because of what Christ did for us. We are clothed in his righteousness.

The threefold office (*munus triplex*) of Christ is a helpful theological construct that succinctly expresses Christ’s work. The three offices of prophet, priest, and king were separate mediatorial roles in the Old Testament. Jesus combines all three in his one person, and he exercises all of them perfectly. Here we reflect not only on Christ’s mediatorial work in the past on the cross but also on his current work as our intercessor at the Father’s right hand.

The concluding stanza affirms the singular, concise confession: *Jesus Christ is Lord*. All true theology leads to doxology or worship. Consequently,

the statement ends with the key verb *praise*. By worshiping Christ now, we are preparing for our eternal work.

III. *Articles of Affirmation and Denial*

The phrases of this statement are gateways into a study of Christology, inviting exploration of the richness of the biblical teaching on the person and work of Christ. To further guide us, twenty-six articles of affirmation and denial have been added, each with accompanying Scripture proofs. One main text has been written out in full for each, with other supporting texts supplied. These articles are crucial. They lay out the boundaries of the biblical teaching on the person and work of Christ.

Article 1 serves as the preface, affirming the incarnation. Article 2 asserts Christ's true deity, while articles 3–5 lay out the Bible's one-person, two-nature Christology. Articles 6–9 unfold the true humanity of Christ. Articles 10–26 turn from the person to the work of Christ. These begin with affirming the doctrines of salvation and end with delineations of the three-fold office of Christ.

The denials are of great importance. It is unfashionable in our age of tolerance to presume to deny a belief, but these articles are not an exercise in proud presumption. Instead, they are offered in the hope of helping the church stay within the safe confines of biblical teaching. Second John 9 declares, "Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God." This refers to going ahead of the biblical teaching of Christ or extending beyond the prescribed boundaries of Christology as revealed in God's Word. As the twenty-six articles expand on the various lines of the statement, so they can lead into deeper biblical teaching on Christ.

There was a moment in the earthly life of Christ when the crowds had abandoned him, and he was left with his band of disciples. He asked them if they were going to leave too. Peter spoke up for the group: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68–69). Sometime later, one of the twelve disciples had doubts. Jesus had been crucified and buried. There was testimony of his resurrection, but Thomas doubted. Then Jesus appeared to Thomas, who touched the wounds Christ had endured for our sins, and confessed, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). There is biblical precedent and warrant for confessing the person and work of Christ (see 1 Tim 3:16). Creeds, confessions, catechisms, and statements reflect this biblical practice.

IV. *Polemics, Didactics, and Elenctics*

The statement and articles have been translated into seventeen languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, and Arabic.⁵ The statement was formally and publicly presented in March of 2016. A second edition, with edits to the articles and a new article on union with Christ, was released later the same year.⁶ The statement itself was unchanged for this second edition.

After the release of the first edition, independently from it, a tempest erupted over the eternal subordination of the Son. The second edition therefore included an explicit denial of the eternal subordination of the Son. This debate pointed to the perennial nature of Christological controversy and the need for every generation to affirm anew the historic, orthodox doctrine of the person and work of Christ.

The statement is intended to serve the church in both polemics and didactics and even, to use an older term, in elenctics—the task of persuading people of the truth of the gospel. The statement has been recited in various churches and groups as a public affirmation of faith. It has been set to music and released as “The Word Made Flesh: A Christology Hymn” on the CD *The Saints of Zion*.⁷ The articles of affirmation and denial are intended to serve as a teaching tool on the core elements of the Christology.

Ligonier Ministries hopes that this work will lead contemporary audiences back to the creeds of the early church and the catechisms and confessions of the Reformation. As we continue to feel the pressure of encroaching secularism or, conversely, of expanding Islam, we have all the more need of a confessional Christianity, a Christianity built upon and upholding convictions.

It is appropriate that this statement and accompanying articles were written for the twenty-first century, much in the same way that Machen labored for the twentieth century. There is a kindred spirit between Machen and the educational institution he founded, Westminster Theological Seminary, and R. C. Sproul (1939–2017) and the educational institution he founded, Reformation Bible College. Both founders were stalwart defenders of the faith who knew how to take the message to the people. The educational institutions they founded have a shared vision of the urgency and

⁵ These may be found at www.christologystatement.com.

⁶ Some of these edits were a result of in-house observations of how certain points could be stated better or more clearly. Other edits in the second edition were a response to criticisms raised by various individuals. Ligonier Ministries is grateful to those who responded to the document. Before the second edition was released, a copy was sent to those who had raised objections, as well as to others, for review.

⁷ Jeff Lippencott and R. C. Sproul, *The Saints of Zion* (Orlando: Ligonier Ministries, 2017).

importance of theological education, and both have a shared commitment to the historic, orthodox, Reformed faith as summarized in the ancient creeds and the Reformed confessions. Both were men of conviction who left a legacy that continues in the ongoing work of the theological education of the next generation of leaders in the church. Both were theologians in the service of the church.

Below follows the full text of the statement and the second edition of the articles of affirmation and denial, along with Scripture proofs.

The Word Made Flesh: The Ligonier Statement on Christology⁸

We confess the mystery and wonder
of God made flesh
and rejoice in our great salvation
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

With the Father and the Holy Spirit,
the Son created all things,
sustains all things,
and makes all things new.
Truly God,
He became truly man,
two natures in one person.

He was born of the Virgin Mary
and lived among us.
Crucified, dead, and buried,
He rose on the third day,
ascended to heaven,
and will come again
in glory and judgment.

For us,
He kept the law,
atoned for sin,
and satisfied God's wrath.

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He took our filthy rags
and gave us
His righteous robe.

He is our Prophet, Priest, and King,
building His church,
interceding for us,
and reigning over all things.

Jesus Christ is Lord;
we praise His holy Name forever.

Amen.

Affirmations and Denials with Scripture Proofs

Article 1

We affirm that Jesus is the incarnation in history of the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity. He is Christ, God's promised Messiah.⁹

We deny that Jesus Christ is a mere man or was a fictional creation of the early Christian church.

Article 2

We affirm that in the unity of the Godhead the eternally begotten Son is consubstantial (*homoousios*), coequal, and coeternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

We deny that the Son is merely like God (*homoiousios*) or that He was simply adopted by the Father as His Son. We deny the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father in the ontological Trinity.

Article 3

We affirm, with the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds, that Jesus Christ is

⁹ "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). See also Ps 110:1; Matt 3:17; 8:29; 16:16; Mark 1:1, 11; 15:39; Luke 22:70; John 10:30; 20:28; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:6; Col 2:9; Heb 5:7; 1 John 5:20.

¹⁰ "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). See also John 3:15–16; 4:14; 6:54; 10:28; Rom 5:21; 6:23; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 2:18; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 5:10; Jude 1:21.

both truly God and truly man, two natures united in one person forever.¹¹

We deny that the Son was created. We deny that there was ever a time when the Son was not divine. We deny that the human body and soul of Jesus Christ existed prior to the incarnation of the Son in history.

Article 4

We affirm the hypostatic union, that the two natures of Jesus Christ are united in His one person without mixture, confusion, division, or separation.¹²

We deny that to distinguish between the two natures is to separate them.

Article 5

We affirm that in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, His divine and human natures retain their own attributes. We affirm that the attributes of both natures belong to the one person Jesus Christ.¹³

We deny that the human nature of Jesus Christ has divine attributes or can contain the divine nature. We deny that the divine nature communicates divine attributes to the human nature. We deny that the Son laid aside or gave up any of His divine attributes in the incarnation.

Article 6

We affirm that Jesus Christ is the visible image of God, that He is the standard of true humanity, and that in our redemption we will be ultimately conformed to His image.¹⁴

We deny that Jesus Christ was less than truly human, that He merely appeared to be human, or that He lacked a reasonable human soul. We deny that in the hypostatic union the Son assumed a human person rather than a human nature.

¹¹ "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9). See also Luke 1:35; John 10:30; Rom 9:5; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:18.

¹² "Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven'" (Matt 16:16–17). See also Luke 1:35, 43; John 1:1–3; 8:58; 17:5; Acts 20:28; Rom 1:3; 9:5; 2 Cor 8:9; Col 2:9; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:18; Rev 1:8, 17; 22:13.

¹³ "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Phil 2:5–7). See also Matt 9:10; 16:16; 19:28; John 1:1; 11:27, 35; 20:28; Rom 1:3–4; 9:5; Eph 1:20–22; Col 1:16–17; 2:9–10; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3, 8–9; 1 Pet 3:18; 2 Pet 1:1.

¹⁴ "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him" (Col 1:15–16). See also Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 4:4–6; Eph 4:20–24; Heb 1:3–4.

Article 7

We affirm that as truly man, Jesus Christ possessed in His state of humiliation all the natural limitations and common infirmities of human nature. We affirm that He was made like us in all respects, yet He was without sin.¹⁵

We deny that Jesus Christ sinned. We deny that Jesus Christ did not truly experience suffering, temptation, or hardship. We deny that sin is inherent to true humanity or that the sinlessness of Jesus Christ is incompatible with His being truly human.

Article 8

We affirm that the historical Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, was miraculously conceived, and was born of the Virgin Mary. We affirm with the Chalcedonian Creed that she is rightly called mother of God (*theotokos*) in that the child she bore is the incarnate Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity.¹⁶

We deny that Jesus Christ received His divine nature from Mary or that His sinlessness was derived from her.

Article 9

We affirm that Jesus Christ is the last Adam who succeeded in His appointed task at every point where the first Adam failed, and that Jesus Christ is the head of His people, the body of Christ.¹⁷

¹⁵ “Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Heb 2:17–18). See also Mic 5:2; Luke 2:52; Rom 8:3; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:5–8; Heb 4:15.

¹⁶ “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:26–27). See also Matt 1:23; 2:11; Luke 1:31, 35, 43; Rom 1:3; Gal 4:4.

¹⁷ “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one

We deny that Jesus Christ assumed a fallen human nature or inherited original sin.

Article 10

We affirm the active and passive obedience of Jesus Christ, that in His perfect life He completely fulfilled the righteous demands of the law on our behalf, and that He bore the penalty of our sin by His death on the cross.¹⁸

We deny that Jesus Christ at any point failed to obey or fulfill the law of God. We deny that He abolished the moral law.

Article 11

We affirm that on the cross Jesus Christ offered Himself as a penal substitutionary atonement for the sins of His people, propitiating the wrath of God and satisfying the justice of God, and was victorious over sin, death, and Satan.¹⁹

We deny that the death of Jesus Christ was a payment of ransom to Satan. We deny that the death of Jesus Christ was merely an example, merely a victory over Satan, or merely a display of God's moral government.

Article 12

We affirm the doctrine of double imputation, that our sin is imputed to Jesus Christ and His righteousness is imputed to us by faith.²⁰

We deny that sin is overlooked without judgment. We deny that the active obedience of Jesus Christ is not imputed to us.

man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5:12–21). See also 1 Cor 15:22, 45–49; Eph 2:14–16; 5:23; Col 1:18.

¹⁸ "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19). See also Matt 3:15; John 8:29; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8.

¹⁹ "Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:25–26). See also Isa 53; Rom 5:6, 8, 15; 6:10; 7:4; 8:34; 14:9, 15; 1 Cor 15:3; Eph 5:2; 1 Thess 5:10; 2 Tim 2:11; Heb 2:14, 17; 9:14–15; 10:14; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 2:2; 3:8; 4:10.

²⁰ "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). See also Matt 5:20; Rom 3:21–22; 4:11; 5:18; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 9:9; Eph 6:14; Phil 1:11; 3:9; Heb 12:23.

Article 13

We affirm that on the third day Jesus Christ rose from the dead and that He was seen in the flesh by many.²¹

We deny that Jesus Christ merely seemed to die, or that only His spirit survived, or that His resurrection took place merely in the hearts of His followers.

Article 14

We affirm that in His state of exaltation Jesus Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection, that He has conquered both sin and death, and that in union with Him we too will be resurrected.²²

We deny that the glorified resurrected body of Jesus Christ was a wholly different body from the one that was laid in the garden tomb. We deny that our resurrection is merely a resurrection of our spirits apart from our bodies.

Article 15

We affirm that Jesus Christ ascended to His heavenly throne at the right hand of God the Father, that He is presently reigning as King, and that He will return visibly in power and glory.²³

We deny that Jesus Christ was mistaken about the timing of His return.

Article 16

We affirm that Jesus Christ poured out His Spirit on the day of Pentecost and that in His present session He is reigning over all things, interceding for

²¹ “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (1 Cor 15:3–5). See also Isa 53; Matt 16:21; 26:32; 28:1–10; John 21:14; Acts 1:9–11; 2:25, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; Rom 4:24–25; 6:9–10; Eph 4:8–10.

²² “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ... ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’” (1 Cor 15:20, 55). See also Rom 5:10; 6:4, 8, 11; 10:9; 1 Cor 15:23; 2 Cor 1:9; 4:10–11; Eph 2:6; Col 2:12; 2 Thess 2:13; Heb 2:9, 14; 1 John 3:14; Rev 14:4; 20:14.

²³ “So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:6–11). See also Luke 24:50–53; Acts 1:22; 2:33–35; Eph 4:8–10; 1 Tim 3:16.

His people, and building His church, of which He is the only head.²⁴

We deny that Jesus Christ appointed the bishop of Rome as His vicar, or that any person other than Jesus Christ can be the church's head.

Article 17

We affirm that Jesus Christ will come again in glory to judge all people and will finally vanquish all His enemies, destroy death, and usher in the new heaven and the new earth in which He will reign in righteousness.²⁵

We deny that the final return of Jesus Christ took place in AD 70 and that His coming and its attendant events are to be viewed as symbolic.

Article 18

We affirm that those who believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be welcomed into His eternal kingdom, but those who do not believe in Him will suffer eternal conscious punishment in hell.²⁶

We deny that every person will be saved. We deny that those who die without faith in Jesus Christ will be annihilated.

Article 19

We affirm that all who have been chosen in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world and who are united to Him through faith enjoy communion with Him and with one another. We affirm that in Jesus Christ we enjoy every spiritual blessing, including justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification.²⁷

We deny that Jesus Christ and His saving work can be separated. We deny that we are able to partake of the saving work of Jesus Christ apart from Jesus Christ Himself. We deny that we can be united to Jesus Christ and not be united to His body, the church.

²⁴ "And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church" (Eph 1:22). See also Acts 2:33; 1 Cor 11:3–5; Eph 4:15; 5:23; Col 1:18.

²⁵ "And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42). See also John 12:48; 14:3; Acts 7:7; 17:31; 2 Tim 4:1, 8.

²⁶ "The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear" (Matt 13:41–43). See also Isa 25:6–9; 65:17–25; 66:21–23; Dan 7:13–14; Matt 5:29–30; 10:28; 18:8–9; Mark 9:42–49; Luke 1:33; 12:5; John 18:36; Col 1:13–14; 2 Thess 1:5–10; 2 Tim 4:1, 18; Heb 12:28; 2 Pet 1:11; 2:4; Rev 20:15.

²⁷ "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). See also John 14:20; 15:4–6; Rom 6:1–11; 8:1–2; 12:3–5; 1 Cor 1:30–31; 6:15–20; 10:16–17; 12:27; 2 Cor 5:17–21; Gal 3:25–29; Eph 1:3–10, 22–23; 2:1–6; 3:6; 4:15–16; 5:23, 30; Col 1:18; 2:18–19.

Article 20

We affirm the doctrine of justification by faith alone, that God declares us righteous by an act of His grace alone through our faith alone in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone, apart from our own personal merit or works. We affirm that to deny the doctrine of justification by faith alone is to deny the gospel.²⁸

We deny that we are justified on the basis of any infusion of grace into us. We deny that we are justified only once we have become inherently righteous. We deny that this justification is now or ever will be based on our faithfulness.

Article 21

We affirm the doctrine of sanctification, that God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, based on the work of Jesus Christ, delivers us from the reigning power of sin, sets us apart, and makes us holy by conforming us more and more to the image of His Son. We affirm that sanctification is a work of God's grace and is inseparably joined with justification, although it is different from justification. We affirm that in this divine work of sanctification we are not merely passive, but we are responsible to apply ourselves to the appointed means of grace in our ongoing endeavor to die to sin and live in obedience to the Lord.²⁹

We deny that a person is justified without immediately bearing the fruit of union with Jesus Christ in sanctification. We deny that our good works, while acceptable to God in Jesus Christ, merit justification. We deny that in this life our struggle with indwelling sin will cease, even though sin has no dominion over us.

Article 22

We affirm that Jesus Christ is the sole mediator between God and His people. We affirm the mediatorial role of Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King in both His state of humiliation and His state of exaltation. We affirm that He was anointed by the Holy Spirit in order to execute this mediatorial

²⁸ "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1). See also Luke 18:14; Rom 3:24; 4:5; 5:10; 8:30; 10:4, 10; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 5:19, 21; Gal 2:16–17; 3:11, 24; 5:4; Eph 1:7; Titus 3:5, 7.

²⁹ "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph 1:3–4). See also John 17:17; Acts 20:32; Rom 6:5–6, 14; 8:13; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 7:1; Gal 5:24; Eph 3:16–19; 4:23–24; Phil 3:10; Col 1:10–11; 2 Thess 2:13; Heb 12:14.

office to which He was called by the Father.³⁰

We deny that God has had or will have any other incarnations or that there are or will be any mediators of redemption other than the Lord Jesus Christ. We deny salvation apart from Jesus Christ alone.

Article 23

We affirm that as the supreme Prophet of God, Jesus Christ was both the subject and object of prophecy. We affirm that Jesus Christ revealed and proclaimed the will of God, prophesied future events, and is in Himself the fulfillment of God's promises.³¹

We deny that Jesus Christ ever uttered a false prophecy or false word, or that He failed or will fail to fulfill all prophecies regarding Himself.

Article 24

We affirm that Jesus Christ is our Great High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, having made the perfect sacrifice of Himself on our behalf and continuing to intercede for us before the Father. We affirm that Jesus Christ is both the subject and object of the supreme atoning sacrifice.³²

We deny that Jesus Christ, being from the tribe of Judah and not from the tribe of Levi, is disqualified from serving as our priest. We deny that He continually offers Himself as a sacrifice in the Mass as victim and priest, even in an unbloody manner. We deny that He became a priest only in heaven and was not a priest on earth.

³⁰ "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). See also Job 33:23–28; Luke 1:33; John 1:1–14; 14:6; Acts 3:22; Col 1:15; Heb 1:1–4; 5:5–6; 9:15; 12:24.

³¹ "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you'" (Acts 3:17–22). See also Matt 20:17; 24:3; 26:31, 34, 64; Mark 1:14–15; Luke 4:18–19, 21; John 13:36; 21:22; 1 Cor 1:20; Heb 1:2; Rev 19:10.

³² "For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Heb 9:24–28). See also John 1:36; 19:28–30; Acts 8:32; 1 Cor 5:7; Heb 2:17–18; 4:14–16; 7:25; 10:12, 26; 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 5:6, 8, 12–13; 6:1, 16; 7:9–10, 14, 17; 8:1; 12:11; 13:8; 15:3.

Article 25

We affirm that as King, Jesus Christ reigns supremely over all earthly and supernatural powers now and forever.³³

We deny that the kingdom of Jesus Christ is merely a political kingdom of this world. We deny that earthly rulers are not accountable to Him.

Article 26

We affirm that when Jesus Christ has conquered all His enemies, He will hand over His kingdom to the Father. We affirm that in the new heaven and the new earth, God will be with His people, and that believers will see Jesus Christ face-to-face, will be made like Him, and will enjoy Him forever.³⁴

We deny that there is any other hope for humanity or any name or way in which salvation may be found except in Jesus Christ alone.

³³ “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Cor 15:25). See also Ps 110; Matt 28:18–20; Luke 1:32; 2:11; Acts 2:25, 29, 34; 4:25; 13:22, 34, 36; 15:16; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8; Heb 4:7; Rev 3:7; 5:5; 22:16.

³⁴ “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘all things are put in subjection,’ it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:24–28). See also Isa 65:17; 66:22; Phil 2:9–11; 2 Pet 3:13; 1 John 3:2–3; Rev 21:1–5; 22:1–5.

IN MEMORIAM

A Tribute to Dr. R. C. Sproul (1939–2017)¹

K. SCOTT OLIPHINT

There is no way to state the impact of Dr. R. C. Sproul adequately. The impact on people could perhaps be measured, but the immeasurable spiritual impact that R. C.'s teaching has had on so many can only be quantified by the Lord himself. Its vast reach will always remain incalculable to us.

No one has had more influence on students coming to Westminster Theological Seminary than R. C. Sproul. Whenever I ask a student why he has come to Westminster to study, almost invariably R. C.'s teaching will be a significant part of the story. His ability to persuade people of the biblical logic of Reformed theology was without equal. His passion for defending the Christian faith was palpable in almost every word he spoke.

As we mourn his loss and extend our prayers to his family, we praise our Savior for R. C.'s life and ministry. It has been a privilege to live in a time when that ministry has had an effect over a number of decades. Surely such times are rare, because such gifts, passions, and abilities are so rarely distributed to just one person.

As he peers now on the holiness of God in Christ, we rejoice that R. C.'s life-long passion has finally been realized. *Soli Deo gloria.*

¹ This tribute was originally published on December 14, 2017. K. Scott Oliphint, "A Tribute to Dr. R. C. Sproul," Westminster Theological Seminary, <https://faculty.wts.edu/posts/tribute-dr-r-c-sproul/>.



PHOTO © LIGONIER MINISTRIES

R. C. SPROUL

February 13, 1939–December 14, 2017

INTERVIEW

Interview with Robert C. Sproul (†)

PETER A. LILLBACK

(May 10, 2017)

PETER LILLBACK: *Reverend Dr. R. C. Sproul, it is a pleasure to be with you again. I would like to open in prayer and then follow through with the interview. Let us pray:*

Father, thank you for the opportunity to have this dialogue with Dr. Sproul. We thank you for his faithful, fruitful, and powerful ministry, which has blessed so many. We pray now that this interview will be useful. We pray, Father, that your glory might be seen through it and that we might, by your mercy, advance your kingdom for the good of your people and the honor of your name. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

It is a pleasure to interview Dr. R. C. Sproul, who has been one of the leaders of Reformed theology and apologetics over the past several decades. Several questions will help us understand his life, the impact of his work, and the things he has come to appreciate and emphasize in his ministry. Dr. Sproul, would you please give us a summation of your academic career? Where have you taught? What books have you written? What conferences have you been involved in?

ROBERT C. SPROUL: I started my career teaching philosophy at Westminster College in Pennsylvania and then moved to Gordon College in Massachusetts and taught, principally, biblical studies and theology. Then I went to the reorganized Conwell School of Theology at Temple University in Philadelphia, where I taught part systematic theology and part philosophy.

I have also taught as a visiting professor at Gordon-Conwell Seminary and systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson. I was the founding dean of the Reformed Theological Seminary Orlando campus, where I taught systematics. I also taught systematics at Knox Theological Seminary. As far as books, I have written over a hundred books, so it is hard to summarize them. But I have been involved with many, many conferences over the years, and one of the most important ones was the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. I was also a member of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy and served as its president for several years.

PL: *That's truly outstanding. As part of your work with the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology, you got to know and befriend the late Dr. James Boice, formerly senior pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church. Tell us a little about your relationship with him and maybe some of the recollections of the impact of his ministry and your partnership in his work.*

RCS: I first met Jim in 1969, I believe, and we hit it off immediately and spoke together at different conferences on several separate occasions and then of course when he started the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. When Jim died, the only person who had spoken more frequently than I was Jim himself. We developed a very close relationship over the years. I counted him as one of my closest comrades and friends. We worked together on so many different enterprises. The irony is that Jim was born and raised in McKeesport, PA, and I was born in the south hills of Pittsburgh. I went to Clairton High School, and our arch enemy was McKeesport. Of course, Jim played sports but did not play for the McKeesport High School because he went to prep school. Otherwise, we would have met earlier on the fields of battle.

PL: *That's great; the Lord brought that partnership together to enrich us all. What do you see as the most significant opportunities and challenges in Reformed theology today?*

RCS: We have had a marvelous resurgence of the Reformed faith in the last half century, and at the same time have seen the spread of the Reformed faith in many different parts of the world where it had not penetrated before. There is a sizable Reformed movement in Africa, in Latin and South America, and even into the Far East, China, Korea, and elsewhere. And so we have unique opportunities because of that, but also strong challenges of the same kind we always face where the Reformed faith is proclaimed. We find pushback and resistance from those who find it almost impossible to accept because of our high doctrine of God and his sovereignty.

PL: *You recently helped develop a statement on Christology called the Ligonier Statement on Christology.¹ Why did you feel that was important, and what is the statement's unique contribution to the churches thinking about the doctrine of Christ?*

RCS: We were at a restaurant in Seattle, if I recall rightly, and somebody at the table asked me what I thought was the biggest crisis facing the church in the next decades. I replied, "I am not a prophet or a son of a prophet, so I am not sure, but I think that it is the person of Christ." The great crises of Christology were obviously in the fourth and fifth centuries, then again in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the Christological debates from the twentieth century have carried over into this century. What bothered me ... we always have had to defend the deity of Christ, the supernatural character of his activity against the unreconstructed nineteenth-century liberals ... however, a great concern at present is the fuzziness that has crept into the Evangelical world, and even strong resistance to such matters as the act of obedience of Christ and the central issue of the imputation of our sin to him and the imputation of his righteousness to us. The Ligonier statement is basically a summary of the historic affirmations of the church's faith, but with a new kind of emphasis on the aspects of imputation, both in terms of the righteousness of Christ to us and also of his passive obedience and his satisfaction of God's justice on the cross. So there is a re-emphasis of these elements.

PL: *Excellent. You mentioned earlier the rivalry between your high schools and Dr. Boice's—there has been some ongoing intramural debate between R. C. Sproul and Westminster on our Van Tillian apologetics.² I know it has always been a friendly rivalry, but I was wondering, in the classic debate between traditional Reformed apologetics and the presuppositional or covenantal model of Van Til, what do you think is the crucial distinction between them, and what have been your reservations to adopting a Van Tillian approach?*

RCS: There is a lot to answer, so I will try to do it as briefly as I can. One thing where we are strongly united is in our commitment to historic Calvinism, and we both understand that apologetics can never convert anybody. We are also concerned about defending the faith from outside attacks. To understand the issues, I go back to Augustine. Both Augustine and John Calvin maintain that there was kind of a symbiotic relationship between our

¹ See the Ligonier Statement earlier in this issue.

² For more on classical apologetics and Cornelius Van Til, see Robert C. Sproul, John H. Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); and John M. Frame, "Appendix A: Van Til and the Ligonier Apologetic," in *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), 401–22.

understanding of our humanness and our understanding of God. Calvin says, in one sense you cannot really understand God until you first understand yourself, but you cannot really understand what it means to be human without having a proper knowledge of God. Going back to the original issue, Augustine said that as soon as you are self-conscious, you are immediately aware of yourself as a finite creature. That is, finitude is a corollary of self-consciousness. And so that idea of having an immediate understanding of finitude implies an immediate understanding of God himself. The basic dispute between classical apologetics and Van Tillianism is, I believe, an epistemological one. We ask: Where the starting point is for apologetics? Classical apologetics says we start with self-consciousness because it is the only place we can start. The Van Tillian approach says you cannot start with self-consciousness; you have to start with the presupposition of God's existence. My basic hesitation with that is that it involves the problem of circular reasoning. As you know, Van Til himself acknowledged that that reasoning is circular, but he defended it by saying that all reasoning is by nature circular inasmuch as your starting point, your mid-point, and your conclusion are all the same sort. My problem with that is that he defended what is usually considered to be a fallacy of circular reasoning with another fallacy, namely that of equivocation, because the definition of circular reasoning changes in the course of the discussion. He could have easily said that we start at one point, and if our thinking is rational and we go on and think that our starting point and our conclusions would end up being of the same kind, we would ask, Why would you call that circular? Why use that metaphor? Why not linear? But in any case, there has been so much discussion over the years, and it has always been, I think, warm, and friendly, and I think we are both trying to get to the same place.

PL: *Would you be comfortable if I followed up with a question as to how the noetic effects of sin play out in the two systems and whether they are similar or different?*

RCS: I do not think there is any ultimate difference, because both of us consider that the noetic effects of sin indicate that the mind is fallen as well as the rest of our humanity. But the question is whether or not our ability to reason correctly at a certain level has been vanquished. This was the substantive debate between Benjamin B. Warfield and Abraham Kuyper over whether or not it is possible for a fallen man in his natural condition to interpret general revelation substantially accurately. Warfield's answer was yes, we can, because this is the basis for human guilt. God reveals himself in nature, clearly, as Romans 1 tells us, and we are without excuse because the message gets through. Even Van Til acknowledged that the basis for our

guilt is that knowing God, we refuse to acknowledge him as God, nor are we thankful, and therefore God has given us over to the darkness of our thinking. Again, we can see through the revelation that God gives us in nature, the reality that God exists, which is one point we have in common with presuppositionalism. I know that when I talk to an unbeliever, that person already knows that God exists, because God himself has revealed it, and he is the best teacher there could possibly be. We would both agree to that. But then, when you get into the point historically of the full impact of the noetic effects, differences emerge. For example, some advocates of presuppositionalism say that if you start with self-consciousness, you end with the view of human autonomy. I debated that one several years ago with one of the leading proponents of presuppositionalism, and I said that self-consciousness does not analytically contain the idea of moral autonomy. That is a fallen conclusion, a distorted conclusion, drawn from self-consciousness. It is not immediately or formally implied, and even though we may dispute aspects of the noetic effects, ultimately, I think, we are in pretty close agreement.

PL: *Good. On a separate topic then, what is your concern for America as a nation, for its future? And do you see Reformed theology making a difference in the American experience?*

RCS: I guess it was about forty years ago—it may have been even longer—I was speaking on the same platform with Francis Schaeffer, and we happened to meet at the airport and shared a ride going to where we were speaking. And during the ride, I asked him the very question you just asked me. I said, “What is your biggest concern for the future of America?” And he did not hesitate even then—this was forty years ago—but replied, “Statism.” We have seen in the last half century the intrusion of government into our lives beyond the normal elements of socialism that you find in Western Europe. We are on a runaway train with respect to the growth of government and its involvement in the life of the people. I think this will make an impact on the Reformed faith in the sense that we will find more and more resistance to it. But at the same time, the influence of Reformed theology may have an impact of retarding this concept of the secular state. The concept of separation of church and state has now become the separation of the state and God. The state has declared its independence from God himself, and here is where a Reformation critique of political theory has and will have an important impact. There are, of course, disagreements on whether or not Christians should even be involved with this discussion, but I think the church has always called the people of God to offer prophetic criticism to the state. Not that we want to be the state. The state has its own function under God, but

the state is under God and has a ministry to the civil elements of society. We would still distinguish between the mission God has given the church and the mission God has given the state, but both under God.

PL: *Excellent—I will quote you on that more than once, I guarantee! What is your assessment of the Reformed theological presence on a global scale? What are the encouragements and the difficulties?*

RCS: I hinted earlier that I am really excited about what is going on in Africa, for instance, about the African Bible University that O. Palmer Robertson started in Kampala in Uganda. Eight hundred or so pastors have gone through that Reformed seminary, which is ultimately a fruit of Westminster Seminary. We also see expansion in Latin America and even in southern Europe, where there was little prior penetration of the Reformation. It is very encouraging, and it is going to continue.

PL: *Why was the Reformation Bible College³ started and what is your hope for it?*

RCS: I looked at the history of Evangelicalism in the United States—as you know as a historian, Evangelicalism had become dominated by Dispensational theology—and I wondered how that happened. Dispensational theology was invented toward the end of the nineteenth century, and how could this new idea have such a widespread influence in the American Evangelical church? From a historical perspective, there were lots of factors involved, like the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible, which had a huge impact. There was impact too from seminaries that were established and Bible colleges: Philadelphia Bible College, Moody Bible Institute. Bible colleges all over the United States had a commitment to Dispensational theology, and it spread like wildfire. When I thought about what was needed in American education from the Evangelical perspective, it was clear that we have now several solidly Reformed seminaries, but there is a huge lack with respect to the Bible college model. I thought one way we could reach future pastors initially is at the college level. From my own conversion and in my own teaching I have found that college students have a very formative time in their education in those four years. That is the reason why we decided to begin a Bible college.

PL: *To conclude our conversation: You have been a good friend of Westminster for many years and received an honorary doctorate from Westminster a few years ago,*

³ The Reformation Bible College is a Reformed college that was founded in 2011 in central Florida in conjunction with Ligonier Ministries; for more information, see <https://www.reformationbiblecollege.org/about/#history>.

so let me ask this final question: What contributions do you think Westminster Theological Seminary has made to Reformed theology, and what are your hopes for Westminster in the coming years?

RCS: At the time of the fiftieth anniversary of Westminster, I was sitting in a restaurant by myself and wrote down the names of a hundred leaders—pastors, teachers—that I knew of. The roots in the Reformed faith of ninety-nine of them could be traced to Westminster Theological Seminary. That is incredible! When you think of the school that came out of Princeton Theological Seminary and how little it was, and how massive its influence has been from its inception to this day—almost every other Reformed theological institution owes a supreme debt to the founding and teaching of Westminster Seminary. So as far as I am concerned, the church has a debt that we can never repay to that institution. My concern and hope are that it will stay absolutely faithful to its classical principles and policies and theology.

PL: *Thank you for that, and we continue to thank God for your leadership and your visionary commitments to advancing Reformed theology worldwide. Thank you for this interview and all your contributions. You remain in our prayers, and I wonder if we could be honored with a concluding prayer. Would you provide that for us?*

RCS: Absolutely, thank you so much:

Father and our God, how grateful we are that you have known us from the foundation of the world. You have, by your sheer and majestic grace—and without any contribution of merit or works of our own—called us to be inheritors of your kingdom and members of your family along with your only begotten Son, who is our elder brother. And because you have adopted us into your family and your house, we are forever grateful; and we pray that you would continue to pour out your grace on the ministry of those that are striving to be faithful to biblical truth, and we believe Reformed theology to be simply a nickname for that; and so we thank you, Lord, for your astonishing grace and abiding love and tender mercy, and we pray in Jesus's name, Amen.

PL: *Thank you, Dr. Sproul. God bless and thanks so much and keep up the great work.*

RCS: Thank you, Peter. It has been great to know you and have you in our midst.

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1. Who are we?

World: we are a global network embracing in our membership millions of evangelical Reformed Christians from many countries.

Reformed: we subscribe to the doctrinal confessions of the Protestant Reformation and to the World Reformed Fellowship Statement of Faith as valid expressions of apostolic faith and doctrine.

Fellowship: we exist to facilitate the networking of our members (denominational, congregational, institutional, and individual) as they encourage, influence, and help one another in every area of life and thought towards greater effectiveness, growth, and consistency in obeying the Lord's command to make disciples of all nations.

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To serve our members and others who share our position as we seek together with them to strengthen and extend God's kingdom by praying for one another, learning from each other, working together, and sharing ministry resources and programs.

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A Moratorium on Dynamic-Equivalent Bible Translating

STEFAN FELBER

Abstract

In this personal reflection, a congruence or resemblance of critiques of modern theories of language and translation is detected. One of them arose from a thorough study of literature (Ian Robinson), the other from biblical studies (Stefan Felber). The author calls for a moratorium on new translations of the Bible into European languages.

Until being called to lecture at Saint Chrischona Theological Seminary in Basel in 2000, I had no problem with the use of dynamic-equivalent translations.¹ Afterward, I became more aware of the changes introduced in modern translations of the Bible. My motivation was by no means negative or hypercritical. The 2002 revision of *Hoffnung für alle* (on the market since 1983) bears my name as co-responsible for the Old Testament introduction (together with Prof. H. H. Klement). On being asked how the translation could be improved, I began a comparison of a series of texts—ever more dismayed—with the German *Gute Nachricht* (*Good News Bible*), and others.

¹ That is, translations which do not simply strive for submitting texts or meanings, but which claim to target for the same impact (dynamic) as the original texts in their respective settings. In the German-speaking world, *Gute Nachricht* (*Good News*) and *Hoffnung für alle* (*Hfa*, i.e., “Hope for everybody”) are dynamic-equivalent translations.

In an essay published in the journal *Theologische Beiträge*,² I concluded,

Hfa changes biblical content inappropriately, translates concretes into the abstract, reduces to psychology, takes out ontological dimensions, even at times replaces the work of God by the work of men, the transcendent by the immanent. Basic biblical terms like “righteousness,” “gospel,” “in Christ,” and “word” will no longer be recognized or even read by the reader. Given that, *Hfa* 1983 is unfit to be read in services. If used in private reading, the parallel use of faithful translations is necessary for correction.³

All the dynamic translations we compared display a loss of brevity, conciseness, and a corresponding loss of wit and flavor. Much subjective and tendentious explanation has been integrated, and through the replacement of a sacred writing style by a fluid journalistic style, the language-shaping power of Luther has been abandoned. Whatever we say in favor of modern translations of the Bible—e.g., bringing people to read it the first time—is thwarted by their reinterpretations and disease-causing legalism. Who can measure the detriment and disservice done by these “translations” to Bible readers and congregations?⁴

Introduction

“Ye shall know them by their fruits.” The fruits of a translation theory consist of translations done properly. Who is held accountable for these translations and their faults? The following theses point to the problems of Eugene A. Nida’s theory of dynamic-equivalence (since 1986 also known as “functional equivalence”). For some ten years, I undertook the task of evaluating Nida’s theories more thoroughly than had previously been done in the German-speaking realm.⁵ I tried to grasp Nida’s theory and its decades-long development as precisely as possible, and to evaluate Nida’s strongest arguments, pointing to the background in Noam Chomsky.⁶ Favorable reviews followed,⁷ but publishers and translators of dynamic translations

² Stefan Felber, “Die Bibelübersetzung ‘Hoffnung für alle’ im kritischen Textvergleich,” *Theologische Beiträge* 35.4 (2004): 181–201; this article, along with others of my publications, is available online: <https://www.stefan-felber.ch/publikationen>.

³ Ibid., 198.

⁴ Ibid., 199.

⁵ The publication of my book *Communicative Translation of the Bible: Eugene A. Nida and the Model of Dynamic Equivalence* (Stefan Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung: Eugene A. Nida und das Modell der dynamischen Äquivalenz*, 2nd ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2016]) put a temporary end to my research. This book was decorated with the Johann-Tobias-Beck-Prize in 2014 and underwent a new, slightly revised edition in 2016.

⁶ Cf. Stefan Felber, “Chomsky’s Influence on Eugene Nida’s Theory in Translating,” in Eberhard Werner, ed., *Bibelübersetzung als Wissenschaft: Aktuelle Fragestellungen und Perspektiven: Beiträge zum Forum Bibelübersetzung aus den Jahren 2005–2011* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 253–62.

⁷ Eight favorable reviews appeared listed here: see www.stefan-felber.ch/publikationen.

remained conspicuously silent: there was no answer justifying an operation so overarching as the translation of the Bible.

I. *Conflict between Literary Studies and Linguistics—An Example*

In spite of extensive research, it was only in 2016 that I was pointed to the English literary critic Ian Robinson. I had not seen his name in footnotes or bibliographies. *Who Killed the Bible? Last Words on Translating the Holy Scriptures* (2006) and *The New Grammarians' Funeral: A Critique of Noam Chomsky's Linguistics* (1975) are especially relevant for our purpose.⁸

The question *Who Killed the Bible?* is not answered directly, but Robinson points to Nida and his dynamic equivalence model. My agreement with Robinson is surprising and far reaching. Let me list some cases:

1. Nida falls short of his own claim of being communicative: it is impossible for him to fulfill this pledge, and there is an inherent contradiction between intended comprehensibility and the reactions of the recipients, even in biblical times.⁹
2. There are *many* examples of obviously wrong translations based on poor or missing exegesis, among others, Nida's favorite translation example (Mark 1:4 and its context).¹⁰
3. Modern and biblical worldviews are naïvely blurred. For example,
 - Replacing "wisdom" by "skill" (Exod 36:2 KJV/GNB) reflects our modern, technological world.¹¹
 - Replacing "blessed" by "happy" in the beatitudes (descriptive of those persecuted, suffering and dying!)¹² emphasizes a world-immanent hope of improving earthly life.¹³
 - Allegedly gender-neutral changes in the Bible create the impression of similar relations of sexes and their respective ways of being addressed as seen in our current culture and time.¹⁴

⁸ Ian Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible? Last Words on Translating the Holy Scriptures* (Herefordshire: Edgeways, 2006); and *The New Grammarians' Funeral: A Critique of Noam Chomsky's Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

⁹ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 72–73.

¹⁰ Ibid., 43ff.; cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 44–59.

¹¹ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 96–97. "On principle they invite a reading in the context of the average modern world. But to take the 'message' (by way of the kernel-sentence paraphrase) into the modern world without its context is to deliver a different meaning" (p. 103).

¹² Ibid., 98ff.

¹³ Cf. Felber, "Die Bibelübersetzung 'Hoffnung für alle,'" 194.

¹⁴ Cf. Stefan Felber, "Vorfahren statt Väter, Geschwister statt Brüder: Zur 'geschlechtergerechten' Sprache und Bibelübersetzung, insbesondere zur Neuen Zürcher Bibel," in Harald

4. Translators in the Third World tend to neglect the Hebrew and Greek texts in favor of drawing upon the *Good News Bible* as a new *Urtext* and/or model for their translations.¹⁵
5. The hypothetical average reader or hearer is implicitly disparaged.
6. The texts' meaning has been localized in the so-called kernels, as stated in this criticism of Chomsky's generative transformation grammar: "I regret I must hold the opinion that Nida's 'theory' of kernel sentences does not explain the analysis and transfer of meaning, that there is no method by which it can be judged applicable, and that in practice it has been, as I shall go on to show, devastating in its effects on translation."¹⁶
7. The distinction between form and content is naïve, and the conception of language is greatly reduced: language is reduced to a code, contents are asserted beyond the pictorial and metaphorical, and the creative and realizing power of language is neglected.¹⁷
8. The postulating of a common speech (Nida's *consumer language*) is without academic basis, and the advancement of this kind of speech is becoming a norm for translators.¹⁸
9. Dynamic-equivalent translators have established by its use in Bible translations a "journalism" style that is low, or at the least misplaced, and they have particularly disparaged poetry and rhetoric.¹⁹

Seubert and Jacob Thiessen, eds., *Die Königsherrschaft Jahwes. Festschrift zur Emeritierung von Herbert H. Klement*, Studien zu Theologie und Bibel 13 (Basel: Lit, 2015), 175–198; cf. Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 107–113.

¹⁵ Robinson refers repeatedly to the study of an Australian Anglican Bishop: Anthony Howard Nichols, "Translating the Bible: A Critical Analysis of E. A. Nida's Theory of Dynamic Equivalence and Its Impact upon Recent Bible Translation" (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 1996).

¹⁶ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 126; cf. Ian Robinson, *Prayers for the New Babel: A Criticism of the Church of England Alternative Service Book 1980* (Retford: Brynmill, 1987), 20; *The Survival of English: Essays in Criticism of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 46, 56, 58ff.; "The N.E.B. is a diminution of our whole language" (*ibid.*, 60).

¹⁸ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 105ff., 128; cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 274, 335ff.

¹⁹ Robinson, *The Survival of English*, 34: "The word for N.E.B.'s style is journalism. ... And that does seem to me disastrous, not because there is anything wrong with journalism in its place, but because its place could not be in the Bible and in public reading in the church." Cf. *ibid.*, 36—however a bit exaggerated—on Revelation 21:5–6, and p. 37: "It is the casualness of style that destroys them as miracles: one can get no sense of the miraculous. ... The new versions make nonsense of the miracles by placing the centre of truth outside religion. If the only possible world is our world of newspapers and commonsense, then the miracles are not merely impossible; they are mischievous impostures" (p. 37). For the critique of a journalistic style, cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 309ff.

10. The level-lowering and ressecularization of the whole of language is having an impact even on non-Christians and nonreaders of the Bible.²⁰

Had I had known of Robinson's books earlier, my book would have been sharper and more precise.

1. Robinson's contribution questions the adequacy of modern translations with respect to the target languages. "If the style fails the sense fails."²¹ Drawing on literature, Robinson adds many examples to the cultural consequences, which I had considered under "the costs of the accommodation to contemporary language."²²
2. In the first place, I questioned the justification of the theory of dynamic equivalence on the ground of text comparisons. But with equal emphasis its *scientific status* is to be questioned. Simply put: Nida's theory being scientific was based on Chomsky's theory being scientific. With the latter, the former fails as well.
3. It is doubtful whether a scientific theory of translation is possible at all. Thus, Robinson's critique reaches even the "essentially literal camp." In the *English Standard Version*, translators or revisers fail to render parataxis by parataxis (e.g., Luke 5:1–2 ESV),²³ thus eliminating the narrative flow and elevating subordinate clauses to main clauses. "It is a reliable technique for dullness. Try and find a line of Shakespeare that would satisfy Ryken's criterion of rhythmic excellence!"²⁴
4. What I (in my preface²⁵) called a paradox—i.e., the coincidence of unbounded availability and ever-growing ignorance of the Scriptures—is no such thing for Robinson. Rather, the "effect—assisted by other causes—has in fact been an extinguishing of the Bible in common consciousness."²⁶ "Religious language (always in danger of going vapid) is one of the guarantees of the whole, but suffers with the whole unless it redeems it."²⁷ He is right—more later.

²⁰ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 114–18, 128f.; cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 267, 303, 315, 349.

²¹ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 41.

²² Cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 354–68.

²³ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 119ff.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁵ Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 11.

²⁶ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 127.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 129. Cf. Barbara Hallensleben and Guido Vergauwen, "Gottes Wort im Menschenwort: Eine kleine Soteriologie der Sprache," in Stefan Felber, ed., *Erkennen und Lieben in der*

Robinson acquired the linguistic, literary, and philosophic foundations for his critique during decades of lecturing in English literature. As early as in his 1975 work *The New Grammarians' Funeral*, he offered an extensive critique of the linguistic theories of Chomsky and his school. I point to this "funeral" only in passing. The title, I think, is an objective genitive: using different perspectives, Robinson rather confidently demonstrates that Chomsky's theory cannot claim scientific status.²⁸ The different paths of the two scholars led them to opposite viewpoints: Chomsky's visual field is filled with grammar, syntactic structures, and analyses of mostly simple sentences that would be judged as right or wrong by the alleged average speaker of English. Robinson, by contrast, has a comprehensive knowledge of English literature at his disposal. Moreover, that Chomsky is not willing to consider literature at its highest level is one of Robinson's charges. One can feel Robinson's pain resonating between the brackets:

Judgement in literature is the only guarantee I can think of judgement in general about language. (Chomsky has never to my knowledge betrayed the slightest interest in imaginative literature.) As said somewhere else, "If English had no great literature it would not be the language we know, even with the same grammar and vocabulary." ... It is neither an accident nor a mistake that for nineteen twentieths of its history the study of language has been firmly subordinated to the reading of classical texts. The oddity is the modern divorce, the study of language disconnected from a centre in the consideration of classical literature.²⁹

And in his critique of the *New English Bible*, which motivated him to write *The Survival of English*, he writes, "We have lost all sense of what is well and badly written, all standards of literacy. And that is not a merely stylistic matter; I shall show that it directly affects every reader of the Bible."³⁰

Chomsky's school insisted that literary critics should dig deeper into linguistics. So far, this requirement has taken one direction.³¹ Then, in Robinson, somebody stood up who hoped to receive help from linguists but was deeply disappointed. He delved into a mountain of books³² but was rejected by linguists,³³ who expected (as he says) to receive acclamation only by people of their own kind.³⁴ A literary critic uses language quite

Gegenwart Gottes: Festschrift für Werner Neuer zum 65. Geburtstag, Studien zu Theologie und Bibel 18 (Wien: Lit, 2016), 193–205.

²⁸ Robinson, *The New Grammarians' Funeral*, 1ff., 32–33, and passim.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁰ Robinson, *The Survival of English*, 26.

³¹ Robinson, *The New Grammarians' Funeral*, 168.

³² Even though not a linguist, he had read everything by Chomsky until mid-1974 (*ibid.*, iv).

³³ Cf. the hate-filled review of Georgia M. Green in *Language* 53.2 (1977): 406–11.

³⁴ Robinson, *The New Grammarians' Funeral*, 13.

differently from a linguist.³⁵ The latter looks upon language-immanent structures and rules: language as a texture, a woven fabric. The former looks upon language with regard to its performative quasi-metaphysical (poetic, i.e., “making”) power³⁶—the reader is placed, via language or speech, before the things mentioned in the words and does not stand still looking at the forms of letters and words.³⁷ Robinson regrets the absence of awe and wonder at language of Chomsky and his language-scientists: “Awe at language should be present in linguistics and inform it. Whatever is the discipline in the subject ought to be what leads the student up to a sense of wonder.”³⁸

Robinson urges linguists to scrutinize language according to its meanings, dialects, and pitches in its everyday use and developments. These realities all too often evade Chomsky’s rules for complete or acceptable sentences!³⁹ The real hazards of language, as Ivor Richards says in a brief suggestive discussion, “are conspicuously not represented.”⁴⁰

Chomsky’s unredeemed pledge also consists of nonverbally explaining language,⁴¹ and ascribing generative or constitutive power to his rules.⁴² I cannot represent Robinson’s critique of Chomsky at length here. However, for the discussion of Nida’s translation theory, it is useful to have a look at Robinson’s evaluation of Chomsky’s theory of kernels, for example, the simple, active, and declarative sentences and their transformations. Why must kernels be in the active voice? It might be the case that active

³⁵ Ibid., 184: “It will seem strange to Chomsky and the surviving structuralists, that I have learned far more about language both from the philosophy of Collingwood and Wittgenstein and Rhees, and from the literary criticism of Leavis, than from the whole corpus of established linguistics” (almost the same list of names in Robinson, *Prayers for the New Babel*, 20).

³⁶ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 126.

³⁷ Robinson, *The New Grammarians’ Funeral*, 15ff.

³⁸ Ibid., vi, cf. 185. Cf. Robinson, *Prayers for the New Babel*, 18, after quoting from the 1980 Alternative Service Book and the New English Bible therein: “Creation is not expressible in English in these so casual temporal clauses. If the passage cannot evoke or make creation it cannot even report it. The result is a credibility gap. This story simply cannot be believed.” Robinson deems the New English Bible consequently “The Atheists’ Bible” (Robinson, *The Survival of English*, 40).

³⁹ For examples, cf. Robinson, *The New Grammarians’ Funeral*, 19–20, 37ff: As to irony: “TG grammar has no way of showing (although it is implied by common parlance) that saying something ironically is less basic to language than saying something straight” (ibid., 49). As to metaphor: “TG grammar can say nothing about metaphor, an obviously central case of aspect because in metaphor we speak of something in terms expository prose uses for something else: we take one thing as another” (ibid., 51).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁴¹ Ibid., 11, 52, 80ff., etc.

⁴² Ibid., 21: One is reminded of discussions about evolution mechanisms: If selection and mutation are recognized as factors for the length of the beaks of finches, what then do we have to say about the mere existence of finches?

sentences (according to Chomsky and thus Nida) can be generated and transformed more easily than passive ones. Perhaps it fits the parlance we are used to. However, there is, according to Robinson, no grammatical reason other than our culture-bound preference for simplicity. Why not, “for instance, take negative interrogative passives as kernels and derive declaratory actives as well as other forms from them”?

Chomsky tries to support his position by arguing that it is easier to derive the passive from the active than vice versa; in fact, it seems to me precisely as easy to transform passive into active as active into passive, and I believe this strengthens the system as pure grammar. We can merely state Chomsky’s rule the other way around to derive active from passive.⁴³

Therefore, the ambiguous “generate” should be specified: These rules are not dealing with real creation of language, but with description of a given wording.⁴⁴ Transformational grammar can be helpful for analyzing syntax but lacks rules for the application of rules. “There is no rule beyond the sense made, i.e. one’s pre-existent sense of language, for whether to apply a transformation at all.”⁴⁵

The absence of rules for the application of rules: Can one of the reasons for the diversity of new translations be found here? Moreover, Chomsky does not describe links between sentences or even paragraphs. It is a great disadvantage for engagement in language if linguists deal with sentences and literary critics, by contrast, deal with paragraphs, chapters, and books⁴⁶ and with “what utterances do in language. This includes some of what people often mean by the ‘effects’ of poetry—the workings of its images, rhythms, figures—but not our responses to them”!⁴⁷

Robinson’s critique of Chomsky, published the same year as *After Babel* by George Steiner,⁴⁸ is close to my critique of Nida. In addition to the issues listed above, I want to highlight the forcing of foreign languages into an English mold⁴⁹ and the devaluation of the idioms of biblical speech, which Robinson articulates powerfully: “It is interesting to see in others how Chomsky’s concentration on universals and/logical operations itself *distracts*

⁴³ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 33–34.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁸ George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

⁴⁹ Robinson, *The New Grammarians’ Funeral*, 80; cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 99, 256, 270, 290, 381.

his attention from language”!⁵⁰ Chomsky cannot understand a view of language as a creative and performative power (and without that, nothing in real life could be considered or changed, as Steiner and Robinson would say). It is an open question to what extent Nida could have done so:

This is an extreme not usually occupied by Chomsky of the position that would make language essentially a reflection of a separately-existing reality. If I look out of the window on the grey Welsh morning and say “There’s an oasis!” Chomsky, to be consistent, would have to say that what I say is false (i.e. incorrect assertion) rather than lies, poetry, a joke, philosophy, or madness!⁵¹

It has been demonstrated extensively elsewhere that Nida’s translation theory works like a filter on the plethora of the biblical metaphors, idioms, and concepts. What comes to light is that Nida’s thinking can be traced back to Cartesian linguistics (according to Chomsky⁵²) and certain romanticists in the nineteenth century. From there, the problem has progressed as follows:

1. Chomsky strived for a scientific linguistics.
2. Nida strived for a scientific theory of translation based upon Chomsky.
3. All too many new translations of the Bible resort to reductionism, as is well known.
4. Translators and publishers, who have swallowed Nida’s theory altogether with Chomsky’s mechanistic (and so atheistic) conception of language, have become deaf to challenges to dynamic-equivalent translation theory.

II. *End Dynamic-Equivalent Translating of the Bible!*

Can it be denied any longer that the coincidence of a growing number of Bible translations and growing ignorance of the Scriptures is no paradox, but a logical connection? Robinson has shown that the Bible according to Nida—that is, by the very transition from a biblically shaped religious language into a materialistic, facts-focused language—is *being made* strange. “The Bible *becomes* a very foreign book, needing copious notes and introduction

⁵⁰ Robinson, *The New Grammarians’ Funeral*, 141 (emphasis mine).

⁵¹ Ibid., 150.

⁵² Cf. Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 197–98, 205–7, 223–24, 349–50; and Heinzpeter Hempelmann, *Wortgetreu oder leserfreundlich? Grundfragen der Bibelübersetzung* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2005), esp. 47–56.

about such matters as the Spiritual Value of the Psalms.”⁵³

However, even after such a cutting critique as *The New Grammarians’ Funeral*, the condemned live on. Studies like those of Robinson, myself, and others⁵⁴ are unheard calls to stop dynamic equivalent translating of the Bible, at least into the European languages. We should reflect more on the legacy of Martin Luther and of the King James Version.⁵⁵ *As for the European languages, I would call for a moratorium on new translations!*

Obviously, no authority or church leader can issue such a decree to translators and Bible societies. But the church as a whole is, in my view, in desperate need of reaching an agreement as to whether the path of the pluralization and individualization of the Holy Scriptures should be followed. To narrow a Bible translation down in order to target certain audiences has raised such grave problems that we have to regain a new perspective on the manner and place of Bible translation in church and society. How long can that wait? The damage already done is enormous. What has been gained? Books with large numbers of copies. The winners? Some publishers. But we are not to do big business with the Word of God (2 Cor 2:17). The church, in turn, is about to lose its center. Not only the church is losing, but also, as Robinson has shown, our language as a whole, and thus the whole society.

Even outside the realm of Bible readers, in the range of secular writing and translating, scholars are calling for reconsideration. Werner Creutziger, a prize-honored translator of French, Serbo-Croatian, and Russian literature, has published a haunting series of essays. Here, he pointed to the dangers of a downward-spiral accommodation:

If we are good translators, we know something about the inventory of linguistic devices of our readers, their passive vocabulary, their passive knowledge of grammar—thus their reception competencies. The deception is mostly found in what we term “today’s language.” Those who cry out often and loud for “Today’s German” often mean something not far from commercial language. And from here, it is only a small step to the writing of mass media. The philosophy of viewing figures and the level of speaking weigh each other down. The main feature of the so-called “today’s language” is a reduction to a few main patterns. Whoever cries out loudly and primitively will certainly be heard by many, but he makes his receptors primitive and deaf. Soon, he will have to cry out even louder, even more primitively. Such modernity leads to a diminishing of the inventory of reception devices; it desensitizes and renders immature [*unmündig*]. Such pop-translating has its place in the theater and will link with some scenic procedures committed to the same spirit: drawing

⁵³ Robinson, *Survival of English*, 46 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁴ Cf. the bibliography in Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 403–61.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., David Norton, *The King James Bible: A Short History from Tyndale to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and for Luther, see Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 369–80.

attention to oneself without respect to further ramifications. It is always the same gag in endless variations: the gag of anachronism. Pop-translating gains its blinding impact from the antagonism between linguistic signals, glaringly pointing to the present, and an action, which will be considered, despite all, as a past one. By consequence, one of the worst mistakes my system of values knows happens: The matter—the piece of literature—is no longer at one with itself; it is destroyed esthetically.⁵⁶

That sounds like a critique against Nida (commercial language, in Nida “consumer language”), and an echo of Robinson. No wonder: we are dealing with problems far beyond the realm of the churches. Without mentioning Nida, Creutziger, a translator of literature, considers it absurd to write as if the translated author had been writing in German. The judgment applies to the claim that a translation would fulfill the same function as the original.⁵⁷ Whereas for Nida, the theorist, the highest goal is to reach the status of a new original, for Creutziger, the practitioner, this goal is devastating, because a translation can be well written, but if it does not—in the micro realm of communication—point elsewhere (besides the content), something crucial is missed.⁵⁸ “I think ... that the current developing German literature gives away possibilities of writing, and impoverishes possibilities of reception, if it embarks too keenly into the alleged linguistic ability or inability of readers.”⁵⁹

Creutziger’s judgment that a piece of literature would be “destroyed esthetically” reminds us of Robinson. What does this mean? Will even the matter of literature be destroyed by wrong esthetics, or would only esthetics be destroyed in the remaining material value and content of a translation? With Robinson, I fear the first alternative to be true. A parallel can also be found in consequences drawn. With respect to modern techniques (nuclear power and genome research), Creutziger pleads for reticence toward a “science” whose structure and goal is moving more and more from knowing to making.⁶⁰

I believe that the dangers of making are much greater than the dangers and disadvantages created by forgoing. I believe (would that be scientific optimism?) that with a great effort of research spirit—which would be necessary—the disadvantages of a forgoing can be minimized.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Werner Creutziger, *Schöne neue Sprache: Essays*, Ost-West-Express 10 (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2011), 109–10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 115–16. Creutziger pleads for new translations of important world literature if those extant are badly done, that is, erroneous. If old translations are bad, the reason is to be found mostly in them being made according to standards of modernity in their time (116).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 119ff.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

Such a forgoing, it seems to me, is advisable also for any new translations of the Bible in European languages, at least for those done by pupils of the Nida school. The effort to determine the dynamics of a Bible translation⁶² is a making (*Machenschaft*) and a functionalism in the realm of translation, even a rendering immature (*Unmündigstellen*) of the reader.⁶³ Only those who dare to expand the inventory of reception devices will reach an expansion. If utilization and expansion of the reception devices of the readers are not undertaken even in the translation of the most important text of Western culture, where else and why should they be undertaken at all? In my view, the efforts of publishers should be to shift to the production of great study Bibles or other helps for readers of one and the same biblical text, rather than filling the market with ever new texts that rival each other. "Quantities claim each other's room. Qualities complement each other."⁶⁴

To pursue an open and in-depth discussion on these intricate matters is not easy. Economic interests are great, maybe too great, and the ideologies criticized reject doubts on their activities.⁶⁵ Applying Creutziger to the case of Bible translation: The interests of publishers in ever-new Bible translations, often concealed by a simple missionary appeal, supersede a reflection on the problems caused by these quickly produced translations.⁶⁶ "Perhaps, nevertheless, the 'Great Dialogue' may be within reach."⁶⁷

⁶² Cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 309, 380, 387.

⁶³ Cf. Creutziger, *Schöne neue Sprache*, 108–9, 143.

⁶⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft*, 9th ed. (München: Kaiser, 1959), 26.

⁶⁵ Creutziger, *Schöne neue Sprache*, 123.

⁶⁶ Overview of the market: cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 22–40.

⁶⁷ Creutziger, *Schöne neue Sprache*, 128.

An Effective Response to the Lessons of History in Mongolia¹

JOHN GIBBENS AND N. ALTANCHIMEG
WITH LYNN SUCHY

Introduction

Garamtseren Bayarjargal's² article "Re-Establishment of the Christian Church in Mongolia: The Mongolian Standard Version Translation by National Christians" describes a past Christian presence among Mongolians and asserts that post-1990 Mongolian Christianity is not new, but is in a process of "re-establishment." The article also describes Mongolian Bible translation history with special emphasis given to the author's Mongolian Standard Version Bible translation project.

Bayarjargal's article raises five questions the answers to which explain why the Bible Society of Mongolia's approach to history is different and results in translations which convey Bible meaning more distinctly from Mongolian Buddhist meanings.

¹ This response is submitted by request of the authors following the publication of the article by Bayarjargal Garamtseren, "Re-Establishment of the Christian Church in Mongolia: The Mongolian Standard Version Translation by National Christians," *Unio cum Christo* 2.2 (October 2016): 49–66.

² Otherwise known as Bayarjargal Garamtseren or G. Bayarjargal (Mongolian publications name people in this way, since Garamtseren is the name of Bayarjargal's father).

1. *Is Christianity Being Validated by Post-1990 Ethnic Values and Why?*

When missionaries arrived in Mongolia after 1990, their Mongolian contacts tended to legitimize Christianity based on post-1990 ethnic values.³ The important question on Mongolian minds was, “Was Christianity in our cultural past?” Articles appeared by Mongolians associated with Christianity claiming that Christianity was not new but a part of Mongolia’s past. Bayarjargal’s article fits this genre, since he similarly asserts that Mongolian Christianity is not new but that God is, “properly speaking, *re-establishing*—his church” (emphasis added).⁴

When Christian missions began to come to Mongolia around 1990, so did Mongolia’s ethnic revival, which created a heightened awareness of Mongolia’s ancient history and widespread emulation of Buddhist and shamanist traditions. This revival peaked after the Soviet system collapsed around 1990. Although some Mongolians were sad to see Russian influence wane, others regarded Russians as a “departing colonial power ... [which made] Mongols feel like second-class citizens in their own country.”⁵ These drastic changes made Mongolians feel vulnerable about their national borders, independence, and racial purity.⁶ They viewed foreigners as “powerful” and “threatening,” to be “admired and emulated,” but to also “be kept out.”⁷ In essence, Mongolians felt “hybridized” by the Sovietization process, and “desperate to claim some authentic Mongol origins.”⁸

Mongolians *en masse* looked to their deep past and found authentic Mongol roots for genuine Mongolian identity, especially in the founding era of Chinggis Khan.⁹ Cultural forms such as ancient religious beliefs, stories, proverbs, clothing styles, and genealogical records were rediscovered and popularized, and in this way “the traditional past ... emerged as [the] critical source of authority in post-socialist Mongolia.”¹⁰

One advantage of claiming Christianity as a part of Mongolia’s past was expressed by Hugh Kemp during a symposium in Ulaanbaatar. He

³ Jeffrey Blythe, “Evangelical Christianity in Post-socialist Mongolia: An Ethnography of an Encounter” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2000).

⁴ Bayarjargal, “Re-Establishment,” 50.

⁵ Christopher Kaplonski, *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: The Memory of Heroes* (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2004), 36.

⁶ Uradyn Erdenebulag, *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 81.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 137, 170.

¹⁰ Caroline Humphrey, “The Moral Authority of the Past in Post-Socialist Mongolia,” *Religion, State and Society* 20.3–4 (1992): 375–89.

encouraged Mongolian Christians to “hold their heads high” as a *legitimate* part of their modern nation, since Mongolian Christians had played a key role in the nation’s past.¹¹

The first word of Bayarjargal’s title, “Re-Establishment,” represents this ongoing effort to validate Mongolian Christianity by post-1990 ethnic values, which idealize traditional cultural forms.

II. *Is Modern Christianity a Re-Establishment or a Brand-New Expansion?*

In a significant sense, post-1990 Christianity among ethnic Outer Mongolians is a brand-new advance and not a re-establishment.

Bayarjargal’s article repeatedly refers to Christian “Turkic” tribes in the ancient Mongolian empire, particularly regarding the Kerait (Turco-Mongol), Naiman, Ongud, and Uyghur peoples. However, none of these were ethnic Mongolian Mongolian-speaking tribes. While scholars agree that Christianity existed among various Turkic groups within the Mongol empire, they see little evidence to suggest that Mongolian-speaking ethnic Mongolians were also Christian. The same may be said about individuals highlighted in Bayarjargal’s article, particularly Markos (also known as Yaballaha III) and Rabban Sauma.¹² Neither of these Christians were ethnic Mongolians whose mother tongue was Mongolian.

After 1990, when hundreds of Outer Mongolians responded favorably to Christianity, it was the first time in history that many Mongolian-speaking ethnic Mongolians had done so. It is also significant that this unprecedented response came as interested Mongolians widely used the 1990 Bible Society of Mongolia New Testament and its descriptive term for God.¹³ In 1997, Kemp asserted, “This numerical growth [of Mongolian Christians] has all been on the back of the BSM Shin Geree [1990 BSM NT] and must be evidence enough for its efficacy.”¹⁴

However, the 1990 New Testament was eventually sidelined for various reasons. One of these reasons is related to Mongolia’s post-1990 ethnic revival, which influenced Mongolians associated with Christianity to prefer traditional Mongolian Buddhist or shamanist words for Bible concepts.

¹¹ Hugh P. Kemp, “Töv Aziin Nutag dah’ Ilgeentiin niigemlegüüdiin Üil Ajillagaa (18–20 зууны эхэн),” Ulaanbaatar, May 22, 2015.

¹² Bayarjargal, “Re-Establishment,” 53–54.

¹³ Past Mongolian Bible translations used “Buddha” (*Burhan*) for God.

¹⁴ Hugh P. Kemp, *To Feel the Spirit: A History of the Mongolian Bible* (Auckland: Privately Printed, 1997), 58.

III. What Are Important Lessons from Mongolia's History?

Bayarjargal competently explains translation challenges that swept over Mongolia after 1990, a semantic confusion that also swamped Christian missions.¹⁵ During these years, ill-chosen words for Bible concepts were popularized. This happened as missionaries commonly depended on interpreters who were untrained in translation principles, unfamiliar with Bible teaching and concepts, and often had only a rudimentary understanding of the foreign languages used by missionaries.¹⁶

During the 1990s, the word *Burhan* (the term Mongolians use for Buddha) was popularized as the word for God. All that Bayarjargal mentions about this word is that Isaac Schmidt in the early 1800s rejected *Burhan* for God because “[Schmidt] saw the latter term [*Burhan*] being equal to Buddha.”¹⁷ By stating it like this, he makes Schmidt’s concern seem novel (unusual) rather than universal. In truth, *Burhan* primarily meant Buddha in Schmidt’s day, still primarily means Buddha, and has a Buddhist image among modern Mongolians.¹⁸

One reason Bayarjargal supports using *Burhan* for God¹⁹ is hinted at when he twice describes *Burhan* as “the traditional” word for “God,” once juxtaposed with the Bible Society of Mongolia’s term, which, in context, is criticized as “a new, non-traditional term for God.”²⁰ It suggests that “the traditional” is preferred to the “non-traditional.” However, “the traditional” in this case means preferring a Buddhist term for God.

Many Mongolian pastors also support using *Burhan* for God based on their understanding of its traditional meanings that predate Buddhism. For instance, although *Burhan* today primarily means Buddha, and almost certainly meant Buddha originally,²¹ a prominent Mongolian Bible school

¹⁵ Bayarjargal, “Re-Establishment,” 64.

¹⁶ Before 1990, Russian was Mongolia’s second language.

¹⁷ Bayarjargal, “Re-Establishment,” 59.

¹⁸ The primary meaning of a word is “that sense that is culturally more relevant to more people.” John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God, with Scripture and Topical Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 172.

¹⁹ Bayarjargal’s Mongolian Standard Version translation is set to employ *Burhan* (Buddha/Buddhist image/idol/god) for God.

²⁰ Bayarjargal, “Re-Establishment,” 59–60. Perhaps Bayarjargal’s reason for describing *Burhan* as “the traditional term” for God is based on its usage in past Mongolian Bible translations and missionary efforts. However, before 1990, so few Mongolians called God *Burhan* that this usage is oddly more “traditional” for foreign missionaries than for Mongolians.

²¹ This is the conclusion, by far, of the broadest range of scholars. See, e.g., Aleksandra Wazgird, “God on the Steppe: Christian Missionaries in Mongolia after 1990” (MA thesis, University of Oslo, 2011), 110.

principal demurs, stating, “*Burkhan* [*Burhan*] was originally used in the pre-Buddhist context, and only later adopted by Buddhism, and therefore is the correct generic Mongolian word for ‘God.’”²² Notice that this reasoning implies that what *Burhan* means today is not as important as what *Burhan* may have meant in Mongolia’s deep past. This thinking reflects post-1990 ethnic values, which consider past Buddhist and shamanist cultural forms as traditionally Mongolian.

The Bible Society of Mongolia, however, approaches history differently. That is, while the “Re-Establishment” article promotes the *emulation* of Mongolian history and traditional forms like the Buddhist word *Burhan* for God, it instead *evaluates* Mongolian Bible translation history, including the use of *Burhan* for God.

The Bible Society of Mongolia recognized that between 1846 and 1990 most missionaries depended on the 1846 *Literary Version* of the New Testament or its later editions, all of which used *Burhan* for God. These missionaries included Stallybrass and Swan in Siberia (1818–1840), James Gilmour in Mongolia and China (1870–1890), and several missionaries to Mongolians mainly in China before 1990. Yet these past efforts combined had negligible results.²³ While there are several reasons for this, the Bible Society of Mongolia discovered one factor was that the use of *Burhan* for God confused Mongolians. For instance, the society found that several past missionaries had rejected this term, including Gilmour, perhaps Mongolia’s most famous missionary, who concluded that *Burhan* for God had misled Mongolians and that another term should be used.²⁴

The Bible Society of Mongolia also surveyed thirty-five Mongolian dictionaries dated from 1717 onwards, and they depict the primary meaning of *Burhan* as Buddhist in every case. The Buddhist meanings of *Burhan* were confirmed by Mongolian students at Leeds University in the UK (fall 1971), Mongolian scholars at Mongolian State University in Ulaanbaatar (fall 1972), and Mongolian participants in a Bible translation workshop in Ulaanbaatar (spring 1993). Repeatedly, Mongolians confirmed that *Burhan* primarily means Buddha and is not appropriate for the Christian God.²⁵ Most professional linguists who have studied this word concur that *Burhan* primarily

²² Wazgird, “God,” 110; Blythe, “Evangelical,” 162–63, 175–80.

²³ John Gibbens, “Concise History of Expressing the Nature of God in Mongolian and Resultant UBS/BSM Relations,” n.d., Pdf., 4.

²⁴ Gilmour recommended that *Degedü ezen* (High lord) be used for God instead of *Burhan*. See Gerda Ollén and Joel Erickson, *Vid Gobiökens Gränser* (Stockholm: Svenska Mongolmissionens Förlag, 1943), 223–24.

²⁵ Gibbens, “Concise History,” 4.

means Buddha and if used for God creates a confusing blend of Buddhist and Bible meanings (see Caesar Malan,²⁶ Daniel Arichea,²⁷ Yutaka Shibayama,²⁸ Maria Tatar,²⁹ M. K. Syn,³⁰ Jeanice Conner,³¹ and John Gibbens³²).

IV. What Are the Highest Priorities of Bible Translation?

Based on this research, the Bible Society of Mongolia made two strategic translation decisions. First, since past Mongolian Bibles were form-based,³³ it would produce meaning-based translations.³⁴ Second, since past Mongolian Bibles borrowed Buddhist religious words,³⁵ including Buddha for God, it would introduce descriptive terms for Bible concepts including *Yertöntsii ezen* (owner/lord of universe/world) for God.³⁶ This strategy followed the practice of famous Mongolian translators who used descriptive terms for words in modern science, technology, and medicine so that Mongolians could accurately understand concepts.³⁷ These decisions were validated as surprisingly effective in the early 1990s.

However, by the mid-1990s, missionaries and their interpreters were promoting the Mongolian Union Bible Society translation, which

²⁶ Solomon Caesar Malan, *A Letter to the Right Honourable The Earl of Shaftesbury; President of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1856).

²⁷ Daniel Arichea, "Report on Mongolian Visit," 1993, 1, Manuscript, Bible Society Archive, Bible Society of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar.

²⁸ Yutaka Shibayama, "Burkhan and Kami," *Mongolica: An International Annual of Mongol Studies* 6.27 (1995): 636–50.

²⁹ Maria Magdolna Tatar, "Pure Souls and Evil Demons: Towards a Christian Terminology in Mongolian," in *Life and Afterlife and Apocalyptic Concepts in the Altaic World: Proceedings of the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference (PLAC), Château Pietersheim, Belgium, September, 3–8, 2000*, ed. Michael Knüppel and Alois van Tongerloo (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 65.

³⁰ M. K. Syn, "How to Translate 'God' in the Inner Mongolian Context," *The Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia* 5 (2006): 109–33.

³¹ Jeanice Conner, "How Faint a Whisper: The Role of Translation in the Development of Syncretism in Mongolia," August 2008, Bible Society Archive, Bible Society of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar.

³² John W. Gibbens, "Modern Evangelical Mission in Mongolia, 1971–2011: Communication and Mutual Misunderstanding" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2012).

³³ Or formal correspondence translation.

³⁴ Or functional correspondence translation.

³⁵ Mongolian Buddhist words have dominant Buddhist meanings, yet include shamanist meanings from the merging of Tibetan Buddhism with Mongolian Tengerism (shamanism) in the sixteenth century.

³⁶ This term was discovered by Gibbens in a 1968 dictionary by Nyamsuren and then was approved for "God" by academics at Mongolian State University. Criticisms of *Yertöntsii ezen* for God are not addressed in this present response.

³⁷ D. Dashdavaa, "Orchuulgyn onolyn, hel shinjlelin zarim asuudal," *Orchuulah erdem* 2 (1976): 16.

popularized the use of *Burhan* for God. This happened just as Mongolian Buddhism also robustly revived.

In his 1888 book *Among the Mongols*, Gilmour laments, “After a Mongol has received some idea of Christianity, he for the most part expresses himself entirely satisfied. He says it is good. It is like his own religion. It is the same.”³⁸ By 2010, Mongolians³⁹ were observed to commonly say that Buddhism and Christianity are the same and that the *Burhan* of the Buddhists and the *Burhan* of the Christians are the same.⁴⁰ History was repeating itself, a situation that the 1990 Bible Society of Mongolia New Testament and its term *Yertöntsiin ezen* for God was designed to avoid but into which the Mongolian Union Bible Society Bible and its term *Burhan* for God had plunged headlong. One lesson of history is that when Mongolian Buddhism is dominant, using *Burhan* for God in a Christian context confuses Mongolians, and efforts by Christians to make “Buddha” mean “God” are impeded.⁴¹

Validating Christianity by post-1990 ethnic values may be beneficial, but the priorities of Bible translation are more valuable. The highest priority of Bible translation is to convey the original Bible meaning accurately, clearly, and naturally in the target language. No other value or agenda is more important, and thus international Bible translation agencies urge translators “to make every effort to ensure that no political, ideological, social, cultural, or theological agenda is allowed to distort the translation.”⁴²

V. Are BSM's Source Languages Questionable?

The “Re-Establishment” article explains well the disadvantages of hard-to-understand Bible translations and translations based on secondary languages.⁴³ However, the author errs in stating that the 2015 Bible Society of Mongolia *Bibli* is “either translated from a secondary language or hard to be verified as coming from the original languages.”⁴⁴ A similar misimpression is given in an American Bible Society article that claims that Bayarjargal's

³⁸ James Gilmour, *Among the Mongols* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 194.

³⁹ Frequently Mongolians associated with Christianity.

⁴⁰ “*Ulaanbaatar hotyn irgediin shashiny talaarh medleg, igtel ühemshil*” *Sunalgaany tailan* (Ulaanbaatar: “Emong Mongolia” HHK, 2011).

⁴¹ Since the sixteenth century Buddhism has been Mongolia's dominant religion. Even so, an attempt is being made to use words from the current, majority religion for Bible concepts.

⁴² Forum of Bible Agencies International, “Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation” (approved April 1999; revised October 2006); cited June 7, 2017; online: http://www.ifoba.org/uploadedFiles/about_ifoba/Translation Standards.pdf.

⁴³ Bayarjargal, “Re-Establishment,” 62–63.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

Mongolian Standard Version translation “will be the first Mongolian Bible translated directly from Hebrew and Greek.”⁴⁵

Contrary to the above assertions, both the 1990 New Testament and the 2015 *Bibli* of the Bible Society of Mongolia are indeed firmly based on original Bible languages and not on a secondary language such as English. Again, these Bible translations are founded on the true meaning of the best available source texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

Regarding the 2015 *Bibli*, it was constantly checked for accuracy against the original languages by Bible Society of Mongolia’s translation team and moreover by United Bible Society and Wycliffe Bible Translators consultants well schooled in the original Bible languages. Gibbens, who is responsible for Biblical exegesis in the Bible Society of Mongolia’s translation work, studied New Testament Greek at Moorlands Bible College in the 1960s and then Hebrew at the University of Leeds in the 1980s, first in the Theology Department, then later in the Semitics Department under a Jewish Rabbi. Furthermore, Wycliffe Bible Translators and United Bible Society consultants approved the 2015 *Bibli* as trustworthy, reliable, and checked against Hebrew and Greek source texts.⁴⁶

Can a Bible translation be verified as translated from the source languages of Scripture by simply looking at its texts? Please consider how differently the King James Version, the 1881–85 Revised Version, the Revised Standard Version, the English Standard Version, and the Good News Bible differ from each other in form and style, yet all are based on the original Bible languages. The reason for the vast differences is the result of such things as different translation emphases (meaning-based versus form-based) and differing scholarly opinion about meaning.

Since verification of source languages by examining a target language translation text cannot be certain, claims made by other Bible translation teams regarding their source languages should be accepted rather than cast into doubt.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ “A New Chapter for the Bible in Mongolia,” *American Bible Society News*; March 31, 2016; Online: news.americanbible.org/article/a-new-chapter-for-the-bible-in-mongolia.

⁴⁶ Carl Gross, Stephen Pattemore, and Larry Allen, “Translation Consultant Approval Form,” June 2, 2008.

⁴⁷ Besides the Bible Society of Mongolia, the *Mongolian Bible Translation Team* (2016) and *First Bible* of the Trinitarian Bible Society (New Testament published July 2017) claim Hebrew and Greek as source languages.

VI. *An Excellent Mongolian Bible Translation*

Although Bayarjargal's assertion is true that modern translated publications commonly "give a 'foreign' and translationese feeling"⁴⁸ to the Mongolian language, we must again confirm that the Bible Society of Mongolia's 1990 New Testament and 2015 *Bibli* are definitely not in that category of translation. Please consider the following: In October 2016, during a drive to Hentii Province, two Mongolians discussed the pleasing qualities of the 2015 *Bibli*. One young man remarked that he heard this new Bible for the first time read aloud at church camp and the following Monday went straight to the local bookstore to buy one for his family. He added that he and his wife now love this translation, since its words go straight to the heart and they feel like they are reading the Bible for the first time.

The 2015 *Bibli* effectively responds to lessons from Mongolian Bible translation and missions history. It is a meaning-based translation which is tightly rendered, based on the original languages, and conveys Bible meaning accurately, clearly, and beautifully in natural Mongolian. Its terminology communicates Bible meaning distinctly from dominant Mongolian Buddhist meanings, a strategy that proved surprisingly effective in the early 1990s. It is our hope that many Mongolians will come to trust Christ through this excellent Bible translation.

Response

BAYARJARGAL GARAMTSEREN

My response follows the order of John Gibbens's questions (hereafter Gibbens).

I. In Mongolia in the 1990s and especially in the 2000s, there has been a search for the source of true Mongolian identity, a search commented upon by Mongolist scholars. I believe such a phenomenon is no surprise and even expected when a nation's identity and history have been seriously altered and rewritten for a political agenda for so long. However, my characterization of the history of Christianity in Mongolia is not based on these "ethnic values" and "cultural past" (to use Gibbens's wording, 228). I want to specifically emphasize that my references are not ethnic and cultural, but historical. Since the past history of Christianity in Central Asia has only recently

⁴⁸ Bayarjargal, "Re-Establishment," 64.

received the attention of scholars and researchers, I wanted to bring up related historical and archeological facts; the existence of Turkic-Mongol tribes who had Christian faith, ecclesiastical structure, and spirituality in the Church of the East during the Mongol empire, Markos's leadership of the Church of the East, and translation of the Scriptures into Mongolian are all little-known historical facts. They establish the historical roots of Christianity in Mongolia.

II. In the strict sense of the term, Gibbens is right in his statement that “post-1990 Christianity among ethnic *Outer Mongolians* is a brand-new advance and not a re-establishment” (227, emphasis added). Indeed, the term *Outer Mongolians* signifies the division of Mongolia into Outer and Inner Mongolia in the first half of the twentieth century. In my article, however, I have used the term “Mongolians” in the broad sense to refer to both today's ethnic Mongolians and their ancestors. At the outset, I wrote, “I will attempt to give a brief overview of the history of Christianity and Scripture translation *in the land of Mongolia*” and stated that “inhabitants of modern-day Mongolia and Central Asia in the pre-Mongol period ... were mainly *Turkic-speaking tribes*” (emphasis added).¹ These Turkic-speaking tribes were a large part of the Mongol Empire.² Thus they are ancestors of present-day Mongolians. Their history, whether ethnic or religious, is a part of the history of all Mongolians. The ethnicity of today's Mongolians is a result and amalgamation of intermarriage and mix between many Mongol and Turkic tribes, especially during the Mongol Empire within the royal families, on ethnic, social, cultural, and linguistic levels. The history continued with wars, relocation of people, subjugation, foreign oppression, and so on. To expect today's Mongolians to have the same ethnicity as past Mongolians would be impossible and anachronistic. The ecclesiology, liturgy, and function of the Church of the East in the past centuries were distinctly different from those of today's Christian Church, especially the Protestant evangelical church. However, I have purposely used the term *Christian Church* to include all, despite their shape and form, who claim Jesus Christ as their only Savior and Lord. Therefore, the presence of Christianity in the land of Mongolia today is a re-establishment of the Christian Church and not a brand-new advancement.

¹ Bayarjargal Garamtseren, “Re-Establishment of the Christian Church in Mongolia: The Mongolian Standard Version Translation by National Christians,” *Unio cum Christo* 2.2 (October 2016): 50.

² Ibid.

There is no doubt that the 1990 Bible Society of Mongolia New Testament was widely read and greatly used for God's purposes in the early 1990s, but it must be remembered that it was the only Mongolian translation readily available at that time.

III. and IV. Gibbens's third point concerns the use of the term *Burkhan*, and the fourth point asserts that such use confuses Mongolians. He states, "By 2010, Mongolians were observed to commonly say that Buddhism and Christianity are the same and that the *Burhan* of the Buddhists and the *Burhan* of the Christians are the same" (233). As a Mongolian, I do not think this generalization is true for most Mongolians, and it can be acceptable for some only in the sense that the message of Christianity (or any other religion) is the same as that of Buddhism (or vice versa), despite what term(s) they may use. Furthermore, the origin of the term *Burkhan* is debated; *Burkhan* can refer to Buddha but does not mean Buddha and Buddha is not the only reference. The term *Burkhan* is a general term that can also be used in reference to a deity, mother, parent, nature, force, spiritual power, and so forth, just as the English word "God/god" can be used in various religious settings. Thus, Gibbens is in error when he states that the "past Mongolian Bibles borrowed Buddhist religious words, including Buddha for God" (232). These translators did not use the word Buddha, but *Burkhan*; they are not the same. Furthermore, Gibbens is not correct in saying that Mongolian Christians are trying to "to make 'Buddha' mean 'God'" (233). They are not using the word "Buddha," but "*Burkhan*." Today no Mongolian Christians use the word "Buddha" to refer to the God of the Bible. Certainly there is no such effort to change the meaning of the word "Buddha."

The point that the use of the term *Burkhan* might cause confusion to Mongolians could be a legitimate concern, but in reality, the whole Christian context, biblical teaching, and worship completely rules out this possibility. It will be informative to read Gibbens's own validation of this point, but unfortunately his PhD thesis is embargoed for consultation until year 2032.³ A few odd individuals might think that Jesus is Buddha, but I have yet to see a group of Mongolians thinking so. Tens of thousands of Mongolians have come to biblical faith in Jesus through a translation using the term *Burkhan* and their lives are transformed by Jesus. The goal of our Bible translation is the same: to present the biblical meaning in accurate, clear, and natural language.

³ <http://lib.leeds.ac.uk/record=b3261785~S5> Shelf mark: not available for consultation before 1st October 2032.

V. The 2015 Bible Society of Mongolia *Bibli* contains transliterations of some proper names that markedly differ from the Hebrew original; the reproducing of unpronounced letters (e.g., the final *h* [ח] in biblical Hebrew) seems to indicate a secondary source language. This is my personal opinion, however, and does not have to be accepted. I have informed the writer of the article, “A New Chapter for the Bible in Mongolia,” about the incorrect information that the Mongolian Standard Version is the first translation from the original languages, but the correction has not appeared yet.⁴

⁴ See “A New Chapter for the Bible in Mongolia,” March 31, 2016, American Bible Society, <http://news.americanbible.org/article/a-new-chapter-for-the-bible-in-mongolia>.

The *Reformed Dogmatics* of Geerhardus Vos¹

RICHARD B. GAFFIN JR.

Many readers of this journal are familiar with Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949), fairly seen as the father of Reformed biblical theology for his numerous publications in this area. These largely date from the period 1893–1932, when he was the first occupant of the chair of biblical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, and after that in his retirement. Less well known is that prior to his Princeton years, he taught at the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Church, now Calvin Theological Seminary, in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

During this time (1888–1893), when instruction at the Theological School was in Dutch, Vos taught a wide range of subjects, including systematic theology (dogmatics). The latter resulted in the circulation of material that, though originally produced for the classroom, led to the publication, handwritten, of *Dogmatiek* in 1896. This, in turn, was subsequently transcribed into typescript and printed in 1910. While the 1896 version is apparently in Vos's own hand, the transcription is almost certainly by some other person or persons. There is no good reason, however, to question that it was done with Vos's full knowledge and approval. The *Reformed Dogmatics* is a translation of this transcription, corrected or supplemented in a few places in light of the 1896 version.²

¹ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5 vols., trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012–2016). In this article I have made some use of material in several of the prefaces to these volumes.

² An extensive bibliography of Vos's writings is in James T. Dennison Jr., *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 89–110, on the *Dogmatiek*, 90, 92.

The *Dogmatiek* has received very little attention, due in large part to its being published in the United States, where a reading knowledge of Dutch was and remains limited. Copies of the 1910 transcription, published in three leather-bound volumes, are found today mostly in the libraries of a few theological institutions and universities. I came into possession of a copy many years ago as a student and soon learned to appreciate it as a work of considerable value.

In early 2011, Logos Bible Software contacted me about producing a digital English translation of the *Dogmatiek* and asked if I would be interested in doing the translation. That I was interested is an understatement. As I had benefitted over the years from consulting it for my own work, I had often wished that a complete English translation were available, much as I had long wished that for Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. But for several reasons—primarily its length, which comes to just under 1200 pages, six-and-a-half by nine-and-a-half inches, single-spaced, and given my age and existing commitments—I was reluctant to undertake the translation on my own.

Logos Bible Software then agreed to recruiting a stable of translators, each of whom would be assigned a portion (some translators more than one), which would be sent to me for review and finalization of the translation. The project went forward in this way beginning in 2012, as translators worked with PDF picture files from the 1910 transcription for each page in their assigned portions. In this regard, it would be remiss not to acknowledge indebtedness to the unknown person or persons responsible for what has proved to be the careful transcription work done over a century ago. Those labors, now digitized, made this translation project immeasurably more feasible.

Initially, the goal was to have the translation completed and published by the end of 2013. This, however, soon proved to be unrealistic. The time required for my review proved to be much longer than had been anticipated. I remain grateful for those who prepared initial translations—their names can be found in the volumes on which they worked. Without their considerable labors, the *Reformed Dogmatics* would not have seen the light of day. Still, with the revisions, major and minor, that proved necessary or advisable, the final volume did not appear until late 2016. If I had known at the outset how much of my time the translation would take, I might have hesitated

For a survey of his life, see 13–85. Recently, Danny Olinger has written a thoroughly researched and important fourteen-chapter biography published serially in volumes 25–28 of *Ordained Servant Online*, beginning in October 2016 with “Geerhardus Vos: Life in the Old Country, 1862–1881,” https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=573&issue_id=118.

taking it on, even as a team effort. But there is no question that it was a project well worth doing and for me personally, for all I that I learned from Vos over the years about Scripture and devotion to the God of Scripture, a labor of love.

The translation has aimed as much as possible for formal rather than dynamic equivalence. Nothing has been deleted, no sections elided or their content summarized in an abbreviated form. Vos's occasionally elliptical style in presenting material, originally meant for the classroom rather than for published circulation, has been retained. The relatively few instances of grammatical ellipsis unclear in English have been expanded, either without notation or, where the expansion is more extensive, placed within brackets.

It should be noted, however, that this is not a critical translation. No effort was made, for instance, to verify the accuracy and provide exact bibliographic details for all the secondary sources Vos cites or quotes, usually by referring to no more than the author and title and sometimes only to the author. Explanatory footnotes have been kept to a minimum. An effort was made to verify Scripture references, and occasional instances of typographical error were corrected without that being indicated.

During the course of the translation the decision, very much welcome, was made to publish a print as well as the digital edition. So, the *Reformed Dogmatics*, with full indices, is available in both forms—the print edition from Lexham Press, the digital edition from Logos Bible Software, divisions of the Faithlife Corporation.

In its basic structure, the *Reformed Dogmatics* follows the conventional *loci* or topical approach, using a question and answer format throughout. The first four of its five volumes treat, in turn, theology proper, anthropology, Christology, and soteriology, with the final volume covering ecclesiology, the means of grace, including a lengthy discussion of the sacraments, and eschatology, both individual and general.

Dealt with in volume 1, along with the knowability, names, being, and attributes of God, and the Trinity, are the decrees of God in general, predestination, creation, and providence. Covered in volume 2 are the nature of man, sin, and the covenant of grace, distinguished from the covenant of works and the covenant of redemption (counsel of peace). Christology is treated in terms of names, natures, person and natures, offices, and states in volume 3. Volume 4 begins with a lengthy discussion of the *ordo salutis* before dealing with regeneration and calling, conversion, faith, justification, and sanctification.

The relative distribution of attention to the topics treated in volume 5 is striking and will likely be surprising to those familiar with the interest in

eschatology prominent in Vos's later work in biblical theology. Here less than a fifth of the whole is devoted to eschatology, the rest to the church and the means of grace—with approximately sixty percent more attention to baptism alone than to eschatology, and only slightly less to the Lord's Supper than to eschatology.

No doubt a disappointment to many readers, there is no introduction (prolegomena) to systematic theology. It is unclear if—and if so, where—this area was covered in the curriculum of the Theological School at that time and whether Vos or someone else taught it.³ In that regard, however, in volume 5, under “The Means of Grace,” the answer to question 11, “In how many senses can the expression ‘the word of God’ be understood?” (83–84), warrants careful consideration, not only in its own right, but also because it provides an indication of key elements that would have surely marked Vos's formal treatment of the doctrines of special revelation and Scripture.

Several further overall observations may be made here about the *Reformed Dogmatics*.

First is the question of antecedents, particularly its immediate antecedents. Were there teachers or others contemporary to Vos or from the recent past who may have had a significant influence on his views or directly contributed to his handling and presentation of material? Vos himself, whether in the *Reformed Dogmatics* or elsewhere, provides no answer to this question. He gives no indication of a current or more recent Reformed theologian or theologians to whom he is indebted or upon whose work he sees himself as building. My limited efforts at looking into this question shed no light on its answer. Perhaps in time others may be able to do that.

Among contemporaries and near contemporaries with whom he was close theologically are certainly Charles Hodge, Abraham Kuyper, B. B. Warfield, and Herman Bavinck. But Vos makes only passing references on specific issues to Hodge and little more to Kuyper—sometimes, particularly for Hodge, to dissent. There is no mention of Bavinck or Warfield, although he carried on a considerable correspondence with both during his time in Grand Rapids, sometimes touching on matters theological.⁴

What is clear, though, along with an impressive grasp of the history of doctrine, is a committed use of the Reformed standards, especially the

³ My thanks to Mark A. Garcia for verifying this state of affairs from the resources available in the Heritage Hall Archive at the Calvin College and Seminary Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

⁴ For Vos's side of ongoing correspondence with Kuyper, Bavinck, and Warfield, see Dennison, *Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, 116–203 (for the time prior to and during his Grand Rapids period, 116–78). None of this correspondence sheds any light on the existence of the *Dogmatiek*.

Heidelberg Catechism, and frequent references, largely appreciative, to the works of a number of earlier Reformed theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Cited most often are John Calvin and, among English-speaking theologians, John Owen.

The *Reformed Dogmatics* invites comparisons. Two that suggest themselves immediately and as potentially profitable may be noted here. Mention has already been made a couple of times of Bavinck, and with good reason, because of the ties between the two men. The slightly younger Vos (by seven years) considered Bavinck not only a close theological ally but also a friend, and that appears to have been mutual. Consequently, the availability of the *Dogmatics* translation of each will now enable English readers not only to compare them but also to do that with the anticipation that whatever differences emerge will also disclose substantial affinity. As that comparison is explored, it should be kept in mind that Vos's work antedates Bavinck's. The first volume of Bavinck (in Dutch) did not appear until 1895, after Vos's Grand Rapids period and the completion of his *Dogmatiek*.⁵

An obvious comparison to be made of course is within Vos himself, between the early and the later Vos, between the systematic theologian and the biblical theologian. Undertaking that comparison will be of particular interest to many who would agree that F. F. Bruce's characterization of *The Pauline Eschatology* provides an apt description of his work in biblical theology as a whole: "indeed outstandingly great ... a rare exegetical feast."⁶

How does the *Reformed Dogmatics* compare?⁷ That question can only be touched on briefly and selectively here. But an important reference point for any comparison made is provided by Vos himself, who is clear in affirming the thoroughly positive, complementary relationship he sees between the two disciplines. He is emphatic on this point in his Princeton inaugural

⁵ Vos provided lengthy and appreciative reviews of volume 1 (1895) and volume 2 (1897) of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* soon after each appeared; see Richard B. Gaffin Jr., ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (1980; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 475–93.

⁶ On the front cover of the 1953 Eerdmans reprint.

⁷ For reflections on his work in biblical theology (or "History of Special Revelation," the designation he much preferred), and its significance, see especially throughout the Olinger biography cited in footnote 2 and my "Vos, Geerhardus," in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2007), 1016–19, with the literature cited there, 1019; and my "Introduction," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ix–xxiii; see also Dennison, *Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, 36–41, 49–59, and the editor's "Introduction: The Writings of Geerhardus Vos," in Danny E. Olinger, ed., *A Geerhardus Vos Anthology. Biblical and Theological Insights Alphabetically Arranged* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 1–27.

address in the spring of 1894,⁸ a point that is echoed decades later, well after his retirement.⁹ My own conclusion, after completing the translation of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, is that whatever differences may yet come to light, it seems safe to say that subsequent comparisons will continue to substantiate continuity between his systematic- and biblical-theological work, a continuity that is deep and pervasive.

Still, there are observable differences, several of which may be mentioned here. Particularly noteworthy for those familiar with his biblical-theological writings, in volumes 1 and 3 he cites Romans 1:4 as a proof text for the deity of Christ. This contrasts with the position he had already arrived at by 1912 in “The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit”¹⁰ and reinforced later in *The Pauline Eschatology*—that verse 4 refers to the transformation of the incarnate Christ by the Holy Spirit in his resurrection and that the contrast in verses 3 and 4 is not between the human and divine natures of Christ but between his state of humiliation followed by his state of exaltation.

Also, in volume 3, in places where we might expect it, lacking is any indication of the already-not yet structure of biblical eschatology. By volume 5, however, despite the relative lack of attention given to eschatology noted above, there is a clear recognition of the two age (aeon) construct, including the present interadvental overlapping of this age and the age to come, and the structural importance of this construct for biblical eschatology as a whole—an insight that he subsequently develops so profoundly in *The Pauline Eschatology* and elsewhere. This, apparently, is a development within *Reformed Dogmatics*, pointing toward his later biblical-theological work.

Another indication of such development is present in both volumes 3 and 4 where, as he argues convincingly in his later biblical-theological work, the description of the resurrected Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:45 is seen as a reference to the Holy Spirit and translated, “life-giving Spirit.”¹¹

Everyone who undertakes to do work in biblical theology need not previously have taught the whole of systematic theology or produced a *Reformed*

⁸ Geerhardus Vos, “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as Theological Discipline,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, 23–24.

⁹ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 23.

¹⁰ Reprinted in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, 91–125.

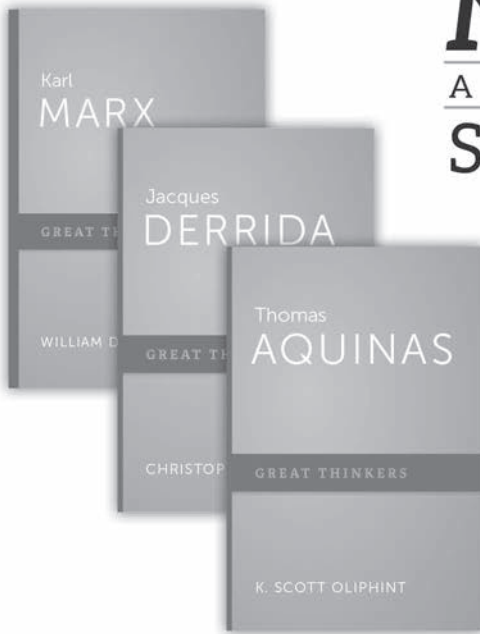
¹¹ The prevailing continuity between his treatment of eschatology in *Reformed Dogmatics* and his latter biblical-theological writings is discussed in my “What ‘Symphony of Sighs’? Reflections on the Eschatological Future of the Creation,” in John M. Frame et al., eds., *Redeeming the Life of the Mind: Essays in Honor of Vern Poythress* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 146–64.

Dogmatics. But what a comparison between Vos's systematic theology and biblical theology signals overall and impressively is that the biblical soundness of the biblical-theological enterprise will only be enhanced where it is informed by a thorough knowledge of the history of doctrine and, above all, of the unified teaching of the Bible as a whole.

This overview doesn't begin to do justice to the riches of *Reformed Dogmatics*. Given that it is apparently without immediate antecedents and was completed before Vos had reached the age of thirty, it is a remarkable achievement. Though understandably overshadowed by the recent availability in English of Bavinck's magisterial *Dogmatics*, it makes a welcome addition of its own for anyone wishing to benefit from a uniformly sound and often penetrating articulation of biblical doctrine. Those who neglect it do so to their loss.

Here is a work that will well serve the well-being of the church and its mission in and to the world in our day and beyond.¹²

¹² One indicator of a recognition of this value, particularly worth noting in this journal, is the Korean translation of the *Dogmatiek* in process by Young Ho Kim, Professor of New Testament at the Hapdong Theological Seminary in Suwon. Volumes 1 and 2 have already appeared in a single volume published in 2016.



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Book Reviews

W. Bradford Littlejohn and Scott N. Kindred Barnes, eds. *Richard Hooker and Reformed Orthodoxy*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017.

The early modern period is a growing area of interest for historians, and particularly for historians of religion. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that theological parties and doctrinal lines were much more complex than was once thought, and not nearly as insular. This appears to be the case in the British Isles because political, ecclesiastical, and theological divisions had significant overlap, cross-pollination, and interplay. There was no neat-and-tidy packaging of thinkers according to theology, ecclesiology, and political stance. Each of these three areas was separate and nondeterminative concerning the others. Richard Hooker (1553/4–1600) was a Church of England cleric who once held the prestigious preaching position at Saint Paul’s Cross in London and who is most famous for his massive book, *Laws of Ecclesiastic Polity*. He is known for being the defender of the Elizabethan establishment and an upholder of liturgical practice according to the *Book of Common Prayer*, and he was credited by the Oxford Movement for being the fountainhead of the *via media* stance of the Anglican Church between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The volume under review addresses some of the issues involved in these claims about Hooker’s historical significance but through the much narrower question as to whether he was a Reformed theologian.

There is an impressive amount of material in this collection of essays, and it will take any careful reader some time to digest it and assess the arguments. The contributors are well aware of the burgeoning discussions in the secondary literature about early-modern Reformed theology and offer substantial engagement with those issues. Perhaps the greatest

contribution this volume makes to broader historical study is that it demonstrates the complexity involved in asking “Was this person *a* ...?” With a growing body of literature about the early modern period, it becomes more difficult to pose these sorts of questions without making nuanced qualifications. This book shows that careful consideration is required in order to define the position of past thinkers by precise categorization. It is a worthy read, not only for those interested in Richard Hooker but for those trying to make sense of historical categories that have shifted over the years and who are seeking to avoid the danger of imposing anachronistically upon figures of the past.

Readers of this review are probably interested to know whether Hooker was Reformed. The answer is that it depends. It depends, in the first case, on what one means by “Reformed.” If one understands Reformed in a broad sense, there are some ways in which Hooker stands within Reformed boundaries. One of the well-executed aspects of these essays is the way they are able to assess Hooker only according to Reformed thought that preceded him, and thus to avoid measuring him according to the confessional developments that occurred after his death. This sound historiographical move helps the reader place Hooker in the context of the Reformed tradition. Additionally, whether Hooker was Reformed also depends on how one reads Hooker. The essays show that he stood in significant and important continuity with Reformed thinking in many ways and on many doctrines and practices. W. B. Patterson’s essay shows that Hooker was in substantial agreement with William Perkins (1558–1603), whom many consider to be a paragon of early Reformed thought. Some of Hooker’s methods and practices, however, were not typical of the Reformed tradition, particularly his high view of the role of human reason. My conclusion is that Hooker was by no means the enemy of Reformed thought. He was also far from being the *via media* theologian proposed by the nineteenth-century Oxford Movement. However, he is hardly a candidate for being the most clear-cut representative of Reformed theology and practice. Hooker was a churchman committed to the Anglican practices and policies of his day, and an avid defender of those positions.

This book is a valuable contribution to the field of historical theology. One need not agree with every conclusion to benefit from its thought-provoking essays. The volume does well in providing a context for Hooker, examining his pastoral approach, and giving introductions to several major areas of his theology. The book presents a further contribution to the literature about the nature of the Reformed tradition and its past. It is a

worthwhile read for those interested in the history of Reformed thinking and the issues involved in defining what “Reformed” implies.

HARRISON PERKINS

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Chad Van Dixhoorn. *God's Ambassadors: The Westminster Assembly and the Reformation of the English Pulpit, 1643-1653*. Studies on the Westminster Assembly. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017.

Chad Van Dixhoorn, an expert on the Westminster Assembly, has provided a scholarly and readable study of the Assembly's work toward the reformation of preachers and preaching in England. Here we find the story of ways the Assembly sought to reform both the preachers and the preaching practices that marked the Church of England in the midst of the Assembly's extensive work during the English Civil War. What emerges is a study of important documents and debates about the ministers who preached and then the theory and theology of preaching. The Assembly believed preaching was the divinely established means by which the will of God is made known, focused on the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Preaching is carried out by ordained ministers who are “God's ambassadors.”

The Assembly saw preaching as a ministry God instituted for “the gathering and perfecting of the saints” (5). In Assembly documents, such as the Confession of Faith and the Larger Catechism, when the term “minister” is used, it is assumed the minister will always be one who preaches. The Assembly frequently expressed belief in the efficacy of preaching in God's work of salvation in all its dimensions (7; see the question and answer of the Larger Catechism 155). Those of the Assembly who can be called “Puritans,” who wanted the reform of the church and who were what Patrick Collinson called the “hotter sort of Protestant,” were especially zealous to emphasize preaching and its importance.

Van Dixhoorn describes “The Road to Reform,” which began with the Assembly's call to Parliament for “speedy proceeding” against “scandalous Ministers.” The major complaint was with the many ministers who were perceived as not being able to preach. Some ministers in the church were content only to read the Scriptures and not to proclaim Scripture's message through preaching. This the Assembly deemed as inadequate. In preaching, God speaks through the person of the preacher as the preacher interprets the Scripture and applies it to the needs of the congregation. To deprive

congregations of preaching was to endanger the salvation of souls. Since preaching was central, this was literally a matter of life and death.

Those moderate Puritans in the Assembly looked to William Perkins (1558–1602), the great theologian. Perkins's *The Art of Prophesying* (1592) set forth three major aspects of preaching after the Scripture text was read: explaining the meaning in light of the whole of the Scriptures, gathering a few points of doctrine from the natural sense of the passage, and applying the doctrines to the life and practice of the congregation in plain, straightforward speech (27–28). Perkins said, “The heart of the matter is this: Preach one Christ, by Christ, to the praise of Christ” (28).

A central goal for the Assembly was to purify English pulpits and establish a godly ministry to reform the people by powerful pulpit preaching. Part 2 of Van Dixhoorn's book examines “A Reforming Assembly” and details the Assembly's efforts toward this end. Here are discussions of the Assembly Examinations to assure the levels of competence and piety requisite for ministers. Problematic cases arose, even among the Assembly's own members (ch. 4).

The nature of the pastor's office was debated by the Assembly (ch. 5). These debates considered preaching and reading the Scriptures, with some arguing that the reading of the Scripture is the preaching of Scriptures, while others claiming that the ordinary way faith is born is through the preaching of the Scriptures and not only the reading (64).

The Assembly also wrestled with the issue of ordination of ministers, establishing a Directory which expressed its ideals and processes (ch. 6). Likewise, a Directory for Public Worship was written. This reflected Assembly debates about preaching while also considering the character of the preacher and sermon structures deemed most appropriate. Some members wanted sermons to be propositional and based on the “doctrine” of the text (according to Perkins's plan), while others favored direct preaching of the biblical text itself. The continuing education of clergy was also an issue. It is estimated the Assembly conducted approximately 5,000 examinations of ministers from among England's and Wales's 8,600 parishes, and perhaps 10,000 ordained clergy (101). This work was an important part of the Assembly's ongoing attempt to “purge the Church of England of preachers who were ungodly” and “unlearned” (101).

Part three of Van Dixhoorn's book is a very helpful discussion of the theory of preaching. These chapters embrace chapters on the need for preachers to be godly, trained, and ordained; and then preaching in relation to theological issues. These include preaching as “the ordinary means of grace” (ch. 9) and the relation of audible and visible words, that is,

preaching and sacraments (ch. 10). The Assembly recognized that both the preached (audible) word and the sacramental (visible) word must be received by faith.

Two chapters on preaching: “Christ-Centered Sermons” (ch. 11) and “Christ-Centered Exegesis” (ch. 12) are especially important. Preaching the Scriptures and preaching Christ were complementary to the Assembly, with Christ being the center of both preaching and biblical interpretation. Anthony Burgess said, “It’s the main end and scope of the Scriptures only to exalt Christ, and the end of the Ministry should be the same with the end of the Scriptures” (145). In the end, said the Scots commissioner Edward Reynolds, every minister should “preach Christ Jesus” (161).

Van Dixhoorn concludes that the Assembly could have done better in treating unmotivated and incompetent candidates, perhaps seeking to institute “prophesyings,” to aid ministers. But the Assembly did “communicate a vision for ministry” that lasted in Presbyterian and Congregational communions in Scotland, Ireland, and the North American colonies (177). The Assembly’s Directories were well received in these places.

This fine study reminds us that much we take for granted today about church and ministry and preaching was fully discussed and debated in the Assembly. Today, we continue to receive the insights of its dedicated work.

DONALD K. MCKIM

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Abraham Kuyper. *Common Grace: God's Gift for a Fallen World*. Volume 1: The Historical Section. Translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas. Collected Works in Public Theology. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015.

“God’s redemption is as wide and high and deep as the expanse of his creation.” Statements like this one by J. K. A. Smith on the cover of this new translation of Abraham Kuyper’s *Common Grace* are supposed to be supported by what is in between the covers. And yet they are not. To be fair, Kuyper himself was also given to grand pronouncements. Nevertheless, upon reading this book, one wonders if there might be a fissure between Kuyper and the Kuyperians.

With Kuyper, we encounter a creative and serious thinker who addressed himself not mainly to the intelligentsia, but through newspaper articles to a popular audience. Moreover, he does not condescend; he aims to elevate and educate his readers and make them better theologians. Both in content

and form, therefore, this is an attempt to bring Calvinist theology into rapport with the times. The current volume is part of a larger collection of Kuyper's translated works published by the Acton Institute, Kuyper College, and the Abraham Kuyper Translation Society. The entire series will be twelve volumes, including volumes on education, ecclesiology, Islam, and works like *Our Program*, the political manifesto of Kuyper's AntiRevolutionary Party. I am very pleased to see the appearance of this collection, not only because—full disclosure—I introduced and co-edited the volume on ecclesiology, but mainly because Kuyper is an outstanding example of confessional Protestantism struggling to answer questions raised by modernity, yet without losing its soul.

For exactly this reason, this book is worth a look even by non-Kuyper devotees. It is the work of more than one man; it is about a tradition finding its way. This is apparent if we pause to notice that the doctrine of common grace gained attention in the nineteenth century. Until then, the notion existed but had never been explored. Kuyper's *Common Grace* answered the age-old question facing Augustinians: How can pagans and sinners, weighed down by original sin and depravity, produce so much apparent good? But it also responded to the optimism and faith in humanity that we have come to associate with the nineteenth century—two apparently opposing forces. Kuyper withdrew from many of the established cultural institutions, like the Dutch *volkskerk* and the state universities, precisely when European culture seemed to have reached its zenith. People said that he was an Anabaptist, yet he was not. He had some explaining to do.

Kuyper's answer was typically Reformed and typically modern. Common grace makes "the nobler development of what was hidden in our human race possible" (347). This statement (there are many more like it) says more than a passing glance suggests. First, Kuyper was not interested merely in the good society or the intrinsic good of creation. He was interested in *development* and progress, and progress was especially the achievement of the Christian West.

In our nineteenth century in every arena of life the power of man over nature, the knowledge of situations, the means of community, the enjoyments of life, and so much more, have advanced so incomparably further from the preceding century. ... [P]recisely this development would have been inconceivable apart from common grace. (547–48)

Second, the possibilities of progress are latent in creation. Nature is something to be worked on. The good in it has to be brought out. It is a kind of neutral form with which to work. Finally, these latent possibilities in

creation must be brought out by human ingenuity. The basis of culture, according to Kuyper, is not the leisurely contemplation of the goodness and beauty of creation. It is about active, human engagement and improvement: work. Common grace brought the Protestant work ethic into the era of steam engines and telegraphs, inventors and colonial governors.

Theologically, *Common Grace* is timely because a great confidence in culture making has reemerged—surprisingly, perhaps—after a century whose main cultural achievements have been in the field of brutal, destructive power and banal entertainment. Alistair MacIntyre, Rod Dreher, and Charles Chaput call for a new Benedict, but a number of Protestant voices are reasserting the old confidence in humanity. These include the likes of Tim Keller, N. T. Wright, and Richard Mouw, who introduces this volume. In these discussions, Kuyper is often close at hand. In his introduction Mouw writes, “[Kuyper] was convinced that the works of culture would be gathered into the holy city when it descends from the heavens as the new Jerusalem” (xxviii). This is where the discussion becomes interesting. In this new translation, Kuyper says just the opposite; human civilization will be destroyed by fire, not purified:

One day there will be an unspeakable catastrophe that will consume the entire cosmos, and along with it there will be an immense change in the arrangement of sun, moon, and stars. Not a single human writing, not a single work of art, will transfer from the existing situation into the new one. (544)

Kuyper’s position is more nuanced than we realized. For example, he distinguished between nature and culture. Human nature will be perfected and resurrected, but the artifacts of culture will not. The future life will be unmistakably embodied, but the continuity between this life and the next will be at the level of organic essence, not cultural forms. Further, the development that especially interests Kuyper, as to what will carry over into the new life, is not so much cultural artifacts but personal, spiritual development—that is, growth in godliness.

Whose side is Kuyper on after all? Have we misread him? Is postmillennialism making a comeback, and more vigorous than before? And does Kuyper have anything to say about it? This volume is a welcome resource, but it raises more questions than it answers. That is not all bad.

JOHN HALSEY WOOD JR.

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Charles E. Van Engen, ed. *The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016.

This book is a telling testimony to the enduring innovations of Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission—now School of Intercultural Studies—in the field of mission. On the occasion of the fiftieth birthday of the school, it is fitting that this volume looking back at its history while encouraging future missiology should be published. It is also quite understandable that Charles Van Engen was chosen to lead this work.

If missiology is a vast, complex, rich, and exciting field, the School of Intercultural Studies has presented and promoted numerous advances under the leadership of Donald McGavran, Ralph Winters, Alan Tippett, Charles Van Engen, Charles Kraft, Peter Wagner, and many others. The mere mention of these names should impress on the reader's mind the accomplishments of this school. Of course, that does not imply that every innovation was without problems. It does highlight, nonetheless, a capacity to rethink mission. Further, the School of Intercultural Studies' theoretical and practical missiological study is an example of what mission supported by theological education can accomplish. This should not, however, be taken as an uncritical endorsement of its missiological directions. Rather, it should be read as an encouragement to move forward in missiological reflection.

The present volume is a reminder of an important part of the evangelical history of mission in the past decades. The historical focus explains some of the weaknesses of this book. Celebrating the innovations of an institution can be beneficial. Remembering the past is indeed necessary for moving toward the future. However, parts of the book assume familiarity with the School of Intercultural Studies and Fuller's missiology. In that sense, the title of the book is somewhat misleading, since it is not first about *global* innovations in Christian witness, but about the school's innovations, which is quite different. Actually, the close association between global mission and this school at times gives the reader the impression that global mission is guided and led by the School of Intercultural Studies. Given the diversity and complexity of the mission field, this would be a rather naive overstatement.

The book is divided into two parts. The first is devoted to the dissemination of innovations formulated at the school. Among these are the church growth movement, a strong focus on the biblical theology of mission, and the ecclesial nature of mission. If the reader should want to become more familiar with these innovations, we recommend the introduction by Van Engen (12–13). Along with this, the first chapter also serves as a fascinating presentation of the early work of Donald McGavran, the initiator of the

church growth movement. The remainder of this first part reviews some of the innovations mentioned in the introduction, in particular, the hermeneutics of mission, the birth and growth of local churches, and the interaction with the religious “other.”

Though the first part is quite informative, for many readers the most engaging part will probably be the second, devoted to the implications of the missiological innovations of the previous section. However, the disconnect with the previous chapters and a sense of relative disunity can also be seen as a weakness. This is particularly the case with chapter 8, “Innovations at the Margins,” by Jayakumar Christian. The author highlights five theological topics that require missiological attention and that are crucial to reaching people at the margins: power, identity, anger, the Holy Spirit, and truth. We cannot develop these five points here, but they are all to varying degrees relevant to mission. It is difficult to see how this is an implication of the innovations of the School of Intercultural Studies. Similar gaps occur in some other chapters, which, though interesting, are not clearly linked with the second part of the book. However, this weakness is balanced by the theological significance of other chapters.

Among the chapters that are the most relevant, the reader will take note of chapter 9 (by Terry Muck), devoted to three ways to nourish an inter-religious dialogue (confrontation, consilience, and confession) that are in constant interaction with each other. If “confrontation” and “confession” do not require much explanation, consilience might. In Muck’s words, consilience is the way mission demonstrates the unity brought about by Christ, who “gathers up all things in him” (Eph 1:10), supremely through neighborly love. Of course, while talking about love, especially of neighbors, as the *locus classicus* for consilience, Muck could provide a stronger case and analysis by reminding his readers of the traditional distinction between love as passion and love as virtue. A further scholastic distinction about the one love of God mentions “*benevolence, beneficence, and complacency*.”¹ This distinction made by Francis Turretin, could also clarify how love of all neighbors is part of our mission.² This would be particularly helpful for those who want to follow the author’s advice and not radicalize consilience at the expense of the uniqueness of the Christian faith.

Let us also note chapter 10 by John Azumah on the meaning of theology to be attached to Muhammad. This last theme is a much-debated subject,

¹ By “love of complacency,” Turretin does not mean a complacent love of the world but the accommodating love of God for his creation.

² Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), 1:242 (3.20.5).

especially given the theological arguments about “insider movements.” Finally, in his conclusion, Scott Sunquist, historian and dean of the School of Intercultural Studies, takes up the risky task of mentioning, with relative success, future “trends” within the global mission. Of course, some of these tendencies are already actual (“insider movements”) and some are not new (“migration”).

Despite the fascinating and often helpful articles collected in the present work, several recurring problems affect the theological quality of the book. To begin with, here and there statements sometimes contradict each other or give a rather simplistic view of mission. For example, it is quite ironic in a book celebrating decades of missiological innovation to come across the following affirmation: “American evangelicalism is relatively free from colonial baggage” (103–4). This demonstrates a simplistic view of colonialism, ignorant of the way colonialism is best seen as a mindset rather than as a political and economic system. At other times, some authors adopt a rather patronizing style, either because they are ignorant of other theological and missiological traditions or because of a lack of critical perspective.

This naiveté is at times echoed in the very generous view taken of the School of Intercultural Studies itself. Of course, that is expected when its accomplishments are being celebrated. But self-criticism and honest evaluation are the hallmark of a mature institution. Fifty years of theological innovations in the field of mission inevitably lead to critical assessments, which have undoubtedly been made. Quite paradoxically, no real critical dialogue has been undertaken in this book. If mission is in great part a dialogue with the “other,” as many articles try to show, then the first place of dialogue must be within the circle of missiological thinking and practice. A theology of mission and an institution dedicated to the strengthening and furthering of mission cannot indulge in the luxury of ignoring the criticisms, generous or not, that have been made in the last five decades. Critical self-reflection is not evident in this book, but we hope that such self-reflection will be engaged in elsewhere. This could help the school move further in its missiological calling.

Among the other weaknesses, the reader should note a somewhat limited view of world mission. This is understandable, since the book highlights the innovations of the School of Intercultural Studies. On the other hand, it is advertised as presenting the state of *global* mission, and on that front, it tragically fails to deliver. In fact, some absences are remarkable. To begin with, nothing is said about mission in the so-called Western countries. A few pages in chapter 12 deal with European secularism, but that is not enough to enable understanding of the challenges of Christian mission in Europe. If the book

were dealing with mission in the Majority World, this absence would be understandable. But in a global context, it is a regrettable omission.

Finally, one subject of concern is hermeneutics. Despite the weight placed by the authors on this topic, discussions are often charged with preconceptions regarding the nature and definition of the hermeneutical task. For example, a significant assumption of chapter 2, “Innovations in Missiological Hermeneutics” by Shawn Redford, is that hermeneutics is always partial, and thus each method needs to be complemented by others. Hermeneutical methods are therefore seen as theologically equivalent, and there is no in-depth discussion of their biblical foundation.

In this respect, there might be confusion between method and tools in the hermeneutical task. That many different tools are needed to interpret the Bible correctly cannot be doubted. However, this does not necessarily lead to a complementarity of hermeneutical methods. The absence of such a distinction is visible in the presentation of the “scientific hermeneutics” (58–59). According to Redford, such a hermeneutic is identical with its tools, which does not take into account that every hermeneutical method is informed by deeper presuppositions. This “historical-critical” method is thus not considered from its philosophical standpoint, leading the author to a naive view of hermeneutics. Unfortunately, he does not mention one major hermeneutical method, the “historical-grammatical” method, which served as the major hermeneutic of the Reformation.

This approach has unfortunate consequences. Some of the innovative proposals made by the author are in fact nothing new. For example, the centrality of the concept of “kingdom of God” in mission is not something that emerges necessarily out of the complementarity of the hermeneutical methods. Similarly, the place of the Holy Spirit, which the author labels “spiritual hermeneutics,” is also nothing new to Reformed theology. In fact, it has long defined two principles of knowledge, the Bible (*principium cognoscendi externum*), and the Holy Spirit (*principium cognoscendi internum*). Certainly, piety, prayer, and spirituality have a place in our hermeneutical task, and this has been recognized in the past. Rather than re-creating hermeneutics, we should learn from the past in order to be better prepared for the future. However, assumptions about hermeneutics often negatively affect this chapter.

We find an example of these potential hermeneutic problems in the same chapter. For example, Redford concludes that “without the field of ethno-hermeneutics, interpretations of Scripture are often subconsciously laden with preconceptions based on the interpreter’s deep-level worldview” (51). That sounds all well and good at first. Problems arise, however, when the

author tries to justify the importance of ethnohermeneutics and uses the example of 1 Samuel 6:1–13 to explain the force of this hermeneutic. In this passage, the Philistines return the ark of the covenant on a chariot pulled by cows whose calves have been left in their pen. The author emphasizes that ethnohermeneutics leads the Maasai people to better understand the text than “Westerners,” who often do not understand why the action of the cows is unusual. However, one can wonder whether this difference in understanding is really due to ethnohermeneutics. Maybe it is merely ignorance of cows, in which case it has nothing to do with ethnohermeneutics. The French farmer in my native countryside knows as well as the Maasai that a cow would not naturally leave its calf behind and that there must be something unnatural in this.

Finally, the reader could have expected more direct discussion of crucial contemporary issues in the field of mission. Although the topics discussed are relevant to the mission field, these topics do not go beyond the missiological discussion of the past decade. Further detail and theorization are proposed, but no new area of mission is brought to the attention of the reader. Three crucial dimensions would have deserved particular mention. The first dimension is *theological*. While the book often mentions biblical theology of mission, we fail to see how these essays help us discover its richness. Maybe the book suffers from an overemphasis on missiological practice. The second dimension is *strategic*. Directions for mission engagement would have been helpful. What should be the next few strategic mission fields? A clear answer would have been helpful. The third dimension is *geopolitical*. Here two topics should have their place. First, how can a book looking forward to the future of mission relegate the relevant—in fact, the crucial—issue of theology of migration to a brief mention in the conclusion? Second, the rise of new nationalisms requires a theological, biblical, and missiological answer.

In conclusion, this book, directed at practitioners, students, and scholars, can be of real value, but its value is found as much in areas of *concern* as in areas of *agreement*. One particular lesson the reader will learn is the importance of continuing hermeneutical and theological reflection that in turn nourish the practice of mission.

YANNICK IMBERT

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J. Alan Branch. *Born This Way? Homosexuality, Science, and the Scriptures*. Wooster: Weaver, 2016.

Born This Way? is a critical discussion of one of the most controversial issues in contemporary America and in global society. The argument hinges on whether or not homosexuality is innate and immutable; the argument is scientific and theological. J. Alan Branch, Professor of Christian Ethics at Midwestern Seminary, is currently a research fellow in Christian ethics for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Branch has approached this debate with great dexterity. This book has eleven chapters, each being devoted to addressing some key developments in the argument concerning homosexuality. In each chapter he analyzes the homosexual claims, points out their lapses, and concludes with biblical injunctions to the appropriate Christian response. He gives a historical analysis of the development of the controversy and points out the inconsistencies in the positions of reputable scientific groups over the years down to the present.

Proponents of homosexuality argue that since “science confirms a biological-genetic causation for homosexual behavior” and that their condition is inherent and as a matter of fact, God-given, there should not be any prejudice against those who are gay (2).

Branch critically engages the scientific research that makes such claims and concludes that while “there are some genetic or biological factors that *correlate* with the incidence of same-sex attraction and homosexual behavior, as of yet there is no proof of genetic or biological *causation* for homosexuality” (2). His goal is to “summarize some of the most important research regarding same-sex attraction in order to foster a clear understanding of what science has or has not discovered about homosexuality” (3).

Branch raises serious questions about the adverse reactions in debates about homosexuality. Proponents of same-sex attitudes and behavior seek to intimidate Christians by describing those who are opposed to their lifestyles as racists, bigots, or homophobes. This threatens free argumentation for, as well as against, homosexuality. This development, in the end, coerces even objective researchers to come to biased conclusions in favor of homosexual practice to avoid harassment. Consequently, this attitude deprives people of an accurate and sound knowledge of the problem, which can be harmful to the growth of a free society.

In spite of the polemic surrounding the debate, Branch interacts and evaluates the historical development of the scientific claims concerning

biological causation of homosexual behavior. He begins with Sigmund Freud and Alfred Kinsey, early popular authorities who influenced subsequent action for homosexual practice. Notably, homosexual practice was placed under psychiatric conditions. Freud advocated that some forms of homosexuality are innate. Branch analyzes how Freud was inconsistent in his conclusions, as he has been quoted by both pro and contra homosexual behavior arguments.

Then Branch takes on Kinsey, who was regarded as the father of the sexual revolution. Kinsey's research was flawed because of a number of factors. First, he renounced Christian faith and embraced atheism, so his views inevitably tilted against biblical teachings on sexuality. Second, he himself became a homosexual, a fact that influenced his bias in favor of homosexuality in his research. Again, Branch shows how Kinsey's data sampling and analysis were distorted and unreliable when he chose only those inmates who were into homosexual practice in order to draw his conclusions. To demonstrate the flaws in Kinsey, Branch notes that John Bancroft, who was a director in the Kinsey Institute, even accused him of deliberately falsifying his data by claiming they came from several people when in fact they came from one man.

Branch also stresses how the American Psychiatric Association in the 1940s and 1950s considered homosexual behavior as "a disease in need of a cure" (33). Other research on homosexuality, however, gave more weight to environmental factors, and the gay movement gained strength over time and pressured the American Psychiatric Association into changing its stance. The pro-homosexual lobby opposed attempts to help homosexuals to change their lifestyle, as they deemed nothing was inappropriate with their behavior.

After his historical examination, Branch goes into greater depth on the scientific arguments over issues of genetic formation and attitudes. He argues that although human genetic codes correlate to behavior, environmental influence plays a key role in shaping attitudes and actions. This conclusion is based on long-term research where "certain changes in the way the brain is structured are clearly related to our interaction with the world in which we live" (44). He demonstrates this in the way that pornography affects brain plasticity, and so we can better understand how we have a moral responsibility in responding to our temptations. Branch insists that, contrary to the absolute claims that prenatal hormones make a person either homosexual or heterosexual, "we are not merely sexual automatons mercilessly unable to resist any desire whatsoever" (65). On the contrary, the gift of gender distinction is beautifully authored by God from the beginning (Gen 1:27).

Furthermore, the argument of “born this way” and data claiming to support homosexuality have either been oversimplified or exaggerated. Branch acknowledges the anomalies that are found in the genetic formation related to homosexual attitudes due to the fall of humanity, which affected the entire creation. The condemnation of sexual practice in Romans 1 alludes to intentional attitude and moral choice.

Branch notes research by Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen that objectively attributed factors in addition to genetics as causal of homosexual behavior, claiming that their studies of twins and homosexual behavior are distorted and come to erroneous conclusions: while demonstrating a “correlation for higher incidence of homosexuality when one twin brother is homosexual,” they do not prove “causation or that someone is ‘born this way’” (92). And indeed, “science has not discovered a gene which causes homosexuality,” whereas genetic research has shown that environmental factors play “a critical role in the formation of a person’s sexual identity” (105–6).

Branch raises an important question for Christians who take Scripture and classic hermeneutics seriously in the context of this homosexual debate: “Does this mean we must then surrender Scriptural teaching concerning the sinful nature of homosexual acts?” (107). Christians who support homosexual positions fail to reconcile Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 3. The “born this way” approach seeks to defeat the call for repentance, since it insists that one cannot change even if one desires such change. This standpoint is contrary to other proven cases of homosexuals who have changed and never gone back to their old ways. Branch shows how cases of repentant homosexuals who have or have not gone back to their old ways can be explained better in terms of social influence rather than of genetic gravitational force.

Branch has consistently noted that the American Psychiatric Association’s and Kirk and Madsen’s research, which previously held homosexuality to be a mental derailment but have changed to support it, owe much to political and psychological pressure from growing social and sexual revolutionary movements rather than new scientific discoveries. Kirk and Madsen inconsistently argue that “homosexuality is the result of a complex set of factors, but [they] urge fellow homosexuals to claim to be ‘born this way’ because it is an advantageous public relations stance” (85). While the data that led to their previous position is still intact, they have been compelled to change their position, which is a major contradiction in the “born this way” stance.

In contrast, the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality published its research, which, while “not denying a biological component to homosexuality,” also asserted more factors for such behavior,

such as family, peer, and social influences (121). A founder of the association, Charles Socarides, argues that one of the strongest causes of homosexual attitude is “a failure in sexual identity,” which requires some form or reparative measures (123).

The strength of Branch’s position is twofold: it points out the inherent flaws and inconsistencies in the “born this way” argument and draws on the teachings of Scripture. The Pauline moral-spiritual code puts a contrast between the former life that was characterized by the domination of sinful practices including homosexuality and the new life in Christ that has been sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:9–11). The biblical message is a call to repentance from sins, whereas homosexual advocates removing homosexuality from the list of sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. This teaching draws the line between autonomous man and God in the battle over who determines what is and what is not sin. The argument of the autonomous man is to admit our inherent sinfulness and enjoy it as much as possible. The debate turns out to be either/or: either we rebel against the teaching of Scripture and embrace sinful pleasures, or we reject the homosexual stance and behavior as having no biblical or scientific proven ground or justification.

What Branch argues is of critical importance. The Scriptures warn about social and environmental influences that can have a negative impact on behavior, thus ruining good morals (1 Cor 15:33). It is also noteworthy that all sin, including homosexuality, is inherent in the sense that we are conceived and born in it (Ps 51: 5) but is transformed by the grace of God. Scriptures attest to homosexual behavior being mutable like any other sin when it pronounces God’s judgment on its practice (Rom 1:24, 26–27; 1 Cor 6:9; Gal 5:19; Col 3:5, 7), and God is not so unjust as to judge what is immutable in human nature. Paul attests that certain believers in Corinth once lived in such sins but were changed and sanctified. Again, when Paul admonishes believers to marry in order to overcome sexual temptation, he explicitly and exclusively speaks about the relationship between male and female (1 Cor 7:2).

Overall, Branch has given us a clear direction to continue critically engaging gay debates in future scientific investigation.

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