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UNIO CUM CHRISTO[®]

UNION WITH CHRIST



Current Debates in Reformed Theology: Practice



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Did Arminius Win?

PAUL WELLS

Some Calvinists may not be convinced, but Arminius won. We are of course talking about the spirit of Arminius, who had been in the tomb a good few years before his defenders' Remonstrant theses were hotly debated at the Synod of Dort, of which this year marks the fourth centenary. Hence some contributions relevant to this theme appear in this issue of *Unio cum Christo*.

Our present age likes nothing better than achievement, and the more spectacular the better. Even those of us who work mundane jobs know the danger of not performing as the statistics demand. Honorific and financial rewards are enormous for performance in business, politics, philanthropy, scientific research, popular culture, and sports. The stars of these worlds are the celebrities whose opinions are respected as having authority outside their fields, a modern fallacy if ever there was one—what do Hollywood glitterati know of poverty, injustice, truth, or right?

Recently I watched the finale of the twelfth stage of the Tour de France bike race, in which the riders made three phenomenal climbs of 1500 meters to reach the top of the Alpe d'Huez. The effort expended was so astounding that my muscles ached in sympathy from my recliner. The only black spot in this spectacle was when a spectator tried to push one of the leaders, who has been accused of doping, off his machine, probably deeming him unworthy to compete. This is where the spirit of Arminius steps in, claiming that it is shabby to minimize the importance of human effort. Effort is commendable. Performance is the dividing line between the meritorious and the unworthy, the successful and the also-rans. When we talk about grace and unmerited mercy today, we find ourselves out of tune with what the modern age admires. It is not only unbelievable that God might give us

something for nothing and that we might even need it; it is also demeaning both for God and man. Moreover, in taking the grace tack, you enter the arbitrary field of who benefits from grace and why those who seem to most merit it do not receive it. Grace trumps equality, and that can never be, dixit the self-made autonomous man.

The apostle Paul knew about the problem of effort and achievements when he wrote some scandalous words to the Corinthians about “not many wise according to worldly standards, nor many powerful, not many of noble birth” being called of God. He turned human expectations on their head: the wise, the debaters, and the scribes of the age are out in the cold, so that no one can boast (1 Cor 1:18–31). It is not the productive people of the age who are called, but the also-rans. Referencing this shows that the spirit of Arminius is not limited to the modern age: it has always been around, as something inherent in human nature. In fact, it has invariably had the upper hand in the world. Any system of thought that places the accent on man’s ability falls into this category: the Pharisees, Pelagius, the semi-Pelagianism of the Roman Church, the Council of Trent, Erasmus, Loyola, Arminius himself, and the Remonstrants, Wesley, Moody, and a host of modern-day evangelical believers. Theological liberalism in its various forms is essentially Arminian, with its accent on human ability, progress, and the social gospel, as are sects such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mormons, and all works religions. If we have ever been under the impression that Calvinists are all-time winners, thinking along this line will be sobering and show us that we are only a sideshow at the fair.

The Pelagian-Arminian line of thought has various manifestations, and its adherents are not all to be evaluated in the same way. They stood over against those who denied human cooperation, or synergism in salvation, in various degrees: Augustine, the Council of Orange (AD 529), Aquinas, Luther and Calvin, the Fathers of Dort, Whitefield, Spurgeon, all stood for sovereign grace. Then there were those, following a sidetrack from Aquinas, who sought a middle-of-the-road solution: Fonseca, Molina, Suarez, Amyraut, down to William Lane Craig in the present.¹

Anyone who thinks Arminius is a piece of cake ought to read him.² The debates are often complex and not for the faint-hearted. There is little

¹ See Henri A. G. Blocher, “‘Middle Knowledge’: Solution or Seduction?,” *Unio cum Christo* 4.1 (April 2018): 29–46.

² James Arminius, *Works*, 3 vols. (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986); on Arminius, see Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Wilmore, KY: Francis Asbury, 1985); and Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

doubt that we can see the dangers much more clearly if we look back in light of historical developments. We are indebted to the fathers of Dordrecht who discerned the problems with his thought. The controversial issues revolve around the question of divine justice and the freedom of the will in accepting the gospel. These questions are intertwined, one conditioning the other. But which should have the primacy? If man does not have the freedom to accept the gospel, how can God be fair? If God is just, how can man not be recognized as a partner in the work of salvation? As Jason Van Vliet formulates the question in his article, “since our merciful God is also perfectly *just*, how can he simply and sovereignly choose some for eternal bliss while sending others to eternal anguish?”

The question of the freedom of the will cannot be resolved without giving some thought to the capacity of human nature in its present state. All positions that can be considered as being over against the Augustinian line do so by attributing some quality of action to human nature in the realm of the intellect and consequently the will. They also reinterpret what Scripture says about the essential points of how salvation is received and the efficacy of the cross. In this way the meaning of total depravity is changed, rendering man save-able, and the cross is broadened in its intention. Human effort in salvation is given some room, whether it be small or great. Without a biblical doctrine of sin, in terms of man’s total depravity, there is no biblical doctrine of grace. This is not a minor issue, and it has profound implications for biblical salvation as a whole. Is it God alone who saves us? Can we get out of the mess that the human race is in by ourselves, rank Pelagianism, or do we cooperate with God in the synergism of Arminius?

The consequences of this are far reaching. “Sin, in other words, in keeping with the intellectualism of Arminius’ theology, distorts the function of the will and the affections, but leaves the intellect quite intact.” The role of the intellect is the launchpad of the modern age, as in the seventeenth century; it “satisfies the demands of the new rationalism and of the dawning of the modern scientific perspective of the early modern era.” This turn is of great importance not only for the development of Protestant theology, but also for that of modern culture. “Of the three major systematic models arising out of Protestantism, the Lutheran, the Reformed, and the Arminian, only one, the Arminian, generally proved open to the new rationalism, particularly in its more empirical and inductive forms.”³

At this point, Arminianism meets the humanism of the Renaissance at the crossroads. The dilution of the biblical doctrine of sin is a feature of this

³ Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 283–85.

type of thought. Whereas humanism believes not in a fall, but in the perfectibility of man, Arminianism believes that sin's effects are limited. Somehow, in the intellect or the will, depending on which one puts first, lies the possibility of opening up to the gospel. Man is not totally depraved, and extremism is sidelined.

This explains the popularity and the appeal of Arminianism. Arminius's thought was more in sync with the spirit of the dawning age, one which would give an ever-increasing place to man's decisions and actions, through deism, down to the French revolution with its "Ni Dieu, ni maître" (Neither God, nor master), the scientific and the industrial revolutions, and secularism. God became a "God of the gaps," ever more excluded from the world. Today this confidence in man is unraveling, and it is human nature itself that is under attack.

Sometimes the question is asked: Why Augustine or Pelagius, why Calvin or Arminius? Between the two there lies no third position, no *tertium quid*. Arminianism is the natural tendency of the human heart; Calvinists were Arminians, then the light dawned.

On Serving God in Our Generation¹

DAVID MCKAY

Abstract

How are Christians to serve Christ at this point in history? We approach the question from the perspective of faith in a sovereign God, not in pessimism or defeatism. While activity is required, God's chief concern is with being rather than doing. We ask first, "Who are we?" Identity is not self-generated but given by God. Christians are Christlike people—redeemed, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, loving, and holy. They are also a covenant community—united with the Triune God and with one another. We then ask, "What should we be doing?" After repenting of our failures, we are, according to our particular callings and contexts, sent to preach the Word, spread the gospel, engage with society, and endure persecution.

Both inside and outside the church a confusing cacophony of voices offers advice regarding what we ought to be doing in our generation. The recommendations range from the distinctly spiritual through what may appear to be baptized versions of secular programs to, at the opposite end of the spectrum, an abandonment of spiritual concerns in favor of pursuing this-worldly

¹ A longer version of this paper was prepared for the Affinity Theological Conference: 1–3 March, 2017, at King's Park Conference Centre, Northampton, and is available on the Affinity web site (<http://www.affinity.org.uk/>). The material in this paper is used with the permission of Affinity.

betterment for the human race, or perhaps the entire planet. While many options can be summarily dismissed, there remains considerable room for disagreement among those equally committed to the authority of Scripture. Recent debates between proponents of a “Two Kingdom” theology and advocates of a “transformational” perspective are but one example of this diversity.²

Such a situation underlines the need for men and women like those from Issachar in 1 Chronicles 12:32, “men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (ESV). It is evident from the context that these are not men distinguished primarily for their political or sociological insight nor, in our contemporary context, men with facility in technology or social media. There is a place for such endowments, but what is surely of greatest significance is the spiritual insight of the men of Issachar, rooted in “the fear of the Lord [which] is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps 111:10). If we are to understand how to serve God in our generation, our foundation must be the fear of the Lord, nurtured by engagement with his self-revelation in Scripture.

Despite the complexity of the circumstances in which we are called to serve God and what appears to be an increasingly overt opposition to the Christian faith in our society, we do not undertake this task in a pessimistic spirit. We are serving a God who remains sovereign over all things and in whose Word we have a unique and authoritative revelation, a “God-breathed” revelation (2 Tim 3:16).

Our first inclination may well be to think of what we should be *doing*—proclaiming the gospel, planting churches, caring for the poor and oppressed, and, perhaps, a multitude of other activities. That, however, would be indicative of the activism that often characterizes evangelicals. Biblical priorities are strikingly different. While activity is required, God’s chief concern is with *being* rather than doing. Jesus’s condemnation of the Pharisees in Mark 7:6–7 is significant in this regard. By any standard, the Pharisees were doers, trying to fulfill all the demands of God’s law and also their own traditions. There was no shortage of activity, yet the Lord exposed their fundamental shortcoming, quoting Isaiah 29:13, saying, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” The key issue is the “heart”—the inner core of a person’s *being*, which then manifests itself in his *doing*.

² See, for example, David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), and Ryan C McIlhenny, ed., *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging in the Two Kingdoms Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012).

I. *Who Are We?*

Issues of identity are currently being hotly debated in Western societies. Who has the right to determine my identity? The answer offered by many is that ultimately, I alone determine my identity. This trend is evident in discussions of sexuality, including homosexuality and transgenderism. Increasingly individuals are claiming the right to self-identify in any way they choose, regardless of their biology. If someone is biologically, genetically male but wishes to self-identify as female, then society must do everything necessary for the acceptance of that identity. Thus, Facebook offers “male,” “female” and seventy-one other options for gender identity.

After noting some of these examples, Vaughan Roberts comments,

Although most people would feel that these self-identifications have gone too far, there is still an uneasiness about challenging any individual’s chosen self-expression. There’s a deeply rooted conviction that everyone is free to define themselves as they wish, and no-one has the right to question that self-definition.³

Such assertions of independence are, of course, nothing new, the first occurrence being in the garden of Eden. One of the factors that contributes to contemporary confusion is the rapid development of the digital technology that has in turn fueled the growth in social media activity. Having noted that the question of identity is as old as humanity, Ed Brooks and Pete Nicholas, writing in *Virtually Human*, go on to comment,

But it is pressed on us in a particular way in a virtual environment where attaching images, ideas, experiences and preferences to our personal icon effectively defines who we are.⁴

The apparent freedom that people have to define themselves is nevertheless an illusion, as Adam and Eve discovered almost as soon as they had rebelled. Their “self-defined” freedom left them cowering behind a tree, trying to hide from the sentence of their Creator and Judge. The pattern is endlessly repeated in human experience. Even in the supposed freedom of the digital world, electronic media are now seen to shape their users far more than the users realize, and in the end, the technology becomes an idol. As Tim Challies notes,

³ Vaughan Roberts, *Transgender* (Purcellville, VA: Good Book, 2016), 30.

⁴ Ed Brooks and Pete Nicholas, *Virtually Human: Flourishing in a Digital World* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), 78.

There are always spiritual realities linked to our use of technology. We know that there is often a link between our use of technology and idolatry, that our idols are often good things that want to become ultimate things in our lives.⁵

In this context of widespread confusion regarding identity and the increasing possibilities for expressing rebellion and supposed autonomy, Christians seeking to serve God in our generation must begin by asserting that identity is not self-generated, or self-invented, but is in fact given to us by God. It is our sovereign Creator who defines who and what we are. At the most basic level, as set out in the opening chapters of Genesis, we are made in the image of God, dependent creatures who ought to respond to the Creator's goodness in loving worship and service. As image-bearers we are made for relationships, primarily with our Creator, a fact expressed in the covenant established with Adam in Eden. Adam, as representative of the human race, broke the covenant, sin entered the world, and all human-kind is implicated: "Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Rom 5:12).

Creation in God's image and the fall into sin are constitutive of the identity of all men and women. For Christians, however, the key element in their identity is their re-creation in Christ. In the language of 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." In Christ, the greatest possible transformation is effected in those who were sinners, under the wrath and curse of God. The Lord's people receive a new identity that is secure and liberating, shaped by the Holy Spirit and not by the forces of a fallen world.

Those who are seeking to serve God in their generation are therefore people who are being progressively conformed to Christ, transformed into his likeness (2 Cor 3:18), by the gracious work of God. This new identity can be thought of both individually and corporately.

1. *Christ-Like People*

We are redeemed.

As Peter expresses it, "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers ... with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet 1:18–19). We begin our service of God in our generation from the perspective of those who "were bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:20); this creates in us not a sense of self-satisfaction, but

⁵ Tim Challies, *The Next Story: Life and Faith after the Digital Explosion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 74.

rather a spirit of humility and thankfulness, a gratitude to God that often expresses itself in joy.

Our thankfulness to God for his wonderful gift of salvation stirs in us a joy in the Lord and also enables us to rejoice in all that is good in his creation. It even enables us to “count it all joy ... when [we] meet trials of various kinds” (Jas 1:2). This is not a transient happiness but a deep-seated spiritual joy that permeates the Christian’s life.

Serving the Lord as redeemed sinners in humility and joy is a powerful testimony to the world.

We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

To think of being conformed to Christ and of manifesting characteristics such as joy inevitably leads to thoughts of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23) and texts such as Romans 1:4, which refers to “the Spirit of holiness.” In fact, every element of Christian life and service is dependent on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, from the new birth “of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5), through transformation into the image of Christ, which “comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18), culminating in the gift to all believers of “a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:44)—a body indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Of particular significance is that the Holy Spirit equips the Lord’s people for service. The indwelling of the Spirit means that we are fully equipped to serve God in all the ways that he has planned. We are not equipped to do anything or everything we may want to do, nor to pursue our own agendas or build our own empires. We are, however, completely sufficient for the implementation of God’s agenda as he brings in his kingdom for his glory.

We are loving.

As the apostle John reminds us, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). In response to the love of God that “has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5), a responding love wells up in the hearts of his children. Fundamental is love for God “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37). Without that love, our “service” will be drudgery that the Lord will not accept.

We also need to take account of 1 John 4:11, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” The community of God’s people is to be characterized by mutual love among its members. It is significant that as the Savior in his Farewell Discourse (John 13–16) prepares his disciples for his imminent departure by way of the cross and for their ministry, which

they are to undertake after his resurrection as the foundation of the church in its New Testament form, he several times stresses this commandment. In John 15:12, for example, he says, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” It is his sacrificial love, illustrated by his washing the disciples’ feet (John 13:1–20) and consummated at the cross, that provides the pattern and the power for the disciples’ mutual love.

Christ makes it starkly clear that love is not an optional extra for disciples: “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar” (1 John 4:20). And this is not just an internal matter for the church: it is to be evident to a watching world. “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

We are holy.

It is vital to understand our true situation: it is not simply that we are to *become* holy but that we *are* holy. Passages such as Romans 6:1–14 indicate that those united to Christ in his death and resurrection have been delivered from the enslaving power of sin. Since believers “have died with Christ” (v. 8), as a result “you must also consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (v. 11). This may be termed “definitive sanctification.” The dominating power of sin has been broken: “Sin will have no dominion over you” (Rom 6:14). As Michael Horton puts it, “all that is found in Christ is holy, because it is in Christ.”⁶

An understanding of definitive sanctification is immensely liberating for Christians but must be accompanied by an awareness of our need for progressive sanctification. “The believer is a new man, a new creation, but he is a new man not yet made perfect,” writes John Murray.⁷ By faithful use of the God-given means of grace, under the blessing of the Holy Spirit, Christians are to grow in holiness. To be more specific, we are to grow in likeness to Christ. Notice how Paul expresses his pastoral concern for the Galatians “for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19), a theme also expressed in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

We undoubtedly need more of the “splendor of holiness” (Ps 96:9) that demonstrates the transforming power of God’s grace. There should be a holy attractiveness in the church that is rooted in our relationship with the

⁶ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 652.

⁷ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 219.

Lord. Bryan Chapell captures this well when he writes that “those who are truly in union with Christ increasingly have the desires of the Author of that union, since his heart beats within them.”⁸

2. A Covenant Community

One of the main weaknesses of Evangelicalism is its rampant individualism. A proper emphasis on the necessity of personal salvation can develop into the idea that Christian faith and discipleship are all about “Jesus and me.” The perspective of Scripture is fundamentally different: the people of God are always thought of in terms of a community, a community united in covenant with God and consequently united with one another.

United with the Triune God

This is the foundation of the church’s existence. It is helpfully summarized by Murray:

The church is the assembly of the covenant people of God, the congregation of believers, the household of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the body of Christ. It consists of men and women called by God the Father into the fellowship of his Son, sanctified in Christ Jesus, regenerated by his Spirit, and united in the faith and confession of Christ Jesus as Lord and Saviour.⁹

The church is therefore divine in its origin, not the result of human planning or pragmatic development. Historically, Reformed Christians in particular have had a high view of the church, reflected in John Calvin’s comment that for those to whom God is Father “the church may also be Mother.”¹⁰ Indeed the goal of Christ’s redemptive work is stated in these terms in Ephesians 5:27: “... that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she may be holy and without blemish.” The church is at the center of God’s gracious work in the world.

The church is thus united to God in the covenant of grace. Among the implications of this truth is the unity of the church of Jesus Christ. That unity is a fact that stands on the basis of union with the Savior in his death and resurrection, but it is also to be expressed increasingly clearly in a visible way. The burden of Jesus’s prayer in John 17:21, “that they may all be one,”

⁸ Bryan Chapell, *Holiness by Grace: Delighting in the Joy That Is Our Strength* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 50.

⁹ John Murray, “The Church: Its Identity, Functions and Resources,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 1:237–38.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559 edition, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.1.1.

has in view a unity that the world can see and, as a result, “believe that you have sent me.”

United with one another

As Paul reminds his readers in Ephesians 4:25, “we are members of one another,” and that union is vividly portrayed in 1 Corinthians 12 in the metaphor of the body: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (v. 27). The New Testament never envisages Christian service and discipleship divorced from the church.

The church is not an appendage or optional extra for Christian service. It is the place where service begins. Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck sum it up pithily: “Churchless Christianity makes about as much sense as a Christless church, and has just as much biblical warrant.”¹¹

However, we recognize that some, perhaps a growing number, believe that as Christians they are members of Christ’s universal church but are under no obligation to belong to a local organized congregation. They may argue that any gathering of believers is “church.” Institutional expressions of church are ignored or ridiculed; living spirituality is pitted against dead structures. While recognizing that structures can inhibit the work of the church and that institutional expressions of Christianity have at times eclipsed Christ and the gospel, nevertheless this understanding of church is not biblical. The New Testament describes a mission that had as its goal the establishment of local congregations under the oversight of duly appointed elders, assemblies of God’s people where the worship of God is conducted “decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40), where authoritative instruction is given, where baptism and the Lord’s Supper are administered, where discipline is exercised, and where loving care to those within and outside the church is provided.

In this ordered community, God’s people are to serve the Lord. It is here that they engage face-to-face as they cultivate fellowship with one another. Made for community as image-bearers of God, they model what community could and should look like. The explosive growth of social media in recent years demonstrates this hunger for community. It would seem, however, that many efforts to connect people digitally have had the opposite effect. Brooks and Nicholas reflect this view when they state,

¹¹ Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 164.

We have moved from conversation to connection, from talking to texting, from solitude to isolation, from interdependent to interconnected.¹²

Writers who seek to make discerning use of digital technology have nevertheless noted the decline in face-to-face engagement, especially on the part of young people, and Tim Challies comments, “Studies now show that many young people are actually losing their ability to relate to one another in an offline context.”¹³

In biblical churches with biblical ministry, the people of God are to put into operation the “one anothers” of Scripture that build strong and attractive communities that are ready to address the needs and opportunities of our generation.

II. What Should We Be Doing?

By God’s grace and the Holy Spirit’s power, the church is to be a “city set on a hill” (Matt 5:14). There is the risk, however, that this remains at the level of generalities: we need to identify some of the specifics of the church’s calling and the particular challenges that face us in each area.

Before engaging with these specifics, however, it seems to me that in answering the question of what we should be doing, we should first answer, “Repenting.” Christians are often portrayed as arrogant and self-righteous, imbued with a “holier than thou” spirit. Much of this is a grossly unfair caricature, maliciously motivated, but not all of it. When we look honestly at ourselves and our churches, we see many failures, with regard to both what we are and what we do. We need to let John’s words sink into our hearts and shape our fundamental attitudes: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). In those who proclaim a gospel of forgiveness for sin, the world needs to see an awareness of sinfulness that required such a gospel as well as a personal appropriation of “the blood of Jesus his Son [that] cleanses us from all sin” (v. 7).

The servant church must see its own failings and avail itself of God’s remedy daily as it serves its Lord and Savior. We may now go on to identify a number of things that we should be doing.

1. Preaching the Word

None of us should need to be reminded of Paul’s exhortation to Timothy: “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke,

¹² Brooks and Nicholas, *Virtually Human*, 104.

¹³ Challies, *The Next Story*, 77.

and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). We should not require any convincing that preaching the Word of God to saved and unsaved is an indispensable element of our calling. We do, however, need to understand the challenges posed by the culture in which we find ourselves.

Writing in 2001, Graham Johnston identified three dangers that need to be faced in “preaching in a postmodern climate”:

The first is preachers could lose confidence in God’s Word, or with only a Bible in hand, feel overwhelmed by postmodernity’s tidal-wave-like force. The second: Preachers might stoop to a type of reduced perspective that shrinks God and His truth to accommodate listeners. Third: preachers might adopt an essentially pragmatic approach.¹⁴

Whether we believe we are in a postmodern world or a post-postmodern one, and bearing in mind that some of our listeners will be unreconstructed premodernists, these words still seem accurate. In the space available I will focus on our need to have confidence in God’s Word and also confidence in preaching itself.

Confidence in God’s Word

Scripture has always come under attack, with its inspiration, trustworthiness, and relevance being questioned and denied. We are familiar with these challenges, and an essential task of theological education is to prepare ministers and Bible teachers to address them. In our generation, thoroughly shaped by digital technology, we also need to be ready to state our confidence in the *stability* of God’s Word.

Most of us have become accustomed to seeing people in our congregations following the reading and the sermon on an electronic device (while hoping that they are not surfing the Internet or reading their e-mails). What we may be slow to realize is that apps for Bible translations may update the text without the reader being aware of it. On a large scale, this happened when some discovered their app had updated the 1984 NIV to the 2011 NIV without notice. Stephen Holmes of Saint Andrews University views such possibilities in a positive light and comments, “A truly digital Bible can embrace every advance in textual scholarship the day it is made, or can review or update one book a month.” He draws out the following implication:

A natively electronic text will be in a constant state of flux—as unstable as the copied texts that everyone in the Christian world worked with before the fifteenth century.¹⁵

¹⁴ Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 61.

¹⁵ Steve Holmes, “From Scrolls to Scrolling: How Technology Has Shaped Our Bible Reading,” *The Bible in TransMission*, Spring 2016, <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/content/ex->

Our response might be to insist that one definitive version of any translation be produced and placed beyond alteration, but the controversy that erupted in August and September 2016 when Crossway first stated that it was producing a text of the ESV that “will remain unchanged in all future editions” and within weeks had to acknowledge the place of ongoing textual scholarship, not to mention disagreements over the choice of wording in a verse such as Genesis 3:16, indicates the complexity of the issues. The idea of a Permanent Text ESV perished.¹⁶

Preachers must be able and willing to address these questions and equip themselves to be able to say with confidence to their hearers that we *do* have the Word of God reliably transmitted to us, the Word in which we can have full confidence and which we as preachers seek to expound faithfully.

Confidence in preaching

Many have abandoned preaching as a viable means of communicating God’s truth in a digital, visual, postmodern culture, and all kinds of substitutes are being proposed. At the root of a significant proportion of objections is the issue of authority: preaching is an exercise of authority as it presents the authoritative Word of God and calls for an obedient response; in so doing it is profoundly counter-cultural.

The sinful heart has always resisted authority. The heart of the first sin was a refusal to submit to God’s word, entertaining the devil’s question, “Did God actually say...?” (Gen 3:1). There is nothing new in challenging authority, but our contemporary culture offers a multitude of new possibilities for expressing that inclination. We live in the age of Wikipedia, where millions of articles on a vast variety of subjects can be created and edited by millions of registered users, many of whom have no particular qualifications relevant to the subject and who may indeed be pursuing a personal agenda. While there is such a thing as the “tyranny of the experts,” online sources of information readily undermine healthy concepts of authority or destroy authority altogether. Indeed, a preacher might well have a listener checking his exegesis against some online source even as he delivers his sermon.

While such factors should stimulate preachers to do their “homework” as thoroughly as possible, making good use of whatever resources are available, we must not allow ourselves to be intimidated by these cultural forces. The Lord who has “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt 28:18) has

plore_the_bible/bible_in_transmission/files/2016_spring/BiT_Spring_2016_Holmes.pdf, 7.

¹⁶ For the Crossway statement withdrawing their original proposal, see Lane T. Dennis, “Crossway Statement on the ESV Bible Text,” Crossway, September 28, 2016, <https://www.crossway.org/blog/2016/09/crossway-statement-on-the-esv-bible-text/>.

sent us to preach, and our textbook is “God-breathed” Scripture (2 Tim 3:16). Preachers sent by God therefore have a God-given authority. The statement of the Second Helvetic Confession, penned by Heinrich Bullinger in 1566, captures this thought well:

Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received by the faithful.¹⁷

This is sometimes stated as “The preaching of the Word of God *is* the Word of God.”

We can therefore preach in an antiauthoritarian culture with humble boldness, knowing that God’s Word will accomplish God’s purpose (Isa 55:11) and all the glory will be his.

None of this exempts preachers from making their best efforts to understand the context in which they are called to minister. We of course cannot be experts in every field, nor do we need to be, but we do need to have a good grasp of the main trends of thought in our culture. We need to engage with the forces that are shaping the minds of those who may listen to our preaching. We need to be answering the questions people are asking and, if necessary, leading them to the questions they *should* be asking.

2. *Spreading the Gospel*

A church cannot fail to be outward looking if it takes seriously the Lord’s final command, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). Without obedience to that command, we are not truly serving God in our generation. The Great Commission is a mandate that demands much of Christ’s church. As Horton notes,

First, this Commission is *deep in its intensiveness*. The eleven disciples of the Lord are called to make disciples, not just converts. Secondly, this Commission is *wide in its extensiveness*. Not only are the nations streaming to Zion; Zion itself is a mobile, spirit-powered chariot winding its course throughout the earth.¹⁸

In considering what this mandate means for the church, we need to recognize that there are conflicting understandings of it even among those committed to a high view of biblical authority. In recent discussions two main approaches may be identified: some focus on proclaiming the gospel with a

¹⁷ The Second Helvetic Confession 1, in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, rev. David S. Schaff (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 3:832.

¹⁸ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 91.

view to sinners repenting and receiving forgiveness and justification before God, while others proclaim the gospel with a view to God's people bringing all of life into submission to Christ and so transforming society. There has been considerable conflict in evangelical circles as a result of these differences, with charges of "reductionism" and "diluting the gospel" common.

A possible means of resolving these tensions is suggested by DeYoung and Gregg Gilbert in *What Is the Mission of the Church?* Their view is that both approaches are justified, since the New Testament uses the word "gospel" in two senses:

Sometimes it looks at the good news of Christianity with a wide-angle lens, calling "gospel" all the great blessings that God intends to shower on his people, starting with forgiveness but cascading from there all the way to a renewed and remade creation in which they will spend eternity. Other times, though, the New Testament looks at the good news with a very narrow focus—with a zoom lens, if you will—and is quite happy to call "gospel" the singular blessing of forgiveness of sins and restored relationship with God through the sacrificial death of Jesus.¹⁹

The first step in making disciples is the presentation of God's call to sinners to repent and receive the forgiveness that Christ offers, and so in this section, we will concentrate on the zoom-lens view of the gospel.

What needs to be emphasized in the contemporary context is that evangelism, mission, spreading the gospel, is fundamentally *God's work*. The focus must be on a sovereign, gracious God. The gospel is "good news" not because it tells sinners what to do to be saved: it is good news because it tells of what God has done in Christ to save sinners. Only in light of that fact is the call for a response meaningful. Not only that, but the command to make disciples is issued by the risen Christ, who says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt 28:18). The power for disciple-making comes from the Holy Spirit poured out by the ascended Lord at Pentecost, so that the apostles and their spiritual descendants "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:8) bear witness to the world. When there is a saving response to the message it is because God has opened the heart, as in the case of Lydia (Acts 16:14), granted repentance that leads to life (Acts 11:18), and opened a door of faith (Acts 14:27).

Crucial to biblical evangelism is the church's "being church," being what God designed it to be. As the people of God seek to fulfill the two great commandments—"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart

¹⁹ Kevin DeYoung and Gregg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 94.

and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:37, 39)—they do so in communities that testify to the transforming power of the gospel they proclaim. It exercises a holy attractiveness to those who are being drawn by the Spirit of God. The failure of the church to be what God has ordained it to be cannot be compensated for by any amount of evangelistic activity.

The church, however, does not fulfill its evangelistic calling simply by putting up a “Lost Sheep Welcome” sign and waiting for some to drop in. The good shepherd goes out looking for the lost sheep: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). There must be a going out to seek the lost so that they might become disciples. A biblical church will be outward looking and outward going.

3. *Engaging with Society*

Christ’s mandate to his church is “Go and make *disciples*” (Matt 28:18). It is not fulfilled by seeing men and women come to saving faith: converts must grow in discipleship. It is indeed such growth that provides the evidence of true conversion. To formulate a biblical perspective on this task we need to take a “wide-angle lens”²⁰ view of the Savior’s gospel proclamation.²¹

Jesus began his public ministry with the proclamation, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Jesus proclaimed the arrival in his person and work of the “kingdom of God” (*hē basileia tou theou*). As many New Testament scholars, such as Herman Ridderbos, have pointed out, the term *basileia* is most often used in the New Testament in a dynamic sense to describe the reign of God, the putting forth of his royal power.²² The spatial meaning of realm is certainly present, but it is secondary. The New Testament focus, however, is on the coming of the King with power to redeem and judge. Thus, a text such as Mark 9:1 can speak of the kingdom coming with power. The Gospels make it clear that Christ is the messianic King, and as a consequence of his death and resurrection he can say, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt 28:18). In Jesus the powers of the age to come

²⁰ DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 95–100. The use of this terminology does not imply that DeYoung and Gilbert would necessarily agree with the view worked out in this section.

²¹ In this section I draw at various points on my paper presented at the 2005 Affinity Theological Conference, “The Crown Rights of King Jesus Today,” in *Tales of Two Cities: Christianity and Politics*, ed. Stephen Clark (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005).

²² Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, trans. H. de Jongste (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), Part II.

have broken into the present age: *already* the kingdom has come but *not yet* in its final glory.

If *basileia* is taken in this sense, it is clear that Christ's kingdom is universal and embraces all things. Not all human beings, however, submit willingly to the reign and authority of King Jesus. It is only those who are changed by grace and who are brought to experience the redemption accomplished by Christ who willingly give allegiance to the King. In Richard Gaffin's words, "The church and only the church is made up of the citizens of the kingdom, those who by repentance and faith submit to the redemptive lordship of Christ."²³

Disciples are therefore citizens living by grace in the kingdom of King Jesus, which is universal in extent. This unified view of the reign of Christ reflects more accurately the New Testament material than more traditional Reformed views that think in terms of "Two Kingdoms."²⁴ Disciples willingly submit to the Lordship of Christ in every area of life, following the injunction of John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." That obedience must be worked out in every area of life, since Christ is king of every area of life. Abraham Kuyper summed this up well:

Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: "mine!"²⁵

Disciples serve God by seeking to bring all aspects of life into conformity with the pattern given by King Jesus. Despite the language used by some proponents of this approach, this activity cannot be described as "bringing in the kingdom" or "building the kingdom." God alone brings in his kingdom, but his people are to seek the king's glory in all of life, and through them he advances the cause of his kingdom, especially as his saving grace brings willing sinners under his reign.

The citizens of Christ's kingdom therefore go into every part of society, according to God's calling, to seek the glory of their king. They are to act as the salt and light spoken of in Matthew 5:13–16. No area of life is "secular"

²³ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Kingdom of God," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 369.

²⁴ A recent defense of the "Two Kingdoms" perspective is found in VanDrunnen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*.

²⁵ Stated by Abraham Kuyper in his Inaugural Address at the Free University of Amsterdam. See *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

and outside the scope of disciples. Despite the pressures from various directions that are being brought to bear on Christians today, faith must not be privatized, and discipleship cannot be confined within the walls of our church buildings.

We do not know what effects our labors will have, and results are not our responsibility. The church is to maintain a testimony to God's truth for all of life, including bearing witness to those in authority, and individual disciples are to pursue righteousness in all of life. It may be that the witness will be ignored and that our labors produce few visible results, but our call is to be faithful (1 Cor 4:2), and the King will be glorified.

4. Enduring Persecution

Biblical realism and a sober assessment of our circumstances suggest that Christ's church in our society will face hard days. That should not surprise us. The normal situation of the church, taking the long view historically, is one of hardship and opposition. Jesus warned his disciples in the Upper Room, "In the world you will have tribulation," while also sounding the note of victory, "But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The latter statement did not cancel the former.

Violent persecution of Christians is on the increase in many parts of the world: as yet that is not the situation in Western Europe. For us, persecution comes in many lesser ways within families, in the workplace, and in countless other settings. Often it is what Don Carson calls "sneering condescension"²⁶ as our Christian views become more and more out of step with the prevailing culture. Carson has also highlighted perceptively the reality of a professed commitment to "tolerance," perhaps the virtue most highly regarded in our culture. It often and easily becomes intolerance of views that do not conform to cultural "orthodoxy." He suggests that if opposition to Christianity increases in Western countries, it will not come in a sudden outburst of overt hostility: "It is far more likely to come incrementally and in the name of preserving tolerance."²⁷ Contemporary examples are not difficult to find.

Serving God in our generation thus requires that we endure with God-given patience the level of persecution we presently face and that we prepare ourselves and our people, especially the young, to endure greater hardship if that should be the Lord's will.

²⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 175.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

III. *People of Hope*

There is much in our contemporary situation that could tempt us to adopt a gloomy outlook. Things are difficult for Christian witness and in some respects, there may be worse to come. On a bad day, we may despair of the cause of the gospel. We should not. As the people of God, we are consequently people of hope. We are in fact the only people in our society who have a solid basis for hope.

The part of John 16:33 that we most readily recall is “In the world you will have tribulation.” The disciples to whom those words were first spoken would know only too well what tribulation meant, and their first experience of it lay a matter of hours ahead of them. The Lord, however, did not leave them with a word of warning but with an assurance of his victory: “But take heart; I have overcome the world.” This text provides for us a perspective of biblical realism that issues in hope. By his life, death, and resurrection Christ has conquered the forces opposed to God and his purpose and will carry that purpose through to its glorious conclusion at his return.

To serve God in our generation we need to cultivate a soundly biblical eschatology. We need always to keep in mind the “already” and the “not yet” of the coming of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus. In his person and work the kingdom of God had truly come.

The kingdom has not yet come in its final glory, but it will come. Christ “must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Cor 15:25). At the appointed time, he will return in glory to judge the world and complete the salvation of his people with their bodily resurrection (Phil 3:21) and the ushering in of “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13). The supreme object of Christian hope is expressed by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, “so we will always be with the Lord.”

This perspective on the future enables disciples to serve God faithfully in every way he provides, knowing that the results are in his hands and that, whether we appear to meet with success or failure, he “works out all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph 1:11). From the divine perspective, failure is impossible. Beyond the present age, there is then the certainty of glory, when faithful servants will be commended and rewarded (Matt 25:33–40) and the creation will be renewed as a fitting home for the redeemed.

We are therefore people of hope: hope grounded in the finished work of a great Savior. Far from weakening our commitment to serving God, this hope in truth provides a tremendous stimulus to godly living and service. We serve in the knowledge that “in the Lord [our] labor is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:58)

and that the Lord's triumph is sure. Therefore "everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:3), and in this spirit, we serve God in our generation.

Transgender: Trans-ition to Nowhere

PETER JONES

Abstract

Based on Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (ESV), the apostle Paul in Romans 1:25 gives an amazingly complete definition of the only two ways of existing in the world: “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” I call these two ways of existing Oneism and Twoism.

In Oneism, if you worship creation, you will believe that the world is self-created, self-explanatory, and all made of the same stuff (matter, spirit, or a mixture). Paganism is the worship of nature. If everything shares the same divine substance, then all distinctions are eliminated and everything is god. In Twoism, if you worship God, you will believe that he is the Creator—an external, intelligent, personal God. There are two kinds of existence—the Creator who is uncreated, and everything else, which is created. He has placed distinctions in his creation, making what I call Twoism a worldview based on the binaries of otherness and difference.

From living under the cultural canopy of biblical truth, our world has changed in the last one or two generations. This becomes especially evident in the modern views of sexuality—in particular, transsexuality, where human beings now self-define and reject the creational binary of male/female sexuality.

Introduction

Most people still regard “transgenderism” as an obscure or marginal issue.¹ Though transgender people are a tiny minority of the populace, the issue has brought about deep cultural conflict. Once the definition of gender is in question, there is no turning back. Perhaps the most striking element of modern Western society is its determination to dismiss the basic liberties God has given humanity by reinventing personal identity, in particular, personal *sexual* identity. Such experimentation is conducted without any satisfying criteria either to guide the process or to indicate when it will have reached a successful end. Such is the context in which we discuss transgenderism, the latest expression of sexual self-redefinition. Merriam-Webster defines *transgender* as “a person whose gender identity differs from the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth.”

I. *The Present Situation*

The speed of change is creating instant dinosaurs. In 2017, TV presenter Jenni Murray, host of BBC Radio 4’s *Woman’s Hour*, was issued an “impartiality warning” for saying that a sex change cannot make a man a “real woman.” A transsexual journalist argued that “the fact that she [Murray] is still allowed to host *Woman’s Hour* while spouting this bile is ridiculous Jenni Murray is a dinosaur and we all know what happened to them.”² This obvious threat to an honest statement of fact indicates the future for politically incorrect “deniers.”

Transgenderism has been an ideal in some indigenous cultures and societies, such as the Hijra of India, the Fa’afafine of Polynesia, the ladyboys and tomboys of Thailand, and the Takatāpui of New Zealand. However, it has not been on most people’s agenda. The first sex change operation in the West was performed by Dr. Felix Abraham—a mastectomy on a transman

¹ In this study, I am not referring to those born with physical anomalies that produce an intersex condition. I realize that such conditions require much wisdom and sometimes include difficult decisions, but, as an anomaly, it is not a condition on which we could establish a valid theology of gender. Note also since writing this article I discovered a useful recent book on the subject: Andrew Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say about Gender Identity?* (Centralia, WA: Good Book, 2017).

² “BBC Issues Warning over Presenter’s ‘Transgender’ Comments,” *Christian Concern*, March 10, 2017, <https://www.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/bbc-issues-warning-over-presenters-transgender-comments>.

in 1926.³ The first serious study, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, appeared in 1966 by the American endocrinologist and sexologist Harry Benjamin, who worked with “sex expert”—some say, “pervert”—Alfred Kinsey.⁴ The term “transgender” did not appear until 1971, and its shortened form, “trans,” until 1996.⁵

Within a few years, however, popular interest in the subject has grown out of all proportion. Transgenderism is not about the handful of sexually abnormal surgical cases. It has reached the headlines with much-trumpeted stories like that of Bruce (now Caitlyn) Jenner, winner of the gold medal in the men’s decathlon in 1976, who came out as transgender in 2015. Jenner was appropriately named *Time*’s “Person of the Year, 2015” and received ESPN’s “Arthur Ashe Courage Award,” though not for athletic achievement!

Other examples of public transgenderism indicate how widespread the phenomenon is becoming:

- Thomas Beatie gave birth to three children between 2008 and 2010. Beatie, born a woman, underwent a surgical and legal gender transition before having children. Arizona recognizes Beatie as their father, even though, biologically, he is their mother.
- Transmen, once women, while insisting on being called by male pronouns, nevertheless have periods, mammograms, and abortions. Therefore, the British Medical Association tells doctors not to call pregnant women “mothers,” in case transgender individuals are offended.⁶
- In 2017, half of Fortune 500 and other large companies offered employees transgender-inclusive health care benefits.⁷
- The District of Columbia motor vehicle department offers an “X” option, in addition to the male/female choices for driver’s licenses or identification cards.⁸
- In 2017, Canada’s Senate passed a law (67 to 11) for the Human Rights Code, criminalizing the wrong use of pronouns to address transgender

³ Stephen Whittle, “A Brief History of Transgender Issues,” *The Guardian*, June 10, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/jun/02/brief-history-transgender-issues>.

⁴ Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York: Ace, 1966).

⁵ Whittle, “A Brief History of Transgender Issues.”

⁶ Laura Donnelly, “Don’t Call Pregnant Women ‘Expectant Mothers’ as It Might Offend Transgender People, BMA Says,” *The Telegraph*, January 29, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/29/dont-call-pregnant-women-expectant-mothers-might-offend-transgender/>.

⁷ John Biver, “Identity Politics and Paraphilias: An Ugly Fight and Bestiality/Zoophilia,” *BarbWire*, April 4, 2017, <http://barbwire.com/2017/04/04/identity-politics-and-paraphilias-an-ugly-fight-bestialityzoophilia/>.

⁸ “DC begins issuing gender-neutral driver’s licenses,” Associated Press, June 29, 2017.

people. Those who refuse to comply are liable for hate crimes and will be jailed, fined, or made to take anti-bias training.⁹

- The Obama administration introduced the full integration of women and homosexuals into all aspects of the US military. Currently, the Army has mandatory transgender sensitivity training, covering everything from “trans-female soldiers,” to “transgender shower etiquette,” to dealing with “male soldiers” who become pregnant.¹⁰ The taxpayer finances double mastectomies and artificial penises for transmen soldiers and castration and vaginal construction for transwomen soldiers.
- One transgender activist now feels comfortable declaring that straight men who do not desire transgender women have an issue they “should try to work through.” Straight men unwilling to be romantic with transwomen hold an “odd opinion.” They should treat “transwomen as the women they are.”¹¹

Whether you are aware of these facts or not, dear reader, we must consider our Christian response to this cultural phenomenon.

II. *Dubious Science?*

Leading progressives are calling religious and cultural Neanderthals to embrace the value of transgenderism and to defend its practice in immediate public legalization. This call fails to recognize the philosophical and scientific difficulties attached to this deeply human problem. Consider the story of Dr. Paul R. McHugh.

McHugh is a retired professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the renowned Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Appointed by President George W. Bush to the Presidential Council on Bioethics, McHugh was, for twenty-five years, the psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital, recognized as the leading academic medical institution for the treatment of transgender people. In 1965, Johns Hopkins made history as the first

⁹ Rob Shimshock, “Canadians Could Face Hate Crimes over Using the Wrong Gender Pronouns,” *The Daily Caller*, June 16, 2016, <http://dailycaller.com/2017/06/16/canada-passes-law-criminalizing-use-of-wrong-gender-pronouns/>.

¹⁰ “Transgender Training: Army Sensitivity Training Now Addresses ‘Male Pregnancies,’” *BarbWire*, June 30, 2017, <http://barbwire.com/2017/06/30/armys-new-transgender-training-now-addresses-male-pregnancies/>.

¹¹ Dave Urbanski, “Transgender Activist: Straight Men Should ‘Work Through’ Non-Attraction to Transgender Women,” *TheBlaze*, July 3, 2017, <http://www.theblaze.com/news/2017/07/03/transgender-activist-straight-men-should-work-through-non-attraction-to-transgender-women/>.

academic institution to offer gender-affirming surgical procedures.

In one publicized case, Dr. John Money (disciple of sexologist Alfred Kinsey and member of the transsexual research team at Johns Hopkins) was firmly convinced that gender was a social construction that could be “learned away” through psychological and behavioral intervention. In 1967, a Canadian couple, the Reimers, asked him to repair a botched circumcision on their two-year-old son, David. Money surgically changed David’s genitalia from male to female, assuming that David’s sexual identity would be shaped by his upbringing as a girl. Money demanded that the parents raise David as a girl without telling him about the surgery. The experiment was an utter failure. By age twelve, David was severely depressed and, at age fourteen, chose to undo the gender change and live as a boy. In 2000, at the age of thirty-five, David and his twin brother Brian, who had been included in the deception, exposed the sexual abuse Money had inflicted, and, soon after, both committed suicide.¹²

However, to return to McHugh—in 1979, McHugh, director of the transgender program, shut it down. He said that most of those who had undergone sex reassignment surgery “had much the same problems with relationships, work, and emotions as before,” and so he concluded, “We psychiatrists would do better to concentrate on trying to fix their minds and not their genitalia.”¹³

In 2016, seeking justification for their past professional conclusions, McHugh, and a Johns Hopkins colleague, Dr. Lawrence S. Mayer,¹⁴ published a 150-page report of the current academic literature on gender reassignment. Entitled “Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences,”¹⁵ this major study examines scores of scholarly and scientific studies that prove heterosexual gender to be a fixed condition that cannot successfully be changed.

The following is a short discussion of this report, which serious readers should read for themselves. The authors offer “a careful summary and an up-to-date explanation of research—from the biological, psychological,

¹² For a fuller description, see Walt Heyer, “‘Too Many End in Suicide’: The Dark History of Gender ‘Reassignment,’” *LifeSiteNews*, May 4, 2015. See also another botched attempt that ended in suicide—John Colapinto, *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).

¹³ Paul R. McHugh, “Surgical Sex: Why We Stopped Doing Sex Change Operations,” *First Things*, November 2004, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2004/11/surgical-sex>.

¹⁴ Lawrence S. Mayer, M.B., M.S., Ph.D., is a scholar in residence in the Department of Psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and a professor of statistics and biostatistics at Arizona State University.

¹⁵ Paul McHugh and Lawrence Mayer, “Society and Gender,” *The New Atlantis* (Fall 2016).

and social sciences—related to sexual orientation and gender identity,” showing that sexual orientation is chosen and not fixed and that gay and transgender people are not “born gay.”¹⁶

The study warns us that we are dealing with sensitive human beings, firstly because the concept of “sexual desire” is complex and difficult to define, with currently no agreed-upon definitions of “sexual orientation.”¹⁷ Furthermore, the subject is fraught with danger, since “combined worldwide studies showed up to fifty percent higher rates of mental disorders and substance abuse among persons self-identifying in surveys as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.”¹⁸ Among the transgender subpopulation in the United States, the rate of attempted suicide is as high as forty-one percent, ten times higher than in the general population. A 2001 study of 392 male-to-female and 123 female-to-male transgender persons found that sixty-two percent of the male-to-female and fifty-five percent of the female-to-male transgender persons were depressed at the time of the study and that thirty-two percent of each population had attempted suicide.¹⁹ McHugh and Mayer conclude that “the real issue is public health not [the ideological] issues of civil rights, or the right to self-define.”²⁰ In other words, progressive ideology must not trump the concern for real, suffering human beings.

One major goal of today’s “progressives” has been to show that sexual deviancies are inborn or biologically determined and, therefore, totally natural. If this is true, then heterosexuality is not normative. In 1991, Simon LeVay, a well-known homosexual scientist, sought to show brain differences in homosexual men,²¹ but he later stated frankly, “I did not prove that homosexuality is genetic, or find a genetic cause for being gay.”²² Indeed, a study of over 23,000 individuals presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Human Genetics in 2012 found “no linkages reaching genome-wide significance for same-sex sexual identity for males or

¹⁶ McHugh and Mayer, “Executive Summary,” *The New Atlantis* (Fall 2016).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 75. See Kristen Clements-Nolle et al., “HIV Prevalence, Risk Behaviors, Health Care Use, and Mental Health Status of Transgender Persons: Implications for Public Health Intervention,” *American Journal of Public Health* 91.6 (2001): 915–21, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.91.6.915>.

²⁰ McHugh and Mayer, “Society and Gender,” 11, and n. 66. See also David Nimmons, “Sex and the Brain,” *Discover*, March 1, 1994, <http://discovermagazine.com/1994/mar/sexandthebrain346/>.

²¹ Simon LeVay, “A Difference in the Hypothalamic Structure between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men,” *Science*, New Series, 253.5023 (August 30, 1991): 1034–1037.

²² McHugh and Mayer, “Society and Gender,” 11.

females.”²³ Making the “born that way” thesis even more untenable, McHugh and Mayer cite numerous studies that show that approximately eighty percent of adolescent boys and half of adolescent girls who expressed either partial or exclusive same-sex romantic attraction in late childhood “turned” heterosexual (opposite-sex attraction or exclusively heterosexual identity) as young adults.²⁴ Mayer and McHugh state their convictions clearly:

The scientific definition of biological sex is, for almost all human beings, clear, binary [that is, heterosexual], and stable, reflecting an underlying biological reality that is not contradicted by exceptions to sex-typical behavior, and cannot be altered by surgery or social conditioning.²⁵

Their examination of scientific studies shows “*no biological features that can reliably identify transgender individuals as different from others.*”²⁶ This conclusion was supported by Johns Hopkins endocrinologist Charles Ihlenfeld, who publicly announced that eighty percent of the people who want to change their gender should not do it and “too many end in suicide.” Ihlenfeld stopped administering hormones to patients experiencing gender dysphoria and switched specialties from endocrinology to psychiatry so he could offer such patients the kind of help he thought they needed.²⁷

Despite the lack of scientific proof, drastic interventions continue to be prescribed, even for many prepubescent children, some as young as two. Mayer and McHugh state, “We have reservations about how well scientists understand what it even means for a child to have a developed sense of his or her gender. We strongly urge caution in this regard.”²⁸ Dr. Michelle Cretella, president of the American College of Pediatricians, agrees:

Today’s institutions that promote transition affirmation are pushing children to impersonate the opposite sex, sending many of them down the path of puberty blockers, sterilization, the removal of healthy body parts, and untold psychological damage. These harms constitute nothing less than institutionalized child abuse.²⁹

²³ *Ibid.*, 33, n. 51, referencing E. M. Drabant et al., “Genome-Wide Association Study of Sexual Orientation in a Large, Web-based Cohort,” *23andMe* (2012), <https://blog.23andme.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Drabant-Poster-v7.pdf>.

²⁴ McHugh and Mayer, “Society and Gender,” 53.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 93. Note that the hermaphroditic biological condition of malformed genitalia or the possession of both sets of genitalia is not a third gender but a biological malformation.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁷ Cited in Susan Brinkmann, “What the Public Needs to Know about Sex Change Surgery,” *Women of Grace*, May 5, 2015, <http://www.womenofgrace.com/blog/?p=39616>.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁹ Michelle Cretella, “I’m a Pediatrician: How Transgender Ideology Has Infiltrated My Field and Produced Large-Scale Child Abuse,” *The Daily Signal*, July 3, 2017, <http://dailysignal.com>.

These warnings seem verified by the growing number of people who call themselves “de-transitioners.”³⁰ These unfortunate individuals were deeply harmed by sex reassignment surgery involving castration, mastectomy, and chemically induced sterility. Deeply regretful, they often seek to recover their original gender identity. The testimony of Walt Heyer is disturbing. He states, “I underwent gender reassignment surgery and lived for eight years as Laura Jensen, female.”³¹ He adds, “Eventually, I gathered the courage to admit that the surgery had fixed nothing—it only masked and exacerbated deeper psychological problems.”³²

The American College of Pediatricians (ACPed) is a national organization of pediatricians and other healthcare professionals “dedicated to the health and well-being of children. Formed in 2002, the College is committed to fulfilling its mission by producing sound policy, based upon the best available research.”³³ The ACPed, like the Mayer-McHugh report, on the basis of “the best available research,” has publicly called for an end to the normalization of gender dysphoria (GD) in children:

Mandates by public institutions to force the acceptance of GD as a normal variant of child development and require social accommodation, toxic hormone therapy and surgical removal of healthy body parts, are misguided and dangerous. The Association of American Physicians and Surgeons, the Christian Medical Association, and the Catholic Medical Association share the College’s concern over this approach. Together our groups represent over 20,000 physicians and health professionals. Opposition also exists among liberal-leaning healthcare professionals who have created an online community known as Youth Trans Critical Professionals. However, those who dare to speak out in support of “First do no harm” often encounter significant public and private harassment, and many have lost or will lose their jobs.³⁴

In spite of this, “progressive” scientists refuse the scientific evidence. McHugh’s research is dismissed as “a weapon in the arsenal of anti-transgender politicians and extremists.”³⁵ Dean Hamer, PhD, scientist emeritus at

com/2017/07/03/im-pediatrician-transgender-ideology-infiltrated-field-produced-large-scale-child-abuse/.

³⁰ Laurie Higgins, “Former ‘Transgender’ Talk about De-‘Transitioning,’” Illinois Family Institute, March 7, 2017, <https://illinoisfamily.org/homosexuality/former-transgender-talk-de-transitioning/>.

³¹ Walt Heyer, “I Was a Transgender Woman,” The Witherspoon Institute, April 1, 2015, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/04/14688>.

³² Heyer, “Too Many End in Suicide.”

³³ “About Us,” American College of Pediatricians (2016), <https://www.acped.org/about-us>.

³⁴ “Normalizing Gender Dysphoria Is Dangerous and Unethical,” American College of Pediatricians, August 3, 2016, <https://www.acped.org/normalizing-gender-dysphoria-is-dangerous-and-unethical>.

³⁵ Dawn Ennis, “Human Rights Campaign Sets Sights on Johns Hopkins after

the National Institutes of Health, dismisses Mayer and McHugh's claims in a scathing review titled "New 'Scientific' Study on Sexuality, Gender Is Neither New nor Science."³⁶ He rejects their work as "data cherry-picking" and cites studies that he believes contradict their work.³⁷

III. *Brain Sex*

Persons with a Y chromosome will always be biological males, in spite of an approach called "brain-sex," which attempts to show that gender is formed *in utero* in the interplay of sex hormones with genes that may produce a sense of incongruence between objective biological identity and psychologically perceived gender identity.³⁸ However, after a careful analysis, Christian psychologist Mark Yarhouse, like many in the field, does not find brain-sex suppositions convincing.³⁹ He concludes, "We do not know what causes gender dysphoria."⁴⁰ Even a convinced transgenderist, Amy Ellis Nutt, says, "There is no one test for gender. ... Gender is truly less about biology and more about what we tell ourselves—and others—about who we are."⁴¹

Hamer, however, represents a powerful and convinced progressive lobby, epitomized by the young transwoman spokesperson of the homosexual Human Rights Campaign, Sarah McBride, the first transgender person to address the Democratic National Convention in 2015. McBride dismisses McHugh's careful academic work as "transphobic" with "dangerous consequences for transgender people, in particular, transgender young people."⁴²

Controversial Trans Report," NBC, September 1, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/hrc-sets-sights-johns-hopkins-after-controversial-sexuality-gender-report-n641501>.

³⁶ Dean Hamer, "New 'Scientific' Study on Sexuality, Gender Is Neither New nor Scientific," *Advocate*, August 29, 2016, <http://www.advocate.com/commentary/2016/8/29/new-scientific-study-sexuality-gender-neither-new-nor-scientific>.

³⁷ See the public lecture by Quentin Van Meter, MD, FCP, a pediatric endocrinologist and a Fellow of the American College of Pediatricians and the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists, who demonstrates the illegitimate, non-scientific, politically correct, scandalous influence of the protransgender lobby that has taken over the public expression of the transgender issues. Clearly, we are not dealing with just scientific evidence but rather with an antibiblical ideology about the nature of the human person. See "Presentations from Mass-Resistance Texas Teens4Truth Conference," *MassResistance*, December 28, 2017, <http://www.massresistance.org/docs/gen3/17d/MR-TX-Teens4Truth-Conf-101817/presentations.html#VanMeter>.

³⁸ Amy Ellis Nutt, *Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family* (New York: Random House, 2015), 88–95.

³⁹ Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 72.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴¹ Nutt, *Becoming Nicole*, 167.

⁴² Ennis, "Human Rights Campaign."

She threatened that unless Johns Hopkins took action and denounced the report of their retired professors, there would be “consequences”: Johns Hopkins’s score on the Healthcare Equality Index would be significantly impacted. The threat worked—immediately. Soon after McHugh’s report appeared, Johns Hopkins reinstated a transgender program at the medical school, including sex reassignment surgery.

IV. *Child Abuse*

A balanced medico-scientific conclusion is proposed by a group including Michelle Cretella (MD and President of the American College of Pediatricians), Quentin Van Meter (MD, Pediatric Endocrinologist, and Vice President of the American College of Pediatricians), and Professor Paul McHugh. They believe that contemporary gender ideology harms children and is really child abuse. They recently issued eight guiding principles:⁴³

1. Human sexuality is an objective biological binary trait: “XY” and “XX” are genetic markers of male and female, respectively—not genetic markers of a disorder.
2. No one is born with a gender. Everyone is born with a biological sex. Gender (an awareness and sense of oneself as male or female) is a sociological and psychological concept; not an objective biological one.
3. A person’s belief that he or she is something they are not is, at best, a sign of confused thinking.
4. Puberty is not a disease and puberty-blocking hormones can be dangerous.
5. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American College of Pediatricians (DMC-V), as many as ninety-eight percent of gender confused boys and eighty-eight percent of gender confused girls eventually accept their biological sex after naturally passing through puberty.
6. Pre-pubertal children diagnosed with gender dysphoria may be given puberty blockers as young as eleven, and will require cross-sex hormones in later adolescence to continue impersonating the opposite sex. These children will never be able to conceive any genetically related children even via artificial reproductive technology.

⁴³ “Gender Ideology Harms Children,” American College of Pediatricians, September 2017, <https://www.acpedcs.org/the-college-speaks/position-statements/gender-ideology-harms-children>.

7. Rates of suicide are nearly twenty times greater among adults who use cross-sex hormones and undergo sex reassignment surgery, even in Sweden, which is among the most LGBTQ-affirming countries.
8. Conditioning children into believing a lifetime of chemical and surgical impersonation of the opposite sex is normal and healthful is child abuse.

V. *The Real Issue*

The “objective,” “scientific” reaction of Hamer reveals the real issues at stake. He claims McHugh’s report “will have zero impact in the scientific world” but will “lend a certain air of legitimacy to the anti-LGBT arguments of various right-wing groups in the U.S. ... the religious fundamentalists who are working to export homophobia to the developing world.”⁴⁴

This ideological standoff comes down to philosophies regarding the meaning of life. Defenders of transgenderism dismiss McHugh’s work because McHugh shows his religious colors by referring to gender-reassignment surgery as “mutilation” and by explaining his actions in a conservative Catholic publication, *First Things*.⁴⁵ Hamer would doubtless take issue with the statement of the American College of Pediatricians, which seeks to “base its policies and positions upon scientific truth,” but “within a framework of ethical absolutes,” namely, “the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death and the importance of the fundamental mother-father family (female-male) unit in the rearing of children.”⁴⁶

The latest scientific evidence comes from a study published in 2017 by Professor Shmuel Pietrokovski and Dr. Moran Gershoni, both researchers from the respected Weizmann Institute’s Molecular Genetics Department in Rehovot, Israel. These researchers found that around 6,500 of the 20,000 protein-coding genes expressed “activity that was biased toward one sex or the other in at least one tissue, adding to the already major biological differences between men and women.”⁴⁷ These scientists conclude that “when it comes to the differences between the sexes, we see that evolution often works on the level of gene expression.” This genetic study refutes the “trans”

⁴⁴ Hamer, “New ‘Scientific’ Study.”

⁴⁵ Paul R. McHugh, “Surgical Sex: Why We Stopped Doing Sex Change Operations,” *First Things*, November 2004, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2004/11/surgical-sex>.

⁴⁶ “About Us,” American College of Pediatricians.

⁴⁷ Weizmann Institute of Science, “Researchers Identify 6,500 Genes That Are Expressed Differently in Men and Women,” *ScienceDaily*, May 4, 2017, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/05/170504104342.htm>.

theory that attempts to detach gender from biological sex. Despite genital re-assignment and cosmetic plastic surgery, there is no way a man can become a woman. The most audacious, sexually suggestive drag queen is still a man!

I leave this subject with a quote from the very public lesbian and brilliant literary critic Camille Paglia:

It is certainly ironic how liberals who posture as defenders of science when it comes to global warming (a sentimental myth unsupported by evidence) flee all reference to biology when it comes to gender. Biology has been programmatically excluded from women's studies and gender studies programs for almost 50 years now. Thus very few current gender studies professors and theorists, here and abroad, are intellectually or scientifically prepared to teach their subjects. The cold biological truth is that sex changes are impossible. Every single cell of the human body remains coded with one's birth gender for life.⁴⁸

Hamer gives his side away in his passionate prose for sexual liberation:

I've been gratified by the gradual increase in knowledge and acceptance of the deeply rooted, intrinsic origins of sexual orientation and gender identity, and equally pleased by the growing realization that freedom of sexuality and gender are basic human rights *independent of any scientific explanation*.⁴⁹

He believes in "pansexual naturalism," whatever science might say. Only this explains how Vimeo eliminates from its "public" platform the 850 videos posted by *Pure Passion Ministries*, a Christian ministry posting testimonies from people who have suffered through abusive homosexual experiences and found healing. Vimeo's openly ideological principle is posted for all to read: "Referring to homosexuality as a 'dysfunction of sexual brokenness' or 'sexual distortion' is not OK, nor is reference to 'the fact that God can transform the life of anyone caught in homosexual confusion.'" Vimeo baldly states, "We don't believe that homosexuality requires a cure and we don't allow videos on our platform that espouse this point of view."⁵⁰ Yet the service gladly hosts pedophile videos glorifying the North American Man-Boy Love Association, all kinds of sexual perversity, including pornography, as well as jihadi calls to violent action. Deliverance from homosexuality? *Verboten!*

⁴⁸ Jonathan V. Last, "Camille Paglia: On Trump, Democrats, Transgenderism, and Islamic Terror," *The Weekly Standard*, June 15, 2017, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/camille-paglia-on-trump-democrats-transgenderism-and-islamist-terror/article/2008464#>.

⁴⁹ Hamer, "New 'Scientific' Study" (my italics).

⁵⁰ Michael L. Brown, "Vimeo Declares War on Gospel Transformation," Ask Dr. Brown, March 27, 2017, <https://askdrbrown.org/library/vimeo-declares-war-gospel-transformation>.

VI. *The New Orthodoxy: Legislation without Evidence*

Only 0.6% of US adults identify as transsexual,⁵¹ and the medical and legal issues have not been the subject of extensive civic debate. So it is curious that transgenderism has provided progressive thinkers an occasion to create an all-inclusive, moralizing discourse. In 2015, the highest law-enforcement officer in the United States, Attorney General Loretta Lynch, gave a detailed and public “moral” argument in support of the normalization and acceptance of transgender people. Going beyond immediate legal debates about appropriate bathroom accommodation, Lynch placed transgender issues in the context of the noble struggle for civil rights and characterized opposition to full transgender acceptance as equivalent to the violent hostility shown to the desegregation of schools in 1954.⁵² Among other things, Lynch declared,

This is about the dignity and respect we accord our fellow citizens and the laws that we, as a people and as a country, have enacted to protect them—indeed, to protect all of us, and it’s about the founding ideals that have led this country—haltingly but inexorably—in the direction of fairness, inclusion and equality for all Americans.⁵³

Without convincing scientific evidence, powerful cultural voices demand strict and *immediate* legislative action. The rush to action without hard fact is disturbing. The famous “bathroom” bills are an example, imposing on various states a new “normal” pansexual view of reality. On November 15, 2017, the governor of California signed into law Senate Bill 179, which allows individuals to change their sex on legal identification documents, without even a doctor’s note. “Non-binary” is now a legally recognized gender, rendering all previous literature and jurisprudence of Western civilization out of date. Though the American College of Pediatricians has issued a statement that transgender ideology “harms children,” and the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-V) recognizes “Gender Dysphoria” (GD) (formerly listed as “Gender Identity Disorder,” or GID), as a “mental disorder,” yet we rush to pass laws demanding its general acceptance. Similar judicial action is occurring elsewhere.

⁵¹ Mayer and McHugh, “Sexuality and Gender,” 9.

⁵² Ernesto Londoño, “Loretta Lynch’s Enlightened Defense of Transgender,” *The New York Times*, May 9, 2016, https://takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/05/09/loretta-lynchs-enlightened-defense-of-transgender-people/?_r=0.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

A missionary friend in Costa Rica recently wrote to say that “the Ministry of Education just published an entire curriculum (mandatory for all schools) which includes gender stuff from first grade on, in ALL the courses. And the Social Medical Services just approved giving hormones and psychological counseling to transgenders, and they want to fund operations also.”⁵⁴

The Canadian government may legally remove children from families that refuse to accept their child’s chosen “gender identity,” thanks to Bill 89, “Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act, 2017,” passed by the Ontario province in a 63 to 23 vote. The Minister of Children and Youth Services, Michael Coteau, who *introduced* the bill, said that “a parent’s failure to recognize and support a child’s gender self-identification is a form of child abuse, and a child in these circumstances should be removed from the situation and placed into protection.” He stated,

I would consider that a form of abuse, when a child identifies one way and a caregiver is saying no, you need to do this differently. If it’s abuse, and if it’s within the definition, a child can be removed from that environment and placed into protection where the abuse stops.⁵⁵

Although many are rushing to legislate gender identity, in some places you cannot even talk about it. According to the students at Evergreen State University, “free speech” isn’t important when the lives of “‘black, trans, fems, and students’ are concerned.”⁵⁶ In our time, the unpardonable and punishable sin has become the questioning of an individual’s self-created identity, in particular, as transgender. What is going on?

VII. Pansexualism—A Triumphant Contemporary Pagan Ideology

Such hastily constructed legislation concerning the cultural parameters of sexuality reveals a deep ideology emerging in the West at breakneck speed. We have seen endless arguments for alternate sexualities, but transgenderism seems to bring us to an endpoint. It overrides arguments for homosexuality, which has sought justification in the genetically inalterable

⁵⁴ Personal communication.

⁵⁵ Thomas D. Williams, “New Ontario Law Enables Gov’t to Seize Children from Parents Opposing Gender Transition,” Breitbart, June 6, 2017, <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2017/06/06/new-ontario-law-enables-govt-to-seize-children-from-parents-opposing-gender-transition/>.

⁵⁶ Dave Urbanski, “F*** Free Speech’: Evergreen State Students Double Down, Want to ‘Weed Out’ Those Who Oppose Them,” TheBlaze, June 20, 2017, <http://www.theblaze.com/news/2017/06/20/f-free-speech-evergreen-state-students-double-down-want-to-weed-out-those-who-oppose-them/>.

basis for same-sex attraction. This is why a radical feminist of yesteryear, Germaine Greer, a literary scholar and lesbian who was one of the great pioneers of second-wave feminism, recently opposed transgenderism. In a public lecture, she denied that men who have undergone sex-reassignment surgery are actually women. She was rejected because of her “offensive” views.⁵⁷ Now we hear that gender can be what we want it to be, and we can eliminate traditional “obligatory sexualities and sex roles” and create “an androgynous and genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one’s sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love.”⁵⁸

Such thinking falls into the category of identity politics, which has taught the rising generation a reticence to disagree with *anything* for fear of seeming intolerant—except, of course, what *they perceive to be* intolerant.

In this utopian vision, differences of economic status, race, and gender must be eliminated. There must be total equality among all classes of humans, and also there must be the power for everyone to choose his or her own destiny without restraint, including men who choose to be women and women who choose to be men. The political civil rights agenda of the Sixties has become the identity politics of the 2000s.⁵⁹

This thesis is powerfully expressed in the writings of postmodern feminist Judith Butler. In her books, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990)⁶⁰ and *Undoing Gender* (2004),⁶¹ Butler sees gender as “performativity theory.” Being a woman or man is not something that one *is* but something that one *decides to do*. There is no divine creation—only self-creation. As one of the early feminists, Simone de Beauvoir, famously stated in 1949, “On ne naît pas femme: on le devient [One is not born a woman; one becomes one].”⁶² Gender is not a fixed causal result of biological sex. Rather, it is a constructed status, radically independent from biology or bodily traits, “a free floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and

⁵⁷ Last, “Camille Paglia.” See also Sheila Jeffreys, *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Critique of The Politics Behind Transgenderism* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁵⁸ McHugh and Mayer, “Society and Gender,” 66; David Nimmons, “Sex and the Brain.”

⁵⁹ Larry E. Ball, “Identity Theology in the PCA: The Central Agitating Issues at the Recent PCA General Assembly Meetings Have Been Related to both Race and Gender,” *Aquila Report*, June 29, 2017, <https://www.theaquilareport.com/identity-theology-pca/>.

⁶⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; repr., New York: Routledge, 2006). See the account of her work in Wikipedia.

⁶¹ Benoit Denizet-Lewis, “The Scientific Quest to Prove Bisexuality Exists,” *The New York Times Magazine*, March 20, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/23/magazine/the-scientific-quest-to-prove-bisexuality-exists.html>.

⁶² Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949; repr., Paris: Gallimard, 2004).

woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one.”⁶³ Transgender furthers this theory because biology can now be manipulated to fit one’s chosen gender. Transgender is no longer a cultural oddity for a minuscule population. It has become an ultimate argument in the contemporary project for the destruction of Western culture through the tools of self-created hypersexualization.

This is cultural neo-Marxism, expressed through sexuality. Such cultural redefinition destroys objective distinctions between the all-powerful state (with its official ideology) and everything else—individuals, churches, families, businesses, morals, and truth. This total flattening of distinctions seeks ultimate embodiment at the core of the human being by creating a genderless sexuality—with no support from biology. By deconstructing sexuality, men and women are remade in the image of the genderless state.

This argument has been brilliantly made by German Christian sociologist Gabriele Kuby in her groundbreaking book, *The Global Sexual Revolution: The Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom* (first published in German in 2012),⁶⁴ which was endorsed by Pope Benedict XVI with the comment, “Mrs. Kuby is a brave warrior against ideologies that ultimately result in the destruction of man.”⁶⁵ It might seem strange to suggest that the cause of the destruction of Western civilization as a whole is sexuality, but Kuby is surely right. Western society is no longer undermined from the outside by notions of class warfare and the dictatorship of the proletariat or the dominance of a master race. The West is imploding from within. The “attack is aimed at the person’s innermost moral structure.”⁶⁶ Sexuality can no longer be assessed in terms of good and evil. The only “good” is the promotion of genderlessness, which is promoted by the United Nations, the European Union, and Hollywood in the name of creating a sexually liberated “new human being.” Kuby ominously concludes, “We have lost the war in one fundamental area. ... This state of affairs in the present time has been achieved by a radical, essentially unopposed, sexualization of the culture.” It works on the principle that “whatever stands in the way of your freedom is deconstructed: gender identity as man or woman, morality, the family, the Church, the sanctity of life.”⁶⁷ Her conclusion is stark but unavoidable:

⁶³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 6.

⁶⁴ Gabriele Kuby, *The Global Sexual Revolution: The Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*, trans. James Patrick Kirchner (Kettering, OH: LifeSite/Angelico Press, 2015).

⁶⁵ Cited on the Amazon page featuring the book.

⁶⁶ Kuby, *The Global Sexual Revolution*, 9.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 270.

The cultural revolution described in this book is taking place behind people's backs—top-down. It emanates from the power elites and is propelled by minorities who define themselves by sexual orientation and seek to topple the world order. Indeed, a change in values can only lead to a change in the world order. Because the changes are global, it is to be expected that the development aims at a new global order.⁶⁸

How is this “new global order” expressing itself? Openness to any kind of marriage is a natural outgrowth. Same-sex marriage, open adoption, the single-parent home, and gender fluidity have already redefined the family. Two-thirds of Americans feel that “a growing variety in the types of family arrangements” is “a good thing” or “makes no difference,” according to a Pew Research Center survey.⁶⁹ Personal liberty becomes the ultimate moral value, according to Justice Kennedy, who defines human freedom as “the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”⁷⁰ The case is made even more graphically by Jeremy Rifkin, an advisor to the European Union since 2002 and head of the largest global economic development team. In 1983, Rifkin declared,

We no longer feel ourselves to be guests in someone else’s home and therefore obliged to make our behavior conform with a set of preexisting cosmic rules. *It is our creation now. We make the rules.* We establish the parameters of reality. We create the world, and because we do, we no longer feel beholden to outside forces. *We no longer have to justify our behavior, for we are now the architects of the universe. We are responsible for nothing outside ourselves, for we are the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever.*⁷¹

Without God’s grace, this progressive utopia may well become a nightmare. The church must live out what true morals are, or a Oneist totalitarian system of people without honor, enforcing on everyone their own dishonorable rules, will operate unopposed. Christians who stand for the truth will doubtless face suffering.

VIII. *The Christian Position*

HarvestUSA, a ministry for sexually hurting people, makes an important point: “The Church is experiencing tremendous pressure to change its

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Julia Duin, “Open Marriage?” GetReligion, May 12, 2017, <https://www.getreligion.org/getreligion/2017/5/12/open-marriage-the-new-york-times-magazine-hopes-hopes-hopes-that-its-a-trend>.

⁷⁰ Planned Parenthood v. Casey, 505 U.S. 833 (June 29, 1992).

⁷¹ Jeremy Rifkin, *Algeny: A New Word—A New World* (New York: Viking, 1983), 244.

understanding of what scripture says about personhood and identity—and to subsume its authority [under] that of the individual.”⁷² The pressure comes from two directions: from hard-hearted ideologues determined to silence the Christian understanding of human identity and from kind-hearted Christians fearful of placing demands on suffering people and making the gospel appear heartless.

The book *Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family*, by Amy Ellis Nutt,⁷³ takes a secular approach to the subject. It recounts the experiences of a boy, Wyatt Maines, who, as a toddler, “loved everything Barbie.”⁷⁴ The desire to be a girl never left him. Wyatt’s family encouraged his transition to a female identity, especially his mother, who herself came from a broken home and “had no idea of ‘normal’ family life.”⁷⁵ Wyatt’s mother told his teacher, “He really likes girls’ things, and we’re okay with that.”⁷⁶ Wyatt, now Nicole, at eighteen, had genital reassignment surgery to the delight of everyone in “her” family who all believed it was a perfectly normal thing to do, as Nicole became “her most authentic self.”⁷⁷ The very last phrase of the entire book expresses the guiding principle: “As long as she is happy.”

What would/should a *Christian* family do? Yarhouse, a competent psychiatrist and professor of psychology at Regent University in Virginia Beach, in his book *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*,⁷⁸ seeks to approach transgenderism from both a professional and evangelical Christian perspective. His book is a useful introduction to the complicated issues surrounding transgenderism, and his heart is touched by the suffering of those he has counseled. His two chapters devoted to a “Christian Response,” are, however, ambiguous. He is aware of the cultural forces that seek to “deconstruct the very nature of sex and gender” against the standards of Scripture,⁷⁹ but he is also dubious of “culture wars,”⁸⁰ and, as a therapist, is wary of causing harm to those suffering from gender dysphoria. He seeks to avoid “knee-jerk reactions”⁸¹ that endorse “rigid gender stereotypes” as “marker[s] of

⁷² Tim Geiger, “Transgenderism: The Reshaping of Reality,” HarvestUSA, 2016, <https://www.harvestusa.org/transgenderism-reshaping-reality/#.W4mSguhKjIU>.

⁷³ Nutt, *Becoming Nicole*.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁷⁸ Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

obedience to God.”⁸² He believes that gender dysphoria is a result of the fall⁸³ but that transgender people are “not morally culpable nor guilty of willful disobedience.”⁸⁴

It is surely fair to see gender dysphoria as an expression of the fall. It is another thing to normalize it, which Yarhouse seems to do. He does not go as far as some leaders in the Anglican Church, like the Archbishop of York, Dr. John Sentamu, who, in July 2017, filed a motion asking bishops to consider new liturgy specially designed to welcome a transgender person under their new name.⁸⁵ But Yarhouse does advise certain parents to allow their children the use of hormone treatments and eventual genital reassignment surgery,⁸⁶ since the primary goal of therapy is to “maximise ... self-fulfillment.”⁸⁷ His advice to churches is equally hesitant, for while aware of the difficulties involved in giving transgender people roles of authority in the church, he concludes bewilderingly that “there is not one blueprint that every church can follow.”⁸⁸

So how will the church resist this sexual Marxist destruction of culture? There is no question in the apostle Paul’s mind as to what blueprint the church should follow: “If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.” He precedes those words with these: “Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not *nature* itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering” (1 Cor 11:13–16 ESV; emphasis added). Paul’s teaching on the importance of making a distinction between women and men in the church, even in hairstyles, is based on the significance of the church’s witness in a pagan world to the givenness of *nature* and thus to God, the Creator of nature. Paul’s conviction is doubtless based on Deuteronomy 22:5: “A woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.” According to the context, Israel must witness before the pagan world to the principle of distinction, even in the way she farms (“You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed”; Deut 22:9) or

⁸² Ibid., 150–51.

⁸³ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 49, 83.

⁸⁵ Olivia Rudgard, “Transgender Worshipers Could Get Church Services to Celebrate Their New Identity after Synod Vote,” *The Telegraph*, July 9, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/07/09/transgender-worshippers-could-get-church-services-celebrate/>.

⁸⁶ Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 123–24, 146.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 113.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 148, 157.

makes cloth (“You shall not wear cloth of wool and linen mixed together”; Deut 22:11). When God created, he made distinctions. He “separated” elements (Gen 1:6, 14, 18) to create a functional, harmonious cosmos. The rabbinic scholar Jacob Milgrom sees the distinctions required of Israel in Leviticus as recalling God’s work of creation in Genesis 1.⁸⁹ As important as it is to see the witness to the divine origin of the universe, much more is at stake. These distinctions go all the way back to the very person and being of God. That is why sexual identity is so important.

God creates by separating in order to reveal who he is, as one who is separate from the creation. Part of his personal essence is to be the transcendent, nondependent Creator relative to the creation. But that separateness goes to the heart of his being because the Godhead is a Trinity, and each person of the Godhead is separate from the other. This God also reveals himself by placing his image on human creatures. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). Here lies the origin of human dignity, and it is bound up with separateness. The image of the Trinitarian God, who is both one and many, is given both to male and female and explains both their separateness as distinct persons and their oneness or “one flesh” unity. We love God by preserving his clear image within us. Just as the three persons of the Trinity may not be confused but must be kept separate in identity and function, so the man and the woman are created as separate beings who may not forsake their specific sexual identities and merge into an androgynous being (a reflection of what I call Oneism). So we love God and respect ourselves by preserving his clear image within us.

What I call Twoism (things being distinct) makes sense of gender in this time of raging conflict on an emotive subject. We may try to create our own identity, but Scripture tells us that the image of God in male and female is our true identity. Dr. Abigail Rine, professor of gender theory at George Fox University, states that her students “arrive in my class thoroughly versed in the language and categories of identity politics and are reticent to disagree with *anything* for fear of seeming intolerant—except, of course, what they perceive to be intolerant.”⁹⁰ Today, and especially in transgenderism,

⁸⁹ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 689: “Creation was the product of God making distinctions (Gen 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18). This divine function is to be continued by Israel: the priests to teach it (Lev 10:10–11) and the people to practice it (Ezek 22:26).” See my book, Peter Jones, *The God of Sex: How Spirituality Defines Your Sexuality* (Escondido, CA: Main Entry Editions, 2006), 128–29.

⁹⁰ Abigail Rine, “What Is Marriage to Evangelical Millennials?,” *First Things*, May 14, 2015, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/05/what-is-marriage-to-evangelical-millennials>.

feelings determine gender: “Who I think I am.” This philosophy is not neutral; it is a radically pagan view of personhood and identity. The world sees the destruction of the gender binary as the essential process of a liberation that calls each human being to discover individual authenticity. But in attempting such a vain task, we move further from our true dignity and blind ourselves to real authenticity, namely our male/female distinctions—a glimpse of who God is. In this sense, all forms of androgyny, such as homosexuality or normalized gender dysphoria, deny the Trinity and become symbols of God-denying pantheism (Oneism). Everything in the All-Is-One circle becomes a continuum—good and evil; God and man; animal and human; rocks and spirits—and sexuality is not spared. Male and female, no longer fixed, binary points, blur human life into an androgynous continuum.

Out of love for Christ, some homosexually tempted Christians choose a life of celibacy in faithfulness to the gospel and the clear witness of Scripture. This is part of Christian suffering.⁹¹ Bekah Mason, a same-sex attracted believer, notes that

in Scripture, marriage isn’t described as the highest expression of love. ... The highest love is *agape* love, not *eros* love, and *agape* is available to all, which means God isn’t withholding the best of himself from single Christians. He offers all of himself and his love to all people.⁹²

Transgender-afflicted believers may also be asked to suffer with sexual dysphoria out of love for God their Creator and Redeemer. They are not, as has been expressed in the recent Revoice conference (July 2018), free to see their homosexual desires without sexual expression as pleasing to God.⁹³ Truly celibate courageous believers will surely bring a noble and powerful witness to a culture committed to both erotic pansexualism and paninterfaith, by which the blurring of the divine image in human beings will inevitably lead to blindness about the only true God, separate from but the lover of his creation, the only hope for repair of broken human beings. The gospel is the greatest love story in history. Jesus shows us where love begins, loving first “the Lord your God” (Mark 12:28). Such love requires

⁹¹ Gregory Coles, *Single Gay Christian: A Personal Journey of Faith and Sexual Identity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2017).

⁹² Bekah Mason, “Finding My ‘True Self’ As a Same-Sex Attracted Woman,” *Christianity Today*, June 23, 2017, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2017/june/finding-my-true-self-as-same-sex-attracted-woman-obergefell.html>.

⁹³ See Peter Jones, “Revoice: Sliding Towards Heresy,” *Truthxchange*, August 3, 2018, <https://truthxchange.com/2018/08/revoice-sliding-into-heresy/>.

believers, including those with transgender feelings, to love the image of God (which includes the male/female distinction, Gen 1:27–28) as witness to the world. As Gregory Coles discovered, “Being gay did not mean that God had rejected me.”⁹⁴ As a faithful believer, Coles has been able to embrace the calling to be celibate by God’s sufficient grace (2 Cor 12:9). Hopefully, transgender believers can find this same grace even if their gender dysphoria is not solved on this side of glory. May they honor God as they “glorify God in their bodies” (1 Cor 6:20).

As a general solution, the Preliminary Position Paper on Human Sexuality adopted by the commissioners to the 37th General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church on July 2, 2017, as it touches gender reassignment, is a fitting conclusion to this study:

God helping us, we shall continue, within our churches and in the public arena, to teach against and to refuse to condone or participate in any sinful form of sexual practice—including sexual abuse, pornography, sexual lust, extra-marital sex, adultery, polygamy, unbiblical divorce and re-marriage, homosexual conduct, same-sex union and marriage, and gender reassignment.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Coles, *Single Gay Christian*, 42–43.

⁹⁵ “EPC General Assembly Adopts Position Paper on Human Sexuality,” Aquila Report, July 2, 2017, <http://theaquilareport.com/epc-general-assembly-adopts-position-paper-human-sexuality/>.

Sexuality and the Lost Proletariat

NOEL WEEKS

Abstract

Original Marxism was utopian, materialistic, and determinist. All human dynamics were explained by the dialectic or conflict between capitalists and the proletariat, with the victory of the proletariat being certain. In spite of the fact that determinism eliminates responsibility, those opposing Marxism were seen as evil. Marx's prophecy failed, and Russian communism emerged as evil and repressive. "Western" Marxism used Freudian psychology to explain the rise of fascism. It looked for another "proletariat," who were "oppressed." Co-opting the 1960s social revolution, it found this proletariat in non-Europeans, women, and homosexuals. This involved accepting the genetic determinism of the fascists. All who disagree continue to be treated as evil.

In analyzing any social change, there are a number of false directions that need to be guarded against. A major one of these is the tendency to put all the responsibility upon individual thinkers or figures. That results in a form of conspiracy theory, the implication being that society as a whole has been beguiled and has entered unwillingly into new movements. While people often do not understand the full implications of what they approve, they probably have some idea, particularly as ideas are further elaborated and developed. Conspiracy theories are often an attempt to avoid acknowledging the wrong motives and judgment of the population as a whole. It is more congenial to believe in the wickedness of a few plotters than to accept the depravity of the mass.

On the other hand, writers and thinkers often spell out the full implications of a line of thought. Once the general public has accepted a basic proposition, the trendsetters will push it to its limits. Hence this treatment argues that we must consider both general trends in society and particular ideological positions. To do that, I need to switch back and forth between general social developments and ideological developments. I will attempt to follow a roughly historical development and to signal when I am switching between topics.

I. *Basics of Marxism*

We might describe the culmination, in Hegel, of European philosophical thought as being a form of secular pantheism. A “spirit” is at work in history through trends and countertrends. Though this “spirit” had nothing to do with the true Spirit of God, Hegel often used quasireligious language, with the result that his position was not acceptable to the radical materialism of Marx. For Marx, the trends and countertrends had to be overtly secular. Hence Marx turned this dynamic into opposing socioeconomic groupings and their interactions. Although the opposing groups differ in different periods of history, for the modern age they are capitalists (bosses) and the proletariat (workers). These two groups are in opposition to each other so that the relationship between them is termed dialectical. Marx’s system, like Hegel’s, was dynamic. The progress of history would, more and more, force people into one or other group, leading to an intensified conflict, necessarily resulting in victory to the proletariat.

Some significant features of this theory tend to emerge in any subsequent theory influenced by Marxism. While the key parties to the dialectic may change, the structural dynamics tend to stay the same. The increasing conflict is a consequence of impersonal historical forces. Capitalists are forced to be capitalists and to oppress workers. A consequence of such a determinist view is that one can claim that the victory of the proletariat is a historical necessity. Yet, if someone is forced to do something with no conscious intent, he cannot be morally guilty. Despite this, popular Marxist rhetoric talks in terms of evil capitalists. There is a fundamental ambiguity here as to whether we are talking of determinism or moral culpability. That ambiguity is not resolved in Marxism. There is an attempt at resolution in picturing Marxism as the way of the future—that is, of progress—and making Marxists “progressive.” Anybody then fighting against “progress,” which is depicted as indubitably good, must be acting from evil motives. This is no real resolution because, if determinism is really operating, then those who oppose are also

responding to forces beyond their control. As we will see, the determinist aspect of Marx will be abandoned, but the moral judgments against any opposition to the current form of Marxism are retained.

Further, Marx was taking over a total, all-explaining metaphysical system. Hence his dialectic of capitalists and proletariat claimed to explain everything. For this to be true, all other aspects of human life must be derivative from the socioeconomic forces. All ideology, all morality, all religion, all art, was a product of the socioeconomic conflict. Consciously or unconsciously, other forms of human life and culture must arise from one side or the other of the conflict. This base–superstructure model is crucial for Marxism. Marx thought of his system as science, not ideology or philosophy. (The German equivalent of “science”—*Wissenschaft*—covers a wider area than English “science,” including any rigorous “discipline.”) In those terms, Marx claimed to base himself on a thorough economic and social history. The socioeconomic structure is basic, and everything else is froth.

The combination of these implications produces significant results. Any religious or philosophical deviation from, or objection to, Marxism must, consciously or unconsciously, be supporting the capitalists. Theoretically, this opposition could be a result of the blind forces of history; however, it is never seen that way, but always in moral terms. Consequently, Christians under Communism are always seen not as religious objectors but as counter-revolutionary class enemies deserving of punishment for supporting the evil capitalists.

The Marxist science included predictions of the growing crisis of capitalism and the eventual victory of the proletariat. The working class was to become more and more conscious of its role in history. Despite the emphasis of the theory on the working class, Marxism never was a working-class movement. Its leadership has come out of middle and upper classes, especially from students. This contradiction was explained away as due to the ability of some parts of the intelligentsia to understand the dynamics of history.

What was the attraction of a theory that proclaimed the victory of a class that was not their class? This is one of the many points where Marxism, in its socioeconomic determinism, fails to explain itself. I suspect at least two factors, one moral and one religious. Cases of the exploitation of the workers and their impoverishment were real, and so Marxism appealed to a moral indignation. Another factor, which becomes very obvious with the later Marxists I will consider, was the materialism of Marxist theory.

Since everything comes out of the base, all human problems, including crime and conflict, are due to the world being in the wrong socioeconomic situation. The victory of the proletariat would bring in a utopian situation

where such problems would disappear. Marxism was seen as a universal movement, and its victory would eliminate national antagonisms. The utopianism of Marxism meant that no serious thought was given to policy after the success of the revolution. For a Marxist society to have serious problems was not conceivable.

II. *The Crisis of Marxism*

World War I was a great disappointment to the Marxists because the working classes in each country supported their own side in the conflict. However, worse for the theory followed. The resolution of everybody into either capitalists or proletariat was supposed to happen first where capital and industrialization were most developed, namely in Western Europe and North America. However, it was in semifeudal Russia that Marxists came to power. Although in 1918–19 prospects seemed good for a communist victory in Germany, that movement failed. The Great Depression could be interpreted in terms of the Marxist theory of a growing crisis within capitalism; however, the outcome in Germany and other parts of Europe was fascism, with strong working-class support. Further, the twentieth century as a whole has seen a lessening of distinction between capitalists and proletariat. Workers often hold shares in companies and invest in their own moneymaking schemes.

The failure of the fulfillment of Marxist predictions led to “the crisis of Marxism.” Russian communists could bolster the legitimacy of their rule by claiming Marx was right and the Russian revolution had to happen. Since many communist parties outside of Russia were financed and controlled by Moscow, that official version of Marxism, or what we might term Old Marxism, was widely dispersed. However, it was plainly implausible, especially as the horrors of Stalinism became better known.

III. *The Recovery Movement*

In the West, Marxists who tried to modify Marxism to make it more in accord with reality were far more influential. The crucial thing to be abandoned was the determinism of Marx. The triumph of the proletariat was not as certain as he predicted. The determinist model saw human will as irrelevant, so the replacement model had to give a greater role to human decisions.

The base–superstructure model came under question. Rather than being just froth, ideology was crucial. In an environment where Catholicism was a major anti-Marxist influence, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci

stressed the importance of ideology.¹ Historians taking this up discovered that the working classes, rather than being the passive victims of historical movements, developed their own approaches and ways of coping. Perhaps this is well illustrated by the subtitle that Eugene Genovese gave to *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, his classic study of the community dynamics of American black slaves: *The World the Slaves Made*.²

If the revolution had failed to come as expected, then the logical thing was to investigate the dynamics of social and political decision making. This analysis became particularly pressing for German Marxists as they watched the German population, and particularly the working class, shift to support of the Nazis. Historical determinism is a dangerous doctrine when history produces the wrong solution. The commitment of Marxists to materialism limited the possibility of explanations. To see the political shifts as a rational response to the problems of Germany would be to abandon Marx. To interpret them in moral terms would open the door to interpretations that were not materialist. Marx needed to be supplemented by explanations that could be seen in materialist terms. The psychological theories of Freud opened the possibility of explanations that were materialist. Freud saw the individual as shaped by experiences in early life. There was then the possibility of reshaping that person during life. This was thus quite different from the genetic determinism of the Nazis, which saw human characteristics as indelibly imprinted. There was also a need to show that any conclusions reached were more than mere Marxist dogma. Marxists found themselves in the difficult situation of proclaiming that “science” could not be seen as an independent authority because the present socioeconomic state of society decisively influenced all cultural products, including science, yet they needed to appeal to something more objective than pure Marxist dogma.

Prominent in this endeavor was an institute established in Frankfurt called the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (commonly called the Frankfurt School),³ which, when the Nazis came to power, transferred to New York because all its prominent members were of Jewish origin. Before the Institute moved to

¹ T. J. Jackson Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities,” *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 567–95; G. A. Williams, “The Concept of Egeomnia in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21 (1960): 586–99.

² Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974).

³ For detailed histories, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (London: Heinemann, 1973); Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance*, trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge: Polity, 1994); and Thomas Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

America, it had set in motion an extensive survey aimed to reveal crucial factors in social psychology. This research endeavor was under the leadership of Erich Fromm, who had had Freudian training. As with any such survey, many forms were not returned, and many were lost in the hurried flight of the Institute to America. Even had that not been the case, conclusions solely based upon the empirical data of the survey would have been unacceptable because it would have conflicted with the belief of the members of the Institute that “science,” as a human social activity, was not unbiased, but was actually decisively influenced by the economic structure of contemporary society. Hence the publication that was produced after the move to America,⁴ while referring to the study, was rather a statement of the theoretical framework within which the survey needed to be interpreted.

In that theoretical structure, Freud was prominent, but it was Freud amended according to a conviction that the original Freud was not aware of the conformity of his thought to the underlying socioeconomic influences. The criticism was that Freud saw his theories as having some general validity for humans, rather than being applicable only to humans at a certain point in time. Thus, his prescriptions, while correctly realizing the unhappy nature of human existence in the present age, tended to encourage people to conform to the present situation.⁵

However, what was seen as valid in Freud was the recognition of a personality type that was referred to as the “authoritarian” or “sado-masochistic” personality, with an explanation of that personality type as arising during life as a response to influences during childhood. Those influences in turn were seen as shaped by socioeconomic forces impinging on the family at a particular period in history. The authority of the father in the family, which was a feature of Protestantism and continued in the period of royal absolutism that followed the Reformation, shaped the thinking and feeling of the son so as to see authority as right and natural. Hence royal or state authority was also accepted. As the socioeconomic crises of capitalism impacted the family, the authority of the father was threatened, and expectations for security turned toward external authorities. The result was an authoritarian personality structure. A further link was made to the psychoanalytic conclusion that sadism and masochism came together in this personality type. The sadistic tendency was connected to the fact that, while

⁴ Max Horkheimer, ed., *Studien über Autorität und Familie: Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung* (1936; repr., Lüneburg: Zu Klampen, 1987). For discussion of these essays, see Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 151ff., and Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 124ff.

⁵ As was generally the case with all the work of the Institute, the essays involved did not explain how the authors escaped the pit into which Freud had supposedly fallen.

there was subservience to those higher, those considered lower and inferior were dominated.⁶ What is clearly being developed here is a way of explaining the German and broader acceptance of fascism as a product of European social history in which Protestantism had a significant role. In view of what developed later, it is significant that Fromm saw homosexuality as a feature of this development, that is, as a feature of the authoritarian or sadomasochistic personality.⁷

The fuller results of the survey were not published at the time of the preliminary volume. The reasons for this lack are complex: one was that Fromm separated from the Institute for reasons partly connected to money and partly connected to basic differences of approach. Fromm took the survey forms with him, and they were not published until 1980.⁸

Fromm interpreted the results of the survey in terms of “radical,” “authoritarian,” and “compromise” types. He looked for a correlation between these types and political affiliation and wider cultural attitudes. While he could classify people into such groups, when correlation was looked for with other responses the results were mixed. His conclusion was that the results often showed a lack of correlation between political opinion and personality type.⁹ Wolfgang Bonss, in his introduction to the publication, reports the view of Herbert Marcuse that the Institute thought it was politically unwise to publish the results because they could be interpreted as showing that German workers, though voting for the Left, were in personality type not opposed to authoritarianism.¹⁰

There are crucial issues here. Freudianism gave those who wanted to stay with Marxism a materialistic way to explain the failure of Marx’s predictions. However, it did not overcome the contradiction caused by determinism. If the authoritarian personality was a product of social and psychological mechanisms, was it not therefore “natural” and inevitable? In other words, there was some basis to the Institute’s fear that the results of the survey

⁶ See Max Horkheimer, “Allgemeiner Teil,” *Studien über Autorität und Familie*, 49ff. (German), 905–7 (English), and Erich Fromm, “Sozialpsychologischer Teil,” *Studien über Autorität und Familie*, 122ff. (German), 908–11 (English).

⁷ Fromm, “Sozialpsychologischer Teil,” 911.

⁸ Erich Fromm, *The Working Class in Weimar Germany: A Psychological and Sociological Study*, ed. Wolfgang Bonss, trans. Barbara Weinberger (1980; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33, n. 56. Bonss also explores other ways in which Fromm’s presuppositions and the results did not match (“Critical Theory and Empirical Social Research: Some Observations,” 1–38). The important point is that Fromm’s whole approach, like that of the other members of the Institute, was not empirical. The theoretical structure interpreted the survey results and was not based on the results.

were politically dangerous. The Institute’s approach was to attach the negative authoritarian or sadomasochistic personality to the Nazis—and in many ways, it fitted—but the survey showed that those characteristics could also appear, though less commonly, in those with Leftist political inclinations. The evils of Stalinist Russia were to emerge as an embarrassment to Western Marxists, but they never faced the reality that was before their eyes: the “correct” political leaning and the wholesome personality type do not necessarily correlate.

Given the failure of Marx’s predictions and the ugly face of Russian communism, why do so many continue to follow Marxism, and why are Western intellectuals so receptive to it? I think it boils down to the fact that Marxism is a secular philosophy with utopian hopes. Non-Christians have a habit of following failed recipes that make great promises. What else do they have?

IV. Explaining America

The takeover by the Nazis of Germany and then of continental Europe had forced the Institute to take refuge in America. Columbia University in New York had given them a place to work. There was a precariousness about that situation, and the Institute took care not to make too obvious its Marxist roots. “Critical Theory” was a substitute for saying “Marxist,” and reading the theoretical essays by Max Horkheimer, Fromm, and Marcuse in *Studien über Autorität und Familie*, one is struck by the willingness to mention Freud but the avoidance of the name Marx, though it is obviously Marxist theory that is being expounded.

The failure of the working class in Germany to support Marxism had been explained in terms of the willingness of that class to accept authoritarianism. What about the American working class and the fabled American values of freedom and choice? The answer of the Frankfurt School was, in effect, that Americans and many others had been bought off with the material profits of capitalism. This, of course, was a concession that the Marxist prophecy of the growing crisis of capitalism had been disproved by events. The Frankfurt School fell back on the common contention of German idealism that the theory had to take precedence over the facts, a belief they used in attacking the English-language traditions of empiricism, positivism, and John Dewey. Involved in that claim that the working class was being bought off by capitalism was an attack on the role of mass media. Literature, films, and TV were providing a fantasy world through which workers could avoid facing the dreariness and meaninglessness of their existence under capitalism. The classic statement of this position was Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man*:

Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society.¹¹

If capitalism was so successful in blinding the eyes of the public, how was it that Marxists still existed? Note the recurrence of fundamental Marxist belief in the passivity of the working class. Note also the fact that Marxism, in this form, is once again an elitist movement: they are the intellectual few who understand what is really happening in history, while the masses have no insight.

V. *The New Proletariat*

Among this Marxist few, now in America, was Marcuse. Along with other Marxists, he faced the question of who would replace the working class as the ground troops of the revolution. They had to be people who could be seen as victims of the triumph of capitalism. Since the Western Marxists had reluctantly acknowledged the horrors of Stalinism, it could not be orthodox Russian communists or their followers. Others had to be found to take the role of the oppressed who could rise to throw off their chain. So, the new “proletariat” was the American Blacks, the Marxist-influenced liberation movements of the Third World such as the Vietcong, and to some extent, women.¹² To these Marcuse added another group. He did this by disputing Freud’s history of the human race. Freud had argued that human sexual desires had to be repressed and limited to prevent chaos and to allow energies to be redirected into civilization and culture. Therein was the origin of the monogamous family. Marcuse acknowledged that some restrictions were necessary for civilization, but claimed that authoritarianism had used these dynamics to be overly restrictive. The main reason for the need of restrictions had been the need to acquire sufficient food. With the growth of technology, that was no longer a problem. There were abundant supplies for all, with the only need being proper and fair distribution. Hence, there was no more need for sexual restrictions, and Marcuse saw things formerly regarded as perversions as falling into the unrestricted category.¹³

¹¹ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1964).

¹² In an unpublished paper, written after *Eros and Civilisation* had been given a new significance by the rise of the New Left, Marcuse says of the cultural revolution, consisting of these groups, that it “not only precedes and prepares the soil for the political revolution (including the economic changes), but that it has, at the present stage *absorbed* the political revolution” (Herbert Marcuse, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, vol. 2 of *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Douglas Kellner [London: Routledge, 2001], 125).

¹³ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilisation: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1965; repr., London: Ark, 1987), 214–15. For a discussion of Marcuse’s use of Freud, see Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 106ff.

VI. *Enter the 1960s Cultural Revolution*

I would like to turn now to social dynamics that were not necessarily Marxist, though eagerly appropriated by Marxists. Wars and threats of war tend to induce social conservatism. Non-Christians under threat, or recovering from major traumas, tend to be religious or moralistic (“There are no atheists in foxholes!”). Society immediately after World War II was somewhat socially conservative. Divorce and sexual promiscuity were frowned upon. The generation that had known the Great Depression, and rationing in wartime, was generally frugal with money. Besides, there was no easy credit. However, this social and moral conservatism lacked any real foundation. Liberalism had ripped the authority from the Bible and the church. Catholicism survived on tradition alone. The generation that grew up in that era was taught a morality that their parents had no basis for believing and probably secretly resented. As the younger generation were faced with the hypocrisy of racism against Blacks, of being drafted to fight the unpopular Vietnam War, and the teaching of their professors, who often held Marxist or similar beliefs, they revolted. Though various forms of Marxism played a role in the revolt, it would be wrong to see it primarily as a Marxist movement. It is arguable that Dewey was more of an influence than Marx. Dewey, believing that Christianity was doomed and American democracy therefore severely threatened, taught that people had to learn democracy by practical participation, and the place where people were to learn to express their ideas and to negotiate with the ideas of others was the public school. Thus, democracy was to be learned by practice. What Dewey did not face was that the willingness to appreciate others and their ideas had, itself, a Christian basis. A generation raised to express itself, believing that its ideas should be taken seriously, and conscious that their parents’ morality was without foundation, encountered a critical situation in the mid to late 1960s.

There is debate as to the role of Marcuse in the 1960s/1970s cultural revolution (aka the New Left).¹⁴ Note the paradoxes. Dewey was a major inspiration for the American students. The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were originally Dewey followers. The Frankfurt Institute had attacked Dewey.¹⁵ The New Left was anti-elitist, but the Marxists, though using egalitarian rhetoric, were elitists. The alliance of the New Left and Western Marxism was an example of the adage that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” For different reasons, both were concerned about the

¹⁴ Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile*, 296ff.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 112ff.

treatment of American Blacks. The American youth who did not want to fight in Vietnam were happy to accept the romanticizing of the Vietcong. Sexual liberation was a theme of those who were rebelling against the morality of their parents' generation. Thus, what was passed on to subsequent society was an amalgam of popular beliefs about freedom and lack of restrictions, together with a form of Marxism seeking to find a new proletariat. One may wonder what Marx and Engels would have thought of the new proletariat being found in pampered college and university youth!

There were, of course, some exponents of old Marxism among the New Left, those committed to violent revolution. There are many examples in modern history of the ability of small groups willing to use ruthless violence to take over inchoate protest movements. The seizure by the Bolsheviks (Communists) of the 1917 Menshevik revolution in Russia and the Muslim Brotherhood takeover of recent uprisings in Egypt are examples. However, the latter example also shows that lasting success depends upon a lack of enemies who are willing and able to use force. The Old Marxist Weathermen and the Red Brigades resorted to violence but were crushed. Many of the youthful troops of the New Left were bought off with the profits of capitalism. However, the ethos of the end of restriction and thus of sexual freedom was attractive not just to members of the generation of the New Left but also to the generation of their parents and to the children of those who lost their revolutionary fervor when bribed by capitalism. Various movements adapted the structure of the new Marxism. It was crucial to claim membership in a victimized class.

The New Feminism found that class in women. Just as Marx argued about the working class of the nineteenth century, there was ample evidence of the victimization of women. Notice, however, how an echo of original Marxist logic reappears. To suggest, and especially to suggest for religious reasons, that the feminist answer has problems and actually hurts certain women is to make one a supporter of the evil misogynists. Marxist materialism cannot allow religion to be real. We have to realize how deeply that belief has sunk into Western society. The Republican administration of George W. Bush refused to heed warnings that any invasion of Iraq had to take the dynamics of Islam seriously. They were confident that all that mattered was a better political and economic system.

Similarly, the unwillingness of Left-leaning politicians and journalists to connect terrorism to a form of Islam flows from the base-superstructure belief that religion is part of the froth and behind it, in the case of Islam, are socioeconomic dynamics of oppressed people. In addition, the search for the new proletariat baptized Third World protest movements as victims of

capitalism, aka colonialism. Since Muslim movements come out of the Third World, they are victims by definition, and we should not blame the victim! In all these cases, we see the consequences of the rejection of the doctrine of total depravity. Marxism leads to the treating of all members of a group as acting as the group acts.¹⁶ If women are the victimized group, all women must be innocent; if Muslims are victims, all Muslims must be innocent! That threatens to set up a reaction that treats all members of a group as guilty.

With respect to homosexuality, the various trends lead to similar results. The rhetoric of choice and freedom leads to the ability of all to indulge their ideas and desires in any way they choose. However, this rhetoric has had to be modified due to the realization that homosexual sex is very unhealthy. Hence, it is being argued that it is genetically determined. Notice here the curious echo of Marxism, though Old Marxism in this case. Russian communism justified its revolution and consequent repression as determined by the forces of history and thus beyond challenge. The logic of the appeal to genetic determinism is the same. However, it is not empirically confirmed by studies of twins, the only way known at present to test such claims.

Furthermore, it runs contrary to one of the great beliefs of our time—Darwinism. Evolution by natural selection depends upon differential reproductive success. The forms that leave the most progeny will prevail. Carriers of genetic combinations that inhibit reproductive success will be eliminated from the population, along with their genes. Creationists do not disagree with this logic. What they question is the continuous appearance of propitious mutations. Now, if there is any genetic composition likely to inhibit reproductive success, it is a homosexual gene.

There is another intriguing paradox. Genetic determinism used to be the preserve of the racist Right. There is a rule of thumb that the Left believes in environmental determinism and the Right believes in genetic determinism. The Marxist belief that all social problems will disappear after the Revolution is founded on a belief that changing the conditions under which men live must change humanity itself. The Right is more inclined to believe that people have intrinsic, that is genetic, characteristics. Nazi extermination practices were justified as the removal of those carrying inherent evil natures.¹⁷ Upper-class disdain of lower classes is generally based on ideas of

¹⁶ Marx was actually more realistic. He saw the crystallization of pure capitalist and worker groups as a process that would take time. With the New Marxism the “oppressed” groups are simply homogeneous without process.

¹⁷ For the genetic basis of Nazi policy, see Hans F. K. Günther, *The Racial Elements of European History*, trans. G. C. Wheeler (London: Methuen, 1927).

inherent superiority, as are racial theories. The writings of members, or former members, of the Frankfurt School show a strong aversion to any idea of intrinsic human nature.¹⁸ Freudianism fits easily into the thinking of the Left because in it experiences during life are claimed to shape the personality.

As mentioned above, Fromm created a quite different appraisal of homosexuality from his combination of Marx and Freud. For him, it was part of the “authoritarian personality.” The departure of Fromm from the Frankfurt School has been variously interpreted.¹⁹ His later books show he had not changed from his beliefs about the authoritarian personality and the contribution of Protestantism to its creation.²⁰ The later polemic between Fromm and the remaining members of the Frankfurt School contains reciprocal accusations of disloyalty to Freud, but I suspect that the real difference lies elsewhere. Is sexual desire, and its disruptive impact on society, a physical fact, leaving humanity the hard choice between desire and civilization? This more Freudian form comes close to a biological determinism. Fromm saw man’s dilemma as something arising in a social context during life and thus as an alienation that a person can hope to overcome during life. The utopian Left does not like a physical determinism that leaves no hope of resolution through social change.

What Marcuse was effectively saying is that the sexually different, specifically the homosexual, was part of the new proletariat, part of those oppressed by traditional sexual morality. It follows that to be opposed to homosexuality is to be part of the oppressors. Notice, here again, the Marxist logic. Marcuse was quite consistent in that he opposed freedom of speech for those who disagreed with his version of Marxism.²¹ His justification was that the powerful in society so dominated the organs of education and communication that toleration of all views still meant that the views Marcuse disliked must prevail. Notice again here the use of determinism when it suits the Marxist argument. If his view were correct, the present promotion of homosexuality by the organs of education and communication would be inexplicable.

¹⁸ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 44. A major part of Erich Fromm’s *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1974; repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) is devoted to refuting theses of innate destructive tendencies.

¹⁹ Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile*, 82–84, 224, 358, n. 63; Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 265–73; Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 88–106.

²⁰ Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973); *The Fear of Freedom* (1942; repr., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960).

²¹ Herbert Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” in Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore Jr., and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), 93–157. Marcuse could not be more explicit: “Liberating tolerance, then, would mean intolerance against movements from the Right and tolerance of movements from the Left” (122–23).

Materialism means that there are only oppressors and oppressed. Notice also the continuing contradiction that something may be determined, yet still treated as evil. If some can claim to be genetically determined to homosexuality, then one might claim on equally flimsy grounds to be genetically determined to hate homosexuals. However, the logic of determinism and guilt is always applied inconsistently. To be against the proclaimed new victims is automatically to be guilty. The historic Leftist rejection of intrinsic human nature is forgotten when it suits.

The utopianism of Marxism has carried into the sexual revolution. The Western Marxists never faced the reality of Russian communism, even while they were anxious to distance themselves from Stalinism. They also did not face the fact that, while “authoritarian personality” was a stick with which to beat the Right, aspects of authoritarianism could emerge in those who voted for the Left. That could be explained away as a residual influence of the social dynamics that produced that personality type. However, Russian communist society continued to produce the horrors of authoritarianism. Maybe, after the Revolution, authoritarian types do not disappear but rather see their opportunity, however contrary that may be to utopian Marxist theory. For this to happen, society after the success of the revolution has to be kept in constant turmoil. It is in this light that we perhaps should see the rise, after the apparent victory of the homosexual cause, of many other varieties of sexuality, all eager to condemn and oppress those who oppose them.

The church cannot hope to remain silent and to be left in peace. The Word of God means that we cannot accept homosexuality. In the modern materialist world, the logic of Marxism still applies: whoever plays the role of the proletariat may not be criticized. Freedom of speech, however, was won on the basis of biblical truth, and it cannot exist in a Marxist world. We must be prepared to question the system at its root. The ability to do so does not ensure that we will be heard. Only God can bring that about. However, it is important that God’s people are made aware that the issue is not a matter of whether we are loving and kind to people in their sin; it is rather a worldview that denies the possibility of any religious or ethical truth and yet makes sinners out of those who oppose it.

Genesis 2:24 and the New Covenant: A Profound Mystery

COLIN HAMER

Abstract

Ephesians 5:31-32 articulates the root metaphor of New Testament marital imagery. The profound mystery is that the “one flesh” marital affinity union of Genesis 2:24 is how the new covenant fulfills the Abrahamic promise and brings the elect of “all the nations” into union with Christ. Thus, a *sensus plenior* is read into Genesis 2:24 that foreshadows redemptive history.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (Eph 5:31-32 ESV)

I. *Metaphoric Structure Mapping*

A metaphor is when A is declared to be B when it is not literally true. A New Testament example is Jesus’s claim recorded in John’s Gospel, “I am the door” (John 10:9). George Lakoff and Mark Johnson say, “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of

another.”¹ George Kennedy believes that metaphor is the “greatest resource for the forceful expression of original thought,” and George Caird that “All, or almost all, of the language used by the Bible to refer to God is metaphor” and that comparison “comprises ... almost all the language of theology.”²

Aristotle is believed to have been the first to recognize that metaphors were a cognitive linguistic instrument, but his insights were not revisited until I. A. Richards first delineated the “tenor” and “vehicle” of the metaphor;³ the vehicle “carries over” characteristics (hence *metapherō*, from the Greek “to carry over”) to the tenor (from the Latin *tenere* “to hold”). Thus, in “I am the door,” the door is the vehicle that carries over characteristics to Jesus, the tenor, the complete statement forming the metaphor. Although not literally true, a metaphor seeks to convey a truth, often such being left to the reader to surmise.

Metaphor theory has previously focused on these “pair-wise bindings” (where A is said “to be” B), but since the 1970s the exploration of large-scale metaphors has emerged as a distinct interdisciplinary field of study.⁴ This is where an initial metaphoric statement (the pair-wise “A is B”) can create a new area of understanding, a new conceptual domain. Linguists tend to refer to such metaphors as structure-mapping, and rather than employing the terms vehicle and tenor, speak of a source domain and a target domain.⁵

An example of a large-scale structural metaphor is found in Psalm 23, where the statement, “The Lord is my shepherd” forms what is called a *root metaphor*—a metaphoric statement that opens a new area of understanding, in this case, that God is like a shepherd to his people.⁶ This can

¹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 5.

² George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 26; George B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980), 18, 144.

³ Mary Gerhart and Allan Melvin Russell, *Metaphoric Process: The Creation of Scientific and Religious Understanding* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1984), 97–101; I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), 96–97.

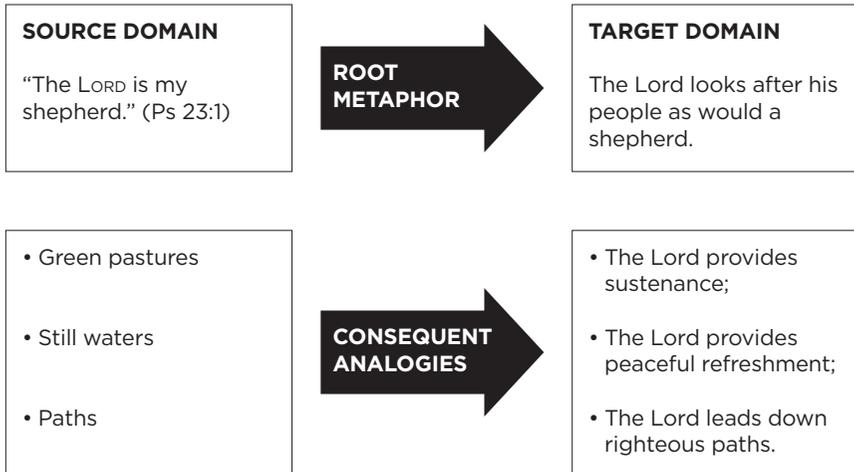
⁴ Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, “Rethinking Metaphor,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 53; Robert Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God: Theology after Cognitive Linguistics*, SPT 54 (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 10–11.

⁵ Dedre Gentner and Brian Bowdle, “Metaphor as Structure-Mapping,” in Gibbs, *Cambridge Handbook*, 109.

⁶ “Root metaphors ... have the ability to engender conceptual diversity ... an unlimited number of potential interpretations at a conceptual level. ... They are the dominant metaphors capable of both engendering and organizing a network.” Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 64.

be diagrammatically imagined like this:

The LORD Is My Shepherd



This root metaphor, THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, allows the Psalmist to exploit the new conceptual domain with consequent metaphoric expressions. For example, “he makes me lie down by green pastures ... your rod and staff they comfort me.” These are not new metaphors but rather analogies that can be seen across the two domains, or as Dedre Gentner and Brian Bowdle see it, “once the alignment is made, further candidate inferences are spontaneously projected from base to target.”⁷

There is now a rapidly expanding body of literature applying structure-mapping principles in a wide range of academic disciplines.⁸ However, Robert Masson’s perception is that

recent developments in understanding ... [in] the interdisciplinary field of cognitive linguistics provide fresh ground for rethinking how God and religious beliefs are conceptualized. ... These challenges of cognitive linguistics to standard accounts of metaphor and figurative language have not been seriously addressed in theology and religious studies.⁹

⁷ Gentner and Bowdle, “Metaphor,” 109–10; for discussion of metaphoric expressions, see Masson, *Without Metaphor*, 13–14.

⁸ Gibbs, *Cambridge Handbook*, 5.

⁹ Masson, *Without Metaphor*, 4, 16.

His observation appears to be supported by the fact that *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* has twenty-eight articles from “distinguished scholars from different academic fields” ranging through science, law, mathematics, psychoanalysis, music, and art, but theology is not represented.¹⁰

II. *The Genesis 2:24 One-Flesh Union*

It is to be argued in this article that Ephesians 5:31–32 articulates the root metaphor of the New Testament marital imagery: GENESIS 2:24 IS CHRIST AND THE CHURCH. To understand that imagery, and the “profound mystery,” it is necessary to understand the meaning of Genesis 2:24.

1. *Genesis 2:23 and Genesis 2:24 Compared*

[23] Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” [24] Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Gen 2)

In verse 23, it seems that Adam is expressing satisfaction that—after being presented with all the animals, and yet still not finding a suitable helper (vv. 18–20)—he at last has another human with whom he can relate (vv. 21–23). But in the expression “This at last (זאת הִפְעֵמָה [*zo’th happa’am*]) is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” Gary Anderson sees the use of the article הַ (h; which has the force of a demonstrative pronoun) as significant, since another demonstrative pronoun זאת (*zo’th*; “this”) is also appended to the phrase, emphasizing the uniqueness of the occasion. He states: “Targum Neophyti and Ps-Jonathan clarify what is so emphatically important and novel about this occasion. ‘This time *and never again will a woman be created from a man as this one was created from me*’ [italics = Midrashic explanation].” Anderson goes on to cite the Abot de Rabbi Nathan, which states, “This one time God acted as groomsman for Adam; from now on he must get one himself.”¹¹ This view is strengthened when it is considered that the “therefore” (*ken*) at the opening of verse 24 could equally validly be rendered as “after that.” Whatever the strength of any grammatical argument, the Old Testament does not record any further miraculous unions, and the pattern

¹⁰ Gibbs, *Cambridge Handbook*, 5.

¹¹ Gary Anderson, “Celibacy or Consummation in the Garden? Reflections on Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Garden of Eden,” *Harvard Theological Review* 82.2 (1989): 125–26.

of marriage subsequently was that the man and woman were born naturally of their own parents and not miraculously formed by God.

It seems, however, that the overwhelming academic consensus is that Genesis 2:24 describes a relationship that in some way replicates the Adam and Eve relationship and that the primal couple is the model for subsequent mundane marriages.¹² This conflation of the miraculous primal couple marriage and all subsequent marriages has obfuscated the nature of the Genesis 2:24 marriage, and in particular what is meant by its “one flesh” union. I suggest that the key to understanding the etiology of mundane marriage, the Bible’s marital imagery—and Paul’s comment in Ephesians 5:32—is to understand that “one-flesh” expression.¹³

It seems clear that the union of Genesis 2:24, unlike that of Genesis 2:23, is not a literal one-flesh union—there is no miraculous (or mystical) union of the flesh suggested in the verse, nor any evidence in the Old Testament record that this was how mundane marriage was later understood. We are told that the couple “shall become one flesh” (וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד; *wehayu lebasar ’ekhad*); thus, unlike the marriage of Adam and Eve, their “one flesh” status is a construct of their union, not a pre-existing state. This concept appears to be underpinned by the Hebrew. Verse 23 has the phrase בָּשָׂר מִבְּשָׂרִי (*basar mibbesari*) employing the inseparable preposition מִן (*min*; “from”) and thus might be translated as “flesh from my flesh,” as per the International Standard Version (even though most Bible versions opt for “flesh of my flesh,” which would normally require a construct phrase). This can be contrasted with verse 24, where the inseparable preposition לְ (*l*; “into”) is used (לְבָשָׂר; *lebasar*)—thus Eve was formed *from* Adam (v. 23), whereas the mundane marriage couple come *into* their one-flesh union (v. 24).¹⁴

2. The Genesis 2:24 One-Flesh Union Forms a New Family

At the heart of Genesis 2:24 is a metaphoric concept—immediately after the description of the miraculous primal couple in Genesis 2:23 being declared to be (literally) one flesh, Adam describing Eve as “flesh of my flesh,”

¹² For a representative list of publications over the last twenty years that articulate such a view, see Colin Hamer, *Marital Imagery in the Bible: An Exploration of Genesis 2:24 and Its Significance for the Understanding of New Testament Divorce and Remarriage Teaching* (London: Apostolos, 2015), 67–68.

¹³ Pauline authorship for the purposes of this article is assumed. It might be noted that Genesis 2:24 is specifically employed in metaphoric cross-mapping in Ephesians 5:32–33 and 1 Corinthians 6:15–16 in a strikingly similar way, thus possibly lending weight to that assumption.

¹⁴ I am grateful to David Instone-Brewer for pointing out to me this aspect of the Hebrew grammar of Gen 2:23–24.

we are told that in subsequent marriages “they [the couple] shall become one flesh.” The two entities are said to equate—A (the couple) is (or rather becomes) B (a one-flesh union). It is not literally true (and such a consanguineous marital union would be forbidden in the Pentateuch)—thus the statement has all the characteristics of a metaphor—and is instead, as Sam Glucksberg terms it, a “literally false assertion.”¹⁵ In other words, the Genesis 2:24 one-flesh marital union is a metaphoric restatement of the Genesis 2:23 literal one-flesh union of Adam and Eve.

Bruce Kaye comments that rabbinic interest in Genesis 2:24 centered on whether or not the husband leaving his parents to join his wife reflected a matrilineal family structure in Jewish history.¹⁶ But having reviewed the evidence for the idea that Hebrew patriarchy was preceded by a more remote matriarchal regime, David Mace concludes, “Such a view is now entirely out of the question.”¹⁷ It is more probable that, as William Loader observes, the “leaving” of father and mother indicates a “new social reality, the beginning of a new household.”¹⁸

Marriages in ancient Israel were formed by means of a volitional, conditional covenant, such being either understood—or articulated orally, or in writing. When the agreement was made, the bride, usually after a betrothal period, would leave her family and become part of her husband’s family.¹⁹ The new “one flesh” status is often symbolized in the West today when the bride takes her husband’s family name—she is “counted as” being in his family. Thus David Instone-Brewer comments that in ancient Israel, “‘They shall be one flesh’ would probably have been interpreted to mean ‘they shall be one family.’”²⁰ And John Skinner points out that in both Hebrew and Arabic, the word “flesh” is synonymous with clan or kindred group, and he references Leviticus 25:49, where the English Standard Version translates *basar* (“flesh”) as “clan.”²¹ Kaye states,

¹⁵ Sam Glucksberg, “How Metaphors Create Categories—Quickly,” in Gibbs, *Cambridge Handbook*, 67–68.

¹⁶ Bruce Kaye, “‘One Flesh’ and Marriage,” *Colloquium* 2 (May 1990): 49.

¹⁷ David. R. Mace, *Hebrew Marriage: A Sociological Study* (London: Epworth, 1953), 76–82.

¹⁸ William R. G. Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 12.

¹⁹ Daniel I. Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 58.

²⁰ David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 22.

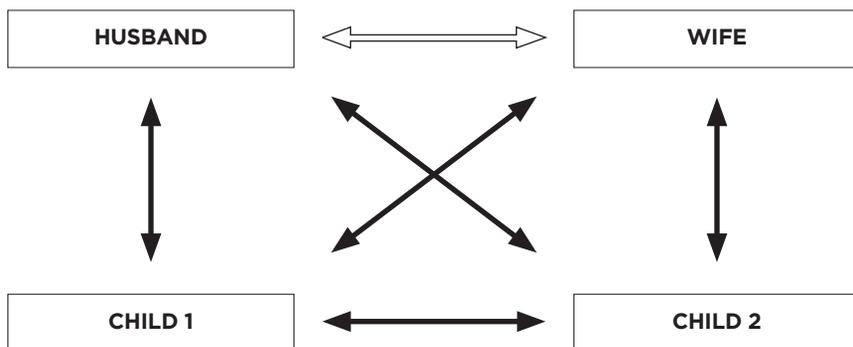
²¹ John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930), 70.

The term “flesh and bone” occurs only eight times in the Old Testament apart from Genesis 2:23. In Genesis 29:14 and 37:27 it directly and clearly means someone who is a close blood relation.... In general terms, the phrase has the immediate and direct sense of blood relation but, as well, is used figuratively of a close relationship.²²

Dennis McCarthy clarifies the situation when he says a covenant was “the means the ancient world took to extend relationships beyond the natural unity by blood.”²³ And Tom Holland considers the various understandings of *basar* (flesh) in the Hebrew Bible and sees that a covenantal concept is contained in its semantic field: “Here [Gen 2:24] ‘flesh,’ implies the covenant relationship a man has with his wife.”²⁴

In light of this analysis it can be seen that Genesis 2:24 could be—and to achieve a contextually sensitive understanding of its meaning probably should be—translated as, “After that [i.e., after the marriage of the primal couple], a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one family.” Thus, the Genesis 2:24 one-flesh union is a marital affinity union, in contrast to the Genesis 2:23 consanguineous union of Adam and Eve.

A mixture of “one flesh” unions (affinity and consanguineous) are evidenced in any family with birth children. Such can be diagrammatically represented thus:



²² Kaye, “One Flesh,” 48–49.

²³ Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*, AB 21 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1963), 175. The marriage agreement is often referred to as a “covenant” by New Testament scholars, and this article will use that same terminology, but in so doing it is not intended to endorse any later connotations of such.

²⁴ Tom Holland, *Romans: The Divine Marriage* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 203; for further discussion, see Hamer, *Marital Imagery*, §1.4.3–4.

The parent/child/sibling relationships are consanguineous and occupy the same conceptual domain as that of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:23, in that these relationships are (and always were) one flesh—they are nonvolitional, noncovenantal, and permanent—a reality, not a construct. In contrast, the Genesis 2:24 one-flesh relationship between the husband and wife is a construct of a volitional, covenantal union, a construct that nevertheless brings the Old Testament prohibited degrees of affinity into force—that is, certain sexual relationships are now forbidden to the new family, as outlined in Leviticus 18 and 20.

The differences between the conceptual domain of the literal one-flesh relationship of the primal couple and that of the one-flesh construct of mundane marriage can be set out as below:

Genesis 2:23	Genesis 2:24
1. A miraculous man and woman.	1. A naturally born man and woman.
2. Remain as they are.	2. Choose to become what they are not.
3. In a literal one-flesh blood union.	3. In a marital affinity relationship.
4. Without the need for a covenant.	4. By means of a volitional covenant.

Despite these differences, Gordon Wenham, reflecting the academic consensus and the conflation of the etiology of marriage in the two verses, states that Genesis 2:24 is “a comment of the narrator, applying the principles of the first marriage to every marriage”;²⁵ however, it can be seen that the four principles of Genesis 2:24 outlined above are mutually exclusive to the principles underlying Genesis 2:23 and the first marriage described there.

But before the implications of this understanding of the one-flesh union of Genesis 2:24 are considered, it needs to be established if that is the way it was understood by the New Testament writers when they cited the verse.

3. The New Testament Understanding of the Genesis 2:24 One-Flesh Union

Paul declared himself to be a student of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), a Hebrew of the Hebrews (Phil 3:5), and demonstrated by his great many quotes from the Old Testament that he was not only thoroughly familiar with it, but that he built his understanding of the gospel on it. Despite this, the tendency within the church and academy has been to place Paul’s thinking in a

²⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 70.

Hellenistic context.²⁶ Barbara Sly comments,

By interpreting the Scripture of the Jews in terms of Platonic tradition of his day Philo of Alexandria made a profound contribution to the religious consciousness of the West.... [He] created a link between Jewish Scripture and Greek philosophy.²⁷

It is clear that such a Neoplatonic perspective influenced the post-apostolic church's view of marriage. John Witte Jr. points out,

Classical [Greco-Roman] sources were a critical foundation for Western marriage. Some of these classical teachings found a place in the writings and canon developed by the church fathers in the first five centuries CE, particularly in the writings of Augustine of Hippo.²⁸

James Dunn considers the Greek word *sarx* (flesh) in the Pauline corpus and points out that the dominant view has been that Paul's use of the word reflects a combination of both Jewish and Hellenistic features.²⁹ However, Holland surveys the use of the word "flesh" (Hebrew *basar* and Greek *sarx*) in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures and suggests that Paul's use of *sarx* in the New Testament reflects the varied understanding of *basar* that the Hebrew Bible demonstrates.³⁰ Holland contrasts those Hebraic understandings with the Hellenist concept of *sarx*, which he points out embraces the concept of the individual sinful human body. This latter perspective is seen in the original edition of the New International Version (NIV), where *sarx* is translated as "sinful nature." Holland then suggests that the New Testament churches, although using the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible, would have known the Hebraic concept of *sarx*, and would have understood that Paul employed the term in a Hebraic way.³¹

Thus, Holland believes Paul employs *sarx* in Philippians 3 in a typical Hebraic way to mean the "covenant people of God," that is, the "family" of Israel:

For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe

²⁶ See discussion of this issue in Holland, *Romans*, 1–6.

²⁷ Dorothy Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women*, BJS 209 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), v, 1.

²⁸ John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 18.

²⁹ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 56, 62.

³⁰ Holland, *Romans*, 203–25.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. (Phil 3:3–6)

On this Dunn agrees with Holland:

The problem was that this confidence was understood in classic Reformation terms as confidence in human ability to keep the law... What had been lost sight of, however, was the fact that in the immediate context, “confidence in the flesh” for Paul was confidence in belonging to the people of Israel.... It follows then that it is *sarx* as denoting membership of Israel.³²

And, as A. T. Robinson comments,

when it is remembered that our modern use of ... “flesh” is almost wholly conditioned by ... Hellenic presuppositions, it is clear that great care must be observed if we are not to read into Paul’s thought ideas which are foreign to him.³³

This seems to be the reasoning behind the NIV translation committee’s decision in the 2011 edition to render *sarx* mostly as simply “flesh”—leaving the reader to decide its meaning, rather than translating it as “sinful nature,” as it had in the past.³⁴

Notwithstanding the perspectives of some recent scholarship, the one-flesh union of Genesis 2:24, when employed in the New Testament (Matt 19:3–6; Mark 10:6–9; 1 Cor 6:15–16; Eph 5:31–32), has historically been understood as a spiritual, or at least a mystical/mysterious union, with a heavenly dimension. This perspective underpinned the Church of Rome’s understanding of marriage as a sacrament that conveyed grace. Eventually, at the 1563 Council of Trent, it was formally declared that marriage was to be conducted by a priest and the ceremony to involve a couple who were consenting baptized adults and such, “spiritually transformed their relationship,” creating an indissoluble union.³⁵

But if we accept that the references to the one-flesh union of Genesis 2:24 in the New Testament are to be understood in its Hebraic sense of “one family,” and not in a newly defined Hellenistic, Neoplatonic sense of a spiritual union, this would imply that New Testament teaching did not change the Old Testament understanding of marriage. In ancient Israel,

³² Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 69.

³³ A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology*, SBT 5 (London: SCM, 1952), 11–12.

³⁴ See comments on FIC: “NIV Changes ‘Sinful Nature’ to ‘Flesh.’” No pages. Cited November 11, 2017. Online: <http://www.ficm.org.uk/news/2011-01-30>.

³⁵ Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 77–112; Peter J. Kreeft, *Catholic Christianity: A Complete Catechism of Catholic Beliefs Based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2001), 363–68.

marriage was not considered to have a heavenly dimension—there is no recorded involvement of a priest or even a recognized verbal formula—it was rather a civil matter for the two families involved. I suggest that New Testament teaching shares that same perspective, Jesus stating that “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Matt 22:30).³⁶

I would argue in light of this that the Reformers, as they looked afresh at the text of Scripture, were correct to reject marriage as a sacrament as defined by the Church of Rome, and instead to move toward the understanding that marriage is a creation ordinance.³⁷ But there is no uniform position on this among Reformed believers today, as demonstrated by the signatory list of the 2017 Nashville Statement, which in its first article—“We deny that marriage is a mere human contract rather than a covenant before God”—in effect denies that marriage is a creation ordinance.³⁸

4. *The Understanding of “One Flesh” as a Union Created by Coitus*

Before we can address our passage, Ephesians 5:31–32, where Paul says that Genesis 2:24 equates to Christ and the church, another issue needs to be clarified: Is the “one flesh” union of Genesis 2:24 created by sexual intercourse? Such a view is held by many (seemingly *contra* John 4:17–18) and is based on a literal understanding of the “prostitute” in 1 Corinthians 6:15–16:³⁹

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” (1 Cor 6:15–16)

Loader comments:

Sexual intercourse leads to people becoming “one flesh”.... Again we have to draw on Gen. 2:24. I make myself a member of a prostitute by having sexual intercourse with her.⁴⁰

³⁶ See analysis in Hamer, *Marital Imagery*, §5, §9.

³⁷ Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 130–34; there is a detailed account of Calvin’s position and that of his contemporaries in Geneva in John Witte Jr. and Robert M. Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage and Family in John Calvin’s Geneva*, vol. 1, *Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

³⁸ CBMW, “Nashville Statement,” no pages; Cited November 11, 2017. Online: <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement>. Gordon Hugenberger in his exhaustive consideration of this subject fails to find a definitive example of a marriage in Scripture being formed or witnessed under divine sanction: Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

³⁹ Holland points out the literal understanding of the prostitute that many scholars hold. Tom Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2004), 124–39.

⁴⁰ William Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 170, 172.

Loader believes that Paul is teaching that sexual intercourse with a prostitute creates a new ontological reality, and he reads such into the one-flesh union of Genesis 2:24—despite pointing out that in the Old Testament, “בשר [flesh] can be used metaphorically ... for one’s own kin or family.”⁴¹ And a careful reading of this Corinthian pericope should alert us to a problem—Paul relates the one-flesh union of Genesis 2:24 to the relationship of the Corinthian believers with Christ (in the same manner as in Eph 5:31–32), *and* to their relationship with a “prostitute.” Thus, I suggest that Paul employs “prostitute” in the same way as the pervasive Old Testament marital imagery does, that is, that Israel *is* the prostitute when she goes after other “gods” (see, e.g., Ezek 16:35)—not that Israel goes *with* prostitutes. That imagery portrays the members of the nation of Israel, by their behavior, just like some church members at Corinth, as identifying themselves with the unbelieving world—making themselves “members of a prostitute”—that is, members of a community of unbelievers. Lynn Huber sees that this concept is exploited in the imagery of Revelation 17–21:

The images of harlot and bride depict two possible forms of existence for the Christian community. The community can live in idolatry, as a prostitute, or the community can live in faithfulness to God, as a bride.⁴²

Such an exegesis is consonant with the Old Testament “one family” understanding of the one-flesh union of Genesis 2:24. To paraphrase Paul’s words to the Corinthian believers,

Which family have you covenanted to be in—the world, or the church? If it is the church, do not go back to behaving like that “prostitute”—with all her idolatry and sexual immorality—instead, be true to your status in the family of Christ.⁴³

5. In Summary: The Genesis 2:24 One-Flesh Union

I suggest that the New Testament marital imagery, the root metaphor of which is articulated in Ephesians 5:31–32, can only be successfully analyzed, and Paul’s “profound mystery” understood, if the Genesis 2:24 marriage is taken to be a volitional, covenantal, “one family” union of a man and a woman. It is to that imagery we now turn.

⁴¹ Ibid., 170–77, 278.

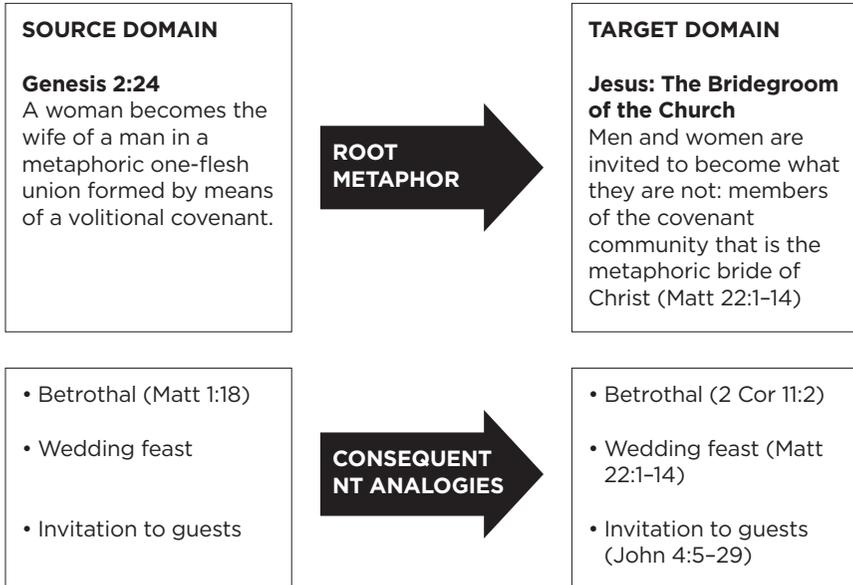
⁴² Lynn R. Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned: Reading Metaphor in John’s Apocalypse* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 32.

⁴³ For a more detailed analysis of these Corinthian verses, see Hamer, *Marital Imagery*, §1.4.4; §9.4.4.

III. *New Testament Marital Imagery*

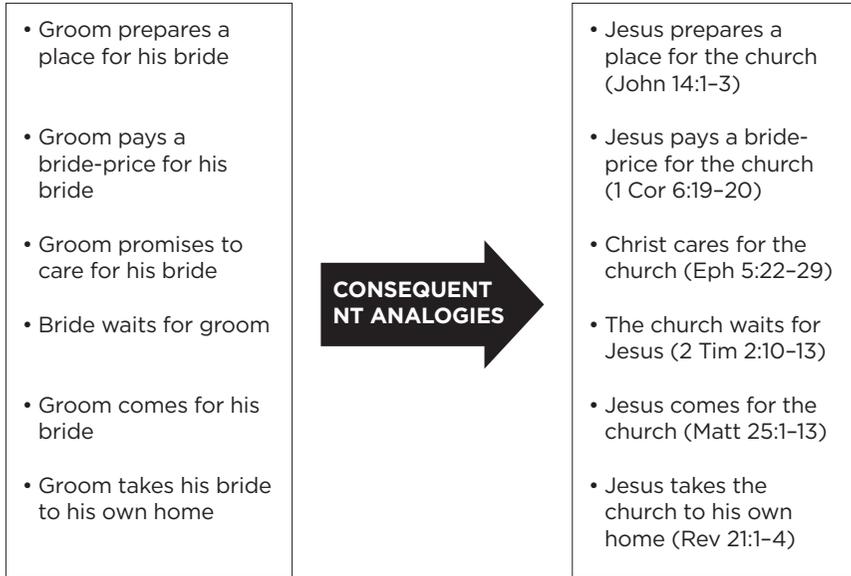
We saw above that the statement “The LORD is my shepherd” (Ps 23:1) is, in effect, a root metaphor statement that gives rise to several consequent analogies. I argue elsewhere that the Bible’s marital imagery is its dominant conceptual metaphor and is the key metanarrative of Scripture from Eden to the eschaton.⁴⁴ The basis of the New Testament marital imagery is the concept that the human marriage relationship “is” the relationship between Christ and the church—thus the root metaphor of the imagery is GENESIS 2:24 IS CHRIST AND THE CHURCH. This root metaphor gives rise to many consequent analogies, and Phillip Long argues that the whole of Jesus’s earthly ministry is told in the Synoptic Gospels as if it were the week before a Jewish wedding—that is, the source domain of the metaphor is populated by Jewish marital practices contemporary to New Testament times.⁴⁵ The imagery also features in the Gospel of John, the Pauline corpus, and, of course, Revelation. It can be mapped like this:

Genesis 2:24 is Christ and the church



⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 265–73.

⁴⁵ Phillip J. Long, *Jesus the Bridegroom: The Origin of the Eschatological Feast as a Wedding Banquet in the Synoptic Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 194.



The imagery makes it clear that Jesus is the bridegroom Messiah who came to fulfill the many Old Testament promises of a new “marriage” (a new covenant) for Israel. For example,

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. (Jer 31:31-32)

IV. A Profound Mystery

But the promise of a new covenant is alluded to much earlier in the Scripture record. In Genesis 3:15, we read, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Paul references this verse when he tells the Roman believers, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom 16:20). Thus, Paul sees that the seed of the woman, the God of peace, and Jesus Christ, are all one and the same. The promised defeat of Satan, and an eventual return into God’s presence, is the gospel that Jesus came to proclaim and fulfill in a new “marriage.” The Genesis 3:15 promise is later restated and applied to Abraham several times. For example,

I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice. (Gen 22:17–18)

Paul in his letter to the Galatians makes it clear that this promise foreshadowed the gospel: “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed’” (Gal 3:8).

He continues by explaining that the “offspring” in Genesis 22:17–18 is a reference to Christ:

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. (Gal 3:16–17)

It has been pointed out that the “offspring” (or “seed,” as it is in the NIV) in both Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 22:17–18, in the Hebrew text itself, is a reference to a single seed.⁴⁶ So Paul is not stretching the understanding of the original promise to Abraham to make his point—which is that the text is referring to the promised Messiah. G. K. Beale comments,

There are no clear examples where they [the New Testament writers] have developed a meaning from the Old Testament which is inconsistent or contradictory to some aspect of the original Old Testament intention.⁴⁷

This promise of a specific seed might have been somewhat hidden in the promises to Abraham, Paul himself indicating such when he says in Galatians 3:8, “Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith.” But Paul clarifies that the words “all the nations” in the promise given in Genesis 22:18 demonstrate that it was always God’s intention that all the nations of the earth would be blessed by a single seed whose arrival lay in the distant future—the promised Messiah would be descended from

⁴⁶ Jack Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 48.1 (1997): 139–48; Desmond T. Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ in Genesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 48.2 (1997): 363–67.

⁴⁷ G. K. Beale, “Positive Answer to the Question: Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? An Examination of the Presuppositions of Jesus’ and the Apostles’ Exegetical Method,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 394, 398.

Abraham. So, Paul directly links the Genesis 3:15 promise to the Genesis 22:17–18 Abrahamic promise of a blessing for “all the nations.”

But Gentiles, who by definition are not of Abraham’s seed, are surely excluded from such a promise? Nonetheless, the inclusion of the Gentiles is the recurring theme of the letter to the Ephesians. For example,

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph 2:11–12)

Ephesians 3:6 calls it a mystery: “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” —in fact, by the time Paul gets to chapter 5, he has declared it a mystery no fewer than five times (Eph 1:9; 3:3, 4, 6, 9). And then he says,

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (Eph 5:31–32)

The profound mystery is that the Genesis 2:24 marital affinity union is the basis of the inclusion of the Gentiles. As seen above (II.2), that union is formed when a naturally born man and woman choose to become what they are not, in a marital affinity relationship, by means of a volitional covenant—the bride is now counted as being in her husband’s family. Thus, those outside of Abraham’s family can choose to become, by faith, what they are not (albeit drawn by the Holy Spirit, as John 6:44 explains)—that is, members of the body of Christ, the church. The church’s bridegroom is, as Galatians 3:16 tells us, the promised seed of Abraham. It follows that the whole church, at the eschaton, comes into a marital affinity relationship with the seed of Abraham—and thus can be counted as being in his family.

This analysis is strengthened when it is considered that in Romans 9 Paul again appeals to the Bible’s marital imagery to make his point about the inclusion of the Gentiles. The Old Testament promises a new exodus to a new marriage—which is described as a new covenant (e.g., Hos 1:9–11; 2:14–15; Isa 54:1–10; Jer 31:31–33). Paul says,

As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’ And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” (Rom 9:25–26)

Earlier in the chapter, Paul states it this way: “This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring” (Rom 9:8). It seems he is contrasting the basis of the Mosaic covenant—entry into which was determined by a Genesis 2:23 consanguineous, one-flesh union with the Abrahamic seed—with the Genesis 2:24 affinity relationship of the new covenant whereby the church is *counted* as being “one flesh” with the Abrahamic seed.⁴⁸ Jeremiah 31:31–33 points out that in the new covenant the law will be written on the hearts of its participants, and such is possibly a reference to its Genesis 2:24 volitional affinity basis. And it is perhaps coincidental, but of interest, that these two key covenants, the Mosaic and the new covenant, have their core etiology expressed in two verses adjacent to each other in the Scripture record—especially as Genesis 2:24 is out of sequence in the Edenic story.

There are several other views of what Paul meant by his “profound mystery,” but space prevents an analysis of them in this article.⁴⁹ However, nearly all are based on two misunderstandings. Those who see the mystery as lying in human marriage have failed, it seems, to grasp how metaphors function. When the psalmist says, “The LORD is my shepherd,” the source domain of the metaphor, the shepherd on the Palestinian hillside with his sheep, is not the mystery, nor is he changed by the metaphoric statement. What changes is our perception of the Lord. The same applies to all metaphors, not just to the many biblical ones. Thus, whether the tangible source domain of the metaphor that illustrates a less tangible truth is seed (Luke 8:11) or leaven (Matt 16:6) or (notwithstanding any confessional position) bread (Matt 26:26) or human marriage, as in our two verses in Ephesians 5, the source of the metaphor does not change, nor is there any “mystery” in the source domain itself; the mystery is what that tangible reality of the source domain illustrates. If this were not the case, the purpose of the metaphor would be defeated.

The second confusion lies in the conflation of Genesis 2:23 with Genesis 2:24—thus most exegetes see Ephesians 5:31–32 as saying that “Adam and Eve = Christ and the church.” J. Paul Sampley, in his biblical monograph

⁴⁸ The John 1:12–13 reference to those “born of the flesh” is probably a reference to Mosaic covenant members; if so, John is making the same point made in Rom 9:8.

⁴⁹ See Hamer, *Marital Imagery*, §9.4.8.

on Ephesians 5:21–33, points out that when Paul has already employed “mystery” five times in the letter to refer to the inclusion of the Gentiles, it is reasonable to assume that he employs the word in the same way in Ephesians 5:32—but what puzzles him is how that relates to Adam and Eve. Based on that understanding, he attempts, as do others, to pursue a typological analysis.⁵⁰ But Paul employs metaphoric imagery throughout the longer pericope (Eph 5:21–33) of which our two verses are the climax, in that they describe the affinity basis of the New Testament metaphoric marital imagery and link that to the mechanism for including the Gentiles in the Abrahamic promise.

In Summary: Genesis 2:24 and the New Covenant

This article has attempted to demonstrate that Ephesians 5:31–32 articulates the root metaphor of New Testament marital imagery, and that the profound mystery is that the “one flesh” marital affinity union of Genesis 2:24 is how the new covenant fulfills the Abrahamic promise and brings the elect of “all the nations” into union with Christ. Thus, a *sensus plenior* is read into Genesis 2:24 that foreshadows redemptive history.⁵¹

⁵⁰ J. Paul Sampley, *And the Two Shall Become One Flesh: A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21–33*, SNTSMS 16 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 52, 83, 91, 100–101. The primal couple typologically prefigure Christ and the church at the eschaton: Adam is a miraculously created man / Christ is a miraculously conceived man; Eve is miraculously made from Adam / the church is miraculously brought into being by the Holy Spirit; Adam marries Eve, his own body / Christ marries the church, his own body—both unions are specifically formed by God.

⁵¹ Accepting that *sensus plenior* differs from typology in that the meaning is in the words rather than in the people or the event.

Unio cum Christo and Reformed Complementarity

NATALIE BRAND

Abstract

This article highlights the reticence of the Reformed community toward spirituality, which is devastating in light of our chief end “to glorify God and enjoy him forever” (Westminster Shorter Catechism 1). Reformed spirituality, seemingly short of a lively biblical contemporary expression, needs to be *rekindled* in a way consistent with its heritage. An increased complementarian practice among the Reformed will assist in such a spiritual reanimation, in the form of a corporate Reformed spirituality founded upon union with Christ. An initial trace of a feminine enjoyment of union with Christ demonstrates this proposal, and, in the spirit of *semper reformanda*, a discussion of areas for an improved complementarity in the pastoral care and employment of women and of the absence of Reformed female scholars follows.

In 1990, Tudur Jones lamented the “deep and prolonged silence about union with Christ”¹ within Protestant theology. Almost twenty years later, we can rejoice that this silence is breaking. Over the last ten years, a number of academic works in historical² and contemporary³ theology, as well as a handful of popular works,⁴ have edged the doctrine of union with Christ closer to an appreciation comparative with its siblings, justification and sanctification.⁵ Stephen Clark has said that this doctrine is under rehabilitation, in part owing to its recentralization in the works of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John Murray, and James Packer toward the end of the last century.⁶ Yet there is still much work to be done, particularly in the realm of spirituality: too few of these contributions explore the glorious implications of the believer’s union with Christ for the Christian life. For this doctrine lies at “the heart” of Pauline religion, finding its beginning in election and reaching its pinnacle in glorification.⁷ The “whole process of salvation has its origin in one phase of union with Christ.”⁸ Consequently, this spiritual, organic, and permanent oneness with Christ is also the origin and anchor of the Christian life. And we should certainly not restrict the *unio cum Christo* to its soteriological categories. With its central posture throughout the *Institutes*, it has long been said that the heart of John Calvin’s

¹ Tudur R. Jones, “Union with Christ: The Existential Nerve of Puritan Piety,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 41.2 (1990): 186–208.

² See, e.g., J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin’s Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008); Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011); and Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

³ See, e.g., J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); and Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

⁴ See, e.g., Natalie Brand, *Crazy but True: Connected to Jesus for Life* (Bryntirion: Bryntirion, 2014); Michael Reeves, *Christ Our Life* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2014); Maurice Roberts, *Union and Communion with Christ* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008); and Rankin Wilbourne, *Union with Christ: The Way to Know and Enjoy God* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2016).

⁵ See the work resultant from the 2015 Affinity Theological Study Conference presented on the theme of Union with Christ; Stephen Clark and Matthew Evans, eds., *In Christ Alone: Perspectives on Union with Christ* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2016).

⁶ Stephen Clark, “Union with Christ: Towards a Biblical and Systematic Theological Framework for Practical Living,” in Clark and Evans, *Perspectives*, 235–83.

⁷ James S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ: The Vital Elements of St. Paul’s Religion* (New York: Harper, 1972), 147; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1939), 447.

⁸ John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), 161.

theology and spirituality is the *unio mystica* (mystical union).⁹ Therefore, a Calvinistic spirituality needs to be reclaimed.

This rediscovery would be of great benefit to the tradition in its current state. We live in a time when spirituality pervades society, from “Hollywood to politics,”¹⁰ and sociologists claim it has (or will) eclipse religion altogether.¹¹ Yet the Reformed—those who adhere to the Westminster Standards as their confession of faith—possess a rich spiritual heritage of applied dogma that is largely being overlooked. Instead of a rich contemporary expression of spirituality, in line with its historical-theological heritage, the tradition suffers from caricature: the Reformed are portrayed as an overly dogmatic and cerebral community that avoids any meaningful interest in spirituality. Joel Beeke is painfully honest in his diagnosis of a “dry Reformed orthodoxy,” which, he states, “has correct doctrinal teaching but lacks emphasis on vibrant, godly living. The result is that people bow before the doctrine of God without a vital, spiritual union with the God of doctrine.”¹² Michael Raiter has declared that many Evangelicals find the spirituality of their own churches “stultifying, and long for a more experientially satisfying relationship with God through Christ.”¹³ Alister McGrath writes, in one work on Reformation spirituality, that there is an unsaid assumption that Reformed Evangelicals do not actually have a spirituality and borrow what they can from other traditions.¹⁴ Might we even go so far as to say that, in its present form, the tradition struggles to excite any significant contemporary expression anchored in Word and Spirit? Could it be that recovering a Calvinistic spirituality based on union with Christ would stimulate a spiritual renewal and reawakening? Douglas Kelly affirms this: “Churches of the West need humbly and earnestly to seek to *experience the full reality of holy life* in an unholy and needy world, *by means of a fresh and constant awareness of our union with Christ in and through the Holy Spirit.*”¹⁵

⁹ David Cornick, *The Reformed Tradition: Letting God Be God* (London: Longman, Dart & Todd, 2008), 33. Mark Garcia writes, “It has long been appreciated that the Calvin corpus contains numerous passages in which the theological, ecclesiological, and practical significance of union with Christ is prominent” (Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 15).

¹⁰ Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 137.

¹¹ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality, Religion and Spirituality in the Modern World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 2.

¹² Joel Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2006), viii.

¹³ Michael Raiter, *Stirrings of the Soul: Evangelicals and the New Spirituality* (Surrey: Good Book, 2003), 29.

¹⁴ Alister McGrath, *Roots That Refresh: A Celebration of Reformation Spirituality* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 21.

¹⁵ Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in the Light of the Church* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2008), 310.

I propose that a distinctively Reformed yet enlivening spirituality might also be encouraged in the improved use of women within the tradition. History demonstrates that celebrated spiritual movements have been particularly stimulated and stirred by the contributions of their women. For example, Bernard McGinn claims the “flowering” of mysticism in the late medieval era birthed from a new freedom of communication between monastic men and women: seemingly the male clerics benefited immensely from the insights and spiritual language of their female counterparts. McGinn documents this significant exchange in his work, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism, 1200–1350*.¹⁶ We have seen something similar in the recent rising popularity of feminist and women’s spiritualities, ensuring that wider society and culture are instilled with a female perspective on the spiritual. Yet this feminine expression is by no means exclusive. McGinn writes,

The fact that some, or even many, women may tend to use language in a certain way, or to adopt distinctive kinds of symbols, or to construct their gender identity and its relation to God according to particular patterns, does not necessarily mean that all women will do so, or that no men can.¹⁷

We must now ask whether a specifically feminine mode of Reformed spirituality exists? Lyndal Roper denies its existence even since the Reformation: “Not even a distinctive feminine mode of religious experience, such as we see in the Catholic saints and Marian cults, or in the extreme hyperpiety of saintly widows, lived on in early mainstream evangelicalism.” He adds, “Far from endorsing independent spiritual lives for women, the institutionalized Reformation was most successful when it most insisted on a vision of women’s incorporation within the household under the leadership of their husbands.”¹⁸

Yet, there is no logical or biblical reason why a complementarian view of male leadership (in the home or the church) should prohibit or inhibit a biblically authentic feminine spirituality. In review of popular works, and the few hymns written by contemporary Reformed women, a distinctively Reformed feminine expression can be traced, as can, as we shall now see, a spiritual enjoyment of union with Christ.

¹⁶ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism, 1200–1350*, vol. 3 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

¹⁷ Bernard McGinn, “The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism,” *Church History* 65.2 (1996): 197–219 (emphasis mine).

¹⁸ Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.

I. *Female Reformed Spirituality*

A strong emotive drive and desire for intimacy in spiritual life is particularly characteristic of a feminine mode. Historically, Christian feminine spirituality has ostensibly grasped hold of the person of Christ in the symbolism, language, and form of union, apparent in the sexual imagery of the mysticism uttered by Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila, and the bridal mysticism of Mechthild of Magdeburg. Popular feminine forms of Evangelical spirituality representing a “Dear Jesus” sentiment are simplistic contemporary forms comparable to this romanticized perception of Christ. Fundamental features are the feminization of the soul and perception of Christ as spouse, and emotions, beauty, and love are key interrelated experiential features.

These characteristics are all manifest in a Reformed feminine enjoyment of the *unio mystica* as the emotions and affections are aroused by the beauty of Christ as Savior; this is pertinent in light of the contemporary Reformed suspicion of the emotive. Faith Cook expresses an essentially spousal enjoyment of union with Christ in her hymns and words, “Drink of Christ and share his life,” “wrapped up in Him, my one desire.”¹⁹ Linda Dillow, in her popular work *Satisfy My Thirsty Soul*, articulates similarly: “I yearned for a joy unspeakable, for a deeper union and oneness, *for spiritual, bridal union.*”²⁰ Here the person of Christ is desired above all things, and so the intimacy of union with him is sought.

Reformed feminine spirituality possesses Christ soteriologically and prizes this spiritually with desire and love for his person. In this manner, enjoyment of union with Christ is intrinsic to Reformed feminine spirituality. The believer contemplates her spiritual oneness with her Savior by meditating upon the beauty of Christ in his divine grace, his supremacy and sufficiency, his forgiveness and love, his servanthood and humility, his exaltation, victory, and lordship, and his glorious humanity as the means of union and communion with God. Union with Christ is not disassociated with his person; that is, the union is not enjoyed apart from Christ since enjoyment of the *unio mystica* is essentially enjoyment of Christ and the whole Trinity.²¹

It is significant that the language of both Cook and Dillow fully engages the affections in enjoyment of union with Christ. Yet it is significant that Cook makes use of Samuel Rutherford’s letters, which similarly “throb” with the loveliness of Christ, suggesting that Rutherford’s expressions are kindred to

¹⁹ *Christian Hymns*, 2nd ed. (Bridgend: Evangelical Movement of Wales, 2004).

²⁰ Linda Dillow, *Satisfy My Thirsty Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2007), 19 (emphasis mine).

²¹ Natalie Brand, *Complementarian Spirituality: Reformed Women and Union with Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 181.

Cook's and not exclusive to women.²² These examples can, therefore, be germane to both male and female spirituality. Grounded on the doctrine of union with Christ, they are devoid of senseless sentimentality yet experiential and dynamic. Might these features help quench the “dry orthodoxy” of the Reformed tradition currently shaped by male thinkers?

McGinn's observations and Roper's comments should continue to challenge us, since a “flowering” in contemporary Reformed spirituality is desirable. But at this juncture, perhaps more basically, we turn to the need to align our church practice with complementarian belief further.

II. *Holes in Our Complementarity*

As the Christian mainstream continues to ordain women and, in the cases of Katherine Jefferts Schori and Libby Lane, consecrate them as bishops, conservative Evangelicals plod on in their conservatism. In the last five years, gender debates on church practice in the ministerial use of women seem to have been somewhat eclipsed in the media by the demands of the LGBTQ+ pressure groups. However, these issues continue to fracture and even rupture church life—frequently to the detriment of unity between those in shared union with Christ.

Within the Reformed community, however, the issue is not generally egalitarian versus complementarian but the impediment of a corporate growth in biblical complementarity. Biblical complementarity has been a lively theological campaign since work began on the Danvers Statement in 1987, operating in the belief that men and women are equal in spiritual responsibility toward God, and in membership in the church.²³ But it is no secret that women are leaving conservative churches because they feel unappreciated and overlooked in their giftings and abilities. Derek Prime writes, “Women's gifts have been, and are, frequently neglected. Some women feel insecure, devastated and robbed of their ministry.”²⁴ Many Reformed Christians are perhaps sluggish in distinguishing between their traditionalism, culturally imbued through years spent in conservative Christianity, and complementarian doctrine and practice. Pastors in particular might not have considered complementarian theology, or be too fearful

²² Faith Cook, *Grace in Winter: Rutherford in Verse* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 18.

²³ See Danvers Statement: Affirmations 1 and 6, Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, <https://cbmw.org/uncategorized/the-danvers-statement/>.

²⁴ Derek Prime, *Women in the Church: A Pastoral Approach* (Cambridge: Crossway, 1992), 8, 97.

to teach or implement it. Jay Adams observes that in many churches there is still a leash placed upon women that is unbiblical and spiritually stifling for the community.²⁵ Mark Johnston elucidates:

Women who have very obvious intellectual and spiritual gifts, who have perhaps been active in missionary work, or in para-church organizations, have struggled with restrictive and even repressive regimes in local evangelical congregations. Situations where the role of the women in practice is little more than tea-maker or cleaner. In some cases where these “evangelical” practices have been questioned by such women, the response they have received has been sufficiently shallow and ungracious to make them wonder even more about what the Bible really says about the worth and usefulness they have as women.²⁶

The correct use of the God-given gifts belonging to Reformed women is essential to our affirmation of shared union with Christ and biblical complementarity. The increasing action in women’s ministries, employment of female workers, and—not least—the biblical vision of women actively ministering to women in Titus 2:3–5, suggests that women can have distinct and unique roles in pastoring and teaching other women. The Reformed community must identify more fully the manifold areas of service that are open to women in the church. But as Ligon Duncan and Susan Hunt state, “this will never happen if our approach to discipleship in the church is androgynous—that is, if it refuses to take into account the gender distinctives of the disciple.”²⁷

Consequently, it is unreasonable to propose that Reformed spirituality is uniform. Throughout the different schools of thought within the tradition, diversity of expression will be found. For example, the spirituality of American Presbyterians will differ from those within Dutch Reformed churches, rendering Reformed *spiritualities* a fairer term. So also, spiritual expression differs among the sexes. In complementarian belief, we acknowledge both “sameness” and “difference” in God’s creation of male and female. This is well received in our practice of ministries specifically designed for men and women. It is logical that this difference also extends to variety in male and female spirituality.

²⁵ Jay E. Adams, *Shepherding God’s Flock: The Pastoral Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 102.

²⁶ Mark Johnston, “Where Are We Today?,” in *Men, Women and Authority: Serving Together in the Church*, ed. Brian Edwards (Leominster, UK: DayOne, 1996), 4–19.

²⁷ J. Ligon Duncan and Susan Hunt, *Women’s Ministry in the Local Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 38, 41.

III. *Pastoral Concerns*

In considering the rise of female spirituality groups since the nineteenth century, feminist historian Allison Stokes states that such groups existed for members to vent their frustrations with restrictions and neglect in church life in light of the emerging feminist project. As a result, they restructured church by means of shared leadership in full member participation and consensus-based decision making.²⁸ They sought the spiritual by open communication, mind-body-soul integration, rituals, acceptance, affirmation, and nurture of personal empowerment and creativity. These characteristics are now found in feminist, goddess, wiccan, and sex-spirituality movements, where women continue to look outside institutional religion for effective pastoral care (as well as power). The popularity of these movements alone—especially in the United States—should challenge the Christian church in its care of women. Appropriate and effective pastoral ministry must be offered together with the establishment of a corporate church life that relationally nourishes and supports women in the larger body.

The Reformed church, in its traditional and increasingly unique complementarian stance, has the opportunity to cultivate a church practice that celebrates the distinct spiritual needs and gifting of women as they minister to each other and the community as a whole. Yet the Reformed tradition has severely underestimated the significance of feminine contribution in spiritual, theological, pastoral, and practical spheres. What is left is a historical tradition that confesses a fruitful complementarian theology, founded by the sixteenth-century Reformers, but neglects its application in church life and practice. *Our orthopraxis must reflect our orthodoxy.* Although recent conservative Evangelical discourse has benefited the tradition in maintaining a biblical view of gender and gender distinctions in light of feminist reinterpretation, many churches that are distinctively Reformed in confession and traditional (or conservative) in practice need further reform in the area of women's service and ministry. Instead of avoiding gender-related issues in the church, or relegating "women's ministry" to the sidelines, the Reformed church must encourage women as they contribute to the theological, pastoral, and spiritual life of the body. "The church needs the theological contributions of each individual woman in the lives of other members of the Body, and the church needs the collective participation of women in the spiritual life of the church if it is to remain strong."²⁹

²⁸ Allison Stokes, "Spirituality Groups," in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, ed. Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (London: Mowbray, 1996), 272–73.

²⁹ Carolyn C. James, *When Life and Beliefs Collide: How Knowing God Makes a Difference*

IV. *Women Pastoring Women*

One biblically sanctioned ministerial employment of women is in female discipleship, or women pastoring women. In Titus 2, Paul exhorts his protégé to delegate the responsibility for the younger women to the older women. “Paul does not tell Titus to teach the young women. This non-instruction probably reflects Paul’s concern that a young woman perceive her husband as the male who is her primary spiritual instructor.”³⁰ Also, it is probable that the apostle also has Titus’s own safety in mind, instructing him in a way that does not lead to sexual temptation. Instead, the apostle presents Titus with a comprehensive syllabus in Titus 2:3–5 to pass onto the mature women. Here is a biblical command for the integration of women ministering to women for the benefit of the whole body. Certainly, Paul sees here not the pastor or elder as redundant in pastoral care but full strategic use of the body in mutual edification. A rigorous structuring of a Titus 2 discipleship program into Reformed church life is the biblical solution for both intentional use of women and intentional ministry to women. Reformed pastor and counselor Adams believes that neglect of the Titus 2 model in female-to-female discipleship is a serious deficiency:

Up until now, women (as well as male pastors) have neglected this all-important task. It is high time for conservative pastors to see both the need and the opportunities that this whole untapped area affords.³¹

This ministry should be viewed as indispensable to the life of the church. It should not be executed peripherally to the main body. If the ministry employment and pastoral care of women do not remain integral to the body, women will go elsewhere for a corporate integration that meets their own expression and experiences. If the Reformed tradition can responsibly promote and foster a biblical corporate spirituality that welcomes female expression, then Reformed women will be safeguarded.

What is required, in the recovery of a Calvinistic spirituality based on union with Christ, is a thoroughly churchly or corporate spirituality of the Bride of Christ in union with him.

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 203.

³⁰ R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 328–29, cited in Duncan and Hunt, *Women’s Ministry in the Local Church*, 124.

³¹ Adams, *Pastoral*, 102.

V. A Corporate Spirituality and Union with Christ

Although rooted in the Reformation, the spread of Evangelicalism since the eighteenth century has overemphasized personal faith. This is demonstrated in what Ian Randall calls the “overriding theme” of Evangelical spirituality: “*personal* relationship to Jesus Christ.”³² In the influence and overlap of Evangelicalism with the Reformed, the former’s individualism and conversionism have robbed the latter of its ideal of corporate life in Christ. Consequently, the recovery of a robust corporate spirituality based on union with Christ would favorably hinder this individualism, which is fueled by the common perception that church is a series of programs to serve the individual. Instead, a biblical ecclesiology might be cultivated wherein the binding of the believer to the “in Christ” community is seen inseparably with the believer’s union with Christ. “Since salvation is only in Christ, there is a sense in which there is no salvation outside the church of Christ, for those whom the Spirit unites to Christ, he unites to all others who are in Christ.”³³

In sum, a corporate Reformed spirituality built upon the *unio mystica* affirms that the church does not exist apart from Christ and Christ does not exist without the church, which “together with him can be called the one Christ.”³⁴ Rebecca Jones names it a Spirit-effected marriage: “Christ and the church are the new Adam and Eve, the founding couple for a new humanity. Their union produces offspring for God by the power of the Holy Spirit.”³⁵

It is the Spirit of Christ, who soteriologically binds the Savior to his people, who furnishes this doctrine with transformative, pastoral, and ecclesiastical power. And it is the Holy Spirit himself who is the author of the Christian life, since without him the Christian life cannot exist. He is, as Calvin says, “The root and seed of heavenly life in us.”³⁶ The Holy Spirit’s work in our union with Christ is the reason it serves as the basis of our corporate and personal spirituality. Sinclair Ferguson agrees: “The model we employ for structuring the Spirit’s ministry should be that of union with

³² Ian Randall, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2005), 15 (emphasis mine).

³³ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 57.

³⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 474.

³⁵ Rebecca Jones, *Does Christianity Squash Women?* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 134.

³⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes* 3.1.2 (*Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960], 1:538).

Christ.”³⁷ It is through this that we find an efficacious unity of Word and Spirit. The Spirit is Christ’s supply to his bride for her sanctification, “by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle” (Eph 5:26–27 esv).³⁸ It is the Spirit, who inspired the biblical writers and illuminates the Word in the hearts of believers, who makes us holy in Christ.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. (Titus 3:4–6)

As he bestows his Spirit on his church (John 14:16–17), convicting her of sin (John 16:8; 1 Thess 1:5) and pouring Christ’s love upon her, he gives her the sacraments as a means of inserting the believer into the whole Christ³⁹ and as “a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body.”⁴⁰ Here in the sacraments we find the means of grace to corporate enjoyment of union with Christ by the Holy Spirit, the maintenance and sustenance of the corporate bride as she awaits her bridegroom.⁴¹

The belief that a recovery of the *unio mystica* will actually benefit and shape spiritual life stems from the Reformed principle that theological truth governs the Christian life. The thirteenth-century divorce of theology from spirituality in academia must not impede upon Reformed thought. Instead, by presenting a theological restatement of union with Christ in a Trinitarian and especially pneumatic-christological capacity, we can discern a unique and distinctively corporate spirituality, true to our Reformed confession.

VI. The Unquestioned Lacuna: A Call for Reformed Female Scholars

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel, Sarah Coakley, Frances Young, and Katherine Sonderegger are but a few female theologians who have changed or are changing the male-dominated landscape both in

³⁷ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 100.

³⁸ Cf. 2 Cor 3:18; 6: 6; Gal 3:3–5; 5:22.

³⁹ Thomas F. Torrance and Robert Bruce, *The Mystery of The Lord’s Supper: Sermons on the Sacrament Preached in the Kirk of Edinburgh*, 2nd ed. (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2005), 71.

⁴⁰ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 955.

⁴¹ For further development, see Brand, *Complementarian Spirituality*, 132–42

university and denomination. With these women influencing their own traditions, Reformed theology remains dominated by male contribution. Perhaps more disturbing, however, is the lack of questioning why this is the case. Does not biblical complementarity allow full freedom for women to contribute to doctrine and its praxiological outworking in spirituality? Why are there no female scholars contributing to key areas of Reformed thought: soteriology, Trinitarianism, ecclesiology, missiology, and pastoral studies? Surely this absence is a serious weakness to the community, its doctrinal development, and its place in wider academia. Indeed, the dearth of female Reformed theologians is a serious shortcoming to complementarianism itself. Reformed thought would benefit greatly from female insights and perspectives.

Unfortunately, theological scholarship is not an arena into which Reformed women are encouraged to enter, so we continue to breathe a cultural air that communicates theology to be a male pursuit. This breeds theologically weak women and sentimental spirituality. I suggest that church leaders and scholars take it upon themselves to undo this absence by actively supporting and encouraging women who are theologically able. For those women who are doctrinally intimidated, it is the privilege of the pastor to embolden them. And the improved ministerial employment of women will automatically encourage and give confidence, feasibly stimulating a deeper understanding of doctrine for use in teaching and discipleship. Thus, the advantages of an increased female action in doctrine will be inestimable, benefiting the home, the local body, the wider Reformed community, and society as a whole.

Conclusion

“In the church—as elsewhere—men and women need each other, and God intends them to be complementary in their gifts and personalities.”⁴² Any neglect of women in the Reformed tradition belittles the Christ–church union and enjoyment of shared union with Christ among the elect. Accordingly, if complementarity is not prevalent in Reformed thought *and* practice, then the tradition conflicts with itself.

When women are not included in the conversation, there are blind spots in the church’s ministry—overlooked needs and issues, places where our theology is underdeveloped and detached. In Christ’s body, every member needs all the others—not simply to be there but to contribute.⁴³

⁴² Prime, *Women*, 29.

⁴³ James, *Life and Belief*, 59.

Many Reformed Christians need to renew their vision of the church to one more consistent with its life as the bride of Christ, in union with him by the Spirit. This article has done no more than highlight areas of concern, while making some suggestions. Concerning the responsibility of church leaders and presbyteries John Piper recommends “prayer and study and humble obedience to discover the pattern of ministry involvement for men and women that taps the gifts of every Christian and honors the God-given order of leadership by spiritual men.”⁴⁴

May the above self-critical observations encourage action in resolving some of the practical inconsistencies of our complementarian belief and excite man and women alike to deeper joy in Christ.

Yet she on earth hath union
with God the Three in One,
and mystic sweet communion
with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we,
like them, the meek and lowly,
on high may dwell with thee.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ John Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 31–59.

⁴⁵ Samuel J. Stone, “The Church’s One Foundation” (1866).

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Lessons from the Reformation for Hermeneutics Today

HENK VAN DEN BELT

Abstract

Recent views of the hermeneutical process, including philosophical speech-act theories, challenge Scripture's authority and emphasize the author's intention rather than a historical-grammatical view. Relating theological issues to philosophical views is legitimate, provided that the results do not contradict the spiritual authority of Scripture. The following hermeneutical principles of the Reformation can help maintain this adherence: 1) Scripture is the first principle and ultimate norm for all theology; 2) Scripture is the living and powerful Word of God; 3) the sovereign Spirit binds himself to the Word; and 4) the Spirit-breathed Word begs for a spiritual and clear explanation. In the (post)modern context, we need to approach hermeneutics from pneumatology and test it by God's Word.

There are many definitions of hermeneutics, but in essence, they all imply that hermeneutics describes the way in which the Bible is read, interpreted, and applied in a specific cultural context. It is the analysis of the interaction between the text and its meaning in its original context and the way it is understood by its readers in present contexts. Hermeneutics not only describes the process but also prescribes how Scripture should be read, interpreted, and applied.

The main question for this article is how reflection on the hermeneutical principles and rules of the Reformation can help evangelical Christians today. After a discussion of a recent hermeneutical development and an example of application, this article summarizes the hermeneutics of the early Reformation in four aspects that are still relevant and concludes with a discussion of their usefulness for today.

I. *From Modern Propositions to Postmodern Locutions*

The way in which texts are interpreted is always related to the cultural context. The earliest Christian theologians, like Justin Martyr, reveal a Hellenistic influence in their understanding of Scripture. During the Middle Ages, the influence of Aristotelian philosophy led to scholastic theology. It is striking today to see how Christians in different cultural contexts understand and interpret the Scriptures in different ways. This historical and cultural diversity is inevitable and is not problematic as long as Scripture remains normative in all these historical and cultural contexts.

In the context of modernity, the orthodox Protestant view of the authority of Scripture was often phrased in the categories of propositional truths. Exemplary of this position is the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics* (1982): “We affirm that the Bible expresses God’s truth in propositional statements, and we declare that biblical truth is both objective and absolute” (Article 6).¹ This statement follows the previous *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978): “Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching.”² Both statements reveal a rather “modern” understanding of biblical truth and were prompted by the debate on the historical-critical exegesis so typical in modernity. These statements are far less popular among evangelicals than formerly. The switch from the modern to a so-called postmodern context offers new challenges to evangelicals. While modernity was characterized by rationality and the autonomy of the individual, postmodernity is highly relativistic.³

¹ Cf., e.g., Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, “Articles of Affirmations and Denial,” *Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*, www.alliancenet.org/the-chicago-statement-on-biblical-hermeneutics.

² Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, “A Short Statement,” Article 4, *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, www.alliancenet.org/the-chicago-statement-on-biblical-inerrancy.

³ On the challenges for the authority of Scripture in a postmodern context, see also Henk van den Belt, “Scripture as the Voice of God: The Continuing Importance of *Autopistia*,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13.4 (2011): 434–47.

1. *Speech-Act Theory*

During the past decades, an important hermeneutical development has taken place among many evangelicals worldwide. This development can be characterized as a moderate application of postmodern language philosophy to the understanding and interpretation of Scripture.

In the so-called linguistic turn, philosophy switched to an emphasis on language as a construction of reality. Evangelicals who integrate this turn generally reject the relativistic consequences of postmodern philosophy.⁴ Instead of referring to the Chicago statements, many evangelicals today rather speak of the authority of Scripture in terms of the speech-act theory.

The founder of this linguistic theory was the British language philosopher John Langshaw Austin (1911–1960). According to this theory, the *locution* is the production of sound or the writing of a sentence, the *illocution* is what the speaker or writer is doing in this act, and the *perlocution* is the intended effect of the language act.⁵

The speech-act theory exemplifies an important philosophical switch in the 1960s, which has been incorporated in theological reflection since the 1990s. For orthodox Protestant theologians, it is an attractive way to replace the modern propositional view of revelation by a moderate postmodern understanding of revelation as a continual act of God without having to take over the relativism of postmodernism.⁶

⁴ Illustrative of this rejection is Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998). The positive answer opposes postmodern relativism exemplified by the book of Stanley E. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

⁵ “A locution is an act of saying something, an illocution is an act done in saying something, a perlocution is an act done by saying something.” Ted Cohen, “Illocutions and Perlocutions,” *Foundations of Language* 9.4 (1973): 493.

⁶ Anthony Thiselton and Nicolas Wolterstorff were among the first who applied the theory to theology. For a short survey, see Anthony C. Thiselton, “Speech-Act Theory and the Claim That God Speaks: Nicholas Wolterstorff’s Divine Discourse,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50.1 (1997): 97–110. The speech-act theory is also important for the Lutheran systematic theologian Oswald Bayer, who claims that the divine promise is a performative utterance that creates the new reality of justification. Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 50–51. John Walton uses the theory to combine a theistic evolutionary view of creation with a form of inerrancy. E. Jerome Van Kuiken, “John Walton’s *Lost Worlds* and God’s Loosed Word: Implications for Inerrancy, Canon, and Creation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58.4 (2015): 679–91. Even in the study of church history, Austin’s theory is influential through the school of Richard A. Muller, who leans methodologically on the work of Quentin Skinner and the Cambridge School of intellectual history. Richard A. Muller, “Scholasticism Revisited: Methodological Reflections on the Study of Seventeenth-Century Reformed Thought,” in *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion*, ed. Alister Chapman, John Coffey, and Brad S. Gregory (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 134–53.

According to Kevin Vanhoozer, the development of the speech-act theory is “the great discovery of twentieth-century philosophy of language.”⁷ The turn to language philosophy—Vanhoozer calls his own approach “canonical-linguistic”—is a turn away from a propositional approach to truth and from foundationalism.⁸ He applies the speech-act theory not only to the level of exegesis, but also to the canon as a whole: the text is the locution, what the authors intend the illocution, and the work of the Spirit is the perlocution. The intention of the author must be distinguished from the literal meaning. We should interpret the text in a way that is congenial with the author’s intention. But the text can also be understood continually in new ways due to changing cultural contexts. That is the freedom of the Spirit. The perlocution takes place where the message of Scripture is effective. “The Spirit is active not in producing new illocutions but rather in ministering the illocutions that are already in the text, making them efficacious.”⁹

It is rather understandable and praiseworthy that contemporary evangelical theologians try to relate hermeneutics positively and carefully to contemporary philosophical positions. It is also essential, however, to think about the implications. Some evangelical Protestants use the speech-act theory to stress the distinction between the text of Scripture and its meaning. The text of the Bible is the locution, the intention of the authors in writing the text is the illocution, and the effect of the Word is the perlocution. This approach potentially leads to a shift of the normativity from the text to the intention of the author and the effect of his writings. Not what Paul or Peter claim, but what they intended with their claims and what the Spirit says through them today is normative.

It is not the intention of this article to generalize regarding the position of all who refer to or incorporate linguistic philosophy in their theology nor to point to speech-act theory as a kind of dangerous Trojan horse. To the contrary, the use of contemporary philosophical reflections like those of Austin shows that theology in general follows philosophical trends—trends that often reflect more general cultural developments—from a distance and that theologians often try to use them very carefully and consciously.

But it is important to consider how the new hermeneutical approach that fits the postmodern context relates to previous understandings of Scripture’s

⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 63.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 67. He also states, “The effectual call is the Spirit’s ministering the word in such a way that hearers freely and willingly answer God by responding with faith.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 374–75.

authority. Before turning to the Reformation as a useful point of reference, one example of the consequences of a new hermeneutical approach may be illuminating.

2. *Women in Ecclesiastical Offices*

A recent example of the switch of the normativity from the text is the decision to accept women in all ecclesiastical offices in the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt*). These churches formerly were fierce opponents of this acceptance. How can the rapid change in this confessional Reformed church be explained?

The report to the synod of Meppel (2017) says the texts in Paul's letters to the Corinthians and to Timothy that contain instructions to women to be silent and not to teach do not intend to impede admitting women to the offices. Paul's instruction encourages us to understand how we may not dominate the other sex.¹⁰ According to a previous report (2014), in these texts, Paul stays in line with the contemporary social norms by confirming the subordinate position of women so that the progress of the gospel will not be hindered. Because the church in Paul's days ought not to give offense, we should not give offense today either.¹¹

Although this change does not exclusively depend on new hermeneutical insights—and there is no mention in the official documents of the speech-act theory—the switch in normativity from the meaning of the text to its intention in the original context is a vital aspect of the way in which the change is related to the authority of Scripture.

Admittedly, the way the New Testament speaks about the diversity of functions and callings in the body of Christ and about the essential role women play within the church stands in contrast to an absolute and strict prohibition of any task or responsibility in today's church. Moreover, the way in which the ecclesiastical offices were shaped in the Reformed tradition is influenced by the context of the sixteenth century, although the general message of the New Testament seems to be clear on the fact that men and women have different callings and that the proclamation of the gospel with the specific authority that pertains to the ordained ministry of the Word does not belong to the calling of women. This article does not leave

¹⁰ "Report of Deputies Male/Female and the Office: Serving Together," [written for the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) to be held at Meppel 2017], 66, *Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt*, www.gkv.nl/download/14681.

¹¹ "Report of deputies Male/Female in the Church: Men and Women in the Service of the Gospel," [written for the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) to be held at Ede 2014], 22, *Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt*, www.gkv.nl/download/6489.

room for a nuanced discussion of the whole issue but only intends to use the rapid and radical change in the Reformed Churches (Liberated) as an example of the influence of new and postmodern hermeneutical approaches to Scripture.

It illustrates that the shift from the modern propositional statements to the postmodern locutions begs for theological reflection. We will now turn to the hermeneutics of the premodern Reformation with the question, what we possibly can learn from the Reformers.

II. *The Reformation: Word and Spirit in a Hermeneutical Circle*

The view of Scripture at the time of the Reformation can be characterized as a verbal–spiritual hermeneutical circle. There are at least four key aspects of the Reformation’s hermeneutics, or spokes of the hermeneutical wheel. For the sake of brevity, this article sticks to the views of Martin Luther and John Calvin—not because they were the only Reformers or because their views are normative, but because they generally agree but also slightly differ on the issue of the relationship between Word and Spirit that is so essential for Protestant theology.

1. *The Word Is the Final Norm for Theology*

The Reformation in Wittenberg was the result of intensive study of the Scriptures, but the Lutheran Reformation did not start with a formal concept of the authority of Scripture. The Ninety-Five Theses arose from a rediscovery of Augustinian soteriology. The authority of Scripture was first discussed in 1519 in Leipzig, when Johan Eck accused Luther of holding positions that corresponded to those of Jan Hus, who was condemned by the Council of Constance. Luther affirmed that he agreed with Hus and therefore that he could no longer appeal to a church council to reform the church; all that remained was Scripture.

The Lutheran Reformation, in general, moves from *gratia* through *fides* to *Scriptura* as the ultimate foundation of Reformation theology. Luther’s rejection of the authority of the pope and the councils, however, is not a renunciation of tradition as such. For example, in his defense of infant baptism, Luther refers explicitly to the tradition of the church: “If infant baptism were wrong, God certainly would not have let it go for so long and so generally in the whole Christianity.”¹²

¹² Martin Luther, *Writings* (1528), *D. Martin Luther Werke* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1993 [henceforth WA]), 26:167. The issue of infant baptism illustrates that the slogan *sola Scriptura*,

In response to his excommunication bull, Luther writes that Scripture “itself is of itself certain, simple, and intelligible; it is its own interpreter, testing, judging, and illuminating everything.”¹³ Referring to Psalm 119:130, where the poet speaks about the “opening of God’s words,” and verse 160, “the beginning of God’s word,” Luther states that Scripture is the primary principle of knowledge. The Spirit illuminates the mind by *sola verbi Dei*. God’s Word is as “an opened door or first principle (as they say), from which we must begin in order to move towards the light of understanding.”¹⁴ The expression “as they say” is a reference to medieval theology. With his view of the ultimate primacy of Scripture, Luther is in line with those medieval theologians who saw tradition principally as the transmission of Scripture and not as extrabiblical revelation. Medieval theology saw Scripture as a *principium*, a principle of knowledge that is self-convincing and the basis for all our theological knowledge. Scripture is a queen that

must rule, and everyone must obey, and be subject to her. The pope, Luther, Augustine, Paul, an angel from heaven—these should not be masters, judges or arbiters, but only witnesses, disciples, and confessors of Scripture. Nor should any doctrine be taught or heard in the church except the pure Word of God.¹⁵

Calvin’s specific contribution to the concept of Scripture as absolute norm and first principle of theology lies in the connection he establishes with the witness of the Spirit. In the second edition of the *Institutes* Calvin radically develops the notion of the independent authority of Scriptures. He joins Luther and declares that Scripture is independent of the authority of the church but does this more systematically than Luther. He places Scripture as the formal principle of theology in the prolegomena. He explains that believers are ultimately certain only by the Spirit’s testimony to the divine authority of Scripture. He emphasizes that Scripture is authoritative as such, but that this self-convincing authority or *autopistia* can only be recognized through faith, that is through the witness of the Spirit. In a sentence in the final edition of the *Institutes* he concisely writes,

understood in an exclusive way, is not adequate to characterize the Reformation. On this issue, see Henk van den Belt, “The Problematic Character of Sola Scriptura,” in *Sola Scriptura: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Scripture, Authority, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hans Burger, Arnold Huijgen, and Eric Peels, *Studies in Reformed Theology* 32 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 38–55.

¹³ Martin Luther, *Writings* (1520/21), WA 7:97.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Lecture on Galatians* (*cap. 1-4*) (1531), WA 40I:120.

Let this therefore stand: those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly find rest in Scripture. It is indeed *autopistos*; it should not be submitted to demonstration by proofs. Still, it owes the certainty that it deserves among us to the testimony of the Spirit.¹⁶

Thus, the first aspect of the hermeneutics of the Reformation lies in the Word as principle from which all doctrines are to be derived or as final norm for theology. It is the special work of the Spirit to lead Christians to belief in the authority of Scripture. Though the Spirit works in a diversity of cultural contexts and helps the church translate Scripture in different languages and communicate the gospel in diverse times and cultures, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, who has spoken through the prophets, always leads Christians to a high esteem for the Bible as the infallible Word of God and the first principle and ultimate authority for all theological statements.

2. *The Word Is Living and Powerful Through the Spirit*

There is a certain development in Luther's thought with regard to the relationship between Word and Spirit. Initially, he was fond of medieval mysticism, for instance, as is expressed in the *Theologia Deutsch*, a German mystic tract, published by him in 1516 and 1518. This mysticism teaches the self-abrogation of the soul that loses itself and is swallowed up by the love of God. The subtitle of *Theologia Deutsch* reads, "How Adam Must Die in Us and How Christ Must Rise in Us."¹⁷ Inspired by Johannes Tauler, Luther taught that "all salvation is resignation of the will in all things ... and pure faith in God."¹⁸ Later Luther understood this mystical self-resignation or *Gelassenheit* explicitly as a result of the divine law. The whole scriptural theology hinges on the correct understanding of the distinction between law and gospel, between commandments and promises.¹⁹

In his *On Christian Liberty*, he divides the entire content of Scripture into commandments and promises. The law humbles the human heart and brings it to despair, but the gospel says,

¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.5., translation mine. Cf. Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 53. For the Latin text, cf. Jean Calvin, *Opera Selecta* [hereafter OS], 3rd ed., ed. Peter Barth and Wilhelm Niesel (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1967), 3:70.

¹⁷ Martin Luther, *Writings, Including Sermons and Disputations* (1512/18), WA 1:153.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9:102.

¹⁹ Luther, *Writings* (1520/21), WA 7:502; Martin Luther, *Sermons* (1532), WA 36:9.

If you want to fulfill all the commandments and as they require, be freed from your bad desires and sins, and be saved, then believe in Christ, in whom I give you all grace, righteousness, peace, and liberty. If you believe, then you receive, if you do not believe, you will not receive.²⁰

In his lectures on Galatians (1535), he states that the law not only reveals that we are sinful but also drives us to Christ. The law, however, can only do this through the power of the Spirit and in conjunction with the gospel. In his book *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525), Luther distinguishes between the salvation won and salvation distributed. Christ gained forgiveness on the cross, but he did not distribute it there. Rather, he distributes it through the proclamation of the gospel and through the sacraments. Christ on the cross would be useless to us if we did not have the Word that brings it to us as a gift. When Christians receive absolution through the Word or in the sacrament, they can say that they saw and heard God himself preaching and baptizing.²¹ In his Large Catechism, Luther states that the Word of God will be lost unless the Holy Spirit proclaims it and raises hearts to accept it.

Calvin does not make such a sharp distinction between law and gospel. His hermeneutical approach underlines the unity of the one covenant of God in the various dispensations of salvation history. In Calvin's work, however, one finds a similar view on the effect of the Word of God in law and gospel. In the first edition of his *Institutes* (1536), he compares the law with a mirror "wherein we may discern and contemplate our sin and curse."²² Later he nuances that pedagogical function of the law by stressing that the law remains a rule for the life of sanctification.

The spiritual power of the Word comes to the fore when Calvin in Strasbourg places the absolution in the liturgy. At the beginning of the service, he calls the members of the congregation to repentance and leads them in a prayer of humiliation before God. Then the absolution follows: "To all those that repent in this way, and look to Jesus Christ for their salvation, I declare that the absolution of sins is effected in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen."²³ After that, the congregation sings the Ten Commandments, with a prayer between the first and the second table of the law. In other words, when the law and the gospel are proclaimed,

²⁰ Luther, *Writings* (1520/21), WA 7:24.

²¹ Martin Luther, *Writings* (1525), WA 18:202–3.

²² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1536 Edition*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (1975; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 17. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.7.7.

²³ John Calvin, *Form of Church Prayers* (1542), OS 2:19. For the English translation, see J. Dudley Weaver, *Presbyterian Worship: A Guide for Clergy* (Louisville: Geneva, 2002), 17.

something really happens to those who hear with a believing heart. Humiliation and true faith are worked by the Spirit through and with the Word.

Thus, a second aspect of, or spoke in the verbal-spiritual hermeneutical wheel is what would later be called the application of the Word to the heart of the believer through the Spirit. Perhaps the term *application* suggests too much of a distance between the content of the Word and what happens in the heart. It is rather the enlivening of the Word—with its message of the condemning law and comforting gospel—through the Spirit that takes effect in the life of those who faithfully hear the Word. The Word of God is creative. Here the postmodern speech-act theory can be helpful to underline the power that the premodern Reformers ascribed to the Word of God. Human beings say many empty things, but when God speaks, he always acts.

The power that the Reformers assigned to the creative Word of God became problematic in the context of modernity because the focus shifted from the redeeming Word to the objective content and subjective experience of the believer. The Word of God does not share bits of objective information in the first place, but it reveals the truth and therefore always confronts us with a moral choice. We can only reject its message because of our sinful hearts. Our primary problem with the Bible is not an epistemological problem; it is a moral problem. It can only be overcome by the power of the Spirit through and with the Word.

3. The Spirit Binds Himself to the Word

As to the precise relationship between Word and Spirit, the Lutheran and Reformed traditions differ. Does the Spirit always work through the Word or does the sovereign Spirit join the Word to work with it? Luther strongly bound the Spirit to the outward Word. This view was partially a reaction against the radicalization and the spiritualism of some of his contemporaries. He thus moved toward a more external understanding of the work of the Spirit. In 1518, he could still write to his friend Georg Spalatin (1484–1545):

Pray that God will reveal the true knowledge of his Word to you by grace. For there is no other Teacher of the divine Word than the writer of the Word himself, as he says: they will all be taught by God. Therefore, do not trust your study and your mind, but trust God alone and under the influence of his Spirit.

It is debated whether Luther would have formulated that in the same way later in his life, after he was confronted with the appeal to the Spirit by his radical colleagues and students, especially Andreas Carlstadt and Thomas

Müntzer. While they emphasized the necessity of the inner work of the Spirit, Luther emphasized the objective Word, the Word outside of us. Against the so-called enthusiasts he emphatically states that God gives no one the Holy Spirit without the preceding outward Word.

Luther was afraid that the Spirit would, as it were, start to lead a life of his own. He did not oppose the sovereignty of the Spirit as such, but he wanted to discern the spirits and distinguish the Spirit of God from evil spirits and spiritual self-deception. He says in a sermon on the gospel of John, “God has decreed that no one can or will believe or receive the Holy Spirit without that gospel which is preached or taught orally.”²⁴

Calvin and the Reformed tradition agree on the close connection between Word and Spirit, but there is a shift from the outward Word to the inner workings of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the inner teacher who, through faith, connects the elect to Christ. While Luther binds the effective work of the Spirit to the Word, Calvin binds the effective functioning of the audible Word—and of the visible Word in the sacraments—to the Spirit. Reformed theology later also emphasizes the sovereignty of the Spirit, who can also work without the Word. We are bound to the Word, but the Holy Spirit is free. Despite these different emphases, the agreement is of course the inseparable connection of Spirit and Word. We know the Word through the Spirit—the first spoke of the hermeneutical wheel discussed above—but we also recognize the Spirit through the Word to which he has sovereignly bound himself.

The Spirit in the church as a whole and the Spirit in the heart of the individual believer will not lead them contrary to Scripture. That was the claim of the Reformers over against Roman Catholic and spiritualist hermeneutics. This is an especially helpful aspect of the Reformation understanding of hermeneutics with which we test modern and postmodern approaches to the authority of Scripture. If the Spirit leads Christians in a modern context to underline the propositional character of the truth over against relativizing tendencies, this might be one-sided, but sometimes one-sidedness is necessary in theology. The question is whether this emphasis hinders the message of Scripture to be clearly communicated. This hermeneutical view can be overemphasized and absolutized. Scripture does not always present itself in propositional forms nor does it have to be cast into these forms.

That the Spirit never leads Christians in a direction contrary to Scripture is also helpful in the present postmodern context and the popularity of

²⁴ Martin Luther, *Commentary on John 1–4* (1540), WA 46:582.

speech-act theory. For the understanding of some texts—especially those containing a proclamation or kerygma—the concept of the Word as perlocutionary act is beneficial. However, Scripture does not always take this form; there are also meditative Psalms and historical narratives. Casting everything into one frame does not in most cases do justice to the diversity of genres in Scripture.

4. The Spirit-Breathed Word Requires a Spiritual and Clear Explanation

The hermeneutical relationship between Word and Spirit, in the fourth place, also has consequences for the interpretation of Scripture. Because Scripture is spiritual, the interpreter also needs the guidance of the Spirit to understand the Word in its spiritual sense. Nevertheless, the meaning of Scripture is clear and unambiguous. Partly inspired by biblical humanism, the Reformation rejected the ancient practice of allegorical explanation. This is a complicated issue in Reformation studies, especially in Luther's theology.

The famous saying that “the letter teaches what has happened, the allegory what to believe, the moral meaning what to do, and the anagogical what to hope for”—including the well-known example of the four meanings of Jerusalem—perhaps became so famous because Luther mentions it.²⁵ Luther, however, only gradually replaces the fourfold exegesis of Scripture—the *quadriga*—with a historical-grammatical reading of the text, though always interpreting the texts christologically. Although Luther continues to draw all kinds of allegorical lessons from Scripture, he holds that the most important and authoritative meaning of the text is the literal and historical meaning. In his introductory sermon of a series on Genesis (1523), Luther states that the Holy Spirit has revealed his wisdom in the Word and that God himself speaks to us in the Bible.

Therefore, when Moses writes that God created heaven and the earth and all that is in them in six days, then let it be six days. You cannot find a gloss that turns those six days into one day. If you do not understand how it could be in six days, then honor the Holy Ghost that he is more learned than you are. You have to deal with the Scriptures in such a way that you realize that God himself is speaking. Because God speaks, you are not allowed to twist his Word in which way you want, because you do not agree.²⁶

²⁵ Martin Luther, WA 57II:95.

²⁶ Martin Luther, *Sermons* (1523), WA 12:440.

Luther, of course, is not rejecting an evolutionistic interpretation but writes this against the view of Augustine, that God's work must have taken place at once. According to Luther, that is speculative. However, he does make an exception from the rule of faith. Sometimes you are forced to understand a text differently from the literal meaning, namely, when faith cannot tolerate the literal meaning of the words. The confession "grace alone through faith alone" is a hermeneutical key in the interpretation of the Scriptures.

Calvin was stricter in his rejection of medieval allegories than Luther. He was particularly concerned that Scripture would become a wax nose. (In the sixteenth century, some people carried a wax nose to hide a mutilation. The owner could give such a nose any shape he wanted.) Calvin was educated as a humanist lawyer and not as a theologian. For him only the literal and grammatical meaning of the Bible was authoritative. Still, Calvin read the Psalms from a christological perspective, and sometimes he even refers to the allegorical or anagogical sense of Scripture to make a particular application.

If the Spirit-breathed Word requires a spiritual and clear explanation, this means for hermeneutics that any exegesis that leads to ambiguity must be rejected, especially if the explanation—for example, according to the supposed intention of the author—is clearly opposed to the grammatical sense of Scripture, as in the case of the silence of women meaning the opposite today because the "real" intention of the author was "to avoid offense." On the other hand, the Christian practice of the allegorical interpretation—as a spiritual and christological reading of Scripture—requires further reflection. The way in which the New Testament refers to the Old Testament does not always immediately follow the lines that historical and grammatical rules seem to require. In the subsequent context of modernity, the Reformation's emphasis on the literal and historical meaning of Scripture was twisted into a historical-critical approach to the Bible.

III. The Verbal-Spiritual Hermeneutical Circle and the Postmodern Context

Radical postmodern philosophy teaches that there is no unambiguous Bible but only endless different interpretations and views of the Bible. Evangelicals deny this relativism and hold that the text of the Bible does have a meaning, although it might be difficult to find that meaning and there might be some ambiguity in Scripture due to the diversity of writers and contexts. This reality does not contradict the fact that there is also a unity in Scripture: as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed states, "the Holy Spirit, the Lord

and Giver of life,” also “spoke through the prophets” of the Old Testament. Evangelicals today differ in their opinions regarding the best strategy to avoid postmodern relativism. Some stick to the modern propositional approach to Scripture, whereas others incorporate aspects of postmodern linguistic philosophy into their theologies.

Whereas the modern approach to hermeneutics easily led to an objectivization of scriptural authority, the present cultural context has a relativizing impact on the authority of Scripture because in this context any understanding or interpretation of Scripture springs from a cultural context completely different from that of Scripture and is therefore arbitrary. The hermeneutical position that takes the linguistic turn into account by approaching Scripture as a divine speech act can help us explain how the authority of Scripture works. This approach even lines up with some of the aspects of the way in which the spiritual authority of Scripture and the proclamation of its message of law and gospel was understood in the Reformation.

The linguistic turn, however, can also lead to an unintentional and sometimes unnoticed relativization of the content of the Word. The claim “thus says the Lord ...” then is too easily replaced by “Paul thought that the Lord said so, but now we know more or better...” The solution is not a return to a modern defense of propositional statements, but a radical theological reconsideration of hermeneutics. In our context the Reformation insight that all spirits, and all hermeneutical views, must be tried by Scripture because the Spirit binds himself to Scripture, is crucial.

It might be helpful to illustrate my point by summarizing how the four aspects or spokes can be helpful today and by carefully applying them to the issue of women in office.

Firstly, realizing that Scripture is the first principle and ultimate norm for all theology helps us to relativize the contextual differences among Christians. There is far more in Scripture that unites them than what divides them culturally. Therefore, the voice of the church of all ages and places is important and might lead to a careful suspicion about radical and rapid changes. Only in cases in which the church clearly departs from Scripture do changes have to be advocated. The Reformation itself was such a radical change, whereas the new views on the calling of women appear to be prompted by cultural changes.

Secondly, if Scripture is the living and powerful Word of God, it should not be cast into a forced and exclusive form of propositional statements. This is where the speech-act theory lines up with the Reformation’s hermeneutics. Applied to the issue of women in office, this character of the Word of God pleads against a static view of what an office is scripturally and

against the indiscriminate exclusion of women from all ecclesiastical tasks in all places.

Thirdly, that the sovereign Spirit binds himself to the Word is vital to the assessment of the influence of diverse philosophical theories and systems on hermeneutics, be it the Hellenistic on early Christianity, Aristotelianism on scholastic theology, the objectivization of truth, or the linguistic turn of postmodernity. The same Spirit has led the church in these different historical contexts and leads the worldwide body of Christ today in a diversity of contexts. Nevertheless, the Spirit, who has spoken through the prophets, guides them all in accordance with the one and only Word of God, that is, by the Scriptures that testify of Christ. Applied to the place and role of men and women there can be a legitimate variety in specific applications of the biblical message, but the Spirit will not lead the church in a direction opposite from Scripture.

Finally, if the Spirit-breathed Word begs for a spiritual and clear explanation, the appeal to the intention of the author in the original cultural context or to the ongoing guidance of the Spirit in the history of the church may never lead to ambiguous interpretations that contradict the message of the historical-grammatical meaning of Scripture. If the apostles tell women to be silent in certain circumstances, this needs to be applied today—however difficult that may be in a culture hostile to biblical principles regarding “gender”—and cannot be countered by a hermeneutics that explains the real meaning as an objection against giving offense.

In sum, there is truth in the statement that our understandings of Scripture are colored by our cultural position. However, we must resist the temptation to take our starting point in postmodern hermeneutics or any other cultural context. We should start theologically with the confession that the same Spirit who inspired the authors of the Bible is given to the church in all these different historical and cultural contexts to lead the church through the Word into the whole truth. In other words, we should approach hermeneutics pneumatologically and understand the different interpretations of Scripture as forms in which the Spirit leads the church into all truth. The norm of this guidance through the Spirit is always the Spirit-breathed Word of God.



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The Theology of the Canons of Dort: A Reassessment after Four Hundred Years

ARNOLD HUIJGEN

Abstract

This article reassesses the value of the Canons of Dort, drafted at the Synod of Dort (1618–19). A picture with diverse shades emerges. After four hundred years, the Canons of Dort stand out when compared to the Remonstrant position for their pastoral tone, Reformed catholicity, emphasis on the efficacy of divine grace, an infralapsarian stance on the decrees of God, and their biblical character. In retrospect, however, the Canons also show theological limitations such as allowing the dominance of the Arminian agenda, the potentially problematic nature of complex, causal logic, the deficiency of certain important biblical notions, and a deficiency as to the centrality of Christ. Christ as the mirror of election in particular deserves a more central place in the doctrine of election.

I. Introduction

The Canons of Dort, drafted and accepted during the international Synod of Dort, which drew delegates from the major Reformed national churches (1618–19), are a hallmark of orthodox, Reformed theology.¹ They originate in a dispute that arose in the middle of the twelve-year truce during the Dutch war with Spain (1568–1621) between the Leiden professors Arminius and Gomarus. The dispute was sparked by debate over justification, but Arminius steered it in the direction of the issue of predestination. After Arminius’s death in 1609, his followers wrote their *Remonstrance*, containing five articles: (1) election is based on faith, which is foreseen by God; (2) Christ died for all people, accomplished atonement for all, but only believers enjoy its benefits; (3) no man has saving faith in himself, but humans must be born again through the Holy Spirit; (4) grace is resistible; and (5) the saints can fall from grace. The Canons of Dort are a written response to the *Remonstrance*, following even its chapter divisions. Since the implications of the third article are only visible in combination with the fourth, the Canons of Dort have a combined chapter 3/4. Thus, the chapters run: (1) election; (2) the extent of the atonement; (3/4) human depravity and regeneration; and (5) the perseverance of saints.²

After four hundred years, a reappraisal of the Canons of Dort’s strengths and weaknesses is needed from a theological point of view. This historical distance can easily be sensed. The scholastic discourse that stamped the discussions at Dort is no longer in vogue, later discussions concerning the relation between election and covenant were unknown to the seventeenth-century delegates, and, most importantly, philosophical developments have shaped the further course of Western theology. In 1619, the Cartesian dichotomy between the subject (*res cogitans*) and the outer world (*res extensa*), which would cause the Reformed much trouble, was not even on the table, although the issues of subjectivity and personal appropriation of salvation were more central to the Synod’s debates than they had been for John Calvin. Meanwhile, ideas in the philosophical mainstream and popular

¹ For a brief introduction, see Herman J. Selderhuis, “Introduction to the Synod of Dort (1618–1619),” in Donald Sinnema et al., *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae, 1618–1619*, ed. Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser, and Herman Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 1:xv–xxxii.

² See the full text: Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 3:550–80; <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.iv.xvi.html>. The modern English translation used in the present article is <https://www.rca.org/resources/canons-dort>.

understandings have shifted. While Arminius was among the first theologians from a Reformed background to emphasize human initiative as decisive for human destiny, this emphasis has become the accepted dogma of the later phases of modernity. On the other hand, late modernity has seen the rise of philosophical movements and scientific viewpoints that counter the idea of human autonomy, for instance in the denial of human consciousness by Daniel Dennett.³ Some emphases of the Canons, which combine the denial of human autonomy as decisive for regeneration and real human responsibility, predestination, and a contingent (nonnecessary) reality, are even more relevant than in the seventeenth century. The fronts have shifted: while the Reformed were under suspicion of determinism in early modernity, neuroscience in the postmodern era presents a form of determinism that Reformed people will wish to refute. How do the Canons sound after four hundred years?

The present article offers a rereading of the Canons in light of the present day, intending to pass this heritage along for future generations. This desire for transmission after four hundred years implies appreciation, appropriation, and critique: it cannot be expected that even the finest Reformed representatives of the early seventeenth century, in the heat of vigorous debate, could have drafted a theology without any downsides. The present article briefly highlights five positive aspects of the Canons and four limitations before offering a conclusion.

II. *Positive Aspects of the Canons*

1. *Pastoral Character*

Since the Canons of Dort were born in a situation of intense conflict, vigorous polemics, and animosity between Remonstrants and contra-Remonstrants, tensions among the delegates at the Synod were to be expected. However, the fierceness of Franciscus Gomarus's anger, which led him to challenge Matthias Martinius of Bremen to a duel, strikes the modern reader as excessive.⁴ In this light, it is remarkable that the result of these debates, the Canons, strike a popular, often pastoral tone rather than a polemical one. The polemic with the Remonstrants was unequivocal, but the mode of teaching in the Canons was accessible to ordinary church

³ Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (New York: Little, Brown, 1991).

⁴ Lee Gattiss, "The Synod of Dort and Definite Atonement," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 155. Gomarus's request was not granted, even after he repeated it. The fight went on verbally.

members, while those who had received formal theological training could identify the theological systems behind the Canons. The pastoral tone of the Canons stands out, particularly when compared to the so-called “judgments” (*judicia*), the opinions of the various delegations, which were written in a scholastic style.⁵

The pastoral character can be illustrated by two examples. First, deceased infants. The Remonstrants criticized the doctrine of predestination as implying that “many infant children of believers are snatched in their innocence from their mothers’ breasts and cruelly cast into hell” (Conclusion). The Canons offer comfort by stating that “godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in infancy” (1.17).⁶ A second example is found in the discussion of conversion. The Synod shows awareness of the doubts and temptations that can assail the human heart:

Those who do not yet actively experience within themselves a living faith in Christ..., but who nevertheless use the means by which God has promised to work these things in us—such people ought not to be alarmed at the mention of reprobation, nor to count themselves among the reprobate; rather they ought to continue diligently in the use of the means. (1.16)

This pastoral tone is not merely the icing on the cake but is integral to the thrust of the Canons. While many delegates advocated a supralapsarianism that tends to make election and reprobation twins and leads to thorny pastoral questions, the Canons take an infralapsarian approach at the beginning of the various chapters. These begin with human sin and guilt. Moreover, the “Conclusion” of the Canons emphatically rejects the position of those who teach “that in the same manner [*eodem modo*] in which election is the source and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and ungodliness.”

The deepest pastoral level is that of God’s sovereign, effective grace. The Remonstrants’ message presupposes that human beings will freely make the right choice once their will is properly informed by their intellect and

⁵ W. Robert Godfrey, “Popular and Catholic: The *Modus Docendi* of the Canons of Dordt,” in *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt, 1618–1619*, ed. Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg, Brill’s Series in Church History 49 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 243–60. Only the judgment from the delegates of the Palatinate offered an example of a *modus docendi*, a mode of teaching, in a popular style.

⁶ Erik A. de Boer, “‘O, Ye Women, Think of Thy Innocent Children, When They Die Young!’ The Canons of Dordt (First Head, Article Seventeen) between Polemic and Pastoral Theology,” in Goudriaan and van Lieburg, *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt*, 261–90.

when God persuades them.⁷ However, for those who feel themselves incapable of spiritual good and realize that only God can save them, the Canons of Dort provide the comfort of God's thoroughly effective grace. Moreover, the pastoral tone of the Canons inspires lyrical passages on God's grace: regeneration is "an entirely supernatural work, one that is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing, a marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible work, which is not less than or inferior in power to that of creation or of raising the dead" (3/4.12).

2. Catholic Stance

The catholicity of the Canons of Dort has a material and a formal perspective. Firstly, the material side. By rejecting the Remonstrant position, the Canons of Dort continued the traditional line of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Calvin, all of whom taught predestination in the sense of both election and reprobation. Dort's doctrine of election is neither a Reformed "central dogma" nor a Reformed "in-house specialty." This catholicity can be illustrated by conflicts similar to the one preceding the Synod of Dort in Roman Catholic circles. At the University of Louvain, also in the Low Countries, the Jesuit Leonard Lessius provoked the Augustinian Michael Baius, who allegedly held Protestant or Protestant-like views, leading to the controversy *de Auxiliis* 1586–88. The Louvain faculty condemned theses by Lessius as Pelagian. In a letter to the Inquisition, Bellarminus identified the issues of cooperation, providence, grace, and election as the four main points of disagreement.⁸ A similar debate took place between the Dominican Domingo Báñez and the Jesuit Luis de Molina, whose idea of middle knowledge (*scientia media*) was highly influential on Arminius's ideas of election and justification.⁹ While Aquinas's theology was an important point of reference for all, Báñez, Baius, and Gomarus took the direction of a strictly Augustinian view of human sinfulness and the gratuity of grace, while Bellarminus, Suárez, Molina, Lessius, and Arminius emphasized a decisive moment of divine-human cooperation. In terms of the Thomist tradition, the traditional Thomism of the Dominicans was against the Jesuit

⁷ See Aza Goudriaan, "The Synod of Dordt on Arminian Anthropology," in Goudriaan and van Lieburg, *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt*, 81–106.

⁸ Robert Joseph Matava, *Divine Causality and Human Free Choice: Domingo Báñez, Physical Premotion, and the Controversy De Auxiliis Revisited*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 252 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 23–29.

⁹ Matava, *Divine Causality*, ch. 2–4; cf. Guido Stucco, *The Catholic Doctrine of Predestination* (n.p.: Xlibris, 2014), ch. 4–5. Cf. Henri A. G. Blocher, "'Middle Knowledge': Solution or Seduction," *Unio cum Christo* 4.1 (April 2018): 29–46.

renewal of Thomism.¹⁰ The Jesuit order, founded only decades before in 1534, won the battle in the Roman Catholic Church and managed to get Baius convicted. In Reformed circles, the Augustinian emphasis on grace prevailed, and Molina's idea of *middle knowledge* was perceived—for instance by one of the youngest delegates at Dort, Voetius—as leading to Pelagianism.¹¹ Roughly speaking, Dort is Augustine against Pelagius again, at least in the Reformed view.

The catholicity of the Canons of Dort also exists on the formal level. Delegations were present from all over the Reformed world except France.¹² By inviting these delegates, the Dutch saw that the weighty matters at hand needed to be decided by the catholic, Reformed church. Thus, the Synod of Dort was not merely a “national” synod but also an international council. This highlights a general willingness to reach agreements amid dissent. For instance, there were disagreements between the strong supralapsarians of the southern Netherlands and the Bremen delegation, who were strongly opposed to supralapsarianism and showed a measure of sympathy for the Remonstrants. In particular, Matthias Martinius's emphasis on the universal nature of Christ's sacrifice seemed dangerously close to the universal atonement taught by the Remonstrants. This led to suspicions and the marginalization of the delegates from Bremen; they almost went home because of the animosity (exemplified by Gomarus's intended duel). The English delegation served as a go-between to mitigate the animosity.¹³ Thus, unity was maintained, the Bremen delegates stayed, and a document was drafted that could be supported by the entire Reformed community, variegated though this community was. The committees presented draft after draft until consensus was found. That itself is a remarkable, and admirable, outcome.

This achievement may still be admired four hundred years later. The Reformed world has not always been an example of this catholic spirit that could bridge major theological differences.

¹⁰ Richard Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 272.

¹¹ Gisbertus Voetius, *Gisberti Voeti theologiae in acad: Ultraiectina professoris selectarum disputationum theologiarum, pars prima* (Utrecht, 1648), 246–64; online, <http://www.e-rara.ch/doi/10.3931/e-rara-22314>.

¹² See Fred van Lieburg, “The Participants at the Synod of Dort,” in Sinnema, Moser, and Selderhuis, *Acta et Documenta*, 1:lxiii–cvii.

¹³ Anthony Milton, *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort, 1618–1619* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005).

3. *Effective Grace*

The effectiveness of grace is the prime concern of the Canons of Dort because of the character of God, salvation, grace itself, and humans. First, grace is effective because God does not stop halfway, leaving it up to humans to make his work complete or not. Second, when Jesus Christ is rightly called savior, he must actually save people, not make their salvation possible. The atonement is not the opening of a possibility but the complete accomplishment of redemption.¹⁴ Third, grace is effective because grace is a relational term, used to denote the personal character of God's dealings with people. Grace is not about a transaction. If grace were not effective, it would not renew sinners and would be comparable to a substance or fluid that has been made available for those who are willing to use it.¹⁵ Instead, God's grace is a matter of love. Fourth, grace must be effective because of human total depravity: unregenerate sinners cannot save themselves, nor contribute anything to their salvation. Once regenerated, the will starts willing, and people begin to be converted (3/4.11).

In the background, particularly to the fourth point, lies a question of theological anthropology. Remonstrants thought more optimistically about the status of human beings after the fall than mainstream Reformed theologians. With respect to the intellect, Arminians attributed a positive role to some natural abilities, particularly the so-called "light of nature" (*lumen naturae*) that would enable humans to attain grace.¹⁶ More importantly, the Arminians taught that no supernatural gifts—e.g., of integrity and righteousness—of the will had been lost in the fall, because the will was never endowed with these in the first place. This position means that the will is in the same condition as it was before the fall, a view suspiciously similar to the Jesuit notion of creation "in pure nature (*in puris naturalibus*)."¹⁷ Aza Goudriaan even notes that Arminians "had a more optimistic view about the current integrity of the human will than Molina."¹⁷

Moreover, the Arminians employed a different definition of the freedom of the will than the Reformed. Although the *Remonstrance* itself did not explicitly mention it, the Arminians defined the freedom of the will as

¹⁴ Because effectiveness is the intent of the Canons' discussion of the extent of the atonement, the often-used acronym "TULIP" for the five points of Calvinism is incorrect, at least as far as the "L" of "limited atonement" is concerned. Indeed, the issue is not that atonement would be subject to any limitation, but that it is effective, definite.

¹⁵ The Canons do sometimes use substantial language next to the personal language. In the opinion of the present author, this weakens the Canons' defense against "grace" in the Remonstrant sense.

¹⁶ Goudriaan, "Arminian Anthropology," 90–94.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 100–101; quote on p. 101.

freedom from necessity (understood as *equilibrium*).¹⁸ The will was conceived as neutral between good and evil, free from any determination, open for persuasion either way, like Hercules at the crossroads. The Synod, however, emphasized that the will is free in the sense that it chooses spontaneously, but since it is dead in spiritual matters, it is inclined to evil and will in effect always choose evil. “Since the Fall ... the human will has no ability to choose well spiritually.”¹⁹ For Arminians, this was an outright denial of human freedom, while for the Synod, the Arminian position meant an overly optimistic view of the human status after the fall. It is, however, not enough for God to make us a good offer and to persuade us to accept it, tweaking possible worlds to make it happen. For the Synod, it is necessary that the Holy Spirit apply the redemption Christ has accomplished to the elect, and that the Triune God guarantee the salvation of the elect by his eternal council; otherwise, no one would be saved.

For the present day, Dort’s accent on effective grace stands over against the background of a culture of unbelief. In this context, it is encouraging and comforting to confess that God himself bestows his effective grace on humans. More than ever, we realize that humans are not rational creatures who will choose good if only they receive the right information. Human beings prefer falsehood over truth, are often irrational, and act in conflict with their best interests. Only effective grace can save.

4. *The Human Condition before God*

The Canons of Dort emphasize the human condition before God as that of limited and fallen creatures. Firstly, human knowledge is limited. The Canons warn us not to investigate curiously into the depths of God.²⁰ Assurance of election, for instance, comes “not by inquisitive searching (*curiose scrutando*) into the hidden and deep things of God, but by noticing within themselves, with spiritual joy and holy delight, the unmistakable fruits of election pointed out in God’s Word” (1.12, cf. 1.14, 3/4.7). This

¹⁸ For Arminius, freedom as spontaneity is insufficient; freedom of indifference is required for freedom to be real freedom. Cf. Eef Dekker, *Rijker dan Midas: Vrijheid, genade en predestinatie in de theologie van Jacobus Arminius, 1559–1609* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993), 133–56. Some Reformed theologians also taught freedom of indifference, but not in the Arminian sense of *equilibrium*, which denies the distinction between absolute and implicative necessity; see Willem J. van Asselt, ed., *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 197, 231–42.

¹⁹ Goudriaan, “Arminian Anthropology,” 98.

²⁰ Warnings against curiosity are a *topos* in the Reformed tradition since Calvin; cf. Eginhard Meijering, *Calvin wider die Neugierde: Ein Beitrag zum Vergleich zwischen reformatorischem und patristischem Denken* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1980).

modesty could be considered to be a mere smoke screen to hide the anomalies of Reformed theology; it must have been irritating to the Remonstrants. It is, however, inherent to the Canons as a whole. The main reason is that God's work as such is of a different quality from any human work: the operation of the Holy Spirit is hidden and unspeakable (*arcana et ineffabilis operatio*, 3/4.12).

Secondly, the infralapsarian setup of the Canons fits this modest approach well. The opening sections of the first chapter are a brief overview of salvation history, starting with the fall and human depravity (1.1), moving via the gospel of Jesus Christ in John 3:16 (1.2) to the preaching of this gospel (1.3), and its effect in belief and unbelief (1.4). Only then do the Canons move on to God's eternal decree (1.5–6). The other chapters also open with the serious nature of sin (2.1; 3/4.1; 5.1), which God counters with his grace.

Because of this position of human beings as sinners before God, faith and unbelief are not parallel phenomena. While people are to be blamed for their unbelief, faith is a gift of God (1.5). While the cause of the undeserved election "is exclusively the good pleasure of God" (1.10), reprobation means that some people "have been passed by (*praeteritos*) in God's eternal election," so that God leaves (*relinquere*) them in the misery into which they have plunged themselves (1.15). It may seem logical to ascribe reprobation to God's will as much as election; the Canons, however, forbid such parallel causality, and that reprobation would be the cause of unbelief.²¹ That would render God the author of sin.

In the background lies a classic discussion concerning reprobation, which dates back to Augustine. The question is whether reprobation should be understood in a negative way (God's will not to elect some), or in a positive way (God's will to actually damn people). Scholastic distinctions had further refined this discussion. For instance, while the Canons deny that reprobation is the *efficient* cause of unbelief, many of the Reformed theologians did teach that reprobation was in fact the *deficient* cause of unbelief.²²

The condition of humans as sinners is not as generally accepted today as it was back then. Through modernism and postmodernism, Westerners have become impressed by the historical, subjective, and fragmented character of knowledge. This makes any God-talk potentially problematic. But the Canons' accent on God's sovereignty in reprobation is even problematic from the perspective of present-day Western common sense, which has been

²¹ See Donald W. Sinnema, "The Issue of Reprobation at the Synod of Dort (1618–1619) in Light of the History of This Doctrine" (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Michael's College, 1985), 429.

²² *Ibid.*, 430.

stamped by the Enlightenment: the immeasurable and incommensurable value of each human being. It seems unthinkable that God, who is love in himself, would say no to humans, his creatures, in a definitive, eternal way. Here, at this sore point, modesty is needed in a new sense. If the seventeenth-century theology did not wish to solve the tension between the presence of sin in the world and God's omnipotence, so the present challenge is to maintain both God's loving goodness and his judgment of humans.²³

5. *Biblical Character*

A final positive aspect of the Canons of Dort is related to the infralapsarian approach: the biblical, nonspeculative character of the Canons. The Canons present the biblical narrative as a sequence of creation, fall, redemption, and glory, centered on Christ. Although the exegesis of texts will be questioned from the perspective of modern exegesis, the intention of the Synod clearly is to reason from Scripture. Its heart, as far as election is concerned, is found in the letters of Paul, particularly the letter to the Romans, and within that letter chapters 8–11, which explicitly deal with the sovereignty of God, election, and reprobation. The Canons focus on the notion that God is not unjust when his purpose of election stands, “not because of works but because of him who calls” (Rom 9:11 *ESV*). Being saved does not depend “on human will or effort, but on God, who has mercy” (Rom 9:16). “So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills” (Rom 9:18). Paul goes on to illustrate this with the image of the potter who has the right over the clay, to make different vessels for different uses. Of course, this does not mean that any potter would make a vessel merely to smash it to pieces.

The Canons of Dort are not speculative in light of the options present in their day. This shows particularly in the Synod's rejection of the Remonstrants' Molinist approach to election and in the fact that the Canons do so implicitly, without technical discussions. Luis de Molina's theory of middle knowledge works with three logical moments within the divine knowledge, the first two of which were uncontroversial in Reformed circles: (1) God's *necessary* knowledge, or knowledge of simple intelligence. This is God's knowledge of all necessary truths; it is prevolitional in the sense that God's will does not operate here. It is God's knowledge of all that must be, and of all that *could* be: it is knowledge of all possibilities. (2) God's *free* knowledge

²³ Whichever position one takes in the debate, the impact of Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011) illustrates the open nerve in contemporary Christianity.

is his knowledge of what *will* be; it is entirely dependent upon God's active willing. (3) God's *middle* knowledge, between the first and the second knowledge. This is God's knowledge of all that *would* be, prior to any determination of the divine will.²⁴ By his middle knowledge, God knows what any person would do when placed in certain circumstances; thus, God can reckon with a person's inclinations in making his free decision. "Because God knows precisely how every individual would respond to any set of circumstances, God then actualizes a particular world with a particular set of individuals and set of circumstances in which they make free choices."²⁵ So, God acts with foreknowledge through conditioning. Against these sophisticated distinctions in God's will, the Synod sticks to a biblical rather than a philosophical argumentation.

In the following sections, more will be said about the Canons' use of the Bible. It is clear that a renewal of the understanding of election cannot do without a rereading of the Bible, not merely of the Canons of Dort. Besides, while it is to be valued that the Canons are not speculative in their set-up, the context and content of the discussion do influence the Canons. This leads to a consideration of the possible downsides of the Canons.

III. *Limitations*

In retrospect and after four hundred years, there are also several aspects of the Canons of Dort that stand out as less favorable for present theological reflection. Four of these are highlighted here.

1. *The Arminian Frame*

Since the Canons of Dort are a response document to the *Remonstrance*, they are defined by the Remonstrants' agenda. This limitation extends beyond the merely formal level of the awkward setup of chapters (i.e., chapter 3/4). The Remonstrants constantly and vehemently accused the Reformed of referring dying infants to hell, and of making God the author of sin. The Synod denied these points pastorally and with good arguments, but the playing field had been marked out by the Remonstrants with a focus on election and reprobation. This makes understandable, although not justified, both the later misunderstanding that predestination was a central dogma for the Reformed and pastoral misconceptions of the doctrine of

²⁴ Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 65–67.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

predestination.²⁶ An alternative focus would have been possible: the doctrine of justification, the central tenet of the Reformation. In his 1608 declaration before the States of Holland, Gomarus had focused on Arminius's doctrine of justification. The Canons, however, say relatively little about it, because the *Remonstrance* did not address it.²⁷

In short, Arminius's doctrine of justification as criticized by Gomarus is that "faith itself—not the righteousness of Christ—is imputed for righteousness to believers."²⁸ This view ascribes a much larger role to faith than the merely instrumental understanding of the Reformed tradition. Gomarus indicated a number of tensions in the writing of Arminius, particularly the tension between the thought that a believer is justified because of his faith and the idea that a believer is justified because of Christ's righteousness imputed to him.²⁹ Arminius and later Arminians insisted on the importance of human activity, which not only diverted the focus from God, who predestines in a sovereign way, but also shifts from the righteousness of Christ to the qualities of faith, understood as human activity. God and Christ are put into the background, human activity in the foreground. People would be justified because God sees human faith as "the whole righteousness of the law that we are held to accomplish."³⁰ Thus, the human act of obedience is our justification. Christ's justice and sacrifice merely make this procedure of justification possible, and faith becomes a human virtue.

The Arminian view of justification shows the same sort of deviation from Reformed theology as the Arminian view of predestination. The Canons of Dort, however, focus on the doctrine of election. This emphasis put the Synod on the defensive, leading to an emphatic denial in the Conclusion of the Canons "that this teaching makes God the author of sin, unjust, a tyrant, and a hypocrite." Had the Synod focused on justification, it would have taught the same doctrine while remaining closer the center of the gospel.

The Arminian frame was probably so compelling because the theme of human subjectivity was becoming increasingly important at the time. Notwithstanding the high level of scholastic, theological reasoning, the impression remains that the Canons illustrated the problem of modern subjectivity as much as they solved it.

²⁶ Alexander Schweitzer, *Die protestantischen Centraldogmen in ihrer Entwicklung innerhalb der Reformirten Kirche* (Zurich: Orell, 1854), 1:xiii.

²⁷ Aza Goudriaan, "Justification by Faith and the Early Arminian Controversy," in *Scholasticism Reformed: Essays in Honour of Willem J. van Asselt*, ed. Maarten Wisse, Marcel Sarot, and Willemien Otten, STAR 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 158–60.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁰ The Arminian Petrus Bertius, quoted via Goudriaan, "Justification by Faith," 164.

2. Potentially Problematic Logic

The Canons of Dort emphasize the unchangeable nature of God and, therefore, of his decree: “Election is God’s unchangeable purpose” (1.7); “Just as God is most wise, unchangeable, all-knowing, and almighty, so the election made by him can neither be suspended nor altered, revoked, or annulled” (1.11; cf. 1.7; 5.7–8). God’s love for the elect is eternal, and the punishment for the reprobate is eternal (2.9; 1.15; cf. 1.12). God’s decree itself is eternal (1.6). The theological intent is clearly to emphasize the gratuity of God’s grace, its priority, and the fact that God finds reasons to love his people not in them but in himself. These are essential features of any Augustinian and Protestant understandings of grace.³¹

However, the logic at work here could become problematic because of a tendency toward reification of both the decree and of the sufficiency of grace. If the eternal decree is regarded in itself, it becomes a phenomenon between God and humans. Of course, this is not the intention of the Canons. As for grace, it is paradoxical that on the one hand the Canons of Dort advocate effective grace, which means that God has distinct persons in mind, and that grace is not a “thing,” no substance that has been prepared but the appropriation of which is left to the devices of humans; on the other hand, the distinction made in chapter 2 between the sufficiency of Christ’s death for everyone and its efficiency for the elect evokes a similar scheme to the one the Remonstrants employed, based on the distinction between possibility and reality. For the Remonstrants, the possibility of salvation had been fulfilled, while the reality through appropriation was a human responsibility. Some of the delegates shared Theodore Beza’s criticism of the sufficiency/efficiency distinction.³² In the present-day perspective, the distinction raises questions about the use of the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice for those who doubt whether they belong to the elect. But even if these questions are solved, the logic implied in the notion of sufficiency is thing-like rather than personal.

Secondly, God’s eternity is understood primarily in terms of pretemporal causation. The *prae* of “predestination” receives more emphasis than the *destinatio*, and eternity is understood as prior to time, but also as distant from time. Of course, since eternity is not time, “prior” must be understood

³¹ Cf. Martin Luther, “Heidelberger Disputation,” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883), 1:354, 35–6: “Amor Dei non invenit, sed creat suum diligibile.”

³² See Pieter L. Rouwendal, *Predestination and Preaching in Genevan Theology from Calvin to Pictet* (Kampen: Sumnum, 2017), 122–25 (on Beza’s position), 164–67, 179–81 (on the Synod of Dort).

in a logical, rather than a temporal sense. Also, there is a distinction between primary and secondary causes, and the notion of “cause” was not as impersonal in the early seventeenth century as it became later on. But the logic of causation raises the question as to how interaction between God and humans, for instance, in prayer, can take place.

While the Canons of Dort offer a sophisticated way to conceptualize the interplay between divine and human causation, and the logic was not intended to be impersonal at the time, alternative approaches are presently more viable. The tendency to reification can be countered by emphasizing that election is election *in Christ*. The causal language can be complemented by eschatological language, which should be primary. To think eschatologically means to direct the attention more to the end to which God calls humans (*destinatio*) than to the beginning (*prae*). The relation between time and eternity can be understood in a more dynamic way, in which eternity is not merely, or primarily, pretemporal. Instead of abstract “eternity,” it is useful to think of the eternal God, who is not only pretemporal but who reigns over all times, which are present to him. This means that the eternal decree is not placed at a distance, but very near: “God’s eternal decisions are made at the very last moment.”³³ This means that God hears our prayers exactly because he is the eternal God, who is not locked up in an eternity *outside* time, but who reigns *over* time. This approach safeguards the priority and effectiveness of God’s grace, while stripping it of overly impersonal aspects and unnecessarily perceived distances, since God has come near in his love.

The key to a solution lies in not taking an abstract balance of “power” approach: neither the balance of power between God and humans, nor the inherent power of Christ’s sacrifice (although the Canons are right here), but the love of God, which he shows now, in the present time, through the preaching of the gospel.

3. Election in the Bible

Some central biblical aspects of election can illustrate the importance and the limitations of the Canons of Dort for the present time.

(1) The main line of God’s sovereignty advocated by the Canons is more in line with biblical teaching than the Remonstrant insistence on human freedom. Particularly in the often-quoted passage Romans 9–11, Paul uses some harsh paradoxes to underline God’s sovereignty. However, this is not all that is found in Romans 9–11. Paul also marvels at God’s wisdom and

³³ Oepke Noordmans, *Het Koninkrijk der hemelen: Toelichting op de Heidelbergse catechismus zondag 7–22* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1949), 110.

bursts into a doxology when highlighting what God has done through his mission work among the Gentiles.³⁴ This aspect is a key to understanding God's election. When discussed in general, abstracted from concrete people, predestination may seem cold and fate-like. But *in concreto* predestination is another word for the love of God for his unworthy people. The Canons of Dort show the doxological and soteriological sides of predestination but are not free of abstract discussions of predestination, for example, in passages that bluntly refer to "some people."

(2) The neglect of Israel is an important reason why the Canons run the risk of abstraction. It would be unhistorical to blame the Synod for this, but the absence of discussion of Israel strikes the present reader. For election in the Old Testament primarily comes in the form of God's election of Israel.³⁵ Also, Israel is center stage in Romans 9–11. Paul starts with his sorrow over Israel (9:1–5), discusses God's election of Abraham's children (9:6–13), leading to the central theme of Israel's unbelief (9:30–33) and the engrafting of Gentiles in Israel (11). The Canons of Dort miss this point.

(3) In the Bible, election has a corporate aspect. Even in Romans 9, where Paul states that Jacob was chosen while Esau was not, the election of Israel as a people is implied. First Peter 2:9 describes the New Testament church as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession." While the accent on Israel was virtually unknown in the seventeenth century, this corporate aspect of predestination was already present in the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), in which election is an aspect of the church.³⁶ The Canons of Dort, however, focus on the individual.

(4) The Canons of Dort emphasize the priority and the efficacy of grace, that is, God's initiative and sovereignty in grace. There are other possible characteristics of grace (e.g., its superabundance, singularity, noncircularity, and incongruity). The incongruity of grace in particular seems more important for the apostle Paul's theology than the priority of efficacy: since the receivers of God's grace are unworthy of such a gift, its incongruity dissolves former criteria of worth and opens up a new reality.³⁷

(5) The New Testament authors emphasize the eschatological reality more than protology or pretemporal eternity.³⁸ The New Testament is full

³⁴ Rom 11:33–36.

³⁵ See Deut 7:6–8, which may suffice for a vast number of texts.

³⁶ Heidelberg Catechism 52, 54. <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/heidelberg-catechism>.

³⁷ John Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 70–75, 569. One does not have to share Barclay's solution of incongruous grace to accept that the priority of grace is not Paul's prime concern.

³⁸ Even when eternity as pretemporal reality is emphasized, this is clothed in the eschatological language of Christ's coming (e.g., Eph 1:3–10).

of predestination, in the sense that the kingdom of God breaks forth: God chooses what is weak, low, despised, “things that are not,”³⁹ to end human boasting and to glorify himself. This emphasis is present not merely in Paul’s letters but also in the Gospels. God in Christ clearly prefers the humble and weak. Jesus transcends the level of moral intuition by preferring whores and sinners of every kind over the neat Pharisees, and the socially lower Lazarus over the rich man. God sympathizes with those in need of conversion; that is predestination in the Gospels. This perspective colors the understanding of election as eternal and pretemporal: believers see in retrospect that God “chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world.”⁴⁰ No starting point for God’s love can be found in time, because God’s love dates all the way back from before the foundation of the world. In this way, predestination again becomes part of doxology. This can happen only through Christ, since election in the Bible is election “in Christ.”

4. *Christ the Center*

Last but not least, the place of Christ in the Canons of Dort is an important point. The relation between election and Christ in the Canons of Dort has been much debated. Chapter 1 states that “God chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people.... God did this in Christ, whom he also appointed from eternity to be the mediator, the head of all those chosen, and the foundation of their salvation” (1.7). According to Karl Barth and others, the relation between God’s decree and his salvific acts in Christ is not clarified, and predestination remains abstract, remote from Christ.⁴¹ The Remonstrants interpreted this passage likewise and criticized that Christ only matters in the effectuation of election, but not in election itself. The Remonstrants themselves preferred to call Christ “the foundation of election” (*fundamentum electionis*), whereas the Synod calls him “the foundation of salvation” (*fundamentum salutis*, 1.7). Others, however, interpret that the decree and Christ are inherently connected and that the Canons are more Christ centered than the Remonstrants and Karl Barth thought.⁴² The truth probably lies somewhere in the middle between the nonchristological and explicitly christological interpretations of these passages. A counter indication for the strong christological interpretation is the fact that Christ has not yet been mentioned by section 6 of chapter 1.

³⁹ 1 Cor 1:28.

⁴⁰ Eph 1:4.

⁴¹ Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, II/2 (Zurich: EVZ, 1959), 118–22 = *Church Dogmatics*.

⁴² E.g., Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer, *Divine Election: Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), ch. 5.

Also, it is clear that the Synod wanted to avoid the formula *fundamentum electionis* for Christ, because the Remonstrants used this expression to denote that faith in Christ was prior to election, and that election was based on faith. That would be anthropocentrism instead of christocentrism.⁴³

Be this as it may, this discussion centers on Christ as figure in God's eternal election, rather than the incarnate, concrete Christ, and the proclaimed Christ of Christian preaching. The concrete character of predestination as relation to Christ could have been more strongly articulated. This wish does not merely stem from later, more christocentric, times. Compare Calvin's famous statement, for instance, that Christ "is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election."⁴⁴ This statement takes seriously that predestination can only be known afterward, a posteriori, in Christ. Not merely on the personal level of assurance, but also in theological reflection, predestination is a complete mystery outside Christ. In Christ, however, it shows that election is another word for love and that God loved his elect from before the foundation of the world.

The pastoral thrust and the theology of the Canons could have been stronger if Christ as mirror of election had been more central. The pastoral problems arising from an eternal, unchangeable, but unknown decision taken regarding a person can be enormous. The Synod was aware of these pastoral aspects and approached them in a sophisticated way, but a stronger focus on Christ could have countered these problems even better. Predestination is not about a reality far off, but about Christ, who is near.

IV. Conclusion: The Next Four Hundred Years

How can the legacy of the Canons remain a vital part of the Reformed heritage for the next four hundred years?

Firstly, it is crucial for any Reformed tradition that God be God, and that the doctrine of God not be humanized. We cannot fathom the depths of God. This is no excuse for lazy thinking; what is needed is a humble expression of our limitedness. Secondly, humans are not as rational as proponents of human autonomy would have them be. Rather, humans are often driven by irrational stimuli. Reason is no less sinful than the rest of human make-up, and the will is completely unwilling. Thirdly, God shows a preference for

⁴³ Cf. Keith D. Stanglin, *Arminius and the Assurance of Salvation: The Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603–1609*, Brill's Series in Church History 27 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 227–31, on Arminius's reasons to call Christ *fundamentum electionis*.

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Institutes* 3.24.5.

those who are not preferable to the human eye. Most importantly, God's grace is by its very nature effective, because the Triune God is at work.

After four hundred years, there are mainly two *desiderata*. Firstly, to think biblically is to think eschatologically, even about eternity. Only God is truly eternal: for him, all times are present. Thus, in our perspective, God takes his eternal decisions at the very last moment. God's eternity does not lock him up *outside* time, but since it is *God's* eternity, he truly reigns over all times. As such, he is unchangeable in his love. Secondly, the eternal God has revealed himself in the man Jesus Christ. He is God's election in action and the mirror of our election. Wherever Christ is proclaimed, the eternal God is at work. Under the proclamation of the gospel eternal decisions take place, at the very last moment. Thirdly, predestination must be understood as the Triune God in action, who is effective in his love and unfailing in his salvation. Ultimately, the mystery of predestination is the mystery of Trinity.

Meanwhile, that other mystery remains: How can it be that God lets some of his creatures remain in their misery? That was a mystery for Paul, and it will remain a mystery until the final day.

Election: The Father's Decision to Adopt

JASON VAN VLIET

Abstract

The doctrine of election presents us with an intellectual challenge. The Synod of Dort maintained that, based on his sovereign good pleasure, God decided to choose some for salvation and punish others with condemnation. This truth often leaves the impression that God acted in an arbitrary or even unjust manner. The Canons of Dort, though, present the electing God as a merciful Father and frame election within the language of adoption. As the Canons shape this doctrine in this way, they help God's people understand it better, even though certain questions will remain. This article combines doctrinal analysis and parabolic storytelling to highlight the particular strengths of the Canons' treatment of this challenging doctrine.

Teaching doctrine effectively is a challenge. The truth of God's Word must be summarized faithfully, lucidly, and succinctly, but also in a way that relates to people in their daily lives. Jesus Christ, as our chief prophet and teacher,¹ was masterful at this. He explained the central teachings of Scripture using some of the shortest, most memorable, and most accessible stories ever told. For instance, he instructed us about the kingdom of heaven by telling us about a farmer whose fields were contaminated by an enemy who sows weed seed

¹ Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 12.

(Matt 13:24–30). Who would have ever guessed it? On another occasion, he clarified the proper way of judging others, or refraining from doing so, by talking about a man who had a full-sized plank stuck in his eye (Luke 6:39–41). Who could ever forget it?

Now far be it from anyone, including the present author, to claim the ability to teach like our Lord Jesus Christ, who stunned the crowds with his pedagogical expertise (Matt 7:28–29). Nevertheless, we can still learn something from him, and in this case, it is the power of story, or narrative, in driving home the truths of the gospel. Regrettably, the two are rarely combined. Either we are teaching doctrine or we are telling a story, but as Michael King once commented, “Never the twain seemed to meet—the doctrines of the church and the stories that excited me.”² In this essay, we will attempt to take his “never” and turn it into a “sometimes.”

Careful definition and forthright correction are vitally important for the church. This year we are reminded of this in a particular way as we commemorate the quadricentennial of the Synod of Dort, convened on November 13, 1618, and closed on May 9, 1619. Concerning intricate doctrines such as election and the extent of the atonement, the Canons of Dort define key terms and refute subtle heresies in a manner that might be considered unparalleled. Such precision ought to be celebrated, not eschewed as theological nitpicking. At the same time, if definition has its place in the pedagogical process, so does story. In what follows, as we explore the doctrine of election from the perspective of the Father’s adopting love, we will endeavor to combine the respective strengths of both definition and storytelling.

I. A Doctrinal Parable

Let us imagine. There once was a king—a kind, wise, and faithful king. This king also had a son—a kind, wise, and faithful son. In every way, this son was the apple of his father’s royal eye. Already for years this father and son had been working together to rule over their kingdom, the kingdom of *Mundus*. The population of their kingdom was forty million people.

One day, with the full cooperation of his son, the king issued a royal decree. He gave an extraordinary gift to five million citizens in his kingdom. Each of them received a beautiful house and a guaranteed annual income of one million dollars for the rest of his life. These five million citizens were astonished and overjoyed.

² Michael A. King, “Flesh on Dry Bones: Combining Doctrine and Story,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 11.1 (1993): 38–39.

However, there was another part to this decree. The other thirty-five million citizens were stripped of whatever earthly wealth they had, thrown into prison, and subjected to hard labor for the rest of their lives. These thirty-five million citizens were shocked and filled with fury.

II. *The Issue Narrowed*

Let us briefly evaluate this story. On the one hand, a king is a king. He is sovereign and has the right to do as he wants with his kingdom. On the other hand, as we think about this particular royal decree, something bothers us. Our sense of justice compels us to ask, "Is this fair? Is this right? It seems so arbitrary. How could the king possibly justify his action?" Deep inside we may quietly wonder: Is this king *really* so kind and wise?

Now let's connect this story to the doctrine. There is a parallel between this imaginary story about Mundus and the doctrine of election. Of course, there are big differences, too. Election includes spiritual and eternal blessings, not beautiful houses and guaranteed incomes. Conversely, reprobation includes hellish agony, which is far worse even than a lifetime of hard labor. At the same time, even though there are certainly places where this analogy breaks down, is not there a line of similarity as well? In his eternal decree, the King of the universe has decided to grant some people salvation while punishing others with condemnation. Moreover, the decision as to *who* receives *what* rests entirely in God's sovereign good pleasure. This is what the first chapter of the Canons of Dort makes abundantly clear. But this is also what we sometimes question. Our deep-seated sense of justice compels us to ask, "How can this possibly be right? It seems so arbitrary, so unfair."

So this is the key question: since our merciful God is also perfectly *just*, how can he simply and sovereignly choose some for eternal bliss while sending others to eternal anguish? In fact, this same question occupied the mind of Jacob Arminius as well. Even though the name of Arminius is usually associated with asserting the significance of the human free will, actually his primary concern was trying to find a way to square God's sovereign election with God's impeccable justice.³ Like us, Arminius and his disciples wanted to know how God could ordain some to heaven and others to hell, purely on the basis of his sovereign good pleasure, and remain just

³ "With the doctrine of God and the justice of God, we enter the heart and foundation of Arminius's theology." See William den Boer, "Defense or Deviation? A Re-Examination of Arminius's Motives to Deviate from the 'Mainstream' Reformed Theology," in *Revisiting the Synod of Dort, 1618-1619*, ed. Aza Goudriaan and Fred A. van Lieburg, Brill's Series in Church History 49 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 28.

and right in all he does (Dan 4:37). We are going to look for an answer to that pressing question by focusing on the fact that our God is not only an eternal King but also the heavenly *Father*. Also, by taking a closer look at the text of the Canons of Dort, we hope to see that God’s sovereignty is not only infinitely powerful but also extraordinarily *paternal*.

III. A Necessary Foundation

Before we delve into all of this, though, we need to lay down two fundamental points. The first point is that there is a significant flaw in the story that I told. At least if we are going to compare it to election, then it must be perfectly clear that the citizens in the kingdom of Mundus are not neutral, more or less decent folk. No, in fact, they are all a bunch of hatred-filled rebels who do whatever they can to ignore and transgress their king’s commands, despite all his good and faithful care of them.

The Canons of Dort remind us of this fundamental truth, confessed by the church throughout the ages,⁴ and they do so repeatedly. Each chapter of the Canons begins with some sort of confession of sin. A quick glance through the titles of the early articles in each chapter confirms this: “All Mankind Condemnable Before God” (1.1), “The Punishment Which God’s Justice Requires” (2.1), “The Effect of the Fall” and “The Spread of Corruption” (3/4.1 and 3/4.2), and “The Regenerate Not Free from Indwelling Sin” and “Daily Sins of Weakness” (5.1 and 5.2).⁵ The truth should be clear: if we do not start in our minds with the vileness of our own human sinfulness, then we will, almost inevitably, get this doctrine wrong. Understanding the lofty subject of divine election requires, before all else, a lowly attitude of humility. The last article of the first chapter of the Canons reinforces this point when it calls for “reverent adoration of these mysteries” rather than haughty protest against them (1.18).

In fact, it is perhaps telling that in some of their key documents the Remonstrants⁶ regularly chose to start with God’s eternal decree rather

⁴ W. Robert Godfrey makes the interesting point that “the first article of each Head of Doctrine states an undoubtedly catholic truth ... [to] which Roman Catholics, Lutherans and the Reformed would all agree.” See W. Robert Godfrey, “Popular and Catholic: The *Modus Docendi* of the Canons of Dort,” in Goudriaan and van Lieburg, *Revisiting the Synod of Dort, 1618–1619*, 258.

⁵ All quotations from the Canons of Dort in this essay are taken from the translation adopted by the Canadian Reformed Churches as it is published in the *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter* (Winnipeg: Premier Printing, 2014). This translation can also be found online: <http://canrc.org/?page=32>.

⁶ *Remonstrants* is a more helpful designation for this group than *Arminians*. Jacobus

than man's original sin. The *Remonstrance* (1610) begins immediately by stating that "God by an eternal and immutable decree has in Jesus Christ his Son determined before the foundation of the world to save . . ."⁷ Similarly, the first and last sections of the Remonstrants' *Sententiae* (1618) both begin with the "decree."⁸ To be sure, the Remonstrants include the concept of God electing certain individuals from the midst of fallen humankind,⁹ but unlike the Canons they do not *start* with that concept.¹⁰ And my story, I must admit, also introduces the decree almost straight away. That is not helpful, so later on I will retell my story and bring it more in line with the order of thought presented in the Canons of Dort.

The second basic point is that what applies to earthly kings does not necessarily apply to the heavenly king, our God. For example, we assume that earthly kings should still be subject to the rule of law. Indeed, in the book of Deuteronomy, we read that each king of Israel was supposed to have a copy of God's law right there with him, and he had to "read in it all the days of his life" (Deut 17:19). Broadening our scope of inquiry for a moment, the history of this world has known enough dictators and demagogues who have taken a different approach and ruled with the iron fist of *rex lex*—that is, the king *is* the law, and as a result, he can do whatever he wants, whenever he wants, however he wants. But since the human nature is corrupt, when earthly kings rule by the principle of *rex lex*, they quickly become arbitrary tyrants. Therefore, rather than *rex lex*, our society strongly endorses a policy of *rex sub lege*, that is, the earthly king (or president or prime minister) *under* the law.

For this reason, we are tempted to do the same with our heavenly King. We take law, or more generally a sense of justice, and we place God under it. However, there is a significant problem here. In effect, we take something—a sense of justice, perhaps even *our own* sense of justice—and we elevate it above God himself. Of course, we would never say it in quite that way, but in reality, that *is* what we often do. Moreover, to do so is to transgress the

Arminius himself died in 1609, one year before the *Remonstrance* (1610) was written and a full decade before the Synod of Dort was convened.

⁷ Peter Y. De Jong, ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 208.

⁸ See sections A.1 and D.1 of the *Sententiae* as quoted in De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 222, 228.

⁹ See sections A.3–4 of the *Sententiae* as quoted in De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 222–23.

¹⁰ In choosing to start the first chapter concerning election with human sin rather than divine decree, the Synod of Dort was following a submission from the Palatinate delegation called the *Modus docendi populariter doctrinam de Predestinatione*. For more detail, see Godfrey, "Popular and Catholic: The *Modus Docendi* of the Canons of Dordt," 246–53.

first commandment, even if unwittingly. To make anything, even our sense of justice, *higher* than God is to make another god.¹¹ And that is something we must never do.

At this point, though, a concern arises. If God is not under the law, is it possible that in his royal sovereignty he would act in an unfair or unjust way? No, that is impossible because, as the first article of the Belgic Confession reminds us, God is “a *simple* and spiritual being.” God’s simplicity means that we cannot divide, nor even begin to tug apart, the attributes of our God. He is always everything that he is—entirely, unfailingly, and *cohesively*. To put it in other terms, every decision that God makes is incomprehensibly, immutably, wisely, mercifully, purely, faithfully, and justly made. Justice, therefore, does not need to be *over* God, since it is integrally and unalterably *part* of who he is. Since God cannot stop being God (2 Tim 2:13), he also cannot stop being just—not even for a moment and certainly not for an eternal decree.

Our latent fear that somehow God may have been unjust in his decree of election and reprobation needs to be answered by a robust understanding of theology *per se*, that is, the doctrine of God, both in his attributes but also in his essence. More to the point, to teach the doctrine of election faithfully and effectively we need to pay particular attention to God’s Triune majesty. For our present purposes, most of our attention will be on God the Father and his only-begotten Son, but a similar analysis could, and probably should, be made concerning the participation of the Holy Spirit in the eternal decree. Simply put, though, God’s decree of election is, to its very core, a thoroughly *paternal* decree. The very fiber of eternal election is woven together with his fatherly care.

IV. Election Defined ... Paternally

Below is the Synod of Dort’s definition of election, as found in Chapter 1, Article 7.

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God whereby, before the foundation of the world, out of the whole human race, which had fallen by its own fault out of its original integrity into sin and perdition, He has, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His will, out of mere grace, chosen in Christ to salvation a definite number of specific persons, neither better nor more worthy than others, but involved together with them in a common misery. He has also from eternity appointed Christ to be the Mediator and Head of all the elect and the foundation of salvation and

¹¹ G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 54–57.

thus He decreed to give to Christ those who were to be saved, and effectually to call and draw them into His communion through His Word and Spirit. He decreed to give them true faith in Him, to justify them, to sanctify them, and, after having powerfully kept them in the fellowship of His Son, finally to glorify them, for the demonstration of His mercy and the praise of the riches of His glorious grace. As it is written: *God chose us in Christ, before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will—to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves* (Eph 1:4–6). And elsewhere, *those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified* (Rom 8:30).

As the italics indicate, this definition is explicitly grounded in two passages, Ephesians 1:4–6 and Romans 8:30. Moreover, in Ephesians 1 the Holy Spirit makes a direct connection between election and adoption: “He [that is, God the Father] predestined us *for adoption as sons* through Jesus Christ.” The second passage, Romans 8:30, does not mention adoption in that specific verse, but the concept is certainly there in the context:

- Romans 8:12–16 is about the Spirit of adoption.
- Romans 8:18–25 speaks about waiting eagerly for “adoption as sons.”
- Romans 8:29 describes Christ, the Son of God, as “the firstborn among many brothers.”

The simple but significant point is this: the Canons *anchor* the definition of election in passages that highlight adoption.¹² Adoption, by the very definition of the word itself, involves a *father* and his *children*.

But there is more. Once again, the Synod’s definition of election is found below, only this time the italic print highlights words or phrases that correspond closely to a verse, or verses, in Ephesians 1. The corresponding verses of Ephesians 1 are indicated in parentheses.

Election is the unchangeable *purpose of God* (v. 5) whereby, *before the foundation of the world* (v. 4), out of the whole human race, which had fallen by its own fault out of its original integrity into sin and perdition, He has, according to the sovereign *good pleasure of His will* (v. 5), out of mere *grace, chosen in Christ* (v. 4) to salvation a definite number of specific persons, neither better nor more worthy than others, but involved together with them in a common misery. He has also from eternity

¹² See further Synod Van Vliet, *Children of God: The Imago Dei in John Calvin and His Context* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 77. “It is essential to take note of [Calvin’s] earlier commentary on Rom 8:17 in which he adduces that the Apostle Paul ‘proves that our salvation consists in having God as our Father.’ It is remarkable that Calvin opts for the term ‘consists’ rather than, for instance, ‘includes.’”

appointed Christ to be the Mediator and *Head of all the elect* (vv. 22–23) and the foundation of salvation and thus He decreed to give to Christ those who were to be saved, and effectually to call and draw them into His communion through *His Word and Spirit* (v. 13). He decreed to give them true faith in Him, to justify them, *to sanctify them* (v. 4), and, after having powerfully kept them in the fellowship of His Son, finally to glorify them, for the demonstration of His mercy and *the praise of the riches of His glorious grace* (vv. 6, 7, 12).

As a confessional summary, Article 7 of the first chapter of the Canons pulls together various passages of Scripture. This is exactly what we would expect. Yet what is striking is how much the delegates at Dort drew from Ephesians 1—there are at least eight close verbal parallels.

This is all the more remarkable because the longest continuous section of the Bible on the doctrine of election is Romans 9–11. Nevertheless, in shaping up the definition of election, the delegates at Dort reached time and again for the language of Ephesians 1, the very chapter that describes election *as adoption*. Furthermore, when they did reference Romans, they mostly went to Romans 8, which also deals with adoption. Evidently, the two grounding passages at the end of the article have strongly influenced the wording of the entire article. The conclusion should be clear: the Canons of Dort want us to think about election in terms of adoption.¹³ Yes, there is pastoral language here, but it is pastoral language with *paternal* shaping.¹⁴

This can even be taken a step further. Looking beyond the definition in Chapter 1 Article 7 and into the other sections of the Canons, these themes of God the Father, election as adoption, and the chosen as children keep coming back. Here is a representative list:

1. Out of the common mass of sinners God “adopted certain persons to be his own possession” (1.10).
2. Over time the elect will recognize within themselves a “childlike fear of God” (1.12).
3. We should accept our heavenly Father’s teaching like “little children” (Rejection of Errors [RE], 1.8).
4. The Father who elects us shines his “fatherly face” upon the repentant (5.5).

¹³ This emphasis already began in the *Counter-Remonstrance* (1611), where we read that “children of wrath” are chosen as “God’s elect children” (1, 2) and that God “bestowed on them . . . the Spirit of adoption as God’s children which they had once received” (6). See De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 211–12.

¹⁴ See Edwin H. Palmer, “The Significance of the Canons for Pastoral Work,” in De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 137–49.

5. The Father will not let his chosen ones fall away entirely from “the grace of adoption” (5.6).
6. The Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirit that “we are children and heirs of God” (5.10).
7. God, who is “the Father of all comfort” (5.11), will not let us be tempted beyond our strength.
8. We should also be careful to avoid all “abuse of [God’s] fatherly goodness” (5.13).

By contrast, the Remonstrants did not shape their explanation of election using the language of adoption. Below are two definitions, or descriptions, of election that they produced:

That God by an eternal and immutable decree has in Jesus Christ his Son determined before the foundation of the world to save out of the fallen sinful human race those in Christ, for Christ’s sake, and through Christ who by the grace of the Holy Spirit shall believe in this his Son Jesus Christ and persevere in this faith and obedience of faith to the end ... according to the word of the holy gospel in John 3:36, “He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life, and whosoever is disobedient to the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him” (*Remonstrance* 1610).¹⁵

God has ordained that Christ should be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and by virtue of that decree He has determined to justify and to save those who believe in Him, and to provide for men means necessary and sufficient for faith in such a way as He knows to be in harmony with His wisdom and justice (*Sententiae* 1618).¹⁶

These definitions contain the Remonstrants’ trademark teaching of election on the basis of foreseen faith, but they do not include any reference to adoption, or God as Father, or the chosen as God’s children. Indeed, scanning through both of these documents in their entirety, the reader discovers that the only time they use the language of children is when they discuss the matter of the election of believers’ children.

Of course, someone may object that this is little more than an argument from silence. Granted. Yet perhaps this inaudible argument gains at least a little bit of volume when we take note of how often the Remonstrants reject, explicitly and vigorously, any notion of God’s *absolute* decree.¹⁷ Why did they reject God’s absolute decree so vigorously? For them, tucked inside the word “absolute” was the idea that God is an Absolute Power that

¹⁵ As quoted in *ibid.*, 208.

¹⁶ As quoted in *ibid.*, 223.

¹⁷ A rejection of an absolute decree can be found in the *Sententiae* A.1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10; B.1; C.6; D.1; De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 221–29.

arbitrarily, and perhaps even dispassionately, sent some people to heaven and the rest to hell.¹⁸ The Remonstrants could not accept, let alone trust, a God who acts in such a cold and arbitrary way. Therefore, they rejected this notion forcefully and irrevocably.

Regrettably, the Remonstrants made the mistake of thinking that this was the way in which the Reformed wanted to portray God.¹⁹ In fact, the conclusion to the Canons expressly states that the Reformed reject the idea that “God has predestined and created the greatest part of the world for eternal damnation *by a mere arbitrary act of his will*, without taking into account any sin.” Thus, from the opening chapter to the concluding paragraphs, the Canons of Dort portray God with warmth—paternal, patient, compassionate, and grace-filled warmth. Is this God completely sovereign? Yes. Is he, therefore, also coldly absolute or callously arbitrary? No, nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, it is highly ironic that due to the absence of this paternal language in their *Remonstrance* and *Sententiae*, the Remonstrants inadvertently portray God in a colder, more dispassionate manner than do the Reformed!

V. A Doctrinal Parable Retold

Earlier I promised to rework my story to bring it more in line with the Canons of Dort. Now is the right time to do so.

There once was a king—a kind, wise, and faithful king. This king also had a son—a kind, wise, and faithful son. Together they ruled justly over the kingdom of Mundus, which had a population of forty million citizens.

Sadly and shockingly, the citizens of this kingdom neither acknowledged nor appreciated the kindness and wisdom of their king. In fact, they transgressed his laws constantly. They even hated their king with an ingrained bitterness—every single one of them. They struck an alliance with a corrupt and callous prince from another kingdom. With this evil prince and his army of thugs, the rebellious citizens of Mundus repeatedly attacked their king, his son, and the castle in which they lived. And, the reader should be

¹⁸ One thing that merits more research is whether the Remonstrant aversion to the *absolute* decree of God is in fact, or least in part, a reaction against certain aspects of the scholastic notion of *potentia absoluta*. In this regard see Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, 56–64.

¹⁹ It is possible that the Remonstrants received this impression from some of the more strenuous supralapsarian strands within the Reformed church. For more on the history of supralapsarianism within the Reformed tradition, see Lynne Courter Boughton, “Supralapsarianism and the Role of Metaphysics in 16th Century Reformed Theology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 48.1 (1986): 63–96.

aware, in the kingdom of Mundus rebellion against the king was a capital offense, punishable by death.

One day, during this rebellion, the king came to his son with a plan. “My son,” said the king, “I’ve decided to adopt, as my very own children and heirs, some of these rebellious citizens of mine—five million of them to be precise.” The king continued, “My plan is to forgive these five million, entirely and completely, for their rebellion. More than that, they will be fully, lovingly, and legally adopted into my royal household. I will take care of them generously for the rest of their lives, and I will transform their hate-filled hearts with my royal love and mercy. And, since my heart overflows with love, I will ensure that they even share in the royal inheritance that I have set aside for you, my natural, firstborn son.”

What a gracious plan! Now, contrary to what you might expect, the son did *not* react to his father’s plan with dismay. After all, your average earthly prince would be horrified at the idea of adopting a bunch of ungrateful rebels into the royal household, especially if it means sharing his inheritance with them. But not so for this prince. Filled as he was with his father’s kindness and wisdom, this son agreed enthusiastically with the plan.

However, he did have one concern. “Father,” the son said, “You have always been a merciful king but also a just king. Your own law requires that rebels be punished with death, but now—it would seem at least—five million of them are going to get off scot-free. How does that fit with your sense of justice?” The father answered, “Yes, my son, I have thought of that. As part of my plan I am asking you, my much-beloved, royal son, to take the punishment of death instead of those rebels. Surely *your* death is worth more to me than that of many soldiers and citizens. *Your* death, in their place, will satisfy my justice.”

Again, contrary to what you might expect, the son neither rejected nor resented his father’s plan. Instead, he completely trusted his father’s love and wisdom. Firmly yet willingly, the son replied, “Yes father, I will do it. Your plan is both exceedingly gracious and entirely just.”

So it was decided. The decree was issued. The son took the punishment of the rebels and died in their place. The father adopted the chosen rebels into his household—fully, legally, and lovingly. All five million of them lived under his fatherly care and protection, and they learned to love him instead of loathing him.

But one day, one of the five million, a young man named Curiosus, was walking pensively through the royal gardens. Various questions swirled through his mind, “Why did my father only adopt five million of us? Wouldn’t it be more fair and just if he adopted all forty million citizens of

Mundus? And, since the death of the king's natural son was so precious to him, why did he not make that substitute death of his son count for all forty million citizens? Then, whether they made good use of it or not, at least everyone had an equal opportunity, and no one could ever accuse him of unfairness." He wandered, and he wondered

VI. *Good Questions Answered*

Let us take another look at this story. To be sure, the analogy between my story and the doctrine of election still breaks down at certain points.²⁰ That is the weakness of every analogy. But perhaps this analogy can help us answer Curiosus's first question, which is a question many of us have: Why did not God just elect everyone? The following points merit consideration:

1. If we are to speak of justice, then injustice and unfairness are clearly on our side, as human beings, not on God's side. *We* are the rebels who daily offend God and trample over his laws.
2. The heavenly Father took the inexpressibly great step of sending his very own Son to bear the full burden of his eternal wrath against sin. Why? He did this precisely to maintain his justice as he chose to adopt some fallen human beings as his children. So for us humans to turn around now and suggest that the Father is being *unjust* in his decree of predestination is the height of imprudence. The well-known words of the apostle Paul should be ringing in our ears: "Who are you, a man?" (Rom 9:20). God's election *in Christ his Son* establishes his justice; it does not undermine it.
3. The eternal Father is neither legally nor morally obliged to adopt any sinful human being. This is all the more true considering that he already has an eternal, natural Son with whom he is very well pleased (Matt 3:17). Added to that, the potential adoptees are not innocent orphans but children of wrath (Eph 2:3), hardened rebels, who in their natural hearts hate this very same eternal Father.²¹
4. Even among earthly parents, the decision of *whether* to adopt and *how many* children to adopt is respectfully left with the parents. It is not for

²⁰ For example, my doctrinal parable is told entirely within the normal chronological parameters of time. However, with God's eternal decree we must deal with the intersection of time and eternity. This significant question is outside the scope of this article. Interesting reading can be found in Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 144–70.

²¹ Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 2.

others to come along and suggest, let alone demand, that for the sake of justice they should adopt more children. If we afford each other that respect as human beings, how much more should human beings do the same toward the Most High God. The decision of whether and how many to adopt is *his*—entirely and emphatically so.

5. When earthly parents adopt orphans, our collective response is one of appreciation. “What kind and generous people!” we exclaim. How much more should we not praise the heavenly Father who has adopted rebels?²²

Returning to Curiosus, though, he had another, related question running through his mind as he was wandering through the royal garden. By way of reminder, he asked, “Why didn’t the king make the substitute death of his son count for all forty million citizens, and then leave it up to them as to whether they made good use of it or not?” This would have pre-empted any charge of unfairness on God’s part. By now it may well be obvious that Curiosus had more than mere questions swirling around in his cerebrum; he also had some Remonstrant theology in the mix of his contemplations. To be more precise, this is how the Remonstrants put it:

Though Christ has merited reconciliation with God and remission of sins for all men and for every man, yet no one, according to the pact of the new and gracious covenant, becomes a true partaker of the benefits obtained by the death of Christ in any way other than by faith.²³

At first glance, it may seem like Curiosus and the Remonstrants have a point. Equal opportunity sounds fair and just. Beyond that, salvation is by faith, isn’t it? But this approach needs to be probed more deeply. First of all, in God’s plan, salvation includes both pardon *and adoption*.²⁴ Logically speaking, why would any of these rebels avail themselves of the opportunity to be adopted into God’s royal household? Theoretically, they might want to grab a quick, legal pardon from riches of God’s mercy, but becoming one of his children is another matter entirely. They naturally hate him. Why would they want to join his household? Sometimes we give human traitors credit where credit is *not* due!

²² Canons of Dort 1.18.

²³ *Sementiae* B.3 as quoted in De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 224–25.

²⁴ Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 5, 12 indicates this when it describes our deliverance not only as an escape from punishment but also renewed reception into God’s favor. See also footnote 12 in this essay concerning how John Calvin defines salvation as adoption.

In addition, it is worth our while to take a careful look at what the Canons of Dort say about the extent of Christ's atoning work. Of course, in the second chapter of the Canons we encounter the well-known distinction between the sufficiency and the efficacy of Christ's death. As the Son of God, his death is "abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world" (2.3), but we also confess that it was "was the most free counsel of *God the Father*, that the life-giving and saving efficacy of the *most precious death of his Son* should extend to all the elect" (2.8; emphasis added). Notice how at the precise moment that the Canons begin to speak of the efficacy of Christ's death, some familiar language returns: Father–Son language! What is more, this same kind of language returns no less than four times in the Rejection of Errors in Chapter 2.²⁵ This cannot be a mere coincidence. Instead, the delegates at Dort purposefully contoured their explanation of Christ's atonement in Chapter 2 with the same kind of language they used in Chapter 1 about election: paternal, and ultimately pastoral, language.

This kind of language is more than semantics. It makes a substantive difference. All too often when we think about the extent of Christ's atoning death, we look at it from a human point of view, immediately latching onto some concept of "equal opportunity for salvation." That just sounds fair. However, what happens if we look at it again from the point of view of the eternal Father and his beloved Son? Imagine that the Father had asked his precious Son to offer himself up to an unimaginably horrible death, all in order to generate an opportunity for human rebels to step forward, if they so desired, and be adopted by the eternal Father. There was no guarantee that they would actually do so. In fact, the chances are nonexistent that they will. So, in the end, the Father would ask his beloved Son to die an inexpressibly agonizing death ... for nothing. Is that fair and just *toward the Son*? Not at all.

Turning it around, as the Canons do in the third rejection of error of the second chapter,²⁶ what can we say about the Son's action toward the Father?

²⁵ RE 1: "*God the Father* has ordained *His Son* to the death of the cross without a specific and definite decree to save any"; RE 2: "but only that He should acquire for *the Father* the mere right to establish once more with man such a covenant as He might please"; RE 3: "He acquired for *the Father* only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man"; RE 4: "The new covenant of grace which *God the Father*, through the mediation of the death of Christ, made with man."

²⁶ The error rejected reads as follows: "By his satisfaction Christ did not really merit for anyone either salvation itself or faith by which this satisfaction of Christ to salvation is effectually made one's own. He acquired for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man, and to prescribe new conditions as he might desire. It depends, however, on the free will of man to fulfil these conditions. Therefore, it was possible that either no one or all men would fulfil them."

For argument's sake, what if the Son agreed to die on the cross to gain for the Father the right to once again deal with the sinful rebels but nothing more than that. In other words, what if the Son gains for the Father the *opportunity* to adopt but not the *reality* of adoption. Is that fair and just *toward the Father*? Would the Son then be doing justice to *the Father's sovereignty*? Moreover, is it right and fair for the Father's desire to adopt to be held captive to the corrupt desires of a mob of sinful rebels? Again, the words of the apostle Paul ring in our ears: who is the Potter and who is the clay (Rom 9:21)?

And what of God's grace? Would the Son be doing justice to his own Father's overflowing grace if he died for an opportunity that never comes to fruition? That would leave the horribly mistaken impression that the Father's grace is both feeble and unfruitful, and that would not be doing justice to the true character of *the Father's grace*.

God is just. Surely all can agree with that truth. However, in the very first place then, the Father and the Son are just *within* the Triune Godhead. The Father is always just *toward his own Son*, and the Son is always just *toward his own eternal Father*. This intra-Trinitarian justice is of the highest priority. Being the self-centered human beings that we are, we often forget this fundamental truth, also when our minds wander and wonder about the doctrine of election.

In this way Curiosus's questions are answered. No, they are not resolved to the full satisfaction of every intellectual angle and inquiry that our fertile minds can generate. There does come a point where our theological curiosity has to stop, lest we find ourselves transgressing the boundaries of Scripture and inquisitively prying into the ways of the Most High.²⁷ Truth be told, the notion that Christ's atoning death gives everyone the opportunity to be saved but provides no one with the reality of salvation is offensive to God because it does not uphold justice. It does not do justice to the *sovereignty* of God's grace nor does it do justice to the *grace* of God's sovereignty.

Moreover, if there is no *sovereign* grace, there simply is no *real* gospel either. Real redemption requires *really* sovereign grace. Thankfully, in Christ, the Son of God, the sovereign grace of the Father is filled to the infinite brim with warm, tender compassion and with faithful, reliable certainty. That is what *paternally* sovereign grace is all about. That is also what the delegates at Dort were so keen to confess and defend.

²⁷ Canons of Dort 1.14.

The Theology of Dort (1618–1619) Confessional Consolidation, Conflictual Contexts, and Continuing Consequences

Groningen, May 8–9, 2019



Dutch theological faculties at the Synod (painting Museum of Dordrecht)

On May 6, 1619, the Synod of Dort promulgated the *Canons* as a final statement on the controversial issues that disturbed the Reformed church in The Netherlands. The importance of the Theology of Dort justifies an academic re-assessment. On May 8 and 9, 2019, the University of Groningen hosts a conference co-organized with the Theological University of Apeldoorn and the Hersteld Hervormd Seminarium (VU Amsterdam).

The conference will focus on 1) the confessional consolidation of the Reformed faith, 2) the ecclesial, historical, and political contexts, and 3) the continuing consequences for the later development of Reformed theology. Among the keynote speakers are Michael Haykin, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Volker Leppin, Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen.

The costs for participating are € 150. Those who are interested, can contact Henk van den Belt, Professor of Reformed Theology: h.van.den.belt@rug.nl.



Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn



Abundant Sufficiency and Intentional Efficacy: Particular Redemption at the Synod of Dort

LEE GATISS

Abstract

This article looks at the background to the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) and examines the debate there on the issue of particular redemption or definite atonement, with a specific focus on the use of the classic distinction between sufficiency and efficacy made famous by Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. It also looks at the variety of Reformed responses to the Remonstrants, including those on the death of Christ that might be categorized as hypothetical universalist. It calls into question the usefulness of the terminology of "four-point Calvinists" to describe delegates such as John Davenant.

Several studies in the last few decades have looked in depth at the Synod's debates and deliverances on the subject of the atonement, which remains one of the most controversial aspects of Reformed doctrine.¹ Since the British delegation was particularly involved on this issue, studies of their role are also

¹ A longer and more detailed version of this article was first published as "The Synod of Dort and Definite Atonement," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson

especially useful.² My aim here is not necessarily to repeat what they have said or even to give a full exposition of the Synod’s deliberations. To avoid treating the Canons of Dort in merely an abstract fashion, I will put the Synod into historical context and note some of the diversity among the delegates. I will focus particularly on the classic sufficient–efficient distinction as it was employed at Dort to show that this was carefully nuanced and clarified in a particular direction as a result of the clash with Arminianism. I will also note that although there was widespread agreement among the Reformed concerning the doctrine of particular redemption, there was no monolithic homogeneity but a degree of diversity in their responses to the theological threat.

I. Historical Context

The first ecumenical synod of Reformed churches met between November 1618 and May 1619 in the Dutch town of Dordrecht (also known as Dordt or Dort). It comprised the cream of Dutch Reformed theologians, representatives from Great Britain and several important German cities, and separate delegations representing Geneva and the rest of Switzerland. Invitations also went out to the newly combined state of Brandenburg-Prussia, and a row of empty chairs was set up in honor of delegates from the Reformed churches of France, who were prohibited from attending by the French Roman Catholic king, Louis XIII. The importance of this international gathering of Reformed theologians cannot be underestimated, since it is here that the so-called “five points of Calvinism” were first carefully defined.

The United Provinces of the Netherlands were famously tolerant of a certain degree of religious diversity. Having liberated themselves from Spanish Roman Catholic rule, they came together in the Union of Utrecht in 1579, which stated that “nobody shall be persecuted or examined for religious reasons.”³ Nearly a century later, one foreign observer wrote about

(Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 143–63; see also W. Robert Godfrey, “Tensions within Inter-national Calvinism: The Debate on the Atonement at the Synod of Dort” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1974); Stephen Strehle, “The Extent of the Atonement and the Synod of Dort,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 51.1 (1989): 1–23; and Michael Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).

² Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987); Peter White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Anthony Milton, *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005).

³ Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck, Jonathan Irvine Israel, and G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes, eds., *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 41.

“how many religions there are in this country, which have complete freedom to celebrate their mysteries and to serve God as they please,” including Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Arminians, Anabaptists, Socinians, and even Jews and Turks (Muslims), since “the Estates give an unlimited freedom to all kinds of religions; in Holland you will find more Sects, open and recognized, than in the rest of Europe.”⁴ One Swiss delegate to Dort had the unusual experience of staying with a family where the mother and daughter were Reformed, the father and son Roman Catholic, the grandmother a Mennonite, and an uncle a Jesuit.⁵

Yet this diverse religious culture existed under a Reformed Protestant umbrella; the politically dominant church of the Republic subscribed to the Reformed standards of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. Roman Catholicism, too closely associated with Spanish rule and the Inquisition, was outlawed. This officially Reformed, confessional state was, however, more likely to encourage a conniving containment of religious dissent than either strict enforcement or libertarian laxity. By the end of the seventeenth century, this resulted in what Jonathan Israel describes as “an ambivalent semi-tolerance ... seething with tension, theological and political.”⁶ It is important to recognize that this is the backdrop for the Synod of Dort and also, in part, its legacy.

The union between Holland and Zeeland in 1575 included an agreement to maintain “the practice of the Reformed evangelical religion.”⁷ What this religion actually was, however, became the subject of dispute when Jacobus Arminius had his first clash with the authorities in 1592. After preaching an unorthodox view of Romans 7, he was ordered to consign to oblivion the dispute he had with another preacher over this and not to let it spread beyond their congregations in Amsterdam.⁸ Yet the Arminian controversy was destined to cause great trouble for many years and became part of a political tussle between the republic’s leaders. Political and religious passions ran especially high when there was an attempt in 1607 to persuade Reformed

⁴ Jean-Baptiste Stoupe, *La Religion des Hollandais* (Cologne, 1673), 32, 79. Translations of non-English texts are my own unless stated otherwise.

⁵ See Judith Pollmann, “The Bond of Christian Piety,” in *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, ed. Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 56.

⁶ Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 676. Cf. Joke Spaans, “Religious Policies in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic,” in Po-Chia Hsia and van Nierop, *Calvinism and Religious Toleration*, 72–86.

⁷ Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 362.

⁸ Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 140–46.

leaders to allow a national synod that would amend their doctrinal standards and make the public church theologically broader.

Reformed leaders insisted that the Confession should not be altered. Those who had been inspired by Arminius (who died in 1609) issued a vigorous protest or “Remonstrance” in 1610, in which they detailed their objections to official Reformed doctrine.⁹ This document, according to one Dutch theologian, set the pace for “liberalism” more generally¹⁰ and made five classic doctrinal points concerning predestination, the extent of the atonement, free will, resistible grace, and Christian perseverance. On the atonement, the Arminians asserted that God decreed to save those who by his grace believe and persevere in obedience to the end, and

that in agreement with this, Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world died for all people, every individual, so that he merited reconciliation and forgiveness of sins for all through the death of the cross; yet so that no-one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except those who believe.¹¹

A year later at the Hague Conference between leaders on both sides, the Reformed issued a “Counter Remonstrance.” They complained that the *Remonstrance* was deliberately ambiguous and dishonest.¹² They insisted that God decreed the end first, then the means:

That to this end [to save his elect] he has first of all presented and given to them his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, whom he delivered up to the death of the cross in order to save his elect, so that, although the suffering of Christ as that of the only-begotten and unique Son of God is sufficient unto the atonement of the sins of all men, nevertheless the same, according to the counsel and decree of God, has its efficacy unto reconciliation and forgiveness of sins only in the elect and true believer.¹³

⁹ The *Remonstrance* was in harmony with Arminius’s teaching, although not inspired by him alone, and Arminian theology developed further once he died.

¹⁰ Lambertus Jacobus van Holk, “From Arminius to Arminianism in Dutch Theology,” in *Man’s Faith and Freedom: The Theological Influence of Jacobus Arminius*, ed. Gerald McCulloch (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 41.

¹¹ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (New York: David McKay, 1877), 546 (my translation) citing John 3:16 and 1 John 2:2.

¹² Cf. the assessment of Jan Rohls, “Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism in the Netherlands until the Synod of Dort,” in *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. Martin Mulso and Jan Rohls (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 19.

¹³ Peter Y. De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 247–50.

As William den Boer points out, “for the Remonstrants, sufficiency presupposes actual procurement, as well as the will on God’s part to extend to all what is sufficient for all.”¹⁴ For the Contra-Remonstrants, the will, decree, and counsel of God were focused on the efficacy rather than the sufficiency of redemption. So the meeting broke up without agreement. When those more sympathetic to the Reformed eventually came out on top of the political wrangling, however, it allowed them to call for a synod to clarify the ecclesiastical situation. As a national synod, it would boost the national unification process involving regions and states that up until then had remained relatively independent. But others from outside the Netherlands would also be invited to participate. The scene was set for the biggest ever international gathering of Reformed theologians.

II. *The Canons of Dort on the Death of Christ*

We can learn a great deal about the manner and method of the Synod from its official and unofficial papers and contemporary accounts of its everyday workings. Each delegation prepared its own position paper on the five doctrines chosen by the Arminians for dispute, which were then read in the gathered Synod. After discussion of these papers, later collected and published,¹⁵ the Canons or judgments of the Synod were drawn up.

The Remonstrants themselves spoke several times at the Synod and were repeatedly asked to give an account of their disagreements with the officially accepted doctrine. They had challenged the Confession and sought to amend it for many years, but rather than accept the opportunity to defend their case they engaged in political posturing and obstructive maneuvering. Due to what one British delegate called their “incredible obstinacy,”¹⁶ they were eventually discharged in January 1619. One commentator asserts that this “proves that the whole of the proceedings against the Arminian party were those of a faction, contending for pre-eminence without regard to justice.”¹⁷ Their opinions were, however, very well known and a matter of

¹⁴ William den Boer, *God’s Twofold Love: The Theology of Jacob Arminius* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 234. Cf. *The Writings of James Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 3:345–46.

¹⁵ *Acta Synodi Nationalis* (Leiden, 1620), 1:78–126; 3:88–153. See Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser, and Herman Selderhuis, eds., *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae, 1618–1619* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).

¹⁶ John Hales, *Golden Remains of the Ever Memorable Mr. John Hales* (London: Printed by Tho. Newcomb, for Robert Pawlet, 1673), 2:73; Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, 95.

¹⁷ Frederick Calder, *Memoirs of Simon Episcopus* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1837), 327.

public record, being plainly set out in the *Remonstrance*, the extensive records of the Hague Conference, the *Sententia Remonstrantium* officially presented at two sessions in December 1618,¹⁸ and the published works of their leaders such as Simon Episcopius. These were given a fair hearing by a far-from-homogenous international gathering that cannot fairly be said to represent a mere “faction” within the Dutch church.¹⁹ Those who wrote and subscribed to the Canons of Dort were very well informed about Remonstrant teaching, and the official record celebrates the “diversity in smaller matters” which could be seen among them, as indicating the liberty of speech and judgment they exercised while remaining solidly anti Arminian.²⁰

When it finally came time to deal with the doctrinal issues, the Synod did not deal with the points in the order we might expect. It is true that the acronym TULIP (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints) was later invented as a mnemonic for the five areas in dispute at Dort.²¹ However, the central petal, the “L” of so-called “limited atonement,” was actually the *second* head of doctrine covered by the Synod, mirroring its place in the Arminian *Remonstrance*.²² As Alan Sell warns us, the nature of “the five points” as responses should “caution us against thinking that they represent the *sum* of Calvinism,”²³ or even its core. Reformed theology was also committed to the five Reformation *solae* to distinguish it from Roman Catholicism, for example, as well as a sacramentology that distinguished it from Lutheranism and a Trinitarianism that distinguished it from Socinianism—all of which, some may argue, are of greater significance than particular redemption. That is not to say these five points are unimportant, however, since they were church-defining issues at a pivotal moment.

¹⁸ *Acta*, 1:113, 116–18.

¹⁹ Several Synod sessions were spent reading pages out. See, for example, Hales, *Golden Remains*, 2:108, 113.

²⁰ See the end of “Præfatio ad Ecclesias,” in *Acta*, 1.

²¹ William Aglionby, *The Present State of the United Provinces* (London: John Starkey, 1669), 283, speaks of a time when “the fancy for tulips did reign over all the Low Countries.” So it is not an entirely inappropriate flower to be associated with a Dutch Synod!

²² Definite atonement did not go by the name “limited atonement” in the sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries, although the word “limited” was sometimes used, as in William Troughton, *Scripture Redemption, Restrayned and Limited* (London: Printed by J. M. for L. Chapman, 1652).

²³ Alan Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 14. Richard A. Muller, “How Many Points?,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993): 425–33.

1. *The Sufficiency of the Cross*

I turn now to the Synod's debates on the sufficiency and efficacy of the atonement and the diversity of Reformed responses to the Arminian use of this formula. The first point made by the Canons on the second head of doctrine, however, concerns the actual need for redemption. God's supreme justice, they say, requires that our sins deserve temporal and eternal punishments. We are unable to do anything about this ourselves, and yet "God, in his infinite mercy, has given us as a Surety his only begotten Son, who, to make satisfaction for us, was made sin and became a curse on the cross, for us and in our place."²⁴ This statement is a classic description of the need for and accomplishment of penal substitutionary atonement.²⁵

The Arminian position at Dort continued to be that

the price of the redemption which Christ offered to God his Father is not only in itself and by itself sufficient to redeem the whole human race but was also paid for all people, every individual, according to the decree, will, and grace of God the Father.²⁶

This takes the first part of the classic medieval formula of Peter Lombard ("sufficient for all, effective for the elect") but pushes it further.²⁷ Not only was the cross sufficient, but it was actually effective in paying for each and every person, and indeed was designed by God to do so. As they had said at the Hague Conference, Christ did not die just for the elect or for those who will finally be saved, but he obtained reconciliation for everyone, and this by the counsel and decree of God.²⁸ Thus the Arminian position on redemption made an explicit claim not just about its extent, but also about its purpose and intention in God's will.

In response to this, the delegates at Dort separated out the two issues of sufficiency and intentionality. As the representatives from Groningen and Omlands said in their submission, the question was not really about the sufficiency of Christ's death at all, for they had no doubts that his sacrifice had such power and value that it was abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of everyone. There was no defect or insufficiency in the cross that could be blamed for the loss of the reprobate. Rather, they said, the question was

²⁴ Articles 2.1–2.2. Translations are from the Latin in *Acta*, 1:241–71. My translation of all the Articles and *Rejectio Errorum* (Rejection of Errors [RE]) on this head can be found in Lee Gatiss, *For Us and For Our Salvation: "Limited Atonement" in the Bible, Doctrine, History, and Ministry* (London: Latimer Trust, 2012).

²⁵ Cf. Heidelberg Catechism 10–13.

²⁶ *Acta*, 1:116.

²⁷ See Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* 3.20.5. Cf. Gatiss, *For Us and For Our Salvation*, 66.

²⁸ *Collatio Scripto Habita Hagae Comitibus*, 139.

about the *intention* (singular) of God the Father and God the Son, and whether together they designed the death of Christ to actually obtain forgiveness and reconciliation for more than just the elect.²⁹ Others, from the Palatinate, Hesse, Belgium, and Utrecht, for example, also linked Christ's sufficiency to his two natures and perfect obedience.³⁰

The Genevan delegation did not, however, utilize the concept of sufficiency. They wrote only of the infinite value of Christ's death, to which is added an efficacious intention for the elect.³¹ In this, they were following Theodore Beza, who considered the Lombardian distinction to be potentially ambiguous and confusing.³² Those from North Holland were somewhat ambivalent about sufficiency,³³ and the ministers of Emden considered the issue using the term *adæquate* rather than *sufficenter*.³⁴ The final approved statement, however, made the following points:

This death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sins, and is of infinite value and worth, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world.

This death, therefore, is of such great value and worth because the person who submitted to it was not only truly man and perfectly holy, but also the only-begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite being with the Father and the Holy Spirit, which it was necessary for our Saviour to be.³⁵

Medieval scholastics debated whether the merit of Christ in his life and death was infinite because of his divine nature, or finite because merited through his human nature.³⁶ The Canons of Dort ground Christ's infinite merit in both his divine nature and his perfect human obedience.³⁷ In distinction from medieval thinkers, seventeenth-century Reformed theologians considered Christ to have acted as a mediator in both his natures rather than just in his human nature,³⁸ and it may be that this lies behind their

²⁹ *Acta*, 3:139.

³⁰ *Acta*, 2:86, 89; 3:88, 117; Heidelberg Catechism 14–18.

³¹ *Acta*, 2:101.

³² W. Robert Godfrey, "Reformed Thought on the Extent of the Atonement to 1618," *Westminster Theological Journal* 37.2 (1975): 142.

³³ *Acta*, 3:107–108.

³⁴ *Acta*, 2:120.

³⁵ Articles 2:3–4.

³⁶ See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 190–91.

³⁷ The British spoke of Christ's *thesaurus meritorum*, "treasury of merits" (*Acta*, 2:79), which sounds positively medieval but is an alternative way of discussing sufficiency.

³⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, Q. 26, Art. 2; Lombard, *Sentences* 3.19.6–7; John Owen, *Χριστολογία* (London, 1679), 312–13; Westminster Confession 8.7.

connections here. Naturally, however, the early, medieval, and Reformed churches were agreed that Christ could not *be* mediator unless he were both God and man,³⁹ which is why Article 4 adds “which it was necessary for our Saviour to be.”

The British delegation did not use the sufficient–efficient distinction, because they could not agree on it among themselves.⁴⁰ They did, however, link Christ’s “ransom for the sins of the whole world” to the sincere, universal proclamation of the gospel.⁴¹ Others were happier to base indiscriminate preaching on what Michael Thomas calls “ministerial inability to distinguish elect from reprobate.”⁴² Thomas also reads two of the delegations as foreshadowing “Hyper-Calvinism,” backing away from the idea that there is a strict obligation to evangelize everyone. Yet the finally agreed-upon Article 5 asserts rather strongly that

the promise of the gospel is that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have eternal life. This promise ought to be declared and published promiscuously and without distinction, to all nations and people to whom God according to his good pleasure sends the gospel, together with the command to repent and believe.

This article places the abundant sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice side-by-side with the necessity for indiscriminate evangelism, but without explicitly making a logical connection between them. It allowed the British (and those like them) to join the dots themselves if they wished but did not spell it out for the sake of those who grounded universal proclamation another way (e.g., simple obedience to Matthew 28:18–20). All this lends credence to Robert Godfrey’s assertion, and my thesis here, that “the history of the Synod when viewed in detail reveals that the Calvinism at Dort was neither irrelevant, monolithic nor uncompromising.”⁴³

One thing was clear, however: if anyone failed to believe and therefore inherit the promise of eternal life through Christ, the finger of blame could not be pointed at Jesus on the cross. Their loss, warns Article 2.6, is “not because of any defect in the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross, or indeed any insufficiency in it” (as those from Groningen had put it), “but is their own particular fault.”⁴⁴

³⁹ Cf. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 108; Lombard, *Sentences* 3.2.3.2.

⁴⁰ See Milton, *British Delegation*, 215; Hales, *Golden Remains*, 2:130–31.

⁴¹ *Acta*, 2:78–79. The latter was based on the merits of the former.

⁴² Thomas, *Extent*, 149.

⁴³ Godfrey, “Tensions,” 268.

⁴⁴ Cf. Articles 1.5; 3/4.9.

2. *The Intentional Efficacy of the Cross*

On that sobering note, the Canons turn to discuss the other side of the classic distinction: the effectiveness of the cross for the elect. The efficacy of Christ's work to actually save those given to him by the Father (John 10:25–30) is intimately linked in the Canons to the divine will. What it effected is what God designed, purposed, and intended it to do. The Remonstrants had affirmed not only universal sufficiency but also that the price of redemption was “paid for all people, every individual, *according to the decree, will, and grace of God the Father.*” This meant that no one was excluded from a share in Christ's death by an antecedent decree of God, but only by their own unbelieving abuse of God's gifts.⁴⁵ The Reformed, however, refused to allow God's eternal will to save whomsoever he wished to be thwarted by supposed human freedom, contending instead that he decreed to elect certain people by his unconditional grace and consequently sent Christ to save those people, even giving them the faith they needed to appropriate this salvation.⁴⁶ As Richard Muller neatly summarizes it,

whereas the Reformed doctrine of the will of God tends to resolve all distinctions into a single, simple, eternal will of God to actualize certain possibilities and not others, the Arminian doctrine tends to emphasize the distinctions for the sake of arguing interaction between God and genuinely free or contingent events.⁴⁷

Hence, the Arminians stressed contingency and conditions where the Reformed saw sovereignty and certainty. The latter acknowledged the free offer of the gospel to all; as Article 2.7 puts it, “as many as truly believe ... are by the death of Christ freed and saved from sin and destruction,” not just potentially, but actually. For them, the atonement *did* something, rather than simply making something possible. Yet alongside this temporal, human-level proclamation, the Reformed discerned (in Scripture) the revelation of an eternal divine purpose. Many are called, but few are chosen. Salvation history, they said, has been divinely ordered from the start to achieve God's ultimate goal, which could not be uncertain or in doubt without undermining God's sovereignty.

Article 8, the longest of the positive articles on this head, expounds the particular design of God:

⁴⁵ *Acta*, 1:113–14, 116.

⁴⁶ RE 2.3.

⁴⁷ Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 189.

For this was the most free purpose and most gracious will and intention of God the Father, that the life-giving and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone justifying faith, thereby to bring them unfaillingly to salvation; that is, God willed that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen for salvation and given to him by the Father; that he should bestow upon them faith (which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he acquired for them by his death); that he should purify them by his blood from all sins, both original and actual, whether committed after or before believing; and having faithfully protected them even to the end, should finally establish them glorious before him, free from every spot and blemish.

As far as Dort is concerned, therefore, Lombard's sufficient-efficient distinction needed to be clarified in the light of the Arminian error. Even Arminians could affirm that the cross was ultimately only "efficient for some."⁴⁸ But in doing so, they made each individual's human will the decisive factor, rather than God's will. So the Synod said, more carefully, that the cross was somehow sufficient for all but only *intended* to be efficacious for the elect. By focusing on the divine purpose and design behind the coming of Christ—he came not to make us redeemable but to redeem—the Reformed put human decisions into what they saw as the proper biblical perspective. Hence, they rejected the view of those

who teach: That God the Father has ordained his Son to the death of the cross without a certain and definite purpose to save anyone in particular, so that the necessity, profitableness, and worth of what Christ obtained by his death might remain in good repair, perfect in all its parts, complete and intact, even if the obtained redemption had never in fact been applied to any individual. For this assertion is insulting to the wisdom of God the Father and the merits of Jesus Christ, and is contrary to Scripture.⁴⁹

There was almost unanimous agreement among the delegations about God's will being behind the efficacy of the cross for the elect. There was also widespread agreement on the co-extensive link between Christ's purchase of redemption and its application, which the Remonstrants denied by making the purchase wider than the application.⁵⁰ Those from Nassau-Wetteravia,

⁴⁸ Raymond A. Blacketer, "Definite Atonement in Historical Perspective," in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Practical Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Roger Nicole*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 311.

⁴⁹ RE 2.1.

⁵⁰ See RE 2.6, on the Arminian use of this distinction as introducing "the pernicious poison of Pelagianism."

for example, spoke of Christ being given up “by the will and intention of the Father” to both acquire and apply salvation to those who were given to him, and that they would be given the Spirit of regeneration simultaneously along with forgiveness.⁵¹ So in this Trinitarian view, the Father gives the elect to the Son, who dies for them, and then gives them the Spirit and faith.

3. Reformed Variations

Two delegations were divided among themselves on these issues. Those from Britain and Bremen gave minority reports to the Synod and aroused some very strong passions. The British delegation had to write home for help in reconciling their internal divisions, but John Davenant claimed he would rather have his right hand cut off than change his mind, so some compromise was inevitable.⁵² When Matthias Martinius from Bremen expressed some of his opinions indelicately, Franciscus Gomarus was so incensed that he threw down the gauntlet and challenged him to a duel! The Synod President tried to calm things down, but after prayers, Gomarus renewed his request for combat.⁵³ The two would fight again (verbally) in the Synod in an undignified manner which did not impress the other foreign delegates, and though others in the Bremen delegation did not agree with Martinius, they nearly left because of this incivility.⁵⁴

Why the fuss? Martinius was seen by some to incline towards Remonstrant views, particularly on the atonement, and was not afraid to say so or strongly to criticize both sides.⁵⁵ Davenant, however, was stubbornly devoted to the cause of moderation and to finding a middle way on this doctrine. Having been tasked with not upsetting relations with the Lutheran churches (particularly offended by Contra-Remonstrant views here), with not being overly precise, and with taking the Anglican formularies into account,⁵⁶ he and Samuel Ward managed to use their positions in the British delegation to air their minority opinion. Ward, for example, spoke about the cross making all people “redeemable,” thus changing the nature of the atonement from definite to indefinite, following Martinius’s lead.⁵⁷ Their approach eventually triumphed over the other British delegates. Davenant held to a

⁵¹ *Acta*, 2:96–97. Others also linked Christ’s sacrifice and intercession, excluding the reprobate from both, using John 17:9.

⁵² Hales, *Golden Remains*, 2:101, 182.

⁵³ The request was never granted.

⁵⁴ Hales, *Golden Remains*, 2:109.

⁵⁵ Hales says Martinius “did stand in effect to the tenets of the *Remonstrants*” (*Golden Remains*, 2:131); *Acta*, 2:103–108.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 216–22.

⁵⁷ See Milton, *British Delegation*, 201–3.

sophisticated form of what is now known as hypothetical universalism,⁵⁸ and this made an impact on the British submission. To begin with, this clearly affirmed that “Christ died for the elect out of a special love and intention of both God the Father and Christ, that he might truly obtain and infallibly confer on them forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation.” To make this effectual, God also gives faith and perseverance to those elect; they are saved not “if they are willing” but “because God wills it.”⁵⁹ So far, so anti Arminian.⁶⁰

On top of this, however, the British paper posited a second intention in the cross: Christ also

died for all, that all and every one by means of faith might obtain remission of sins, and eternal life by virtue of that ransom.⁶¹ But Christ so died for the elect, that by the merit of his death in special manner ... they might infallibly obtain both faith and eternal life.⁶²

So as well as dying efficaciously for the elect, Christ also intended to die conditionally for all. As Davenant later explained, “the Divine Will or Intention sometimes denotes merely the appointment of means to an end, although there is no determinate will in God of producing that end by those means.”⁶³ This appears to marry the Reformed insistence on a single, simple will of God with Arminian distinctions concerning contingency; it is in outline the same *via media* construction suggested by Anglican bishop John Overall in an influential paper, where he also speaks of a second “conditional intention” of God as being behind the general grace of the gospel promise.⁶⁴

Further, as a letter from the British divines to the Archbishop of Canterbury explained, there are “some fruits of Christ’s death, not comprised in the decree of Election, but afforded more generally, yet confined to the Visible Church (as viz. true and spiritual Graces accompanying the Gospel,

⁵⁸ See his *Dissertationes duæ: Prima de morte Christi* (Cambridge: Ex officina R. Daniel, 1650), and Jonathan D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 187–213.

⁵⁹ *Acta*, 2:78.

⁶⁰ The first of three “theses heterodoxæ” rejected by the British also refutes the idea that God’s sole intention in sending Christ was “suspended on the contingent act of man’s faith” (*Acta*, 2:81).

⁶¹ *The Collegiat Suffrage of the Divines of Great Britaine* (London: R. Milbourne, 1629), 47, adds “paid once for all mankind.”

⁶² *Acta*, 2:79.

⁶³ Milton, *British Delegation*, 399.

⁶⁴ CUL [Cambridge University Library], MS Gg/1/29, fo. 6v.

and conferred upon some *non-electi*.”⁶⁵ That is, there are spiritual benefits short of conversion (such as those spoken of in Hebrews 6:4–5) that are merited by the cross and dispensed to the nonelect.⁶⁶ Yet, it should be noted, these are only available “in the Church” (the visible church), according to the British.⁶⁷ Word and Spirit are inseparably joined together in the ministry of the Word, they claimed, so when the gospel is proclaimed, there the Spirit is at work, even among the nonelect. The Word “insinuates itself into the secretest closets of the soule” to awaken believers or eventually harden the stubborn.⁶⁸

Many have seen the British as having a major role in softening the Canons of Dort on this head, especially on sufficiency and the gospel call.⁶⁹ Evidently, their views were greatly respected,⁷⁰ and they played a helpful role in mediating many disputes personally. Yet the final Synodical statements about sufficiency can be adequately explained as reflecting the majority view of the Synod, without supposing a British counterweight was necessary to balance Genevan dislike of the concept. The British did not use the standard sufficient–efficient distinction in their submission in any case. They were divided among themselves on whether the universal language in verses such as 1 John 2:2 (partly echoed in their Prayer Book) should be restricted to the elect only.⁷¹ Perhaps this too was left undefined in the Articles as a result of British concerns, but again this is speculation.⁷²

British concerns probably did lie behind the statement of the gospel promise in Article 2.5. This does not, however, enlarge grace beyond the elect per se, as Davenant would have wished, or put forward an unconditional new covenant for the elect alongside a conditional gospel covenant for all,⁷³ or even connect theoretical sufficiency with universal proclamation. However, what Davenant wanted to protect by means of his twofold-intention

⁶⁵ Hales, *Golden Remains*, 2:185.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:187.

⁶⁷ *Acta*, 2:79.

⁶⁸ *Collegiat Suffrage*, 52. This view seems to be reflected in Dort’s Article 3/4.9, where it is said that “various gifts” are conferred by God on those who are called by the ministry of the Word but do not come to Christ.

⁶⁹ White, *Predestination*, 191; Godfrey, “Tensions,” 263–64; and Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 213.

⁷⁰ The British view is always placed first in the foreign position papers in the *Acta*, which indicates a certain primacy of honor.

⁷¹ Hales, *Golden Remains*, 2:101, 130–31; Milton, *British Delegation*, 215.

⁷² Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, 98. We await a definitive study by Sinnema and Milton of the scattered documents relating to the formation of the Canons, which will shed light on these issues.

⁷³ Davenant’s covenant schema, as seen in Milton, *British Delegation*, 398–99.

theory was the idea that if people are not saved “it arises from themselves alone, and the hardness of their heart repelling the means of salvation.”⁷⁴ The Canons, as with several delegations, made exactly this point in Article 2.6, without needing to posit contingency or conditionality in God’s eternal will. Article 2.8 affirmed that God “willed that Christ ... should *effectually* redeem ... all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen,” but this left a backdoor open for Davenant and others by not actually denying an ultimately *ineffectual* universal redemption in addition to this.⁷⁵ Other Reformed statements on the subject were phrased in such a way as to exclude this view, but Dort refrained from doing so.⁷⁶ Without the British pressing the Synod on these points, the Canons may perhaps not have been so carefully stated.

Genevan delegate Giovanni Diodati complained that the English were “so scrupulous and speculative” on these matters and had so many difficulties that it caused a great deal of time and trouble to find “the centre point.”⁷⁷ Yet he did not see their hypothetical universalism as a grave threat to Reformed unity.⁷⁸ Walter Balcanquhall reported to the British Ambassador, at the end of all the wrangling, that regarding the atonement

there was not altogether so uniform a consent both in regard of phrases and forms of speaking, and in regard of some propositions, as was in the first Article: yet certainly there was very great [agreement], more than could well have been expected from so great a number of learned men in so hard and controverted an Article.⁷⁹

III. *After the Synod*

In the immediate wake of the Synod, around two hundred Remonstrants were deprived of their right to preach by the authorities. A fifth of these subsequently conformed and were reinstated, while approximately seventy agreed not to preach or teach but to live quiet lives as private citizens. The remainder, who refused to follow either of these courses, were banished

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 397, 401.

⁷⁵ Jonathan D. Moore, “The Extent of the Atonement,” in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 145–46.

⁷⁶ *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (Leiden, 1625), XXIX.xxix, says, “the end, object, and ‘for whom’ (ϕ or cui) of satisfaction is only Elect and true believers.”

⁷⁷ MS Lullin 53, fols. 55^r–55^v.

⁷⁸ Nicolas Fornerod, “A Reappraisal of the Genevan Delegation,” in *Revisiting the Synod of Dort, 1618–1619*, ed. Aza Goudriaan and Fred A. van Lieburg, Brill’s Series in Church History 49 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 211.

⁷⁹ Hales, *Golden Remains*, 2:132.

from the United Provinces, which could ill afford internal strife or potential civil war, as the Twelve Year Truce with Spain came to an end and Europe geared up for what became the Thirty Years War.⁸⁰ To complete his consolidation of power in the fragmented provinces, the Prince of Orange ensured that his rival (and patron of the Arminians) van Oldenbarnevelt was executed before that bloody, religious conflict could begin. Hugo Grotius was imprisoned but soon made a famous escape to Roman Catholic France, where other leading Arminians also fled. Foreign delegations urged mildness and peace upon the Dutch as they departed and, indeed, the Remonstrant Brotherhood was openly tolerated within a few years, though no longer within the pale of the official national church.

The French Reformed church, whose delegates had been kept away from the Synod, adopted the Canons for themselves as binding on churches and universities.⁸¹ There were also attempts in England, as Arminianism began to rise there, to bring peace to the church by officially adopting the Canons alongside the Thirty-Nine Articles, but these were ultimately unsuccessful.⁸² In 1646, however, the Westminster Assembly debated the issue of the extent of the atonement, and Dortian divisions cast their shadow over the proceedings, with a range of Reformed opinions again being acknowledged.⁸³ The Canons of Dort have since been accepted as part of the confessional make-up of several denominations and institutions around the world and, given their origin in such an honored assembly, are often considered a touchstone of Reformed orthodoxy.

That the Canons of Dort carefully left certain questions undecided and were framed to enable subscription by Davenant and Ward is significant. It has been suggested that Davenant held to an Amyraldian view of the order of God's decrees—before Moïse Amyraut. There is no real evidence for this,⁸⁴ but it is clear that Davenant did espouse a variety of Reformed hypothetical universalism. It is not true that the Overall-Davenant position (shared to a large extent by others such as Archbishop Ussher) was the

⁸⁰ Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 462–63; Spaans, “Religious Policies,” 78; Archibald Harrison, *Beginnings of Arminianism to the Synod of Dort* (London: University of London Press, 1926), 287–88.

⁸¹ *Articles Agreed on in the Nationall Synode of the Reformed Churches of France, Held at Charenton* (Oxford: Printed by John Lichfield and James Short, 1624).

⁸² Milton, *British Delegation*, 383; Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, 152, 170, 176–77.

⁸³ See my two chapters on the Westminster Assembly debate in Lee Gatiss, *Cornerstones of Salvation: Foundations and Debates in the Reformed Tradition* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 2017), 117–58.

⁸⁴ Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 188, n. 74, against Thomas, *Extent*, 151, 165.

definitive Church of England word on the subject, as Peter White claims.⁸⁵ The other British delegates did not think so, and neither did the Archbishop of Canterbury.⁸⁶ There were many fights still to come over what the official Anglican view was.⁸⁷

Those who have since held to Reformed varieties of hypothetical universalism have sometimes referred to themselves as “four or four-and-a-half point Calvinists.” This designation, however, may well be technically inaccurate for some. Despite disagreements with other delegations, Davenant and Ward happily subscribed to the original “pristine” statement of “five-point Calvinism.” Perhaps, then, others who take a less “strict,” non-Genevan view on this issue may also lay claim, historically speaking, to all five petals of the TULIP. Richard Baxter certainly considered himself to be in accord with Dort, despite his famous disagreement with John Owen on the issue.⁸⁸ Indeed, he stated that “the meer *Doctrinal Decrees* of the Synod of *Dort* are so moderate and healing, that where Violence hath been forborn, and Reason used, many have been pacified by them.”⁸⁹ The question, however, must be whether he or hypothetical universalists today are as careful to avoid the slippery slope of Arminianism as the British at Dort were; and whether the Reformed are as willing now as they were at Dort to tolerate a certain amount of diversity within their robust internal debates, while also avoiding an unevangelistic hyper-Calvinism.

⁸⁵ White, *Predestination*, 191.

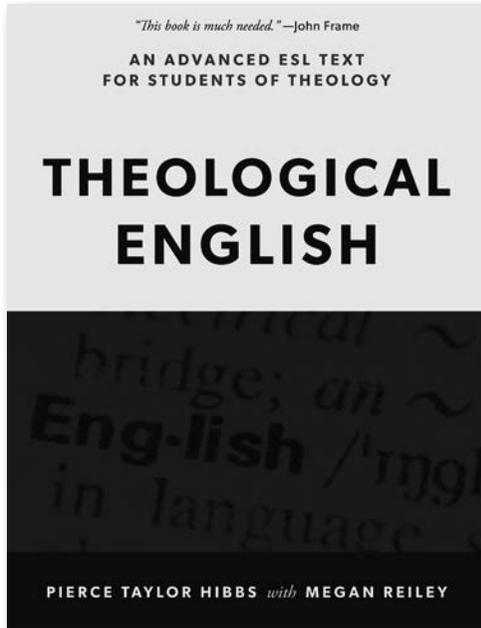
⁸⁶ Milton, *British Delegation*, 215. George Carleton was aware of some bishops holding to a more Arminian view on atonement but confessed, “I never thought that their Opinions were the Doctrine of the Church of England” (Hales, *Golden Remains*, 2:180).

⁸⁷ See Henry Hickman, *Historia Quinq-Articularis Exarticulata* (London: Printed for Robert Boulter, 1673). From the next century, Augustus Toplady, *Historic Proof of the Doctrinal Calvinism of the Church of England* (London: Printed for George Keith, 1774) is a classic defense of Anglican Reformed credentials on this and other points.

⁸⁸ In *Richard Baxter's Confession of His Faith* (London, 1655), 25, Baxter writes, “In the article of the extent of redemption, wherein I am most suspected and accused ... I do subscribe to the Synod of Dort, without any exception, limitation, or exposition of any word as doubtful and obscure.” See Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (1993; repr., Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2004), 209–19.

⁸⁹ Richard Baxter, *The True History of Councils* (London: T. Parkhurst, 1682), 184. Cf. Baxter's views on Dort in *Catholic Theologie* (London: Printed by Robert White, for Nevill Simmons, 1675), I.i.124–26; ii.51–54; iii.67–69; II.57–59, 61, and *Universal Redemption of Mankind* (London: For John Salusbury, 1694).

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The Documents of the Synod of Dort (1618–1619) —A New Edition

DONALD SINNEMA

Abstract

A new project is underway to produce a ten-volume critical edition of all the documents of the Synod of Dort in their original languages (Latin [eighty percent of them], Dutch, German, English, and French) as close as possible to the anniversary years 2018 and 2019. It is published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (Göttingen) and includes documents already published and those available only in manuscript. In contrast to the originally published *Acta*, the new edition contains the documents produced by the synod and its delegates and fully incorporates all the Remonstrant documents.

The years 2018–2019 mark the four-hundredth anniversary of the Synod of Dort (1618–19). Along with the Westminster Assembly, the Synod ranks as one of the most significant ecclesiastical assemblies in the Reformed tradition. It was the climax of the Calvinist-Arminian controversy, which had been raging in the Netherlands for some twenty years. The synod rejected the Arminian (or Remonstrant) position on predestination and related points and produced the Canons of Dort as its response.

The Synod of Dort met for six and a half months, from mid-November 1618 to the end of May 1619. It was convened by the Dutch government—

the States General—primarily to find a resolution to the Arminian controversy, but it also dealt with a variety of other important ecclesiastical matters.

Though it was a Dutch national synod, it also had a strong international character. Among the more than one hundred delegates present at the synod, there were not only sixty-one Dutch ministers, elders, and professors, but also twenty-six leading Reformed theologians from eight foreign territories, including Great Britain, the Palatinate, Geneva, Switzerland, Hesse, Nassau-Wetteravia, Bremen, and Emden. Since the Dutch government convened the synod, there were also eighteen state delegates present to supervise the proceedings and monitor church–state issues.

There were four segments to the agenda of the synod:

(1) The first three-and-a-half weeks, the Pro-Acta sessions, were devoted to preparatory matters and a number of important church items, including a new Dutch Bible translation, catechetical instruction, training for the ministry, baptism of slave children, and printing abuses.

(2) After the arrival of thirteen Remonstrant leaders, who were summoned before the synod to have their views examined and adjudicated, the synod and the cited Remonstrants were engaged in five weeks of procedural wrangling about the authority of the synod and how to handle the theological issues. This very contentious period of the synod ended when the Remonstrants refused to fully cooperate with the synod’s demands—though both they and the synod had made significant concessions—and so the cited Remonstrants were summarily dismissed by President Bogerman in mid-January.

(3) During the next three and a half months, the synod focused primarily on examining the Remonstrant views from their writings, since they were no longer present, and on drawing up the synod’s judgment on their views in what is commonly known as the Canons of Dort. In this period the synod also reviewed the doctrine of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, and it considered four other discipline cases relating to Johannes Maccovius, Conrad Vorstius, four Kampen ministers, and the Geisteranus brothers.

(4) After the Canons were formally approved, the foreign delegates went home, and the Dutch delegates spent the final three weeks of the synod, the Post-Acta sessions, focusing on concerns relating to the life of the Dutch churches, especially matters of church order, liturgical forms, and subscription to confessions.

This article aims to introduce the project to produce a critical edition of all of the documents of the Synod of Dort in their original languages. The goal is a projected ten-volume series to be published in connection with

the 2018–2019 anniversary of the synod. This article first offers a survey of the documents of Dort and then describes the contours of the project to produce a critical edition of these documents. The critical edition will for the first time make all the documents of Dort readily accessible and enable scholars to better understand the deliberations of the synod and the dynamics of the controversy in its real-life context.

I. *The Sources*

Since the synod lasted six-and-a-half months and had over a hundred participants, it produced much paperwork. Roughly half of the documents of Dort have been published, mostly in seventeenth-century editions; the other half have remained only in manuscript form. Among the unpublished materials were many essential documents, including the original *Acta* or minutes of the synod and a number of important journals reporting on the daily sessions.

The most significant published source is the *Acta Synodi Nationalis*, first published in Leiden in 1620.¹ This *Acta* volume was published at the direction and expense of the Dutch government, the States General. The first half of the *Acta* consists of session-by-session minutes of the synod, with a selection of supporting documents integrated into the minutes; the second half consists of the *iudicia* or judgments of the nineteen foreign and Dutch delegations on the Five Remonstrant Articles (1610) at the center of the controversy. It is important to recognize, however, that the published *Acta* was a highly edited version of the official *Acta Authentica*. There are changes in almost every line. Daniel Heinsius, the secretary of the state delegates at the synod, and Festus Hommius, one of the synod's secretaries, were mainly responsible for producing this government-sponsored edited version, which was intended primarily for foreign readers, especially for churches and schools in countries that supported the Reformed tradition.

Most of the changes in the published *Acta* were of an editorial nature, polishing the Latin of the original *Acta Authentica*. But there were also many changes affecting content, often motivated by political considerations. There were many alterations of the text and omissions intended to cast a favorable light on the Dutch nation and its religious situation in order to avoid negative impressions by foreign readers. The minutes of the Post-Acta sessions, which focused on specifically Dutch church matters, especially church order, were entirely omitted. The embarrassing case of

¹ *Acta Synodi Nationalis ... Dordrechtii habitae, Anno MDCXVIII et MDCXIX* (Leiden, 1620).

Maccovius, an orthodox theologian who was overly scholastic in his treatment of theology, is only mentioned in passing as “the particular Frisian case.”² The published *Acta* was dedicated to foreign princes and authorities.³ The States General used these *Acta* to strengthen its foreign relations at the end of the Twelve Year Truce by highlighting the participation of foreign theologians at the synod and by downplaying anything embarrassing to the Dutch government.⁴

The original *Acta Authentica* incorporated very few supporting documents. The published *Acta* include not only the *iudicia* of the nineteen delegations, starting with the foreign delegations, but also a variety of supporting documents, some of them highlighting the participation of the foreign delegates. However, apart from just eight Remonstrant documents on procedural matters and their *Sententiae* on the Five Articles⁵—a brief statement of their views—most Remonstrant documents submitted to the synod were not included in the published *Acta*; the most important of these were their lengthy explanations and defenses of their views, as well as their observations on the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism. The Dutch government clearly wanted to limit access to Remonstrant views and also suppressed the publication of their books.

Since the published *Acta* omitted most Remonstrant documents, the Remonstrants themselves clandestinely published their synod-related documents later the same year, 1620, in a hefty volume titled *Acta et Scripta Synodalia Dordracena Ministrorum Remonstrantium* (Harderwijk, 1620). This volume included all the Remonstrant documents relating to the squabbles over procedure and the statements of their views in their *Sententia*, *Explicatio*, and *Defensio* of each of the Five Articles. According to the preface, the Remonstrants wanted the world to see their views in their own words, not as distorted by the partiality of synodical judgments.

Beyond these two major published sources, a variety of other Dort documents have been published. These include the English letters of John Hales and Walter Balcanqual reporting on the synod,⁶ the letters of the Hesse

² Sessions 139, 141–42, 152.

³ *Acta*, letter of dedication.

⁴ On some of the differences between the *Acta Authentica* and the printed *Acta*, see J. P. van Dooren, “De Tekst van de Acta van de Synode te Dordrecht 1618–1619,” *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 51 (1970): 187–98; and Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser, and Herman J. Selderhuis, eds., *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae, 1618–1619*, vol. 1, *Acta of the Synod of Dordt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), xliv–l.

⁵ Sessions 31, 34.

⁶ John Hales, *Golden Remains* (London: Printed by Tho. Newcomb, for Robert Pawlet, 1673), 2:1–168.

delegation,⁷ the reports on the synod by Remonstrant writers Caspar Barlaeus,⁸ Bernard Dwinglo,⁹ and Eduard Poppius,¹⁰ the materials of the Pro-Acta¹¹ and Post-Acta sessions,¹² some early drafts of the Canons,¹³ materials relating to the Swiss delegation,¹⁴ Anthony Milton's edition of documents relating to the British delegation,¹⁵ and Nicolas Fornerod's *Registres* of the Genevan Company of Pastors for the years 1618 and 1619, which includes documents of the Genevan delegation.¹⁶

Nevertheless, a good half of the documents of Dort have remained only in manuscript. There are over 18,000 pages of Dort manuscripts dispersed in some twenty-five European archives in the Netherlands, England, Switzerland, Germany, and France. Many of these pages are copies of documents already published or available in original manuscripts. The original autographa of Dort have been well preserved in seventeen folio volumes housed in the Utrechts Archief.

The main reason Dort documents are so dispersed is that foreign theologians were invited from ten foreign lands (those from France and Brandenburg could not attend). There is correspondence with the state or church leaders who sent them, and these theologians returned home with their papers, some of which ended up in archives.

Among the unpublished materials are many very significant documents. First of all, the *Acta Authentica* needed to be published.¹⁷ There are fourteen

⁷ Heinrich Heppe, ed., "Historia Synodi Nationalis Dordracenae, sive Literae delegatorum Hassiacorum de iis quae in Synodo Dordracena acta sunt ad Landgravium Mauritium missae," in *Zeitschrift für historische Theologie* 23 (1853): 226–327.

⁸ [Caspar Barlaeus], "Epistolica Narratio eorum quae in Synodo Dordracena gesta sunt," in *Praestantium ac Eruditorum Virorum Epistolae Ecclesiasticae et Theologicae* (Amsterdam, 1684), 513–27.

⁹ [Bernardus Dwinglo], *Historisch Verhael van't ghene sich toghedraeghen heeft binnen Dordrecht, in de Jaeren 1618 ende 1619* ([Amsterdam], 1623).

¹⁰ Eduardus Poppius, *Historisch Verhaal van 't gene tusschen den Synode Nationaal ende de geciteerde Remonstranten in ende buyten de synodale vergaderinghe is ghepasseert* (Amsterdam, 1649).

¹¹ Hendrik Kaajan, *De Pro-Acta der Dordtsche Synode in 1618* (Rotterdam: T. de Vries, 1914).

¹² H. H. Kuyper, *Post-Acta of Nahandelingen van de Nationale Synode van Dordrecht in 1618 en 1619 gehouden* (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser, 1899).

¹³ D. J. De Groot, "Stukken met Betrekking tot de Opstelling der Dordtsche Canones," *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap (gevestigd te Utrecht)* 59 (1937): 134–210.

¹⁴ In *Miscellanea Tigurina* (Zurich, 1723), 2:263–473.

¹⁵ Anthony Milton, ed., *The British Delegation at the Synod of Dort, 1618–1619* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005).

¹⁶ Nicolas Fornerod, ed., *Registres de la Compagnie des Pasteurs de Genève*, vol. 14, 1618–1619 (Geneva: Droz, 2012).

¹⁷ In Utrechts Archief: Oud Synodaal Archief, vol. O.

journals of synodical delegates and observers that report on the day-to-day proceedings of the synod. The unpublished journals include those of Swiss delegate J. J. Breitinge¹⁸, Genevan delegate Theodore Tronchin,¹⁹ English delegates John Davenant²⁰ and Samuel Ward,²¹ Nassau delegate Georgius Fabricius,²² Dutch delegates Caspar Sibelius²³ and Theodore Heyngius,²⁴ another Swiss journal,²⁵ and an unidentified journal titled *Synodalia Hollandica*.²⁶ These journals are extremely important, since they offer much more color and detail about the daily proceedings of the synod than do the official minutes. The most significant of these journals is that of Theodore Tronchin, since it offers the most detail. But it is extremely difficult to read, since Tronchin's hand is very challenging to decipher.

Among other unpublished materials, the most important are the *Acta Contracta*, an abbreviated version of the synodical minutes; the minutes of the meetings of the state delegates; the advices of the nineteen delegations on a variety of issues; the speeches of foreign and Dutch theologians on theological issues relating to the Five Articles; various early drafts of the Canons and related documents; many States General resolutions with correspondence relating to the synod; the documents of the five other discipline cases; and contemporary letters about the synod.

Of special interest is over a hundred documents relating to the drafting of the Canons by President Bogerman and the drafting committee. These include the various drafts of each chapter (eight drafts for Chapter One alone), amendment suggestions submitted on these drafts by the nineteen delegations, and various drafting committee documents.

¹⁸ J. J. Breitinge, *Profectio ad Synodum Nationalem Dordracenam*, in Zentralbibliothek Zürich, Ms F 216:1–379.

¹⁹ “Journal de Theodore Tronchin au Synode de Dordrecht,” in Musée Historique de la Réformation, Geneva, Archives Tronchin, Ms 16:9r–170r.

²⁰ Exeter College, Oxford, Ms 48:6r–29v.

²¹ Samuel Ward, *Diarium rerum gestarum in Synodo Dordracena*, in Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, Samuel Ward Papers, Ms L1.

²² *Synodus Dordracena, hoc est, Summaria et Compendiosissima Relatio plerorumque eorum, quae in Synodi sessionibus omnibus et singulis ... proposita et pertractata fuerunt*, Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, Ms 83, nr. 6429, 32r–64v.

²³ Caspar Sibelius, *Annotationes ad Synodum Dordracenam*, in Staatsarchief Dordrecht, GAD150, Ms 1113, [206 pp.].

²⁴ Theodore Heyngius, *Acta Synodi Nationalis breviter conscripta*, in Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, Ms 457:15–233.

²⁵ In Centrale Bibliotheek Rotterdam, Bibliotheek der Remonstrantsch-Gereformeerde Gemeente te Rotteram, Ms 58:58–111.

²⁶ *Synodalia Hollandica*, in Centrale Bibliotheek Rotterdam, Bibliotheek der Remonstrantsch-Gereformeerde Gemeente te Rotteram, Ms 58, [164 pp.].

II. A New Critical Edition

To address the need to make the documents of Dort readily accessible to modern scholars so that they may make fair assessments of both the synod and the Remonstrants, the four-hundredth anniversary of the Synod of Dort is providing the occasion for a major project to publish a critical edition of all the documents of Dort in their original languages.

The inception of this project goes back to 2008, when Herman Selderhuis and William Den Boer of the Theologische Universiteit of Apeldoorn conceived the idea of celebrating the upcoming anniversary of Dort with a new edition of the *Acta*. They shared the idea with me, since I had done my dissertation on the Synod of Dort and had worked extensively with the manuscripts and printed sources.²⁷ I proposed that such a project should be extended to publish a critical edition of all the documents of Dort, since many significant Dort documents had never been published. In 2009, Den Boer and I presented an outline of this project to a conference in Dordrecht on John Calvin. We received strong encouragement from conference participants to proceed with the project.

After that, we began to organize the project by drawing up a prospectus and recruiting interested scholars to transcribe and edit the documents. In the summer of 2010, I compiled the first draft of an inventory of all the documents of Dort. Selderhuis, the director of Refo500, became involved in organizing the project and recruited several institutional sponsors for the project. The main sponsor is the Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek in Emden,

²⁷ Donald Sinnema, “The Issue of Reprobation at the Synod of Dort in Light of the History of this Doctrine” (Ph.D. diss., University of Saint Michael’s College, Toronto, 1985); also, “Reformed Scholasticism and the Synod of Dort (1618–19),” in *John Calvin’s Institutes: His Opus Magnum*, ed. B. van der Walt (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1986), 467–506; “The Drafting of the Canons of Dordt: A Preliminary Survey of Early Drafts and Related Documents,” and “The Canons of Dordt: From Judgment on Arminianism to Confessional Standard,” in *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt, 1618–1619*, ed. Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 291–311, 313–33; “Calvin and the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619),” *Church History and Religious Culture* 91 (2011): 87–103; and more recently, “The French Reformed Churches, Arminianism, and the Synod of Dort (1618–19),” in *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches: From Henri IV to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*, ed. Martin Klauber (Grand Rapids, Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 98–136; “The Doctrine of Election at the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619),” in *The Doctrine of Election in Reformed Perspective*, ed. Frank van der Pol (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), forthcoming; “Is the Canons of Dordt a True Reflection of Calvin’s Doctrine of Predestination?” in *die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* (2018): forthcoming; “Procedural Wrangling in the Remonstrant Case at the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619),” in *More than Luther: The Reformation and the Rise of Pluralism in Europe*, ed. Karla Boersma and Herman Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), forthcoming.

Germany. Other supporting institutions include the Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, the Huygens Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis in Den Haag, the Institut für Schweizerische Reformationsgeschichte Zurich, the Protestantse Kerk Nederland, the Remonstrantse Broederschap, and the Vrij Universiteit Amsterdam.

The first formal meeting of interested participants took place in Zurich in July 2011. Since then, meetings have been held in Emden in January 2012, in Dordrecht in September 2012, and then annually in Berlin (2013), Bologna (2014), Leuven (2015), Copenhagen (2016), and Wittenberg (2017), in connection with the annual RefoRC conference each May. Otherwise, regular communication among participants is by email.

The goal is to produce a critical edition of all the documents of the Synod of Dort in their original languages as close as possible to the anniversary years 2018 and 2019. The new edition includes all the documents of Dort, both those already published and those available only in manuscript. Moreover, in contrast to the originally published *Acta*, the new edition includes not only the documents produced by the synod itself and its delegates, but it fully incorporates all the Remonstrant documents relating to the synod, their explanations and defenses of their views, as well as three or four important Remonstrant journals. Well over eighty percent of the Dort documents are in Latin; the rest are in Dutch, German, English, and French. It is expected that the full series will consist of ten volumes, each over five hundred pages. The publisher of the series is Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, based in Göttingen.

The project is led by three general editors. Herman Selderhuis is taking the lead in coordinating the organizational aspects of the project; Christian Moser, formerly from the Institut für Schweizerische Reformationsgeschichte in Zurich, is in charge of the technical aspects and the project website; and I am taking the lead in overseeing the inventory and general content of the edition. Janika Bischof, representing the a Lasco Bibliothek, served as the first editorial assistant and is now succeeded by Dagmar Bronner. Under the direction of the general editors are many contributing editors, who work on transcribing and editing individual documents or collections of documents. Thus far, an international team of over fifty scholars has been assembled to work on the project. Most are European scholars. Among the participants are five scholars from the Remonstrant tradition. Since this is an enormous project, there is still need for more contributing editors to transcribe and edit documents that are not yet assigned.

The task of each contributing editor is to transcribe the most authentic text of a document—in most cases the original copy—and edit the text by

providing a critical apparatus that takes note of editorial matters, especially variant readings, when there are multiple copies.

The general editors have developed a detailed set of editorial guidelines. The decision was made to use the TUSTEP program for layout of the edition. This program enables us to reproduce marginal notes, and it provides for two levels of footnotes, one for the critical apparatus to take note of variant readings, the other for notes relating to content. TUSTEP also enables us to create name and Bible reference indices easily.

In 2012, Christian Moser developed an in-house website for the Dort project, for use by the project participants. It gives access to online copies of the major printed sources, and of the major manuscripts of the synod. The website also includes a task list of Dort documents, a bibliography, editorial guidelines, and templates needed for editing documents and creating the critical apparatus. Moser also developed ten helpful screen-casts to introduce new participants to every phase of the editing process, and he has posted a number of samples illustrating the editing stages.

The series is being published under the title *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae*. The first volume contains the actual acts or minutes of the synod; the remaining volumes contain mostly the supporting documents produced by the synod and reports about the synod. Thus far, two volumes have been published. Volume one contains four versions of the *Acta* of the synod: the *Acta Authentica*, the first printed *Acta* of 1620; the *Acta Contracta*; and the acts of meetings of the state delegates.²⁸ This volume also includes various introductory articles that provide an introduction to the synod, the editorial guidelines, an introduction to each version of the *acta*, and short bios on each of the synod's participants. Volume II/2 focuses on the early sessions of the synod, including the Pro-*Acta* sessions and the period of procedural debates with the Remonstrants until their expulsion on January 14, 1619.²⁹

Because there was too much material to include in this one volume, a decision was made to publish a separate volume II/1, which focuses on the convening of the synod. This volume, which will be published in the fall of 2018, includes multiple resolutions of the States General and correspondence relating to the convening of the synod by the States General, as well as correspondence relating to the invitations of foreign theologians from the various foreign lands.

²⁸ See footnote 4.

²⁹ Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser, and Herman J. Selderhuis, eds., *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae, 1618–1619*, vol. II/2, *Early Sessions of the Synod of Dordt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017).

Volume three will focus on the doctrinal deliberations after the expulsion of the Remonstrants and the drafting of the Canons of Dort as the synod's response to the Remonstrant Five Articles. Volume four will contain the various Remonstrant doctrinal statements they submitted to the synod, and volume five will include the judgments of the nineteen synodical delegations on the Remonstrant Five Articles. Volume six will contain documents from the later sessions of the synod and its immediate aftermath. These include the five other discipline cases considered by the synod, as well as the Post-Acta sessions. Volumes seven, eight, and nine will contain the various journals and reports on the synod produced by Remonstrant observers, various foreign delegates, and several Dutch delegates, as well as assorted letters concerning the synod.

Conclusion

A major result of the production of this critical edition will be full access to Dort documents on both sides of the Arminian controversy, so that new scholarship may be able to reach a fairer understanding of the opposing positions and see through the misunderstandings created by the heat of the original setting.

It will be possible to examine the Synod of Dort in a much more nuanced way than was previously possible. Let me illustrate this in three ways. First, with the availability of new materials, especially journals that flesh out details of sessions not in the official *Acta*, scholars will discover that Dort was not a monolithic synod, as was previously supposed. Among the Dutch and foreign delegates themselves—though they all considered themselves orthodox Reformed and rejected the Remonstrant positions—there was some diversity of views, and, at moments, even open contention over such matters as the role of Christ in election, the supra- versus infralapsarian stances to predestination, the nature of reprobation, the scope of Christ's death, the absolute versus hypothetical necessity of Christ's incarnation for human redemption, the identity of the "physical cause" of conversion; and the irresistibility of grace.

Second, closer scrutiny of all of the Dort documents will allow scholars to recognize that the synod was not as intolerant as previously thought. At least on the procedural disagreements about how to handle the theological issues, there were definite concessions on both the Remonstrant and synodical sides, though in the heat of the conflict this was not fully recognized at the time. With only a little more grace toward the other side, agreement on procedure was certainly within reach, and the Remonstrants need

not have been dismissed from the synod but could well have remained present to explain their views in person.

Third, with the publication of all Dort documents on both sides of the controversy, including States General resolutions and correspondence relating to the convening of the synod and its ongoing proceedings, the Synod of Dort may be studied in its fuller national context. For example, it will become evident that the Remonstrants were summarily dismissed from the synod, not simply because of President Bogerman's angry outburst, "Dimittimini! Exite!" but because the States General and state delegates had already authorized the dismissal.

All in all, the availability of the documents of Dort should spark a revival of scholarly interest in this very defining event of the Reformed tradition.



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The Perennity of Anselm's *Proslogion*

YANNICK IMBERT

Abstract

The first goal of Anselm in the *Proslogion* is to encourage believers by demonstrating the absolute necessity of the existence of the God of the Bible. Anselm most likely succeeds as the definition of God that he adopts is faithful to the content of special revelation. Whether the argument can function as an argument for the existence of God can be doubted. In this article we look at the various aspects of the question.

Anselm's *Proslogion* belongs to those works that have weathered all kinds of opposition, reaching a status that neither the author nor history itself could have anticipated. When the eleventh-century theologian set out to write this great work, he probably did not envision centuries of Christian apologetics debating the relevance and persuasiveness of its main argument for the existence of the God of the Bible.

What is today known as the ontological argument remains one of the great accomplishments of Anselm's work as a theologian. It has been commented on, accepted, rejected, and modified. After Anselm, it was rejected by Thomas Aquinas before being resurrected by René Descartes and opposed by Gottfried Leibniz. Kant unequivocally rejected the argument, while Hegel heavily criticized Kant's objections, all the while remaining ambiguous about his own evaluation of it. In the twentieth century, Kurt Gödel presented a modal form of the ontological argument, but Bertrand

Russell's atomism led him to reject it. The great English philosopher had initially found it valid: "I remember the precise moment, one day in 1894, as I was walking along Trinity Lane, when I saw in a flash (or thought I saw) that the ontological argument is valid. I had gone out to buy a tin of tabacco; on my way back, I suddenly threw it up in the air, and exclaimed as I caught it: 'Great Scott, the ontological argument is sound.'"¹

Russell would, of course, soon change his mind about the ontological argument but would still recognize its force, concluding that "it is easier to feel convinced that it must be fallacious than it is to find out precisely where the fallacy lies."² In this comment, Russell shows himself to be a much more perceptive and honest critic of Christian theism than many modern-day atheists of the Dawkins type.³ In any case, the argument has become a classic one in Christian apologetics, while by no means being without serious flaws. Closer to us, Cornelius Van Til criticized traditional theistic arguments—including the ontological argument—for giving up too much ground to the unbeliever's assumption of the power of fallen reason. In this short presentation, the intention is not to summarize Van Til's convincing objections to the argument. Rather, we will provide some background to the argument itself.

I. *Historical Context*

When Anselm began the *Proslogion* in 1077, he had been at the Abbey of Le Bec for about twenty years. In the course of these two decades, he had become prior in 1063, serving as a spiritual counselor for the Benedictine monks, as well as taking on the role of administrator of the abbey—a task he profoundly disliked. It was an extremely busy time, and he had little opportunity for writing, which partly explains why he did not produce any work during the decade preceding his *Monologion* (1075–1076). Only upon the request of some monks did Anselm gather the necessary momentum to write both the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*. "Some of the brethren," he writes, asked him how to meditate "on the divine essence."⁴ They added to this initial request a qualification, that "whatever the conclusion of each

¹ Bertrand Russell, "My Intellectual Development," in Paul A. Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* (New York: Tudor, 1946), 10.

² Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 586.

³ Richard Dawkins, in his typical absence of philosophical intellectual curiosity, writes of Russell, "Why, I wonder, didn't he say something like: 'Great Scott, the ontological argument seems to be plausible.'" Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Black Swan, 2016), 105.

⁴ Anselm, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2007), "Monologion," 1.

individual investigation might assert, the necessity of reason would concisely prove.”⁵ With some reluctance, Anselm wrote his two short treatises.

Anselm's argument, if it was a spiritual and devotional aid for the monks at Le Bec, was not merely the work of a spiritual counselor. It was also an apologetic argument. In fact, in our evaluation of the argument, we should avoid the pitfalls of thinking of the *Proslogion* as merely an argument against “atheism” or a spiritual support for his “brethren.” Certainly, Anselm had an apologetic intent in writing the *Proslogion*, whether his first audience (the monks at Le Bec) were conscious of it or not. But we should not think that this apologetic thrust was directed at eleventh-century atheists, which would be a gross anachronism. It is more plausible that the *Proslogion*'s argument was directed at Jewish polemicists.⁶ The *Proslogion* is indeed primarily a prayer and a meditation—in that, theologians are correct—but it is not merely that: it is also an argument in favor of the necessity of God's existence.

II. *God, Reason, and the Ontological Argument*

The main thrust of the ontological argument could be summarized as follows:

God is the greatest being we can conceive of. Any being we can conceive of exists in our mind or in reality. Furthermore, a being that were to exist only in the mind would not be greater than any other being (or thing, for that matter) that exists in reality. For God to be the greatest of all beings, he must necessarily exist not only in the mind but also in reality.

That is at least the common understanding of the argument.⁷

One of the critical questions of the *Proslogion* is whether Anselm's definition of God is a valid and convincing one. Of course, Anselm defines God as the greatest of all beings, “than which nothing greater can be thought.”⁸ That is the core definition on which subsequent constructions of the ontological arguments have focused. Most syllogisms summarizing the argument begin with this line, including Alvin Plantinga's modal version, often thought as being the most compelling form of the argument.⁹

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Nancy Kendrick, “The Non-Christian Influence on Anselm's *Proslogion* Argument,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 69.3 (April 2011): 73–74.

⁷ There has been discussion about whether this common understanding is true to Anselm's original formulation. See for example Ian Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion: The History of Anselm's Argument and its Significance Today* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁸ Anselm, “Proslogion,” §5, 83.

⁹ Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

However, it is a problematic simplification to think of the argument as *merely* defining “God” as “that ‘than which nothing greater can be thought.” To Anselm, the *Proslogion* was a unit, a consistent meditative reasoning about God. Sectioning parts of the discourse in order to build a rational argument for the existence of God, while legitimate on the basis of the work, only builds on one of its aspects. Whether we analyze or meditate on the *Proslogion*, we should not forget that Anselm immediately qualifies his initial definition of God by adding that God is the one “who alone exists through himself and made all other things from nothing.”¹⁰ God is thus not merely the “greater being” but a *different* being.

To go further in our understanding of the ontological argument, we should remember that Anselm does not merely think of God as the maximally greater being of contemporary philosophy. He goes to great length to present the God of biblical theism and comments on God’s attributes such as his mercy and impassibility (§8), as well as his love and justice (§9–10), and his simplicity (§18). Moreover, God is not just “that than which a greater cannot be thought” but also “something greater than can be thought.”¹¹ God is thus not entirely demonstrable through reason but will always escape absolute delimitations of his being.

III. Anselm’s Use of the “Fool” of Psalm 14

Criticisms of the ontological argument have taken many forms but have mostly focused on the notions of perfection and existence. This is the point of Leibniz and Kant’s rejection of the argument. However, there is another troubling dimension in the argument that has rarely been commented upon. Anselm’s argument begins by quoting Psalm 14:1: “The fool says in his heart ‘There is no God.’” Following this text, he explains the relationship between something that is understood and the existence of the thing. Here, Anselm seems to interpret Psalm 14:1 as a reference to a sort of theoretical atheist, someone who denies existence to something that is necessary.

However, one question must be asked: Who is the “fool” in Psalm 14? Is he merely an atheist who has reasoned and concluded the nonexistence of God? When one considers the text carefully, the answer is more complex. There is no question that the heart of the fool’s attitude is a denial of God, but folly here “represents practical rather than theoretical atheism.”¹² The

¹⁰ Anselm, “Proslogion,” §5, 83.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, §15, 90.

¹² Nancy DeClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 166.

fool completely discounts the presence of God in the world, which explains that the rest of the Psalm is an answer to the assumption that God is not present and active in the world.¹³ Thus, there is a fundamental ethical dimension to the fool's attitude.

This ethical nature of the fool's rejections of God is reinforced by the fact that the fool is likely part of God's covenant people, one who has seen and witnessed the great acts of God. The psalmist "implicitly addresses fellow Israelites."¹⁴ This identification of the "fool" with a member of the people is important, as the Psalm ends on a covenantal note. This is double folly because, as a member of God's people, the fool still claims, "There is no God."

However, the psalmist does not limit himself to a particular instance. Rather he adds: "there is no one who seeks God," implying a universality of judgment. From a particular judgment, the psalmist moves to a general one. Not only is this particular person a "fool" as a member of God's people who has rejected God, but all who do so are fools. Still, the immediate focus of the psalm's context is folly within the people of God. The point is not merely theoretical, but practical. If this exegetical misdirection does not in itself invalidate Anselm's construction of the ontological argument, it does point to the necessity of careful examination of the biblical text in formulating an argument for the existence of God. Careful examination of the context of Psalm 14 would not have changed history. Anselm would likely still have written the *Proslogion*.

The importance of this point for Anselm's ontological argument is simple. Anselm's argument revolves around the conviction that the fool of Psalm 14 is a fool because he denies existence to something that is necessary. Thus, he says in his heart what cannot be thought because what cannot be thought cannot have notional reality (§4). And without this, there can be no thought. The mere fact that there is thought about God points to his necessary existence. In identifying the fool in such a way, Anselm is true to his predecessors, including Augustine.¹⁵ That, however, is hardly the meaning of Psalm 14, and thus the argument developed in the *Proslogion* loses some of its strength.

¹³ John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalm 1–41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 213.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹⁵ In his commentary on Psalm 53, Augustine writes, "For not even have certain sacrilegious and abominable philosophers, who entertain perverse and false notions of God, dared to say, 'There is no God.'" Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms* (Enarrationes in Psalmos), Digital Psalms, <https://faculty.gordon.edu>, 2007, 83.

Conclusion

Anselm's first goal in the *Proslogion* is to encourage believers by demonstrating the absolute necessity of the existence of the God of the Bible, and in that he most likely succeeds, as the definition of God that he adopts is faithful to the content of special revelation. Whether the argument can function as an argument for the existence of God can be doubted. There are too many presuppositions at work, including the nature of God and the normative function of human reason. Of course, these criticisms of Anselm's argument are valid if our understanding of it is correct.

But the argument can also be read as presupposing that it is impossible for God not to exist, even though the argument itself lends credence to its interpretation in light of subsequent natural theology. Thus, the *Proslogion* could be seen as an argument for the impossibility of God's nonexistence. Seen in this light, Anselm's argument can be reinterpreted with a more consistent apologetic basis—even a Van Tilian one. To do so would require a closer examination of the entire *Proslogion*.

Anselm's *Proslogion* has traversed centuries. The attraction of this work is as much his argument as the union of piety, prayer, meditation, and rational inquiry that it displays. Faith crowns the theologian's reasoning, enlightening a humble mind. Anselm's work is a constant reminder that "doing theology" is a task that requires humility and devotion under God, fixing mind and heart on the one who, as creator, is ultimately distinct from his creation.

Pierre Viret: A Pastor and Ethicist for the Twenty-First Century

TIMOTHY BLOEDOW

Abstract

Pierre Viret was a Swiss Reformation leader who worked alongside John Calvin, William Farel, and Theodore Beza, but he is less well known in the English-speaking world. Viret brought his distinctive contributions to the Protestant Reformation as a pastor and an ethicist. These contributions in life and doctrine need to be rediscovered for a more robust reformational church today. This article considers Viret's credentials as a Reformer. It then explores various areas in which Viret applied his distinctively biblical ethic, particularly respecting the role of the magistrate and the relation between church and state. His biblical worldview is comprehensive in breadth and depth. His example is very accessible to Christians wanting to follow in his footsteps.

Pierre Viret (1511–1571)¹ is a lesser-known leader of the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland and France in the English-speaking world. He does not make a single appearance in some histories, including the popular *2000 Years of Christ's Power*.² In other histories, Viret receives much less coverage than other Reformation

¹ There is at present some scholarly debate as to the exact year of Viret's birth. One of the leading experts on Viret's writings, Dominique Troilo, opts for the date of 1509.

² N. R. Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power*, Part Three (Welwyn Garden City, England: EP Books, 2003).

leaders. He shows up three times in the index of Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*.³ Others, such as William Farel, John Calvin, and Theodore Beza, receive noticeably more exposure.

The modern church's lack of familiarity with Viret, who was Calvin's best friend, is a sad deficiency that needs to be remedied.⁴ Viret made his distinctive contributions to the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland and France, a legacy from which we could benefit in the twenty-first century.

In his day, Viret was a popular pastor and preacher and an energetic evangelist. He was a prolific writer and a courageous apologist who would challenge opponents to public debate.⁵ Viret was one of the founders of the Reformation church in French-speaking Switzerland.⁶ In 1537, he became one of the first two professors, and the most zealous ambassador, of the Bernese-founded Lausanne Academy.⁷ The Lausanne Academy did crucial work to advance the Reformation prior to the founding of the Geneva Academy.⁸ Much of the value in Viret's work is his thinking on applied ethics, especially in the area of civil governance. Added to this is the courage he expressed personally confronting, rebuking, and resisting civil magistrates in the cause of the gospel and justice. The twenty-first century church would benefit greatly from greater time spent studying and applying Viret's teaching.

Viret was born in 1509 in Orbe, eighteen miles north of Lausanne, Switzerland, and converted from Roman Catholicism at the age of eighteen while studying in Paris at the College de Montaigu. Viret's knowledge of Greek and Hebrew is seen as instrumental in his conversion and subsequent ministry: "Forsaking the traditions of the religious leaders of his day and returning to the original languages of God's Word would before long

³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910).

⁴ Jean-Marc Berthoud, *Pierre Viret: Forgotten Giant of the Reformation* (Tallahassee: Zurich Publishing, 2010), provides a short popular introduction. Thanks to the support of L'Association Pierre Viret, a critical edition of his *Christian Instruction* is being republished; the first two volumes are now available: Pierre Viret, *Instruction Chrétienne*, Tome premier, ed. Arthur-Louis Hofer (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 2004), and *Instruction Chrétienne*, Tome deuxième, ed. Arthur-Louis Hofer (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 2009).

⁵ Rebekah A. Sheats, *Pierre Viret: The Angel of the Reformation* (Tallahassee: Zurich Publishing, 2012), 51–52.

⁶ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* 8:252.

⁷ Sheats, *Pierre Viret*, 87.

⁸ "These printing restrictions [in Bern] go a long way toward explaining why the Lausanne Academy has been so neglected by modern scholars. Beza, Hotman, Cordier, and especially Viret were actively writing while in the city, but they had to have their works printed in Geneva." Michael W. Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground: Conflict and Reform in the Pays de Vaud, 1528–1559* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 175.



PIERRE VIRET
1509-1571

become imperative for the soon-to-be Reformer.”⁹ Viret quickly began preaching at the age of twenty in Vaud, Switzerland, at the urging of William Farel. Farel, when he was in Orbe preaching in the face of strong Roman Catholic opposition, noticed Viret’s faithful attendance at his sermons. “Ever in search of men to join him in his work, Farel approached the silent Viret and asked him to commence preaching at Orbe.”¹⁰ With Farel and Antoine Froment, he laid the groundwork in the early 1530s for the planting of the Reformation in Geneva. Viret died at the age of 60 (May 4, 1571) in southern France in the service of Jeanne d’Albret (the mother of the future French king Henry IV).

Viret pastored in Payerne, Neuchâtel, and Geneva, and for the longest period—over twenty years (1536–1559)—in Lausanne. On being exiled from Lausanne by the Council of Bern in 1559, Viret returned to Geneva for a few years. It was after this that he took up residence in southern France due to ill health. During that time, he also “labored for a while as an evangelist, with great success, at Nîmes, Montpellier, and Lyons,”¹¹ and spent his final years serving at Jeanne d’Albret’s academy at Orthez and as the Superintendent of the Reformed churches in the Kingdom of Navarre. He spent his latter years becoming arguably the most influential leader of the French Reformation in his day.

[He was] champion of the Reformation in the Swiss canton of the Vaud and the most important native religious Reformer of French-speaking Switzerland. ... As pastor at Neuchâtel (1533), he won the favour of the Bernese, who, following their annexation of the Vaud (1536), supported his reforming efforts in the Vaudois capital of Lausanne. Viret led the disputation of Lausanne (October 1536) and subsequently organized the Reformed Church throughout Vaud.¹²

I. Viret’s Popularity in His Day

Viret, then, was one of the early leaders of the Protestant Reformation in France and Switzerland alongside Calvin, Farel, and Beza. Because of his popularity, Viret was often pulled in more than one direction at a time. The church in Geneva called him in 1536 while he was serving in Neuchâtel, and “the Council of Neuchâtel replied to that city with a letter detailing the reasons why they could not part with Viret.”¹³ Viret, however, ended up

⁹ Sheats, *Pierre Viret*, 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* 8:252.

¹² “Pierre Viret,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pierre-Viret>.

¹³ Sheats, *Pierre Viret*, 48.

leaving Neuchâtel for Geneva, but, while on his way to Geneva, he encountered soldiers from Lausanne, and “the officers from Lausanne begged Viret to return with them to their city to proclaim the Gospel—Geneva had preachers already, they declared; Lausanne had none. Faced with such an entreaty, Viret could not refuse the men’s plea.”¹⁴

Viret did visit Geneva, and later, when expelled from Lausanne in 1559, he pastored in the city for a couple of years. Michiel van den Berg writes,

[Geneva] showed its preference [for Viret over Calvin] by providing Viret with a better parsonage and living conditions than they gave Calvin. At the later date, when he once again became a permanent preacher in the city, no effort was too great to look after his needs. Even when his health issues forced him to go south for a significant period, the city council paid all his expenses.¹⁵

Viret became a very close friend of Calvin, who “often calls him ‘my very best friend’ in his extensive correspondence with him, of which some four hundred letters survive.”¹⁶

In a biography of Calvin, reports historian Scott Manetsch, Beza commended different strengths of the preaching styles of Viret, Farel, and Calvin—Viret’s eloquence, Farel’s sublimity of mind, and Calvin’s weighty insights—concluding “that a preacher who was a composite of these three men would have been absolutely perfect.”¹⁷ Schaff observes, “Viret went to Geneva and was appointed preacher of the city (March 2, 1559). His sermons were more popular and impressive than those of Calvin, and better attended.”¹⁸

Viret was known as the Angel of the Reformation for his reputation as a peacemaker, even toward Roman Catholic adversaries. He was called upon by Calvin, those who opposed him, and many others to serve as a mediator and negotiator to resolve intractable disputes.¹⁹ He was fearless before magistrates and much loved among the poor and working class. Viret could be stinging in his rebukes of injustice, especially by the civil magistrates and the wealthy, but Beza billed him as possessing “the sweetness of honey.”²⁰

Viret was also a prolific writer, and his “written legacy ... in quantity, content, and influence is second only to Calvin’s among the Francophone

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Michiel A. van den Berg, *Friends of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 97.

¹⁶ Ibid., 90.

¹⁷ Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 156.

¹⁸ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* 8:252–53.

¹⁹ Sheats, *Pierre Viret*, 143–50.

²⁰ Van den Berg, *Friends of Calvin*, 93.

Reformed.”²¹ The effectiveness of Viret’s Reformation-era ministry can be seen in that Roman Catholic assassins attempted to kill him on two separate occasions. There is much in Viret’s reputation as a leader in the Protestant Reformation to commend him to subsequent generations. In the English-speaking world in particular, however, the man is rarely mentioned and is often unknown. “[Viret] is usually relegated to a role of minor importance as one who labored in the shadow of the really great men of the Calvinist Reformation.”²²

II. *Viret’s Obscurity Today*

This begs the question, Why does Viret not have the recognized stature of other Reformation leaders? If not of a Calvin, why not at least the name recognition of Farel or Beza? Some have suggested that part of the reason for the English-speaking world’s lack of familiarity with Viret could be because most of his writing was in a difficult archaic form of the French language, so little effort has been made to translate his works.²³

Perhaps later Reformers prioritized the gifts that others, such as Calvin, possessed. Robert Linder acknowledges that Viret was not the theologian that Calvin was. Jean-Marc Berthoud proffers the idea that “if his good friend, John Calvin, was the consummate dogmatician and the prince of exegetes, Pierre Viret must be considered as the finest ethicist and the most acute apologist of the 16th century.”²⁴ In subsequent decades and generations, as the Reformation consolidated and developed, the Reformed world seems to have come to prize theology and preaching over other fields such as ethics and apologetics? R. Scott Clark has observed,

We know relatively less about these other figures because, in the 20th century, for reasons that had more to do with systematic theology rather than history or historical theology, Calvin became virtually [the] sole face of Reformed theology, as if the entire Reformed faith teetered on one man’s head.²⁵

²¹ Ibid., 93.

²² Robert Dean Linder, *The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret* (Geneva: Droz, 1964), 12.

²³ Lee Duigon, “Pierre Viret: A Forgotten Giant of the Reformation by Jean-Marc Berthoud,” *Chalcedon*, February 28, 2011, <https://chalcedon.edu/magazine/pierre-viret-a-forgotten-giant-of-the-reformation-by-jean-marc-berthoud>.

²⁴ Jean-Marc Berthoud, “Pierre Viret: The Apologetics and Ethics of the Reformation,” *Adorning the Doctrine: Papers Read at the 1995 Westminster Conference* ([London]: Westminster Conference, 1995), 32.

²⁵ R. Scott Clark, “More Than the Institutes and More Than Calvin,” *The Heidelberg*, January 5, 2009, <https://heidelberg.net/2009/01more-than-the-institutes-and-more-than-calvin-pt-2/>.

Perhaps Viret became sidelined due to some distinctive views he held that did not endure among the dominant streams of Reformation thinking. On baptism, in his *Simple Exposition of the Principal Points of the Christian Faith*, Viret, in the catechetical form in which he wrote the book, has his questioner ask,

And if faithful men present the children of unfaithful parents and bind themselves for them, taking it upon themselves to instruct them in the Christian religion as if they were their own parents, would it be lawful to baptize such infants?

The respondent answers:

I would not have any difficulty with this provided the parents do not oppose it, but are in agreement, and principally for two reasons ... seeing there is a faithful surety.... For such surety takes the place of parents, provided they do not oppose it and indeed have given him the authority to do what he does.²⁶

Viret may also have been out of step with his views on governance. He seemed to have a flatter, more “democratic,” view of both civil and ecclesiastical government than did other Reformation leaders: “Viret stressed the autonomy and democracy of the local churches. He was convinced that a sort of congregationalism was ordained by God.”²⁷ Most Reformation leadership stood against absolute subservience to the civil magistrate, though their views on how citizens and subjects were to resist corrupt civil government differed. Maybe Viret was on one extreme with a position that fell out of vogue.

Perhaps Viret simply did not fit the mold of the other Reformers. He was raised in humble conditions as the son of a tailor. He did not come from the world of merchants or gentry, as did many other Reformers. Linder suggests that Viret was influenced in his political ethics by his heritage, and this may have led him to be even more cynical and suspicious of the civil magistracy than were other Reformation leaders. Linder says Viret was especially harsh toward the wealthy and civil magistrates. He observed much injustice in the treatment of the poor and the working class at the hands of these privileged members of society. He spoke out strongly and regularly against usury, unfair taxation, and bribery. Linder writes,

²⁶ Pierre Viret, *Simple Exposition of the Principal Points of the Christian Faith*, trans. Rebekah A. Sheats (Tallahassee: Zurich Publishing, 2017), 214.

²⁷ Paul T. Fuhrmann, review of *The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret*, by Robert D. Linder, *Journal of Presbyterian History* 45.1 (March 1967): 62.

There is little doubt that in a country dominated by the government of Berne, Viret had acted like a political subversive. In the eyes of the civil authorities he was a rebel and a fomenter of sedition, and therefore should be treated accordingly. Even many of Viret's fellow Protestant ministers criticized his immoderate actions, counseled submission, and refused to back his policy of resistance to the secular authorities of Berne.²⁸

Viret's biblically based ethics, along with his outspokenness on civil government may also have set him apart. Berthoud, a Viret expert, suggests that Viret had a stronger commitment than Calvin did to the relevance and authority of Scripture (over against natural law) for the realm of civil government.²⁹ Linder observes that "there is a brevity of [Calvin's] treatment of the subject of government in his *Institutes* which makes it seem almost to be an afterthought."³⁰ On the other hand, a historian who reviews Linder's book, *The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret*, cautions that "there is occasional evidence of too great a concern to make [Viret] appear independent of and different from Calvin and other reformers."³¹ The reviewer, nevertheless, observes,

The analysis of Viret's political views is painstaking and well reasoned. ... Linder makes it clear that Viret, more than other reformers, emphasized the point that the ruler is under the law and should strive for justice and equality before the law. A good case also is made for giving Viret credit for developing ideas concerning a congregational form of church government, separation of church and state, the right of political resistance, and religious toleration.³²

In discussing the political theory of Viret and his sixteenth-century colleagues, Linder cautions that they were speaking into a different political world.³³ Nevertheless, the universal biblical principles from which Viret drew his applications are relevant for all times and peoples. When it comes to governance, there may be many localized particulars, but there are relatively few categories, and there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl 1:9), so

²⁸ Linder, *Political Ideas*, 38.

²⁹ Jean-Marc Berthoud, "Pierre Viret and the Sovereignty of the Word of God over Every Aspect of Reality," *A Comprehensive Faith*, ed. Andrew Sandlin (San Jose, CA: Friends of Chalcedon, 1996), 102.

³⁰ Robert D. Linder, "John Calvin, Pierre Viret and the State," *Calvin and the State: Papers and Responses Presented at the Seventh and Eighth Colloquia on Calvin and Calvin Studies*, ed. Peter De Klerk (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1993), 173.

³¹ Harold J. Grimm, review of *The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret*, by Robert D. Linder, *Church History* 35.1 (March 1966): 112.

³² *Ibid.*, 112–13.

³³ Linder, "John Calvin, Pierre Viret and the State," 171.

there still is much benefit to studying Viret's thought when it comes to the theology and ethics of civil government as we find it today.

III. *What Viret Taught about Civil Government*

The Protestant Reformation's break with Roman Catholicism had substantial implications for Christian views of civil government, including the relationship of the church to the state. At that time, European society was coterminous with the church, with intersecting jurisdictions between church, state, and family. Church membership and, therefore, church discipline, including excommunication, had direct implications for social standing and citizenship. The success of "Protestant" movements gave civil magistrates a choice of which church with which to align themselves, a new reality that complicated international relations and contributed to military conflict. Reformed Christians did not have the luxury of ignoring these areas of life and conflict. They had to attempt to speak into these complex realities with biblical truth and justice.

Viret did not fear wading into these theological conflicts or confronting civil magistrates in person when he believed that they were advancing injustice or encroaching on the biblically-defined jurisdiction of the church. His thinking on political matters was reflected in numerous writings, but most comprehensively in his *Instruction chrétienne en la doctrine de la Loy et de l'Evangile et en la vraie philosophie et théologie, tant naturelle que supernaturelle des chrétiens* [*Christian Instruction in the Doctrine of the Law and the Gospel and in True Christian Philosophy and Theology, both Natural and Supernatural*], which includes his commentary on the Ten Commandments.³⁴

The state "was a direct creation of God."³⁵ It was a gift from God for keeping peace and order in society, and a key reason for this role was to facilitate the work of the church in its redemptive mission on earth.³⁶ The work of the civil magistrate is "holy and just."³⁷ Viret believed that civil magistrates should exercise all their rightful authority, including execution of those warranting such punishment. On the need for true criminal justice, Viret wrote,

³⁴ Berthoud, Berthoud, "Pierre Viret and the Sovereignty of the Word of God," 97.

³⁵ Berthoud, "Pierre Viret: The Apologetics and Ethics of the Reformation," 36.

³⁶ Linder, *Political Ideas*, 83–84.

³⁷ Pierre Viret and John Calvin, *Thou Shalt Not Kill: A Plea for Life*, trans. Rebekah A. Sheats (Monticello, FL: Psalm 78 Ministries, 2016), 73.

The law truly shows us what danger men place themselves in—particularly rulers, judges, and their officers—when they leave known murderers and manslayers unpunished; or when they do not use such diligence as they ought in searching out and discovering them as they should; or when they flippantly show them mercy without a good or just reason to do so.³⁸

Despite recognizing civil government as a divine creation, Viret was very critical of the men who held positions as civil magistrates in his day.

Viret wrote that even though God had ordained the magistrate's office, nevertheless the magistrate was not beyond criticism for corrupt and unjust actions. He was never timid in denouncing kings and princes when they were clearly in the wrong, and he sometimes got in trouble for this sort of thing. He bluntly stated that kings and princes had no right to steal from peasants, and if they did, they should be treated as a peasant who is caught robbing a king. ... Viret was never awed by a prince merely because he bore a lofty title but considered him to be a mortal man like himself, as prone to error and sin as any other human being.³⁹

Viret denied, according to Linder, that any political model was inherently superior to the others. All these models gave one or more people the right, on their own terms, to rule over others. Instead, Viret argued that the law was king. One of the staples of his political theory was equality before the law between the governors and the governed: "Prince and magistrate must be subject to the laws of the land and conform their rule to them. For they are not rulers of the law but servants thereof, as they are servants of God from whom all good laws proceed."⁴⁰ His view was not a new concept, but, as Linder noted, "the idea was neglected during the late Middle Ages."⁴¹ Its rediscovery was short lived. If those who hold the levers of power do not have the heart or conscience to submit willingly to the law they administer to others, there is no sure mechanism for holding them accountable. Decentralizing authority and maximizing the number of checks and balances help, but enduring Christian conviction is truly what is necessary.

One reason why Viret may not have wanted to declare for one form of government over another, suggests Linder, is that he was much more sympathetic to a democratic model than would have been helpful to affirm in the world of the Magisterial Reformation, especially since he seemed to

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁹ Robert Linder, "Pierre Viret on War and Peace," *Calvin Theological Journal* 48.1 (April 2013): 128, referring to Pierre Viret, *Instruction chrétienne* (1564), 1:572–73, 583–87; *Traitez divers*, part 5:156–57; and *Le monde à l'empire et le monde demoniacle fait par dialogues*, 228–32.

⁴⁰ Berthoud, "Pierre Viret and the Sovereignty of the Word of God," 101, citing Viret from *Le monde à l'empire*, 91–92.

⁴¹ Linder, *Political Ideas*, 60.

affirm a similar model for both church and state. Linder writes, “Probably the most important feature of his thought on [civil government] was his personal preference for some sort of democratic republic.”⁴²

IV. What Viret Taught about Law and Civil Government

When Viret argued for law to govern in the civil realm, what law did he have in mind? In the preface to his *Instruction chrétienne*, Viret wrote, “My aim in this volume has been to produce an exposition of the Law of God, Law which must be regarded as the rule for every other law through which men are to be directed and governed.”⁴³ Viret’s comments about the role of God’s law in civil government speak into the ongoing debate regarding the differences between moral law and judicial law, and how we are to understand the relevance of old covenant judicial case law in Israel. This conversation is also tied in with the question of whether God’s law is necessary, or if some form of natural law is adequate for the realm of civil law and government. Some believe one can decide this question adequately in favor of God’s law with the help of better-known Reformers such as Calvin, but others believe that Viret makes a stronger case for the comprehensive authority of Scripture over every area of life, including the civil realm.

Berthoud has cited Viret as writing,

God has included in this Law every aspect of that moral doctrine by which men may live well. ... This Law stands far above all human legislation, whether past, present or future and is above all laws and statutes edicted by men. It follows that whatever good men may put forward has previously been included in this law, and whatever is contrary to it is of necessity evil. ... This law, if it is rightly understood, will furnish us with true Ethics, Economics and Politics.⁴⁴

More specifically, in terms of law, including punishment, Viret wrote,

God ... commands us to punish the transgressors of these commandments, be it by death or some other penalty according to what they deserve, whether they have transgressed the commandments of the first or the second table, as it appears by these laws: “He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed” (Ex. 22:20). ... The same is also commanded of blasphemers: “And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him ...” (Lev. 24:16). ... The Lord has done the same for the second table. For we have the laws which were given against

⁴² Ibid., 115.

⁴³ Berthoud, “Pierre Viret: The Apologetics and Ethics of the Reformation,” 33.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 33–34.

children who rebel against their parents, and against adulterers, those who commit incest, Sodomites, those who give false testimony, and murderers and manslayers, who by these laws are all judged and condemned to death (Lev. 20:9–16; 18:6–23; 24:19–22; Deut. 22:22–24).⁴⁵

Comparing Viret with Calvin, Berthoud writes,

It is enlightening to compare Viret's and Calvin's exegesis of specific texts. In his sermons on Deuteronomy, for example, we often find that Calvin, while not ignoring the detailed practical implications of the Mosaic law, nonetheless pays but scant attention to their application to the political and social problems of his time. He often rapidly passes from these practical ethical and social considerations to, in his eyes, more essential matters and goes on to draw out the doctrinal and spiritual implications of the text. Viret, on the other hand, while never minimizing the doctrinal aspect of his text, paid far more attention to the immediate literal meaning of the specific law under consideration and to its application for his own time. This may explain the fascination his preaching exercised even on those who were foreign to the Faith.⁴⁶

Viret was recognized for his particular expertise on civil governance and public ethics. At a formal public disputation between Protestants and Roman Catholics in the Pays de Vaud in 1536, ordered by the Council of Bern, where Calvin, Farel, and Viret all spoke, "worth noting was the fact that Viret's careful and skillful handling of the question of the relation of the civil magistracy to the true Church of God was seconded by both Calvin and Farel."⁴⁷

Viret's commitment to the comprehensive implications of the Law-Word of God and, through it, to the perpetual reign of Jesus Christ over mankind, does not put him neatly into any modern Reformed camps. He supported state funding of education.⁴⁸ His concerns over the economic exploitation of the poor by the wealthy do not carry a libertarian flavor. He supported civil adjudication of some offences found in the First Table of the Law such as idolatry. Some say he leaned in a congregationalist direction rather than Presbyterian.

Viret's ethical analysis and judgment covered a lot of ground: economics, the military, politics, the arts, and more.⁴⁹ On war, his comments brought into the present could fill a void left by the silence of today's Christian

⁴⁵ Viret and Calvin, *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, 71–72.

⁴⁶ Berthoud, "Pierre Viret and the Sovereignty of the Word of God," 102.

⁴⁷ Linder, *Political Ideas*, 25–26.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 103–4.

⁴⁹ Berthoud, "Pierre Viret: The Apologetics and Ethics of the Reformation," 34–35.

leadership. Viret did hold to a theory of just war, but he “considered ambition, avarice, covetousness, and corruption to be the fundamental causes of most wars. ... He was not willing to support any kind of politically inspired offensive war against another nation.”⁵⁰ Viret’s “conclusion was that peace was always to be desired over war and that every effort should be given to maintaining peace if possible.”⁵¹

Viret frequently spoke on money and wealth, condemning economic injustice. “Viret likened all parasitical rulers to bees who with their stingers tormented the poor people until they were bloody and raw.”⁵² In *Le monde à l'empire et le monde demoniacle fait par dialogues* (p. 156), he writes,

The greatest evil that can be imagined is when the public purse is impoverished and individual men wealthy. This is an evident sign that the commonwealth is in an unhealthy condition, that public policy is in weak and incapable hands and that the state is under the domination of thieves and bandits who make of it their prey.⁵³

According to Linder,

Viret singled out usurers as a special target for his attack on the corruption of riches. [He] censured those who loaned money solely for profit when there was no physical necessity and those who charged excessive rates of interest on legitimate loans ... and described the men who did this as those “who live off human flesh.”⁵⁴

Viret reportedly “demonstrated a lively interest in the welfare of the poor, the peasantry and the working class. ... However, he did not conceive of the state as a welfare agency but placed the responsibility for the care of the poor squarely upon the local church.”⁵⁵

A rarity today is clergy who speak to civil magistrates about taxation, but they are quick to urge Christians to do their duty of paying their taxes. Not so with Viret. He told Christians to pay their taxes, but he also

devoted much more space in his writings to warning secular authorities against excessive and illegal taxation. ... He was particularly sensitive about the *gabelle* and considered it immoral to tax an object so necessary to the diet of the average man as salt.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Linder, “Pierre Viret on War and Peace,” 125.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵² Linder, *Political Ideas*, 96.

⁵³ Berthoud, “Pierre Viret and the Sovereignty of the Word of God,” 104.

⁵⁴ Linder, *Political Ideas*, 100–101.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

A look at Viret's exposition of the sixth and ninth commandments⁵⁷ shows how detailed his analysis is and how comprehensive his application tends to be. He covers the implications of God's law for individuals, family relationships, the church, and the civil magistrate.

When it comes to murder, Viret does not simply tell individuals not to murder. He also warns civil magistrates about the dangers of dealing inadequately with such a crime.

The judge who does not punish those whom he is charged to punish by the commandment of God his sovereign Ruler and Lord, renders himself guilty not only of the crime which the criminal has committed, but also of all those that he afterward commits, and also of the crimes of others who impudently engage in evil-doing because they see that wicked men escape without receiving a punishment worthy of their crimes.⁵⁸

Viret also addresses killing in self-defense and does so far more carefully than most others who support this right. He warns that it is very easy to abuse the privilege of self-defense: "It is indeed difficult for a man to kill another out of self-defense—no matter how good a cause he might have—without mixing with it anger and wrath unworthy of a Christian man."⁵⁹

When Viret came to the ninth commandment, he considered not just lying, but also flattery, gossip, slander, and the extraction of testimony through torture. He explored motivations and considered effects.

Viret considers the spiritual realities surrounding deception. He begins his exposition of the commandment by considering truth and the nature of God.⁶⁰ He also says that there is "no vice by which man renders himself more like the devil than by lying."⁶¹

Viret also makes the point that the language of the commandment—bearing false witness—requires one to see a court of justice—a sphere of government—as the primary context for interpreting the full range of meaning. And false testimony given in a court is typically given under oath; such false testimony is thus also a violation of the third commandment.⁶²

⁵⁷ Pierre Viret, *Instruction chrétienne en la doctrine de la Loy et de l'Evangile et en la vraie philosophie et théologie, tant naturelle que surnaturelle des chrétiens* (Geneva, 1564). This book was published in three volumes; the third was never printed, but a section of it was published separately with the title *De la providence divine* (Lyon, 1565).

⁵⁸ Viret and Calvin, *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, 60.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁰ Pierre Viret and John Calvin, *Defend the Truth: A Conversation on the Ninth Commandment*, trans. R. A. Sheats (Monticello, FL: Psalm 78 Ministries, 2017), 9–13.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 19.

When it comes to the heart of the matter, Viret's consideration of false witnessing is very detailed. "There are four types of people who can greatly sin in such a matter. The first is the accuser; second, the defendant; third, the witnesses which are produced; and fourth, the judges."⁶³ He appeals to Scriptures such as Proverbs 19:5; 21:28; 6:16–19; and 25:18 as well as Deuteronomy 19:16–21, which says of a false witness, that "you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother ... life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."⁶⁴

Viret holds the civil magistrate to a high standard for combatting false witnessing, not even allowing him to quickly absolve himself with a claim of ignorance about the false witness. An appeal to ignorance is only acceptable, Viret says, "if no negligence, carelessness, or indifference exists on the judge's part, and if he has not sinned because he failed to properly investigate the matter as he ought to have done."⁶⁵

Viret's insightful view of Scripture enables him to see the moral law with its abiding obligations where others see merely temporal judicial application. After all, false witnessing receives very little time among today's Christians compared with the amount of commentary given to what one might call "issue-based" moral erosion. Do Christians today realize that they can bring at least as much biblical authority to bear against false witnessing and the judicial process that produces the issue-based decisions that they find so distressing?

Viret also understands the principle behind God's requirement with stoning that the witnesses cast the first stone. The principle is abiding, yet America has rejected this fundamental principle of justice with no outcry from Christians. Viret explains,

It is not without good reason that the Lord commanded in His Law that the witnesses who would be produced against a criminal must be the first to raise a hand against him in the execution of the sentence of the judge given according to their testimony (Deut. 17:7). For the Lord teaches us by this commandment that the witnesses must have as much fear of testifying falsely against the life of their neighbor as of wickedly murdering him themselves by their own hand; and that they must testify with such conscience as they themselves would desire to be judged and executed, seeing that they kill the person who is put to death because of their testimony.⁶⁶

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 29–30.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

These brief examples of Viret's ethics demonstrate his pastoral vision and ethical depth. He was a gospel minister with evangelistic zeal and a passion for justice that endeared him to his people.

V. What Viret Taught about Limits to Civil Government

Viret's life was also marked by his battle for the independence of the church from interference by the state. This was the same battle Calvin fought in Geneva and Farel in Neuchâtel. Viret's conflict was with the Council of Bern, which governed Lausanne. His refusal to back down to the demands of the Bernese officials led to their decision to banish him after twenty-two years pastoring the city of Lausanne.

Along with the other Reformers, Viret believed that the church should be sovereign in its sphere. During his long pastorate in Lausanne, he was constantly battling the Bernese magistrates over their insistence at having the final authority over several areas of church life, specifically the selection of church officers, access to the Lord's Supper, and the right of excommunication. Viret had a running battle with the Council of Bern for years, and eventually, they sent him into exile. The last straw was his refusal to administer the Lord's Supper in the days leading up to the Christmas of 1558 without being permitted to exercise the right first to examine those who wanted to participate in the meal. He wanted to exercise his rightful spiritual oversight of the souls of his parish. "Pastors," he stated, "must be allowed to enforce 'this discipline, by which we can distinguish between swine, dogs, and sheep, according to Christ's teaching.' ... [The] Word and the sacraments cannot be properly administered without it."⁶⁷

Furthermore, Viret's strong ethical orientation produced explicit and specific moral application in his sermons that got under the skin of those who came under conviction, including civil magistrates.

The sermon was his chief weapon in bringing spiritual and moral reform to Lausanne. ... His constant insistence upon a program of moral legislation and socially centered preaching appeared to grate on the nerves of the Bernese for on several occasions they censured him for an unduly severe moral emphasis in his preaching.⁶⁸

The Reformers tended to take a firm position on the maintenance of law and order as a key role of civil government. The Reformation period "was a world in political, religious and social upheaval. In periods of widespread

⁶⁷ Sheats, *Pierre Viret*, 167–68.

⁶⁸ Linder, *Political Ideas*, 34.

upheaval and unrest, the most valued political principle is usually that of order. Therefore, it is not surprising that Calvin, ... in Geneva, greatly valued and supported political order.”⁶⁹ Viret, too, “taught that the state operated to keep peace and order—two functions which he highly prized.”⁷⁰

In subsequent eras, therefore, analysts have wrestled over what, if any, room Reformed orthodoxy provides for defiance of civil government. Reformed Christians affirm that we must obey God rather than men, but they typically argue that those who do so should meekly accept the consequences. There is little evidence of a coherent theology of active resistance. Even in terms of the American War of Independence, it is easier to find Reformed Christians in the United States than abroad who accept that as a biblically defensible conflict. Linder notes the importance of this aspect of political theory by pointing out that resistance theory is “the key to understanding any theorist’s political bottom line.”⁷¹ He affirms that

Calvin did, in fact, allow for resistance in certain limited circumstances [when] lawfully-established inferior magistrates are available to lead the resistance against such despotism.⁷²

Viret also required the leadership of lesser magistrates for political resistance, but, according to Linder, he was “more bluntly qualified in his acceptance of the authority of the state than was Calvin.”⁷³ We have already seen that Viret had no fear of going head-to-head with civil magistrates over matters of justice for the oppressed and defense of the spiritual authority of the church. He called civil magistrates, “public criminals,” “ministers of the devil,” and “the head chiefs and captains of other criminals” when they engaged in unjust warfare and when, as judges, they released the guilty and punished the innocent.⁷⁴ Viret also asserted that “the only legitimate kingdoms with valid laws were those which had a legal code based upon the Ten Commandments of God.”⁷⁵

Linder notes that “Viret saw political order as an absolute necessity if true religion were to exist among humans,”⁷⁶ but that the Reformer also

⁶⁹ Linder, “John Calvin, Pierre Viret and the State,” 175–76.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Linder, “John Calvin, Pierre Viret and the State,” 177.

⁷⁴ Viret and Calvin, *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, 76, 80.

⁷⁵ Linder, *Political Ideas*, 63.

⁷⁶ Linder, “John Calvin, Pierre Viret and the State,” 177.

believed that the powers of the state were neither absolute nor transcendent. Indeed, his own life of ministry involved much conflict with civil magistrates. Viret's own views on resistance against tyrannical civil magistrates were formed in the fires of front-line conflict in Lausanne. It is true that he wrote that magistrates were like 'lieutenants of God' and that to avoid anarchy all governmental superiors should be given the obedience that is their due "by divine right."⁷⁷

Yet, he "denounced those people who took 'their princes for their law in matters of religion and conscience.'"⁷⁸ In fact,

it was in terms of his formulation of a Calvinist resistance theory that Viret made his greatest contribution to the limitation of state power. ... Viret, like Calvin and Theodore Beza, authorized the taking up of arms in defense of the Gospel only under certain conditions.⁷⁹

One of these conditions, as noted above, was that "resistance to secular government could be led only by duly constituted inferior magistrates who already possessed a measure of legitimate political authority."⁸⁰ The Lesser Magistrate Project is trying to raise awareness among today's American Christians about the biblical basis of this doctrine of interposition.⁸¹ They embrace Viret as a Reformer of similar vision. The organization seems to have little traction in Reformed circles today, where the doctrine of interposition is little known and carries marginal appeal. The outspoken leader of the movement and the founder of the Lesser Magistrate Project is a Lutheran pastor, Matthew Trehwella. Despite the fears many have over the very idea of resistance, respected Reformed leaders have continued to affirm it. Charles Hodge, a Presbyterian theologian and the principal of Princeton Theological Seminary in the mid-nineteenth century, affirmed that "the right of revolution is a sacred right of freedom. It is a right which, if Englishmen and Americans had not claimed and exercised, despotism had now been universal and inexorable."⁸² Linder goes so far as to say that

many of [Viret's] political ideas seem to be of greater importance and more significant for the development of modern democratic thought than do those of either Calvin or Beza. Even if his other contributions to the Reformation are ignored, his

⁷⁷ Ibid., citing Viret, *Instruction chrétienne*, 1:22.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 178.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ <https://lessermagistrate.com/>.

⁸² Charles Hodge, "President Lincoln," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 37.3 (July 1865): 452.

political theory recommends him as one of the most important of the early leaders of historic Calvinism.⁸³

Presenting Viret's pedigree on the doctrine of political resistance, Linder writes that "Viret expressed these ideas as early as 1547, seven years before the appearance of Beza's better known tract *De Haereticis a Civili Magistratu Puniendis*, fifteen years before the outbreak of the first war of religion in France."⁸⁴ Further time spent in the works of Viret may, indeed, lead to a different spirit among modern Reformed Christians.

Conclusion

Viret had a robust and much-needed biblical ethic for his day, and for ours, one confidently rooted in the law of God. Clarity on the scope of the true spiritual jurisdiction of the church and of the limited jurisdiction of the state, as well as a biblical understanding of resistance against civil magistrates, are long overdue developments for the modern church. This should especially be appreciated in our day, in which we see growing persecution of the church and continued confusion over the implications of the lordship of Christ over public life. These areas of doctrine stir much controversy in some branches of even the Reformed church, yet Viret, with his views, was broadly known—and used—as a peacemaker. In his practice as a leader and his doctrine, Viret could be of great help to the twenty-first century church on these much-neglected areas of thought and practice in today's Western church.

⁸³ Linder, *Political Ideas*, 92.

⁸⁴ Linder, "John Calvin, Pierre Viret and the State," 179.

John Calvin and Philip Melancthon's *Sum of Theology*

PAUL AND ALISON WELLS

Abstract

This preface to the French translation of Melancthon's *Sum of Theology* (*Opera Omnia* 9:847-50) was written by Calvin in 1546. It has been translated from the French by Alison Wells, introduced and annotated by Paul Wells. Our thanks to Paul Helm for suggesting this translation, to our knowledge the first time into English.

Introduction

In 1546 a French translation of Philip Melancthon's 1545 *Loci communes* was published in Geneva under the title *The Sum of Theology, or Common Places, revised and expanded for a last time by M. Philippe Melancthon*.¹ In his introduction, Calvin is careful to praise Luther's lieutenant, rather than pointing to fracture lines that existed between them, particularly on free will and predestination. Wulfert de Greef states, "This is surprising because later (1552), in a debate with Jean Trollet about predestination, it

¹ *La Somme de théologie, ou Lieux communs, revus et augmentez pour la dernière fois, par M. Philippe Melancthon*. Melancthon's work, which first appeared in 1521, was expanded through several editions, principally in 1535 and 1545 before its definitive version in 1559 a year before its author's death. The "last time" referred to in the French title is probably a sales pitch.

is quite clear that Calvin and Melanchthon did not agree in every respect.”² However, the lack of reference to these subjects is perhaps not all that surprising because of Calvin’s purpose in his preface. Bruce Gordon judges that Calvin’s aim was “to make the Wittenberg professor known to French readers as a godly teacher of the Church (and) to demonstrate that there was an agreed body of doctrine among the Protestant churches and that in addressing the French evangelicals Calvin spoke with the common voice of the wider Reformation.”³

It is certainly a mark of Calvin’s appreciation and magnanimity that he did not allow these differences on issues both men held to be central to mar a lifelong friendship, which began in October 1538 when they were put in contact by Martin Bucer.⁴ Calvin valued this friendship, even though at times Melanchthon’s advocacy of Luther and his subservience to him was to cause Calvin distress, particularly with regard to the doctrine of the real presence in the eucharistic controversies and Luther’s virulence on the subject. In the dedication to his commentary on Daniel, he described Melanchthon as “a man who, on account of his incomparable skill in the most excellent branches of knowledge, his piety, and other virtues, is worthy of the admiration of all ages.” From his side, Melanchthon called Calvin “The Theologian.”⁵ Their mutual esteem is witnessed to in the letters they exchanged, rather more from the Genevan side (14) than from Wittenberg (8). As Philip Schaff says, “Melanchthon was twelve years older than Calvin, as Luther was thirteen years older than Melanchthon. Calvin, therefore, might have sustained to Melanchthon the relation of a pupil to a teacher.”⁶

The two Reformers met three times in all, in Frankfurt (1539), Worms (1540), and Regensburg (1541). After the Colloquy of Regensburg, they did not see each other again, as Calvin had resumed his position in Geneva in September 1541 after a three-year absence. The following year Melanchthon suggested that Calvin reply to the Dutch theologian Albert Pighius, which

² Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 193. De Greef suggests that Calvin’s reference to Melanchthon’s “accommodation” (see the Preface below) is critical, whereas it can be interpreted as an appreciation of the Wittenberger’s sensitive approach to difficult issues.

³ Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 162. Melanchthon did not respond to the translation and, with no French, probably never read the text.

⁴ James T. Hickman, “The Friendship of Melanchthon and Calvin,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 38.2 (1976): 152–65. Cf. Clyde L. Manschreck, *Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 254–55.

⁵ Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, *Modern Christianity. The Swiss Reformation*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc8.iv.xi.vi.html>, 344 (344–54 are on Calvin and Melanchthon).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8:344.



PHILIP MELANCHTHON

1497-1560

Calvin did, dedicating his treatise *De Libero Arbitrio* to Melanchthon in February 1543.⁷ Melanchthon thanked Calvin for this gesture the following May: “I am much affected by your kindness, and I thank you that you have been pleased to give evidence of your love for me to all the world, by placing my name at the beginning of your remarkable book, where all the world will see it.”⁸

Calvin wrote this introduction to Melanchthon’s major work being fully aware of the difference in their approaches, particularly concerning the problem of divine foreordination and sin. In the first edition of the *Loci* in 1521 and his commentary on Romans three years later, Melanchthon had affirmed, like Luther in the controversy with Erasmus, that God does all things not *permissive*, but *potenter*, and that he foreordained free human acts.⁹ Later he equivocated, saying, “I maintain the proposition that God is not the author of sin, and therefore cannot will it. David was by his own will carried into transgression.”¹⁰ In spite of this difference, Calvin put his reservations behind him and wrote an exceptional introduction. Schaff comments, “This is the only example of a Reformer republishing and recommending the work of another Reformer, which was the only formidable rival of his own chief work on the same subject (the Institutes), and differed from it in several points.”¹¹

Calvin also had the final word in these fraternal exchanges at the height of the eucharistic controversy, two years after his friend’s death in April 1560, appealing to Melanchthon in a heartfelt prayer:

O Philip Melanchthon! I appeal to thee who now livest with Christ in the bosom of God, and there art waiting for us till we shall be gathered with thee to that blessed rest. A hundred times, when worn out with labors and oppressed with so many troubles, didst thou repose thy head familiarly on my breast and say, “Would that I could die in this bosom!” Since then I have a thousand times wished that it had been granted to us to live together; for certainly thou wouldst thus have had more courage for the inevitable contest, and been stronger to despise envy, and to count as nothing all accusations. In this manner, also, the malice of many would have been restrained who, from thy gentleness which they call weakness, gathered audacity for their attacks.¹²

⁷ Cf. note 18 below.

⁸ Schaff, *History*, 8:348.

⁹ In the 1521 edition of the *Loci* Melanchthon quotes a dozen texts and affirms that “since everything that comes about happens necessarily according to divine predestination, our will has no freedom” and then adds, “What else is Paul doing in Romans 9 and 11 except consigning everything that happens to divine predestination?” *Commonplaces: Loci Communes*, 1521, trans. Christian Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 65–66.

¹⁰ Quoted by Schaff, *History*, 8:349.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8:350.

¹² Calvin, *Opera* 9:461 quoted by Schaff, *History*, 8:354.

Preface to Melanchthon's *Summa*, 1546¹³

John Calvin, to the Readers,

If this book were being published in Latin, it would hardly be worth my while to give it a commendation at all; were I to do so, I would be opening myself to charges of impertinence and presumption. Its author is so reputed among learned people today that no one can fail to know him. As well as being renowned for his excellent erudition, he is also to be credited for referring to the writings of others, which is all the more reason for recommending his works. Since he is less well-known to those of our countryfolk who have not had the benefit of scholarly instruction, I thought it worthwhile, along with several of like mind, to inform readers that a great deal of fruit is to be gleaned from this book and to encourage them to study it thoroughly.

I will not comment here on the author, or on the extraordinary gifts with which he is blessed, graces for which he is worthy of being honored by all those who love the things of God. I will refer only to the book. As to its contents, it is a brief summary of the things Christians must know to guide them along the way of salvation. Here we find all we need to know of God; how we are to serve him; what we need to hold about Christ; why he was sent to us by his Father; the grace we receive through him; on what we are to found hope for our salvation; how we are to call on the name of the Lord; what true faith and repentance are; how we can be patient in adversity and where Christians can find true consolation; where we ought to discern the church; how it should be governed and who are its true leaders; what use the sacraments are and their administration; what our responsibilities are towards one another, to those in authority over us, to those in our charge, and to our equals. These are the things to which Christians should devote their lives, if they aspire to spend their time with beneficial teaching. All these issues are dealt with in this book, and presented in such a way that both young and old can receive useful instruction from it, as long as they come to it with a desire to learn.

What is praiseworthy is that this deeply learned author has not sought to indulge in subtle niceties, nor write with rhetorical grandeur as he could easily have done, but has simplified the material as much as possible, seeking only to edify his readers. We should all try to write in this fashion, apart from occasions when the specious arguments put forward by our adversaries

¹³ Hereafter follows John Calvin's Preface to the French translation of Philip Melanchthon's *Loci Communes*, in *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, ed. Baum, Cunitz, Reuss (Brunschwig: C. A. Schwetschke, 1870), 9:847–50.

constrain us to do otherwise. However, simplicity is the greatest quality in dealing with Christian doctrine. That is why the author has refrained from developing certain points in depth, even though they may warrant it.¹⁴ He has stuck to what is deemed necessary for salvation, leaving aside or omitting issues not absolutely essential, about which lack of knowledge or suspended judgment do not endanger the outcome, such as, for example, the question of free will. I am well aware that the presentation made here is insufficient to satisfy everyone.¹⁵ It would seem that human capacities are allowed too much latitude. The reason for this is that having dealt with the heart of the matter, the author prefers to pass on, and not to enter upon issues that are not essential to the salvation of believers. He takes it as given that human understanding is blind, so much so that our reason cannot lead us to God or knowledge of him, unless God enlightens us by the grace of his Holy Spirit. In the same way, our very will is perverse and distorted, so much so that it produces only wrong inclinations and rebellion against God and his justice, which are consequently displeasing to him, until the Holy Spirit renews our hearts.¹⁶ So we see that he takes God's grace alone to be the origin of any spiritual good in our salvation, and that man has nothing to glory in. He does, however, maintain that man has a certain freedom in what pertains to this earthly life, in waking and sleeping, going about the daily round, in working, studying, or business.¹⁷ Why? In limiting himself to the essential, he puts man at his true level by showing that of himself he can only stray away from God and sin, so falling into lostness, and that any capacity he has to do good is not his by nature, but only by the grace of God. That said, he sets limits to this freedom, which he calls civil liberty, maintaining that God continually rules from on high. There is not much to find fault with that. But it was important to point out to the reader what the author's intentions were, so no one take offense over a minor detail.

¹⁴ Calvin's trademark is simplicity and brevity.

¹⁵ Melancthon's formulations on the subject of free will are a good deal more rounded than the trenchant tone of Martin Luther's *De servo arbitrio* against Erasmus (1525). Calvin probably thinks Melancthon does not go far enough but refrains from explicit criticism.

¹⁶ In spite of Calvin's reservations, his moderate reaction is partly due to the fact that the essentials are secure—the total sinfulness of man and the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in renewal.

¹⁷ Freedom in terrestrial things was indicated by Luther in his argument against Erasmus, and not to be confused with man's incapacity in the spiritual realm, apart from regeneration. In the 1521 *Loci*, Melancthon distinguishes between internal and external freedom, *Common-places*, 76. Considered according to predestination there is no freedom in either domain, but if the will is considered according to external works, "natural judgment concludes that some freedom exists."

The same can be said for the question of predestination. Since today there are so many wayward spirits who seek only to satisfy their curiosity and who know no moderation, in an effort to forestall the danger, he prefers to deal only with what is necessary to be known, leaving further things in abeyance.¹⁸ Were he to fully develop this question, full rein would be given to a great deal of confused and bewildering debate, without fruit or edification. I maintain that nothing of what is revealed to us in Scripture must be held back, whatever be the case. However, anyone who desires to edify his readers should not be blamed for limiting himself to the things known to be the most useful, or for only touching on or leaving aside what he knows to be unprofitable.

When it comes to the sacraments, a sense of humility prompted him to add absolution as a third to baptism and the Lord's Supper.¹⁹ Since absolution commonly appears in this context, he has accommodated to common practice in a desire to avoid contention. Not that he ever intended to put absolution on the same level as baptism and the Lord's Supper and give it equal status, or to oblige Christians to observe it as if it were a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ. His intention was not to impose it, but rather to allow Christians to have recourse to it.²⁰ This can be seen clearly in the reason he gives. He considers it to be a good and useful practice, which is not, however, a sufficient reason for considering it to be a sacrament.

If readers keep the same sense of proportion in assessing this book as the writer has shown in writing it, all will be well, and nothing will prevent them from profiting greatly from reading it. But the problem is that many people today do not read books with a desire to learn, whatever they may be about, but rather seek to find something to attack. And if they are able to quibble over a single word, it acts as a stumbling block that prevents them from benefiting in any way at all. Then ignoring all the good in the book, they pride themselves in a way that causes their downfall. Even worse, the most ignorant are the most outspoken and critical. Others are so finicky that a single detail can put them right off, so much so that a single sentence that is not to their taste turns them away from the book as a whole, even though it may contain a great deal that they would be well advised to dwell upon.

¹⁸ Calvin replied in 1543 to the first six books of Albert Pighius, *Ten Books on Human Free Choice and Divine Grace* with his *De Libero Arbitrio*, English translation, *The Bondage and the Liberation of the Will*, ed. A. N. S. Lane, trans. G. I. Davies (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

¹⁹ Cf. Herman A. Spielman, *Melanchthon and Calvin on Confession and Communion: Early Modern Protestant Penitential and Eucharistic Piety* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

²⁰ Absolution for Calvin is related to the "power of the keys" and forgiveness through the preaching of the gospel, in contrast with the sacrament of absolution. Cf. John Calvin, *Institutes* 3.4.14–15 and 4.19.16.

It is no doubt a trick of the devil to turn them aside and stop them from receiving sound doctrine presented them. So those who would reap any profit from this book should cultivate a teachable spirit, putting aside anything that is an obstacle to progress, so that they might advance on the straight path that leads towards the pure truth of God, the only thing we are called to hold to, using those human means to help us reach that goal.²¹

²¹ Calvin likes to contrast the straight and narrow path of truth in Christ with wandering paths that are “stormy and uncertain.” Cf. for example, his commentary on Christ as unique mediator in *Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:5*, *Opera* 42:270.

Puritans on the Family: Recent Publications

JOEL R. BEEKE AND PAUL M. SMALLEY

Abstract

The Puritans are well known for their teachings on practical godliness, especially godliness in the family. This article reviews three selections from biblical commentaries, five portions of books, four booklets, and seven complete books by the Puritans on family life that have been reprinted recently. Full books reviewed include those by William Gouge, Richard Baxter, Daniel Rogers, Matthew Henry, George Hammond, and Dutch Further Reformation divine Jacobus Koelman. The article concludes with a full bibliography of Puritan works on the family, including early modern publications and more recent reprints.

Post *tenebras lux*—“After darkness, light.” In many ways, the Reformation of the sixteenth century was the breaking of divine light through clouds of darkness that had gathered over the church for centuries. The Reformers poured out their lives like oil into a lamp to shine the light of Holy Scripture across Christian belief and practice. By necessity, they focused their major writings upon the great doctrines of the gospel, summarized by the *solas*: Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, and the glory of God alone. When the Puritans arose in the latter half of the sixteenth century, they basked in this light and labored to bring it into practical application for all of human life and society. One area in which the Puritans excelled was the Christian family, and their writings on marriage and parenting continue to be republished today.

A number of classic Puritan writings on marriage and family were reprinted in the last century, including facsimile reprints of William Whately's two small books on marriage¹ and William Ames's book on *Conscience*, which contains several chapters on household life.² Richard Baxter's massive tome on Puritan ethics and spirituality, *A Christian Directory*, which we will mention again later in this paper, contains many directions for family life.³ The republication of *The Works of George Swinnock* brought forth the valuable *Christian Man's Calling*, with sections on conduct in the home.⁴ Furthermore, six volumes of *Puritan Sermons* preached at the Cripplegate Morning Exercises were reprinted; these include sermons by Richard Adams on the duties of parents and children, Thomas Doolittle on family prayer, and Richard Steele on the duties of husbands and wives.⁵

Though we are presently only eighteen years into the twenty-first century, twenty more Puritan works relevant to this topic have appeared in print. Let us introduce them, organizing them into categories for the sake of convenience.

I. Puritan Bible Commentaries

First, we must not pass by the commentaries by Puritans who expounded Scripture passages that set forth God's will for the family. Today people who talk about the Puritans tend to focus on their theological and practical treatises, but the Puritans produced major commentaries on Scripture, as the names Matthew Poole and Matthew Henry still bear witness today. When we think of extended biblical treatments of family life, our minds move quickly to Paul's epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians. Three

¹ William Whately, *A Bride-Bush or A Wedding Sermon* (1617; repr., Norwood, NJ: Walter J. Johnson, 1975); *A Care-Cloth or the Cumbers and Troubles of Marriage* (1624; repr., Norwood, NJ: Walter J. Johnson, 1975). I (Joel Beeke) gave this article as an address at the Evangelical Theological Society in Atlanta in November 2015 and wish to thank Paul Smalley for co-authoring it with me.

² William Ames, *Conscience with the Power and Cases thereof* (1639; facsimile repr., Norwood, NJ: Walter J. Johnson, 1975), 156–59, 196–211 (book 5, chapters 21–22, 35–38).

³ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), 1:394–493 (part II: Christian economics, chapters 1–22).

⁴ George Swinnock, *The Christian Man's Calling*, in *The Works of George Swinnock* (1868; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 1:464–528.

⁵ Richard Adams, "What Are the Duties of Parents and Children; and How Are They to Be Managed According to Scripture?," in *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 2:303–358; Thomas Doolittle, "How May the Duty of Daily Family Prayer Be Best Managed for the Spiritual Benefit of Every One in the Family?," in *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689*, 2:194–272; Richard Steele, "What Are the Duties of Husbands and Wives towards Each Other?," in *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689*, 2:272–303.

Puritan commentaries on those epistles have been reprinted in the twenty-first century.

Paul Bayne or Baynes (ca. 1573–1617) succeeded William Perkins as the preacher at Saint Andrews, Cambridge. Though not as well known today as Perkins, William Ames considered Bayne to have a double portion of the spirit of his Elijah-like predecessor. Bayne’s commentary on Ephesians, reprinted by Tentmaker Publications, gives twenty-seven large pages to the apostle’s instructions to wives, husbands, children, and parents.⁶ His comments are sometimes couched in quaint Elizabethan language, but they are full of doctrinal and practical observations. For example, commenting on Ephesians 5:28, Bayne says that the husband who does not love his wife tenderly, although she is one flesh with him, is like a man who eats his own liver or becomes his own hangman.⁷

Nicholas Byfield (1579–1622) died in his early forties after terrible suffering from kidney stones, but he published a number of prized books, including a commentary on Colossians reprinted by Tentmaker Publications in 2001.⁸ John Davenant (1572–1641) represented the Church of England at the Synod of Dort. He wrote a commentary on Colossians reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust in their Geneva Commentary Series. His commentary is rich in scholarship and devotes over forty pages to family duties.⁹ For example, Davenant warns that husbands must not treat their wives like maids or servants, but as friends and fellow rulers over the family—“the wife is to be subject to her husband, and directed by him; but as a companion, not a slave”—and specifically forbids husbands to physically strike their wives.¹⁰

Though we may not think of the Old Testament prophets as sources of teaching about the family, we mention the commentary by Richard Stock (ca. 1569–1626) on Malachi, also reprinted by Tentmaker, which contains twenty pages of exposition on the prophet’s rebuke of the sins of husbands against their wives (Mal 2:13–16).¹¹

We encourage scholars to give attention to Puritan commentaries on Scripture. Such expositions offer fertile fields for studies in early Reformed

⁶ Paul Bayne, *An Entire Commentary upon the Whole Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians* (1866; repr., Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker, 2001), 337–64.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁸ Nicholas Byfield, *An Exposition upon the Epistle to the Colossians* (1866; repr., Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker, 2007), 346–61.

⁹ John Davenant, *Colossians*, trans. Josiah Allport, A Geneva Series Commentary (1831; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 2:151–95.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:166–67.

¹¹ Richard Stock, *A Commentary upon the Prophecy of Malachi*, 168–91, in *Richard Stock and Samuel Torshell on Malachi and Richard Bernard and Thomas Fuller on Ruth* (1865; repr., Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker, 2006).

exegesis, hermeneutics, theology, Christian experience, and ethics. In their own time, these biblical commentaries were not the specialized domain of scholars and preachers but influenced all of society from family life to politics and legislation.

II. *Puritan Books with Sections on the Family*

Second, we would like to highlight five books reprinted in the twenty-first century that contain significant sections relevant to the family. The Puritans often used the Ramist method of dividing each topic into subtopics, analyzed into further divisions and subpoints. As a result, even a single chapter or sermon often contains a remarkably detailed exposition of its subject. We find such sections on marriage and parenting in books by two Scots, two ministers of the Church of England, and one English Separatist, all recently reprinted.

James Durham (1622–1658) was a Scottish Presbyterian pastor known for his humility and scholarship. Though he died at age 35, he produced an enormous amount of edifying theological writing. Of all the books written by Durham, probably the most popular was his *Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, now carefully edited by Christopher Coldwell and republished by Naphtali Press. While discussing worship under the Fourth Commandment, Durham’s treatment of family worship extends to sixteen pages.¹² He directs families to gather in the home to “pray, read, sing psalms,” discuss sermons, and have spiritual conversations, for in such times God sweetly draws near and reveals himself, and the knowledge of God is propagated and increased.¹³

Although the ministry of Thomas Halyburton (1674–1712), followed upon what many scholars would consider to be the end of the Puritan era, he was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Puritanism, so we include him here. His collected works have been reprinted by the James Begg Society in Scotland. In his book *The Great Concern of Salvation*, he ends with thirty-five pages on family religion. He said that making the home into a place of godliness and worship is a great evangelistic strategy: “It is the way for thee to win souls.”¹⁴

¹² James Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, ed. Christopher Coldwell (Dallas, TX: Naphtali, 2002), 221–36.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 232, 235.

¹⁴ Thomas Halyburton, “The Christian’s Duty, with Respect to Both Personal and Family Religion,” in *The Great Concern of Salvation*, in *The Works of Thomas Halyburton* (Aberdeen: James Begg Society, 2000–2003), 2:368–403.

The twenty-first century also saw the reprinting of an early English Puritan known as the “silver-tongued preacher,” Henry Smith (1560–1591). Among the collected sermons of Smith is *A Preparative to Marriage*, a thirty-five-page exposition of biblical teaching on matrimony that is full of wisdom and love.¹⁵ He said that for a husband, his wife is “like a little Zoar, a city of refuge to fly to in all his troubles (Gen 19:20).”¹⁶ Rebuking men inclined to be physically abusive to their wives, he asks, “Doth a king trample his crown?” (cf. Prov 12:4).¹⁷

Lewis Stuckley (1621–1687) ministered in the Church of England until ejected by the government on Saint Bartholomew’s Day in 1662. His book, *A Gospel Glass*, recently reprinted by Ebenezer Publications, is an aid to self-examination with regard to a wide variety of sins. It contains a searching section of fourteen pages on family relationships.¹⁸ For example, Stuckley asks wives if they gossip about their husbands’ flaws more than they publicly praise their graces.¹⁹

Lastly in this category, we would note the republication by Sprinkle of the *Works* of English separatist John Robinson (1576–1625), the revered pastor of the Pilgrims in the Netherlands before they went to the New World on the Mayflower. His *Essays* contain two short pieces on marriage and child-rearing.²⁰

For scholars desiring to locate chapters in Puritan books on a particular subject, let us commend the use of the electronic library catalog for Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.²¹ Our librarians have keyed in not only the titles of each book, but also the chapter headings, which makes for unusually fruitful keyword searches. In the advanced keyword search, you can specifically target books in the Puritan Research Center, limiting your search to primary works by the Puritans.

¹⁵ Henry Smith, *A Preparative to Marriage*, in *The Works of Henry Smith* (repr., Staffordshire: Tentmaker, 2002), 1:5–40.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:27.

¹⁸ Lewis Stuckley, *A Gospel Glass: Representing the Miscarriages of Professors, Both in Their Personal and Relative Capacities* (1852; repr., Grand Rapids: Ebenezer, 2002), 169–83.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

²⁰ John Robinson, “Of Marriage,” and “Of Children and Their Education,” in *New Essays, Or Observations Divine and Moral, in The Works of John Robinson*, ed. Robert Ashton (1851; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 2009), 1:236–50.

²¹ See the Cornerstone University Library Network (<http://eaglelink.cornerstone.edu/>), a database shared by Cornerstone University, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, and Kuyper College.

III. *Puritan Booklets Pertinent to Family Life*

Third, let us bring to your attention a few booklets relevant to family life recently reprinted from Puritan sources. These are all short, helpful pieces published by Soli Deo Gloria, now an imprint of Reformation Heritage Books.

Arthur Hildersam (1563–1632), though largely forgotten today, was a powerful preacher often persecuted for his refusal to conform to the demands of church and state. His booklet, *Dealing with Sin in our Children*, is an excerpt from a massive folio volume containing 152 sermons on Psalm 51.²² Given David’s statement that he was conceived in his mother’s womb in a state of sin (Ps 51:5), parents should recognize that they have passed original sin to their children and strive to lead their children to salvation by the use of their authority, instruction, example, arrangements for schooling, work, marriage, and, most of all, prayer.

Edward Lawrence (1623–1695) is the author of *Parent’s Concerns for the Unsaved Children*, based on Proverbs 17:25, “A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.”²³ He wrote instructions for parents and an appeal to wayward children, with his heart heavy with grief for two of his own children who continued to live in rebellious folly.

The last two booklets both come from the pen of Cotton Mather (1663–1728), the warm-hearted but prolix pastor from Boston, Massachusetts. *A Family Well-Ordered* sets forth the responsibility of parents to raise their children in God’s ways, and the responsibility of children to honor their parents.²⁴ He taught parents to pray, “Lord, give unto my child a new heart, a clean heart, a soft heart, and a heart after Thy own heart.”²⁵ Mather’s other booklet is *Help for Distressed Parents*, in which he cites the book by Edward Lawrence just mentioned.²⁶ Mather offers comfort to the parents of wayward children, calls them to self-examination, and directs them to keep talking to their children about Christ and not give up.

²² Arthur Hildersam, *Dealing with Sin in Our Children*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2004).

²³ Edward Lawrence, *Parent’s Concerns for Their Unsaved Children*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2003).

²⁴ Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered: Or, An Essay to Render Parents and Children Happy in One Another*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2001).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁶ Cotton Mather, *Help for Distressed Parents*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2004). For his citation of Lawrence, see p. 6.

IV. *Puritan Books on Marriage and Family*

Fourth, let us consider entire books by the Puritans that address Christian marriage or parenting. Seven have been reprinted in the twenty-first century.

One of these books appears in two significantly different forms, the treatise by William Gouge (1575–1653) on the duties of husbands, wives, children, and parents—probably the premier Puritan treatise on the subject. Gouge and his wife Elizabeth had thirteen children, eight of whom lived to adulthood. His book, *Of Domesticall Duties*, was edited by Greg Fox and reprinted by Puritan Reprints in a single large volume of over five hundred pages.²⁷ This reprint stays close to the seventeenth-century edition and thus is a valuable resource for scholarly study, though it omits Gouge’s original marginal citations. The same book was more thoroughly revised and modernized by Scott Brown and me (Joel Beeke) and published by Reformation Heritage Books under the title *Building a Godly Home*. It appears in three volumes with these subtitles: (1) *A Holy Vision for Family Life*, (2) *A Holy Vision for a Happy Marriage*, and (3) *A Holy Vision for Raising Children*.²⁸ While remaining true to Gouge’s words, this modernized version aims to make him more accessible to readers, defines difficult words, and omits a few sections that may no longer be relevant.²⁹

The first part of Gouge’s book consists of an exposition of Ephesians 5:21–6:9. While addressing the responsibilities of each member of the household, Gouge also presents a beautiful exposition of the redeeming work of Christ for his church. For example, he exults, “In that the person of Christ, God-Man, was given up, I gather that the price of our redemption is of infinite value. Neither Christ, nor God Himself could give anything greater. Heaven and earth and all things in them are not of similar worth.” This gives hope to sinners: “What place can be left for despair in those that know and believe the worth of this ransom?”³⁰

The second part of Gouge’s book contains an exhaustive treatment of the duties of husbands and wives. Gouge stresses that each spouse must be concerned about performing his or her own duties regardless of whether

²⁷ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, ed. Greg Fox (1622; repr., Pensacola: Puritan Reprints, 2006).

²⁸ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Scott Brown, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013–2014).

²⁹ The largest omission from *Building a Godly Home* is Gouge’s exposition and application of Paul’s instructions to masters and servants (Eph 6:5–9).

³⁰ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 1:57; cf. *Domesticall Duties*, 34.

one's spouse is performing his or her duties. Husbands must love their wives as Christ loves the church no matter how their wives treat them; wives must respect and show submission to their husbands no matter how their husbands treat them. For each virtue required by God, Gouge also sets forth the contrary vice to be avoided. Regarding adultery, though ancient customs and medieval traditions tended to make a woman's adultery a worse crime than a man's, Gouge resolutely insisted that God's Word condemns adultery equally in either case.³¹ Throughout, his emphasis is on love: "A loving mutual affection must pass between husband and wife, or else no duty will be well performed."³²

The third part of Gouge's book develops the mutual responsibilities of parents and children. He examines cases of conscience regarding how a child should honor his parents even if he disagrees with them. As with marriage, he insists that the "fountain" of all right behavior between parents and children is love.³³ He warns parents against extremes in correcting their children. On the one hand, they should not pamper them and fail to correct their sins so that they run ahead into wickedness; on the other hand, they must not correct them with excessive severity so that their minds are dulled, and their hearts hardened. What is excessive correction? Gouge says it is correction for no fault, correction administered in anger and fury, correction that treats young and tender children as if they were older and extremely obstinate, correction for every little thing done wrong, or correction that physically injures the child.³⁴

Another recent reprint worthy of our attention is *The Godly Home*, by Richard Baxter (1615–1691), published by Crossway.³⁵ At the beginning of this paper, we mentioned Baxter's *Christian Directory*. This reprint is a substantial (200-page!) excerpt from it, edited by Randall Pederson. Though Baxter deviated from the orthodox Reformed view of the atonement and justification by faith, his practical writings have been greatly treasured through the centuries. His book is a compilation of "directions" to husbands, wives, parents, and children outlining their duties to one another and indicating what their motives should be in doing them.

One notable feature of the book is a chapter of forty pages containing twenty arguments why families should practice regular worship or devotions

³¹ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:41; cf. *Domestical Duties*, 159.

³² Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:48; cf. *Domestical Duties*, 163.

³³ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:84; cf. *Domestical Duties*, 362.

³⁴ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:144–46; cf. *Domestical Duties*, 407–8.

³⁵ Richard Baxter, *The Godly Home*, ed. Randall J. Pederson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

together in their homes.³⁶ Baxter argues that God created the family, owns it as his institution, and rules over it, and therefore each family owes him its worship.³⁷ God revealed his will that the family be dedicated to his worship by his command to Abraham to circumcise his household (Gen 17), by instituting the Passover as a sacred meal in each household (Exod 12), by his promise that when the Spirit is poured out, “every family apart” will mourn over the death of Christ (Zech 12:10–14), and by the salvation of entire households in the Book of Acts.³⁸ Baxter also points out that the Bible commands heads of households to teach God’s Word to those under their authority and care, and commends those that do so (Gen 18:18–19; Deut 4:9; 6:7; 11:18–21; Prov 22:6; Eph 6:4; 2 Tim 1:5, 3:15).³⁹ And he makes many more arguments besides.

Though we may not agree with Baxter on all points, the wisdom and balance of his 340-year-old directions are amazing. For example, he says that parents must not treat young children as either equals or servants, but as their dearly loved children. Children are thinkers, and if they only fear your anger, then “fear will make them liars as often as a lie seems necessary to their escape.” However, if they see that “you dearly love them and that all your commands, restraints, and corrections are for their good,” then they will “obey you more willingly,” even in your absence.⁴⁰ Another example is Baxter’s instructions for “sports and recreations.” He commends activity for children that serves “their health and cheerfulness,” particularly stating that whatever “exercises their bodies is best.” However, he warns against activities that hinder their schoolwork and chores or tempt them to greed and gambling.⁴¹ These are but samples of Baxter’s book.

Daniel Rogers (1573–1652) wrote a treatise based on Hebrews 13:4, titled *Matrimonial Honor*, which was recently retypeset and republished by Edification Press.⁴² Rogers was the son of the more famous Richard Rogers, author of the book of practical divinity, *Seven Treatises*, and a very large commentary on Judges. Like Gouge and Baxter, the younger Rogers expounds the mutual duties of spouses, the specific duties of husbands, and the specific duties of wives. He concludes with sobering warnings of God’s judgment against fornicators and adulterers, and an exhortation to sexual

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 57–97.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 67–69.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 72–73.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁴² Daniel Rogers, *Matrimonial Honor* (1642; repr., Warrenton, VA: Edification, 2010).

purity. To those feeling the guilt of their sexual sins, Rogers urges earnest faith in Jesus Christ and broken-hearted repentance toward God:

Will God judge adulterers? Stoop [bow down] then at his bar; he can save or destroy Here is a judge that can damn you to hell forever! ... Go on, be earnest with God to give you a glimpse of hope in the Lord Jesus, who was made all sin ... and has satisfied the wrath of this judge, that he might say, Deliver him, I have accepted a ransom Beg of the Lord to turn a terrified heart into a melting one; that it is, which mold an unclean soul, to a clean and chaste one.⁴³

This exhortation reminds us that the Puritans addressed practical and ethical matters in light of the gospel. Eternity weighed heavily upon their minds. They dealt with the mundanities of household life, but always with an eye on judgment day, hell, and heaven.

This same spiritual emphasis appears in another, smaller book reprinted by Edification Press, *An Antidote Against Discord between Man and Wife*, whose author we know only by the initials D. B.⁴⁴ The Antidote diagnoses the root problem of marital conflicts as the inward corruption of original sin, especially inordinate self-love and pride.⁴⁵ The author proceeds to describe in very practical terms how the fallen heart of man rages with sinful anger. However, his solution is not a mere list of how-tos but the call to put sin to death by the grace of the gospel. He says that you cannot put sin to death unless “thou art engrafted into Christ by faith,” for only then do you have the Spirit of God to enable and empower you to fight against indwelling sin.⁴⁶ He goes on to give a dozen directions about overcoming sinful anger, adding that all reformation must be rooted in Christ.

Matthew Henry (1662–1714) is best known for his commentary on the Bible. He also wrote four treatises recently reprinted by Christian Focus Publications under the title *Family Religion*.⁴⁷ The first three treatises are *A Church in the House*, *The Catechising of Youth*, and *Christ’s Favour to Little Children*. In the last of these, Henry at one point directly addresses children, saying that “the Lord Jesus Christ has a tender concern and affection for you; and that he has blessings in store for you, if you apply yourselves to him, according to your capacity Has he thus loved you, and will not you

⁴³ Ibid., 342–43.

⁴⁴ D. B., *An Antidote Against Discord Between Man and Wife* (1685; repr., Warrenton, VA: Edification, 2013).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 13–15.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁷ Matthew Henry, *Family Religion: Principles for Raising a Godly Family* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2008).

love him?”⁴⁸ The entire second half of the book is a treatise on baptism, where Henry shows himself true to his Reformed, covenantal tradition.

George Hamond (ca. 1620–1705), an English Presbyterian minister and schoolteacher, wrote a book in answer to the question, “Upon what Scripture-grounds and reasons may family-worship be established and enforced?”⁴⁹ Soli Deo Gloria has republished it as *The Case for Family Worship*.⁵⁰ Hamond draws upon the examples of Abraham, Job, Joshua, the Lord Jesus Christ (with his disciples as his spiritual family), and Cornelius to argue that family worship is an important preparation for public worship on the Lord’s Day.

Finally, we have to slip in a book from the Dutch Further Reformation, a movement parallel to and influenced by English Puritanism. The Dutch Reformed Translation Society has overseen the translation of a number of Further Reformation works into English, including *The Duties of Parents* by Jacobus Koelman (1632–1695).⁵¹ This book contains 282 concisely stated principles about rearing children in the Lord, many of which cannot be found in any other books. One striking aspect of the book is Koelman’s sensitivity to child development, adjusting expectations according to the child’s age.

Conclusion

Puritan writings on the family arose out of the conviction that God’s Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps 119:105). Recent reprints of these books demonstrate that the Puritans were indeed burning and shining lights, and their treatises still shine for us today (cf. John 5:35). There is no denying that their language is quaint—four or five centuries make for many changes in the English language. There is also no denying that the Puritans wrote as people of their own culture, sometimes revealing the blind spots of British and European minds in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, the Puritan expositions and treatises on family life are rich with biblical and practical insights, some of which are seldom found in more modern books. We hope that this brief survey whets your appetite to “take up and read.”

⁴⁸ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁹ George Hamond, *A Discourse of Family-Worship* (London: John Lawrence, 1694), title page.

⁵⁰ George Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship*, ed. Don Kistler (Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria, 2005). The twelfth chapter in this book is not the work of Hamond, but of Matthew Barker, and was originally an appendix.

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INTERVIEW

Interview with Peter Opitz

PETER A. LILLBACK

(May 2017)

PETER LILLBACK: *Please tell us who you are and what you do here at the University of Zurich.*

PETER OPITZ: My name is Peter Opitz, I am professor of church history and the history of theology from the Reformation to the present at the University of Zurich. I studied theology and philosophy in Bern, Zurich, and Tübingen. I am also the director of the Institute for Swiss Reformation Studies, which has as its primary focus, as the name says, on the studies of the Reformation and the sources of the Swiss Reformation. I teach church history; one of my focuses is the sixteenth century, but I also teach on the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries.

PL: *Are you ordained to preach?*

PO: Yes, I am an ordained minister of the Bernese church, and I worked for five years in the rural parts of Bern as a pastor. I do not have time now to do a lot of work in the parish, but I regularly preach in several churches here in Zurich and outside of Zurich.

PL: *Which book of the Bible is your favorite to preach from?*

PO: My favorite books to preach from are the writings of the apostle Paul, but also the Gospel of John. Preaching is very important for me.

PL: *How did you become interested in the Reformation, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and Heinrich Bullinger?*

PO: The way I became interested in the Reformation is a little strange. It

was the idea of my doctoral mentor. At the end of my studies, one professor told me, “You must write a dissertation. Think about what you would like to write.” I had a proposal, and he listened and said, “It is an interesting proposal, but I have another one. Please write something about Calvin.” This is how I came into Reformation studies.

PL: *What is distinct about the German-speaking Swiss Reformed tradition as it compares with the French-speaking Swiss Reformed church?*

PO: This question is challenging. Zwingli and Bullinger have shaped the German-speaking part of Switzerland very much; by contrast, the French-speaking part of Switzerland was more shaped by Calvin.

PL: *How have Zwingli and Bullinger influenced this area?*

PO: They were the founders of the Reformation; the idea came from Zwingli and Bullinger. The Swiss Reformation is complicated because Switzerland did not exist at that time. It was an *Eidgenossenschaft*, a confederation where each canton was independent. So, the Reformation spread from Zurich to different places, but each place had to decide about the Reformation and had its independent Reformation. The ideas of Zwingli were crucial, and where the Reformation was adopted in Switzerland, it was on the basis of Zwingli’s ideas—also in French Switzerland. However, the Swiss and Southern German Reformers were independent intellectuals, and they followed Zwingli (as well as Luther) only insofar they became convinced that his ideas were confirmed by Scripture. But quite often, this was the case.

PL: *What role do the traditional Reformation confessions of faith play today in the contemporary Swiss churches? Are they binding, guiding, or no longer important? Why is this so?*

PO: Today the confessional texts or confessions of faith are of no importance in the Swiss Reformed churches. To understand this, we have to look at the history of our churches. In the nineteenth century, we had a lot of polemics between different theological factions, between pastors and church members and parishes. To simplify, there was a liberal party and a more conservative party that wanted to stick to the confessions. The church was very close to breaking into different churches. To avoid this, the churches agreed about 1870 that the confessions are no longer binding and mandatory, and so we now have room for different ways of understanding Christianity: from very liberal to more conservative, traditional ways.

PL: *What impact does the theology of Karl Barth play on the theology of the*

contemporary Reformed churches in Europe? Was Professor Barth, in your opinion, a faithful proponent of orthodox Reformed theology or a representative of a more modern liberal Protestant theology?

PO: Many more conservative Reformed Christians consider Barth as a liberal, probably because he made a distinction between the Bible as God's Word and God's word "proper," which in his view could only be a living act of God (God's Spirit), speaking to people in a specific moment. Others like Paul Tillich call him a neo-orthodox theologian because Barth believed in the incarnate Son of God, the virgin birth, and the bodily resurrection.

However, Barth's intention was to face the Bible criticism of his time by accepting that the Bible as a collection of texts is a document of men's religious history, depending on many other sources, and insisting at the same time, that the living God himself speaks through the text of the Bible even today. His paradigms are the prophets of the Old Testament and their witness: "Thus says the Lord ..." In a time in which more or less all theologians and church leaders followed Schleiermacher and were of the opinion that human "religion" is more important than the biblical witness of Christ, Barth learned from the Reformers and pointed to the God who speaks his own word to humans and is critical of human "religion" which is often not much more than idolatry.

In our European context in which most of the leading theologians are still pupils of Schleiermacher and tend to transform the Christian faith into a general religious feeling almost without any content (in order to keep on board in the traditional mainline churches as many people as possible), Barth is an important witness to the God of the Bible.

I have read his entire *Church Dogmatics*; I do not agree with every aspect, and I will not comment on his personal life, but I believe that he is worthy of being read seriously because he always points in a thoughtful way to the core of Christian faith.

PL: *What impact does the International Calvin Congress have on scholarly research today? Will you be attending the 2018 Congress that will be held at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia?*

PO: For me, the International Congress on Calvin Research is an excellent opportunity to exchange thoughts among Reformed theologians and historians from all over the world. I was delighted to be the host of this conference three years ago in Zurich, and I will attend the next conference in Philadelphia. I am also a board member of the Calvin Conference, so I am among those who prepare it.

PL: *In this Reformation year as we celebrate Martin Luther's Reformation, what impact did Luther have on Zurich, Zwingli, and the Reformed churches led by Calvin?*

PO: I could give a lecture about this, not only one hour but a whole semester! For the Germans, Luther is an essential figure, but not so much for other countries. Here in Switzerland, we had our own Reformation, and the starting point of the Reformation in Switzerland is Zwingli here in Zurich. Zwingli did read Luther, but selectively. He took over some ideas with which he agreed and felt that he had a companion in Luther; he disagreed in other places and refuted part of what Luther said, but he did not have the same problems as Luther. So, at some points, he simply ignored what was very important for Luther. You can say that the Reformation in Switzerland was independent of Luther but not entirely without knowledge of Luther's writings and his impact.

PL: *What, in your opinion, were the most significant contributions of Zwingli to the Protestant Reformation?*

PO: In my view, Zwingli did contribute a lot to the Reformed movement as a whole. He was the pioneer and founder of Reformed Protestantism all over the world. It is historically and theologically wrong to start Reformed theology with Calvin, as Calvin owed a lot to Zwingli. Unlike Calvin, Zwingli did not have so much time to write dogmatics because he died quite early, but the fundamental insights of Reformation Protestantism Calvin owed to Zwingli and Zwingli's direct pupils and friends like Heinrich Bullinger, Martin Bucer, Wolfgang Capito, and Guillaume Farel.

PL: *How did Zwingli's theology and goals for the Reformation differ from Luther's?*

PO: Zwingli's theology differs significantly from Luther's. Of course, he agreed with Luther on the central point that we are saved by grace alone. But Luther was a monk. His main question was, How can I be saved as an individual? Zwingli was not a monk, but as a priest he was among the people. His concern was, How can the people of Switzerland as a whole be saved? How can the Swiss people who call themselves a Christian people become a real Christian country? And this means that his gospel has a public, political aspect. The life not only of the individual believer but also of the community was vital for Zwingli, more than for Luther. Zwingli lived here in Switzerland, where the political structure was different: for example, there were no monarchs, but councils and people elected to councils. So, he put some democratic and republican elements into theology—which

means that his eyes were sharpened to detect the roots of “Congregationalism” or “Presbyterianism” in the New Testament. It was clear for Zwingli that the church must be built from the bottom up, not the top down. It was much more the case than with Luther. And so, we do not have bishops, and the idea of synods or presbyteries stem originally from the Zurich Reformation.

PL: *What, in your opinion, were the similarities and differences between Calvin and Zwingli, and between Calvin and Bullinger?*

PO: Basically, the Reformed tradition was not a tradition with one main thinker, like the Lutheran tradition, with Luther as the source of doctrine. The Swiss Reformed tradition has Zwingli, but there are also other thinkers. It was a communal Reformation also theologically. Calvin shared many fundamental ideas with Zwingli and even more with Bullinger. As to the most controversial issue, the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, Calvin agreed with the Reformed doctrine and not with Luther, however, he tried to integrate in his doctrine more aspects of Luther’s doctrine than Zwingli had done.

But Calvin also made a vital contribution to the Reformed tradition that went beyond what was possible for the Zurich Reformation. Because the Zurich Reformation was an urban Reformation, politics and the church were very close. For Zwingli and Bullinger, the city council, all Christians, are allowed to function as the church council at the same time. However, they invented the synod. For Calvin, it was different: Calvin was from France, where the Protestants were persecuted. He took some elements from the Zurich tradition but constructed a church order that distinguished more sharply between political government and church government. A system that caused many controversies in Geneva but could also be upheld in an environment where the church was independent of the government. It became the Presbyterian tradition, organized independently from the state. As a consequence, Calvin’s doctrine of church government was and still is suitable for the whole world, even in countries where Protestants were and are a minority.

PL: *Tell us about the Reformation treasures that are still to be investigated in the archives at the University of Zurich.*

PO: In Zurich, we have a lot of sources, real treasures from the sixteenth century. Many of them are not yet edited, and this is why my small Institute for Swiss Reformation Studies exists! We should make these resources available. We are a small team and do what we can, and we invite researchers to

Zurich. Academics from the United States, Japan, Korea, and Germany come here and work. Particularly in the middle of the sixteenth century, Zurich was a European center of theological thought. Bullinger, Zwingli's successor, was then the main pastor here. His correspondence is the most extensive we have from the sixteenth century, larger than Luther's, Erasmus's, and Calvin's together! We are still working on it very slowly, but there are unique resources here.

PL: *Why did Zwingli fight the Catholics in his efforts to advance the Reformation? What happened at the first and second battles of Kappel?*

PO: One thing that almost everyone knows about Zwingli is that he died on a battlefield. It is not a very good thing, of course, for a Reformer who wanted to spread the gospel to die on a battlefield, and I always have to explain why it happened. In short, the Reformation was a movement that spread rapidly in Switzerland, but there was also a lot of resistance because reforming the church had implications for political power and revenue. The Catholic cantons wanted to suppress the Reformation. They killed Protestant preachers and forbade the preaching of the gospel in their territories. They threatened the Protestant cantons with military force and made contracts with Catholic neighbors, bishops, and the Hapsburgs. Zwingli on the other hand desired to have the gospel preached all over Switzerland and wanted the people to decide if they wanted to join the Protestant movement or to remain Catholic. A disputed issue were the "Gemeine Herrschaften" (common principalities): some territories were ruled in common by different Swiss cantons in alternance. Every two years, the ruler changed. So, in the period Zurich was in charge, most people of these territories wanted to join the Reformation and appointed Protestant preachers for their villages. Two years later, for instance, the Catholic Schwyz became the ruler of this area and threatened to convert the people back to Catholicism by force and to burn their Protestant preachers. Of course, these rural areas called Zurich for help and Zurich was in a dilemma. Understandably, it was a very tough situation.

It is important to be aware that in the sixteenth century, religion could not be separated from economics, politics, and culture. Everything was mingled together, and so a reformation of the church meant a reformation of the whole society. In the eyes of Zwingli, it was self-defense to use military means to defend the Reformed region. Luther did not have this problem because the political authorities supported his Reformation, and when his followers had to go to war (1546), he was already dead.

PL: *What is the difference between the first battle and the second battle of Kappel? One seemed to be peaceful and the other deadly. Why was that? Would you say that at the first battle of Kappel, they actually said, “We do not want to fight” and sat down for the celebration, and the second battle was deadly, and Zwingli died?*

PO: The first battle in Kappel in 1529 ended peacefully indeed; it ended up in a political agreement. The two armies agreed on the kind of a peace deal and ate the so-called “Kappel soup” as a sign of peace. However, the content of this agreement was very unclear, and Zwingli already perceived that this was not a lasting solution: As soon as the Catholic party was militarily strong enough, it came back. This was exactly what happened in the second battle of Kappel in 1531. The Catholics took Zurich by surprise, and there was a real battle, in which Zwingli died, as did many Zurichers, including pastors.

PL: *Do you think the Reformation still has relevance for contemporary culture, given all the changes in the world like technology and postmodern values? What relevance does the Reformation have?*

PO: In my view, the Reformation is very relevant today, not only because hundreds of millions of people in the world are Reformed or Protestant, but as a way to understand and practice Christianity. The Reformation had a form of practicing Christianity which could adapt to different cultures, which also can adapt to modernity. We see that one of the problems of the Roman Church is that the structure stems from centuries ago. In the time of the early church, every structure was hierarchical. The Protestant movement was a kind of democratic republican movement. Christians are part of a community, and the community is the important thing. We have no sacred places or practices because God is everywhere and not bound to a particular place or rite. And this core belief of Protestant Christianity makes Protestantism very flexible and enables Protestant Christians to live in every culture. But there is also a more theological answer: The Reformation puts the living God in Christ into the center of the Christian belief and way of life, and this is always very relevant as long as we call ourselves Christians!

PL: *Is there anything else you would like to address, maybe about the University of Zurich and its theological program or Bullinger’s archives or anything else that may be on your mind about your work here?*

PO: Yes, maybe I could say something in relation to Westminster. We in Zurich have a long tradition; we have a lot of texts and sources in our archives, and we invite people to come here and to do research. We are at the same time, of course, in a very secular country; so, we are thrilled when

we can be in touch and have exchanges with other Christians and with other Christian institutions for which the Reformation is important both historically and theologically.

Book Reviews

Robert Sherman. *Covenant, Community, and the Spirit: A Trinitarian Theology of the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015.

Covenant, Community, and the Spirit is the second installment of a projected trilogy by Robert Sherman focusing on the Triune God's work in creation, redemption, and the church. It follows on his *King, Priest, and Prophet: A Trinitarian Theology of Atonement* (2004). Sherman was professor of Christian Theology at Bangor Theological Seminary, a theological college of the United Church of Christ, until the closing of that institution in 2014.

As in *King, Priest, and Prophet*, Sherman's point of departure is the patristic adage *opera ad extra trinitatis indivisa sunt* ("the external works of the Trinity are undivided") brought to bear on the Spirit's primary area of activity, the church. After two introductory chapters on the irreducibly communal nature of humanity and the Holy Spirit's particular role in relation to the Father and the Son, Sherman devotes one chapter each to the biblical motifs of body of Christ, people of God, and temple of the Holy Spirit. A final chapter draws these themes together, showing how the dynamic character of each contributes in grounding the church in God's action in the past, while at the same time orienting her to the eschatological future of God's eternal kingdom.

The chapters developing the different biblical expressions each focus on the work of a particular person of the Trinity: the body of Christ focuses on the Son's activity, the people of God on the Father's, and the temple of the Holy Spirit on the Spirit's. This is perhaps Sherman's most original contribution: because the outward works of the Trinity are undivided and yet distinct, one can profitably explore how the Spirit works out, in the church, those aspects of salvation that are specific to the Father, those specific to the

Son, and those that are properly the Spirit's. The following can serve as a summary of the general approach:

In keeping with *the Father's* gracious purposes and covenantal plan, the *Holy Spirit* knits together a particular community to be the continuous earthly "body" of its crucified and risen head, *Jesus Christ*, who is seated at the right hand of the Father as the world's Lord and Savior. (73–74, italics added)

Sherman's emphasis on the communal nature of humanity, and so also of redeemed humanity, is no less important. This too is a consequence of his Trinitarian focus. Because humans are created in the image of the Triune God, community is no less integral to humanity than is individuality. For the present reviewer, the reflections on this subject are in themselves worth the price of the book.

How successful is Sherman in combining the double motifs of the Triune God's undivided work and the specific biblical emphases of each person's contribution to the life of the church? Perhaps the question can best be answered by a description of the final product: Sherman has given us not so much a book on the doctrine of the Trinity or the church per se as an incursion into diverse aspects of the Spirit's activity in the church. By the author's own admission, the chapters on the specific works of each person of the Godhead, more than anything, offer a springboard for developing different facets of ecclesiology: worship, Christian identity, church discipline, and so on. This can sometimes give the impression of a "catch-all" of discrete themes held together by an overarching reference to one of the persons of the Trinity. This is especially apparent in the chapter on the church as the temple of the Holy Spirit, where Sherman himself seems conscious of the somewhat arbitrary character of certain rapprochements (see his comments, 173–75). On the whole, though, this approach does not detract from *Covenant, Community, and Spirit's* quality; the variety of the themes, and the way they show how the Spirit applies the work of the Godhead in the church, is usually quite helpful in drawing out the book's emphases.

Sherman is generally conservative and writes from an avowedly Reformed perspective. He regularly and approvingly quotes Calvin and the sixteenth and seventeenth century confessional documents. His aim, however, is not to merely restate or defend traditional formulations but to move theological reflection forward, bringing it into contact with recent developments and specific situations in which the (especially American) church finds herself in the twenty-first century. After Calvin, the most frequently cited theologian is Karl Barth, and several points—Sherman's affirmation of the election of all humanity in Christ, for instance—clearly betray this influence. Sherman

focuses on positive theological construction and welcomes other traditions into the discussion wherever possible. This can be seen, for instance, in his developments on baptism and the Lord's Supper, borrowing categories from the ecumenical document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (95–100), although his own presentation remains basically indebted to Calvin. Sherman also offers a highly personal—one might say eccentric—understanding of the Reformed teaching of “the covenant of grace” and “the covenant of works” (55–62). The overall result is a theology that can be described as warmly and moderately Reformed, with an eye to ecumenicity.

Although numerous points could be mentioned, this review will limit its comments to one specific element. As mentioned earlier, the book's emphasis on the communal nature of redemption and sanctification is especially helpful. Against a highly exacerbated individualism that pervades Western culture and has made deep inroads in the church—including some forms of Reformed ecclesiology—Sherman underscores the profoundly social nature of humanity:

Each of us is placed within a particular historical and cultural ecology, upon which we depend for our individual lives and to which we contribute for good or for ill. Our physical existence derives from a long chain of progenitors. Our psychological, linguistic, and spiritual existence is nurtured by family, friends, teachers, indeed a whole cultural matrix rooted in the past and extending into the future. Our fears and concerns, our hopes and aspirations, are always fostered by and exercised within a particular communal context ... that we simultaneously receive and further. (3)

This corporate nature is not merely a fact. It is how we were made to be, as creatures formed in the image of the triune God.

Communal considerations also help explain the social embeddedness of sin and redemption. Original sin, states Sherman, is not so much a biological datum as the fact that, from the moment we come into the world, we are enmeshed in a situation dominated by actions and attitudes—in brief, human beings—oriented toward self and against God:

This is why it does not suffice to locate immorality and evil solely in individuals. The repercussions of individual acts embed themselves in a broader context, so that the acts and their context then combine and interact in unexpected ways and, as a result, become the context in which further individual acts are done.

Because of this, says Sherman, “evil is a matter no longer merely of particular misdeeds but also of broader structures and patterns of being, of received cultures and thought worlds” (14). As a description of original sin, this remains, from a Reformed perspective, incomplete—as is evidenced by

Sherman's somewhat disappointing explanation of Psalm 51:2–5 (16). That being said, the specifically corporate and social aspects of evil, highlighting that we are caught up from birth in an all-pervasive web of human sin, helpfully supplement traditional presentations, sometimes unduly limited to individually inherited guilt.

The upshot of all this is that, in redemption also, God's plan is not merely to save individuals but to redeem a people. This is, of course, classic Reformed theology. The practical outworking, however, is a refreshing emphasis on the role of the community for all of Christian life:

The scriptural witness makes it abundantly clear that salvation is a social, covenantal reality that unfolds in time toward a divine end, and that the God effecting this salvation is trinitarian. The Triune God does not save by plucking individuals up to heaven or by us establishing a particular social agenda or political regime following Jesus's example. Rather, salvation is the fruit of God's embedding persons in a community called and sanctified (which is to say, set apart) by the Holy Spirit to be a witness to God's own fulfillment of creation's ultimate goal in the work of Jesus Christ. (41)

On the whole, *Covenant, Community, and the Spirit* is a helpful reflection on how the church, as the community of those living together in the sphere of God's grace and lordship, can thrive in an increasingly individualistic, secularized, and postmodern culture. The book bristles with theological and practical thoughts on the church's life, call, and witness, and it will generously repay repeated meditation. Admittedly, some sections may be a challenging read for churchgoers with no formal theological education, while it might strike others as not going deep enough into certain issues. But this should not detract Christians, especially pastors and teachers, from grappling with the issues Sherman develops and asking how the church can better understand, and live out, her communal nature—and her communal testimony—in today's world.

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Herman Selderhuis. *Martin Luther: A Spiritual Biography*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.

Among the many books published on Martin Luther in 2017 to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of the Ninety-Five Theses, Herman Selderhuis's book *Martin Luther: A Spiritual Biography* offers a fascinating

portrait of the man behind this famous event. Instead of writing a hagiography of the Reformer, Selderhuis presents a fair and balanced view of Luther in his own historical context. From Luther's childhood to his career as a theologian and his death in 1546, various aspects of his life are told in a narrative form. What one consistently reads in the book is that Luther was a human being just like any other, a man with doubts and fears but who also had a deep desire to seek God. Luther comes alive in the pages of this book as a brilliant and humorous yet problematic man of his time. It is thus notable that the author begins his introduction with these words: "Luther was a problem" (19).

The book is divided into ten chapters. Each chapter deals with one phase of Luther's life in chronological order. The first four chapters, which covers the years 1483 to 1517, serve the purpose of introducing Luther's family history, educational background, and the internal spiritual struggles that drive him to reform the church. An important theme that emerges in these chapters is that Luther did not just happen to discover the Bible and its truth one day in contrast with the corrupted teaching of the papacy. Selderhuis describes Luther's path to discovery, showing how his internal struggle to find the assurance of salvation was the driving force that led to his breakthrough. Thus, Selderhuis correctly points out that Luther's arrival at the truth happened progressively and gradually. In chapter four, after mentioning the disagreements among scholars as to when Luther's breakthrough took place, he writes, "Instead of choosing an earlier or later date, it is probably better to speak of a reformational development that began in 1513 and was completed by 1518" (84). The author also emphasizes that Luther did not come up with new ideas on his own; rather, his understanding came from reading patristic and medieval sources. Although Selderhuis does not explain in depth the medieval philosophical thinking that shaped Luther's thought, he consistently shows that his thoughts did not occur in isolation from the past. Even Luther's emphasis on Scripture was not his unique contribution, but, as the author points out, it came at a time when there was a growing focus on the authority of Scripture.

In chapters five and six (1517–1521), Selderhuis describes the events that led up to Luther's excommunication, beginning with the famous story of the Ninety-Five Theses. Instead of simply repeating this story, Selderhuis argues that it is more likely that the beadle of the university would have posted the theses, not Luther, on October 31, 1517 (100). In these chapters, the author explains Luther's key theological changes of idea on humility, justification, the sacraments, and authority through an account of the Heidelberg Disputation, the Diet of Augsburg, and the Leipzig Debate.

Selderhuis explains that these are crucial years for Luther, which culminate in him burning of the bull of excommunication and the canon law as a sign of a definitive breach with Rome.

From chapter seven to the end of the book (1521–1546), Selderhuis narrates how Luther’s theology developed and matured as his ideas spread and attracted supporters as well as enemies. The church was Luther’s most obvious opponent. There were also others who seemed to be on Luther’s side at first but in fact turned out to be adversaries as differences emerged. In chapter seven, Selderhuis illustrates the mixed emotions surrounding such conflicts in Luther’s relationship with the peasants, Erasmus, and Carlstadt. Against the challenges to his Reformation thought, Luther continued to write many theological treatises. In chapter eight, Selderhuis discusses Luther’s debates with Zwingli on the Lord’s Supper. Luther also received many questions regarding faith and Christian life on topics such as marriage and the role of the government. He lectured on the books of the Bible, imparting his knowledge of the Scriptures to students at Wittenberg. Luther was also an ardent preacher. To ensure that people were taught right doctrine, Luther produced Large and Small Catechisms. Through these narratives, the author portrays the zeal that Luther had for the gospel. Then in chapters nine and ten, Selderhuis moves on to the later stages of his life, during which Luther expressed his frustration with the way the Reformation was going and the chronic illnesses he suffered. Selderhuis does not shy away from dealing with the controversial topics that emerge in Luther’s story, such as his approval of Philip of Hesse’s double marriage and his notorious claims about the Jews. While trying to see him in a world very different from ours, Selderhuis illustrates Luther’s difficult character, his stubbornness, and his shortcomings.

As Selderhuis unfolds the theological contributions of Luther, he also pays close attention to the social, political, and economic factors that shaped Luther’s thought and his Reformation. The invention of the printing press allowed his writings to disseminate quickly. The threats from the Turks diverted the emperor’s attention from the Luther problem at times. The political tensions between the emperor and the electors, and the emperor and the pope were also essential to Luther’s Reformation. As Selderhuis writes, “the matter of the Reformation had the advantage that all of them were a bother to each other” (119). These contextual factors indicate that Luther was the right man for the right time.

Furthermore, Selderhuis takes his readers into Luther’s personal life, including his roles as a husband and a father. The anecdotes about his family life are intriguing even for readers of the twenty-first century. For

example, Luther and his wife Katharina would have arguments about whether accepting money from Luther's enemies would be appropriate (198). At other times, Katharina would become frustrated with "Luther's fairly unorganized manner of doing things" (223) or admonish Luther to consume less wine (242). As a father, Luther had the deepest affection for his children. The accounts of his daughter's death communicate the overwhelming sadness that a father faces when burying his own child. By telling such stories, Selderhuis allows the readers to sympathize with Luther and to understand him at a personal level.

One strong feature of this book is the sheer number of sources that Selderhuis uses to shed light on Luther's life and his world. The author uses his own translations of Luther's writings from various theological treatises, sermons, letters, and the table talk. He tells the story using Luther's own words. At the same time, Selderhuis interacts with secondary sources from Luther scholarship, at times showing consent but at times criticizing other scholarly interpretations on Luther.

What one will not find in this book, however, is an in-depth theological analysis of Luther's thought. Although as a competent theologian Selderhuis is fully capable of doing so, his purpose in this book does not lie in writing a textbook on Luther's theology. Instead, as a churchman and a teacher, he guides readers to walk with Luther as he rises and falls with the daily tasks of his Christian life. Thus, the author invites readers to witness an example of a Christian brother who found his greatest joy in studying the Scriptures and lived fully devoted to his faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In sum, theological, pastoral, personal, and humorous aspects of Luther are woven into one narrative through which Selderhuis draws a complete and complex picture of a significant man who made a great impact in the history of the church. Written in an accessible and engaging style, this book is one of the best introductions to Luther's life for readership of all levels.

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Jonathan Willis. *The Reformation of the Decalogue: Religious Identity and the Ten Commandments in England, c. 1485-1625*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Jonathan Willis has written the first extended analysis of how the Ten Commandments were explained in the English Reformation and what social impact they had. Previous historiography argued that in the medieval

period the so-called seven deadly sins had dominated the Christian ethical scheme, but Protestants focused on the Ten Commandments as the source for ethical norms. Willis advances beyond this to demonstrate how the Ten Commandments were integrated into English society within Protestant argumentation. In this way, the Commandments became far more than an ethical guide; they were also used as paradigm for theology and culture. Willis relates the three uses of the law—the civil use, convicting of sin, and guiding the moral life—to three major aspects of the Reformation. The book is structured into three parts, each with two chapters, and each part is devoted to issues tied to one of the three uses of the moral law.

The civil use connected to society as a whole because “there was incumbent upon all humanity, elect and reprobate, a temporal obligation to obey the ten precepts of the Decalogue at least outwardly” (16). The things forbidden in God’s law were bad for society, and therefore the civil sphere benefitted when God’s standards were upheld. Willis demonstrates this point through a case study on the fifth commandment, which enjoins honoring father and mother. Protestants certainly took the command to honor parents as programmatic training for how we are supposed to relate to superiors and inferiors throughout our lives as we engage in the world. Willis, however, argues in addition to this that Protestants under the English monarchy took particular advantage of this view to support their view of submission to the crown. He additionally points out that clerical authors included that the command required submission to ecclesiastical authorities. It is hard to tell if he thinks this was a matter of self-promotion or of legitimate application based on their principles.

Willis terms the second use of the law as “the evangelical office.” This use related to the Protestant goal of obtaining salvation. The Ten Commandments played a major role in the process of salvation because the proclamation of the law pointed out to sinners that they could not meet the standard of righteousness to enter heaven. The Commandments defined sin and so were “the pre-eminent mechanism” for showing people their need of a Savior (177). The Commandments were the guide to a godly life for those who converted to faith in Christ, and attention to their requirements formed an essential part of Puritan practical divinity (213–14). Works done after the event of salvation were counted as evidence of having been saved.

Willis calls the third use of the law its “practical office.” In part three, he analyzes how English Protestants used the Decalogue to address their concerns about finding the best ways to serve God. The Ten Commandments not only defined sin, as explained in part two, they also “defined comprehensively and in brief the praxis of the true Christian” (218). Willis

investigates many ways that the Commandments formed Christian piety in England, ranging from rigorous Puritan considerations of how to apply them to the way in which they were used to decorate the interior of churches and even formed the basis of church music.

There are some problems with this work, but they are essentially isolated to the conclusion. The rest of the volume is incredibly useful, and I highlight its strengths below. The first problem is that Willis fails to consider English Protestant developments in light of the broader Reformation on the Continent. His work is focused on England, but when he interprets English Protestant uses of the Commandments as having been shaped by the concern to address specific issues in England, he does not consider why there was continuity with the views of Continental Protestants and how they explained the Decalogue. Continental theologians would not likely shape their views to change English society. In this way, Willis wrongly depicts English Protestants as shaping their understanding of the Decalogue to achieve pragmatic ends. Additionally, he claims that “the commandments were manipulated by English Protestants in order to condemn sins which either hadn’t been considered sins—or which simply hadn’t existed—at the time when the precepts were first enumerated” (348). Although it may be true that Protestants addressed some sins that existed in their context with the Decalogue, Willis neglects to explain the use of casuistry in forming the implications of the commands. Thinkers like William Perkins made significant use of casuist arguments to show how certain precedents, and good and necessary consequence, shape the application of the Decalogue. English Protestants were not trying to overanalyze the Decalogue but did attempt to give fuller explanations for how it could work out in daily life.

Despite these problems, this volume is highly useful in many ways. Scattered throughout the chapters are short excursions on each of the Ten Commandments. In these ten subsections, Willis describes how each commandment was argued and applied, and the shape it took in relevance to English society. These are fascinating treatments that will be helpful overviews or guides to primary sources on the Commandments.

Additionally, although many social historians fail to grasp the actual theological ideas of the early-modern period, Willis is not one of them. His work is focused on social history as it related to the Ten Commandments, but he does not dismiss or mischaracterize the ideas that drove the English Reformation. Readers of this journal will likely find places where they quibble with his description of early-modern Reformed theology, but there are no places where he radically misrepresents it. He responsibly depicts the doctrines of justification by faith alone, the necessity of works in the

Christian life, and even the covenants of works and grace. This volume is also incredibly well written in clear and readable style, and at no point was it burdensome to read. It will be of great benefit for those who want to understand Reformation thinking on the Ten Commandments in a deeper way.

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Matthew Barrett. *The Grace of Godliness: An Introduction to Doctrine and Piety in the Canons of Dort*. Kitchener, ON: Joshua, 2013.

Matthew Barrett is Associate Professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Barrett's book is a comprehensive and insightful text on the importance given in the Canons of Dort (1618–1619) to a balance between doctrine and holiness in the Christian life. This book has an encouragingly positive foreword by Michael Haykin (xi–xii), an author's preface (xii–xv), and a timeline of Jacob Arminius, the Arminian controversy, and the Synod of Dort (xvii–xix). It begins with a brief introduction, followed by five major chapters. The author ends the book with a summary. In addition, the book includes seven invaluable appendices that provide the historical and theological background of the Arminian Remonstrants controversy and the Dutch Reformed response to it in its historical and theological contexts. He includes a bibliography that is a valuable resource for further study.

The author briefly examines the historical background to the Synod of Dort in chapter 2 (9–22). He pays special attention to “the historical context of the seventeenth-century debate” (10). In so doing, he focuses on the life and the synergistic view of grace of Jacob Arminius (1559–1609), his immediate theological legacy in the Remonstrants, the formation of the Synod of Dort, the adoption of the Canons of Dort by the Dutch Counter-Remonstrant Calvinists, and ecclesiastical conflict between the Remonstrants and the Counter-Remonstrants (10–22).

Barrett then moves on to deal with the balanced understanding of doctrines and piety in the doctrinal formulations. He interprets divine predestination as the “source of assurance, humility and holiness” in light of the teachings of Dort in chapter 3 (25–49). Analyzing *The Opinions of the Remonstrants*, he argues that the Arminians promoted the unbiblical doctrine of conditional election, which denied God's absolute sovereignty and free grace in election (26). In response, Barrett properly argues that Dort affirmed unconditional election, based upon the teachings of Acts

13:48; Romans 8:30; 9:11–13; and Ephesians 1:4–6. When the author deals with the issue of reprobation, he sees it in light of the justice of God, exploring Dort (37–39). In fact, in light of God’s absolute sovereignty, Dort held the balanced understanding of two different horizons of undeserved election and just reprobation in the discussion of double predestination over against the Remonstrants’ conditional election (Canons of Dort 1.18). Discussing Dort’s doctrine of double predestination, the author moves on to an explicit integration of election and personal and corporate spirituality in which there is a close connection between God’s free election and the true godliness and piety of believers (39–49).

The author explores Dort’s particular atonement over against the Remonstrant doctrine of universal atonement in chapter 4 (51–75). He summarizes the universal atonement of the Arminians as follows:

Here we see the conditionality of the atonement. Just as election is conditioned upon faith, so also is the efficacy of the atonement merited by Christ. While Christ merited reconciliation and the remission of sins for every person, its efficiency is void unless man wills to embrace it by faith. . . . Therefore, it is essential to observe that while the Calvinist may limit the *extent* of the atonement (as we have yet to see), the Arminian limits the *efficacy* of the atonement.” (53)

In addition, the author comprehensively summarizes the Reformed affirmation of particular atonement—basing his summary upon the teachings of the Canons of Dort—in which “the particularity and efficacy of the atonement” go together (66). In the end, the doctrine of limited atonement, defended by Dort, leads believers to elicit true piety with “persistent love and worship of Christ, both here and in eternity” (74).

In chapter 5, Barrett explores Dort’s comprehensive understanding of total depravity and effectual grace over against the Arminian Remonstrants’ view of synergism (77–96). Evaluating *The Opinions of the Remonstrants*, he insightfully notes that “the Arminian concern in arguing against the distinction between an *external* gospel call to all people and an *internal* effectual call only for the elect, is rooted in the Arminian rejection of a secret and a revealed will in God” (80). Affirming Dort’s doctrines of total depravity, effectual call, and irresistible grace, Barrett guides his readers to the spiritual path of integration of “the doctrine of effectual grace to spiritual humility and gratitude” (92). Moreover, he properly indicates a pastoral theology, noting that “Dort provides hope to the tired and wearied pastor by reminding him that it is not his own human efforts, whatever they may be, but the power of God to work irresistibly within a dead man’s heart that saves” (95).

Finally, Barrett explores Dort's view of the perseverance of the saints over against the Arminian Remonstrants' view of the loss of salvation in chapter 6 (99–123). In fact, the Arminians in *The Opinions of the Remonstrants* clearly denied the perseverance of the saints:

3. True believers can fall from true faith and can fall into such sins as cannot be consistent with true and justifying faith; not only is it possible for this to happen, but it even happens frequently. 4. True believers are able to fall through their own fault into shameful and atrocious deeds, to persevere and to die in them; and therefore finally to fall and to perish. (*The Opinions of the Remonstrants* 5; 157)

Responding to the Arminian rejection of the perseverance of the saints, Dort beautifully and harmoniously connects election and perseverance in Christ: “For Holy Scripture testifies that perseverance follows from election and is granted to the chosen by virtue of Christ's death, resurrection, and intercession: The chosen obtained it; the others were hardened (Romans 11:7)” (Canons of Dort, Rejection of Errors 5.1; 187). Interacting with Dort's view of the preservation and perseverance of the saints, Barrett highlights Dort's emphasis on the balance of free grace and holy exercises of Christian godliness and piety with the assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ (108–23).

Barrett as a Reformed Baptist scholar provides a good account for his readers, revisiting the historical context of the shaping of the Canons of Dort over against the synergistic soteriology of the Arminians in the Netherlands in the early part of the seventeenth century. In so doing, he documents and summarizes well, interacting with primary and secondary resources with keen insights. In short, he does an excellent job of mapping out the five points of Calvinism, deeply embedded and summarized in the Canons of Dort, over against the unbiblical synergism of the Remonstrants.

Nevertheless, one important point is conspicuously lacking. In this regard, I would like to add that Dort's distinction between election and reprobation under the umbrella of double predestination is closely tied together with the evangelical distinction between law and gospel. The Arminians not only denied the proper distinction between election and reprobation in double predestination but also rejected the distinction between law and gospel in the perspective of the believer's evangelical obedience and man's free will:

What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law can do, God accomplishes by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word or the ministry of reconciliation. This is the gospel about the Messiah, through which it has pleased God to save believers, in both the Old and the New Testament. (Canons of Dort, 3/4.6; 175)

Thus, the synergistic soteriology of the Arminian Remonstrants is an Arminian monocovenantalism in which they deny the Protestant Reformation distinction between law and gospel in light of the believer's evangelical obedience and man's free will. Having clarified that, I highly recommend Barrett's book to readers because the spirit of Dort's defense of the gospel during the Arminian controversy is important for preaching and defending the good news of the gospel in the global mission field.

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David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, eds. *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

The doctrine of definite atonement, popularly known as "limited atonement," is a doctrine that, while having an early and distinct place in Reformed theology, has been, and continues to be, contested both within and outside of the broader Reformed tradition. The editors of this volume bring together an impressive array of scholars to "paint a compelling picture of the beauty and power of definite atonement" (17). J. I. Packer opens up the volume with a foreword that recalls his now classic introduction to John Owen's treatment of the same subject. In the preface, the editors, David and Jonathan Gibson, set the tone for the volume: a humble, irenic approach that eschews animosity or self-righteousness.

Following this, we come to the first chapter, the editors' helpful introduction to the volume. Here, they express their aim "to show that history, the Bible, theology, and pastoral practice" provides a unified understanding for articulating definite atonement, and, as such, these four areas are to be seen as "four mezzanine levels of the one house" rather than four separate perspectives or "windows" (37). Moreover, the editors see definite atonement as analogous to doctrines such as "the Trinity or the two natures of Christ"; that is, it is not derived solely from the exegesis of particular passages nor a purely logical construct; rather, it is a "biblico-systematic doctrine" (38). They, in turn, offer the metaphor of a web as a description of how they have arrived at definite atonement; thus, they see this volume as a "map through and to the doctrine of definite atonement" (39). The remainder of the chapter gives a snapshot of the four "levels" that are treated in the volume.

The first section deals with definite atonement in church history and consists of seven chapters written by seven different authors. Michael Haykin draws from John Gill's (1697–1771) evidence for definite atonement in patristic authors in order to discuss a sampling of authors, namely, Clement of Rome and Justin Martyr (ca. 100–165), Hilary of Poitiers (310/315–367/8), Ambrose (ca. 340–397), Jerome (ca. 347–420), and a few others. Before embarking on this, he states that definite atonement was not a point of controversy during this era; therefore, rather than “direct assertion,” we find “implied comments” tending in its direction (59). David Hogg argues, in the third chapter, that “medieval theologians ... wrote about predestination, divine foreknowledge, free will, and the atoning death of Christ” in such a way that was consistent with, and, in addition, “preparatory and foundational for the doctrine [of definite atonement]” (75).

In one of the most relevant chapters in this section, Paul Helm, building on his earlier work in Calvin studies (*Calvin and the Calvinists* [1982]), argues that Calvin's use of “indefinite or indiscriminate language” is consistent with “being committed to definite atonement” (97), *contra* those who deny that Calvin would affirm definite atonement (e.g., R. T. Kendall). He discusses Calvin's understanding of three main areas: (1) providence and the future; (2) aspiring toward something not necessarily decreed by God (e.g., the salvation of every person); and (3) “the language of universal or indiscriminate invitation” in preaching (108). Further supporting this, he offers a case study of Calvin's interpretation of two biblical passages relevant to definite atonement.

Raymond Blacketer demonstrates that Theodore Beza, while an explicit proponent of definite atonement, was not as distant from Calvin as some would suppose, for “neither Calvin or Beza provide a fully elaborated doctrine of the extent of Christ's redemption, though [a] tendency [in them] toward particularism [is discernable]” (140). Thus, Beza served as a bridge between those eras characterized by implied statements in favor of definite atonement and “the Synod of Dordrecht (or Dordt, 1618–1619) [which] formulated the doctrinal boundaries of Reformed thought on [definite atonement]” while leaving “room for variation” (122).

Lee Gatiss, in chapter six, describes the historical context of the Synod of Dort, the “Canons or judgments” arising from the teaching of this Synod (i.e., the Canons of Dort) on the death of Christ, and developments following after the Synod. He notes a few things of importance regarding the Synod of Dort. First, it is here that definite atonement “achieved confessional status” (143). Second, the British delegation of Reformed theologians at the Synod (e.g., John Davenant) espoused a strand of hypothetical

universalism, which likely influenced the teaching of the Canons of Dort that Christ's work effectually redeemed the elect (Article 2.8) "without denying an ultimately *ineffectual* universal redemption in addition" (157). This, in turn, reflects for Gatiss both variations among the Reformed and the relative lack of concern regarding hypothetical universalism.

This brings us to the chapter by Amar Djaballah, who provides the helpful service of giving context to and summarizing the French work of Moïse Amyraut's (1596–1664) *Brief traité de la prédestination* (English translation, Charenton Publishing, 2017). Amyraut saw himself in continuity with Calvin (over against Beza) and the Canons of Dort in advocating his version of hypothetical universalism. Djaballah notes modern-day views akin to Amyraut's own. In the last chapter of this section, Carl Trueman offers a penetrating analysis of how John Owen, in response to the criticisms of Richard Baxter, works through the connections between atonement and justification, the relationship between Christ's death and his mediatorial role, and the Trinitarian nature of salvation expressed in the covenant of redemption.

The second section of this volume deals with pertinent biblical data pertaining to definite atonement. Paul Williamson, in the ninth chapter, persuasively demonstrates that the election of and intercession for Israel, as well as the need for atonement to be made for both corporate and individual sins, points to definite rather than universal atonement. J. Alec Motyer presents the exegetical case that the death of the suffering servant of Isaiah was complete and efficacious for those elect for whom this death was intended and that this view does not undermine the case for universal proclamation of the gospel in light of the broader context of Isaiah. In chapter eleven, Matthew Harmon works through relevant passages of the Synoptic Gospels and the Johannine literature to demonstrate that Christ died to glorify his Father, to accomplish "salvation for his people" (267), and for the sins of "the world," namely, people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Jonathan Gibson, in the twelfth chapter, builds the case that definite atonement is taught in the Pauline Epistles alongside the universal implication (Jew and Greek) and proclamation of the gospel, which he fills out and expands upon in chapter thirteen by exploring definite atonement in Paul's theology of salvation. Here, he drives home what he and David Gibson stated in the first chapter: "Definite atonement is a *biblico-systematic* doctrine" (352). He brings into view Paul's teaching on the indivisibility of God's saving work, the relationship between the atonement and union with Christ, the Trinitarian nature of salvation, and the goal of salvation to bring glory to God. These two chapters are, in many ways, the center of the volume, as they draw together some of the theological insights found in the historical

section and anticipate much of what will be seen in the theological section. Concluding this section, Thomas Schreiner works through specific passages of the Pastoral (1–2 Timothy, Titus) and General Epistles (esp. 1–2 Peter, Hebrews) in defense of definite atonement.

The theological perspective on definite atonement comprises the third section of this volume. Donald MacLeod, in debate with Karl Barth, argues that God has determined “to bring his named [elect] ones to glory” and “actually to save them,” rather than “make salvation possible” or merely contribute to it (434). Robert Letham, taking the indivisible work of the Trinity, the incarnation, and the atonement into account and relating them to one another, argues against James B. and Thomas F. Torrance’s rejection of definite atonement.

Garry Williams, in conversation with and critique of James Ussher (1581–1656) and D. Broughton Knox (1916–1994), with a trenchant eye to the “biblical portrayals of atonement [that] locate the particularity in the sacrifice itself, not simply in its application” (472), argues that penal substitutionary atonement, by its very nature, is definite. Williams takes up a second chapter to work through the charge against definite atonement that it confuses commercial debt with penal substitution, reducing atonement to a price paid to pay off the debt that is sin. By demonstrating that punishment for sin must be specific to sin as an answer to and contradiction of it, Williams demonstrates that penal substitutionary atonement is specific and definite as it “in itself answer[s] the sins committed by actual people” (508).

Stephen Wellum argues that general atonement proponents sever the vital link between Christ and his people, whom he represents as their high priest, separating, in turn, the unbreakable link between the provision of salvation and its application. Henri Blocher, concluding this section, essentially provides a summary statement of much of what had been said before by given attention to theological prolegomena, important historical figures (e.g., Augustine, Charles Hodge, Karl Barth, and Bruce McCormack), and presenting key arguments against competing positions, with some additional insight.

The fourth and briefest section of this volume looks at definite atonement practically. Daniel Strange argues against universal redemption from the fact that some die without being evangelized and offers reasons why definite atonement motivates Christian mission. Sinclair Ferguson, in debate with John McLeod Campbell, shows the cogency of definite atonement, as well as the ground it gives for assurance of salvation. John Piper, in the final chapter, engages with the denial of definite atonement by Mark Driscoll and Bruce Ware and offers various pastoral applications of the doctrine

(e.g., it promotes gratitude and strengthens worship).

The combination of depth and breadth offered by the contributors of this volume in defense of definite atonement is a superb achievement. Rigor and clarity of expression are sustained throughout the book, and, moreover, the promise to do so in a humble, irenic manner is fulfilled. Both old and new opponents of definite atonement are dealt with fairly and answered evenly and with precision. Also, it is made clear that such figures as Amyraut, while rejecting definite atonement, were still within the pale of Reformed orthodoxy. Of course, as with any multiauthor volume, there are occasional points of difference among the contributors, but this strengthens rather than weakens the overall case presented.

Two weaknesses ought to be mentioned. First, there was a certain amount of repetitiveness as one progressed through the volume, but this is inevitable given that it is a seven-hundred-page treatment of a particular doctrine from four different perspectives. Second, the pastoral perspective was the least developed of the four levels and was at times strongly reminiscent of the prior theological perspective, especially since the former, like the latter, was characterized by thorough engagement with opponents of definite atonement. It seems possible that other areas of the volume could have been trimmed down to afford more space to develop this perspective.

Despite these weaknesses, this is essential reading on the oft-misunderstood and oft-contested doctrine of definite atonement and, as such, cannot be recommended enough. The opponent or doubter of definite atonement would be amiss if they failed to consult this volume, and the friend of the doctrine will gain much benefit by perusing its pages. This volume will likely be a standard defense of definite atonement for generations to come.

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Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers. Translated and edited by James P. Eglinton. Peabody, MA; Hendrickson, 2017.

In the English-speaking world, it is only in the last fifteen years that Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) has emerged from the shadow of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and been more widely appreciated. Outside of the Dutch-American community, he has remained in relative obscurity. A hitherto too-small number of non-Netherlanders have been familiar with his work in English translation: his Stone Lectures on *The Philosophy of Revelation* (1909); the translation by the New Testament commentator William

Hendriksen of part of his *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, published as *The Doctrine of God* (1951); Henry Zylstra's translation of his superb and beautiful *Magnalia Dei* (1956); and a handful of other pieces. They have eagerly devoured whatever they could find of Bavinck. All that began to change in 2003 with the publication in English of the whole of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (*Reformed Dogmatics*, four volumes, 2003–2008)—justice, at last, for one of the truly great systematic theologians of the Reformed church. Now, in this slim volume, James Eglinton—who has made his own signal contribution to Bavinck studies—has selected and translated several shorter pieces from the theologian's pen, intriguingly around the theme of preaching.

The book consists of an "Introduction" to Bavinck followed by four chapters plus an appendix and copious endnotes. In the second of these selections, "The Sermon and the Service," Bavinck strikes several significant notes. For him, worship is a high calling and sacred privilege. In our church gatherings, "we are placed in community with the heavenly congregation and are joined with it in *one* work, for which reason the angels, as a sign of this unity, are present both in our gatherings and in the heavenly gathering" (60). Thus, "the preacher's calling is ... to teach people the meaning of the church service" (61)—that is to say, through the preaching of the word to impress on the congregation that worship is the *raison d'être* of the gathering of the people. But, alas, he argues, "we can safely say that preaching is at present, out of touch with the time and does not meet its needs" (63). If that was true then, it is surely true now. But what is the solution? Bavinck's answer is reminiscent of Paul's counsel for any "time ... when people will not endure sound teaching ... and will turn away from listening to the truth" (2 Tim 4:3–4):

If the pulpit is to become a mighty force once again, this situation must be remedied, and that will happen when we return to searching the holy Scriptures. That is the lack of contemporary preaching: it is not drawn out of the Scriptures; it is not baptized in their spirit. (63)

In nuce, "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2).

By way of illustration, Eglinton has included in his selection Bavinck's only published sermon (on 1 John 5:2, preached in Kampen in 1901 on the occasion of a visit of Paul Kruger, President of the South African Republic; this was also the text of the first sermon Bavinck ever preached).

The final chapter is an intriguing piece entitled "On Preaching in America," which readers may well find simultaneously both amusing and devastating. Bavinck's view of American church life is that

the churches have much that is better than ours: they are cozy (*gezellig*), welcoming, warmed in winter, without a pulpit, but it is also the case that they could be used as theaters without a single alteration. Light in color, with red carpets, lighthearted, lively, clear, fresh—precisely the opposite of that solemn, dignified, somber, serious [character] found in our European churches. And as the church is, so is the religion. Religion there is an amusement.

American preaching, he writes, is

short, varied, lively, theatrical ... spirited but shallow, enjoyable, peppered with humor ... interspersed with songs, with choirs, with solos, with vocal and instrumental music ... what American religious life lacks in depth, it wins in breadth. (85)

All this in 1908! And yet Bavinck also notes “so much that is good” (88). One is reminded of words from Robert Burns’s poem *To a Louse—On seeing one in a lady’s bonnet at church*:

O wad some Power the gift tae gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
An foolish notion.

Bavinck was certainly not slow to help us to “see ourselves as others see us”! It would be interesting to read a contemporaneous mirror-image account from a Connecticut Yankee visiting Prime Minister Kuyper’s church!

A five-page appendix “On Language” and its relationship to thought forms the final piece. There are nineteen pages of endnotes, a three-page bibliography, plus name and subject indices.

It is, however, the first and longest chapter in the book that forms its centerpiece. “Eloquence” is the published version of a lecture delivered in Kampen in 1889 by the young Professor Bavinck, and in it, he practices the quality he teaches. No doubt enthusiasts will welcome it simply because it comes from Bavinck. Theologians will also find his reflections of interest. But since most readers of books on preaching are themselves *preachers*, will this be of any more than antiquarian interest to them? Should they expect to find anything to clarify their thinking and stir their preaching blood in a lecture on eloquence delivered in a Dutch theological seminary more than a century ago? After all, the passing of the years has seen a marked change in the role of eloquence and rhetoric in public life in general, never mind in preaching. Gone are the days when a Robert L. Dabney could lecture on “Sacred Rhetoric,” or when it could be assumed that entering seminary students would already have taken courses in rhetoric or have much interest in it.

One only needs to read a sermon preached by a Benjamin Morgan Palmer or even by a B. B. Warfield to recognize that there have been significant changes in the genre of preaching since the late nineteenth century. The value of eloquence and the importance of rhetoric have largely vanished. Contemporary concerns may seem a diameter removed from those of this lecture. Today's seminaries and training institutions and organizations are more focused on hermeneutics and modes of communication than on eloquence in preaching. Here the focus may be on training students to preach Christ from the Old Testament; there it may be on communicating to a posttruth society. But in any event, the old styles and emphases—not to mention the pulpits—are largely gone. Faculty members who teach preaching to today's seminarians apparently often find that rather than thirsting for instruction in speech, or feeling the need for rhetoric and eloquence, or demanding help with voice training, many incoming students are confident that the one thing they can do is *speak well*. (Why else would they think they were called to preach and go to seminary?) Whose voice needs to be trained when there are microphones? Who today has any interest in principles of *rhetoric* and in becoming an *eloquent* preacher?

Bavinck sought to place some weighty considerations before his hearers (and later, readers). Being *able to talk* is one thing, *speaking well* is another. But speaking well is a biblical duty for all Christians (e.g., Col 4:6).

Speaking well is an adornment ... for the Christian man ... it is an exquisite virtue More than we often think, the Holy Scripture places a strong accent on the dutiful, holy use of the tongue and speech Speaking well is not only a requirement in the pulpit ... but also in daily life This ... is to be distinguished from verbosity [Bavinck's *welbespraaktheid* sounds much more expressive!]. (21)

Eloquence in the pulpit is simply an extension of this. The point is important, for eloquence has substance and weight only if it is the expression of a whole life. Doubtless, some have been guilty of a false and superficial oratory in preaching where the vocabulary or the voice employed fails to express weighty and profound thoughts or the stirrings of a Christ-adoring soul. Such preaching could never be described as portraying Christ crucified before the eyes of the hearers (Gal 3:1). But for Bavinck eloquence is never a matter of artifice, but of truth grasped by a humble mind and felt deeply within the soul, coming to expression in a way that accurately expresses and graciously adorns it.

To speak well is a theological responsibility, since “the word is the first-born of all creatures” (23). So, in the preacher, “deep, inner feeling is the principle of oratory” (28). Bavinck is very clear on this, alluding to Pascal:

“Real eloquence mocks eloquence.” (Mere artifice for its own sake constitutes “the sophisticated hawking of words.”) True eloquence therefore is “the gift developed by the art, the power of the word to convince the mind, touching the conscience and persuasively affecting the will of the people” (32).

Such genuine eloquence is multifeatured. It requires, first, a sound knowledge of the subject matter (32–36). But in addition, it has a poetic quality: “The orator must make us perceive what he is saying” (37) if he is to touch our conscience. And eloquence goes one step further, for thirdly, “it tries to go through the intellect and heart in order to move the will of the person. The orator may not be satisfied until his hearers think, feel, and act as he does.” An important implication is that “real eloquence is ... inconceivable without mastery of the language” (42).

These comments raise all kinds of ancillary issues for today’s preachers, such as the breadth, depth, and facility of our vocabulary (and therefore of our reading habits), the sanctified use of the imagination, and the discipline (indeed discipling) of the tongue and the voice as an expression of the heart reaching out to the hearers’ thinking, feeling, and acting.

In this connection, Bavinck himself briefly addresses such practical matters as the use of the voice, gesticulations, and other issues we moderns often belittle. Why should any student regard attending a *speech* class as a *sine qua non* of seminary education? (I write to my own shame!) Yet to employ the right words, to manifest feeling, and to express his experience of the power of the truth in his soul is the very essence of the preacher’s task, for his voice and the words it produces are the chief instruments of his life. Listen to an orthodox but dull preacher, and as you do, transpose his words into the voice of someone whose preaching has left its mark on you. How is it that the whole character of the sermon can immediately change? Now it has life, feeling, force. For Bavinck eloquence is, simply put, the ability to capture the significance of and express in speech the living power of the Word of God in a way that captures the mind, imagination, affection, and will of the hearer. The voice is the instrument by which this takes place; it is *that* important.

Herman Bavinck on *Preaching and Preachers* stimulates such reflections and much more. It is a *multum in parvo* indeed, and an eloquent one too. Thoughtfully and honestly read, Bavinck can raise important questions for us and strike some raw nerves in us. Bavinck has not given us a textbook on preaching, but whenever he speaks, it is worth listening.

We owe a debt to Eglinton for his labor of love in rescuing these pieces from obscurity. Preachers who have turned increasingly to Bavinck for

theological instruction and stimulation will feel that it is a bonus to know that he was a genuine fellow pilgrim in the long and arduous journey of growing as a preacher. In turn, it can only enhance our estimation of him as a theologian to know that he was sufficiently concerned to employ his exceptional gifts to helping others in the great task of preaching. Preachers at every age and stage should find these pages a pleasure to read and a stimulus to fulfill the apostolic desideratum that everyone should be able to see we are making progress in our ability to preach the word (1 Tim 4:15).

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